JOURNAL OF GASTRONOMY HOSPITALITY AND TRAVEL

ISSN: 2619-9548 **Journal homepage:** www.joghat.org

Received: 26.12.2025 Accepted: 20.02.2026

Journal of Gastronomy, Hospitality and Travel, 2026, 9(1), 38-60

Research Article

EXAMINING THE SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPACTS OF IRANIAN TOURISTS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF RESIDENTS: A SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY APPROACH

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Abstract

This study examines residents' perceptions of the socio-cultural impact of Iranian tourists in Van. Social Exchange Theory guided the conceptual framework of this research. A questionnaire survey was conducted with 444 respondents selected via convenience sampling. Descriptive statistics, factor analysis, and parametric tests were employed to analyse data. The findings revealed that residents' socio-cultural perceptions of Iranian tourists vary to some extent according to socio-demographic characteristics. Significant differences were identified across gender, age, level of education, occupation, income level, language of communication, and purpose of communication in specific socio-cultural dimensions. In contrast, the length of residence did not reveal statistically significant differences. Overall, communication-related variables and education level emerged as stronger differentiating factors shaping residents' socio-cultural perceptions. These findings lend empirical support to Social Exchange Theory, suggesting that residents evaluate tourism impacts based on perceived interaction benefits and socio-cultural exchanges. The study concludes with theoretical contributions, practical recommendations for destination stakeholders, and suggestions for future research.

Keywords: Resident, Iranian Tourist, Destination, Socio-Cultural Impact

Introduction

The tourism industry, with its dynamic and ever-evolving structure, has become increasingly strategic. It acts as a lever for destination growth (Ibanescu et al., 2018). In 2024, it generated approximately US$11.1 trillion, accounting for 10% of global GDP, up from about $ 9.9 trillion (9.1%) in 2023. This growth further strengthens its position as a key driver of economic development. In addition to boosting GDP, tourism stimulates job creation, attracts foreign investment, and increases government revenue through taxes and fees. For example, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) reported that the sector supported over 338 million jobs worldwide in 2024, underscoring its significant role as a major employer (WTTC, 2024).

The economic impact of tourism alone is insufficient to ensure long-term sustainability. The relationship between residents and tourists forms the basis of tourism. Tourists seek memorable experiences that often depend on positive interactions with residents. However, resident involvement should not be viewed solely as a determinant of tourist satisfaction. Local participation represents a fundamental pillar of sustainable tourism development. Sustainable tourism requires not only economic benefits but also social legitimacy and community support to ensure long-term viability. When residents are actively involved in tourism planning and decision-making, they are more likely to perceive tourism as beneficial, thereby enhancing social cohesion and reducing potential conflicts. Conversely, excluding local voices may generate resistance, weaken community support, and threaten the sustainability of tourism initiatives. Therefore, effective and harmonious communication among policymakers, tourism leaders, and the local community is essential not only for enhancing the visitor experience but also for securing the destination's long-term social sustainability and resilience (McCool and Martin, 1994; McDowall and Choi, 2010; Vargas-Sánchez, Plaza-Mejía, & Porras-Bueno, 2009).

Host-guest interactions drive tourism's socio-cultural impacts and shape daily life. These impacts change traditional ideas, values, norms, and identities (Oketch, 2010). Understanding them is vital for the

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DOİ: 10.33083/joghat.2026.600

sustainability and long-term success of a destination. Tourism alters social and cultural structures and affects the environment. Tourism activities can have both positive and negative environmental effects.

Economic, socio-cultural, and environmental impacts shape residents' support for tourism. Residents are more likely to support tourism when they have a positive attitude toward tourism (Ramkissoon, 2023; Piuchan, Chan, and Kaale, 2018; Zaei and Mahin, 2013). Positive perceptions encourage them to preserve culture and promote social stability by benefiting the local economy (Gnanapala and Sandaruwani, 2016). Tourists also prefer places where they feel welcome and accepted; host community hospitality is vital, and favourable treatment leads to repeat visits (Almeida-Garcia et al., 2016).

Residents' perceptions depend on costs, benefits, and their involvement. Past research often focused more on economic benefits than on other aspects. Critics argue this neglects socio-cultural and environmental factors (Mbaiwa, 2005; Deery, Jago, and Frendline, 2012; Meimand et al., 2017; Gürbüz, 2002). This study highlights the value of perceived socio-cultural impacts. People drive tourism, and locals and tourists interact with one another and with the destination. These interactions shape attitudes, expectations, views, and lifestyles. Tourism development happens alongside unique local characteristics (Almeida-Garcia et al., 2016). To understand tourism, start with its sociological dimension (Gjerald, 2005).

While the literature provides substantial evidence on residents' perceptions of tourism impacts, research conducted in border cities such as Van, where cross-border mobility and socio-cultural interactions are highly visible, remains limited. As a border destination attracting a significant number of Iranian tourists, Van offers a unique context for examining the socio-cultural impacts of tourism. Accordingly, this study investigates how residents of Van perceive the socio-cultural effects of Iranian tourists and contributes to a deeper understanding of host–guest relations in border destinations. Moreover, existing tourism impact studies show that residents' perceptions of tourism's impact may vary with several socio-demographic variables. However, the results are contradictory (Charag, Fazili, & Bashir, 2021; Long & Kayat, 2011; Andriotis & Vaughan, 2003; Sirakaya, Teye, and Sönmez, 2002; Chen, 2000). Some empirical studies suggest that these variables are positively related to residents' perception of tourism impacts; however, other studies suggest that these impacts are negative or neutral. The current study, therefore, contributes to the literature by broadening the limited or contradictory research on residents' perception of tourism's impact by examining the factors that influence these perception in the Van context.

Literature Review

Impacts of Tourism

Tourism has both positive and negative effects on the economy, society, and the environment. Many studies have explored residents' perceptions of these impacts for over fifty years (Jurowski, Uysal and Williams, 1997; Andereck et al., 2005; Abdollahzadeh and Sharifzadeh, 2014; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2015; Gogitidze et al., 2022; Segota, Mihalic, and Perdeu, 2024; Cadima et al., 2025). In the 1960s, research focused on positives, but by the 1970s, negatives became important, and by the 1980s, both sides were considered. The 1970s also saw a growing focus on residents' attitudes. Researchers have increased their studies of local people's attitudes and behaviours since the 1970s (Almeida-Garcia et al., 2016). This trend comes from recognising that tourism development affects local communities, both positively and negatively (Almeida-Garcia et al., 2016). Researchers conduct these studies because negative resident attitudes could hinder tourism success and sustainability (Diedrich and Garcia-Buades, 2009).

Tourism brings both benefits and costs to residents and governments. Recent studies highlight many positive economic effects that influence public views. Benefits include more jobs (Ap and Crompton, 1998; Williams and Lawson, 2001; Gursoy, Jurowski and Uysal, 2002; Haley, Snaith and Miller, 2005; Sharma and Gursoy, 2015), better infrastructure (Choi and Murray, 2010), higher quality of life (Choi and Murray, 2010; Woo, Kim and Uysal, 2015), increased investment (Ap and Crompton, 1998; Haley et al., 2005; Northcote and Macbeth, 2005; Sharma and Gursoy, 2015), more opportunities for local businesses (Northcote and Macbeth, 2005), boosts to local and regional economies (Ap and Crompton, 1998; Williams and Lawson, 2001; Haley et al., 2005; Northcote and Macbeth, 2005; Gu and Wong, 2006), and higher household income. Tourism also stimulates other sectors. However, it can raise living costs, push up land prices, and create low-paid, temporary jobs (Kumar, Hussain, and Kannan, 2015; Mihalic, 2014; Haralambopoulos and Pizam, 1996). Recognising both effects, governments and businesses invest in tourism but also debate fair benefit distribution and sustainability (Kumar et al., 2015).

