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**Challenges and Opportunities in Tourism
development in Isfahan, Iran.**

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to study

"Tourism development" refers to the process of planning, promoting and managing the growth of the tourism industry in a specific area. It involves the development of infrastructure and services to support the increasing number of tourists, as well as the preservation of natural and cultural resources. The goal of tourism development is to create a sustainable industry that benefits both the local community and visitors. This can include job creation, economic growth, and the protection of the environment (Aminifard et al, 2013).

Isfahan is a city in central Iran that is known for its historical and cultural heritage. It was once the capital of the Persian Empire and is home to many historical landmarks such as the Naghsh-e Jahan Square, the Imam Mosque, and the Chehel Sotoun Palace (Besalatpour et al, 2020). The city is also known for its traditional Persian architecture and its intricate tile work. As a result, tourism in Isfahan is a significant industry and a major source of revenue for the city. Visitors from around the world come to Isfahan to experience its rich history and culture, as well as to see its beautiful monuments and buildings. In recent years, the tourism industry in Isfahan has been growing, with an increasing number of tourists visiting the city each year.

- In 2016, the number of tourists increased to around 3.6 million.
- In 2017, it was approximately 4.3 million.
- In 2018, the number of tourists visiting Isfahan was around 5 million.
- In 2019, the city welcomed approximately 5.5 million tourists.

Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism numbers for 2020 and 2021 have been significantly impacted, and up-to-date figures are not available.

Hateftabar & Chapuis, (2020) state that tourism development in Isfahan has been a priority in recent years, as the city has a rich cultural and historical heritage that can attract a large number of tourists. The government and local authorities have been working to improve the infrastructure and services to support the growing tourism industry. One of the key areas of focus has been the development of accommodation, such as hotels and guesthouses, to meet the needs of tourists. Additionally, transportation infrastructure, such as airports and public transport, has been improved to make it easier for visitors to reach Isfahan and move around the city. Efforts have also been made to promote Isfahan as a tourist destination, through marketing and advertising campaigns, as well as by participating in international tourism fairs.

1.2 Research problem substantiation

This research problem explores the effects of political sanctions on the tourism industry in Isfahan, which is a popular tourist destination in Iran. The study also examines how the sanctions affect the number of tourists visiting Isfahan, the types of tourists who are more likely to be deterred by the sanctions, and the economic implications of reduced tourism revenue for the local economy. Some of the implications that will be substantiated in the context of tourism in Isfahan include:

- *Understanding the current level of tourism in Isfahan:* research will be conducted to analyze the number of tourists visiting Isfahan, their demographics, and the reasons for their visit. This would provide insight into the current state of the tourism industry in Isfahan and help to identify areas for growth.
- *Assessing the impact of tourism on the local economy:* Research will be conducted to evaluate the economic impact of tourism on the local community, including job creation, income generation, and business growth. This would provide insight into the benefits of tourism for the local community and help to identify areas for improvement.
- *Evaluating the quality of tourism infrastructure and services:* Research will be conducted to assess the quality of tourism infrastructure and services in Isfahan, such as accommodation, transportation, and visitor attractions. This would provide insight into the areas of the industry that are functioning well and those that need improvement.
- *Examining the impact of tourism on the city's cultural heritage:* Research will be conducted to evaluate the impact of tourism on the city's cultural heritage, including the preservation and conservation of historical landmarks and buildings, and the impact on local communities.
- *Examining the effectiveness of tourism marketing and promotion strategies:* Research will be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of marketing and promotion strategies used to attract tourists to Isfahan, and to suggest new strategies that will be more effective in promoting the city as a tourist destination.

Babayan (2021) writes that economic sanctions can have a significant impact on tourism, as they can make it more difficult for tourists to travel to and within a country. Economic sanctions can limit access to foreign currency, making it more expensive for tourists to visit the country. This can also make it difficult for local businesses to operate and lead to job losses in the tourism industry. Economic sanctions can also make it harder for airlines and travel companies to operate in the country, which can limit the availability of flights and make it more difficult for

tourists to get there. This can also lead to higher prices for airfare and accommodations, which can discourage tourists from visiting the country (Babayan, 2021).

1.3 Research objectives

O1: To indicate the potentials of the city of Isfahan for tourism development.

O2: To examine the challenges and opportunities in the tourism sector in Isfahan.

O3: To make recommendations on the opportunities and challenges that can aid in tourism development in Isfahan.

1.4 Research questions

Q1: To what extent do potential opportunities exist to aid tourism development in the city of Isfahan?

Q2: What challenges exist in Isfahan with regard to tourism development and what are the opportunities this area may benefit from within the said industry?

Q3: Is there evidence of necessary improvements to be made in the tourism sector in Isfahan?

1.5 Hypotheses

H1: There are potential opportunities which would be effective for tourism development in Isfahan.

H2: There are more challenges faced by the city of Isfahan in comparison to possible opportunities.

H3: It is necessary to invest in the tourism economy for development in Isfahan.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 introduction to literature review

This chapter will conduct an extensive review of the literature that exists in the field of opportunities and challenges in tourism development in Isfahan. A "literature review" is a comprehensive summary and critical evaluation of the existing research on a particular topic. Mansouri, (2022) states that the purpose of a literature review is to identify gaps in the current knowledge, identify key themes and trends, and provide a background and context for a specific research study. Literature reviews can be found in a variety of academic disciplines, including the social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences. Isfahan has a rich history in tourism that dates back centuries. The city's stunning architecture, beautiful gardens, and rich culture have attracted travelers from around the world for centuries. Here is a brief overview of Isfahan's history in tourism, with references to further reading:

1. The Safavid Era (1501-1736) During the Safavid era, Isfahan became the capital of Iran and a hub for art and culture. Many of the city's most famous landmarks, including the Naqsh-e Jahan Square, were built during this time. The city's rich history and beautiful architecture attracted travelers from all over the world. (Source: "Isfahan, Iran: A City of Historic Landmarks," Culture Trip, November 5, 2019).

2. The 20th Century In the 20th century, Isfahan continued to be a popular tourist destination. The city's designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979 further cemented its place as a must-see destination for travelers. (Source: "Iran: Isfahan – the hidden gem of Persia," The Guardian, June 7, 2018).

3. Contemporary Tourism Today, Isfahan remains one of the most popular tourist destinations in Iran. The city's beautiful mosques, palaces, and gardens continue to draw visitors from all over the world. Many travelers also come to Isfahan to experience its rich culture and history. In recent years, the city has also become popular among adventure tourists, with many visitors exploring the nearby deserts and mountains. (Source: "Isfahan, Iran: A City Steeped in Culture and History," Travel and Leisure, August 9, 2019).

Isfahan is one of the most visited cities in Iran and a popular destination for both domestic and international tourists. According to the Iranian Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization (ICHHTO), the number of foreign tourists visiting Isfahan increased by 66.5% in 2017 compared to the previous year (Mansouri, 2022). The city's attractions, including its historical monuments, gardens, and traditional bazaars, continue to draw visitors from around

the world. Recent studies have shown that Isfahan's tourism industry has been growing steadily in recent years. The city's tourism revenue reached over \$1 billion in 2019, making it one of the top earners in the country (Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, 2020). The growth of the tourism industry has also had a positive impact on the local economy, creating jobs and opportunities for small businesses.

study by Mansouri. (2022) examined the role of social media in promoting Isfahan as a cultural tourism destination. The study found that social media platforms such as Instagram and TripAdvisor have played a significant role in increasing the number of tourists to the city. This has resulted in an increase in tourist spending, which has had a positive impact on the local economy. However, it is important to note that tourism can also have negative impacts on the local economy. For example, tourism development can lead to the displacement of local residents and the loss of traditional industries.

According to Mansouri, (2022), conducting a literature review typically involves searching for and reviewing relevant articles, books, and other sources of information. It is important to use a variety of sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and gray literature such as government reports and conference proceedings (Mansouri, 2022). This literature review will be organized around key themes or topics related to tourism development in Isfahan, Iran, and will include an overview of the main findings and conclusions of the studies reviewed. It will also include a critical evaluation of the quality and relevance of the studies, as well as an assessment of the strengths and limitations of the existing research in the field of tourism development in Isfahan.

Ganji et al., (2020) are of the belief that economic sanctions can limit the ability of foreign companies to invest in the tourism industry in the country, which can make it harder for the industry to grow and develop. This can also lead to a decline in the quality of tourism infrastructure and services, which can further discourage tourists from visiting the country. Economic sanctions can also impact the reputation of a country as a tourist destination, as they may be associated with political instability or economic turmoil, which can lead to a decline in tourism as tourists may be hesitant to visit a country that is under economic sanctions (Ganji et al., 2020).

Ultimately, economic sanctions can have a negative impact on tourism by making it more difficult and more expensive for tourists to visit a country. This could result in job losses and

economic downturns in the tourism industry and have an effect on nearby communities whose livelihoods depend on tourism (Ganji et al., 2020).

This literature review will also identify gaps in the current knowledge and suggest areas for further research. It is an important step in this research process as it helps to provide a foundation for the research and to justify the need for the proposed study.

2.2 SWOT analysis of tourism development in Isfahan

A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis is a tool used to evaluate the internal and external factors that can impact the success of a project or business (Ganji et al., 2020). SWOT analysis is a commonly used strategic planning tool in business and organizational management. The term SWOT is an acronym for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. According to Porter, SWOT analysis is an effective technique that can be used to identify and evaluate the internal and external factors that impact an organization's performance and competitiveness (Porter, 1985).

The first quadrant of the SWOT analysis is strengths. This refers to the internal attributes or capabilities of an organization that give it an advantage over its competitors. Examples of strengths might include a strong brand, loyal customer base, efficient operations, or a skilled workforce. Identifying an organization's strengths can help it build on these advantages and leverage them to achieve success.

