



## Study of Short Videos Uploaded on the Instagram platform Related to Sustainable Cross-Cultural Communication Management Cases of Iran and Oman

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### Article Info

### Abstract

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Technological development, especially over the past few years has influenced the quality of human lives considerably. According to the World Tourism Organization, the internet plays a crucial role in tourism, since it provides an opportunity for access to tourists across the world and it has the most audience compared to conventional media. Therefore, the main objective of this research is to study the short videos created on the Instagram platform for sustainable cross-cultural communication management in the cases of Iran and Oman. Among 50 Instagram pages related to Iran and Oman, only 10 pages were selected based on defined criteria and were studied using the thematic analysis method. The main discovered themes were commercial tourism (which includes sub-themes of company registration, exports, imports, skilled workers immigration); cultural tourism (which includes sub-themes of cultural similarities, cultural differences, and diplomatic relations between two countries); medical tourism (including sub-themes of Shiraz medical centers, Tehran medical centers, Ramsar health tourism, and the unknown destinations of health tourism in Iran); recreational tourism (which includes sub-themes of cruise ships, recreational Islands, desert tours, culinary tourism and restaurants, the unknown sights of Oman, and recreational tourism in Iran) and lastly ecotourism (including sub-themes of ecotourism in Iran and Oman). In general, all the discovered themes were about the sustainable cross-cultural communication between Iran and Oman.

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### Introduction

Tourism is a manifestation of popular culture, and popular culture is a factor that shapes contemporary tourism. Such relations play significant roles in production, consumption, and studies on tourism. Media

plays a pivotal role in this regard. Indeed, media not only transmit and distribute visual representations to feed expectations and experiences, but media images are strengthened by the ideas and experiences of tourism and tourists are projected to the world (Tazim & Robinson, 2009, pp. 140-1). As the destination image plays a significant role in selecting a destination, it is profoundly important to perceive the factors and variables that influence it. Some factors influencing the destination image include information obtained from diverse resources (e.g., different media, brochures, and booklets – to name but a few) and visits to the destination (Domínguez-Azcue et al., 2021).

Technological advances, particularly over the past few years, have significantly influenced humans' quality of life (Roy & Samaddar, 2016). Culture and trade expanded around the globe in an unprecedented way with the emergence of the internet in the 1990s. The expansion of social media is indebted to the growth of the internet and its international penetration (Tarman & Yigit, 2013). The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) regards the internet as a major player in tourism since it has enabled access to tourists worldwide and covers a wider population of audiences than any traditional media (Bhin, 2020). According to this definition, social media expand online social networks by connecting users' profiles (Ifigeneia & Dimitrios, 2018). Also It is claimed that a significant relationship exists between globalization and media. In this regard, Burton (2010) argued that globalization introduced new forms of autonomy to the world and was a sign of the reduced influence of the West on other regions of the world. This view considers globalization in modern times an instrument to promote diverse cultures worldwide using modern technologies like social media and social networks. Indeed, globalization and social media share concepts like borderless interaction and collaboration between people and organizations – to name. This has been possible because of the elimination of borders by the internet and social media worldwide. Being interactive is the most significant characteristic of social media and social networks, which allows users to create content. Thus, users determine the path for the future development of social networks and the manner of such development by the behavior, which results in hearing the voices of all users around the world and establishing more interactions (Effiong, 2018).

It should be noted that influencing and convincing are the two major factors for the success of all media (Saroukhani, 2004), and they contribute to a significant portion of the effectiveness of media (Khajehsarvy & Sohrab Zadeh, 2017). In this regard, virtual social networks are currently the most powerful online media in the world and highly influence users (Ziaeparvar & Aghili, 2010). This important tool can be implemented to establish cross-cultural communications due to strong the influence and convincing power of social media worldwide and the access to diverse cultures worldwide.

Statistics have shown that Instagram has the fastest growth rate among social network platforms, and users spend an average of 28 minutes on it . Platforms like Instagram and TikTok have attracted many amateur and professional tourists and tour guides to share long and short videos of destinations

and describe the attractions and heritage – among other things. This indicates that the platforms have increasingly become important in shaping destination images and changing tourists' behaviors, and they have turned into a medium for tourists' experiences (Chiao et al., 2018; Du et al., 2020). Among the necessary conditions for using social networks is social media literacy.

Schreurs and Vandenbosch (2021) argued that social media literacy consisted of a degree of cognitive and emotional constructs in users to perceive probable risks in their interactions with the content produced in cyberspace and maximize opportunities in implementing the media. Implementing films in tourism and the emergence of the term "film tourism" (or "television tourism") began by Metz in 1982 (Li & Liu, 2020). At the same time, technological advances – particularly the emergence of digital imaging - significantly influenced the filmmaking industry (Nedaei & Khanlari, 2018), and they developed social media, as well. Similarly, the influence of modern technologies like Virtual tourism, virtual reality, and modern social media on tourism is undeniable (Ilić & Nikolić, 2018; Sigala, 2018; Stankov & Gretzel, 2020; Shermohammadi et al., 2020; Ravadrad & Hajimohammadi, 2010). There is a significant amount of evidence to support the positive effects of using films on tourism and the increased number of people visiting a particular place after releasing a film about that (Tomala & Faber, 2011). Displaying a destination using films or videos can establish views about native sights and cultures and enhance them by offering people knowledge about them (Li & Liu, 2020). Multiple studies have been conducted on film tourism, dealing with topics like the effects of film tourism on the host society and its development (e.g., Kim, Kim, & King, 2018; O'Connor, 2011; Pan & Ryan, 2013), tourists' personal motives in the film tourism destinations (Buchmann et al., 2010; Macionis & Sparks, 2009; Reijnders, 2016), the film tourism as a way to strengthen the image of distinguished sights and increase the future visit intentions of tourists (Hudson et al., 2011; Kim & Kim, 2018; Yen & Croy, 2016), and many others, which indicates the significance of implementing films and videos in tourism (Kim et al., 2019).