Tourism changes residents' socio-cultural features, including habits, routines, social life, beliefs, and values. Some studies show tourism creates positive social impacts, such as tourists' respect for local culture and traditions, improved cultural understanding, enhanced pride in national culture, and growth of local tourism (Tangit, Hasim, and Adanan, 2014; Sharma and Gursoy, 2015; Jafaar, Rasoolimanesh and Ismail, 2017). However, research also finds negative effects: decline in traditions (Tangit et al., 2014), rise in materialism, more crime, gambling, social conflict, crowding, drug abuse, and fights (Tangit et al., 2014; Jafaar et al., 2017). Poor management can lead to the loss of resident identity and local culture (Rosenow and Pulsipher, 1979). Residents' perceptions depend on balancing cultural preservation and social disruption.

Tourism also causes some favourable and unfavourable impacts on the environment. On the positive side, it can stimulate conservation, expand protected areas, support infrastructure improvements such as roads and public facilities, and improve residents' behaviours (Tangit et al., 2014). On the negative side, it can lead to traffic, crowding, and congestion (Liu and Var, 1986; Tichaawa and Moyo, 2019), parking problems, disturbance and destruction of flora and fauna, air and water pollution, and littering (Brida, Disegna, and Osti, 2011).

Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET), first proposed in the field of sociology by Emerson (1976), has subsequently been adopted as a fundamental theoretical framework in the tourism literature to explain local people's perceptions and attitudes toward tourism development and has been used by numerous researchers to explain local people's perceptions and attitudes toward tourism impacts (Wang and Pfister, 2014).

According to this theory, individuals evaluate social and economic interactions based on a perceived balance between benefits and costs. When residents perceive that the benefits of tourism outweigh its costs, they develop positive attitudes towards tourism; conversely, when the costs are perceived as greater, they tend to develop negative attitudes (Tovar and Lockwood, 2008). In this context, the perceived benefits of tourism for residents include encouragement of public participation (Andereck et al., 2005; Haley et al., 2005), an increase in employment opportunities (Ap, 1990; Williams and Lawson, 2001), the creation of investment and development opportunities (Ap and Crompton, 1998; Tomljenovic and Faulkner, 2000), the establishment of new local businesses (Northcote and Macbeth, 2005), the revitalization of the local and regional economy (Ap and Crompton, 1998), the development and preservation of public facilities (Mason and Cheyne, 2000), and the attraction of new cultural events and activities. In contrast, perceived costs include disruption of residents' daily lives (Brunt and Courtney, 1999), an increase in alcohol and substance use (Andereck et al., 2005), exploitation of local people (Ap, 1990), an increase in prostitution and sexual permissiveness (Ap and Crompton, 1998), an increase in the cost of living and prices of goods and services (Tomljenovic and Faulkner, 2000), and deterioration of the area's physical appearance and environmental quality (Gu and Wong, 2006).

Hypotheses Development

Prior research grounded in Social Exchange Theory and subsequent empirical studies have consistently demonstrated that residents' perceptions of tourism impacts vary according to demographic characteristics such as gender, age, education, occupation, income level, and length of residence (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2015) These demographic variables influence the perceived balance between tourism-related benefits and costs, thereby shaping residents' socio-cultural evaluations of tourism development (Brougham & Butler, 1992; Williams & Lawson, 2001; Al-Saad et. al., 2018; Charag, Fazili, & Basrir, 2020; Muresan et al., 2021; Pathmanandakumar, 2021; Timothy & Said, 2023).

Gender: A review of the literature reveals contradictory findings regarding gender-based differences in residents' perceptions of tourism's impact. Andereck and Vogt (2000) argue that even when males and females support tourism development in a region, the underlying reasons for their support may differ. This finding suggests that perceptions and attitudes toward tourism can differ by gender. Some studies, for instance, Mensah (2012) and Pham (2011) report significant differences in perception between males and females, with males tending to perceive tourism's impact more positively than females. Another study found that, while females were generally more critical, citing anticipated negative impacts, they simultaneously acknowledged the potential advantages, including community facilities and regional benefits, to a greater extent than men (Mason & Cheyne, 2000). Also, Williams and Lawson (2001) reported that females in small towns in New Zealand held more negative attitudes toward tourism than males. In a similar vein, Özaltın Türker and Türker (2014), in a study conducted in Dalyan to examine local residents' perceptions of tourism impacts, found that female residents were more likely than male residents to perceive tourism's effects as negative. In contrast, Wang and

Pfister (2008) and Afthanorhan, Awang and Fazella (2017) reported that females have a more positive perception of tourism impact than males. They perceive greater benefits from downtown revitalisation and tourism activities, with an emphasis on arts and culture. These findings align with those of Vareiro, Remoaldo, and Ribeiro (2013), who found that younger and female residents show the greatest enthusiasm for tourism. Similarly, the study by Petrzelka et al. (2005) shows that males are more opposed to tourism development projects than females. While the literature has extensively explored residents' perceptions of tourism's positive and negative impacts, several studies report no statistically significant differences by gender (Almeida-Garcia et al., 2016; Wanjohi, 2002; Sharma & Dyer, 2009; Amuguandoh, 2010; Akyeampong, 2011; Pavlic and Portolan, 2019; Charag et al., 2020). Thus, it remains unclear whether residents' perceptions of tourism impacts differ significantly by gender; accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed for empirical testing:

H1: Residents' perceptions of the socio-cultural impacts of Iranian tourists differ significantly by gender.

Age: The relationship between gender and tourism has attracted scholarly attention since the 1990s, and gender has since been recognised as a critical variable in examining perceived tourism impacts in the field (Alrwajfah, Almeida-García, and Cortés-Macías, 2019). Within this context, several studies have examined the influence of age on residents' perceptions of tourism, yielding mixed results. Age is a significant determinant of attitudes toward tourism development (Neiss et al., 2009). Long and Kayat (2011) reported that younger residents tend to hold more positive perceptions of tourism, a finding consistent with Haralambopoulos and Pizam (1996) and Sinclair-Maragh (2017). Nguyen (2021) empirically demonstrated that highly educated and elderly residents exhibited greater concern regarding tourism impacts. Similarly, Armenski et al. (2011) indicated that older and more highly educated individuals tend to perceive the negative or inappropriate behaviours of foreign tourists more strongly than younger and less educated individuals. Another study found that younger and female residents are among the groups most enthusiastic about tourism development. By contrast, Tomljenovic and Faulkner (2000), and McGehee and Andereck (2004) demonstrated that older residents have more positive attitudes toward tourism than their younger counterparts. Also, Sharma and Gursoy (2014) identified age as having a statistically significant yet weak explanatory effect on certain perceptions of tourism impacts, particularly those related to lifestyle impacts, cultural identity, and traffic congestion. Some empirical studies also suggest that age does not significantly predict residents' perceptions of tourism impacts (Papastathopoulos et al., 2020; Bender et al., 2009; Belisle and Hoy, 1980; Ryan and Montgomery, 1994). Therefore, there is no clear consensus among researchers regarding whether age constitutes a valid predictor of residents' perceptions of tourism. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Residents' perceptions of the socio-cultural impacts of Iranian tourists differ significantly across age groups.

