



Testing the Tourism Marketing Model of Chabahar and Ranking Marketing Factors Affecting Tourist Attraction

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ABSTRACT

Chabahar Free Zone, endowed with unique natural capacities and a strategic geographical position, possesses substantial potential to emerge as a national and international tourism hub. However, realizing this objective necessitates the precise identification and systematic ranking of key marketing factors that effectively influence travelers' decision-making processes. The primary aim of this research was to test the tourism marketing model of Chabahar and to rank the marketing factors affecting tourist attraction. In terms of purpose, the present study is applied in nature, while adopting a quantitative methodological approach. A survey strategy was employed for the quantitative component, and the research design was descriptive-survey with respect to data collection procedures. The statistical population comprised all investors in the tourism sector ($N = 650$), from which a sample of 242 participants was selected through simple random sampling based on Cochran's formula. Data analysis was conducted using structural equation modeling, and model validation was performed utilizing SmartPLS4 software. The findings revealed that consequences, with a mean rank of 2.63, occupied the highest priority. Intervening factors, with a mean rank of 2.55, ranked second. The central phenomenon, with a mean rank of 2.43, ranked third. Contextual factors, with a mean rank of 2.40, ranked fourth. Strategies, with a mean rank of 2.39, ranked fifth. Finally, causal conditions, with a mean rank of 2.38, occupied the lowest priority. Furthermore, model validation indicated that the Goodness-of-Fit (GOF) index yielded a value of 0.546, representing a robust indicator that confirms the overall high quality and adequate fit of the proposed model.

KEYWORDS: Tourism Development, Tourism Marketing, Chabahar, Tourist Attraction

1. Introduction

Tourism constitutes a vital economic sector that contributes significantly to job creation, foreign exchange earnings, and regional development (Hall, 2019). Effective tourism marketing is essential for promoting destinations and attracting both domestic and international tourists. The United Nations has formally recognized the tourism industry as one of the instruments for economic development and employment generation. According to bulletins issued by the World Tourism Organization, the tourism industry is not unidimensional; rather, it encompasses various domains, including economic, cultural, social, and even political dimensions (Foris, 2014).

The tourism sector has witnessed considerable expansion over the past century and has emerged as a critical catalyst for economic advancement in numerous governments worldwide (Akhtar et al., 2023). Marketing within the realm of tourism marketing functions as a managerial mechanism that anticipates the needs of current and prospective tourists and formulates plans to address these needs. Tourism marketing fundamentally fosters competition among service providers in the tourism industry, such as travel agencies. Tourism marketing management is not confined solely to financial considerations; multiple factors can influence the growth of tourism activities. The expansion of global trade has contributed to an increase in international travel and the development of hospitality infrastructure (Doll et al., 2023). Furthermore, the rise in business travel, driven by negotiations, trade exhibitions, supply chain management, and market research, has rendered such travel indispensable (Krupskyi et al., 2017). Additionally, empirical studies have demonstrated a direct correlation between the trade openness index (improved GDP resulting from export surplus over imports) and the demand for international tourism. Trade openness often attracts international visitors to target tourism destinations through visa policies, infrastructure improvements, and the creation of a more aesthetically pleasing environment (Ostian, 2024; Worsnop et al., 2023).

A primary challenge in industrial tourism marketing lies in the cultural differences between tourists and local communities. In tourism marketing management, conditions must be established whereby local residents benefit from the influx of tourists. Consequently, local populations are more likely to welcome tourists with open arms and more readily accept cultural differences (David et al., 2019). As the benefits accrued by local communities from tourism increase, their receptiveness toward tourists intensifies, which in turn enhances tourist satisfaction (Sofronov, 2019). In tourism marketing, when a balance can be achieved between the expectations of tourists and the interests of local communities, the sustainability of tourism marketing efforts can be reasonably anticipated.

The enduring popularity of coastal areas, coupled with the substantial volume of demand for such destinations and the fragile ecological structure of these environments, has prompted planners to demonstrate heightened awareness regarding tourism development in these regions. In pursuit of sustainable tourism, efforts are directed toward preserving economic benefits, enhancing tourism experiences, and conserving environmental resources. Coastal zones represent spaces that typically maintain an inseparable connection with surrounding urban centers and hubs (Dilman Gokkaya et al., 2024). According to reports from the World Economic Forum (WEF, or Davos Agenda) in recent years, Iran ranks as the most price-competitive tourism destination among 140 countries

worldwide in terms of the price competitiveness index. Nevertheless, Iran occupies the 73rd position in the Travel and Tourism Development Index (TTDI) for 2024, as reported by the World Economic Forum (Dadparvar & Kaleji, 2024).

