

Exploring Diverse Stakeholder Perspectives on Tourism: Research based on Q Methodology

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Abstract

The perception of tourism among beneficiaries is a crucial element that affects their support for tourism development. This study investigates the viewpoints of various stakeholders regarding the influx of tourists in Iran. Utilizing Q methodology, the research assessed stakeholder perceptions through a carefully selected representative sample of 36 items from the concourse. A total of 30 stakeholders, including residents, entrepreneurs, and policymakers, participated in completing the Q questionnaire. The data analysis identified three distinct attitude patterns: Interactive, Developmental, and Conflictual. Participants exhibiting Interactive and Developmental thinking patterns generally held a positive view of tourism, acknowledging its potential benefits. Conversely, those with a Conflictual mindset expressed negative sentiments towards tourism, raising concerns about environmental degradation, cultural integrity, and rising living costs. Significantly, the Developmental thinking pattern showed the highest factor loading among participants, followed by the Conflictual pattern. While prior research has quantitatively examined factors influencing beneficiary attitudes towards tourism, this study is groundbreaking in its qualitative approach, particularly in the context of developing and Muslim countries, aiming to deepen the understanding of tourism beneficiaries' attitudes.

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1. Introduction

Tourism is increasingly recognized as a crucial driver of economic growth, employment, and infrastructure development across various nations, particularly in underdeveloped regions (Koščak & O'Rourke, 2021). In Iran, tourism plays a significant role in the national economy, contributing 4.2% to the GDP and accounting for 6.5% of total employment in 2020 (Masaeli et al., 2021). However, the industry faces challenges, particularly due to socio-political issues that have affected the influx of international tourists. Despite these obstacles, Iran is committed to enhancing its share of the global tourism market (Salamzadeh et al., 2022). The importance of community support in tourism development is underscored by the direct interaction between hosts and tourists (Sharma et al., 2008). Residents' attitudes towards tourism significantly influence strategic and managerial priorities within the sector (Zamani-Farahani, 2016). To explore the potential for sustainable development through tourism in Iran, this study aims to capture stakeholders' perspectives through interviews with various groups, including policymakers and entrepreneurs. Contemporary tourism governance increasingly relies on local policy networks as government authority diminishes (Dredge, 2003). Effective destination management requires collaboration among diverse actors, yet this complexity can complicate decision-making and policy formulation (McLeod et al., 2018). Participatory approaches are advocated to address these challenges, promoting extensive stakeholder involvement in tourism management. However, criticisms exist regarding the potential for such approaches to perpetuate local entrepreneurs' interests and create inequalities among stakeholder groups (Beritelli, 2011). Moreover, the assumption that collective ideas outweigh individual opinions can hinder transparent communication and marginalize less organized individuals from participating in decision-making processes (Baggio & Cooper, 2013). This oversight can create significant challenges in the evolving tourism landscape, leading to divergent views among stakeholders (Kunz et al., 2018). Research indicates that local residents' perceptions of tourism are shaped by economic, social, cultural, and environmental factors (Kim et al., 2013). While many studies have quantitatively examined these factors (Alrwajfah et al., 2019; Hsu et al., 2019), there is a gap in qualitative research, particularly regarding tourism's impact in Muslim societies (Liao et al., 2019). This study aims to qualitatively investigate the views of various stakeholders in Iran, employing Q methodology to uncover underlying mental frameworks surrounding tourism. Understanding these perspectives

is essential for formulating recommendations for improvement and fostering meaningful change in the sector.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Tourism and Sustainability

Tourism serves as a catalyst for economic mobility in both marginalized and developed areas by generating employment and income (Liu & Wall, 2006). It is considered a vital source of revenue, job opportunities, private sector growth, and infrastructure development in many nations. Recently, tourism has emerged as a key driver of economic and social reconstruction, particularly in underdeveloped regions, with its potential to address economic and social challenges in Europe (Koščak & O'Rourke, 2021). Leveraging tourism to strengthen the economic resilience of host communities requires addressing the sector's developmental needs and promoting local participation (Lee, 2013). Given its increasing importance to national economies, policymakers have emphasized the socio-economic benefits that tourism can bring to host communities, ultimately enhancing the quality of life for local populations (Ozturk et al., 2015). However, negligence in planning can lead to adverse outcomes and hinder future development. Three key factors—social and technical infrastructure, environmental considerations, and lifestyle dynamics—are critical for local policymakers and tourism enterprises (Kachniewska, 2015). In 2015, the United Nations established 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed at eradicating poverty, safeguarding the planet, and promoting global success through collaboration among policymakers, academics, practitioners, and tourism stakeholders (UNWTO, 2017). Scheyvens (2018) proposed that tourism's links to progress across multiple domains could be harnessed to achieve these goals. Local, regional, and national destinations stand to gain significantly from tourism while working toward sustainable development, provided appropriate policy and planning mechanisms are implemented (Birendra et al., 2021). The SDGs are globally applicable, including in countries like Iran, to foster sustainable development through 2030 (Scheyvens, 2018). Continuing the work of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), poverty alleviation remains a central aim, and tourism has significant potential to contribute to this goal and others (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020). The private sector plays a crucial role in achieving the SDGs, including poverty reduction (SDG 1), quality education (SDG 4), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), and climate action (SDG 13) (WTO, 2020).

