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Nematpour, Mohammad ; Khodadadi, Masood; Makian, Sarasadat; Ghaffari, Mohammad

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Future scenarios for improving Iran's overall destination image and attractiveness: A supply-side perspective

Mohammad Nematpour¹  | Masood Khodadadi²  | Sarasadat Makian³  |
Mohammad Ghaffari¹ 

¹Business Management Department, Faculty of Management and Accounting, College of Farabi, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran

²School of Business and Creative Industries, University of the West of Scotland, Paisley, UK

³Urban Planning and Alpine Geography Institute, Grenoble Alpes University, Grenoble, France

Correspondence

Mohammad Nematpour, Business Management Department, Faculty of Management and Accounting, College of Farabi, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.
Email: Nematpour.1993@gmail.com

Masood Khodadadi, School of Business and Creative Industries, University of the West of Scotland, Paisley PA1 2BE, UK.
Email: masood.khodadadi@uws.ac.uk

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Abstract

Since overall image and attractiveness can play a key role in developing a destination's tourism market, the current study attempts to identify the main factors influencing Iran's overall image and attractiveness from a supply-side perspective. To reduce the uncertainties in Iran's future tourism market development, we first used factor analysis to identify factors that affect Iran's tourism market. Second, we used multiple linear regressions to examine the relationships between the identified factors and Iran's overall image and attractiveness as a destination. According to the findings, political, product, and service factors significantly affect Iran's overall image and attractiveness. Third, we provided scenarios for improving Iran's overall image and attractiveness based on cross-impact balanced analysis.

KEYWORDS

destination attractiveness, destination Image, destination planning, scenario, tourism supply perspective

1 | INTRODUCTION

Today, with the increase in the world's transformations, relying on forecast-based planning methods does not meet Iran's macro management needs, and the heavy shadow of uncertainties and the emergence of discontinuous issues have led to difficulties for planners to predict the future. The lack of any ability to predict the future, as well as the ever-increasing complexities of the world, have caused scholars to take advantage of the capabilities of the emerging knowledge of future sciences and include foresight in their planning and forecasting activities (Seyitoğlu & Costa, 2022). Today, the main mission and effort of planning in developed countries, in addition to

paying serious attention to current challenges and providing cross-sectional approaches, is thinking about future challenges and how to face and gain strength in those areas (Nematpour, Khodadadi, & Rezaei, 2021). In Iran, the history of planning goes back to the country's 5-year national plans, and its development vision document is considered in different horizons in different time frames. These plans are the result of strategic and long-term thinking. One of the drivers of Iran's development document is the growth of tourism (Nematpour, Khodadadi, & Rezaei, 2021) since the country has many tourist attractions, including 22 world heritage sites and two natural heritage sites (UNESCO World Heritage, 2020). Furthermore, tourism reduces the impact of western sanctions on the national economy,

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which the Iranian government can benefit from. As a result, the Iranian government will recognize the importance of tourism in the near future, as the contribution of tourism to the economic growth of Iran's provinces is positive, according to a study by Habibi et al. (2018). However, despite the unique importance of the tourism industry in economic development and prosperity, and knowing that Iran is one of the most amazing countries in the world in terms of cultural, historical and natural attractions, this important part of the economy has not collaboratively been subjected to planning and structured thinking. It has also not been able to take advantage of its benefits, even with its high potential for economic development. This is all due to lack of a specific management procedure, comprehensive and systematic plan, and foresight thinking. The systematic approach is a relatively comprehensive approach for understanding, analyzing, and planning tourism. In this approach, the sectors and factors affecting tourism, such as tourists, host society, related organizations and companies, environment, and so on, can be examined in a sustainable manner. In other words, the systematic approach depicts the reality, foundation and basis of tourism as a coherent whole plus the relationship between the components and elements of the tourism supply side sector, including attractions, transportation, accommodation units, services, organizations with demand side (Nematpour, Khodadadi, et al., 2022).

As part of socioeconomic development, focusing on the tourism sector is requisite, but this should have a comprehensive and detailed approach (Nematpour, Khodadadi, & Rezaei, 2021). One of the barriers to the development of Iranian tourism is its unfavorable destination image (DI) (Khodadadi, 2016), which is linked to events such as the Iranian revolution, the 1980–1989 war with Iraq (Reza Jalilvand et al., 2012), political tensions with other countries (Golghamat Raad, 2019), the sanctions, ongoing tensions with western powers, and regional instability (Jalilvand, 2017). A major factor in tourism development is the overall image of a destination created in an individual's mind by the elements shaping a tourist's experience (Tosun et al., 2021). As the government lifts the Iranian visa restrictions for international tourists to help the severely hit tourism industry caused by Covid-19 (Tehran Times, 2021), Iran needs to develop an attractive image as a competitive destination. Iran's tourism potential makes it a highly suitable candidate for renewing the focus on tourism resources to obtain its share of the world's tourism market (Alipour et al., 2013) by relying on international tourism with integrated and comprehensive planning (Nematpour, Khodadadi, & Rezaei, 2021). This approach requires comprehensive strategic planning for the industry's future, including maintaining market share and competitive advantage by ensuring that the industry achieves productivity growth as successfully as other sectors (OECD, 2010). The destination must distinguish itself from competitors and position itself in the minds of customers to gain a market share. Capturing, managing and creating an appealing and distinct image of the destination is a critical part of the process because the DI influences the behavior and decisions of tourists and their overall satisfaction with their trip (Esmaili et al., 2017). Iran's image has a significant impact on the intention of visiting. Tourism planners and officials are expected to develop strategies to create

and improve a positive image of the country (Mahmoudi et al., 2017). Furthermore, the DI is linked to destination attractiveness, which means that the level of destination attractiveness is strongly influenced by the DI and vice versa (Krešić & Prebežac, 2011). The more appealing a destination is to visitors, the more likely it is to be chosen as a tourist destination (Kim & Perdue, 2011). Therefore, due to the lack of a sustainable national income and the government's over-reliance on revenues from the oil industry, it is vital to develop Iran's tourism market share to restore the economy.

