

# Exploring the Impact Factors of Tourists' Intention to Choose Iran as a Traveling Destination

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the effective factors in attracting outbound tourists to choose Iran as a traveling destination. This survey has been done in China. The total number of respondents was 406, where 95% of respondents filled an online questionnaire and 5% filled it manually. The exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were used to analyze the questionnaire, and logistic regression was deployed to explore the effective factors in this survey. The questions were defined based on the theory of planned behavior (TPB) and the role of culture, custom, the source of traveling information, and perceived traveling risks in choosing Iran as a traveling destination. The outcome of this survey on Chinese people suggested that the attractions of Iran, environment, and political risks are the main factors which play an important role in choosing Iran as a traveling destination. The experience of traveling abroad also revealed a significant effect in decision making on traveling destination.

**Keywords:** Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), tourism, destination choice, perceived risks, culture, media, analyzing and testing tools

**Paper type:** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

This paper deals with exploring the impact factors causing the development of the tourism market in Iran to promote economic growth. A large percentage of economic income for the Iranian government relies on the export of oil and gas. The economy of Iran is a single product economy and some threats such as sanctions by the United States can easily affect it negatively. Indeed, it is time for the Iranian government to move toward a multi-product economy and they need to develop other industries in addition to the oil and gas industry.

One of the industries which a positive effect on the economy and countries' Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the travel and tourism industry. Some researches such as ((Khoshnevis Yazdi, Homa Salehi, & Soheilzad, 2017) & (Mamipour & Nazari, 2014)) proved that the growth in the tourism industry has a positive effect on the rate of growth in the economy of Iran. (Khoshnevis Yazdi et al., 2017) claimed that a 1% increase in tourism expenditure (TE) leads to a 0.59% increase in real GDP in the long run.

As travel and tourism industry has both a direct and indirect contribution to the other industries such as accommodation, transportation, entertainment, and attraction; so the development in this industry causes improvement and development in the mentioned industries in response. GDP is one of the primary indicators used to gauge the health of a country's economy. The value-added amount made by services constitutes a large portion of GDP in high-economy countries suggesting that making improvement in services add more value to the income. Indeed, as travel and tourism industry is regarded as a service industry and also influences the related macroeconomic variables, the development of this industry plays an important role in the economic development (Khoshnevis Yazdi et al., 2017).

The purpose of this research is to discover the significant factors in increasing the number of incoming arrivals to Iran which directly affect the development of the travel & tourism industry in Iran. To achieve this goal, a scale was developed to measure the intention of tourists in choosing Iran as a traveling destination. A number of

questions were provided to explore: What is the tourists' imagination about Iran? Which factors are important in absorbing tourists to Iran? Which factors function as deterrents in attracting tourists to Iran?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Travel & Tourism Industry in Iran

Iran is a large country located in the Middle East. Concerning the history of travel & tourism industry in Iran, it is one of the oldest civilizations in the world which was considered to be the Middle East's top tourist destination during the period 1967-1978 when Egypt was ranked 14th in the region ((Morakabati, 2011) and (Khodadadi, 2016)). According to statistics, the number of incoming tourists to Iran in 1970 was around 243,000 which increased to 695,000 in 1978, where the rate of growth in 8 years was 2.86%, indicating a fast growth. However, this number decreased to 62,373 in 1982. What caused this collapse in the number of incoming tourists to Iran?

Table 1. Comparison of Tourist Arrivals (the Middle East Countries)

Country	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2016	2017	1995-2017
<b>Turkey</b>	7,083,000	9,586,000	20,273,000	31,364,000	39,478,000	30,289,000	37,601,000	<b>515,248,000</b>
<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	3,325,000	6,585,000	8,037,000	10,850,000	17,994,000	18,044,000	16,109,000	<b>221,461,000</b>
<b>Egypt</b>	2,871,000	5,116,000	8,244,000	14,051,000	9,139,000	5,258,000	8,157,000	<b>173,488,300</b>
<b>Bahrain</b>	2,311,000	3,869,000	6,313,000	11,952,000	9,670,000	10,158,000	11,370,000	<b>153,162,000</b>
<b>Iran</b>	568,000	1,342,000	1,889,000	2,938,000	5,237,000	4,942,000	4,867,000	<b>58,002,000</b>
<b>Cyprus</b>	2,100,000	2,686,000	2,470,000	2,173,000	2,659,000	3,187,000	3,652,000	<b>56,454,000</b>
<b>Syrian</b>	815,000	2,100,000	3,571,000	8,546,000				<b>55,237,000</b>
<b>Israel</b>	2,215,000	2,417,000	1,903,000	2,803,000	2,799,000	2,900,000	3,613,000	<b>52,020,500</b>
<b>Lebanon</b>	450,000	742,000	1,140,000	2,168,000	1,518,000	1,688,000	1,857,000	<b>26,843,000</b>
<b>Oman</b>	279,000	571,000	891,000	1,441,000	1,909,000	2,335,000	2,372,000	<b>25,775,000</b>
<b>Iraq</b>	61,000	78,000		1,518,000				<b>7,564,000</b>
<b>Kuwait</b>	72,000	78,000	104,000	207,000				<b>3,041,000</b>

Source: World Bank

There are a plenty of reasons which might have caused this collapse such as the possible negative image of Iran formed by international media, 8 years' war between Iran and Iraq, no good relationship with foreign countries, political and economic sanctions, and giving a lower priority to the development of this industry by the Iranian government which can be one of the most important reasons in the decline in the number of tourists ((Morakabati, 2011) and (Khodadadi, 2016)).