As previously noted, Iran ranked 73rd in the Travel and Tourism Development Index in 2024 with a score of 3.72. However, compared to 2019, the country has experienced a four-position improvement and a 1.5 percent growth rate. Moreover, employment in the tourism sector increased by 10.3 percent in 2023, representing a notable rise relative to the preceding year. Despite improvements in Iran's ranking within the Travel and Tourism Development Index and certain other enhancements, the country's position remains relatively low compared to many other nations (Akhtar et al., 2023). Therefore, Iranian policymakers must accord greater attention to this sector, prioritize it accordingly, and align complementary activities to strengthen this domain. Particular emphasis should be placed on ecotourism, as the development strategy for the Makran coastal region, according to the Department of Environment, is fundamentally grounded in nature-based tourism. Accordingly, given the high volume of unemployment and the capacity of tourism to generate employment opportunities, this research endeavors to identify the dimensions, components, and indicators of tourism development in the tourist port of Chabahar, rank the marketing factors influencing tourist attraction in Chabahar, and propose an appropriate tourism marketing model tailored to this destination.

2. Theoretical Foundations and Literature Review

Tourism is a compound term consisting of two components: "tour," meaning travel, sightseeing, journey, or wandering, and "ism," a suffix denoting a doctrine or a particular mode of thought. In essence, tourism refers to a doctrine whose intellectual foundation is centered on travel and exploration, while a tourist is an individual who engages in travel and exploration. The term "tourism" (or "gardeshgari" in Persian) originates from the French language, derived from the root "tour." In French, "tour" signifies circular movement, the act of traversing, covering distance, journeying, or wandering (Dilman Gokkaya et al., 2024). According to the definition provided by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in 1997, tourism encompasses the range of activities (including rest, recreation, and other pursuits) undertaken by individuals or groups who travel to a location outside their usual place of residence, stay there for a minimum of one night and a maximum of one year, and whose primary purpose is leisure. Tourism comprises diverse forms and types, which are defined according to the tourist attraction and the visitors' intentions for visiting the destination (David et al., 2019).

Tourism marketing is a term that refers to business activities aimed at attracting visitors to a specific location, which may include a state, a city, a particular heritage site, a tourist destination, a hotel, or a conference center. Tourism marketing is closely aligned with marketing strategies within the tourism domain (Sofronov, 2019).

Four fundamental characteristics distinguish tourism marketing from other service sectors:

Inflexibility: Tourism marketing is entirely inflexible with respect to capacity, meaning that the number of hotel rooms or airplane seats remains fixed and cannot be increased in response to

sudden demand. Furthermore, restaurant tables, hotel beds, and airplane seats remain vacant and unused if demand is insufficient; the seasonal nature of tourism exacerbates this challenge (Xiang et al., 2017).

Non-storability: Tourism service products are entirely non-storable. Vacant hotel rooms or empty airplane seats represent lost revenue and profit, which adversely affects the profitability of the tourism industry and its marketing efforts (Akhtar et al., 2023).

Fixed location: Tourist destinations are fixed in location, and efforts must be made to ensure that potential customers can access them. While a customer may comfortably watch a film at a local cinema in their place of residence, motivating them to travel to visit the Taj Mahal in India requires generating sufficient travel incentive (Dallen, 2014).

Relatively high investment: Providing advanced tourism equipment and facilities necessitates substantial capital investment, which often requires considerable time. In other words, the level of risk and return on investment holds significant importance for tourism management (Doll et al., 2023).

Chabahar Port serves as the administrative center of Chabahar County, one of the southern counties of Sistan and Baluchestan Province. Historically, this county has been renowned as "Chahar Bahar" (Four Springs) due to its exceptional climatic conditions. The county spans an area of 13,161 square kilometers and has a population exceeding 216,000 residents. Prior to the establishment of the Free Trade-Industrial Zone, the majority of Chabahar Port's inhabitants sustained their livelihoods through fishing and agriculture. However, following the growth and development of the free zone, the region experienced an influx of migrants and population growth attributable to the attraction of specialized workforce and human resources.

Chabahar is a strategic port city endowed with pristine tourism potentials. Its untouched coastlines, unique cultural heritage, and geopolitical significance render it a promising destination. Nevertheless, inadequate marketing strategies and infrastructural deficiencies have impeded its growth. Given its tourism capacities, particularly in the domains of geotourism and ecotourism, Chabahar has the potential to serve as a pivotal point for the development of both international and domestic tourism. According to researchers from the United Nations specializing in international transportation, approximately half of global transportation flows occur between the Far East and other regions worldwide. Of the three global transportation corridors projected by United Nations experts, two traverse Iran, with Chabahar representing the southernmost point of the East-West global corridor (Arbabi Sabzevari et al., 2018).