To develop Iran's tourism market from the supply side, it is necessary to identify the factors influencing its tourism destination's overall image and attractiveness. These factors must be considered in the decision-making processes of tourism managers, planners, and policymakers. Therefore, the main aim of this study is to identify the key factors influencing the development of the Iranian tourism market through the overall image and attractiveness to attract international tourists by adopting an expert-based approach. In the next phase, the study has developed future scenarios in the aim of determining short- and long-term goals and providing strategies based on key factors and their impact on Iran's tourism system. In the face of uncontrollable and indivisible uncertainty, consistent scenarios are a valuable tool for decision making because they identify and explore a variety of potential outcomes for the future of Iran's tourism market (Kok et al., 2006). Planning for potential future scenarios allows destination management organizations (DMOs) to act quickly and appropriately by developing strategies (Makian & Nematpour, 2021). In this regard, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

- (a) What supply-side factors can be identified to develop Iran's tourism market globally?
- (b) What factors play an important role in developing the overall image and attractiveness of Iran's destination?
- (c) What are the consistent scenarios to develop Iran's overall DI and attractiveness?

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Future-based development through scenarios

Future scenarios are stories that take place in the future to examine how society might change if particular trends grew stronger or weaker or if different things happened (Nematpour, Khodadadi, & Rezaei, 2021). Creating useful inputs for planning and decision making and facilitating dialogue between various stakeholders are two ways that developing and using scenarios can benefit society at various levels (De Smedt et al., 2013). The future is not a fixed continuation of the past; scenarios acknowledge that multiple potential futures are possible at any given time. Compared to sensitivity analyses, scenarios are better suited for planning and management purposes due to their ability to confront conventional thinking and accepted presumptions when producing possible futures (Mahmoud et al., 2009). Future images are produced by combining

various possible developments of individual influencing factors. Each represents an independent and consistent scenario, regardless of its likelihood of occurrence. This enables destinations to plan for various development opportunities and futures (Marthaler et al., 2020). Furthermore, scenarios can be used in various ways, such as assigning probabilities, market research, resource allocation, team building and participant training, and influencing manager performance (Millett, 2003). Future studies are also needed for the development and planning of tourism destinations. Tourism stakeholders must clearly understand the direction of change and its implications for managing the business or destination to gain a competitive advantage in times of rapid change (Dwyer et al., 2009). This shows how crucial scenario planning is to the growth of any location. The practice of scenario thinking is based on three core ideas: the long view, which calls for looking beyond present needs and far enough into the future to see new opportunities; outside-in thinking, which considers external changes that are likely to have an impact on the organization or destination; and multiple perspectives, which entails participation from members of various stakeholder groups to shed new light on the strategic challenges (Formica & Kothari, 2008). Therefore, examining, identifying and managing uncertainties using scenario design is a necessary prerequisite for creating a sustainable and long-term program in the current tourism situation of Iran (Nematpour, Khodadadi, & Rezaei, 2021). In the competitive and unstable environment of global tourism, predicting the future and knowing the future is a powerful tool for using and facing environmental opportunities and threats.

2.2 | Tourism destination development from a supply-side perspective

Tourism development can bring enormous improvements and benefits to tourists and the local community when effectively planned and managed. Therefore, strategic tourism planning should be encouraged to meet people's desires in a demanding world, promote and attract tourists, and build their confidence in tourism activities (Butler, 1999). For that reason, the supply side of tourism destinations should be managed and marketed in a coordinated manner (Volgger et al., 2021). Additionally, the supply side is responsible for managing resources, which means the strategies and actions to develop destination capacities, resulting in its attractiveness (Pallavicini, 2017). Successful development of supply-side strategies requires a longer planning horizon (OECD, 2012), and these strategies will maximize the utilization of a tourist destination's existing resources. Long-term planning orientation is necessary for good governance (Nowacki et al., 2018). Using scenarios for long-term planning and strategic foresight allows for rapid adaptation to major changes by incorporating and emphasizing those aspects of the system that are essential to the forecast (Amer et al., 2013). Therefore, an extensive analysis of trends and influencing factors will enable policymakers to better integrate current unforeseen and emerging issues into their strategic policy agendas, develop potential

scenarios and policy responses, and better assist public and private sectors in taking advantage of opportunities and challenges that arise (OECD, 2020).

Various factors should be considered when developing tourism. Economic factors have the greatest influence on the success of tourism development, highlighted by items such as modern marketing efforts (Buhalis & O'Connor, 2005), foreign direct investment (Endo, 2006), privatization (Williams & Baláz, 2000), and involvement of the entrepreneurial sector (Lordkipanidze et al., 2005). Structural and organizational factors are other important factors like interorganizational cooperation (Wäsche, 2015), incentive policies (Ward, 1989), and tourism education (Cooper & Shepherd, 1997). Tourism product diversification (Benur & Bramwell, 2015), resource-based planning (Denicolai et al., 2010), and tourism-related facilities (Mandić et al., 2018) are among the product and services factors that contribute to effective tourism development. Similarly, spatial and infrastructure factors are key to the development of the tourism market (Khadaroo & Seetana, 2008), as are physical (Catudan, 2016) and aesthetic attributes (Wang et al., 2008). On the other hand, political factors are highly important, related to security (Hall et al., 2004) and positive image perception (McCartney et al., 2009). Finally, informational and technological factors must also be considered, including general knowledge about tourism (Belanche et al., 2017; Davis et al., 1988) and new technologies (Bizirgianni & Dionysopoulou, 2013). Since destinations must allocate limited resources to determine the importance of attractive features (Vo, 2020), the development of the destination requires careful planning and management (Vengesai et al., 2009). The costs and benefits of tourism are well-understood by governments. Hence, tourism plays a role in local economies and requires long-term planning strategies based on accurate market and product information (Wilkinson, 1987).

2.3 | Tourism destination's overall image

Destinations attempt to differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive market (Melo et al., 2016). Image is a critical factor in selecting tourist destinations (Melo et al., 2016) and a powerful management tool to empower the tourism industry in the market (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020). The term DI refers to a city, region, or country (Pereira et al., 2021) and includes beliefs, emotions, understandings, and knowledge of a destination, obtained through direct (traveling to the destination) and indirect information (reference groups, tourism channels, social media, or the Internet) (Shafiee et al., 2020). DI is essential in promoting tourism destinations and influencing travelers' choice of a destination (Huete Alcocer & López Ruiz, 2020). DI is essential in the marketing and management of destinations, as it refers to creating a consistent element mix to identify and distinguish places through positive image construction (Woosnam et al., 2020). When tourists decide where to go, one of the most important elements they examine is the overall image of the destination (Pereira et al., 2021). They create it by evaluating both the cognitive and affective elements of the image, which allow them

to make a general assessment of the destination based on their knowledge and beliefs about the place and their feelings towards it (Huete Alcocer & López Ruiz, 2020). The overall image is an individual's complete representation and perception of a destination as a result of processing information from diverse sources (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020) and attitudes toward the destination's perceived value tourism features (Stylos et al., 2016). The overall image of a destination influences tourist satisfaction (Huete Alcocer & López Ruiz, 2020), intention to recommend and/or return to destinations (Melo et al., 2016), destination loyalty (Stylidis et al., 2020), tourist behavioral intention (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020), destination selection (Shafiee et al., 2020) and tourism destination competitiveness (Stylos et al., 2017).