Table 1 reports the number of international arrivals in some of the Middle East countries. To compare the total number of international arrivals from 1995 to 2017, it is observed that the first place was claimed by Turkey, signifying that Turkey is the most attractive country among the Middle East countries. Turkey was followed by Saudi Arabi; Saudi Arabia's international tourists consist of Moslem pilgrims. Iran is ranked in the fifth place among Middle East countries. Unfortunately, there are no data about the number of international arrivals in United Arabs since 2006, so it does not exist in Table 1. The rate of arrivals from 1995 to 2017 indicates that the tourists' traveling destination is easily affected by unexpected events. For example, the number of tourists in Syria collapsed to zero, because of local war in Syria since 2011. Turkey faced an unexpected fall in the number of international arrivals in 2016, because of terrorist attacks in Turkey and the associated war in borders with Syria. The ranking shows that having old civilization, historical sites, and even having the top 10 UNESCO world heritage sites in Iran are not enough for being the most attractive traveling destination for outbound tourists. Now the question is which factors affect the outbound tourists' intention in choosing a traveling destination?

### 2.2 The Theory of Planned Behavior

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) model developed by Ajzen (1991) is used as one of the most recognized testing instruments for measuring the cognitive factors of consumers (Al-swidi, Rafiul Huque, Hafeez, & Mohd Shariff, 2014). This theory has been used to examine various human behaviors to predict leisure choice (Ajzen &

Driver, 1992), hunting intention (Hrubes et al., 2001; Rossi & Armstrong, 1999), choice of travel destination (Bamberg, Ajzen, & Schmidt, 2003; Lam & Hsu, 2006)(Lee, 2009), and consumer behavior in buying organic food (Al-Swidi et al., 2014). The test of the TPB model revealed that it is a useful theoretical approach for investigating behavioral intentions (Sparks & Wen Pan, 2009).

Ajzen (2008) argued that TPB provides a sound basis to predict behavior by understanding three discrete belief categories (Sparks & Wen Pan, 2009): beliefs about some targeted behavior (such as traveling to a specific destination) as well as an evaluation of these beliefs; beliefs about the normative expectations of others (e.g. family, friends) as well as a desire to comply with these expectations; and beliefs about factors that might facilitate or impede the target behavior (e.g. available funds to travel) as well as the ability to deal with these potential impediments.

According to the TPB, people's motivation to behave in a specific way within a specific context is based on three interrelated elements which are the core of the TPB model: an individual's attitude towards the behavior (behavioral beliefs), subjective norms (normative beliefs), and perceived behavioral control (control beliefs) (Ajzen, 2005, 2012)(Gstaettner, Rodger, & Lee, 2017).

### 2.3 Core of TPB

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) includes three core concepts which are attitude, subjective norms, and perceived control behavior. According to (Boerjan, 1974) definition, attitude consists of two elements: values and beliefs; a belief is a state of knowledge while values are learned predispositions which are shaped by enduring sources such as culture, special class, education, etc. or by transitory sources such as advertisements.

Ajzen & Fishbein (2000) have also defined attitude toward an object as a function of the belief of the object and associated implicit evaluation which occurs spontaneously and inevitably as beliefs are formed (Li, Cai, & Qiu, 2016). There are some specific definitions of attitude in the field of tourism such as tourist attitudes involving cognitive, affective, and behavioral components (Unger & Wandermman, 1985; Vincent & Thompson, 2002). The cognitive response is the evaluation made in forming an attitude; the affective response is a psychological response expressing the preference of a tourist for an entity; and the behavioral component is a verbal indication of the intention of a tourist to visit or use that entity (Lee, 2009). Attitudes toward a behavior form most favorably when individuals believe this behavior to result in beneficial and enjoyable outcomes (Gstaettner et al., 2017).

Subjective norms and perceived behavioral control were also defined by (Li et al., 2016): the subjective norm is the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behavior in question, while perceived behavioral control is the difficulty of performing a behavior as perceived by the individual. The theory of planned behavior (TPB) predicts that there are some factors which potentially influence the travel intention, what others think or do (often referred to as subjective norms) as well as constraints or barriers, where the control over constraints or barriers (Ajzen, 1991) have the potential to impact travel intentions (Sparks & Wen Pan, 2009).

### 3. Sources of Traveling Information, Culture Distance, and Perceived Traveling Risks

As mentioned above, the purpose of this study is to explore the influential factors in increasing the intention of outbound tourists to visit Iran. One of the theories which is very useful in measuring the intention of customers in buying a product is the theory of planned behavior. The product of this study is traveling to Iran. Indeed, the research participants are questioned based on the three concepts of TPB which are attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control.

According to the definitions of attitude by Boerjan (1974), Ajzen & Fishbein (2000), Unger & Wandermman (1985), Vincent & Thompson (2002), Lee (2009), and Gstaettner et al. (2017), attitude is formed by the evaluation of an object based on the knowledge associated with that object and is obviously influenced by the sociography of the evaluator, such as education, gender, age, culture, and so on. In the tourism field, knowledge can be acquired from different sources of information about a specific destination. Books, articles, media, newspapers, journals, tourism websites, families, friends, tourists' own traveling experience, and travel agencies are some examples of the sources for information collection. These sources are very important as tourists' decisions might be affected by them positively or negatively. It also has influence on forming the tourists' expectations which is one of the important elements in purchasing decision (Alvarez & Korzay, 2008).

Tourists' attitude and tourists' image are very similar by definition; tourists' image has been defined by Barich & Kotler (1991) as the sum of beliefs, attitudes, and impressions a person or group has of an object where impressions may be true or false, real or imagined (Rajesh, 2013). Therefore, there is no difference in the influence of the information collection sources on them.

Fakeye & Crompton (1991), and Gunn (1972) defined three types of tourists' images based on the sources of acquiring traveling knowledge (Byon & Zhang, 2010); organic image originates from non-tourism information such as geography books, television reports, or magazine, and articles; an induced image can arise from tourism-specific information such as a destination brochure or vacation website; and complex image can be a result of direct experience of the destination (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991).

