

Development of tourism model in the promotion of rural handicraft cooperatives

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Abstract

This study has developed a tourism model to promote rural handicraft cooperatives in the northern cities of Iran. The main goal of the research is to develop and validate the tourism model on the development and improvement of the performance of handicraft cooperatives in this region. The research method is a descriptive survey. The data were collected through a questionnaire distributed among 112 handicraft experts and tourists of the Northern city of Iran. Data analysis was done using interpretive structural model techniques and structural equation modeling by Smart PLS software. The results showed that socio-cultural and entrepreneurial spirit positively affect environmental dimensions and increase income and employment. Also, these two variables have a direct impact on economic dimensions. The proposed model has good validity, reliability, and credibility. Tourism plays a vital role in promoting rural handicraft cooperatives, and by understanding the importance of this issue, managers and policymakers can use this model to strengthen handicraft cooperatives and optimally exploit tourism in the northern cities of Iran.

Keywords: socio-cultural dimension, entrepreneurial spirit, environmental dimension, increasing income and employment, economic dimension.

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1- Introduction

Tourism is a vital industry in the global economy that contributes to job creation, economic growth, and cultural exchange (Camilleri, 2018). This industry involves the movement of people for various purposes and includes activities such as accommodation, transportation, food and beverage, attractions, and events (Srivastava et al., 2023). Tourism has become essential to modern life, and millions of people travel annually (Chadhari et al., 2023). Organizations and individuals must understand this industry's structure, dynamics, opportunities, and challenges (Srivastaha & Shiha, 2023). Handicrafts are part of the art of intangible cultural heritage, which is considered the symbol and identity of a nation (Abdullah & Samin, 2020). These industries are created with high creativity and ideas and need careful planning (Ferreira et al., 2019; Mokhtar, 2018). Handicrafts represent the intellectual values of previous societies that have been transferred to today's generation (Ferreira et al., 2019) and have a high heritage value that must be preserved (Kamaruddin et al., 2021). Preserving these industries means preserving the traditions and culture of a nation (Arifin et al., 2023).

Cooperatives can play an essential role in developing and increasing handicraft production. Studies have shown that cooperatives can increase cooperative members' bargaining power and income by accessing markets, technologies, and credit facilities. Also, providing cooperative educational programs can increase producers' productivity and profitability and play an essential role in strengthening social solidarity and community development (Scott, 2024).

One of the essential measures in coordinating handicrafts and tourism is the design of tourism products. These products should be diverse and attractive and designed according to the taste of tourists while maintaining the authenticity of local handicrafts. These products can include cultural experiences, craft workshops, and local exhibitions that help attract more tourists and increase cooperatives' income (Reilly, 2024). The design of tourism products should be done by preserving the authenticity of local handicrafts in order to prevent the loss of their unique characteristics (Wang & Ghani, 2024).

Tourism development has positive economic and social effects by creating demand for local products. It can help strengthen the local economy, create job opportunities, and preserve local culture and art. Supporting local production and promoting sustainable tourism can reduce negative environmental impacts and increase community awareness of environmental issues (Liu et al., 2023). The success of countries like India in developing tourism and its positive economic and social effects indicate the need for more research in this field in our country.

Tourism emphasizing handicrafts can be one of the best mechanisms to remove deprivation. In the Northern city of Iran, due to the variety of traditional handicraft workshops and the beauty of manufactured objects, these workshops can be suitable for attracting tourists. Creating suitable conditions for visiting and shopping can help the prosperity of handicrafts and the growth of the city's economy.

2- Literature review

In their research, Sheikhi and Kosari (2022) investigated the factors of attraction and repulsion to tourist destinations, emphasizing the experience of French cultural tourists entering Iran. For this reason, they conducted a field study to identify the factors that influence the choice of Iran as a tourist destination. The results indicate that, more than anything else, French tourists tend to communicate with the local people during their trip and create a qualitative cultural familiarity experience by interacting with the local community. It was also shown that the exchange rate, reasonable travel expenses, and attractive hospitality played a key role. On the other hand, international problems caused by obtaining Iranian visas, lack of adequate road services and surrounding attractions, and cultural and religious restrictions are also

considered repulsive factors. Finally, with the Kandal test, it was determined that the change in the attitude of tourists after the trip has a significant correlation with the encouragement of their friends and the desire to travel to Iran again.

