

Original Research Article

# An Investigation of the Iranian Cultural and Religious Policies for the Development of Halal Tourism

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**Abstract** | Traces of the 'halal issue' can be found in most of today's industry including food, cosmetics, transportation, and other related productions. Muslim tourists are paying more attention to tourism markets than ever before. Since Iran is an Islamic country and its laws are in accordance with the standards of Islam, halal tourism can be flourished in this country according to the background of Islamic culture. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the importance of paying attention to the cultural and religious policies of Iran to develop halal tourism. The purpose of this article is to evaluate the contribution of the cultural and religious policies of Iran to the improvement and development of halal tourism. To this purpose, the relationship between religious and cultural indicators affecting the development of this type of tourism was examined using the interpretive structural modeling (ISM) technique. This method is a system analysis that examines the interactions between its elements and is based on the opinion of experts. The group of experts in the field of religious tourism and cultural heritage, tourism stakeholders, and managers of accommodation centers have received foreign Muslim tourists. The findings showed that Islamic branding indicators focusing on Iranian culture, marketing, and advertising can introduce the Islamic religious culture of Iran to Muslim tourists and create a good image of the cultural situation in Iran. As a result, Muslim tourists can be attracted to Iran by the most basic religious and cultural indicators affecting tourism development. This strategy should be incorporated into the executive policies of the country as a priority.

**Keywords** | Politics, Religion, Culture, Halal Tourism, Iran.

**Introduction** | Today, leisure activities and travel plans are among the most important aspects of people's lives. Each person tries to make the most out of his/her travel based on his purpose while having a comfortable trip. Muslims around the world can travel more easily according to their religious values (Zamani-Farahani & Henderson, 2009). On the other hand, Muslim tourism is one of the pristine markets in the world, which is growing rapidly due to the influx of tourists. It increasingly raises its unique needs in the market of travel, tourism, and hospitality

(Hosseini, Khavari & Soleimanpour, 2019), as Muslim tourists have attracted the attention of tourism markets more than ever (Saifi, 2019). Among the factors that play a significant role in the development of 'local/ domestic tourism' and 'outbound or international tourism' in Muslim countries the following can be mentioned: the diverse geographical locations, population distribution, and population dispersion of these countries around the world, in addition to the diversity of climatic conditions and cultural richness (Maghsoudi & Arab, 2016). Halal tourism can be considered as one of the economic branches of tourism that can promise the

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growth of the non-oil economy in the country of Iran (Adaby & Nourbakhsh, 2019). The importance of this issue is doubled as a result of a series of events as follow: Announcing 2010 as the year of “Islamic tourism” by the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), turning the tourism industry into an effective factor in cultural interactions, and finally establishing dialogue and familiarity between civilizations and nations. Relying on this, it seemed necessary to pay attention to and get informed of the critical parts of this industry, especially Islamic tourism, and subsequently halal tourism. Halal tourism is a kind of tourism that has developed in accordance with the religious values of Muslims in recent years (Hosseini, et al., 2019). This tourism approach has been emerged as a newfound concept in the tourism industry, as the shareholders in this area, especially the leading countries in tourism and hospitality have paid special attention to it, within the current years. This concept is not a new kind of tourism but is a novel approach compared to the other types of tourism. In fact, halal tourism comprises the whole set of preparation and provision of tourism services and hospitality in which the rules and religious values of Muslims are highly considered, as the whole desired products and services are provided based on this condition (Nawabi, 2016). Halal tourism is not addressing merely halal goods and food, rather, it includes the whole geographical environment, ethics, culture and citizens, economic, social relations, and all Islamic religious aspects (Bagheri, Abdi & Abdi, 2013). There are three various approaches to cultural aspects in tourism which are shown in Fig. 1. In other words, halal tourism seeks to benefit from the third approach, in which culture represents identity. That means culture is not only considered as a barrier in the tourism industry but also observed as a beneficial and profitable resource (Torabi, 2012, 127). The country of Iran with its unique culture, the historical background reflected in many architectures and buildings, and the innovative and diverse natural attractions, with worldwide registration sometimes,

attract a large number of tourists each year. In recent years, Iran has made a special effort to attract travelers from all over the world. In recent years, Iran has made a special effort to attract travelers from all over the world. In addition to these two mentioned important attractions, Iran hosts a large number of Muslim tourists (especially from neighboring countries) every year due to its high potential for religious tourism (due to the existence of religious sites) and the history of cultural tourism among the countries in the region. Access to new markets for Muslim travelers around the world (especially in East Asian countries) requires introducing Iran as a halal tourist destination in the world. For individuals and families who are interested in health and family environments and like to enjoy halal tourism during their travels, the country of Iran can be considered as a target place for this experience. They might easily encourage their young children to travel to Iran (these people are not necessarily Muslims). Considering halal tourism as a behavioral-functional pattern, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the cultural and religious policies of Iran in developing this type of tourism.

**Theoretical foundations**

Many Muslim countries are inclined to substitute their trade areas for a more prosperous and sustainable economy. This will not be achieved unless the industries reduce their reliance on energy sources (Sarvar & Nourani, 2012). The economies of many countries, including Iran, are single-product economies. It means they apply a single source of income. An alternative way for releasing the country’s economy from oil boundaries is the tourism industry (Bagheri, et al., 2011). Tourism is considered to be one of the most dynamic and fastest-growing industries in the world (Arefi, Feyz, Bishami & Zarei, 2020). According to the ‘World Tourism Organization’, tourists are visitors who target a place other than their place of residence for traveling, for more than 24 hours and less than a year, and for a different purpose, they used to have in their permanent place of

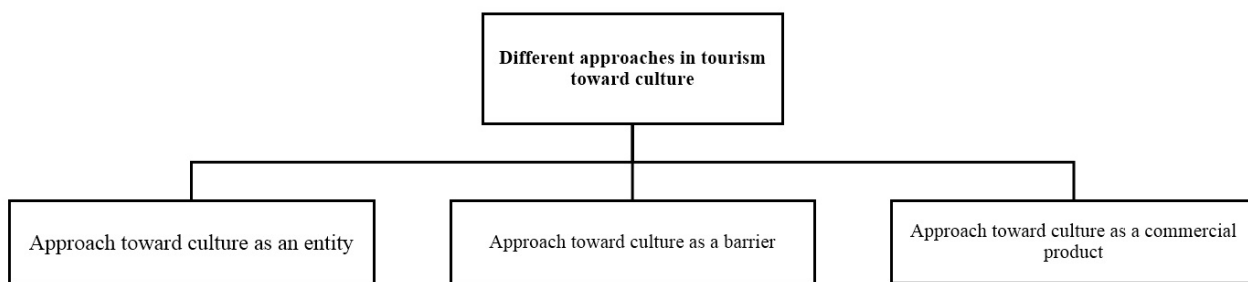


Fig. 1. Different tourism approaches to culture. Source: Torabi, 2012.

residence (Hajinejad, Paydar, Bagheri & Abdi, 2016). In today's world, the tourism industry has become the third most profitable industry in all its dimensions. The importance of this industry is due to its potential in creating jobs, raising incomes, and improving cultural and social relations (Keshavarz & Delbari, 2017). The international growth on one hand and growing interest in tourism, on the other hand, has made various combinations of this word (Haghighi Kafash, Ziaee & Jafari, 2009). In the last two decades, a new concept has emerged as halal branding, which has provided a suitable platform of facilities based on religious definitions, in response to the needs of the target market, both Muslims and non-Muslims (Arefi et al., 2020).