On the other hand, contemporary studies mostly emphasize the use of various media in tourism (e.g., Dolan et al., 2019; Jansson, 2018; Nusair, 2020). Researchers highlight media use in modern tourism due to the expansion and prevalence of virtual networks.

The question here is how films or videos produced and shared by post-tourists in the global environment of social networks assist sustainable cross-cultural relationships. In this regard, it seems that Instagram, which is a popular social network around the world based on users' films, photographs, and created content, is a medium that can have a profound influence on tourism, the introduction of cultures, the achievement of cultural, tourism literacies and ultimately the fulfillment of sustainable cross-cultural relations between nations. Thus, the present study aimed to investigate the existing status of the short videos produced by tourists on Instagram to promote the management of sustainable cross-cultural relations (a case study of Iran and Oman).

## **A review of the related literature**

The process of globalization has facilitated the removal of barriers against travel by eliminating borders, and tourism, particularly on an international scale, strengthens the process of globalization. The two main drivers of the globalization of tourism include transportation technology, which is manifested by the reduction of the financial and temporal costs of travel and the elimination of geographical barriers, borders, the communication technology and the emergence of diverse media (Nekouei et al., 2010). The globalization of tourism can be defined as a process in which the flow of tourists, services, capital, information and technologies most of which are not controlled by nation-states, significantly gets intensified (Stezhko et al., 2020).

Over the past few decades, international tourism has emerged as a cross-cultural area and is a way to link people worldwide. International cooperation aims to promote the products of tourism in the global market and establish a joint tourism space in the world. Internal tourism relations are among the relations that exist in the world and influence state policies, and tourism has the potential to influence the international prestige of various governments and is a reflection of their foreign policy. Tourism globalization is an objective and irreversible process toward establishing a singular socio-cultural space and the mutual connection of different nations and cultures. Global tourism is essential for establishing discourse between cultures and creating a community of countries (Stezhko et al., 2020). The growth of the rate of information and the advancement speed of information and communication technologies tourism and the process of globalization have influenced The development of modern information and communication technologies, particularly over the past few decades, has revolutionarily transformed all sectors, particularly tourism performance, promotion, and improvement. The growth of the tourism industry has been intertwined with the past development of modern technologies. The information revolution has penetrated all sectors and industries and has had a faster influence on tourism. On a global scale, employing modern information and communication technologies has changed the manner of doing trade in tourism and people's relationships. Also development of technologies has facilitated the process of globalization so that tourism-related products like hotels, restaurants, travel agencies and tour operators can quickly broadcast and offer their products to any place in the world (Ilić & Nikolić, 2018). Virtual tourism is defined as the virtual display of an attraction, destination, or tourists' real experiences. It can be used to manage tourists' consumption or train and replace physical visits in environmentally sensitive regions. Virtual reality technologies eliminate barriers to tourism - like distance – and have a significant value in that regard (Kim & Hall, 2019). Virtual tourism also helps people with limitations visit certain tourist destinations and experience (Hassani & Bastenegar, 2020). Moreover, virtual travel can replace and supplement actual travel and provide tourists with the knowledge and information

required for actual travel (Seifan et al., 2019). Also, the advancement of technology has led to the development of Intelligent media. Intelligent media (e.g., Instagram or Facebook), which are indeed user-oriented media, significantly focus on users' satisfaction and being user-oriented. Indeed, they are a combination of media and artificial intelligence and can turn into markets for user-oriented content (Gao & Huang, 2019). Instagram is an intelligent media that has attracted a lot of attention worldwide. The increasing growth of Instagram, which is based on sending and sharing photos and videos, is an indication of the enhanced attractiveness of visual social media and the more profound interest of users in them (Hassani & Kalantari, 2018). As the social network is user-oriented, it can be argued that it can play a significant role in tourism. That is because users create content and display the actual cultures and images of the tourist destinations for other users differently than the official advertisements created by managers in destination or source countries.

In modern times, the content created by users is a vital medium to express users' attitudes and views and establish relationships (Mohammad et al., 2020). Filieri et al (2015) stated that 80% of users spend an average of 2 hours on social networks to collect information about destinations and read other users' suggestions. In general, studies have shown that the content created by users influences users' travel intentions, satisfies their sense of curiosity, and helps them to plan better and have a more realistic and better image of their destination (Lam et al., 2020).

