

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

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## Validation of Urban Branding Model in Order to Develop the Tourism Industry of Guilan Province

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### Abstract

Some cities have unique and special features that have created a strong image of them in the minds of people elsewhere; but there are many cities that, despite their special features, have not been successful in this area. The purpose of this research is to validate the urban brand model in order to develop the tourism industry in Gilan province. The statistical population of the study includes managers and experts of Guilan Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization and employees working in tourism services offices of Guilan Province. Using a researcher-made questionnaire, 201 of them by Simple random sampling method were selected. Structural equation modeling using LISREL software was used to validate the model. The results of model validation showed that there is no significant relationship between contextual factors and strategies. But there is a significant relationship between other relationships in the model and the relationship between them was confirmed.

**Keywords:** Branding, Urban Brand, Tourism Development

### Introduction

Branding is one of the categories related to brand and nowadays it has been considered more in the service industry than before (Cutler and Keller, 2018). The importance of motor activity and brands in today's society is well documented. The synchronization of motor activity and branding brings people together. (Rostami et al., 2019). Branding in the service industry has been one of the most important topics for marketers in recent years. One of the obvious factors resulting in a significant difference in service branding is intangibility of services. For this reason, more attention should be paid to service performance. Thus, using the brand in products to some extent guarantees quality for the customer and makes customers gain a better understanding of the intangible characteristics

of services (Feyz et al., 2017). The concept of branding was used in the late 1990s for tourism goals. Tourism is a crucial part of the economy for almost every country in the world. It contributes to social, economic and cultural development and affects the identity of nations and in many areas creates relationships that help to sustainable regional development (Berezka et al., 2018)city branding is fast becoming a popular public policy instrument for governments to communicate their city image and achieve a variety of urban development goals(Ma et al,2021).

Tourism is one of the important strategies to achieve sustainable development because it has few adverse environmental effects while contributing as an inexhaustible resource (Dehghani et al, 2021)Since tourism plays a key role in urban development, the most

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important issue for a city is to make a brand attractive for visitors. (Shen et al., 2018). In recent years, urban branding has gained high popularity among marketers and city managers and has gradually become the most valuable asset of cities. This issue not only can help cities have a positive mental image, but also can also create new qualities and values. A successful brand is a brand that generally creates a unique and powerful image for a city, so the first step in urban branding is to find this important characteristic and highlight it. (Laaksonen, et al., 2019). Gilan province is one of the northern provinces of Iran and Rasht city is its capital. Despite the province's high potential in attracting tourists, the number of tourists entering the province has decreased in recent years. Each of the cities of this province has unique tourist attractions. However, efforts made to attract more tourists to the province have not been sufficient.

### Literature Review

The science of branding has been used as a tool for differentiation for centuries. It is rooted in the Old Scandinavian language meaning to heat or burn (Keller, 2018). Branding is one of the most important aspects of any business, whether big or small (Minkman & Buuren, 2019). In today's world, branding is one of the key factors in the success of marketing and exporting products and services. The market is not an arena for product

competition, but an arena for confrontation among commercial brands (Mousavi et al., 2018). A brand creates a positive mentality in customer and encourages him or her to purchase that product (Karimi, 2018). However, brand appears in the mind of the consumer in the same way, whether that brand is about physical products or about services or a specific place brand (Ayoubi, 2017). Nowadays, branding has a special importance in the tourism industry. Tourism brands, whether they are a business or an enterprise or a destination, always transmit a message to their potential customers and visitors (Saunders, 2016). In fact, urban branding is one of the appropriate solutions in a positive imaging of a city to attract more investors and tourists, which is considered as one of the components of the tourism industry. The importance of urban branding in developed countries is so high that mayors compete with each other in creating new infrastructure and tourist attractions and introducing their city. Brand is a multidimensional concept that has both physical and psychological characteristics. To survive in the competitive world market, cities must maintain a successful mental image or restore a valid mental image of the past or renew their brand by creating new mental images. In this regard, domestic and foreign studies have addressed these issues, some of which will be briefly stated below:

Table 1.