Based on the outcomes of Frederik et al. (2016) research, access, amenities, and local community are the other issues which have a positive significant impact on tourists' attitude (Frederik, Brunner-sperdin, & Stokburger-sauer, 2016). Several studies have examined the role of cultural distance, what represents the extent of cultural discrepancy between tourists' home and destination countries (Ng, Lee, & Soutar, 2007), and its association with tourist destination choice (Jackson, 2000, 2001; Ng et al., 2007; Ng, Lee, & Soutar, 2009; Vietze, 2012; Yang, Liu, & Li, 2016; Yang & Wong, 2012). Some have concluded that cultural distance negatively impacts destination choice, such that tourists are more likely to visit destinations that are culturally similar to their home countries (Jackson, 2000; Ng et al., 2007, 2009; Vietze, 2012; Yang & Wong, 2012) while some have found mixed results pertaining to the relationship between cultural distance and destination choice (Jackson, 2001; Yang et al., 2016) (Liu, Robert, Cárdenas, & Yang, 2018). It seems that as the cultural distance can be one of the motivators for absorbing outbound tourists, it can also be concerned as perceived barriers, challenges, and conflicts for some outbound tourists in choosing a traveling destination. For example, in 2010, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reported that a British man and woman in Dubai were fined for drinking alcohol and sentenced to jail for kissing in public (BBC, 2010) (Liu et al., 2018).

Based on the in-depth literature review, the respondents were questioned about the cognitive of the country image for measuring the tourists' attitude (Table 4), which includes different questions associated with the Iranian community, culture, attractions, accessibilities, and amenities. Each item was phrased into a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Several questions were also defined to ask about the sources of gathering traveling information (Table 4) which are important in shaping the tourists' attitude. Each item was phrased into a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = not important to 5 = very important.

The TPB predicts that there is a range of factors that can potentially influence or constrain travel intentions (Sparks & Wen Pan, 2009). Subjective norms are one of the factors which are very important in the decision-making process of. It is shaped by social influences and beliefs. What do other people think about your decision or behavior? Where do the important people to you recommend you to travel? Which destination is popular among my family, relatives, friends, and colleagues for traveling? As noted in the previous section, these types of questions and their answers can directly influence the traveling intention. Some constraints or barriers easily change the tourists' intention of traveling to a place. For example, traveling cost and time are two factors that directly affect tourists' behavior in choosing a traveling destination. The other important factor which is captured by perceived behavioral control is the risk and uncertainty associated with the traveling destination (Floyd et al. 2004; Fuchs and Reichel 2006; Kozak, Crotts, and Law 2007; Sönmez and Graefe 1998a, 1998b; Karl, 2016).

Tourism, resembling other service products, is intangible, inseparable, heterogeneous, and perishable, which renders risk an essential part of the tourist experience (Mitchell & Greatorex, 1993; Williams & Balaz, 2013) (Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, & Arcodia, 2017), in certain tourism settings, risk contributes to the sense of excitement and adventurousness in travel experience (Cater, 2006; Dickson & Dolnicar, 2004; Quintal, Lee, & Soutar, 2010). Many studies dealing with risk perception and destination choice concentrate on risk categories as possible generators or sources of risk at a destination such as natural disasters (Park and Reisinger 2010), health risks (Jonas et al. 2011), criminality (Ryan 1993), political instability (Fletcher and Morakabati 2008), or terrorism (Fuchs et al. 2013) (Karl, 2016). Previous studies found that perceived risk ratings can differ based on factors such as gender (Carr, 2001), age (Floyd & Pennington-Gray, 2004; Kozak, Crotts, & Law, 2007), travel experience (Sonmez & Graefe, 1998a), nationality (Seddighi, Nuttall, & Theocharous, 2001), and personality (Lepp & Gibson, 2003) (Kapuściński & Richards, 2016); More recent studies have suggested significance for subjective risk of religion (Adam, 2015; Mansfeld, Jonas, & Cahaner, 2016), knowledge (Sharifpour, Walters, Ritchie, & Winter, 2014), and risk tolerance (Williams & Balaz, 2013).

Individuals perceive, evaluate, and respond to risk in a variety of ways, depending on psychological processes and the perceived situational context at the time of making a decision ((Trimpop, 1994) & (Gstaettner et al., 2017)). If the difference between risk perceptions/cost and the attractiveness of a destination has a strong positive value, the individual might decide to travel to that destination (Korstanje, 2009). The reaction to the outcome of assessment is different, where tourists may decide to travel to a different destination and find a

substitute for an alternate destination ((Decrop, 2010)&(Karl, 2016)), alternatively, tourists may choose to travel to the same destination but later, or alter their travel plans by shifting from traveling individually to booking a package tour, or from traveling alone to traveling in groups (Adam, 2015).

Note that peoples' perception of risk is somehow variable, where this understanding could be influenced by factors such as the media, their social surroundings like friends, families, tourist organizations, their personalities, and their past experience (Korstanje, 2009). The result of Kozak, Crotts, and Law (2007) research demonstrated that participants identified risk of infectious illnesses as a major one and they cataloged the risk of terrorism in a secondary role and they also mentioned that negative risk perceptions not only affect involved countries but also neighboring ones or broader regions (Korstanje, 2009).

Several questions related to subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, perceived local barriers, and perceived traveling risks and uncertainty, based on the in-depth review of ((Morakabati, 2011); (Karl, 2016) and (Reza Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012)) research, were defined in the questionnaire (Table 4). Each item was phrased into a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = not important to 5 = very important.

#### 4. Methodology

According to the theory of planned behavior (TPB), there are three main concepts which are attitude, subjective norms (social pressures), and perceived behavioral control. The purpose of this research is to measure the intention of outbound tourists to choose Iran as a traveling destination, where TPB has been employed as a fundamental theory in designing the scale for this research.

