

# Analysis of Social and Cultural Factors Affecting the Development of Tourism Culture in Iran: A Case Study of Border Regions

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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify and analyze the social and cultural factors affecting the development of tourism culture in Iran and to prioritize these factors. The primary objective was to explain the existing paradox between Iran's vast potential tourism capacities and the weak practical performance of this industry. The study adopted a mixed-methods (integrative) research design. In the quantitative phase, the research was conducted using a descriptive-survey method with a correlational approach. The statistical population consisted of all tourists visiting the border city of Bazargan (over 100,000 individuals). Based on the Morgan table, a sample size of 384 participants was determined and selected through simple random sampling. The data collection instrument was a researcher-developed questionnaire comprising 52 items, whose validity was confirmed using the content validity ratio method (CVR = 0.851) and whose reliability was verified using Cronbach's alpha coefficient (ranging from 0.761 to 0.931 across components). Data were analyzed using SPSS software through descriptive and inferential statistics, including Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression analyses. The results of the regression analysis indicated that the model consisting of eight independent variables (cultural, social, economic, political, environmental, infrastructural, entrepreneurial, and security-related factors) explained a total of 52.7% of the variance in the dependent variable (tourism propensity) ( $R^2 = 0.527$ ). Among these factors, five showed positive and statistically significant effects: cultural factors with a beta coefficient of 0.414 (the strongest predictor), political factors (0.220), safety and security (0.404), economic factors (0.172), and social factors (0.174). The three factors of environmental, infrastructural, and entrepreneurial dimensions were not statistically significant.

**Keywords:** *Tourism culture development, social factors, cultural factors, sustainable tourism*

## 1. Introduction

Tourism development is increasingly understood as a multidimensional and system-dependent phenomenon in which economic performance, socio-cultural change, governance capacity, environmental constraints, and destination competitiveness evolve through reciprocal feedback loops rather than linear cause–effect relations. Early planning and management scholarship emphasized that tourism is best approached as an integrated planning domain requiring coordination across institutions, markets, and host communities, because fragmented decision-making tends to produce policy incoherence and weak implementation outcomes (Getz, 1986). Systems-based thinking further conceptualizes tourism as an interdependent set of generating regions, transit routes, and destination regions, where demand, supply, and regulatory frameworks interact to shape visitor flows and local impacts (Leiper, 1990). As tourism expanded into a professional field of practice, management-oriented approaches highlighted the necessity of structured processes for strategy, organization, service delivery, and performance monitoring, particularly in destinations where multiple stakeholders compete over limited resources and symbolic representations (Alvani & Pirouzabakh, 2006). Standard tourism management texts subsequently consolidated these insights into practical principles for destination governance, marketing, and product development, emphasizing that sustainable growth depends on aligning policy instruments with local capacities and market realities (Kazemi, 2006). Within this trajectory, modern tourism management continues to treat destinations as complex organizations—embedded in place, regulated by the state, and shaped by socio-cultural meanings—requiring coherent planning architectures and evidence-informed decision-making (Leiper, 2004). Classic planning literature also underscores that tourism development must be staged, spatially organized, and matched with infrastructure and attractions, otherwise destinations experience congestion, uneven benefit distribution, and reputational decline (Gunn, 2002).

Contemporary debates have moved beyond growth-centric approaches to foreground sustainability, resilience, and socio-cultural legitimacy as core preconditions for tourism development. Sustainable tourism research argues that tourism must be evaluated not only through arrivals and receipts but also through its capacity to maintain environmental integrity, preserve socio-cultural assets, and sustain local livelihoods over time (Holden, 2000). The

