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## Analysis of identity dimensions in the development of shopping centers from the perspective of Iranian-Islamic city with a structural analysis approach; case study: shopping centers in Tabriz

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### Abstract

In recent decades, the rapid development of urban shopping centers in Iran, particularly in metropolitan areas, has fundamentally transformed the spatial landscape of cities. Despite their economic and social functions, this trend has often neglected identity-related and cultural foundations, leading to the formation of spaces that reflect global consumerist and commercial patterns more than the identity roots of Iranian-Islamic cities. Accordingly, this article aims to “explore the future and identify the key drivers of shopping center development from the perspective of Iranian-Islamic identity dimensions.” The main research questions are: “How is the identity of the Iranian-Islamic city manifested in traditional and contemporary shopping centers in today’s cities?” and “What are the key drivers for the future development of shopping centers in contemporary cities, particularly Tabriz, based on structural analysis?” In total, 26 variables were identified as effective indicators influencing the identity of shopping centers. The findings revealed that, out of these 26 variables, 10 play a fundamental role as key drivers in shaping the future of Tabriz’s shopping centers. These drivers include visibility, utilization of social, cultural, and religious symbols, vibrancy, strong mental image, leisure and recreation, advertising displays, legibility, and safety and security. The results indicate that attention to these components can strengthen the Iranian-Islamic identity in contemporary shopping centers and prevent them from becoming mere realms of consumption. Conversely, neglecting these drivers risks deepening the identity crisis and reinforcing the dominance of consumerist patterns in urban spaces.

### Keywords

Development  
Islamic-Iranian Identity  
Shopping Centers  
Structural Analysis  
Tabriz

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## 1. Introduction

Cities are the primary centers of civilization, reflecting the culture of the societies they serve. The form of the Islamic city was primarily determined by social and economic factors rather than legal and religious dictates (Neglia, 2008). Cities are places where individual and social structures are formed and manifested. These cities were designed to be compatible with society and feature spaces with diverse functions. Mosques in alleys, neighborhoods with specific social structures based on culture, bazaars as the main element with various functions composed of diverse components, passageways, and living environments creating social relations, all form a cohesive structure of community, architecture, and urban fabric. The bazaar, fulfilling basic human needs, itself shapes a dynamic city. In addition to meeting material needs, it fulfills the social and cultural needs of the individual due to the presence of spaces such as mosques, shrines, schools, and many other places (Shalchi, 2013).

The historical fabrics and buildings of cities, as key nuclei in today's urban landscapes, possess an authentic identity that reflects Iranian culture, art, and architecture. Recognizing their identity dimensions in complexes like historical bazaars can be effective in urban development (Molaei & ZirakSima, 2021). The bazaar has been one of the most influential pillars of the city on social, political, and economic developments throughout all eras, acting as a foundational element for fundamental changes in society. With its long history from the past to the present, it has sustained the system of urban life, so much so that in Iranian-Islamic cities, the bazaar was considered one of the most important urban spaces and functional elements (Irandost & Bahmani, 2011). The bazaar, the economic core of the city with its hierarchy of trade and crafts, has been the center of socio-economic-cultural activities since the Sasanian period. It expanded from the heart of the Shār-e Mīāne (citadel) to the Shār-e Bīrūnī (outer city), and in its path, by shaping urban neighborhoods, it became the beating heart of the city (Habibi, 2021).

With the emergence of new developments in Iran starting from the late Qajar period and accelerating during the second Pahlavi era, significant changes occurred in the structure of the old bazaar. Rapid urbanization and the emergence of new cities created a need for new shopping centers, and new construction boomed. Today, commercial complexes and shopping

centers, as the most prominent form of these complexes, considering their function and importance in the daily life of citizens, have become one of the active commercial nuclei of large cities. In other words, the structure of cities underwent transformation in terms of economic development from a physical perspective, and modern centers grew more intensely in cities, to the extent that in contemporary and modern cities, the number of these centers exceeds the suggested per capita standards and the needs of the people, while traditional and identity-rich centers are marginalized.

Given the mentioned concepts and issues, the present article aims to "understand the future and identify the key drivers of shopping center development from the perspective of Iranian-Islamic identity dimensions" and also by posing questions such as "How is the identity of the Iranian-Islamic city manifested in traditional and contemporary shopping centers in today's cities?" and "What are the key drivers for the future development of traditional and contemporary shopping centers in today's cities, especially Tabriz, based on structural analysis?" Accordingly, first, the theoretical foundations and concepts in this field, such as spaces of the Iranian-Islamic city, bazaars and shopping centers in Iranian-Islamic cities, and contemporary shopping centers, have been examined. Based on studies and expert questionnaires, the conceptual model of the research is presented. Subsequently, the conceptual model is examined in the case study of shopping centers in Tabriz. In this process, an influence/independence matrix and the results of structural analysis are used to identify key future development drivers based on Iranian-Islamic identity dimensions. One of the existing limitations in the present article is the lack of up-to-date spatial (GIS) information on the number of shopping centers in Tabriz, which was fully collected and updated by the authors themselves.

## 2. Literature Review

With the prevalence of the fever of mall construction, commercialization, and luxury development in identity-rich urban fabrics over the past few decades in America, Europe, and Asia, numerous interdisciplinary research and studies have been conducted on this subject, attempting to examine the various socio-cultural dimensions of these urban complexes. Kazemi and Ahmadi (2019), in an article titled "Traditional Bazaars and Malls in the Middle East

with an Emphasis on Iran,” investigated the relationship between bazaars and malls. According to the results of the mentioned article, traditional bazaars, despite extensive transformations, have been more resilient than malls and, by accepting changes and updating, continue their existence, preserving their living sphere and functions.

Labibzadeh and Karami (2023), in an article titled “An Approach to Promoting Identity in the Cityscape with an Emphasis on Islamic Thought,” examined identity aspects in the urban structure and urban elements from the perspective of Islamic thought. According to the specialists in this research, attention to archetypes has a significant effect on representing the identity of urban elements. Shiee and Hajiani (2019), in their research titled “The Impacts of Mega Malls on Neighborhood Identity in Tehran,” studied the effect of constructing these special shopping centers on the identity and lifestyle of neighborhood residents. According to the obtained results, the impact of the large-scale shopping center project on neighborhood identity is very gradual, slow, and requires policy-making and planning.

Nasiri (2021), in their research titled “The Role of Commercial Centers in Enhancing the Vibrancy of Urban Spaces,” analyzed the role of the Kourosh Commercial Center on urban space vibrancy based on 22 indicators extracted from theoretical foundations. Kazemi and Amir Ebrahimi (2019), in a study titled “Typology of Commercial Complexes in Tehran,” pointed to the multiplicity of criteria in the typology of shopping centers and classified commercial complexes in Tehran based on geographical location and historical periods. Salehi et al. (2022), in their article titled “Futures Studies of the Implicit Mental Image in Large Shopping Centers,” examined the future of shopping centers considering the diverse developments of these centers.

In another article titled “Consequences of Constructing Malls and Shopping Centers in Tehran,” Ahmadi et al. (2022) examined the impacts of mall construction and large-scale shopping centers in cities from various urban aspects. The results of that study indicate that the policy of unprincipled mall construction beyond capacity in Iranian metropolises, especially Tehran, has serious conflicts and inconsistencies with the goals and vision of cities. Molaei (2023), in his research titled “Explaining Economic Rules and Ethics in Islamic Urban Planning with a Quranic Approach, Emphasizing the Model of Bazaars from the Perspective of Quranic

Teachings,” also refers to the observance of human values in urban development and bazaars. The research results show that historical bazaars, benefiting from mosques and socio-economic patterns, utilized Islamic business rules and ethics, but this has been replaced in contemporary shopping centers with new patterns that bring a consumerist lifestyle, ostentation, deceptive advertisements, and inattention to business rules and ethics.