This corridor originates at the "Gateway of the Silk Road" in China, nourishes the economic heartland of the country, namely Guangdong Province, connects to Southeast Asia, and after traversing this route, enters India. It then covers major cities in the region, such as Kolkata, Nagpur, Jaipur, Hyderabad, Karachi, and Port Qasim, before reaching Chabahar. According to port experts, Chabahar Port is situated at the intersection of two significant global transit corridors, namely the North-South and East-West corridors, which constitutes one of the most critical advantages of Iran's eastern axis (Krupskiy et al., 2017).

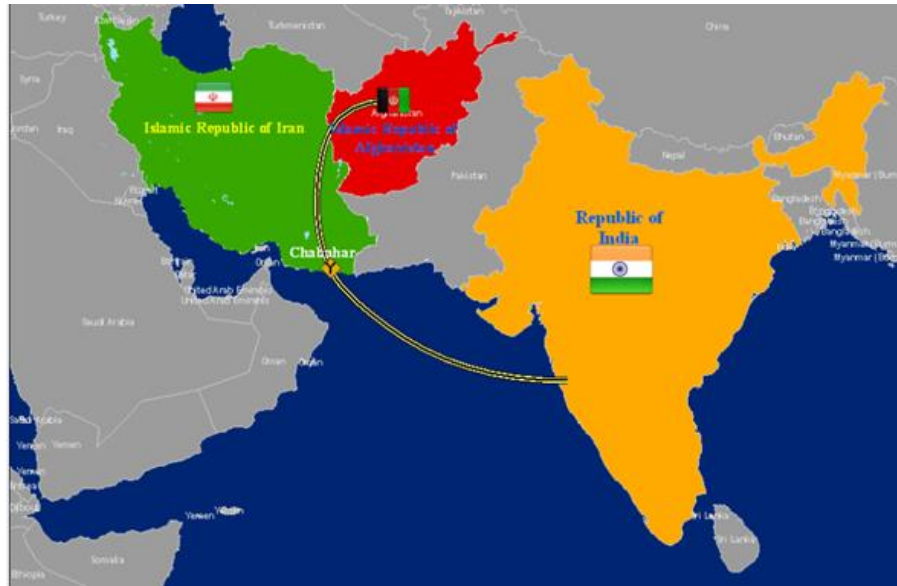


Figure 1. Global transportation corridors connected to Chabahar

A significant number of international tourists exhibit a strong interest in engaging with local folklore, experiencing traditional handicrafts and music, and exploring the natural landscapes and pristine coastlines of the Baluchestan region. Consequently, they travel to Chabahar, recognized as one of Iran's most captivating destinations. The residents of Chabahar, located in southern Sistan and Baluchestan Province, are notably warm and hospitable. Provided that adequate tourism infrastructure is developed, the region could witness a substantial influx of visitors (Mortazavi, 2024).

Recent research in sustainable management emphasizes the necessity of developing precise indicators and establishing data trust as fundamental prerequisites for achieving macro-level objectives. Martinez and Lopez (2024), in their study, demonstrated that trust in data and management statistics plays a vital role in realizing overarching health and sustainability goals. By introducing a "data trust coefficient," they argued that transparency and accuracy in managerial data form the foundation of effective policymaking in the health sector.

In this regard, the role of regulatory and advisory institutions in enhancing sustainability has gained considerable attention. Chen et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of "Health Councils" in monitoring sustainability indicators and preserving environmental integrity. Their findings indicate that such councils can ensure alignment between developmental initiatives and natural resource conservation through systematic oversight of standard implementation. Similarly, Santos and Rivera (2024), introducing the concept of a "Sustainability Council," stressed the need to establish specialized institutional structures for the continuous monitoring of sustainability indicators across various administrative and managerial levels.

Beyond institutional frameworks, stakeholder and citizen participation is a critical determinant in the success of environmental and developmental initiatives. Hansen and Walker (2025) demonstrated that engaging stakeholders in the planning process and conducting rigorous needs

assessments lead to improved environmental health indicators and increased project effectiveness. Kumar and Singh (2025), focusing on the role of citizens, argued that empowering local communities and raising their environmental awareness exhibits a significant positive correlation with urban sustainability metrics. Lewis et al. (2024) and Robertson and Hill (2024) have also emphasized the importance of robust environmental data and the design of indicators that accurately reflect the true ecological state of a region.

As sustainability concepts continue to expand within the tourism industry, scholarly inquiry has increasingly focused on the intersection of technology, environmental conservation, and tourist experience. Mendes and Oliveira (2025) confirmed in their research that integrating emerging technologies with sustainability principles can significantly enrich and enhance the tourism experience for environmentally conscious travelers. This finding suggests that digital and technological innovations can serve as a catalyst for elevating the quality and accessibility of ecotourism.