geography of tourism similarly emphasizes that place, space, and environmental contexts are not passive backdrops; rather, they actively condition the feasibility of tourism products, the distribution of impacts, and the governance instruments available to planners (Hall & Page, 2020). This spatial lens is particularly important in destinations affected by ecological fragility and climate variability, where tourism growth can be constrained by physical limits and by political debates about environmental justice (Varnajot & Saarinen, 2021). In addition, environmental policy has become inseparable from tourism strategy, as emissions regulations and decarbonization pathways increasingly shape transportation costs, destination accessibility, and the regulatory burden facing tourism businesses (Zhang, 2021). Evidence from decarbonization research suggests that “environmentally friendly” tourism development is not only an ethical aspiration but also a policy corridor that can alter industrial structure and investment incentives in tourism-dependent economies (Rej et al., 2022). Systematic reviews indicate that sustainability has also become a competitiveness factor, with destinations seeking differentiation through green standards, governance quality, and innovation in product design (Streimikiene et al., 2021). At the macro level, bibliometric and synthesis research documents a broadening scholarly consensus: tourism development is linked to economic growth, but the direction and quality of this relationship depends on mediating variables such as institutional performance, human capital, infrastructure, and environmental stewardship (León-Gómez et al., 2021).

Despite the conceptual clarity of integrated and sustainable tourism development, empirical evidence demonstrates persistent heterogeneity in outcomes across regions, especially in developing and emerging contexts. Tourism is often promoted as a pathway to inclusive development, yet the benefits can be spatially concentrated and socially selective unless governance mechanisms ensure distributional fairness and local participation (Ridderstaat et al., 2022). This concern has intensified alongside efforts to frame rural tourism as a development strategy, where local economies may depend on tourism as a complement to agriculture and small enterprise, but where institutional capacity is often limited. Government’s role becomes critical in such settings because policy design, funding priorities, and administrative coordination shape the enabling environment for rural tourism projects (Liu et al., 2020). Investment is similarly recognized as a foundational input to regional tourism development, influencing the quality of

accommodation, transport services, and destination branding; however, investment effectiveness depends on regulatory stability and the alignment of private incentives with public priorities (Mubinova, 2020). Implementation studies of tourism development policy, including geopark-based strategies, show that formal plans do not automatically translate into effective outcomes unless governance networks can coordinate agencies and ensure compliance across jurisdictions (Yuniarti et al., 2022). At the community level, residents' perceptions and perceived impacts may mediate support for tourism development, implying that social license can function as a hidden constraint on destination expansion (Gannon et al., 2021). Moreover, research on subjective well-being suggests that tourism's legitimacy is also tied to whether residents perceive improvements in quality of life, not merely aggregate economic gains (Wang et al., 2021). These insights are particularly relevant for contexts where tourism is politically sensitive and where perceptions about identity, authenticity, and social cohesion shape both resident attitudes and visitor experiences.

The socio-cultural dimension of tourism development is especially salient because tourism is an encounter between visitors and hosts that is simultaneously economic, symbolic, and political. Sociological perspectives conceptualize tourism as an arena in which nations and localities "perform" identity and history for external audiences, and where cultural narratives can be selectively curated, commodified, or contested (Babb, 2011). From this standpoint, tourism is not only a market exchange but also a cultural encounter that shapes how places are imagined, governed, and represented—often in ways that reflect unequal power relations between destinations and source markets (Urry & Larsen, 2011). In management terms, this implies that tourism development strategies must address not only supply-side investments but also the socio-cultural infrastructures that enable hospitable interactions, intercultural communication, and trust-building. Empirical studies within Iran have similarly emphasized that socio-cultural drivers can structure tourism development outcomes, suggesting that destination success may hinge on the alignment between local values, cultural assets, and visitor expectations (Makhsous et al., 2021). In ecotourism contexts, evidence indicates that social and cultural factors can be decisive for development trajectories, because ecotourism depends heavily on local participation, cultural authenticity, and community acceptance (Haj Ali Akbari et al., 2022). Intercultural communication research further

demonstrates that tourism interactions are shaped by communicative competence, mutual perceptions, and cultural norms, which influence satisfaction, perceived safety, and revisit intentions (Jabari & Jafari Haftkhan, 2024). Thus, tourism culture development can be conceptualized as the institutionalization of norms, values, and practices that make tourism socially acceptable, culturally meaningful, and operationally feasible within host communities, while also remaining legible and attractive to visitors.