Consequently, tourism is inherently linked to all 17 SDGs (Trupp & Dolezal, 2020). The SDG guidelines highlight tourism's role in achieving these interconnected targets, with tourism contributing 10% to global GDP. If managed effectively, tourism can foster both economic and social progress, facilitating the realization of the SDGs (WTO & UNDP, 2017). Additionally, tourism plays a vital role in promoting decent work and economic growth (SDG 8) and responsible consumption and production (SDG 12) (Trupp & Dolezal, 2020; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020; UNWTO, 2017). It also supports other objectives, including poverty reduction, gender equality, and environmental protection (Scheyvens, 2018; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020; UNWTO, 2017). Numerous studies have explored tourism's capacity to contribute to sustainable development goals. Trupp & Dolezal (2020) highlighted tourism's significance for economic growth in Southeast Asia and its potential to reduce poverty. However, Scheyvens and Hughes (2019) argued that poverty eradication is challenging due to its multidimensional nature, as structural inequalities often hinder progress. They suggest that tourism stakeholders should “increase people's access to assets and enhance their resilience,” empowering marginalized individuals and enabling them to assert their rights and engage more meaningfully in tourism-related decision-making (p. 1075). Contrary to these positive aspirations, several studies have documented the negative impacts of tourism on impoverished communities. For instance, Manyara & Jones (2007) found that areas with high tourism activity often experience elevated poverty levels. Scheyvens and Hughes (2019) also noted that initiatives designed to promote pro-poor tourism frequently fail to reach the most disadvantaged groups. Movono and Hughes (2020) emphasized the importance of improving communication among stakeholders and fostering strong partnerships to achieve sustainable development goals. Hall (2019) further stressed the necessity of collaboration to maximize tourism's potential in achieving these goals. The active participation of stakeholders in tourism development—through planning and policymaking—is essential for success. Inclusive engagement of all relevant groups is crucial to ensure positive outcomes (Hall, 2019).

To address challenges related to greenhouse gas emissions, economic crises, resource management, and the potential negative impacts of tourism on local communities and cultural heritage, the UNWTO (2017) argues that “harnessing the positive contributions of tourism to sustainable development and mitigating the negative impacts of this sector requires robust participation and decisive actions from all tourism stakeholders” (p. 10). Therefore, achieving sustainable development goals in tourism is

unattainable without the collective efforts of all relevant stakeholders. While considerable academic attention has been devoted to the social, economic, and environmental impacts of tourism, especially concerning host communities, research on resident attitudes dates back to the late 1970s (Sharpley, 2014). Due to the lack of consensus on the concept of resident attitudes, various theories have been proposed to conceptualize this construct (Wang & Chen, 2015). To achieve sustainable tourism development, the success of any initiative depends on understanding and addressing the needs and aspirations of the host community. Governments and tourism planners must recognize these needs and gain community support by aligning with local expectations (Kitnuntaviwat & Tang, 2008).

2.2. Host Community Attitude

Community participation is often a critical factor in national development (Brickins, 2022). The support and involvement of local communities are essential for effective destination management and achieving planning goals that benefit both host and guest communities (Ullah et al., 2022). Existing literature underscores the central role of native populations in tourism development, with their support being vital for the sustainability and success of tourism initiatives (Ozturk et al., 2015). Most community members strongly endorse tourism development and are willing to face its challenges, particularly concerning environmental protection and adherence to local cultural norms (Falak et al., 2016). However, the literature on residents' attitudes often overlooks how individual perceptions of tourists may influence broader views on tourism (Sharpley, 2014). Seminal research has shown that sustainability significantly affects local communities' attitudes toward tourism (Fan et al., 2019). Notably, residents employed in the tourism sector tend to adopt a commercial perspective on tourists, rather than a personal one (Sharpley, 2014). Both intrinsic and extrinsic factors can directly or indirectly shape residents' views on tourism development (Sharpley, 2014). Despite substantial research on residents' attitudes, ambiguities persist (Eusébio et al., 2018). Sharpley (2014) highlighted that tourism development depends on a balanced relationship between tourists and hosts. Positive attitudes among hosts can enhance service quality and the destination's reputation, attracting more visitors. Conversely, negative attitudes may damage the destination's image and cause friction between hosts and tourists (Fan et al., 2019). Residents' attitudes toward tourism development are often conceptualized across three dimensions: cognitive (beliefs, knowledge, and perceptions), emotional (likes and dislikes), and behavioral (actions taken or expressed). Most tourism studies have

predominantly focused on the behavioral dimension, typically assessed through residents' support for tourism (Eusébio et al., 2018). Aschauer (2010) emphasized the need to explore the psychological aspects of tourism by considering the views of both the host community and tourists.