2.4 | Tourism destination's attractiveness

Success in the international market is determined by how well it is positioned and promoted to attract potential tourists' attention and encourage them to visit (Ma et al., 2018). Meanwhile, a major issue in tourism attractiveness is establishing a DI consistent with consumer preferences (Abdellatif et al., 2014). The attractiveness of a destination and its image are inextricably linked; the attractiveness of a destination is impacted by its image and vice versa (Krešić & Prebežac, 2011). Destination attractiveness is a destination's ability to attract and satisfy prospective tourists (An et al., 2019), and it is the most influential motivation for tourists to visit a destination (Raimkulov et al., 2021). Destination attractiveness may aid tourism planning and policy development by thoroughly understanding target markets and visitors' decision-making processes (Raimkulov et al., 2021). It is related to tourist satisfaction and loyalty and can potentially affect tourists' destination preferences, needs, and desires (Raimkulov et al., 2021). The physical aspects of a destination, the psychology of consumers/tourists, and the perceived capacity of destinations to meet their individual needs are the focus of destination attractiveness (An et al., 2019). There will be no tourism without attractiveness and there may be little or no need for tourism infrastructure and services. Services are only provided when people are drawn to a destination. The more a destination can satisfy the demands of tourists, the more appealing it is perceived and the more likely it is to be selected (Dimitrov et al., 2017). The destination's development planning is vital for its attractiveness to avoid unwanted and unintentional consequences that would create tourist and resident dissatisfaction (Pallavicini, 2017).

3 | METHODOLOGY

To develop consistent scenarios, we used a mixed-method approach that combined three techniques: factor analysis (quantitative), multiple regression (quantitative), and scenario analysis (qualitative). From March to June 2020, this study was done in Iran in three phases: (1) conducting interviews and reviewing past research, (2)

determining influencing factors, and (3) providing possible scenarios for the development of Iran's overall image and attractiveness as a destination. It is advantageous to use mixed-method research to produce a research output of greater value than single approaches in qualitative or quantitative methods. Various methods have been combined to achieve future scenarios in tourism and other fields. For example, Muskat et al. (2012) combined expert interviews, cross-impact analysis (CIA), and scenario development to create a stronger basis for data analysis. Nematpour, Khodadadi, & Rezaei (2021) proposed an approach combining CIA and cross-impact balanced (CIB) analysis to provide possible and consistent scenarios for development of Iranian tourism. Nematpour, Makian, et al. (2022) used capacity study, factor analysis, and structural analysis to create consistent scenarios for agritourism development. We used a mixed-methods approach from a quantitative to qualitative structure for various reasons, including enrichment of participants, increasing the validity of the findings, generating ideas for future research, and giving readers more confidence in the results (McKim, 2017). As a result, three different methods were used in this study. The statistical population for the study consisted of specialists, academics, and professionals who worked and specialized in tourism, hospitality, and event businesses and affairs.

3.1 | First phase (factor analysis)

This study used a statistical population of 330 tourism experts. According to various authors, this study determined the optimum sample size using a variable-ratio technique (e.g., Baggaley, 1983). The following table summarizes the demographic characteristics of the experts who took part. Three hundred and twenty completed questionnaires were returned in total.

We included the variable-to-component ratio in our analysis because some authors asserted the importance of the number of variables per component or factor (Everitt, 1975). This could be regarded as a significant outcome in which a researcher discovers results that differ significantly from the population and should thus be investigated as a variable of interest. Since there were 32 items/variables in this study, there should be a range of 1 to 10 cases for each item in the instrument used, resulting in 10 ratios of items used. However, the purposive-sampling method was applied to obtain proportionate samples of tourism experts from all over Iran (Nematpour, Khodadadi, Rezaei, et al., 2021). Purposive sampling, known as judgmental or subjective sampling, is a non-probability method based on the characteristics of experts and the study's objectives (Neuman, 2007).

Experts participated in the survey through email. We used a self-administered questionnaire (with 43 questions in three parts) for the first and second phases of the data collection processes. The first part included 33 items related to the major factor influencing Iran's overall image and attractiveness in the form of a Likert-type scale with five points, in which the scale of all items ranging from strongly disagree (=1), disagree (=2), neutral (=3), agree (=4), and strongly agree (=5). The second part comprised six questions about Iran's overall DI and

attractiveness. Finally, the third part contained four demographic items on gender, age, educational attainment, and academic and professional positions. The questionnaire-related statements were based on the interview process and previous studies (Nematpour, Khodadadi, & Rezaei, 2021; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017). Ten tourism management experts were asked to review and clarify the content of the proposed measurement instrument to verify and confirm the validity of the content of the questionnaire items. The final version of the questionnaire was created using these corrections, and its content validity was confirmed. This test revealed that Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this questionnaire is 0.801, a satisfactory value that confirms the validity of the questionnaire. The study analysis was performed on 320 fully completed questionnaires. Version 20 of SPSS software was used for data analysis. A 33-item correlation matrix was formulated for factor analysis based on experts' preferred factors during the first phase. Principal component analysis with varimax rotation was applied, which was considered an appropriate option among factor analysis estimation methods (Nematpour & Khodadadi, 2021). By applying this method, we identified the major factors' underlying subsets (dimensions). Subsequently, reliability was measured based on Cronbach's alpha to corroborate the internal consistency and reliability of the items within each dimension.

3.2 | Second phase (multiple regression)

Stepwise linear regression was used in the following phase to discover the main factors influencing Iran's overall image and destination attractiveness. Data collection for this phase was done using the results of the first phase and second part of the questionnaire. Multivariate regression analysis seeks to take into account the variation of the independent variables in the dependent variable in a synchronous manner (Nematpour & Khodadadi, 2021). Data analysis using a stepwise linear regression model has two specific advantages: establishing the relative importance of one or more predictor variables in determining the criterion value and identifying outliers or anomalies (Jeon, 2015). According to (Neter

et al., 1983); the most well-known regression methodology for displaying choice is the stepwise approach, in which only a few subsets are evaluated by either including or excluding independent variables one at a time Table 1.