The Muslim population makes up a quarter of the world's population who have beliefs and, consequently, needs that are sometimes different from the other religions' demands (Zainalian & Sehat, 2017). Muslims are required to obey the commands during the journey, such as the prohibition of alcohol and gambling, eating halal food, male-female separation, having Islamic dress, performing religious duties such as prayer and fasting, and other religious practices. Many Muslim tourists may refuse to travel for fear of not finding tourism accommodations that fit their lifestyle. Therefore, providing a touristy environment based on Muslims' needs offers many opportunities under the title of halal tourism (Imani Kalesar, 2010, 122), which is a relatively new version of the tourism industry that provides special recreational and tourism programs for Muslims (Fakheri, 2010). Within the last decade, "Halal" has become a very common word in various economic sections of Islamic countries. The meaning of this Arabic word is "permissible" or "legitimate" (Nowroozi, 2014). This Arabic word refers primarily to food-related items, but its application can comprise other items such as clothing style and other activities such as leisure time, financial transactions, and personal relationships (Dolan, 2010). The Malaysian Standards Institute defines halal as "acts or activities that are permitted by Islam without any imposed punishment" (Kamaruddin, Ibrahimi & Shabudin, 2012, 722). According to the pattern of halal tourism, different types of tourists, including religious, sporting, recreational, and others are required to observe all Islamic principles and rules in accordance with the religion of Islam, based on the specific criteria (Movahedi Reza Abad, Mafi & Bidkhorji, 2019). As a concept, a halal journey and halal tourism consist of three following elements:

- Strengthening and promoting the Islamic culture and values;
- Creating economic benefits for Muslim communities;

- Improving Islamic self-esteem, identity, and beliefs (Tajzade Namin, 2013).

In Islamic culture, tourism has been considered as traveling the outside world against a psychic journey. Islam considers human beings and their needs precisely and validates what makes life blessed and easy. It targets what improves the health and well-being of the human soul (Riahi Samani, 2005). Islamic tourism is related to Muslims since this group constitutes the largest religious community in the world and has some concerns associated with their specific lifestyle (Doman, 2011). According to the 'Organization of Islamic Cooperation', whenever the population of a country reaches over 50%, it is considered an Islamic country (Hosseini, et al., 2016). According to Islamic customs, Islamic countries have common cultural representation both in material and spiritual aspects. According to what has been mentioned about Islamic tourism, the most significant basic factor in Islamic tourism is the religion factor (Yaghfori, Alizade, Eslamfard, & Alamolhoda, 2012). One of the difficulties for Muslims in the tourism industry is the presence of different cultural structures of many countries with those allowed in Islam, as some are considered as prohibited items even though Islam has ordered people to travel (Ramezanpour & Kamal, 2016). Tourism is considered an important factor for the social, cultural, and economic development of countries. Whatever is the motivation of travel, in general, it causes cultural interaction and creates new ideas and opinions (Rezvani, 2007). Since halal tourism is one of the branches of cultural tourism, this industry, by creating opportunities in the communities, will lead to the sustainable cultural development of that country (Aidi, Ranjbar & Shafiee, 2016, 1). In fact, tourism with such an outcome facilitates the unification of cultural, economic, and social affairs and embodies it as a whole context (Khalili Dehdezi & Qaleh Sardi, 2015). One of the important points that should be considered in halal tourism is inter-cultural communication (Torabi, 2012). Basically, the spiritual atmosphere of Muslim countries is attractive on its own, and many Muslims are inclined to travel to areas where the Islamic culture and values are considered (Shafaghi, Hassanvand & Moslehi, 2012). The target market of halal holidays is not only points to tourists with Islamic motives, as the tourists with different travel motivations, such as cultural, historical, sporting, health, and other related reasons can make such trips (Hasan Kashi, 2016). Research evidence shows that halal tourism also has the potential to attract non-Muslim tourists to halal destinations and products. Halal tourism in the case of addressing the considerations of Muslims in desired travel destinations and packages, and fulfilling their

needs, is a potential context that can be realized in Iran with no extensive infrastructure to be grounded. Iran is among the few Muslim countries where Islamic laws and rules are required to be implemented across the country. However, with all its existing capacities, it has not yet been able to introduce itself to the world as a halal tourism destination. Along with the significant growth of the income of Muslim countries citizens, the development of halal tourism is considered as the vision of different countries of the world, especially Islamic countries. Iran has an older background in tourism planning compared to other countries. Since 1978, a series of five-year socio-cultural and economic programs have been developed and continues up to now. Among the main goals of these programs, those efforts made to highlight the ancient Islamic culture of Iran are considerable, together with the attempts for increasing the amount of incoming currency, the development of the local economy and industry to improve the country's position in the world (Zamani- Farahani & Henderson, 2009). According to the 'Crescent Rating' report in 2016, among 130 countries surveyed, the countries, Malaysia, UAE and Turkey, are recognized as the top three Muslim /Halal tourism destinations, accordingly; while the country of Iran is placed in the 15th position (Kashi, 2016). The top fifteen Muslim tourism destinations which are a member of OIC are shown in Table 1.

Although Iran is ranked in this position, its capacity to achieve a suitable position among the mentioned countries is magnificent due to its various attractions. This requires policy-making considerations to improve the position of Iran as a halal tourism destination.

### Research background

Halal tourism is a relatively new concept and so far not much research has been conducted on this type of tourism. The development of halal tourism in Iran was reviewed by Safaeipour and Daman Bagh (2017). The results of this study showed that there are different views on the issue of halal tourism in Iran. According to the proponents of the scheme of halal tourism, Iran has the potential to become a hub of Islamic and halal tourism in the region. Moreover, considering that Iran is a country with Islamic perspectives and approaches, it can provide a higher desired condition for Muslim tourists, compared to the other halal tourist destinations.