Given the existence of numerous articles on the bazaars of Iranian cities and shopping centers and new developments, regarding the innovative aspect of the present article, a few points can be mentioned: the present article systematically and in a quantitative-qualitative manner examines the components of shopping center formation from the perspective of Iranian-Islamic identity and its authentic context over time. On the other hand, combining theoretical studies, expert questionnaires, and structural analysis (MICMAC) has made it possible to extract key drivers with scientific and empirical support. The innovation of the article lies in the integration of the Islamic-Iranian theoretical framework, quantitative-qualitative data analysis, and the determination of key drivers, which distinguishes the study from previous research and takes it a step forward.

### 3. Research Framework and Theoretical Foundations

#### 3.1. Identity in the City

Identity is the feeling of belonging to a set of material and spiritual elements that have been shaped beforehand. In another definition, identity includes cultural, physical, and environmental entities that distinguish a particular place from others (Paasi, 2013). A city’s identity is the indicator that distinguishes it from another city; this distinction and divergence between one city and others is the main attraction for the city (Ginting and Wahid, 2015). A city’s identity can be examined from various physical, natural, social, historical, and economic aspects, and indeed, the formation of urban identity is influenced by culture, natural form, and the built environment. The physical environment is the main element constituting urban space and the primary context in which the built environment is formed.

Every space possesses identity with varying intensity and weakness, and the final identity of a space is the resultant of its functional, physical, environmental, cultural, and semantic identity. Thus, it becomes possible to distinguish Iranian urban space from the

urban space of other civilizations by specifying the identity characteristics of each space. The relationship between city identity factors can be two-way. A city is meaningless without the human factor. Therefore, when speaking of a city, we speak of human interactions. Interactions between humans, humans with the environment, and humans with the city. For this reason, the components forming the city's identity also shape human identity, and one of the elements by which humans are defined is memory. The city also has memory. A city lacking historical memory has no identity. One of the notable elements that can give identity to the city is art. Art is the discussion of aesthetics in the city. Urban architecture is also shaped by the artistic works created within it. Creating works consistent with Iranian culture is very important in the cityscape. Urban growth and the development of constructions have their own various and specific consequences, one of the important types being the change in the city's face over time and its identity becoming subject to change (Nasr & Majedi, 2014).

The issue of city identity is a qualitative matter arising from sublime human values, and movement, dynamism, and continuity inherent in the concept of identity shape the city's body. In fact, the identity of each city is directly related to the citizens' feeling of the continuity of their psychic life. On the other hand, the process of identity recognition is essentially a type of qualification and valuation by the residents, which changes from minimum to maximum based on the degree of sense of belonging and attachment, and mental memory. The identity of a city can only be read and narrated in interaction with the city's body when the symbolic cultural and social values of the citizens are recognized and understood; otherwise, a kind of incongruity is seen in the city.

Indeed, identity builds the city, and after the city is built, the city itself plays a role in shaping the identity of future generations. Every building or city is as alive as it is committed to the timeless way. The timeless way is a process that brings forth order only from itself. This process is not acquired but happens by itself. Urban identity is a quantitative and qualitative shell, subjective and objective, matter and meaning, symbolic and non-symbolic, possessing temporal and spatial dimensions, the ability and power of invitation, and environmental discernment in various dimensions to which individuals have specific attachments and strive to apply it, and they have the power to manifest it in relation to the other; it is rooted in the present

and past and manifests in various forms in the future (Golipour, 2013).

The crisis of spirituality in cities and human settlements of the contemporary era is one of the concerns of thinkers and also one of the most critical challenges of humanity. Human loneliness and helplessness in the modern world, turning to virtual space and its undesirable consequences on the human soul and body, as well as the vast and chaotic world of information, have led to the decline of spirituality in the contemporary world (Molaei, 2020). Religion and spirituality balance humans in thought, speech, and behavior, so that humans strive to provide public welfare and ensure a healthy family to create a pure and blessed society where every individual can easily attain their natural and legitimate rights.

### **Iranian-Islamic Identity**

According to Ahmad Ashraf (1934), the conscious belief in the cultural distinction of Iran has been the basis and sign of a common identity and the binding force of the people of Iran throughout past centuries. Iranian identity, as a historical and political phenomenon, is not a product of the modern and post-modern era but a product of centuries before and after Islam. From another viewpoint, Professor Motahhari emphasizes the two components of Islamic and Iranian in Iranian identity, and in his view, the definition and nature of the national identity of Iranians differ significantly from common definitions in academic circles. He emphasizes the importance and role of religion as the most authentic element in national identity and gives meaning and identity to other elements within a religious framework. Thus, in his view, non-religious elements play a secondary role (Ghorbani, 2004). Therefore, Iranian identity can be defined as the feeling of belonging to the land, history, government, and culture of Iran, introducing oneself to others, and thereby distinguishing oneself from them (Ahmadi et al, 2022).

On the other hand, Islamic identity actually represents the feeling of belonging and commitment to religion and the religious community. The most important achievement of Islamic identity is answering fundamental questions, giving direction to life, unifying beliefs, and giving meaning to the world. Islamic identity actually represents the reality that no individual or group is superior to another, except those who have God-consciousness. Islamic identity actually emphasizes not the superiority of an individual or

group, but the superiority of piety and God-consciousness among humans (Morshedizad & Ahmadlu, 2017).

Islamic identity means the understanding that Muslims have of themselves and also that others have of Muslims. This concept creates a shared identity called the Ummah. The Ummah means the followers of a specific religion, here, Islam. Islamic identity includes sub-identities in the form of different sects, the most prominent classification being Shiism and Sunnism. The elements forming Islamic identity include: belief in the religion of Islam, adherence to Islamic appearances, practice of Islamic rulings and rituals, shared religious ceremonies and occasions, shared Islamic history that starts from the emergence of Islam and extends to the present time (Babaei, 2004).

Therefore, Islamic identity should be considered in relation to individuals with contemporary religious culture, beliefs, and organizations, as faith communities build religious identity. Islamic identity in Iranian society means the belonging and commitment of Iranian individuals to religious beliefs and values, performing individual and collective religious behaviors and rituals, having religious experience and sense, and possessing religious identity (Shiee & Hajjani, 2019).

### 3.2. Shopping Centers in the Traditional and Contemporary City

For centuries, humans have gathered around the world to trade and buy and sell goods in their commercial and population centers. A byproduct of these commercial activities has been that merchants spread and developed new ideas and inventions. Money, as the axis of activity, quickly appeared in the market, and culture developed alongside and parallel to markets. In the central market of large Middle Eastern Islamic cities, fixed and mobile retail sectors, wholesale and banking, brokerage, foreign trade, private and public services, credit and financial affairs, production, and craftsmanship are gathered in an organizational texture, interdependent and interacting. This interweaving and diversity of economic sectors, the origin of most of which is foreign trade, is found only in the large markets of provincial capitals and capital cities. In small cities, simpler markets can be found (Wirth, 1974). Sociability and social participation were among the fundamental characteristics in bazaars.