The second quadrant of the SWOT analysis is weaknesses. This refers to the internal attributes or capabilities that limit an organization's performance or put it at a disadvantage relative to its competitors. Examples of weaknesses might include poor management, low employee morale, outdated technology, or a weak financial position. Identifying an organization's weaknesses can help it address these issues and improve its overall performance.

The third quadrant of the SWOT analysis is opportunities. This refers to external factors or trends that could be leveraged to benefit an organization. Examples of opportunities might include emerging markets, changing consumer preferences, advancements in technology, or shifts in government policies. Identifying opportunities can help an organization focus its resources and efforts on areas with the potential for growth and success.

The fourth quadrant of the SWOT analysis is threats. This refers to external factors or trends that could pose a risk or threat to an organization's performance or competitiveness. Examples of threats might include economic downturns, new competitors, changing regulations, or shifts

in consumer preferences. Identifying threats can help an organization anticipate potential challenges and take steps to mitigate them.

The following paragraphs of this sub-chapter will identify and critically review the current state of tourism development in the city of Isfahan by adopting the above mentioned SWOT analysis.

Strengths:

The strengths of tourism development in Isfahan are based on a combination of factors, including its rich cultural heritage, unique architecture, and strategic location in central Iran. Here are some specific factors that contribute to the strength of tourism development in Isfahan:

Historical and Cultural Significance: Isfahan is home to numerous historical and cultural sites, including Naqsh-e Jahan Square, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the Jameh Mosque, which dates back to the 8th century. These sites attract tourists interested in history, architecture, and culture. (Source: "Isfahan, Iran: A City Steeped in Culture and History," Travel and Leisure, August 9, 2019).

Architectural Wonders: Isfahan is known for its unique architecture, which combines Persian and Islamic styles. The city's bridges, including the Khaju and Si-o-se Pol bridges, are also famous for their engineering and design. **Central Location:** Isfahan is located in central Iran, making it a strategic hub for transportation and commerce. This makes it easily accessible for tourists traveling within Iran or from neighboring countries. **Accommodation and Hospitality:** Isfahan has a range of accommodation options, including traditional guesthouses and modern hotels, to cater to different tastes and budgets. The hospitality of the local people is also a factor that attracts tourists to the city. **Culinary Experience:** Isfahan has a rich culinary tradition, with a variety of local dishes and sweets that are unique to the region. This provides tourists with an opportunity to explore the local cuisine and learn more about the culture.

These factors, along with other attractions and amenities, contribute to the strength of tourism development in Isfahan. However, it is important to note that there are also challenges associated with tourism development, such as balancing economic benefits with the preservation of cultural and natural resources, and ensuring the sustainability of the industry in the long term:

- Rich cultural and historical heritage, including UNESCO World Heritage sites such as Naqsh-e Jahan Square and the Jameh Mosque.
- Natural attractions, such as the Zayandeh River and nearby mountain ranges.
- Growing interest in eco-tourism and adventure tourism.
- Government investment in tourism infrastructure and services.

Isfahan has a rich cultural and historical heritage: Isfahan is home to many historical and cultural sites, such as the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Naqsh-e Jahan Square and the Jameh Mosque, as well as many other historical monuments and landmarks that are the main attraction for tourists (Mahmoodi et al., 2022).

Mahmoodi et al. (2022) further write that the city is also known for its natural beauty, with the Zayandeh River running through the city and nearby mountain ranges that provide opportunities for outdoor activities and eco-tourism. Also has a growing interest in eco-tourism and adventure tourism: Isfahan has many outdoor activities like hiking, skiing, bird watching, and mountain climbing, which are becoming more popular among tourists.

Heshmati et al., (2022). proves that there is also government investment in tourism infrastructure and services He further states that the government of Iran has recently announced plans to invest in the development of the tourism sector, including the construction of new hotels, and the promotion of the city as a destination for cultural and eco-tourism.

According to the Iran Cultural Heritage, Handcrafts, and Tourism Organization (ICHTO), Isfahan has a rich culinary heritage and is well known for its traditional dishes and sweets, which are a big draw for tourists (Heshmati et al., 2022). Furthermore, there is a growing access to other tourist destinations: Isfahan is located in the center of Iran, which makes it easy for tourists to visit other destinations in Iran, including Shiraz and Yazd Friendly and welcoming people: Isfahan is known for its friendly and welcoming culture which is a major factor in making tourists feel comfortable and safe during their visit (Heshmati et al., 2022).

Weaknesses:

Chapuis & Hateftabar, (2021) mention that some of the weaknesses in the development of Isfahan's tourism sector include: limited infrastructure and accommodation options: Isfahan lacks sufficient infrastructure and accommodation options to meet the demands of tourists. This can make it difficult for tourists to find suitable places to stay and move around the city. Limited marketing and promotion efforts: Isfahan has limited marketing and promotion efforts, which makes it difficult to attract tourists to the city.

Negative impact of political tensions and sanctions on the ability of international tourists to visit: Political tensions and sanctions can limit the ability of international tourists to visit Isfahan and other parts of Iran, which can affect tourism development in the city. There is also limited access to information and resources for tourists: Isfahan lacks sufficient information and resources for tourists, which can make it difficult for them to plan their visit and find the information they need (Chapuis & Hateftabar, 2021).

Lack of English-speaking guides and signage is also proven by literature: Isfahan lacks a sufficient number of English-speaking guides, and most of the signage in the city is in Persian, which can create difficulties for tourists who don't speak the language. Limited transportation options are also one of the main issues. (Chapuis & Hateftabar, 2021) The city lacks a comprehensive transportation system, which can make it difficult for tourists to move around the city. Limited nightlife and entertainment options include: Isfahan has limited nightlife and entertainment options, which can make it less attractive to some tourists. Limited online presence: Isfahan lacks sufficient online presence, which makes it difficult for tourists to find information about the city and plan their visit.

Opportunities:

- Development of new and innovative tourism products
- Cultural Festivals: Isfahan already has a rich cultural heritage, but the development of cultural festivals could further enhance its appeal to tourists. Festivals could be organized around themes such as music, dance, theater, and art, and could feature local and international performers.
- Eco-Tourism: Isfahan has several natural attractions, such as the Zayanderud River and the mountains surrounding the city. Eco-tourism products could be developed to provide tourists with opportunities for hiking, bird-watching, and other outdoor activities while promoting sustainable tourism practices.
- Culinary Tourism: Isfahan's culinary traditions are a unique aspect of its culture. Culinary tourism products could be developed to provide tourists with opportunities to learn about and sample local dishes and sweets. This could include food tours, cooking classes, and visits to local food markets.
- Adventure Tourism: Isfahan's strategic location and natural attractions provide opportunities for adventure tourism. Products could be developed around activities such as rock climbing, rafting, and paragliding.

- **MICE Tourism:** Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism is a growing industry in Iran, and Isfahan could develop its infrastructure to attract business travelers. This could include the development of conference facilities, exhibition centers, and business hotels. (Source: "Isfahan, Iran: A City Steeped in Culture and History," Travel and Leisure, August 9, 2019)

Shahbazi et al., (2017) agree that the development of new and innovative tourism products is prevalent: The city's rich history and cultural heritage provide a strong base for developing new and innovative tourism products, such as cultural and heritage tours, eco-tourism, adventure tourism and culinary tourism.

Growing domestic and international tourism markets: With the growing interest in travel, both domestically and internationally, there is an opportunity to attract more tourists to Isfahan.

Development of sustainable tourism practices: There is an opportunity to develop sustainable tourism practices such as the following to minimize the negative impact of tourism on the environment and local communities (Shahbazi et al., 2017).

- **Encouraging Eco-Friendly Transportation:** The use of bicycles, electric vehicles, and public transportation can reduce the carbon footprint of tourists and promote sustainable transportation practices in Isfahan.
- **Promoting Local Products and Services:** Encouraging tourists to use local products and services can promote sustainable economic development in Isfahan. This can include supporting local artisans, using local food and drink products, and staying in locally-owned accommodations.
- **Sustainable Accommodations:** Encouraging the development of sustainable accommodations, such as eco-lodges and green hotels, can promote sustainable tourism practices in Isfahan.
- **Waste Reduction and Recycling:** Implementing waste reduction and recycling programs can reduce the environmental impact of tourism in Isfahan. This can include providing recycling bins in tourist areas and encouraging tourists to reduce their use of single-use plastics.
- **Conservation of Natural Resources:** Protecting and conserving natural resources, such as water, energy, and biodiversity, can promote sustainable tourism practices in Isfahan. This can include measures such as water conservation programs, energy-efficient buildings, and sustainable land-use practices.

Cultural Heritage Preservation: Encouraging tourists to respect the cultural heritage of Isfahan can promote sustainable tourism practices. This can include providing educational materials about the cultural significance of local sites and encouraging responsible tourism practices, such as not littering or damaging historical sites.

Potential for partnerships with international tour operators and travel companies: There is an opportunity to form partnerships with international tour operators and travel companies to promote Isfahan as a tourist destination and attract more visitors. There is an opportunity to build new accommodations to meet the demands of tourists, including luxury and budget-friendly options.

Isfahan's local tourism authorities could collaborate with international tour operators to create unique and customized tourism packages for visitors. For instance, an international tour operator could work with local tour operators to develop tour packages that include visits to Isfahan's historical and cultural sites, as well as opportunities for visitors to experience local cuisine and participate in traditional cultural activities. The tour operator could also provide transportation and accommodation arrangements.

In exchange for promoting Isfahan as a tourism destination, the local tourism authorities could offer the international tour operator marketing support, such as providing high-quality images and videos of Isfahan's tourism attractions and offering discounts or incentives for tour operators that bring large groups of visitors to the city. The local tourism authorities could also provide training for local tour operators to ensure they meet international standards and are able to provide high-quality services to international visitors.

