Strategic Planning of Rural Tourism in Iran

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers rural tourism as one of the most important forms of tourism and studies proper strategies for its development considering its specific and extraordinary environment. In other words the object of preparing and writing this article is to formulate suitable strategies for Iran rural tourism in a three phase framework consisting of input, matching and decision levels. This research is applied in target and statistical population are all technical managers of tourism agencies in the country and data is gathered by designing and administration of questionnaire. The sample sizeof this study amounts to 278 persons.

Surveys show that rural tourism is one of the most powerful forms of tourism in this country and can be the first choice for domestic and foreign tourists. Result shows that for development of this industryharvest or divest strategies are the first priority. Reinforcement of local rural communities through training and management of rural tourism attractions and suitable interaction with tourists are most important requirements for development of rural tourism.

KEYWORDS: Rural Tourism, Strategic Planning, TOPSIS, Forms of tourism, Grow and Build strategies, Iran Rural Tourism.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays traveling and tourism with the aim of recreation is one of the most important industries in the world. This sector by job creation has an important role in economic sphere. Foreign exchange and the expenditure that tourists spend for local products and services are the other benefits of this sector for economy [1].

Tourism industry as one of the important and global pillars of the economy becomes more important day by day. So, most of the governmentsuse it as a suitable way to encounter with today's economic problems. Iran, as one of the developing countries, has a big share of tourism industry and has the potential to become a top destination. Development of tourism without any guiding framework and pre-determined strategy for achieving development goals and in ad hoc manner is impossible[2].

Tourism acts as a panacea: a way to fund conservation and research, protect ecosystems, make income for rural communities, help to tourism development process in poor countries, increase ecological and cultural sensitivityand create environmental and social awareness in tourism sector [3].

To prevent the negative effects of lack of appropriate tourism development plans such as undesired social and environmental effects, preparing tourism plans is necessary [4].

Strategic planning is a process that creates congruity between managerial targets and changing market opportunities. Strategic planning of tourism industry shows strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to governments that are useful in increasing the advantages of sector. So countries by strategic planning can have a better place in market. Also defines religion as a system of beliefs that warns humans of their superhuman power and their ability to overpass the problems of life [5].

Rural tourism has a close relation to people's interest to city suburbs or their motivation for visiting rural areas because of the nostalgic feeling to the living in rural communities [6,7,8].Lack of comprehensive and clear definition about rural tourism has caused lack of surveys and researches in this field. Sometimes farm tourism (including accommodation established in the farms or farm based recreational activities such as horse riding tours or agricultural festivals) is considered as a part of rural tourism [9,10,11].

Other authors have considered nature-based tourism including walking in natural parks and recreation in open air environments or staying in rural cottages or summer houses as a part of rural tourism[12].In a thesis titled "Rural Tourism Development through Rural Cooperatives" refer to important goals of leaders with respect to rural cooperatives in tourism development which would include facilitating, encouraging participants and training and developing local skills in rural areas and then present a figure which indicates overall interaction between rural cooperatives and rural tourism development and states that in this process three community capacities level have a vital role and must play an active role in promoting tourism in rural areas by establishing strong networks with tourism organizations and fostering collaboration of locals[13].

Iran consists of 31 provinces that in each of the provinces there are 5 to 15 villages are considered as tourism areas by Iran Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization because of its unique natural and historical attractions. Although Iran hashigh potential for rural attractions, rural tourism industry is a new

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phenomenon in this country and has been considered only in recent years. Iran rural areas include varied cultural, historical, natural attractions and monuments because of the old civilizationof the country and attract large number of tourists and travelers.Management of rural tourism is possible in a number of ways, but we can't and shouldn't use all areas for development of rural tourism [14] and unplanned development of rural tourism can result in unfavorable and negative results, some of them are as follows:

- Destruction of the environment and the threat imposed on cultural heritage.
- Social and cultural problems and damaging social and cultural identity of host communities.
- Not achieving the target of removing the poverty when rural tourism companies are owned by non-local institutions.
- Unbalanced rural tourism development can result in marginalization of agriculture.

Iran includes lots of attractions and areas with natural or historical importance, so unsuitable and incorrect policies and strategies can result in deterioration of the places and even declining of tourism which has potential to create job opportunities for 2/5 million persons and 3% of GDP. Although planning for tourism development in Iran has started from 1858, but because of prioritization of other plans and existence of oil and other resources this industry has been neglected and the need for formulating strategies has been never felt [15].