Due to the increase in the amount of communication between different nations, and due to the rapid development of communication and information technologies and the high penetration of media especially social media, as well as the acceleration of the process of tourism and globalization, which was mentioned in the above section, it is necessary to respond to the diversity of society with various social and cultural contexts should create a mechanism for action, which should make it possible to recognize these divergences in the society and respect different aspects such as ethnicity, culture, language, so that it leads to Create a positive mentality and leading the society towards free thinking and high acceptance. Indeed, the mechanism is an essential instrument in mutual understanding and sustainable cultural relationships between societies within multicultural ones. The need to understand cultural sensitivities is an indispensable topic in responding to challenging issues like high tension potential. Adopting strategic approaches and ambitious views toward the mutual acceptance of cultures is necessary to raise consciousness in society about cross-cultural relations. Managing existing conflicts is an important solution that can be gained from sufficient understanding and knowledge about problems. The significant element in achieving the sustainable management of cross-cultural and multicultural relations is the promotion of the sense of mutual acceptance as the main element and the establishment of opportunities to develop cross-cultural experiences and mutual trust, understanding, and responsibility to maintain mutual cultural relations (Huda et al., 2021). The European Science

Foundation defined cultural literacy as identifying, reflecting, implementing, and moderating cultural interactions that emerge in media and form the existing culture (Shliakhovchuk, 2021). Cultural literacy considers people's cognitive (thoughts, ideologies, and beliefs), behavioral (actions), and emotional (feelings and emotions) aspects to orient them toward cosmopolitanism. The instrument offers a comprehensive understanding of tourism (Johnson, 2014).

Based on the related paper reviews, the researcher showed that no study had been conducted on the topic of study, though some researchers had dealt with some items that could be indirectly relevant to the study. Dimitrova and Pakarova (2015) investigated culture, tourism, and communications and the mutual interactions between the concepts to study the relationship between cultural tourism and cross-cultural relations. Huda, Mustafa, and Mohamed (2021) investigated multicultural sustainability with a focus on establishing convenient grounds for mutual acceptance. The study findings showed that the pivotal element in achieving the sustainable management of cross-cultural and multicultural relations was promoting the sense of mutual acceptance and providing grounds for cross-cultural experiences and mutual trust, understanding, and responsibility to maintain mutual cultural relations. Effiong (2018) conducted a study to determine the effectiveness of the efforts to promote Nigerian cultural values on the World Wide Web and found that Nigeria could effectively implement social media to promote its cultural values in a world that approached globalization. Lam, Ismail, and Li (2020) found that the perceptions of usefulness and ease of access were significant predictors of joint experience creation platforms.

Moreover, they found a significant relationship between the content produced by users and the destination image and satisfaction with it. Yagi and Pearce (2007) concluded that recall systems play significant roles in media to create a fresh sense in travelers to select their tourism destination, and they can be implemented by creating short films and photos in cyberspace. Skare and Soriano (2021) found that globalization was a key channel that influenced the effects of digital technologies on innovation. Moreover, globalization played a significant role in global competition and multifactor productivity and was a major player in the penetration and spread of digital technologies. Li and Liu (2020) emphasized the content and plot of stories in short films made to increase travelers' empathy and encourage them to visit an intended destination. They found that storytelling in short films on tourism was very effective in enhancing audiences' empathy and encouraging them to visit the destinations. Canavan and McCamley (2021) examined the concept of "authenticity" in the tourism of modern, postmodern, and post-postmodern ages. They stated that tourists did not necessarily pay attention to the concept of authenticity in a certain age – e.g., modern, postmodern, or post-postmodern – but considered a combination of them across all three ages. Christou and Farmki (2018) investigated the concept of utopia in tourism experiences. They argued that tourists are exposed to various stimuli related to the

environment of the utopia within the context of tourism and when they consume services and products. Shaping tourists' interpretations and experiences in terms of the utopia lead to promoting the experiences of utopia and stimulating their interest and enthusiasm. Rezagholizadeh (2010) found that the tourism media played the most significant role in the tourism industry by introducing and popularizing tourism attractions. Karubi (2011) found that paying attention to discussions on tourism advertising was one of the most important considerations in tourism, which could be revived and reconstructed by the media to gain a considerable share of Iran's tourism industry. Nasrollahi (2015) concluded that tourism media in Iran were not as popular as required, and they had to be improved to become active players in the countries tourism industry and management. Media in the field of tourism did not offer rich materials and occasionally published reports. Moreover, they could not communicate with their audiences in a process-oriented manner.

In general, the summary of the literature shows that the development and progress of communication and information technologies has caused a huge transformation in the field of tourism and the promotion of new media and social networks, and the acceleration of the process of globalization and the promotion of cultural diversity. Meanwhile, culture plays a very important role in the formation of communication between people, especially from different nations. The creation and management of sustainable cross-cultural relations require understanding its multiple dimensions considering the role of effective media like Instagram in the field of tourism. The need to pay more attention to social platforms and media has become more and more pressing due to the expansion of virtual tourism around the world, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic. It Should be mentioned that virtual tourism has become more and more meaningful, along with physical tourism, and the rate of content produced by users in user-oriented networks has increased significantly. The development of virtual tourism through social networks like Instagram can help green tourism by reducing the number of unnecessary trips.