*Summary of the history of domestic and foreign studies*

Number	Researcher	Summary of results
1	Feyzi (2021)	Findings showed that branding of destinations has a positive and significant effect on the development of urban tourism. The results also showed that branding of urban tourism destinations in metropolitan areas can increase the value and perceived benefits, increase the support of tourism stakeholders for its development and contribute to its sustainability.
2	Chan, etal (2021)	By emphasizing the dimensions of city branding, ie presence, potential, place, people, pulse and prerequisites, and dimensions of city identity, a picture of the city consisting of five main elements, namely routes, edges, areas, nodes and signs, shows that these dimensions of the image The city of Purwakarta is interpreted as a tourist city.
3	Jabbari et al. (2020)	Results suggest increasing attention to this issue, which strategies such as hosting large events, the use of cyberspace and the design of symbolic structures have been used to achieve this goal, and visual identity design has been used to give visual properties to such strategies.

Number	Researcher	Summary of results
4	Mahmoudi and Davoodpour (2018)	Mentioning that the idea of a creative city tries to strengthen the qualities that make the mental image of a city more beautiful for citizens, we can consider gaining the status of a creative city and achieving economic stability as the ultimate goal of urban branding.
5	Jojic (2018)	based on the studies, branding is associated with economic value. Branding has symbolic values because it is a strategy to present places, cities, towns, an image and its cultural meaning. Branding represents the need for individuality and emotional relationship with the environment in the context of globalization, thus giving cities depth and authenticity
6	Haji (2017)	To analyze the data, theme analysis was used and the identified codes were placed in the classless of justice-orientation, participation, compromise, transparency, integration, diversity, culture development, imagery, education and commercialization.
7	Falahat Kar (2017)	By improving spatial qualities such as diversity and coordination, brand differentiation and authenticity, physical and visual permeability, nature-orientation and cleanliness, as well as estimating the needs and preferences of the target brand audience to improve the sense of place, we can help cities and urban places to become successful brands
8	Rusta et al (2017)	The process of urban branding, multiple results in various economic areas such as increasing revenue, business prosperity, tourism development, investment willingness and social effects such as increasing satisfaction, improving the city's influence, creating a favorable image as consequences in urban branding can be They are designs.
9	Sepe & Pitt (2017)	Growing importance of using experience in the process of urban regeneration causes cities to be involved in creating appropriate images and symbols of their transformed areas to achieve new trends and in accordance with luxury items. proper planning of high-quality architecture and public spaces can prevent it by creating the right combination of innovation and culture.
10	Kim & Jun (2016)	an unknown city could benefit more than a well-known city by improving the image of the city using event advertising as a promotional tool. Lastly, image congruence affects peoples' attitude toward the event-hosting city.

The model that we will validate in the present study is first identified using the data technique of the foundation, categories and subcategories of urban brand in order to expand tourism in Gilan province. The data analysis process was based on data collection, classification, coding and comparison. This process of analysis was performed by examining the text prepared from the sayings and sentences of the interviewees in a process

called open coding that allows them to identify categories, features and dimensions. Categories were gradually found and developed during the coding process. Using MaxQDA software and Grounded theory method, the foundation was selected and analyzed in three open, pivotal stages. Finally, the following model was extracted, which we will validate in the present article.