In today's world, presenting a definition about geographical area and making policies for different tourists is of considerable importance. According to differences between tourism destinations and forms of tourists adapting different policies and strategies is necessary [16].
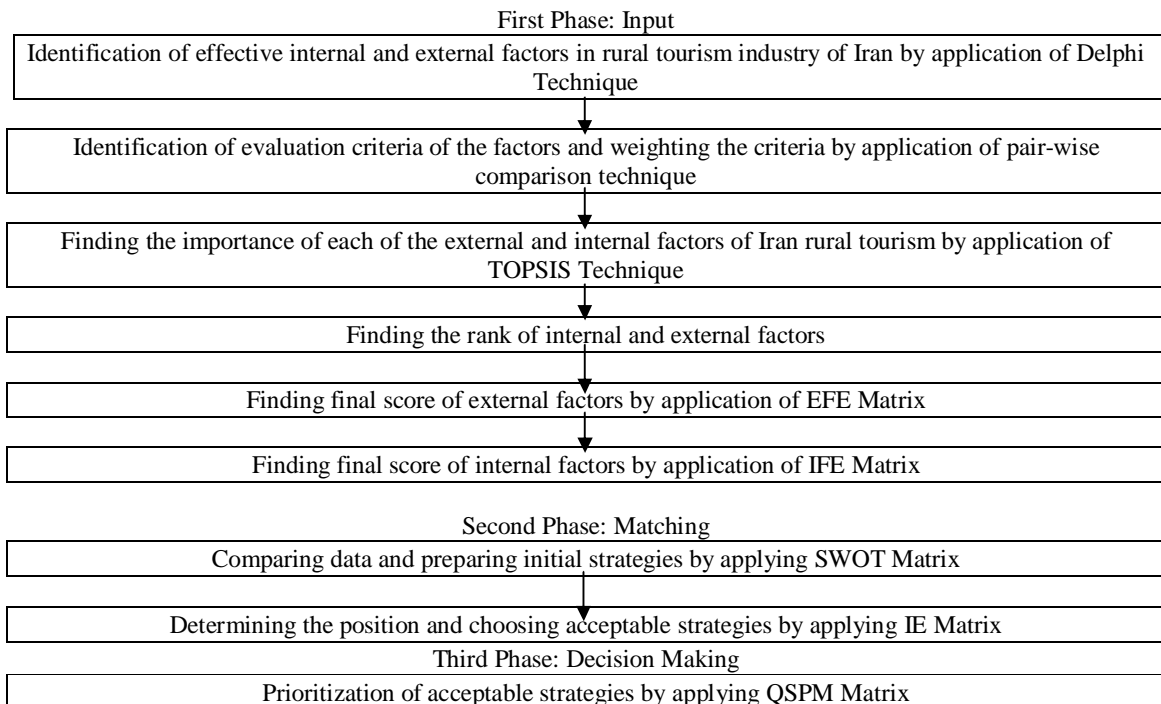
MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

The present study is of descriptive research type. It is considered as applied type in terms of objective. The present study is of survey research type in terms of collection of information and data has been made through studying books and documents. For obtaining necessary information at this study, required data have been collected through library-based studies, questionnaire and obtaining data from resources and documents (for provision of study theoretical fundamentals).

2.1. ResearchModel

Basic methods of preparing rural tourism strategies can be included in a three phase framework including input, adaptation and decision making (Diagram 1). The first phase of preparing strategies includes recognizing effective internal and external factors on the forms of tourism by applying pair-wise technique.

Diagram 1. Strategic Framework to Formulate Strategy

First Phase: Input

Identification of effective internal and external factors in rural tourism industry of Iran by application of Delphi Technique

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Identification of evaluation criteria of the factors and weighting the criteria by application of pair-wise comparison technique

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Finding the importance of each of the external and internal factors of Iran rural tourism by application of TOPSIS Technique

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Finding the rank of internal and external factors

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Finding final score of external factors by application of EFE Matrix

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Finding final score of internal factors by application of IFE Matrix

Second Phase: Matching

Comparing data and preparing initial strategies by applying SWOT Matrix

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Determining the position and choosing acceptable strategies by applying IE Matrix

Third Phase: Decision Making

Prioritization of acceptable strategies by applying QSPM Matrix

Before applying EFE and IFE matrix to find the final score of Iran rural tourism industry, we calculate the importance degree of each factor by applying TOPSIS technique and the degree of reaction (rank) of rural tourism to the factors by administration of questionnaire. In the first phase (input), basic information for preparation of strategies is determined. In the second (matching) stage, different forms of possible strategies are considered and for doing this, balance is made among external and internal factors. Techniques applied in the second phase include strengths- weaknesses-opportunities-threats (SWOT) matrix and internal and external matrix (IE).