Transparency in natural destinations is also a decisive factor in attracting responsible and sustainability-oriented tourists. Taylor and Bryant (2024) demonstrated that natural destinations that transparently communicate their environmental sustainability policies through marketing campaigns generate greater trust among visitors. This transparency not only yields positive ecological impacts but also shapes tourist attitudes and actively influences their destination selection decision-making processes.

Ultimately, global macro-environmental trends significantly influence the trajectory and demand for ecotourism. Fernandez and Nakamura (2024), in a study conducted in 2024, revealed that tourists' environmental motivations are on a steady rise. They argued that this trend stems from growing global concerns regarding climate change and the degradation of natural ecosystems. Accordingly, the sustainable tourism market must operate with a strategic focus on environmental values. They defined ecotourism as a responsible and ecologically compatible destination model that can effectively address contemporary climate-related challenges. A comprehensive review of the literature indicates that while numerous studies have independently examined sustainability indicators, data management practices, and tourist motivations, the integration of these concepts into a unified analytical model that simultaneously emphasizes "data transparency," "stakeholder participation," and "technology-driven ecotourism experiences" has received limited scholarly attention. Drawing upon this existing body of research, the present study seeks to bridge the theoretical and practical gap between sustainability data management and tourists' environmental experiences in emerging coastal destinations.

3. Research Methodology

In terms of purpose, this research is classified as applied, and with respect to data collection procedures, it adopts a descriptive-survey design. The data collection approach employed in this study is quantitative in nature. Quantitative data were gathered using a standardized, researcher-developed questionnaire. The statistical population for the quantitative phase of the research comprised all investors active in the tourism sector of Chabahar between the Iranian year 1402 and

the time of sampling (Winter 1403). The questionnaire link was distributed to participants via email. Given the limited accessibility to the target population, the statistical population was considered unlimited, and a non-probability convenience sampling method was employed. Data related to the research variables were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire derived from a doctoral dissertation. To assess the reliability coefficient, Cronbach's alpha method was utilized in this study. Composite reliability (CR) and the reliability of each research component were calculated, with results indicating acceptable reliability of the measurement instrument. Furthermore, both discriminant and convergent validity of the questionnaire were examined, and the results confirmed the adequate validity of the instrument. Similarly, causal relationships among variables were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) via SmartPLS4 software. Unlike variance-based structural equation modeling, which evaluates the fit of a hypothesized model and consequently focuses on explanation, testing, and theory confirmation, the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach is prediction-oriented and can be employed as a theory-building method.

4. Findings

Descriptive findings indicate that 126 participants (51.8%) were male, and 116 respondents (48.2%) were female. Regarding age distribution, 58 individuals (24.1%) were under 30 years old, 88 participants (36.5%) were between 30 and 40 years old, 60 individuals (25.0%) were between 40 and 50 years old, and 36 respondents (14.4%) were 50 years or older. In terms of educational attainment, 154 participants (63.8%) held a master's degree, while 88 respondents (36.2%) possessed a doctoral degree.

To assess the fit of the reflective measurement model, reliability and validity tests were employed. Reflective reliability tests encompass two criteria: Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR).

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR)

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE	CR
Contextual Factors	0.912	0.926	0.513	0.926
Intervening Factors	0.896	0.917	0.583	0.917
Central Phenomenon	0.944	0.950	0.514	0.950
Causal Conditions	0.821	0.864	0.537	0.846
Consequences	0.867	0.897	0.526	0.897

The values of composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha for all dimensions of the studied model exceed 0.70; therefore, it can be asserted that the questionnaire demonstrates acceptable reliability. The construct validity of reflective constructs is assessed through two approaches: convergent validity and discriminant (divergent) validity. In the convergent validity approach, confirmatory validity and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) index are utilized.

It is observed that the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values consistently exceed 0.50, and composite reliability values in all cases are greater than 0.70 and also exceed the corresponding AVE values; therefore, convergent validity is also confirmed.

Table 2. Factor Loadings of Research Variables

Direction	Factor Loading	t-statistic
IC ← Individual Characteristics	0.678	10.752
OF ← Organizational Characteristics	0.680	7.303
IL ← Issues and Constraints	0.808	16.572
ATT ← Tourist Attraction	0.623	8.565
AT ← Attitudes	0.647	8.007
MIS ← Micro Strategies	0.619	7.506
MAS ← Macro Strategies	0.859	19.461
IC ← Individual Consequences	0.797	12.048
EC ← Environmental Consequences	0.708	10.818

