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Futures Studies of Food Tourism based on Structural Analysis

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Abstract

The purpose of this work is to use structural analysis to create believable scenarios of Iranian food tourism. In the present study, to formulate plausible scenarios, first by reviewing the literature and interviewing experts, 37 factors affecting food tourism were extracted. The variables affecting the future of food tourism, directly and indirectly, were calculated using a questionnaire and analysis by MICMAC software. Finally, considering the two most critical factors called food festivals and sanctions/international relations, plausible scenarios for the future of Iranian food tourism were developed. Based on the results, four scenarios are presented. These scenarios include Golden Scenario, Limited Scenario, Neglected Scenario and Chaotic Scenario. In Golden scenario, which depicts the ideal conditions, as many suitable food festivals as possible are being held in a country, and sanctions are not imposed. According to Limited Scenario, holding more and better food festivals is on the officials' agenda, but on the other hand, the country is under sanctions and pressure. In Neglected Scenario, holding festivals is the same as in the past, and the country is not sanctioned. In Chaotic Scenario, depicting the worst-case scenario, the festival process is the same as in the past and has not been developed quantitatively and qualitatively. Also, the country is in a problematic situation of sanctions. Creating Credible The industry's major players and beneficiaries greatly benefit from Iranian food tourism scenarios, which enable them to provide flexible preparation-based programmers in response to shifting circumstances. The techniques and factors that influence the growth of the business will be known to the participants and recipients of food tourism, and this will open up a multitude of opportunities for the players involved.

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Introduction

With the beginning of the 21st century, the tourism industry has become one of the top three industries globally. With the global expansion of this industry, an increasing number of regions in developing countries have recognized the importance of tourism as an essential factor in developing the regional economy (Sarvar et al., 2017). A nation's political, cultural, and economic aspects are significantly impacted by tourism. In addition to generating jobs and bringing in cash, tourism also boosts internal security by driving up demand for domestic travel and gains political credibility abroad. To make a tourism site more appealing, it needs infrastructure related to security, economy, society, and culture. According to Jandaghi et al. (2019), governments are working to increase visitor appeal in terms of sustainability, sustainability, and cultural accessibility (Jandaghi et al., 2019). Tourism is an economic activity that is service-oriented. Tourism is a multifaceted charter that each aspect refers to one of the human needs (Ebrahimzadeh et al., 2015; Mirtaghian Rudsari & Gharibi, 2013). Tourism is a set of people's activities who temporarily travel outside their residence for recreation and other activities to meet their vital, cultural, and personal needs. In addition, tourism can contribute to economic and social development and integration in underdeveloped countries. The financial crisis has shown that many sectors of the economy are still uncertain. However, despite the poor state of the global economy, the travel and tourism sector appears to be flexible and has been expanded. With the growing population, the demand for travel and tourism is expected to expand more in the future.

Recently, food tourism has grown significantly and become one of the most dynamic and creative tourism sectors (Izadi, 2015; Sarvar et al., 2017). Food has been and is one of the basic human needs (Zahedi & Ranjbarian, 2010; Mirtaghian Rudsari & Gharibi, 2013), so many tourist destinations have used food as an attractive resource to strengthen tourism marketing (Lin et al., 2011; Sarvar et al., 2017). Food tourism, unlike general tourism, assumes that travelers can acquire remarkable, distinctive, and cultural experiences by using food tourism resources or food experiences (Chen & Huang, 2018; Bu et al., 2021). Food tourism can act as tremendous potential in tourist destinations' economic, social, and environmental development. Today, the food tourism sector, which has been ranked in the category of high-income jobs, is considered as one of the ways to attract tourists in the world (Mirtaghian Rudsari & Gharibi, 2013). Most countries have introduced their local food as national food to the world's people to revive traditional food and tourism (Kazemi & Zahedi, 2011; Mirtaghian Rudsari & Gharibi, 2013). Food tourism is a concept that, when introduced, has many practical implications for economic growth. Food tourism refers to a visit or a trip whose primary motive is food and drink. As a result, an essential motivation of people in this type of tourism is the interest in the experience of food and drink, which can leave a stable image of that destination in the mind of the tourist due to being different from the daily food and different cultural context (Amin & Dadras, 2015). Historical documents show the 4000-

year history of Iranian food. Iran has one of the wealthiest tables in the world, so that about 2200 types of food, 109 drinks, sweets, and bread have been identified in the country (Motamedimehr & Mesdaghi, 2011; Mirtaghian Rudsari & Gharibi, 2013). Few countries like Iran have a great variety of food. In some parts of Iran, food is not only consumed for human needs; some foods and drinks also have a therapeutic aspect. By introducing this industry to tourists, we can hope for the prosperity of this industry in Iran, which will lead to the growth and prosperity of the economy and job creation. Iran is a strategic area to attract tourists from all over the world due to its geographical location, having 7,000 years old antiquities, diversity of climate and vegetation, etc., and yet, little attention has been paid to this industry. People worldwide are less familiar with the tourist attractions in Iran because of political issues, lack of attention to antiquities, and the lack of registration and identification of many antiquities.

Compared to other fields, the overall number of papers published in journals related to hospitality and tourism is still lower. The majority of research was empirical and used quantitative techniques, while there is still a dearth of modern methodological approaches. Few papers seem to cover food and gastronomy subjects, despite the fact that worldwide and national collaboration on food-related management, finance, and marketing matters has been increasing among various organizations in the hospitality and tourist area (Okumus et al. 2018). Most food tourism research has concentrated on food attractiveness, festival food experiences, and local food marketing, while other studies have investigated food tourists' decision-making processes (Chen & Huang, 2018, Bu et al., 2021).

The present study seeks to map the future of Iranian food tourism by adopting a different approach using futures studies and scenario planning. Futures studies is one of the most fundamental issues raised in recent years. Futures studies is an interdisciplinary study that has attracted the attention of many researchers and innovators in social sciences and can affect all sciences. The thematic realm of futures studies encompasses all sectors of culture, economics, politics, technology, and arts, and its range of topics is increasing. Studies show that thinking about the future requires a particular language to be formulated. Planning needs a tool to express the future in the form of predictable elements and uncertainties. These tools are scenarios that together show the uncertainties about the future, so relatively specific elements and uncertainties of the future can be explained by a set of scenarios (Taghavi & Hosseinkhah, 2018; Nasr, 2019). By developing different scenarios, possible futures and strategies are identified to make better use of them. Therefore, we can play a more active role and create our future (Fathi et al., 2018).

Given the importance of tourism and especially food tourism in the world, future research seeks to provide scenarios for the future of the Iranian food industry. In summary, the research questions will be as follows:

What are the effective drivers of Iranian food tourism?

What are the plausible scenarios for the future of Iranian food tourism?