Ozturk et al. (2015) examined the relationship between residents' perceptions of tourism and their happiness. Their findings revealed that local satisfaction is influenced by both positive and negative cultural, environmental, and economic impacts. Liu and Li (2018) found that the perceived impacts of tourism vary based on residents' demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, such as age, gender, occupation, education, and income. Some studies suggest that women may face greater challenges related to tourism, such as increased traffic congestion, noise, and crime. Perceptions also differ based on a destination's development level (Liu & Li, 2018). Liao (2019) explored residents' satisfaction with tourism, identifying key factors such as sociocultural conservation, economic benefits, and environmental protection. Numerous studies emphasize the impact of residents' perceptions on overall satisfaction. For example, Wang et al. (2019) noted that resident satisfaction is crucial for tourism success. In his study of Bigodeli, Okanda, Lepp (2007) observed predominantly positive attitudes toward tourism, noting its role in societal growth, agricultural market development, and overall prosperity. This positive outlook contributed to supportive behaviors, a hypothesis confirmed through six months of observational data. Abdollahzadeh and Sharifzadeh (2014) examined rural residents' perceptions of tourism development impacts, finding strong support for economic goals, though opinions varied on its broader effects. Factors like education, gender, age, income, employment, and community attachment influenced residents' attitudes (Abdollahzadeh & Sharifzadeh, 2014). Similarly, Rasoolimanesh and Jaafar (2016) found that generally positive attitudes toward tourism in Malaysia facilitate support for tourism initiatives. Zamani-Farahani (2016) highlighted the importance of local community responsibility in tourism management, while also pointing out the marginal role of municipal and public sector agencies in managing tourism's impacts. Látková and Vogt (2012) studied rural communities' attitudes toward tourism growth, finding broad support with minimal negative sentiment, even in destinations with high tourist traffic. They identified key factors influencing attitudes, including personal interests, community reliance, tourism knowledge, personal trust, and participation in tourism-related activities (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004; Wang, 2006). The success and sustainability of tourism rely on positive interactions between local residents and tourists. Understanding residents' attitudes, perceptions,

and satisfaction levels is crucial for fostering these interactions. Governments, policymakers, and businesses must understand and address the needs and desires of local residents to ensure sustainable tourism development (Kitnuntaviwat & Tang, 2008). The relationship between hosts and tourists plays a significant role in shaping residents' views on tourism development. While opposing perceptions can affect attitudes, positive impacts typically have a more substantial influence (Eusébio et al., 2018). Expanding research on host communities' attitudes underscores the importance of their involvement and responses in achieving sustainable tourism outcomes (Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012). Therefore, assessing residents' attitudes and understanding their preferences should be a priority for tourism planners. Effective community participation in tourism planning requires the involvement of all community members. However, engaging the public can be time-consuming, and if not managed well, may yield limited results. The diverse range of stakeholders in the tourism planning process can complicate efforts, as individuals often hold varying, and sometimes conflicting, interests and values. While significant research on tourism and community attitudes exists, there are gaps in understanding the typology of host community perspectives. This study aims to address that gap by exploring the varying viewpoints held by host communities on tourism.

2.3. Negative Effects of Tourism Development

Tourism development, while often seen as a catalyst for economic growth, can have several negative effects, particularly in developing countries. The literature highlights various dimensions of these adverse impacts, which can be categorized into environmental, social, and economic effects.

1. **Environmental Degradation:** Tourism can lead to significant environmental challenges, including habitat destruction, pollution, and resource depletion. For instance, the construction of hotels and infrastructure can disrupt local ecosystems. A study by Gössling et al. (2020) emphasizes that increased tourist footfall can lead to soil erosion, loss of biodiversity, and water scarcity in fragile environments.
2. **Cultural Erosion:** The influx of tourists can lead to the commodification of local cultures and traditions. As local communities adapt their practices to cater to tourist expectations, there is a risk of losing authentic cultural identities. A report by Cohen (2019) discusses how traditional practices in various

developing countries have been altered or commercialized, leading to a dilution of cultural heritage.

3. **Economic Disparities:** While tourism can create jobs, it can also exacerbate economic inequalities. The benefits of tourism often do not reach the local population, as profits may be repatriated by foreign investors. A study by Mowforth and Munt (2016) highlights that in many developing countries, the tourism sector is dominated by multinational corporations, which can lead to economic leakage and limited local investment.
4. **Social Conflicts:** The rapid development of tourism can lead to social tensions between local communities and tourists. Issues such as overcrowding, increased cost of living, and changes in local lifestyles can create friction. A case study by Smith (2021) in Southeast Asia illustrates how local communities have protested against tourism projects that threaten their livelihoods and social fabric.
5. **Health and Safety Concerns:** The rise in tourism can also pose health risks, particularly in developing regions with limited healthcare infrastructure. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted vulnerabilities in tourism-dependent economies, as seen in the work of Hall et al. (2020), which discusses the implications of health crises on tourism sustainability.

In conclusion, while tourism development can offer economic opportunities, it is crucial to consider and address its negative effects, especially in developing countries. Sustainable tourism practices that prioritize environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and equitable economic benefits are essential for mitigating these challenges. The literature on the Muslim context in tourism development highlights the unique challenges and opportunities that arise in predominantly Muslim countries. This context is shaped by cultural, religious, and social factors that influence both the development of tourism infrastructure and the experiences of tourists.

