

Designing a Model for Health Tourism Entrepreneurs 's expectation of Governments in the City of Isfahan

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Abstract

Purpose of this paper. The aim of the study is to develop a structured model that identifies and categorizes the expectations of health tourism sector entrepreneurs from governmental and provincial institutions in the city of Isfahan, Iran.

Design/methodology/approach, a qualitative method was used to answer the research questions. To do this, a semi-structured questionnaire was used. Interviews were conducted in person and by phone. The sampling method was snowball, to collect the data from seven entrepreneurs. Data analysis was done using thematic analysis method. The obtained codes were reviewed by two university professors in the field of tourism. Findings. Main model is in line with the research question is the expectations of health tourism entrepreneurs from the government, which includes Facilitation of Health Tourism Regulations, Infrastructure Development, Development of Health Tourism Regulations, Health city Segmentations according to target markets, latitude of Private Sector, Calm political relations with countries, Establishing internal security, High Quality health services, Structural and administrative reform in Health tourism regulations, Establishing Coordination in related Organizations. The results show that creating a safe and stress-free environment for tourists can be a good solution for the development of this industry.

Keywords: Health tourism, Policy Development in Health Tourism, Entrepreneurship in Health Tourism, Iranian Health Tourism, Isfahan as a Health Tourism Hub.

JEL Codes: L83, L83, O21
Research Article

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1. Introduction

Classical health tourism is defined as: "Traveling from the country of origin to another country to obtain healthcare services." On the other hand, health is defined by the World Health Organization as: "Not merely the absence of disease but the complete physical and mental well-being of an individual" (WHO, 2017). By integrating these two definitions, we can say that health tourism refers to travel from one country to another for reasons related to tourism and health, with the primary goal of being healthy (Hoxha, 2020). However, in another definition, the term health tourism refers to a method whereby people go beyond their healthcare facilities to access better services. The concept of health tourism has been created by integrating tourism services (including hotel management, transportation, accommodation, and marketing) with health and rehabilitation services (medical interventions, surgeries, spas, and herbal treatments). This new market has significant potential to create substantial impacts on the social and economic lives of countries, particularly in developing nations. This specific market cannot be easily overlooked. (Wong *et al*, 2021). In recent years, there has been significant interest in medical tourism due to its positive impact on the economy of the destination country. The rapid growth of the tourism industry and its desirable prospect have encouraged countries to focus on their competitive advantages. (Shabankare *et al*, 2023). Health and tourism concepts complement each other, and with the growth of incomes in countries worldwide, an aging population, and advancements in transportation and online marketing, health tourism has flourished. As a result, many governments are striving to enter the expansive international health tourism market by adopting new forms of tourism that aim to generate higher revenues (Sag *et al.*, 2021).

It is estimated that a health tourist spends three to four times more than an ordinary tourist in the destination country. Globalization, the development of air travel, reduced travel costs, advancements in telecommunications and information technologies, increasing elderly population in developed countries, high treatment costs in these countries, lack of insurance coverage for many diseases, and legal and service limitations in the country of origin are among the reasons encouraging individuals to engage in tourism for treatment and healthcare (Devkota *et al*, 2020).

The governments have realized the significant impact that health tourism can have on their economies and tourism cycles. According to Andrade and Velonjara (2020), there is a long-term positive relation between tourist expenditure and economic growth, highlighting the importance of tourism for GDP growth. Hofer *et al* (2012) states health care market is a significant value creator in terms of GDP and workplaces in economies. More specifically, Agazadeh (2024) finds out in a strongly supported result that health tourism boosts economic growth. To be more precise, it was estimated that a one-point increase in health tourism revenues, expressed as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) of

personal health travel exports, causes an increase of 4.9345 in GDP growth rate and 4.2558 in per capita GDP growth rate.

The expansion of medical tourism has led to the globalization of healthcare, resulting in the cross-border provision of healthcare services and the growth of the healthcare sector in many countries. Consequently, improving the tourism industry by providing the necessary infrastructure for health tourism is a priority for governments(Emamjani,2021).