Literature Review

Futures studies or futures research is a systematic effort to investigate the long-term future of science, technology, the environment, and society and identify emerging phenomena and strategic infrastructure areas with the most significant social and economic benefits. Therefore, in today's world, futures studies and foresight are a necessity. Futures research is a tool for intelligent engineering of the future. Therefore, innovative organizations should pay more attention to future studies and risk management, identify future-oriented strategies, and achieve their desired future more easily. Futures research is seeing everything before it happens. Crises, except in rare cases, show warning signs before they occur. Managers should not easily ignore these warning signs. By conducting futures research, they can understand and control the early symptoms of many crises before they occur (Jandaghi et al., 2019). In Iran, the history of futures studies and scenario planning goes back to the five-year plans. Iran's 1404 Development Vision Document, which marks the next two decades, is the first document of Iran's strategic and futuristic thinking in which different departments have been designed and compiled.

By carrying out the regional division of labor, each country's provinces have assumed responsibilities commensurate with their capabilities to achieve their desired future. Iran is a strategic area to attract tourists from all over the world due to the geographical location, having ancient antiquities, diversity of climate and vegetation, food diversity. However, little attention is paid to the tourism industry and not specifically to food tourism. Food and tourist consumption patterns have evolved as civilization has progressed. In 1950, 25 million visitors traveled internationally; now, that number has risen to nearly one billion and more—Yeoman (2012) predicts it would reach 4.2 billion by 2050. Without a doubt, food tourism is an integral part of a tourist's itinerary and a focus of destination initiatives. Food tourism reflects today's tourism, in which culture has gone out of the museum and is now reflected in the experience economy, with food tourism as one of the most critical areas. So, where does food tourism stand in the future? (Findlay & Yeoman et al., 2015). Iranian researchers in food and nutrition believe that there are more than 2500 types of food, 109 types of drinks, and a wide variety of bread and sweets in Iran. Although the Iranian culinary school is one of the three primary schools of food, along with Roman and Chinese cooking schools, unfortunately, the local food in the country is still unknown. There is not enough knowledge about how the women of this land work miracles in cooking in their kitchens. Food tourism is a style of tourism that has been of interest to tourists for many years, and every year a significant number of tourists travel to experience new flavors. However, food and health tourism in Iran are not very popular. Most restaurants and cafeterias are limited to offering

limited food options. It is so evident that foreign tourists, after a few days in Iran, complain by saying, “Every day is kebab”.

Food tourism has grown in popularity as a leisure lifestyle (Okumus et al., 2018, Bu et al., 2021). Food tourism is known by several terms that indicate different approaches to this issue as a field of study and an industry (Murray & Haraldsdottir, 2004; Sarvar et al., 2017). In the tourism literature that discusses food, there are several terms such as: “tasty tourism,” “excellent tourism,” “culinary tourism,” and “food tourism” (Horng & Tsai, 2012; Sánchez-Cañizares & López-Guzmán, 2012; Yeoman & McMahon-Beatte, 2016). Some academics argue that the latter three terms are very similar and are used interchangeably in some cases (Horng & Tsai, 2012; Ellis et al., 2018). However, it seems that these terms are commonly used in different contexts, and the meaning of each term reflects different perspectives on the structure of the host-tourist (Ellis et al., 2018). While culinary tourism refers to food-related activities, food tourism refers to the physical experience of tourists motivated by a desire to interact with local food (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Ellis et al., 2018). In other words, the importance of food tourism lies in its physical and sensual embodiment.

In contrast, the meaning of culinary tourism is based on the cultural information obtained through this physical experience. The term food tourism was first introduced in 1998 to refer to the international travel of people to experience different cuisines and foods. In 2013, World Food Travel Association considered food tourism the whole food industry, defining it as “achieving and enjoying unique, memorable food and tasting drinks in places near and far.” Food is seen as a medium of cultural experiences in culinary tourism; as a result, ‘culinary tourism’ is characterized by the experience of food activities and subsequent cultural consumption, as well as the motivation for an individual’s participation (Smith & Xiao, 2008; Horng & Tsai, 2010; Ellis et al., 2018). Food tourism is a form of cultural anthropology that aims to explore the interaction between visitors and destinations via the medium of food (Bu et al., 2021).

In order to identify feasible scenarios of food tourism, it is crucial to extract the significant driving factors that affect it. A survey of the associated literature was performed in this research study to identify the significant driving elements. Some of the previous studies on this topic will be discussed later in the study.

Chang et al. (2020), in an investigation entitled “Food tourism: cooking holiday experiences in East Asia,” defined four attributes and 22 criteria that make up a cooking holiday experience framework. The most important of the four attributes discovered in the research was cooking experience. Moreover, ingredients with integrity, local features, and a diverse curriculum were selected as the three most essential requirements of the more numerous criteria. Okumus (2020), in an article titled “Food tourism research: a perspective article,” said that food tourism has progressed significantly in both academia and

the business over the last two decades. The key study issues in food tourism are offering unique food experiences, authenticity via food five experiences, utilizing food in destination marketing, and combining food tourism with sustainability. Lugosi et al. (2020) conducted a study titled “Managing experience co-creation practices: Direct and indirect inducement in pop-up food tourism events.” This study added knowledge on practical co-creation management by conceptualizing multiple paths through which companies and consumers coordinate behaviors. In addition, this article distinguished between direct and indirect forms of inducement utilized to accomplish experiential outcomes when theorizing from the data, revealing how ‘value signaling’ techniques engage event stakeholders and alter their co-creation. Rachão et al. (2020) conducted a study entitled “Co-creation of tourism experiences: are food-related activities being explored?.” They found that food-related activities, including active involvement, are more likely to succeed in more informal environments, culinary experiences co-created by both visitors and hosts being preferred. Furthermore, tourists who learn something new value co-creation in food tourism experiences better. Fusté-Forné (2020) examined local, national, and international cheeses in a paper titled “Savoring place: cheese as a food tourism destination landmark.” The findings revealed the identity derived from cheese offer and its potential for planning and growth in food tourism. In a study, “Slow food tourism: an ethical micro trend for the Anthropocene,” Fusté-Forné and Jamal (2020) showed that slow food tourism (SFT) is a pathway to contribute to locally based agricultural and food practices for food security, sustainable development, community well-being, and social sustainability. Through co-creating with local producers the sociability, pleasure, and sharing of bioregional meals in different ethnic and cultural contexts, SFT visitors are active participants in ecological, cultural, and heritage conservation. Star et al. (2020) conducted a study entitled “From farm to fork: Is food tourism a sustainable form of economic development?” The results estimated that in 2016, the event produced consumer surpluses of \$754 per participant and more than \$8 million in total, underscoring the value of artisan food experiences for tourist events. To guarantee that food experiences are sustainable as an economic development strategy, they must be given more thought and linked to agriculture, the environment, and the community. Jeaheng and Han (2020), in a study, “Thai street food in the fast-growing global food tourism: Preference and behaviors of food tourists,” showed that the attributes were positively significant in predicting visitor behaviors. The perceived risks of eating Thai street foods were also studied and shown to be a possible moderator. The study’s implications were studied to determine which aspects of street food had a major impact on tourist post-purchase behavior and may be used to increase visitor intention. An article entitled “Touring destination and intention to consume indigenous food: A case of Kadazan-Dusun food in Sabah” was published by Fam et al. (2019). According to the data, tourists from China and Europe consume local food in Sabah in similar ways. Even if they are unfamiliar with the food, they like tasting it. Furthermore, their studies revealed that