2.4. Tourism in Muslim Countries

1. **Cultural Sensitivity and Religious Practices:** Many Muslim-majority countries have specific cultural norms and religious practices that impact tourism. For instance, the observance of prayer times, dietary restrictions (such as halal food), and dress codes can affect how tourism is developed and marketed. Research indicates that understanding these cultural nuances is crucial for attracting

tourists from non-Muslim countries while ensuring that local customs are respected (Almeida, 2020; Jamal & Hill, 2004).

2. **Social Perception of Tourists:** The perception of tourists from non-Muslim countries can vary significantly within Muslim communities. Some studies suggest that there is a growing acceptance and curiosity towards non-Muslim tourists, particularly in urban areas where exposure to diverse cultures is more prevalent (Hassan & Rahman, 2019). However, there can also be apprehension or negative stereotypes, often fueled by media portrayals and geopolitical tensions (Khan, 2021).
3. **Economic Impact and Community Involvement:** Tourism can serve as a vital economic driver in many Muslim countries, providing jobs and supporting local businesses. However, the literature emphasizes the importance of community involvement in tourism development to ensure that benefits are equitably distributed and that local cultures are preserved (Sharif & Kadir, 2022). Engaging local communities can also enhance the social perception of tourists, fostering a more welcoming environment.
4. **Sustainable Tourism Practices:** There is a growing emphasis on sustainable tourism practices that align with Islamic values, such as environmental stewardship and social responsibility. This approach not only appeals to Muslim tourists but also resonates with an increasing number of non-Muslim travelers who prioritize ethical travel (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Sharpley, 2014).
5. **Case Studies and Comparative Analysis:** Recent studies have explored specific case studies in countries like Malaysia, Turkey, and Morocco, examining how these nations balance tourism development with cultural preservation and social cohesion (Cohen, 2018; Noy, 2016). These case studies provide valuable insights into best practices and highlight the diverse experiences of tourists in different Muslim contexts.

In summary, the literature on tourism development in Muslim contexts underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity, community involvement, and sustainable practices. Understanding the social perception of non-Muslim tourists is essential for fostering positive interactions and enhancing the overall tourism experience.

3. Methodology

To understand the mindset of stakeholders in tourism, we employed Q methodology (Watts and Stenner, 2005). This approach allows researchers to identify and categorize individual insights before classifying participants according to these insights (McKeown and Thomas, 2013). The current research involved the following steps:

□ **Concourse Development:** The concourse, defined as a diverse set of statements relevant to the research topic, was developed through interviews with stakeholders in Tehran, including policymakers and entrepreneurs in the tourism sector. These interviews were designed to elicit a wide range of opinions and experiences related to tourism, ensuring that the concourse reflected the complexities of the sector. Additional insights were gathered from magazines, news articles, and scholarly works related to tourism, resulting in a total of **148 statements**. This comprehensive collection aimed to capture various perspectives, including economic, social, and cultural dimensions of tourism, thereby providing a robust foundation for the subsequent analysis.

□ **Representative Sample of the Concourse:** The initial set of 148 statements was refined to **36** by consulting field experts. This refinement process was critical, as it focused on selecting phrases that held the most relevant meaning and conceptual significance. Experts in the field evaluated the statements for clarity, relevance, and potential impact, ensuring that the final selection accurately represented the key themes and concerns of stakeholders in the tourism sector. This step not only streamlined the data but also enhanced the validity of the findings by ensuring that the statements used in the Q sorting process were both meaningful and representative of the broader discourse on tourism.

- **Participant Selection:** From the individuals identified in the concourse, a targeted sample was selected to participate in Q sorting. The nature and purpose of the Q study dictated the sample size. Ultimately, 30 participants were chosen, comprising host community members, entrepreneurs, and policymakers. This selection utilized both targeted and snowball sampling methods, where initial participants identified others qualified to contribute. Data collection took place in Tehran. Alongside their participation in Q sorting, these individuals responded to inquiries from the researcher (see

Appendix 2 for details). To ensure a diverse representation of perspectives, the selection criteria focused on individuals who had relevant experience or knowledge related to the study's themes. The host community members were selected based on their engagement in local initiatives, while entrepreneurs were chosen for their contributions to the economic landscape. Policymakers were included to provide insights into regulatory and governance aspects.

- **Sorting Stage:** This phase was conducted in Tehran in **2019**, during which participants organized statement cards based on the instructions provided in the Q sorting diagram (Figure 2). Each participant was asked to rank the statements according to their personal viewpoints, placing them on a continuum from "most agree" to "most disagree." This sorting process is crucial for identifying the underlying factors that shape stakeholder attitudes toward tourism. By engaging in this structured ranking, participants were able to express their perspectives in a way that highlights the nuances of their opinions. The resulting data from this sorting stage will be analyzed to uncover distinct viewpoints among stakeholders, allowing for a deeper understanding of the complexities and dynamics within the tourism sector.

Through these systematic steps, the research aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of stakeholder mindsets in tourism, facilitating a deeper understanding of the complexities and dynamics within this sector. The insights gained from this study can inform policy decisions and strategic planning in tourism development, ultimately contributing to more sustainable and inclusive tourism practices.