This research has been conducted in China. The participants in this study were Chinese people who were older than 18 years old. There was no other limitation for choosing respondents in this research. There were two reasons for choosing Chinese people in this study: first, because of administration of this survey in China, and due to the growth rate of outbound Chinese tourists. The number of outbound trips from China has reached 129 million in 2017, up to 5.7% greater than 122 million in 2016 ("2017 China Outbound Tourism Travel Report," 2018). Further, based on this report, the top 10 popular destinations with the fastest growth in attracting the Chinese tourists' attention were Turkey, Germany, Vietnam, Spain, the UAE, Italy, Philippines, Australia, France, and Egypt in 2017. Turkey is the neighboring country of Iran and there are some similarities between Iran and Turkey especially in their culture. If Turkey is an interesting traveling destination for outbound Chinese tourists, it will be a good sign for the tourism market in Iran to attract them as well.

The research participants were 406 subjects who were asked about their attitude about the specific destination which was Iran. Other questions addressed the source of gathering information for choosing a traveling destination, as it is one of the important factors in forming the tourist attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control which were proved to have a direct effect on the tourists' behavior in choosing a place as traveling destination (Sparks & Wen Pan, 2009).

It is not easy to know the accurate proper sample size for factor analysis. According to a number of textbooks, for example, Gorsuch RL. (1983), Tabachnick BG, Fidell LS., 2007; Hair et al. (1995), Pett MA, Lackey NR, Sullivan JJ. (2003), cited the work of Comrey and Lee (1973) in their guide to sample sizes: 100 as poor, 200 as fair, 300 as good, 500 as very good, and 1000 or more as excellent ((Williams, Onsmann, & Brown, 2010), (Wilson Van Voorhis & Morgan, 2007), and (Henson & Roberts, 2006)). In this study, there were 406 participants as the research sample, which is better than good based on Comrey and Lee (1973).

After preparing the questions based on the literature reviews, the preliminary questionnaire was sent to two university professors, one specializing in tourism and service innovation and the other in research methods in social sciences along with three experts in business marketing. The modified questionnaire was translated to Chinese and it was sent to a group of 30 people, who were professional in Chinese and English language, as a pilot study where they were also asked to mention the translation issues. The final questionnaire was bilingual in English and Chinese with 95% of data collection being online and 5% manually. The IP address of participants, who filled out the online questionnaire, were recorded in the database, so everyone was allowed to participate in this survey only once.

SPSS statistical version 23 was used for descriptive analysis while exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and Amos software were used in confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). As mentioned by (Hinkin, 1995), various scholars suggest using both EFA and CFA when developing a new scale (Byon & Zhang, 2010); so both EFA and CFA were used in this study.

The following steps were taken to analyze the preliminary questionnaire in this research:

1. calculating Cronbach's coefficient alpha;

2. analyzing the validity through construct validity plus content validity;
3. exploratory factor analysis; and
4. confirmatory factor analysis.

After evaluating the scale, as there were one dependent variable and some independent variables, the logistic regression was employed to predict the impact of each categorical independent variable on the dependent variables. Further, as the type of dependent variable was binary, so binomial logistic regression (BLR) was employed in this research.

## 5. Results

### 5.1 Descriptive Analysis

A total of 239 respondents out of 406 were female accounting for 58.9% percent of the entire sample, while 167 respondents who constituted about 41.1% percent of the sample were male. The age of respondents ranged from 18 to 82 years. Further, 69.2% of respondents had no religion, 15.3% were Buddhist, 5.7% had Chinese traditional religion, 4.9% were Christian, and 4.9% had other religion including Islam. On the other hand, 12.8% of respondents had never traveled abroad, 23.2% had traveled abroad less than once in a year, 25.4% had traveled abroad once in a year, 19.5% had traveled abroad twice in a year, 4.7% had traveled abroad three times in a year, and 14.5% had traveled abroad more than three times in a year. A majority of the respondents (57.6%) in this sample preferred to travel with friends, 19.7% to accompany their partners in traveling abroad, 16.7% to travel abroad alone, and 5.9% to travel abroad with children younger than 6 years old. The annual traveling budget for 34.5% of respondents (140 tourists) was equal to 11,000 to 20,000 RMB; this value for 32.3% of respondents was equal to 6,000 to 10,000 RMB, while for 16.5% it was equal to 21,000 to 30,000 RMB, and 10.8% dedicated more than 31,000 RMB for traveling in a year. Finally, 5.9% of respondents preferred to allocate less than 5,000 RMB for traveling abroad in one year. Table 2 reports the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents in this survey.

The next step is to check for missing data (Schafer & Graham, 2002); there were only 15 cases which had no data in two questions. The missing data were completed by replacing the mean value of those questions in empty cells; as it was mentioned by Paul Kline that the mean value will not make any changes in the distribution model.

Table 2. Frequency distributions for sociodemographic variables

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Gender</b>	Female	239	58.9	58.9
	Male	167	41.1	100
<b>Age</b>	younger than 25 years old	38	9.4	9.4
	26-30 years old	74	18.2	27.6
	31-35 years old	112	27.6	55.2
	36-40 years old	92	22.7	77.8
	older than 41 years old	90	22.2	100.0
<b>Nationality</b>	Chinese	396	97.5	97.5
	Non-Chinese	10	2.5	100.0
<b>Religion</b>	Christian	20	4.9	4.9
	Buddhism	62	15.3	20.2
	Chinese traditional religion	23	5.7	25.9
	no religion	281	69.2	95.1
	other religions	20	4.9	100.0
<b>Travel party</b>	alone	68	16.7	16.7
	with my friends	234	57.6	74.4
	with my partner	80	19.7	94.1
	with children younger than 6 years old	24	5.9	100.0
<b>Number of traveling abroad in a year</b>	never	52	12.8	12.8
	less than once a year	94	23.2	36.0
	once a year	103	25.4	61.3
	twice a year	79	19.5	80.8
	three times a year	19	4.7	85.5

		more than three times a year	59	14.5	100.0
<b>Travel (annually)</b>	<b>budget</b>	less than 5000 RMB	24	5.9	5.9
		6000 to 10000 RMB	131	32.3	38.2
		11000 to 20000 RMB	140	34.5	72.7
		21000 to 30000 RMB	67	16.5	89.2
		more than 31000 RMB	44	10.8	100.0

### 5.2 The Refinement of the Scale

According to (Tucker & MacCallum, 1997), the factor analysis methodology is used to determine the number and nature of the factors, as well as the pattern of their influences on the surface attributes.