Moreover, implementing such media can result in the development of sustainable cross-cultural relations, promoting and enhancing cultural literacy among people around the world, particularly among tourists. The promotion of the concept of virtual tourism along with physical tourism is close to the concept of post-postmodern tourism. As Canavan and McCamley stated, post-postmodern tourism is a convenient replacement for the iconoclastic condition of postmodern tourism, according to some authors. Theatrical aspects help tourists perceive authenticity in their experiences with the environment and tourism, reduce doubts, and lead to authenticity persistence despite the concept's internal paradoxes. In this regard, the present study aimed to investigate the existing condition of the short films displayed on Instagram to promote the management of sustainable cross-cultural relations between Iran and Oman using thematic analysis.

## **Relations between Iran and Oman**

Relations between Iran and Oman have a history of several thousand years. Such political and commercial have experienced ebbs and flows in various eras. Oman has played a remarkable role in negotiations between Iran and western countries to resolve crises between the two parties. Oman is very important as it is a neighbor of Iran, plays important roles in establishing peaceful international relations, and is a strategic partner of Iran (Nattaghpour Nouri et al., 2017).

Concerning cultural and tourism relations between Iran and Oman, the tourism ministers of the countries met each other in 2017 and 2019 to expand mutual cooperation in the field of tourism, particularly cultural and medical tourism (IRNA News Agency, visited on July 31st, 2021) . After the negotiations, Iran's tourism minister reported positive results in his interviews, including a 362% increase in the entry of Omani tourists to Iran from March to September 2019 (almost 49,000 Omani tourists) compared to the preceding year (Donya-e-Eqtasad Newspaper, visit on July 31st , 2021). By the time Oman's borders were reopened (after the COVID-19 pandemic) to tourists and direct flights were resumed between the two countries, Oman announced visa-free travel to Iranians and travelers from 102 other countries. Thus, Iranians could officially visit Oman visa-free for 10 days after that date (IRNA News Agency, July 31st, 2021) .

## **Method**

The present study was applied in terms of purpose and was a qualitative study according to the data type. The study implemented the thematic analysis method. The present study implemented the thematic analysis to find the core and peripheral themes in managing sustainable cross-cultural relations represented in Instagram films. Indeed, thematic analysis is a flexible method to detect, analyze, and express patterns within a data set. There are two methods to obtain a theme: the inductive (data-driven) method and the deductive (theory-driven) method. In the inductive (top-down) method, the identified themes are closely related to the data (Patton, 1990, p. 85).

In the deductive (bottom-up) method, the thematic analysis is performed based on the researchers' theoretical interests or analyses. Thus, the method mostly revolves around the researcher. The present study implemented the inductive (data-driven, top-down) thematic analysis. The phases and steps of the thematic analysis may be similar to some phases in the qualitative methodology. In other words, though the steps may not be exclusive to the thematic analysis, they generally include the following items which current research is also based on this basis (Braun & Clarke, 2006):

1. Getting familiarized with the data: writing down the data, reading and rereading them, documenting new ideas;



2. Creating initial codes and carrying out the coding process: coding the intended characteristics of the data uniformly across the dataset and matching and accommodating the data with each code;

3. Searching and detecting the themes: matching the codes with potential themes and collecting all data related to the potential themes;

4. Revising the themes: checking the potential themes with the extracted codes (level) and the datasets (level) and creating an analytical network of themes;

5. Defining and naming the themes: carrying out continuous analysis to purify the characteristics of each theme, expressing the quotes extensively, developing clear definitions and titles for each theme;

6. Developing the report: the last opportunity for analysis, selecting clear-cut and obvious samples, carrying out the ultimate analysis based on the analytical extraction relevant to the questions of the study and the related literature, and developing a report out of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The study population consisted of all Instagram pages working on Iran and Oman, their followers, and the active experts in the field of tourism between Iran and Oman. As the first phase of the study consisted of investigating the short films displayed on Instagram pages, the hashtags of Iran and Oman were investigated first. Then, 50 active pages were identified, out of which 10 pages were selected to investigate the short films displayed by their stories and posts. The following criteria were considered in selecting the pages:

1. Displaying short films relevant to Iran-Oman interactions
2. The rates of views and likes
3. Taking into account cultural, medical, and business tourism between Iran and Oman.

The selected ten pages were as follows:

1. Omanairofficial
2. Export.oman
3. Omanbusinesss
4. Oman.restaurant\_guide
5. Biya.oman
6. oman.wall
7. Oman\_business\_official
8. Omsn.fact
9. Oman.iran
10. Oman.information

Concerning the investigation of reliability and validity, it should be acknowledged that investigating the reliability and validity of qualitative studies is not based on specified principles and rests upon the internal logic of the study and its interpretive aspect. Indeed, the validity of qualitative studies originates

from the realness of the descriptions of the data and research findings, Thus, the researcher investigated and reviewed all initial codes after the end of the coding process and the collection of the core codes to enhance the study's validity. Moreover, the extracted codes were investigated by a colleague and were approved by him.

## Findings

The following table illustrates the core and peripheral themes.