The history of the bazaar in its current concept dates back to the Sasanian period, where it expanded as the

backbone of the city from the heart of the Shār-e Mīāne (citadel) to the Shār-e Bīrūnī (outer city), and along its path, by shaping urban neighborhoods, it functioned as the heart of the city (Habibi, 2021). In the Islamic period, gradually, physical symbols of religion appeared as inseparable elements of the bazaar, and elements such as mosques, schools, Hosseiniyehs, and Tekyehs found their place in the bazaar. In fact, during the Islamic era, new functions were formed in the bazaar, and it gradually included the collective life of the entire city, and its structure and body became a composite organ considering all the functions of the city's public life (Khan Mohammadi, 2007). These changes in the Islamic period mean utilizing cultural-social symbols as well as religious symbols and adding diverse functions to the bazaar. This increased the vibrancy of the bazaar and also enhanced safety and security. Attention to and utilization of various types of urban signs in bazaars, in addition to increasing sensory richness, also led to improved legibility and visibility. The manifestation of this can be seen in the naming of some bazaar spaces based on the names of mosques, etc.

In the Qajar period, with Iran's entry into the process of integration into global capitalism and the entry of foreign goods into the country and the establishment of a number of factories outside the bazaar, the role of the bazaar gradually weakened (Soltanzadeh, 2004). However, the main physical transformation and the decline of the bazaar's position in the city began in the Pahlavi period, when, with the expansion of a capitalist economy based on new communications and transformation in the traditional structure of cities and new street layouts, the bazaar mainly suffered physical and functional disintegration. After the Islamic Revolution, with the further expansion of suburbanization and the development of the market in a new style, the traditional bazaar faced an increasing decline in its role and status (Irandost & Bahmani, 2011). In other words, since the arrival of modernism in Iran and the acceptance of modern life, urban elements in the form of different spaces underwent their own specific transformations (Azizi, 2000).

In pre-capitalist Iranian cities, other urban elements were generally organized in close and coherent connection with the bazaar, which had a very determining physical, economic, social, and religious role. In the contemporary period, the rapid growth of cities, new methods of urban service delivery, the use of cars, the importance of fast and easy motorized

access, the new system of land division, the formation of straight streets in the old fabric of the city, changes in the production and consumption methods of citizens, and the formation of new physical and commercial urban symbols alongside new streets caused the structure of most bazaars to undergo transformation and in many cases face stagnation, and this dynamic urban center often turned into an old, historical, and stagnant space. Of course, in some cases and mostly in large cities, the bazaar has been able to preserve and revive its role to some extent by creating physical transformations in its structure and play its role in the new economic conditions of the city; a large part of this can be attributed to the attention of owners and investors in that city to the development and maintenance of bazaars (Irandoost & Bahmani, 2011).

Iranian urban bazaars are actually covered pedestrian streets where shops offer their goods on both sides. The street layouts of the Pahlavi era and the emergence of showcase streets as the first reflection of modernization in the realm of urban spaces caused a transformation in the retail and wholesale function of the bazaar (Micu, 2020). Commercial spaces took the form of shops in a row along the street wall and next to each other. This type of construction was in response to the need for commercial land use and its development.

Modern shopping centers have been an attractive phenomenon almost all over the world. These centers, by recognizing new conditions and requirements, have turned into multi-functional or multi-purpose complexes that can attract a wide range of people (Kunc et al, 2022). Commercial-cultural complexes, also called Malls and Mega Malls, are somehow the most evolved examples of modern shopping centers and are considered clear examples of global spaces and products of globalization. Malls, which were an emerging phenomenon fifty years ago, have become "new urban centers" all over the world in the past fifty years and have become among the places that attract the most presence and visits by people (Ahmadi et al, 2022). This, and people's welcome to new shopping centers, have somehow changed people's mental image. In other words, it can be said that both bazaars and some new shopping centers have been influential in creating a mental image. On the other hand, the change in shopping style and modern urban life has added a new feature called nightlife and vibrancy centered on new centers in cities.

The welcome of malls and new shopping centers has

been such that in many Western countries, malls rank third in terms of the amount of time people spend in a specific place, after home and workplace (Szymańska & Płaziak, 2021). At the same time, there is also evidence that in some developed countries, the growth of malls is reaching saturation, and in this situation, they are faced with the phenomenon of dead or abandoned malls in cities (Guimarães, 2019). The expansion of contemporary shopping centers within cities led to the emergence of a kind of private space with relatively public accessibility, and this caused damage to cities and their cultural-social structure.

With the emergence of modern shopping centers, traditional bazaars have undergone structural changes. Simultaneously with the change in the meaning and concept of bazaars, their architectural forms also change; therefore, on the one hand, new buildings are constructed in the form of shopping centers and complexes, and on the other hand, old bazaars that were part of older traditional structures are destroyed (Kazemi & Ahmadi, 2019). Contemporary commercial spaces mostly have a commercial approach, and in all dimensions of product advertising, display effects, product presentation, and the approach to the customer, a profit-oriented and economic view, in other words, the thinking of economic utility, prevails. In this regard, the use of cultural tricks such as famous brands, fashion, and deceptive advertising is very effective, and ethics in such economic spaces are declining (Molaei, 2023). Among other issues and challenges of new mall construction is their large scale and grandeur, which is somewhat in conflict with the characteristics of traditional bazaars, such as human scale and respect for human dignity. The lack of attention to moral issues and justice-centeredness specific to bazaars and their merchants in today's society is strongly felt. For example, among the merchants of Tabriz metropolis, attention to other colleagues in business problems, communications and social values, help from merchants to each other in critical conditions can still be observed in some rows today; but in new shopping centers, these communications have been minimized and, in some centers, even become zero, to the extent that even one shop is unaware of the other!

The old fabric, which was located deep inside, became worn out, and its value declined. During this period, investors thought of building commercial centers that could extend the commercial value of the street edge to the depth of the building fabric around the street.

Thus, the typology of the passage (Pasaaz) with the same French word was used. The passage was a covered passageway that occupied a narrow frontage on the street and penetrated deep into the heart of the fabric perpendicular to the street axis. In conditions where the share of foreign direct investment in production decreased, the share of services increased. Therefore, the size of retail centers increased significantly. In this period, we see the emergence of shopping centers that are mostly larger than passages and have a wider geographical range. Shopping centers often have a cafe or restaurant, but lack other recreational and leisure spaces (Kazemi & Amir-Ebrahim, 2019). What can be seen today in contemporary cities is the marginalization of traditional bazaars in many Iranian cities, to the extent that their connection with the dynamic system of the city becomes weaker every day. Given the characteristics of city development in today's world, identity issues in many urban activities and functions have undergone transformation. Commercial land use, including bazaars and modern shopping centers, is among these functions. Therefore,

considering the identity dimensions in the spaces of the Islamic-Iranian city, the future of modern and traditional shopping centers has been examined. In this regard, in the next step after studying the existing foundations and concepts in this field, the research model is presented. In this direction, using articles and valid documents, the model has been extracted.

### 3.3. Conceptual Model of the Research

Commercial spaces can be considered among the most important urban spaces that, under the influence of modernization programs in Iran, have undergone numerous transformations and have various types and species in terms of form and architecture, size, function, and operational scale, and this classification increases in different urban contexts with different cultures. Therefore, examining criteria from the perspective of various studies requires more precision. In Table and Figure 1, using studies and conceptual frameworks of related and semi-related research in this field, the criteria and their frequency in each source are provided.