In the Iranian context, the paradox between extensive tourism potential and relatively weak performance has been discussed through multiple lenses, including governance, image, security, and soft power. Tourism in Iran is frequently positioned as a strategic sector for diversifying regional economies and strengthening international engagement, yet external perceptions and macro-level political constraints can suppress demand even when cultural attractions are abundant. Recent research on stimulating foreign tourists' willingness to travel to Iran emphasizes the role of soft power and policy-driven reputation management, suggesting that destination attractiveness is partly constructed through state narratives, diplomacy, and perceived openness (Mahmoudi Darani et al., 2024). Security and national stability are also repeatedly identified as pivotal variables for tourism growth, as tourism can both contribute to national security through development and be constrained by security concerns and risk perceptions (Mogharpak & Ghorbani, 2018). At the destination scale, urban symbols and built-environment elements can function as cultural signifiers that enhance place identity and experiential quality, thereby supporting tourism development through the strategic design of urban spaces and symbolic landscapes (Mandani Pour & Heydari, 2024). Cultural preservation and architectural integrity are similarly relevant in areas where tourism development pressures may threaten local identity; desert-region studies underscore the need for design solutions that balance tourism accommodation needs with the conservation of local architectural character (Saqelani, 2024). Extending this line of inquiry, strategy-focused research highlights that policies for tourism accommodation development can produce economic and physical impacts, implying that destination design choices are simultaneously cultural decisions and development interventions (Saqelani, 2025). Within niche segments, memorial tourism research suggests that tourism development in Iran may be influenced by distinctive cultural meanings and commemorative practices, further

supporting the claim that cultural logics can organize demand and destination positioning (Javan & Mohammadi, 2025). In rural and community-oriented contexts, research on social capital indicates that networks of trust, participation, and collective efficacy may strengthen sustainable rural tourism development by facilitating collaboration and lowering transaction costs among stakeholders (Zarei, 2025).

At the same time, contemporary tourism development is increasingly shaped by service quality management and digital communication ecosystems, both of which are directly relevant to tourism culture and destination competitiveness. Service quality research indicates that perceived quality can affect tourist attraction and loyalty, making operational performance in hospitality firms a strategic lever for destination-level outcomes (Ashourzadeh & Noori, 2024). Digital platforms now mediate information search, destination image, and social validation processes; evidence from Instagram-focused research in Iran suggests that social media can attract tourists through socio-cultural mechanisms such as lifestyle signaling, narrative dissemination, and peer influence (Enahari, 2024). Beyond marketing, technology and ICT can influence tourism development through productivity effects, innovation diffusion, and complementarities with renewable energy and sustainability agendas, as demonstrated in multi-country analyses (Bano et al., 2022). Macro-empirical work also links international tourism development to economic growth, indicating that tourism can function as a growth engine under certain structural conditions, while still remaining sensitive to governance quality and market shocks (Wu et al., 2022). These dynamics imply that a comprehensive model of tourism culture development must account for both “hard” drivers (security, policy, investment, service systems) and “soft” drivers (social capital, cultural meanings, communication norms), especially in destinations where external perceptions and internal socio-cultural alignments jointly determine tourism trajectories.

Conceptually, the evolution of tourism scholarship supports the need for integrative frameworks that bridge planning models, socio-cultural theory, and managerial decision-making. Work on the conceptual system of tourism emphasizes that tourism is a complex conceptual field with multiple interacting subsystems, and that analytical clarity requires mapping how core constructs relate to each other across disciplinary boundaries (Briones et al., 2009). Tourism sociology similarly warns against reducing tourism to purely economic indicators, highlighting that tourism

cultures are co-produced through encounters, representations, and institutional practices that shape both visitor gaze and host responses (Sharpley, 2018). Tourism geography complements this by showing that spatial context, accessibility, and destination positioning structure the practical feasibility of development strategies (Williams, 2009). In parallel, inclusive tourism research underscores that development agendas must address accessibility and participation, because exclusionary infrastructures and services can constrain demand and undermine the ethical legitimacy of tourism growth (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020). Planning scholarship also points out that sustainability-oriented rural projects require careful early-stage governance to manage stakeholder expectations, sequencing, and institutional learning, otherwise projects may stall despite strong initial support (Mwesiumo et al., 2022). These literatures collectively suggest that tourism culture development should be treated as a strategic management problem: it involves shaping norms and experiences, coordinating stakeholders, allocating resources, and managing environmental and political constraints in a coherent system.

