

The Perceived Risk of Iran as a Tourism Destination (A Mixed Method Approach)

Alireza Emami*, Bahram Ranjbarian

*Department of Management, Faculty of Administration and Economic Science, University of Isfahan,
Isfahan, Iran*

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Abstract

Risk is an inherent factor in the traveler's choice of destination. Tourism destinations differ in many aspects including their location, economic condition, cultural and political status and crime. Given such differences, the analysis of destination risk and its dimensions is of substantial interest. The current study explores the risk factors perceived about Iran as a tourism destination using the mixed methods of qualitative content analysis and exploratory/confirmatory factor analysis. The results of qualitative and quantitative studies indicated that the potential tourists perceive eight types of risk factors about Iran, including the risk of human rights violation, satisfaction, inappropriate dress, inaccessibility to cash, crime, communication, securing visa and social risk.

Keywords

Risk Perception, Tourism Destination Marketing, Islamic country, Mixed Methods, Iran.

* Corresponding Author, Email: emami_999@yahoo.com

Introduction

International tourist's arrivals have a strong effect on the domestic economy of a country. There is a universal competition among different regions of the world to increase their international arrivals. According to UNWTO 2014 (World Tourism Organization), the regional prospects are the strongest for Asia and the Pacific (+5% to +6%) and Africa (+4% to +6%), followed by Europe, and America (both +3% to +4%) and the Middle East (0% to +5%). In relative terms, Iran has 0.22 % of the world's share in tourism arrival market (Annual Report of UNWTO, 2016). Iran has experienced a significant fall in its international tourism market since the Islamic Revolution in 1977 (Morakabati, 2012). Over the past 30 years, concurrent with the organized expansion of tourism in such countries as Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia and some Persian Gulf Arab states, Iran has only received a share equal to 5% from the \$80 billion Islamic tourism market (Morakabati, 2011). In terms of arrivals, Iran welcomes less than two million arrivals annually, which is also behind the arrival numbers of countries like Jordan (Morakabati, 2011). There are different reasons to explain why Iran performs poorly in attracting international tourists. From a psychological point of view, the risk perception level of tourists affects their decision in selecting an international destination for vacation (Somnez & Graefe, 1998). Safety is one of the most important issues for tourism development (Fletcher & Morakabati, 2008). Destinations perceived as risky will have a serious deterrent impact on tourist attraction (Rittichainuwat & Chakraborty, 2009). During a decision-making process, tourists evaluate attributes of destination, especially those relating to safety. It is obvious that the tourist's perceptions are highly subjective in nature (Seabra and et al., 2013). Risk perceptions, associated with specific destinations (Garg, 2013) selected by tourists, can vary depending on the destination or region (Kozak, Crotts, & Law, 2007). Therefore, risk perception has been considered as a "situation-specific" factor (Wong and Yeh, 2009). As stated above, Iran as a tourism destination has its own specific political, social and religious attributes. Thus, the question is that what kind of risks potential tourists perceive when deciding whether to visit Iran or not? This question has important implications: how is it possible to modify dimensions of the projected image of Iran in the best manner in order to recover the

industrial gain of the country to its former status, which has been strong, solid and lucrative to the country's economy? The main purpose of the current survey is to investigate dimensions of the perceived risks of Iran as a tourist destination using a mixed methods research. The study will focus on those who have never visited Iran in order to evaluate the possible reasons for avoiding the destination.

Literature Review

Samadi and Nejadi (2009) describe risk perception, one of the most studied topics in recent years, as "subjective belief that one has about the negative consequences of buying decision" (Samadi and Nejadi, 2009, p.262). The risk perceived by consumers is subjective (Han, 2005) and contains factors of probability and consequences (Mitchel, 1999). Mitchel and Greatorex (1993) defined the term 'perceived risk' as losses and uncertainties, and also the significance that the amount of loss depends on the degree of mismatch between the desired and the attained outcome of a particular attribute. During the decision-making process, consumers evaluate the probability that the intended attribute might fail to meet the desired outcome and significance of the attribute (Boksberger *et al.*, 2007). Akin and Albuz, (2016) discovered that the perceived risk is a situational construct related to the uncertainty level. One factor that may contribute to the traveler's uncertainty is the availability of different choices when planning for a vacation destination. Surveys on tourism have consistently shown that safety and security are important concerns among tourists (Poon & Adams, 2000) and that the tourists' travel decisions are, indeed, influenced by their risk perceptions (Kozak *et al.*, 2007). As a theoretical framework, "Prospect Theory" can explain how tourists perceive risks in the consumer's decision-making process under risky situations (Kahneman & Tversky, 1992). Kahneman and Tversky (1992) proposed that in making their risk-based decisions, consumers pass through two phases: editing and evaluating. In the former phase, the outcomes of the decision are codified in terms of losses and gains. In the second phase, the consumer evaluates each outcome and assigns probability to them. Roger's protection motivation theory (1975) is another theoretical support for tourist risk perception (Wong & Yeh, 2009). Protection motivation theory explains the likelihood of engaging in a protective behavior such

as risk avoidance, which is positively related to the degree of that available information. Protective behaviors are influenced by destination image and risk perception. (Sonmez & Graefe, 1998).