Educational Level: The level of education refers to the highest degree or qualification an individual has completed (Papastathopoulos et al., 2020). Educational attainment may influence individuals' ability to articulate concerns regarding tourism development (Sinclair-Maragh, 2017). The literature generally suggests that residents with higher levels of education tend to perceive tourism impacts more positively than those with lower levels of education (Inbakaran & Jackson, 2012). Husbands (1989) identified education as the most influential factor shaping residents' perceptions of tourism, noting that educational attainment was strongly associated with employment in the tourism sector. Bender et al. (2009) reported no significant differences in overall perceptions; however, college-educated residents were more likely to anticipate an increase in cultural events. Similarly, Latkova and Vogt (2012) found that more educated residents were more inclined to agree that tourism generates positive impacts, a finding further supported by Almeida-Garcia et al. (2016) and Tichaawa and Moyo (2019). Conversely, Andriotis and Vaughan (2023) observed that residents with higher levels of education held less favourable attitudes toward tourism impacts than those with medium or lower levels of education. Similarly, Armenski et al. (2011) demonstrated that respondents with higher levels of education perceived foreign tourists' negative behaviours more strongly than those with lower levels of education. Conversely, according to Vareiro et al. (2013), more educated residents tended to perceive tourism more favourably, demonstrating stronger expectations of its positive outcomes while exhibiting comparatively less concern about possible adverse impacts. Moreover, Ravikumar, Subhi, and Meesala (2022) and Teye et al. (2002) reported no statistically significant differences in perceptions across educational qualifications. Nevertheless, Teye et al. (2002) argued that higher educational attainment may still be associated with more favourable attitudes toward tourism. Based on these findings, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: Residents' perceptions of the socio-cultural impacts of Iranian tourists differ significantly across educational levels.

Occupation: Drawing on social exchange theory, occupation type is considered a significant factor in shaping residents' perceptions. Most studies indicate that residents whose livelihoods depend on tourism are more likely to view tourism impacts positively than those with lower levels of dependence. Andereck et al. (2005) found that residents who receive income directly or indirectly from the tourism industry perceive greater positive impacts of tourism compared to those who do not. Costa et al. (2020) found that residents whose professional activities are related to tourism tend to hold more optimistic views of tourism's contribution to economic benefits and its environmental impacts, and this is similar to the findings of Andereck et al. (2005), Kuvan and Alkan (2005), Ward and Berno (2011) and Martinez-Gonzales, Parra-Lopez, and Buhalis (2017). However, Alrwajfah et al. (2019) stated that residents with tourism-related jobs do not have favourable perceptions of tourism impacts. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H4: Residents' socio-cultural perceptions of Iranian tourists differ significantly according to occupation.

Monthly Income: The literature suggests that residents' perceptions of tourism impacts vary by income level. Ritchie and Inkari (2006) conducted a study in the Lewes District of southern England and found that although residents were generally supportive of tourism and cultural tourism development, significant differences emerged in their perceptions of economic and social benefits. In particular, income level and proximity to the tourist centre were identified as major influencing factors shaping residents' attitudes. Latkova and Vogt (2012) stated that residents with higher annual incomes were more likely to agree that positive impacts occurred. Consistent with prior research, Vareiro et al. (2013) and Teye et al. (2002) found that household income emerged as a significant differentiating factor in residents' perceptions of tourism impacts. However, Hao, Long, and Kleckley (2011) reported no significant association between income and residents' attitudes toward tourism development. Similarly, Kim et al. (2021) found that household income was not a significant predictor of residents' perceptions of the positive or negative impacts of tourism. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is being proposed:

H5: Residents' perceptions of the socio-cultural impacts of Iranian tourists differ significantly by monthly income level**.**

Length of Stay: The term "length of residency" denotes the total number of years an individual has lived in a particular country (Kanta Sharma, Paudel, and Dhungana, 2025). Several studies have investigated whether the length of residence influences residents' perceptions of tourism impacts. Almeida-García et al. (2016) found that residents who had lived in the destination for less than five years held more positive attitudes toward the impacts of tourism than long-term residents. Likewise, according to Olubulyera, Ipara, and Kiete (2015), a significant positive relationship was found between the length of residency and residents' attitudes toward cultural tourism development. The results showed that most residents in the Kogelo area supported tourism development, and that this support increased with longer residence. Furthermore, Huh & Vogt (2008) stated that residents who perceived tourism as the leading industry, had shorter tenure, were female, and earned less than $40,000 annually, reported more favourable attitudes toward tourism as a tool for community development. Conversely, Papastathopoulos et al. (2020) reported that residents' attitudes toward tourism were not significantly influenced by their length of residence. Similarly, Allen et al. (2003) found that residency duration was not a significant predictor of residents' perceptions of tourism development. Moreover, McGehee and Andereck (2004) reported that the length of residence was not a statistically significant determinant of residents' perceptions regarding both positive and negative tourism impacts. Therefore, the following hypothesis is being proposed:

H6: Residents' perceptions of the socio-cultural impacts of Iranian tourists differ significantly based on length of residence.

Language Communication and Purpose of Communication: The level and quality of interaction between tourists and local residents shape not only tourists' overall experiences and perceptions of the destination but also residents' acceptance, support, and tolerance toward tourists. This reciprocal interaction is a key determinant of sustainable tourism development and effective destination management (Armenski et al., 2011). Grounded in Social Exchange Theory, effective communication facilitates mutual understanding, reduces uncertainty, and enhances perceived socio-cultural benefits derived from tourism encounters. When communication barriers exist, misunderstandings and social distance may increase, leading residents to perceive tourism impacts more negatively. Residents may communicate with tourists for various purposes, including establishing friendships, engaging in cultural exchange, or fulfilling economic and service-related needs, and these differing interaction motives may influence residents' socio-cultural perceptions of tourists. Williams and Lawson (2001) demonstrated that the frequency and quality of interaction between residents and

tourists affect how tourism-related benefits and costs are evaluated. In contrast, Ward and Berno (2011) reported that demographic characteristics, employment in tourism, and perceived positive tourism impacts contribute to more favourable attitudes toward tourists, while increased contact with tourists and lower perceived threats further enhance these attitudes. On the other hand, the language used in communication between residents and tourists may influence residents' perceptions of socio-cultural tourism impacts, as effective linguistic interaction facilitates mutual understanding and positive social exchange. Ersoy (2017), in a study examining the socio-cultural impacts of tourism on local residents in Manavgat, found significant differences in perceived socio-cultural impacts according to the language used in communication with tourists. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are being proposed:

H7: Residents' perceptions of the socio-cultural impacts of Iranian tourists differ significantly according to the language used in communication with tourists.

H8: Residents' perceptions of the socio-cultural impacts of Iranian tourists differ significantly according to the purpose of communication with tourists.

Methodology

The Study Area

Van, located in eastern Türkiye within the Eastern Anatolia Region, is endowed with rich natural and cultural resources that have made it a prominent destination for both domestic and international tourists. Covering approximately 19,000 km², Van is surrounded by high mountain ranges and is home to Lake Van. It is the largest lake in the country. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), the province has a population of about 1.1 million (2024), distributed across 13 districts, with the provincial capital, Van.

Its proximity to Iran and the Kapıköy Border Gate significantly enhances accessibility, making Van particularly attractive to Iranian visitors. In addition, Van is connected by road and air through Van Ferit Melen Airport, facilitating domestic and international travel. These infrastructural advantages contribute to the city's role as a gateway for cross-border trade and tourism.

The city offers diverse tourism opportunities, ranging from cultural and heritage attractions such as Van Castle, Akdamar Island, and Urartian archaeological sites, to natural and recreational resources such as Lake Van and nearby mountain landscapes that support trekking and nature-based tourism. In recent years, events such as the Van Breakfast Festival have further promoted the city's cultural heritage.

Although the city's economic structure is predominantly based on agriculture and livestock, industrial, commercial, and tourism activities also make substantial contributions. In particular, cross-border trade with Iran provides financial benefits to the regional economy, while the expenditures of Iranian tourists constitute a noteworthy component of the city's economic activity (Akdağ,2018)

Van also reflects a socio-cultural diversity, with its multi-ethnic population contributing to a dynamic social life. This cultural diversity provides fertile ground for interaction with visiting tourists, particularly Iranians, who share cultural similarities while also introducing new perspectives to the local community.

In recent years, Van has experienced a substantial and steadily increasing influx of Iranian tourists. According to official statistics, the number of Iranian visitors reached 435,282 in 2022, increased to 554,032 in 2023, and rose further to 716,929 in 2024 (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2024). This increase in tourist numbers has intensified interactions between residents and tourists.