Chinese visitors consider sensory appeal a critical factor in meal selection. Meanwhile, Malaysians' preferences for indigenous foods are influenced by convenience and mood. In an article, "Exploring the food tourism landscape and sustainable economic development goals in Dhofar Governorate, Oman Maximizing stakeholder benefits in the destination," Enzenbacher (2019) showed that certain current food tourism trends in other cities might be implemented in Salalah to generate interest in Dhofar's food culture and history. As a result, the destination's stakeholders may reap different advantages. The governorate's environment produces a diverse range of agricultural and other food products that may be used to develop new types of food tourism and broaden the region's attractiveness beyond the Khareef season. The potential advantages are protecting local food knowledge, production, culture, and legacy, growing SMEs, creating new employment, and increasing tourist stay and expenditure.

As mentioned, the present study seeks to map the future of Iranian food tourism using futures studies and scenario planning approaches. By reviewing the literature, no research has been found regarding the said approach, so future research in tourism will be examined later.

Fountain (2021) conducted a study entitled "The future of food tourism in a post-COVID-19 world: insights from New Zealand". The report found that previous to the COVID19 pandemic, there were tendencies in the food and tourist sectors that have intensified during a lockdown and are likely to impact tourism's resetting on a more resilient and regenerative pathway. The three possible food and drink tourism trends highlighted are returning to fundamentals, valuing locals, and eating for well-being. Jandaghi, et al. (2019) published an article, "Identification of Tourism Scenarios in Turkey Based on Futures Study Approach." The research's drivers and essential elements were initially discovered through a review of the literature and interviews with Turkish tourism professionals. In order to construct feasible scenarios, two critical elements of government policy in the tourist industry and the value of the country currency were picked utilizing the cross-impact analysis technique. Based on these two uncertainties, four scenarios of luxury tourism, low-cost tourism, tourism deterioration, and unplanned tourism were identified. In their research, "Scenarios for the future of Iranian tourism (case study: Hormozgan province)," Ahmadi Kahnali et al. (2020) intended to construct a tourism scenario for Hormozgan Province in southern Iran, based on a heuristic logic approach and the perspectives of key stakeholders and players. By interviewing experts and assessing the relevance and uncertainty of the elements and essential aspects impacting the future of tourism, this study attempted to identify the primary factors affecting the tourist sector in Hormozgan Province. These scenarios can be helpful and efficient for managers, decision-makers, and stakeholders in tourism. In a study, "Futures Studies of Spiritual Tourism based on Cross Impact Matrix and Soft Systems Methodology," Fathi et al. (2019) determined the variables impacting the future of spiritual tourism in Qom province. Then, they put the

data into the MICMAC software using the Cross Impact matrix technique. Facilitate vs. Rigor and Culture Policy were discovered to be critical factors among the eleven final influential variables.

The next stage of this research was to offer four scenarios. These scenarios included Limited liberalism, Liberal world, Negligence, and Authoritarian Spirituality. Ian Yeoman and McMahon-Beatte (2016) published an article entitled “The future of food tourism.” Based on findings, food tourism as political capital, as a visionary state, what it means to be a foodie, the drive for affluence, exclusivity, and fluid experiences in a post-modernist society were the five driving forces highlighted. Ying et al. (2018) conducted a study, “Examining the efficacy of self-classification approach in segmenting special-interest tourists: food tourism case.” This study tested the efficacy of a single-item self-classification technique using empirical evidence. In order to assess the robustness of this self-classification measure, it was compared to a data-driven multidimensional psychographic method in terms of its capacity to predict tourist behavior toward food-related destination consumption. The findings showed that the single-item self-classification technique and the psychographic approach work equally well when segmenting food-related consuming patterns.

Research Methodology

This paper is pragmatic, exploratory from the target’s point of view, and practical from a philosophical standpoint. In terms of data collection, it is survey research using a hybrid technique. This research uses scenario planning for futures studies in the Iranian Food Tourism. This study aims to identify influential factors on the future of the Iranian Food Tourism and the development of a plausible scenario for it. For believable futures, plausible scenarios are required. Believable futures are scenarios that can happen in the future.

Stated differently, a sequence of occurrences that are conceivable in light of current human comprehension. Realistic futures adhere to these criteria, even though conceivable futures may include possibilities that are even at odds with what is now known to humans. Figure 1 shows the phases of this paper.

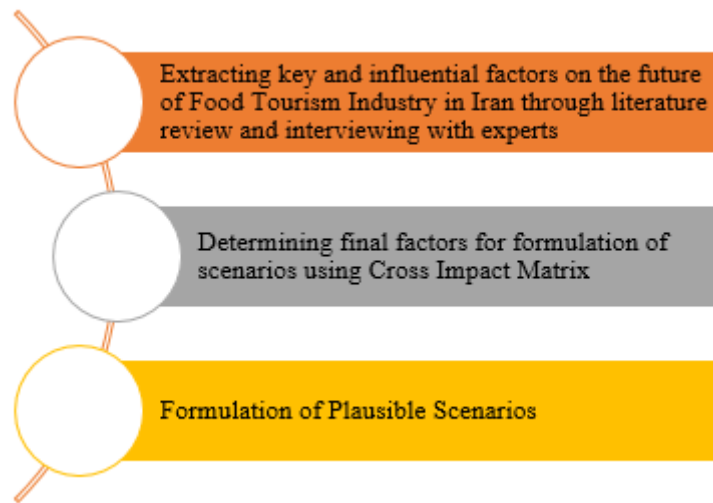


Figure 1. Hierarchy of research steps

Analysis

Identifying the Factors Affecting Food Tourism

Following expert interviews and a review of the literature, 37 important variables were found for further investigation into Iranian food tourism. These parameters are listed in Table (1).