Types of Tourist Perceived Risks

Bhatt and Suryawanshi (2014) identified seven types of risk in consumer behavior literature, including social, physical, satisfaction, time, psychological, functional or performance and financial risks. However, in the context of tourism, Roehl and Fesenmaier (1992) noted that the perceived risk contains three dimensions: destination risk, vacation risk and physical-equipment risk. Other studies have mentioned that travel risks are associated with crime, natural disaster, hygiene problems, transportation, time and communication (Resigner and Mavondo, 2005). Baker (2014) studied risk perception of various tourist destinations in terms of health, functional/equipment, physical, psychological, social, satisfaction, time and financial, political instability and terrorism dimensions.

Since perceived risk was viewed in terms of probable loss, some researchers have suggested that perceived risk arises from different types of potential loss (Dholakia, 2001). "Health risk" refers to the possibility that traveling to a particular destination will result in physical danger, injury or sickness (Sonmez and Graefe, 1998). Potential tourists perceive health risk in relation to water quality, food safety, quality of health care systems, disease infection, physical injuries and drug and sexual abuse (Jonas and *et al.*, 2011). Terrorism risk refers to the probability of being involved in a terrorist attack (Sonmez and Graefe, 1998). Many researchers have investigated the relationship between tourism and crime (Brunt, Mawby and Hambly, 2000). Physical violence, robbery, rape, pick pocketing, theft, larceny and murder are different forms of crime within the tourism context (Mansfeld, 2006). Political instability is another type of potential loss, which negatively affects the image of tourism destination (Steiner, 2007; Heslop, Lu & Cray, 2008). Literature review indicates that the potential tourist evaluates the probability of financial losses in traveling to particular destinations (Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992), and the term "financial risk" refers to losing or wasting money if the service goes wrong (Resigner & Mavondo, 2005; Boksberger *et al.*, 2007). Risk of

natural disaster is another type of tourism risk (Pearlman & Melnik, 2008). The exposure to natural hazards like tsunamis (Becken & Hughey, 2012), hurricanes (Matyas *et al.*, 2011), as well as, floods and earthquakes (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2006) may threaten the life of tourists. "Social risk" refers to losing or lowering of the social status because of traveling to a particular destination (Resigner & Mavondo, 2005). "Time risk" focuses on the possibility that a trip may take too much time or be a waste of time (Roselius, 1971). "Communication risk" refers to the possibility of negative consequences due to language barrier to communicate with local people, and "functional and equipment risk" is associated with malfunction of tourist equipments (Han, 2005). Literature review indicates that different types of potential loss (risk) are associated with different destinations. On the other hand, potential tourists evaluate the attributes of specific destination due to which they might perceive different types of potential loss.

Attributes of Islamic Destinations and Perception of International Tourists

Lack of tourism facilities, poverty and destitution of Muslim countries along with a negative attitude of hedonistic forms of tourism due to Islamic restricted law, war and Middle East instability are the reasons why international tourists avoid traveling to Islamic countries (Din, 1989). Furthermore, Islamophobia has been intensified after the terrorist attack in September 11, 2001, which has led the tourists to believe that Islamic countries are unsafe and inhospitable destinations (Stephen, 2014). Though all Islamic countries have similar religious beliefs, some do have different interpretations of Islam and local culture and rules (Zamani-Farahani & Ghazali, 2011; Jafari & Scott, 2013). In some conservative Islamic countries (for example, Brunei and Saudi Arabia), the tourism industry seems to have a negative influence on Islamic culture and traditions (Aziz, 1995; Gossling, 2002). Jafari and Scot (2013) labeled Islamic countries as moderate or conservative as a way to assess Islam's influence on tourism. A moderate Islamic country contains secular state and secular society, and emphasizes separation of Islam and public life. These moderate countries include Malaysia, Turkey and Indonesia. Conservative Islamic states, on the other hand, are highly concerned with several tourist behaviors such as the consumption of alcohol and pork,

inappropriate dressing and open affection between the sexes in public (Sindiga, 1996; Aziz, 1995). Henderson (2008) noted that international tourists are concerned with Islamic traditions and rules and they perceive the Islamic destination negatively due to strict Islamic codes of behavior and restrictive religious norms (Mansfield & Winckler, 2008). Based on the perceived and projected images of conservative Islamic countries, potential tourists take into account the consequences of traveling to such countries and perceive them as unsafe or risky destinations (Henderson, 2006).