Table 3. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha (Standardized)	N of Items
.934	.941	45

The exploratory factor analysis was used to refine the preliminary scale. The alpha Cronbach of all the items was calculated. The Cronbach's alpha was 0.934 for 45 items. As it was greater than 0.7, it can be said that the reliability of the scale is high. The value of "Cronbach's alpha if item deleted" for all the items was less than "Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items" which was 0.941, so there was no need to omit any items at this step.

The KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) and Bartlett's test was done to understand if it is possible to reduce the large number of 45-scale items into fewer factors. As observed in Table 4, the result of KMO test is 0.914, suggesting that it is possible to cluster the 45 items in the scale into fewer factors. The Bartlett's test of sphericity equals to 10943.394 and it is significant at the level of  $p < 0.01$  which means that despite having a strong correlation between variables in each factor, there is no correlation between variables of the different factors.

Table 4. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.914
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	10943.394
	Df	990
	Sig.	.000

The principal component analysis, Scree test, and Varimax rotation were run to find the number of significant factors. For the Kaiser's criterion which is a kind of rule of thumb, eigenvalue greater than 1 (Kaiser HF., 1960) (Williams et al., 2010) and the criterion of factor loadings greater than 0.3 were considered in this study. It is suggested to use the Scree test in conjunction with Kaiser rule for determining the retaining factors (Yong & Pearce, 2013).

The table of "total variance explained", Table 5, shows that there are ten items with eigenvalue greater than one. The outcome of eigenvalues and Scree plot indicate that the items can be clustered into ten significant factors. The varimax rotation method was utilized to cluster the items into ten factors. The factors will be named conventionally as there is no rule for naming these factors or latent variables. Each factor includes a number of items, where the one with only two items is not a strong factor.

Table 5. Summary of results of exploratory factor analysis N=406

Constructs	Items	Factor Loadings	Eigenvalue	Variance Explained (%)	Cronbach's Alpha
<b>Local Attractions</b>	Getting familiar with Iranian culture	.691	14.337	31.860	.863
	Visiting historical sites in Iran	.812			
	Visiting natural sightseeing in Iran	.799			
	Visiting holy shrines in Iran	.800			
	Getting familiar with Iranian handicrafts	.745			
	Taking activities in Iran like a safari in the desert	.456			
<b>Service Infrastructure</b>	The procedure for obtaining a visa for traveling to Iran doesn't cause any problem for me in my trip itinerary.	.512	3.182	7.071	.874
	The language barrier doesn't change my mind about traveling to Iran.	.326			
	Finding enough good information	.425			

	about how to travel around Iran				
	Being satisfied with the availability and quality of transportation in Iran	.631			
	Being satisfied with the quality of Iranian cuisine	.591			
	Being satisfied with the availability and quality of accommodation in Iran	.708			
	Facing no problem because of visa regulations	.584			
	Facing no problem because of the issues related to banking and monetary issues	.727			
	I can find good travel packages to Iran	.626			
	Cost of traveling to Iran is cheap	.688			
	The ticket price for visiting attractions is reasonable	.714			
	Cost of transportation in Iran is cheap	.821			
	Cost of a meal in Iran is cheap	.820			
<b>Perceived Behavioral Control</b>	Cost of accommodation in Iran is reasonable	.609	2.503	5.563	.871
	The distance between my place and Iran doesn't change my mind about traveling to Iran	.385			
	The way of dressing for ladies and gentlemen in Iran doesn't change my mind of traveling to Iran	.321			
	Iranian people are friendly with visitors	.737			
	Iranian people are very hospitable	.760			
	Iran is a safe country	.637			
<b>Environment of Iran</b>	I won't face any problem in Iran for possible being robbed or subject to credit fraud	.633	2.088	4.639	.870
	Preferring to plan my trip to Iran on my own	.370			
	Planning for traveling to Iran is easy	.447			
	No reason for worrying of getting caught in the acts of terrorism	.593			
	No reason for worrying about arresting or punishing because of breaking local customs	.813			
<b>Perceived Local Barriers</b>	No reason for worrying about arresting or punishing because of breaking religious restrictions such as forbidden drinking alcohol, covering hair for ladies, and etc.	.796	1.715	3.812	.848
	Gathering info. from friends and relatives	.653			
	Gathering info. from books and articles	.801			
<b>Sources of Gathering Traveling Information</b>	Gathering info. from media (TV., radio, newspapers, magazines, and etc.)	.809	1.586	3.524	.740
	Gathering info. from tourism websites (TripAdvisor, Ctrip, and etc.)	.645			
	Gathering info. based on my own experience	.380			
	No reason for exposing to danger because of political unrest in Iran	-.894			
<b>Political Risks</b>	No reason for exposing to danger because of the political relationship between Iran and western countries	-.880	1.319	2.931	.857



<b>Subjective Norms</b>	Traveling to Iran is popular among my friends, relatives, and colleagues	<b>.768</b>	<b>1.214</b>	<b>2.698</b>	<b>.737</b>
	Traveling to Iran is recommended to me by people who are important to me	<b>.836</b>			
	Feeling good to talk about my trip to Iran among my families, relatives, friends, and colleagues	<b>.438</b>			
<b>Perceived Travel Risks</b>	No reason for worrying about being caught in natural disasters	<b>.701</b>	<b>1.061</b>	<b>2.358</b>	<b>.736</b>
	No reason for worrying about falling ill from a local disease and/or epidemic	<b>.545</b>			
<b>Advertisements</b>	Gathering info. from travel agencies' advertisement	<b>.628</b>	<b>1.003</b>	<b>2.230</b>	<b>.768</b>
	Gathering info. from tourism and travel fairs and exhibitions	<b>.613</b>			

5.3 The Validation of the Constructs

Amos was employed to validate the constructs derived from EFA and Alpha Cronbach's tests. The 45-scale items with first-order factor structure were tested. The output of the test is shown in Table 6. This model seems to require modification as the coefficient value of determination ( $R^2$ ) for several indicators were lower than 0.5. Based on the recommendation of Hair et al. (1998), such variables should be deleted from the model (Ho & Lee, 2007).