On the other hand, according to the opponents of halal tourism, this type of tourism is unnecessary and shows a wrong decision for Iran. Therefore, the prosperity of halal tourism in Iran is not applicable as in this country halal principles are already observed. Similar research studies on halal tourism have shown that the effect of this

model of tourism on the development, performance, and effectiveness of different types of tourism in the country can be different. It means that while halal tourism can contribute to the growth of some parts of the tourism industry, it may have the opposite effect on other parts. In this way, Hajinejad et al. (2016) in their study found that the factor of development and progress of some types of tourism including religious, cultural, historical, health and ecotourism are based on the pattern of halal tourism; however, the same pattern of halal tourism is a limiting factor for recreational, marine and adventure tourism. Furthermore, it has been found that one of the factors for the prosperity of halal tourism in the world is the large population of Muslims and also their desire toward tourism in accordance with religious values. In this regard, Molaei Moghadam (2014) has explained the components of halal tourism in different sectors of the Iranian tourism industry and presented a model for this kind of tourism when presenting its role in attracting more Muslim tourists to Iran. According to experts, another influential factor in the growth and development of halal tourism in Iran is the position of the halal brand in the world and also in Iran (Torabi, 2012). Shafaei and Mohammad (2015) in a study evaluated the brand name of Malaysia as an Islamic tourism center. According to their research findings, Malaysia is currently considered a popular destination for Islamic tourism due to its Islamic environment and conditions. They pointed that, it is now considered as a halal tourism center where financial resources, services, and the required facilities are provided.

Since the country provides tourism facilities and industries of Islamic hospitality, in addition to considering the art, heritage, and special culture of Malay Muslims, these all attempts will support the commercialization and branding strategy of this country as an Islamic tourism center. In another similar research conducted by Duman, halal tourism, Islamic tourism, and the halal market in Turkey were explained (Duman, 2011).

He suggested that the word "halal" be used to describe the halal goods and services offered to markets. According to Doman, specialists in Islam, tourism, and other related fields should work together to publish a book in this field. In a study by Battour et al, they explained the concept of Islamic Sharia and its compliance with tourism and the hospitality industry. Their study also examined recent issues of "halal tourism" and "Islamic hospitality" by adopting the statistical population of Muslims in several Asian and Middle Eastern countries, including the United Arab Emirates, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Egypt.

Table 1. The top tourist destinations of Muslim countries, which are members of the OIC.

Top tourist destinations of Muslim countries of OIC		
Rank	Destination	Score
1	Malaysia	81.9
2	United Arab Emirates	74.7
3	Turkey	73.9
4	Indonesia	70.6
5	Qatar	70.5
6	Saudi Arabia	70.4
7	Oman	70.3
8	Singapore	68.4
9	Morocco	68.3
10	Jordan	65.4
11	Bahrain	65.3
12	Brunei	64.6
13	Kuwait	64.1
14	Tunisia	63.7
15	Iran	63.6

### Research questions

According to the research purpose, two questions have been raised. In the first question, the religious and cultural indicators which are effective in the country's policy-making to motivate Muslim tourists and attract them to develop halal tourism are being addressed; The second question deals with the importance of indicators in order of priority.

### Research methodology

This study is a qualitative approach. In terms of purpose, it is applied research. The descriptive method was used for data collection. To analyze the data, interpretive structural modeling (ISM) was used. The ISM approach relies on expert opinions, in which the number of experts is proposed to be between five and fifteen. To investigate the relationship between religious and influencing cultural indicators on the development of halal tourism, the ISM technique was used by applying the expert's opinion. The experts in this study consisted of experts in the field of religious tourism and activists of the Cultural Heritage and Tourism

Organization and managers of accommodation centers accepting foreign Muslim tourists. The experts in this study consisted of experts in the field of religious tourism and activists of the 'Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts', and managers of accommodation centers for accepting foreign Muslim tourists. The indicators were identified by using the following items: 1. Using content analysis method, 2. The data gathered from open interviews were based on the research topic, 3. Relying on the support of 13 experts active in the field of tourism, cultural heritage, and travel agencies in the field of religious tourism, and 4. codifying the responses received from experts, which followed by ISM technique, to identify the relationships and dependencies between the qualitative variables of the research problem (Table 2).

### Data analysis

The study applied content analysis as a common method for reviewing different resources. Content analysis is considered by most experts as a research method that is used to explain certain concepts or words in a text(s). Some consider it as a method of data analysis. The text can include a book, or a chapter(s) of it, writings, interviews, conversations, titles, articles in the media, and historical documents. The researchers analyze the existence of a concept and the relationship between words or concepts using this method and conclude about the messages in the text, its author, the audience, and even the culture and time of the work. In this study, for the data collection interview method was used. In other words, by conducting deep and unstructured interviews using open-ended questions, the preferred religious and cultural indicators were extracted. This type of interview, by having no guidance questions, is suitable for qualitative research due to its flexibility and profundity. Based on these interviews, based on the opinions of experts 13, the religious and cultural indicators affecting the development and growth of halal tourism in the executive policies of Iran have been selected as a suitable destination for Muslim tourists. For selecting these factors from the literature review, the opinions of experts have been used. The selected religious and cultural indicators based on the literature review and expert's opinions have shown in Table 3.

Table 2. Profile of Experts Participating in the Interpretive Structural Modelling (ISM) Process. Source: Authors.

No.	Education level	Area of activity of the participant
4 persons	Ph.D.	University professors in the field of tourism
5 persons	Master degree and higher	Senior managers in the field of cultural heritage and tourism
4 persons	Bachelor degree and higher	Managers of travel agencies active in the field of medical tourism

Table 3. The religious-cultural indicators affecting the development of halal tourism in the executive policies of Iran relying on the expert's opinion. Source: Authors.

No.	Religious-cultural indicators effective in the development of halal tourism in the executive policies of Iran
1	Islamic branding focusing on the culture of Iran
2	Authorization and training of human resources on the religious and cultural field in dealing with Muslim tourists
3	Marketing and advertising to present the Islamic religious culture of Iran to Muslim tourists
4	Diversity of halal accommodation with emphasis on Iranian welcome culture
5	Multiplicity of cultural and recreational activities with emphasis on religious-Islamic training.
6	Encouraging the investors to participate in constructing halal tourism infrastructure along with cultural-religious attractions
7	High focusing on cultural heritage as a cultural resource on providing halal services such as music, food, and other related items to Muslim tourists
8	Conformity of halal tourism policies with the cultural vision of Iran
9	Holding conferences and exhibitions of photos, films, and other related items by using Iranian culture, art, and original spirituality in the countries of origin of halal tourism
10	Considering the common principles and foundations between the culture of Muslim tourists and the culture of Iranian people as hosts
11	Cutting the costs received from Muslim tourists (fairness by all Muslim employees in the whole chain of supply)
12	Establishment and settlement of halal tourism offices in countries of origin to promote Iranian culture of hospitality
13	Creating a proper image of the cultural situation in Iran to attract Muslim tourists

• **Introducing the indicators**

- **Indicator 1: Islamic branding on the culture of Iran**

The Islamic branding focusing on the Iranian culture is an attempt to introduce and broadcast the Religious-Islamic culture of Iranian people. People usually connect with the brand and get affected by it and trust it. Brand is a necessity as the customer makes decisions based on the brand. That means, when Muslim tourists think about traveling to Iran, a series of images and connotations are formed in their minds. In Iran, no specific action has been taken in the field of halal tourism culture and attracting Muslim tourists to create this mental association. In this area of tourism, branding alone is not enough; Therefore, the desired mentality should be created for the products and services offered to Muslim tourists according to Iranian culture, along with religious and Islamic rituals and principles in their tourism industry. So that Muslim tourists can decide the cultural country of Iran as a tourist destination.