Table 1. Important factors gleaned from interviews and the literature

N	Factors	References
1	Local and traditional food branding	Izadi (2015); Sarvar et al. (2017)
2	Hygiene considerations and principles	Izadi (2015); Mirtaghian and Gharibi, (2013); Sarvar et al. 2017; Kim (2016)
3	Foreign resources and capital	Mirtaghian and Gharibi,(2013)
4	Advertising and Marketing	Sarvar et al. (2017); Kim et al. (2019)
5	Food Festivals	Sarvar et al. (2017); Robinson et al. (2018); Lee et al. (2017)
6	Recruit specialized human resource	Nasr (2019); Muangasame and Park (2019)
7	Well-equipped kitchen	Chang et al. (2020)
8	Fair pricing	Chang et al. (2020); Interview
9	Convenient location	Chang et al. (2020); Kim (2016)
10	Strengthening the Private Sector	Fathi et al. (2019); Enzenbacher (2019)
11	tourism stakeholder perceptions	Enzenbacher (2019)
12	Information and Communication Technology Infrastructure	Enzenbacher (2019); Interview
13	Food market	Robinson et al. (2018); Ellis et al. (2018); Kim (2016); Bu et al. (2021)
14	Economic Support	Muangasame and Park (2019)
15	Using Renewable and Clean Energy	Muangasame and Park (2019); Lee et al. (2021)
16	Prepare a brochure containing the names and ingredients of various food, desserts, and drinks	Interview; Chang et al. (2020)
17	Self-service appetizers	Interview
18	Wearing local clothes by traditional restaurants' staff	Interview
19	Use traditional copper and earthenware dishes and decorate food when serving	Interview
20	Legislation issues	Enzenbacher (2019)
21	Food distribution system	Interview
22	Diverse curriculum	Chang et al. (2020)
23	Unique food experiences	Okumus (2020)
24	Active participation by both tourists and hosts	Rachão et al. (2020)
25	Perceived risks of consuming different food	Jeaheng and Han (2020)
26	Culture and heritage	Enzenbacher (2019); Kim et al. (2019); Kim (2016); Ellis et al. (2018)
27	Destination image	Cardoso et al. (2019); Ellis et al. (2018)
28	Organic and local foods	Garner and Ayala (2019); Chang et al. (2020); Wisansing and Vongvisitsin (2019)

29	Reminiscence and memories	Kim et al. (2019); Chien et al. (2018); Kim et al. (2019)
30	Textural seduction	Kim et al. (2019)
31	The authenticity of cooking and food methods	Kim et al. (2019); Okumus (2020); Ellis et al. (2018)
32	Prestige and self-enhancement	Kim et al. (2019)
33	Consumer coproduction	Chien et al. (2018)
34	Trust	Chien et al. (2018); Interview
35	Recommendation intention	Chien et al. (2018)
36	Social interaction and face-to-face relations	Roy et al. (2017), Chang et al (2019)
37	Sanctions/International Relations	Interview

Several factors were removed following the execution of the binomial test. Eighteen of the 37 criteria that were taken from the interview and literature were eliminated. Table (2) contains a list of the final criteria.

Table 2. Final factors affecting Iranian food tourism

Number	Final Factors
1	Hygiene considerations and principles
2	Advertising and Marketing
3	Food Festivals
4	Recruit specialized human resource
5	Convenient location
6	Strengthening the Private Sector
7	Food market
8	Wearing local clothes by traditional restaurants' staff
9	Use traditional (copper and earthenware) dishes and decorate food when serving
10	Legislation issues
11	Food distribution system
12	Diverse curriculum
13	Active participation by both tourists and hosts
14	Perceived risks of consuming different food
15	Culture and heritage
16	Organic and local foods
17	The authenticity of cooking and food methods
18	Social interaction and face-to-face relations
19	Sanctions/International Relations

Formation of Cross Impact Matrix

In this part, 55 experts in the area were given the questionnaire created in the previous step, which used the factors retrieved with the use of the t-test, to ascertain the influence of these crucial aspects. The average scores that Individuals submitted are displayed in Table (3).

Formation and Analysis of Cross Impact Matrix

After the questionnaire data were entered into the software, the effects of factors were calculated directly and indirectly. The direct and the points of each factor are shown in the column and the matrix row. Table (4) shows the direct effects of the factors.

Table 3. Completed Cross Impact Matrix of key factors

.	1:	2:A	3:F	4:	5:	6:S	7:F	8:	9:	10:	11:	12:	13:	14:	15:	16:	17:	18:	19:
1: Hygiene	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	2	1	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0
2: Advertisi	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
3: Food Fes	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
4: Recruit s	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	1	0
5: Convenie	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
6: Strength	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	2	0
7: Food ma	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
8: Wearing l	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
9: Use tradi	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
10: Legislati	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	1	0
11: Food di	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
12: Diverse	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	2
13: Active p	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
14: Perceiv	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	1
15: Culture	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0
16: Organic	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
17: Sanctio	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	3	0	2	1
18: Social i	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
19: The aut	2	0	0	0	2	0	3	0	3	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3	0

Table 4. The Matrix of Direct Effects of Factors

N	Variable	Total Number Of Rows	Total Number Of Columns
1	Hygiene Considerations And Principles	9	9
2	Advertising And Marketing	9	4
3	Food Festivals	11	5
4	Recruit Specialized Human Resource	10	4
5	Convenient Location	7	12
6	Strengthening The Private Sector	7	4
7	Food Market	8	9
8	Wearing Local Clothes By Traditional Restaurants' Staff	5	7
9	Use Traditional (Copper And Earthenware) Dishes And Decorate Food When Serving	4	11
10	Legislation Issues	9	11
11	Food Distribution System	4	6
12	Diverse Curriculum	9	7
13	Active Participation By Both Tourists And Hosts	4	7
14	Perceived Risks Of Consuming Different Food	8	8
15	Culture And Heritage	8	5
16	Organic And Local Foods	3	11
17	Sanctions/International Relations	12	6
18	Social Interaction And Face-To-Face Relations	3	12
19	The Authenticity Of Cooking And Food Methods	16	8
	Totals	146	146

Table (5) shows the indirect effects of factors.

Table 5. The Matrix of indirect Effects of Factors

Number	Variable	Total number of rows	Total number of columns
1	Hygiene considerations and principles	498	540
2	Advertising and Marketing	570	276
3	Food Festivals	665	360
4	Recruit specialized human resource	427	241
5	Convenient location	540	604
6	Strengthening the Private Sector	324	180
7	Food market	380	445
8	Wearing local clothes by traditional restaurants' staff	217	476
9	Use traditional (copper and earthenware) dishes and decorate food when serving	187	562
10	Legislation issues	389	584
11	Food distribution system	266	319
12	Diverse curriculum	544	385
13	Active participation by both tourists and hosts	157	423
14	Perceived risks of consuming different food	375	497
15	Culture and heritage	385	214
16	Organic and local foods	188	476
17	Sanctions/International Relations	592	234
18	Social interaction and face-to-face relations	263	541
19	The authenticity of cooking and food methods	833	443
	Totals	146	146

Table (6) lists the factors affecting based on its influence and dependence directly and indirectly.