Table 6. Confirmatory factor analysis of initial 45 scale items (first-order factors)

Constructs	Items	Standardized Factor Loadings	CR	Measurement Error ( $\theta$ )	$R^2$	CCR
<b>Local Attractions</b>	Getting familiar with Iranian culture	<b>.792</b>	-	<b>.247</b>	<b>0.627</b>	<b>.878</b>
	Visiting historical sites in Iran	<b>.899</b>	<b>20.406</b>	<b>.116</b>	<b>0.808</b>	
	Visiting natural sightseeing in Iran	<b>.820</b>	<b>18.189</b>	<b>.188</b>	<b>0.672</b>	
	Visiting holy shrines in Iran	<b>.780</b>	<b>17.056</b>	<b>.265</b>	<b>0.608</b>	
	Getting familiar with Iranian handicrafts	<b>.672</b>	<b>14.198</b>	<b>.321</b>	<b>0.452</b>	
	Taking activities in Iran like a safari in the desert	<b>.419</b>	<b>8.366</b>	<b>.800</b>	<b>0.176</b>	
<b>Service Infrastructure</b>	The procedure for obtaining a visa for traveling to Iran doesn't cause any problem for me in my trip itinerary.	<b>.611</b>	-	<b>.400</b>	<b>0.373</b>	<b>.879</b>
	The language barrier doesn't change my mind about traveling to Iran.	<b>.587</b>	<b>10.093</b>	<b>.506</b>	<b>0.345</b>	
	Finding enough good information about how to travel around Iran	<b>.692</b>	<b>11.464</b>	<b>.312</b>	<b>0.479</b>	
	Being satisfied with the availability and quality of transportation in Iran	<b>.748</b>	<b>12.127</b>	<b>.237</b>	<b>0.560</b>	
	Being satisfied with the quality of Iranian cuisine	<b>.707</b>	<b>11.650</b>	<b>.339</b>	<b>0.500</b>	
	Being satisfied with the availability and quality of accommodation in Iran	<b>.776</b>	<b>12.450</b>	<b>.229</b>	<b>0.602</b>	
	Facing no problem because of visa regulations	<b>.629</b>	<b>10.662</b>	<b>.437</b>	<b>0.396</b>	
	Facing no problem because of the issues related to banking and monetary issues	<b>.529</b>	<b>9.281</b>	<b>.575</b>	<b>0.280</b>	
	I can find good travel packages to Iran	<b>.712</b>	<b>11.709</b>	<b>.365</b>	<b>0.507</b>	
<b>Perceived Behavioral Control</b>	Cost of traveling to Iran is cheap	<b>.754</b>	-	<b>.220</b>	<b>0.569</b>	<b>.886</b>
	The ticket price for visiting attractions is reasonable	<b>.837</b>	<b>17.269</b>	<b>.133</b>	<b>0.701</b>	
	Cost of transportation in Iran is cheap	<b>.803</b>	<b>16.508</b>	<b>.147</b>	<b>0.645</b>	
	Cost of a meal in Iran is cheap	<b>.786</b>	<b>16.121</b>	<b>.170</b>	<b>0.618</b>	
	Cost of accommodation in Iran is reasonable	<b>.702</b>	<b>14.222</b>	<b>.236</b>	<b>0.493</b>	

	The distance between my place and Iran doesn't change my mind about traveling to Iran	.620	12.425	.366	0.384	
	The way of dressing for ladies and gentlemen in Iran doesn't change my mind of traveling to Iran	.551	10.949	.602	0.304	
<b>Environment of Iran</b>	Iranian people are friendly with visitors	.819	-	.208	0.671	
	Iranian people are very hospitable	.837	19.617	.194	0.701	
	Iran is a safe country	.786	17.954	.300	0.618	
	I won't face any problem in Iran for possible being robbed or subject to credit fraud	.769	17.403	.306	0.591	.880
	Preferring to plan my trip to Iran on my own	.577	12.114	.739	0.333	
	Planning for traveling to Iran is easy	.643	13.814	.549	0.413	
<b>Perceived Local Barriers</b>	No reason for worrying of getting caught in the acts of terrorism	.710	-	.458	0.504	
	No reason for worrying about arresting or punishing because of breaking local customs	.921	16.576	.145	0.848	.865
	No reason for worrying about arresting or punishing because of breaking religious restrictions such as forbidden drinking alcohol, covering hair for ladies, and etc.	.834	15.738	.325	0.696	
<b>Sources of Gathering Traveling Information</b>	Gathering info. from friends and relatives	.533	-	1.091	0.284	
	Gathering info. from books and articles	.721	9.491	.583	0.520	
	Gathering info. from media (TV., radio, newspapers, magazines, and etc.)	.794	9.837	.426	0.630	.752
	Gathering info. from tourism websites (TripAdvisor, Ctrip, and etc.)	.630	8.842	.732	0.397	
	Gathering info. based on my own experience	.361	5.951	.923	0.130	
<b>Political Risks</b>	No reason for exposing to danger because of political unrest in Iran	.893	-	.157	0.797	
	No reason for exposing to danger because of the political relationship between Iran and western countries	.840	8.515	.248	0.706	.858
<b>Subjective Norms</b>	Traveling to Iran is popular among my friends, relatives, and colleagues	.746	-	.351	0.557	
	Traveling to Iran is recommended to me by people who are important to me	.802	13.052	.286	0.643	.759
	Feeling good to talk about my trip to Iran among my families, relatives, friends, and colleagues	.589	10.509	.494	0.347	
<b>Perceived Travel Risks</b>	No reason for worrying about being caught in natural disasters	.628	-	.426	0.394	
	No reason for worrying about falling ill from a local disease and/or epidemic	.931	11.498	.115	0.867	.767
<b>Advertisements</b>	Gathering info. from travel agencies' advertisement	.820	-	.372	0.672	
	Gathering info. from tourism and travel fairs and exhibitions	.760	10.194	.489	0.578	.769

Based on the recommendation of Hair et al. (1998), seventeen indicators with a value lower than 0.5 were omitted, after which confirmatory factor analysis was run again. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 7.