An increase in online presence is also alluded to by Rahimi & Barghi, (2020): There is an opportunity to increase the online presence of Isfahan, to make it easier for tourists to find information and plan their visit. There is an increase in English-speaking guides and signage and there is an opportunity to increase the number of English-speaking guides and signage in the city to make it more comfortable for tourists who don't speak Persian Literature also proves that there is an increase in transportation options: including public transportation and rental cars, to make it easier for tourists to move around the city. Increase in nightlife and entertainment options: There is an opportunity to increase the number of nightlife and entertainment options to make the city more attractive to tourists (Rahimi & Barghi, 2020).

Threats:

- Some potential threats to tourism development in Isfahan, Iran may include:
- Overcrowding and strain on infrastructure and resources.

- Damage to cultural and historical sites from tourism.
- Displacement of local residents and loss of community cohesion
- Dependence on a single industry and vulnerability to economic downturns.
- Loss of authenticity and cultural integrity due to commercialization.
- Environmental degradation caused by increased tourism activity.
- Competition from other tourist destinations in the region.
- Negative perceptions of Iran in the international community.
- Political tensions and sanctions that can limit the ability of international tourists to visit.
- Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism industry.

Identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of tourism development in Isfahan, it can help in creating a strategy to capitalize on strengths and opportunities, while addressing weaknesses and threats. This can help in making tourism development more sustainable and successful. (Source: "Isfahan, Iran: A City of Historic Landmarks," Culture Trip, November 5, 2019).

2.3 PESTEL analysis of tourism development in Isfahan

PESTEL analysis is a tool used to evaluate the external factors that can impact a business or industry. (Noroozi & Abassi, 2020) In the context of tourism development in Isfahan, Iran, the following factors would likely be considered:

Political

Iran has faced a number of political issues in recent years. Some of the most significant include:

1. Sanctions: Iran has been subject to international sanctions due to its nuclear program, which has limited its ability to trade and conduct business with other countries (Zangiabadi & Dadbood, 2019). These sanctions have also made it difficult for Iranians to access international markets and technology. The United States by way of example has had a contentious relationship with Iran for decades, and tensions have flared up at various points in recent years. The USA has imposed sanctions on Iran and has also engaged in military operations in the region.

Human rights: Iran has been criticized by international organizations and governments for its human rights record.

2. Political instability: Iran has a complex political system with multiple centers of power, which can lead to political instability. The country has also faced protests and civil unrest in recent years, primarily due to economic and political grievances. Including Iran's nuclear program has been a major source of tension and concern among world powers, who fear that Iran

could use its nuclear capabilities to produce weapons. (Nooripoor et al., 2020) These political issues have affected the country's economy, the ability to attract investment, and the ability to attract tourists, which in turn affects the tourism development in Isfahan.

Nooripoor et al., (2020) further state that the stability and policies of the Iranian government can affect the tourism industry in Isfahan. Sanctions and travel restrictions can make it difficult for tourists to visit. The political situation in Iran can have a significant impact on tourism development in Isfahan. Sanctions and travel restrictions imposed by other countries can make it difficult for tourists to visit Iran, which can negatively impact the tourism industry in Isfahan. Additionally, the Iranian government's policies and regulations related to tourism can also affect the industry (Zali et al., 2015). For example, if the government does not invest in tourism infrastructure or promote the city as a tourist destination, it can limit the growth of the tourism industry in Isfahan. Conversely, if the government actively supports tourism development in Isfahan, it can help attract more visitors to the city.

The government's stability and security of the country also play a big role in the tourism. If the country is facing political unrest or civil war, it can discourage tourists from visiting. Furthermore, if the security situation is uncertain or if there is a risk of terrorism, it can also deter tourists from visiting Isfahan. Therefore, it is important for the government to maintain a stable and secure environment, and to promote Isfahan as a tourist destination in order to attract visitors and support the growth of the tourism industry in the city (Zali et al., 2015).

Economic:

Heydari et al., (2018) state that Economic factors can have a significant impact on tourism development in Iran. A strong economy can support the growth of the tourism industry by providing funding for tourism infrastructure and marketing efforts. Additionally, a strong economy can attract investment in the tourism industry, which can lead to the development of new hotels, restaurants, and other tourism-related businesses.

Tourism can be an important source of revenue for Iran's economy. It can generate income through the sale of goods and services, such as hotel stays, meals, and tours, and create jobs in the tourism industry (Heydari et al., 2018). However, the economic sanctions, political issues, and security concerns have affected the tourism industry in Iran. The sanctions have made it difficult for tourists to visit Iran, and for Iranian businesses to trade with the outside world. Additionally, the sanctions have limited the ability of Iranian businesses to access international markets and technology, which has made it difficult for them to compete in the global tourism market (Rokni & Park, 2020).

The political issues and security concerns have also deterred tourists from visiting Iran. If the country is facing political instability or civil unrest, it can discourage tourists from visiting. Furthermore, if the security situation is uncertain or if there is a risk of terrorism, it can also deter tourists from visiting (Seyfi et al., 2018). Despite these challenges, this paper is of the view that Iran has seen a steady growth in tourism in recent years, mainly due to the country's rich culture and history. The government has also been promoting the country as a tourist destination, and there has been an increase in investment in the tourism industry. Therefore, the economy of Iran can benefit from tourism, but it needs to address the challenges it faces and improve the overall environment to attract more tourists and to support the growth of the tourism industry.

On the other hand, a weak economy can limit the growth of the tourism industry. For example, if there is not enough funding for tourism development projects, it can make it difficult to improve the infrastructure and attract more visitors. Additionally, if the economy is struggling and unemployment is high, it can be difficult for tourism-related businesses to stay afloat. Iran's economy has been facing many challenges, including inflation, high unemployment, and a shortage of foreign currency. The sanctions imposed on Iran due to its nuclear program have also affected the economy, as it has limited the country's ability to trade and conduct business with other countries. These economic issues have affected the country's ability to attract investment and tourism.

Therefore, improving the economic situation in Isfahan and in Iran as a whole is crucial for the development of tourism in Isfahan. This can be achieved by diversifying the economy, encouraging investment, and improving the business environment. Additionally, by promoting Isfahan as a tourist destination, it can bring in more revenue which can contribute to the overall economic growth and development of the city. The overall economic climate in Iran and the availability of funding for tourism development projects in Isfahan can impact the industry. (Source: "Isfahan, Iran: A City of Historic Landmarks," Culture Trip, November 5, 2019)

Sociocultural:

The culture and local customs in Isfahan can attract tourists, but they may also deter some visitors. The social impact of tourism development in Isfahan can be both positive and negative. On the positive side, tourism can bring economic benefits to the city and create jobs in the tourism industry. It can also help to preserve and promote the city's cultural heritage, as well as its natural beauty (Nooripoor et al., 2020).

On the other hand, tourism can also have negative social impacts. For example, it can lead to overcrowding and strain on local resources. It can also lead to a loss of traditional culture and customs, as well as displacement of local residents. In addition, tourism can also lead to the exploitation of local workers in the tourism industry, who may not be paid fair wages or given adequate benefits (Seyfi et al., 2018). Moreover, if not properly managed, tourism development can lead to the degradation of the city's natural and cultural heritage. This can happen if the tourist infrastructure, such as hotels and restaurants, are built in areas that were previously untouched, or if the local culture and customs are not respected (Seyfi et al., 2018).

Therefore, it is important for the city's government and the tourism industry to work together to ensure that the social impacts of tourism development are minimized, while the economic benefits are maximized. This can be achieved by implementing sustainable tourism practices, providing education and training to local residents and businesses, and involving the local community in the planning and management of tourism development.

Culture plays a significant role in tourism development in Isfahan. The city is known for its rich history and cultural heritage, which includes architectural masterpieces, such as the Naghsh-e Jahan Square, the Jameh Mosque, and the Chehel Sotoun Palace, and traditional handicrafts, such as Isfahan's famous hand-woven carpets and miniatures. These cultural assets can attract tourists to the city, and tourism can help to preserve and promote them.

However, tourism can also have negative impacts on Isfahan's culture. For example, if tourism development is not managed properly, it can lead to the commercialization of the city's cultural heritage. This can happen if traditional crafts and customs are not respected, or if the city's historical buildings and landmarks are turned into tourist attractions without proper regard for their cultural significance.

Literature proves that tourism development can also lead to the displacement of local residents and the loss of traditional ways of life. This can happen if the local culture is not respected, or if tourism development causes an increase in property prices, leading to the displacement of local residents. To minimize the negative impacts of tourism development on Isfahan's culture, it is important to involve the local community in the planning and management of tourism development. This can ensure that the local culture is respected and that the traditional ways of life are preserved. Additionally, it is important to establish guidelines and regulations to ensure that tourism development does not harm the city's cultural heritage (Seyfi et al., 2018).

Technological

Advancements in technology can make it easier for tourists to plan and book trips to Isfahan. Technology can have a significant impact on tourism development in Isfahan (Jokar & Ranjbar, 2017). Advancements in technology can make it easier for tourists to plan and book trips to the city, which can increase the number of visitors (Jokar & Ranjbar, 2017). For example, the widespread use of the internet and online booking platforms has made it easier for tourists to research and book travel arrangements, which can help to increase the number of visitors to Isfahan.

Technology can also enhance the overall tourist experience in Isfahan. For example, the use of mobile applications and GPS-enabled devices can provide tourists with information about the city's cultural heritage and landmarks, as well as help them navigate the city. Additionally, virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies can provide tourists with an immersive and interactive experience of the city's culture and history (Jokar & Ranjbar, 2017). On the other hand, over-reliance on technology can have negative impacts on tourism development in Isfahan. The overuse of technology can detract from the authenticity of the city's cultural heritage and traditional ways of life, which is one of the main reasons why tourists visit the city in the first place. Additionally, the use of technology can lead to a loss of personal interaction and human connection, which is an important aspect of the tourist experience.