**Table 1. Criteria for desirable shopping centers from the perspective of Iranian-Islamic identity in the reviewed studies**

Theorists	Desirable Shopping Center Criteria from an Islamic-Iranian Identity Perspective
Farhoodian et al 2023	Grandeur & Majesty, Use of Cultural-Social Signs & Symbols, Use of Religious Signs & Symbols, Sensory Richness, Vibrancy, Legibility, Easy Access, Nightlife, Parking, Ownership & Investors, Social Participation
Salehi et al 2022	Economic Desirability, Grandeur & Majesty, Use of Cultural-Social Signs & Symbols, Use of Religious Signs & Symbols, Sensory Richness, Safety/Security, Human Dignity & Respect, Vibrancy, Legibility, Justice, Strong Mental Image, Ownership & Investors, Social Participation
Parsapour & Rafiee 2022	Shopping Center Advertising Displays, Type of Market, Price of Goods, Quality & Variety of Goods, Location Characteristics & Easy Access, Suitable Parking, Individual-Social Lifestyle Characteristics
Khosrozadeh et al 2021	Entertainment & Leisure, Economic Desirability, Social Interactions, Ethical Characteristics, Vegetation, Human Dignity & Status, Economic Value, Comfort & Accessibility, Facilities for Children, Safety & Security, Social Events, Advertising Displays, Emotional-Temporal Experiences
Rezaei et al 2021	Economic Desirability, Use of Religious Signs & Symbols, Sensory Richness, Observance of Ethical Precepts, Advertising Displays, Environmental Hygiene
Nasiri 2021	Grandeur & Majesty, Use of Cultural-Social Signs & Symbols, Use of Religious Signs & Symbols, Safety/Security, Easy Access, Visibility, Variety, Density
Rao 2020	Vibrancy, Legibility, Justice, Visibility, Nightlife, Density, Environmental Hygiene, Parking, Ownership & Investors, Leisure & Recreation
Amiri et al 2020	Safety & Security, People Attraction, Distinctiveness & Uniqueness, Legibility, People's Lifestyle, Memorability, Environmental Characteristics, Physical Characteristics
Moradi & Khanzadeh 2020	Economic Desirability, Sensory Richness, Safety/Security, Vibrancy, Sociability, Easy Access, Variety, Vegetation, Density, Environmental Hygiene
Molaei 2020	Economic Desirability, Use of Cultural-Social Signs & Symbols, Use of Religious Signs & Symbols, Sensory Richness, Human Dignity & Respect, Legibility, Strong Mental Image, Ownership & Investors, Social Participation

Theorists	Desirable Shopping Center Criteria from an Islamic-Iranian Identity Perspective
Kunzmann 2019	Sensory Richness, Human Dignity & Respect, Legibility, Sociability, Easy Access, Advertising Displays, Leisure & Recreation, Social Participation
Mahdinezhad & Najjari 2019	Economic Desirability, Grandeur & Majesty, Use of Cultural-Social Signs & Symbols, Use of Religious Signs & Symbols, Vibrancy, Easy Access, Leisure & Recreation
Zamani et al 2018	Use of Cultural-Social Signs & Symbols, Human Dignity & Respect, Legibility, Justice, Sociability, Easy Access, Observance of Ethical Precepts, Strong Mental Image, Ownership & Investors, Social Participation
Nahavandi et al 2017	Economic Desirability, Safety/Security, Vibrancy, Legibility, Easy Access, Variety, Nightlife, Vegetation, Density, Strong Mental Image, Ownership & Investors, Social Participation
Azizi & Asadi 2017	Economic Desirability, Variety, Parking, Ownership & Investors, Social Participation
Irاندوست & Bahmani 2011	Use of Cultural-Social Signs & Symbols, Use of Religious Signs & Symbols, Easy Access, Observance of Ethical Precepts, Vegetation

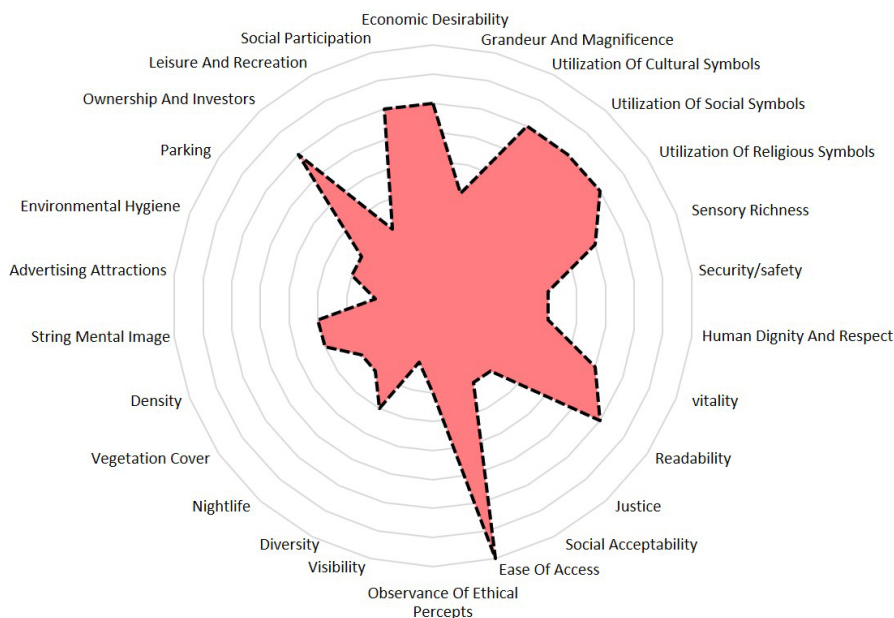


Figure 1. Frequency of criteria for desirable shopping centers from the perspective of Iranian-Islamic identity

By studying over 100 sources related to the characteristics of shopping centers, identity in urban spaces, desirability of shopping centers, Iranian-Islamic identity, and its manifestation in urban spaces, 26 high-frequency variables were identified as shown in Figure 1. These variables can manifest within various components of city cognition. These variables are derived from studies and also expert questionnaires. In the questionnaire sent to experts, they were asked

to select the most important ones from the numerous variables mentioned in various studies from the perspective of the Iranian-Islamic city. By summarizing and coding among the proposed variables from 25 experts, they were again asked to provide their specialized opinion on the designed conceptual model to explain the reliability and validity of the model. Figure 2 presents the proposed conceptual framework of the research.

