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# Designing a Content Strategy Model for Sustainable Tourism Development in Yazd Province

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## Abstract

Thanks to the expansion of internet communications worldwide, significant awareness of tourism has emerged among diverse societies, contributing to the rapid growth of the tourism industry. Given the conditions of the country and Yazd Province, the tourism industry holds a potential that can accelerate national development. Online content plays a crucial role in attracting audiences and facilitates greater awareness and understanding of the destination, its conditions, and various strategies for visiting. Content strategy is one of the solutions that can support the tourism industry in increasing the pace of sustainable development and significantly transforming tourism destinations. Yazd Province, due to its high potential in terms of the diversity of tourist attractions, can play a significant role in its future by showcasing this potential through content aligned with sustainable development goals. In this article, the researcher attempts to describe the role of content strategy in the sustainable tourism development of Yazd Province and, while providing an explanation, offers localized solutions with a global perspective. Through library research, grounded theory methodology, and interviews with experts and professionals in the tourism and media industries, the conceptual model of a content strategy for sustainable tourism development in Yazd Province has been outlined. Success in employing an effective and efficient content strategy and managing content in line with sustainable development goals will guarantee success in the sustainable tourism development of Yazd Province.

**Keywords:** Content strategy, sustainable development, tourism, Yazd.

## 1. Introduction

Due to global transformations, the content published in internet-based media has profoundly influenced the patterns, meanings, and functions of relationships. Modern communication technologies, fueled by the growth of the internet, various social networks, and smartphones, have made content production and exchange among diverse audiences easier and faster. Given the increasing development of various technologies, particularly in the field of information and communications, tourism is one of the industries that has benefited the most from these advancements (Shia & Sadeghi, 2024). The role of these technological developments in the growth of the tourism industry is undeniable. This industry, by its very nature, is deeply intertwined with the content produced and disseminated through internet-based media, as in today's world, travel is almost inconceivable without using online content, digital services, and modern communication technologies (Rasouli et al., 2024; Safari Namivandi, 2024).



The significance and impact of content production in the growth and attraction of tourists cannot be denied, especially in Iran and the city of Yazd, which are rich in diverse tourism potentials. Merely showcasing the existing assets and tourism capabilities of this province to audiences can accelerate the process of sustainable tourism development in the region. The tourism industry is considered one of the most profitable, cleanest, most efficient, and largest industries in the world. This fact illustrates the importance and status of the tourism sector globally. The industry can exert both direct and indirect effects on the economy, culture, job creation, welfare, and comprehensive development (Pazaki, 2024; Pourjavad et al., 2024; Rajabi et al., 2024).

Tourism is an information-driven industry. Therefore, the rapid advancement of information and communication technologies has significantly and effectively transformed the tourism industry in areas such as eliminating intermediaries and providing accessible information, making it one of the largest sectors within online communication (Deb et al., 2024; Khadem Hosseini et al., 2024). Tourism services, which are intangible and variable, cannot be physically inspected before sale, and most of their products are naturally purchased prior to consumption and away from the place of consumption (Alves, 2024; Zarei, 2023). Therefore, tourism products are highly dependent on introduction, description, and presentation through written, audio, and visual information. In recent years, the significance of new media in various fields has increased considerably, and the tourism industry is among those affected by this trend. Content production and audience awareness of the potential tourism assets through internet-based media is one of the most fundamental activities for attracting tourists. The well-known “global village” theory has now become a tangible reality, necessitating a suitable strategy toward globalization and sustainable tourism development. The creation and dissemination of relevant content in destination marketing influences tourists’ perceptions of the destination, familiarity with the destination, behavioral engagement with the destination, and actual visitation as tourists (Ramaano, 2024; Wang & Butkouskaya, 2023). Informational familiarity refers to the quantity and quality of an individual’s information resources about a destination. Obtaining information from various sources—especially from commercial literature and advertisements—enables even those who have never visited a destination to form a mental image of it. While in the past, the primary motivation and factor in tourism were the limited available written sources (books, newspapers, travelogues, and photographs), today’s information superhighways—such as the internet, satellite programs, and audiovisual productions across all countries—have enabled a vast number of people to move from one location to another, motivated by the desire to explore and benefit from tourism features (Mashur, 2024; Nazari et al., 2024; Oka & Subadra, 2024).