2.2 Statistical Population, Sample Size and Sampling Method

All technical managers of tourism companies are statistical population of the preset study. In this study sample sizeis calculated by application of Morgan table and equals 1000 persons according to reports presented in Euromonitor 2009 report about real number of active traveling agencies. The sample sizeof this study amounts to 278 persons. The reason for choosing them is that they have enough experience in related matters and are well acquainted with different forms of tourism and internal environment (strengths and weaknesses) and external environment(opportunities and threats) of tourism industry of Iran. Random classified sampling method was used and one technical manager is selected from each company.

2.3 Validity& Reliability, Measuring Tools

At the present study, library based study was applied for preparation of theoretical basis and recording of previous studies and questionnaire is used for determining the affective factors and degree of reaction of tourism industry to these factors.

Provided initial questionnaire was given to university professors and experts in charge, with the aim of presenting their views on validity of questionnaire and whether questions posed at the questionnaire are appropriate or not. Then, viewpoints of lecturers and officials in charge were considered at questionnaire and consequently, necessary changes were made at questions.

Cronbach's Alpha Test was used for testing reliability of questionnaire of study [17]. For this reason, 76 study questionnaires were distributed among statistical population (individuals set for this study). Then each answer was studied individually and response rate of each question was calculated. First, the rate of acquired responses was over 90% of the sample. Second, there was no question to which most of the 16 person group didn't answer or gave an unexpected response. In the same direction, Cronbach'sAlpha Reliability Test was made through the application of SPSS software package. Generally, test reliability rate was obtained 85% at large.

2.4 Method of Analysis
Delphi

Delphi method starts with identification of the problem and selected experts (Delphi panel) based on their experiment related to the defined problem. A questionnaire is designed and distributed to the Delphi panel. Then data is collected and analyzed to reach consensus in responses. If the respondents have reached consensus a report is developed based on responses, if not, a new questionnaire is developed based on the results of the previous round and again distributed to the panel. This process is repeated until consensus is reached and based on which a final report is developed [18].

Weighting the Criteria

The basic procedure to carry out the pair-wise comparison consists of Prioritization of criteria by pair-wise comparison (weighing). Rating the relative priority of the criteria is done by assigning a weight between 1 (equal importance) and 9 (extreme importance) to the more important criterion, whereas the value reciprocal to that is assigned to the other criterion in the pair. The weightings are then assigned a number and averaged in order to obtain an average weight for each criterion [19].

TOPSIS

For ranking and selecting the most appropriate suppliers TOPSIS method is more appropriate due to the following reasons: In this technique, due to permission of desirability exchange between the attributes, it is possible to improve a supplier performance through its comparative advantage in some areas, despite its poor performance in other cases. In TOPSIS decision making technique, interaction effect of attributes is considered. This technique also considers Conflict and compatibility between attributes [20,21,22,23].

TOPSIS decision making technique is less sensitive compared to weighting technique. Considering the subjects covered in this study, compensating models and its constructive subgroup, TOPSIS technique, is used for evaluating and ranking the suppliers [24].

EFE and IFE Matrixes

External Factor Evaluation (EFE) Matrix summarizes economic, social, cultural, demographic, environmental, political, governmental, legal, technological, and competitive information [25,26,27]. Internal

Factor Evaluation Matrix (IFE) summarizes the major strengths and weaknesses in the functional areas of a business. Ratings and Weighted Scores are two important variables in IFE and EFE matrixes. Companies and industries rate each internal and external factor 1-to-4 in EFE and IFE Tables to indicate how effectively the firm's current strategies respond to the factor. Firms assign a weight from 0.0 to 1.0 to each internal and external factor in EFE and IFE Tables. Weights indicate the relative importance of that factor to being successful in the firm's industry.

SWOT

Surveying internal and external environment is an important part of the strategic planning. Internal factors can be classified as strengths (S) or weaknesses (W), and external factors can be classified as opportunities (O) or threats (T). Such analysis of the strategic environment is referred to as SWOT analysis. The SWOT analysis provides information that is helpful in matching the firm's resources and capabilities to the competitive environment. It is instrumental in strategy formulation and selection.

Strength: An internal competence, valuable resource or attribute that an organization can use to exploit opportunities in the external environment
Weakness: An internal lack of a competence, resource or attribute that an organization requires to perform in the external environment
Opportunity: An external possibility that an organization can pursue or exploit to gain benefit
Threat: An external factor that has the potential to reduce an organization's performance [28].
• **SO strategies:** pursue opportunities that are a good fit to the company's strengths.
• **WO strategies:** overcome weaknesses to pursue opportunities.
• **ST strategies:** identify the ways that the firm can use its strengths to reduce its vulnerability to external threats.

• **WT strategies:** establish a defensive plan to prevent the firm's weaknesses from making it highly susceptible to external threats [29].