Another solution for branding tourism and halal tourism in Iran is to define the identity of tourism based on the target market. To build such an identity, it is required to define body, personality, culture, and self-image, and focus more on one area to empower it.

- **Indicator 2: Authorisation and training of human resources in religious and cultural areas in dealing with Muslim tourists**

Researchers have long debated about human resources

as a vital source of success for most industries. Since human resources are the most valuable factor of production, and the significant investment factor of a competitive advantage which create the basic capabilities of any organization, therefore, one of the most effective ways to achieve competitive advantage in the current situation is to increase the efficiency of human resources by empowering and educating them in any society, organization, and industry.

By implementing these kinds of training and skills in the religious and cultural fields of the destination country, it is possible that in addition to success in the field of halal tourism and introducing the Islamic country of Iran to tourists –who are seeking religious and halal tourism destinations- causes the development and prosperity of other areas and sectors related to the tourism industry as well.

- **Indicator 3: Marketing and advertising to introduce the Islamic religious culture of Iran to Muslim tourists**

Advertising and the use of media tools have a special place in the communication era. Therefore, even if the economic sector provides the highest service or production, but lacks proper advertising activities to introduce it to the customer, most likely, they should leave the market to competitors which may be at a lower level of service or quality of products. The tourism industry follows the same rule and in some cases is dependent on information and advertising services

even more than other industries. It is because attracting tourists and justifying them to admit travel difficulties and related costs requires the various attractions, services, and facilities of the destination to be thoroughly introduced.

Halal tourism is a kind of advantage for the tourism industry in Iran, which requires to be fully and properly presented to the world to develop the tourism industry.

One of the factors that can develop and improve the country's tourism industry is the use of effective tools and mechanisms of marketing and advertising; as by necessary attention to these issues and by having proper and desirable management to recognize halal tourism in the destination country, the target community of tourists will get acquainted with the culture, customs, and capabilities of that region, as this familiarity will develop and transfer to different countries. For implementing halal tourism over Iranian rich culture, cultural advertising and addressing the hospitality and rich culture of them, with emphasis on the religious and Islamic standards, together with marketing and providing services to Muslim tourists are of great importance.

**- Indicator 4: The diversity of halal accommodation focusing on Iranian hospitality/welcome culture**

Muslims constitute a significant part of the world's tourists are. Therefore, it is essential to make the required arrangements to respect their beliefs. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) even generalizes halal tourism to hotels and accommodation centers and highly recommends not to serve any alcoholic beverages or haram snacks. Respecting the privacy of men and women in public areas and recreational places, including swimming pools, beaches, spas, and massage salons, has also been considered. In this way, Muslims in any country of halal tourism destinations will be able to deal with the entertainment programs on their journey according to the principles of Sharia. Considering the variety of accommodation for Muslim tourists such as thematic hotels, attractive ecotourism, accommodation with Islamic architecture, in accordance with Iranian culture, and preparing comfortable accommodation for Muslim tourists near mosques and religious places are some of those suitable options for this group of tourists.

**- Indicator 5: Diversity of cultural and recreational activities focusing on Religious-Islamic instructions**

Halal tourism does not merely refer to the use of religious places during the journey, but also means that Muslims can enjoy all kinds of entertainment as long as it is in accordance with the principles of Sharia. To get this aim, the countries such as Malaysia and Turkey, which are pioneers in accepting all types of tourists, especially religious or Muslim tourists, are setting arrangements

to attract Muslim tourists and so empower this part of their country's tourism industry, which is known as halal tourism. For this reason, these countries besides providing a variety of opportunities for attracting their local tourism have also provided opportunities for the use of Muslim tourists.

**- Indicator 6: Encouraging investors to participate in the construction of halal tourism substructures beside the cultural-religious attractions**

Among the important indicators in the development and growth of halal tourism in the country of Iran cooperation with local and foreign investors are considered to build and complete the appropriate substructure for Muslim tourists. The policies should be legislated on the path of encouraging and supporting the investors.

**- Indicator 7: Concentrating on cultural heritage as a reliable resource to provide halal facilities, including music, food, and similar items to Muslim tourists**

In general, there are two types of cultural heritage: tangible and intangible. Intangible heritage pays attention to the religious and cultural beliefs, food, music, and other related issues which can be considered as important cultural resources for presenting to tourists.

**- Indicator 8: The conformity of halal tourism policies with the cultural vision of Iran**

The cultural vision of the country in specified upstream documents and development plans are defined in such a way that these visions can be attained in an effective time. For the development of halal tourism, the policies and strategies should be defined in a way to let the highest level of consistency with these policies achieve the desired progress.

**- Indicator 9: Holding conferences and exhibitions of photos, films, and other related items with a combination of Iranian culture, art, and original spirituality in the origin countries of halal tourism**

It is possible to create a suitable context for the development of halal tourism in Iran by providing documentaries or narrative films, preparing comprehensive catalogs about the facilities and conditions of halal tourism, and holding related conferences, exhibitions, and festivals.

**- Indicator 10: Considering the common principles and foundations between the culture of Muslim tourists and the culture of the Iranian people as the host country**

Iranian culture has a long and brilliant history. Tourism has been considered as a social connection due to its cultural effects; as in any culture the lifestyle, beliefs, customs, and communication are considered as a manifestation of that culture. In developing the tourism industry, discovering and introducing common cultural and religious aspects of Muslim tourists with those of Iranian people can be effective in attracting tourists.

**- Indicator 11: Cutting the expenses received from Muslim tourists (fairness by all Muslim employees in the whole chain of supply)**

In the religion of Islam, it is highly recommended to be fair in dealing. The presence of Muslim suppliers in the service chain ensures the buyers and tourists that the services are provided at a fair price.