4. Results

In this phase of the research, a quantitative approach is employed, contrasting with the qualitative method used in the previous stage. The aim is to identify common mindsets among participants, achieved through Q factor analysis, the primary statistical tool for analyzing the Q data matrix. This method emphasizes correlations between individuals rather than variables, hence the term "Q factor analysis," which focuses on categorizing individuals during the factor analysis process. Statistically, Q factor analysis is equivalent to traditional factor analysis (Khoshgooyan Fard, 2007, pp. 67-68). For this analysis, the researcher used PQmethod software, a specialized tool for Q factor analysis. Following the sorting phase, the raw data was input into the software to generate a Q dataset or Q data matrix for statistical

evaluation. The matrix is organized in a table format, with each row representing a statement and each column corresponding to a participant. Each participant was assigned a unique identifier (code) for ease of reference in subsequent data analysis stages.

The software first calculated correlations among the Q diagrams (see Appendix 1) to establish relationships between them. Next, central factor analysis was conducted, resulting in three groups of non-rotating factors. To improve interpretability, Varimax rotation was applied, yielding three rotated factors (see Table 1). Significant factor loads were automatically highlighted. A factor load is considered significant if its absolute value exceeds $(1/\sqrt{n}) * 2.58$, indicating a 99% significance level, where n in this study is 30. It is important to clarify the relationship between the identified mental patterns and the participants. This step involves determining which participants correspond to each of the three factors or mental patterns. A rotating matrix, shown in Table 2, was used for this purpose. Participants p06, p09, p07, p10, p08, p19, p21, p28, p22, and p15 were associated with the first mental pattern (Factor 1). Participants p24, p30, p12, p13, p01, p11, p03, and p04 represented the second mental pattern, while participants p20, p02, p26, p14, and p29 were linked to the third mental pattern. Next, factor scores were calculated to rank the Q statements, and the weights of significant factors were derived using a specific formula. In this formula, 'f' represents the factor load, and 'w' denotes the corresponding weight. Each weight was then multiplied by the initial ranks from the Q diagram (based on the studied spectrum) for each individual, resulting in the calculation of factor scores. The factor scores and the ranking of Q propositions are presented in Table 1. Table 2 details the factor loading for each individual's mental patterns.

Table 1. Factor Arrays

Row		conflictual	interactive	developmental
1		5	-4	-5
2	Indigenous people offer their products to tourists at a higher price than the original price.	4	1	-4
3	In addition to the potential for reviving the economic development of the region, tourism can have a negative impact on the social and cultural life of the host community.	-2	-2	-3
4	Mass tourism causes cultural degeneration due to the interaction of the local community with tourists from various places.	-4	-3	-4
5	Mass tourism increases the transportation of people and the mobility of the population to those areas.	-3	4	3
6	Mass tourism increases the living costs in host communities due to increase in land prices.	4	-5	5
7	Most societies do not easily allow a new culture to enter their society.	0	-2	1
8	There is no need to increase social freedom for foreign tourists.	-5	-2	
9	In Iran, the host community does not participate in attracting tourists and they are only spectators.	1	-3	1

10	Tourism is cheaper and easier than other economic development strategies, such as production.	0	1	2
11	Entrepreneurs with SMEs play a key role in successful tourism development.	0	0	3
12	Tourism development with diverse tourism activities could help prevent migration.	1	1	2
13	Tourism development help minimize the enviromental effects.	-2	-1	3
14	By arrival of tourists in a region , all the residents would benefit.	-3	0	2
15	Tourists have accepted the rules before entering Iran.	2	1	0
16	The role of governments in all countries is policy making and supportive and not executive.	2	-1	2
17	Feeling safe and secure makes the tourist want to come back.	-1	1	4
18	Communicating with other countries increases attendance of tourists.	0	0	4
19	Decrease in financial ability would reduces tourism.	0	-1	1
20	The rich culture and traditions of Iran are a good base for tourism activities.	-1	2	1
21	Iranian treat tourists especially the foreign ones as if they already knew them.	-4	-4	-1

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22	Increase in tourism services and quality would lead to more tourist attraction.	-2	2	0
23	Government agencies can do a lot to help facilitate tourism.	-3	4	-1
24	With accurate recognition of capacities of every region, there can prosper.	3	0	0
25	Tourism boost will create jobs for the indigenous people.	3	2	1
26	Tourists visiting a place make local products more popular.	2	3	0
27	Tourists are usually either looking for a new and experience or for a return to the old nostalgic atmosphere.	0	0	-2
28	Tourism development may bring about significant changes in income, population and unemployment.	-1	1	-1
29	Mass tourism increases the demand for public services.	1	-2	0
30	Mass tourism in disadvantaged areas is booming.	-1	-1	-3
31	The destination community can get a lot of positive feedback from the tourist, which expand its sight .	1	-2	0
32	with tourism, lack of currency threat can be turned into an opportunity.	1	-1	-1
33	Developing small-scale tourism can strengthen local culture and identity.	-1	2	-1

34	Iranians are very hospitable and friendly that attracts tourists.	-2	3	-3
35	Increasing quality and services attracts new tourists.	3	3	-2
36	Technology and the media are making tourism better known.	2	5	-2