In their research, Hashempour et al. (2021) discussed the effects of entrepreneurship on small businesses in developing sustainable rural tourism in Hasanlu village. The results indicated a positive and significant relationship between the dimensions of identification and rural entrepreneurship. In research, Cheraghtape et al. (2021) identified and analyzed the drivers of rural tourism development in Urmia City in Iran. In this regard, the descriptive-analytical research method has been carried out with an exploratory future-research approach.

Hosseinzadeh and Haghi (2018) conducted research entitled "Analysis of the Role of Tourism Development and its Impact on the Development of Iran's Handicrafts Market." This study aims to investigate the state of tourism in Iran and its impact on the prosperity of handicrafts. This analysis shows that with the increase in the tourism industry and the arrival of tourists, the handicraft market will prosper and develop. Considering the high potential and attractiveness of tourism in Iran, increasing the GDP, preventing foreign currency outflows due to the attraction of domestic tourists, and producing and selling handicraft products will be the economic consequences of developing tourism activities.

Kianpour and Kuravand (2019), a research titled; They investigated the effect of handicraft marketing on the development of the tourism industry (case study of Izeh city). Handicrafts are one of the oldest human heritages and are considered a valuable national capital, which can create jobs and generate high income. Considering the importance of this industry in the development of tourism, which is expected to become the number one industry in the world by the 2020s, it can lead to the development of urban and rural areas and promote national production for developing countries such as Iran. The development of handicraft production, made by native and local artists and most of the region's women, and the conversion of traditional production to production with marketing methods is a favorable solution to developing Izeh City. This is even though handicrafts have many capabilities for developing tourism in urban and rural areas of Iran. However, so far, the potential capacities of this industry have not been recognized and introduced as it should be. This article aims to investigate the effect of handicraft marketing on developing the tourism industry in Izeh city to attract tourists and restore handicraft production in line with the region's economic development. In their research, Ahmadi and Mousavi (2014) stated that they developed the tourism industry through craft branding. This research aimed to investigate the development of the tourism industry through the branding of Isfahan handicrafts. The research is mixed; the data was collected using a semi-structured interview and a questionnaire. The results showed that the two factors of quality and price are the determining features of buying handicrafts and determining the industries of pen-making, carpet, rod embroidery, and inlaying as the prominent handicrafts of Isfahan compared to other competitors. Also, the results showed that customer criteria and internal processes are at a favorable level, and growth and financial criteria are at an unfavorable level.

3- Research methodology

In this research, a mixed method (mixed qualitative and quantitative method) with an exploratory approach is used, which is a tool development model. This research uses the qualitative part of the foundation data technique and the quantitative part of the factor analysis and modeling technique. The mixed research method is a research approach in which quantitative and qualitative methods are used simultaneously. This method is also known as exploratory mixed research design in internal studies. In this thesis, the research onion model is used. The research onion model was presented by Saunders et al. (2009), who modified the above model by Danaee Far et al. (2004). This model is as follows:

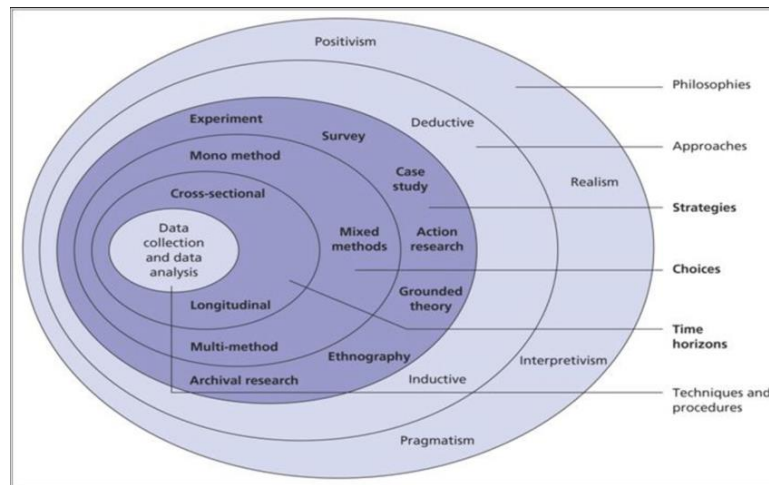


Figure 1. Research process (Saunders et al., 2009)

In the following, each stage of the current research process is described and explained accordingly. These layers are:

First layer: Research philosophy: Research philosophy can take many forms, including positivism, interpretivism, pragmatism, and critical theory. Positivism is an approach that applies the principles of natural science to studying human behavior. On the other hand, interpretivism emphasizes the meaning and context of social phenomena. In this research, because it is based on the principles of experimental science and an objective approach, the philosophy of positivism has been used.

