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The Role of the People in Islamic Governance (Religious Democracy): The Perspective of Imam Khamenei

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Abstract

Purpose: This scientific note aims to examine the role of the people in Islamic governance—often conceptualized as religious democracy—from the viewpoint of Imam Khamenei. It seeks to clarify the relationship between divine authority and popular participation within Islamic political thought.

Method/Approach: The study adopts a conceptual and analytical approach grounded in Islamic political theory, focusing on the intellectual framework articulated by Imam Khamenei regarding governance, legitimacy, and public participation.

Findings: The analysis demonstrates that in Islamic political thought, divine authority and popular participation are not contradictory but complementary and mutually reinforcing. God-centered governance presupposes conscious faith, voluntary participation, and moral responsibility of the people. Public religiosity, social responsibility, ethical governance, and human vicegerency (khilāfah) constitute the conceptual foundations of Islamic political legitimacy. Furthermore, popular will is essential both in the establishment and continuity of an Islamic government, while elected officials bear profound moral and practical obligations toward society.

Conclusion: Islamic governance is ultimately presented as a system in which human agency, divine law, justice, and ethical accountability converge, forming an integrated model of religious democracy rooted in both divine guidance and active public participation.

Keywords

Islamic Governance, Popular Participation, Religious Democracy, Ethical Leadership, Public Religiosity.

Introduction

One of the most frequently debated issues in contemporary political theory—particularly within discussions of Islamic governance—is the relationship between divine sovereignty and popular participation. Critics of religious governance often assume an inherent tension between God-centered authority and people-centered democracy. However, Islamic political thought, especially as articulated by Imam Khamenei, rejects this dichotomy. In this view, divine legitimacy and popular will are not opposing principles but interdependent dimensions of governance.

The concept of *religious democracy* in Islamic thought rests upon the assumption that a political system grounded in divine law can only emerge, function, and sustain itself through the active will, belief, and participation of the people. Thus, the people are not passive subjects of a sacred authority, but conscious agents whose faith, choice, and responsibility are central to political legitimacy.

1. People-Centeredness in God-Centered Governance

In Islamic understanding, God-centered thinking is inseparable from people-centered thinking. A religious government cannot be imposed upon a society that lacks religious belief or public acceptance. The existence of an Islamic government in any country necessarily reflects the religiosity and conscious will of its people. In other words, the formation of such a government signifies that the people themselves have chosen this path and desired its realization.

From this standpoint, public faith is not merely a private or spiritual matter; it is a social and political force that shapes collective destiny. Without the people's belief in religion and their readiness to uphold it in social life, neither a religious society nor an Islamic government can be established. Therefore, popular will is not an auxiliary element of Islamic governance, but one of its essential pillars.

2. Popular Will and Political Legitimacy

A fundamental question arises: if a religious government is based on divine laws, does this eliminate the role of the people? Imam Khamenei's response to this question is unequivocal—never. No ruler can assume power without public acceptance and allegiance. If people do not pledge allegiance to a leader and do not desire his leadership, he cannot legitimately govern.

This principle highlights a critical dimension of Islamic political legitimacy: authority is realized through public consent. While divine law

provides the normative framework, the realization of governance occurs through the people's choice. Thus, legitimacy in Islamic governance is both normative (rooted in divine values) and social (rooted in public will).

3. Democracy in the Islamic Framework

Democracy, as understood in Islamic governance, has two inseparable dimensions. The first concerns the formation of the political system. The people choose the system, determine the form of government, elect their representatives, and participate—directly or indirectly—in selecting key officials. This participatory process reflects the centrality of popular will in political organization.

The second dimension relates to responsibility and accountability. Those who are elected by the people assume serious, real, and ongoing duties toward them. Governance is not a privilege or a favor granted to society, but a responsibility entrusted by the people. Officials must not regard public service as benevolence, nor should they exaggerate their achievements or make promises they fail to fulfill.

4. Ethical Governance and Moral Responsibility

A core element of Islamic governance is ethical conduct. Leaders are warned against self-glorification, broken promises, and symbolic performance devoid of substance. Exaggeration diminishes truth, and broken promises erode trust—both in the eyes of the people and before God.

The Qur'anic principle articulated in Surah As-Saff (Verse 3) underscores this moral accountability: *"It is very displeasing to God that you say something and do not do it."* Although these teachings were originally addressed by Amir al-Mu'minin (Imam Ali) to Malik Ashtar, they transcend time and context and apply equally to all who hold authority.

In this ethical framework, governance is inseparable from moral integrity. Political authority without ethical commitment loses its legitimacy, regardless of formal structures or legal claims.

5. Human Vicegerency and the Philosophy of Responsibility

From a broader philosophical perspective, Islamic thought introduces the concept of the human being as the vicegerent of God (khalīfat Allāh) on earth. Humanity has been entrusted with the responsibility of managing, developing, and cultivating the world. This trusteeship requires both knowledge and action.

Human history demonstrates that natural forces—such as fire, electricity, gravity, and countless other potentials—existed long before humanity recognized or utilized them. Discovering and harnessing these forces is part of humanity's divinely assigned mission. Seeking knowledge, understanding nature, and advancing human life are therefore not merely scientific endeavors, but religious responsibilities.

6. Inner Capacities and Human Development

The concept of vicegerency extends beyond external nature to the internal dimensions of the human being. Humans are endowed with intellect, wisdom, creativity, and profound psychological capacities. Extracting and cultivating these inner talents is a fundamental duty.

In this view, human development is holistic: it encompasses intellectual growth, moral refinement, self-purification, and social responsibility. A society guided by Islamic governance must therefore create conditions that allow individuals to realize their full potential—both as moral agents and as contributors to collective progress.

7. Justice, Social Relations, and Collective Responsibility

At the macro level, the target audience of Islamic governance is all individuals within society. Justice, ethical relations, and social responsibility are not confined to rulers or elites; they are obligations shared by all members of the community.

Every individual is responsible for his or her words and actions, for self-transcendence and moral purification, and for contributing to the development of society and the world. Governance, from this perspective, is not merely a top-down structure but a shared moral project.

8. Conclusion

From Imam Khamenei's perspective, Islamic governance represents a synthesis of divine law and popular will. People are not marginal actors but central participants in both the establishment and the continuation of political authority. Religious democracy, as articulated in this framework, is grounded in public faith, ethical governance, human responsibility, and collective justice.

Ultimately, Islamic governance is a system in which legitimacy flows from conscious belief, moral accountability, and active participation. It affirms that a God-centered system is not opposed to the people, but is realized through them.

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Measurement of the Efficiency of Bank Branches using Data Envelopment Analysis based on Balanced Scorecard

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Abstract
Background: Over the years, financial institutions, especially banks, have been placed in an almost developing competitive environment as one of the most underlying components of the economic system of the state. Hence, the measurement of the efficiency of banks has been the priority in the studies of the recent decade.
Purpose: The present study is aimed at measuring the relative efficiency of Bank Branches in Tehran.
Method/Approach: To this end, the library studies are used first to derive the desired indicators and are regulated based on a Balanced Scorecard (BSC). Then, some indicators were confirmed using the opinions of experts and were regulated based on inputs and outputs. Finally, the measurement of the efficiency of the said branches was done using Data Envelopment Analysis (DEA) and based on Balanced Scorecard (BSC).
Findings: As a result, out of the 73 branches studied, the relative efficiency of 30 branches was at a maximum level equal to 1. In other words, 30 branches were recognized as efficient ones. The other 43 branches gained efficiency in the range 0.69506 to 099714, which is relatively high efficiency.

Keywords
efficiency, Data Envelopment Analysis, Balanced Scorecard.

Introduction

Over the years, financial institutions, especially banks, have been placed in a relatively developing competitive environment as one of the most underlying components of the economic system in Iran. Banks are commercial entities that take financial mediation and distribute excess liquidity among different economic factors. In terms of microeconomics and macroeconomics, the major functions of banks include using deposits and other debts of individuals or firms as excess resources and allocating them in the form of loans and other assets to economic brokers, who lack such resources (Jiménez-Hernández et al., 2019, p.185).

The banking industry, same as other industries, has encountered many impulsions by the mediation of recent financial crises at the international and national levels. The impulsions have raised the question of how efficient the banking system and its function are based on the capital consumed for the establishment and developmental strategies (Majumder & Li, 2018). Here, the question of performance and efficiency measurement of the banking system on the establishment of different branches and managing them (as a consequence of development strategy) gains a more serious aspect, because bank branches are the major heavy physical assets (Dranove et al., 2017). These assets can decrease the reaction power of banks in financial crises, and prevent the agility and dynamicity of the management system of the economic institute. Hence, studying the issue of bank branch efficiency and the evaluation of bank strategies in this field is required using reliable methods and instruments in strategy knowledge.

However, it should be reminded that the issue of "performance" is underlying not only in crises such as the said financial crisis, but also the impact of performance management on various organizational departments such as finance departments and manpower department, and its impact on social and environmental aspects of the organization has been the subject of discussions of managers and experts in the field of management (Xiao et al. 2018, p.325). However, when the companies encounter developing competitive challenges, they increase the effort to consider the performance and to enhance the performance indicators, and the scholars pay specific attention to this issue ultimately (Hauff, Alewell & Hansen, 2017). Performance is one of the vital activities of every organization, which is affected by major policies and procedures of the organization (Marzouk & Saleem, 2018, p.1308). Hence, careful and academic evaluation can provide accurate results.

According to the significance of the banking system in current economic conditions, and due to the efforts of beneficiaries to improve the performance indicators, such as the efficiency of different economic firms, such as banks, this study tends to use the Data Envelopment Analysis (DEA) method based on Balanced Scorecard (BSC) to measure the efficiency of bank Branches in Tehran Province. In other words, this study first derived the efficiency measurement indices using the DEA method based on BSC. Then, the branches of the studied bank were ranked based on the combined method.

1. Literature Review

1-1. Performance management

Performance management is one of the issues that have been noted from the past to the date whether in the field of implementation of research. In terms of implementation, a performance management system (PMS) is today being used in about 90% of large companies (Cascio, 2006). In terms of research, about 1915 articles were published during 1980-2017 on performance on academic bases and credited magazines in the field of management (Schleicher et al. 2018). In these articles, three levels are mentioned for performance, including individual, team, and organizational performance (Guinot and Chiva, 2019). Although there are agreements on definitions of two individual and team levels, there are again disputes on the definition of organizational performance. Individual performance is defined as the scalable measures, behaviors, and outputs, which are associated with goals, and the employees try to help the realization of these goals by the advent of these factors. Also, team performance refers to the level of the working standards determined within the organization (Guinot and Chiva, 2019). On the organizational performance, however, it could be claimed that the term refers to the achievement of organizational goals efficiently (Civelek et al., 2015).

Added to the definition of different levels, one aspect of management is mostly emphasized in each period in terms of process. However, the most agreed-upon thing can be the tasks determined for a performance management system (PMS). PMS is responsible for specifying performance expectations, monitoring the performance of the company and the employees, collecting performance-related information, performance appraisal, providing feedback, and codifying training plans to promote organizational performance (Schleicher et al., 2018).

1-1-1. Performance Evaluation

The history of performance evaluation dates back to the early 1800th century and the cotton manufacturing factories in the UK. However, performance

evaluation was spread mostly after World War II, and today it is being used by employers widely (Cappelli & Conyon, 2017). According to a survey made by Aberdeen Group (2010), 91% of employers in the world use various methods of performance evaluation. Various criteria have been mentioned to date for the performance evaluation, including objective criteria such as efficiency, effectiveness, profitability, return on investment, and business growth, and subjective criteria such as quality, innovation, customer satisfaction, and so on (Guinot and Chiva, 2019). In general, the performance evaluation system can be analyzed from different aspects. Two underlying views are available on performance evaluation: traditional and modern views. In the traditional view, the underlying purpose of the evaluation is judgment and performance evaluation. However, the modern view has made the philosophy of evaluation focused on the growth and development, and improvement of evaluated capacity. The differences between traditional and modern criteria are presented in Table1. The modern indicators are new objectified performance evaluation systems (Najafi et al., 2008).

Table 1. Differentiation of evaluation criteria in traditional and modern attitudes

specifications	judgment-oriented (performance reminder – traditional view)	development-oriented (performance improvement – modern view)
The role of the evaluator	performance judgment and measurement (judge)	counselor and performance facilitator
appraisal period	past	future
appraisal standards	the opinion of the organization and senior directors	self-standardization
man's evaluation goal	controlling the evaluated	development of the capacity of the evaluated factor
system output	performance control	performance growth, development, and improvement
evaluation results	determination of the most successful managers and rewarding them	providing counseling services for the continuous and increasing improvement of activities (making incentives to improve quality and services, and activities)
post-evaluation interviewing style	command (similar to a trial)	conversation

1-2. Performance management

As the concept of efficiency is one of the most underlying and oldest concepts in the field of management and is discussed in the literature of management in detail, here the author is satisfied with just a definition relevant to the Data Envelopment Analysis (DEA) technique. Concerning the said technique as the method used in this work, efficiency can be divided into the following types (Zolanvari, 2012, p.13):

a) Economic efficiency (EE): It is the ratio of the applicable product to the resources used to produce the product. Farrell believes that economic efficiency includes two components of technical and allocative efficiencies.

b) Technical efficiency (TE): It reflects the ability of a firm to obtain maximum output from the applied inputs. The efficiency is affected by factors such as performance management, organizational scale, or operational size.

c) Allocation efficiency (AE): It reflects the ability of a firm to use inputs in an optimized ratio based on price and production technology. In Figure 1, the three efficiencies are illustrated.

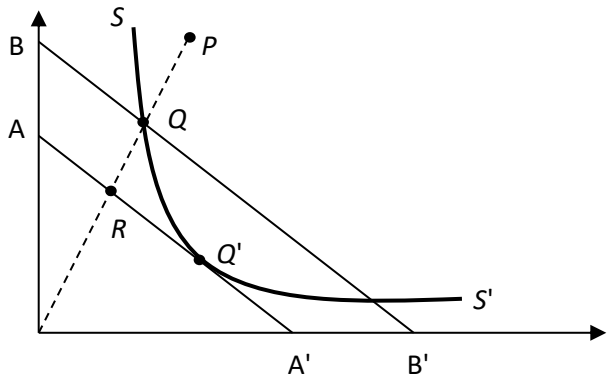

Figure 1

$$Economic\ Efficiency:\ EE_i = TE_i \times AE_I = \frac{OR}{OP} \quad (1)$$

$$technical\ efficiency\ of\ firm\ p:\ TE_i = \frac{OQ}{OP} \quad (2)$$

$$allocation\ efficiency\ of\ firm\ p: AE_i = \frac{OR}{OQ} \quad (3)$$

d) Structural efficiency (SE): Structural efficiency is usually used to measure the efficiency of an industry with various firms operating there. Accordingly, the structural efficiency of an industry is realized from the average efficiency of active firms. Hence, if the efficiency of firm j is shown as E_j and the weight given to the firm is shown as $Wj = \frac{qj}{Q}$, the structural efficiency is estimated as:

$$SE = \sum_{j=1}^{n}(w_j \times E_j) \quad (4)$$

Where q is the amount of product in firm j, and Q is the product in the whole industry.

Studying the issue of efficiency, especially in the banking industry, has developed significantly over the decade (Jiménez-Hernández et al., 2019). Hence, more than 100 articles, books, and dissertations can be referred to in the literature (Zolanvari, 2010), which is out of boredom of the article. However, due to the research background, the works done over the four years in Iran and abroad are mentioned here, and a conclusion is presented at the end of this section concerning the subject of this study.

Shakouri, Salahi & Kordrostami (2020) have studied the stability of efficiency scores in the DEA method in the banking sector. In this study, the classic model of DEA was analyzed in summary. After that, the DEA p-robust model was introduced, and the prior weight of each scenario for the DEA was estimated. To measure the prior weight of criteria in wider scenarios, the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) was used. Jiménez-Hernández et al (2019) studied the efficiency of Latin American Banks. The purpose of this paper is to analyze a variety of factors that can explain the differences in commercial bank efficiency among 17 countries in Latin America (LatAm) among 409 banks for the 2014-2016 period. Findings from the first stage scores reveal the heterogeneity of average efficiency within the region. The results allow us to state that certain internal variables, such as bank size, the ratio of loans to total assets, and the ratio of non-performing loans, show the expected relationship to efficiency, in line with much of the previous literature.

Aiello & Bonanno (2018) conducted a study under the title of "On the Sources of Heterogeneity in Banking Efficiency Literature". The meta-dataset consists of 1661 observations retrieved from 120 papers published over the period 2000–2014. The results showed that parametric methods always yield lower levels of banking efficiency than non-parametric studies. Isavi et al. (2018) conducted a study under the title of "Relationship between stability indicators and technical efficiency of Iranian banks during the year

(2004-2016)". In this study, the authors analyzed the relationship between stability indicators and efficiency in 11 public and private banks during 2004-2016. The efficiency of banks was measured using the DEA and the mediational approach. Also, to measure bank stability, indicators including credit risk and liquidity risk were used. The results revealed that the improvement of stability indicators can decrease bank efficiency. This shows the inefficient performance of banks in selecting such a portfolio to improve efficiency and decrease risk simultaneously.

As mentioned before, to prevent redundancy, the results of the relevant studies are presented in the end of the literature instead of explaining each study in details: the deposit in branch, the paid facilities, the import and export bonds, the warrantees, the receivables (delayed, unpaid, and overdue receivables), net profit received from facilities, miscellaneous income, net fee received, the amount of securities distributed in the branch, credits, number of current accounts, number of saving accounts, number of issued bank cards, average waiting time to issue a bank card, number of facilities paid in the branch, average waiting time for bank customers, number of branch customers, active to stagnant accounts ratio, number of cheques issued, evaluation of branch by the customers, manpower expenses (wage and salary of branch personnel), average number of transactions per week, number of computer equipment in the branch, number of counters providing banking services to customers, value of monument and facilities of the branch, current expenses, transaction speed, experience of branch personnel (year), number of training courses for personnel, antiquity of the branch, job circulation of personnel, personnel group promotion rate, and personnel fraud rate (Zolanvari, 2010).

1-3. Strategy controlling

Usually, there is a long time gap between beginning strategy implementation and the achievement of desired results. During the period, various projects are implemented, and different investments are made. Controlling strategies to conduct the organization throughout the event are required. Such controls should provide guidelines to correct the measures and orientations of the organizations to implement the strategy and to cope with the evolutions in environmental and in-organization situations (Kordnaeij, 2017, p.429). Strategy controlling is divided into four groups including default control (on the predictions and strategy codification assumptions), implementation control (on lack of changing overall strategies and lack of violating them while implementation), strategic control (on supervising a wide range of

internal and external events threatening the strategy), and specific knowledge control (on unexpected events) (Kordnaeij, 2017, pp.430-431).

1-3-1. Balanced Scorecard (BSC)

Various instruments are available to control strategy and realize operational goals, and this study has applied the BSC method for this purpose. Four generations of BSC have been introduced to date. The first-generation BSC is used to provide a series of measures to balance the goals of stockholders, customer goals, and operational goals. The measures include learning and growth perspective (the effect of innovation and learning on organizational performance), the business process perspective (unemployment time, job circulation time, and profitability), customer perspective (customer satisfaction), and financial perspective (with criteria such as cash flow, return on investment, and income growth) (Kordnaeij, 2017, p.433). The second-generation BSC was founded in 1996 in an article under the title "Connecting BSC to strategy". Kaplan and Norton added new specifications to the second-generation to increase the strategic communications in this instrument and founded the third-generation. The considerations were associated with the accuracy and reliability of selecting strategic goals directly from the strategies and determining goals quantitatively. Finally, the fourth-generation BSC was introduced in 2008 as a comprehensive management system. Introducing this generation caused the integration of a wide range of strategy codification and performance management instruments, including mission statements, perspectives, strategy codification methodologies, dynamic budget, resource allocation, process improvement, spontaneous strategies, and economic-statistical analytic instruments (Kaplan and Norton, 2009, p.85). It should be mentioned that the instrument was used in 2009, 2010, 2012, and 2013 in the banking system of three countries, including Taiwan, Jordan, Iraq, and India (Kordnaeij et al. 2015, p.123).

2. Methodology

The present study is fundamental and slightly aligned with post-positivist philosophy in terms of typology. Besides, in terms of nature, this is descriptive-applied research. In terms of method, the library method was used for data collection based on the type of data. To obtain the indicators, library sources were used, and the official statistics in Bank were used to gain statistical data. After data collection, the DEA method was used for data analysis, along with the Anderson-Pearson Method.

In the following, three methods, including data envelopment analysis (DEA), Anderson-Pearson method, and the DEA-BSC combined method, are explained.

2-1. Data Envelopment Analysis (DEA)

The scholars in the field of performance evaluation have provided different definitions of DEA:

Charnes, Cooper& Rohdes, as the founders of the DEA method, have defined it as a nonlinear planning model, which has provided a new definition of efficiency to be used in the evaluation of the activity of non-profit institutes participating in public plans (Charnes et al., 1978, p.429). In another definition, Data Envelopment Analysis is introduced as a method for mathematical planning, which measures the relative efficiency of several decision-making units (DMU) based on the inputs and outputs and due to different measurement units (Hosseinzadeh Lotfi et al., 2010, 1977). Contreras (2020) has provided a review of this method and has mentioned that DEA is a mathematical planning technique, which measures the relative efficiency of multiple decision-making units based on the observed inputs and outputs expressed probably by types of metrics.

Farrell (1957) introduced the efficiency measurement method in a work based on economic theories (Farrell, 1957, 290: 253). However, because of practical problems in measurement and limitations in Farrell's method (constant returns-to-scale efficiency), the method could not be applied practically. The instrument considers a boundary based on the data received from DMUs and divides the decision-maker units into two efficient and inefficient groups based on the boundary. In this method, efficiency is measured by the ratio of the total weight of outputs (real outputs) to the total weight of inputs (real inputs) and can possess values in the range (0-1) (Ketkar et al. 2003, 513). The technique is recognized in the three decades as an applicable and efficient technique for the measurement of performance of banks, insurance branches, cooperative funds, educational centers, medical centers, and similar institutions (Vassiloglou et al. 1990, 591).

Data Envelopment Method (DEA) was added to economic literature by CCR through the generalization of Farrell's method in such a way that it can encompass the characteristics of production processes with multiple production factors and multiple products. The method, which is mostly recognized as an efficient measurement method in the world, provides the return to production scale efficiency, separated for firms, while measuring efficiency. With the advancement of this method, DEA is now one of the active research fields for efficiency measurement and is significantly

welcomed by scholars. This method is highly applicable for the performance evaluation of public and non-profit organizations, the price information of which is unavailable or unreliable. In this method, the term "decision-maker" (decision-making unit or decision-maker unit) is mostly used instead of the term "producer" for generalization (Zolanvari, 2012).

Figure 2 illustrates the situations of DMUs with one output and one input. Three DMUs are specified to measure their management efficiency. The production function expresses the maximum output produced by a certain value. DMUs P1 and P2 obtained the maximum output possible based on their input levels; however, P3 obtained a lower level of output compared to the output that can be obtained from input X3. To measure the efficiency of units with one input and one output, let's have:

$$\boldsymbol{Max\ h_{\circ}} = \frac{\boldsymbol{uy_1}}{\boldsymbol{vx_1}}$$

St:

$$\mathbf{1} \geq \frac{\boldsymbol{uy_1}}{\boldsymbol{vx_1}} \qquad \mathbf{1} \geq \frac{\boldsymbol{uy_2}}{\boldsymbol{vx_2}} \qquad \mathbf{1} \geq \frac{\boldsymbol{uy_3}}{\boldsymbol{vx_3}} \qquad \boldsymbol{u, v} > \mathbf{0} \qquad (5)$$

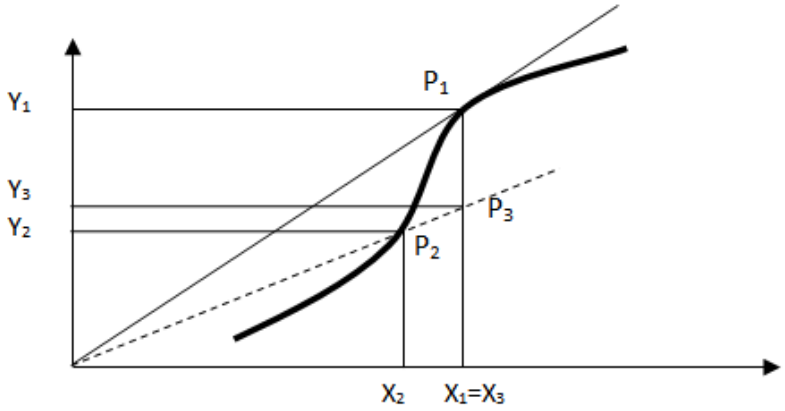

Figure 2. The diagram of the position of DMUs with one input and one output

In eq.5, $\mathbf{x_i}$ and $\mathbf{y_i}$ values show the coordinates of inputs and outputs relevant to the DMUs of Pi per i=1,2,3. As it is illustrated in the figure, the line slope tangent to the production function at point P1 is more than the crossed line of the production function at points P2 and P3. This means that DMU associated with P1 is efficient, and the other two DMUs are inefficient. Let's have (Banker et al. 1984, 1080: 1079):

$$\frac{u^* y_1}{v^* x_1} = 1 \qquad \frac{u^* y_2}{v^* x_2} = \frac{u^* y_3}{v^* x_3} < 1 \tag{6}$$

Finally, Banker, Charnes, and Cooper (1984) changed the CCR model and supplied a new model, which became known as the BCC model due to the first letters of their names. The BCC model is a model of DEA-type models, which evaluates the relative variable returns-to-scale efficiency. The constant returns-to-scale efficiency models are more restrictive than the variable returns-to-scale efficiency models. This is because constant return-to-scale efficiency encompasses fewer efficient units, and the efficiency decreases. The reason for this can be the specific nature of constant returns-to-scale efficiency compared to variable returns-to-scale efficiency.

2-2. the combined approach of DEA-BSC

Efficiency can be measured based on the total weight of the outputs to a total weight of the inputs. In the majority of relevant studies, the inputs and outputs are derived based on a series of financial and quantitative criteria. No certain process is defined for the determination of the criteria (Zolanvari, 2012). The efficiency of bank branches refers to the capacity of that branch to obtain maximum output from a certain amount of inputs. In the traditional approach, different analyses are provided using various financial ratios (such as return on assets (ROA) and return on investment ROI) to measure efficiency (Al-Tamimi et al. 2007, 334). The main issue in this study is finding a systematic method to derive appropriate inputs and outputs to evaluate the efficiency of branches based on BSC. The study is also aimed at determining the basic model based on DEA and quantifying the qualitative indices obtained to use in the efficiency measurement of the studied bank branches. Also, the study tends to separate the efficient and inefficient branches and to define the reference branches for the maximization of efficiency in the inefficient branches.

In the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) model, in addition to financial aspects, nonfinancial aspects are noted in line with the strategic goals of the organization. The model creates a balanced framework between financial and non-financial aspects, which can lead to the creation of a strategic position for transparency of organizational goals and interaction of managers and different organizational members. However, it should be noted that the model is unable to compare the performance of an organization in different years or compare the performance of similar organizations. The shortage can be met using the DEA model. In this model, the outputs of the organization are measured based on certain inputs, and the method is capable of comparing the performance of an organization during various periods or

comparing the performance of multiple similar organizations, such as branches of a bank. However, it should be noted that although the DEA model has a high ability to compare the performance and provide an improvement way, the model plays no vital role in the determination of input and output criteria. Therefore, it seems that with a combination of two models of DEA and BSC, not only can the strategic criteria of the organization be evaluated in a longitudinal process, but also the performance of different units can be compared, and the organizational performance can be evaluated in certain sections at the same time.

The combination of the two methods has paved the way for the measurement of organizational performance and to determine an improvement way. In the model, which was presented by Chen (1997) for the first time, the indicators defined by BSC are divided into two input and output groups. Then, using the DEA method, various decision-making units are compared. By determining the efficient units, the most efficient unit of an organization is specified.

3. Results

In the first step, along with analysis of the results associated with efficiency measurement of banks using the DEA method and analysis of the relevant studies in the field of BSC, the criteria derived in the studies were regulated based on the four views of the method. The criteria are the same components and indicators referred to at the end of the methodology. In this section, the criteria are presented due to the method implementation steps as the findings of the study: the deposit in branch, the paid facilities, the import and export bonds, the warrantees, the receivables (delayed, unpaid, and overdue receivables), net profit received from facilities, miscellaneous income, net fee received, the amount of securities distributed in the branch, credits, number of current accounts, number of saving accounts, number of issued bank cards, average waiting time to issue a bank card, number of facilities paid in the branch, average waiting time for bank customers, number of branch customers, active to stagnant accounts ratio, number of cheques issued, evaluation of branch by the customers, manpower expenses (wage and salary of branch personnel), average number of transactions per week, number of computer equipment in the branch, number of counters providing banking services to customers, value of monument and facilities of the branch, current expenses, transaction speed, experience of branch personnel (year), number of training courses for personnel, antiquity of the branch, job circulation of personnel, personnel group promotion rate, and personnel fraud rate.

In the second step, the opinions of the experts in the field of banking are used (Colleagues in the field of the plan and program deputy under the supervision of the Bank), and mathematical modeling is applied to the significance of each efficiency criterion listed in the first step. Also, the limitations caused by the DEA method are considered to provide a list of criteria for the experts of the Bank. Due to the easy access to information and its effect on the measurement and comparison of the efficiency of Bank Branches, a final list was prepared. The selected factors include the number of savings, the number of facilities provided, the amount of resources, consumption level, delays, number of current accounts, profit, the experience of branch personnel, education level of personnel, number of manpower, the value of electronic equipment, number of counters providing banking services to customers, and customer satisfaction.

In the third step, the abovementioned list was again sent to the personnel of the Bank, so that the criteria could be divided into two groups of inputs and outputs. Finally, the conceptual model was prepared based on the opinions of bank personnel.