The most attractive destinations for health tourists include India, Cuba, Costa Rica, Thailand, Singapore, Colombia, and Malaysia. However, Iran also has the potential to become a significant destination for health (medical) tourists in the region (Sag and Zengul,2019). This potential arises from its skilled and specialized treatment staff, as well as its public and private hospitals, particularly for cosmetic surgeries, which are notably cost-effective due to Iran's economic conditions and the recent depreciation of the local currency. Economic stability and continuous growth of economic indicators on one hand, and the reduction of relative living costs, final prices, exchange rates, inflation rates, and investment risks in medical and non-medical infrastructure on the other, significantly influence tourists' destination choices (Majid and kim, 2023). In all, the most important factor that a health tourist is concerned with, after being sure of the standards and quality of the medical services and security, is the cost of his / her medical trip to the destination country. Regarding the value of the Iranian currency, Iran is considered to be one of the cheapest tourist destinations throughout the world. During the years 2017 until 2019, Iran turned into an interesting tourist destination regarding its facilities, security and tourist attractions as a result of the sudden and severe drop of the value of the Iranian Rial (Mitramedical,2020).

According to Ministry of cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicraft(MCTH) information, there are five active Health tourism travel agency in Isfahan which is 11percent of the total, which seems to be insufficient in comparison which other rivals such as Tehran and Shiraz (Jaberi *et al*, 2013) well-trained personnel and the rich historical heritage in cities like Isfahan create a unique potential for health tourism. Over the past decade, several efforts have been made to accelerate the number of health tourism demanders in Isfahan, including the establishment of the Isfahan Health Care City (IHCC). However, the absence of a strategic marketing map and long-term planning in government policy has hindered progress in this field (Shabankareh et al., 2013; Emamjani, 2021).

Isfahan is one of the greatest cities in Iran, not only for its population and industries, but also for its cultural heritage and medical capacities. Therefore, this study aims to conduct this research which aims to identify the expectations of health tourism entrepreneurs regarding governmental support and provincial institutions. To conduct this study, the researcher identified active companies and agencies

in the field of health tourism in the city of Isfahan, and data was collected using face-to-face and telephone interviews. Using the thematic method, a model was extracted that included the expectations of entrepreneurs in the field of health tourism. By recognizing these expectations, government policies can be organized to better support entrepreneurs and drive the growth of the health tourism sector in Isfahan.

2. The Role of Governments in Health Tourism

The tourism industry is one of the leading sectors globally, and governments play a significant role in its growth and development. To enhance economic growth, governments can employ various strategies and roles, including overseeing and regulating tourism to facilitate it, attracting foreign investment, implementing cultural planning within tourism organizations, addressing barriers to the development of the tourism industry (such as terrorism and fear), privatization in the tourism sector, and improving related infrastructure, including transportation (Nilipour et al, 2015).

Governments, particularly in developing countries, can play a key role in the development of health tourism. In these countries, in addition to policymaking and regulatory activities, the government directly and indirectly controls a significant portion of hospitals, infrastructure, facilities, and financial resources. Health tourism can benefit Iran's economy by creating jobs, fostering entrepreneurship, promoting economic growth, improving the business environment, reducing government budget dependence on oil, and attracting both domestic and foreign investments (Vaezi et al., 2017). Therefore, government support significantly impacts growth and development.

Despite the high profitability and promising outlook of health tourism, the lack of necessary infrastructure in Iran has prevented it from playing a strategic role in the region. Iran, with its high potential and numerous advantages, including low costs, high-quality medical services, and excellent doctors, alongside unique natural attractions, deserves to surpass regional competitors in health tourism. A considerable portion of budget planning, macro decision-making, and policymaking, especially in developing countries, is undertaken by governments. In this way, governments can create the necessary infrastructure and play a vital role in the development of the tourism industry (Mosayebi, 2020).

Several studies have examined the barriers and challenges facing the health tourism industry. For example, Singh (2014) identified the weak motivation of the government to develop the industry, insufficient efforts, and the lack of unique pricing and standardization systems in hospitals as the main barriers to the development of health tourism in India (Hofet et al, 2012). Heng (2011) examined factors such as costs, infrastructure, and the lack of policies and government support as key obstacles to the development of health tourism in Hong Kong (Shabankareh et al, 2023). In Turkey, the absence of a

comprehensive tourism policy, lack of supporting and facilitating organizations, complex bureaucracy, low political stability in neighboring countries, and the absence of standards for healthcare services are the main barriers to the development of health tourism (Sag and Zengul,2019).

Momeni et al. (2018) conducted research on the barriers to the growth of health tourism in East Azerbaijan province and concluded that marketing, international challenges, culture, transportation issues, and bureaucratic policies and regulations are the most significant obstacles to tourism development in the province.