Sampling, Data Collection, and Data Analysis Techniques

The target population of this study consists of residents aged 18 and above living in Van Province. Due to practical constraints related to accessibility and the absence of a comprehensive sampling frame, probability-based sampling was not feasible. Therefore, convenience sampling was used to recruit residents who met the study criteria within the defined time and resource constraints.

Data were collected between April and August 2025 through face-to-face surveys and online questionnaires administered by the researcher. In total, 600 questionnaires were distributed and collected, of which 113 were administered online, and 487 were conducted face-to-face. Following data screening, questionnaires containing missing responses or inconsistent patterns were excluded. Consequently, 444 questionnaires were deemed valid and included in the final analysis.

The minimum required sample size was determined in line with the sampling framework proposed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). For large populations (N > 100,000), a sample size of 384 is considered sufficient at a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error. Accordingly, the final sample size exceeds the recommended minimum threshold.

The survey instrument consists of two parts. The first part presents the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics. The socio-demographic questions were measured at nominal and ordinal levels. The respondents were expected to select responses that reflected their characteristics. The second part measures residents' perceptions of the socio-cultural impacts of tourism. The socio-cultural impact scale was adapted from Ersoy (2019). All items were presented using a 5-point Likert-type (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree).

IBM SPSS Statistics 22 was used for data analysis. Initially, frequency and percentage analyses were conducted to describe the participants' socio-demographic characteristics. Secondly, mean scores and standard deviations were computed for each item to identify the ten most strongly perceived socio-cultural impact statements among residents. Then, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to identify the underlying dimensions of residents' socio-cultural perceptions of Iranian tourists. After determining the factor structure, the data were assessed for normality using skewness and kurtosis. Since all factors met the normality assumption, independent-samples t-tests and a one-way ANOVA were performed to assess potential differences across socio-demographic variables.

Research Ethical Approval

This study received ethical approval from the Van Yuzuncu Yil University Ethics Committee, decision number 25716, dated 07.10.2024.

Socio-Demographic Profile of Residents

The demographic characteristics of respondents are summarised in Table 1. Nearly half of the participants were female (n=219, 49.3% and half were male (n=225, 50.7%). The largest age group was 18-30. Most of the participants had an undergraduate degree (48.2%). 20.7% of the participants were students and self-employed. Regarding monthly income, 33.3% earned 22,000 TRY or less, and 21.6% earned 40,000-60,000 TRY. As for length of stay, the largest share of respondents had 21 years or more (37.2%), followed by 23.2% with less than 5 years, 17.8% with 16–20 years, 12.8% with 11–15 years, and 9.0% with 6–10 years. Persian (n=148, 33.3%) and English (n=123, 27.7%) were the most commonly used communication languages, while economic interaction was the leading purpose of communication (n=133, 30%)

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants (n=444)

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	225	50.7
	Female	219	49.3
Age in years	18 to 30 years old	236	53.2
	31 to 43 years old	113	25.5
	Above 43 years old	95	21.4
Level of education	Elementary School	21	4.70
	High School	81	18.2
	Associate Degree	63	14.2
	Undergraduate degree	214	48.2
	Graduate degree	65	14.6
Occupation	Academician	40	9.00
	Teacher	83	18.7
	Lawyer	57	12.8
	Civil Servant	80	18.0
	Student	92	20.7
	Self-employed	92	20.7
Monthly income (Turkish Liras)	22 000 TRY or less	148	33.3
	22.001-40.000 TRY	46	10.4
	40.001-60 000 TRY	96	21.6
	60 000-80 000 TRY	87	19.6
	80 001 TRY or above	67	15.1
	5 years or less	103	23.2

Length of stay	6-10 years	40	9.00
	11-15 years	57	12.8
	16-20 years	79	17.8
	21 years or above	165	37.2
Language of communication	English	123	27.7
	Persian	148	33.3
	Turkish	67	15.1
	No Communication	106	23.9
Purpose of communication	Language practice	29	6.50
	Friendship	70	15.8
	Economic	133	30.0
	Cultural exchange	32	7.20
	Asking for Direction	74	16.7
	No communication	106	23.9

Assessment of Common Method Bias

Harman's single-factor test was conducted to assess the possibility of common-method bias. The results indicated that the first factor accounted for 25.93% of the total variance, which is below the recommended threshold of 50%. Therefore, common method bias is not considered a serious concern in this study (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Findings

Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of the Ten Most Strongly Perceived Socio-Cultural Impact Items among Residents

The means and standard deviations of the scale items were calculated. The results indicate that residents' primary concern is the emergence of various entertainment styles in Van. They are also concerned about harmful habits such as alcohol and drug use. On the positive side, residents believe the benefits of tourism outweigh its negative impacts.

Table 2. Mean Scores and Standard Deviation of Statements (n = 444)

	Items	Mean	SD
1	Iranian tourists are contributing to the emergence of different styles of entertainment in Van	3.67	1.27
2	Iranian tourists are causing the spread of harmful habits, such as alcohol and drugs, in Van	3.45	1.37
3	Cultural and artistic activities in Van increase during the tourism season.	3.41	1.28
4	Local people are respectful and friendly towards Iranian tourists	3.39	1.26
5	Iranian tourists are changing the way locals dress and behave	3.39	1.33
6	Iranian tourists are causing an increase in prostitution in Van.	3.39	1.33
7	Iranian tourists negatively affect young people's attitudes and behaviours	3.37	1.31
8	Iranian tourists are changing the lifestyle of locals	3.35	1.31
9	The positive effects of tourism in Van are greater than its adverse effects	3.26	1.32
10	Iranian tourists display disrespectful and rude behaviour in hotels, restaurants and other places they stay in Van	3.25	1.31

Note: SD: Standard deviation

Factor Analysis

To examine residents' perceptions of the socio-cultural impacts of Iranian tourists, 30 items were subjected to an exploratory factor analysis. Prior to conducting the factor analysis, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were examined to assess the suitability of the data for factor analysis. The results in Table 3 show that Bartlett's Test of sphericity is significant ($p < 0.05$), supporting the suitability of the data for factor analysis (Bartlett, 1954; Hair et al., 2019). In addition, the sample is adequate if the KMO value exceeds 0.5 (Kaiser, 1974). The KMO value is 0.909, exceeding the recommended minimum value of 0.5. Accordingly, the current data are acceptable.

Table 3. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser Meyer Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.909
Bartlett's test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi Square	6976.480
	df	435
	Sig.	.000

Principal component analysis revealed five factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 (see Table 4), which together explain 26.07%, 19.21%, 5.61%, 4.50%, and 3.57% of the variance, accounting for a cumulative variance of 58.98%. The cumulative explained variance of 58.98% exceeds the commonly accepted 50% threshold in social science research (Hair et al., 2019).

The first factor was labelled "Negative socio-cultural impacts", comprising eight items with factor loadings ranging from 0.727 to 0.874 and communalities ranging from 0.537 to 0.787. This factor reflects negative impacts such as prostitution, violence, the spread of harmful habits, family disruption, and cultural degradation. Cronbach's alpha was very high ($\alpha = 0.938$).

The second factor, labelled "Cultural revitalisation and positive impacts", consisted of eight items, with factor loadings ranging from 0.479 to 0.738 and communalities ranging from 0.424 to 0.609. It captures the positive contributions of Iranian tourists, including cultural revival, handicrafts, folklore, and adaptation. Cronbach's alpha was 0.853, indicating high reliability.

The third factor, "Social interaction and tolerance," consisted of seven items, with loadings ranging from 0.446 to 0.666 and communalities ranging from 0.432 to 0.638. This factor reflects new friendships, respect, tolerance, desire to learn foreign languages, and acceptance of different beliefs. Reliability was acceptable ($\alpha = 0.817$).

The fourth factor, labelled "Communication and adaptation issues," contained four items, with loadings ranging from 0.573 to 0.695 and communalities ranging from 0.427 to 0.569. It covers communication hesitation, imitation of behaviour, and changes in the local dialect. Reliability was marginal but acceptable ($\alpha = 0.623$).