Core theme	Peripheral theme
Business tourism	The registration of a company, imports and exports, and the migration of specialist workforce
Cultural tourism	Cultural similarities and differences, diplomatic relations between the two countries
Medical tourism	Medical centers in Shiraz and Tehran, medical tourism in Ramsar, unknown destinations for medical tourism in Iran
Entertainment tourism	Cruise ships, entertainment islands, desert tours, food tours and restaurants, unknown sights in Oman, entertainment tourism in Iran
Ecotourism	Ecotourism in Iran and Oman

The first core theme (the registration of a company, imports and exports, and the migration of specialist workforce)

The first extracted theme was related to business tourism. This aspect was much highlighted in the film content shared on the selected pages due to Iran and Oman's business and economic relations and the mutual contracts signed. The peripheral codes found concerning business tourism and the prosperity of the discovered content included instances of the registration of companies and the related procedures, the methods of exports and the most significant exported items by the two countries, the methods of imports and the most significant items imported by the two countries, job opportunities, and the methods of the migration of the specialist workforce. Indeed, the existing contracts, the atmosphere of the relations between Iran and Oman, and the most significant content materials created on the selected pages showed that business tourism was the most remarkable form of tourism between the two countries. Consequently, this aspect was more highlighted in the films displayed on the selected Instagram pages.

The first peripheral theme: Company registration

The films on the pages related to Iran and Oman offer comprehensive information about registering companies and establishing business relations. An example is offered below:

“Companies stationed in Oman need to employ at least 30% Omani citizens, but the rate reduces to 10% in free trade zones. For example, a company established in al-Mazunah has to employ only 10% local workers.”

“Companies stations in al-Mazunah Free Trade Zone are mostly established for business and service transactions.”

The advantages and disadvantages of presence in the free zones are explained and stated in the films. Indeed, information collected by spending a lot of time and effort can be easily obtained from the film-based content shared on Instagram. In this way, audiences access valuable information and, simultaneously, can visit the surrounding areas of the free trade zone via virtual tourism.

The second peripheral theme: exports

The investigated pages offer rich content containing general information on exports, the export rates of the two countries (particularly exports between them), their interests, and the volume of their exports. Thus, performing meticulous investigations on the customs offices of the two countries and assisting people interested in exports between them via offering attractive information has been useful for the audiences of the pages. For instance, a film displayed on one page offers the following information: “the most significant commodities imported by Oman from Iran in 2018 included the following. The statistics have been taken from the World Trade Organization: iron and steel, fossil fuels and coal, oil products, livestock, grains, edible vegetables, fruits and citrus, nuts, construction materials, tobacco, various types of fish, and ceramic products”.

“Based on the data collected from Iran’s Customs Office, the products exported from Iran to Oman are divided into the following classes: food and fruit like edible vegetables, lemon, kiwi, watermelon, eggplant, lettuce, cauliflower, beetroot, and similar products, iron and steel like various types of iron rebar and other types of iron products, and construction industries like types of stone, plaster, and cement.”

All the content materials on the selected pages focused on introducing the countries' attractions. Indeed, the films are attractive for both nationalities as they offer opportunities for establishing relations.

The third peripheral theme: imports

The themes in this regard show rather complete information about the import rates of the two countries, particularly their imports from one another, the commodities they intend to import, and the number of such commodities. Such information is necessary and important for people who intend to enter the markets of Oman or Iran. The films related to imports and introducing the regulations, commodities, and standards in Iran and Oman are indicators of the significant demand by the nationals of the two countries to enter the other party's market. Such content materials are definitely useful for

business tourists and can be considered instances of virtual tourism. Furthermore, a lot of that information can be useful for future planning like the following instances:

"Iranian products do not have a significant share of the ones imported to Oman even though the two countries are neighbors."

Themes similar to the above instances should be implemented in the future planning to expand transactions and identify the Omani market to enhance the rate of interactions. Such information encourages investors to seek opportunities, visit the destination, participate in conferences in Oman or Iran, and decide whether to invest in them. This indicates that films on Instagram can influence the tendency to expand communications, interactions, and tourism. It should be noted that comprehensive information has been collected and produced on imports and exports by the pages focusing on the significance of business relations. On the other hand, the expansion of business tourism is also an indication of the importance of business relations. Thus, countries with more extensive business relations with one another, naturally, receive more business tourists than other types of tourists from their business partners.

The fourth peripheral theme: job opportunities and the migration of the specialist workforce

Job opportunities and the migration of specialist workforce, particularly to Oman, indicate another opportunity for business tourism. The announcement of employment opportunities, rules and regulations for the admission of the workforce, and the display of up-to-date films on the pages indicate the increasing interest of Iranians to travel to Oman for work or migrate to the country. Thus, information like the instances provided below show the profound inclination in Oman to receive a specialist workforce:

"More than one million foreign nationals live, study, and work in Oman. It is interesting to know that the population of Oman is slightly above five million people. Indeed, foreigners make up 20% of the country's population." This can be very attractive for Iranians who seek job opportunities. Oman is a neighbor of Iran, and traveling to it is easy and takes a short time. The relative films were created to offer comprehensive information about job opportunities like the attractions of living in Oman, which prompt people to take their chances of obtaining a job in the country. Indeed, such information is an indication of the increased communication between the nationals of the two countries.