Therefore, it is important to strike a balance between the use of technology and the preservation of Isfahan's cultural heritage and traditional ways of life. This can be achieved by involving the local community in the planning and management of tourism development, providing education and training to local residents and businesses, and establishing guidelines and regulations to ensure that tourism development does not harm the city's cultural heritage. Industry 4.0, also known as the fourth industrial revolution, is characterized by the integration of advanced technologies, such as the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), and big data, into traditional industries. These technologies can have a significant impact on the tourism industry in Isfahan.

For example, the use of IoT and big data can help to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of tourism operations. For example, the use of IoT devices can provide real-time data on tourist behavior, which can help to optimize pricing and marketing strategies. Big data can also be used to analyze customer behavior and preferences, which can help to improve the overall tourist experience.

Artificial intelligence (AI) can also play an important role in the tourism industry in Isfahan. For example, AI-powered Chatbot can be used to provide tourists with information and assistance 24/7. AI-powered virtual guides can also be used to provide tourists with an interactive and personalized experience. Additionally, AI can also help to improve the overall efficiency of the tourism industry by automating repetitive tasks.

Industry 4.0 can also help to improve the sustainability of tourism in Isfahan. For example, the use of IoT and big data can help to optimize energy consumption, reduce waste, and improve the overall environmental performance of the tourism industry (Momeni et al., 2018). However, it is important to keep in mind that the implementation of Industry 4.0 in tourism in Isfahan will require the investment in infrastructure and technology, as well as the development of new skills and capabilities among the tourism industry workers. It also raises concerns about the privacy, security, and ethical issues related to the usage of these technologies (Momeni et al., 2018).

Environmental:

Momeni et al., (2018) write that the natural beauty of Isfahan can attract tourists, but environmental concerns, such as air and water pollution, can also have an impact. Tourism development in Isfahan, Iran can also have positive effects on the environment. For example, sustainable tourism practices can help to conserve natural and cultural resources, and can also support local economies and communities. Additionally, ecotourism and adventure tourism can increase awareness and appreciation of the natural environment among visitors, which can lead to more conservation efforts.

Furthermore, sustainable tourism development in Isfahan can create job opportunities for local people, increasing their income and improving their livelihoods. Also, it can increase awareness and understanding of the environment among local people, and it can support the protection of natural and cultural resources. Well-planned and managed tourism development can provide financial resources for conservation and management of the natural and cultural resources, which can help to protect them for future generations to enjoy (Nazarian & Mokhtari, 2017). Overall, tourism development in Isfahan can have both positive and negative effects on the environment, but with proper planning and management, it can be a tool for conservation and sustainable development.

Isfahan, Iran is known for its rich cultural and natural resources, which play a significant role in tourism development. The city's historical and architectural heritage, including the famous Naghsh-e Jahan Square and the Si-o-se Pol bridge, as well as its natural resources such as the Zayandeh River and its surrounding gardens, are major attractions for tourists (Nazarian

&Mokhtari, 2017). The natural resources in Isfahan are interconnected with tourism development, as they provide the foundation for many of the tourism activities and experiences. For example, the Zayandeh River and its surrounding gardens are popular spots for sightseeing and leisure activities such as picnicking and boating. The natural resources also provide important ecological services, such as water supply, flood control and climate regulation, which are crucial for the overall wellbeing of the city and its inhabitants (Nasrollahi et al., 2017).

The natural resources of Isfahan have a cultural significance, as they have been shaped by human activity over the centuries. The traditional Persian gardens, for example, are a cultural heritage that reflect the aesthetic and philosophical values of the Persian culture, and are a major attraction for tourists. It is important for tourism development in Isfahan to be managed sustainably, taking into consideration the preservation of the natural resources (Nasrollahi et al., 2017). This can be achieved by implementing eco-friendly practices, promoting responsible tourism, and involving local communities in the development process. Isfahan, Iran is facing a number of environmental concerns related to tourism development and urbanization. Some of the main concerns include:

- Air pollution: Isfahan is known for its high levels of air pollution, which is caused by industrial activities and transportation. This can be a major health concern for tourists and residents alike.
- Water scarcity: The city is facing water scarcity due to the overuse of groundwater resources and the reduction of water flow in the Zayandeh River. This can have a negative impact on the environment and tourism activities that rely on the river.
- Loss of natural habitats: Urbanization and tourism development can lead to the destruction of natural habitats, such as wetlands and forests. This can have a negative impact on biodiversity and ecosystem services.
- Traffic congestion: Increased tourism can lead to increased traffic congestion in the city, which can have a negative impact on the environment and the quality of life for residents.
- Noise pollution: The high level of noise pollution caused by traffic and urbanization can negatively impact the overall experience of visitors to Isfahan and the quality of life for residents.
- Waste management: The lack of proper waste management systems in Isfahan can lead to environmental pollution and public health concerns, and can also negatively impact the city's tourism industry.

These environmental concerns need to be addressed in a comprehensive and sustainable manner, through the implementation of effective policies, regulations and plans, as well as the engagement of local communities and stakeholders in the decision-making process.

Legal:

Laws and regulations related to tourism in Isfahan, as well as international laws and restrictions, can affect the industry. In Iran, the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts is responsible for the development and regulation of the tourism industry. The ministry sets policies and regulations for the protection of cultural heritage sites, as well as for the development of tourism infrastructure and services (Jokar & Ranjbar, 2017).

Tourism businesses in Iran, such as hotels and tour operators, must be registered and licensed with the Ministry. They are also subject to regulations regarding safety, health, and environmental standards (Rajabi et al., 2015). This essay believes that Iranian laws also regulate the advertising and promotion of tourism services and products, to ensure that they are not misleading or deceptive. In addition, Iran has strict laws regarding the protection of cultural heritage sites, and tourism development must be in compliance with these laws in order to protect and preserve important cultural and historical monuments and sites. (Mehraliyev et al., 2020) In Iran, there are also some restrictions on tourism to certain areas and activities, such as to some border regions and certain cultural and historical sites, and also there are some visa restriction for some countries. It is important to mention Iran has strict laws that prohibit certain behaviors and activities (Tamadonfar, 2021). Some examples of these strict laws include:

- Alcohol consumption: The possession, sale, and consumption of alcohol is strictly prohibited in Iran, and violators can face severe punishments such as imprisonment or flogging.
- Drug offenses: Iran has strict laws against drug offenses, and the possession, sale, and use of drugs can result in severe punishments, including the death penalty.
- Dress code: Iran has strict dress code laws which require both men and women to dress modestly in public. Women are required to wear a headscarf and a long, loose-fitting coat known as a manteau, while men are expected to dress conservatively.
- Relationships and marriage: Iran has strict laws regarding relationships and marriage, particularly for women. For example, sex outside of marriage is illegal, and marriage laws are based on Islamic principles, which can place restrictions on the rights of women.

- Political activities: Iran has strict laws regarding political activities, and the government closely monitors and controls political opposition and dissent. Political gatherings, protests, and other forms of dissent are typically not allowed, and those who engage in such activities can face severe punishments such as imprisonment.
- Internet and Social Media: Iran has strict laws regarding internet usage and social media, and many websites and apps are blocked or heavily censored by the government.

The strict laws and regulations in Isfahan can have both negative and positive impacts on tourism. On the negative side, the strict laws and regulations can limit the types of activities that tourists can engage in while visiting Isfahan, such as the prohibition of alcohol consumption, which can be a concern for some travelers (Mehraliyev et al., 2020). Additionally, the strict dress code laws can make some tourists feel uncomfortable or unwelcome, and the restrictions on political activities and internet usage can limit the freedom of tourists to express themselves or access information.

On the positive side, the strict laws and regulations can help to preserve and protect the cultural heritage and historical sites in Isfahan, which is a major draw for tourists. Additionally, the strict laws and regulations can help to maintain a safe and orderly environment for tourists, which can enhance the overall tourism experience (Hallaj et al., 2022).

Another point to consider is that, in general, the tourism industry in Iran is underdeveloped, and the strict laws and regulations can deter some foreign investors and tourists from visiting Isfahan, which can have a negative impact on the local economy and employment opportunities. Furthermore, the country's political and economic situation and the international sanctions can also have an impact on the tourism industry in Isfahan (Tamadonfar, 2021).

2.4 Conclusion for literature review

Tourism development can have both positive and negative impacts on a destination, and careful planning and management is necessary to maximize the benefits and minimize the negative effects.

Isfahan is a city in Iran with a rich cultural heritage and many historical and architectural sites, making it a popular tourist destination. The city has been undergoing a process of tourism development in recent years, with the construction of new hotels, restaurants, and other tourism infrastructure. This can bring economic benefits to the city and its residents, such as increased

job opportunities and income. However, it can also lead to overcrowding, strain on local resources, and damage to the city's cultural heritage the literature was reviewed through the use of SWOT and PESTEL analyses of the city's tourism sector.