In reviewing the literature on sustainable tourism and content strategies, recent international and domestic studies have emphasized the central role of digital media, management, and strategic planning. Hysa, Zdonek, and Karasek (2022) explored “Social Media in the Recovery of Sustainable Tourism” during the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland, highlighting how destination management and the use of social media content shared by residents and tourists can support tourism recovery while minimizing environmental and social impacts. Their findings showed generational and gender-based differences in social media usage, with women more likely to gather and share travel-related information, which in turn supports responsible travel behaviors (Hysa et al., 2022). In another 2022 study, Pahrudin, Liu, and Li investigated “The Role of Tourism Management and Marketing in Sustainable Tourism,” analyzing global literature and trends in sustainable tourism marketing, underlining the essential role of tourism governance (Pahrudin et al., 2022). Similarly, An et al. (2022) in South Korea examined how tourists interact with travel-related content on websites and social media, revealing that content-based empathy significantly influences tourism participation without prior identity formation, and that user-generated travel content indirectly enhances engagement (An et al., 2022). Within Iran, Taghavi Fard and Asadian Ardakani (2016) presented a model for e-tourism development using interpretive structural modeling, asserting that competitive advantages from e-tourism can significantly boost the sector, with financial capability being a core factor (Taghavi Fard & Asadian Ardakani, 2016). Additionally, Karimpour Reyhan and Sharif Jahed (2017) applied strategic planning to the sustainable development of tourism in the Shahdad desert of Kerman Province. Their results indicated that strategic planning can transform local resources into tourist attractions, enhancing employment, social welfare, and preservation of historical and natural assets (Karimpour Reyhan & Sharif Jahed, 2017). Collectively, these studies underscore the pivotal role of digital infrastructure, audience engagement, and strategic governance in achieving sustainable tourism development.



Given the unique characteristics and exceptional potential of Yazd Province, a critical question arises: why is the tourism development process in this province advancing with such fluctuation and, at times, at a very slow pace? In some instances, tourists are even unaware of the diverse attractions of the province during their trips. In response to this question, several factors such as political, cultural, security, and infrastructural conditions may be involved. However, these factors alone cannot fully or accurately justify the lack of development in this profitable industry, as the task of informing the public about the province's assets has often been overlooked or undervalued. Considering the very high tourism potential in Yazd Province and the significance of media and content production in reaching a broader domestic and international audience, this study aims to design a content strategy model for the sustainable tourism development of Yazd Province.

## 2. Methods and Materials

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach and grounded theory methodology. This method employs a process that requires the simultaneous and sequential collection and analysis of data.

In the initial phase, the theoretical foundations and literature review related to the subject were developed and documented. Subsequently, the interview questions and the research population—consisting of experts and practitioners in the tourism and media industries—were identified.

Sampling was carried out using the snowball technique and continued until data saturation was reached, resulting in 14 in-depth interviews.

In the next phase, the concepts derived from these interviews were analyzed, and categories were extracted. Based on this analysis, core categories, context, causal conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences were identified using MAXQDA software. The final model of the research was also presented in the form of a diagram.

## 3. Findings and Results

The results of the open and axial coding included the identification of components and indicators, which were finalized through expert consensus using the Delphi method, as shown in the table below:

The findings of this study were analyzed in three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In the open coding phase, the data obtained from the interviews were meticulously studied, examined, and analyzed, and concepts corresponding to similar data were assigned accordingly. After reviewing the data, labeling events and incidents, and extracting concepts, each of these concepts was compared with one another to identify their similarities and differences. This process was undertaken to determine the categories. In addition to extracting concepts and categories, the characteristics and features of each category were also derived based on the content of the data and respondents' indications, and they were classified into six groups: core category, context, causal, intervening, strategy, and outcome.

**Table 1. Concepts and Categories Related to the Content Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development in Yazd Province (Source: Author)**

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Category
Core	Content Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development in Yazd Province	Tourism as a Development Factor
		Effective Cultural Development in Tourism
		Content Production
Causal Conditions	Importance of Training in Tourism	Effective Content
		Specialized Personnel Training Effective in Content Production Quality
		Specialized Personnel Training as a Factor in Tourism Development
		Training as an Effective Factor in Tourist Awareness and Attraction
		Language Training as Effective in Attracting Foreign Tourists
		Effective Training in Providing Better Services to Tourists
		Audience-Appropriate Training as Effective in Enhancing Communication
		Destination Content as Effective in Travel Management
		Effective Content Management in Travel Management
		Effective Content Production in Decision Making
	Importance of Content Production	Effective Content Production in the Decision to Travel
		Content Production in Tourism as a Factor in Increasing Tourists
		Effective Content Production in Attracting Investment