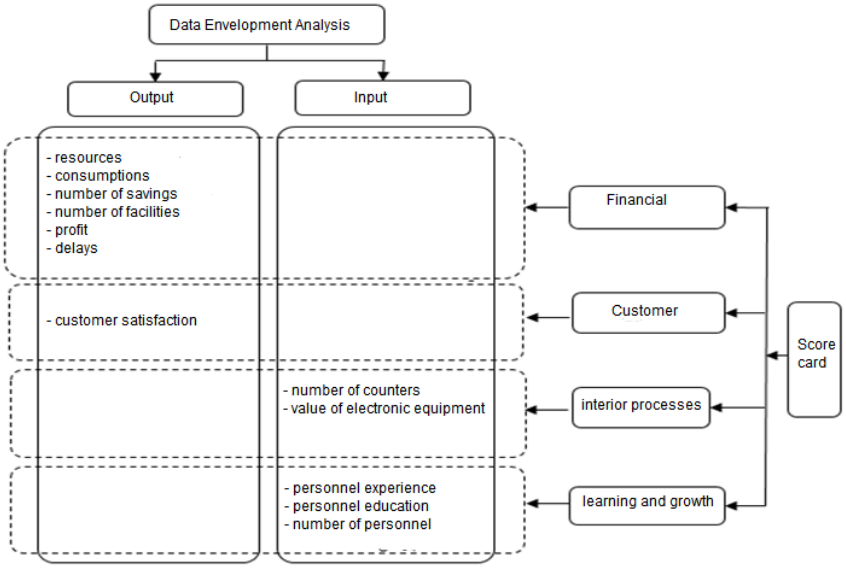

Figure 3. A conceptual model made by the combined method (DEA-BSC)

In the fourth step, the data collection is done, separated into the inputs and outputs. The data was provided by the efforts of Statistics, Research and Development Departments of the Deputy for Planning and Budget, and Human Resources, Education, and Finance Departments of the Bank.

It should be mentioned that the collected data is attributed to the fiscal year of 2012 and belongs to Bank Branches in Tehran. Besides, branches established in 2012 were excluded from the estimations. Hence, 73 branches were studied.

In the fifth step, the data analysis was conducted. After data collection and applying required changes to facilitate the DEA measurements, data-based CCR and BCC models were implemented to rank all branches in the frame of the GAMS IDE software. The results of efficiency measurement of the branches based on BSC and DEA are presented in Figure 4.

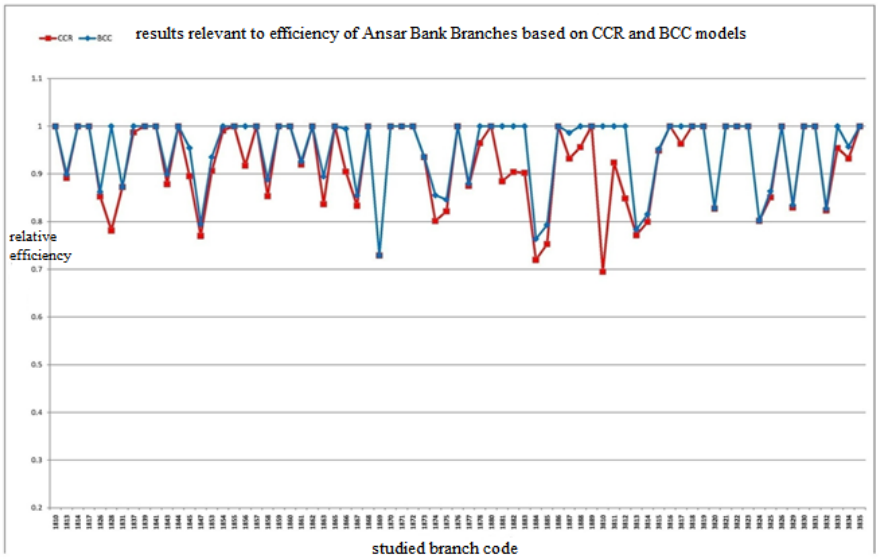

Figure 4. The diagram comparing results relevant to the efficiency of Bank Branches based on the CCR and BCC models

4. Conclusion

In the present study, due to the growing process of study in the field of efficiency, especially in the banking industry, the efficiency of bank Branches is measured. As it was mentioned in the literature, various theoretical and empirical studies have been done on applying the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) in strategic management and efficiency and performance evaluation. The instrument is one of the major instruments in the field of strategic management. On the other hand, various Persian and Latin articles are available on the measurement of efficiency of bank branches using the

Data Envelopment Analysis (DEA) method. Hence, this study has presented a model to measure the efficiency of Bank Branches using the DEA models, the criteria of which were defined in the framework of Balanced Scorecard (BSC). The combined method used in this study is an innovation compared to the previous literature.

As mentioned in the results and based on the diagrams, comparing the relative efficiency of branches measured by CCR and BCC models, there was no significant difference between the obtained results from CCR and BCC models. Hence, the return-to-scale efficiency of Bank Branches in Tehran is constant. Therefore, the results of the CCR model are considered as the basis of the analyses in this study.

Finally, based on the measurements, 30 out of 73 studied branches in Tehran possessed the maximum value and gained equal efficiency. In other words, 30 branches were efficient. The other 43 branches obtained an efficiency of 0.69506 to 0.99114, which is a relatively high efficiency.

Note: This research was conducted in a bank in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and due to ethical considerations and the authors' commitment not to publish the name of the bank, the name of the institution has been withheld.

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Administrative Diplomacy: A New Framework for Regional Cooperation in Public Administration Development in Asia

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Abstract

Background: In recent decades, the landscape of international relations has expanded beyond traditional diplomacy to include new forms of cooperation in governance and public sector development. While economic and political diplomacy are well established, the concept of administrative diplomacy remains underexplored, particularly in the Asian context.

Purpose: This paper introduces administrative diplomacy as a new framework for fostering regional cooperation in public administration development.

Definition / Conceptualization: Administrative diplomacy is defined as the systematic interaction among public administrations across borders aimed at capacity building, knowledge sharing, and policy innovation.

Method/Approach: Drawing upon theories of governance networks and institutional cooperation, the paper positions administrative diplomacy as a complementary layer to political and economic integration. The study reviews the challenges of public administration in Asia, such as institutional diversity, capacity gaps, and uneven governance quality, and identifies the potential role of regional cooperation in addressing these challenges. Building on comparative experiences from ASEAN, SAARC, BRICS, SCO, ECO, and other regional bodies, the paper proposes a four-pillar framework of administrative diplomacy: (1) knowledge sharing and policy learning, (2) capacity building and training, (3) institutional networking, and (4) collaborative problem-solving.

Findings: Through illustrative cases, the paper demonstrates how administrative diplomacy can contribute to trust-building, sustainable development, and resilience against transnational crises such as pandemics and climate change.

Conclusion: Finally, the paper offers policy recommendations for governments, regional organizations, and academic institutions to institutionalize administrative diplomacy as a driver of good governance in Asia. By conceptualizing administrative diplomacy and outlining a practical framework, this study aims to enrich the discourse on comparative public administration and highlight Asia's potential to pioneer innovative forms of regional cooperation.

Keywords

Administrative Diplomacy, Public Administration, Regional Cooperation, Governance, Asia.

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, diplomacy is no longer confined to the sphere of high politics, foreign ministries, or international negotiations. The interconnectedness of today's world has expanded the scope of diplomacy to encompass economic, cultural, educational, and increasingly, administrative dimensions. While the notions of economic diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, and public diplomacy have been studied extensively, the role of *administrative diplomacy* remains relatively underexplored, despite its growing relevance for governance and sustainable development.

Administrative diplomacy can be broadly defined as the cross-border engagement of public administrations and bureaucratic institutions with the purpose of building institutional capacities, sharing knowledge, transferring policy innovations, and creating collaborative mechanisms for solving common governance challenges. Unlike traditional diplomacy, which is primarily political and state-centric, administrative diplomacy operates through networks of public servants, training institutes, regulatory agencies, and civil service commissions. Its focus is less on power politics and more on cooperation, mutual learning, and institutional trust-building.

Asia, as the world's most populous and diverse continent, provides a particularly fertile ground for exploring this concept. The region is home to advanced economies with highly developed bureaucratic systems, such as China, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore, as well as emerging economies still striving to modernize their public administration. Regional challenges such as climate change, migration, health crises, and digital transformation transcend national borders and require administrative cooperation that complements political agreements. However, mechanisms for systematic administrative collaboration in Asia remain fragmented and ad hoc.

Existing regional organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and broadly BRICS, provide platforms for political and economic dialogue, but they often lack robust frameworks for administrative cooperation. Unlike the European Union, where administrative integration has supported policy harmonization and capacity building, Asian regionalism has been more cautious and fragmented. This creates both a gap and an opportunity: the absence of an established paradigm for administrative diplomacy in Asia leaves room for innovation and the creation of new frameworks tailored to the region's unique diversity and needs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further underscored the urgency of such cooperation. Governments across Asia faced similar challenges—ranging from healthcare system overloads to supply chain disruptions—yet responses were largely national and uncoordinated. Stronger administrative networks could have facilitated the sharing of lessons, coordination of responses, and pooling of resources. Likewise, issues such as climate adaptation, digital governance, and disaster management demand transnational administrative mechanisms that move beyond political declarations.

This paper argues that administrative diplomacy provides a conceptual and practical framework for enhancing regional cooperation in public administration development across Asia. By institutionalizing mechanisms of administrative dialogue, capacity-building exchanges, and joint problem-solving, Asian countries can build mutual trust and resilience while advancing governance reforms aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and comprehensive Development Goals (CDGs).

The contribution of this study is threefold. First, it introduces the concept of administrative diplomacy as a distinct form of diplomacy that bridges governance and international cooperation. Second, it situates the concept within the Asian context, highlighting the specific challenges and opportunities of the region. Third, it proposes a new framework built on four pillars—knowledge sharing and policy learning, capacity building and training, institutional networking, and collaborative problem-solving—that can guide policymakers, practitioners, and academics in advancing administrative diplomacy.

The paper is structured as follows. Section Two provides the conceptual foundations of administrative diplomacy and differentiates it from related forms of diplomacy. Section Three discusses the regional context of Asia, outlining governance challenges and opportunities for collaboration. Section Four presents the proposed framework for administrative diplomacy, followed by illustrative cases in Section Five. Section Six highlights expected outcomes and policy implications, and Section Seven concludes with recommendations for future research and practice.

By articulating administrative diplomacy as both a theoretical construct and a practical policy tool, this study seeks to enrich the discourse on comparative public administration and open new avenues for regional cooperation in Asia.

1. Defining Administrative Diplomacy

Diplomacy has traditionally been associated with the conduct of international relations through state actors and foreign ministries. However, as globalization has deepened and governance challenges have become increasingly transnational, new dimensions of diplomacy have emerged. *Administrative diplomacy* can be defined as the systematic, cross-border engagement of public administrations aimed at exchanging knowledge, building institutional capacities, transferring best practices, and fostering collaborative solutions to shared problems.

Unlike traditional diplomacy, which emphasizes negotiations and political interests, administrative diplomacy operates through bureaucratic channels, public sector institutions, and networks of civil servants. Its purpose is not to advance power politics but to strengthen governance systems, improve administrative effectiveness, and build mutual trust between states (Kettl, 2015).

1-1. Related Concepts and Distinctions

Administrative diplomacy is closely related to, but distinct from, several other forms of diplomacy:

- **Traditional diplomacy:** Focused on interstate relations, treaties, and political negotiations, usually through ministries of foreign affairs (Berridge, 2022).
- **Public diplomacy:** Seeks to influence foreign publics and promote soft power through cultural and educational exchange (Cull, 2009).
- **Economic diplomacy:** Concerned with trade, investment, and economic cooperation (Okano-Heijmans, 2013).
- **Knowledge diplomacy / Education diplomacy:** Involves the use of academic and training cooperation to build relationships (Knight, 2019).

Administrative diplomacy differs in that its primary actors are public administrators and civil service institutions, rather than diplomats or political leaders. It emphasizes practical cooperation, policy learning, and administrative reforms.

1-2. Theoretical Underpinnings

The study of administrative diplomacy can be situated within several theoretical perspectives:

1. **Institutional Theory:** Institutions are not isolated but embedded in broader environments where they adapt and learn from others. Regional

cooperation among bureaucracies can be seen as institutional isomorphism, where organizations borrow practices to enhance legitimacy and efficiency (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

2. **Governance Networks:** Modern governance is increasingly characterized by interdependence and collaboration across borders. Administrative diplomacy can be interpreted as the creation of transnational governance networks among public administrations (Rhodes, 1997).
3. **Policy Transfer and Policy Learning:** Administrative diplomacy facilitates the transfer of policies and practices from one context to another, not through coercion, but through voluntary learning, benchmarking, and adaptation (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000).
4. **Regionalism and International Public Administration:** Comparative studies on regional integration highlight the role of bureaucratic cooperation in building functional regimes, such as the European Union's administrative capacity-building mechanisms (Olsen, 2003). Asia, however, has fewer institutionalized mechanisms, which makes administrative diplomacy a potential driver of future regionalism.

1-3. Toward a Conceptual Model

Bringing these perspectives together, administrative diplomacy can be conceptualized as a hybrid form of international cooperation that:

- Operates primarily through bureaucracies and public administrations.
- Relies on institutional learning and policy transfer.
- Builds cross-border governance networks.
- Strengthens state capacity and legitimacy in the international arena.

This conceptualization positions administrative diplomacy as an innovative addition to the broader typology of diplomacy studies, filling a gap between traditional diplomacy and transnational governance.

2. Regional Context of Asia

2-1. Public Administration Challenges in Asia

Asia is characterized by its extraordinary diversity in political systems, economic capacities, cultural traditions, and stages of administrative development. Advanced economies such as China, Japan, Singapore, and South Korea are often cited as models of bureaucratic efficiency and innovation, while emerging and developing countries in South and Central Asia face persistent challenges related to capacity deficits, corruption, and

uneven institutional development. This wide disparity creates both obstacles and opportunities for regional cooperation in public administration.

Transnational challenges—climate change, disaster management, pandemics, digital transformation, migration, and regional security—require solutions that transcend national boundaries. However, most Asian cooperation mechanisms remain politically driven, with limited institutionalized frameworks for administrative exchange and learning. This gap highlights the potential of *administrative diplomacy* as a complementary approach to political and economic integration.

2-2. Regional Organizations and Opportunities for Administrative Cooperation

Some regional organizations in Asia provide platforms that could host or strengthen administrative diplomacy:

- **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN):** ASEAN has developed a modest but growing agenda for administrative cooperation, including the ASEAN Cooperation on Civil Service Matters (ACCSM), which promotes exchange programs, capacity building, and public sector reforms across member states (Berman, 2011).
- **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC):** Although hampered by political tensions, SAARC provides an institutional framework for South Asian countries to collaborate on development issues, including governance and administrative training. However, its initiatives remain underutilized due to interstate rivalries.
- **Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO):** Initially security-focused, SCO has gradually expanded into economic, cultural, and administrative cooperation. It has promoted exchange among civil service academies and public administration institutions, though still at an early stage.
- **BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa):** Although not limited to Asia, BRICS provides an important platform for emerging economies—particularly China and India—to collaborate on governance modernization, digital public services, and administrative reform (Stuenkel, 2015).
- **Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)** is a regional intergovernmental organization founded in 1985 by Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey, later expanded to include ten member states from West, Central, and South Asia. Its primary objective is to promote sustainable economic development, trade facilitation, transport connectivity, and regional integration (ECO Secretariat, 2023).

- **Asian Development Bank (ADB) and UNESCAP:** Both international organizations, though not regional treaties per se, play an important role in supporting governance capacity-building and administrative reforms across Asian states.

2-3. Gaps and Potential for Administrative Diplomacy

Despite these mechanisms, administrative cooperation in Asia remains fragmented and ad hoc:

- Programs often lack continuity and institutional depth.
- Exchange of civil servants or policy professionals is limited compared to Europe or North America.
- Political tensions (e.g., between India and Pakistan) frequently inhibit broader regional cooperation.

Nevertheless, these same conditions underline the importance of administrative diplomacy: while political disputes may stall high-level agreements, bureaucratic collaboration can advance more quietly and pragmatically. By focusing on technical issues—such as digital governance, regulatory harmonization, disaster preparedness, and public health administration—administrative diplomacy can build trust incrementally, thereby contributing to long-term regional stability.

2-4. Toward a Regional Administrative Space in Asia

Drawing from comparative experiences such as the European Union's development of a "European Administrative Space" (Olsen, 2003), Asia has the potential to cultivate its own model of cross-border bureaucratic cooperation. Such a model would not aim for uniformity, given Asia's diversity, but rather for interoperability, policy learning, and mutual support. Administrative diplomacy can thus serve as a building block for a more resilient and cooperative Asian governance order.

3. A Proposed Framework of Administrative Diplomacy in Asia

3-1. Pillars of Administrative Diplomacy

Building upon literature and comparative experiences, administrative diplomacy in Asia can be conceptualized around **four interrelated pillars**:

1. **Knowledge Sharing and Policy Learning**
    - Exchange of best practices in areas such as social capital, welfare, citizen Satisfaction, digital governance, anti-corruption, public service delivery, and performance management.

- Joint research projects, comparative policy studies, and benchmarking exercises.

2. **Capacity Building and Training**
   - Regional training programs for civil servants hosted by national academies and schools of government.
   - Fellowship schemes, study visits, and secondments among member states.
   - Development of shared curricula on governance challenges relevant to Asia.
3. **Institutional Networking**
   - Formation of transnational networks of public administration institutions, civil service commissions, and ministries of administrative reform.
   - Partnerships between regional centers of excellence and public policy schools.
   - Role of professional and academic associations (e.g., Asian Association for Public Administration, national public administration societies) in facilitating academic–practitioner dialogue.
4. **Collaborative Problem-Solving**
   - Establishing working groups on cross-border issues such as disaster risk management, climate adaptation, health crises, and digital transformation.
   - Use of regional platforms to design collective responses and pilot projects.
   - Institutionalizing joint task forces and shared databases for evidence-based policymaking.

3-2. Key Processes in Administrative Diplomacy

Administrative diplomacy is not a one-time intervention but an ongoing process that involves:

- **Dialogue:** Regular forums, conferences, and workshops among senior administrators and scholars to create shared understanding.
- **Exchange:** Structured programs for civil servant mobility, peer learning, and study missions.
- **Standardization:** Development of soft standards and guidelines for governance reforms (e.g., ethics codes, service quality frameworks).

- **Institutionalization:** Gradual embedding of cooperative practices into permanent regional structures.

These processes allow cooperation to move from ad hoc initiatives to sustainable institutional practices.

3-3. Barriers and Challenges

Despite its potential, administrative diplomacy in Asia faces several barriers:

- **Political Sensitivities:** Regional rivalries and lack of trust can restrict cooperation, especially in South and Central Asia.
- **Institutional Diversity:** Wide differences in administrative systems make harmonization difficult.
- **Resource Constraints:** Many developing countries lack the financial and human capital to engage in sustained exchange programs.
- **Fragmentation of Regional Organizations:** Overlapping mandates among ASEAN, SAARC, SCO, BRICS, and others often result in duplication rather than synergy.
- **Weak Knowledge Infrastructure:** Limited comparative research and underdeveloped regional databases restrict policy learning.

Recognizing these obstacles is critical for designing realistic frameworks of cooperation.

3-4. Role of Academic and Professional Associations

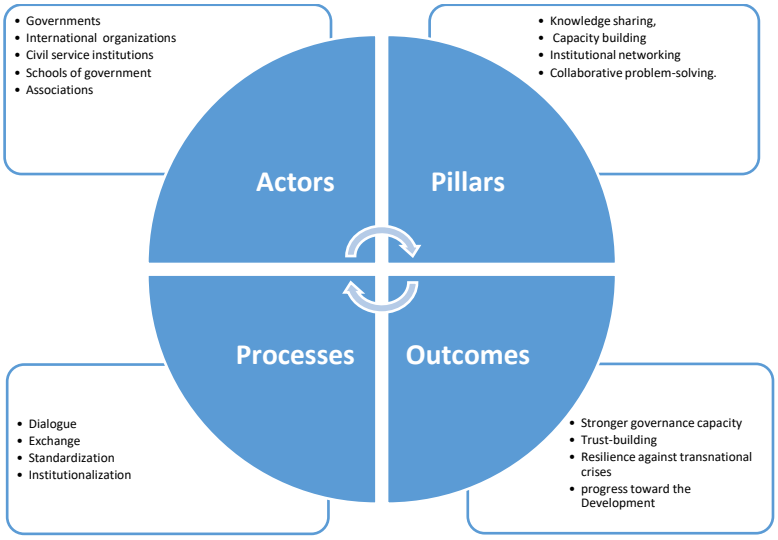
A unique advantage in fostering administrative diplomacy lies in the involvement of academic and professional associations of public administration. For example:

- The **Asian Association for Public Administration (AAPA)** has already initiated conferences and publications connecting scholars and practitioners.
- National societies of public administration—such as the Chinese Public Administration Society, Indian Institute of Public Administration, Korean Association for Public Administration, and Iran Association for Public Administration —can act as bridges between governments and academia.
- Collaborative projects between these associations can facilitate comparative research, regional training programs, and policy dialogues, ensuring that administrative diplomacy is grounded not only in political will but also in scientific evidence and professional expertise (Hou et al., 2011).

3-5. Toward a Practical Framework

Integrating the above elements, the proposed framework of administrative diplomacy in Asia can be summarized as:

- **Actors:** Governments, civil service institutions, schools of government, international organizations, and academic/professional associations.
- **Pillars:** Knowledge sharing, capacity building, institutional networking, collaborative problem-solving.
- **Processes:** Dialogue, exchange, standardization, institutionalization.
- **Outcomes:** Stronger governance capacity, trust-building, resilience against transnational crises, and progress toward the Comprehensive Development Goals.



This framework positions administrative diplomacy not only as a theoretical construction but also as a practical roadmap for enhancing regional cooperation in Asia.

4. Case Illustrations of Administrative Diplomacy

4-1. ASEAN Cooperation on Civil Service Matters (ACCSM)

One of the most prominent examples of administrative diplomacy in Asia is the ASEAN Cooperation on Civil Service Matters (ACCSM). Established in 1981, ACCSM aims to promote the exchange of experiences and best practices among ASEAN member states on issues such as civil service reforms, capacity building, and service delivery.

Key achievements include:

- Development of training modules on leadership, integrity, and public sector innovation.
- Civil servant exchange and study visit programs.
- Collaborative initiatives on e-governance and digital transformation (Quah, 2010).

ACCSM demonstrates that even in politically diverse regions, practical cooperation among public administrations can advance mutual learning and strengthen state capacity.

4-2. The Asian Association for Public Administration (AAPA)

The AAPA, founded in 2010, provides a regional academic–professional platform for dialogue on public administration. Although not an intergovernmental body, it plays an indirect but important role in administrative diplomacy by:

- Organizing annual conferences bringing together scholars, practitioners, and policymakers from across Asia.
- Publishing comparative research on governance and administrative reforms.
- Facilitating networks between national public administration societies, such as those in China, Korea, and India.

Through its activities, AAPA has contributed to building trust, advancing academic knowledge, and providing an evidence base for administrative reforms across the region.

4-3. Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

The SCO, originally focused on security, has gradually expanded its agenda to include administrative and developmental cooperation. In recent years, SCO members have initiated dialogues among civil service academies, particularly between China, Russia, and Central and West Asian states, to exchange training models and curricula. Although still limited in scope, these initiatives represent an evolving form of administrative diplomacy in Eurasia (Aris, 2011).

4-4. BRICS Governance Cooperation

Within BRICS, administrative diplomacy has emerged through joint working groups on governance modernization and digital government. For instance, the BRICS Working Group on Public Administration has facilitated policy

dialogues on digital transformation, anti-corruption, and public service innovation (Stuenkel, 2015). While not Asia-exclusive, BRICS provides India and China with a platform to exchange governance practices with other emerging powers, strengthening their administrative capacities and international legitimacy.

4-5. UNPAN, UNDP, and ADB Initiatives in Asia

Beyond intergovernmental bodies, international organizations such as the United Nations Public Administration Network (UNPAN), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) have supported regional initiatives for administrative reform. Examples include:

- UNPAN Online Training Centre delivers courses and features training material on various topics in public administration.
- UNDP's regional program for capacity building in e-governance.
- ADB's governance and public sector management initiatives that fund training programs, policy research, and institutional strengthening in multiple Asian countries (UNDP, 2014).

Although these are externally driven, they often act as catalysts for regional networking and policy learning.

4-6. Lessons Learned from Case Illustrations

From these cases, several lessons emerge for advancing administrative diplomacy in Asia:

1. **Institutional anchoring is essential.** Regional cooperation mechanisms must be embedded in formal structures (e.g., ACCSM within ASEAN) to ensure continuity.
2. **Academic and professional associations complement intergovernmental efforts.** Organizations like AAPA can sustain dialogue and knowledge exchange even when political cooperation stalls.
3. **Flexibility and pragmatism matter.** In politically sensitive regions, focusing on technical issues such as digital governance or disaster management helps bypass political tensions.
4. **External partners can act as enablers.** International organizations provide funding, expertise, and legitimacy that strengthen regional administrative initiatives.

5. Expected Outcomes and Policy Recommendations

5-1. Expected Outcomes of Administrative Diplomacy

If effectively institutionalized, administrative diplomacy in Asia could yield several important outcomes:

1. **Enhanced Governance Capacity**
    - Governments would gain access to a wider pool of administrative knowledge, reform models, and best practices.
    - Civil servants would benefit from training opportunities and cross-border exposure, leading to higher professionalism.
2. **Trust-Building Among States**
    - By focusing on technical cooperation rather than political disputes, administrative diplomacy can create channels of communication and build trust between states, even in politically tense environments.
3. **Resilience to Transnational Crises**
    - Shared platforms for public administration cooperation would enable faster and more coordinated responses to global and regional crises such as pandemics, climate change, natural disasters, and cyber threats.
4. **Progress Toward Comprehensive Development Goals (CDG)**
    - Administrative diplomacy can accelerate achievement of CDGs by fostering inclusive governance, reducing institutional inequalities, and promoting collaborative and comprehensive solutions.
5. **Strengthening Regional Identity**
    - Just as the European Administrative Space helped shape a shared European governance culture, an Asian approach to administrative diplomacy could foster a sense of regional identity rooted in governance cooperation.

5-2. Policy Recommendations

To move administrative diplomacy from concept to practice, several policy measures are recommended:

For National Governments:

- Establish bilateral and multilateral Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) on civil service exchange and administrative training.

- Create national focal points or units within ministries of administrative reform or public service commissions dedicated to regional cooperation.
- Support the mobility of civil servants by funding exchange programs, joint fellowships, and professional networks.

For Regional Organizations (ASEAN, SAARC, SCO, BRICS, etc.):

- Institutionalize regional forums on public administration to meet regularly and set shared agendas.
- Develop regional databases and knowledge platforms for policy learning and best practice exchange.
- Launch joint task forces on transnational challenges such as disaster management, digital governance, and health administration.
- Provide funding mechanisms for collaborative pilot projects that demonstrate the value of administrative diplomacy.

For Academic and Professional Associations:

- Expand the role of organizations such as the Asian Association for Public Administration (AAPA) to act as intermediaries between governments and research communities.
- Promote comparative research projects on administrative reforms in Asia.
- Develop regional curricula and joint training programs in partnership with schools of government and civil service academies.
- Encourage peer-reviewed publications and knowledge dissemination focused on administrative diplomacy.

For International Organizations (UNPAN, UNDP, ADB, etc.):

- Provide technical assistance and funding for administrative diplomacy initiatives.
- Facilitate triangular cooperation by linking Asian countries with global best practices.
- Act as neutral conveners to overcome political barriers and foster regional dialogue.

5-3. Strategic Implications

Implementing administrative diplomacy will not only improve the technical effectiveness of governance but also reshape regional cooperation in Asia by adding a bureaucratic and institutional dimension. This complements

political and economic diplomacy, helping Asia develop a more comprehensive and resilient governance architecture.

6. Conclusion and Future Research Directions

6-1. Conclusion

This paper has introduced the concept of administrative diplomacy as an innovative construct and framework for enhancing regional cooperation in public administration across Asia. The idea of administrative diplomacy in Asia is not entirely new. Historically, vast parts of Asia—from China to India and Persia—shared interconnected bureaucratic traditions and administrative practices that facilitated governance, trade, and cultural exchange across empires. For instance, during the Seljuk and Timurid periods, administrative institutions drew upon Persian bureaucratic models, which were later adopted and localized across Central and South Asia (Lambton, 1980). Similarly, the Mughal Empire in India institutionalized Persian as the administrative and court language, creating a shared medium of bureaucratic interaction across diverse regions (Richards, 1993).

China also exerted a profound influence through its Confucian bureaucratic system, merit-based civil service examinations, and centralized governance practices, many of which inspired neighboring states such as Korea, Vietnam, and even administrative reforms in Central Asia (Fairbank & Goldman, 2006). These overlapping legacies of Persian, Islamic, and Confucian administrative traditions demonstrate that Asia historically experienced forms of administrative convergence that enabled diplomacy, cultural exchange, and governance cooperation long before modern concepts of regional integration emerged.

This historical continuity provides an important foundation for conceptualizing a modern Asian Administrative Space, where administrative diplomacy could build upon both shared traditions and contemporary institutional innovations.

Unlike traditional diplomacy, which primarily focuses on political negotiations, administrative diplomacy operates through bureaucracies, civil service institutions, and professional associations to achieve shared governance objectives.

The analysis highlighted:

1. **The conceptual foundations** of administrative diplomacy, drawing on institutional theory, governance networks, and policy transfer mechanisms.

2. **The regional context of Asia**, including governance disparities, the role of organizations such as ASEAN, SAARC, SCO, ECO, and BRICS, and the opportunities and challenges for cross-border administrative cooperation.
3. **A practical framework**, built around four pillars—knowledge sharing, capacity building, institutional networking, and collaborative problem-solving—supported by processes such as dialogue, exchange, standardization, and institutionalization.
4. **Case illustrations**, including ACCSM, AAPA, SCO initiatives, BRICS governance cooperation, and international development partners, demonstrating the feasibility and impact of administrative diplomacy.
5. **Expected outcomes and policy recommendations**, emphasizing enhanced governance capacity, trust-building, resilience to transnational crises, and progress toward comprehensive Development Goals (CDGs).

Collectively, these findings suggest that administrative diplomacy can act as a complementary mechanism to political and economic integration in Asia, fostering mutual learning, strengthening state capacity, and enabling coordinated responses to complex regional challenges. By institutionalizing administrative networks and engaging professional associations, countries can achieve sustainable improvements in public administration while building regional trust and identity.

6-2. Future Research Directions

Although this paper provides a conceptual and practical framework, several avenues for future research remain:

- **Empirical evaluation of administrative diplomacy initiatives:** Comparative studies measuring the impact of civil servant exchanges, joint training programs, and policy transfers on governance performance.

- **Digital and e-governance dimensions:** Investigating how digital platforms and data-sharing mechanisms can enhance administrative diplomacy, particularly for cross-border crisis management.