The fifth factor was labelled "Socio-cultural change" and included three items with loadings ranging from 0.573 to 0.755 and communalities ranging from 0.600 to 0.754. This factor reflects changes in lifestyle, clothing, and entertainment. Reliability was adequate ($\alpha = 0.755$).

Table 4. Results of Factor Analysis for Perception of Socio-Cultural Impact (n:444)

Factor Names and Statements	**Factor loadings**					**Commonality**
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	
Factor 1: Negative Socio-Cultural Impacts						
Iranian tourists are causing an increase in prostitution in Van.	0.874					0.787
Iranian tourists harm Van's culture and customs.	0.845					0.757
Iranian tourists are negatively impacting Van's local culture.	0.833					0.753
Iranian tourists are causing an increase in fights and assaults in Van	0.825					0.692
Iranian tourists are causing the spread of harmful habits, such as alcohol and drugs in Van.	0.824					0.711
Local people's family life is negatively affected by Iranian tourists.	0.814					0.716
Iranian tourists negatively affect young people's attitudes and behaviours	0.788					0.697
Iranian tourists display disrespectful, rude behaviour	0.727					0.537

in hotels, restaurants, and other places they stay in Van.				
Factor 2: Cultural Revitalisation and Positive Impacts				
Iranian tourists visiting the region contribute to the development of Van's local culture.	0.738			0.609
Thanks to Iranian tourists, art, handicrafts, folklore and other elements of local culture are reviving and gaining value in Van.	0.663			0.586
Iranian tourists are interested in Van's culture, folklore, art, local cuisine, and the lifestyle of the local people.	0.662			0.520
I enjoy learning new things about Iranian culture through tourism.	0.658			0.582
The positive effects of tourism in Van outweigh its adverse effects.	0.640			0.424
Iranian tourists treat locals with respect and friendliness.	0.612			0.553
Cultural and artistic activities in Van increase during the tourist season	0.543			0.492
Iranian tourists coming to Van are adapting to our lifestyle.	0.479			0.507
Factor 3: Social Interaction and Tolerance				
Iranian tourists create a desire or need to learn a foreign language in the people of Van.		0.666		0.523
New friendships are being made in Van thanks to Iranian tourists.		0.628		0.524
The people of Van want to establish good relations with Iranian tourists and encourage more to visit.		0.606		0.630
Tourism provides people in Van with the opportunity to accept different religious beliefs.		0.552		0.432
I want more Iranian tourists to come to Van.		0.537		0.586
Thanks to Iranian tourists, a culture of tolerance is emerging in Van.		0.497		0.638
Local people are respectful and friendly towards Iranian tourists.		0.446		0.507
Factor 4: Communication and Adaptation Issues				
Locals are hesitant to communicate with Iranian tourists.			0.695	0.507

Iranian tourists are hesitant to communicate with locals.				0.685		0.520
Locals imitate Iranian tourists' behaviour.				0.582		0.569
Iranian tourists are changing the daily language (dialect) of the people in Van.				0.573		0.427
Factor 5: Socio-Cultural Change						
Iranian tourists are changing the way locals dress and behave.					0.755	0.754
Iranian tourists are changing locals' lifestyles.					0.689	0.695
Iranian tourists are contributing to the emergence of diverse entertainment styles in Van.					0.573	0.600
Reliability	0.938	0.853	0.817	0.623	0.755	
Eigenvalues	7.82	5.76	1.68	1.35	1.07	
Variance (%)	26.07	19.21	5.61	4.50	3.57	
Cumulative variance (%)	26.07	45.28	50.89	55.40	58.98	
Factor Items	8	8	7	4	3	

Normality Test

Before conducting the difference analysis, it is necessary to test whether the data follow a normal distribution. Since the sample size exceeded 50, the assessment of normality was primarily based on skewness and kurtosis. These indicators are considered reliable indicators of whether the assumptions of parametric tests are met. The data were normally distributed as skewness and kurtosis values were within the ±3 range (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Normality test results are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5. Normality Test

Factor	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Negative Socio-Cultural Impacts	3.278	1.128	−0.260	−0.779
Cultural Revitalisation and Positive Impacts	3.115	0.941	−0.282	−0.275
Social Interaction and Tolerance	2.848	0.910	−0.114	−0.671
Communication and Adaptation Issues	2.560	0.887	+0.378	+0.089
Socio-Cultural Change	3.474	1.071	−0.530	−0.323

Note: SD: Standard Deviation

Findings on the Differences Between Participants' Individual Characteristics and Socio-Cultural Perceptions

The proposed hypotheses were tested using independent-samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA, which examined differences in residents' socio-cultural perceptions across demographic characteristics, including gender, age, education level, occupation, income, length of residence, language of communication, and purpose of communication. Accordingly, the hypotheses were tested.

Table 6. Results of the T-test for Gender

	Gender					
	Male		Female			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t-Value	Sig.
Negative Socio-Cultural Impacts	3.30	1.10	3.25	1.15	-0.44	0.660
Cultural Revitalisation and Positive Impacts	3.08	0.85	2.96	0.98	-1.30	0.192
Social Interaction and Tolerance	3.05	0.85	2.75	0.97	-3.45	0.001*
Communication and Adaptation Issues	2.59	0.87	2.52	0.90	-0.78	0.434
Socio-Cultural Change	3.54	1.03	3.40	1.10	-1.36	0.172

Note: * $p<0.05$, SD: Standard Deviation

The findings of the independent-samples t-test presented in Table 5 indicate that there were no significant differences between male and female respondents in negative socio-cultural impacts, cultural revitalisation and positive impacts, communication and adaptation issues, and socio-cultural change dimensions ($p>0.05$). However, a significant difference was found in the social interaction and tolerance dimension ($t = -3.45$, $p = 0.001$), indicating that male and female residents differ in their perceptions of this factor.

Table 7. Results of ANOVA for Age Groups

Factors	18-30 years old	31-43 years old	44+	F	p
Negative Socio-Cultural Impacts	3.36	3.18	3.18	1.448[1]	N.S.
Cultural Revitalisation and Positive Impacts	3.01[c]	3.16	3.29[a]	3.420	0.034**
Social Interaction and Tolerance	2.69[b,c]	2.95[a]	3.10[a]	8.338	0.000*
Communication and Adaptation Issues	2.57	2.53	2.53	0.080	N.S.
Socio-Cultural Change	3.39	3.61	3.49	1.570	N.S.

Note: [1] Asymptotically F distributed. * Bonferroni post hoc test results with significance level at $\alpha = 0.05$. ** Tamhane's T2 post hoc test results with significance level at $\alpha = 0.05$. Superscript letters in the table indicate statistically significant differences among the groups. The superscript letters correspond to the groups presented in columns 2-4: i.e. a: 18–30 years, b:31–43 years, and c: 44 years or more.

Table 7 presents the ANOVA results for the age groups. The results revealed significant differences across age groups for social interaction and tolerance dimension ($F = 8.338$, $p <0.05$) and cultural revitalisation and positive impact dimensions ($F = 3.420$, $p<0.05$). To identify intergroup differences, both Bonferroni and Tamhane's T2 post-hoc tests were conducted depending on the homogeneity of variances. Post hoc comparisons indicated that younger residents (aged 18–30) reported lower scores on social interaction and tolerance than older residents. These findings suggest that older residents tend to perceive tourism more positively, particularly for cultural and social interaction. Also, older residents (aged 44 and above) perceive tourism as contributing more positively to the revival of local culture and traditions than younger residents do. No significant differences were found in negative socio-cultural impacts, communication and adaptation issues, or socio-cultural change dimensions ($p>0.05$).