		Effective Content Production in Establishing a Position in Global Tourism
		Effective Content Production in Diminishing Iranophobia
	Content Production Topics	Content Production and Presentation of the Destination's Daily Culture as Effective in Attracting Tourists
		Natural Attractions as an Important Topic in Content Production
		Environmentally Sustainable Content as Effective in Sustainable Tourism Development
		Display of Service Quality in Content as Effective in Attracting Tourists
	Tourist as an Important Factor in Content Production	Tourists as Effective in Producing and Disseminating Trust-Building Content
	Content Production Leads to Awareness	Effective Content Production in Shaping Audience's Perception of the Destination
		Display of Tourist Attractions on Social Networks as Effective in Destination Recognition
		Content Production from Attractions as a Factor in Establishing Attractions as Reference
		Targeted Content as Effective in Changing Audience Perspective
		Effective Content Production in Showcasing Tourism Capabilities
		Specialized Personnel as Effective in Producing Impactful Content
	Importance of Specialized Personnel in Content Production	
	Importance of Content Production in Branding	Effective Content Production in Destination Branding
	Increase in Tourists	Increase in Tourist Numbers as the Main Factor in Sustainable Development
		Greater Tourist Presence as a Factor in Tourism Development
		Tourist Presence as a Factor in Enhancing Tourism Services
	Tourism Services	Increase in Tourist Inflow as Important in Infrastructure Development
	Security in Tourism	Provision of Tourism Services as an Important Factor in Development
		Security as a Very Important Factor in Sustainable Tourism Development
		Destination Security as a Prerequisite in Tourism Content
	Political Conditions Effective in Tourism	Policy as an Effective Factor in Sustainable Tourism Development
		Political Conditions Have a Direct Impact on Tourism
		The Importance of Government Policies in Tourism
	International Relations	International Communications as Effective in Tourism Development
		Positive Foreign Relations as Effective in Influencing Content Production
	Economic Conditions	Economic Conditions as Effective in Tourism Development
		Inflation and Price Instability as Effective in Tourism Development
		The Necessity of Investment in Tourism
Context	The Internet as an Important Factor in Tourism	The Internet as an Important Factor in Content
		The Internet as a Vital Factor in Sustainable Tourism Development
		The Internet as Effective in Informing the Audience about the Tourism Destination
		The Internet as an Important Factor in Providing Tourism Services
	Tourist Attractions as an Important Topic in Content Production	Tourist Attractions as an Important Factor for Content Production
		Creating Tourist Attractions as Effective in Producing Engaging Content
	Obstacles to Content Production	Lack of Proper Investment as an Obstacle in the Domain of Content Production
		Imposing Limitations as an Obstacle to Effective Content Production in Tourism
		Lack of Expertise as an Effective Factor in Producing Low-Quality Content
		Lack of a Clear Strategy as an Obstacle to Targeted Content Production
		Organizational Limitations as an Obstacle to Content Dissemination in Media
		Lack of Commitment as an Obstacle to Producing High-Quality Content
		Lack of Confidence in the Future of Tourism as a Major Obstacle to Content Production
		Incorrect Production and Dissemination of Content as an Obstacle to the Destination's Visibility
		Lack of Teamwork as an Obstacle to Producing Accurate Tourism Content
		Subjective Opinions in Content Production as an Obstacle to Producing Content
		Lack of Global Political Interactions as an Obstacle to Content Dissemination