The second core theme: Cultural tourism (including cultural similarities and differences, diplomatic relations between the two countries)

The second theme that was identified in the present study was cultural tourism. The peripheral themes in it included cultural similarities and differences between Iran and Oman, the attractiveness of such similarities and differences, and the longstanding and peaceful cultural and diplomatic relations between the two countries as grounds for the development of cultural tourism. After investigating the

general information of the two countries, the selected pages deal with significant discussions like cultural, geographical, and historical similarities between the two countries. Then, they discuss cultural differences between them, and the similarities and differences are attractive grounds for exchanging cultural tourists between the two countries. The shared cultural history of the two countries, the assistance provided by the two countries in the past to maintain peace, and their longstanding friendly diplomatic relations are convenient grounds for the exchange of cultural tourists between them, and the films and content materials produced on Instagram and their promotion can strengthen sustainable cultural relations between Iran and Oman. Particularly, the relations between Iran and Oman have been promoted to a higher status through signing various contracts in diverse areas.

The first peripheral theme: cultural similarities

Concerning cultural tourism, expressing cultural similarities between Iran and Oman can be frequently seen in the created films. Indeed, as neighboring countries have higher priorities in the development of tourism due to cultural and geographical similarities, it can be argued that the films displayed on Instagram can facilitate the expansion of cultural tourism between the two countries, particularly as the attraction of cultural tourists is prioritized in Iran's plans for the development of tourism. Thus, paying attention to cultural similarities, highlighting them, and providing film-based virtual tours that offer realistic images of Iran and Oman can effectively expand cultural and tourism relations between the two countries. Being Muslim countries, the type of clothing and similar cultural attractions can make the countries interesting to one another. An instance is provided below:

“Hospitality is a cultural similarity between Omani and Iranian people. Whether acquaintances or strangers, Omanis invite you to their houses and treat you generously. The well-known Arabic coffee is the most popular drink prepared to serve a guest. If you have visited an Arab-speaking neighborhood in Iran or an Arabic country, you have probably tasted this wonderful coffee.”

Indeed, the profound cultural similarities between Iran and Oman make planning to expand sustainable cross-cultural relations for tourism more pressing than ever. Such similarities help tourists experience lower levels of cultural shocks or reduce the probability of changing the host society by tourists, and this highlights the significance of cross-cultural relations between the two countries.

The second peripheral theme: cultural differences

The selected pages discuss the cultural differences between the two countries besides expressing their similarities. It is well-known that the existence of differences is as essential to the expansion of tourism as similarities. Being introduced to the differences between the countries helps people gain information before visiting them so they can manage their behavior at the destination more conveniently. Thus, introducing differences in the films is a strength that includes training tourists before they visit the two countries in line with the expansion of virtual tourism. An example is provided below:

"Kissing the tip of the nose is a custom of Omani people under such circumstances, but kissing the cheeks is also welcome" or "they consider the left hand disrespectful and shake hand just with the right one. They stand some distance away when they talk, and the distance between men and women is more." Expressing such items not only introduces attractiveness to the customs and rituals of the host country but it makes people interested in knowing more, watching more films, and, ultimately, visiting the destination, which results in the expansion of cross-cultural relations, learning, and teaching.

The third peripheral theme: the significance of diplomatic relations between the two countries

Another highlighted issue among the themes was the significance of diplomatic relations between the two countries and their influence on cultural tourism and the exchange of cultural tourists. The themes in this regard revolved around the longstanding diplomatic ties between the two countries and their cooperation in various periods. In this regard, multiple documents and memoranda of the agreement have been signed between the two countries. This is more highlighted during the thirteenth government of the Islamic Republic of Iran due to its more profound inclination toward expanding relations with neighboring countries, particularly Oman. The content the films created on Instagram emphasize the expansion of diplomatic relations and the types of documents signed by the two countries, particularly in the field of tourism, and consider them remarkably important in the expansion of tourism (more specifically, cultural and business tourism). The expansion of such relations can make the two countries closer to each other and increase interest in developing tourism, particularly cultural and business tourism, between them, and this has been highlighted in any of the investigated films.

The third core theme: Medical tourism (medical centers in Shiraz and Tehran, medical tourism in Ramsar, unknown destinations of medical tourism in Iran)

The third core theme was medical tourism. Omanis are remarkably interested in consuming such services due to the advancement of Iran in that field and direct flights between Oman and cities like Shiraz. The centers of medical tourism preferred by a lot of Omanis are located in Shiraz and Tehran. Moreover, medical tourism in Ramsar and unknown medical tourism destinations are other peripheral themes detected in the films created on Instagram. It seems that the progress of medical and health tourism in Iran is attractive for Omanis, which can expand cross-cultural relations between the two countries.

The first peripheral theme: medical centers in Shiraz

Neighboring countries are interested in benefiting from Iran's advanced medical facilities, and Oman is no exception in that regard. This has facilitated Omanis as direct flights are established between Shiraz and Oman. This opportunity can be grasped as Shiraz is a major center for tourism in Iran. Introducing the medical potential of Shiraz to Omanis is a remarkable undertaking in this field. Thus, convenient plans need to be made based on numerous tourist attractions in the city.