Table2. Factor loading for each individual's mental patterns

Component		
1	2	3

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p06	.879	-.096	-.003
p09	.862	.143	.030
p07	.837	.089	.058
p10	.778	.118	.071
p08	.745	.183	.015
p19	.728	.129	.312
p21	.670	.071	.160
p28	.574	.209	.205
p22	.544	.023	-.019
p15	.441	.075	.281
p24	.427	.082	.246
p30	.140	.742	-.050
p12	.429	.735	.075
p13	.375	.697	.065
p01	.196	.673	-.170
p11	.484	.584	.171
p03	-.018	.557	.489
p05	-.212	.520	.277
p04	-.205	.474	.102
p20	.132	.380	.220
p02	.211	-.101	.704
p26	.219	-.068	.684
p14	.262	.213	.558
p29	.052	.110	.548
p23	.204	.246	.527
p16	.229	.077	.502
p18	.139	-.102	.489
p25	-.191	.159	.468
p17	-.067	.098	.454
	-.272	.073	.284

Upon analyzing the data, three distinct mental patterns regarding tourism emerged, each named and analyzed as follows:

4.1. Development Perspective

This group views tourism from a macro perspective, emphasizing its positive aspects (statements 11, 13, 17, and 18). They believe that the presence of tourists mitigates negative environmental impacts, fosters security and tranquility in host communities, facilitates connections between countries and financial hubs, and creates opportunities for entrepreneurs. Tourists also open channels for communication between local communities and visitors, as well as prospects for local businesses (Prayag et al., 2010). Additionally, attracting tourists can drive regional infrastructure development, which in turn enhances local living standards (Poudel et al., 2016). The interconnectivity of various elements within the tourism sector plays a critical role in its development. The active involvement of host communities is vital for infrastructure utilization, promoting cross-sectoral growth, and improving local well-being. The multifunctional aspects of tourism-related infrastructure contribute to both economic and social benefits, enhancing the overall tourist experience. Key infrastructure elements such as accommodations, transportation, and communication facilities are essential for global tourism success. Tourism also influences the socio-cultural landscape, impacting local culture and community practices. Research suggests that the presence of tourists can improve services, promote cultural activities (Lundberg, 2017), and aid in the preservation of historical monuments (Ali et al., 2017). Proponents of this view argue that tourism fosters endogenous development, enabling regions to grow culturally, economically, and socially from within, thereby reducing reliance on external investment and benefiting local populations. The literature supports the notion that tourism contributes to socio-economic development and serves as a crucial source of employment (Thapa and Panta, 2019). However, these employment opportunities must be scrutinized for sustainability, and relevant stakeholders must be engaged in the development process. While foreign investment is often seen as a pathway to economic growth, it can also lead to capital flight. Thus, strong local community support is essential for the effective management and marketing of tourism, directly influencing the well-being of families.

4.2. Interactive Orientation

The findings indicate that individuals with an interactive orientation have a predominantly positive outlook on tourism in Iran (refer to statements 5, 23,

26, 34, and 36). Kitnuntaviwat and Tang (2008) argue that the success and sustainability of tourism in any region depend on positive interactions between local residents and tourists. This group believes that the influx of tourists not only increases the visibility of local culture but also plays a critical role in preserving cultural heritage. In today's globalized society, the importance of subcultures is growing, and their preservation can serve as a valuable income source for local communities. This group emphasizes the inherent hospitality of the Iranian people, which fosters a warm welcome for tourists and individuals from diverse backgrounds. They believe that the presence of tourists promotes a deeper understanding of the traditional culture of the region. These interactions often take on a cultural dimension, as tourists immerse themselves in the local culture from the moment they arrive, positioning tourism as a significant driver of cultural transformation. This interaction provides an opportunity for the host country to showcase its culture and values to visitors from other nations. In turn, locals gain insights into the socio-cultural characteristics of tourists' home countries, which can foster social cohesion among ethnic groups and reduce intergroup tensions (Sheikhi, 2015). The group argues that culture is not an isolated phenomenon but is shaped through historical processes and communication with other cultures. However, members of this group caution that if a local community is overly vulnerable to change, the rise in tourism could lead to cultural erosion, economic disparities, and societal anomalies. Thoughtful and planned tourism development can yield positive impacts on values, lifestyle, family dynamics, individual behaviors, and the social fabric of the host community. In this sense, global cultural convergence can be advanced through the promotion of tourism. Tourism also helps enhance communication and understanding in international interactions by introducing foreign tourists to national culture. Therefore, since the tourism industry belongs to all of humanity, it is crucial not to overlook the cultural and social concerns of diverse communities.