		Unstable Political Conditions as an Obstacle to the Impact of Content Production
	Infrastructure	Infrastructure Development as a Factor in Tourism Development
		Effective Smart Technology Integration in Tourism
	Management in Tourism Development	Effective Tourism Management in Attracting Tourists
		Provincial Managers as Effective in Creating Tourism Infrastructure
		Environmental Management as an Important Factor in Sustainable Development
	Obstacles to Tourism Development	Political Conditions
		Organizations
		Subjective Management
		Lack of Audience Awareness of Attractions as an Obstacle to Development
		Insecurity as a Very Important Obstacle to Tourism Development
		Lack of Planning as an Obstacle to Sustainable Tourism Development
		Change of Tourism Managers as an Obstacle to the Implementation of Development Programs
		Neglecting Tourism as an Obstacle to Tourism Development
		Inflation as an Obstacle to Sustainable Tourism Development
		Lack of Appropriate Infrastructure as an Obstacle to Tourism Development
		Lack of Organizational Coordination as an Obstacle to Sustainable Tourism Development
		Lack of Access to International Media as an Obstacle to Development
		Lack of Awareness of International Media as an Obstacle to Attraction
		Lack of Confidence in the Future of Tourism as an Obstacle to Investment
		Lack of Content Planning as an Obstacle to Sustainable Development
		Failure to Use Appropriate Models as an Obstacle to Sustainable Development
		Low Content Quality as a Limiting Factor in Development
		Ineffective Advertising as a Major Obstacle to Tourism Development
		Lack of Activity by Specialized Websites as an Obstacle to Development
		Lack of Investment
		Domestic Internet Filtering and Limitations
		Government Policies as an Obstacle to Tourism Development
	Iranophobia	Iranophobia as an Obstacle to Tourism Development
Intervening Conditions	Media Importance	The Importance of Media in Tourism
		The Importance of Internet Media
		The Importance of Websites in Tourism
		Effective Media in Tourism
	Cyberspace as Effective in Tourism	Publishing Content in Cyberspace as Effective in Attracting Audiences
		Virtual Media as Effective in Widespread Content Dissemination
		Virtual Networks as Effective in Destination Recognition
		Cyberspace as a Very Important Factor in Tourism Development
		Social Networks as Effective in Tourism Communications
	Audience Importance	Audience Characteristics as an Important Factor in Content Production
		Studying Audience Needs as Effective in Planning
	The Importance of New Technologies in Tourism	Mobile Phones as Effective in Content Production
		New Technologies as Effective in Tourism Management
		New Technologies as Effective in Audience Awareness
		New Technologies as Effective in Attracting Tourists
		Filtering as a Limiting Factor in Tourism Development
	Foreign Filtering in Tourism	Influencers as Effective in Destination Recognition
	The Importance of Bloggers in Tourism	Subjective Management as an Obstacle to Targeted Content Production
	Managerial Obstacles in Content Production	Lack of Expertise Among Tourism Managers as an Obstacle to Content Production
		Managerial Changes as Effective in Incorrect Content Production Planning
	The Impact of the Private Sector in Content Production	The Private Sector as an Important Factor in Tourism Content Production
	The Impact of Organizations in Tourism	Organizations as Effective in Sustainable Tourism Development
	Tourist-Generated Content as Effective in Tourism	Content Production and Dissemination by Tourists
Strategy	The Need to Address Tourism Development Factors	Specialized Personnel as Effective in Tourism Development



		Diversity in the Portfolio of Foreign Tourists as Effective in Tourism Growth
		Being Up-to-Date as a Factor in Attracting and Developing Tourism
		Understanding the Importance of Tourism as Effective in Tourism Development
		Prioritizing Tourism as a Factor in Provincial Development
	Effective Recognition and Awareness in Tourism Growth	Destination Recognition as Effective in Sustainable Tourism Destination Development
	The Need for Tourist-Generated Content	Content Production from Tourist Experiences
	The Need for Planning and Goal-Setting in Content Production	Having a Content Strategy as a Factor in Tourism Development
	The Need for Planning and Goal-Setting in Tourism	Planning Based on Conditions as Effective in Sustainable Development
		Tourism Planning Tailored to the Tourist
		Tourism Development Planning as Effective in Content Production
	The Need to Attract Audiences Through Content Dissemination	Content Dissemination in Media as Effective in Attracting Audiences
		Interaction Between Tourism Prosperity and Content Production
	The Need for Using Appropriate Equipment in Content Production	Content Production Tools as Effective in Producing Quality Content
	The Need for Producing Honest and Trustworthy Content	Honest and Realistic Content as Effective in Attracting Audiences
	The Need to Consider the Nature of the Content	Video Content
		Visual Content
		Textual Content
		Audio Content
		Mixed Content
	Management in Content Production	The Mindset of Tourism Managers as Effective in Content Production
		Management Stability as a Very Important Factor in Content Production
		Effective Content Production in Tourism Marketing
	Effective Advertising and Marketing in Tourism Growth	Effective Advertising in Destination Recognition
		Advertising in International Media as Effective in Development
		Effective Content Marketing in Attracting Tourists
	The Need to Consider Audience Feedback	Feedback on Specialized Websites as Effective in Tourism Development
Outcome	Attracting Tourists Through Effective Content Production	Content Production as One of the Factors in Attracting Tourists
	Sustainable Tourism Development Through Content Production	Effective Content Production in Sustainable Tourism Development

### Core Category

Given the various extracted categories, “Content Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development in Yazd Province” has been designated as the core category and is positioned at the heart of the model. The rationale for its designation as the core category is that its presence is clearly observable in most of the data. In other words, most interviewees have indicated that in the current era—marked by modern tourism and the pervasive influence of the internet and social networks, which have altered functions and definitions—the adoption of a content strategy in promoting sustainable tourism development is extremely essential and vital.