Table 6. Impact score of factors affecting based on its influence and dependence

Rank	Label	Direct influence	Label	Direct dependence	Label	Indirect influence	Label	Indirect dependence
1	The authen	1095	Convenient	821	The authen	1067	Convenient	774
2	Sanctions/	821	Social int	821	Food Festi	852	Legislatio	748
3	Food Festi	753	Use tradit	753	Sanctions/	758	Use tradit	720
4	Recruit sp	684	Legislatio	753	Advertisin	730	Social int	693
5	Hygiene co	616	Organic an	753	Diverse cu	697	Hygiene co	692
6	Advertisin	616	Hygiene co	616	Convenient	692	Perceived	637
7	Legislatio	616	Food marke	616	Hygiene co	638	Wearing lo	610
8	Diverse cu	616	Perceived	547	Recruit sp	547	Organic an	610
9	Food marke	547	The authen	547	Legislatio	498	Food marke	570
10	Perceived	547	Wearing lo	479	Culture an	493	The authen	567
11	Culture an	547	Diverse cu	479	Food marke	487	Active par	542
12	Convenient	479	Active par	479	Perceived	480	Diverse cu	493
13	Strengthen	479	Food dist	410	Strengthen	415	Food Festi	461
14	Wearing lo	342	Sanctions/	410	Food dist	341	Food dist	408
15	Use tradit	273	Food Festi	342	Social int	337	Advertisin	353
16	Food dist	273	Culture an	342	Wearing lo	278	Recruit sp	308
17	Active par	273	Advertisin	273	Organic an	241	Sanctions/	300
18	Organic an	205	Recruit sp	273	Use tradit	239	Culture an	274
19	Social int	205	Strengthen	273	Active par	201	Strengthen	230

Interpretation of the Influence and Dependence of Factors

The most important output of the MICMAC software is the Influence and Dependence of Factors chart. In this chart, the areas are classified into four parts, where each factor in each part represents the type of factor. Figure (2) shows the status of key factors in food tourism.

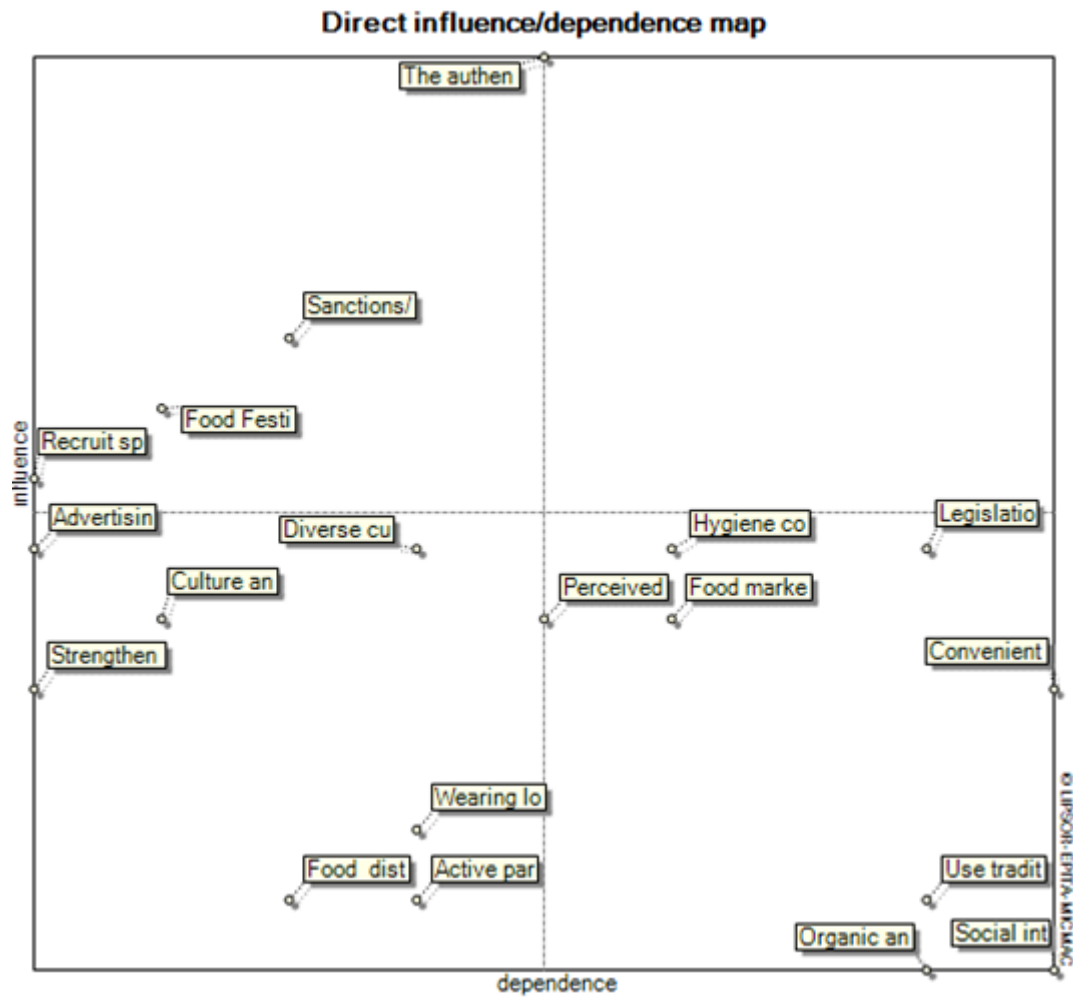


Figure 2. The positioning of factors based on their status

After determining each factor's status affecting the Iranian food tourism, the relationships of these factors were investigated in the MICMAC method, and the relationships of the effects of factors were shown directly and indirectly in the Figures (3&4). Also potential direct and indirect diagrams were shown in the Figures (5&6).