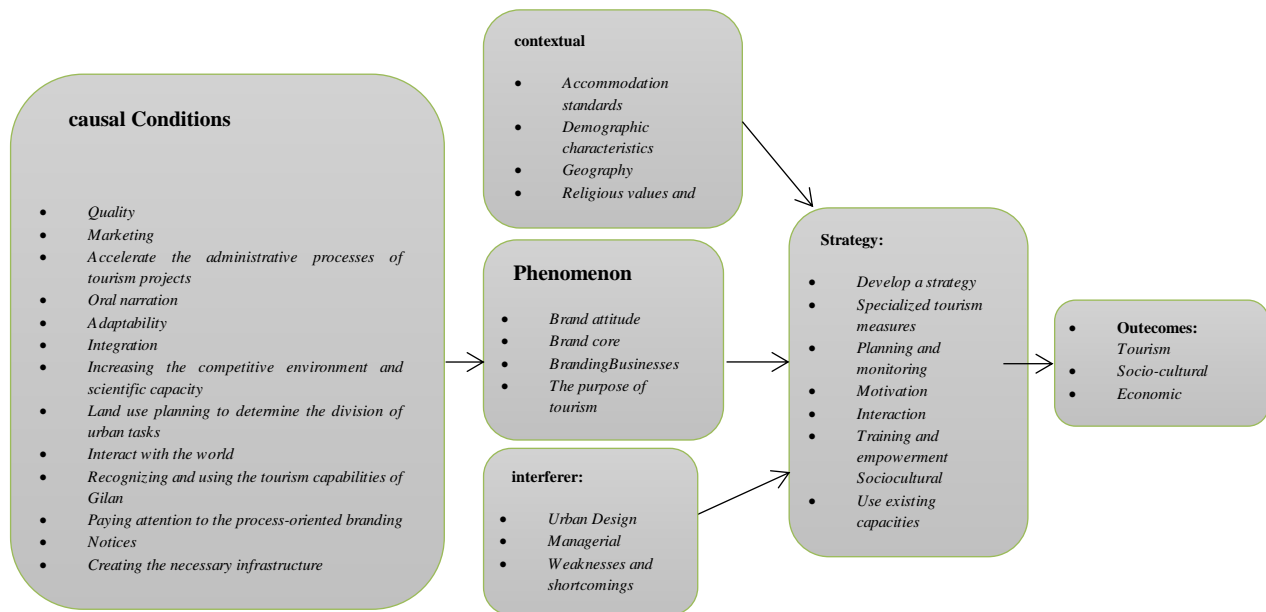


Figure 1. Research model

In the above model, the consequences include the dimensions of tourism (loyalty, protection of natural and cultural heritage, formation of a positive and clear image of the city among potential tourists, urban brand awareness), socio-cultural (development, reduction of rural-urban migration, improving quality of life in the urban sphere and indigenous peoples), economic (development, increase in GDP).

Strategies include dimensions of planning and monitoring (planning goals, continuous monitoring of the tourism process), motivation (motivating to attract investors, using the capabilities of the Chamber of Commerce, providing vacancies for tourism to young people, supporting national production in the country, creating will And encouraging people to work in the field of tourism), interaction (national and global registration), education and empowerment (government empowerment, public education, holding meetings and conferences and practical seminars), cultural and social (giving importance to the nature of Gilan, improving the culture of Gilan ), And the use of existing capacities and capabilities (using the capabilities of the free zone, using the capacity

of the private sector, establishing a cooperative, trusting the youth, using the opinion of experts).

Therefore, in the present study, we seek to know:

1. To what extent are strategies related to outcomes?

Interfering factors include urban design dimensions (wall painting and use of colors, design of gardens and parks, urban furniture), management (tourism politicization, value added, lack of interaction with the world, lack of budget allocation, obstruction by executive bodies, conflict of executive organizations, lack of Organization of artists), and weaknesses and shortcomings (management, information, facilities and logistics, inconsistencies in designs, lack of investors, lack of manpower, weakness in maritime tourism). So some of the questions we face in this research are:

2. To what extent are intervention factors related to strategies?

Causal factors include the dimensions of attention to the process-oriented branding (gaining the trust of tourists, receiving facilities, recognizing the audience, creating a mental image), and recognizing and using the

tourism capabilities of Gilan (tourism capabilities).

The phenomenon also includes the dimensions of businesses (providing services to travelers, catering), the purpose of tourism (health tourism, familiarity with cultures, monuments and historical issues, recreation, pilgrimage, mission, nature tourism). Therefore, the present study seeks to find:

3. To what extent are causal conditions related to paddling?

4. To what extent is the phenomenon related to strategies?

Finally, contextual factors include the geographical dimensions of Gilan (border location, climate, forest, mountains, Caspian Sea, rangelands), religious values and rituals (the need to observe the hijab), government restrictions (management instability, government resources), Economic issues (low economic growth of tourists to Gilan, cheap tourism in Gilan, exchange rate). So another question that arises in the present study is:

5. To what extent are contextual factors related to strategies?

### Research Methodology

The present study is of a quantitative type. In this research, using the structural equation modeling method based on the partial least squares approach, the relationship between the desired components has been explained to validate the model. Data collection method has been used in both library and field methods. In the section on theoretical foundations in collecting secondary information using the library method through books, internal and external articles, upstream documents, reports, etc. We will collect information and in the field method for collecting primary data to answer research questions, the tools used for data collection will be interviews and questionnaires. Finally, LISREL software will be used to analyze the data. Statistical community in the quantitative stage of research, including managers and experts of the Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization of Guilan Province and also employees working in tourism services offices of Guilan Province are as follows:

This division was done in order to examine all tourism sectors in Gilan province and to evaluate people at all levels.