Table 8. Results of ANOVA and Post-Hoc Test for Educational Level

Factors	Elemantary School	High school	Associate Degree	Undergraduate Degree	Graduate Degree	F	p
Negative Socio-Cultural Impacts	3.61	2.97 [c,d]	3.60[b,e]	3.38 [b,e]	2.89 [c,d]	5.870	0.000*
Cultural Revitalisation and Positive Impacts	2.76	3.26	2.98	3.04 [e]	3.40 [d]	3.613	0.009**
Social Interaction and Tolerance	2.68	2.99	2.73 [e]	2.72 [e]	3.23 [c,d]	5.098	0.001*
Communication and Adaptation Issues	2.76	2.55	2.37	2.60	2.53	1.089	N.S.
Socio-Cultural Change	3.38	3.27 [c]	3.79 [b]	3.51	3.31	2.611	0.035*

Note: * Bonferroni post hoc test results with significance level at $\alpha = 0.05$. ** Tamhane's T2 post hoc test results with significance level at $\alpha = 0.05$. Superscript letters indicate that the mean values are significantly different from the mean values in the equivalent columns. Alphabets denote column 2-6: i.e. a: elementary school, b: high school,c: associate degree, d: undergraduate degree, e: graduate degree. N.S. Not significant

Because the ANOVA revealed statistically significant differences among the groups, Bonferroni and Tamhane's T2 post hoc tests were performed to identify specific differences. As shown in Table 8, respondents with an associate degree had a stronger negative perception of socio-cultural impacts and a stronger positive perception of socio-cultural change. In addition, respondents with a graduate degree held more positive views of cultural revitalisation and its benefits, and reported greater social interaction and tolerance toward Iranian tourists.

Table 9. Results of ANOVA for Occupation

Factors	Academician	Teacher	Lawyer	Civil servant	Student	Self-employed	F	p
Negative Socio-Cultural Impacts	2.90 [d]	3.12	3.38	3.60 [a]	3.27	3.23	2.652	0.002*
Cultural Revitalisation and Positive Impacts	3.16	3.33	3.06	2.96	2.95	3.22	2.230	N.S
Social Interaction and Tolerance	3.02	3.11 [d,e]	2.71	2.68 [b]	2.65 [b]	2.94	3.612	0.000*
Communication and Adaptation Issues	2.53	2.59	2.41	2.41	2:59	2.71	1.501	N.S.
Socio-Cultural Change	3.40	3.51	3.42	3.67	3.25	3.55	1.512	N.S.

Note: *Bonferroni post hoc test results with significance level at $\alpha = 0.05$. Superscript letters indicate that the mean values are significantly different from the mean values in the equivalent columns. Alphabets denote column 2-7: i.e. a = academician, b = teacher, c= lawyer, d= civil servant, e = student, f=self-employed. N.S. Not significant

ANOVA results revealed significant differences among occupation groups for negative socio-cultural impacts ($F = 2.652$, $p < 0.05$) and social interaction and tolerance ($F = 3.612$, $p < 0.05$). The Bonferroni post hoc test indicated that civil servants (M = 3.60) reported significantly higher mean scores for negative socio-cultural impacts than academicians (M = 2.90), suggesting that they perceive adverse effects of tourism more strongly. In contrast, for social interaction and tolerance, teachers (M = 3.11) had higher mean scores than civil servants (M = 2.68) and students (M = 2.65), suggesting that individuals in the education profession are more open and tolerant toward Iranian tourists.

Table 10. Results of ANOVA for Monthly Income

Factors	20 000 TRY or less	20 001-40 000 TRY	40 001-60 000 TRY	60 001-80 000 TRY	80 001 TRY or more	F	p
Negative Socio-Cultural Impacts	3.38	3.13	3.30	3.28	3.09	0.953	N.S.
Cultural Revitalisation and Positive Impacts	2.96	3.16	3.19	3.19	3.20	1.373	N.S
Social Interaction and Tolerance	2.67 [c]	2.75	3.00 [a]	2.98	2.89	2.935	0.022**
Communication and Adaptation Issues	2.54	2.52	2.58	2.69	2.41	1.033	N.S.
Socio-Cultural Change	3.40	3.43	3.51	3.47	3.58	0.391	N.S.

Note: **Tamhane's T2 post hoc test results with a significance level at $\alpha = 0.05$. Superscript letters indicate that the mean values are significantly different from the mean values in the equivalent columns. Alphabets denote column 2-6: i.e. a = 20,000 TRY or less, b = 20,001- 40,000 TRY, c = 40,001- 60,000 TRY, d = 60,001- 80,000 TRY, e = 80,001 TRY or more. N.S. Not significant

As the ANOVA revealed statistically significant differences among the groups, Tamhane's T2 post hoc analyses were performed to identify the specific group differences. The study revealed a significant difference only for the social interaction and tolerance dimension ($F = 2.935$, $p < 0.05$). Respondents earning between 40,001 and 60,000 TRY had the highest mean scores, suggesting that residents with moderate-to-high incomes may experience more positive interactions with tourists. However, no significant differences were found in negative socio-cultural impacts, cultural revitalisation and positive impacts, communication and adaptation issues, or socio-cultural change dimensions ($p > 0.05$).

Table 11. Results of ANOVA for Length of Stay

Factors	Less than 5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-20 years	21 years or more	F	p
Negative Socio-Cultural Impacts	3.41	3.40	3.21	3.10	3.26	1.001	N.S.

Cultural Revitalisation and Positive Impacts	3.01	3.26	3.17	3.06	3.14	0.671	N.S.
Social Interaction and Tolerance	2.73	3.18	2.76	2.90	2.83	1.957	N.S.
Communication and Adaptation Issues	2.59	2.77	2.46	2.32	2.63	2.484	0.004*
Socio-Cultural Change	3.46	3.70	3.38	3.23	3.56	1.873	N.S.
Note: N.S= Not Significant							

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether residents' socio-cultural perceptions differ by length of residence in Van. Following the ANOVA, Bonferroni post hoc tests were performed to identify the specific group differences. Although the ANOVA model for communication and adaptation issues was statistically significant ($F = 2.484$, $p < 0.05$), Bonferroni post hoc comparisons revealed no significant pairwise differences among groups. This indicates that the duration of residence in Van does not significantly influence residents' socio-cultural perceptions of Iranian tourists.

Table 12. Results of ANOVA for Language of Communication

Factors	English	Persian	Turkish	No Communication	F	p
Negative Socio-Cultural Impact	3.21	3.36	3.14	3.32	0.778	N.S.
Cultural Revitalisation and Positive Impacts	3.24 [d]	3.11	3.34 [d]	2.82 [a,c]	5.725	0.001**
Social Interaction and Tolerance	2.99 [d]	2.80	3.14 [d]	2.54 [a,c]	7.834	0.000*
Communication and Adaptation Issues	2.65	2.45	2.57	2.57	1.140	N.S.
Socio-Cultural Change	3.54	3.60	3.36	3.27	2.089	N.S.

Note: * Bonferroni post hoc test results with significance level at $\alpha = 0.05$. ** Tamhane's T2 post hoc test results with significance level at $\alpha = 0.05$. Superscripted letters indicate that the mean values are significantly different from those in the equivalent columns. Alphabets denote column 2-5: i.e., a = English, b = Persian, c = Turkish, d = No communication. N.S. Not significant.

The results of the one-way ANOVA in Table 11 indicate that significant differences emerged for the Cultural Revitalisation and Positive Impacts dimension ($F = 5.725$, $p < 0.05$) and the Social Interaction and Tolerance dimension ($F = 7.834$, $p < 0.05$). Bonferroni post hoc tests revealed that residents communicating in English or Turkish had significantly higher mean scores than those who reported no communication with Iranian tourists. Residents who communicated in English or Turkish exhibited more positive attitudes than those who reported no communication. These results suggest that language competence and active interaction with tourists contribute to more favourable socio-cultural perceptions. However, no significant differences were found in negative socio-cultural impacts, communication and adaptation issues, or socio-cultural change dimensions ($p > 0.05$).