In light of these theoretical and empirical considerations, there is a clear need for research that identifies and prioritizes the social and cultural determinants of tourism culture development in Iran, particularly in border regions where tourism intersects with security, intercultural contact, mobility corridors, and place identity. Border destinations can exhibit unique tourism dynamics because they are spaces of intensified encounter, heightened risk perception, and rapid symbolic framing, making socio-cultural factors both highly consequential and difficult to manage through conventional infrastructure-only policies. Although existing studies have separately examined tourism management processes (Alvani & Pirouzbakh, 2006), policy implementation (Yuniarti et al., 2022), government roles (Liu et al., 2020), service quality and loyalty mechanisms (Ashourzadeh & Noori, 2024), digital attraction pathways (Enahari, 2024), social capital and sustainability (Zarei, 2025), cultural-social drivers (Makhsous et al., 2021), and security-related considerations (Mogharpak & Ghorbani, 2018), fewer studies have integrated these insights into a single prioritization framework focused on tourism culture development as an applied management objective in an Iranian border setting.

Accordingly, the aim of this study is to identify, analyze, and prioritize the social and cultural factors influencing the development of tourism culture in Iran, with a case focus on

border regions, in order to explain the gap between tourism potential and observed performance and to inform evidence-based policy and planning interventions.

## 2. Methods and Materials

In the quantitative phase, this study adopts a descriptive–survey design with a correlational approach. It is applied in purpose and is formulated within an explanatory–deductive research framework. The statistical population of this phase comprises all tourists visiting the border city of Bazargan, numbering more than 100,000 individuals. Based on the Morgan table, and considering a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, the sample size was calculated as 384 participants. The sampling method employed was simple random sampling. The data collection instrument in this phase was a researcher-developed questionnaire consisting of 52 items, which was designed and developed based on the findings of the qualitative phase and the results of interview coding. The questionnaire included two main sections: the first section contained four items related to demographic

information, and the second section consisted of 48 items measuring the independent and dependent variables of the study. To determine the validity of the research instrument, the content validity method was used. For this purpose, the designed questionnaire was evaluated by 10 subject-matter experts, and its content validity was confirmed through the calculation of the Content Validity Ratio (CVR). The mean CVR coefficient for the entire instrument was 0.851, indicating satisfactory validity. In addition, the reliability of the questionnaire was assessed by calculating Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for each component. The obtained values demonstrated acceptable reliability of the research instrument, as presented in Table 1. For the analysis of quantitative data, both descriptive statistical methods (including mean, median, mode, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage) and inferential statistical methods (including Pearson correlation coefficient to examine bivariate relationships and linear regression analysis to test multivariate hypotheses) were employed using appropriate statistical software.

**Table 1**

*Cronbach’s Alpha Results*

Variable	Cronbach’s Alpha
Tourism Propensity	0.846
Cultural Factors	0.791
Social Factors	0.889
Economic Factors	0.821
Safety and Security	0.793
Political Factors	0.931
Environmental Factors	0.853
Infrastructural Factors	0.861
Entrepreneurship	0.761

## 3. Findings and Results

This section analyzes the results derived from structural equation modeling and examines the effects of various dimensions on tourism propensity. The present data are the outcome of a multivariate regression analysis conducted using SPSS software, designed to assess the extent to which eight key factors influence tourism propensity. The analysis is presented in three main parts: first, the model summary,

which indicates the overall goodness of fit of the model; second, the analysis of variance (ANOVA), which evaluates the overall significance of the model; and third, the coefficients table, which specifies the contribution of each independent variable to predicting the dependent variable. The findings of this analysis can provide an effective roadmap for policymakers and planners in the tourism industry to prioritize the most influential factors affecting the development of this sector.