Table 2.

*Statistical population, statistical sample and sampling method*

N	Statistical community of research	Number of statistical population	Sampling	Sampling formula and sample size
1	Managers of the organization	50	Simple Random Sampling	Cochran sampling formula n=201
2	Organization experts	200		
3	Employees of tourist service offices	60		
4	Total	310		

$$\frac{(1.96)^2 \cdot (0.572)^2 \cdot 310}{(0.05)^2 \cdot (310) - (0.05)^2 + ((1.96)^2 \cdot (0.572)^2)} = 192$$

Considering that the minimum sample size was set at 192 people, and considering that there was a possibility that the collected questionnaires were missing or incomplete; a total of 250 questionnaires were distributed among the community, which was finally used in the analysis according to the return rate at the end of 201 questionnaires.

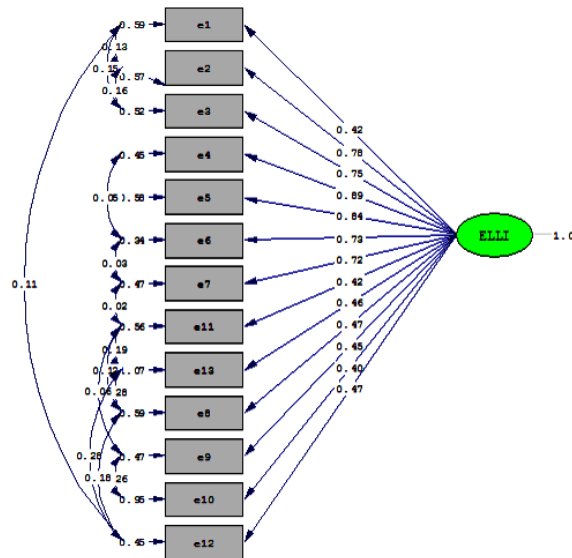
**Research Findings**

At this stage, the relationships of each of the components extracted in the conceptual model are examined independently and then predicted simultaneously using the structural equation modeling method. To test the model

is also performed. Structural equation modeling will be used. In this step, an attempt is made to evaluate the fit of the overall model after examining the confirmatory factor analysis of the variable measurement model.

Confirmatory factor analysis is one of the methods of classification. In this method, the researcher has done and reviewed the categories based on the interview and after reviewing the validity, and using confirmatory factor analysis and quantitative method intends to evaluate this method of classification. The following confirmatory factor analysis of variables is performed as follows:

First-order factor analysis of causal factors



Chi-Square=217.15, df=88, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.072

presented in the research, the path analysis test using structural validity:

Figure 2. First-order factor analysis of causal factors

Based on the above model, it can be seen that factor analysis of causal factors has been

confirmed. The following is a review of the suitability of the measurement model:

Table 3.

*Fitness of the causal model measurement model*

RMSEA	NFI	CFI	IFI	GFI	CMIN/DF	Fitness index
0/072	0/781	0/808	0/813	0/835	2/47	Model estimate
less than 0.1			more than 0.7		less than 3	Acceptable rate

As the table above shows, the above measurement model has a good fit.

First-order factor analysis of the phenomenon using structural validity:

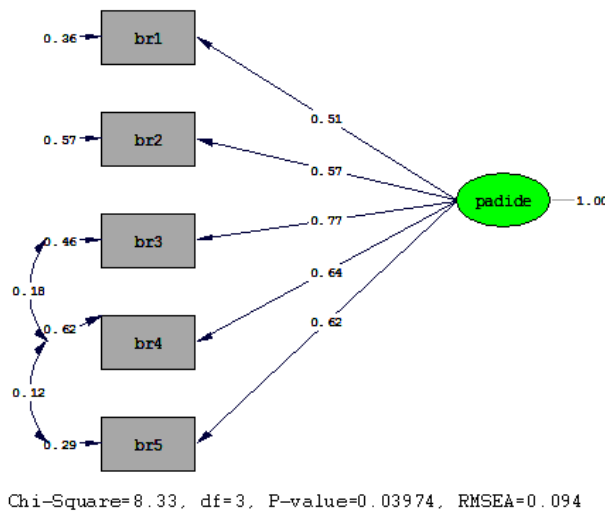


Figure 3. First-order factor analysis of the phenomenon

Based on the above model, it can be seen that the factor analysis of the phenomenon has been

confirmed. The following is a review of the suitability of the measurement model:

Table 4.