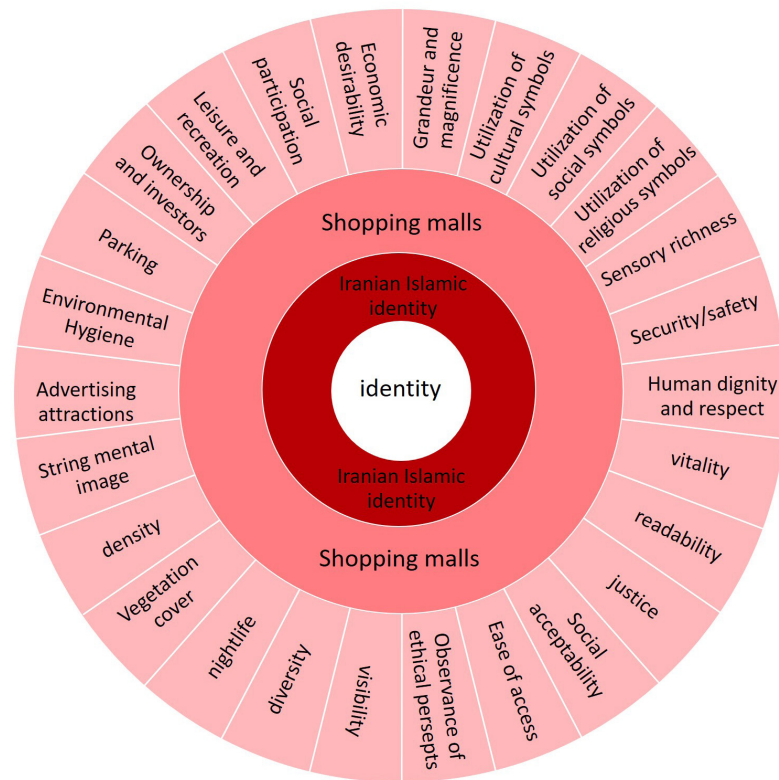


Figure 2. Theoretical framework of the research

#### 4. Research Method

The present research can be considered a mixed-methods study. In other words, by relying on theoretical studies and foundations, the variables for evaluating shopping centers based on Iranian-Islamic identity were explained in the form of the research conceptual model. In the first stage, the literature related to commercial spaces and shopping centers, as well as the components that affect their formation, was reviewed. The focus of the research was on identifying key variables and criteria based on Iranian-Islamic identity. This analysis, in addition to strengthening the theoretical basis of the research, clarifies the innovation of the present study compared to previous research, as few studies have systematically examined the components of Iranian-Islamic identity and combined them with structural analysis. To measure the importance and priority of each component, a questionnaire based on the research conceptual model was designed and distributed among 35 specialists in the fields of urban planning, architecture, and urban design. These specialists, in addition to scientific experience, had practical experience related to the design and management of commercial spaces so that the collected data would be

valid and reliable. The reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.694, and its validity was ensured through confirmation by professors and expert specialists. To identify the drivers and determine the priorities affecting the development of shopping centers, the structural analysis method and MICMAC software were used. At this stage, a questionnaire was distributed to determine the degree of influence and dependence of each criterion, completed by 20 specialists in the fields of urban design, commercial space management, and urban planning. Scoring was done on a scale of 0 to 3. Data analysis was performed not only based on the software output but also with active and specialized interpretation to ensure accurate and realistic extraction of results and identification of key drivers. This research method, by combining a precise theoretical framework, field evaluation by specialists, and active structural analysis, provides the possibility of presenting valid, practical, and innovative results. The research findings represent the criteria and key drivers for the development of shopping centers in Tabriz from the perspective of Iranian-Islamic identity.

## 5. Discussion and Research Findings

### 5.1. Introduction of the Case Study

The city of Tabriz, with an area of about 25,056 hectares, is located at 38°1' to 38°8' north latitude and 46°5' to 46°22' east longitude, with an average altitude of about 1460 meters above sea level, in the northwest corner of the country and along the international Tehran-Bazargan axis that connects Iran to Europe. In terms of geographical and natural characteristics, the location of Tabriz and its core formation indicate the most suitable and favorable geographical factors, which have enabled it to become one of the largest cities in the country through the historical process of physical development.

This city, due to its strategic location in the past, was one of the region's commercial centers and is now considered one of Iran's important industrial centers. Tabriz has been the origin of many social, cultural, and industrial developments in the country in the last two centuries; such that this city was the initiator of the Constitutional Revolution and played a key role in events like the Iranian Revolution of 1357 (1979) and the modernization of the country. According to recent discoveries in the Blue Mosque area, the antiquity of Tabriz is estimated to be 4500 years (Ayashm et al, 2023).

One of the important elements in the metropolis of Tabriz is its historical covered bazaar. The Tabriz Bazaar is one of the important bazaars of Iran, which, despite many changes in the city structure, damages from earthquakes, floods, and political and socio-economic upheavals, has been able to maintain its economic-

social role after a century and a half since its construction. This bazaar has long been a clear sign of the expanse of Tabriz, because due to the geographical location of Tabriz, throughout history, it has been the meeting place of civilizations from ancient times to the contemporary era. The main communication routes of east and west, north and south, from China to Europe and from Egypt to Russia passed through it, and it has been one of the major cities on the Silk Road.

This bazaar, like most bazaars of Eastern cities, was located inside the old city wall, and its oldest core is connected to the Jameh Mosque of the city. Unlike most cities of Islamic countries, the Tabriz Bazaar has a defined area with special gates. In the north of the bazaar, the Mehraneh River is located, which connects the north and south of the bazaar through the bazaar bridges. In the west is the Jameh Mosque, and in the east is the Qajar Crown Prince's residence (current governor's office). Most of the existing buildings in the Tabriz Bazaar have historical value, and the bazaar has always been considered a cultural environment. The adjacency of holy places, mosques, and religious schools has doubled their religious-cultural function. One of the important features of the metropolis of Tabriz is the existence of various commercial and shopping centers on different scales, to the extent that it is somewhat effective in attracting tourists, and some people intend to travel to this city to benefit from these shopping centers. Figure 3 shows the spatial distribution and dispersion of shopping centers in the metropolis of Tabriz.

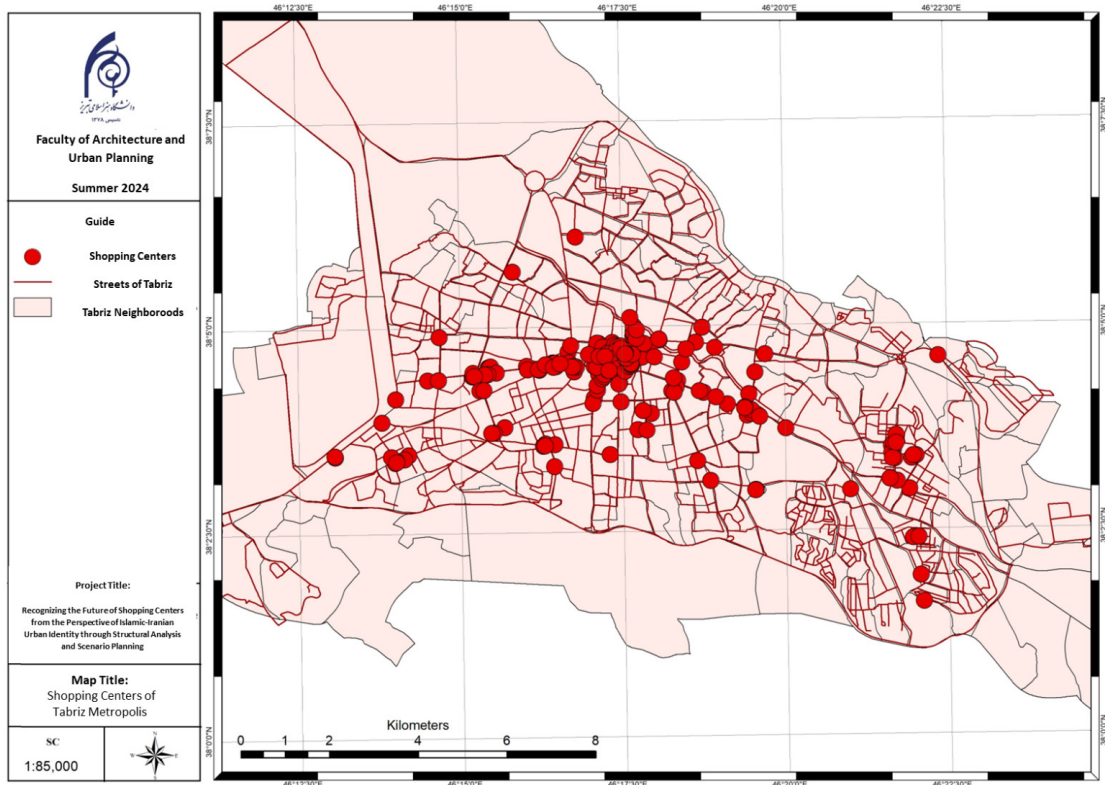


Figure 3. Spatial distribution and dispersion of shopping centers in the metropolis of tabriz

In Tabriz city, there are 194 shopping centers, and a diverse range of centers can be seen. Some shopping centers, such as Laleh Park Shopping Center, are among the luxurious centers full of international brands, and shopping centers located within the Tarbiat pedestrian street attract many tourists. In recent years, with the concentration of special shopping centers in the city center and the eastern part of the city, new centers have been built in the western parts of the city. On the other hand, the distribution and concentration of these centers alongside valuable centers, historical buildings, and complexes of the Tabriz metropolis are among other positive points in this regard.