Iran as an Islamic country has its own legal, cultural, political and religious attributes and potential tourists evaluate these attributes in order to consider the consequences of traveling to Iran. So far, there have been no rigorous and accurate studies to investigate and extract the risk perceptions of potential tourists of Iran as an Islamic country. The purpose of the current study is thus to:

- Explore dimensions of risk perception phenomenon in relation to Iran as a tourism destination using a qualitative approach.
- Conceptualize and measure multidimensional construct of overall perceived risk using a quantitative approach.

Mixed Methods Design

As stated earlier, the main purpose of this survey is to investigate the risk perceptions of potential tourists for traveling to Iran as a tourism destination. For this purpose, a two-stage mixed method (qualitative and quantitative) was used. Members of couch-surfing virtual community (www.couchsurfing.com) from all over the world participated in both qualitative and quantitative studies. Mixed methods research involves collecting, analyzing and interpreting quantitative and qualitative data in a series of studies investigating similar underlying phenomena (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). The e-survey of the first study contained eighteen open-ended questions in order to produce textual data. The link of qualitative questionnaire was posted to discussion pages of various groups and then, visitors were asked to fill out the questionnaires. Textual data was collected using convenience sampling method which was continued to saturate the responses until no new finding was obtained. Finally, sixty respondents participated in the qualitative study. The textual data was analyzed using inductive

content analysis method and themes of risks were extracted. Qualitative content analysis refers to non-statistical and exploratory methods which involve inductive reasoning (Berg, 1995). The investigator triangulation technique (Kimchi, Polivka & Stevenson, 1991) and member validation criteria (Neuman, 2006) were used to ensure the validity of qualitative results. In the second study, the themes extracted from the previous study were used to generate the items of self-administrated questionnaire. Electronic version of the quantitative questionnaire included 40 items measuring dimensions of the perceived risk. Seven hundred respondents who had visited the virtual tourism community participated in the quantitative study in July-August 2017. The required data for the second study was obtained through convenience sampling method from the members of the community. The sample included non-traveled people who were eighteen years old or older. Five-option Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) was used to measure the perceived risk dimensions. One question was proposed to separate the traveled people from non-traveled ones. Eighty questionnaires had been filled incompletely and finally 620 questionnaires were used to analyze the risk perceptions of potential tourists. The Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS Version 16) was used for data reduction and exploratory factor analysis. In addition, a second-order conformity factor analysis was conducted for measuring the construct validity (convergent and discriminate) and modeling the perceived risk dimensions using Amos graphic 18.

Qualitative and Quantitative Data Analysis

Based on the literature review, eighteen open-ended questions (Table 1) were considered in order to investigate the risk perceptions qualitatively. Among the sixty participants, 55% were male and 45% were female among whom 60% were married, 30% were single and 10% were divorced. The average age of the participants was 35 years old. The youngest and the oldest participants were 20 and 65 years old, respectively. Inductive content analysis was used to analyze the textual data in three steps, including preparing, organizing and reporting (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In the first step, sentence was selected as the unit of analysis, depending on the qualitative questions. Nine hundred sentences were generated and then fragmented to be used in the next step.