3.3 | Third phase (CIB analysis)

We used the CIB analysis method to develop consistent scenarios for improving Iran's overall image and attractiveness as a tourist destination in the future. The study adapts the original CIA method, considering direct and indirect relationships. A cross-impact approach is used to analyze a system that consists of several interconnected variables and a network that must be analyzed using inter-relationships between the variables and an interconnection matrix to predict the system's future evolution (Nematpour, Khodadadi, & Rezaei, 2021). A CIB analysis is a type of CIA that uses a pair-interaction system approach to analyze multidisciplinary qualitative systems. A common area of application for CIB analysis is the Scenario Wizard tool. When developing scenarios, it is critical to determine which combinations of favorable, neutral, and unfavorable forecast variants improve the net of interrelations. Following identifying a set of key factors via the first and second phases (using EFA and stepwise regression) referred to as descriptors, it is important to determine key factors' possible states or variants. The descriptors provide a qualitative description of the system (Nematpour, Khodadadi, & Rezaei, 2021). Each network element is connected to the others via reciprocal and one-sided relationships. The system will seek an internally consistent configuration and balance the web of influences. The CIB process requires three steps to create a scenario. The initial step is to create a list of descriptors for the critical system variables, such as $X_1 \{x_a, x_b, x_c\}$, $X_2 \{x_x, x_y, x_z\}$, and so on. As an illustration:

$$\begin{aligned} X_1 \{x_a, x_b, x_c\} \\ X_2 \{x_y, x_z\} \\ X_3 \{x_i, x_j\} \\ X_n \{x_1, \dots, x_n\}. \end{aligned}$$

The second step requires making a judgment (ranging from 3 "strongly restricting influence" to +3 "strongly promoting influence") about the impact of state x_a of descriptor X_1 on state x_b of descriptor X_2 based on literature reviews and expert interviews. As an illustration:

$$\begin{aligned} X_{ij}(3, 1)X_{ij}(3, 2)X_{ij}(3, 3) \\ X_{ij}(2, 1)X_{ij}(2, 2)X_{ij}(2, 3). \\ X_{ij}(1, 1)X_{ij}(1, 2)X_{ij}(1, 3) \end{aligned}$$

Previous studies were used to establish sample size criteria, with the typical sample size between 10 and 100 individuals divided into two or three groups (Avella, 2016; Nematpour, Khodadadi, & Rezaei, 2021). Participants with expertise in the field of study were chosen using purposeful sampling. We assembled a 12-member expert panel

TABLE 1 Sample profile—First phase (N = 320)

Gender		Education status			
Male	227	(70.9)	Vocational training	38	(11.9)
Female	93	(29.1)	University	134	(41.9)
			Master	47	(14.7)
			Doctorate/PhD	101	(31.5)
Age		Position			
20–30	30	(9.4)	Academic	118	(36.9)
31–40	112	(35.0)	Professional	172	(53.7)
41–50	123	(38.4)	Both	30	(9.4)
Over 50	55	(17.2)			

from the first phase sample group (320 participants) to determine each important factor's appropriate and needed states. Six criteria guided our selection of experts: (1) availability and accessibility of experts for in-person data collection (2) sufficient time to create and complete the questionnaire (3) expert characteristics (4) in-depth knowledge and wealth of information about scenario thinking (5) diversity and (6) agreement to participate in the research (see Flint, 1998). Table 2 contains information about the experts chosen in the second round of sampling.

After identifying possible states of each key factor (descriptor), we developed a selfmade questionnaire in an $n \times n$ cross-impact matrix to collect data from the selected sample considering the states of the identified influencing factors (from the second phase). Experts validated the questions to ensure the questionnaire's validity. The experts' panel determined the rate of influence–dependence of the system's variables' states using cross-impact judgmental thinking as a qualitative measure, including +3: strongly promoting influence; +2: promoting influence; +1: weakly promoting influence; 0: no influence; -1: weakly restricting influence; -2: restricting influence and -3: strongly restricting influence (Weimer-Jehle, 2018).

4 | RESULTS

4.1 | Determining factors contributing to Iran's overall DI and attractiveness

The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) test found that the sampling adequacy of this study was 0.883, indicating that the data distribution used to estimate the major factors was adequate for factor analysis. As mentioned earlier, this study used exploratory factor analysis to identify the functional criteria of the experts' operational behavior. The 33 tourism development statements were subjected to factor analysis using PCA and varimax rotation to determine the underlying dimensions of the tourism experts' opinions. Based on previous studies (Lee et al., 2004; Nematpour & Ghaffari, 2019; Nematpour & Khodadadi, 2021), items with a factor loading lower than 0.40 were set aside, and then the remaining items were repeated and measured again and again until the rotation process attained only items with a factor loading above 0.40. Finally, the number of items remaining after rotation was 32. In addition, eigenvalues, which must be equal to or greater than 1, are also essential. The factor analysis results explain at least 71.95% of the

total variance. Factors that do not explain a significant variance may not be worthy of being included in the final model. Within the varimax rotation, high factor loading values show a high correlation between a factor and its elements (Nematpour & Khodadadi, 2021). The factor analysis results based on the PCA technique are presented in Table 3. Six variables had high-reliability coefficients and eigenvalues equal to or greater than 1. Reliability coefficients were estimated using Cronbach's alpha for the six variables extended above 0.8. Based on Hulin et al. (2001), the value is good. The six resultant factors reflect experts' opinions of Iran's overall image and attractiveness as a tourism destination, including economic, structural and organizational, information communication technology (ICT), product and service, spatial and infrastructure, and political factors. The researchers concluded that “economic” represents a distinguishing central indicator of Iran's tourism development because factor 1 accounted for a large part of the total variance.

4.2 | Identifying the key factors influencing Iran's overall DI and attractiveness

We used multivariate regression analysis on the six main factors to generate a statistically significant model using a stepwise method to identify the factors that substantially influence Iran's overall DI and Iran's destination attractiveness. According to Nematpour and Khodadadi (2021), a determinant phase for researchers is the assumption test using multiple regression. It is necessary to ensure that the regression assumptions are met by testing what needs to be verified to show that the analysis is reliable and valid. To test the assumptions needed for the model, the three criteria of homoscedasticity, multicollinearity, and normality of the statistical concept of regression were considered (see Osborne & Waters, 2002). “Iran's overall DI” was considered the dependent variable. The independent variables in the model were economic, structure and organization, product and services, political, ICT, and spatial and infrastructure.