The second peripheral theme: Medical centers in Tehran

There are a lot of content materials about Omani's interest in using medical centers in Tehran, though it has attracted less attention than business and cultural tourism. This is an indication of the high potential of such centers, and more attention should be paid to them. Creating relevant content in virtual networks like Instagram can lead to popularizing the capabilities of Tehran's medical centers (and other cities with specialized medical equipment), attracting tourists, and carrying out cultural transactions.

The third peripheral theme: Medical tourism in Ramsar

Ramsar is a favorite destination for Arab tourists, highlighted in the case of Omanis and medical tourism, particularly their use of hydrotherapy centers in the region. In general, Iran's northern regions are very attractive for Omanis because of their climate and sights, which differ remarkably from their country. There are many potential capabilities that need to be actualized by planning conveniently and producing content materials on social networks. As there are many springs, hydrotherapy centers, and other potential capabilities in Mazandaran Province, the potential can be actualized to attract Omani tourists by making convenient plans. However, the lack of such plans is evident at the moment.

The fourth peripheral theme: Unknown destinations of medical and health tourism for Omanis

Another gap identified in the present study was that many Iranian medical tourism destinations were unknown to Omanis. For instance, Yazd has a lot to say about medical tourism, particularly in specialized gynecology, childbirth, infertility services, and other specialized services offered in Tehran, and many pages' point to the existence of this gap. Moreover, a destination like Ardabil has been left unknown and neglected despite its hydrotherapy centers and pleasant climate, which is very different from Oman's dry climate (particularly as Omanis are interested in such attractions) and is a potential attraction that can attract a lot of Omani tourists by making convenient plans.

The fourth core theme: entertainment tourism (cruise ships, entertainment islands, desert tours, food tours and restaurants, unknown sights in Oman, entertainment tourism in Iran)

The fourth theme was entertainment tourism. Analyzing the Instagram pages and the films displayed on them shows that entertainment tourism between the two countries is a potential that has not been touched upon significantly. Thus, it can be an opportunity for the future expansion of relations between the two countries. Presently, the rate of entertainment tourism is slowly growing, and its potential can be implemented in the near future. Cruise ships, entertainment islands, desert tours, restaurants, and unknown sights are instances of entertainment tourism whose potential can be implemented to expand the relations between Iran and Oman within the context of cultural tourism. As both countries have positive attitudes concerning the expansion of tourism, the above items are indispensable to any planning to expand entertainment tourism due to the proximity of the two countries. The identified themes were more concerned with entertainment tours and other forms of entertainment

in Oman, and the absence of entertainment tours in Iran resulted from neglecting the Omani market. The peripheral themes identified concerning entertainment tourism were as follows:

The first peripheral theme: Cruise ships

An instant identified in this section was entertainment tours on cruise ships and related advertising.

“In the cruise ships of MSC Co. stations in the Persian Gulf, you have the opportunity to visit one of the oldest cities in the Middle East: Muscat. The city would send incense to Greece and Rome from the second century AD onward.

Various tours have been defined in Oman, and tours on cruise ships are among the most notable ones due to the proximity of the country to the sea. The tours revolve around Muscat as the most significant part. An example is provided below:

“You can find traces of a glorious past in the center of Old Muscat.”

The second peripheral theme: desert tours

According to the environment of Oman, desert tours and visits to intact desert and safari regions are also popular in the country. Wadi al-Arbaeen is a popular place frequently observed on Instagram films.

“You get on a Jeep, leave the port, and reach a fishing village called “al-Qurayyat” by moving through a mountainous and rough area.”

After a short break to take some photos, you continue the trip and pass through mountains along the beautiful dock in an adventurous route. In the end, Wadi al-Arbaeen, with its deep pools between date palms, awaits you.”

As it can be observed, the description of the characteristics and atmosphere of the desert and displaying them to potential tourists double their attractiveness and result in the fulfillment of virtual goals.

The third peripheral theme: Entertainment tours

“This wonderful tour takes you from the magnificent interior parts of Oman to a town called Nizwa on a two-hour ride. The town was the capital of Oman during the Middle Ages. Your first stop is the Nizwa Fort, one of the most magnificent castles in Oman with a circular tower built in the 17th century.”

Indeed, Oman offers a package of diverse tourism products to audiences, including entertainment tours that have been displayed well in Instagram films. All attractive images and descriptions have been designed to increase motivation to visit the country.

“It is an unavoidable pleasure for all photographers and people who want to take beautiful pictures”, or “the tour offers multiple photography opportunities to you”.

Moreover, the combination of the Sun, the sea, and sand forms another type of entertainment tour, which is very attractive to Iranian audiences.



The fourth peripheral theme: food tourism and restaurants

Describing traditional Omani cuisine and foods and offering information supplemented with images and films, particularly based on the increasing importance of food tourism, are the strengths of entertainment tours in Oman. Information on the type of food, tastes, similarities, and differences are other pieces of information offered on the pages.

“Try traditional Omani foods, which are typically spicy and influenced by Indian and Taiwanese cuisines”, or “in your trips to Oman, make sure to try Arabic coffee and tea. You will experience many differences between the tea and coffee you drink in Iran”.

The above instances focus on differences to attract tourists.