Table 1. Open-ended questions

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- 1-What are the discouraging factors for traveling to Iran? Please explain.
 - 2- In your opinion, is there any factor threatening your own safety in traveling to Iran?
 - 3- What do you think about the reaction of your relatives and friends when hearing about your intention for traveling to Iran?
 - 4- Suppose that you are leaving your country for Iran. What are the effective factors in feeling anxiety about this decision?
 - 5- In what respects do you perceive Iran as a risky travel destination?
 - 6- If you spend your money and time for traveling to another destination rather than Iran, do you think it will be more satisfying? Please explain your reasons.
 - 7-What are the threatening risk factors for tourists on behalf of local people?
 - 8-What are the financial risks in traveling to Iran?
 - 9- Is visiting Iran as a tourist destination a kind of waste of money? Please explain.
 - 10- How do the local media in your country describe Iran as a risky tourist destination? What are the reasons?
 - 11- In what respects is visiting Iran a waste of time?
 - 12- In your opinion, why do some governments create some barriers for their citizens who want to travel to Iran? Please explain.
 - 13- What kind of problems does exist for the tourists who want to travel to Iran regarding the international sanctions in this country?
 - 14- In your opinion, what kind of risks does exist for the tourists who intend to travel to a developing country such as Iran?
 - 15- In your opinion, What are the discouraging factors for traveling to radical religious (fundamentalist) countries? What is your idea about Iran?
 - 16- In your opinion, what kind of risks may tourists encounter on behalf of Iranian official bodies?
 - 17- In your opinion, what cultural factors may cause Iran to be a risky tourism destination?
 - 18- Suppose that you had a travel to Iran where something went wrong. For what reasons may you blame yourself for this decision?
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In the organizing step, the textual data was read repeatedly. The researcher interpreted the latent meaning of sentences associated with risk perception. Then, open coding of the data was conducted within the text, meaning that notes and headings were written in the margins of the text while reading it (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The headings were written in the margins of the text to describe all aspects of the content and then were collected from the margins and generated several categories. Lists of sub-categories were grouped under higher order headings or themes. These categories were created to provide the meaning of the described phenomenon. The main categories or themes

Table 2. Abstraction process in inductive content analysis of textual data

Sub -Categories	Generic Themes	Main Theme
Fear of wearing traditional Muslim clothing (Burka) Fear of punishment because of wrong clothing Woman's dressing code Restrictions on wearing Social and legal pressure on woman's clothing like covering head	"Fear of violating the dressing code" "Adapting to strict Islamic clothing code"	Perceived risk of Traveling to Iran
lack of women's rights Women are not treated the same as men. It is hard for women to live Bad attitude toward women General lack of rights for women	"Sexual discriminations"	
Strict Islamic rules Lack of human rights The fear of being misinterpreted by the Iranian authorities Being arrested on the suspicion of being a spy or for violating some kind of moral code Fear of offending Iranian religious or political beliefs Hostility of the government towards Westerners	"Restrictive Iranian rules" "Fear of violating Islamic rules" "Fear of being arrested as spy "	
Negative reaction of tourist's relatives toward traveling to Iran Ridiculing tourists due to traveling to Iran by important people Losing social status for traveling to Iran	"Lowering social status" "Disapproving for visiting of Iran by others"	
Not knowing the language Language barrier to communicate Problem of communicating with local people	"Communication and language barrier" "Misunderstanding of guide sign"	
Middle East countries as dangerous destinations Instability of neighboring countries Unsafe region	"Political instability of the region"	
Wasting a lot of money and time for obtaining Iranian visa Lack of consular services for getting visa Fear of passports being stamped by Iranian authorities Securing of other countries' visa may be restricted due to visiting Iran	"Lack of securing Iranian visa" "Fear of losing the opportunity of visa getting for traveling to other countries"	
Lack of access to funds Not being able to get money from ATM Lack of pay pal system Problem with Money transfer Problem with the use of credit card Losing cash money Inaccessibility of personal accounts	"Fear of shortcoming of money and cash"	
Lack of standard hygiene Lack of some foods and medicines	"Fear of losing health"	
Better to spend money and time to visit other destinations Iran is not on the top of list of destinations to visit Traveling to Iran is not easy	"Fear of losing the opportunity of traveling to other countries"	
Lack of infrastructure for tourism Unavailability of goods and services Poor transport facilities Poor level of comfort and provision can be experienced	"Uncertainty associated with tourism equipments"	
Potentiality of war Possibility of preventive attacks from other countries to defeat Iran's nuclear program	"Uncertainty associated with war"	
Anti-American sentiment of the government and radical groups Strained relations with Western nations Fear of being used as a political bargaining chip	"Fear of hostage taking "	

were created using abstraction process, as shown in Table 2 where the left column contains the sub-categories generated from the headings and the right column contains the generic themes and main theme of risk phenomenon. The generic themes are abstracted from the sub-categories. As noted in the methodology section, investigator triangulation technique was used to evaluate the validity of the results of the qualitative study. Investigator triangulation uses more than one researcher for interpretation and evaluation of results (Kimchi *et al.*, 1991). In the present study, three researchers re-evaluated the qualitative results. Furthermore, the results of generic themes along with a description of risk phenomenon were returned to the participants to ensure member validity. Results of triangulation technique and member validation method showed that the extracted generic themes have a good validity and highlight various aspects of risk phenomenon in Iran as a tourism destination.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The purpose of quantitative study was to explain the dimensions of perceived risk phenomenon in relation to Iran as a tourism destination. A self-administrated questionnaire was developed to measure risk dimensions. The items included in the questionnaire were proposed using the latent meaning of generic themes abstracted from the qualitative study. Thus, the qualitative study was integrated with the quantitative one. As mentioned in the methodology section, the perceived risk questionnaire contained 40 items and 620 respondents participated in the second study. Table 3 shows demographic characteristics of the sample.