**- Indicator 12: Creating and establishing halal tourism offices in countries of origin focusing on Iranian hospitality culture**

Iran is an Islamic country in which all religious principles are considered, as according to the constitution of its Islamic order, culture, and custom governing the public space, is committed to observing all Islamic ideologies, laws, and rules. Therefore, Iran can be a pioneer in halal tourism for other countries as a destination, considering the potential economic, cultural, religious, and political benefits of the halal tourism industry and having the required capacities for this type of tourism. Unfortunately, Iran has not yet been capable of acquiring an important position in this area. Creating and establishing halal tourism offices in the countries of origin, where the Iranian culture of hospitality has been emphasized, can help Muslim tourists to present this halal tourism destination.

**- The Indicator 13: Creating a proper image of the cultural situation in Iran to attract Muslim tourists**

Having a mental image of the destination affects the current behaviors of the tourist and shapes emergent attitudes and manners. One of the most important issues that cause a negative mental image in the minds of Muslim tourists is the disruption of their rights in the Iranian culture. Muslim tourists are usually interested in traveling to tourist destinations that have specific standards and rules for foreign Muslim tourists in terms of security, facilities, infrastructure, religious services, and appreciation of their culture. This will play a significant role in creating a positive mental image and ultimately attracting Muslim tourists.

**• Performing ISM method**

**- Formation of structural self-interactive matrix**

The indicators identified in the previous step were put into the structural self-interaction matrix. The number of target factors determines the dimensions of this matrix. The factors are placed in rows and columns, respectively. In other words, this matrix is formed to analyze the relationship between elements by applying four symbols of V (one-way statistical relationship from i to j), A (one-way relationship from j to i), X (two-way relationship of i and j), and O (no connection between two elements I and j). Thus, experts have been asked to represent the relationship between these indicators using the above symbols (Table 4).

**- Formation of initial achievement matrix**

At this stage, by converting the symbols of the structural self-interaction matrix to numbers Zero (0) and One (1) the initial achievement matrix can be obtained (Table 5).

-Formation of the final Achievement Matrix: Once the initial achievement matrix has been obtained, its internal consistency must be established. For example, if factor 1 leads to factor 2 and factor 2 leads to the formation of factor 3, factor 1 will certainly lead to factor 3, and if this relationship is not established in the access matrix, the matrix should be corrected and replace the relationships with other factors which were not identified at the beginning (Table 6).

-Determining the level and priority of variables: To determine the level and priority of variables, the 'achievement/access' and 'initial' sets for each index were determined. The achievement set for each index includes the indicators that can be reached through this index, and the initial set includes the indicators through which these indicators can be reached. This process was performed by using the access matrix (Tables 7-12).

After determining the achievement and priority matrices for each index, the common elements in the achievement and initial set for each index were identified. After determining these sets, the level of indicators was specified which shows whether the indicators affect other indicators or are influenced by others. Those indicators which were at the highest level (1), were affected by other indicators and did not affect other indicators.

-Representing the interpretive structural pattern At this stage, the final model was presented according to the 1. Determined levels of the previous stages, and 2. The final achievement matrix (Fig. 2).

- The analysis of 'driving-dependence power': The sum of row numbers in the final achievement matrix for each element indicates the degree of 'driving power' and the sum of the column numbers indicates the degree of dependence. The factors that are placed at the lower levels of the model are considered as leading factors due to their greater driving power, and factors that are placed at higher levels are considered as lagging factors due to their dependency. According to driving-dependence power, four groups of elements are recognizable: self-reliance, dependent, connected, and independent (Fig. 3). Autonomous/self-reliant factors: They refer to those factors and indicators that have low 'driving-dependence power'. These indicators are somehow separate from other factors and have a little correlation with other indicators. According to Fig. 3, the only indicator which is placed in this group is the cutting costs received from Muslim tourists (fairness by all Muslim employees in the whole chain of supply). This means that cutting the costs



Table 5. The Initial Access Matrix. Source: Authors.

Indicators	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
2	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
3	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
4	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
5	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
6	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
7	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
8	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
9	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1
10	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
11	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
12	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
13	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1

Table 4. The Structural interactive self-matrix. Source: Authors.

Row	The religious-cultural indicators affecting the development of halal tourism in Iran	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
1	Islamic branding with emphasis on the culture of Iran	X	A	O	A	X	O	A	O	O	O	A	A	
2	Authorisation and training of human resources in religious and cultural area in dealing with Muslim tourists	O	O	V	X	O	O	O	O	O	X	V		
3	Marketing and advertising to introduce the Islamic religious culture of Iran to Muslim tourists	X	X	A	A	A	O	A	O	A	X			
4	The diversity of halal accommodation with emphasis on Iranian hospitality/welcome culture	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	V	V				
5	Diversity of cultural and recreational activities with emphasis on Religious-Islamic instructions	O	O	O	A	O	X	A	O					
6	Encouraging investors to participate in the construction of halal tourism substructures beside the cultural-religious attractions	O	V	O	O	O	O	O						
7	Concentrating on cultural heritage as a reliable resource to provide halal facilities, including music, food, and similar items to Muslim tourists	O	O	O	V	V	X							
8	The conformity of halal tourism policies with the cultural vision of Iran	O	O	O	V	O								
9	Holding conferences and exhibitions of photos, films and other related items with a combination of Iranian culture, art and original spirituality in the origin countries of halal tourism	X	O	O	X									
10	Considering the common principles and foundations between the culture of Muslim tourists and the culture of the Iranian people as the host country	O	O	O										
11	Cutting the expenses received from Muslim tourists (fairness by all Muslim employees in the whole chain of supply)	O	O											
12	Creating and establishing halal tourism offices in countries of origin with emphasis on Iranian hospitality culture	V												
13	Creating a proper image of the cultural situation in Iran to attract Muslim tourists													

received from Muslim tourists does not have much effect on the growth and improvement of other indicators to improve the quality level and development of halal

tourism. In addition to this, the lack of attention to other indicators does not affect the improvement of this factor. Dependent factors: They refer to those factors that