Based on the results of the measurement model, the observed factor loadings in all cases exceed 0.50, indicating an appropriate correlation between observed variables and their corresponding latent variables. Furthermore, according to the measurement model results, the bootstrapping values (t-statistics) in all cases exceed the critical threshold of 1.96, indicating that the correlations between observed variables and their corresponding latent variables are statistically significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that each latent variable has been appropriately measured by its corresponding observed indicators. To examine the discriminant validity of the measurement model, the Fornell and Larcker criterion was employed. When the correlation between instruments measuring distinct constructs is low, the instruments are considered to possess discriminant or diagnostic validity. According to this criterion, a latent variable should exhibit greater variance among its own observed indicators compared to other latent variables. This assessment is conducted by comparing the square root of the AVE for each construct with the correlation coefficients among constructs. For this purpose, a matrix must be constructed wherein the diagonal elements represent the square roots of the AVE coefficients for each construct, and the off-diagonal elements below the diagonal represent the correlation coefficients between each construct and the others. The square root of the Average Variance Extracted for each latent variable must exceed the maximum correlation of that variable with other latent variables in the model. This matrix is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity of Reflective Constructs: Fornell and Larcker Test

	Contextual Factors	Intervening Factors	Central Phenomenon	Causal Conditions	Consequences
Contextual Factors	0.716				
Intervening Factors	0.479	0.764			
Central Phenomenon	0.162	0.426	0.717		
Causal Conditions	0.325	0.631	0.741	0.628	
Consequences	0.583	0.537	0.702	0.725	0.733

As indicated in the matrix above, within each column, the square root of the AVE for each construct exceeds the correlation coefficients of that construct with other constructs, which confirms the acceptable discriminant validity of the constructs.

Tenenhaus et al. (2005) introduced the Goodness-of-Fit (GOF) index to evaluate overall model fit. The global fit criterion can be calculated by computing the geometric mean of the average communality values and the coefficient of determination (R^2). For this index, values of 0.01, 0.25, and 0.36 are described as weak, moderate, and strong, respectively.

$$GOF = \sqrt{\text{Communality} \times \bar{R}^2}$$

Table 4. Communality Values and R^2

Variable	Communality	R^2
Contextual Factors	0.513	0.404
Intervening Factors	0.583	0.535
Central Phenomenon	0.514	0.677
Causal Conditions	0.526	0.817
Consequences	0.531	0.752
Strategies	0.319	—

As shown in the table above, only endogenous variables possess R^2 values. Following the calculations, the GOF index yielded a value of 0.546, which represents a strong indicator and confirms the overall high quality of the model.

The relationships among the examined variables within each hypothesized path were tested based on a causal structure using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) technique. In the overall research model depicted in Figure 2, both the measurement model (relationships between each observed variable and its corresponding latent variable) and the structural model (relationships among latent variables) were estimated. To assess the statistical significance of the relationships, t-statistics were computed using the bootstrapping technique, as presented in Figure 3. This model, generated by SmartPLS software, summarizes the results concerning the significance of standardized factor loadings and the significance of relationships among research variables. Path coefficients and their corresponding significance levels are reported in Table 5.