On the other hand, cultural factors play an important role in tourists' destination choices. Cultural factors refer to the similarities and differences between tourists and locals in terms of language, customs, meal habits, etc. Providing services to tourists with diverse cultural backgrounds, religions, languages, habits, and preferences requires the host country to create a suitable cultural environment and develop human resources in various service sectors. Given their importance, cultural factors are considered one of the most crucial elements of the non-medical infrastructure affecting health tourism. These factors can be assessed through aspects such as the status of tourism in popular culture, the flexibility of religious laws, and the training of human resources in hospitality and service sectors (Shaegh and Karampour,2021). Improving appropriate transportation systems and accommodation infrastructure (such as airports, ports, highways, public transportation systems, hotels, travel agencies, telecommunications, and information technology, public health services, and safe drinking water) is a prerequisite for tourism development (second article). The quality of surgical procedures, medications, specialized medical staff, healthcare facilities, and the hospital brand are among the medical criteria for selecting health tourism destinations (Kim, 2023).

In health tourism, governments have the ability to facilitate and coordinate among multiple stakeholders, thereby minimizing the negative effects of weak coordination and conflicts of interest in decision-making processes. Factors such as the political security stability of the host country, laws and regulations related to financial, banking, and insurance issues can create a conducive environment for attracting health tourists. Other factors for attracting health tourists include international advertising, training medical staff, quality of services and physical environment, and the use of advanced equipment. Other non-medical infrastructures make travel easier, cheaper, and accommodation more comfortable. Such facilities help tourists achieve greater satisfaction from their stay in the host country (Sag et al ,2021).

3. The Health System in Iran

During the past four decades, Iran has experienced substantial turmoil in its economy and international policy. After the 1979 revolution, Iran was afflicted with the longest war in the 20th century with its neighbor Iraq. After the end of the war in 1988, Iran entered an era of massive construction and investment in its health and non-health infrastructures, with an increase in gross domestic product (GDP) per person. The economic and social development included, but was not limited to, improvement in literacy, urbanization, and investments in the transport and food industries. In the health sector, policies were designed and implemented in the four main domains of primary care, secondary and tertiary care, training health-care professionals, and research to reach universal health coverage (UHC); nevertheless, international sanctions against Iran in 2011 imposed some restrictions on these efforts. On the path towards UHC, Iran has undergone several major transformations, including expanding the primary health-care (PHC) system and integrating the Ministry of Health with Medical Education in the 1980s,¹ the 2004 Universal Rural Health Insurance and the 2014 Health Transformation Plan; however, existing evidence indicates unequal improvements in the distribution of specific health indicators across 31 provinces. (Farzadfar,2022).

One of the primary objectives of Iran's healthcare system is to ensure universal health coverage, which has been largely successful through the establishment of various health insurance schemes. These initiatives aim to provide essential health services to all citizens, regardless of their economic status. The government allocates considerable resources to enhance healthcare infrastructure, including hospitals and clinics, particularly in rural areas where access to medical services is often limited.

4. Structure of Healthcare in Iran

Public sector

The public healthcare system in Iran is designed to provide comprehensive medical services to its population, emphasizing accessibility and equity. At the core of this system lies the Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MoHME), which plays a pivotal role in establishing healthcare policies, regulations, and standards. Through its various departments, the MoHME oversees the management and provision of healthcare services across the nation, ensuring that they adhere to the established guidelines and protocols.

Iran's public healthcare is organized into a hierarchical structure that includes primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of care. Primary healthcare centers represent the first point of contact for patients, offering essential services such as immunizations, maternal and child health, and chronic disease management. These centers are widely distributed across urban and rural areas, aiming to reduce

barriers to healthcare access. Secondary care is primarily offered through district hospitals and specialized clinics, which provide more advanced medical services and consultations, while tertiary care facilities consist of university hospitals equipped to manage complex medical conditions and surgeries (Iran health system, 2024).

Additionally, the Iranian healthcare system is supported by various governmental institutions and organizations, including Health Insurance Companies and the Iranian Red Crescent Society, which ensure people can afford and access necessary medical treatments. The integration of public and private sectors in healthcare delivery also plays a vital role in enhancing service availability. The system focuses on preventive health measures, health education, and community participation, fostering a holistic approach to public health. Such an organized structure is vital for addressing the diverse health needs of the Iranian population, promoting health equity and improving health outcomes throughout the country.

Private sector

The private healthcare sector in Iran plays a significant role in the overall health system, complementing the public healthcare services offered by the government. This sector encompasses a range of facilities, including private hospitals, clinics, and specialty centers, which vary in scale and quality. The characteristics of these private health facilities often include advanced medical technologies, a higher standard of individualized patient care, and shorter wait times compared to public healthcare services. Many private facilities are equipped to provide a comprehensive array of services, from preventive care to specialized treatments, catering to both outpatient and inpatient needs.