Internal-External (IE) Matrix

Internal-External (IE) Matrix positions an organization's various divisions in a nine cell display through plotting them in a schematic diagram. The size of each circle represents the percentage sales contribution of each division, and pie slices reveal the percentage profit contribution of each division in IE Matrix [19].

IE Matrix is based on two key dimensions: IFE total weighted scores on the x-axis and EFE total weighted scores on the y axis. On the x-axis of the IE Matrix, an IFE total weighted score of 1.0 to 1.99 represents a weak internal position; a score of 2.0 to 2.99 is considered average; and a score of 3.0 to 4.0 is strong. Similarly, on the y-axis, an EFE total weighted score of 1.0 to 1.99 is considered low; a score of 2.0 to 2.99 is medium; and a score of 3.0 to 4.0 is high. The IE Matrix can be divided into three major regions that have different strategy implications. First region gives the prescription of grow and buildfor divisions that fall into cells I, II, or IV. Intensive (market penetration, market development, and product development) or integrative (backward integration, forward integration, and horizontal integration) strategies can be most appropriate for these divisions. Second region gives the prescription of hold and maintainfor divisions that fall into cells III, V, or VII. Market penetration and product development are two commonly employed strategies for these forms of divisions. Third region gives the prescription of harvest or divestfor divisions that fall into cells VI, VIII, or IX. Liquidation, retrenchment and divestiture are appropriate strategies for these divisions. Successful organizations are able to achieve a portfolio of businesses positioned in or around cell I in the IE Matrix [30].

Reorganization of Internal and External Factors in Iran Rural Tourism

In the first phase internal and external factors of Iran rural tourism were recognized by surveying literature review and research backgrounds. Then all the internal and external factors were analyzed carefully and most repeated and frequented factors in different researches were extracted. After administering 3 rounds of Delphi method, we acquired expert's attitudes and recognized strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats affecting Iran rural tourism industry. (Table 1)

Table 1. Opportunities, Threats, Strengths and Weaknesses in Iran Rural Tourism

Opportunities	Threats	Strengths	Weaknesses
8	6	5	12

Reorganization and Weighting of Evaluative Criteria

Referring to literature review and research background, some criteria which are affecting Iran rural tourism are recognized and then by administration of questionnaire, aspects and ideas of tourism and geography experts are acquired. Then weight of each criterion is calculated on the basis of pair-wise comparison (Table 3).

Table 2. Weights of Criteria

Criteria	Weight
Number of Tourists	0.354
Length of Stay	0.303
Second Visit	0.116
Encouraging the Others	0.227

Finding the Importance of Each Factor in Rural Tourism

In this phase importance degree of each factor in rural tourism is calculated on the basis of number of rural tourists, length of stay, second visit and encouraging others. Weights are given by technical managers of tourism companies in Iran. Degrees are assigned a number between 0 (not important) & 1(most important). Then by application of TOPSIS technique and considering the weight of each of the determined criteria importance degree of each factor is calculated.

Tables of Importance of Iran Rural Tourism

Table 3. Table of Importance of External Factors

Opportunities	Number of Tourists	Length of Stay	SecondVisit	Encouraging the Others
1. Ever developing demand for rural tourism across the world.	6.63	6.44	6.12	6.03
2. Existence of a considerable number of potential touristslike Iranians settled in Western countries and neighbor and Islamic countries which have historical, religious and cultural relations with Iran.	8.84	8.89	8.73	8.66
3. Originality, distinction and authenticity of Iran's rural tourism attractions for some of rural tourists.	9.65	9.79	9.91	9.78
4. Existence of demand by domestic tourists (potential tourists) and increase of free time.	9.71	9.67	9.84	9.79
5. Geographical position of this country (Closeness to tourist generating countries).	7.69	7.74	7.56	7.67
6. Accessibility by ship, airplane, train and car.	7.19	7.06	6.65	6.43
7. High level of technological development in the world, which can support tourism industry.	6.81	6.2	5.4	5.3
8. Existence of supplementary attractions, beside rural attractions.	7.34	7.19	6.03	6.11
Threats	Number of Tourists	Length of Stay	SecondVisit	Encouraging the Others
1.Presentation of an unsuitable image of Iran in international societies (negative advertisement and political and economic prohibitions) to international tourists.	9.72	9.75	9.69	9.77
2.Tensions, restlessness and insecurity in Middle East and especially in neighbor countries like Afghanistan and Iraq, which causes the number of international tourists to decrease.	6.69	6.83	6.85	6.45
3. Increase and intensification of competing in international markets and existence of capable competitors with high capacity to attract rural tourists (e.g. Turkey) and the threat imposed by potential rivals.	9.75	9.82	9.75	9.80
4. World economic recession which causes the number of travelers to decrease.	7.31	8.06	7.44	7.65
5. Natural disasters like floods and earthquake.	8.66	8.73	8.36	8.19
6. Not choosing Iran by rural tourists from western and developed countries.	9.16	9.27	8.88	9.13