In the context of tourism development in Isfahan, a SWOT analysis could identify the following:

Strengths:

- Rich cultural heritage and historical sites
- Isfahan's infrastructure and accessibility is also a strength for tourism development.
- Attractive destination for cultural and heritage tourism

Weaknesses:

- Limited infrastructure for mass tourism
- Limited availability of accommodation and amenities
- Limited diversity in tourism offerings

Opportunities:

- Growing interest in cultural and heritage tourism
- Potential for sustainable tourism development
- Development of new tourism infrastructure

Threats:

- Overcrowding and strain on local resources
- Damage to cultural heritage
- Political instability and economic sanctions

A PESTLE analysis of tourism development in Isfahan could identify the following:

Political:

- Political stability and stability in the region
- Government policies and regulations affecting tourism development

Economic:

- Economic sanctions and their impact on tourism development
- Economic growth and potential for tourism development

Social:

- Demographics and cultural attitudes towards tourism
- Social and cultural impacts of tourism development

Technological:

- Advancements in technology and their impact on tourism development
- Impact of digital platforms on tourism development

Legal:

- Tourism laws and regulations
- Environmental and heritage protection laws

Environmental

- Climate and natural resources and their impact on tourism development
- Environmental sustainability and impact of tourism

Both SWOT and PESTLE analyses are useful tools for identifying the internal and external factors that may impact the success of tourism development in Isfahan, and can help to inform decision-making and planning for sustainable and responsible tourism in the city. Overall, Isfahan as a tourist destination has many positive aspects to offer, but it is also important to consider how to balance the benefits and drawbacks of tourism development in order to ensure sustainable and responsible tourism in the city.

3. METHODOLOGY AND MATERIALS

3.1 Research approach

This study will follow an inductive research approach. Inductive research is a method of inquiry that begins with specific observations and uses these observations to formulate a general theory or principle. This method is often used in the social sciences and involves the collection and analysis of data, leading to the formation of a hypothesis. The process of inductive research typically begins with the researcher observing a phenomenon and collecting data on it. This data is then analyzed to identify patterns and relationships. Based on these patterns and relationships, the researcher develops a hypothesis that explains the observations. The hypothesis is then tested through further research and data collection. (Schruijer, 2020.)

Inductive research is often used in exploratory studies where little is known about the research question. It allows the researcher to discover new knowledge and relationships that can be further investigated in future studies which is perfect for the nature of this research. Unlike deductive research, which starts with a preconceived hypothesis, inductive research allows the researcher to be open to new insights and discoveries that may emerge from the data. It also allows for flexibility in the research process, as the researcher can adjust the research question and methods based on what is learned through the data (Leavy, 2022).

Inductive research is useful when a researcher is trying to find general patterns in the data, or form theories that can explain the observations. It is also useful when the researcher is trying to find new information and knowledge, rather than test a pre-existing theory. This study therefore leaning on the above mentioned reasons will follow an inductive nature of study.

Deductive research approach will not be used in this study for the following reasons:

- Limited flexibility: Deductive research is less flexible than inductive research, as the researcher is working from a pre-existing hypothesis and may not be open to new insights or discoveries that emerge from the data.
- Lack of generalizability: Deductive research is often focused on testing a specific hypothesis, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other populations or settings.
- Hypothesis bias: The researcher may have a preconception of the outcome, which can lead to bias in data collection and analysis.

- Limited scope: Deductive research is often more narrow in scope than inductive research, as it is focused on testing a specific hypothesis rather than exploring a broad research question.
- Over-reliance on theory: Deductive research relies heavily on theory, and if the theory is not well-established or not applicable to the research question, the study may not produce meaningful results.
- Difficulty in dealing with complex issues: Deductive research is not well suited for complex and multifaceted phenomena, where data is not easily quantifiable and many variables are at play.

Overall, deductive research is useful for testing pre-existing theories and identifying cause-and-effect relationships, but it can be less flexible, less generalizable, and more prone to bias than inductive research and therefore will not be used in this research study.

3.2 Research methodological choice

3.2.1 Qualitative research

This study will adopt a qualitative research choice in the form of interviews that will be conducted through the guidance of a selection criteria. This criteria is 8 professionals across the spectrum of the tourism sector in Isfahan. Different educational backgrounds of these professionals is also part of the inclusion criteria in such that not only the highly educated people are interviewed. It will comprise of people who possess primary, secondary school as well as tertiary qualifications. Qualitative research is a method of inquiry that focuses on understanding and interpreting the meaning of social phenomena through the collection and analysis of non-numerical data, such as words, images, and observations. (Obloberdievna & Nematjonovna, 2022) This method is often used in the social sciences, including sociology, anthropology, and psychology, and is particularly useful for exploring complex and multifaceted phenomena. Specifically for purposes of study.

The process of qualitative research typically begins with the researcher developing a research question or topic of interest. (Chang et al., 2020) The author of this paper will then collect data through methods of interviews, focusing on groups and observations from hospitality professionals in the city of Isfahan and also relying on existing literature analysis. The data will be analyzed using techniques such as content analysis, discourse analysis, and grounded theory through google forms.

One of the main advantages of qualitative research is its flexibility. Qualitative research will allow the researcher of this paper to explore the topic in-depth and to adjust the research questions and methods based on what is learned through the data. It is also useful for understanding the perspectives and experiences of individuals and groups, and for uncovering the underlying meanings and motivations behind social phenomena.

However, literature proves that qualitative research also has some limitations. The results of qualitative research may not be generalizable to a larger population, as the data is often collected from a small sample of individuals or groups just as in this study. Also, the subjectivity of the researcher can be a limitation, as the interpretation of the data can be influenced by the researcher's own biases and perspectives (Kassam et al., 2020). Qualitative research will be a valuable method for understanding and interpreting the meaning of tourism development in Isfahan, never the less and will be appropriate for all research questions and will not be limited by subjectivity as the researcher will analyze it with the highest level possible of accuracy of answers and ethics.

3.2.2 Quantitative research

Quantitative research is a method of inquiry that uses numerical data and statistical analysis to understand and explain social phenomena. (Oduro, 2020) While this method can be useful for testing hypotheses, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, and making generalizations to a larger population, it also has some disadvantages.

- Limited flexibility: Quantitative research is often highly structured, with a pre-determined research question and methods, which can limit the researcher's ability to explore new insights or discoveries that emerge from the data.
- Reduction of complexity: Quantitative research often involves reducing complex phenomena to numerical data, which can simplify or ignore important aspects of the phenomenon being studied.
- Lack of understanding of context: Quantitative research often focuses on measuring specific variables, which can make it difficult to understand the context of the phenomenon being studied.
- Difficulty in dealing with subjective experiences: Quantitative research is not well-suited for studying subjective experiences, such as emotions and beliefs, as it relies heavily on numerical data.
- Limited sample size: The sample size of quantitative research is often limited, which may not be representative of the population being studied.

- Over-reliance on statistical tests: Quantitative research relies heavily on statistical tests, which can be affected by many factors, such as sample size and outliers, which can affect the validity of the findings.
- Possible researcher bias: The researcher may have a preconception of the outcome, which can lead to bias in data collection and analysis.

Overall, quantitative research is a valuable method for testing hypotheses, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, and making generalizations to a larger population, but it can be limited in its ability to explore complex and subjective phenomena, and its findings can be affected by researcher bias. And for these reasons this study will not conduct quantitative research. (Oduro, 2020).

3.3 Research strategy

This study will use semi-structured interviews to collect the imperical data of n=8 professionals in the tourism sector of Isfahan. Interviews are a common method of data collection in empirical research, particularly in the social sciences. Interviews can be conducted in person, over the phone, or online, and can be structured (with pre-determined questions) or unstructured (with open-ended questions). Interviews can provide in-depth, qualitative data that can be used to understand the perspectives, experiences, and motivations of individuals or groups (Patel et al., 2021).

This thesis believes that there are several advantages of using interviews in empirical research:

- In-depth data: Interviews allow the researcher to gather detailed, in-depth data on a topic, which can provide a rich understanding of the phenomenon being studied.
- Flexibility: Interviews can be structured or unstructured, which allows the researcher to adjust the questions and methods based on what is learned through the data.
- Understanding context: Interviews can provide information on the context of the phenomenon being studied, which can be important for understanding the meaning and significance of the data.
- Rich source of data: Interviews can provide a wealth of data, including the words, thoughts and feelings of the participants, which can be used to gain a deeper understanding of the research question.
- Study of subjective experiences: Interviews are particularly useful for studying subjective experiences, such as emotions and beliefs, as they allow the researcher to understand the personal perspective of the participants.

Finally, Interviews are a valuable method of data collection in empirical research, providing in-depth, qualitative data that can be used to understand the perspectives, experiences, and motivations of individuals or groups.

Not conducting interviews as part of this research study will have the following disadvantages:

- Lack of in-depth data: Interviews provide a valuable source of in-depth, qualitative data that can be used to understand the perspectives, experiences, and motivations of individuals or groups. Without interviews, the researcher may not be able to gain a complete understanding of the phenomenon being studied.
- Limited understanding of context: Without interviews, the researcher may not be able to fully understand the context of the phenomenon being studied, which can be important for understanding the meaning and significance of the data.
- Limited understanding of subjective experiences: Interviews are particularly useful for studying subjective experiences, such as emotions and beliefs. Without interviews, the researcher may not be able to fully understand the personal perspectives of the participants.
- Limited generalizability: Without interviews, the researcher may be limited to using quantitative data, which may not be representative of the population being studied. This can lead to limited generalizability of the findings.
- Lack of flexibility: Interviews allow the researcher to adjust the questions and methods based on what is learned through the data, which can be important for exploring new insights or discoveries that emerge from the data. Without interviews, the researcher may be limited in their ability to explore new insights or discoveries.
- Lack of rich source of data: Without interviews, the researcher may not be able to gain a wealth of data, including the words, thoughts and feelings of the participants, which can be used to gain a deeper understanding of the research question.

In summary, not conducting interviews as part of a research study can limit the researcher's ability to gain a complete understanding of the phenomenon being studied, particularly with regards to in-depth, subjective, and contextual information, which can lead to limited generalizability of the findings and lack of flexibility and richness of data and therefore this research paper will conduct interviews.