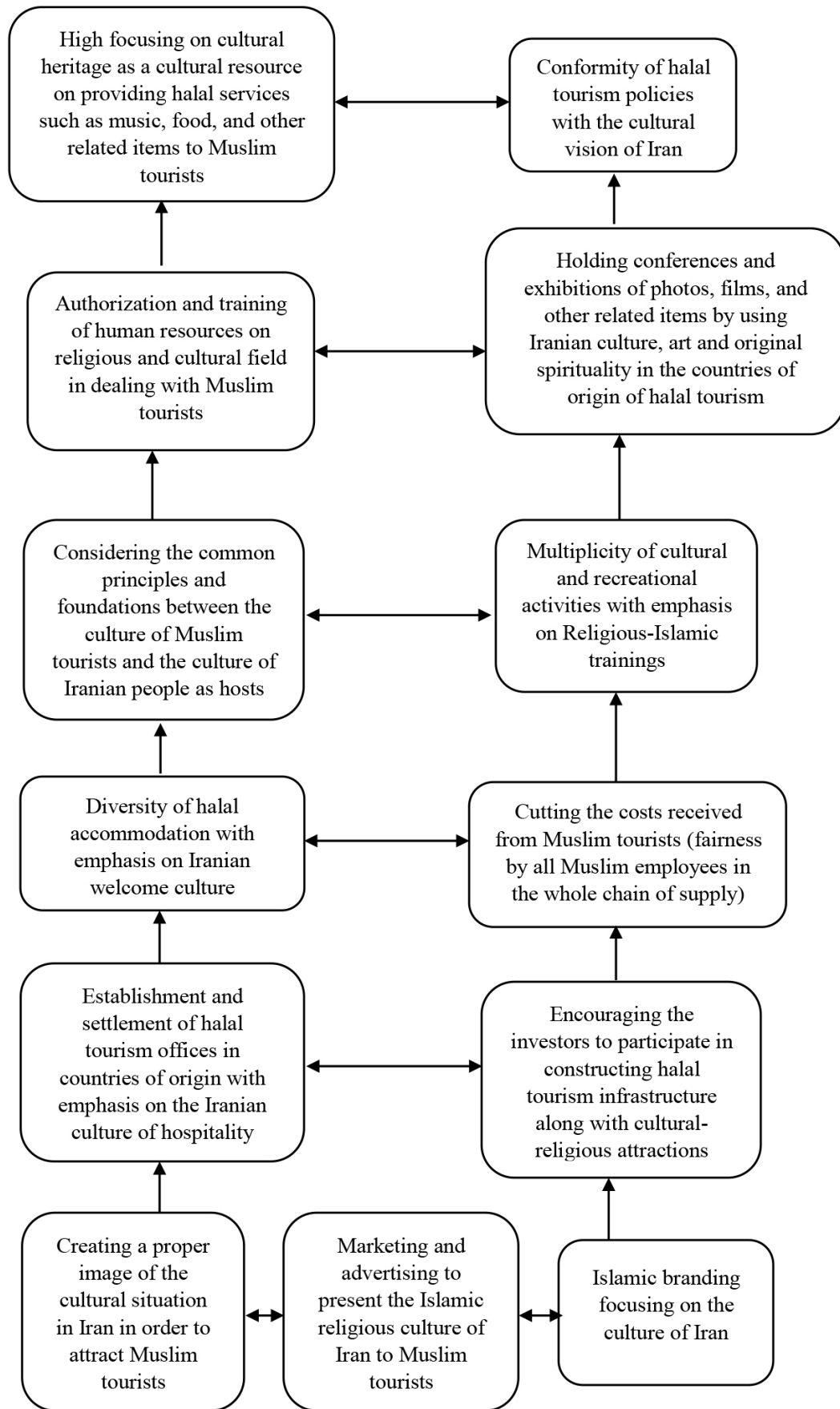


Fig. 2. The model of religious and cultural indicators affecting the development of halal tourism in the executive policies of Iran. Source: Authors.

Table 6. The Final Access Matrix. Source: Authors.

Religious and cultural indicators of halal tourism development in Iran	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	Driving Power
1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	5
2	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	11
3	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	9
4	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	9
5	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	9
6	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	7
7	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	11
8	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	10
9	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	9
10	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	11
11	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	6
12	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	9
13	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	6
Degree of Dependency	13	9	13	10	6	6	3	7	8	9	4	12	13	

Table 7. Determining the levels of variables (repetition 1). Source: Authors.

Row No.	Access Set	Initial Set	Common Set	Level
1	1,3,9,10,13	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13	1,3,9,10,13	1
2	1,2,3,4,5,6,9,10,11,12,13	2,3,4,6,7,8,9,10,12	2,3,4,6,9,10,12	
3	1,2,3,4,6,8,9,12,13	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13	1,2,3,4,6,8,9,12,13	1
4	1,2,3,4,6,10,11,12,13	2,3,4,5,7,9,10,11,12,13	2,3,4,10,11,12,13	
5	1,3,4,5,7,8,10,12,13	2,5,7,8,9,10	5,7,8,10	
6	1,2,3,6,8,12,13	2,3,4,6,8,12	2,3,6,8,12	
7	1,2,3,4,5,7,8,9,10,12,13	5,7,8	5,7,8	
8	1,2,3,5,6,7,8,9,10,12	3,5,6,7,8,10,12	3,5,6,7,8,10,12	
9	1,2,3,4,5,9,10,12,13	1,2,3,7,8,9,10,12	1,2,3,9,10,12	
10	1,2,3,4,5,8,9,10,11,12,13	1,2,4,5,7,8,9,10,13	1,2,4,5,8,9,10,13	
11	1,3,4,11,12,13	2,4,10,11	4,11	
12	1,2,3,4,6,8,9,12,13	2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13	1,2,3,4,6,8,9,12,13	
13	1,3,4,10,12,13	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13	1,3,4,10,12,13	1

have low 'driving power' but high 'dependence power'. The results show that the Islamic branding indicator is considered as a dependent factor by focusing on Iranian culture and representing a proper image of the cultural situation in this country to attract Muslim tourists. This means that although managers and tourism planners, especially those involved in halal tourism, provide the necessary conditions and substructure to increase the efficiency of these two indicators, due to the high dependency of these indicators to others for improvement, and also the effect and low influence of these two indicators on the growth of other indicators, it is not possible to attract Muslim tourist to the Cultural-

Islamic country of Iran to the highest desired level. Thus, it is recommended that not to spend more time, cost, and effort on the growth and development of these indicators. Connected factors: They refer to those factors that have high influence and dependency. Among the cultural-religious indicators studied in this study, six of them had a high degree of influence and impact on the growth and improvement of other indicators; however, it should be noted that these factors are highly dependent on the growth and decline rate of other indicators, which are connected to the level of their consideration as well. This means that the slightest failure to address the conditions of these indicators will significantly reduce their ability

Table 8. Determining the levels of variables (repetition 2). Source: Authors.

No.	Access Set	Initial Set	Common Set	Level
2	2,4,5,6,9,10,11,12	2,4,6,7,8,9,10,12	2,4,6,9,10,12	
4	2,4,6,10,11,12	2,4,5,7,9,10,11,12	2,4,10,11,12	
5	4,5,7,8,10,12	2,5,7,8,9,10	5,7,8,10	
6	2,6,8,12	2,4,6,8,12	2,6,8,12	2
7	2,4,5,7,8,9,10,12	5,7,8	5,7,8	
8	2,5,6,7,8,9,10,12	5,6,7,8,10,12	5,6,7,8,10,12	
9	2,4,5,9,10,12	2,7,8,9,10,12	2,9,10,12	
10	2,4,5,8,9,10,11,12	2,4,5,7,8,9,10	2,4,5,8,10	
11	4,11,12	2,4,10,11	4,11	
12	2,4,6,8,9,12	2,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12	2,4,6,8,9,12	2

Table 9. Determining the levels of variables (repetition 3). Source: Authors.