## 5.2. Discussion and Research Findings

Structural analysis or cross-impact analysis is a method for diagnosing interactive relationships; such that the influence of each variable on other variables is graded; in other words, cross-impact analysis is a semi-quantitative method in which, instead of simple cause-effect relationships, the interactive relationships between different subsystems are analyzed in a matrix. Cross-impact analysis, as a tool for research on the future, reveals the role of an indicator variable in

relation to other variables within a system and identifies those variables that play an important and significant role in the development of the system in the future. The information provided by this method is a picture of the interaction between variables. Also, it gives a picture of what is dependent and what is independent, what is a driver, and what is driven by other things. The cross-impact analysis method is very useful in identifying key variables and trends. For a variable, the important characteristic is having a strong connection with the system, which is measured by the number and intensity of these connections. Variables that possess this characteristic are called key variables. Obviously, any change in the key variables affects the entire system, especially its stability.

One of the important analytical features in the structural analysis technique is explaining the degree of influence and dependence of each variable on the whole system, so that it is determined what effect each variable has on the subject. Which variables does it affect and is affected by? Therefore, first, according to the research conceptual model, a cross-impact matrix of variables was formulated in the form of the second questionnaire and distributed to 20 specialists in the fields of urban issues, futures studies, and

related areas. In this questionnaire, specialists were asked to score the variables for evaluating shopping centers from the perspective of the Islamic-Iranian city identity on a scale (0-3) and specify the degree of influence and dependence of each variable on other variables.

In this spectrum (0-3), the number zero (0) indicates no relationship, number one (1) signifies a weak relationship and influence, number two (2) represents a medium relationship and influence, and finally, number three (3) denotes a strong relationship and influence. This process was repeated for all variables,

and the degree of influence and dependence of each variable on other variables was presented in the form of a cross-impact structural analysis matrix. The responses and scores given by experts and specialists were summarized and entered into the MICMAC software to perform the structural analysis steps. The results regarding the matrix and its optimization are as follows. Based on the collected and presented cross-impact matrix tables, the cross-impact matrix had 100% desirability and optimization after three data rotations, indicating the validity of the questionnaire and matrix responses.

**Table 2. Specifications and desirability of the cross-impact structural analysis matrix in micmac software**

Matrix Dimensions	26*26	Number of Zeros	55
Number of Ones	233	Number of Twos	298
Number of Threes	90	Fill Rate	91.8639%
First Rotation	98%		97%
Second Rotation	99%		99%
Third Rotation	100%		100%

One of the first analyses resulting from the cross-impact matrix questionnaire is drawing the plan or scatter plot of the conceptual model variables based on their influence and dependence. Usually, the influence/dependence plan of structural analysis is arranged in two forms. If the arrangement of variables is L-shaped, it indicates the stability of the system; that is, some variables have high influence, and some have high dependence. However, in unstable systems where

the arrangement of variables is centered around the diagonal axis, the conditions of influence and dependence of variables are significantly more complex. In this case, the relationship between variables exhibits an intermediate state of influence and dependence, making it difficult to identify key drivers. Figure 4 illustrates the influence/dependence plan, as well as the arrangement of variables.

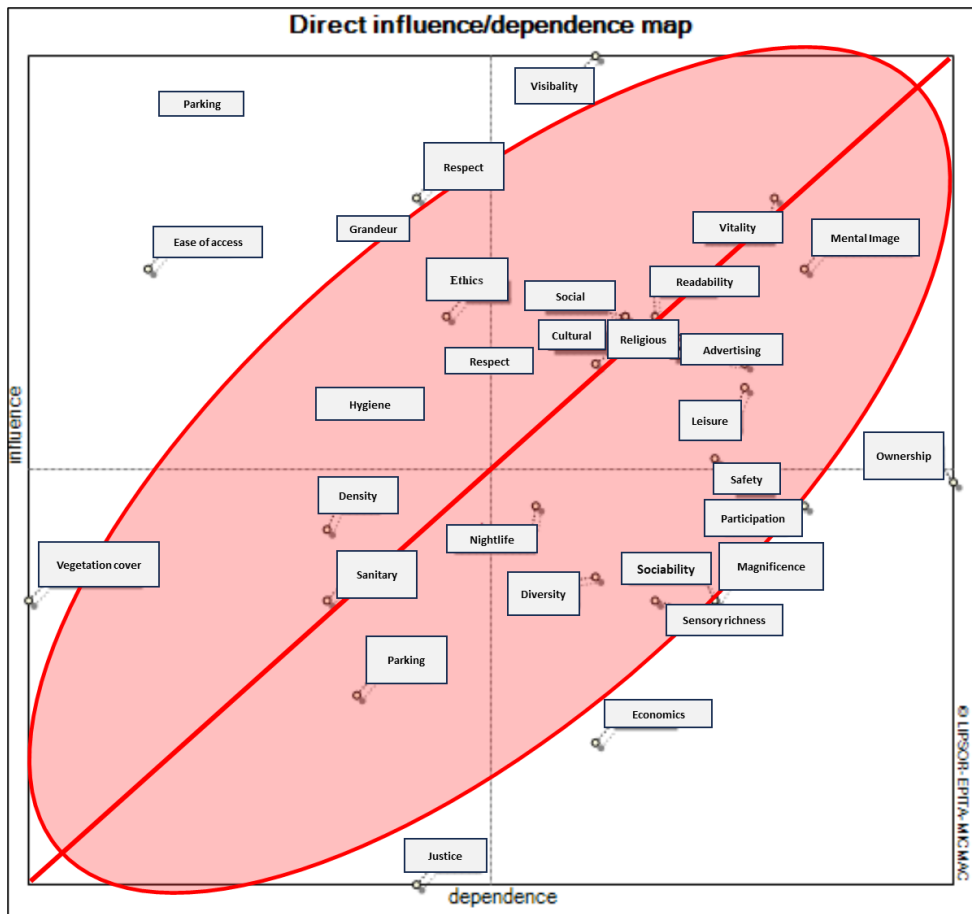


Figure 4. Scatter plot of conceptual model variables in the influence/dependence plan of structural analysis and system instability

Considering the scatter of variables in the influence/dependence plan and the matrix fill rate, the instability of the system can be noted. According to the variable scatter map, four types of variables can be observed:

two-faced variables, influencing variables, independent variables, and dependent variables. According to Figure 5, the typology of research variables can be described as follows:

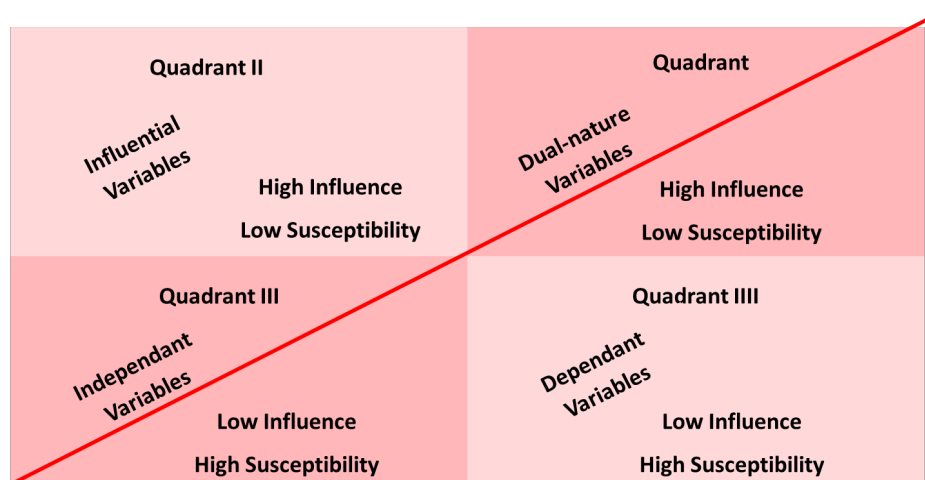


Figure 5. Areas of the influence/dependence plan in structural analysis and the nature of variables

(A graph divided into four quadrants: Influencing Variables (Northwest), Two-Faced Variables (Northeast), Dependent Variables (Southeast), Independent Variables (Southwest))

According to Figure 4 and the comparison with the influence/dependence plan, the degree of influence and dependence of each variable can be identified. Based on Figure 5, the 26 variables of the present research are listed in detail below:

- **Influencing Variables (Northwest area):** These drivers are input factors that are the main influencing drivers, and their dependence is much less than their influence. These factors and variables are located in the northwest part of the influence/dependence plan, and the stability of the system depends heavily on them. They are considered key and determining factors of the system's behavior. Based on the influence/dependence plan of the present research, the influencing variables include: Human Dignity & Respect, Accessibility, and Observance of Ethical Commands.
- **Two-Faced Variables (Northeast area):** These variables act with high influence and high dependence and are placed in the northeast part of the plan. The nature of these factors is mixed with instability because the slightest change or action in these variables will affect the entire system and the variables. Out of the 26 variables identified in the

conceptual model, 10 variables are considered two-faced and include: Visibility, Utilization of Social Symbols, Utilization of Cultural Symbols, Utilization of Religious Symbols, Vibrancy, Strong Mental Image, Leisure & Recreation, Advertising Displays, Legibility, Safety & Security.

- **Dependent Variables (Southeast area):** Variables located in this area have low influence and high dependence. Therefore, they are much more sensitive to two-faced and influencing variables and react quickly to the slightest changes in other variables. These variables include: Ownership & Investors, Social Participation, Nightlife, Diversity, Sociability, Grandeur & Majesty, Sensory Richness, and Economic Desirability.
- **Independent Variables (Southwest area):** These factors have low influence and low dependence and are located in the southwest part of the plan. These factors do not create reactions and changes and include: Density, Environmental Health, Vegetation Cover, Parking, and Justice.

After determining the quantity, quality, and the degree of influence and dependence of each variable in the system, examining the relationships between variables is necessary. This was also examined and evaluated in the MICMAC software. Direct relationships based on two levels of sensitivity among the variables are presented as in Figure 6.

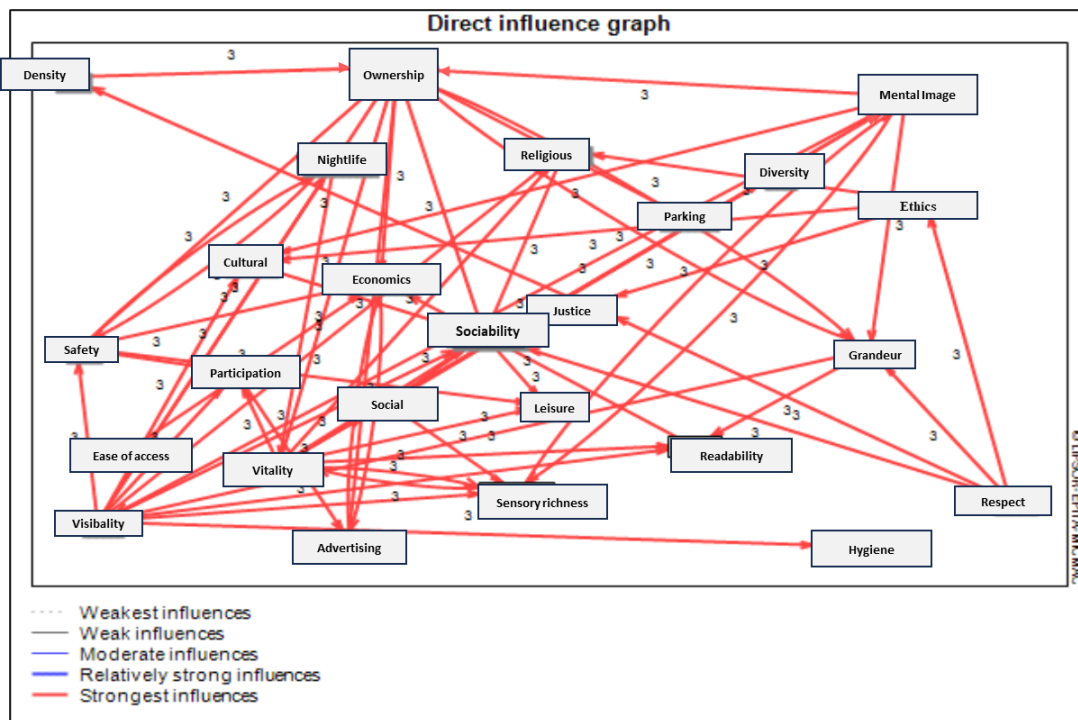


Figure 6. Graph of direct relationships and influences among research variables with 10% sensitivity

By setting the sensitivity level to 100%, the relationship graph can be obtained as in Figure 7.

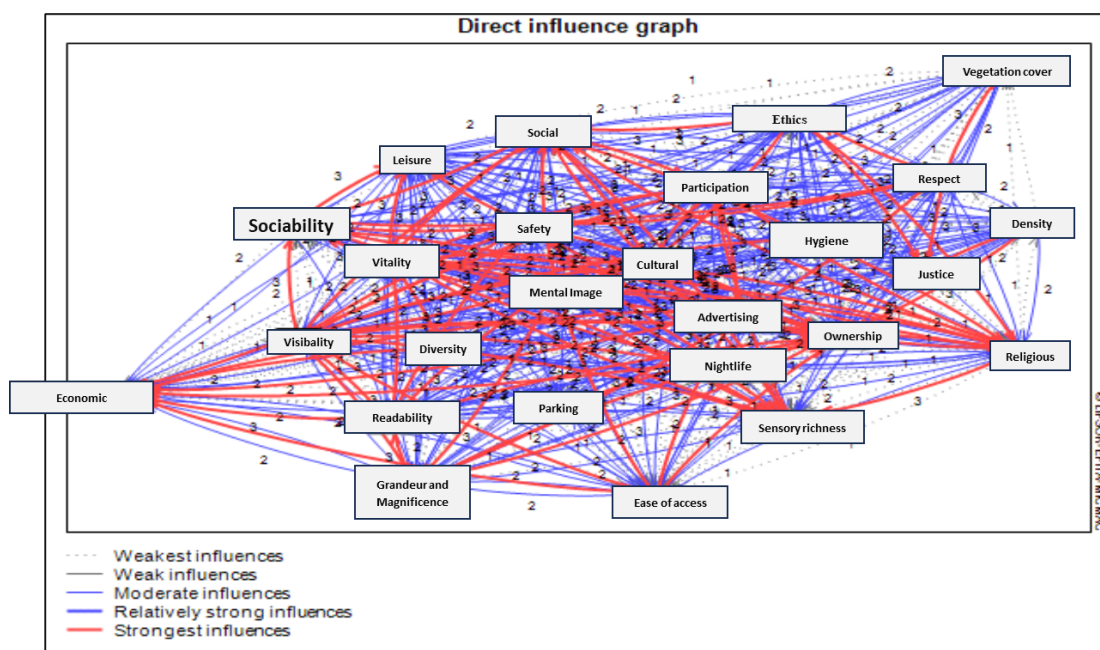


Figure 7. Graph of direct relationships and influences among research variables with 100% sensitivity

Finally, based on the investigations conducted among the relationships of the 26 research variables, 10 variables were identified as key variables and have the highest importance in the identity sector for the future development of shopping centers in metropolitan areas, especially in the metropolitan area of Tabriz.