Layer Two: Research Approach: The research paradigm is the framework in which the theories and practices of your field are placed to create a research plan. It guides all aspects of your research design, including the purpose of the study, the research question, the instruments or measurements to be used, and the analysis methods. The nature of this research is to reach from the part to the whole based on experimental philosophy, and therefore, this research is of an applied type with an inductive approach.

Layer three: Research Strategy: The research strategy is a comprehensive program that determines the data collection and analysis methods based on the research philosophy. Determining the strategy is the second layer of scientific research that defines the research plan. A research strategy is a step-by-step action plan guiding the researcher's thought process. It enables the researcher to conduct the research systematically, orderly and planned. The main goal is to introduce the main components of the research, including the research topic, areas, the central axis of the research, the research plan, and finally, the research method. This research is applied in terms of its purpose and based on the data collection method; it is a descriptive research of the exploratory category.

Layer Four: Research Selection: Research methodology describes the techniques and methods used to identify and analyze information related to the specific research topic. It is a process in which researchers design their study in such a way that they can achieve their goals by using the selected research tools. Regarding direction, research is divided into four categories: applied, fundamental, evaluation, and development. Because this research included content analysis, interviews, and coding in terms of implementation in the qualitative and quantitative phases, indexing, exploratory analysis, and structural-

interpretive equation modeling were mixed (qualitative and quantitative). The following figure shows the steps of implementing the mixed method in the current research:

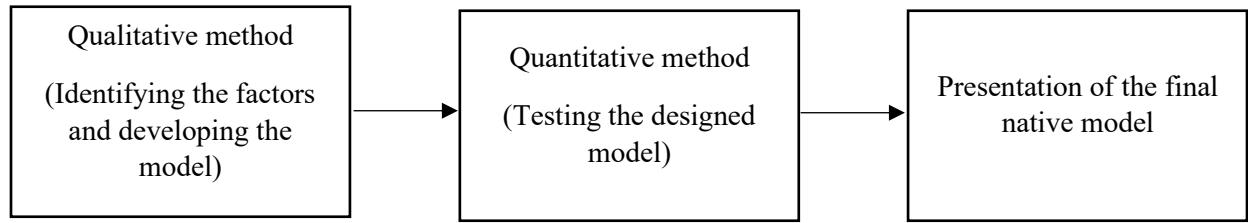


Figure 2. The steps of implementing the mixed method in the present study

Layer Five: Research Time Frame: This layer defines the research time frame—a cross-sectional or short-term study involving the collection of data at a specific point in time. Longitudinal data collection is done repeatedly over a long period of time to compare data. The study of the desired phenomenon is carried out at a specific time and is cross-sectional.

Layer six: Data collection is the process of collecting raw data. Data mining involves discovering patterns and insights from data, and data analysis is the overall examination and interpretation of data to obtain meaningful conclusions. The method of data collection and analysis is: documents and questionnaires, and library studies:

The library research process involves a step-by-step process for gathering information to write a research paper, essay, presentation, or project. As you progress from one stage to the next, it is often necessary to implement support, modify, and add additional content.

Field studies:

Survey research is "gathering information from a sample of people through their responses to questions." This type of research allows for different methods of recruiting participants, collecting data, and using different instrumentation methods.

The qualitative part of the research method used qualitative content analysis and the quantitative part used correlation. According to the objectives of the research, which are descriptive and exploratory, and according to the research method, coding analysis and factor analysis were used. Max Kyuda software was used for coding, and Smart PSS was used for factor analysis.

Data was collected using a researcher-made questionnaire, the validity and reliability of which were checked in a separate section. The questionnaire was distributed among 112 handicraft experts and tourists in the northern cities of Iran. SmartPLS software was used to compile and validate the model.

4- Research findings

Interpretive structural modeling

First, a 5x5 matrix including indicators was formed and provided to the experts to form the structural interaction matrix. Managers completed the matrices based on the following principles.

For each "j, i," the relationship between these two variables is examined below.

V: Variable i helps to reach variable j.

A: Variable j is only improved by variable i.

x: variable j, i will help each other to reach.

O: j and i variables are unrelated.