### Causal Conditions

Events and occurrences that lead to the emergence and expansion of the phenomenon are categorized under causal conditions—in other words, conditions whose occurrence results in the desired outcomes. Fifteen categories fall under causal conditions: the importance of training in tourism, effective content management in travel management, effective content production in decision-making, the importance of content production, content production topics, tourists as a significant factor in content production, content production leading to awareness, the importance of specialized personnel in content production, the importance of content production in branding, increasing the number of tourists, tourism services, security in tourism, political conditions effective in tourism, international relations, and economic conditions. These categories reflect the causal conditions emphasized by experts. In effect, achieving a content strategy for sustainable tourism development in Yazd Province is contingent upon the aforementioned factors. Attaining development—especially sustainable development in the tourism sector—is crucial for the country, and this is realized through an understanding of the necessity of content production. For





tourism development, content production can be employed for destination branding to accelerate progress and enhance audience awareness of the tourism destination, thereby influencing their travel decisions. Content management is one of the most critical factors in tourism for managing travel, both from the tourist's perspective and that of the destination. Awareness of the topics required for content production is highly effective in attracting the audience. Moreover, given the accessibility and ease of use of social networks, every tourist can serve as an agent for producing and disseminating content. As the number of tourists increases, this process can expand significantly—fostering greater trust while not imposing content production costs on the destination. Another key factor in sustainable tourism development via content production is the presence of well-trained, specialized personnel. Additionally, providing and showcasing appropriate tourism services is a fundamental necessity within the tourism industry. It should also be noted that creating and presenting a safe environment in tourism is a prerequisite for attracting tourists, and if appropriate political conditions and international relations are established, this objective becomes attainable—provided that proper governmental policies are in place. Ultimately, suitable, secure, and transparent economic conditions can contribute to high-quality content production and attract investment, thereby fostering the overall development of the industry.

### Context

Context, or the background, comprises a set of distinctive characteristics that pertain to the phenomenon in question; in other words, it is the collection of conditions within which strategies of action and reaction take place. Among the categories, seven fall under context: the internet as an important factor in tourism, tourist attractions as an important topic in content production, obstacles to content production, infrastructure, management in tourism development, obstacles to tourism development, and Iranophobia. These seven contextual categories must be taken into account; otherwise, even with the correct application of strategies, the expected outcomes will not be achieved. The internet is one of the most essential necessities for content production and the tourism industry, and if it is subjected to filtering or restrictions—whether domestically or internationally—it can cause severe damage to the tourism sector. Currently, the role of the internet in tourism is so integrated that even the smallest trips, from origin to destination, are inconceivable or extremely challenging without it, as it serves as a platform for travel convenience, planning, and even the dissemination and review of travel memories both before and after a trip. The category of tourist attractions is one of the most important prerequisites for content production; the first step in attracting tourists to a destination is the presence of compelling tourist attractions. Without such attractions, both content production and tourism would undoubtedly cease to exist. Obstacles to content production comprise a category that encapsulates many sub-concepts; until these obstacles are identified, achieving the desired outcomes will be very difficult or exceedingly slow. By identifying and eliminating obstacles, the impact of content production can be magnified several times over. Preparing the infrastructural conditions for tourist presence at a destination is also crucial because, while content production can showcase attractions and a destination's capacity to attract visitors, factors such as access routes, transportation facilities, accommodation options, communication networks, and welfare amenities become critically important once a tourist decides to travel. Any deficiency in these infrastructures can alter the tourist's decision-making process. Furthermore, having specialized, proper, and comprehensive management in tourism is indispensable. One of the most serious obstacles to tourism development is the production of content with anti-Iranian and Iranophobic themes. The creation and dissemination of such content have negatively affected the audience's perception of Iran's internal conditions, causing them to avoid choosing Iran as a tourism destination. Incorrect policies and inappropriate international relations—accompanied by targeted Iranophobia—are significant factors hindering tourism development and require reconsideration and strategic planning.

### Intervening Conditions

Intervening conditions are structural factors related to the core phenomenon that influence the strategies of action and reaction; they either constrain or facilitate these strategies within a specific context. Ten categories fall under intervening conditions: the importance of media, the effective virtual space in tourism, the importance of the audience, the significance of new technologies in tourism, foreign filtering in tourism, the importance of bloggers in tourism, managerial obstacles in content production, the impact of the private sector in content production, the impact of organizations in tourism, and content disseminated by tourists as effective in tourism. Media plays an exceedingly important role in tourism, with its significance increasing day by day. Tourism is one of the industries that provides many of its service processes to the audience via internet media and virtual spaces—from initial acquaintance with a tourism destination to evaluation, service acquisition, and ultimately, feedback—demonstrating the critical role of media. Additionally, the capabilities offered by virtual spaces and