**Table 2**

*Model Summary*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.726a	0.527	0.517	2.49877

a. Entrepreneurship, safety and security, infrastructural factors, cultural factors, economic factors, environmental factors, political factors, social factors

Based on the results of the model summary table, the regression model including eight independent variables (cultural, social, economic, political, environmental, infrastructural, entrepreneurial, and security-related factors) is able to adequately explain the variance of the dependent variable (tourism development). The multiple correlation coefficient ( $R = 0.726$ ) indicates a strong and positive relationship between these factors and tourism development. The coefficient of determination ( $R^2 = 0.527$ ) shows that these eight factors collectively predict 52.7% of the

variance in tourism development. Moreover, the adjusted coefficient of determination (Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.517$ ), which accounts for the number of predictors in the model, remains relatively high and confirms that the model has satisfactory explanatory power. The standard error of the estimate (2.49877) reflects the precision of the model's predictions. Overall, these results indicate that the combination of these factors can be used as a robust model for analyzing and predicting tourism development.

**Table 3**

*ANOVA Results*

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	2606.216	8	325.827	52.184	0.000b
Residual	2341.445	375	6.244		
Total	4948.060	383			

a. Tourism propensity

b. Entrepreneurship, safety and security, infrastructural factors, cultural factors, economic factors, environmental factors, political factors, social factors

The results of the above table indicate the overall significance of the regression model ( $F = 52.184$ ;  $Sig. = 0.000$ ). This finding suggests that the combination of independent variables (cultural, social, economic, political, environmental, infrastructural, entrepreneurial, and security-related factors) is collectively capable of significantly predicting the dependent variable (tourism propensity). The

large F value and the significance level below 0.05 confirm that the variance explained by the model is substantially greater than the unexplained variance. This result is consistent with the coefficient of determination of 52.7% reported in the previous table and indicates an adequate model fit and a strong capacity to predict tourism propensity.

**Table 4**

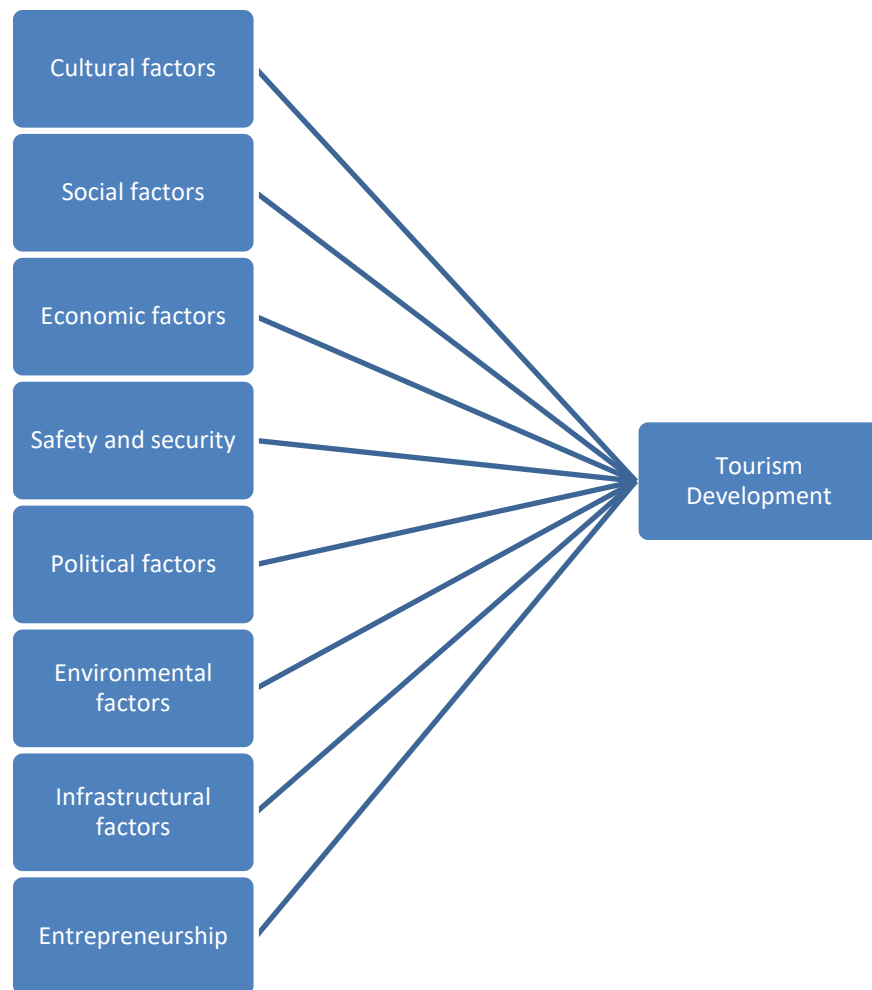
*Coefficients*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	8.750	0.776	—	11.273	0.000
Cultural factors	0.342	0.047	0.414	7.331	0.000
Social factors	0.105	0.033	0.174	3.214	0.001
Economic factors	0.215	0.057	0.172	3.784	0.000
Safety and security	0.834	0.100	0.404	8.376	0.000
Political factors	0.281	0.062	0.220	4.496	0.000
Environmental factors	0.089	0.058	0.075	1.542	0.124
Infrastructural factors	-0.074	0.067	-0.045	-1.110	0.268
Entrepreneurship	0.079	0.052	0.074	1.520	0.129