- **Role of subnational governments:** Exploring how provincial, municipal, or local governments can participate in administrative diplomacy, complementing national-level cooperation.

- Institutional design and sustainability: Identifying optimal structures for regional administrative networks to ensure continuity, adaptability, and political neutrality.

- Cross-regional learning: Examining lessons from other regions, such as the European Administrative Space, to inform Asia-specific approaches while considering political, cultural, and economic diversity.

By addressing these research gaps, scholars and practitioners can refine administrative diplomacy as a tool for enhancing governance capacity, resilience, and cooperation in Asia and beyond.

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A Meta-Synthesis of the Determining Components of Islamic Financial Literacy in the Iranian Banking System

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Abstract

Purpose — This study aims to identify and conceptualize the key components of Islamic financial literacy (IFL) within Iran's banking system, recognizing its growing importance in enabling individuals and institutions to make Shariah-compliant financial decisions, minimize Shariah non-compliance risk, and navigate the complexities of the global financial environment.

Design/Methodology/Approach — Adopting a qualitative meta-synthesis and content analysis design, the study systematically reviewed literature indexed in Scopus and Web of Science from 2000 to 2025, supplemented with domestic regulatory documents issued by the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran. From an initial pool of 339 studies, a three-stage screening process yielded 46 valid sources, which were coded and analyzed using MAXQDA 2020 software.

Findings — The results introduce a localized, three-dimensional framework of Islamic financial literacy, encompassing Islamic financial knowledge, Islamic financial attitude, and Islamic financial behavior—each consisting of eight codes, totaling 24 key components. These components include familiarity with Islamic financial concepts and contracts (riba, mudarabah, murabahah), the ability to distinguish halal from haram transactions, understanding of jurisprudential principles (gharar, la darar, akl al-mal bil-batil), and awareness of the linkage between financing, real assets, and ethical as well as regulatory requirements.

Originality/Value — This research is the first systematic meta-synthesis in the Iranian context, integrating international literature with domestic Shariah governance documents. It presents a theoretical–practical framework that can inform policy development, educational initiatives, and Islamic banking practices aimed at strengthening financial literacy in a Shariah-compliant context.

Keywords

Islamic Financial Literacy, Meta-Synthesis, Qualitative Content Analysis, Iranian Banking System, Islamic Banking.

Introduction

Over the past few decades, financial literacy has emerged as a fundamental pillar in enhancing individuals' economic well-being and reinforcing the stability of financial systems. It extends beyond mere public awareness of financial matters, encompassing a systematic ability to comprehend, analyze, and apply financial knowledge and skills in making prudent decisions related to saving, investment, debt management, and effective engagement with financial institutions.

Nevertheless, in societies whose economic and financial foundations are rooted in the principles of Islamic Shariah, financial literacy cannot be adequately conceptualized through conventional Western paradigms. Instead, it must be redefined within a framework aligned with the jurisprudential, ethical, and economic foundations of Islam.

The banking system of the Islamic Republic of Iran, established upon the principles of interest-free banking and the application of Shariah-compliant contracts, exemplifies the need for specialized mechanisms within the context of Islamic banking. In such a setting, banking employees and stakeholders require dual competencies: mastery of conventional financial and banking concepts, and a profound understanding of Shariah-based requirements and sensitivities in financial transactions. A lack of this dual understanding can give rise to Shariah non-compliance risk, ultimately eroding public trust in the Islamic financial system. Therefore, the development and institutionalization of Islamic financial literacy constitute not merely an educational or academic necessity but an integral component of economic governance in an Islamic framework.

Despite its crucial importance, the extant literature reveals the absence of a comprehensive and coherent theoretical framework for identifying the dimensions, components, and measurement indicators of Islamic financial literacy at both national and international levels. Existing studies—such as Qublan & Yıldız (2022), which remain primarily conceptual, and Sufyati (2021), which focus on limited aspects of the phenomenon—reflect a fragmented research landscape lacking theoretical integration. This fragmentation has hindered the design of valid measurement instruments, the development of effective educational programs, and the formulation of sound policy interventions aimed at promoting Islamic financial literacy. Consequently, developing a contextually grounded yet scientifically robust conceptual framework has become an inevitable prerequisite for advancing research and policymaking in this domain.

Accordingly, the present study seeks to identify, synthesize, and integrate the findings of previous research—both in general financial literacy and Islamic financial literacy—alongside national documents and the Central Bank of Iran's policy frameworks, to extract and analyze the key components of Islamic financial literacy within Iran's banking system. The research is structured around three core stages: identification, analysis, and conceptual modeling of Islamic financial literacy. The main research question guiding this study is "What are the key components determining Islamic financial literacy within the Iranian banking system?" and The ultimate objective is to propose a theoretically sound and practically applicable framework that can serve as a foundation for designing measurement tools, developing educational programs, and formulating policy strategies to enhance Islamic financial literacy across society.

1. Literature Review

1-1. The Concept and Dimensions of Financial Literacy

The rapid advancement of financial knowledge in the modern era, along with the emergence of increasingly complex and innovative financial instruments and institutions, has made attention to the notion of financial literacy an indispensable necessity for both individuals and organizations. This growing necessity is equally reflected in the theoretical literature, where numerous definitions of financial literacy have been proposed.

Lusardi and Mitchell (2023) define financial literacy as "the ability of individuals to understand and use financial information with the aim of making informed financial decisions." This ability encompasses a set of skills that enable individuals to manage everyday financial issues, including understanding concepts related to saving, investment, and financial planning. Financial literacy empowers individuals to navigate the complexities of today's financial world more effectively and to achieve financial well-being.

Similarly, Goyal and Kumar (2021) describe financial literacy as "the ability of individuals to comprehend and effectively utilize financial information for sound economic decision-making." This competency includes the capacity to use financial resources efficiently and to make optimal financial decisions.

Aprea (2016) extends this understanding by defining financial literacy as the knowledge and understanding of financial concepts and risks, together with the skills, motivation, and confidence to apply such knowledge and understanding for effective financial decision-making in order to improve

individual and collective financial well-being and facilitate participation in economic life.

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2017), financial literacy is "a combination of awareness, knowledge, skill, attitude, and behavior necessary to make sound financial decisions and ultimately achieve individual financial well-being."

In a similar vein, the United Kingdom's Financial Services Authority (FSA) defines financial literacy as a set of processes or activities aimed at enhancing the knowledge, confidence, and skills of consumers and the wider community to enable them to better manage their financial affairs.

The Financial Services Authority (2006) further specifies financial literacy as "the understanding of ordinary investors regarding the principles of markets, financial instruments, organizations, and regulations."

Moore (2003) conceptualizes financial literacy as a functional capacity, suggesting that individuals are considered financially literate when they can demonstrate their ability to effectively apply the knowledge they have acquired. Since financial literacy cannot be directly measured, it must be assessed through proxy indicators. It is acquired through practical experience and the active application of knowledge. As individuals enhance their literacy, their financial behavior becomes more sophisticated—an observation that may also signify an increase in overall financial competence.

Financial literacy is a multidimensional construct. Dewi et al. (2020) identified three primary dimensions of financial literacy: financial knowledge, financial behavior, and financial attitude:

1. Financial knowledge refers to the understanding of fundamental financial principles and awareness of financial products, playing a crucial role in enhancing the quality of financial decision-making.
2. Financial behavior encompasses practices such as saving, investing, spending, budgeting, and debt management, all of which are influenced by an individual's knowledge, attitudes, experiences, and social context.
3. Financial attitude reflects a person's beliefs, values, and emotional orientation toward money and economic matters, directly affecting sustainable and responsible financial behaviors.

Other studies—such as those by Lusardi and Mitchell (2023), Goyal and Kumar (2021), Hung et al. (2009), and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)—have similarly emphasized the core

competencies of financial literacy, highlighting dimensions such as awareness, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors.

Despite the diversity of approaches and conceptual models, a comparative review of both domestic and international studies indicates that the three components of financial knowledge, financial attitude, and financial behavior are consistently recognized as the fundamental and universal elements of financial literacy. These three dimensions represent the common core across most definitions and measurement frameworks of financial literacy and have appeared with the highest frequency in conceptual modeling of this construct.

1-2. The Concept and Dimensions of Islamic Financial Literacy

Despite the global development of theoretical literature on financial literacy, the fundamental differences between the economic and financial value systems of conventional and Islamic finance necessitate the development and enrichment of the theoretical foundations of Islamic financial literacy (IFL). Conventional financial literacy predominantly revolves around concepts such as profit, interest, and investment, whereas the Islamic financial system is governed by principles including the prohibition of riba (interest), profit-and-loss sharing, and the pursuit of economic and social justice.

Accordingly, for individuals living in Islamic societies or interacting with Islamic financial institutions, familiarity with Islamic financial literacy is essential. It enables them to make financial decisions in accordance with Shariah principles and to understand the fundamental distinctions between Islamic and conventional (non-Islamic) financial systems. The advancement of this body of knowledge contributes to enhancing public awareness and strengthening financial capabilities within an Islamic framework.

Rahman et al. (2018) and Nawi et al. (2022) define Islamic financial literacy as the understanding of Islamic financial products and related concepts that can be acquired through education and experience. Similarly, Nawi et al. (2018) describe IFL as individuals' knowledge and ability to comprehend and utilize Islamic financial concepts and instruments, which includes awareness of Shariah principles in finance, the ability to identify Islamic financial products, and the capability to make sound financial decisions in line with those principles.

Setyawati et al. (2018) emphasize that Islamic financial literacy is an essential concept for Muslim financial decision-making, referring to individuals' ability to understand and use Islamic financial products

effectively, thereby facilitating proper financial decisions consistent with Islamic teachings.

Ahmad et al. (2020) highlight that Islamic financial literacy encompasses cognitive knowledge concerning Shariah compliance, prohibition of riba, and participation in profit-sharing mechanisms. Kevser & Doğan (2021) define it concisely as the comprehension and application of financial knowledge based on Islamic law.

Furthermore, Parhan et al. (2022) state that Islamic financial literacy entails better financial management and the ability to make intelligent choices regarding halal and profitable investments. Alsayigh et al. (2022) similarly conceptualize Islamic financial literacy as the ability to understand and apply Islamic financial concepts such as Islamic banking, social finance, and Shariah-compliant investments.

A review of prior studies on Islamic financial literacy indicates that several researchers have explored its underlying dimensions, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Dimensions of Islamic Financial Literacy and their definitions

Dimension	Definition
Islamic Financial Knowledge	Refers to a set of information, skills, and perceptions that enable individuals to become familiar with Islamic financial principles and concepts, and to apply them effectively in daily life and financial decision-making. (Gunawan et al., 2021; Albaity & Rahman, 2019; Muslichah & Sanusi, 2020; Osman et al., 2024; Yulius Dharma et al., 2024; Roemanasari et al., 2022).
Islamic Financial Attitude	Represents a Shariah-based perspective on financial matters, emphasizing adherence to principles such as the prohibition of riba (interest), fairness, honesty, and conducting transactions within the framework of Islamic rulings. This attitude shapes individuals' financial orientation not merely from the standpoint of efficiency, but also upon the foundation of religious and ethical values. (Atmadja et al., 2021; Siswanti et al., 2024).
Islamic Financial Behavior	Encompasses the financial processes and actions of individuals and institutions that are guided by Islamic principles—particularly Shariah jurisprudence—and emphasize compliance with religious laws and values in financial decision-making. (Ramadhani, 2020; Risman et al., 2024).

1-3. Differences Between Conventional and Islamic Financial Literacy

Differences in Foundations and Theoretical Frameworks. Conventional financial literacy is rooted in the doctrines of classical and neoclassical

economics and is founded upon the model of the "rational economic man." Within this paradigm, financial decision-making is primarily driven by the objective of maximizing personal utility and optimizing resource allocation to achieve higher profits or returns (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2014). In contrast, Islamic financial literacy emerges from the teachings of Islamic Shariah and, in addition to economic rationality, incorporates principles such as justice, fairness, human dignity, social responsibility, and adherence to religious rulings as its theoretical foundations (Dinc et al., 2021). Accordingly, profit in this framework is not merely understood as a quantitative increase in wealth, but must also satisfy the requirements of Shariah legitimacy and ethical acceptability.

Differences in the Treatment of Interest (Riba). One of the most fundamental distinctions between the two approaches lies in their respective positions on interest (riba). In the conventional financial system, interest is considered a natural and legitimate mechanism for financing, investment, and financial resource management, forming the backbone of most monetary and banking policies. Conversely, in the Islamic financial system, riba is strictly prohibited, and a variety of Shariah-compliant alternatives—such as mudarabah, murabahah, ijarah muntahia bittamleek (lease-to-own), and musharakah madani (joint partnership)—are employed for financing purposes (Haniffa & Hudaib, 2007). These alternatives not only prevent financial exploitation but also emphasize the principles of profit-and-loss sharing and fair risk distribution.

Differences in Financial Instruments and Products. In the conventional financial literacy literature, instruments such as interest-bearing savings accounts, credit cards, bonds, and commercial insurance are commonly introduced as standard tools of financial management. However, in the context of Islamic financial literacy, all such instruments must be assessed through the lens of Shariah compliance. For instance, conventional bonds are replaced by Sukuk (Islamic securities), while in the field of insurance, conventional contracts—often characterized by elements of gharar (uncertainty) and riba—are substituted with Takaful, a cooperative and ethically oriented system (Alam et al., 2019). Therefore, the primary objective of Islamic financial instruments is not merely to generate profit but the attainment of permissible (halal) profit accompanied by adherence to ethical and religious principles.

Differences in the Approach to Financial Decision-Making and Ultimate Objectives. In conventional financial literacy, financial decision-making is primarily centered on improving the economic well-being of individuals and households. In contrast, Islamic financial literacy situates financial decisions

within a broader moral and spiritual framework in which every financial choice must simultaneously be assessed in terms of its Shariah permissibility and ethical acceptability. Hence, even if a decision appears economically profitable, it loses its legitimacy if it contradicts Shariah principles. Accordingly, in Islamic financial literacy, financial decision-making is not merely a means of enhancing personal welfare but serves as a mechanism for fulfilling religious responsibility and strengthening social solidarity (Dinc et al., 2021).

Differences in Emphasis on Ethics and Social Responsibility. In conventional financial literacy, ethics and social responsibility are often regarded as supplementary rather than foundational values, and thus occupy a peripheral role. Conversely, in Islamic financial literacy, these elements form the very core of the financial system. Key components such as Zakat (obligatory almsgiving), Waqf (endowment), and Sadaqah (voluntary charity) are integral parts of Islamic financial literacy. They not only contribute to a more equitable distribution of wealth and the reduction of socioeconomic disparities but also encourage individuals to play an active social role and strengthen communal solidarity (Sarea & Hanefah, 2013). Therefore, understanding and practicing these principles constitute an essential aspect of Islamic financial literacy, distinguishing it fundamentally from the conventional approach.

1-4. Islamic Financial Literacy and Islamic Banking

Islamic financial literacy (IFL)—defined as the ability to understand, analyze, and make sound financial decisions based on Shariah principles—plays a crucial role in achieving the objectives of Islamic banking. It enables individuals to make informed economic decisions by fully understanding Shariah-compliant financial instruments, products, and services. Within the Islamic banking system, the enhancement of financial literacy among bank employees and managers is a prerequisite for the proper implementation of Shariah-compliant processes and the effective delivery of Islamic financial services. Knowledgeable staff who possess a deep understanding of jurisprudential concepts and banking regulations are better equipped to provide accurate advisory and operational services, thereby minimizing both Shariah and financial non-compliance risks. Similarly, customers with a strong level of Islamic financial literacy are able to make informed choices about Islamic banking products and services, avoid prohibited financial practices such as Riba (interest) and Qharar (excessive uncertainty), and actively contribute to the promotion of Islamic financial culture (Junipa & Sugiarti, 2024).

The relationship between Islamic financial literacy and Islamic banking is both complementary and interactive, in structural as well as operational terms. Islamic financial literacy not only provides the cognitive and conceptual foundation required for implementing Islamic banking practices but also enhances the efficiency, credibility, and trust within the banking system. In other words, the higher the level of Islamic financial literacy among employees and customers, the greater the likelihood of accurate and successful implementation of Islamic banking principles. This reciprocal relationship highlights the importance of education and the promotion of Islamic financial literacy at all levels of the banking system, as the realization of Islamic banking objectives requires the alignment of knowledge, attitudes, and financial behavior across all stakeholders. Therefore, Islamic financial literacy serves as a key enabler—both facilitating the development of Islamic banking and fostering the broader dissemination of Islamic financial culture within society (Adawiah et al., 2024).

Previous studies have primarily focused on examining the dimensions of Islamic financial literacy and the role of financial knowledge, attitude, and behavior in the adoption of Islamic banking, as well as the factors influencing the level of financial literacy among students and banking customers in various countries, including Indonesia, Pakistan, Turkey, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates (Ahmad et al., 2016). Most of these studies have concentrated on identifying indicators, measuring the level of Islamic financial literacy, and exploring the relationships between variables and the intention to use Islamic banking. They have typically relied on limited sample sizes, quantitative questionnaires, and context-specific analyses. In contrast, the present study adopts a meta-synthesis approach that moves beyond focusing on a single dimension or population sample. It seeks to identify and integrate the key components influencing Islamic financial literacy within Iran's banking system and to examine, in a comprehensive manner, the interconnections and reciprocal effects among these components. This research contributes by providing an integrated framework for policymaking and education in Islamic financial literacy in Iran. Its distinctiveness lies in its comprehensiveness, its specific focus on the Iranian banking context, and its methodological advancement through the use of meta-synthesis to combine both qualitative and quantitative findings—representing a significant step forward compared to prior studies (Qublan & Yıldız, 2022).

2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and applied research approach. Data were collected through a systematic review of documents and scholarly works,

employing the meta-synthesis method. The focus of the study was on international research related to financial literacy and Islamic financial literacy. Data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis with the aid of MAXQDA software (version 2020).

2-1. Meta-Synthesis Methodology

The meta-synthesis method involves integrating and interpreting the primary data extracted from selected studies. In other words, meta-synthesis is a qualitative analytical approach that reinterprets and synthesizes the findings of previous research using the established techniques of qualitative coding and thematic analysis (Mohammadian et al., 2017). This approach can be implemented through several systematic stages. In the present study, the seven-step model proposed by Barroso and Sandelowski (2007) was employed.

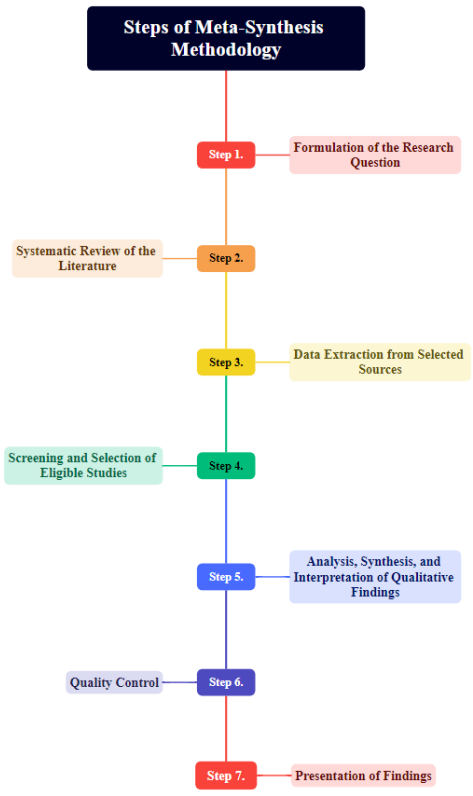

Figure 1. Steps of Meta-Synthesis Methodology (source: Baghmirani et al, 2018)

Step 1: Formulation of the Research Question. In the first stage, the research question must be clearly formulated based on several key indicators such as the target group, the nature of the subject, the time frame, and the method of implementation. The formulation of the research question serves as the foundation of the entire meta-synthesis process, guiding the selection, evaluation, and interpretation of previous studies. The key elements of the research process are summarized in the table 2. This structure ensures that the study follows a systematic approach to data collection and analysis, and that its findings are grounded in a scientifically documented and transparent methodology.

Table 2. Indicators for Formulating the Research Question

Indicator	Description
What	The components influencing the design of the Islamic financial literacy measurement framework.
Who	English-language scholarly articles on financial literacy and Islamic financial literacy measurement published in reputable academic journals.
When	From 2000 to 2025.
How	Qualitative content analysis using MAXQDA 2020 software and documentary analysis of qualitative data.

Step 2: Systematic Review of the Literature. This stage involves several essential sub-steps that ensure the comprehensiveness and rigor of the meta-synthesis process:

Searching for relevant sources. To conduct a meta-synthesis, it is first necessary to determine whether sufficient and relevant studies exist within the field of interest. Accordingly, a preliminary search was carried out in reputable academic databases to assess the adequacy of existing research for conducting a comprehensive analysis.

Selection of appropriate keywords. Based on a preliminary review of related studies and consultations with academic supervisors and subject-matter experts, a set of relevant keywords was developed to guide the systematic search process.

Selection of databases. To ensure both the breadth and precision of the search, several databases were initially examined. Ultimately, two major databases—Scopus and Web of Science—were selected as the primary sources for data collection. This decision was made due to the diversity, reliability, and academic rigor of the publications indexed within these databases.

The detailed search commands used in the selected databases are presented in table 3:

Table 3. Database search Query details

Website	Search Query	Result
Web of Science	AK=("Islam*" AND "Financ*" AND "literacy") OR TI=("Islam*" AND "Financ*" AND "literacy") OR AK=("Islam*" AND "Financ*" AND "literacy" AND "Scale") OR TI=("Islam*" AND "Financ*" AND "literacy" AND "Scale") OR AK=("Islam*" AND "Financ*" AND "literacy" AND "knowledge") OR TI=("Islam*" AND "Financ*" AND "literacy" AND "knowledge") OR AK=("Islam*" AND "Financ*" AND "literacy" AND "Index") OR TI=("Islam*" AND "Financ*" AND "literacy" AND "Index") OR AK=("Islam*" AND "Financ*" AND "literacy" AND "Measure*") OR TI=("Islam*" AND "Financ*" AND "literacy" AND "Measure*") OR AK=("Islam*" AND "Financ*" AND "literacy" AND "Bank*") OR TI=("Islam*" AND "Financ*" AND "literacy" AND "Bank*") OR AK=("Financ*" AND "literacy*" AND "Index") OR TI=("Financ*" AND "literacy*" AND "Index") OR AK=("Financ*" AND "literacy*" AND "Measure*") OR TI=("Financ*" AND "literacy*" AND "Measure*") OR AK=("Financ*" AND "literacy*" AND "Scale") OR TI=("Financ*" AND "literacy*" AND "Scale") OR AK=("Financ*" AND "literacy*" AND "knowledge") OR TI=("Financ*" AND "literacy*" AND "knowledge") Search Query in Scopus (resulting in 79 records):	356 records
Scopus	•TITLE ("Islam*" AND "Financ*" AND "literacy") OR AUTHKEY ("Islam*" AND "Financ*" AND "literacy") OR TITLE ("Islam*" AND "Financ*" AND "literacy" AND "Scale") OR AUTHKEY ("Islam*" AND "Financ*" AND "literacy" AND "Scale") OR AUTHKEY ("Islam*" AND "Financ*" AND "literacy" AND "knowledge") OR TITLE ("Islam*" AND "Financ*" AND "literacy" AND "knowledge") OR AUTHKEY ("Islam*" AND "Financ*" AND "literacy" AND "Index") OR TITLE ("Islam*" AND "Financ*" AND "literacy" AND "Index") OR TITLE ("Islam*" AND "Financ*" AND "literacy" AND "Measure*") OR AUTHKEY ("Islam*" AND "Financ*" AND "literacy" AND "Measure*") OR AUTHKEY ("Islam*" AND "Financ*" AND "literacy" AND "Bank*") OR TITLE ("Islam*" AND "Financ*" AND "literacy" AND "Bank*")	79 records

After executing these search queries, the retrieved articles were filtered based on two criteria:

(a) publication in the English language, and (b) inclusion in peer-reviewed academic journals.

Duplicate articles appearing in both databases were identified and removed. As a result, the total number of studies retained for review was reduced to 339.

Step 3: Data Extraction from Selected Sources. In this stage, the selected articles are carefully reviewed to extract their key findings and relevant content. The extracted information is systematically organized based on the following criteria:

1. Identification of relevant bibliographic information — including the authors' names, year of publication, and the main variables or constructs discussed in each study.
2. Recording methodological details — such as the research objectives, methods, implementation steps, and measurement instruments utilized in the studies.

This stage ensures that all relevant studies are analyzed consistently and that their methodological and conceptual contributions are appropriately documented for subsequent synthesis.

Step 4: Screening and Selection of Eligible Studies. At this stage, it is essential for the researcher to establish explicit criteria for selecting appropriate studies. These criteria are categorized into two groups: inclusion criteria and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria determine which studies are considered relevant and suitable for inclusion in the analysis, while the exclusion criteria specify which studies—although initially identified through the inclusion criteria—should be omitted from the final review. This two-level screening process ensures that only high-quality, relevant, and methodologically sound studies are retained for synthesis, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the meta-synthesis results.

In This Study, Following the determination of keywords and the systematic search across the selected databases, duplicate entries were removed, resulting in the identification of 339 initial studies.

The screening process was conducted in three sequential stages:

- In the first stage, after reviewing the article titles, 175 studies were excluded, leaving 164 for further review.
- In the second stage, after examining the abstracts, 80 additional studies were eliminated, and 84 were advanced to the next phase.

- In the third stage, after a full-text review, the remaining irrelevant articles were removed.

Ultimately, 46 studies were selected as relevant sources for analysis.

The detailed screening procedure of the reviewed studies is illustrated schematically in Figure 2.

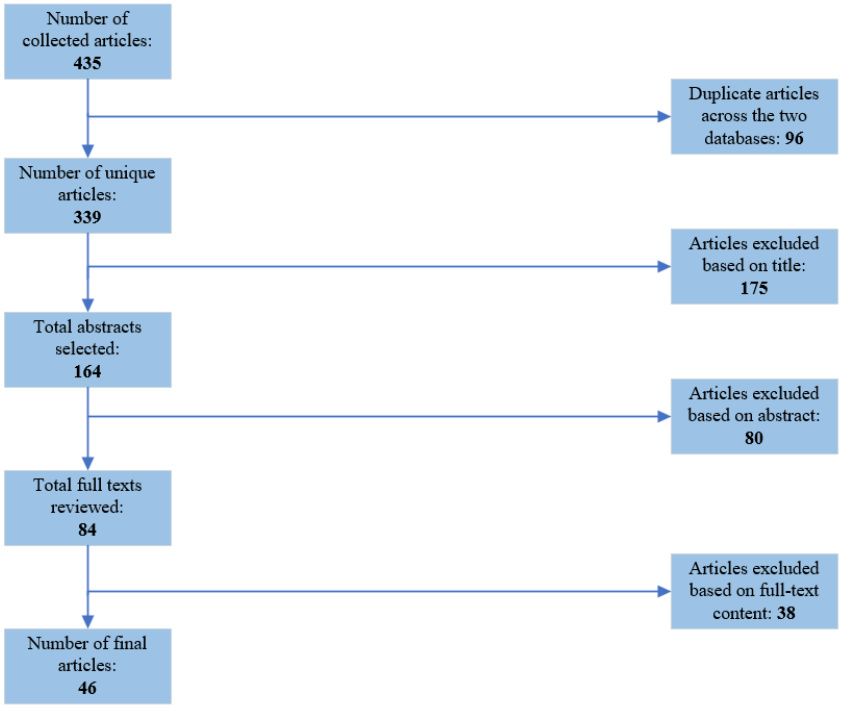

Figure 2. Screening Procedure for Selecting the Final Studies

Up to this stage of the present study, the key components determining Islamic financial literacy within the banking system were identified and analyzed in detail through a review of the selected international studies. However, it is essential to note that the extracted components must align with the structural, legal, and supervisory framework of Iran's banking system. Accordingly, these components should be consistent with the regulatory and operational ecosystem governing the Iranian banking context. This consideration necessitates that, in addition to refining and contextualizing the components derived from international (English-language) studies, relevant domestic documents also be reviewed. To this end, the study examined Shariah Board circulars of the Central Bank of Iran,

regulatory checklists, and standardized banking contracts issued by the Central Bank. A summary of these reviewed documents is presented in Table 3.

Table 4. Circulars and Domestic Documents Utilized

No.	Document Title
1	Standard Ijarah Muntahia Bittamleek (Lease-to-Own) Contract – Central Bank of Iran
2	Standard Istisna‘ Contract – Central Bank of Iran
3	Standard Ju‘alah Contract – Central Bank of Iran
4	Standard Bai ‘al-Dayn (Debt Purchase) Contract – Central Bank of Iran
5	Standard Salam (Forward Sale) Contract – Central Bank of Iran
6	Standard Murabahah Contract – Central Bank of Iran
7	Standard Muzara‘ah (Sharecropping) Contract – Central Bank of Iran
8	Standard Musāqāt (Irrigation Partnership) Contract – Central Bank of Iran
9	Circular: “Requirement to Explain Contracts to Customers Using Clear and Accurate Language”
10	Circular: “Operational Guidelines for Shariah Supervision and Compliance in Credit Institutions”
11	Circular: “Assessment of Jurisprudential Challenges Related to Preferential Deposits in the National Banking Network”
12	Supervisory Checklists on “Shariah Compliance in the Implementation of Islamic Contracts” – Central Bank of Iran

Step 5: Analysis, Synthesis, and Interpretation of Qualitative Findings. The primary objective of the meta-synthesis method is to provide an integrated and novel interpretation of research findings. Moreover, this approach clarifies concepts, patterns, and insights that help refine and analyze existing bodies of knowledge and develop operational models and theories. At this stage, the researcher identifies the codes derived from the meta-synthesis process. Accordingly, each factor extracted from the relevant sources is assigned a specific code. These codes are then categorized based on their sources and the frequency of their occurrence (Baghmirani et al., 2018).

In this phase of the meta-synthesis, qualitative content analysis was applied to analyze the data. Qualitative content analysis is a research technique designed to interpret textual data subjectively through a systematic process of classification, coding, and theme development or construction. A fundamental characteristic of qualitative research lies in its aim to generate theory rather than merely test it. Within this framework, qualitative content

analysis enables the researcher to adopt an empirical, systematic, and step-by-step approach while simultaneously respecting the unique contextual characteristics of the studied phenomenon. This methodological orientation allows for the interpretation of data authenticity and meaning in a subjective manner grounded in rigorous scientific principles. The objectivity and reliability of findings are ensured through a structured and disciplined coding process (Kleinheksel et al., 2020).