One of the notable advantages of private healthcare in Iran is its ability to offer a diverse range of medical services and procedures. From routine check-ups to complicated surgeries, private healthcare providers are often seen as more flexible and responsive to patient needs. Moreover, these facilities frequently invest in modern medical equipment and technology, thereby enhancing the quality of care provided. Additionally, many private healthcare facilities maintain a focus on specialized areas such as orthopedics, cardiology, and cosmetic surgery, which attracts patients seeking specific treatments that may be less accessible in the public sector.

Integration and competition between the public and private healthcare systems in Iran present a dynamic landscape. The public sector predominantly serves a larger segment of the population, especially those from lower-income backgrounds, whereas the private sector tends to cater to wealthier individuals. This separation often leads to a dual healthcare system, whereby patients may choose to pursue private care for its perceived advantages. Furthermore, the rise of private health insurance has added a layer of

complexity, providing patients with greater options when it comes to financing their healthcare needs. These emerging trends underscore the importance of understanding the structure and function of private healthcare in Iran as it continues to evolve within the broader context of the national health system. (Tabrizi *et al*,2017)

5. Government Oversight and Regulation

The Iranian healthcare system is significantly shaped by government oversight and regulation, which ensures that ethical practices and healthcare delivery standards are consistently maintained. **The Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MOHME)** plays a pivotal role in this oversight, functioning as the primary regulatory body responsible for formulating health policies, implementing quality assurance measures, and promoting public health initiatives. Regulatory frameworks established by the government dictate the operational procedures of healthcare institutions, encompassing both public and private providers.

One of the critical components of the regulation in Iran is the establishment of laws that govern various aspects of the healthcare sector. These laws are designed to safeguard patient rights, ensure the quality of care, and impose regulations on healthcare professionals. For instance, ethical codes of conduct have been developed to guide medical practitioners in their clinical practice. The government's commitment to these ethical standards not only influences healthcare professionals but also enhances the trust of patients in the healthcare system.

In addition to laws and ethical guidelines, the government also emphasizes regular inspections and evaluations of healthcare facilities to ensure compliance with established norms. This oversight is crucial as it aims to address any discrepancies in service delivery and patient care. Furthermore, the MOHME collaborates with various stakeholders, including medical associations and civil society, to promote public awareness regarding healthcare rights and the importance of quality assurance (Medical Sciences University, 2024).

6. Health Tourism in Iran

In developing countries like Iran, the government plays a central role in the development of medical and non-medical facilities. The Iranian government manages hundreds of hospitals and medical universities. This can significantly contribute to providing the necessary facilities for the tourism industry. Iran has one of the most advanced healthcare systems in the Middle East, and this feature, along with its unique natural and historical attractions, as well as its ethnic and geographical diversity, offers great potential for the development of health tourism. Approximately four hundred thousand medical tourists visited Iran in 2019 (Statistical Calendar of the Ministry of Health and Medical

Education, 2019). Estimates suggest that Iran has the potential to attract one million medical tourists annually (Gholami et al., 2020). Most of these tourists have come from Afghanistan, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Pakistan, Turkey, India, Armenia, Turkmenistan, Lebanon, and Tajikistan (Webda News Agency, Medical Sciences University, 2024).

Specific standards must exist for hospitals that accept foreign tourists; this permit is known in Iran as IPD (International Patients Department). In fact, hospitals that possess this permit are authorized to engage in medical tourism. All private and public hospitals that are equipped and meet the necessary standards for accepting foreign patients can obtain this permit. Therefore, hospitals rated as excellent, one, or two can apply for the IPD permit. According to the annual report of the Health Tourism Department under the Ministry of Health, Treatment, and Medical Education, 94 hospitals in Iran have achieved these standards (Emamjani et al.2021). After obtaining this permit, the hospital can establish the IPD unit. Activities within this unit include; The unit is responsible for estimating costs based on the patient's condition and then presenting these to the patient before travel. The IPD unit handles patient admission and treatment processes within the hospital, coordinating various departments such as doctors, operating rooms, patient rooms, and financial matters for the patient. This unit also coordinates all activities outside the hospital during the patient’s stay, such as airport reception, translation services, hotel reservations, and tourism and recreational activities. Fig 1 shows IPD members and in following there is a description of duties.