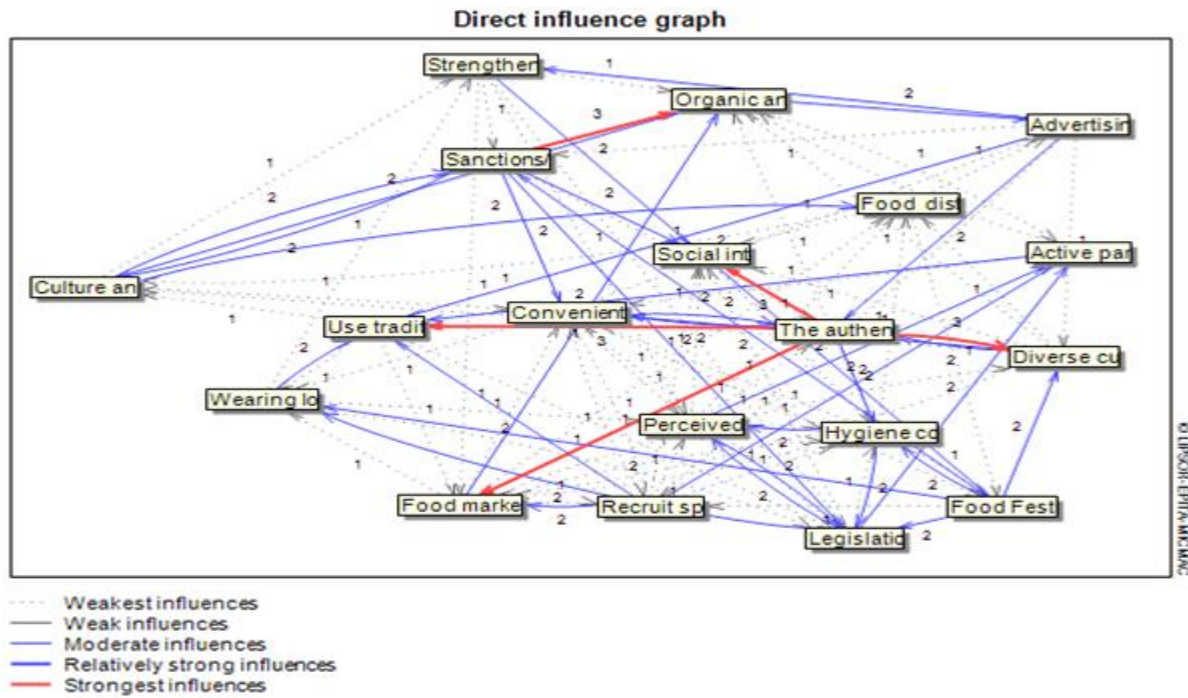


Figure 3. Direct effect diagram

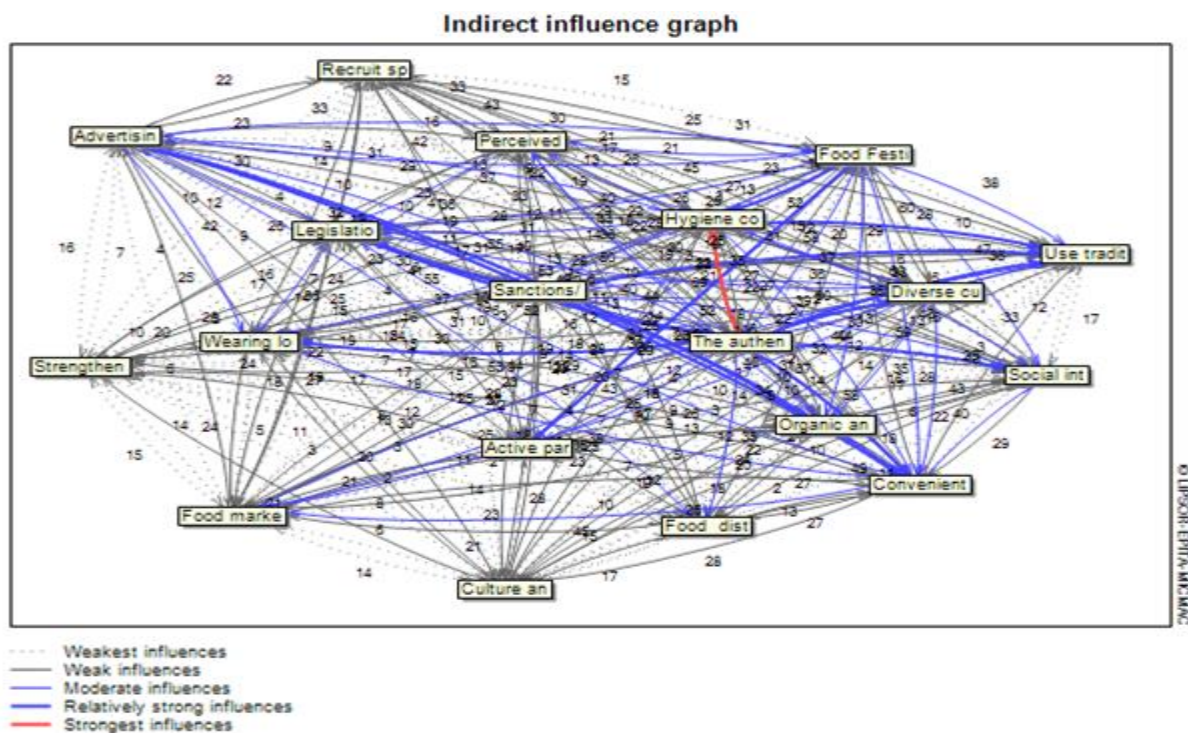


Figure 4. Indirect Factor Diagram

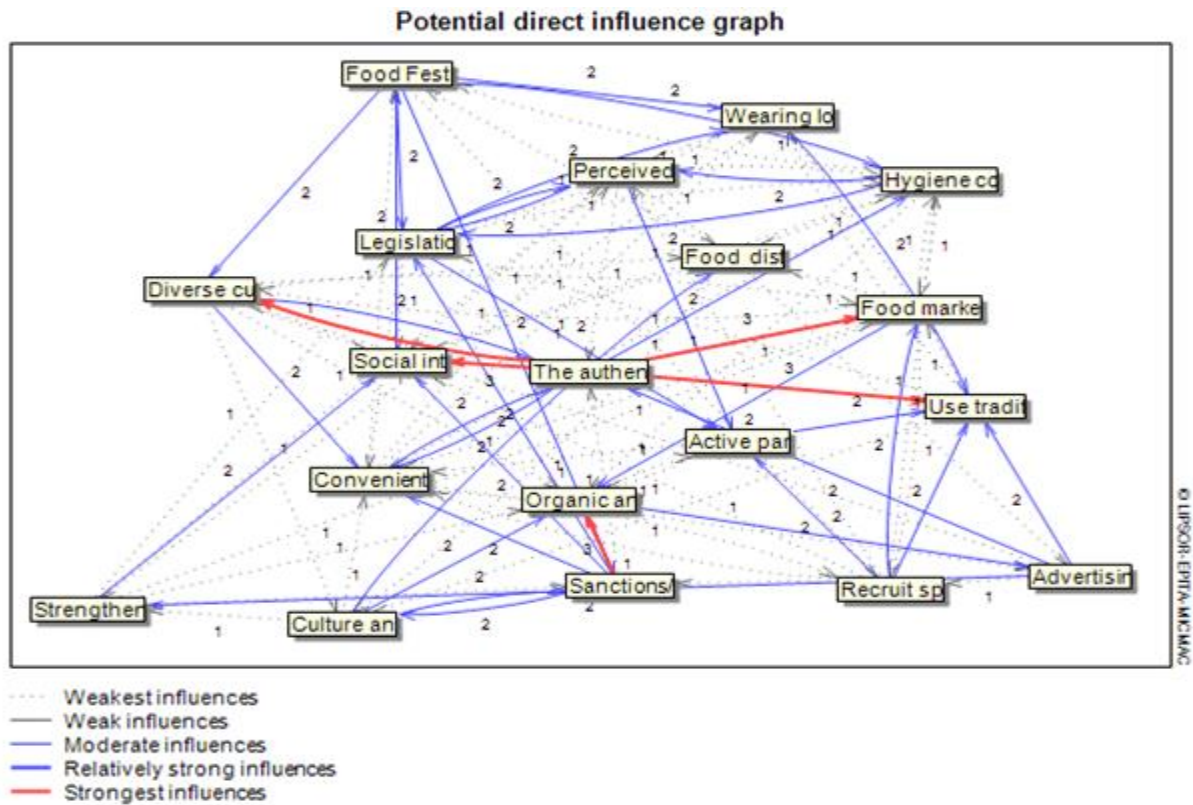


Figure 5. Potential direct Diagram

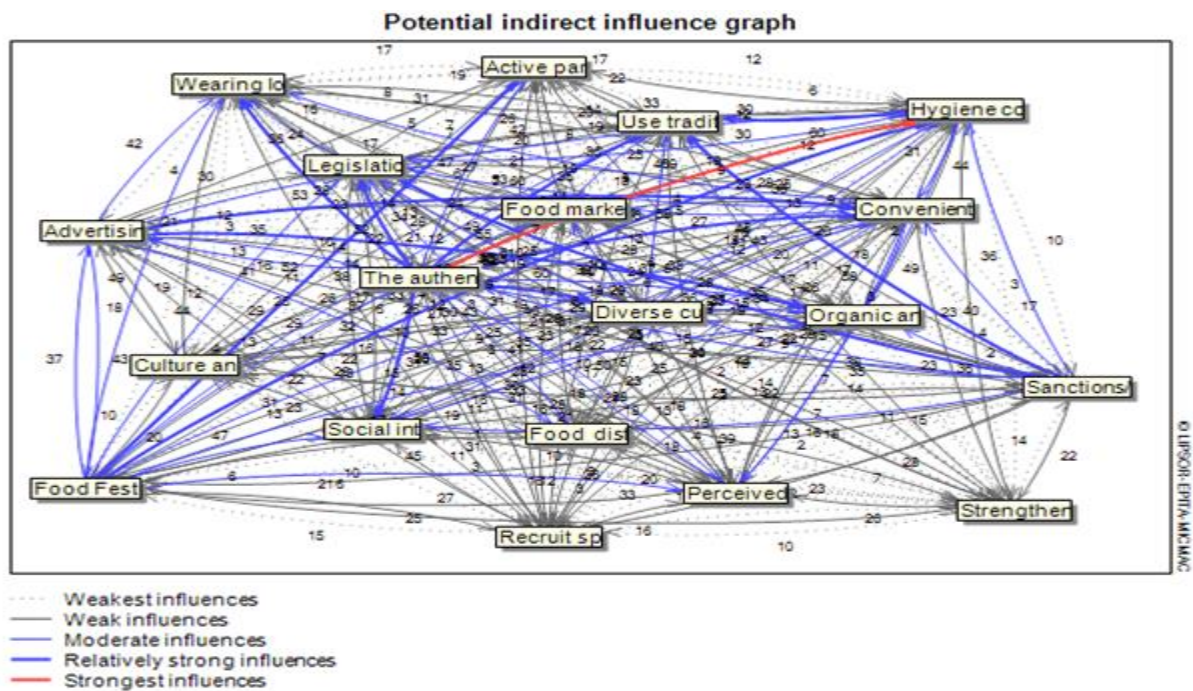



Figure 6. Potential Indirect Diagram

Formulation of Scenario

The findings indicated that, in respect to other factors, the two drivers—food festivals and sanctions/international relations—were the most significant. Thus, four possible futures for Iranian food tourism might be formulated based on these two uncertainties. With regard to the two aforementioned uncertainties, figure (7) depicts these four situations. Below is a detailed description of each of the four conceivable scenarios.



Imposition of many sanctions

Figure 7. Plausible scenarios of Food Tourism

Scenario One: Golden Tourism

According to this scenario, the country is not sanctioned. The deposited funds from oil exports are being transferred freely and unconditionally. The conditions for foreign investment in Iran have been improved by upgrading Iran's ranking by reputable foreign financial and credit institutions. Iranian officials can buy different desired airplanes directly under no restricted conditions and develop the tourism industry. There are no constraints on the entry of foreign tourists, and foreign tourism companies can easily organize various tours to Iran. Economic and tourism exchanges are in ideal condition. Officials try to use food in tourism as one of the pillars for developing this industry and use this opportunity to promote their country's culture.

In this scenario, the number of food festivals has increased significantly. Food festivals have developed different regions and greatly impact the sustainability and profitability of tourist areas. Food provides an opportunity for different groups of tourists to experience new foods and flavors together. Locals can showcase their region's unique culture and customs, market for their products by the food presented at festivals, and provide tourists an authentic experience that will lead to tourists' satisfaction and loyalty. It creates a positive mental image and strengthens the regional economy and environmental sustainability of the tourist destination. In addition