a. Tourism propensity

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Model*



The results of the coefficients table show that among the eight independent variables, five have a statistically significant effect on tourism propensity. Cultural factors, with a standardized coefficient (Beta = 0.414; Sig. = 0.000), represent the strongest positive predictor of tourism propensity. They are followed by political factors (Beta = 0.220; Sig. = 0.000), economic factors (Beta = 0.172; Sig. = 0.000), and social factors (Beta = 0.174; Sig. = 0.000), respectively. In addition, safety and security demonstrate a strong and statistically significant positive effect on tourism propensity (Beta = 0.404; Sig. = 0.000). In contrast, the three variables of environmental factors (Sig. = 0.124), infrastructural factors (Sig. = 0.268), and entrepreneurship (Sig. = 0.129) do not show statistical significance. The constant term of the model (8.750) is also statistically significant (Sig. = 0.000). These findings indicate that improvements in cultural, political, economic, and social

factors, as well as safety and security, can significantly increase tourism propensity.

From a sociological perspective, the results of the multivariate regression analysis reveal a “structural hierarchy influencing tourism-related action” within Iranian society. The coefficient of determination of 52.7% indicates that tourism development in Iran is only partially explained by objective and measurable variables, while a substantial proportion of the variance (47.3%) is accounted for by “invisible” sociological factors such as symbolic capital, the tourism field, and fields of power.

Based on Pierre Bourdieu’s field theory (Bourdieu, 1986), the strong effect of cultural factors suggests that tourism in Iran is more of a “cultural action” than a purely “economic action.” This finding implies that individuals select tourism destinations not merely based on economic utility, but according to their “symbolic status” and “cultural

capital.” In other words, tourism has become a field for displaying cultural distinctions and social positioning.

The significant impact of political factors can be interpreted within the framework of the theory of the “centralized state” in Iran. This result indicates that tourism-related action is largely influenced by governmental “soft power” and macro-level policymaking. In other words, tourism in Iran is highly politicized and dependent on power relations.

From the perspective of structural functionalism, the simultaneous influence of social and economic factors reflects a state of “functional equilibrium” among different social systems. This finding suggests that tourism development requires coordination among the “cultural system” (value transmission), the “social system” (social integration), and the “economic system” (resource provision).

A noteworthy sociological point is the strong effect of safety and security, which can be analyzed through Anthony Giddens’s theory of trust (Giddens, 1990). In modern societies, security is a fundamental precondition for the formation of “systemic trust.” This result indicates that in the absence of security, other forms of capital (cultural, economic, and social) are unable to organize tourism-related action.

The lack of significance of infrastructural, environmental, and entrepreneurial factors can be interpreted as an indicator of the “absence of instrumental rationality” in Iran’s tourism development. This suggests that within the Iranian tourism field, “symbolic logic” predominates over “instrumental logic,” and objective and technical factors receive less attention from social actors.