Table 4 summarizes the multiple linear regression model and the overall adjustment statistics. It can be seen that the adjusted R^2 of this model is = 0.455. This value means that the linear regression explains 45.5% of the variance in the data. The Durbin–Watson value = 1.920, between the two critical values of $1.5 < d < 2.5$. Thus, it can be assumed that first-order linear autocorrelation is not present in this multiple linear regression data. Based on the findings, political factors are the most influential in shaping Iran's overall image.

Participant	Degree	Academic/professional position
E1, E2, E3, E4	PhD in tourism management	Academic
E5, E6, E11	PhD in marketing management	Academic
E9, E10	PhD in strategic management	Academic
E12	PhD in hospitality management	Academic
E7, E8	PhD in tourism management	Professional

TABLE 2 Sample profile—Third phase (N = 12)

TABLE 3 Factor analysis results

Items	Factor loading	Eigenvalue	Variance explained	Cronbach's α	Mean	Overall mean
Factor 1: Economic (EC)		10.841	33.878	.938		3.44
Ec 1. Allocating specific budgets and financial supports for implementing tourism plans	.765				3.55	
Ec 2. Creating a competitive culture	.854				3.44	
Ec 3. Developing modern marketing planning and management based on various media and the Internet	.865				3.41	
Ec 4. Developing entrepreneurship in tourism management	.840				3.46	
Ec 5. Extending privatization to the macro level	.843				3.43	
Ec 6. Attracting domestic and foreign investment	.566				3.38	
Factor 2: Structural and organizational (SO)		4.870	15.220	.870		4.06
SO 1. Increasing interdepartmental/organizational coordination and integration on a national scale	.529				4.22	
SO 2. Developing a tourism development master plan	.642				4.19	
SO 3. Policymaking for tourism on a large scale (macro)	.816				3.93	
SO 4. Formulating incentives policies for the private sector	.861				4.00	
SO 5. Developing and improving education and research in the field of tourism	.843				3.98	
SO 6. Developing specialized tourism management	.733				4.02	
Factor 3: Information communication technology (ICT)		2.349	7.340	.921		3.08
IT 1. Developing virtual information space (provision of quality, interactive, multimedia and edutainment) information)	.847				3.05	
IT 2. Developing virtual transaction systems (destination management system)	.894				3.07	
IT 3. Developing virtual distribution systems (digital TV, Internet, information centers, etc.)	.854				3.03	
IT 4. Developing virtual relationship systems (developing an (e)-CRM strategy including email newsletters; personalization/customization services; privacy policy; incentive programs, etc.)	.828				3.16	
Factor 4: Product and services (PS)		1.891	5.909	.836		4.18
PS1. Diversifying incoming tours	.621				4.31	
PS2. Providing products and services based on cultural heritages	.594				4.33	
PS3. Focusing on developing medical tourism	.745				4.24	
PS4. Development of accommodation, wellness and entertainment facilities	.794				4.07	
PS5. Developing event-based tourism	.788				4.13	
PS6. Development of creative tourism	.775				4.02	
Factor 5: Spatial and infrastructure (SI)		1.671	5.220	.850		3.91
SI 1. Modifying and improving the aesthetic attributes of public and human-made spaces and increasing green zones such as parks	.504				4.12	
SI 2. Improving governance infrastructure properties (law and order machinery, customs, and immigration)	.817				3.93	
SI 3. Improving cultural infrastructure elements (local art, music, language, and food)	.799				3.72	

(Continues)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

Items	Factor loading	Eigenvalue	Variance explained	Cronbach's α	Mean	Overall mean
SI 4. Improving service infrastructure elements (banking facilities, insurance agency, travel agency, tour guides)	.857				3.82	
SI 5. Improving physical infrastructure elements (transportation, accommodation, etc.)	.717				3.98	
Factor 6: Political (PO)		1.402	4.381	.815		3.82
PO1. Improving international relations	.409				3.65	
PO2. Improving physical security structures	.703				3.90	
PO3. Reducing international tourists' perceived risks	.789				3.71	
PO4. Adopting tourism diplomacy strategies	.738				3.98	
PO5. Moderating travel constraints	.763				3.84	

Independent variables	Standardized coefficients	t-value	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)		10.535	.000		
Political (PO)	0.286	5.243	.000	0.841	1.190
Product and services (PS)	0.258	4.731	.000	0.841	1.190

Note: $R^2 = 0.455$, $F = 41.443$, ($p = .000$). Dependent variable: Iran destination's overall image (overall mean = 3.87, SD = 0.459). Inputs: economic, structure and organization, product and services, political, information communication technology, spatial and infrastructure. Method: Linear regression based on the stepwise method.

Abbreviation: VIF, variance inflation factor.

TABLE 4 Multiple linear regression of the main developmental factors that influence Iran's overall destination image

Independent variables	Standardized coefficients	t-value	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)		8.479	.000		
Product and services (PS)	0.287	5.331	.000	1.000	1.000

Note: $R^2 = 0.286$, $F = 28.407$, ($p = .000$). Dependent variable: Iran's destination attractiveness (overall mean = 4.06, SD = 0.671). Inputs: economic, structure and organization, product and services, political, information communication technology, spatial and infrastructure. Method: Linear regression based on the stepwise method.

Abbreviation: VIF, variance inflation factor.

TABLE 5 Multiple linear regression of major developmental factors on Iran's destination attractiveness

We also employed multiple regression analysis regarding "Iran's destination attractiveness," a quantitatively dependent variable. The multiple linear regression model and the overall adjustment statistics are summarized in Table 5. The adjusted R^2 of this model is = 0.286. This value means that linear regression explains 28.6% of the variance in the data. The Durbin-Watson value was equal to 1.689. According to the findings, products and services are the most influential factors in Iran's destination attractiveness.

4.3 | Providing scenarios to improve Iran's overall DI and attractiveness

It is necessary to point out that from now on, the key factors identified in the first and second phases are known as system

descriptors, and each of these descriptors can have different states (Nematpour, Khodadadi, & Rezaei, 2021). At this phase, to determine the possible states of each descriptor and to study each of them in detail, CIB analysis has been used. In other words, after factor analysis and linear regression and determining the key descriptors (factors) of the system, it is necessary to provide an appropriate structure of scenario assumptions to avoid contradictions and inconsistencies of the mutual role of each descriptor to influence on origin and purpose in the third phase (Weimer-Jehle, 2018). By examining the possible states of each of the descriptors, two lists of variables were designed considering the effect of each on the growth and development of the Iranian tourism market development system. That is to say, after preparing a list of the most important system factors (descriptors), it is necessary to define a set of qualitative variants that describe the possible states of the descriptors and

include different states of the development of Iran's tourism market. In fact, these states can occur in the system and serve as strategic drivers for national tourism development. In this regard, we provided Table 6 which shows the political descriptor and its 19 possible states for developing Iran's DI, and subsequently Table 7 which presents the product and services descriptor and its 20 possible states for improving Iran's destination attractiveness.