to what has been said, according to this scenario, the officials are trying to prepare a prestigious and distinctive festival of Iranian culture and register it nationally and globally like the famous festivals of different countries such as Moon Cake Festival: China, Pizza Festival: Italy, Melbourne Food Festival: Australia, Putin Festival Ottawa: Canada, Festival of Flavors: Singapore, Chocolate Festival: France. As a result, the best traditional and local food in Iran's annual festival will be put as a choice in the menu of hotels so that the ranking of restaurants will be influential from now on.

Scenario Two: Limited Tourism

According to this scenario, the country is under sanctions. The country's oil revenues have declined, and in the challenging and sensitive economic situation, officials are thinking of new foreign exchange revenues to replace oil revenues essentially. As a policymaker and supporter of the private sector, the government is developing strategic and macro-plans in the tourism industry to make the most of the private sector active in the tourism industry to counter sanctions. The government provides a context for the private sector and paves the way for a broad private sector presence in the tourism industry. In these circumstances, it is easier than ever to attract many foreign tourists and be hopeful. Government officials are trying to facilitate the widespread presence of private sector investors in the tourism industry and provide more support to firms in this area to deal with US sanctions more effectively. Red tape should be reduced so that investors are more willing to inject their capital into the tourism industry. Iranian tourism officials talk to Chinese officials about their investment in Iran's tourism industry. A plot to invest in constructing tourist sites and complexes will likely be provided to Chinese investors, and Iranian officials plan to involve China in research and reconstruction. Iranian officials hope the country will be able to attract one million Chinese tourists a year. The government also approves visa exemptions for Chinese tourists. Iranian officials are trying to apply a similar trend to China in neighboring countries, including Iraq, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Pakistan, Bahrain, and Oman.