Table 4.Table of Importance of Internal Factors

Strengths	Number of Tourists	Length of Stay	SecondVisit	Encouraging the Others
1. Natural attractions of rural areas including deserts, mountains suitable for climbing, hot springs, forests, rivers, valleys, wildlife and flora and fauna.	6.78	6.91	6.16	6.03
2. Farm-based attractions like aqueducts, old mills and dams, old trees, methods for planting, growing and harvesting of agricultural products and deriving the extraction of herbs.	9.43	9.19	8.81	8.92
3. Rural arts and handicrafts such as hand-woven carpets and workshops to wove carpets, dish production and other art works.	9.48	8.83	9.39	9.27
4. Cultural and religious customs like nomadic living style and their migration, anthropological attractions, local and ethical communities, local food products and games, religious and traditional festivals, carnivals, celebrations and mourning, communicative old centers like tea houses and bathes.	9.86	9.94	9.74	9.89
5. Rural buildings and monuments such as ancient villages, notable mosques and monuments which exceed over 70000 and also some huge castles and forts located in rural areas.	7.26	7.04	6.27	6.14
Weaknesses	Number of Tourists	Length of Stay	Second Visit	Encouraging the Others

1. Lack of comprehensive plans and strategies to develop rural tourism and existence of public and legal restrictions and over incumbent of the government in the field of tourism.	9.69	9.73	9.86	9.79
2. Unsuitable transportation system for easy access to rural tourism attractions which are located in different parts of the country.	8.70	9.07	8.78	8.66
3. Unsuitable hospitality and accommodation centers to provide good services to rural tourists.	8.92	9.46	9.06	9.14
4. Inexpert, weak and inefficient human resource and lack of suitable educational system, especially in the field of rural tourism.	8.79	9.14	8.92	9.07
5. Weak promotion and marketing efforts to introduce rural tourism attractions to tourists.	9.27	9.50	9.12	9.13
6. Providing unsuitable health services in the vicinity of rural tourism attractions.	8.66	8.79	8.41	8.27
7. Low access to modern technologies such as internet, express post, mobile phones and guiding software in the areas which have potential to develop rural tourism.	6.53	6.08	5.74	5.39
8. Limited activity of travel agencies in the field of rural tourism.	8.68	8.91	8.63	8.31
9. Seasonality of rural tourism and unequal distribution of tourism volume through the year.	9.53	9.49	9.26	9.08
10. Weakness of social security, especially in remote areas.	9.07	9.56	9.17	9.10
11. High rate of inflation and unsuitable domestic economy which makes the development of rural tourism difficult and increases the expense of traveling to Iran.	8.66	8.94	8.62	8.55
12. Cultural and communicative barriers especially in the vicinity of rural attractions and negative attitude of authorities, strategists and local communities to the development of tourism.	9.74	9.80	9.78	9.87

Finding Final Scores of External Factors (EFE)

In order to calculate the final score of external factors, we put the opportunities and threat factors for rural tourism in EFE matrix. Then degrees of importance of each of the factors which was previously calculated via TOPSIS technique were added and each of the degrees of importance was divided to total degree and the result is entered in the column of coefficients of EFE. This helps us to gain the total coefficient equal to one. In the next step we found the ranks of each external factor. The importance degree (weight) of each factor was multiplied in its rank to find the total score of each factor. After that, the scores of all factors in the matrix were added to find the total final score of external factors.

Table 5. Matrix of External Factors in Rural Tourism

External Factors		Importance Degree	Rank	Final Score
Opportunities	1. Ever developing demand for rural tourism across the world.	0.0131	2.08	0.0272
	2. Existence of a considerable number of potential touristslike Iranians settled in Western countries and neighbor and Islamic countries which have historical, religious and cultural relations with Iran.	0.0941	2.16	0.2033
	3. Originality, distinction and authenticity of Iran's rural tourism attractions for some of rural tourists.	0.1261	2.36	0.2976
	4. Existence of demand by domestic tourists (potential tourists) and increase of free time.	0.1254	3.54	0.4439
	5. Geographical position of this country (Closeness to tourist generating countries).	0.0557	2.19	0.1220
	6. Accessibility by ship, airplane, train and car.	0.0293	2.31	0.0677
	7. High level of technological development in the world, which can support tourism industry.	0.0041	2.06	0.0084
	8. Existence of supplementary attractions, beside rural attractions.	0.0288	2.04	0.0588
Threats	1.Presentation of an unsuitable image of Iran in international societies (negative advertisement and political and economic prohibitions) to international tourists.	0.1262	1.32	0.1666
	2.Tensions, restlessness and insecurity in Middle East and especially in neighbor countries like Afghanistan and Iraq, which causes the number of international tourists to decrease.	0.0236	1.78	0.0420
	3. Increase and intensification of competing in international markets and existence of capable competitors with high capacity to attract rural tourists (e.g. Turkey) and the threat imposed by potential rivals.	0.1273	1.06	0.1349
	4. World economic recession which causes the number of travelers to decrease.	0.0543	1.55	0.0842
	5. Natural disasters like floods and earthquake.	0.0853	1.14	0.0972
	6. Not choosing Iran by rural tourists from western and developed countries.	0.1067	1.08	0.1152
Total		1		1.8690