The evaluation of the model was done in this phase. It is not very easy to evaluate the fitness of a model to the data, while several indicators are going to be checked. The value of CMIN/DF ( $X^2$ / degree of freedom) was checked as the first indicator of a good model fit. According to (Ghasemi, 2014), the value of this indicator can range from 1 to 5 and the value which is near 2 or 3 is interpreted as a very good model fit to the data. As observed in Table 7, the value of CMIN/DF decreased from 3.093 to 2.761 which was mentioned as a good model fit.

The other two indices which estimated the improvement in fit were the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI; also known as the Non-normed Fit Index) and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI). Both of these statistics were bound between 0 and 1, where Monte Carlo research suggests that values of .95 or higher indicate a good model fit. The value of TLI (table 7) increased from 0.801 to 0.903, and the value of CFI increased from 0.819 to 0.920 revealing a fairly good model fit.

GFI (Goodness-of-Fit Index) is another indicator in evaluating the model fit to the data. According to Jöreskog & Sörbom (1984), the value of GFI is equal or less than one and if it equals to one, it means that the model completely fits the data. The value of GFI (Table 7) was increased from 0.760 to 0.868.

AGFI (Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index) ranges between 0 and 1 and if it is higher than 0.90, the model fit will be fine as it noted by Tabachnick & Fidell (2007) (Movahed Mohammadi & Pouratashi, 2016).

RMSEA (Root Squared Error of Approximation) is another indicator in estimating the goodness of fit of a model. According to Browne & Cudeck (1993) and Mîndrilă (2010), if the value of RMSEA is equal to or less than 0.05, it will be an excellent fit model, while if it is between 0.05 and 0.08, it will have an acceptable goodness of fit (Movahed Mohammadi & Pouratashi, 2016). The value of RMSEA (Table 7) was reduced from 0.072 to 0.066 suggesting an acceptable fitness of the model.

Table 7. Indicators of the model fitness

Scale	X <sup>2</sup>	Df	CMIN/DF	NFI	TLI	CFI	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA
Initial scale (45 items, first order factors)	2783.626	900	3.093	.756	.801	.819	.760	.724	.072
Initial scale (28 items, first order factors)	795.244	288	2.761	.881	.903	.920	.868	.827	.066

#### 5.4 Binomial Logistic Regression

Choosing or not choosing Iran as a traveling destination was the dependent variable in this study. The independent variables were categorized into two groups: sociodemographic variables and intention affected variables. The sociodemographic variables included gender, age, religion, traveling budget, number of traveling abroad, and travel partner. On the other hand, the intention affected variables involved the variables which were finalized in the CFA test.

Table 8. Regression Coefficients and Significant values

Type of Variable	Variable Name		$\beta$	Wald	Exp( $\beta$ )	Sig
Sociodemographic Variables	Gender	Male	<b>-.596</b>	<b>2.606</b>	<b>.551</b>	<b>.106</b>
	Age		<b>.005</b>	<b>.064</b>	<b>1.005</b>	<b>.800</b>
	Religion		<b>-.058</b>	<b>.357</b>	<b>.944</b>	<b>.550</b>
	Travel Partner			<b>1.642</b>		<b>.650</b>
	Travel Partner (1)		<b>-.306</b>	<b>.123</b>	<b>.736</b>	<b>.726</b>
	Travel Partner (2)		<b>-.558</b>	<b>.465</b>	<b>.572</b>	<b>.495</b>
	Travel Partner (3)		<b>-.841</b>	<b>.957</b>	<b>.431</b>	<b>.328</b>
	No. of Traveling			<b>10.934</b>		<b>.053</b>
	No. of Traveling (1)		<b>-1.731</b>	<b>5.678</b>	<b>.177</b>	<b>.017</b>
	No. of Traveling (2)		<b>-.260</b>	<b>.213</b>	<b>.771</b>	<b>.645</b>
	No. of Traveling (3)		<b>-.327</b>	<b>.359</b>	<b>.721</b>	<b>.549</b>
	No. of Traveling (4)		<b>.216</b>	<b>.152</b>	<b>1.242</b>	<b>.697</b>
	No. of Traveling (5)		<b>1.130</b>	<b>1.498</b>	<b>3.095</b>	<b>.221</b>
	Traveling Budget			<b>2.495</b>		<b>.646</b>
	Traveling Budget (1)		<b>-.102</b>	<b>.012</b>	<b>.903</b>	<b>.911</b>
	Traveling Budget (2)		<b>-.223</b>	<b>.133</b>	<b>.800</b>	<b>.715</b>
Traveling Budget (3)		<b>-.564</b>	<b>.908</b>	<b>.569</b>	<b>.341</b>	
Traveling Budget (4)		<b>.117</b>	<b>.033</b>	<b>1.124</b>	<b>.855</b>	
Intention Affected Variables	Attractions		<b>.438</b>	<b>26.954</b>	<b>1.550</b>	<b>.000</b>
	Service Infrastructure		<b>.135</b>	<b>2.564</b>	<b>1.145</b>	<b>.109</b>
	Perceived Behavioral Control		<b>.070</b>	<b>.502</b>	<b>1.072</b>	<b>.478</b>

Environment of Iran	.710	44.763	2.033	.000
Perceived Local Barriers	-.098	1.149	.906	.284
Sources of Gathering Information	.154	2.710	1.166	.100
Traveling				
Political Risks	-.289	5.774	.749	.016
Subjective Norms	.169	2.119	1.184	.146
Perceived Travel Risks	-.210	.713	.811	.398
Advertisements	-.142	2.369	.867	.124
Constant	-14.969	35.569	.000	.000

As shown in Table 8, traveling abroad once, attractions of Iran, the environment of Iran, and political risks were significant with  $P < 0.01$  and  $P < 0.05$ . Based on this outcome, it could be interpreted that the probability of choosing Iran as a traveling destination by Chinese tourists depends on the mentioned independent variables.