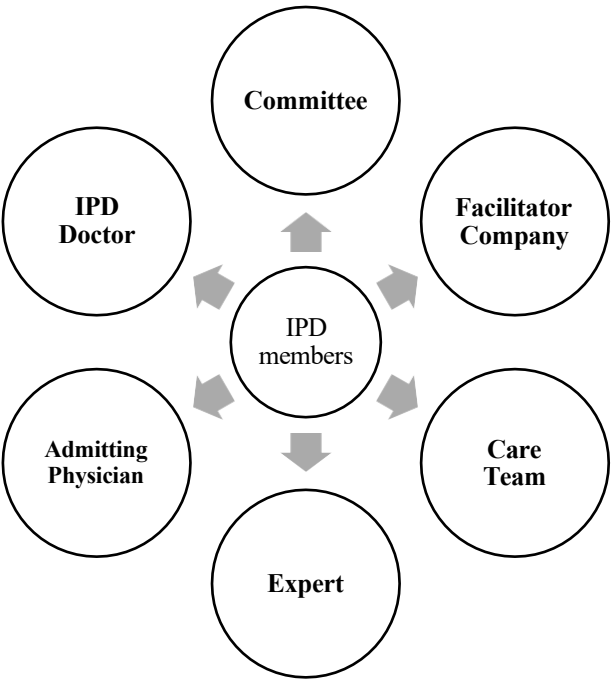


Figure 1: Members of the IPD Unit

- **Committee:** This member is responsible for developing operational policies and defining the hospital's objectives concerning services for foreign patients.
- **Expert:** Foreign patients visiting Iran may be unfamiliar with the processes and procedures. This individual enters Iran on a medical visa and expects the best medical and treatment services. At this time, a knowledgeable person oversees all activities such as patient admission, discharge, coordination with doctors, cost estimation, and other services related to medical care.
- **IPD Doctor:** The IPD doctor is responsible for all treatment procedures for the patient. This doctor performs duties such as conducting the initial examination, providing initial instructions, coordinating with the admitting physician, collaborating with the head nurse and nursing staff for task execution, daily patient visits, preparing a summary of the medical file, coordinating with the IT staff for electronic file preparation, and following up on emergency situations.
- **Admitting Physician:** This type of doctor is responsible for the patient's treatment.
- **Care Team:** This team consists of individuals who accompany the patient throughout their treatment in the hospital. One team member acts as a translator, facilitating communication between the patient and the medical staff, and is responsible for maintaining contact between the patient and the IPD expert.
- **Facilitator Company:** In addition to the above personnel, a company known as the medical tourism facilitator has specific responsibilities. This company is responsible for organizing contracts between the patient and the hospital and essentially introduces the patient to the hospital. All tourism and recreational services related to the patient and their companions are managed by the facilitator company(Ghasran,2024).

6.1. Research Method

This study is an applied-developmental research project in terms of purpose that is carried out using a qualitative approach. With regard to Creswell and Plano Clark's typology of research designs, this study has a sequential explanatory design. In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews as well as a review of the upstream documents of the Cultural Heritage were the data collection instruments. The content validity index was used to determine the qualitative validity of the questionnaire content. Subsequently, some health tourism organization experts studied the questionnaire and specified the questions that seemed to need revision.

The thematic analysis was used to analyze the data obtained from the interviews. This method involves coding and analyzing the data in order to uncover the hidden messages within it. In fact, this method aims at finding patterns in the data (Mohammadpour, 2016). The interviewees included 7 entrepreneurs

from Isfahan who had effective working experience in medical tourism. These participants were selected using targeted sampling, and their demographic features are provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Features of Interviewees

Descriptive variable	Frequency	Percentage
Field of study		
Tourism management	4	57
Educational management	1	14
Business management	2	29
Job experience		
3-5 years	1	14
5-8years	3	43
8-12years	3	43
Education		
PHD	1	14
Master	4	57
Bachelor	2	29
Total	7	100

In order to check the validity of the data obtained from the interviews, data saturation (Leininger, 1994) and triangulation (Belcher, 2005), which compares the obtained data with other sources (Mohammadpour, 2016), were used. The research population in the quantitative phase involved all managers and interim managers of **health tourism units** operating in Isfahan and Tehran. Data were collected in July and August 2024. The duration of each interview was approximately 20-30 minutes. Interviews continued until reaching the saturation point. The interview questions are as follows:

- A) Please explain what activities you are involved in within the field of health tourism.*
- B) Which governmental institutions are related to your activities?*
- C) Which institution has the most significant influence?*
- D)How can the government and relevant institutions play an effective role in the development of this industry?*
- E) What are your expectations from the government and public institutions at the national and provincial levels regarding your work?*