4.3. Conflictual Perspective

In contrast, the conflictual perspective presents a negative viewpoint on the impact of tourists on host communities (as reflected in statements 1, 2, and 6). This group argues that tourism disrupts both the environment and local cultures, leading to increased living costs due to heightened demand. Unlike their interactive counterparts, those with a conflictual orientation perceive the adverse effects of tourism as outweighing any potential benefits. Bujosa and Russell (2007) note that tourism can drive up living expenses, ultimately exacerbating poverty levels. Rising inflation diminishes local residents'

purchasing power (Torres-Delgado and Palomeque, 2012), and numerous studies have highlighted the detrimental environmental effects of tourism (Bujosa and Rosselló, 2013). The conflictual group expresses skepticism about tourism's advantages for local populations, arguing that it fails to improve quality of life or foster meaningful cultural exchanges. They assign little credence to statements affirming the benefits of tourism (statements 14, 21, and 22). They view the arrival of tourists as a threat, contributing to stress, pressure, and anxiety among residents (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). Tourism planners and managers must recognize that attention is needed not only to address health and economic crises but also to mitigate social issues, such as xenophobia and discrimination within host communities. Investigating the host community's attitudes and responses to tourism is essential for developing appropriate solutions. Individuals with negative perceptions are often predisposed to prejudice and may feel apprehensive about the potential adverse outcomes of intergroup interactions (Monterrubio, 2016). Furthermore, Stephan et al. (2000) assert that individuals who experience cultural interactions may face ridicule due to fears of non-acceptance and difficulties in engaging effectively with members of different cultural groups. As a result, intergroup anxiety emerges as a critical factor in predicting discriminatory attitudes and negative perceptions in multicultural contexts.

5. Discussion

The examination of tourism through the lenses of three distinct mental models—Developmentalist, Conflictual, and Interactive—offers a nuanced understanding of tourism's multifaceted and often contested impacts on host communities. These perspectives reflect the spectrum of stakeholder experiences, from enthusiastic support to cautious critique, and underscore the necessity of tailored, context-sensitive tourism policies. The Developmentalist perspective underscores tourism's role as a driver of economic growth, social development, and cultural exchange. Advocates argue that tourism stimulates local economies by creating employment, enhancing infrastructure, and facilitating broader regional development goals. This aligns with a macroeconomic framework where tourism is positioned as a tool for inclusive development, especially in underdeveloped or rural regions (Gursoy et al., 2019). Recent literature reaffirms that inclusive participation from local stakeholders is vital for ensuring that tourism outcomes are sustainable and equitable (Jovicic, 2019; Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018). The emphasis here is on collaborative governance and

community-based tourism, which enable locals to become active agents in tourism planning and benefit distribution (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006).

In contrast, the Conflictual perspective brings attention to tourism's negative externalities, particularly its potential to exacerbate socioeconomic inequalities, erode cultural integrity, and cause environmental degradation. Stakeholders with this view often highlight how unregulated tourism development can lead to the commodification of traditions, inflation in local housing markets, over-tourism, and even displacement of vulnerable communities (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019; Milano et al., 2021). This critical stance challenges the assumption that tourism is inherently beneficial, instead advocating for a precautionary approach where impact assessments, carrying capacity analyses, and policy safeguards are integral to tourism planning (Hall, 2011). The Interactive Orientation perspective represents a more balanced and dialogic approach. Drawing from both positive and critical elements, it sees tourism as a potential platform for cultural exchange, heritage preservation, and mutual understanding, while recognizing the risks of cultural commodification and unequal power dynamics between tourists and hosts. This viewpoint promotes transformative encounters—those that foster empathy and reciprocal learning—rather than one-sided consumption of culture (Salazar, 2012). Scholars like Kontogeorgopoulos (2020) have emphasized that such interactions can serve as a foundation for social cohesion if managed inclusively and respectfully. The Interactive perspective encourages adaptive tourism models that are both culturally sensitive and economically viable, reflecting a growing trend in post-pandemic tourism recovery towards more human-centered, ethical travel (Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020). Together, these three mental models illustrate the complexities inherent in tourism development. They reinforce the importance of multi-stakeholder engagement and contextual awareness in crafting tourism strategies that not only generate income but also safeguard social fabrics and ecological systems. Future tourism planning, particularly in culturally rich but vulnerable regions like Iran, should therefore be informed by an integrative framework that harmonizes development with cultural and environmental stewardship.

6. Conclusion

This study makes a significant contribution to the understanding of stakeholders' perspectives on tourism development in Iran by adopting an integrated analytical lens through the Q methodology. In contrast to previous

research, which often isolates stakeholder categories—such as local communities, business owners, or public officials—our approach captures a nuanced matrix of attitudes and intergroup dynamics. The methodological rigor of the Q method enables a systematic exploration of subjectivity, offering a more holistic insight into how tourism is perceived and experienced by different actors within the same socio-economic ecosystem. Empirical findings from this research reveal three predominant stakeholder perspectives: Developmentalist, Interactive, and Conflictual. The *Developmentalist* group demonstrates optimism regarding tourism's capacity to enhance local infrastructure, generate employment, and stimulate economic growth. This aligns with findings from Sharpley (2020), who emphasized tourism's role in rural revitalization and sustainable economic stimulation in emerging economies. The *Interactive* group underscores the importance of cross-cultural dialogue and mutual understanding between tourists and host communities, echoing the work of Richards (2021), who argues that intercultural encounters in tourism foster social cohesion and cultural resilience. Conversely, the *Conflictual* group raises concerns about the commodification of culture, gentrification, and the marginalization of vulnerable groups—a sentiment supported by studies such as those by Colomb and Novy (2016) on tourism-induced social tensions in urban and rural areas.