social networks allow individuals to attract a following through their presence and content production. Influencers, in particular, play a fundamental role in tourism; by producing content and highlighting tourist attractions and destinations, they can effectively familiarize and attract tourists. Moreover, private sector activities in content production have further increased the recognition of tourism destinations. Tourism products are service-oriented and inherently dependent on the various conditions, emotions, and characteristics of the audience. In media, giving due attention to the audience in tourism content production is paramount. Considering the audience's attributes, dispositions, interests, preferences, and needs is an undeniable necessity. In recent years, global growth and new technologies have progressed at a rapid pace, and tourism is one of the industries that has consistently benefited from these advancements. Technologies such as smartphones, the internet, social networks, GPS, and other current innovations have catalyzed substantial transformations in tourism. The easy access of tourists to these new technologies and content production tools has positioned tourists as one of the primary pillars of content production. Notably, content produced and disseminated by tourists themselves—grounded in their personal experiences—tends to earn the audience's trust most effectively.

### Strategies

Strategies, or actions, are purposeful measures that provide solutions to the phenomenon in question and lead to the generation of outcomes and results. In other words, if strategies are well defined and implemented—taking into account the contextual conditions, causal conditions, and intervening conditions—it is reasonable to expect that the desired outcomes will be achieved. In this study, 13 strategic categories have been identified: the necessity of attending to the factors of tourism development; effective recognition and awareness in tourism growth; the need for content production by tourists; the necessity of planning and goal-setting in content production; the necessity of planning and goal-setting in tourism; the need to attract the audience through content dissemination; the necessity of using appropriate equipment in content production; the need for producing honest and trustworthy content; the necessity of paying attention to the nature of the content; management in content production; effective content production in marketing; effective advertising and marketing in tourism growth; and the necessity of considering audience feedback. To achieve sustainable tourism development, it is essential to be aware of its underlying factors and then establish planning, goal-setting, and strategies for each factor that ultimately culminate in development. Educating the audience about the tourism destination is one of the most fundamental activities that must be undertaken in tourism. In the early stages of raising audience awareness, the role of content production is particularly prominent. The more comprehensive the audience's knowledge about the tourism destination, the greater the likelihood that more people will be inclined to visit. One of the most effective methods of attracting tourists is through content produced by tourists who are present at the destination; such content can evoke a genuine sense of authenticity because the audience identifies with it, thereby profoundly influencing their trust and travel decisions. On the other hand, content production concerning attractions and tourism destinations represents distinct facets of tourism, and the content derived from individuals' feedback on their experiences is another aspect that must be taken very seriously for sustainable tourism development. Goal-setting and planning are indispensable for sustainable tourism development; when aligned with existing conditions and coupled with the anticipation and resolution of issues, they can significantly contribute to the process. Moreover, in tourism content production, the correct strategy leads to the production of superior content, the selection of optimal media, a better understanding of the destination by the audience, the attraction of more tourists, and ultimately, sustainable tourism development. Given the nature of the tourism industry—which is service-oriented and involves highly visual, experiential offerings at the destination—visually appealing and realistic content is of paramount importance. The priorities regarding content nature can be classified as follows: video content with high frequency takes precedence, followed by visual (photo-based) content; then textual content; and finally, integrated content that combines image, text, and sound, which can have an even greater impact. Marketing in tourism holds a crucial role, as it assists tourists in making the best choices for their services and travel based on their needs. Content production in tourism is among the most practical marketing methods, and it must be capable of understanding and effectively addressing the audience's needs through the produced content.