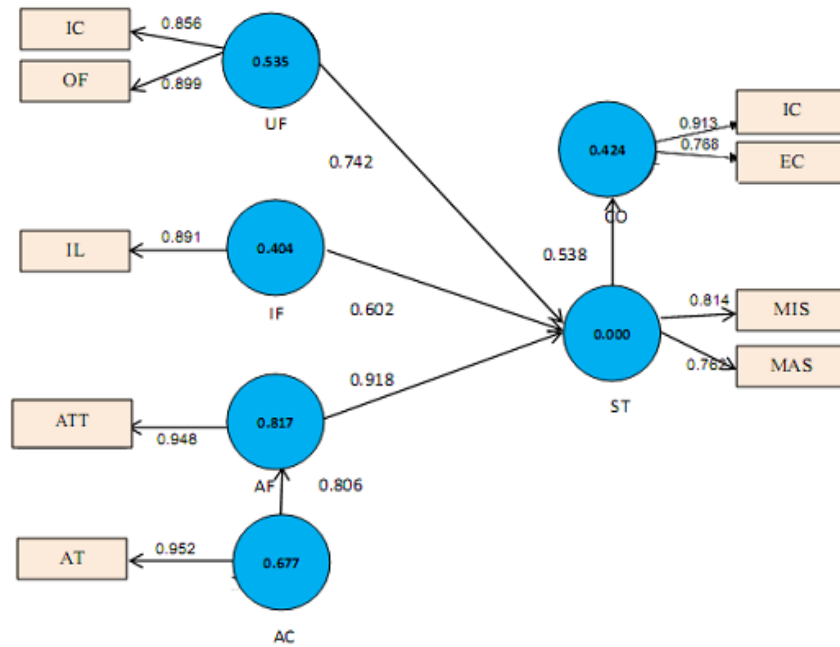


Figure 2. Overall Research Model Using Partial Least Squares Technique

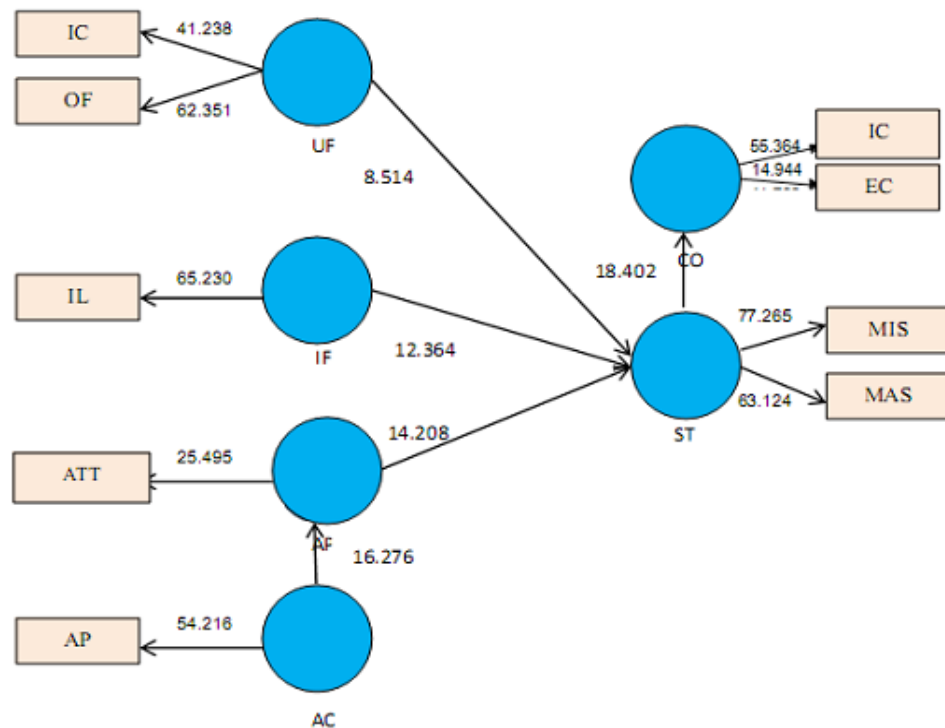


Figure 3. t-Statistics for the Overall Research Model Using Bootstrapping Technique

Table 5. Path Coefficients

Path Direction	Path Coefficient	t-statistic
Contextual Factors → Strategies	0.742	8.514
Intervening Factors → Strategies	0.602	12.364
Causal Conditions → Central Phenomenon	0.806	16.276
Central Phenomenon → Strategies	0.918	14.208
Strategies → Consequences	0.538	18.402

The path coefficient from contextual factors to strategies was calculated as 0.742, and the corresponding t-statistic was 8.514, which exceeds the critical t-value of 1.96 at the 5% significance level, indicating that the observed effect is statistically significant. Therefore, with 95% confidence, it can be concluded that a positive and significant relationship exists between contextual factors and strategies.

The path coefficient from intervening factors to strategies was calculated as 0.602, and the corresponding t-statistic was 12.364, which exceeds the critical t-value of 1.96 at the 5% significance level, indicating that the observed effect is statistically significant. Therefore, with 95% confidence, it can be concluded that a positive and significant relationship exists between intervening factors and strategies.

The path coefficient from causal conditions to the central phenomenon was calculated as 0.806, and the corresponding t-statistic was 16.276, which exceeds the critical t-value of 1.96 at the 5% significance level, indicating that the observed effect is statistically significant. Therefore, with 95% confidence, it can be concluded that a positive and significant relationship exists between causal conditions and the central phenomenon.

The path coefficient from the central phenomenon to strategies was calculated as 0.918, and the corresponding t-statistic was 14.208, which exceeds the critical t-value of 1.96 at the 5% significance level, indicating that the observed effect is statistically significant. Therefore, with 95% confidence, it can be concluded that a positive and significant relationship exists between the central phenomenon and strategies. The path coefficient from strategies to consequences was calculated as 0.538, and the corresponding t-statistic was 18.402, which exceeds the critical t-value of 1.96 at the 5% significance level, indicating that the observed effect is statistically significant. Therefore, with 95% confidence, it can be concluded that a positive and significant relationship exists between strategies and consequences.

Ranking of Research Variables

The Friedman test is a non-parametric statistical test employed to compare three or more related groups measured at the ordinal level. This test serves as the non-parametric equivalent of the dependent F-test in repeated-measures analysis of variance. In the Friedman test, the null hypothesis posits that the mean ranks are equal across groups. Rejection of the null hypothesis indicates that at least two groups differ significantly in their rankings. The results of the Friedman test are presented in the tables below.