A principal component analysis (PCA) was conducted in order to extract the constructs mentioned in the analysis. Initially, EQUIMAX rotation identified an eight-factor solution that explains 61.78 % of the variance with a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) statistic equal to 0.935 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity equal to 0.00. The KMO value was more than the minimum value of 0.6. It should be noted that Bartlett's Test of Sphericity reached statistical significance (0.00). The results of this test revealed that the data was suitable for factor analysis. Table 4

Table 3. Demographic characteristics of the quantitative sample

	frequency	percent		frequency	percent
Gender			Marital status		
Male	335	56.8	married	229	48
Female	265	47.2	single	185	29
Age			divorced	16	2.6
18-25	63	10.1	Living with partner	121	19.5
25-35	163	26.2	Education level		
35-45	143	23	Less than high school	15	2.4
45-55	150	24.2	High school	47	7.6
More than 55	102	16.4	Bachelor	169	27.2
Nationality			Graduate	390	62.8
Middle East	25	4	Travel frequency		
EU	212	34.1	Once in a year	131	21.1
Central America	9	1.4	Twice in a year	136	21.9
Africa	30	4.8	Three times in a year	87	14
Asia	92	14.8	More than three times	265	42.7
North America	137	22.1			
South America	26	4.2			
Oceania	26	4.2			
Caribbean	18	2.9			
European	46	7.4			

shows the final solution and rotated component matrix. The items with a factor loading less than 0.5 were eliminated and the composite reliability was then calculated for the rest of the items. All the constructs were more than the acceptable minimum alpha coefficient of 0.7 and indicated that the items for each construct are internally consistent and reliable (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). In addition, the percentage of the variance explained is shown in Table 4. The first factor was labeled "risk of human rights violation" and included the items associated with violation of human rights by the government; being arrested as spy; strict adherence to Islamic rules, misbehavior by Iranian officials; fear of radical individuals and incompatibility between cultural values of tourists and Iranian society. The second factor included those items that reflected "satisfaction risk". The third factor was composed of five items emphasizing the consequences of traveling to Iran in relation to the dress including the fear of violating dress code in Iran, sexual discrimination, fear of punishment for not knowing clothing rules as well as adapting to the local clothing code and the possibility that Iranian authorities may misinterpret these tourist dress actions. The results indicated that the third factor would be best to be labeled as "risk of inappropriate dress". The

fourth factor was identified as "social risk" and included those items emphasizing the disapproval of others for visiting Iran. The fifth factor was associated with the unavailability of credit cards and ATMs, difficulty in carrying cash, money transfer problems and risk of overpricing for goods and services. The fifth factor was labeled as "risk of inaccessibility to cash". Two additional items such as pick-pocketing and loss of property risk and corruption and extortion risk were considered in the sixth factor which was labeled as "crime risk". Three items were included in the seventh factor called communication risk or communication problem with local people. These items included problem with understanding guide signs, difficulty in finding a tour guide and having a guide who can communicate with tourists in their mother tongue. The eighth and final factor was associated with visa problems, including securing visa cost, lack of consular services in order to obtain an Iranian visa and waiting a long time to secure Iranian visa that might cause losing the opportunity to visit other destinations. Moreover, securing other countries' visa may be restricted due to visiting Iran. These items were associated with uncertainty with regard to visa. As a result, the eighth factor was identified as the "risk of securing visa". Eight items with a factor loading less than 0.5 were eliminated in the rotated and sorted factor-loading matrix. They included such items as the possibility of getting infected with different diseases, health risk due to polluted weather and unhealthy water and food, incompatibility of strict rules with tourists' personal values, lack of medicine and standard health services, potential military attack to Iran, terrorism and hostage taking, risk of natural disaster and political instability of the neighboring countries. The risk construct was extracted using explanatory factor analysis (EFA) method, and the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) confirmed the results of the scale derived from EFA. A second-order confirmatory factor model by means of likelihood estimation method was used to measure the overall perceived risk construct, to examine the overall goodness of the measurement model and to ensure the construct validity and reliability. Convergent validity was evaluated in the confirmatory factor analysis model by examining the significance of standardized factor loading (λ). As it is presented in Table 5, all loadings exceeded 0.53 and were significant at p-level 0.01. The values of average variance extracted (AVEs) were calculated to evaluate the construct validity. The AVEs of

all eight factors were more than 0.5. suggesting that various reflective constructs had suitable convergent validity (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). As shown in Table 5, the AVE for each construct is equal to 0.57, 0.64, 0.59, 0.71, 0.52, 0.77, 0.63 and 0.78, respectively.