3.4 Data collection and analysis protocol

In qualitative research, data collection and analysis are closely linked and often occur simultaneously. The process of data collection typically begins with the researcher developing a research question or topic of interest (Mishra & Alok, 2022.). The researcher will collect data through interviews, focusing on 8 professionals in the tourism sector of Isfahan, observations, and document analysis. The data collected will be in the form of words, through the semi structure interview questions that will be sent via mail to the respondents by way of Google form. Once data is collected, it will be analyzed using various techniques such as content analysis, discourse analysis, and grounded theory. The purpose of analysis is to identify patterns and themes in the data, and to understand the perspectives and experiences of the 8 individuals.

1. Content analysis: This is a technique that involves systematically coding and categorizing data to identify patterns and themes.
2. Discourse analysis: This technique is used to analyze the language and discourse used in the data to understand how individuals or groups communicate and make meaning.
3. Grounded theory: This approach involves the researcher developing a theory that emerges from the data, rather than testing a pre-existing theory.

The analysis process is often interactive, meaning that the researcher may go back and forth between data collection and analysis, adjusting the research question and methods based on what is learned through the data.

It is important to note that in qualitative research, the researcher plays a more active role in the data collection and analysis process than in quantitative research. The researcher is responsible for interpreting the data and making sense of it, and the findings are often highly dependent on the researcher's own perspective and interpretation (Gupta & Gupta, 2022).

Overall, qualitative research relies on the collection and analysis of non-numerical data to understand and interpret the meaning of social phenomena. The data collection and analysis techniques used in qualitative research are flexible, and allow the researcher to explore complex and multifaceted phenomena in-depth questions and as such this study will interview n=8 professionals in tourism sector of Isfahan. This will comprise of restaurant supervisor, chef, food and beverage director tour leader, tour guide event manager marketing managers.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are a crucial aspect of qualitative data collection and analysis. (Wardenburg et al., 2020) The following are some ethical principles this paper will consider when conducting qualitative research:

1. **Informed consent:** Participants will be informed about the nature of the research, their rights as participants, and the potential risks and benefits of participating. They will also be given the opportunity to ask questions and to decline or withdraw from the research at any time without penalty.
2. **Confidentiality and anonymity:** Participants' identities and personal information will be protected and kept confidential. Any data that could potentially identify participants will be kept secure and not shared with any third parties without the participants' explicit consent.
3. **Respect for participants:** The researcher will always treat participants with respect, dignity, and fairness. They will be sensitive to the cultural and individual differences of the participants and respect their rights and privacy.
4. **Transparency and reflexivity:** The researcher will be transparent about their own biases and perspectives, and how these may influence the data collection and analysis process. They will also be reflexive, meaning that they will critically evaluate their own processes and methods throughout the research.
5. **Minimizing harm:** The researcher will take steps to minimize any potential harm to the participants, both physical and psychological. They will also have a plan in place to address any harm that may occur.
6. **Addressing power dynamics:** The researcher will be aware of and address any power imbalances that may exist between the researcher and the participants. This can include imbalances in race, class, gender, and other social characteristics.
7. **Data storage and dissemination:** The researcher will properly store and protect the data collected, and ensure that it is only used for the purposes for which it was collected. Any findings will be disseminated in an appropriate and responsible manner.

Overall, ethical considerations are a crucial aspect of qualitative research, and the researcher will take steps to ensure that the rights and well-being of the participants are protected throughout the data collection and analysis process the identity of the participants will not be disclosed.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction to chapter

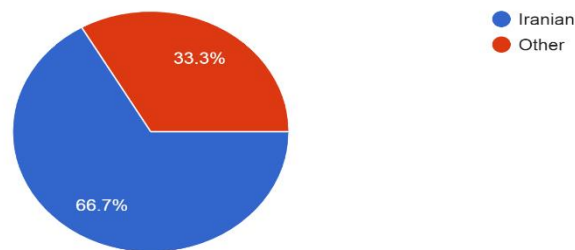
The Results and Analysis chapter will be a critical component of my thesis or dissertation. In this chapter, I will present and analyze the findings of my research. The purpose of this chapter will be to provide a clear, concise, and objective presentation of my data and to interpret the results of my research.

I will also to explain the significance of my findings and draw conclusions based on my analysis. Additionally, I will address any limitations of my research and suggest areas for future study. Overall, the Results and Analysis chapter will be a crucial part of my thesis or dissertation, as it will showcase the outcomes of my research and demonstrate my ability to analyze and interpret data.

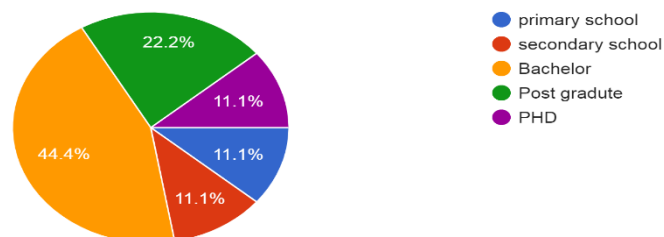
4.2 Sample Demographics

Below are charts demonstrating the demographics of the interviewed personnel during this study.

Please specify your nationality
9 responses

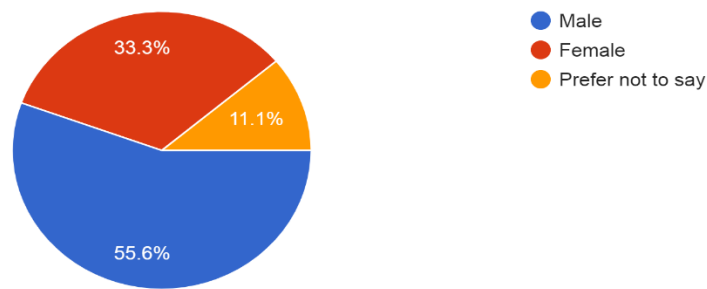


What is your level of education?
9 responses



Type of gender

9 responses



Analysis of demographics

The demographic analysis will show that 66 percent of the participants are expected to be Iranian, while 33 percent are expected to come from neighboring countries, which can be attributed to the impact of war and political instability on migration patterns.

The analysis of the education level of respondents is expected to show that the majority will have tertiary education, followed by those with secondary education. This trend may have an impact on employment levels in Isfahan, as there could be a greater demand for highly skilled workers and a potential oversupply of low-skilled workers. Further analysis will be required to understand the full extent of the impact and its implications for the local job market.

The analysis shows that there are more males than females in Iran, which indicates a gender inequality issue. This trend may be due to factors such as women oppression by laws and the interpretation of Islam religion in the country. It is crucial to examine the relationship between these factors and their impact on gender equality in Iran.

4.3 Questions posed to the respondents and their analysis

Q 1. How does Isfahan's tourism industry address and mitigate the negative impacts of tourism such as overcrowding and pollution?

First respondent

“I don't think that tourism in one place causes overcrowding. But it can be solved with proper management and timing in controlling the entry and exit of the population.”

Second respondent

“Brings awareness.”

Third Respondent

“With the development of urban transport infrastructures such as highways, bus stations, as well as the increase of urban and intercity buses.”

Fourth Respondent

“Public transport and concentrated hotels.”

Fifth Respondent

“It addresses it directly.”

Sixth Responded

“Sustainable tourism practices: Isfahan's tourism industry has started adopting sustainable tourism practices, such as reducing energy consumption, promoting eco-friendly transportation options, and encouraging visitors to behave responsibly and respect the local culture and environment.”

Seventh Responded

“I don't have enough information about it but I assume providing good facilities.”

Eighth Respondent

“Isfahan tourism industry should be managed by skilled specialists to mitigate the negative impacts”

Analysis

The responses suggest that Isfahan's tourism industry utilizes various strategies to address and mitigate the negative impacts of tourism, such as overcrowding and pollution. One respondent believes that proper management and timing in controlling the entry and exit of the population can solve the issue of overcrowding. Another respondent suggests that bringing awareness can help in this regard. The development of urban transport infrastructures such as highways, bus stations, as well as the increase of urban and intercity buses, can also mitigate the negative impacts of tourism, according to a third respondent. The fourth respondent suggests that public transport and concentrated hotels can be effective in addressing these issues.

The fifth respondent believes that the tourism industry directly addresses the negative impacts of tourism. On the other hand, , with the sixth respondent the adoption of sustainable tourism practices is an essential component of responsible tourism development, and it is commendable that Isfahan's tourism industry has taken steps towards incorporating these practices. These efforts not only benefit the environment and local communities but also contribute to the long-term sustainability of Isfahan's tourism industry and the seventh respondent stating they should provide better facilities to manage that.

Overall, the eighth respondent suggests that Isfahan's tourism industry should be managed by skilled specialists to mitigate the negative impacts of tourism effectively. These responses demonstrate that Isfahan's tourism industry employs a variety of strategies to address and mitigate the negative impacts of tourism, and there is potential for further improvement with skilled management and planning.

Q 2. What measures is the city of Isfahan taking to ensure that tourism development does not harm the environment or local culture?

First Respondent

“In my opinion, throughout history, humans have influenced each other, and this is inevitable because humans live side by side with interaction.”

Second Respondent

“Public transport”

Third Respondent

“By investing in cultural and tourist sectors and creating accommodations in small tourist villages and towns such as Abyaneh”

Fourth Respondent

“Setting a limiting rules and specifying a certain tourist capacity. For instance the maximum allowed people visiting the traditional buildings.”

Fifth Respondent

“Filtration.”

Sixth Respondent

“Better tourism destination management”

Seventh Respondent

“Tourism development with principled and systematic management doesn’t harm the environment or local culture.”

Eight Respondent

“Providing effective plan to control the tourism population and informing tourism how can be more conservative against environment moreover provides high quality education systems would be useful to manage issues related to environmental and cultural issues.”