If i,j in the SSIM matrix (Structural Self-Interaction Matrix) is in the form of V, therefore, in the availability matrix (i,j) becomes one and (j,i) becomes zero. If (i,j) is in the form of A in the SSIM matrix, (i,j) becomes zero and (j,i) becomes one in the achievement matrix. If (j,i) is entered as x, then (j,i) will become one in the matrix and j,i will also become one. If (i,j) is entered as O, then i,j and j,i become zero. The achievement matrix is prepared using the structural interaction matrix. As indicated in the table below, if the relationship was in the form of V, then $1=(i,j)$ and then $0=(j,i)$, if the relationship was in the form of A, then $0=(i,j)$ and then $1=(j,i)$. If the relationship was X, $1=(i,j) = (j,i)$. If the relationship was O, it is $0=(i,j) = (j,i)$. Using these relationships, the achievement matrix presented in Table 1 is formed.

Table 1. Availability matrix

	A	B	C	D	E
A	-	1	0	2	1
B	-1	-	-1	2	0
C	0	1	-	2	-1
D	2	2	2	-	1
E	-1	0	1	-1	-

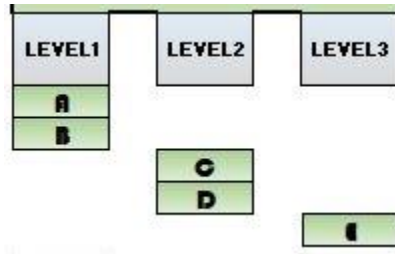
In the following, after the statistical analysis, the modified achievement matrix is also presented:

Table 2. modified access matrix (final access matrix)

	A	B	C	D	E
A	1	1	0	1	1
B	0	1	0	1	0
C	0	1	1	1	0
D	1	1	1	1	1
E	0	0	1	0	1

Below are the results of leveling variables:

Table 3. The first stage of determining the level in the ISM hierarchy



In the last column, the levels are determined in such a way that if the share of the attainable set and the preceding set is equal to the attainable set, the relevant variable is placed at the highest level in the hierarchy of the ISM matrix. In the ISM graph, mutual relationships and influence between criteria and the relationship of criteria of different levels are visible, which leads to a better understanding of the decision-making environment.

The groups in Table 4 are defined as follows:

- The first group consists of criteria that have weak power and dependence. These variables are almost separated from the system because they have weak connections with it, which in the examined sample is not a variable in this group.
- The second group: Some variables have weak power but strong dependence.
- The third group consists of variables that have strong power and dependence.
- The fourth group consists of variables with strong power but weak dependence.

Table 4. Level determination stage in the ISM hierarchy

	Driving forces	Dependent forces
A	↑ 17	↑ 17
B	↑ 17	↑ 17
C	↑ 17	↓ 16
D	↑ 17	↑ 17
E	↓ 16	↓ 16

In the last column, the levels are determined so that if the share of the attainable set and the preceding set is equal to the attainable set, the relevant variable is placed at the highest level in the hierarchy of the ISM matrix. In the ISM graph, mutual relationships and influence between criteria and the relationship of criteria of different levels are visible, which leads to a better understanding of the decision-making environment. The results of leveling variables are shown in the diagram below:

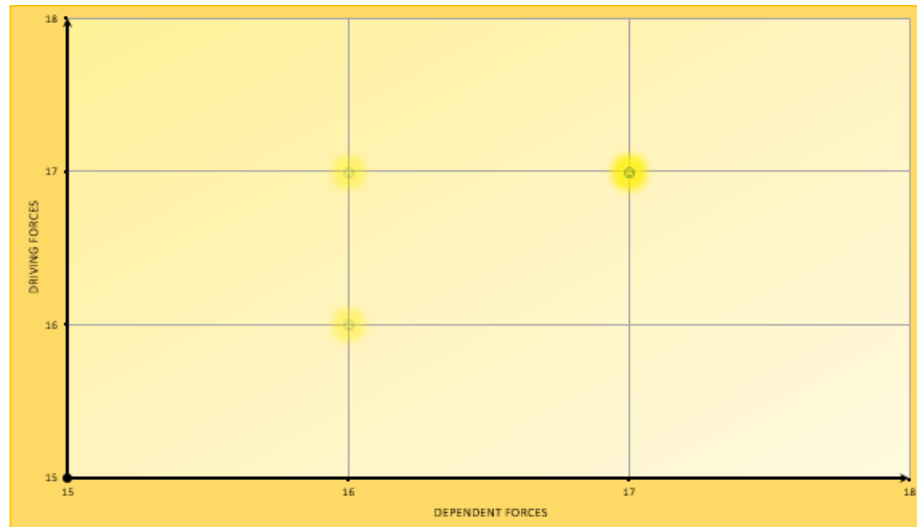


Figure 3. MICMAC diagram

The results of the stratification of variables are presented in the SmartPLS software output diagrams.