Table 4. Rotated and sorted factor- loading matrix

Items	F1: Risk of violation of human rights	F2: Risk of satisfaction	F3: Risk of inappropriate dress	F4: Social Risk	F5: Risk of inaccessibility to cash	F6: Crime Risk	F7: Communication Risk	F8: Risk of securing Visa
Violation of human rights	.727							
Strict Islamic rules make you uncomfortable	.665							
Being afraid of radical individuals	.628							
Misbehaved by Iranian officials	.615							
The fear of being arrested as a spy	.612							
Incompatibility between cultural values of Iranian society and international tourist values	.532							
Lack of appropriate tourist facilities		.676						
Existence of asymmetries between the features of Iran (as a tourist destination) and my travel priorities		.665						
Lack of quality goods and services		.584						
Risk of losing opportunity to visit other better destinations		.576						
Lack of appropriate and safe transportation		.556						
Possibility of getting infected with different diseases		omitted						
Health risk due to polluted weather and unhealthy water and food		omitted						
Fear of consequences of dress code violation in Iran			.802					
Sexual discrimination			.797					
Women are obliged to adapt to the local clothing code			.793					
The possibility of action misinterpretation as an insult by Iranian authorities			.587					

Table 4. Rotated and sorted factor- loading matrix (Continious)

Inconsistency between strict rules and tourists' personal values	omitted							
Probable negative effect of visiting Iran on other's opinion about you	.807							
My friends may ridicule me for visiting Iran	.799							
Individuals who are important to me will disapprove my visit to Iran	.786							
Your friends and relatives disapprove your visit to Iran	.627							
No possibility of money transfer	.795							
Unavailability of credit cards and ATM / difficulty to carry cash	.768							
Overpricing of goods and services	.511							
Lack of medicine and standard health services	omitted							
Pick pocketing and loss of property	.573							
Corruption and extortion	.545							
The potential military attack to Iran	omitted							
Terrorism and hostage taking	omitted							
Risk of natural disaster	omitted							
Difficulty to communicate with local people	.721							
Difficulty in understanding guide signs	.677							
Difficulty in finding a tour guide who can communicate with my language	.503							
Political instability of Iran's neighboring countries	omitted							
Waiting a long time to secure Iranian visa may cause losing the opportunity to visit other destinations	.797							
Cost of securing visa	.719							
Restriction of securing other countries' visa due to visiting Iran	.586							
Lack of consular services in order to obtain Iranian visa	.576							
Eigen value	12.484	3.906	1.818	1.561	1.429	1.357	1.126	1.034
Percentage of variance explained	8.734	8.171	7.877	7.730	7.701	7.477	7.306	6.786
Composite Reliability	0.829	0.840	0.824	0.836	0.746	0.785	0.729	0.741

Table 5. Results of confirmatory factor analysis

Items	Factor Loading (standardized)	AVE	P-value (0.01)	t-value
F1:Risk of Human Rights Violation		0.57		
Violation of human rights	0.73		**	13.6
Strict Islamic rules make you uncomfortable	0.67		**	14.6
Being afraid of radical individuals	0.60		**	12.3
Misbehaved by Iranian officials	0.66		**	13.1
The fear of being arrested as a spy	0.67		**	10.3
Incompatibilities between cultural values of Iranian society and international tourist values	0.65		**	12.9
F2:Risk of Satisfaction		0.64		
Lack of appropriate tourist facilities	0.76		**	13.0
Existence of asymmetries between the features of Iran (as a tourist destination) and my travel priorities	0.74		**	12.9
Lack of quality goods and services	0.84		**	14.8
Risk of losing opportunity to visit other better destinations	0.62		**	10.5
Lack of appropriate and safe transportation	0.77		**	14.6
F3: Risk of inappropriate Dress		0.59		
Fear of the consequences of dress code violation in Iran	0.80		**	
Sexual discrimination	0.79		**	17.8
Women are obliged to adapt to the local clothing code	0.50		**	13.2
The possibility of action misinterpretation as an insult by Iranian authorities	0.73		**	8.7
Fear of punishment because of not knowing the covering rules	0.74		**	14.5
F4:Social Risk		0.71		17.5
Visiting of Iran may negatively affect other's opinion about you	0.53		**	13.4
My friends may ridicule me for visiting Iran	0.68		**	14.1
Individuals who are important to me will disapprove my visit to Iran	0.68		**	10.8
Your friends and relatives disapprove of your visit to Iran	0.84		**	9.3
F5: Risk of Inaccessibility to Cash				12.6
No possibility of money transfer	0.82		**	14.8
Unavailability of credit cards and ATM / difficulty to carry cash	0.83		**	15.8
Overpricing of goods and services	0.91		**	16.9
F6: Crime Risk		0.77		6.4
Pick pocketing and loss of property	0.77		**	
Corruption and extortion	0.77		**	10.9
F7: Communication Risk		0.63		9.7
Difficulty to communicate with local people	0.74		** **	9.7
Difficulty in understanding guide signs	0.65		**	6.9
Difficulty in finding a tour guide who can communicate with my language	0.60		**	
F8: Risk of securing Visa		0.78		12.8
Waiting a long time to secure Iranian visa may cause losing the opportunity to visit other destinations	0.73		**	11.5
Cost of securing visa	0.68		**	
Restriction of securing other countries' visa due to visiting Iran				10.7
Lack of consular services in order to obtain an Iranian visa				9.8