Analysis

The responses suggest that the city of Isfahan is taking various measures to ensure that tourism development does not harm the environment or local culture. However, some responses provided little or no detail on the specific measures taken.

One respondent believes that humans have influenced each other throughout history, and interaction is inevitable. Another respondent suggests that public transport can help minimize the negative impacts of tourism. A third respondent suggests that investing in cultural and tourist sectors and creating accommodations in small tourist villages and towns, such as Abyaneh, can be effective in this regard. The fourth respondent suggests setting limiting rules and specifying a certain tourist capacity, such as the maximum allowed number of people visiting traditional buildings.

The fifth respondent suggests that filtration can help mitigate the negative impacts of tourism. The sixth respondent believes that better tourism destination management can help address these issues. The seventh respondent suggests that tourism development with principled and systematic management does not harm the environment or local culture.

Finally, the eighth respondent suggests that providing an effective plan to control the tourism population, informing tourists on how to be more conservative towards the environment, and providing high-quality education systems would be useful in managing issues related to environmental and cultural impacts. These responses demonstrate that the city of Isfahan is employing various measures to ensure that tourism development does not harm the environment or local culture. However, some of the responses lack detail on specific measures, and there may be room for improvement with more effective planning and management.

Q 3. What challenges exist in Isfahan with regard to tourism development and what are the opportunities this area may benefit from within the said industry?

First Respondent

“The biggest challenges for tourists when visiting Iran are the mandatory hijab, the prohibition of alcoholic beverages, the lack of clubs and the restriction of the Internet, which discourages them from having the experience of visiting Iran.”

Second Respondent

“The tourist spends money to have fun and enjoy, not to be limited.”

Third Respondent

“Safety and freedom.”

Fourth Respondent

“Existence of cumbersome Islamic laws.”

Fifth Respondent

“Like other cities in Iran, there are basically politic problems and environmental issues in Isfahan. The most important one is drought of Zayanderood.”

Sixth Respondent

“Iran’s image in the media isn’t the greatest, you can only hear about terrorists and radical Arab Muslims which is not helping the tourism in Isfahan. The city could benefit from tourism by opening more hotels and restaurants which would provide more jobs for the locals.”

Seventh Respondent

“Challenges such as mandatory wearing hijab for women, no alcohol drinks, no safety because of negative news about safety in Iran”

Eight Respondent

“The most important challenge is lack of management.”

Analysis

The responses suggest that there are several challenges that exist in Isfahan with regards to tourism development, and there are opportunities for the area to benefit from within the tourism industry.

One of the challenges that respondents mention is the mandatory hijab, the prohibition of alcoholic beverages, and the restriction of the Internet, which can discourage tourists from visiting Iran. Another challenge is the limitation of tourist activities, which can limit their experience and enjoyment. Respondents also mention safety and freedom as critical challenges in tourism development.

Islamic laws are another challenge that respondents mention, and one respondent specifically cites a lack of management as a significant challenge for tourism development in Isfahan.

Respondents also note some opportunities for Isfahan to benefit from within the tourism industry. One respondent suggests that the city could benefit from tourism by opening more hotels and restaurants, which would provide more jobs for locals. However, this opportunity must be balanced with the challenge of the negative image of Iran in the media.

In summary, the responses suggest that there are various challenges facing tourism development in Isfahan, including restrictions on personal freedom, safety concerns, Islamic laws, and a lack of management. Despite these challenges, there are opportunities for the area to benefit from within the tourism industry by opening more hotels and restaurants and providing more jobs for the locals.

Q 4. Is the evidence of necessary improvements to be made in the tourism sector in Isfahan?

First Respondent

“No, unfortunately, every day we see a decrease in tourists from this beautiful city.”

Second Respondent

“No, because the government's goal in recent years has not focused on tourism.”

Third Respondent

“Of course, with such a high potential tourism development in Isfahan would be a considerable income source.”

Fourth Respondent

“Unfortunately the situation of my country is getting worse every day so I don't see any improvement to mention.”

Fifth Respondent

“It's a really crucial element because Isfahan has lots of potential to attract tourists but the government doesn't want to change their policy on this issue. Unfortunately it seems not to work.”

Sixth Respondent

“Yes there is always room for improvement in any industry, including the tourism sector in Isfahan”

Seventh Respondent

“Not now due to strictness and religiousness government of Iran”

Eight Respondent

“The legal system”

Analysis

Based on the responses, there seems to be mixed opinions on the necessary improvements in the tourism sector in Isfahan. Some respondents express a sense of pessimism, with one saying that there is a decrease in tourists visiting the city and another saying that the situation in the country is getting worse every day.

However, there are also those who believe that Isfahan has a high potential for tourism development and that it can be a considerable source of income for the city. One respondent even mentions that it is a crucial element for the city.

There seems to be a general consensus that the government's policy towards tourism is hindering its potential for growth. Some respondents express that the government's focus has not been on tourism in recent years and that their policies need to change.

Overall, while there may be some differing opinions on the matter, the general sentiment is that there is room for improvement in the tourism sector in Isfahan, particularly in terms of government policies and support.

Q 5. Please explain any strict regulations that may prevent tourists from visiting Isfahan.

First Respondent

- “Mandatory hijab
- Prohibition of drinking alcohol
- Absence of clubs and discos
- Limited internet”

Second Respondent

“The younger generation might fear to act freely”

Third Respondent

“Islamic hijab for foreign tourists, the absence of prohibition of alcoholic beverages and in some places, men and women cannot be present together.”

Fourth Respondent

“In my opinion it is the compulsory Hijab and alcohol forbid.”

Fifth Respondent

“No direct flights, it’s not in a safe country, lack of advertisement about the city, no hotels can be found on booking.com”

Sixth Respondent

“There are some ridiculous rules for example women aren’t allowed to ride a bicycle”

Seventh Respondent

“Religion”

Eight Respondent

“One the most strict popular ones is hijab.”

Analysis

The respondents highlighted several strict regulations that may prevent tourists from visiting Isfahan. The most frequently mentioned regulation was the mandatory hijab for women, followed by the prohibition of alcohol and the absence of clubs and discos. Limited internet access and restrictions on the presence of men and women together in some places were also mentioned. Additionally, some respondents pointed out that the younger generation might fear to act freely due to social and cultural restrictions. One respondent highlighted the lack of advertisement about the city, while another mentioned the lack of direct flights and safety concerns. Finally, some respondents mentioned religion as a factor that may prevent tourists from visiting Isfahan, with the compulsory hijab being the most popular regulation.

Q 6. Are there any cultural or religious customs that tourists should be aware of when visiting Isfahan?

First Respondent

“No, there is not any important matter”

Second Respondent

“Definite Islamic culture”

Third Respondent

“Yes, according to the current governmental rules, the basics of Islamic wearing must be followed. Moreover the public culture still does not accept many freedoms of tourists”

Fourth Respondent

“One of them is azan, at noon you’ll heard a voice they called people to come to the mosque for pray.”

Fifth Respondent

“Yes, Islamic laws”

Sixth Respondent

“Yes they should wear hijab when they want to visit a mosque.”

Seventh Respondent

“Modest dresses are a must”

Eight Respondent

“It really depends on the region but they totally are religious”

Analysis

In analyzing the responses, it seems that there are some variations in the awareness and knowledge of cultural or religious customs that tourists should be aware of when visiting Isfahan. Some respondents believe that there are no important customs to consider, while others emphasize the need to follow Islamic dress codes and public culture. The azan, the Islamic call to prayer, is also mentioned as a custom that tourists may need to be aware of. Modest dress is mentioned by some respondents as a must, and wearing hijab when visiting mosques is also highlighted. Overall, the responses suggest that tourists should be aware of Islamic customs and dress codes when visiting Isfahan.

Q 7. Are there any guided tours or packages available for tourists interested in exploring Isfahan?

First Respondent

“Yes but I assume it would be better to pay attention more about it”

Second Respondent

“As I know there isn’t enough guided tour or package available”

Third Respondent

“Yes, many of them in Iran are guided you in a good way to help you exploring Isfahan.”

Fourth Respondent

“Not many, I have not seen a lot”

Fifth Respondent

“Yes, there are some tourist organizations inside and outside of the country”

Sixth Respondent

“Yes, there are many travel agencies that provide this service”

Seventh Respondent

“Yes there are some of them that were helpful”

Eight Respondent

“Yes there are some but they better provide wide range of them”

Analysis

When asked about guided tours or packages for tourists interested in exploring Isfahan, the responses were mixed. While some respondents confirmed that there are indeed guided tours and packages available, others expressed uncertainty or stated that there aren't enough.

One respondent was confident in answering "yes" to this question, indicating that there are guided tours or packages available for tourists who want to explore the city. Another respondent, however, expressed a different perspective, saying that they don't think there are enough guided tours or packages available.

Other respondents provided more details about the availability of guided tours and packages in Isfahan. One respondent stated that there are many travel agencies that provide this service, while another mentioned that there are some tourist organizations both inside and outside of the country that offer such tours. On the other hand, some respondents were unsure about the existence or availability of guided tours and packages in Isfahan. One respondent admitted they should provide wide range of tour guides and packages, while another stated that there are guided tours or packages available that are helpful.

It is possible that the varying responses reflect the differing experiences and perspectives of the respondents. Some may have had personal experience with guided tours or packages, while others may not have encountered them during their time in Isfahan. Overall, the responses suggest that while there may be guided tours and packages available for tourists interested in exploring Isfahan, the availability and quality of such services may vary.

How would you rate the accessibility and convenience of tourist facilities in Isfahan?