Structural equation modeling

At this stage, to evaluate the research's conceptual model, ascertain the existence or non-existence of a causal relationship between the variables of the research, and check the appropriateness of the observed data with the conceptual model of the research, the research model was tested using the structural equation model. The results of the model test are reflected in Figures 4 and 5.

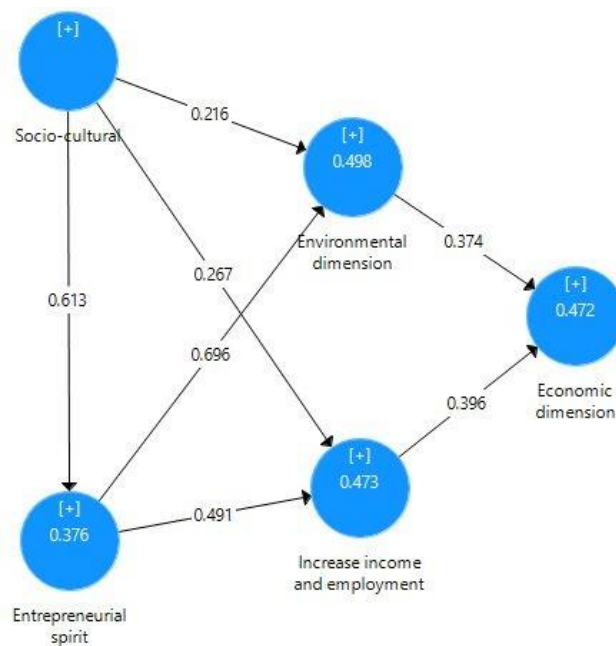


Figure 4. Overall model measurement in standard mode

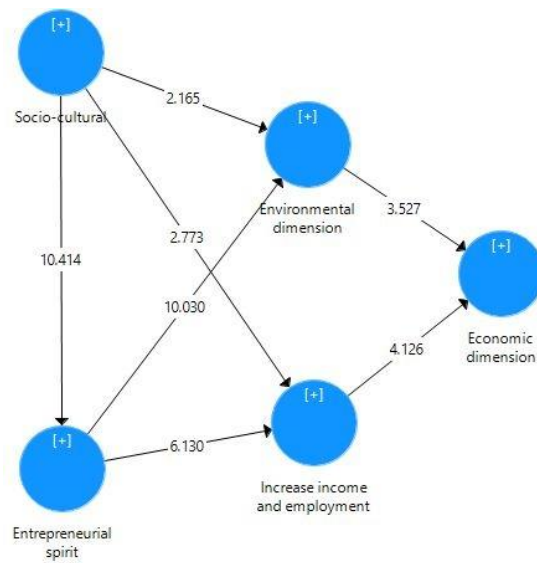


Figure 5. Overall model measurement in meaningful mode

The results of the validity, reliability and fit analysis of the model are shown in the following table:

Table 5. Model validation results

Variables	Composite reliability	extracted variance	Cronbach's alpha	GOF
Social cultural dimension	0.883415	0.559085	0.841678	0.75
Entrepreneurial spirit	0.850707	0.592171	0.769435	
Environmental dimension	0.798226	0.508631	0.662904	
Increase in income and employment	1.000000	1.000000	1.000000	
Economic dimension	0.954563	0.777992	0.943048	

Considering the three values of 0.01, 0.25, and 0.36 as weak, medium, and strong values for GOF, the result of 0.75 shows the strong fit of the model.

5- Conclusion

The current research has carefully examined the impact of tourism on the promotion of handicraft cooperatives in the northern cities of Iran. The findings show that the impact of tourism is a combination of three main factors and the outputs of handicraft cooperatives can be divided into three key factors. While previous research has focused more on conceptual modeling and less on actual inputs and outputs, this research has comprehensively investigated these elements in the majority of a paradigm model.

In order to solve the shortcomings of previous research, with a quantitative approach, the experience of people about the impact of tourism on handicrafts has been addressed, and then a model has been designed for the handicraft space in the northern cities of Iran. According to this model, various variables and factors influence the expansion of rural handicraft cooperatives and these factors can be classified into two main categories of inputs and outputs.

Managers, marketers, and decision-makers in the fields of tourism and handicrafts can benefit from the results of this scientific and systematic research to create competitive advantages, remove existing obstacles, and promote handicraft cooperatives in the northern cities of Iran. Applying this research model can help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of cooperatives and play an effective role in the economic and social development of the region.

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