*Fitness of the phenomenon measurement model*

RMSEA	NFI	CFI	IFI	GFI	CMIN/DF	Fitness index
0/094	0/978	0/985	0/986	0/985	2/77	Model estimate
less than 0.1	more than 0.7				less than 3	Acceptable rate

As the table above shows, the above measurement model has a good fit.

First-order factor analysis of strategies using structural validation:

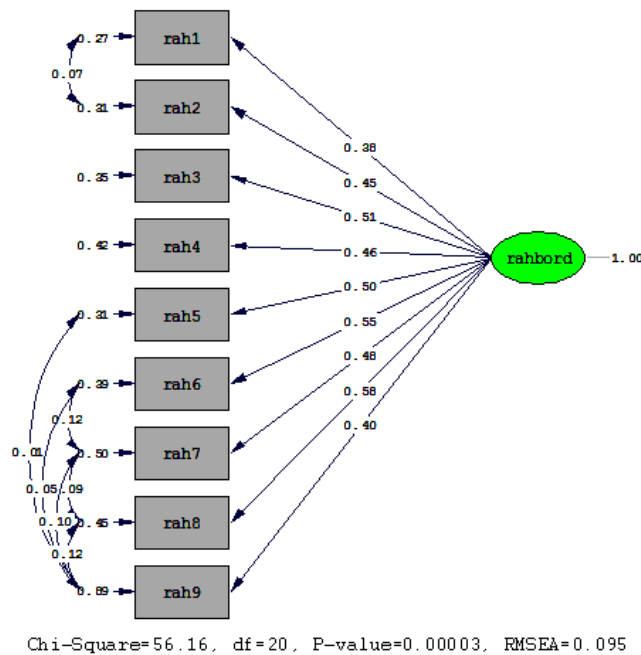


Figure 4. First-order factor analysis of strategies



Based on the above model, it can be seen that the factor analysis of the strategies has been

approved. The following is a review of the suitability of the measurement model:

Table 5.

*The suitability of the measurement model of strategies*

RMSEA	NFI	CFI	IFI	GFI	CMIN/DF	Fitness index
0/095	0/905	0/935	0/937	0/939	2/808	Model estimate
less than 0.1	more than 0.7			less than 3		Acceptable rate

As the table above shows, the above measurement model has a good fit.

First-order factor analysis of outcomes using structural validity:

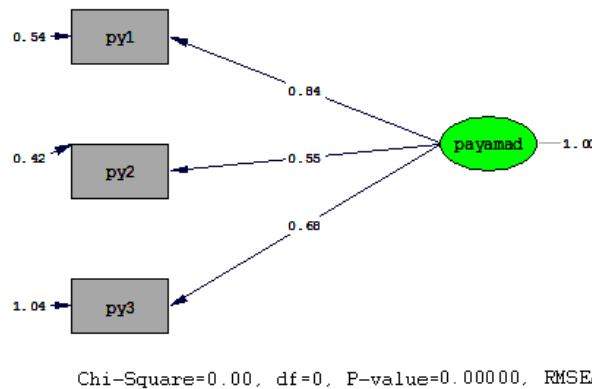


Figure 5. *First-order factor analysis of consequences*

Based on the above model, it can be seen that the factor analysis of the consequences has

been confirmed. The following is a review of the suitability of the measurement model:

Table 6.

*The suitability of the outcome measurement model*

RMSEA	NFI	CFI	IFI	GFI	CMIN/DF	Fitness index
0/000	0/985	0/995	0/997	0/999	0/000	Model estimate
less than 0.1	more than 0.7			less than 3		Acceptable rate

As the table above shows, the above measurement model has a good fit.