6.2. Qualitative Findings

In order to carry out thematic analysis, first the interviews were transcribed. To this end, the interview transcripts were turned into paragraphs, and deleting the unnecessary cases, it was summarized into 98 phrases. Then, the repetitious concepts were deleted, and the 70 final phrases were extracted. In the next stage, each group of phrases that revolved around a similar concept was attributed a selective code. Subsequently, each group of related selective codes was merged to form a secondary theme, and each group of secondary themes was combined to come to the main theme. Based on these analyses, one main theme, 13 secondary themes, and 22 selective codes were extracted. These are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3: Main Themes and Codes of research

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Selected code	Quotes
Challenges Faced by Health Tourism Entrepreneurs in Iran	Ambiguity in Structural Processes	Lack of a Clear Framework for leading entrepreneurial activities	...For startups and all involved actors, there isn't an organized framework, entrepreneurs face a lot of disasters in administrative affairs... ... There should be a clear process for health tourism who comes Iran, especially from Gulf countries...
	Conflict of Interests	Lack of Coordination Among Responsible Organizations	 It seems that the greatest impact in this area lies between the University of Medical Sciences and Cultural Heritage organization. Unfortunately, due to the lack of compatibility between these two institutions, we still haven't been able to establish a comprehensive regulation or a flexible and acceptable system for this sector. Some startups, new businesses and agencies that have recently entered this field are working on these matters, but we still lack a robust framework.... The Ministry of Health, the Medical System Organization, and the office related to Cultural Heritage information oversee the entry of individuals, particularly those coming from the USA, UK, and Canada. These institutions are in contact with us and are responsible for health tourism in Iran. ...The institution with the most significant influence is the Ministry of Health and Medical Education because they provide the main services and pricing. Therefore, they have the greatest impact on attracting health tourists....
		Severe Disagreements Among Related Units	
		Absence of an Independent Organization for Health Tourism	

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Selected code	Quotes
	Government inefficiency in managing health tourism affairs	Lack of Agility in Government Decision-Making	...There are multiple institutions, and coordination is difficult. Each has different policies. This situation can harm you. Given our governance model, all stakeholders have rights.... There is a bureaucratic government in Iran that can't be agile, so it complicates our activities. We work in private sector that makes decisions and implements them quickly.
		The brokers who do not adhere to health tourism standards	...The majority of the market share belongs to brokers operating in this field... However, it can't really be called illegal since there is no law governing this area. It operates as a middleman, and a number of tourism and health standards are not adhered to, but the major market share goes to these brokers...
		Competition with neighboring countries for market share	...Even neighboring countries, such as Oman, are heavily investing in this area. For instance, in the port of Salalah, which is considered a commercial and recreational port, many Iranian doctors are hosted on weekends so their patients can be treated there, eliminating the need for patients to travel to Iran. If no action is taken regarding this, Iran will lose all its market share....
		Disappointment with government activities	...Now I have to compete with them. Here, it's unclear who makes decisions for me and supports me! ...My response regarding expectations from the government is that I have no expectations at all because I know it's not feasible. What do I expect? I hope for good, but do not bring harm. My request is that you do nothing. Everything we have done has been through the private sector. We have made films about this country. We have produced documentaries about this country. As a private entity, we have brought \$5 million in foreign currency into the country. Who has helped us? No one!
		The lack of prioritization of health tourism in the Iranian government	In my opinion, the main problem is that the issue of health tourism is not recognized as an issue within health tourism itself. If we want to conduct research, we must first identify it as a problem. I think the starting point is still not recognized by friends in government institutions. Health tourism has potential, but it also faces challenges; let's address them. This sentence is never heard from them.....