To analyze the impact of each state on other states in the related system we designed two matrices (19 × 19 matrix for overall DI and 20 × 20 matrix for destination attractiveness). Future scenarios have been built in the following phase based on upcoming judgments, relationships, and interactions of variables and structured processes. Judgments have been made on the impact of state x (of descriptor X) on state y (of descriptor Y) by considering one condition: what impact will any changeability in each descriptor variable have on the trend of growth and development of Iran's tourism? These judgments were based on reviews of the literature and expert interviews (it means they are rich in knowledge and have deep understanding about tourism literature). In this regard, only direct influences have been considered in these judgments. This procedure results in a cross-impact matrix in the Scenario Wizard software. We considered possible states of five descriptors (political key factors) which have a dominant role in influencing the development of Iran's overall DI. Results showed that the total scenarios for improving Iran's DI were 720 (3 × 5 × 4 × 3 × 4), of which, as shown in Table 8, only three highly consistent scenarios have a high probability of occurring in the future to improve the overall image of the destination. The first has ideal and desirable conditions (driving scenario) among these three scenarios. Based on scenario 1, PO1/c (considering profit-based approaches), PO2/b (concentrating on technology and control systems), PO3/c, (focusing on cognitive factors), PO4/b (establishing NGOs and private multinational companies in the field of tourism development), and PO5/a (decreasing structural constraints) improve Iran's overall image. Consistency values of these variants were 391, 254, 193, 107, and 37, respectively. In this direction, developing international relations by considering a profit-based approach has the highest consistency value (equal to 391) among other possible states for improving Iran's overall DI. According to experts, Iran's foreign relations with other countries should focus on economic growth by increasing foreign income.

The second scenario is appropriate but has an intermediate status, and the third is not recommended for improving Iran's overall DI. In Table 8, strong, consistent future scenarios for Iran's overall image improvement are presented, along with the possible states of each key variable in each scenario.

On the other hand, to provide possible scenarios for future Iran's destination attractiveness, we considered consistent states of six descriptors (product and services) which have dominant roles. Results showed that the total scenarios for improving Iran's attractiveness were 1296 (3 × 3 × 3 × 3 × 4 × 4), of which, as shown in Table 9, only four highly consistent scenarios have a high probability of occurring in the future. The first scenario is ideal (known as a driving scenario). Based on scenario 1, PS1/b (considering specific destinations in Iran), PS2/b (based on the built environment), PS3/a (with the approach of high-quality and low-price medical services), PS4/c (with an island

TABLE 6 Possible states of overall destination image descriptors

Descriptor	States
PO1. Improving international relations	PO1/a. Considering security-based approaches PO1/b. Considering culture-based approaches PO1/c. Considering profit-based approaches
PO2. Improving physical security structures	PO2/a. Improving physical barriers in cities PO2/b. Concentrating on technology and control systems PO2/c. Increasing law enforcement cooperation PO2/d. Creating integrated health care systems PO2/e. Employee responsibilities
PO3. Reducing international tourists' perceived risks	PO3/a. Focusing on contextual factors PO3/b. Focusing on individual factors PO3/c. Focusing on cognitive factors PO3/d. Focusing on affective factors
PO4. Adopting tourism diplomacy strategies	PO4/a. Considering Iranian outbound tourists as ambassadors PO4/b. Establishing NGOs and private multinational companies in the field of tourism development PO4/c. Using social networks and similar approaches to follow nationalities
PO5. Moderating travel constraints	PO5/a. Structural constraints PO5/b. Practical constraints PO5/c. Personal constraints PO5/d. Spatial constraints

TABLE 7 Possible states of destination attractiveness descriptors

Descriptor	States
PS1. Diversifying incoming tours	PS1/a. Considering primary and secondary attractions in tour packages PS1/b. Considering specific destinations in Iran PS1/c. Presenting flexible and independent travel
PS2. Providing products and services based on cultural heritages	PS2/a. Based on the natural environment PS2/b. Based on the built environment PS2/c. Based on artifacts
PS3. Focusing on developing medical tourism	PS3/a. With the approach of high-quality and low-price medical services PS3/b. Based on the quality of accommodation services PS3/c. With the approach of developing advanced medical technology for treatments
PS4. Development of accommodation, wellness and entertainment facilities	PS4/a. With a global development approach PS4/b. With a regional development approach PS4/c. With an island development approach
PS5. Developing event-based tourism	PS5/a. Holding educational events PS5/b. Holding entertainment and cultural tourism events PS5/c. Holding business-oriented tourism events PS5/d. Holding religious events
PS6. Development of creative tourism	PS6/a. Based on creative accommodations PS6/b. Focusing on a series of creative activities and other initiatives under a common theme PS6/c. Based on the experience of local culture PS6/d. Based on creative gastronomic experiences

TABLE 8 Scenarios with great consistency in the improvement of Iran's overall image in the future

Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3
PO1/c	PO1/b	PO1/a
PO2/b	PO2/c	PO2/a
PO3/c	PO3/a	PO3/b
PO4/b	PO4/c	PO4/a
PO5/a	PO5/d	PO5/c

TABLE 9 Scenarios with great consistency in the improvement of Iran's destination attractiveness in the future

Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Scenario 4
PS1/b	PS1/b	PS1/a	PS1/c
PS2/b	PS2/c	PS2/a	PS2/a
PS3/a	PS3/a	PS3/c	PS3/b
PS4/c	PS4/b	PS4/b	PS4/a
PS5/b	PS5/a	PS5/c	PS5/d
PS6/c	PS6/b	PS6/d	PS6/a

development approach), PS5/b (holding entertainment and cultural tourism events), and PS6/c (based on the experience of local culture) variants improve Iran's destination attractiveness. Consistency values of these variants were 415, 384, 255, 197, 89, and 16, respectively. In addition, diversifying incoming tours by considering specific destinations in Iran has the highest consistency value (equal to 415) among other possible states for improving Iran's destination attractiveness.

The second and third scenarios are both acceptable but have a middle status. The fourth scenario is not recommended for improving Iran's destination attractiveness. Table 9 presents strong, consistent future scenarios to enhance Iran's destination attractiveness, along with the possible states of each key variable in each scenario.