Analysis of the Results of the Table of Matrix of External Factors of Rural Tourism

On the basis of table of final scores of the external factors in Iran rural tourism we can say that this industry is facing 8 opportunities and 6 threats among which factor number 3 (Originality, distinction and authenticity of Iran's rural tourism attractions for some of rural tourists) with importance degree equal to 0.1261 and factor number 4(Existence of demand by domestic tourists and increase of free time)with importance degree equal to 0.1254 are the most important opportunities for Iran rural tourism.

Surveying and studying of the ranks indicates that this industry is showing average reaction just to factor number 4 with importance degree equal to 3.54and in other cases the reaction has been weak and below average.

Surveying the threats indicates high importance of factor number 3(Increase and intensification of competing in international markets and existence of capable competitors) with importance degree equal to 0.1273 and factor number 1(Presentation of an unsuitable image of Iran in international societies) with importance degree equal to 0.1262.

Reaction to all threats has been weak and rural tourism industry has not been able to prevent negative results of the threats. Total score equal to 1.8690 in rural tourism shows general weakness of this industry against external factors.

Table 6. Matrix of Internal Factors in Rural Tourism

Internal Factors		Importance Degree	Rank	Final Score
Strengths	1. Natural attractions of rural areas including deserts, mountains suitable for climbing, hot springs, forests, rivers, valleys, wildlife and flora and fauna.	0.0069	2.47	0.0170
	2. Farm-based attractions like aqueducts, old mills and dams, old trees, methods for planting, growing and harvesting of agricultural products and deriving the extraction of herbs.	0.0696	2.51	0.1747
	3. Rural arts and handicrafts such as hand-woven carpets and workshops to wove carpets, dish production and other art works.	0.0691	2.24	0.1548
	4. Cultural and religious customs like nomadic living style and their migration, anthropological attractions, local and ethical communities, local food products and games, religious and traditional festivals, carnivals, celebrations and mourning, communicative old centers like tea houses and bathes.	0.0880	2.31	0.2033
	5. Rural buildings and monuments such as ancient villages, notable mosques and monuments which exceed over 70000 and also some huge castles and forts located in rural areas.	0.0087	2.16	0.0188
Weaknesses	1. Lack of comprehensive plans and strategies to develop rural tourism and existence of public and legal restrictions and over incumbent of the government in the field of tourism.	0.0841	1.28	0.1076
	2. Unsuitable transportation system for easy access to rural tourism attractions which are located in different parts of the country.	0.0589	1.77	0.1043
	3. Unsuitable hospitality and accommodation centers to provide good services to rural tourists.	0.0676	1.08	0.0730
	4. Inexpert, weak and inefficient human resource and lack of suitable educational system, especially in the field of rural tourism.	0.0631	1.06	0.0669
	5. Weak promotion and marketing efforts to introduce rural tourism attractions to tourists.	0.0724	1.05	0.0760
	6. Providing unsuitable health services in the vicinity of rural tourism attractions.	0.0533	1.36	0.0725
	7. Low access to modern technologies such as internet, express post, mobile phones and guiding software in the areas which have potential to develop rural tourism.	0.0141	1.13	0.0159
	8. Limited activity of travel agencies in the field of rural tourism.	0.0551	1.23	0.0678
	9. Seasonality of rural tourism and unequal distribution of tourism volume through the year.	0.0749	1.09	0.0816
	10. Weakness of social security, especially in remote areas.	0.0702	1.93	0.1355
	11. High rate of inflation and unsuitable domestic economy which makes the development of rural tourism difficult and increases the expense of traveling to Iran.	0.0566	1.69	0.0957
	12. Cultural and communicative barriers especially in the vicinity of rural attractions and negative attitude of authorities, strategists and local communities to the development of tourism.	0.0874	1.02	0.0891
Total		1		1. 5545

Analysis of the Results of the Table of the Internal Factors of Rural Tourism Matrix

Surveying the results of the internal factors in the matrix of Iran rural tourism industry shows that this industry is facing 5 strengths and 12 weaknesses. Among the strengths, factor number 4 (Cultural and religious customs like nomadic living style and their migration, anthropological attractions, local and ethical

communities,) with importance degree equal to 0.0880 is the most important factor. The ranks indicate weak reaction to this strength and unsuitable utilization of them.