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Selected code	Quotes
		Branding is not carried out by the government and Private sector cannot perform branding	In my opinion, the main problem is that the issue of health tourism is not recognized as an issue within health tourism itself. If we want to conduct research, we must first identify it as a problem. I think the starting point is still not recognized by friends in government institutions. Health tourism has potential, but it also faces challenges; let's address them. This sentence is never heard from them.... I don't want to say that the government should provide loans; I don't want loans from the government. However, branding incurs significant costs that I, as a private entity, cannot handle; this is not my role.....
Entrepreneurs Expectations of the Government	Facilitation of Health tourism Regulations	The need for flexibility in religious laws	 The flexibility of religious laws is one of the key factors facilitating health tourism...
	Infrastructure Development	The need for the development of the country's infrastructure	... In the context of health tourism, issues such as infrastructure, logistics, and so on are important...
	Development of Health Tourism Regulations	The necessity of establishing a reference law for the coordination of units	... Every decision made requires coordination, like a dictionary that everyone can refer to. If this happens, it can lead to better organization among the institutions...
	Health city Segmentations according to target markets	Regulating Travelers by Country to Benefit Different Cities	...Regarding the flights between provinces, most of our health tourists arrive in Mashhad, particularly those coming from Iraq. The situation is that Iraqi travelers come for both pilgrimage and treatment. Mashhad is the best option for them; however, if they are coming from Oman, Shiraz may be a better choice, as it is much closer and they can reach Shiraz with a one-hour flight...
	Given the Private Sector latitude	Limitation of Government interferences Private Business Sector	...We demand that the government reduce its size, withdraw from private entities, and allow entrepreneurs in health tourism to operate independently, so that we do not compete with those who make their own decisions and have established agencies...
	Calm political relations with countries	Establishing friendly and tension-free relations with other countries	...The most important role the government can play is as a facilitator regarding Iran's relations with other countries and how much attracting health tourists is prioritized. They should adjust the laws to allow those who are implementing to have more freedom...

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Selected code	Quotes
	Establishing internal security	Ensuring security for foreign travelers	... The main impact lies in establishing good relations with other countries; we need to ensure the security of our country so that those intending to travel to Iran feel assured...
	High Quality health services	Improving the quality of healthcare services	...We need to improve the quality of services provided, which the government and the Ministry of Health play a significant role in...
	Structural and administrative reform in Health tourism regulations	Efforts to shorten the administrative processes related to health tourism	...They should reduce bureaucratic red tape and increase cooperation, as our entire effort is to carry out positive activities. The better these institutions collaborate, the faster progress will be made...
	Establishing Coordination in related Organizations	Establish Coordination Among Responsible Institutions	...There needs to be a framework established where effective institutions and key players in this sector come together to discuss and consider their shares. I have often observed conflicts among these institutions, where the University of Medical Sciences claims that health tourism belongs to them because their health system is more prominent, while the Cultural Heritage Organization argues that it belongs to them because their tourism sector is more prominent...m