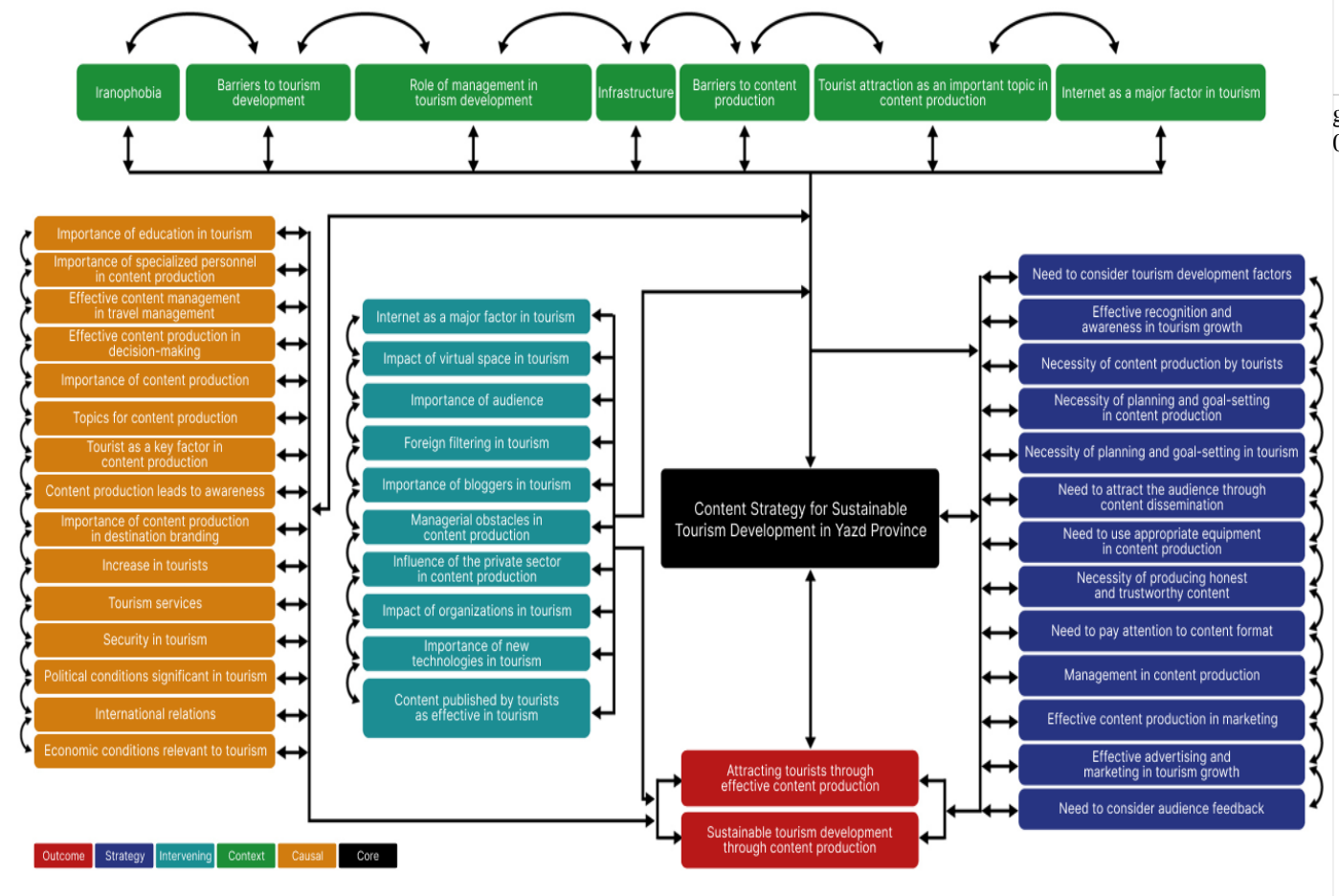
### Outcomes

Outcomes are the results and consequences of actions and reactions. Irrespective of those outcomes that are unpredictable, unintended, or negative, it appears that if the aforementioned categories are carefully considered within their respective frameworks, the effects of content—beyond merely impacting the growth of other infrastructures—will lead to the attraction





of tourists, improvements in economic and welfare conditions, preservation of various destination resources, and ultimately, sustainable tourism development.



**Figure 1. Final Model of the Study**

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to design a content strategy model for the sustainable tourism development of Yazd Province through a grounded theory approach based on expert interviews. The findings, extracted through open, axial, and selective coding, revealed six main components: causal conditions, context, intervening conditions, strategies, core category, and outcomes. The core phenomenon identified was the "content strategy for sustainable tourism development in Yazd Province." The significance of this central theme was reinforced by participants' repeated references to the decisive role of digital content in influencing tourist behavior, shaping destination branding, and facilitating responsible travel decisions. Participants emphasized the growing importance of digital platforms and social media in the tourism sector and considered content strategy not as a supplementary element but as an essential tool for the post-pandemic recovery and long-term sustainability of tourism in the region.

The causal conditions identified in the model—such as the role of education and training, the importance of content production in destination awareness, investment attraction, destination branding, and decision-making—highlight the multifaceted influence of content on tourism development. These results are in line with the findings of Hysa, Zdonek, and Karasek (2022), who argued that in the context of post-COVID tourism recovery, social media content generated by residents and tourists is instrumental in rebuilding tourism systems while simultaneously supporting environmental and socio-cultural sustainability (Hysa et al., 2022). The interviewees in this study confirmed that professionally trained personnel and the strategic production of localized and honest content not only attract tourists but also shape their expectations and enhance trust, especially when shared through tourists' own narratives and experiences.