[**:P-value =0.0,AVE >0.5, t- value >2, Cmin/df = 2.67, P-value = 0.07,CFI=0.919, TLI=0.93, RMSEA= 0.052 (Lo 90= 0.04,Hi=0.056)]

Several fitness indices as suggested by Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010) were used to evaluate the model's fitness adequacy. They presented the model adaptability standard as: ($C_{min}/df < 3$, $CFI > .90$, $TLI > .90$, $RMSEA < .06$). C_{min} value of the measurement model was not significant ($C_{min}(431) = 1151.1$, $P\text{-value} = 0.07$) which indicates the fitness of empirical data and theoretical model as significant. Furthermore, value of Normed Chi-square index ($C_{min}/df = 2.67$) was less than 3. In order for the model to be accepted, comparative fit index (CFI) should be equal to or more than 0.90, indicating that the given model can reproduce 90% of the co-variation in the data (Hair et al., 2010). Value of CFI was equal to 0.919 and showed the model fitness. Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) was one of the fitness indexes less affected by the sample size. Hu and Bentler (1999) have suggested $TLI \geq .90$ as the cutoff for a good fitness. The value of TLI was equal to 0.93 indicating good fitness of the model. Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is a popular index for model fitness and Hu and Bentler (1999) have suggested $RMSEA \leq .06$ as the cutoff for a good fitness. The value of RMSEA was equal to 0.052. Values of fitness indices presented above show that the measurement model has suitable goodness of fit.

Discussion and Conclusion

The mixed methods research explored the perceived risk of visiting Iran as a tourism destination from the perspective of a group, which had no prior experience of visiting the place. The results indicate that potential tourists perceived Iran as a destination with several types of risks, including the risk of human rights violation, satisfaction, inappropriate dress, crime, and lack of access to cash, communication, securing visa and social risk. The perceived risk of human rights violation implies some negative potential consequences such as possibility of misinterpreting the tourist's behavior by Iranian authorities. The results of Morakabati's study (2011) revealed that the hostility between Iran and Western countries since the revolution of 1977 has led to Iran's negative image. According to the perceived hostility, Iranian's anti-Westerner sentiments and the perceived negative image of Iran, the potential tourists would think that the possibility of being arrested on the suspicion of being a spy is not unexpected. Another reason for

tourist's risk perception of violations of human rights is due to their fear of offending Iranian religious or political beliefs unintentionally and even deviating Islamic rules due to the lack of knowledge. They believe that Iranian officials would perceive their behavior negatively. This finding is consistent with the results of Haderson's study (2006) which indicated that international tourists are concerned with Islamic traditions and rules. As mentioned in the literature review, the tourists' behavior in some conservative Islamic countries is considered to have a negative influence on Islamic culture and traditions. (Aziz, 1995; Gossling, 2002). Similarly, the results of this study revealed that potential tourists are concerned with the actions of radical and conservative Islamic groups and individuals regarding human rights violation of tourists and vacationers.