Overall, these results indicate that tourism in Iran, as a complex “social practice,” is shaped by the dynamic interaction of multiple fields of power, culture, and economy. To fully understand this phenomenon, it must be analyzed within the framework of the prevailing “structural relations” in Iranian society and the “symbolic hierarchies” that shape social action.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the present study demonstrate that tourism development in the studied context is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by the interaction of cultural, social, political, economic, and security-related factors, while infrastructural, environmental, and entrepreneurial variables played a comparatively weaker

role. The regression results showed that cultural factors were the strongest predictor of tourism propensity, a finding that aligns closely with sociocultural theories of tourism emphasizing meaning-making, identity, and symbolic value in travel behavior. This result is consistent with the notion of tourism as a cultural practice rather than merely an economic activity, as articulated in classic and contemporary tourism theory, where destinations are consumed through narratives, images, and symbolic representations rather than only through cost–benefit calculations (Sharpley, 2018; Urry & Larsen, 2011). Empirical studies have similarly highlighted the centrality of cultural capital, heritage, local traditions, and destination image in shaping tourists’ motivations and preferences (Haj Ali Akbari et al., 2022; Makhsous et al., 2021; Mandani Pour & Heydari, 2024). The strong effect of cultural factors observed in this study also corresponds with research emphasizing the role of socio-cultural attractiveness and authenticity in enhancing tourists’ emotional attachment and destination loyalty (Ashourzadeh & Noori, 2024; Tosun et al., 2021).

Political factors emerged as another significant predictor of tourism propensity, underscoring the role of governance, policy stability, and macro-level decision-making in shaping tourism flows. This finding is in line with studies that conceptualize tourism development as deeply embedded in state capacity, policy coherence, and international relations. In contexts where tourism is sensitive to geopolitical conditions, visa regimes, diplomatic relations, and national image, political stability and effective governance can significantly enhance or constrain tourism demand (Hall & Page, 2020; Liu et al., 2020). Previous research has shown that governments play a critical role in enabling tourism development through strategic planning, regulatory frameworks, and investment in destination branding (Getz, 1986; Gunn, 2002; Yuniarti et al., 2022). Moreover, studies focusing on soft power have demonstrated that political narratives, international perceptions, and cultural diplomacy directly influence foreign tourists’ willingness to travel (Javan & Mohammadi, 2025; Mahmoudi Darani et al., 2024). The significance of political factors in this study therefore reflects the broader reality that tourism is not politically neutral but is shaped by power relations and governance structures.

Economic factors also showed a statistically significant positive effect on tourism propensity, although their influence was weaker than that of cultural and political variables. This finding supports the established literature linking tourism development with economic conditions such

as income levels, price competitiveness, exchange rates, and employment opportunities (Ridderstaat et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2022). At the same time, the relatively moderate effect size suggests that economic incentives alone are insufficient to drive tourism demand in the absence of favorable cultural and political contexts. This result resonates with studies arguing that while economic growth and tourism development are mutually reinforcing, the relationship is mediated by social and institutional factors (León-Gómez et al., 2021; Streimikiene et al., 2021). Research conducted in developing and emerging economies similarly indicates that economic capacity must be complemented by destination attractiveness, governance quality, and social acceptance to translate into sustainable tourism outcomes (Bano et al., 2022; Mubinova, 2020).

Social factors were also found to have a significant effect on tourism propensity, highlighting the importance of social capital, community attitudes, and host–guest interactions. This finding aligns with a growing body of research emphasizing residents’ perceptions, social cohesion, and community support as key determinants of tourism success (Gannon et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). Tourism development that is perceived as socially inclusive and beneficial is more likely to generate positive attitudes among local communities, which in turn enhances tourists’ experiences and destination reputation (Zarei, 2025). Studies focusing on intercultural communication further suggest that social openness, tolerance, and effective interaction between hosts and visitors play a crucial role in shaping tourist satisfaction and repeat visitation (Babb, 2011; Jabari & Jafari Haftkhan, 2024). The present findings reinforce the argument that tourism is a relational process embedded in social structures rather than a purely transactional exchange.