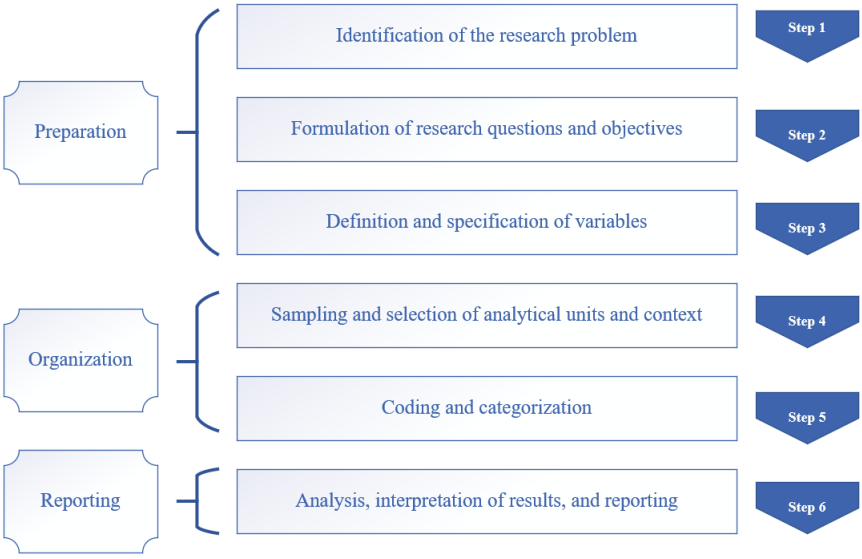

Figure 3. Steps of the Qualitative Content Analysis Process (source: Momeni Rad et al., 2013)

In this study, after completing the meta-synthesis stages, the selected documents and articles—including 46 research papers, circulars, and standard contracts issued by the Central Bank of Iran—were subjected to qualitative content analysis using MAXQDA 2020 software. During this process, the research problem and objectives—namely, the identification of the key components determining Islamic financial literacy within Iran's banking system—were clearly formulated. Subsequently, through a systematic process of coding and categorization, the main components were extracted and finalized.

Step 6: Quality Control. In the meta-synthesis method, the researcher undertakes several measures to ensure and monitor the quality and credibility of the study:

1. Throughout the research process, the researcher provides clear and precise explanations regarding methodological choices and implementation procedures.
2. Both manual and electronic search strategies are employed to identify and retrieve relevant studies.
3. The researcher applies quality control techniques consistent with those adopted in the primary studies included in the analysis (Kamali, 2017).

These procedures collectively enhance the transparency, reliability, and methodological rigor of the meta-synthesis process.

Step 7: Presentation of Findings. In meta-synthesis methodology, the presentation of findings represents a critical stage in which the results of various studies are integrated and interpreted to provide the researcher with a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. This stage is essential for constructing an overall analytical perspective that synthesizes the insights, patterns, and conceptual linkages emerging from the reviewed literature. Ultimately, it enables the development of a holistic and coherent conceptual framework that reflects the collective findings of prior research.

3. Findings

Among the circulars issued by the Shariah Board of the Central Bank of Iran, three directives are of particular significance due to their direct relevance to the dimensions of Islamic financial literacy:

1. The circular titled “Requirement to Explain Contracts to Customers Using Clear and Accurate Language” emphasizes the importance of knowledge and awareness of Shariah-based contracts and highlights the educational role of banking staff in communicating these concepts effectively to customers.
2. The circular “Operational Guidelines for Shariah Supervision and Compliance in Credit Institutions,” which relates to Islamic financial behavior and the practical observance of Shariah principles within banking operations.
3. The circular “Assessment of Jurisprudential Challenges Related to Preferential Deposits,” which pertains to employees’ attitudes toward Islamic financial innovation and underscores the importance of analytical awareness and sensitivity when addressing emerging jurisprudential and operational challenges in the banking sector.

Extraction of Determining Components of Islamic Financial Literacy in the Banking System

After the final selection of relevant international studies and the inclusion of domestic documents to ensure contextual alignment with Iran's banking environment, the document analysis process was initiated. To identify the key components influencing Islamic financial literacy within the banking system, qualitative content analysis was conducted using MAXQDA 2020 software. The results of the coding process applied to the selected studies are summarized in Table 4.

Table 5. Key Determinants of Islamic Financial Literacy in Iran's Banking System (Source: Authors' Findings)

Dimension	Key Components	Description	References
Islamic Financial Knowledge	Familiarity with core Islamic financial concepts such as riba (interest), mudarabah, murabahah, ijarah, musharakah, qard al-hasan, istisna', sukuk (Islamic securities), zakat, waqf, ijarah muntahia bittamleek, etc.	These components reflect the individual's level of understanding regarding the concepts and principles of Islamic finance.	Dinc et al. (2021); Lajuni et al. (2018); Abdullah & Anderson (2015); Bayram & Ugurlu (2022); Setiawati et al. (2018); Antara et al. (2017); Antara & Musa (2020); Hidajat & Hamdani (2017); Dinc et al. (2023)
	Ability to distinguish between halal and haram financial transactions based on Shariah principles		
	Understanding of jurisprudential principles such as la darar (no harm) and akl al-mal bil-batil (unlawful gain)		
	Familiarity with the structure and operation of Islamic banking and its distinction from conventional banking		
	Knowledge of Islamic banking products and the ability to differentiate between Islamic and non-Islamic products, such as musharakah accounts and qard al-hasan loans		
	Awareness of regulatory		

Dimension	Key Components	Description	References
	frameworks and supervisory standards		
	Understanding of the fundamental principles of money and its ethical implications		
	Comprehension of Islamic finance from legal, contractual, and operational perspectives		
Islamic Financial Attitude	Willingness to use Islamic financial services	These components reflect individuals' attitudes and beliefs toward Islamic financial concepts and services.	Dinc et al. (2021); Abdullah & Anderson (2015); Lajuni et al. (2018); McGregor et al. (2024); Setiawati et al. (2018); Nawi et al. (2018)
	Belief in the importance of adhering to Shariah principles in financial decision-making		
	Positive attitude toward Islamic banking and its products		
	Trust in Islamic financial institutions and their transparency		
	Tendency to avoid doubtful or prohibited (haram) transactions		
	Commitment to Shariah-compliant financial decision-making (preferring permissible options even when more profitable non-Islamic alternatives exist)		
	Perception of financial risk within an Islamic framework (willingness to engage in partnership-based investments with shared risk and reward)		
	Confidence in obtaining and allocating funds within permissible (halal), beneficial, and Shariah-compliant boundaries		

Dimension	Key Components	Description	References
Islamic Financial Behavior	Actual use of Islamic financial products and services	These components reflect individuals' real financial behaviors in accordance with Islamic principles.	Dinc et al. (2021); Abdullah & Anderson (2015); Lajuni et al. (2018); McGregor et al. (2024); Setiawati et al. (2018)
	Avoidance of Riba-based transactions and investment in prohibited industries		
	Regular payment of zakat and sadaqah (charitable contributions)		
	Personal financial management based on Shariah principles		
	Participation in halal and ethically responsible economic activities		
	Promotion of Islamic financial culture in the workplace (encouraging colleagues and clients to use Islamic financial services)		
	Engagement in Islamic financial education (attending training courses and workshops on Islamic banking)		
	Behavioral practices related to financial planning, choice of funding sources, earning methods, and allocation of funds in compliance with Shariah		

The findings of the study indicate that the key determinants of Islamic financial literacy within Iran's banking system comprise three main categories—Islamic financial knowledge, Islamic financial attitude, and Islamic financial behavior—each encompassing eight codes, resulting in a total of 24 codes overall.

Islamic Financial Knowledge. Islamic financial knowledge refers to individuals' awareness and understanding of Shariah-based financial principles, laws, and instruments—encompassing not only financial concepts but also jurisprudential, ethical, and supervisory frameworks. Such knowledge

underpins financial decision-making that accords with Islamic values and rulings and helps balance profitability with social justice (Alam et al., 2019). Within this domain, several key components play a formative role: familiarity with fundamental Islamic finance concepts such as Riba (interest), Mudarabah, Murabahah, Qard al-hasan, and Zakat; the ability to distinguish halal from haram transactions based on principles like la darar (no harm) and akl al-mal bil-batil (unlawful appropriation); knowledge of the structure of Islamic banking and its distinctions from conventional banking; understanding of Islamic financial instruments and products—e.g., partnership accounts and murabahah financing; and awareness of Shariah supervisory bodies and regulatory frameworks. Moreover, grasping the nature and functions of money within a Shariah framework, along with the legal and contractual dimensions of Islamic financial instruments, is essential. Taken together, Islamic financial knowledge comprises a set of cognitions and skills that enable individuals to participate in financial and economic activities in an informed, responsible, and Shariah-compliant manner.

Islamic Financial Attitude. Islamic financial attitude represents a value-based and philosophical framework that guides all financial activities and decisions in light of Islamic Shariah. It emphasizes the balance between economic profitability, social justice, and ethical principles. This attitude shapes individuals' beliefs, preferences, and inclinations toward money, wealth, and the use of financial resources in accordance with the common good and religious values. It also plays a decisive role in the selection of financial options, interactions with Islamic banking institutions, and the avoidance of riba-based, gharar-based, or otherwise haram transactions. Key indicators of Islamic financial attitude include the willingness to use Islamic financial services, trust in Islamic financial institutions, avoidance of doubtful transactions, commitment to Shariah principles in financial decisions, and a partnership-oriented approach toward risk-sharing. Alongside this attitudinal dimension, Islamic financial knowledge also holds special significance. By encompassing essential concepts such as riba, mudarabah, murabahah, ijarah, qard al-hasan, and zakat—as well as the ability to distinguish halal from haram transactions, familiarity with Islamic banking structures, understanding of Shariah-compliant products, awareness of supervisory frameworks, and comprehension of the nature of money in Islam—it equips individuals to make informed and Shariah-compliant financial decisions. Together, Islamic financial attitude and knowledge form a cohesive foundation for shaping and reinforcing authentic Islamic financial behaviors.

Islamic Financial Behavior. Islamic financial behavior refers to a set of financial decisions and actions in areas such as saving, investment,

consumption, borrowing, insurance, and other economic activities that are shaped by the principles of Shariah, ethical values, and religious commitments. These behaviors are characterized by the avoidance of riba (interest), maysir (gambling), gharar (excessive uncertainty), israf (extravagance), and other prohibited transactions, while emphasizing justice, collective welfare, and divine satisfaction. As one of the key dimensions of Islamic financial literacy, Islamic financial behavior represents the translation of Islamic knowledge and beliefs into real-life financial practices.

The major components of this dimension include:

- Conscious use of Islamic financial services such as qard al-hasan (benevolent loan) accounts and takaful (Islamic insurance);
- Avoidance of riba-based transactions and investment in prohibited industries;
- Regular payment of zakat and sadaqah as instruments for equitable wealth redistribution;
- Personal financial management grounded in discipline, piety, and avoidance of unnecessary debt;
- Participation in halal and ethically responsible economic activities;
- Promotion of Islamic financial culture in the workplace by encouraging colleagues and clients to adopt Islamic services; and
- Engagement in educational programs and training related to Islamic banking and finance.

Overall, Islamic financial behavior reflects the level of an individual's awareness and commitment to religious and ethical values. Strengthening such behavior not only contributes to personal and moral development but also enhances public trust, operational efficiency within the Islamic financial system, and the realization of economic justice across society.

4. Conclusion

The present study was conducted with the objective of identifying and explaining the key components determining Islamic financial literacy, employing a qualitative meta-synthesis approach. Through a systematic review of scholarly sources published in major international databases—Scopus and Web of Science—from 2000 to 2025, along with the analysis of domestic documents issued by the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran, a total of 46 valid and relevant studies were selected as the analytical foundation. Data analysis was performed using the qualitative content analysis method with the aid of MAXQDA 2020 software.

The findings of this study led to the development of a localized three-dimensional framework for Islamic financial literacy, encompassing three core dimensions: Islamic financial knowledge, Islamic financial attitude, and Islamic financial behavior. Each dimension consists of eight key components—a total of 24 components—covering a comprehensive range of jurisprudential, ethical, cognitive, and behavioral concepts. The most significant extracted components include: familiarity with Islamic financial concepts and contracts; understanding the jurisprudential rules governing financial transactions; the ability to distinguish halal from haram transactions in banking and investment contexts; awareness of the structure and functions of the Islamic banking system; comprehension of the relationship between financing and real assets; and awareness of the ethical, supervisory, and Shariah requirements shaping financial behavior.

The findings further reveal that Islamic financial literacy is a multidimensional and complex construct that extends beyond theoretical knowledge to encompass individuals' beliefs, attitudes, and actual behaviors within financial contexts. This highlights the necessity of designing comprehensive and interdisciplinary approaches to effectively promote this form of literacy within society. The following section outlines the theoretical and practical implications of the present study, followed by a discussion of research and policy recommendations derived from the findings.

4-1. Theoretical Implications

This study represents the first systematic research in Iran to employ the meta-synthesis method for the structured identification and explanation of the components of Islamic financial literacy. The proposed framework can serve as a theoretical foundation for developing reliable measurement instruments to assess Islamic financial literacy within the Islamic banking system.

Moreover, the findings of this research contribute to enriching the international body of literature on financial literacy within Islamic financial systems, offering a conceptual bridge between global financial literacy models and the unique characteristics of Shariah-compliant finance.

4-2. Practical Implications

Institutions such as the Central Bank of Iran, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance, the national education system, and religious seminaries (Hawzah) can utilize this framework to design educational, promotional, and capacity-building programs aimed at enhancing Islamic financial literacy. Furthermore, banking and financial institutions may apply this model in developing marketing strategies, Shariah-compliant financial products, and

employee training programs, thereby strengthening both public awareness and institutional adherence to Islamic financial principles.

4-3. Research Recommendations

1. Development of a quantitative measurement instrument based on the proposed model, followed by psychometric evaluations including tests of reliability, validity, and both exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses.
2. Comparative studies on Islamic financial literacy between Iran and other countries with established Islamic financial systems, such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Pakistan.
3. Empirical analysis of the relationship between Islamic financial literacy and individuals' actual financial behaviors, particularly in the areas of saving, investment, and utilization of banking facilities.
4. Assessment of the impact of Islamic financial literacy education across schools, universities, seminaries (Hawzah), and mass media, as well as its influence on society's overall financial decision-making processes.
5. Investigation of the role of Islamic financial literacy in promoting financial stability and preventing economic risks such as non-Shariah-compliant debt, financial fraud, and credit crises.

4-4. Practical Recommendations

1. Design and implementation of a comprehensive national program for promoting Islamic financial literacy through the collaboration of governmental, religious, educational, and media institutions.
2. Revision of school and university curricula to incorporate Islamic financial concepts tailored to the learners' age, educational level, and specific needs.
3. Establishment of Islamic financial advisory units within banks and credit institutions to guide customers in selecting Shariah-compliant financial services.
4. Development of digital platforms and educational applications aimed at enhancing Islamic financial literacy, particularly among the younger generation.

4-5. Acknowledgments

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Examining the Relationship between Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religiosity and Peer Influence on Moral Recognition, Judgment, and Intention

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Abstract

Purpose**:** The present study aims to examine the impact of intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity, as well as peer influence, on the three stages of ethical decision-making: ethical recognition, ethical judgment, and ethical intention.

Background**:** The expansion of ethical challenges in the accounting profession and the growing societal sensitivity to unethical behaviors have further highlighted the necessity of investigating factors influencing ethical decision-making.

Method/Approach**:** Relying on Rest's (1986) ethical decision-making model, this research employs a quantitative methodology and partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). Data were collected by distributing a validated questionnaire among university faculty members in the field of accounting.

Findings**:** The findings revealed that both intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity have a significant positive effect on ethical recognition, judgment, and intention. Within the Iranian cultural context, even extrinsic religiosity, due to the normative role of religion, strengthens ethical orientation. Furthermore, peer influence emerged as the strongest factor affecting all stages of ethical decision-making—a finding that underscores the importance of group structures and social norms in shaping ethical behavior. The internal pathways of Rest's model were also confirmed, demonstrating the effect of ethical recognition on ethical judgment and the effect of ethical judgment on ethical intention, with the mediating role of ethical judgment being substantiated. The results indicate that ethical decision-making is the product of the simultaneous interaction of individual religious inclinations and social forces stemming from the peer environment.

Conclusion**:**These findings have significant implications for designing professional ethics training programs, enhancing ethical organizational cultures, and strengthening social mechanisms that support ethical behavior.

Keywords

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religiosity, Moral Recognition, Moral Judgment, Moral Intention.

Introduction

Internal and external religiosity, as two fundamental religious orientations, play a crucial role in shaping ethical beliefs and individual decision-making. While internal religiosity reflects deep, internalized beliefs and a stable moral commitment, external religiosity often indicates instrumental, social, or strategic attitudes toward religion. Evidence suggests that internal religiosity is frequently associated with greater sensitivity to moral norms and consistent ethical decision-making, whereas external religiosity may render ethical decision-making more flexible or, at times, unstable when faced with social pressures and complex situations (Giacomin et al., 2025). These effects do not operate solely through individual pathways; peer influence, as a powerful social factor, can moderate how religious beliefs translate into moral judgment and intention through normative pressure, behavioral modeling, and encouragement to align with the group. Recent empirical evidence shows that peer support plays a significant role in developing adolescents' religious character and moral values, clearly highlighting the interaction between individual religiosity and the social context (Earley Atoun & Anggraini, 2025). On the other hand, ethical decision-making is typically conceptualized as a multi-stage process involving ethical cognition (identifying an ethical situation), ethical judgment (evaluating an action or agent), and behavioral intention (commitment to moral action), with each stage susceptible to various factors. For instance, cognitive load or constrained cognitive resources have been shown to alter moral judgment: under high cognitive load, individuals tend to adopt more utilitarian or public-interest-based decisions, indicating that limited cognitive resources can shift the direction and intensity of moral judgment (Zheng et al., 2025). Simultaneously, religiosity interacts with cognitive processes; for example, studies have shown that religious belief is linked to "deontological" moral judgments, particularly when an individual perceives divine authority as the moral standard, suggesting that faith can support a specific type of moral reasoning under cognitive constraint (Weiss & Forstmann, 2024). However, the intersection of religiosity and peer influence within the process of ethical cognition and decision-making has not been fully examined. While traditional research often emphasizes the direct effects of religiosity on ethics (Tariq et al., 2019), the moderating role of social networks and peers requires more careful investigation. Even strongly, internally committed religious individuals may recalibrate their moral judgments and intentions in the face of peer norms, especially in conditions of moral ambiguity or when group alignment provides an alternative action framework. Meta-analytic evidence also reliably shows

that a lack of cognitive resources or cognitive pressure influences moral judgment (Rehren, 2024), indicating that the interaction between religiosity and cognitive processing under such constraints deserves attention. An integrated model that considers internal and external religiosity, peer influence, and the three-stage ethical decision-making process (cognition → judgment → intention) represents a significant theoretical innovation. This framework allows researchers to examine the direct and interactive effects of religious orientation and social context on each stage of moral processing. From a methodological perspective, testing such a model requires experimental designs that manipulate cognitive load, measure peer normative pressure, and assess moral outcomes at each stage to reveal their compound effects. For example, external religiosity might affect ethical intention only under conditions of convergent peer influence, or internal religiosity might exert its strongest influence when cognitive resources are limited, and peer pressure aligns with religious values. Empirically testing this integrated model has important practical implications. If peer influence can weaken or neutralize the ethical effects of religiosity, educational interventions aimed at fostering ethical intention must, in addition to individual training, incorporate training on group moral norms or the design of ethics-centered social networks. Furthermore, investigating the role of cognitive load in these interactions can improve strategies for ethical decision-making in high-stress environments, including educational and organizational settings. In summary, this paper proposes an integrated framework in which internal and external religiosity, peer influence, and the stages of ethical cognition (identification, judgment, intention) simultaneously influence ethical behavior. Elucidating these interactions not only contributes to theories in moral psychology and religious ethics but also provides practical insights for fostering ethical behavior in complex social environments under cognitive pressure.

The primary innovation of the present study lies in being the first within the Iranian research context to examine a combined model of internal/external religiosity, peer influence, and the three-stage ethical process (ethical cognition → ethical judgment → ethical intention) in an integrated manner. Although previous Iranian research has considered religiosity as a factor influencing moral values and behavior (e.g., previous Iranian studies on social capital and religiosity) and some qualitative studies have explored the experience of ethics-oriented religiosity among the youth, most of these studies have limited themselves to the belief dimension or the function of religiosity and have not systematically examined the role of peer social pressure and its interaction with religious belief. On the other hand,

Iranian studies on religiosity have predominantly focused on the general quantitative measurement of religious beliefs without meticulously modeling the dimensions of internal and external religiosity separately. Critiques in the domestic religious literature on the measurement methods used in national surveys indicate that existing measurement models are insufficiently aligned with the semantic and cultural structure of religiosity in Iran. Furthermore, no known Iranian study to date has examined the process of ethical cognition as a distinct stage mediating between religious belief and ethical intention. Understanding this pathway could reveal which factor—internal/external religious belief or peer pressure—has a greater impact on moral decision-making. Therefore, an empirical test of this model not only represents a novel step in developing the theory of religiosity and ethics in Iran but can also yield significant practical implications.

1. Literature Review

The study of religiosity, particularly in relation to moral reasoning, is rooted in diverse psychological frameworks and historical contexts. In the 1960s, researchers introduced a model of religious orientation that classified religiosity into intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions. Intrinsic religiosity is characterized by a deeply personal and committed approach to religion, emphasizing private devotion and personal piety. In contrast, extrinsic religiosity is more social and utilitarian, often viewed as a means to achieve social connections or provide psychological comfort. This distinction has important implications for understanding how individuals process moral dilemmas. Intrinsic religiosity has been linked to higher levels of moral development, as individuals who engage with their faith more profoundly may possess a more nuanced understanding of ethical principles. Conversely, extrinsic religiosity, with its focus on external validation and social conformity, may influence moral reasoning differently, potentially leading to judgments that prioritize social acceptance over personal conviction (Arli et al., 2025).

1-1.Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religiosity

Allport and Ross (1967) used the term "religious orientation" to describe religiosity, defining it as "the personal practice of religion." McDaniel and Burnett (1990) define religiosity as trust in God coupled with a commitment to follow principles believed to be set by God. Intrinsic religiosity refers to motivations rooted in the inherent goals of the religious tradition itself, reflecting a religious commitment to more intrinsic and spiritual ends. This reflects the motivation for an internal commitment to religion and its

principles as part of one's daily life, to contribute to the public good, and to support one's own religion (Vitell et al., 2011). King and Crowther (2004) describe intrinsically motivated religious individuals as those who view religious practice as an end in itself, are "true believers" in the practice for its own sake, and have a pure and direct motivation toward religion and practice. Extrinsic religiosity refers primarily to utilitarian motivations for religious behaviors. This reflects religious participation for somewhat self-serving reasons, such as social approval for advancing one's business (Vitell et al., 2011).

Empirical findings on the effect of intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity on ethical decision-making remain inconclusive among researchers who support the influence of religiosity on the ethical decision-making domain (Walker et al., 2014; Auvray et al., 2015). Singhapakdi et al. (2013) found that managers with higher levels of intrinsic religiosity were more likely to adhere to ethics in their intentions. This result indicated that intrinsic religiosity has a significant positive impact on ethical intention. They also found that managers with higher levels of extrinsic religiosity were less likely to adhere to ethics in their intentions. This result indicated that extrinsic religiosity has a negative impact on ethical intention. Vitell et al. (2011) studied 114 undergraduate consumer students from a university in the United States and claimed that intrinsic religiosity is a significant determinant of consumer ethical beliefs (three of the four dimensions). Furthermore, Walker et al. (2014) surveyed 330 individuals over 19 years of age with at least one year of work experience in the United States to examine the influence of religiosity on work-related ethical judgments. They found that religiosity is associated with ethical outcomes. Intrinsic religiosity was negatively correlated with the endorsement of ethically questionable actions, while extrinsic religiosity was positively correlated with the endorsement of ethically questionable actions.

1-2.Ethical Cognition and Ethical Judgment

The influence of ethical cognition on ethical judgment is described by Rest (1986) in his ethical decision-making model. Furthermore, Hunt and Vitell (1986), in their ethical decision-making model, posited that an individual's recognition of an ethical problem situation is the catalyst for the ethical decision-making process. To measure the construct of ethical recognition, Singhapakdi and Vitell (1990) propose asking respondents whether the situation described in each scenario involves ethical problems. Specifically, they asked respondents to indicate their agreement with statements such as "The above situation involves an ethical problem." Their study found that

individuals who possess ethical recognition ability, or can perceive that a situation involves an ethical problem, will make more ethical judgments.

1-3.Ethical Judgment and Ethical Intention

The Theory of Reasoned Action states that individuals' attitudes or judgments influence their behavioral intentions. Hunt and Vitell (1986), in their marketing ethics model, explain ethical judgment as the fundamental factor in an individual's intention to implement a specific alternative to resolve an ethical dilemma. To measure ethical intentions, Singhapakdi et al. (1996) propose asking respondents to indicate whether they would act in the same ethically questionable ways as the person described in the scenarios. Specifically, they used the statement "The above situation involves an ethical problem." Previous studies, such as Vitell and Hunt (1990) and Singhapakdi et al. (2013), found that ethical judgment has a positive effect on ethical intention.

Bani Mahd et al. (2025) studied the relationship between mindfulness and ethical judgment, finding that mindfulness has a significant positive impact on auditors' ethical judgment. Mindfulness, as a psychological trait, enhances the ethical judgment of auditors.

Moradi and Iqbal (2024) examined the effect of moral equity on auditors' ethical behavior, with religiosity as a moderating variable. The results indicated that moral equity significantly affects auditors' ethical behavior with a high level of confidence. This highlights the importance of auditors' personality and traits, which lead to the manifestation of moral equity in their ethical behavior. Furthermore, the results showed that moral equity significantly influences religiosity with a high level of confidence, and that religiosity plays a significant role in the relationship between moral equity and auditors' ethical behavior with a high level of confidence. As the level of religiosity and auditors' adherence to religious teachings increases, the incidence of fraud in financial reporting decreases.

Yazdi et al. (2023) investigated the impact of auditors' professionalism—through its components—on their ethical judgment, emphasizing the moderating role of auditors' perception of the organization's ethical culture. The results revealed a significant relationship between the components of professionalism (auditors' commitment to public interest and the exercise of independence) and their ethical judgment. Furthermore, the auditor's perception of the organizational ethical culture plays a moderating role in the relationship between professionalism (via its components) and ethical judgment.

Abedi Jafari et al. (2018) proposed a model to explain how intrinsic religiosity influences ethical decision-making in business. The findings demonstrated that intrinsic religiosity positively impacts ethical decision-making both directly and indirectly by strengthening variables such as duty orientation and guilt from unethical behavior, while weakening the variable of Machiavellian ethics.

Jalise et al. (2025) investigated the relationship between spirituality, ethics, and intrinsic/extrinsic religiosity as antecedents of green purchase behavior. The findings indicated a significant relationship between ethics and green purchase behavior for Chinese and Pakistani consumers. The results also showed that both intrinsic religiosity and spirituality positively influence the green purchase behavior of Chinese and Pakistani consumers.

Chan et al. (2022) examined whether religiosity and ethical principles influence ethical decision-making in a multi-religious context. The findings revealed that intrinsic religiosity has a positive relationship with ethical recognition and intention, while extrinsic religiosity has a negative relationship with ethical intention in the sample related to the duty of care. Although intrinsic religiosity predicted justice, deontology, and relativism across three samples, it also showed a positive relationship with utilitarianism in one sample. Egoism was not associated with intrinsic or extrinsic religiosity. Extrinsic religiosity was negatively related to justice, deontology, relativism, and utilitarianism. Additionally, the ethical recognition of intrinsic religiosity and the extrinsic religiosity-ethical intention relationship are mediated differently by ethical principles.

Anriani et al. (2022) explored how religion influences individuals' ethics and ethical principles in both extrinsic and intrinsic dimensions. The results showed that religiosity plays a significant role in individuals' ethics and ethical principles, which subsequently affect their mental health. Individuals' ethics and ethical principles serve as beneficial mediators in building a bridge between religion and mental health.

2. Research Hypotheses

H1: Intrinsic religiosity has a significant effect on ethical cognition.

H2: Intrinsic religiosity has a significant effect on ethical judgment.

H3: Intrinsic religiosity has a significant effect on ethical intention.

H4: Extrinsic religiosity has a significant effect on ethical cognition.

H5: Extrinsic religiosity has a significant effect on ethical judgment.

H6: Extrinsic religiosity has a significant effect on ethical intention.

H7: Peer influence has a significant effect on ethical cognition.

H8: Peer influence has a significant effect on ethical judgment.

H9: Peer influence has a significant effect on ethical intention.

H10: Ethical cognition has a significant effect on ethical judgment.

H11: Ethical judgment has a significant effect on ethical intention.

H12: Ethical cognition has a significant effect on ethical intention through the mediation of ethical judgment.

3. Methodology

The present research is applied in an objective manner and falls within the category of descriptive studies. The constructed model is examined quantitatively using a correlational survey method. Given the use of historical data, this study is retrospective. Since the required research data are obtained from archival information, it is considered library research; however, for testing the model, a questionnaire is employed. The statistical population of this study consists of university faculty members in the field of accounting. For sampling, the simple random sampling method was used, and to determine the sample size, the formula introduced for structural equation modeling, as per Equation (1), has been applied (Taftiyan & Baghi Nasab, 2023):

$$
\begin{aligned}
& n = \max(n_1, n_2) \\
& n_1 = \left[50\left(\frac{j}{k}\right)^2 - 450\left(\frac{j}{k}\right) + 1100\right] \\
& n_2 = \left[\frac{1}{2H}\left(A\left(\frac{\pi}{6} - B + D\right) + H + \sqrt{\left(A\left(\frac{\pi}{6} - B + D\right) + H\right)^2 + 4AH\left(\frac{\pi}{6} + \sqrt{A} + 2B - C - 2D\right)}\right)\right] \\
& A = 1 - \rho^2 \\
& B = \rho \arcsin\left(\frac{\rho}{2}\right) \\
& C = \rho \arcsin(\rho) \\
& D = \frac{A}{\sqrt{3 - A}} \\
& H = \left(\frac{\delta}{z_{1-\alpha/2} - z_{1-\beta}}\right)^2
\end{aligned}
\qquad (1)
$$

According to Equation (1), the minimum sample size was calculated to be 140, and the optimal sample size was 420. In the present study, a final total of 392 completed questionnaires were collected and analyzed. The data collection method for this phase involved using a researcher-developed questionnaire. The factorial structure of the model was assessed based on the dimensions and components of the proposed model (Mubarak, 2018). The

questionnaire was distributed among the statistical sample. To evaluate the responses, the items in this questionnaire were arranged on a 5-point Likert scale.