The fifth peripheral theme: Unknown sights in Oman

According to the themes obtained for creating the content of entertainment tourism, it can be seen that the content related to tours revolving around Oman and its attractions highlights the existence of unknown sights in the country, and the remarkable consideration in this regard is an implicit emphasis on the splendor, greatness, long history, and the magical nature of the regions. Some examples are offered below:

“Nowadays, you can find traces of that magnificent past in the center of the old city”, or “a visit to the wonderful and unknown castles of Muscat”.

Indeed, the content materials are managed and created to attract the attention of entertainment tourists to such destinations by stimulating their curiosity to visit them and establishing relationships with them.

The sixth peripheral theme: Entertainment tourism in Iran

Based on the obtained themes, an obvious gap regarding the content produced on Instagram was content creation about entertainment tourism in Iran. The study's findings showed that very little content was created about attracting entertainment tourists from Oman. A reason is that entertainment tourism in Iran is generally overlooked, and the tours defined to attract potential foreign tourists revolve around cultural tourists. Nevertheless, Iran has significant potential in terms of entertainment tourism that should be actualized by making convenient plans. Moreover, it is obvious that entertainment tourists spend more money than cultural tourists, and the country can earn more money in this way. Thus, creating and promoting content on entertainment tourism and attracting tourists from rich countries like Oman can increase the tourism income of Iran. Another reason is the higher priority of business tourism and the business contracts signed between the two countries, resulting in neglecting entertainment tourism. Consequently, those who create content are less inclined to create content about Iran's entertainment tourism and put less emphasis on it. It should be noted that convenient planning to

establish entertainment tourism and the required infrastructure to attract tourists by considering the source market is a prerequisite to such actions.

The fifth core theme: Ecotourism (ecotourism in Iran and Oman)

Ecotourism was the fifth theme detected in the present study. The content of the films shared on the selected pages dealt with Iran and Oman's nature and its attractions for the residents. This is another neglected field needing convenient planning. Introducing the intact natural attractions of the two countries to tourists can be a way to expand ecotourism. This is being carried out by the film-based content produced on Instagram, and it is essential to make convenient plans.

The first peripheral theme: Ecotourism in Iran

Iran's nature is popular among Omanis due to the climate differences between Iran and Oman and the existence of natural attractions in Iran.

"The nature in Ramsar and Shiraz is particularly popular among Omanis."

Unfortunately, no convenient planning has been carried out to attract Omani tourists to Iran, which shows weaknesses in that field. Thus, it is essential to develop solutions to increase the relations between the two countries and attract tourists.

The second peripheral theme: Ecotourism in Oman

An example of ecotourism themes in Oman is provided below:

"We can promise that Oman will offer you whatever you expect from unique nature by its marvelous mountain and cliffs."

Indeed, as was mentioned above, Oman has defined various tours that can satisfy any taste. However, most Iranian visitors to Oman are business tourists, and other types of tourists rank next. It should not be overlooked that many Omani natural attractions are also found in Iran, explaining the Iranian tourists' lower interest in visiting them.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

In sum, it can be argued that the business, cultural, medical, entertainment, and ecotourism forms of tourism between Iran and Oman have been formed via the film-based tourism content propagated on Instagram. However, some forms of tourism (like business tourism in the case of Iranians visiting Oman) have become more highlighted due to strong business relations between the two countries, their interest in establishing such relations, the peaceful relations of Oman with other countries, and the resulting political and economic stability in the country. On the other hand, some areas have received less attention (e.g., cultural tourism and ecotourism). Based on the important agreements signed between the countries recently, such areas have a high potential to be actualized by planning conveniently. In this way, the creation of film-based content and virtual tourism can be directed toward attracting the attention

of tourists and expanding the rate of tourist exchange between the two countries by planning conveniently and targeting the markets appropriately. Indeed, the identified themes show the strengths and weaknesses of the field (e.g., what types of tourism have been highlighted and what other types need planning and improvement in the short- and long-term perspectives). For instance, medical tourism (hydrotherapy) centers in Ardabil are completely unknown to Omani tourists, and the advertising gap in the field is evident as the region's climate is different and attractive to Omani travelers. The creation of film-based content on Instagram, the promotion of friendly relations between the two countries, emphasis on similarities, and the acknowledgment of differences (another source of attractiveness for tourists) can result in the expansion of sustainable cultural relations between the two countries.

Nevertheless, Iran has not made convenient plans and even does not participate in the relevant exhibitions held in the Arab States of the Persian Gulf despite its intention to prioritize the attraction of tourists from neighboring countries. It should be noted that the arrival of Omani tourists can significantly increase Iran's revenues resulting from the export of culture due to the very exchange rate of the Omani Rial (1 Omani Rial is equal to around \$2.5 US). Indeed, the expansion of tourism and sustainable cross-cultural relations requires the development of a lot of infrastructure and the adoption of convenient planning to actualize the potential fields maximally. However, achieving such goals at the moment is unrealistic due to the political and economic conditions of the country, the effect of economic sanctions, and the lack of economic stability. Nevertheless, above such topics (which are necessary for any country that intends to expand its tourism), exploiting the potential of Instagram films to introduce potential areas and establish relations with other nations can positively affect audiences' attitudes no matter what images are created by media giants. Indeed, the medium is an opportunity for countries Iran to project more realistic voices and images to people worldwide. It is a free-of-charge opportunity that must be employed to establish peaceful and sustainable relations between nations.

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