5 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Many countries, in close and intensive competition, are seeking to increase their interests and revenues from this global industry more than ever before. Deciding to develop tourism in a country requires comprehensive studies. With a brief look at the successful experiences of international tourism destinations, we can make the assumption based on the fact that tourism development should be done in the framework of the planning process (Nematpour, Khodadadi, & Rezaei, 2021). Meanwhile, strategic planning can be considered one of the planning methods in the field of tourism that is a basic and effective method for advancing the goals and creating a clear and realistic vision for the future of the destination's tourism. Iran has the potential to attract the attention of international tourists,

but it still has not led to the growth and development of the tourism industry (Nematpour, Khodadadi, et al., 2022). The existence of historical, cultural, and natural tourist attractions can provide the grounds for economic growth and development of various economic, environmental, and social issues in this country, and as an important tourism hub in south-west Asia and at the macro and international level. Given the economic significance of tourism development in Iran, this destination's overall image and attractiveness should be enhanced. Developing a distinct image and a valuable national brand is seen as the most effective method of communicating a country's national values and identity to the rest of the world. It is a means of increasing Iran's destination attractiveness (Khodadadi, 2016). First, we used factor analysis to determine factors contributing to Iran's overall image and attractiveness as a tourism destination. These factors include economic, structural and organizational, information communication technology, product and service, spatial and infrastructure, and political factors (see Table 3). The Iranian government and tourism authorities must consider these general factors to promote Iran's tourism market to attract international tourists as part of economic regeneration and growth. Tourism is economically critical for Iran. It is a viable means of reducing its heavy dependence on oil earnings and alleviating the burden and influence of sanctions on the national economy (Khodadadi, 2018). The next stage was to perform a multiple regression analysis to determine which of these six factors had the greatest impact on the overall image and attractiveness of the destination (see Tables 4 and 5). According to the findings, the political factor greatly influences Iran's overall image. Political risks associated with visiting a certain destination inevitably influence tourists' impressions of its image and, consequently, their travels to that destination (Eid et al., 2019). Political stability may allow Iran to rejuvenate and strengthen its tourism industry, resulting in a more favorable image of this misunderstood country (Rokni & Park, 2019).

The findings indicate that the most relevant elements affecting Iran's destination attractiveness are product and service factors. The attractiveness of a place contributes to its ability to attract and satisfy tourists (An et al., 2019), which is also influenced by the destination's overall image (Krešić & Prebežac, 2011). Thus, the Iranian tourism authorities must consider product and service factors to increase the attractiveness of Iran's destination, resulting in the country's tourism market growth. The factors of product and service are based on diversification, which is a destination's marketing strategy. A destination must add new products to its existing product mix to diversify and bring new tourists (Petkova & Marinov, 2014). These factors involve offering cultural and historical tourism products and services (Nematpour, Khodadadi, & Rezaei, 2021), developing creative tourism that engages local culture (Ali et al., 2016), and developing event-based tourism such as business events, and other types, for example, sporting events, entertainment, festivals, and other cultural events (Getz, 2008).

In the last step, possible states were determined by an expert panel based on the statements of two key factors to present scenarios and future development paths in improving Iran's overall

image and attractiveness (see Tables 6 and 7). By performing CIB analysis in Scenario Wizard, the most consistent scenarios were identified. As shown in Table 8, the most favorable future scenario for improving Iran's overall image is scenario 1 (PO1/c, PO2/b, PO3/c, PO4/b, and PO5/a). Political factors shape the destination's overall image as they significantly enhance or limit tourism growth (Athari et al., 2021). Morakabati (2010) argued that the solution to the deterrents to tourism development in Iran lies in political issues rather than the tourism industry itself. The negative and unfavorable imagery in the West is also stated by Khodadadi (2016) as a major problem facing Iran on an international scale. Iran's DI is not specific to tourism and is closely linked to political propaganda and the country's relationships with other countries (Akhoondnejad, 2015). Therefore, Iran needs to consider a profit-based approach in its international relations (Nematpour, Khodadadi, Rezaei, et al., 2021). On the other hand, peace, comfort, and security in Iran are among the most critical factors in attracting tourists (Ghasemi et al., 2014) because tourists' perceptions of safety, security, and risks have an impact on the destination's image (Khan et al., 2016). As a result, focusing on technology and control systems is critical in improving physical security structures (Kingsley-Hefty, 2013).

Furthermore, to reduce international tourists' perceived risks of visiting Iran, tourism authorities must concentrate on affective factors when planning marketing campaigns and improving Iran's overall image. Tourists' positive and negative affective states, which can influence people's ability to deal with negative information and self-positivity biases, are among the affective factors (Godovykh et al., 2021). A tourism destination can promote resources and solve related crises or problems through peaceful negotiation between nations using the peaceful power of tourism (Chandra Kuri et al., 2020). As a result, tourism diplomacy helps manage and develop Iran's DI and identity (Papageorgiou & Papagianni, 2018). Therefore, the Iranian government must develop tourism diplomacy strategies while establishing public and private multinational companies (Nematpour, Khodadadi, & Rezaei, 2021). Finally, addressing travel structural constraints related to travel intention improves Iran's overall image as a destination (Chen et al., 2021).

On the other hand, as presented in Table 9, the most favorable future scenario for improving Iran's destination attractiveness is scenario 1 (PS1/b, PS2/b, PS3/a, PS4/c, PS5/b, and PS6/c). The study also found that product and service factors significantly impact the attractiveness of Iran as a tourism destination. From the supply side, Iran is a force consisting of all products and services available at the destination at any given time (Formica & Uysal, 2006). To contribute to the country's attractiveness as a destination, the Iranian tour operators need to diversify the incoming tours by considering specific destinations (Nematpour, Khodadadi, Rezaei, et al., 2021) for international tourists. Furthermore, integrating products and services based on culture and heritage into tourism is important in improving a destination's attractiveness (Pallavicini, 2017), particularly through the built environment, which is recognized as an important heritage to enhance the tourist experience (Moulin, 1996). Focusing on developing medical tourism, with a focus on high-quality, low-cost

medical services, is another way to improve Iran's destination attractiveness. In medical tourism, the cost of medical services, lodging, food, and transportation are important factors determining a destination's attractiveness (Sultana et al., 2014). Iran's attraction for medical tourism is unique and the quality of medical services is acceptable (Rezaee & Mohammadzadeh, 2016) because the attractiveness of a tourism destination is linked to tourism facilities and services (Ariya et al., 2017). In this regard, developing accommodation, wellness, and entertainment facilities using a cluster development approach is critical for Iran. This approach is based on geographic concentrations of businesses engaged in producing, promoting, and selling tourist products or services and other tourism-related activities (Rukomoinikova & Polukhina, 2016).