Data analysis was performed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS software. The measurement model included tests for indicator reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The structural model included path coefficients, significance levels, and the coefficient of determination (R^2), which were used to examine the hypotheses. The reasons for employing PLS-SEM in this study included the assessment of hierarchical models, the lack of a requirement for data normality assumptions, the ability to handle issues of measurement model identification, and the absence of missing data and outliers.

The data analysis was based on the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) method using PLS software. To assess the fit of the structural model, indices such as R^2, Q^2 (predictive relevance), and GOF (Goodness-of-Fit) were used.

4. Findings / Results

4-1. Questionnaire Reliability

If Cronbach's alpha is greater than 0.7, the internal components (items) exhibit adequate correlation. As can be observed, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for all variables is greater than 0.7, confirming the reliability of all variables.

Table 1. Results of Reliability Testing

Variable / Construct	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Result
Extrinsic Religiosity	0.855	Reliability Confirmed
Intrinsic Religiosity	0.911	Reliability Confirmed
Ethical Cognition	0.728	Reliability Confirmed
Ethical Judgment	0.804	Reliability Confirmed
Peer Influence	0.911	Reliability Confirmed
Ethical Intention	0.737	Reliability Confirmed

4-2. Composite Reliability

The results of the composite reliability test, as shown, indicate that McDonald's Omega coefficient for all variables is greater than 0.7. Consistent with the Cronbach's alpha results, the reliability of all variables is confirmed. The results related to the composite reliability test are reported in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of Composite Reliability Analysis

Variable / Construct	Composite Reliability (ω)	Result
Extrinsic Religiosity	0.890	Reliability Confirmed
Intrinsic Religiosity	0.930	Reliability Confirmed
Ethical Cognition	0.846	Reliability Confirmed
Ethical Judgment	0.877	Reliability Confirmed
Peer Influence	0.927	Reliability Confirmed
Ethical Intention	0.884	Reliability Confirmed

4-3. Questionnaire Validity

Convergent Validity

If the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is greater than 0.5, the questionnaire possesses convergent validity. As shown in Table 3, where the AVE for all variables exceeds 0.5, the convergent validity of all variables is confirmed.

Table 3. Results of Convergent Validity Analysis (Average Variance Extracted)

Variable / Construct	AVE	Result
Extrinsic Religiosity	0.539	Validity Confirmed
Intrinsic Religiosity	0.657	Validity Confirmed
Ethical Cognition	0.649	Validity Confirmed
Ethical Judgment	0.647	Validity Confirmed
Peer Influence	0.563	Validity Confirmed
Ethical Intention	0.791	Validity Confirmed

4-4. Discriminant Validity

For assessing discriminant validity, the correlation matrix and the Fornell-Larcker matrix are used. If the correlation coefficients between variables are smaller than the values on the main diagonal, discriminant validity is confirmed. According to the results, this condition holds true in both the correlation and Fornell-Larcker matrices, confirming discriminant validity.

Table 4. Fornell-Larcker Criterion Matrix

Construct	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
(1) Extrinsic Religiosity	0.734					
(2) Intrinsic Religiosity	0.641	0.810				
(3) Ethical Cognition	-0.624	-0.546	0.806			
(4) Ethical Judgment	0.708	0.678	-0.438	0.805		
(5) Peer Influence	0.743	0.743	-0.497	0.777	0.750	
(6) Ethical Intention	-0.714	0.746	0.655	-0.568	-0.689	0.890

According to the contents of Table 4, Fornell and Larcker (1981) propose that discriminant validity is assessed using a matrix. A component should demonstrate greater distinction and separation among its own observable indicators (questions) compared to other components to be considered as having high discriminant validity. In discriminant validity, we seek to answer the question: To what extent can a factor explain the variance in a set of questions, in competition with external, unrelated, and unmeasured factors? If a factor accounts for the largest portion of the variance within its own set of questions and shows low correlations with unrelated factors, it possesses discriminant validity. In other words, the square root of the convergent validity (AVE) for each component must be greater than its highest correlation with any other component (the numbers on the diagonal of Table 4) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The presented numbers indicate appropriate discriminant validity according to the Fornell-Larcker criterion.

4-5. Structural Model Fit

The quality of the structural model was also calculated using the predictive power index (Q^2). The purpose of this index is to examine the structural model's ability to predict using a holdout sample method. Based on this criterion, the model should predict the indicators of the reflective endogenous latent variables. Positive values greater than zero indicate that the observed values are well reconstructed, suggesting that the structural model is of appropriate quality.

The results of the structural model fit from the SmartPLS software are presented in Figures 1 and 2. The values on the lines are the standardized beta coefficients resulting from multivariate regression estimation, referred to as path coefficients. To examine the significance of the coefficients, the bootstrapping method was used with 5000 subsamples, as recommended in the Partial Least Squares approach.

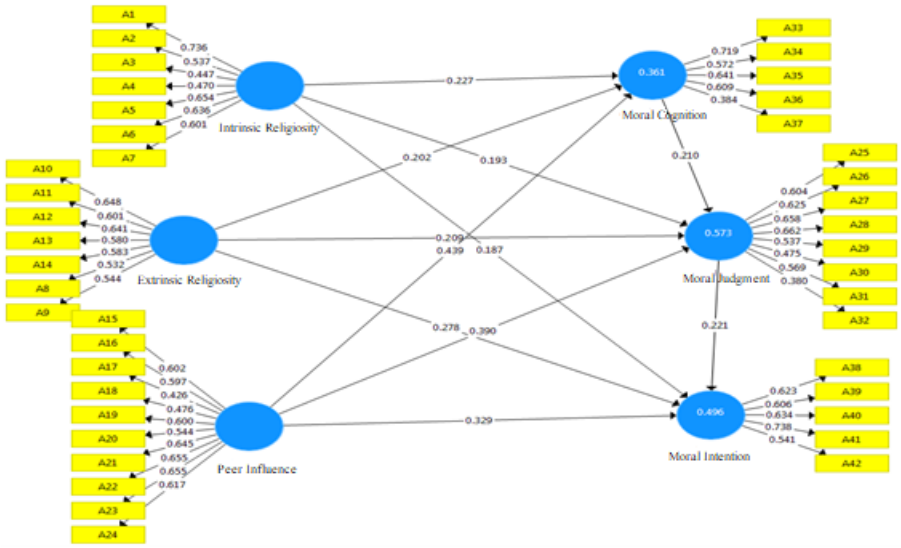

Figure 1. Model Fit Results in SmartPLS Software: Path Coefficients and Coefficients of Determination

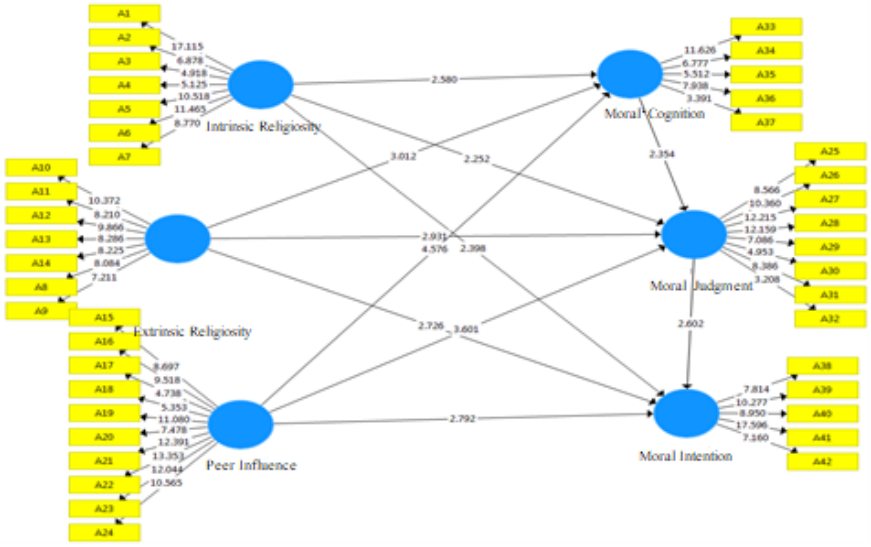

Figure 2. Model Fit Results in SmartPLS Software: Significance Coefficients

Table 5. Model Fit Results in SmartPLS Software: Predictive Power

Variable	R^2	Adjusted R^2	SSO	SSE	Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO)
Extrinsic Religiosity	–	–	2,247.0	2,247.0	–
Intrinsic Religiosity	–	–	2,247.0	2,247.0	–
Ethical Cognition	0.361	0.349	963.0	735.8	0.236
Ethical Judgment	0.573	0.562	1,284.0	796.9	0.379
Peer Influence	–	–	3,210.0	3,210.0	–
Ethical Intention	0.496	0.484	642.0	290.7	0.547

Based on Table 5, the obtained predictive power (Q^2) coefficient is appropriate, and the obtained Goodness-of-Fit (GoF) index is at a desirable level. The obtained values indicate the overall desirability of the model.

4-6. Hypothesis Testing

The results of the model fit, along with the values of path coefficients, t-statistics, and significance levels for testing the hypotheses, are presented in the tables below.

Table 6. Results of Direct Hypothesis Testing (Path Analysis)

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient (β)	t-statistic	p-value
Extrinsic Religiosity → Ethical Cognition	0.202	3.012	0.000
Extrinsic Religiosity → Ethical Judgment	0.209	2.931	0.000
Extrinsic Religiosity → Ethical Intention	0.278	2.726	0.007
Intrinsic Religiosity → Ethical Cognition	0.227	2.580	0.010
Intrinsic Religiosity → Ethical Judgment	0.193	2.252	0.025
Intrinsic Religiosity → Ethical Intention	0.187	2.398	0.017
Ethical Cognition → Ethical Judgment	0.210	2.354	0.019
Ethical Judgment → Ethical Intention	0.221	2.602	0.010
Peer Influence → Ethical Cognition	0.439	4.576	0.000
Peer Influence → Ethical Judgment	0.390	3.601	0.000
Peer Influence → Ethical Intention	0.329	2.792	0.005

Table 7. Model Fit Results in SmartPLS Software: Significance Coefficients

Hypothesis	Specific Indirect Effect	t-statistic	p-value
Ethical Cognition → Ethical Judgment → Ethical Intention	0.086	2.014	0.045

As shown in Table 6, since the significance level (p-value) of the effect of intrinsic religiosity on ethical cognition, ethical judgment, and ethical intention is less than 0.05, it can be concluded that intrinsic religiosity significantly affects ethical cognition, ethical judgment, and ethical intention. Consequently, hypotheses H1, H2, and H3 are supported.

Furthermore, since the significance level of the effect of extrinsic religiosity on ethical cognition, ethical judgment, and ethical intention is less than 0.05, it can be concluded that extrinsic religiosity significantly affects ethical cognition, ethical judgment, and ethical intention. Consequently, hypotheses H4, H5, and H6 are supported.

Similarly, since the significance level of the effect of peer influence on ethical cognition, ethical judgment, and ethical intention is less than 0.05, it can be concluded that peer influence significantly affects ethical cognition, ethical judgment, and ethical intention. Consequently, hypotheses H7, H8, and H9 are supported.

Additionally, as observed in Table 6, since the significance level of the effect of ethical cognition on ethical judgment and ethical judgment on ethical intention is less than 0.05, it can be concluded that ethical cognition significantly affects ethical judgment, and ethical judgment significantly affects ethical intention. Consequently, hypotheses H10 and H11 are supported.

As shown in Table 7, since the significance level of the indirect effect of ethical cognition → ethical judgment → ethical intention is less than 0.05, it can be concluded that ethical cognition affects ethical intention through the mediation of ethical judgment. Consequently, hypothesis H12 is also supported.

4-7. Assessment of Fit Indices

R^2 (Coefficient of Determination) Index

This index measures the proportion of variance in a latent variable explained by its predictors relative to the total variance. For this index, values of 0.19, 0.33, and 0.67 are introduced as benchmark criteria for weak, moderate, and strong explanatory power, respectively. The results of the R^2 fit index are presented in Table 9, indicating a good model fit.

Table 8. Results of the R^2 Fit Index

Variable	R^2	Result (Strength)
Ethical Cognition	0.361	Moderate Fit
Ethical Judgment	0.573	Substantial Fit
Ethical Intention	0.496	Substantial Fit

4-8. Q^2 (Predictive Relevance) Index

This index, introduced by Stone (1974) and Geisser (1975), specifies the predictive power of the model. Models with appropriate structural fit should be capable of predicting the indicators related to endogenous constructs. In this case, the constructs will be able to adequately influence one another to properly test the hypotheses. For this index, values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 are introduced as benchmark criteria for weak, moderate, and strong predictive relevance, respectively. The higher the Q^2 index for a model's constructs, the better the model's fit. The results of the Q^2 fit index are included in Table 9 and indicate a good model fit.

Table 9. Results of the Q^2 (Predictive Relevance) Fit Index

Variable	Q^2	Result (Predictive Power)
Ethical Cognition	0.236	Moderate Predictive Power
Ethical Judgment	0.379	Strong Predictive Power
Ethical Intention	0.547	Strong Predictive Power

4-9. GOF (Goodness-of-Fit) Index

The GOF index pertains to the overall part of structural equation modeling and is used for the model's overall fit. For this index, values of 0.01, 0.25, and 0.36 are introduced as benchmark criteria for weak, moderate, and strong fit, respectively. Therefore, the higher the GOF index for a model, the better the model's fit. The results of the GOF fit index are reflected in Table 11 and indicate a strong model fit.

Table 10. Results of the GOF (Goodness-of-Fit) Index

Variable / Construct	R^2	Communality (AVE)
Extrinsic Religiosity	–	0.384
Intrinsic Religiosity	–	0.527
Ethical Cognition	0.361	0.308
Ethical Judgment	0.573	0.417
Peer Influence	–	0.460
Ethical Intention	0.496	0.328
Average	0.477	0.404
Goodness-of-Fit (GOF) = $\sqrt{}$(Average R^2 × Average Communality) = $\sqrt{}$(0.477 × 0.404) = 0.439		

5. Conclusion

The findings of the present study provide a clear, multi-layered picture of how intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity, along with peer influence, affect the three-stage process of ethical decision-making—namely, ethical cognition, ethical judgment, and ethical intention. The results indicated that all three independent variables have a significant effect on all stages of ethical decision-making. This demonstrates that within the Iranian cultural and professional context, ethical decision-making is not a purely individual phenomenon; rather, it is the outcome of the simultaneous interaction of psychological factors (intrinsic religiosity), normative-social factors (extrinsic religiosity), and group-environmental factors (peer influence). The confirmation of these simultaneous influences highlights the importance of a multi-dimensional perspective on professional ethics, revealing that explaining ethical behavior without considering social and cultural contexts would be incomplete. First, the significant positive impact of intrinsic religiosity on ethical cognition, judgment, and intention was confirmed. This finding aligns with the theoretical literature on religiosity and ethics, which posits that an intrinsic religious orientation fosters a stable, internalized commitment to ethical principles and heightens an individual's sensitivity to ethical situations. Individuals with intrinsic religiosity typically pursue an ethical system not for gaining rewards or social approval, but as an integral part of their personal identity. Consequently, when faced with ethical situations, they possess greater accuracy in recognition, and their judgments are based on internalized values. The influence of this type of religiosity on ethical intention is also a natural consequence of this value system, as ethical intention ultimately stems from an individual's deepest beliefs; when ethical principles are internalized and stable, ethical action is more likely. The path coefficients obtained in the model further indicate that this effect is stable and significant across all stages of ethical decision-making.

In contrast, findings regarding extrinsic religiosity also showed a significant positive effect on all stages of ethical decision-making. This finding contrasts with some Western literature that often portrays extrinsic religiosity as more instrumental and sometimes even contradictory to ethical behavior. However, in Iran, where religious behavior, even when motivated by external reasons, is embedded within social, cultural, and normative networks, extrinsic religiosity can serve as a motivator for ethical behavior. This result suggests that individuals who engage in religious practices for social or instrumental motives may still demonstrate a greater inclination toward ethical behavior to preserve their social standing, ethical image, or conformity with collective norms. In other words, within the Iranian cultural

context, religious behavior is perceived as a social marker of ethical conduct. This perception causes extrinsic religiosity, even if it lacks the depth of intrinsic religiosity, to still guide ethical decision-making in a positive direction. From a sociological perspective on ethics, this points to a strong link between "religion" and "general ethical norms" in Iranian culture.

The most significant and prominent finding of this study is the very strong and significant impact of peer influence on ethical cognition, judgment, and intention. The path coefficients revealed that peer influence has the highest predictive power among all variables. This finding underscores that in professional environments, individuals' behavior and judgment depend not only on their religious and personal beliefs but are also heavily influenced by group values, behaviors, and norms. The prominent role of peers is entirely consistent with social and normative learning theories, which posit that individuals in work settings tend to align their behavior with group norms, and this alignment can even supersede personal religious beliefs. The present results show that peers in the professional environment can directly intervene in the process of forming ethical cognition—they can instruct individuals, create ethical sensitivity, and shape the definition of an ethical problem. Furthermore, individuals' ethical judgment and intention are also influenced by normative pressures, observing others' behavior, and concerns about social acceptance or rejection. This finding has considerable practical importance, as it indicates that enhancing professional ethics cannot rely solely on individual training; instead, group environments and collective norms within organizations must be improved and strengthened. Regarding the internal relationships within the model, the results were fully consistent with Rest's theoretical model. The effect of ethical cognition on ethical judgment indicates that an individual can only engage in accurate moral judgment after first successfully recognizing the ethical nature of a situation. Therefore, problem recognition acts as a vital input for ethical decision-making. Moreover, the significant effect of ethical judgment on ethical intention shows that the intention for ethical action is formed based on ethical analysis and evaluation. Ethical judgment is the stage where an individual weighs the ethical merits of options before deciding on a course of action. The mediating role of ethical judgment between cognition and ethical intention also demonstrated that ethical cognition alone is insufficient; it can only translate into behavioral intention through conversion into a valid ethical evaluation. These findings confirm and reinforce the three-stage structure of Rest's model and suggest that ethics training should enhance individuals'

capacity for ethical judgment rather than focusing solely on ethical awareness.

An examination of fit indices such as R^2, Q^2, and GOF also showed that the research model possesses high explanatory and predictive power, indicating these factors are capable of explaining a substantial portion of the variance in ethical behavior. This demonstrates that the three factors—intrinsic religiosity, extrinsic religiosity, and peer influence—simultaneously create a robust framework for analyzing the ethical behavior of professionals.

In summary, the scientific analysis of the results demonstrates that ethical behavior is a dynamic, multi-factorial, and context-dependent process arising from the interaction of internal beliefs, external motivations, and social forces. Theoretically, these results contribute to strengthening behavioral ethics models. Practically, they offer strategies for enhancing professional ethics in accounting and financial environments, such as fostering ethics-oriented group environments, training ethical judgment skills, and creating an organizational culture that reinforces ethical behavior and discourages unethical conduct. These findings also indicate that policymaking in the realm of professional ethics should adopt a combined, systems-oriented approach that encompasses both individual and collective factors to be effective.

Given the study's results, which showed that intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity, and particularly peer influence, play a significant and determining role in the formation of ethical cognition, judgment, and intention, it is recommended that professional organizations and institutions in the accounting and finance fields expand ethics enhancement programs beyond the individual level and design them in a networked and group-oriented manner. This means that, instead of relying solely on individual training, organizations should establish ethics-oriented peer groups, ethical mentoring, scenario-based workshops, and professional dialogue circles to make ethical behavior in the workplace a "collective expectation" through group norm-setting.

Furthermore, considering the positive impact of intrinsic religiosity on all stages of ethical decision-making, it is recommended that universities and professional institutions design programs with a "spirituality-oriented" approach, including workshops on ethical reflection, value-based learning, and character development programs, to strengthen intrinsic religiosity and the personal understanding of ethical responsibility.

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Appendices (if any)

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Modeling the Position of Thinking in the Geometry of Religious Knowledge through a System Dynamics Approach

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Abstract

Purpose: The present study seeks to reexamine the position of reflection (tafakkur) within the framework of religious knowledge by employing a system dynamics approach in order to model the mechanism through which reflection contributes to the existential elevation of the human being.

Design/methodology/approach: Based on content analysis of authentic Islamic texts (the Qur'an and the narrations of the Infallibles, peace be upon them) and informed by expert opinions, this research develops a structured model that explains the causal relationships among fundamental variables, including thought, remembrance (dhikr), piety (taqwa), and the purification of the heart, within six reinforcing feedback loops.

Findings: The findings indicate that reflection, as a strategic and leverage variable, transforms the system of human purposes and intentions, thereby activating the entire epistemic system and providing a scientific explanation for the exceptional value attributed to "one hour of reflection." The proposed model also depicts the reciprocal interaction between reason and heart in such a way that the awakening of the intellect leads to inner purification, while the clarity and tenderness of the heart prepare the ground for deeper rational perceptions.

Originality/value: A precise understanding of the structure of religious concepts and the relationship between rational and spiritual dimensions requires analytical tools capable of explaining the internal dynamics of these teachings beyond a linear perspective. The ultimate aim of this system is identified as the attainment of the sound heart (qalb salīm) as the most balanced state of the system. Overall, the study demonstrates that the application of systemic modeling can open new horizons for understanding the complex relationships among religious concepts and contribute to the development of knowledge in Islamic management.

Keywords

Islamic management, thought, sound heart, systems thinking, soft modeling.

Introduction

Certain Islamic sources and teachings—foremost among them the Holy Qur'an—possess *inner layers* (*butūn*). This means that, in addition to their outward meanings, they encompass multiple esoteric and interpretive strata. For example, according to certain narrations, the Qur'an has seven inner layers (*bāṭin*) (Babaei & Shaker, 2014). In essence, these teachings contain multiple levels of knowledge: while no one is deprived of their basic understanding, each person accesses deeper layers in proportion to his or her intellectual, spiritual, and moral capacity (As'adi, 2019).

System dynamics, on the other hand, is a perspective and a set of conceptual tools that enable understanding the structural configurations and dynamic behaviors of complex systems (Sterman, 2000, p. vii). It facilitates deeper comprehension and the provision of more profound analyses. The central question of the present study is whether system dynamics can be used to gain deeper insight into religious teachings and to access their latent layers. Considering the multilayered nature of Islamic knowledge and the analytical power of this approach in structural studies, such an endeavor appears plausible. Nevertheless, beyond theoretical debates about its feasibility, it is necessary to evaluate the practical applicability of this analytical tool by dissecting one of the key concepts in Islamic teachings.

Islam places exceptional emphasis on thinking, and the religious leaders of Islam have expressed statements on this topic that, at first glance and from a linear-thinking perspective, may appear astonishing or even illogical. For example, one hour of thinking is deemed superior to one year of worship; and reflection (tafakkur) has been described as the father and mother of all virtues and greater than any act of worship. Accordingly, the topic of "reflection (tafakkur)" was selected for analysis within Islamic teachings using a system dynamics approach.

To the linear mind, thinking appears to be a simple matter; thus, many people easily pass over it without attention. The key question is how a seemingly simple phenomenon, such as reflection, can be the source of all virtues and possess such immense value. This is a question that linear reasoning cannot adequately answer. In this study, an effort is made—drawing upon religious sources and system dynamics tools—to offer at least a partial response. It should also be noted that, during the modeling process, additional elements such as "remembrance (dhikr)" and "piety (taqwa)" were identified as core variables influencing the model, and their foundational role in strengthening the system of reflection was articulated.

1. Theoretical Foundations and Literature Review

Before explaining the causal links and loops, it is essential to examine certain foundational concepts from the perspective of Islamic sources. This not only prevents potential misunderstandings but also facilitates a more accurate grasp of the causal relations within the model. Accordingly, several key concepts are presented below with reference to Qur'anic verses and narrations, and where appropriate, their significance within the structure of the study is highlighted.

1-1. Intellect (ʿaql)

Imam Hasan (a) was asked what intellect is, and he replied: "To drink the cup of sorrow, sip by sip, until opportunity presents itself" (Ibn Shu'ba Harani, 1984, p. 225). Imam Ali (a) stated: "Intellect is that you adopt moderation, avoid excess, fulfill your promises, and when angered by the Temimi tribe, you respond with forbearance" (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 252). Imam Ali (a) also said: "Intellect is, in reality, avoiding sin, being farsighted, vigilant, and cautious. Souls are unrestrained, but the hands of intellect hold their reins and prevent them from plunging a person into misfortune" (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 51).

When Imam Sadiq (a) was asked what intellect is, he responded: "Intellect is that by which the All-Merciful is worshipped, and Paradise is attained." The narrator asked: "Then what was in Muʿawiya?" He replied: "That is cunning; that is devilry. It resembles intellect, but it is not intellect" (Kulaini, 1984, Vol. 1, p. 11).

Allamah Tabataba'i, in his commentary on verse 242 of Surah al-Baqarah—"Thus God makes His signs clear to you so that you may understand"—explains that intellect originally means binding and restraining. The application of the term ʿaql to the kind of human cognition through which one commits to what one perceives, and to the faculty by which good and evil and truth and falsehood are distinguished, derives from this meaning. In contrast to ʿaql are terms such as madness, foolishness, stupidity, and ignorance, each used in different contexts. Intellect refers to cognition accompanied by the heart's affirmation of what God has innately instilled in human nature—namely, the understanding of truth and falsehood in theoretical matters and the discernment of good, evil, benefit, and harm in practical matters (Tabataba'i, 1995, Vol. 2, p. 374).

Many narrations from the Prophet (s) emphasize the value of intellect. For example, he states: "God has not distributed anything better to His servants than intellect. The sleep of an intelligent person is superior to the

night vigil of a fool; the staying at home of the intelligent is superior to the traveling of a fool (for worship, such as pilgrimage or jihad). God never sent a prophet or messenger until his intellect reached perfection and surpassed the intellects of his community." He also said: "The intelligent are the possessors of intellect (ulu al-albāb) of whom God has spoken: 'And none take heed except those of intellect.'" (Kulaini, 1984, Vol. 1, p. 15).

The Prophet (s) further stated: "Everything has an instrument, and the instrument of the believer is intellect; everything has a mount, and the mount of a human being is intellect; everything has an ultimate goal, and the goal of worship is intellect; every group of travelers has a tent that shelters them, and the tent of Muslims is intellect" (Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2010, Vol. 8, p. 3874).

1-2. Thinking (ta'aqqul)

The term ta'aqqul (on the morphological pattern tafa''ul) denotes firmness in accepting and applying (Ibn Manzur, Vol. 11, p. 458). In other words, ta'aqqul is the process of actualizing the faculty of intellect (Tabataba'i, 2011, Vol. 2, p. 114). However, within the structure of religious knowledge, mere thinking is not intrinsically valuable; rather, the subject-orientation of reflection and its direction toward essential truths demarcate genuine reflection from illusion (Jawadi Amoli, 2012, p. 184). The quality of the output of the human mental system is determined by the subjects one selects as the input for reflection (Motahhari, 2012, p. 54).

For example, Qur'anic verses and narrations recommend reflection in the following strategic domains:

a) The system of creation and the realm of existence (systemic holism)

The Qur'an calls the human being to contemplate the truth-oriented structure of the universe so that one may transcend a fragmented view:

"Have they not reflected within themselves? God has not created the heavens and the earth and what is between them except with truth and for a specified term…" (al-Rum: 8).

choosing this systemic perspective, Imam Ali (a) states: "Reflection on the dominion of the heavens and the earth is the worship of the sincere" (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 58).

b) Divine blessings (system resources)

Another key domain is the recognition of the capacities and blessings granted to the human being. Imam Ali (a) states: "Reflection upon God's blessings is a noble act of worship" (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 58).

c) The conditions of past nations (historical dynamics)

In system dynamics, studying the past behavior of a system is essential for anticipating its future. The Qur'an likewise instructs humans to travel upon the earth and observe the causal structures underlying the fate of earlier communities:

"Have they not traveled through the land so that they may observe how the outcome was for those before them…" (al-Rum: 9).

The Qur'an further emphasizes in Surah Al-'Imran that such events are not random but unfold according to established patterns:

"Many precedents have passed before you, so travel through the earth and observe…" (Al-'Imran: 137).

1-3. Remembrance (dhikr)

According to Islamic narrations, remembrance is not limited to verbal repetition; rather, it encompasses the entire spectrum of recalling God across all dimensions of human existence—verbal and non-verbal. The Prophet (s) describes the multifaceted nature of this inner presence: "My Lord commanded me that my speech be remembrance, my silence reflection, and my gaze a lesson" (Majlisi, 1984, Vol. 93, p. 165).

In the same spirit, Imam Ali (a) links felicity to the union of silence and divine remembrance, saying: "Blessed is the one who speaks only in remembrance of God" (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 392; Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2010, Vol. 4, p. 1837).

In a deeper statement, he describes remembrance as a reality beyond outward rituals: "Remembrance of God is neither among the duties of the tongue nor among the formalities of thought; rather, its beginning lies with the One remembered (God), and only in the second degree does the rememberer appear" (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 188).

The priority of inward, hidden remembrance is also emphasized. The Prophet (s) said: "Remember God with silent remembrance." They asked: "What is silent remembrance?" He replied: "Hidden and concealed remembrance" (Muttaqi Hindi, 1981, Vol. 1, p. 431).

1-4. Heedlessness (ghaflah)

In the view of the Infallibles (a), heedlessness is not a mere lapse but a fundamental obstacle to awareness. Imam Ali (a) states: "Heedlessness is the opposite of alertness" (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 462). The Prophet (s), in a cautionary tone, describes the roots of heedlessness related to worldly distraction and forgetfulness of death: "I am astonished at one who is

heedless while others are not heedless of him; and astonished at one who pursues the world while death pursues him; and astonished at one who opens his mouth in laughter while not knowing whether God is pleased with him or displeased" (Mufid, 1992, p. 169).

This downfall—heedlessness—directly affects human action. Imam Sadiq (a) states: "Whoever truly remembers God obeys Him, and whoever is heedless of God disobeys Him… The root of both is remembrance and heedlessness" (Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2010, Vol. 4, p. 1857). Thus, Imam Ali (a) identifies "remembrance with presence of heart" as the path out of heedlessness, stating: "Do not remember God in a state of heedlessness… Rather, remember Him in a manner where your heart and your tongue are one" (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 188).