The contextual conditions—such as internet accessibility, existing infrastructure, management practices, and the pervasive issue of Iranophobia—further elucidate the environment in which content strategies must operate. These findings affirm the notion of media environments and policy constraints as pivotal in enabling or hindering tourism development. Taghavi Fard and Asadian Ardakani (2016) emphasized the importance of e-tourism infrastructure and digital capacity in fostering competitiveness and economic growth in tourism (Taghavi Fard & Asadian Ardakani, 2016). Similarly, participants in the current study underscored that without adequate infrastructure and unfiltered internet access, the potential of content strategies remains largely unrealized. The digital divide and political barriers, including limited access to international media and the dissemination of negative imagery about Iran, emerged as critical issues. Addressing these contextual barriers is therefore vital for leveraging the full potential of content strategy in Yazd's tourism ecosystem.

Intervening conditions such as the significance of media, social networks, emerging technologies, managerial competence, and private sector involvement were also recognized as influential forces. The findings confirmed that media and influencers play a central role in disseminating travel narratives, a claim echoed in the study by An et al. (2022), who found that empathy with content shared on social media significantly increases tourists' intention to engage in travel-related activities (An et al., 2022). Interview participants stressed that influencer-generated content, particularly that which reflects real, lived experiences, holds greater persuasive power than institutional advertisements. Additionally, the rise of user-generated content and digital storytelling by tourists themselves was noted as a cornerstone of authentic marketing that resonates across diverse demographics.

Strategically, the study proposed several actionable elements: raising audience awareness, incorporating tourists into the content creation process, tailoring content to the preferences and characteristics of target audiences, and ensuring professional standards in content production. These recommendations mirror the conclusions of Pahrudin, Liu, and Li (2022), who pointed out that tourism management and marketing should align with sustainability principles to promote long-term value (Pahrudin et al., 2022). The experts in this study similarly argued that content strategy must be rooted in research, equipped with technological tools, and aligned with sustainable tourism values—promoting ecological preservation, cultural respect, and economic inclusion. Participants emphasized that the strategic integration of user feedback, particularly through specialized websites and social media analytics, can enhance the responsiveness and adaptability of content plans.

The outcomes of implementing an effective content strategy, as reported by participants, include increased tourist arrivals, improved infrastructure, enhanced destination image, better economic conditions, and stronger community involvement. These results are congruent with the insights provided by Karimpour Reyhan and Sharif Jahed (2017), who emphasized that strategic planning in desert tourism can convert local resources into sustainable attractions that contribute to employment, social well-being, and the conservation of natural and cultural heritage (Karimpour Reyhan & Sharif Jahed, 2017). The present study confirms that a well-designed content strategy not only acts as a promotional tool but also fosters a broader framework for sustainable development. By empowering local communities and integrating cultural authenticity into content, the strategy builds long-term value for both tourists and host communities.

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. First, the research is context-specific and focused solely on Yazd Province, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions with differing cultural, political, and infrastructural realities. While Yazd's rich heritage and existing tourism base provide an ideal case for model development, provinces with different levels of digital access, international visibility, or tourism potential may require distinct strategies. Second, data collection was qualitative and reliant on semi-structured interviews with a relatively small group of experts and stakeholders. Although theoretical saturation was achieved, the inclusion of a broader and more diverse sample—such as international tourists or policymakers—might have enriched the findings further. Finally, while the grounded theory method offers depth, it lacks the predictive power of quantitative modeling, which could be useful for validating the proposed framework in future studies.

Future studies should consider expanding the geographical scope to include comparative analyses between multiple provinces or countries with similar tourism challenges and opportunities. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how content strategy can be tailored to different contexts. Researchers may also benefit from employing mixed-methods designs that incorporate both qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys or digital analytics to triangulate findings and test the relationships proposed in the current model. Moreover, further exploration into the psychological effects



of different types of content—such as video, text, or mixed formats—on tourist behavior and decision-making could offer practical insights for content creators. Finally, future research should investigate the role of artificial intelligence and machine learning in personalizing tourism content and enhancing user engagement, as emerging technologies continue to redefine media consumption patterns.

For tourism stakeholders in Yazd and beyond, several practical recommendations emerge from this study. First, tourism organizations and destination managers should invest in the development of a comprehensive content strategy rooted in audience research and sustainability principles. This includes hiring trained content specialists, equipping them with advanced tools, and fostering collaborations with influencers and local communities. Second, efforts must be made to improve the digital infrastructure of tourism destinations, especially ensuring unrestricted internet access and modernizing websites and social media channels. Third, policies should be enacted to counteract negative portrayals of Iran in international media and promote positive narratives through coordinated content campaigns. Local authorities should also support community-based storytelling, which enhances authenticity and diversifies the voices representing the destination. Finally, evaluation mechanisms such as feedback loops and performance metrics should be incorporated into the content strategy to monitor its impact on tourist engagement and destination sustainability. By aligning media efforts with strategic objectives and stakeholder collaboration, Yazd can position itself as a model for sustainable tourism through innovative content practices.

### Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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### Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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