Developing event-based tourism by hosting entertainment and cultural tourism events contributes to Iran's destination attractiveness. Events are animators of destination attractiveness and marketing propositions in promoting places in the face of increasing global competition to attract visitor spending (Getz & Page, 2016). Creative tourism increases the competitiveness and attractiveness of destinations (Ince Keller & Velibeyoğlu, 2021); therefore, attracting the creative class as visitors contributes to the creative atmosphere of the destination, increasing its creative production and attractiveness to tourism (Richards & Marques, 2012). Developing creative tourism based on local cultural experiences is necessary, as culture is the most important factor in a destination's attractiveness (OECD, 2008). Iran's destination attractiveness meets international tourists' perceptions and expectations by creating commensurate conditions using the destination's local resources. In this regard, cultural heritage-oriented products and services are primary resources for enhancing the attractiveness of Iran's tourism destination by developing appealing regional cultural and historical tourism products and services. Their connection with local communities should be emphasized when developing new products. A scenario with states of PO1/c, PO2/b, PO3/c, PO4/b, and PO5/a is ideal for improving the overall image of the destination. In contrast, a scenario with states of PS1/b, PS2/b, PS3/a, PS4/c, PS5/b, and PS6/c is ideal for improving the destination's attractiveness. These scenarios can formulate developmental paths for future tourism market development in destinations similar to Iran.

6 | STUDY IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

6.1 | Theoretical implications

This study proposed a framework for providing alternative scenarios for the future of tourism destinations. This framework presents an exploratory design with in-depth systematic thinking from a quantitative to qualitative approach. From a material and method viewpoint, the study adopted a mixed method that includes factor analysis, regression analysis, and CIB analysis. It provided an innovative triangle process to propose rich and deeper insights into

the study problem and contributed to realize tourism development issues comprehensively (Nematpour, Makian, et al., 2022; Truong et al., 2020). In addition, this study proposed that mixed method-consistent methodologies result in providing valid and reliable scenarios for the future, which is the primary theoretical implication of the study (Nematpour, Khodadadi, & Rezaei, 2021; Nematpour, Makian, et al., 2022). When considering the underlying of previous studies (e.g., Muskat et al., 2012; Nematpour, Makian, et al., 2022; Nematpour, Khodadadi, & Rezaei, 2021; Wright et al., 2017) on the importance of mixed-method frameworks and models for proposing future scenarios, we can confirm the applicability of this triangle framework to other developmental issues. Furthermore, the innovative way of constructing scenarios based on quantitative to qualitative thinking highlights scenario planning flexibility to better understand the research problem and the destination's overall image and attractiveness issues (Truong et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2017). Future studies can consider dominant variants that influence the future development of tourism (Nematpour, Khodadadi, & Rezaei, 2021). Identifying dominant variants by quantitative methods is binding but not deterministic, in this direction, employing a supplemental qualitative method (fuzzy CIB analysis) to more exploration and systematic cognition about dominant variants, disclosing the relative significance and interdependencies of the destination development tourism factors. DMOs can develop a vision of the future using scenario development, which gives them the ability to understand the complexity of the future, develop resilience, establish rules, and then plan and implement tourism policies (Makian & Nematpour, 2021). It is suggested that DMOs combine appropriate methods for scenario development of tourist destinations since managers must make decisions in an uncertain and complex environment. This study supports the use of mixed methods to ensure an effective result, allowing researchers to gain an in-depth understanding into complex issues at various levels.

Economic, structural and organizational, information communication technology, product and service, spatial and infrastructure, and political factors must be considered to improve Iran's tourism market's overall image and attractiveness to reduce uncertainties for future development. On the one hand, political factors (PO) significantly impact Iran's overall DI. On the other hand, product and service factors (PS) significantly influence Iran's destination attractiveness. The scenarios were created based on these two major influencing factors and their possible states.

6.2 | Managerial implications

This study provides significant implications for DMOs, particularly in Iran. Standard DMOs do not exist in Iran. The most significant government organization in charge of the development of the tourism sector in the country is the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, which consists of three departments. This organization has also not performed well in external marketing measures because it lacks a structure and functions to manage and

market the destination (including image formation). However, the ministry may benefit from the provided suggestions. Tourism development improves significantly as the country's diplomatic system takes its first steps in interacting with the rest of the world to expand mutual, regional, and international cooperation. Tourism diplomacy can be proposed in various ways, including using Iranian tourists as ambassadors, forming nongovernmental organizations and private global corporations, and using social networks and similar approaches to follow other nationals (Baranowski et al., 2019). In this regard, the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts can increase its cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in developing international relations so that Iranian consulates in various countries can work towards forming the image of Iran's destination.

The findings suggest that tourism products and services can help the destination's competitive position by attracting international tourists through providing a prominent and recognizable feature. Good quality cultural and historical tourism products and services with local community characteristics have cultural, economic, and social benefits for communities and help increase their visibility and attractiveness. However, such products and services in Iran require considerable effort because they are not developed adequately for competitiveness and do not fully exploit the existing cultural, historical, and social potential. Through surveying studies, policymakers can identify suitable areas to develop local products and services and then take steps to develop and flourish tourism in these areas via proper planning, management, and marketing. Design, fashion, street art, music, popular culture, literature, and technology can create products and services that represent cultural heritage. These activities can be used for this purpose in the old city centers considering various elements of the local community. Iranian cultural heritage products and services can be one of the goals of attracting global tourists. World heritage sites can be pieces of Iran's DI. The Ministry of Tourism can use these sites to design its marketing strategies to enhance the destination's image and increase its attractiveness.

6.3 | Research limitations and future research

This is an exploratory study, and several research limitations can be identified. First, the study focused on developing the supply side of Iran's tourism market by investigating the overall image and attractiveness of Iran's destinations. As a result, we recommend that future research considers the demand side. Second, a structured questionnaire was used to collect data in this study. We suggest using other data collection methods, such as in-depth interviews, to better understand the subject area. Third, because the study findings are country-specific, they may not be applicable in other contexts. Geographic differences were not addressed because the country was examined from a broad national perspective.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

ORCID

Mohammad Nematpour  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0766-2010>

Masood Khodadadi  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5122-6443>

Sarasadat Makian  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9935-5877>

Mohammad Ghaffari  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0566-4717>

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