Table 13. **Results of ANOVA for the Purpose of Communication**

Factors	a	b	c	d	e	f	F	p
Negative Socio-Cultural Impacts	2.84	3.15	3.35	3.12	3.30	3.41	1.624	N.S.
Cultural Revitalisation and Positive Impacts	3.53 [b, f]	2.92 [a]	3.18	3.44	3.17	2.89 [a]	4.038	0.001*
Social Interaction and Tolerance	3.15 f	2.68 [d]	2.91 [f]	3.28 [b, f]	2.98 [f]	2.56 [a, c, d, e]	5.402	0.000*
Communication and Adaptation Issues	2.79	2.53	2.56	2.65	2.63	2.42	0.080	N.S.
Socio-Cultural Change	3.49	3.27	3.57	3.45	3.56	3.41	0.752	N.S.

Note: *Bonferroni post hoc test results with significance level at $\alpha = 0.05$. Superscripted letters indicate that the mean values are significantly different from those in the equivalent columns. Alphabets denote column 2-7: i.e., a = language practice, b = friendship, c = economic, d = cultural exchange, e = asking for direction, f = no communication. N.S. Not significant.

The ANOVA results showed significant differences in cultural revitalisation and positive impacts ($F = 4.038$, $p < 0.05$) and in social interaction and tolerance ($F = 5.402$, $p < 0.05$). Bonferroni post hoc tests revealed that residents who interacted with Iranian tourists for cultural exchange or language practice reported significantly higher positive perceptions than those who did not interact. This finding emphasises the role of interpersonal contact quality in shaping residents' attitudes toward tourism. However, no significant differences were found in negative socio-cultural impacts, communication and adaptation issues, or socio-cultural change dimensions ($p > 0.05$).

Table 14. Summary of Hypotheses Testing

	Hypotheses	Results
H1	Residents' perceptions of the socio-cultural impacts of Iranian tourists differ significantly by gender.	Partially supported
H2	Residents' perceptions of the socio-cultural impacts of Iranian tourists differ significantly across age groups.	Partially supported
H3	Residents' perceptions of the socio-cultural impacts of Iranian tourists differ significantly across educational levels.	Partially supported
H4	Residents' socio-cultural perceptions of Iranian tourists differ significantly according to occupation.	Partially supported
H5	Residents' perceptions of the socio-cultural impacts of Iranian tourists differ significantly by monthly income level**.**	Partially supported
H6	Residents' perceptions of the socio-cultural impacts of Iranian tourists differ significantly based on length of residence.	Rejected
H7	Residents' perceptions of the socio-cultural impacts of Iranian tourists differ significantly depending on the language used in communication with them.	Partially supported
H8	Residents' perceptions of the socio-cultural impacts of Iranian tourists differ significantly depending on the purpose of communication with them.	Partially supported

Conclusion and Discussion

The study aims to analyse differences in residents' socio-cultural perceptions according to their socio-demographic characteristics, with reference to Van, Türkiye. There are numerous studies examining tourism's economic, environmental, and socio-cultural impacts. However, empirical findings on the socio-cultural impacts of tourism remain inconsistent and inconclusive across destinations. From a theoretical perspective, these differences are interpreted through Social Exchange Theory (SET), which posits that residents evaluate tourism-related interactions by comparing perceived benefits and costs.

The findings of this study indicated that a significant gender difference emerged solely in the Social Interaction and Tolerance dimension. In contrast, no statistically significant differences were observed between males and females for Negative Socio-cultural Impacts ($p>0.05$), Cultural Revitalisation and Positive Impacts ($p>0.05$), Communication and Adaptation Issues ($p>0.05$), and Socio-cultural Change dimensions ($p>0.05$). Similarly, Sharma and Dyer (2009), Akyeampong (2011), and Charag et al. (2020) reported no significant difference in residents' perceptions of tourism by gender. In contrast to these findings, several studies have reported significant gender-based differences in residents' attitudes toward tourism development. For example, Wang and Pfister (2008) and Timothy and Said (2023) found that female respondents had more positive attitudes toward the socio-cultural impacts of tourism than male respondents. Conversely, Mensah (2012) reported that male respondents had more positive attitudes than their female counterparts. In addition, Mason and Cheyne (2000) found that female respondents in a rural area of New Zealand were more concerned about the negative impacts of tourism development, such as increased drunk driving, traffic problems, noise, and crime, than male respondents were. The disparity between the two studies' findings may stem from contextual and temporal differences. Van is a relatively urbanised region where women are more accustomed to cross-cultural interactions. In contrast, Mason and Cheyne's study area was a rural region where tourism development was newly proposed. Additionally, gender roles have evolved significantly over the past decades, and women today tend to hold more positive, socially engaged views of tourism than in previous periods. Based on these results, H1 was partially supported.

Second, regarding residents' age groups, significant differences were found only in the Cultural Revitalisation and Positive Impacts, and Social Interaction and Tolerance dimensions. However, an analysis of variance shows no significant differences in Negative Socio-cultural Impact, Communication and Adaptation Issues, and Socio-cultural Change dimensions. According to post hoc test results, older residents showed greater

agreement on several positive socio-cultural items. They tended to believe more strongly that Iranian tourists contribute to the development and revitalisation of Van's local culture by increasing interest in art, handicrafts, folklore, and other cultural elements. Older respondents also agreed that Iranian tourists help create new friendships between locals and visitors, promote tolerance and mutual respect, and stimulate cultural and artistic activities during the tourist season. In addition, they perceived that tourism fosters intercultural understanding and provides opportunities for different beliefs and lifestyles to be accepted within the local community. From a Social Exchange Theory perspective, older residents may perceive greater socio-cultural benefits from tourism due to their stronger community attachment, broader life experience, and more stable social positions. These factors may lead them to view interactions with tourists as more rewarding than costly, thereby leading to more positive socio-cultural perceptions. These findings align with those of Sharma and Dyer (2009). Similarly, Muresan et al. (2021) reported that although no significant differences were found among age groups in cultural benefits, older residents expressed higher satisfaction with the social benefits of tourism development. However, these findings are inconsistent with those reported by Charag et al. (2021), who found no significant differences in socio-cultural perceptions across age groups. Beyond the theoretical explanations offered by Social Exchange Theory, this finding may also be interpreted within the specific socio-cultural context of Van, a border city characterised by long-standing cross-border interaction with Iran. Older residents in Van have historically experienced continuous economic, cultural, and social exchanges with Iranian visitors through trade, migration, and daily border crossings. Such prolonged exposure may reduce perceived cultural threat and increase familiarity, leading older residents to interpret the presence of tourists as a normal and beneficial component of local social life rather than a source of disruption. Thus, H2 was partially supported.

Third, it was found that there are significant differences among educational levels in Negative and Socio-cultural Impacts, Cultural Revitalisation and Positive Impacts, Social Interaction and Tolerance, and the Socio-Cultural Change dimension. However, no significant differences in communication and adaptation issues were found across residents' educational levels. According to the post-hoc test results, residents with higher education levels did not perceive that Iranian tourists led to harmful situations such as cultural and traditional degradation, an increase in fights, physical assaults, alcohol and drug use, and disrespectful and rude behaviours. Conversely, they demonstrated their perception of revitalisation and appreciation of local art, handicraft, and folklore, enjoyment of learning Iranian culture, an increase in cultural and artistic activities during the tourism season, a respectful and friendly attitude of locals toward Iranian tourists, and the emergence of new entertainment styles in Van as a result of Iranian tourists. In line with Social Exchange Theory, residents with higher levels of education may be better equipped to recognise and value the intangible benefits of tourism, such as cultural learning, tolerance, and intercultural interaction. These results were similar to those obtained by Al-Saad et al. (2018), who found that those with university-level or higher education tend to agree more strongly than the less educated with the positive impacts of tourism. By contrast, those less educated are more strongly opposed to the industry's adverse effects. In contrast to these findings, while Muresan et al. (2021) suggested that less educated people had a positive attitude towards the social benefits of tourism, Sharma and Dyer (2009) found a significant difference in residents' perceptions of tourism impacts by education level. In addition to Social Exchange Theory, the relatively high educational attainment observed among urban residents in Van may contribute to more favourable perceptions of Iranian tourists. As a regional educational and commercial centre attracting students, academics, and professionals from diverse backgrounds, Van provides greater opportunities for intercultural exposure. Highly educated residents may therefore demonstrate higher cultural awareness and openness toward cross-border interaction, interpreting tourism-related socio-cultural change as enrichment rather than cultural erosion. Hence, H3 was partially supported.