Notably, the predominance of the Developmentalist view in our sample indicates a favorable climate for tourism-related development in Iran. However, the presence of critical voices—particularly from the Conflictual group—suggests that efforts to promote tourism must be inclusive and sensitive to potential cultural and social disruptions. Unlike quantitative surveys that might overlook dissenting voices, our qualitative findings present a continuum of perspectives, thus providing actionable insights for more inclusive tourism planning. The concept of community-oriented tourism emerges as a key strategy for addressing stakeholder concerns. As articulated by Scheyvens and Biddulph (2018), this approach not only promotes sustainable livelihoods but also fosters local empowerment by ensuring that residents have a voice in tourism-related decisions. Community-oriented tourism is particularly crucial in the Iranian context, where socio-cultural nuances play a significant role in shaping public opinion. Initiatives that involve local women, youth, and minority groups can help democratize the tourism sector, thereby enhancing both social equity and economic inclusiveness. Additionally, enhancing stakeholder education and participation—through workshops, co-planning initiatives, and participatory governance—can mitigate resistance and reduce the

friction often associated with top-down tourism development (Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2017). These participatory models promote transparency, build trust, and improve residents' perceptions of tourism, ultimately enhancing the tourist experience and the destination's global reputation. From a policy perspective, the study calls for a coordinated framework that integrates local insights into regional tourism strategies. By leveraging the shared goals of stakeholders—particularly the alignment found in the Developmentalist and Interactive perspectives—planners can foster cohesive partnerships across sectors. This is in line with the stakeholder collaboration models proposed by Bramwell and Lane (2011), which advocate for shared governance as a path toward sustainable destination management. In conclusion, our research not only reveals a spectrum of stakeholder attitudes toward tourism in Iran but also illustrates a promising convergence of interests that can be harnessed for long-term regional development.

Based on the findings of the study regarding stakeholders' perspectives on tourism development in Iran, several suggestions can be made to enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of tourism initiatives:

1. **Adopt Community-Oriented Tourism Models:** Implement community-oriented tourism strategies that prioritize local involvement and empowerment. This approach should ensure that local residents, particularly marginalized groups such as women, youth, and minorities, have a significant voice in tourism-related decisions. By doing so, the tourism sector can promote social equity and economic inclusiveness.
2. **Facilitate Stakeholder Education and Participation:** Organize workshops and co-planning initiatives that encourage stakeholder engagement. These participatory governance models can help mitigate resistance to tourism development by fostering transparency and building trust among stakeholders. Enhanced education about the benefits and challenges of tourism can improve local perceptions and acceptance.
3. **Integrate Diverse Perspectives in Planning:** Recognize and incorporate the varied perspectives of stakeholders—Developmentalist, Interactive, and Conflictual—into tourism planning processes. This holistic approach can help address concerns about cultural commodification and social tensions while leveraging the optimism surrounding tourism's potential for economic growth.
4. **Promote Cross-Cultural Dialogue:** Encourage initiatives that facilitate intercultural encounters between tourists and host

communities. This can enhance mutual understanding and social cohesion, aligning with the Interactive group's emphasis on the importance of dialogue in tourism experiences.

5. **Develop a Coordinated Policy Framework:** Establish a coordinated framework that integrates local insights into regional tourism strategies. By aligning the shared goals of stakeholders, particularly those from the Developmentalist and Interactive perspectives, planners can foster cohesive partnerships that support sustainable destination management.
6. **Monitor and Address Social Impacts:** Implement mechanisms to monitor the social impacts of tourism development continuously. This includes assessing the effects on local culture and vulnerable groups to ensure that tourism initiatives do not lead to gentrification or cultural commodification.
7. **Leverage Empirical Findings for Advocacy:** Use the empirical findings from the study to advocate for policies that support inclusive tourism development. Highlighting the predominance of the Developmentalist view can help garner support for tourism initiatives while addressing the concerns raised by the Conflictual group.

By following these suggestions, stakeholders can work collaboratively to create a more sustainable and inclusive tourism landscape in Iran, ultimately enhancing both the local community's well-being and the overall tourist experience. It is important to note that while the study primarily focused on participants from Tehran, further clarification regarding the inclusion of individuals from rural areas or other regions of Iran would enhance the understanding of the study's applicability. Future research could benefit from a more comprehensive sampling strategy that encompasses a wider geographical range to capture the diverse experiences and opinions across different contexts. Future research should expand upon these findings by incorporating longitudinal studies and comparative analyses across regions to better understand how stakeholder perceptions evolve and how integrated strategies can be tailored for specific socio-cultural contexts. The pathway to sustainable tourism in Iran lies in inclusive planning, transparent communication, and equitable stakeholder engagement—cornerstones of a resilient and adaptive tourism system.

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Most
Most Agreeable

Disagreeable

[illegible]

1-What is your idea about statements placed at +4/+5?

2-What is your idea about statements placed at -4/-5?

3-Why do you sort these statements as you did?

Appendix 1. Q diagram

Exploring Diverse Stakeholder Perspectives ... 255