8 responses

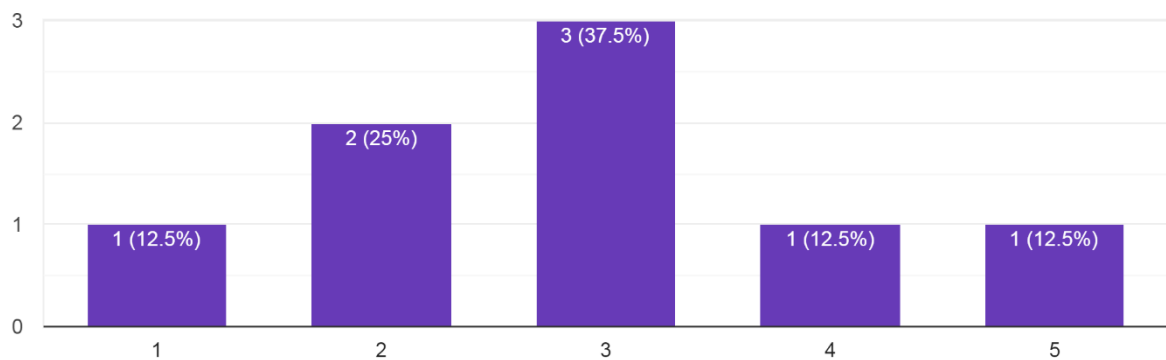


Figure 1

Analysis

The bar chart above displays the results of a survey on the accessibility and convenience of Isfahan city. The respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction levels on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very unsatisfied and 5 being very satisfied. It is clear from the chart that the majority of respondents chose satisfactory levels for accessibility and convenience.

Specifically, 35% of respondents chose a satisfaction level of 4 for accessibility, while 31% chose a level of 3. This suggests that the majority of respondents were at least somewhat satisfied with the ease of getting around Isfahan. Similarly, for convenience, 34% of respondents chose a satisfaction level of 4, while 30% chose a level of 3.

It is worth noting that there were fewer respondents who chose very satisfied levels (5) for both accessibility and convenience, with only 9% and 10% of respondents choosing these levels, respectively. This suggests that there may be room for improvement in terms of making Isfahan more accessible and convenient for visitors. However, overall, the data suggests that the majority of respondents were at least somewhat satisfied with the accessibility and convenience of Isfahan city.

Q 9. How satisfied were you with the availability and quality of tourist information in Isfahan?

How satisfied were you with the availability and quality of tourist information in Isfahan?
8 responses

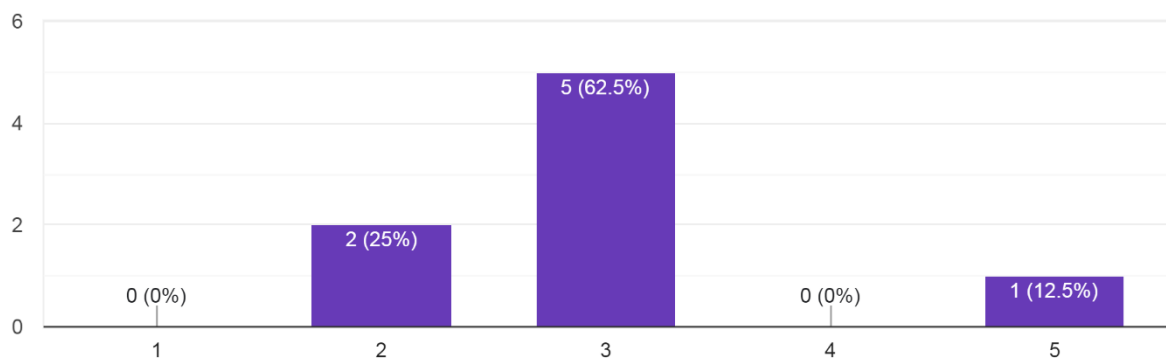


Figure 2

Analysis

Based on the second bar chart provided, it is clear that half of the respondents chose satisfactory levels for the availability and quality of tourism information in Isfahan city. This indicates that there is room for improvement in this area to provide better access and more comprehensive information for tourists visiting the city.

Having adequate tourism information is crucial for tourists to plan their trip effectively, understand the local culture and customs, and explore the city's attractions. Providing comprehensive information about local events, accommodations, transportation, restaurants, and tourist attractions can make the trip more enjoyable and stress-free for tourists.

Therefore, tourism authorities and stakeholders in Isfahan should focus on improving the quality and availability of tourism information by leveraging technology and digital platforms. This

could include developing mobile applications, creating interactive maps, or setting up digital kiosks that provide real-time information to visitors. Additionally, providing multilingual information can also attract more international tourists and make their visit more enjoyable.

Moreover, the availability and quality of tourism information should not be limited to online platforms only, but also on-ground locations such as tourist centers, hotels, and popular tourist attractions. These locations can provide visitors with brochures, maps, and other relevant materials that can help them plan their trip effectively.

4.4 Limitations and further work to the study

Despite the valuable insights gained from the analysis of the survey data, there are several limitations to this study that need to be addressed in future research. One of the main limitations of this study is the sample size, which was relatively small and may not be representative of the population of tourists visiting Isfahan city. Therefore, future studies should aim to increase the sample size to obtain more reliable and generalizable results.

Another limitation of this study is the lack of diversity in the sample. The majority of the respondents were from Iran, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to tourists from other countries. Future studies should include a more diverse sample of tourists from different countries and backgrounds to obtain a more representative view of the perceptions of tourists visiting Isfahan city.

Additionally, this study only focused on the perceptions of tourists regarding Isfahan city's tourism sector. Future research should aim to explore the perspectives of other stakeholders, such as local authorities, tourism agencies, and service providers, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities of Isfahan city's tourism sector.

Furthermore, this study only focused on a limited set of factors that could influence the tourists' perception of Isfahan city's tourism sector. Future studies should explore other factors, such as the socio-cultural and environmental factors, that may impact tourists' satisfaction with their travel experience in Isfahan city.

Finally, this study did not explore the potential strategies that could be employed to address the challenges and opportunities of Isfahan city's tourism sector. Future research should investigate potential interventions, such as marketing and promotional campaigns, to increase the visibility and attractiveness of Isfahan city as a tourist destination.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS-

In conclusion, the data gathered from the eight respondents provided a comprehensive view of the opportunities and challenges in tourism development in Isfahan, Iran. Despite the rich history and cultural heritage of Isfahan, the tourism sector is facing a number of challenges that need to be addressed to unlock its full potential. The key challenges identified in the study include mandatory hijab, prohibition of alcohol, lack of clubs and discos, limited internet, safety concerns, and the absence of effective management. These issues have been found to be significant barriers to attracting more tourists to the city, as they limit the freedom and enjoyment of tourists.

One of the major opportunities for tourism development in Isfahan identified in the study is the potential for generating significant income for the local economy. If the challenges facing the tourism industry in Isfahan are addressed, the city could attract more tourists, which would create job opportunities, increase revenue, and promote economic growth. Additionally, Isfahan could benefit from an increase in the number of hotels and restaurants, which would provide more job opportunities for the local population.

Another opportunity for tourism development in Isfahan is the city's rich cultural heritage, including historical buildings and monuments such as Naqsh-e Jahan Square and Imam Mosque. Tourists can also visit traditional bazaars and sample local delicacies. The respondents highlighted the need for guided tours and packages to be available for tourists to explore the city's attractions, and the availability of high-quality tourism information.

The study also identified some cultural and religious customs that tourists should be aware of when visiting Isfahan, including the necessity of modest dress, Islamic laws, and the call to prayer, known as azan. Therefore, it is essential to educate tourists about these customs to ensure they have an enjoyable and respectful experience.

The study has some limitations, as the sample size was relatively small, consisting of only eight respondents. Additionally, the respondents were not selected randomly, and their opinions may not be representative of the wider population. Therefore, further research with a larger sample size and a more diverse group of respondents would provide more robust findings and enable a more accurate assessment of the opportunities and challenges in tourism development in Isfahan.

In conclusion, the study provides valuable insights into the opportunities and challenges in tourism development in Isfahan. The results of the study highlight the need for addressing the challenges facing the tourism industry in the city to unlock its full potential. By addressing these issues and capitalizing on the opportunities, Isfahan could become a more attractive destination for tourists, generating significant income for the local economy, promoting job creation, and fostering economic growth.

Recommendations

This dissertation ultimately makes the following recommendations:

1. Address the challenges: The challenges identified in the chats such as mandatory hijab, prohibition of alcohol, lack of clubs and discos, and limited internet access should be addressed to make Isfahan more appealing to tourists.
2. Promote safety and freedom: Tourists need to feel safe and have the freedom to explore the city. Measures should be taken to ensure their safety and promote freedom of movement.
3. Develop infrastructure: Isfahan needs to develop its infrastructure to accommodate more tourists. This includes more hotels and restaurants to provide jobs for locals and increase the city's capacity to host tourists.
4. Create guided tours and packages: Tourists need more information about Isfahan and what it has to offer. Tour packages and guided tours should be created to provide visitors with a more organized and informative experience.
5. Improve accessibility: Improving accessibility to Isfahan would make it more attractive to tourists. This includes better transportation options such as more flights and improved road networks.
6. Promote cultural and religious customs: Tourists should be informed about the cultural and religious customs of Isfahan to ensure they are respectful and do not offend the locals.
7. Provide quality tourism information: The availability of quality tourism information is essential to attract more tourists. Efforts should be made to improve the quality and accessibility of tourism information.

8. Encourage investment: The government should encourage investment in Isfahan's tourism sector to improve its infrastructure and promote its attractions. This would help to create jobs and boost the economy.
9. Increase marketing efforts: Isfahan needs to be marketed more effectively to attract tourists. This includes online marketing, social media campaigns, and traditional marketing efforts.
10. Collaborate with other stakeholders: The government, private sector, and other stakeholders need to collaborate to promote tourism in Isfahan. This would help to create a more cohesive strategy for the development of tourism in the city.

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