Table 6. Friedman Rankings of Research Dimensions

Variable	Mean	Friedman Rank	Priority
Contextual Factors	3.4132	2.40	4
Intervening Factors	3.4702	2.55	2
Central Phenomenon	3.4165	2.43	3
Causal Conditions	3.4126	2.38	6
Strategies	3.4129	2.39	5
Consequences	3.4511	2.63	1

Table 7. Friedman Test Statistics

N	Chi-Square	Degrees of Freedom	Significance Level
275	7.215	3	0.045

The chi-square coefficient was calculated as 7.215, and the significance level was computed as 0.045, which is below the 0.05 threshold, indicating statistical significance. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected, and the claim of equal rankings (priorities) among these variables is not supported, signifying the presence of significant differences in rankings among the tested variables. Therefore, it can be stated with 95% confidence that significant differences exist in the rankings of the factors.

According to the obtained results, consequences, with a mean rank of 2.63, occupy the highest priority. Intervening factors, with a mean rank of 2.55, rank second. The central phenomenon, with a mean rank of 2.43, ranks third. Contextual factors, with a mean rank of 2.40, rank fourth. Strategies, with a mean rank of 2.39, rank fifth. Finally, causal conditions, with a mean rank of 2.38, occupy the lowest priority.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the present study, which aimed to test the tourism marketing model of Chabahar and rank the factors influencing tourist attraction, revealed that consequences ranked first with a mean rank of 2.63, intervening factors ranked second with a mean rank of 2.55, and the central phenomenon ranked third with a mean rank of 2.43. This prioritization indicates that investors and stakeholders in Chabahar's tourism sector place the greatest emphasis on the ultimate outcomes and achievements of marketing activities, expecting marketing strategies to yield tangible economic, social, and cultural results. This finding aligns with recent studies emphasizing the role of effective governance, foreign direct investment, and the utilization of natural endowments in attracting Asian tourists (Akhtar et al., 2023). Furthermore, the high priority assigned to consequences underscores the necessity of linking marketing programs to measurable performance indicators that can substantiate the economic and social rationale for tourism investment in Chabahar.

The second-place ranking of intervening factors suggests that variables such as political, economic, cultural, and environmental conditions can act as either facilitators or barriers in Chabahar's tourism marketing process. This finding is consistent with studies highlighting the political-administrative dimension of tourism and the impact of macro-policies on destination development (Foris, 2014; Hall, 2019). Particularly in the context of Chabahar, the transition from geopolitics to geo-economics through the Chabahar transit project can serve as a key intervening factor, simultaneously creating new opportunities for international marketing and presenting challenges stemming from regional developments (Dadparvar & Kaleji, 2024). Therefore, the design of Chabahar's tourism marketing model must incorporate sufficient flexibility to respond to environmental fluctuations and capitalize on strategic opportunities. The third-place priority of the central phenomenon, which in this study likely refers to the core tourism experience or the destination's value proposition, indicates that while intrinsic destination attractions are fundamentally important, they alone cannot sustainably attract tourists without appropriate facilitation through favorable outcomes and effective management of intervening factors. In this regard, assessing the climatic capabilities of southeastern Iran's coastal areas, including Chabahar, as a component of the central phenomenon can provide a scientific basis for designing seasonal and specialized tourism products (Arbabi Sabzevari et al., 2018). Additionally, sustainable coastal city development through a multi-criteria decision-making approach emphasizes that balancing environmental, economic, and social dimensions in tourism experience design is a prerequisite for the long-term success of coastal destinations (Dilman Gokkaya et al., 2024).

Contextual factors and strategies ranked fourth and fifth, respectively, indicating that while marketing infrastructure and operational tools are essential, they are secondary to investors' priorities after ensuring desirable outcomes and mitigating environmental risks. This finding can be explained by studies emphasizing the role of digital marketing and online review platforms in enhancing destination competitiveness (Xiang et al., 2017; Ostian, 2024). In the digital era, developing smart marketing strategies capable of leveraging big data and social media analytics can establish a sustainable competitive advantage for Chabahar. Furthermore, franchising models for expanding international travel businesses can serve as an operational strategy, facilitating the entry of new actors and standardizing tourism services in Chabahar (Krupskyi et al., 2017).

In other words, from the perspective of local experts, while causal conditions influence trend formation, intervention and corrective priorities lie at other levels (consequences, intervening factors, and strategies). Overall, it can be concluded that in Chabahar's tourism marketing model, attention to marketing outcomes holds the highest priority, reflecting a results-oriented mindset and the need for concrete, measurable programs in the tourism sector. Subsequently, intervening and contextual factors must be carefully identified and optimized to enable effective strategy implementation. Accordingly, the proposed tourism marketing model for Chabahar should feature a dynamic, localized, and outcome-driven structure, wherein strategies are designed and executed realistically and in alignment with regional conditions.