On the basis of the results of the same table, the most important weakness of Iran rural tourism industry are factors number 12 (Cultural and communicative barriers) with importance degree equal to 0.0874 and number 1 (Lack of comprehensive plans and strategies to develop rural tourism) with importance degree equal to 0.0841. Surveying the ranks indicates weak reaction of Iran rural tourism to all weaknesses. Total score equal to 1.5545 shows weak status of internal factors of Iran rural tourism industry.

Comparing Data and Preparing Initial Strategies by Applying SWOT Matrix

In the matrix of preparing strategies, evaluation stage includes all instruments which are dependent on all acquired data from previous stages (evaluation of internal and external factors) and it compares external opportunities and threats with internal strengths and weaknesses. For this, internal and external factors in SWOT matrix are compared to prepare possible strategies.

In the next step recognized opportunities, threats, strengths and weaknesses of rural tourism industry of Iran were put in columns of the matrix. Then internal strengths and external opportunities, internal weaknesses and external threats are compared and the results are entered in the places related to SO (strengths-opportunities), WO (weaknesses-opportunities), ST (strengths-threats) and WT (weaknesses-threats) strategies.

SO Strategies

1. Focus on the domestic rural tourism, strengthening and developing it.
2. Penetrating in Potential markets, such as Iranians settling in Western, neighbor and Muslim countries, which have historical, religious and cultural relations with Iran.
3. Developing new geographical markets and especially attracting rural tourists from tourist generating markets, such as America and Europe.
4. Developing tourism products with emphasis on rural tourism attractions by enhancing services and providing quality products.
5. Focusing on target markets, which rivals have a small share of it.

ST Strategies

1. Sustainable and balanced development of rural tourism.
2. Diversifying rural tourism products (providing varied rural tourism products in a package to rural tourists).
3. Providing distinguished and special rural tourism products for rural tourists, so that these kinds of products cannot be provided in rival countries especially Turkey.
4. Providing other tourism products such as leisure tourism, Spa tourism, cultural tourism, urban tourism and … to rural tourists.
5. Renovating and developing rural tourism areas.

WO Strategies

1. Reinforcing domestic rural tourism by preparing legislatures and supporting plans and improving the security of rural tourists.
2. Balanced or sustainable development of Iran rural tourism, through conservation and protection of environment, customs, languages and dialects, archeological style and etc.
3. Decreasing expenses and providing cheap rural tour packages for tourist generating countries.
4. Attracting rural tourists all year round and holding rural tourism ceremonies and ritualswith emphasis on anthropological attractions, ethical and native communities, food products, local games, religious and traditional festivals, feast and mourning.
5. Transferring the services related to air, sea, rail and road travels to domestic and foreign companies to increase the quality and decrease the prices.
6. Importing and adaptation of new global technologies to provide support for Iran rural tourism.
7. Transfer or participate in the management of rural tourism service units, such as accommodation along rural attractions, local and road-side restaurants, and special rural tourism tours.
8. Inclusion of other tourism products in rural tourism packages and establishing supplementary attractions beside rural tourism attractions.
9. Reforming the plans and preparing comprehensive strategies to develop rural tourism in Iran.

WT Strategies

1. Improving the image of Iran in the world, through suitable diplomacy, advertisement, establishing rural tourism developing offices in Iran embassies located in different countries.
2. Invest to deal with natural disasters such as floods and earthquake, enhancing the quality of infrastructures such as road transport, accommodation and hospitality centers, health and treatment services, increase access to new technologies such as internet, telephone, post, guiding software and etc. in the vicinity of the areas which have potential to develop rural tourism.
3. Marketing and introducing rural tourism attractions of Iran.

4. Reinforcing local rural societies, through training and management of rural tourism attractions and suitable interaction with tourists, so that besides providing maximum profit for local communities, it will result in the least negative effects on the environment and living style.

5. Participating with neighbor countries such as Turkey to arrange joint rural tourism packages.

6. Investing in rural tourism areas through devoting public funds, encouraging the local community to participate; and demanding loans from international financial institutions.

7. Encouraging volunteer associations, domestic and foreign related organizations, local communities and so on to recognize, protect, conserve, reinforce, develop and exploit rural tourism attractions.