An analysis of these narrations reveals that heedlessness and remembrance stand in direct opposition. Ontologically, the two cannot coexist; the presence of one negates the other.

1-5. Literature Review

Prior studies relevant to the thematic domain of this research can be classified into two general categories:

1-5-1. Studies on the Systemic Nature of Concepts Related to Reflection in Islamic Sources

Within the field of Islamic teachings, numerous studies have examined the status of reflection and its connection with other ethical concepts. For instance, Izadpanah (2013), in explaining the Qur'anic moral system, argues that Qur'anic concepts are not scattered elements but are interconnected within a "networked structure." Likewise, Parhizkar et al. (2017) demonstrated that reflection in religious texts constitutes the starting point of inner transformation, which—through strengthening remembrance (dhikr)—leads to the acquisition of piety (taqwa). However, most of these studies are descriptive or exegetical in nature and seldom present the "interactive mechanisms" or causal relationships among these variables within a structured model.

1-5-2. Application of the Systemic Approach and System Dynamics in the Humanities and Religious Studies

The use of system dynamics—established by Sterman as a tool for understanding complex systems—has, in recent years, expanded from industrial and engineering domains into the social sciences and humanities. In Iran, Azar et al. (2016) emphasized the need for soft modeling in

analyzing complex human phenomena. However, specifically regarding "religious knowledge," very few studies have employed this approach. Mousavi et al. (2019), in an article titled "A Systemic Analysis of Islamic Lifestyle Components," attempted to explain the relationships among religious variables using causal-loop diagrams. They concluded that many ethical dead-ends originate from "heedlessness (ghaflah)" as a reduction of the positive feedback loop within the system. At the international level, scholars such as Witt (2010) argue that system dynamics can serve as a "shared language" for developing an intuitive understanding of classical and philosophical texts.

1-5-3. Research Gap and Contribution of the Present Study

A review of the literature indicates that although the multilayered nature of religious teachings and the significance of reflection have been widely discussed in theological and exegetical writings, the interactive dynamics between reflection and other components of religious knowledge have not been analyzed within a feedback-based system. The contribution of the present study is that—unlike conventional linear approaches that treat these concepts as isolated—it uses system dynamics tools to demonstrate how strengthening a foundational element such as reflection can, through reinforcing loops, elevate the entire cognitive-religious system of the individual and provide a scientific explanation for the extraordinary value attributed to "one hour of reflection."

2. Materials & Methods

The process of conducting this research commenced with the clarification of the problem and the formulation of initial objectives. In the data collection phase, to achieve a coherent model, priority was given to examining the views and opinions of religious experts. Accordingly, in the first step, the content of 23 religious lecture sessions centered on "reflection (tafakkur)" was identified and analyzed. Simultaneously, narrations relevant to the subject were extracted and categorized.

In the subsequent step, based on the findings derived from the primary sources, a preliminary model of causal relationships was designed. This model was refined and adjusted through an iterative back-and-forth process, drawing upon supplementary resources. For the purpose of validating and revising the initial model, it was presented to experts along with the delineated causal loops and a brief explanation of the relationships among the variables.

In selecting the experts, criteria such as “mastery of Islamic teachings,” “deep understanding of the foundations of reflection,” and “familiarity with the methodology of systems thinking” were applied. Among the nine invited experts, five expressed willingness to collaborate. Their educational qualifications and academic ranks are presented in Table 1.

Table1. Educational Degrees and Academic Ranks of Experts

Row	Educational Degree	Academic Rank
1	PhD in Philosophy	Full Professor
2	PhD in Philosophy	Assistant Professor
3	PhD in Organizational Behavior Management	University Lecturer and Memorizer of the Entire Qur’an
4	PhD in Philosophy	Lecturer in Seminary and University
5	PhD in Systems Management	Assistant Professor

In the final stage, based on the corrective feedback provided by the experts, the review of related postgraduate theses, and a deeper examination of narrational sources, the research model was revised through several iterations. The final model resulting from this process exhibited noticeable changes compared to the initial model. All relationships incorporated in the final version were directly derived and finalized with reference to the narrations of the Infallibles (peace be upon them) and the verses of the Holy Qur’an, which enhanced the rigor and validity of the extracted model.

3. Research Findings

In this section, the overall causal loop model is first presented. Subsequently, each loop related to the model is explained separately using narrations from the Infallible Imams (peace be upon them) and, where appropriate, supported by verses from the Holy Qur’an.

3-1. The Overall Causal Relationship Model

In this section, the overall causal loop model is first presented. Subsequently, each loop in the model is explained separately using narrations from the Infallible Imams (peace be upon them) and, in some cases, supported by verses from the Holy Qur’an.

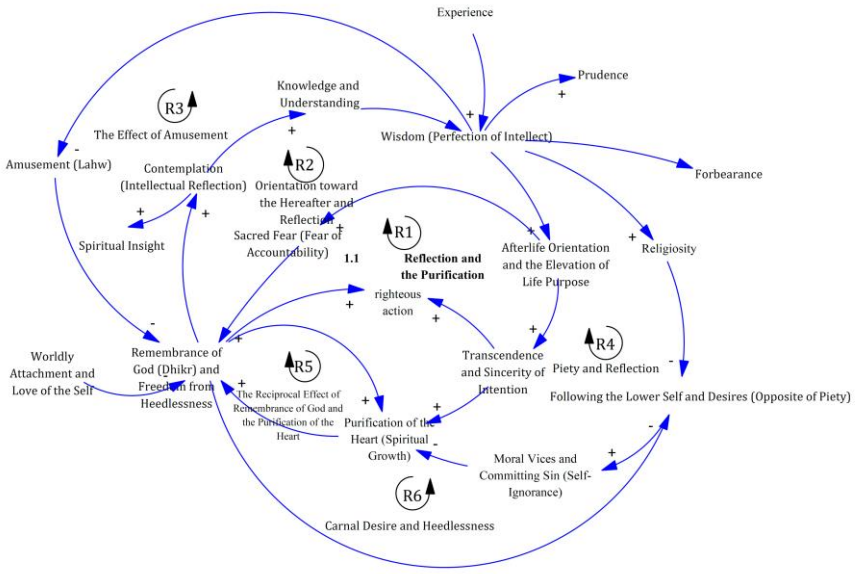

Figure 1. The overall causal relationship model in the system of religious knowledge

The overall model of the identified causal relationships—representing the system of religious knowledge—is shown in the figure below.

As illustrated, the model consists of six loops. For a clearer explanation of the model and a better understanding of the causal relationships, each loop and the relationships within it are explained in turn.

3-2. Loop One: Reflection and the Purification of the Heart

In the model of the system of religious knowledge, this loop constitutes a "cycle of virtue" or reinforcing loop, demonstrating how rationality and spirituality, through continuous interaction, contribute to the elevation of the human being's existential level.

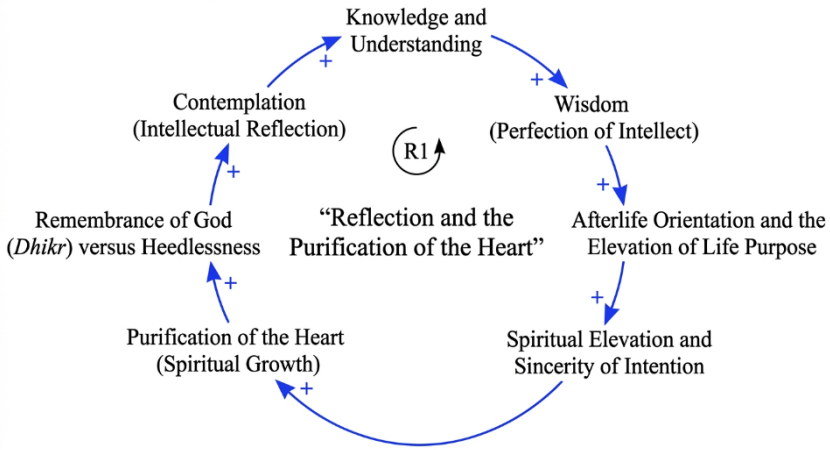

Figure 2. The reflection and purification of the heart loop

Acc According to the following narrations, reflection in the Islamic sense is not merely a mental activity but leads to an increase in knowledge and understanding:

- Imam ʿAli (a): "Through reflection, the darkness of affairs becomes illuminated." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 56)
- Imam ʿAli (a): "There is no knowledge like reflection." (Nahj al Balaghah, Saying 113)
- Imam al Rida (a): "Reflection is your mirror; it shows you your good and bad qualities." (Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2010, vol. 3, p. 436)
- Imam ʿAli (a): "Reflection is a clear mirror." (Nahj al Balaghah, Saying 5)

As also indicated in the overall model, reflection (tafakkur) increases insight (basīrah), a point explicitly mentioned in the following narrations:

- Imam ʿAli (a): "Whoever reflects for a long time, his insight becomes sound." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 57)
- Imam ʿAli (a): "Whoever reflects becomes perceptive." (Nahj al Balaghah, Letter 31)

Continuing the explanation of causal relations, a narration from Imam ʿAli (a) states that the intellect (ʿaql) is an innate faculty that increases through knowledge and experience (Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2010, vol. 7, p. 404). He also states:

"The intellect and desire are two enemies. The ally of intellect is knowledge, and the adornment of desire is passion. Between these two, there is a struggle over the soul; whichever prevails, the soul follows it." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 96)

Numerous narrations likewise point to the effect of reflection on the intellect, a relationship that in fact operates through the production of knowledge and understanding:

- Imam ʿAli (a): "Reflection yields wisdom." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 56)
- Imam ʿAli (a): "Reflection polishes the intellects." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 56)
- Imam ʿAli (a): "The root of intellect is reflection, and its fruit is safety from error and sin—or from the punishment of the Hereafter." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 52)
- Imam al Sadiq (a): "Frequent contemplation in knowledge opens and blossoms the intellect." (Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2010, vol. 7, p. 3418)

One effect of the perfection of the intellect is that a person chooses higher and more transcendent goals and turns his attention toward the eternal abode of the Hereafter. As the human intellect becomes more complete, attention shifts from the transient world to the enduring one. This idea appears in the following narrations:

- Imam ʿAli (a): "The wise seek perfection, whereas the ignorant seek wealth." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 48)
- The Prophet (s): "The most intelligent of people is the servant who recognizes his Lord and obeys Him, recognizes his enemy and disobeys him, knows his eternal abode and cultivates it, and knows that he will soon depart and thus prepares provisions for the journey." (Daylami, 1408 AH, p. 337)
- Imam ʿAli (a): "The most intelligent people are those who are most mindful of the consequences." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 52)
- Imam ʿAli (a): "The limit of intellect is separation from what perishes (this world) and attachment to what endures." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 51)

When human goals—that is, the purposes a person selects for his life—are elevated and become more transcendent, intentions (niyyāt) are likewise elevated; they become purer and more refined. Consequently, this elevation

of intention—meaning focused attention on God, His signs, and His awliyāʾ—leads to the purification of the heart (spiritual growth).

The purification of the heart, in turn, prevents a person from becoming heedless of the remembrance of God. In proportion to the degree of purification and spiritual growth, moments of heedlessness and the overall extent of heedlessness decrease. Imam al Sadiq (a) states:

"A servant must have sincere intention (for God) in all his movements and stillness; otherwise he is counted among the heedless." (Majlisi, 1983, vol. 70, p. 210)

The more a person remembers God and engages in dhikr, the more his reflection increases. In fact, a necessary condition for reflection in the sense defined here—reflection as understood in Islam—is freedom from heedlessness. Imam ʿAli (a) says:

"…So, O listener! Awaken from your intoxication, arise from the sleep of heedlessness, restrain your haste, and reflect well upon what has been conveyed to you from the tongue of the unlettered Prophet—something from which there is no escape." (Nahj al Balaghah, Sermon 153)

Some narrations also refer to indirect relationships. For example, Imam Hasan (a) points to the role of reflection in reviving and purifying the heart:

"Reflection revives the heart of the insightful person." (Ibn Shuʿbah Harrani, 1984, p. 226)

Regarding the influence of intellect on knowledge, the following narrations from Imam ʿAli (a) may be cited:

- "The intellect is the mount of knowledge, and knowledge is the mount of forbearance." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 55)
- "The intellect is the root of knowledge and the motivation for understanding." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 51)
- "The intellect is the root of knowledge and the cause of comprehension." (Tamimi Amadi, 1981, vol. 2, p. 91)
- "Through the intellect one may attain the highest levels of knowledge." (Tamimi Amadi, 1981, vol. 3, p. 221)
- "The wealth of the intelligent person lies in his knowledge." (Tamimi Amadi, 1981, vol. 4, p. 376)

A wise person does not fall into heedlessness; this is another indirect relationship mentioned in the narrations. Imam ʿAli (a) states:

"I am astonished that intelligent people could be heedless of seeking the best provision for the Hereafter and preparing for their return." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 160)

He also says regarding the effect of heedlessness on intellect:

"Whoever becomes heedless remains ignorant." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 73)

Sincerity of intention likewise removes heedlessness. The Prophet (s) advised Abu Dharr:

"O Abu Dharr! Intend to perform a good deed, even if you do not actually perform it, so that you are not written among the heedless." (Tabarsi, 1991, vol. 2, p. 378)

In summary, this loop shows that reflection revives the heart, and a heart that has come alive—through remembrance of God and spiritual awakening—provides a more precise and receptive ground for deeper reflection. This continuous interaction between intellect (reflection) and heart constitutes the driving engine of growth in the system of religious knowledge.

3-3. Loop Two: Orientation toward the Hereafter and Reflection

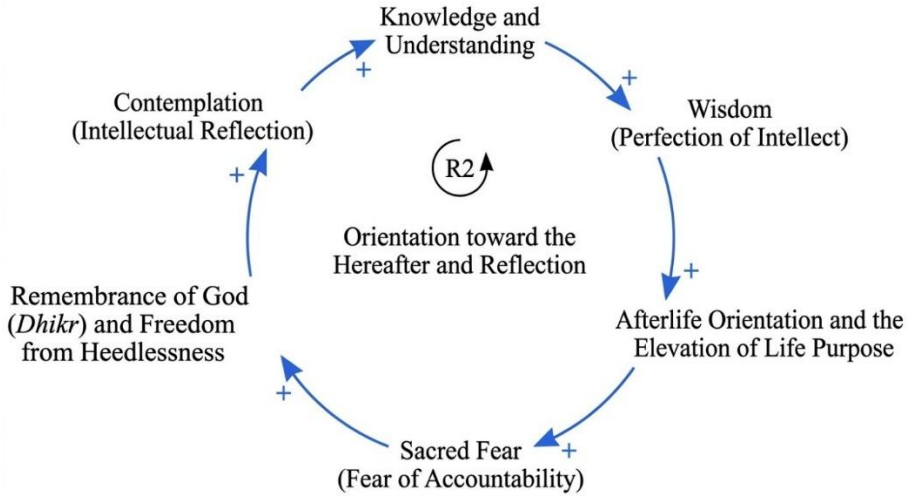

Figure 3. The Hereafter orientation and reflection loop

Like the previous loop, this loop is also a reinforcing loop and shares many similarities with it, but it highlights the motivational dimensions of the system. From the element of remembrance of God to orientation toward the Hereafter, the relevant relationships were explained in the previous loop.

Attention to the eternal abode and the selection of transcendent goals lead a person to see himself as accountable before God for his actions in this world. Awareness of divine reckoning and attention to the punishment of sinners create a form of sacred, awakening fear within the person who is oriented toward the Hereafter. The Prophet (s) once passed by a gathering where loud laughter was heard and said:

"Mix your gatherings with the remembrance of that which disturbs pleasures." They asked, "What is that?" He said, "Death." (Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2010, vol. 12, p. 5623)

Imam ʿAli (a) similarly states:

"Remember the destroyer of pleasures, the disturber of enjoyments, the disperser of gatherings, the one that cuts off hopes, brings death near, and announces separation and dispersal." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 161)

This fear and awakening resulting from orientation toward the Hereafter do not lead to stagnation; rather, they draw a person toward the Lord of the Day of Judgment and lead him to maintain continuous remembrance of God. As the Qur'an states:

"Men whom neither trade nor sale distracts from the remembrance of God, the establishment of prayer, and the giving of alms; they fear a day when hearts and eyes will be overturned." (Qur'an 24:37)

In the words of Imam ʿAli (a), sustained, vigilant fear assists the believer on the long journey of life, preventing him from relying on heedlessness and false hopes. (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 161)

Indirect relations within this loop also show that heedlessness—by causing forgetfulness of the journey to the Hereafter—is the principal obstacle to the growth of this cycle. Imam ʿAli (a) states:

"Woe to the one overcome by heedlessness who, as a result, forgets the journey to the Hereafter and fails to prepare for it." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 161)

Conversely, orientation toward the Hereafter ensures that a person never becomes weary of remembering God (Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2010, vol. 4, p. 1758). A heart that has been softened by the remembrance of death is freed from hardness and rigidity. As Jesus (a) is reported to have said:

"If a beast is not ridden and no burden is placed upon it, it becomes wild and ill-tempered. Hearts are the same: if they are not softened by the remembrance of death and followed by constant worship, they become hard and harsh." (Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2010, vol. 11, p. 5005)

Imam ʿAli (a) likewise warns:

"Beware of seeing the endpoint of life (death) as far away, for this hardens the hearts." (Arbili, 2002, vol. 3, p. 140)

Therefore, this loop—by linking awakening fear and continuous dhikr—provides the necessary ground for returning to deeper reflection and for sustaining ongoing growth within the system of religious knowledge.

3-4. Loop Three: The Effect of Amusement

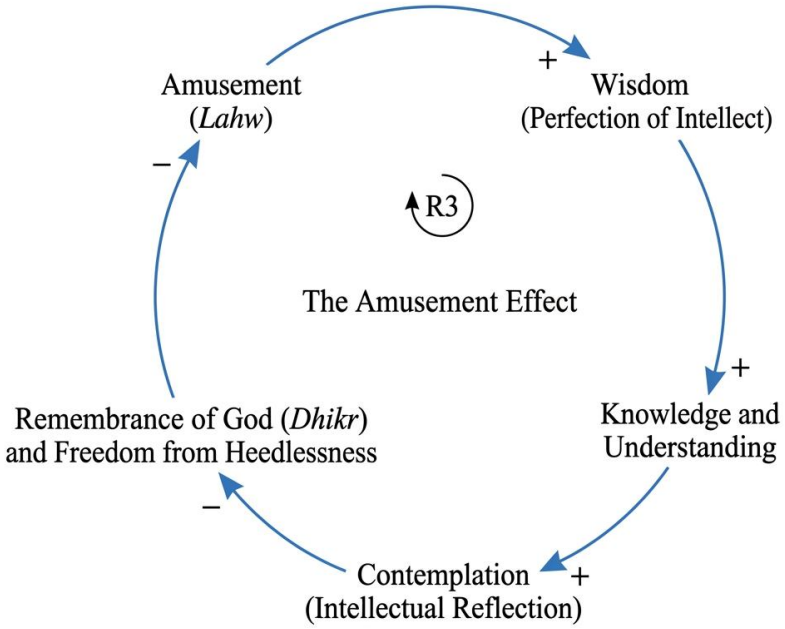

Figure 4. The amusement effect loop

A substantial portion of this loop was implicitly clarified in the earlier loops. The third loop in the system of religious knowledge explicates the inhibitory role of *lahw*—idle, heedlessness-inducing forms of amusement—in obstructing intellectual and spiritual growth. Within this cycle, the intellect (ʿaql) functions as a guiding and regulatory force that prevents the human being from devoting time to activities devoid of value or teleological benefit.

According to the teachings of Imam ʿAli (a), refraining from futile amusement represents one of the highest degrees of wisdom (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 51), whereas persistent engagement in amusement is a sign of intellectual deficiency (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 221). At a deeper level,

heedless amusement is counted among the fruits of ignorance (jahālah) itself (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 75).

The destructive influence of *lahw* stems from the fact that it directly drives the heart toward heedlessness (ghaflah) and weakens the servant's bond with the sacred domain. Imam Hasan (a) states that the believer avoids vain amusement lest he fall into heedlessness (Warram ibn Abi Firas, 1990, vol. 1, p. 52). This link is so decisive that Imam ʿAli (a) declares:

"Whoever busies himself with remembering people, God—majestic is He—separates him from remembering Himself." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 437)

Thus, amusement acts as an impediment to remembrance (dhikr), and as dhikr diminishes, the entire mechanism that enables reflection (tafakkur) loses its vitality.

Beyond the direct effects, the indirect relationships within this loop reveal that *lahw* progressively erodes the very substance of the intellect. From the viewpoint of Imam ʿAli (a), amusement and heedlessness are in fact "food for foolishness" (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 221). Continuous indulgence in *lahw* weakens rational faculties and distances the person from the path of perfection.

Accordingly, this reinforcing loop demonstrates that the more the intellect becomes perfected, the more it rejects *lahw*; and by distancing itself from heedless amusement, it clears the ground for sustained remembrance of God and for deeper reflection. Avoidance of futility, therefore, becomes itself a source of protection and advancement for religious knowledge.

3-5. Loop Four: Piety and Reflection

Figure 5. The piety and reflection loop

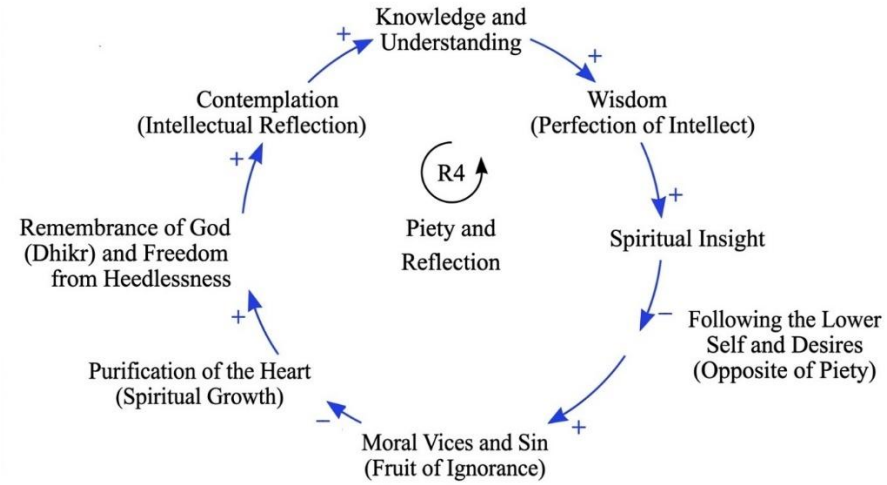

Figure 5. The piety and reflection loop

The fourth loop in the system of religious knowledge explains how the structure of thought is safeguarded through behavioral purity—namely, piety (taqwa). Earlier loops clarified that remembrance of God, through several intermediaries, contributes to the perfection of the intellect (ʿaql).

According to the narrations, the perfection of intellect naturally leads to religiosity. Imam al-Sadiq (a) states that "whoever possesses intellect is religious" (Kulaynī, 1984, vol. 1, p. 11), and Imam ʿAli (a) likewise affirms that religiosity and refinement are among the fruits of intellect (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 51). Fundamentally, the truly intelligent person is one who submits to the truth (Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2010, vol. 8, p. 3393). Imam ʿAli (a) further states: "The believer does not attain faith until he employs his intellect." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 52)

When religiosity is deep and authentic—not merely external—it manifests in practice as taqwa, which is defined as resistance to the impulses of the lower self (nafs) and the pleasures it demands. Imam ʿAli (a) states: "The order of religion lies in opposing the lower self and turning away from the world." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 241) In another narration, he states: "The apex of religion is opposing desire." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 241)

One who practices taqwa avoids sin and moral vices, whereas following the desires of the lower self inevitably leads to sin. Imam ʿAli (a) declares:

"Obedience to the lower self and its desires is the foundation of every misery and the source of every misguidance." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 233)

He also warns: “Avoid desires, for they lead you toward sins and drive you toward evil.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 305)

From an indirect perspective as well, remembrance of God prevents sin. Imam al-Sadiq (a) states:

“Whoever truly remembers God obeys Him; whoever is heedless of God disobeys Him. Obedience is a sign of guidance, and disobedience a sign of misguidance—and the root of both is remembrance and heedlessness.” (Majlisi, 1983, vol. 93, p. 158)

Ultimately, sin and moral corruption result in hardness of heart (qasāwat) and destroy the purification of the heart. Imam al-Sadiq (a) states: “Nothing corrupts the heart more than sin.” (Kulaynī, 1984, vol. 2, p. 268) Imam ʿAli (a) likewise states: “Tears do not dry except because of the hardness of hearts, and hearts do not harden except due to an increase in sin.” (Ibn Bābawayh, 2001, vol. 1, p. 81)

The indirect relationships in this loop are also reinforced by numerous narrations. Concerning the role of taqwa in awakening from heedlessness, Imam ʿAli (a) states:

“I enjoin you to have taqwa of God… Through taqwa, turn your sleep into wakefulness and complete your day with it.” (Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 191)

Multiple narrations from Imam ʿAli (a) indicate that reflection reduces heedlessness and prevents wrongdoing. He states: “Reflection leads to taking heed, protects from slips, and produces caution and vigilance.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 57) Elsewhere, he says: “Persistent reflection and alertness safeguard one from slips and free him from fluctuations.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 57)

Regarding the effect of intellect on remembrance of God, Imam ʿAli (a) says:

“The intelligent person, when silent, reflects; when he speaks, he remembers God; and when he looks, he takes heed.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 58)

Numerous narrations also affirm the influence of intellect on avoiding sin and moral vices. Imam ʿAli (a) states: “The fruit of intellect is detesting the world and subduing desire.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 52) He also affirms: “Intellect distances one from wrongdoing and calls him toward goodness.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 51) And: “The intelligent person aspires to abandon sins and eliminate faults.” (Karajaki, 2015, vol. 1, p. 200)

On the influence of intellect on controlling desires, several narrations state: “Among the qualities of the intelligent is little desire and little heedlessness.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 54)

"When the intellect becomes complete, desire diminishes." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 52)

And fundamentally: "The intelligent person is one who causes his desires to die." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 240)

Regarding the role of reflection in accepting religion, Imam al-Kāẓim (a) states:

"God did not send His prophets and messengers except so that His servants might reflect about God. Whoever's recognition is deeper is more accepting of the Divine call. And the most knowledgeable among them about God is the one whose intellect is most complete." (Kulaynī, 1984, vol. 1, p. 16)

Numerous narrations also describe the destructive impact of following desire on the intellect.

- Imam ʿAli (a) states: "Through desire, intellect is destroyed." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 242)
- Imam ʿAli (a) also states: "The enemy of intellect is the lower self." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 241)
- Imam al-Bāqir (a) states: "No intellect is like opposing the lower self." (Ibn Shuʿbah Harrani, 1984, p. 286)
- Imam ʿAli (a) also states: "Preserving the intellect lies in opposing the lower self and distancing oneself from the world." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 241)
- And: "Whoever distances himself from his desires, his intellect becomes sound." (Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2010, vol. 8, p. 3480)

The effect of following desire on heedlessness is also explicit. Imam ʿAli (a) states: "Among sins, none is more destructive than following desire, for it makes you heedless of God." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 240). Imam al-Sajjad (a) explains that overeating, laziness born of satiation, and heedlessness born of worldly power all slow a person's actions and erase remembrance of God, making him heedless of the nearness of death and intoxicated with love of the world. (Ibn Shuʿbah Harrani, 1984, p. 273)

The influence of moral vices on intellect is also emphasized. Imam al-Bāqir (a) says: "No pride enters a person's heart except that an equal measure of his intellect is taken away." (Majlisi, 1983, vol. 78, p. 186) Imam ʿAli (a) likewise states: "Self-admiration is among the adversaries of intellect." (Nahj al-Balaghah, Saying 212).

3-6. Loop Five: The Reciprocal Effect of Remembrance of God and the Purification of the Heart

Figure 6. The reciprocal effect of remembrance of God and purification of the heart

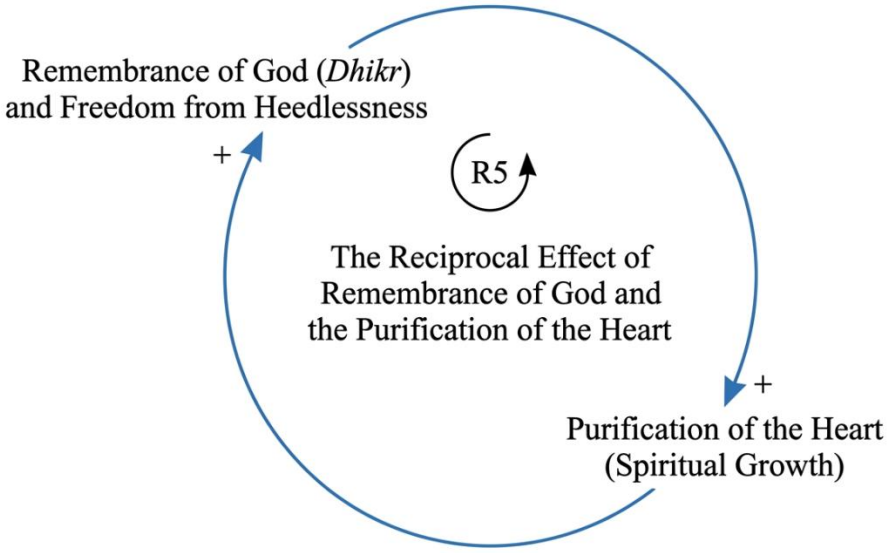

Figure 6. The reciprocal effect of remembrance of God and purification of the heart

T The fifth loop in this epistemic system elaborates on the core synergistic interaction between divine remembrance (*dhikr*) and the inner purification of the heart (*qalb salim*). This reinforcing feedback loop demonstrates how these two factors reciprocally elevate the spiritual dimension of the human being.

According to the luminous sermons of *Nahj al-Balaghah*, the Almighty God has ordained His remembrance as a "polish for hearts" so that even the ears heavy with heedlessness may become attentive through it (Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 222). Therefore, continual engagement in *dhikr* is not merely a ritualistic activity; it forms the root of spiritual rectitude and heart's purification (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 188). The Prophet (ṣ) similarly emphasizes that remembrance of God is the cure that brings hearts to life (Muttaqi Hindi, 1991, vol. 1, p. 433), breathing vitality into the spiritual faculties.

Conversely, this loop highlights the indispensable role of a prepared heart ready for sustained *dhikr*. When the heart is freed from spiritual opacities and garnished with polish, the servant's desire and inclination towards the Divine presence intensify. Imam ʿAli (a) strongly exhorts believers to decisively "treat the fatigue of the heart," rouse the soul, and withdraw the "sleep of heedlessness from the eyes" (Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 223), thus creating a fertile ground for unceasing remembrance.