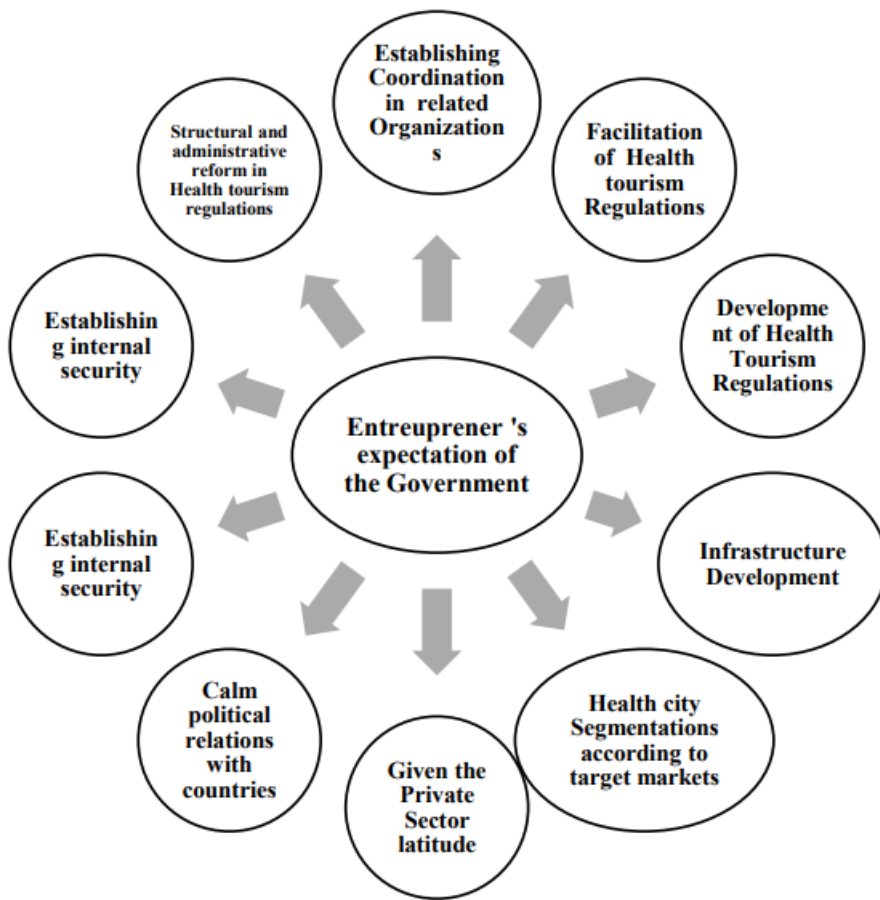


Fig 2: The Extracted Research Model

7. Discussion and Conclusion

Given the crucial role of governments in fostering health tourism, this research sought to identify a model that outlines the expectations of health tourism entrepreneurs. In countries like Iran, where the Ministry of Health plays a major role in providing services and its quality, the role of governments becomes more important. In the process of data analysis, we encountered another theme that was very valuable for study. This theme included the challenges of health tourism entrepreneurs in Iran, which is very significant. This model consists of Ambiguity in Structural Processes and Government inefficiency in managing health tourism affairs this is a very important factor and this finding is aligned with finding of Tabrizi *et al* (2017), which outlined five control knobs, which are financing, payment, organizing, regulation and behavior of 'tools' available for all managers and policy makers to determine health system status. Conflict of Interests is the other factor that is it seems that the Iranian government has not been able to perform effectively in supporting and creating structures in relation to health tourism. Effective health tourism development requires a delicate equilibrium in the interactions among tourists, residents, destinations, and the organizations and companies offering tourism services. In this context, holistic, sustainable tourism development encompasses the involvement of various

stakeholders

(Figueiredo,2024) unresolved conflicts of interest persist, resulting in considerable setbacks for entrepreneurs. Jabbari *et al* (2013) finds stakeholders of Health tourism which consists of nine groups. They included the provincial governance of Isfahan, the Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization of Isfahan, the Chamber of Commerce, the Medical Council, the Isfahan University of Medical Sciences, health service providers, tourism services providers, investors, and the Tosea Saderat Bank. The rate of knowledge of the Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization of Isfahan, clinic and international relationship of Isfahan University of Medical Sciences from government policy about medical tourism were very much. Private Hospitals, the Medical Council, investors, and the University of Medical Sciences had great power. Private hospitals, clinics, the Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization of Isfahan, and the University of Medical Sciences were in the supporter position. The effected strategies were the included strategies, focused on increasing power; increasing support, and on maintaining the position.

And the main model that is in line with the research question is the expectations of health tourism entrepreneurs from the government, which includes Facilitation of Health Tourism Regulations and Infrastructure Development. Development of Health Tourism Regulations is in line with Figueiredo (2024) there are specific regulations that apply to health tourism in certain countries and have a significant impact on the health tourism industry. In Guatemala, for example, the need for adequate public regulation of the medical tourism sector has created regulatory gaps and raised concerns about patient safety and health equity. Key informants in Guatemala expressed the need for government regulation and the potential use of international accreditation to increase national regulation.

The other factors are, Health city Segmentations according to target markets, latitude of Private Sector, Calm political relations with countries.

Establishing internal security is the other factor in this model of study, Wilks (2009) indicates to security, defined as freedom from danger, risk or doubt, was included in the original list, though until recently it has been a largely neglected area of service consideration in tourism. High Quality health services, Structural and administrative reform in Health tourism regulations, establishing Coordination in related Organizations. The results show that creating a safe and stress-free environment for tourists can be a good solution for the development of this industry. Likewise, the development of internal infrastructure, including transportation and accommodation, is very effective. It is a matter that needs to be looked into more closely. Entrepreneurs say that we are disappointed with the government to do something. Perhaps this issue refers to the wrong and ineffective interventions of governments. It is

recommended that government processes and frameworks within the health tourism sector be meticulously reassessed, focusing on the contributions of effective government institutions.

8. Limitation and Directions for Future Research

As explained, thematic analysis was used to extract our model. Although a deductive approach of thematic analysis is used, because of its flexibility, it leads to inconsistency and lack of coherence while developing themes. The other limitation is that the model was not tested in qualitative method. So, a structural model testing by the sample of stakeholders is suggested.

Considering that there are many stakeholders involved in the health tourism industry in Iran and that many of the challenges faced by entrepreneurs stem from this lack of coordination, it is recommended that future research focus on examining the coordination network among these stakeholders.

Declaration of Research and Publication Ethics

The author declares that this study did not require ethics committee approval. The research was conducted in accordance with national and international standards of research and publication ethics.

Author Contributions

The author is solely responsible for the conception, design, writing, and final approval of this manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no potential conflicts of interest regarding the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Data Availability Statement

The datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Statement

The author declares that no artificial intelligence (AI) tools or large language models (LLMs) were used in the preparation of this manuscript, including text generation, data analysis, or image creation.

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