No.	Access Set	Initial Set	Common Set	Level
2	2,4,5,9,10,11	2,4,7,8,9,10	2,4,9,10	
4	2,4,10,11	2,4,5,7,9,10,11	2,4,10,11	3
5	4,5,7,8,10	2,5,7,8,9,10	5,7,8,10	
7	2,4,5,7,8,9,10	5,7,8	5,7,8	
8	2,5,7,8,9,10	5,7,8,10	5,7,8,10	
9	2,4,5,9,10	2,7,8,9,10	2,9,10	
10	2,4,5,8,9,10,11	2,4,5,7,8,9,10	2,4,5,7,8,9,10	
11	4,11	2,4,10,11	4,11	3

Table 10. Determining the levels of variables (repetition 4). Source: Authors.

No.	Access Set	Initial Set	Common Set	Level
2	2,5,9,10	2,7,8,9,10	2,9,10	
5	5,7,8,10	2,5,7,8,9,10	5,7,8,10	4
7	2,5,7,8,9,10	5,7,8	5,7,8	
8	2,5,7,8,9,10	5,7,8,10	5,7,8,10	
9	2,5,9,10	2,7,8,9,10	2,9,10	
10	2,5,8,9,10	2,5,7,8,9,10	2,5,8,9,10	4

Table 11. Determining the levels of variables (repetition 5). Source: Authors.

No.	Access Set	Initial Set	Common Set	Level
2	2,9	2,7,8,9	2,9	5
7	2,7,8,9	7,8	7,8	
8	2,7,8,9	7,8	7,8	
9	2,9	2,7,8,9	2,9	5

Table 12. Determining the levels of variables (repetition 6). Source: Authors.

No.	Access Set	Initial Set	Common Set	Level
7	2,7,8	7,8	7,8	6
8	2,7,8,9	7,8	7,8	6

in attracting Muslim tourists to the cultural-religious country of Iran, which might complicate the process of introducing the country as a halal tourism destination. Independent factors: They refer to those factors that have high influence/driving power and weak dependence power. According to Fig. 3, the ‘Ministry of Cultural Heritage’ of Iran, as a cultural reference has shown a high level of consideration on the following subjects: 1. providing halal facilities such as music, food, and other related items to Muslim tourists, 2. Compliance of halal tourism policies with the cultural landscape of Iran and 3. Providing a diversity of cultural and recreational activities with emphasis on Religious-Islamic instructions, which all had high influence power and low dependency. In this regard, it is important to note that since the most important problems of Muslims in tourism activities are: finding halal food, facing with serving a wide range of alcoholic drinks, and observing the condition in which men and women are mixed, which all causes restrictions for them, Iran’s cultural heritage organization should take stronger and efficient steps in providing better conditions and substructures to offer required services to this group of tourists relying on marketing tools; considering this organization is a cultural resource for presenting and broadcasting the Iranian customs and traditions to the world, and introducing the religious and Islamic culture of Iran to others, due to having a close relationship with foreign Muslim tourists and being more familiar with the demands and needs of this group of tourists.

It is because according to the research findings, this indicator has the greatest influence and driving power on other indicators compared to other counterparts, by having a very low dependency on them; moreover, the growth, attention and focus on this indicator will lead to the improvement of other indicators as well, which ultimately, the improvement of all indicators together, causes the growth and development of halal tourism in our country. Another significant issue is that despite the coincidence of Iran’s development plan with the developed countries, and experiencing about seventy years in implementing the plans, strategies, and executive policies for growing the tourism industry, still more achievements in various type of this field is expected, even at the basic levels of this area; the compliance of these policies with the religious and Islamic culture of Iran is highly needed as well. Especially in the field of halal tourism as one of the sub-branches of religious tourism, this compliance is more important and effective than other parts. Implementing the executive policies of halal tourism in accordance with the culture of Iran can accompany other indicators affecting the development of

Table 13. The Levels of variables for religious and cultural indicators affecting the development of halal tourism in executive policies of Iran. Source: Authors.

Level	Common Set	Initial Set	Access Set	Religious and cultural indicators	Repetition
1	1,3,9,10,13	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13	1,3,9,10,13	1	1
1	1,2,3,4,6,8,9,12,13	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13	1,2,3,4,6,8,9,12,13	3	
1	1,3,4,10,12,13	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13	1,3,4,10,12,13	13	
2	2,6,8,12	2,4,6,8,12	2,6,8,12	6	2
2	2,4,6,8,9,12	2,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12	2,4,6,8,9,12	12	
3	2,4,10,11	2,4,5,7,9,10,11	2,4,10,11	4	3
3	4,11	2,4,10,11	4,11	11	
4	5,7,8,10	2,5,7,8,9,10	5,7,8,10	5	4
4	2,5,8,9,10	2,5,7,8,9,10	2,5,8,9,10	10	
5	2,9	2,7,8,9	2,9	2	5
5	2,9	2,7,8,9	2,9	9	
6	7,8	7,8	2,7,8	7	6
6	7,8	7,8	2,7,8,9	8	