This dynamic interaction between *dhikr* and *qalb salim* underpins the essential pulsation of the spiritual system and reveals how the purification of the heart and the act of remembrance mutually reinforce and exponentially amplify the spiritual elevation of the servant.

3-7. Loop Six: Carnal Desire and Heedlessness

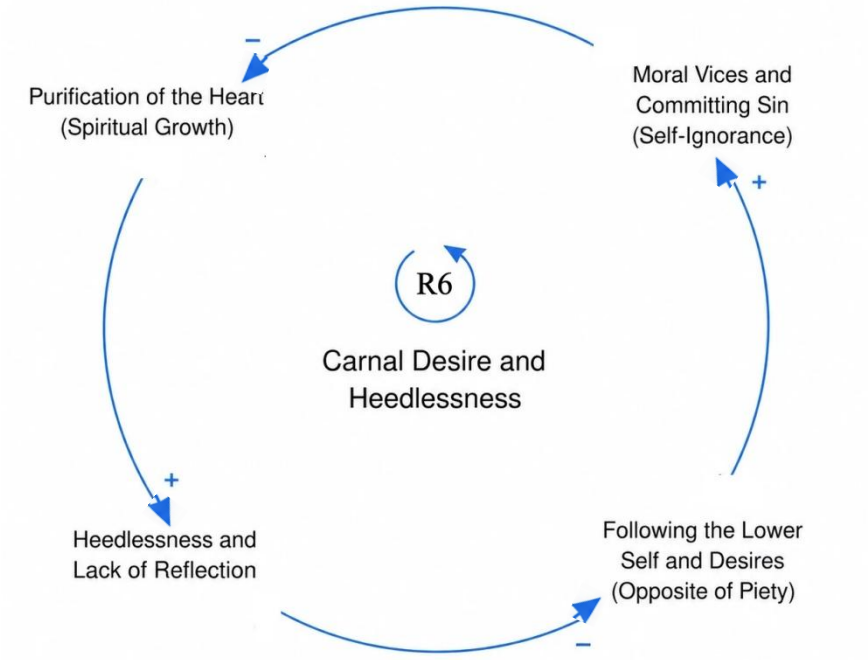

Figure 7. The carnal desire and heedlessness loop

T The sixth loop addresses the intricate connection between the lower self's carnal desires (*hawā al-nafs*) and spiritual heedlessness (*ghaflah*), demonstrating how *dhikr* functions as a robust barrier against satanic intrusion and the dominance of base desires.

Imam ʿAli (a) clearly asserts that remembrance of God repels Satan and constitutes a pillar of faith and protection from satanic influence (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 188). The Prophet (ṣ) also illustrates that Satan is constantly lying in ambush over the heart. It is only by remembrance of God that Satan withdraws, but the slightest lapse into heedlessness prompts the resumption of his insidious whisperings and temptations (Huweizi, 1994, vol. 5, p. 725).

Moreover, divine tradition elucidates a profound spiritual cycle:

"When remembrance of Me overcomes My servant, I place his desires and pleasures within My remembrance; then he loves Me, and I love him. When we love each other, I remove the veil between us and overpower his soul with My love so that he no longer falls into heedlessness and distraction. These people are the true champions, as spoken by the Prophets." (Muttaqi Hindi, 1991, vol. 1, p. 433)

This evidences how *dhikr* strengthens *taqwa* (God-consciousness) and reinforces the servant's spiritual resilience to passions and desires.

Opposingly, this loop warns that heedlessness not only impedes remembrance but also wreaks havoc upon the seat of the heart. Imam al-Baqir (a) states that heedlessness leads to the hardening of the heart (Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2010, vol. 9, p. 3892). Imam ʿAli (a) declares:

"Whoever is overcome by heedlessness, his heart dies." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 266)

Therefore, this feedback loop completes the chain of human spiritual ascent or decline by coupling *dhikr* and *taqwa* on the one hand, and the devastating consequences of heedlessness and unchecked desire on the other.

3-8. Relationships Outside the Loops

Beyond the major feedback loops, several critical relationships operate independently, mediated by variables defined outside the loops themselves.

One such relationship is the effect of *reflection* (tafakkur) on *righteous action* (*amal salih*). Imam ʿAli (a) proclaims:

"Contemplation upon good deeds motivates one to perform them." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 56)

Similarly, Imam clarifies:

"Reflection calls one toward goodness and its practice." (Kulayni, 1363 SH, vol. 2, p. 55)

The Prophet (ṣ) further affirms the primacy of *knowledge* in guiding action:

"Knowledge is the leader [of action], and action follows it." (Ibn Shuʿbah Harrani, 1363 SH, p. 28)

Moreover, *remembrance of God* itself catalyzes righteous conduct. Imam ʿAli (a) states:

"Whoever adorns his heart with continual remembrance of God performs goodness openly and privately." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 189)

Conversely, attachment to worldly life (*hubbu ad-dunya*) and self-love serve as primary causes of heedlessness. The Qur'an explicitly commands believers: "O you who have believed, let not your wealth or your children distract you from the remembrance of God...\(Qur'an 63:9)."

Another significant external relation is the effect of *intention* (*niyyah*) on action.

- Imam ʿAli (a) remarks: "Actions are the fruits of intentions." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 92)
- Imam al-Sadiq (a) states: "Nobody is incapable of accomplishing what his intention strongly wills." (Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2010, vol. 12, p. 5686)
- And again, Imam ʿAli (a) emphasizes: "Good intention draws divine success." (Tamimi Amadi, 1987, p. 92).

4. Discussion & Conclusion

As demonstrated throughout the study, the final model extracted—fully grounded in the verses of the Holy Qur'an and the narrations of the Infallible Imams (peace be upon them)—possesses strong scientific and narrative authenticity and, by employing the minimum number of variables, succeeds in facilitating an integrated understanding of the Islamic epistemic system. Systemic analysis of the model indicates that remembrance of God (dhikr) is a leverage variable present in all loops and constitutes the primary key to human awakening and felicity. Every moment of the removal of heedlessness pushes the entire system toward spiritual elevation.

Alongside dhikr, reflection (tafakkur) functions as the driving engine of the growth of the intellect, for based on the logic of revelation, even experience—without reflection and taking heed—cannot lead to the perfection of the intellect. Similarly, piety (taqwa), understood as refraining from following the lower self, operates as a protective variable that provides the essential ground for the purification of the heart and the continuity of dhikr. The strategic connection among these elements is embodied in the advice of the Holy Prophet (s): "Soften your hearts, reflect frequently, and weep much out of fear of God" (Warram ibn Abi Firas, 1990, vol. 1, p. 250).

This synergistic pathway ultimately leads to the station of the sound heart (qalb salim)—the highest level of the purification of the heart (Naraqi, 2009, p. 567)—in which a person, having transcended the destructive cycles of carnal desire, attains stable equilibrium in the realm of servitude to God, and all of his existential faculties become harmonized in the pursuit of God's pleasure. As the Qur'an states, it is the only accepted capital on the Day of Resurrection (Qur'an 26:87–89).

From this systemic vantage point, it becomes clear why the religious authorities have described reflection as the father and mother of all virtues and have regarded an hour of reflection as superior to years of worship. Reflection is not a static act; rather, it is a dynamic process whose effects propagate exponentially through all the epistemic "gears" of the human being. In this model, reflection functions as a leverage point that, by transforming intentions and goals, reorients the entire existential system. Because its influence on other variables operates through reinforcing and feedback-based mechanisms, each increment of growth in the domain of reflection produces exponential growth in the domains of taqwa and the purification of the heart—an effect that linear modes of reasoning are incapable of fully analyzing.

Within this epistemic framework, the inseparable relationship between rationality and spirituality becomes clearly delineated. Purification of the heart is not only the product of taqwa but also a vital input for rational insight. The closer a person draws to the truths of existence through reflection, the stronger his inclination toward inner purification becomes; and this purity, in turn, removes mental obscurities and opens the way for deeper intellectual perception. This continuous interaction generates a system in which awakened rationality safeguards spirituality, while refined spirituality nourishes and revitalizes the intellect.

In response to the potential objection that the reinforcing nature of all loops may appear inconsistent with systemic realities, it must be noted that the goals emphasized in Islam—such as perfection of the intellect, purification of the heart, and righteous action—do not have intrinsic upper limits and possess open-ended capacity for growth. Moreover, these loops resemble interlocking gears whose combined movement determines the overall direction of the system: growth may occur either toward elevation and ascent through dhikr or toward decline and regression through heedlessness.

Ultimately, this research demonstrates the effectiveness of the system dynamics approach in uncovering the complex relationships among profound religious concepts and hopes to provide an appropriate scientific

foundation for the application of this method in Islamic management studies and related fields.

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A Review of the Scope of Religious Requirements in Social Security Policy Research

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to examine the religious imperatives in social security policymaking with a particular emphasis on the concept of Social Takaful.

Methodology: The research method is based on a systematic review of scholarly sources, including books, peer-reviewed articles, and academic theses published up to July 2024. A comprehensive search was conducted in reputable academic databases, followed by multi-stage screening based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. Quality appraisal was conducted using the CASP tool, and 51 sources were ultimately analyzed.

Findings: The findings indicate that while numerous works address welfare, social justice, and Islamic perspectives on social security, there is no comprehensive study that systematically derives the religious imperatives of social security policymaking from the framework of Social Takaful. Content analysis of the selected studies revealed that the core dimensions of Islamic social policy include social and economic justice, mutual responsibility and solidarity, social welfare, spiritual growth, human dignity, duties of the Islamic state, public participation, universal coverage, empowerment, and adherence to religious principles.

Accordingly, the Islamic state, beyond its direct supportive role, is tasked with responsibilities such as managing religious endowments (waqf), meeting the basic needs of the poor, raising orphans, supporting the disabled, and paying the debts of those unable to fulfill them. Moreover, informal institutions such as the family, kinship, community, and networks of brotherhood play a central role in realizing Social Takaful.

Conclusion: The study concludes that a systematic review of Islamic sources can provide a solid foundation for identifying and reconstructing a conceptual framework for Islamic social policymaking. This can contribute to designing indigenous models of social security characterized by justice, ethics, and sustainability.

Keywords

Islamic management, social security, public policy, secondary studies, scoping review.

Introduction and Problem Statement

From its very inception, Islam has been the herald of humanity's salvation. The rejection of polytheism and the affirmation of monotheism begin with the verbal testimony of faith (*shahadatayn*), after which the believer embarks upon a path of salvation that requires aligning all dimensions of life—including policymaking and governance—with the comprehensive program of divine guidance. With the commencement of the Greater Occultation of Imam al-Mahdi (may God hasten his reappearance), humanity entered a new stage of divine guidance. Religious scholars, through their profound understanding of the teachings of the Shari'ah, assumed an even more critical role than before in guiding the Islamic community. Their responsibilities encompass a wide spectrum of duties toward both the Muslim ummah and the global community, foremost among them the safeguarding of religion's authority in the life of the Islamic society (Tavasoli, 2014).

The Islamic Revolution of February 1979 marked a decisive victory in transforming the very foundations of governance in Iran, and this revolutionary process continues in pursuit of the desired ideal state. One of the essential needs of any new revolution is the construction of its own distinctive concepts, terminologies, and institutions (Salari, 2012). Moreover, every act of concept formation requires appropriate theorization, practical embodiment, and extension into the realities of society.

Most prevailing theories in existing Western and Eastern systems have been the product of limited intellectual engagement with the divine realms of legislation (*tashri'*) and creation (*takwin*). Although many of these theories have evolved through critique and adaptation over time and gained acceptance, they have also, at times, resulted in the erosion of human values. By contrast, the Islamic school of thought rests on theories rooted in the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny). Unlike other systems, which are "invented," the theoretical structure of Islamic systems has already been predesigned in accordance with the order of creation, requiring only the "discovery" of their authentic framework. In other words, while the detailed structure of Islamic systems is not explicitly laid out in the sources, the Qur'an and narrations provide a collection of rulings, rights, and concepts. By carefully examining these and identifying their interrelations, one can derive the overarching principles and foundational theories of Islamic governance (Sadr, 1996).

In Islam, it is the duty of the government to ensure the livelihood of all individuals in society. This responsibility is generally fulfilled in two stages. First, the government provides opportunities and tools for individuals to

work. If, however, an individual is unable to sustain themselves, the second stage comes into effect, wherein the government must implement the principle of social security. In an Islamic government, if an individual cannot meet their own needs, it becomes the responsibility of the broader Islamic community—including institutions such as the family, social solidarity networks, and ultimately the state—to provide for those needs to an appropriate extent (Aram, 2020).

Regarding social security in the Islamic Republic, the Supreme Leader (may his shadow be extended) states:

> *"The Islamic Republic is a system that fundamentally agrees with social security in the form in which it is recognized today worldwide; it is not among those systems that are philosophically or fundamentally opposed to social protection in society. We believe that the authorities of the country and the government of the Islamic Republic must, in a special way, provide assistance to the classes in need. … Therefore, this endeavor is consistent with the very foundation and philosophy of the Islamic system. The more effort is exerted, the more innovative measures are taken, the more properly coverage is expanded, and the more carefully assistance is delivered in ways that motivate families to make appropriate efforts—without generating stagnation but rather stimulating movement in society—the more this will conform to the objectives of the Islamic Republic. The government, God willing, must ensure that the groups covered by social security, such as retirees, receive the special attention and consideration they deserve."*

Thus, the general framework of social security within our society is both desirable and aligned with the philosophy of the Islamic system. Nonetheless, greater effort is required to ensure that the scope of coverage and the modes of assistance are more closely aligned with the objectives of the Islamic Republic.

Similarly, as emphasized in the *General Policies of the Social Security System*:

> *"The creation of public welfare, the elimination of poverty and deprivation, and the protection of targeted groups in need of social services—including orphans, the disabled, the incapacitated, and the elderly—as stipulated in Articles 3, 21, 28, 29, 31, and 43 of the Constitution, require the design and implementation of an efficient, empowering, justice-based, dignity-enhancing, and comprehensive social security system for all, derived from Islamic-Iranian models and enriched by public participation."*

Social security, in this regard, is a form of public management system employing tested instruments to safeguard income. It aims to prevent individuals and groups from falling into poverty or remaining trapped in it. Marshall argues that some of these systems are based on citizenship, while others are grounded in residency (Marshall, 2009: 1103). At present, various organizations in the domain of social security each adopt their own approaches and systems, lacking integration. Furthermore, a considerable portion of the population is not covered by social security. Even in cases where they are supported by institutions such as the Relief Committee or the Welfare Organization, the level of support remains minimal and does not provide comprehensive social security.

Public policies represent the manifestation of governmental will, enabling states to pursue their overarching objectives. Social security policies, therefore, pertain to the processes, models, and decisions designed to address collective problems, including poverty. Consequently, it becomes necessary to elucidate the concept of social security in Islam and to derive its foundations and requirements directly from religious sources.

- The Role of Social Takaful in Social Security Policy

Social Takaful has the potential to provide guidance for mobilizing individuals and both formal and informal collective identities around shared social attachments and norms, thereby contributing to the social security system in our country. Social Takaful refers to the recognition of the types and degrees of needs and challenges faced by members of society, in order to facilitate mutual assistance among individuals within the Islamic community, ensuring that needs are met and problems resolved. Historically, this form of social cooperation within Islamic civilization was carried out through pre-state institutions active in the domain of Takaful—such as families, neighbors, kinship networks, tribes, and religious brotherhoods—functioning as protective and supervisory belts of solidarity (Aram, 2019).

Drawing on Islamic teachings and the historical legacy of Islamic civilizations, Social Takaful represents a model with significant potential for meeting needs and addressing problems within Islamic societies. Based on the Islamic worldview and ideology, the concept of Social Takaful is regarded as a meta-policy (*super policy*) in Islamic communities. Meta-policies encompass assumptions, criteria, frameworks, and guidelines that shape the processes of policymaking and public administration (Alvani, 2016). In other words, such a meta-policy serves as a mirror reflecting the ideals and preferred models of the Islamic society, offering essential requirements and recommendations to policymakers and practitioners alike.

Accordingly, in this study, to gain a precise understanding of the subject and to review existing research, Islamic studies on social security conducted both inside and outside the country are systematically reviewed and synthesized. Subsequently, the religious requirements of social security policymaking will be identified and articulated with a focus on Social Takaful. It is hoped that by clarifying these religious requirements, a more accurate understanding of the nature of social security policies—aligned with the objectives of divine law—will be achieved. Such an understanding can help policymakers in Islamic societies adopt more precise orientations in their policymaking processes.

One of the primary reasons for the challenges facing the social security sector is the insufficient attention to religious requirements and Islamic ethical principles in the design and implementation of social security policies. In Islamic societies, religious teachings play a crucial role in shaping attitudes, values, and social behaviors. Social Takaful, as one of the fundamental Islamic principles, can make a significant contribution to the improvement of social security policies. It embodies the notions of solidarity and mutual support within society, as emphasized in Islamic teachings, and can foster greater social justice while ensuring the protection of vulnerable groups.

- Research Questions

Given the depth required for understanding concepts, describing and explaining phenomena, and conducting in-depth evaluations, the research approach adopted in this study is qualitative. It is worth noting that since this study is exploratory rather than hypothesis-testing, it relies on research-oriented questions instead of hypotheses.

This study is designed with the aim of exploring and explaining the religious requirements (Bayesteha-ye Dini) of public policies in the field of social security within the Islamic Republic of Iran. Accordingly, the main research question is formulated as follows:

1. What religious requirements for social security policies have been presented in the existing religious studies, including scholarly articles, dissertations, and books?

1. Theoretical Foundations

Theoretical foundations refer to the set of theories, frameworks, models, or concepts that researchers use as a basis for designing a study, program, or project, and to which they refer (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). In this research, the theoretical foundations include the key concepts employed in the title and the main research question. Since the aim of this study is to examine the

religious requirements of social security policies, it is necessary first to analyze and clarify the core concepts. Based on these concepts, further explanations will be provided in subsequent sections.

The central theme of this research lies within the notion of the religious requirements of social security policies. Therefore, the history, definitions, dimensions, and components of the concept of social security policy must first be explored and explained. The theoretical framework of this study has been selected in line with its objective, which is to investigate the religious requirements of social security policies. This necessitates choosing an appropriate theoretical framework (Rahimi Moghaddam, Amiri, Safari & Khoshchehreh, 2020). Accordingly, this research strategy has been adopted.

By reviewing the core findings of previous studies on social security, it becomes possible to identify the religious requirements of social security policies. To ensure the confirmability of the identified factors, they are integrated with insights obtained from expert interviews in the field of social security.

The importance and added value of this research lie in achieving a comprehensive understanding of the religious requirements of social security policies, which can play a significant role in shaping future policies in this field as well as in guiding organizations related to social security.

To clarify the concept of social security policy, three steps are necessary:

1. Reviewing the history of social security, policy, and related studies.
2. Defining the terms “policy” and “social security” from both linguistic and academic perspectives, and distinguishing them from similar concepts.
3. Examining the different types of social security policies for use in analyzing the findings.

1-1. Public Policy

In a comprehensive definition, public policy can be described as a set of decisions and actions taken by government authorities to address public issues and achieve predetermined objectives. As a systematic process, public policy encompasses problem identification, policy formulation, policy implementation, and policy evaluation.

1-1-1. Definitions of Public Policy

In the literature of public administration, numerous definitions of public policy have been provided. Among the most prominent are the following:

- **Thomas Dye (2013):** Public policy is "whatever governments choose to do or not to do." In other words, it encompasses all government decisions and activities that address public problems or respond to societal needs (Dye, 2013).
- **James Anderson (2014):** Public policy is defined as a sequence of government activities that pursue specific goals and are realized through a political process. This definition highlights the purposive and political nature of decision-making (Anderson, 2014).
- **William Jenkins (1978):** Public policy is "a set of interrelated decisions taken by one or more actors, public or private, concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them within a specified situation" (Jenkins, 1978). This emphasizes the multidimensional and complex nature of the policymaking process.
- **Carl Friedrich & Edward Mason (2015):** They describe public policy as "a series of actions and decisions taken in a given environment to address a public problem," underscoring the dynamic and continuous character of policies (Friedrich & Mason, 2015).
- **David Easton (1965):** Public policy is considered the "authoritative allocation of values in society," which stresses the government's role in distributing resources and values within a community (Easton, 1965).
- **Imami & Soudagar (2017):** By synthesizing previous views, they distinguish two perspectives:
  1. **From the policy audience perspective:** Public policy is a relatively stable practical logic of interconnected decisions, laws, positions, and actions attributed to one or more governmental actors in response to a concern or issue.
  2. **From the policy analyst perspective:** Public policy is a chain of interconnected decisions, laws, positions, and actions adopted by policy actors to allocate values in society in the most desirable way (Soudagar, Amiri & Imami, 2017).

This last definition reflects the nature, characteristics, and purpose of public policy while also emphasizing the role of state institutions and stakeholders in addressing public concerns.

1-2.Social Security

Social security has a history as long as human social life itself (Heydarpour & Maleki, 2019). In social security theory, two concepts can be

distinguished: a general concept and a specific concept. In the general sense, social security refers to meeting the material and spiritual needs of individuals in society. In the specific sense, the primary aim is the participation of all members of society in its economic benefits. The specific concept mainly focuses on areas such as retirement, death, and disability, whereas the general concept encompasses broader societal groups and includes policies related to employment, healthcare, and prevention (International Labour Organization, 2003).

Historically, social security systems are generally classified into Bismarckian and Beveridgean models. The Bismarckian system, originating in Germany, links the entitlement to benefits to the payment of insurance contributions, with its funding largely derived from these contributions. Countries such as France and Germany employ this system. In contrast, the Beveridgean system, established in 1942 in the United Kingdom based on Beveridge's theories, covers all individuals in need regardless of insurance contributions. In this system, also known as the national social security system, funding comes primarily from taxes, and administration is under government control. Countries such as Denmark and the United Kingdom adopt this model. In the Beveridgean system, entitlement to benefits is determined by citizenship and individual need, while financial resources are mainly provided through taxation (Hosseini & Adabi-Firoozjai, 2018).

1-2-1. Concept of Social Security

The term *social security* officially entered the literature with the enactment of the 1935 Social Security Act in the United States; however, some scholars argue that the term had been used earlier. One expert notes that the phrase appeared in an executive order in October 1918, following the Russian Revolution. The term "security" is often used interchangeably with *social welfare* and *social services*. In general, definitions of social security are influenced by the economic and social conditions of each society, as well as the capacity of governments to allocate resources and prioritize programs. Accordingly, the International Labour Organization (ILO) stated in 1949 that no universally accepted definition of social security exists (Iraqi, 2003).

From a practical perspective, social security should be regarded as a fundamental concept and ultimate objective, especially when discussing specific and limited aspects of it (Omrani, n.d.). Nevertheless, this definition provides an abstract and broad conceptualization of social security, which, even today, is largely overlooked in human rights forums despite idealistic views. Such a definition often does not align with the real economic,

cultural, and social conditions of countries, nor with the capacities and resources of their governments.

From another perspective, social security is defined as the protection that society provides to its members through a set of public measures, aimed at preventing economic and social distress arising from events such as illness, pregnancy, work-related accidents, unemployment, aging, or death (Nowruz Taleghani, 1978). Ultimately, in its broad sense, social security refers to government efforts to compensate for losses resulting from social events, taking into account the resources and socioeconomic conditions of each country (Taleb, 2002).

1-2-2. Social Security in Iran

On 21/01/1401 (Persian calendar), the Supreme Leader issued the General Policies of the Social Security System. The introduction of these policies emphasizes designing and implementing a social security system that is efficient, empowering, justice-based, dignity-enhancing, and comprehensive, drawing upon Islamic-Iranian models, based on an effective administrative system, eliminating unnecessary organizations, removing unfair discrimination, and incorporating public participation.

The constitutional position of the Social Security Organization is recognized in the Iranian Constitution as a supreme legal document. In line with Article 29, Articles 2 and 4 of Article 21, and to ensure coherence in welfare policies aimed at social justice and protection of all citizens against social, economic, and natural events, the Social Security Law was ratified by the Iranian Parliament in 2004. Regardless of the content and implementation details of the law, the main model of welfare and social security currently practiced in Iran is compulsory insurance.

Currently, extensive activities are carried out in three groups: insurance, support, and relief services. Due to the administrative structure, coverage, scope of services, and organizational dependencies, these activities are broad, fragmented, and diverse.

Globally, Iran’s GDP in 1991 was estimated at approximately $117 billion (around $2,000 per capita). By comparison, in countries with less than 9 million people, such as Sweden, about three-quarters of Iran’s GDP would be spent on social security. Similarly, in 1995, social expenditures as a share of GDP were 34.4% in Denmark, 32.8% in Finland, 31.4% in the Netherlands, 30.6% in France, 29.7% in Austria, and 29.9% in Germany. This indicates that, even excluding charitable or religious organizations,

nearly 30% of GDP in developed countries is redistributed through social security systems.

The modern concept of social security represents an advanced stage of collective efforts by all societal groups to cope with economic insecurity and to ensure a minimum level of livelihood. Support for this system by governments and social security policymakers is considered a key factor in achieving social justice (Darbandi, 2013).

In summary, the current welfare and social security system in Iran is insufficient to meet societal needs, eliminate manifestations of poverty, or guarantee a minimum standard of living. Social security systems reflect the development and welfare level of a society and serve as a foundation for national development. Many experts argue that, given current conditions, Iran must redefine its social security policies and welfare system from the ground up.

2. Systematic Review of Islamic Studies on Social Security Policies

A systematic review of Islamic studies in the field of social security is conducted to answer the research questions and examine the research background. All scientific studies—including articles, theses, and books—need to be identified, collected, and reviewed. Therefore, this stage of the research requires a secondary study.

After reviewing various methods for conducting secondary studies, the systematic review method was selected as the most appropriate for collecting the relevant studies, providing a coherent report on their interrelationships, and extracting suitable components for further analysis. Data collection was performed through major and reputable domestic scientific databases (no relevant studies were found in international databases). These include: Comprehensive Humanities Portal (ensani.ir), Noor Specialized Journals (noormags.ir), Persian Scientific Search Engine Elmnet (elmnet.ir), Civilica (civilica.com), Iran Scientific Information Database (Ganj), and the National Library for domestic sources.

2.1 Research Method: Scoping Review

No knowledge can be acquired without employing a scientific method, since researchers follow a specific approach when addressing unknowns—this approach is essentially their method. Therefore, methodology and knowledge are intrinsically linked (Parsania, 2016). In research, choosing an appropriate scientific method and applying it correctly is crucial for obtaining valid and applicable results. The foundation of any research lies in its methodology; without it, the results would hold little value (Barrell et al., 2023).

The term secondary study contrasts with primary study, the main difference being the *source* of information. Secondary studies describe, discuss, interpret, analyze, evaluate, summarize, and process primary studies. Secondary studies can be conducted in various ways: systematically or non-systematically, or with a focus on quantitative or qualitative aspects (Seyed-Tabatabai et al., 2021).

Conducting secondary studies to accumulate primary research can lead to the production of new knowledge. However, scholars historically have not aggregated these studies in a systematic and scientific manner. Until the late 20th century, no established method existed for combining primary studies. The development of such methods has primarily occurred in the last two decades (Chalmers et al., 2002). Accordingly, secondary studies can be classified into non-systematic and systematic secondary studies (Bolderston, 2008).

Systematic secondary studies employ a specific research method. Today, a variety of research methods are available for use in secondary studies, and their use has grown significantly in recent years. However, in the field of management studies, these methods—mostly qualitative and integrative—have rarely been applied, and researchers often overlook them (Seyed-Tabatabai, 2021: 355).

The term meta-study is a general term for conducting secondary studies and encompasses different types of secondary research, such as meta-method (analysis of methods), meta-theory (analysis of theories), meta-analysis (quantitative analysis of results), and meta-synthesis (qualitative analysis of results). Meta-study is not considered a research method by itself but emphasizes the systematic nature of secondary studies. Various research methods can be employed to conduct meta-studies or secondary studies. Among these, the scoping review method was selected as the most appropriate for addressing the research question. This method will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

2.2. Steps of Scoping Review Studies

The present research, as a secondary study using a systematic review approach, primarily examines the existing research background in the field of social security. In this section, the study is conducted in detail using the scoping review method. Nevertheless, the research background was initially searched under the title *"Systematic Review of Social Security Policy Studies"* and similar keywords across various databases, but no results were found. For further assurance, the Iranian Research Institute for Information Science and Technology (IranDoc) was consulted, and it also reported the absence of prior research in this specific area.

Subsequently, to collect scientific studies—including scholarly articles, university theses, and books—related to the field of social security, the systematic scoping review method was selected among various secondary study strategies. Conducting this part of the research allows for defining the scope and boundaries of existing studies in this domain.

The scoping review method is used to quickly examine the main concepts of a specific research topic across various primary sources and available evidence. It is particularly suitable for complex topics or areas where no comprehensive review has previously been conducted (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Scoping reviews are considered a type of semi-systematic review and are increasingly employed to identify existing innovations. They are commonly used when studies are part of the grey literature, distributed across multiple journals, span different academic disciplines, or are poorly indexed (Taylor & Pagliari, 2018).

The scoping review framework was first introduced by Arksey and O'Malley in 2005 and later updated by Levac in 2010. O'Malley and Arksey identified four primary purposes for conducting a scoping review:

1. To determine the breadth, scope, and nature of research activities,
2. To assess the value of conducting a systematic review,
3. To summarize and disseminate the results of conducted studies, and
4. To identify research gaps in the existing literature on a specific topic.

They also proposed five steps for conducting a scoping review:

1. Designing the research question,
2. Searching and retrieving studies relevant to the research,
3. Selecting the related studies,
4. Charting and summarizing the information and data, and
5. Reporting the results (Levac et al., 2010).

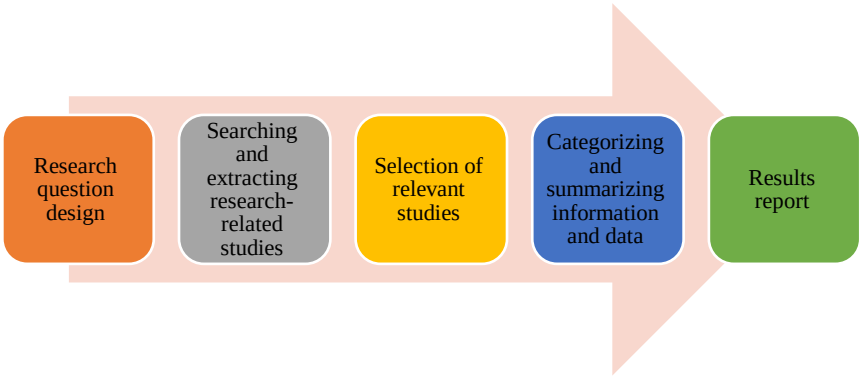

Figure 1. Steps of Conducting a Scoping Review

As previously explained, the primary objective of this research is to identify the religious requirements for social security policies through a review of existing studies. Given the nature of the research problem, the most appropriate method is one that examines primary studies and subsequently synthesizes their extracted components and concepts to propose a final model.