Another type of perceived risk associated with visiting Iran is tourist satisfaction. In the present study, potential tourists believe that Iran has poor tourism facilities and infrastructures, unsafe transportation and poor quality goods and services. As a result, they think they won't be satisfied by traveling to Iran. Additionally, they believe that they will lose other opportunities to visit better destinations if they travel to Iran. This finding is consistent with the results of Roehl and Fesenmeier (1992). As noted in the literature review, Islamic laws mandate certain behavioral codes asserting that women must cover their bodies and hair when they appear in public (Mansfield & Winckler, 2008). The results of qualitative and quantitative studies reveal that tourists are concerned with the consequences of violating dress code and believe that there is sexual discrimination in Iran. It seems that tourists believe that strict social rules with regard to dress restrict personal freedom, and violating the dress codes will result in negative consequences. This finding is consistent with the result of Mansfield and Winckler(2008) who indicated that international tourists perceive the Islamic destination negatively due to strict Islamic codes of behavior and restrictive religious norms. Risk of inappropriate dress refers to probable negative consequences of wrong clothing perceived by tourists as punishment and misinterpretation by the government.

Social risk, referred to as losing or lowering the social status, is another type of risk (Akin and Albuz, 2016). Both qualitative and quantitative findings indicate that tourists are concerned with the

reactions of important people such as parents and friends for their trip to Iran. On the other hand, tourists believe that traveling to Iran affects other people's opinions negatively. These findings are similar to the results of Akın and Albuz (2016) who showed that tourists may lose their social standing because of traveling to a particular destination. The results of the studies show that potential tourists are concerned with inaccessibility to cash in traveling to Iran. According to them, since Iran banking system is not integrated with international banking systems, their personal account is inaccessible. Moreover, unavailability of banking services for tourists who cannot have access to their international credit cards and withdraw money from ATMs are additional reasons of uncertainty in having access to cash resources. The results also show that tourists are worried about the possibility of pick pocketing, loss of property and probability of corruption and extortion. This finding is similar to the results of Mansfeld's study (2006) which revealed that crime risk is associated with physical violence, robbery, rape, pickpocketing, theft, larceny and murder. The obtained results also demonstrate that the communication problem is another concern of the tourists in Iran. Since Iranians speak Persian and tourists do not understand the language, tourists are concerned whether they will be able to communicate with local people or not. In addition, they believe that the problem of understanding guide signs would make the trip difficult. Consequently, tourists consider this country as a tourist destination with potential communication risk. Similarly, prior studies indicated that the difficulty of communication is a type of perceived risk by international tourists (Han, 2005). The results of both qualitative and quantitative studies show that potential tourists are not sure about securing Iranian visa. They think that if they have Iranian authorities' stamp on their passports, they will lose the opportunity of securing other countries' visa, and traveling to other countries may be restricted. Furthermore, tourists perceive that securing Iranian visa requires excessive red tape that involves loss of time and money. Similarly, lack of consular services of Iranian government due to poor political relationships with other countries makes visa processing difficult. The qualitative results of the study also implied other types of risk such as war, health risk and political instability of the region which were not supported in the quantitative study. Therefore, these items

were omitted in the exploratory factor analysis. The present survey contributes to the existing body of tourist's risk perception knowledge in two ways. First, the survey confirms four types of risk, which have been studied in prior researches. These risks include crime risk, communication risk, satisfaction risk and social risk. Second, it enhances the tourist risk literature by conceptualizing and measuring four new types of risk including the risk of human rights violation, inappropriate dress, inaccessibility to cash and the risk of securing visa.

Based on the research findings, destination marketers and tourism industry practitioners should develop communication and media strategies to decrease the perceived risk and improve the perceived image of Iran as a destination for potential tourists. Iranian government must create peaceful foreign relations with other countries, especially with Westerner governments to decrease Islamophobia and Iranophobia propaganda and create a positive image of the country. The government should also attract internal private sectors and foreign capital to invest in Iran's tourism infrastructure. These investments will reduce some of the risks such as satisfaction, securing visa, communication and inaccessibility to cash money and cause the growth of tourism industry.

Limitations and Future Directions

The current research was limited to the data collected over the Internet. While this method is gaining popularity, it has some limitations associated with technology, sample composition and sampling method bias. For instance, the differences in response rates (34 percent from Eu, 22 percent from North America ,4 percent from the Middle East, and ...) may have been due to technology usage rate and potential tourists may have been excluded as they lack Internet access or choose not to be a member of couch surfing virtual community. Such issues may limit the generalizability of the obtained results. Since the current study focused on potential tourists' perception, the textual data was collected using open-ended questions and mixed sampling methods, which were conducted in a virtual community. Future researchers should examine the perceived risks of tourists who have travel experience to Iran using phenomenological or grounded theory method. In addition, future researchers can compare the risk perceptions of two groups of traveled and non-traveled people.

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