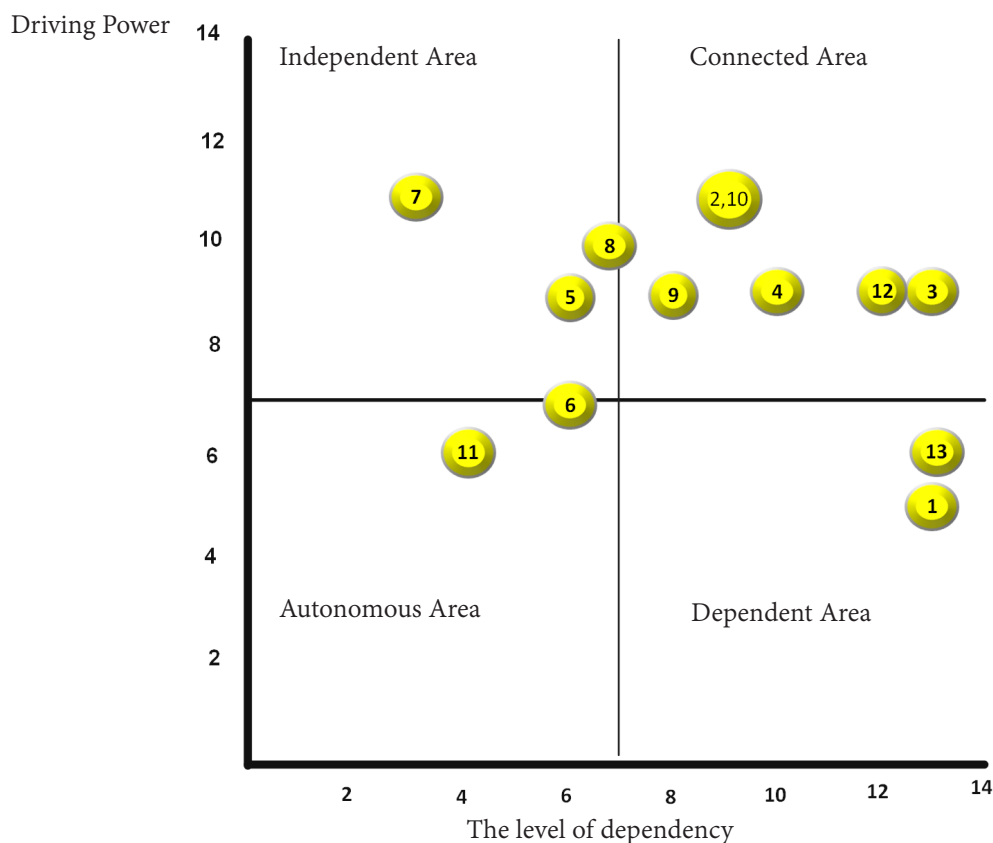


Fig. 3. The diagram of 'dependence- driving power'. Source: Authors.

halal tourism in Iran; however, the growth and decline of other indicators do not affect the influence of this indicator in improving the halal tourism industry in this

country. Another indicator with high influence and low dependence, according to the findings of this study is the diversity of cultural and recreational activities with

emphasis on Religious-Islamic teachings. Since cultural and spiritual resources are the most significant reason of strength and advantage of the Islamic societies and are considered the most important basis for support, unity, national identity, and the existence of Muslim countries, representing their culture and belief structure, so it is required to pay attention to following areas: 1. The substructure and cultural planning in the Islamic society of Iran, and 2. The diversification of these activities to attract more Muslim tourists; these attempts will help to benefit from the existing potential of the country to provide appropriate and satisfactory services to this group of tourists.

As the research findings show, by paying attention to the diversification of cultural and entertainment programs based on the Religious-Islamic teachings, the growth and improvement of other indicators for the development of the halal tourism industry will emerge, due to the high influence and driving power of this indicator. Among the indicators studied, the index of encouraging investors to participate in the construction of halal tourism infrastructure along with cultural-religious attractions; Which is in a neutral state in terms of influence and degree of dependence. Among the mentioned indicators, the index of encouraging investors to participate in the substructure of halal tourism, and providing the cultural-religious attractions, are placed in a neutral state in terms of influence and degree of dependency.

## Conclusion

From the time of human creation until now, human beings has considered travel as a way to gain knowledge and experience, or sometimes as a way to escape from his difficulties. A phenomenon that is now called "tourism" and the world considers it a valuable industry. Tourism has become one of the most profitable and lucrative industries in the world for many years. The industry is serving countries around the world to gain a small share of this struggle, each with its own competitive advantage. While, some countries consider their natural and man-made resources as a basis for earning income, relying on the tourism industry, others prefer to pay attention to the ideology, cultural and religious values , and their customers' preferences. Muslims, as one of the ideological leaders, constitute a significant portion of the world's population and have a special place in the tourism industry. However, tourism still brings problems and limitations for followers of this religion, often due to differences available in the cultural structure and laws of destination countries. Tourism is considered to be one of the most exciting behaviors that people of all religions try to experience. This has caused activists in this

field to continuously try to implement this newfound phenomenon in the best possible way for followers of various religions, including Muslims; The effort has been going on for several years and has led to the emergence of one of the most important types of tourism called "halal tourism". The concept of tourism is rooted in the multiple nature of human beings, and from another perspective, "halal" is a moral norm that is based on religious ethics, according to the sociological point of view.

Halal tourism is a type of tourism in which procedures have been made based on Islamic standards and are in compliance with it. Halal tourism can be considered as a subdivision of religious tourism, which is organized based on the beliefs of Muslim families, in accordance with Islamic law. Hatem El-Gohary (2016) has addressed this issue in his research and answered the following basic questions:

Is halal tourism really halal? Does halal tourism only address Muslim families who follow Islamic law? Should tourism necessarily be a halal act or according to Islamic law? Is halal tourism an issue only related to Islamic countries or matters to other countries as well? What effect does violation of halal principles have on the performance of hotels (and other tourism organizations)?

One of the constant problems of Muslims in the tourism industry has been the different cultural structures of many countries, which are against the Islamic law, and are prohibited in Sharia, although the religion of Islam encourages people to travel and see the world. Studies carried out by Safaeipour and Daman Bagh (2017) show the importance of the cultural structure of countries in the growth and development of halal tourism. Halal tourism is a type of religious tourism in which all activities are allowed under Islamic law; so in this regard, developed countries do their best to attract Muslim tourists from all around the world. The World Tourism Organization correspondingly has defined halal tourism arrangements for hotels and accommodation centers, with recommendations on avoiding any alcoholic beverages and serving pork. Moreover, the privacy of men and women in public and recreational places, including swimming pools, beaches, spas, and massage centers, has been considered. Thus, Muslims can have their own activities in accordance with Islamic principles while dealing with entertainment programs in any country of halal tourism destinations.

Iran can be considered one of the best travel destinations for Muslims around the world due to its high potential in the field of halal tourism. It is a country with a high cultural background, in which executive laws are based

on Islam and halal principles are well observed in most areas of this country. So the Islamic government of Iran, together with natural and historical tourist attractions, can represent a lot of potential in this field. Therefore, to attract Muslim tourists to the Islamic country of Iran, as a country with a rich cultural background, the following actions are recommended according to the research findings:

- The government is highly responsible to recognize Iran as a halal tourism destination and attract Muslim tourists through strengthening its diplomacy, negotiating with tourism organizations in Islamic countries, presenting Iran's tourist attractions, and holding permanent and temporary exhibitions.
- Also, following the advertising model of leading countries in this field can be another suggestion for the prosperity of halal tourism in Iran, which unfortunately has not yet been implemented in the country.

-The prosperity of halal tourism in Iran requires more information in this field. In other words, in commercial markets where halal tourism is important for their tourists, it is recommended to broadly advertise Halal tourism in Iran.

-Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization, as one of the most important organizations in charge of religious tourism in the country, is responsible for one type of tourism that plays a major role in the social life of Iranians and Islamic countries. So, for people who plan to have a halal trip, these organizations can give them this reassurance.

-In general, it can be said that considering and presenting religious and cultural values can be the basis for decisions related to halal tourism. In this regard, visual and virtual advertising by various media platforms is highly contributed to emphasizing and recognizing the capabilities of halal tourism by observing the religious and cultural indicators of our country.

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