According to this scenario, the country's officials decide to hold more food festivals with the slogan "we change the taste of the world" and add new foods to their menus every year. Restaurants and big hotels send their representatives to the festivals to add new foods to their menus and make food menus

attractive. There is a need for prominent professors and holding various food festivals in restaurant management, marketers, and stakeholders in this field to be trained and continue their activities with encouragement. Given that more than 45 countries are looking for halal food and Iran has many opportunities to attract tourists with its capabilities in this area, government officials are trying to promote this by holding more festivals. The Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization (ICHO), the only government authority, has the budget line for creating a culture about local food, tries to play a more critical role, plan carefully and consciously, and hold more targeted food festivals on different occasions.

Scenario Three: Neglected Tourism

According to this scenario, the country is not sanctioned. The way of looking at foreign policy in domestic politics has been changed, and with the slogan “Think globally and act nationally,” things are getting better. The country’s economic growth has grown at an average annual rate of 5 percent since the war until 1990, and the economic growth was at best zero, or half percent is now improving. The distance between developed countries is narrowing. The tourism industry, which faced many problems during the sanctions, is now booming. During the sanctions, tour sales sites that removed Iran’s name from their tour sales list now have no problem transferring money by credit card.

According to this scenario, many travelers who choose Iran for their trip, before packing their bags, go to the shops in their own country to buy the necessary food for the trip because they have not heard well or had incomplete information about food in Iran. Due to the lack of proper food festivals, Iran’s food circulation seems to have been neglected despite the rich culture and ethnic diversity. At the same time, countries such as China, France, and Japan provoke tourists’ tastes by advertisings and publishing pictures of their food. However, Iranian tourism officials do not try to provoke the appetite of tourists. The Iranian tourism industry, including food tourism, is underdeveloped. Since oil has always been the country’s source of income, not much attention is paid to food tourism. Even in restaurants, there is less Iranian local food. Usually, kebabs and chicken kebabs are offered. They are not very attractive for foreign tourists because the raw materials are available worldwide and everyone can cook them! More surprisingly, in Iranian restaurants, there is food from other countries, meantime in the same countries, there are no restaurants that serve Iranian food! Due to the negligence of the country’s officials, the remaining Iranian food is named after neighboring countries by UNESCO. It causes a part of the country’s food identity to be lost.

Scenario Four: Chaotic Tourism

Due to the sanctions and their destructive effects, tourists are faced with a worn and inadequate rail and air transportation system and a shortage of accommodation units in the peak season of the trip. Most

tourists who travel to Iran from European and American countries are cultural tourists. Their primary destinations are three cities: Isfahan, Yazd, and Shiraz, while no planning has been done for rail and air transportation between these three cities. Therefore, tourists are forced to travel by road and with a worn-out transportation system. Iranian officials take measures to overcome the hostile psychological atmosphere and not lose tourists. For example, unilaterally abolish visas for most countries, including Europe, and in another action, exempt Chinese citizens from obtaining visas. As entry into Iran hurts obtaining a US visa, government officials ensure that entry and exit stamps into Iran are not registered in the passports of foreign nationals. In general, the government's approach is shifting from focusing on European tourists to tourists in the region, trying to turn the challenge and threat into an opportunity. Devaluation of the national currency makes trips to Iran more competitive than other countries, so Iran's tourism sector will move away from the recession.

According to this scenario, the current trend of holding festivals is not very appropriate. In previous years, food festivals have been less thought of as a tourist attraction, so foreign tourists who do not have complete information about a variety of traditional and local Iranian food encounter monotony in the food menu of restaurants and accommodation centers. The food tourism that could have been an opportunity to attract different groups of tourists and capture a positive image in their minds has been lost. Locals, who could offer their products and culture if there were more food festivals, are also frustrated. With the inflation caused by the sanction, they are thinking of other profitable jobs, such as living in the city and engaging in industrial activities.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to identify plausible Iranian food tourism scenarios. For this purpose, first, by reviewing the literature and interviewing experts in food tourism, the drivers and critical factors of the research were identified. These factors were screened using a non-parametric binomial test, and out of 37 key factors, 18 were removed. Two key factors, including food festivals and sanctions/international relations, were selected to write plausible scenarios using the interaction analysis technique. Based on these two uncertainties, four scenarios were identified.

According to Golden Scenario, which depicts the ideal conditions, holding as many suitable food festivals as possible in a country is a priority. Sanctions are not imposed. Oil, foreign investment, and world trade, including the purchase of foreign aircraft directly and without time constraints, are developing the tourism industry. In this scenario, the number of food festivals increases significantly. The local people try to use this opportunity to present their culture and customs and market their products, which creates satisfaction and loyalty of foreign tourists.

According to Limited Scenario, holding more and better food festivals is on the agenda of Iranian officials. However, on the other hand, the country is under sanctions and pressure. The country's oil revenues have declined, and in the challenging and sensitive economic situation, officials are thinking of new foreign exchange revenues to replace oil revenues essentially. As a policymaker and supporter of the private sector, the government is developing strategic and large-scale plans in the tourism industry to make the most of the private sector active in the tourism industry to counter sanctions. Moreover, Iranian officials speak to Chinese officials and hope Iran will attract one million Chinese tourists. Iranian officials are trying to follow a similar trend to other neighboring countries, including Iraq, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Pakistan, Bahrain, and Oman. According to this scenario, the country's officials decide to hold more culinary and food festivals with the slogan "We change the taste of the world" and add new foods to their menus every year.

In Neglected Scenario, the festival process is the same as in the past. The country is in a state without sanctions. Looking at foreign policy in domestic politics has been changed, and with the slogan "Think globally and act nationally," things are getting better. The tourism industry, which faced many problems during the sanction, is now booming. Alternatively, due to the lack of proper food festivals, food circulation seems to have been neglected despite the rich culture and ethnic diversity. At the same time, countries such as China, France, and Japan provoke tourists' tastes by publishing pictures of their food. However, Iranian tourism officials do not try to provoke tourists' appetite. In summary, the Iranian tourism industry, including food tourism, is an underdeveloped industry based on this scenario.

In Chaotic Scenario, depicting the worst-case scenario, the festival process is the same as in the past and has not been developed quantitatively and qualitatively. Also, the country is in a problematic situation of sanctions. Due to the sanctions and their destructive effects on the country, in the peak season of the trip, tourists face a worn and inadequate rail and air transportation system, a shortage of accommodation units, transportation between these three main tourist cities, including Isfahan, Yazd, and Shiraz are not well planned. Tourists are forced to travel by road and travel with a worn-out transportation system. According to this scenario, the current trend of holding festivals is not very appropriate. In previous years, food festivals have been less thought of as a tourist attraction, so foreign tourists who do not have complete information about a variety of traditional and local food encounter monotony in the food menu of restaurants and accommodation centers.

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