As observed in Table 8, attractions of Iran along with its environment had a positive impact on choosing Iran ( $\beta$  coefficient in BLR), while the other two variables which were political risks and traveling abroad once had a negative impact on choosing Iran. To explain it comprehensively, it means that improving the attractions of Iran by one unit leads to about 55% increase in the intention of Chinese tourists in choosing Iran (according to the value of  $\text{Exp}(\beta)$ ). More importantly, improving the environment of Iran by one unit results in around 203.3% rise in Chinese tourists' intention. Finally, decreasing the perceived traveling risks by one unit causes an increase in Chinese tourists' intention in choosing Iran by about 74.9%.

### 5.5 Model Evaluation

Figures in Table 9 demonstrate the fitness of the model.

Table 9. Evaluators of the Model Fitness

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	271.031 <sup>a</sup>	.513	.683

The value of (-2log likelihood) equals to 271.031. The value of Cox & Snell R Square equals to 0.513, this indicator plays the same role of  $R^2$  in regression analysis and if it is greater than 0.50, the fitness of the model will be good. The next indicator is Nagelkerke R Square, whose value also confirms this model goodness of fit.

The next test is based on the chi-square distribution ( $X^2$ ) and the significance of the model, which is the Hosmer & Lemeshow test.

Table 10. Hosmer and Lemeshow Test

Step	Chi-square	df	Sig.
1	23.031	8	.003

The  $H_0$  hypothesis in this test suggests lack of a relationship between independent and dependent variables or all of the regression coefficients equal 0. This hypothesis is rejected in the confidence level of 99% as it is significant in  $p < 0.01$ . To confirm this result, there is another indicator in regression logistic which is called the power of the detection model.

Table 11. Classification Table

Observed	Predicted destination		Percentage Correct		
	No	Yes			
Step 1	irdestination	No	182	24	88.3
		Yes	26	174	87.0
Overall Percentage					87.7

The percentage of correctness reveals the correctness of the model in logistic regression. According to Table 11, the percentage of correctness for this model has been 87.7% which is a good value for this indicator.

## 6. Conclusion

Based on the results of the Binomial Logistic Regression, there are three factors whose improvement might have a more positive influence on the Chinese intention in choosing Iran as a traveling destination. There are factors related to the attractions and environment of Iran and political issues. Attractions of Iran include historical and cultural sites, world heritages, holy shrines, natural sightseeings, handicrafts, and adventurous activities. The number of the cultural world heritages in Iran such as Bisotun, Golestan Palace, and Persepolis, which are already registered by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), are 22

sites and there is only one natural world heritage in Iran which is Lut desert (List, 2019).

Previous research about the role of world heritage sites in absorbing outbound tourists by (Su & Lin, 2014) proved that both cultural and natural world heritage sites could enhance the number of inbound tourists, but the effect of natural world heritage sites is slightly larger than that of cultural heritage. Another research on Chinese tourist's behavior on destination choice by the authors also found that Chinese tourists have more interest in visiting natural sightseeing. So improving attractions in this study could be mostly related to nature-associated issues. Another research also claimed that tourists have more motivation for experiencing new unique activities (Frederik et al., 2016). These research achievements guide tourism operators to concentrate more on providing better facilities for visiting natural and cultural sites in Iran and designing more unique activities. For example, the process of making rose water in Kashan could be useful in improving this factor.

The environment of Iran includes the characteristics of Iranian people and the safety of Iran. Most outbound tourists mentioned the hospitality and the friendly behavior of Iranian people in treating them. They were very impressed by such moral characters. It can be pointed out that these attributes might play an important role in making outbound tourists feel more attached to a specific destination which will influence developing the tourist market in the mentioned destination (Lee, 2009). Indeed, presenting the reality of people's life and safety of traveling in Iran could enhance the interest of outbound tourists to choose Iran for traveling.

Another impacting factor in decision-making by Chinese tourists is the issues related to political unrest and the relationship between Iran and western countries. Nevertheless, according to Anholts (2002), a distinction should be drawn between a country image and destination image as the country image is the sum of beliefs regarding a country and is affected by economic, political, and geographical factors while destination image is related to how a country is perceived as a vacation place (Lee, 2009). The results demonstrated that political issues have affected the destination image. There are examples indicating the effect of political issues on tourists' choices; the number of tourist arrivals collapsed in Egypt for Arab spring events which originated from political issues. Similarly, of the number of tourists fell in Turkey recently because of the decisions made by the government based on political affairs. So, improvement in this issue will be effective in enhancing the tourists' intention to choose Iran as a traveling destination.

Another factor which revealed negative effects on the Chinese tourists in choosing Iran as a traveling destination was the number of trips abroad. The people with one experience of traveling abroad had a negative intention for traveling to Iran. It could be interpreted that traveling to Iran is not in priority for Chinese people, and Iran is not attractive enough for them. It is suggested that the correct information should be provided to inform Chinese tourists about Iran by making short videos of the attractions of Iran, presenting Iran in tourism fairs, and publishing guide books about Iranian culture, history, geography, and all the issues related to tourism.

There are several limitations to this research. It was done in China. As such, It is suggested that this survey be conducted in other countries to measure the intention of people in choosing Iran as a traveling destination. Knowing the perception of tourists about Iran would help to improve tourism affairs in this country. Secondly, it focused mostly on Chinese people who were living in Shanghai. It would have been nice if this survey had been taken in other parts of China as well, as China is a vast country, to obtain far more accurate information about Chinese outbound tourists.

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