First-order factor analysis of underlying factors using structural validity:



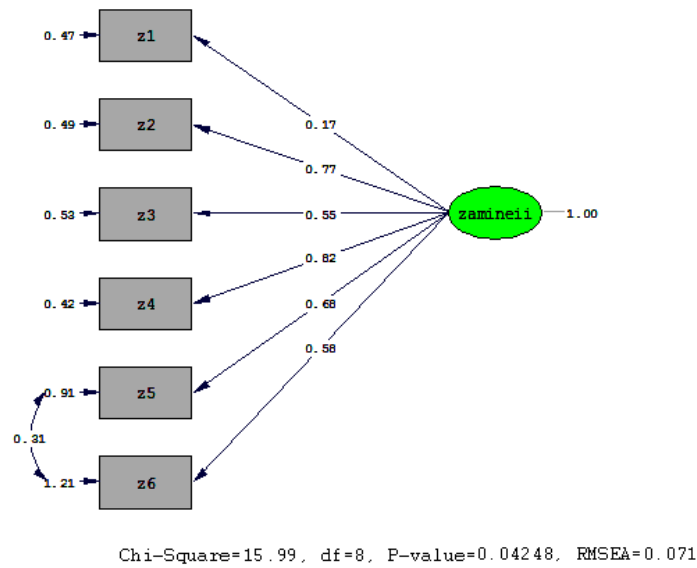


Figure 6. First-order factor analysis of underlying factors

Based on the above model, it can be seen that the contextual factor analysis has been

confirmed. The following is a review of the suitability of the measurement model:

Table 7.

*Fitness of the underlying measurement model*

RMSEA	NFI	CFI	IFI	GFI	CMIN/DF	Fitness index
0/071	0/946	0/972	0/972	0/974	1/99	Model estimate
less than 0.1		more than 0.7			less than 3	Acceptable rate

As the table above shows, the above measurement model has a good fit.

First-order factor analysis of intervention factors using the validity of the structure:

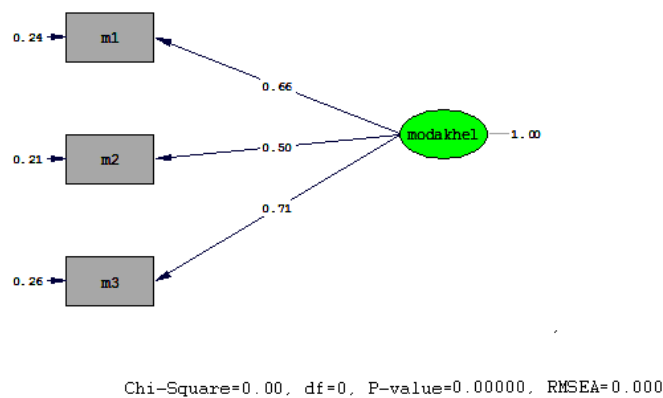


Figure 7. First-order factor analysis of intervening factors

Based on the above model, it can be seen that the intervention factor analysis has been

approved. The following is a review of the suitability of the measurement model:

Table 8.

*The suitability of the intervening measurement model*

RMSEA	NFI	CFI	IFI	GFI	CMIN/DF	Fitness index
0/071	0/946	0/972	0/972	0/974	1/99	Model estimate
less than 0.1			more than 0.7		less than 3	Acceptable rate

As the table above shows, the above measurement model has a good fit. At this stage, an attempt will be made to evaluate the structural model of the present

study, which is derived from interviews collected and qualitative analysis:

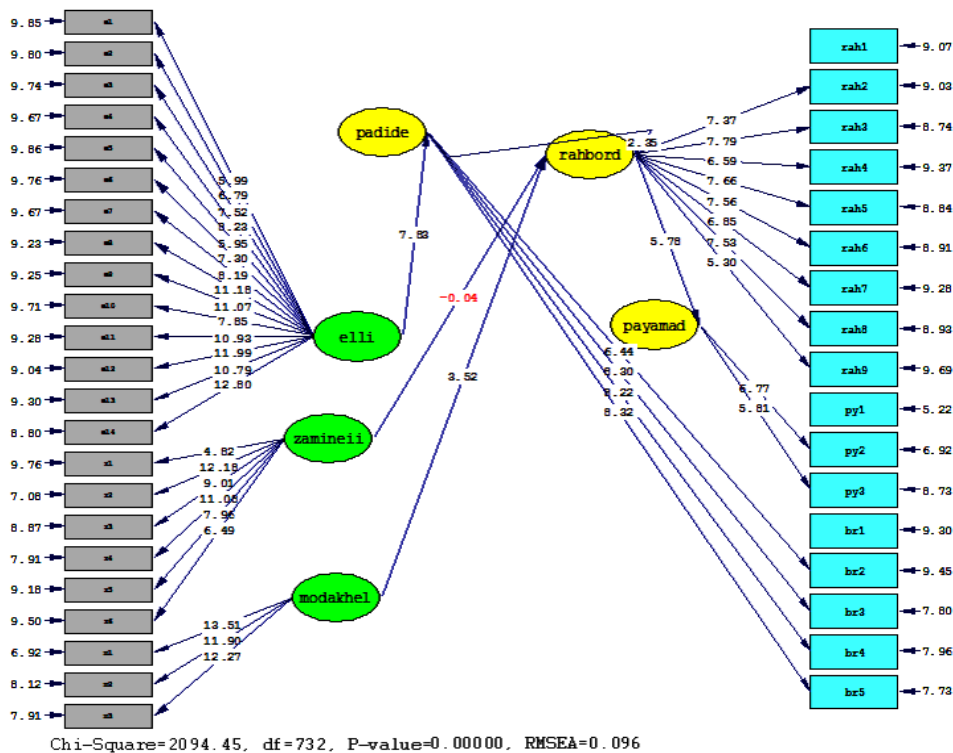


Figure 8. Significant state of the structural model

The t-statistic for the variables has been shown that if the calculated t-value is greater than 1.96 and less than -1.96, it indicates the existence of a relationship that according to the graph of the t-value of the relationship between the underlying factors and the strategy is

smaller. From 1.96 and greater than -1.96 indicates that there is no relationship. While the value of t-statistic for the rest of the relationships is greater than 1.96, which indicates the confirmation of the relationships.

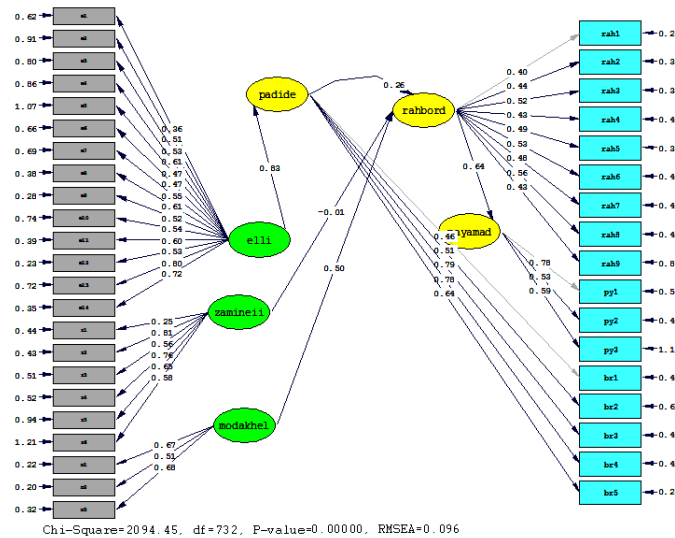


Figure 9. Standard mode of structural model

The data in the hidden variable connection arrow to the observed variable (structure) are the same as the factor loads. The larger the factor load and the closer it is to 1, the better the observed variable can explain the hidden

variable. Also, the larger the factor load, the lower the model error coefficient.

The following is a review of the suitability of the measurement model:

Table 9.

The suitability of the underlying measurement model

RMSEA	NFI	CFI	IFI	GFI	CMIN/DF	Fitness index
0/096	0/975	0/972	0/976	0/975	2/86	Model estimate
less than 0.1		more than 0.7			less than 3	Acceptable rate

As the table above shows, the measurement model also fits well. In the following, an

attempt is made to present the final model of the research based on quantitative findings:

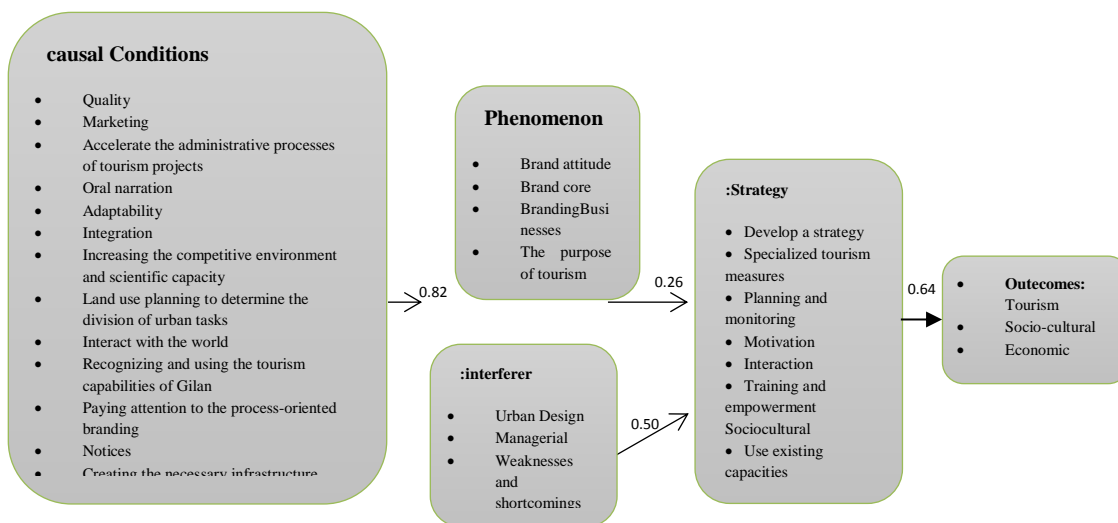


Figure 10. The final pattern of urban branding

The test results of the research hypotheses based on the structural equation model are shown in Table (10).

Table 10.

*Validation results of model components*

Relationships	Standard coefficients	T-Value	Result
causal factors → Phenomenon	0.82	7.63	Confirmation
contextual → Strategy	-0.01	-0.04	disapproval
Phenomenon → Strategy	0.26	2.25	Confirmation
Interferer → Strategy	0.50	3.52	Confirmation
Strategy → Outcomes	0.64	5.76	Confirmation

As can be seen in Table (10), the path coefficients are obtained for four significant relationships and for one non-significant relationship. In fact, the relationship between contextual factors and strategies was not confirmed, but there was a significant relationship between other relationships.

### Conclusion

In view of the above, the following activities are suggested:

1. In the field of causal factors it is suggested:

❖ It is further suggested that city managers, by spreading the obvious identity of the province, by introducing to all investors, pave the way for attracting capital to their city. This can be achieved by using appropriate information and advertising to introduce the identity of the city in order to attract investors along with branding.

2. In the field of strategies, it is suggested:

❖ it is proposed to form a working group of executive-government agencies and companies, tourism activists, members of parliament, and representatives of non-governmental organizations under the supervision of Gilan Governor's Office, and while summarizing all cases, strategies, programs And plan the necessary measures for the development of tourism in Gilan province and provide the necessary support.

Of course, it should be emphasized that the definition of the working group should not only increase the process of administrative bureaucracy, but the exit of this working group should eliminate a problem in the way of tourism in Gilan. Unfortunately, in some cases, the working groups, due to inefficiency, have only prolonged the executive and practical processes or created a source of power and rent, which will only be to the detriment of the entire province.

3. Considering that the main phenomenon of research (urban branding) has been able to influence the strategies of the model, so:

❖ It is suggested that organizations active in the province, together with and in cooperation with the Radio and Television of Gilan Province, produce content and produce films, serials, documentaries and other video and even audio content groups in the form of content to the country's audience. And even be presented globally in order to create the necessary view and knowledge about the province in the minds of Iranian and even foreign citizens that Gilan can be a very useful tourist destination and through this, all kinds of tourists to Enter the province.

4. The effect of intervention factors on research model strategies was also confirmed, therefore:

❖ It is also suggested that in-service training courses in this field be held using the country's leading universities and professors in order to strengthen the skills and knowledge of managers and employees of the tourism industry while gaining knowledge of the world's successful achievements in the field of tourism. It is also suggested that conferences and applied conferences in the tourism industry, by combining the three groups of government, private sector and people, increase the level of public awareness, and through this, try to provide practical solutions to address the limitations and shortcomings.

5. In the area of outcomes, it is suggested:

❖ It is suggested that in order to create a positive image and mentality and ensure the security of the tourist places of the province, the necessary planning should be done and by creating culture and spreading the culture of hospitality and tourism among the people, the ground for attracting investment and tourism should be created. This seems necessary by using advertisements, holding ceremonies and exhibitions on Nowruz or summer, when more tourists visit Gilan province.

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