These variables include: Visibility, Utilization of Social Symbols, Utilization of Cultural Symbols, Utilization of Religious Symbols, Vibrancy, Strong Mental Image, Leisure & Recreation, Advertising Displays, Legibility, Safety & Security. The score and rank of these 10 key variables are provided in Table 3.

Table 3. Score and rank of key factors in the future development of shopping centers in tabriz metropolis with emphasis on iranian-islamic identity

Variable	Final Score		Rank	
	Direct Influence	Indirect Influence	Direct Influence	Indirect Influence
Visibility	288	283	1	1
Utilization of Social Symbols	254	275	6	4
Utilization of Cultural Symbols	245	243	9	9
Utilization of Religious Symbols	273	280	2	2
Vibrancy	273	279	3	3
Strong Mental Image	266	261	5	6
Leisure & Recreation	242	241	10	10
Advertising Displays	247	251	8	8
Legibility	271	270	4	5
Safety & Security	249	254	7	7

Findings from the structural analysis of key factors for the future development of shopping centers in Tabriz

metropolis show that Visibility, with the highest score, ranks first. This result indicates that, like traditional

Iranian-Islamic cities, being visible and the prominent position of commercial centers in the city's spatial structure are among the important requirements for giving identity to these spaces. In the past, bazaars were at the beating heart of the city, alongside the Jameh Mosque and the main square, and held a prominent place in the city's visual network; an issue that today also manifests itself in the necessity of promoting urban legibility and strengthening identity symbols in new shopping centers.

In the subsequent ranks are Vibrancy and the utilization of Religious Symbols. These two factors have a direct connection with the identity characteristics of Islamic cities, because vibrancy in the Islamic city is not limited to the physical presence of individuals but is a manifestation of social dynamism, collective interactions, and meaningful vitality. Also, the use of religious symbols in commercial spaces recalls the historical connection of bazaars with devotional centers and can elevate contemporary shopping centers from mere economic function to an identity-rich and meaningful arena. On the other hand, Social Symbols and Strong Mental Image are in the middle ranks, indicating the importance of recreating "collective memory" in these spaces. This theme was also observed in traditional cities, where the bazaar and caravanserai were not only the arena of economic exchange but also a platform for social interactions, strengthening social capital, and forming urban identity.

In contrast, factors such as Leisure & Recreation and Advertising Displays are in the lowest ranks. This finding indicates that from the citizens' perspective, shopping centers should not be defined only as consumerist and entertaining arenas, but such spaces are expected to play a deeper role in reflecting local identity and promoting the Islamic-Iranian lifestyle. This result is in line with upstream documents, including the "Country's Cultural Engineering Map" and the "Statement of the Second Phase of the Revolution," which emphasize the necessity of avoiding extravagance, confronting wastefulness, and recreating the Islamic lifestyle in urban arenas. In general, the research findings show that the future development of shopping centers in Tabriz, if based on the identity principles of the Islamic-Iranian city, such as spatial legibility, social vibrancy, connection with religious symbols, and strengthening the sense of place belonging, can prevent these spaces from turning into centers of Western-oriented consumerism and elevate them to identity-creating and social arenas.

## 6. Conclusion

The bazaar is an urban phenomenon; in traditional cities, it formed the heart of the city, and in Islamic civilization and culture, the bazaar had an extensive form and meaning. Throughout recent history, shopping was seen as a laborious activity, an activity that had to bear the concept of life and survival, but today, shopping has become one of the most important conventional leisure activities in the world, and consumption is also defined as leisure.

New shopping centers produce social and cultural possibilities that are different from buying goods, and through it, cities have transformed from a productive nature to consumer identities. This event has affected not only the city's architecture but also the distribution of urban spaces. In the past, the city's mosques were the axis and focal point of urban spaces, and other spaces gained identity based on the type of interaction they had with these places, but today, with the arrival of commercial malls and mega-malls, these relations have faced fundamental changes. This unbridled development of shopping centers and the lack of connection with the urban context and its authenticity will impose heavy consequences on the city in the future.

In the present article, considering the necessity of the subject, the future development of urban shopping centers from the perspective of the identity of Iranian-Islamic cities was investigated. The article's questions included: "How is the identity of the Iranian-Islamic city manifested in traditional and contemporary shopping centers in today's cities?" and "What are the key drivers for the future development of traditional and contemporary shopping centers in today's cities, especially Tabriz, based on structural analysis?" Therefore, first, the theoretical foundations and concepts in this field, such as spaces of the Iranian-Islamic city, bazaars and shopping centers in Iranian-Islamic cities, and contemporary shopping centers, were examined. Based on the conducted studies and expert questionnaires, the conceptual model of the research was presented. To examine the reliability and validity of the conceptual model, the expert questionnaire and the Delphi technique were used again. According to the research conceptual model for evaluating shopping centers from the perspective of Iranian-Islamic city identity, twenty-six (26) variables are involved.

Subsequently, the conceptual model was examined in the case study of shopping centers in the metropolis of

Tabriz. To answer the research questions, the influence/dependence matrix was developed and distributed among experts to explain the degree of influence and dependence of each variable on other variables. This leads to the recognition of key variables and influential drivers and motivators. Based on the results from the structural analysis questionnaires, out of the 26 identified variables, 10 variables were identified as key drivers for the future development of shopping centers in the metropolis of Tabriz, with an emphasis on Iranian-Islamic identity. These drivers include: Visibility, Utilization of Social Symbols, Utilization of Cultural Symbols, Utilization of Religious Symbols, Vibrancy, Strong Mental Image, Leisure & Recreation, Advertising Displays, Legibility, Safety & Security.

The Iranian-Islamic identity and its manifestation in traditional shopping centers of today's cities are considered their distinguishing feature and majesty, which is neglected in many examples of contemporary centers. In other words, the lack of attention and emphasis on the authentic and identity context of Tabriz city in the development of shopping centers is one of the most important points in today's Tabriz. This will lead to many consequences in the present and future situation of the city. As mentioned in the key drivers, variables such as the utilization of Religious Symbols and Visibility are among the most key variables and will have profound effects on the future development of shopping centers with an emphasis on Iranian-Islamic identity. In other words, variables such as Visibility and Religious Symbols are not only the most key identified drivers but can also create a bridge between tradition and modernity and pave the way for the reproduction of identity in new commercial spaces. This research clearly shows that inattention to these drivers will bring irreparable damage to urban spaces and will expose the future of Tabriz to serious identity challenges. Today, this inattention has led to irreparable damage in the spaces of Tabriz city, and in some parts of the city, the city has been taken over by malls. It is hoped that this research will be a small step towards reminding specialists and urban decision-makers to take steps in paying attention to the variables of Iranian-Islamic city identity in the development of shopping centers.

## Authors' contributions

The contribution share of both authors is equal.

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## Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest declared by the authors.

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