Fourth, significant differences were found in residents' socio-cultural perceptions by occupation regarding Negative Socio-cultural Impacts and the Social Interaction and Tolerance dimensions. According to the post hoc test results, public-sector employees perceived the negative socio-cultural impacts of Iranian tourists more strongly than those in other professions. Additionally, academicians scored significantly higher on the social interaction and tolerance dimension than other occupational groups. These findings do not support those of Guo, Hu and Zhang (2023), who reported that residents' occupations are not directly related to their attitudes toward tourism. Sharma and Dyer (2009), on the other hand, stated that small business owners tended to perceive significantly higher positive social impact than other groups. Beyond theoretical explanations, occupational differences may also be understood within the socio-economic structure of Van, a border city where civil servants provides relatively stable income and limited direct dependence on tourism revenues. Therefore, they may be more sensitive to potential socio-cultural disruptions associated with increasing tourist

mobility. In contrast, academicians and education-sector professionals, who are generally exposed to intercultural environments and international interaction, may demonstrate greater openness and tolerance toward Iranian tourists. Accordingly, H4 was partially supported.

Fifth, regarding residents' monthly income, significant differences were found among groups only in the Social Interaction and Tolerance dimension. The post hoc tests indicated that higher-income individuals had a more positive perception than lower-income individuals. According to SET, individuals with higher income levels are less likely to perceive tourism as a personal or social burden and more likely to experience its benefits, which may explain their more positive socio-cultural perceptions. These findings support those of Haralambopoulos and Pizam (1996), who stated that wealthier residents with more positive attitudes would support tourist development more, and that low-income residents would support it less. In the context of Van, income-based differences may be associated with unequal exposure to tourism-related economic benefits generated through cross-border trade and shopping tourism. Higher-income residents are less likely to perceive tourism-related crowding or lifestyle changes as economic pressure, whereas lower-income groups may experience tourism growth more as competition over urban space and living costs. This context may contribute to more favourable socio-cultural perceptions among higher-income residents. Thus, H5 was partially supported.

Sixth, regarding the length of residence, the results of one-way ANOVA indicated significant differences in the Communication and Adaptation Issues dimension. Although the one-way ANOVA indicated a statistically significant difference at this dimension, post hoc comparisons did not reveal significant differences among the length-of-residence groups. Similarly, previous studies have reported no significant differences in residents' perceptions of socio-cultural impacts by length of residence (Pathmanandakumar, 2021; Stojkovic et al., 2020; Allen et al., 1993). Beyond theoretical explanations, the absence of substantial differences by length of residence may be interpreted within the specific context of Van, a long-established border destination characterised by continuous interaction with Iranian visitors. Cross-border mobility, trade activities, and repeated tourist arrivals have been integral to daily urban life in Van for many years. Consequently, both long-term residents and relatively newer inhabitants may have developed similar levels of familiarity and adaptation toward Iranian tourists. In such a context, tourism-related socio-cultural interaction is perceived less as a new external influence and more as a routine component of the city's social environment, which may explain why length of residence does not significantly differentiate residents' perceptions. H6 was rejected.

Seventh, significant differences were found in residents' socio-cultural perceptions by language of communication. Post hoc test results indicated that residents who used Turkish as their primary language of communication with Iranian tourists held more positive perceptions of cultural revitalisation and its positive impacts, as well as of social interaction and tolerance. They believe that Iranian tourists adapt well to local life, maintain respectful, friendly relationships with locals, and create opportunities for new friendships. Moreover, many residents perceive that Iranians exhibit courteous, considerate behaviour during their visits, thereby strengthening cultural ties between the two communities. The use of Turkish as a shared communication language likely facilitates smoother interactions and reduces cultural misunderstandings, thereby fostering greater tolerance, mutual respect, and social cohesion within the local community. These findings are consistent with the results reported by Ersoy (2021). The findings provide strong empirical support for Social Exchange Theory, as direct communication reduces perceived social costs and increases perceived rewards, such as mutual understanding, respect, and trust. Within the specific context of Van, communication through Turkish may reflect deeper levels of social integration between residents and Iranian visitors. Due to frequent commercial exchanges and repeated visits, many Iranian tourists acquire basic Turkish communication skills, facilitating smoother daily interaction in markets, restaurants, and public spaces. This shared linguistic ground likely reduces social distance and strengthens interpersonal trust, contributing to more positive socio-cultural perceptions among residents. Based on these findings, H7 was partially supported.

Finally, it was found that there are significant differences depending on the purpose of communication. By applying an LSD post hoc test, it has been determined that residents who communicated with Iranian tourists to practice and improve their foreign language skills exhibited higher levels only in cultural revitalisation and positive impacts, social interaction and tolerance dimensions. Therefore, language-based interaction appears to play a key role in fostering more favourable perceptions of tourism and enhancing intercultural tolerance among residents. From a Social Exchange Theory perspective, residents who engage in meaningful interactions with tourists for cultural or language-related purposes are more likely to perceive tourism as mutually beneficial. In Van's border tourism context, communication motivated by language learning or cultural exchange may indicate voluntary and meaningful interaction rather than purely transactional contact.

Residents who engage with Iranian tourists for social or educational purposes are more likely to experience tourism as a form of cultural enrichment. Such interactions are common in Van, where repeated tourist visits foster informal social relationships beyond economic exchange. Thus, H8 was partially supported.

Practical Implications

In line with Social Exchange Theory, policies that increase residents' perceived benefits while reducing socio-cultural costs are essential for sustaining resident support for tourism development. At this point, practitioners and policymakers can take several measures to address these issues. One of the most important is to ensure cultural sensitivity in tourism planning. Tourism activities and events should be designed in accordance with the local community's cultural values and social norms. In addition, strengthening monitoring and regulatory mechanisms in areas where tourism and entertainment activities are concentrated can help prevent potential adverse outcomes. It is also recommended to organise awareness and interaction programs to enhance mutual understanding and respect between tourists and residents. Finally, implementing community-based social and youth programs can raise awareness among young people about the harmful effects of addictive behaviours and help maintain a healthier social environment in Van.

Limitations and Future Research

This research focused solely on residents' socio-cultural perceptions toward Iranian tourists and their socio-demographic characteristics. Future studies could achieve a more comprehensive understanding by comparing residents' and tourists' perceptions. Moreover, this study did not consider economic and environmental impacts. Future research should incorporate these dimensions and examine different groups of international and domestic tourists to provide a more holistic evaluation of the destination and its tourism impacts.

This study employed a cross-sectional research design; however, residents' perceptions of tourism may change over time due to socio-economic conditions, natural disasters, or political developments. Therefore, future research is encouraged to adopt longitudinal approaches to examine how residents' perceptions evolve over time. In addition, although questionnaire surveys enable the identification of general perception patterns, quantitative data may not fully capture the underlying meanings behind residents' attitudes. Accordingly, future studies may benefit from employing qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus group discussions, to obtain richer and more nuanced insights into residents' perceptions of tourism.

Furthermore, the use of convenience sampling is an important limitation of this study. Although this approach facilitated data collection from residents across different parts of Van, participants were selected based on accessibility rather than through random sampling. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted with caution regarding their generalisability to the entire population aged 18 and above, as the sample may not fully reflect the population's demographic structure. Future studies are therefore encouraged to employ probability-based sampling techniques to enhance representativeness and external validity.

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