One of the most notable results of this study is the strong and statistically significant effect of safety and security on tourism propensity. This finding is consistent with extensive research identifying security as a fundamental prerequisite for tourism development, particularly in regions perceived as politically or socially sensitive. Prior studies have demonstrated that perceptions of safety influence destination choice, length of stay, and expenditure patterns, often outweighing economic considerations (Hall & Page, 2020; Mogharpak & Ghorbani, 2018). The centrality of security observed in this study supports the argument that trust and risk perception are core elements of modern tourism behavior, as tourists seek environments that offer predictability and protection from physical and symbolic threats (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Empirical evidence from

various contexts confirms that even destinations with rich cultural and natural assets struggle to attract tourists when safety concerns dominate media narratives and public discourse (Rej et al., 2022; Varnajot & Saarinen, 2021).

In contrast, infrastructural, environmental, and entrepreneurial factors did not show statistically significant effects in the regression model. This finding does not imply that these factors are unimportant, but rather suggests that they may operate indirectly or be taken for granted by tourists once a basic threshold is met. Infrastructural adequacy, such as transportation, accommodation, and basic services, may function as a necessary but not sufficient condition for tourism development, becoming salient only when deficiencies are severe (Kazemi, 2006; Leiper, 2004). Similarly, environmental factors may influence tourism more strongly in contexts where nature-based or ecotourism is the primary attraction, whereas in culturally oriented destinations their effect may be mediated by cultural narratives and symbolic meanings (Holden, 2000; Zhang, 2021). The non-significant effect of entrepreneurship may reflect structural constraints in the tourism system, where individual entrepreneurial initiatives are limited by regulatory, financial, or political barriers (Saqelani, 2024, 2025).

Overall, the findings suggest that tourism development should be understood as a complex social system in which cultural meanings, political structures, economic conditions, social relations, and security considerations interact dynamically. This perspective is consistent with systems-based approaches to tourism that emphasize interdependence among multiple subsystems rather than linear cause–effect relationships (Briones et al., 2009; Leiper, 1990). The results also reinforce contemporary critiques of purely technocratic or infrastructure-driven tourism planning, highlighting the need to account for symbolic, social, and political dimensions in policy design (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020; Williams, 2009). By situating tourism within broader social and institutional contexts, the study contributes to a more holistic understanding of tourism development and its determinants.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal inferences about the relationships between the examined factors and tourism propensity. Second, the reliance on self-reported survey data may introduce response bias, particularly in relation to perceptions of cultural and political factors. Third, the study focused on a specific geographical and social

context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions with different institutional and cultural characteristics. Finally, qualitative dimensions of tourists' experiences and meanings were not explored in depth, which may have constrained the interpretive richness of the results.

Future studies could address these limitations by adopting longitudinal designs to examine how changes in political, social, and cultural conditions influence tourism development over time. Mixed-methods approaches combining quantitative modeling with in-depth qualitative interviews could provide deeper insights into tourists' motivations and meaning-making processes. Comparative studies across different regions or countries would also help clarify the contextual specificity of the findings and identify universal versus context-dependent drivers of tourism development. Additionally, future research could explore the mediating and moderating roles of infrastructure, environment, and entrepreneurship to better understand their indirect effects within the tourism system.

From a practical perspective, policymakers and tourism planners should prioritize cultural development, social engagement, political stability, and security enhancement as core components of tourism strategies. Efforts to strengthen destination narratives, protect and promote cultural heritage, and foster positive host–guest interactions can significantly enhance tourism attractiveness. Transparent and coherent governance, coupled with effective communication of safety measures, can build trust among potential tourists. At the same time, infrastructure and environmental management should be integrated into broader cultural and social frameworks rather than treated as isolated technical issues. By adopting a holistic and context-sensitive approach, practitioners can design more resilient and sustainable tourism development strategies.

### Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

### Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

### Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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### Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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### Ethics Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were considered.

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