8. Developing global technical and technological and also research and development cooperation and participation with research centers and global experienced universities.

9. Participating with leading countries in the field of rural tourism to perform grand projects through arranging midterm and long-term treaties and attract foreign investors to provide financial support for these projects.

Determining the Position and Selecting Acceptable Strategies by Applying IE Matrix

After preparing initial strategies by comparing internal and external factors in the matrix of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) acceptable strategies were selected among them. The process of selecting acceptable strategies of Iran rural tourism industry is as follows:

Preparing internal and external matrix (IE) includes two main dimensions. Final scores of matrix of evaluation of internal factors are shown on X axis and sum of final scores of matrix of evaluation of external factors of Iran rural tourism industry is shown on Y axis. The incidence point of sum of scores of internal and external factors of Iran rural tourism on X and Y determines the status of Iran rural tourism industry in internal and external matrix.

Diagram 2. Internal and External Matrix of Iran rural tourism (IE)
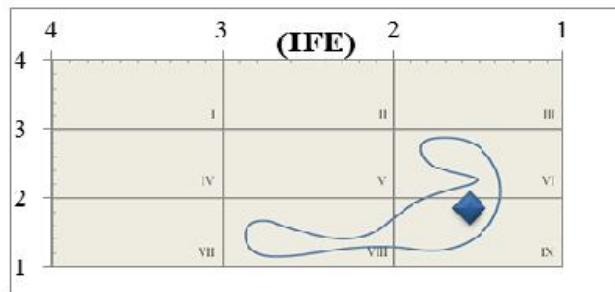
Choosing Acceptable Strategies

The joining point of total scores of internal and external factors of Iran rural tourism is in cell 9 of the internal and external matrix (IE), but because of closeness to cell 6 and lots of strengths of this industry, first harvest or divest strategies and then WO strategies are suggested .

Table 7. Final Strategies for IranRuralTourism

No	Final Strategies in RuralTourism	Total Attractiveness Score
1	Reinforcing local rural societies, through training and management of rural tourism attractions and suitable interaction with tourists, so that besides providing maximum profit for local communities, it will result in the least negative effects on the environment and living style.	3.89
2	Balanced or sustainable development of Iran rural tourism, through conservation and protection of environment, customs, languages and dialects, archeological style and etc.	3.56
3	Reinforcing domestic rural tourism by preparing legislatures and supporting plans and improving the security of rural tourists.	3.22
4	Invest to deal with natural disasters such as floods and earthquake, enhancing the quality of infrastructures such as road transport, accommodation and hospitality centers, health and treatment services, increase access to new technologies such as internet, telephone, post, guiding software and etc. in the vicinity of the areas which have potential to develop rural tourism.	3.08
5	Marketing and introducing rural tourism attractions of Iran.	2.85
6	Investing in rural tourism areas through devoting public funds, encouraging the local communities to participate; and demanding loans from international financial institutions.	2.63
7	Encouraging volunteer associations, domestic and foreign related organizations, local communities and so on to recognize, protect, conserve, reinforce, develop and exploit rural tourism attractions.	2.33

CONCLUSION

Surveys show that despite ever developing demand for rural tourism in the world, this sector of the tourism industry does not grow well and even originality and authenticity of the most of rural attractions has not been effective in convincing rural tourists to choose Iran as an ecotourism destination.

Natural attractions such as deserts, mountains, hot springs, forests and etc. and also farm-based attractions such as aqueducts, dams, old mills and trees and methods for planting, growing and harvesting of agricultural products and deriving the extraction of herbs on one hand and art and handicrafts, archeology and rural structure, customs and rural life style on the other hand can make the basis for development of this industry.

Lack of comprehensive plans and strategies to develop rural tourism, unsuitable transportation system, inexpert, weak and inefficient human resource, cultural and communicative barriers, providing unsuitable health services in the vicinity of rural tourism attractions, weak promotion and marketing efforts between local communities and rural tourists all indicate under development of rural environments and not paying attention to rural tourism.

On the basis of the surveys, this sector of Iran tourism needs careful attention to reinforcement of domestic rural tourism (by preparing legislatures and supporting plans) and balanced and sustainable development of the rural areas (by conservation and protection of the environment, customs, languages and dialects, architectural styles and etc.).

Selection of special areas for rural tourism, investing in those areas through devoting public funds, encouraging the local communities and volunteer associations to participate in reorganization, protection, conservation, reinforcement, development and exploiting rural attractions are other suitable strategies.

What is the most important point and in fact survival and progression of Iran rural tourism is depending to it, is reinforcement of local rural communities through training and management of rural tourism attractions and suitable interaction with tourists, which without this, rural tourism will not experience its favorable development.

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