Placing causal conditions at the lowest priority, while seemingly counterintuitive at first glance, indicates that Chabahar's investors are more focused on managing outcomes and controllable

factors rather than conducting root-cause analyses. Nevertheless, neglecting causal conditions may lead to reactive rather than proactive strategy design. In this context, applying the Quantitative Strategic Planning Matrix (QSPM) can assist decision-makers in making more optimal choices among strategic alternatives based on the weighted influence of internal and external factors (David et al., 2019). Additionally, recognizing the link between tourism and economic growth as a fundamental causal condition reinforces the necessity of aligning marketing policies with broader regional development plans (Dallen, 2014). Model validation, with a Goodness-of-Fit (GOF) index of 0.546, indicates a strong model fit and provides sufficient confidence in the generalizability of the findings and the practical applicability of the model for Chabahar's tourism marketing planning. This result aligns with studies emphasizing the necessity of employing advanced quantitative methods for prioritizing tourism destination development factors (Sofronov, 2019). However, it should be noted that global developments, such as health pandemics, can rapidly transform tourism marketing paradigms, necessitating flexible models capable of integrating risk scenarios (Worsnop et al., 2023; Doll & Golole, 2023).

Based on the research findings, Chabahar's tourism organizations should define specific quantitative and qualitative indicators to measure outcomes, such as tourist arrival rates, overnight stays, visitor satisfaction, and tourism's revenue share in the local economy. These indicators should be monitored periodically to accurately assess marketing program performance. Easy accessibility and standardized infrastructure represent the most critical intervening factors in attracting tourists. Strategic priorities include road upgrades, expansion of Chabahar International Airport, development of standardized eco-lodges, and improved internet connectivity in tourism zones. The marketing model should center on targeted tourist acquisition (considering tourist typology, interests, and target markets), such as focusing on coastal tourism, ecotourism, and cultural tourism, which constitute Chabahar's competitive advantages. Integrating local handicrafts, Baluchi music, traditional cuisine, and indigenous rituals into promotional content plays a significant role in differentiating Chabahar's brand. A formal marketing program should be developed collaboratively with universities, the tourism industry, and executive agencies, encompassing target market analysis, branding, advertising, public relations, and infrastructure development. Government attention to balanced tourism development in eastern Iran through financial, promotional, and infrastructural support is essential.

From a practical standpoint, the findings of this study carry several important implications for policymakers, investors, and tourism marketing practitioners in Chabahar. First, focusing on measurable outcomes can provide a foundation for designing marketing performance monitoring and evaluation systems. Second, intelligent management of intervening factors, particularly within the context of regional geo-economic transformations, requires establishing cross-sector coordination mechanisms and active tourism diplomacy (Mortazavi, 2024). Third, leveraging digital technologies and social media data analytics can facilitate personalized marketing messaging and increase the conversion rate of potential tourists to actual visitors. Finally, integrating environmental, economic, and social sustainability dimensions into marketing strategy

design not only strengthens the destination's corporate social responsibility but also enhances Chabahar's appeal to conscious and responsible travelers.

Theoretically, by testing a structural model within the specific context of Chabahar, this research contributes to the enrichment of tourism marketing literature concerning free trade zones and strategic coastal destinations. Furthermore, integrating structural equation modeling with conceptual frameworks such as the Strauss and Corbin paradigm enables the simultaneous analysis of causal, contextual, and consequential relationships, which can serve as a template for future research on other Iranian tourism destinations. Nevertheless, limitations such as the exclusive focus on investor perspectives (rather than tourists or local communities), the cross-sectional nature of the study, and the insufficient exploration of region-specific socio-cultural variables necessitate follow-up studies employing mixed-methods approaches and longitudinal designs.

In final conclusion, Chabahar's success in evolving into a national and international tourism hub requires the design and implementation of an integrated, dynamic, and context-aware marketing model that, while prioritizing tangible outcomes, maintains the flexibility to adapt to environmental shifts and capitalize on regional strategic opportunities. Realizing this vision demands close collaboration among public, private, and local community sectors, investment in digital and human infrastructure, and a steadfast commitment to sustainability principles across all dimensions of tourism development. By leveraging Chabahar's unique natural capacities, strategic transit position, and cultural-historical potentials, alongside the findings of this research and lessons learned from comparative studies, a more confident and resilient path toward sustainable and competitive tourism development in the region can be pursued.

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ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Authenticity of the texts, honesty and fidelity has been observed.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Author/s confirmed no conflict of interest.