To answer the main research questions, it is necessary to identify and collect all scientific studies—including articles, theses, dissertations, and books. Therefore, a secondary study was used to ensure the comprehensiveness of the collection process. For certain reasons discussed later, an alternative method was employed specifically for searching books in this field. After reviewing various secondary study methods, the scoping review method was selected as the most suitable approach to collect the relevant studies, provide a coherent report on their interrelationships, and extract the necessary components for further analysis.

An important aspect of this study is that, in addition to systematically following the five stages of the scoping review method, each stage was carried out using a specific strategy informed by the latest methodological insights. These strategies were adopted to enhance both the scientific rigor of the process and the comprehensiveness and validity of the findings. A concise overview of these strategies is provided here, while detailed explanations are presented at each stage.

Table 1. Strategies adopted in carrying out the different stages of the selected research method

No.	Stage of the Scoping Review Method	Strategy Employed
1	Designing the research question	SPIDER question refinement tool
2	Systematic search and extraction of related studies	Three-step review process
3	Systematic screening and selection of relevant studies	Stepwise screening + CASP (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme)
4	Classification and synthesis of information and data	Content analysis framework
5	Reporting the results	–

2-2-1. Research Question Design

At this stage, it is necessary to formulate a clear research question with an appropriate definition. To achieve this, various *problem-refinement frameworks* can be employed. These frameworks help sharpen the research problem by specifying its main dimensions. Since different types of research require different approaches, there are also multiple frameworks available for problem refinement.

As in all research, the research question must be properly formulated at this stage. Cooper referred to this stage as *"problem formulation"* and emphasized that the concept to be studied should be clearly defined and that evidence from prior studies related to the problem should be identified. Moreover, in formulating the problem, it is important to determine whether the focus is on the simple description of variables or on the relationships between two or more variables (Cooper et al., 2018).

It should also be noted that in secondary studies, the research scope should be broad enough to cover the field comprehensively, yet sufficiently focused to ensure that the findings are meaningful and useful for end-users. In addition, the research question should emerge from the researcher's academic interests and previous studies (Finlayson & Dixon, 2008).

Several tools can facilitate the refinement of the research problem. Given that the present study is qualitative in nature, the SPIDER tool was used for formulating the research question, as outlined in the problem statement (Cooke et al., 2012). This tool is designed to guide the development and evaluation of research questions in qualitative studies. Its purpose is to provide a systematic structure for qualitative research question design. The key components of this framework include:

- Sample (S)
- Phenomenon of Interest (PI)
- Design (D)
- Evaluation (E)
- Research type (R) (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods).

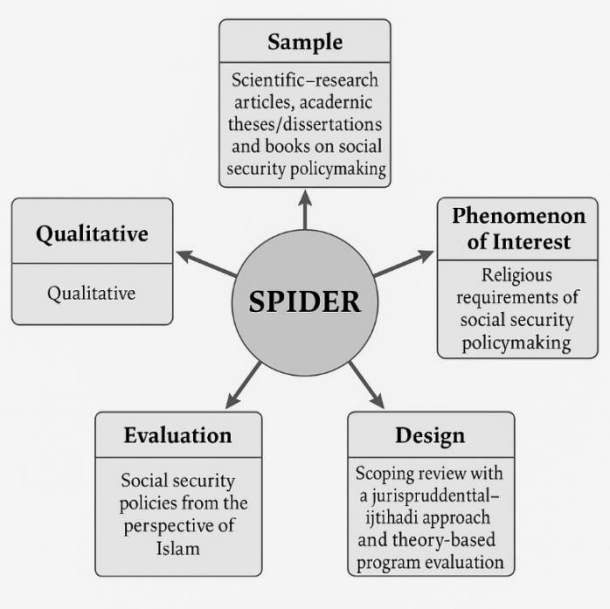

Figure 2. Applying SPIDER tool components to research

2-2-2. Data Collection Method

A systematic literature review summarizes existing studies by identifying patterns, themes, and issues. Using this approach, the researcher can gain insights into the progress made regarding a specific problem or research topic. This method also contributes to identifying the conceptual content of the phenomenon under study and plays an important role in the development and refinement of theory (Bailey et al., 2018).

A systematic review can be regarded as a rapid synthesis of the key concepts of a specific research topic and the identification of primary sources and various types of evidence. It can be particularly applied to complex topics or those for which no comprehensive review has previously been conducted, implemented as a stand-alone research project (Whitten et al., 2002).

It is worth noting that systematic reviews are considered a type of semi-systematic review increasingly employed to understand existing innovations in studies that are either poorly indexed, distributed across different journals, part of the grey literature, or situated across multiple academic disciplines (Taylor & Pagliari, 2018).

2-2-3. Systematic Search and Extraction of Relevant Studies

At this stage, the researcher must compile a comprehensive list of relevant studies. This is accomplished by identifying the **keywords** related to the research problem and using them to access resources in the selected databases within the desired time frame. Hence, familiarity with the process of selecting appropriate keywords and effectively using different databases is essential (Erwin et al., 2011).

The researcher must also decide in advance which types of studies will be included in the review. For example, one important criterion is whether unpublished studies should be considered. Furthermore, it should be determined whether the review will be limited solely to peer-reviewed journal articles or will also include theses, dissertations, reports, and books (Conn et al., 2003).

One suggested model for the systematic review process consists of three main stages:

1. Establishing inclusion and exclusion criteria,
2. Selecting the appropriate databases, and
3. Determining the keywords and their combinations (Seyed-Tabatabai et al., 2022).

Before beginning this stage, three components should be considered to refine the search and ensure the effective extraction of relevant studies:

- **Defining inclusion and exclusion criteria**: In the search for articles, the following criteria were applied:

Table 2. Inclusion and exclusion index of articles

No.	Criterion	Inclusion Limitation
1	Time frame	Studies published before 21 July 2024 (31 Tir 1403, Persian calendar)
2	Geographic scope	No limitation
3	Language	Only studies in Persian
4	Type of publication	Research articles, theses/dissertations, and books
5	Subject of study	Islamic studies on social security policymaking
6	Academic level	Peer-reviewed scientific–research level

2-2-4. Selection of Appropriate Databases

The choice of databases depends on the research question and the relevant academic disciplines. Since the present study falls under the field of humanities and social sciences, and in line with the inclusion and exclusion criteria, it was deemed necessary that the search for the research question be comprehensive and span multiple databases. The selected databases met two main conditions:

1. They include the majority of scholarly and peer-reviewed journals in the humanities, and
2. They register master's theses and doctoral dissertations.

Accordingly, the following databases were identified:

- **Noormags**, Civilica, Elmnet (Persian Scientific Search Engine), Comprehensive Humanities Portal (Ensani.ir), and SID (Scientific Information Database) – for searching scientific research articles;
- **IranDoc (Ganj)** – exclusively for theses and dissertations;
- **National Library of Iran** – exclusively for books.

2-2-5. Selection and Combination of Keywords

Since the aim of this study was to review Islamic studies on social security policymaking, two sets of keywords were identified:

1. Keywords related to Islamic studies, and
2. Keywords related to social security policies.

A cross-search was then carried out by constructing a matrix of Islamic and policy-related keywords and combining them in meaningful ways (Seyed-Tabatabai et al., 2021).

2-2-6. Selection of Appropriate Keywords

In this scoping review, all articles related to the field of *social security* were to be examined. However, two considerations were important:

1. Some researchers used terms equivalent to or closely related to "social security" instead of the exact phrase.
2. Some studies, while not explicitly focused on social security, contained relevant content addressing the subject and were therefore valuable for this review.

Given that the title of the present research contains two main components—social security policymaking and Islamic studies—the keywords also needed to reflect both dimensions. Therefore, after a thorough

review of the social security literature and extraction of equivalent or related terms, a focus group of experts was formed, and through consultation with academic faculty, the most suitable keywords for searching the identified databases were finalized.

Table 3 presents the keyword matrix used in the systematic search, combining terms from Islamic studies and social security policy studies.

Table 3. Keyword Matrix

Research Domain	Keywords
Islamic Studies	Religion, Islam, Qur'an, Hadith, Narrative, Fiqh, Sunnah
Social Security Policy Studies	Social security, Takaful, Poverty, Welfare, Policy, Decision-making, Policymaking

2-2-7. Search Strategy

After determining the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the process of searching for keywords in the selected databases was carried out with consideration of the limiting factors. Two general points should be emphasized:

1. Since the identified keywords were divided into two categories, the searches in the selected databases had to be conducted in combination.
2. Among the databases for scholarly articles, Noormags and the Comprehensive Humanities Portal (Ensani) provide advanced search options, whereas the Scientific Information Database (SID) lacks such advanced search features.

a) Noormags Database

For searching combined keywords in Noormags, the first set of keywords was entered in the "any of these words" field, and each of the second set of keywords was searched separately under the "all of these words" field. This combined search yielded a total of 255 sources.

b) Comprehensive Humanities Portal (Ensani.ir)

Since the search engine of Ensani is similar to that of Noormags, the same method was applied, resulting in 82 scholarly articles.

c) IranDoc (Ganj)

As the search engine of IranDoc differs from the above two, a different approach was required. Using its advanced search function, each keyword from the first set was combined with one from the second set as a dyad (e.g., *"social security + Qur'an"*) and searched within titles or keywords.

Proposals and theses without accessible full texts were excluded. This search identified 61 academic theses and dissertations.

d) Civilica (Marjaʿ-e Danesh)

Due to its less efficient user interface, keywords were searched sequentially. Ultimately, 153 **sources** were identified.

e) Elmnet (Persian Scientific Search Engine)

Keywords were searched crosswise, and a total of 146 sources were obtained.

f) Summary of Results

Altogether, 697 sources were identified in the initial search, where the specified keywords appeared in the titles, abstracts, or keywords.

g) National Library of Iran

As noted earlier, the process of searching and collecting books related to social security differs from that of articles and theses. Searches were conducted via the National Library of Iran, the country's most comprehensive library resource. The library's database does not support advanced Boolean keyword combinations, and simple keyword searches (as performed in IranDoc) produced overly broad and irrelevant results. Therefore, the search was restricted to books that directly addressed social security. Advanced searches were conducted using combinations such as *"Social Security + Qur'an"*, *"Social Security + Hadith"*, *"Social Security + Narration"*, *"Social Security + Sunnah"*, *"Social Security + Religion"*, and *"Takaful"*. This resulted in 168 books being identified.

Table 4 provides a summary of the databases searched, the fields used for keyword matching, and the number of sources retrieved in the initial search.

Table 4. Summary of searches for selected social security keywords across selected databases

Database	Number of Sources Identified	Search Field
Noormags	255	Title + Keywords
Comprehensive Humanities Portal (Ensani.ir)	2,369	Title + Keywords
Elmnet	146	Title
National Library of Iran	168	Title
SID (Scientific Information Database)	153	Title + Keywords
IranDoc (Ganj)	61	Title + Keywords
Total	3152	–

2-2-8. Systematic Screening and Selection of Relevant Studies

In some cases, after identifying potentially relevant studies, it is also necessary to evaluate their methodological quality. The main purpose of this step is to exclude studies whose findings cannot be considered reliable (Yahya Kamali, 2017). Some scholars further recommend that the researcher illustrate the process of data collection, review, exclusion, and inclusion of studies using a flow diagram (Aguirre & Bolton, 2014).

Given the large number of articles, theses, and books identified in the search stage, a four-stage screening process was implemented to select studies relevant to the research problem and eliminate those irrelevant or unhelpful. The stages are as follows:

1. **Stage One: Removal of Duplicate Titles.** Since scientific articles are often indexed in multiple databases, many of the retrieved items were duplicates. In addition, overlaps were expected due to combined keyword searches. Therefore, in this stage, all titles were carefully reviewed, and duplicates were removed. After this step, 612 sources remained out of the initial 3152.
2. **Stage Two:** Removal of Irrelevant Titles Among the collected studies, many were unrelated to the research topic of *social security policies*. Therefore, the titles of all 612 sources were examined, and irrelevant studies were coded and excluded. A total of 445 studies were deemed irrelevant. Items whose relevance could not be determined based on the title alone were carried forward to the next stage for abstract review.
3. **Stage Three:** Removal of Irrelevant Abstracts. For studies whose relevance could not be judged by title alone, abstracts were examined. This process reduced the pool to 51 studies.
4. **Stage Four:** Content Screening and CASP Quality Appraisal. In the final screening step, the full content of the remaining studies was reviewed. The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) framework was used to assess the quality of the articles. The CASP checklist includes the following criteria:
    1. Relevance of the study's objectives to the research aim,
    2. Recency of the article,
    3. Research design,
    4. Sampling method,
    5. Data collection method and quality,
    6. Reflexivity and generalizability of results,

7. Adherence to ethical considerations in research writing,
8. Accuracy of data analysis,
9. Clarity in the presentation of findings, and
10. Overall value of the study.

Scores are calculated based on these criteria, and any study with a total score below 25 was excluded (Long et al., 2020).

Finally, through this four-stage process, the researcher thoroughly examined the 51 remaining studies, excluded those deemed irrelevant or unhelpful, and categorized the others as *partially relevant* or *highly relevant* to the research questions.

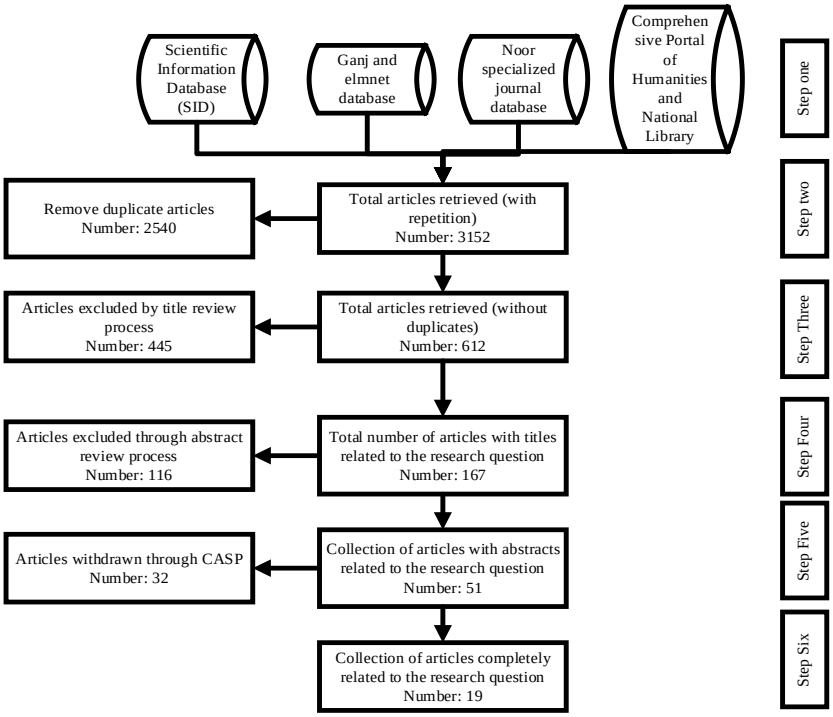

Figure 3. Article screening steps

In this stage of the study, the researcher thoroughly reviewed the content of the remaining studies to determine which of them were suitable for addressing the research question. The results of this review are summarized as follows:

- **First Category**: Studies deemed fully relevant to the research question (*n = 19*). These studies are briefly presented in the table below. Table 5 lists the 19 studies identified as fully relevant to the research question after the four-stage screening process.

Table 5. List of selected studies for domain review analysis

No.	Title (Translated)	Year of Publication
1	Insurance and Social Security from the Perspective of Islam	1996
2	Welfare and Social Security in Islam	2010
3	Jurisprudential Requirements in Social Security	2012
4	The Model of Social Security in Early Islam and Its Implications for Modern Models	2012
5	Critique of Conventional Social Security Models and Proposal of an Islamic-Compatible Model	2013
6	Institutional Analysis of Social Security in the History of Islamic Civilization	2013
7	Social Security in Imam Ali's Covenant to Malik al-Ashtar	2014
8	Mechanisms of Social Security in the Islamic Approach	2014
9	Welfare and Social Security in the Qur'an Based on *al-Mizan* Commentary	2016
10	Functions of Takaful in the Islamic Political System	2016
11	Poverty Alleviation Policies with Emphasis on Social Takaful	2016
12	The Right to Social Security and the Obligations of the Islamic State	2019
13	Social Security Policies within the Framework of Social Policy with an Islamic Approach	2019
14	Islam and Social Security: Foundations and Supportive/Insurance Approaches in the Qur'an, Hadith, Ethics, and Fiqh	2020
15	Comparative Study of the Foundations of Social Security in Islam and the West	2020
16	Conceptualization of Social Security in the Government of Imam Mahdi (A.J.) with Emphasis on the Qur'anic Concept of *Hayat Tayyiba*	2021
17	Shi'a Jurisprudence and Social Security	2021
18	Analysis of the Role of Social Takaful in the Framework of Islamic Principles	2023
19	The Ideal Model of Social Takaful in Islam	2023

- **Second Category**: Studies that did not directly answer the research question but whose content was considered relatively suitable for addressing it (*n = 10*). These studies are presented in the following table. Table 6 presents the 10 studies categorized as partially relevant, whose content was deemed relatively useful for addressing the research question.

Table 6. Research in the second branch (relatively related to the research question)

No.	Title (Translated)	Year of Publication
1	The Scope of the Duty of the Wealthy toward the Poor from a Religious Perspective	1999
2	Interactions between the Concepts of "Islamic Ummah" and "Social Takaful" with a Qur'anic Approach	2017
3	The Principle of Equality and Non-Discrimination in Access to Social Security in the Islamic Government	2019
4	The Capacity of Preferential Jurisprudential Rulings in Addressing the Problem of Poverty	2019
5	An Analysis of the Role and Position of the Basij in the Institutional Structure of Poverty Alleviation in the Islamic Government	2020
6	Conceptualization of the Qur'an-Based Social Security System with Emphasis on the Concept of *Hayat Tayyiba*	2021
7	Jurisprudential Analysis of the Structure of Expenditures and Revenues in Social Takaful	2021
8	Principles of Dealing with Different Types of Beggars Based on Qur'anic Teachings and Hadiths	2021
9	Social Takaful from the Perspective of Martyr Sayyid Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr: A Pathway to Expanding Social Justice	2022
10	Jurisprudential Foundations of Public Welfare and Its Position in the Islamic Government	2022

- **Third Category**: Studies that did not, in any way, address the religious requirements of social security policymaking and were therefore deemed unsuitable for answering the main research question (*n = 12*).

Based on the above categorization, studies in the first category were selected as the primary sources for examining the religious requirements of social security policymaking. However, studies in the second category were also used to supplement the extracted requirements. Accordingly, in consultation with a focus group, the researcher considered the components

identified from the first-category studies as the foundation, and then added details from the second-category studies to complete the framework.

It should be noted that after categorizing articles, theses, and books, the book *"System Building Based on Social Takaful"* was excluded since it was derived from a thesis, leaving a total of six books deemed suitable for this study. Similarly, the full text of the doctoral dissertation entitled *"The Optimal Model of Social Security Policymaking and Its Role in the Efficiency of the Redistributive System, Social Balance, and State Solidarity with Reference to the Views of Martyr Sadr"* was not available and thus excluded.

As observed, the scope of studies conducted in the field of Islamic social security research is relatively limited. Some studies have addressed the subject in general terms, while others have examined specific subtopics. However, no comprehensive study has been found that specifically focuses on the religious requirements of social security policymaking. Nevertheless, considering the quantity and quality of related studies, this body of literature represents a valuable resource that cannot be overlooked. Conducting a systematic review of these studies is therefore regarded as a suitable strategy for identifying key religious requirements in this field and provides significant support for the continuation of this research.

Classification, Summarization, and Reporting of Data

In this stage of the scoping review process, a summary of the main information from the selected studies on social security policymaking is presented and analyzed.

The reliability of this stage was ensured through two methods: test–retest reliability and inter-rater reliability (Creswell, 2012). In the test–retest method, the search, screening, and resulting findings were repeated and compared by the author, showing consistency and thus deemed reliable. For inter-rater reliability, the researchers independently conducted the categorization of studies and later discussed the results in a focus group, which again demonstrated consistency and reliability. The validity of the study was established by employing systematic steps and reliable research tools. Strategies such as clearly stating the objectives and research questions, applying an appropriate research design, using validated measurement tools, and examining appropriate samples (Danaeifard et al., 2017) confirmed the validity and credibility of the research.

2-2-9. Data Extraction and Synthesis of Findings

Although studies on Islamic perspectives of social security vary in method and depth, they need to be consolidated and refined. A report of the findings

of all selected studies on the religious requirements of social security policymaking is presented in the following table.

Table 7. Summary of related research

No.	Full Title (English)	Author(s)	Key Findings / Summary
1	Insurance and Social Security from the Perspective of Islam	(Ebrahimi, 1996)	Presents Islamic foundations for social security (social justice, equitable distribution, support for the vulnerable, zakat/charity, social cohesion) and policy suggestions for Islamic insurance and the state's supportive/supervisory role.
2	Welfare and Social Security in Islam	(Mahmoudi et al., 2010)	Explores Islamic bases of social security; clarifies roles of state, society, and individuals in realizing justice; proposes practical models leveraging zakat/charity to support vulnerable groups.
3	Jurisprudential Requirements in Social Security	(Naderan et al., 2012)	Argues that modern social security schemes differ from Islamic principles (esp. in insurance strategies) and require renewed fiqh inquiry; highlights zakat/khums/charity as Islamic support mechanisms.
4	The Social Security Model in Early Islam and Its Implications for Modern Models	(Naderan et al., 2012)	Historical analysis shows a people-centered, entitlement-based, neighborhood-oriented model integrating taxation with social security—offering guidance for today's challenges.
5	A Critique of Conventional Social Security Models and an Islamic-Compatible Model	(Hosseini, 2013)	Through ijtihād-based analysis, it proposes an Islamic model built on three pillars: private provision, Social Takaful, and state solidarity; it stresses spirituality, community-centricity, entitlement, and fiscal integration.
6	An Institutional Analysis of Social Security in the History of Islamic Civilization	(Darbandi, 2013)	Maps Islamic social institutions (informal/semi-formal/formal) and shows social security historically led by people and religious community bodies rather than the state; identifies key actors (state,

No.	Full Title (English)	Author(s)	Key Findings / Summary
			guilds, awqāf, clergy, neighborhood, family).
7	Social Security in Imam ʿAlī's Covenant to Malik al-Ashtar	(Kaviani, 2014)	Extracts social security duties from the covenant: earmarked resources for the underclass; ruler's obligation; ethical qualifications of officials; frames provision as ḥaqq Allāh with enforceable guarantees.
8	Mechanisms of Social Security in the Islamic Approach	(Hosseini, 2014)	Compares Islamic and contemporary models; in Islam, social security rests on balanced coordination among private provision, Social Takaful, and state solidarity; success depends on harmony across these mechanisms.
9	Welfare and Social Security in the Qur'an Based on the *al-Mīzān* Exegesis	(Poustindouz, 2020)	Derives Qur'anic principles for social security (zakat, spending in God's path, justice) via *al-Mīzān* exegesis; frames doctrinal bases for Islamic welfare policy.
10	Functions of Social Takaful in the Islamic Political System	(Aram, 2016)	Distinguishes individual vs. social Takaful; grounds them in justice/ihsān/altruism/common responsibility; posits pre-state religious/community institutions as primary providers, with the state in a supportive/complementary role.
11	Poverty-Alleviation Policies with Emphasis on Social Takaful	(Aram & Seyyed-Emami, 2016)	Shows limits of state-only approaches in developing contexts; evidences the anti-poverty potential of traditional Islamic institutions (family, kin, neighbors) and calls for investing in them alongside the state.
12	The Right to Social Security and the Obligations of the Islamic State	(Abbasi Azad, 2019)	Analyzes social security as a legal–fiqhi right; identifies state obligations (including those reflected in the Constitution, e.g., Article 3) using a descriptive–analytical method.
13	Social Security Policies within the Framework of Social Policy: An Islamic	(Hosseini & Kazemi Najafabadi,	Positions Islamic social security within social policy; emphasizes coordinated roles of

No.	Full Title (English)	Author(s)	Key Findings / Summary
	Approach	2019)	private/charitable/state sectors; outlines differences from conventional models in aims, institutions, and sequencing (market → social → state).
14	Islam and Social Security: Foundations and Supportive/Insurance Approaches in the Qur'an, Hadith, Ethics, and Islamic Jurisprudence	(Ghabel, 2016)	Synthesizes scriptural, ethical, and fiqhi sources to propose actionable, supportive, and insurance mechanisms for an Islamic social security system.
15	A Comparative Study of the Foundations of Social Security in Islam and the West	(Yaghoubian Ahangari, 2020)	Compares Islamic and Western bases; notes improvements via existing systems yet calls for reforms (taxation, saving, redistribution) aligned with Islamic moral–value foundations.
16	Conceptualizing a Qur'an-Based Social Security System in the Government of Imam Mahdi (A.J.), with Emphasis on *Hayāt Ṭayyiba*	(Zohrab et al., 2021)	Re-conceptualizes social security as the provision of material and spiritual needs under a Qur'an-guided polity, oriented toward dignity, tranquility, and *hayāt ṭayyiba*.
17	Shiʿa Jurisprudence and Social Security	(Fathi, 2021)	Traces a millennium of Shi'a fiqh views on poverty relief; examines khums/zakat; argues for recognizing insurance as a rational/'urf-based obligation in Shi'a jurisprudence.
18	The Position of Social Takaful within the Framework of Islamic Foundations	(Mostafa Kazemi Najafabadi & Seyyed Reza Hosseini, 2024)	Conceptualizes Social Takaful as people-based provision for the needy, grounded in creed/philosophy and *hayāt ṭayyiba*; delineates individual duties and social rights.
19	An Optimal Model of Social Takaful in Islam	(Kazemi & Hosseini, 2023)	Offers a model to strengthen the charitable sector and upgrade provision, aligning spiritual aims with social policy instruments in contemporary settings.

As can be observed, despite the comprehensive search conducted, a significant number of studies in the field of *Islamic research on public policies in the domain of social security* have been collected. However, no comprehensive study—or a meta-study derived from these works—that specifically addresses the religious imperatives of social security policies, with emphasis on authentic Islamic concepts such as takaful (mutual solidarity), was found.

Nevertheless, given that the number of relevant studies is considerably rich in both quantity and quality, they cannot be overlooked. Reviewing the findings of these studies through a systematic review provides an appropriate strategy for identifying some of the religious imperatives in the field of social security policies.

3. Synthesis of Findings

After examining the studies conducted on public policies in the field of social security and reviewing them, the dimensions and components defined so far for social security policies can be summarized in the following table:

Table 8. Religious dimensions or components related to social security policies in past studies

No.	Sources	Related Religious Dimensions/Components	Explanation
1	15, 5, 11, 2, 7, 13, 1, 18, 3, 6, 19, 8	Social solidarity and mutual responsibility	Emphasis on the social role of Muslims in meeting the needs of others.
2	18, 19, 12, 10, 5, 15, 7, 13, 16, 4, 11, 17, 2, 3, 19, 8	Social justice	The necessity of establishing social justice as one of the fundamental principles in Islam to ensure that needs are met, and wealth and resources are distributed fairly.
3	18, 16	Spiritual growth	*Takāful* (mutual solidarity) not only addresses material needs but also contributes to the spiritual growth of individuals (both givers and recipients).
4	18, 3, 11	Economic balance	Emphasis on the importance of *takāful* in maintaining economic equilibrium and preventing class divides in society.
5	9, 14, 16, 17,	Social welfare	Qur'anic emphasis on social

No.	Sources	Related Religious Dimensions/Components	Explanation
	2, 3		welfare as an essential goal of the Islamic community.
6	9, 7, 11, 2, 3, 1	Economic justice	Qur'anic principles for establishing economic justice in Islamic society.
7	4, 12, 15, 17, 2, 5, 14, 6, 1, 8	Role of the Islamic state	Explanation of the role and duties of the Islamic government in creating welfare and ensuring social security.
8	12, 5, 14, 15, 16, 4, 11, 17, 8, 3, 11, 1	Observance of religious principles	Analysis of religious principles such as justice, responsibility, and support for the needy as the foundation of social policymaking, and adherence to ethical and moral standards in implementing social security in Islam.
9	9, 10, 5, 14, 6, 11, 3, 2, 19, 1	Material resources of *takāful*	Utilization of Islamic financial resources such as zakāt, waqf, khums, family guarantees (*ḍamān al-ʿāʾilah*), etc., in social security.
10	10, 2, 16, 11, 3, 6	Comprehensive layers and support institutions	Holistic support of individuals through institutions such as family, brotherhood, clan, neighbors, and friends.
11	10, 15, 13, 4, 11	Public participation and civic involvement	Emphasis on public participation in financing, managing, and implementing social security policies.
12	5, 11, 8, 3	Relevance to contemporary needs and practicality	Proposing models that, in addition to adhering to Islamic principles, are feasible and capable of responding to modern needs.
13	5, 13	Sustainability and economic balance	Establishing a social security system that, beyond effectiveness, also ensures economic sustainability.
14	15, 16, 3, 19, 1	Security and insurance	Emphasis on creating social and economic security through social insurance.
15	7, 8	Oversight and monitoring	Establishment of monitoring and inspection systems to ensure

No.	Sources	Related Religious Dimensions/Components	Explanation
			proper implementation of policies and prevent violations.
16	7, 17, 2	Provision of basic needs	Securing housing, food, and healthcare services as fundamental and essential needs of society.
17	13	Human dignity	Emphasis on preserving and enhancing human dignity in all aspects of social policies.
18	13, 3, 16, 6, 19	Comprehensive coverage	Efforts to provide universal coverage for all social groups within the social security system.
19	16, 3, 19	Material and spiritual needs	Simultaneous provision of both material and spiritual needs within the social security system.
20	17, 16	Empowerment	Expanding economic opportunities and promoting active participation of individuals in the economy and other social domains.
21	8, 5, 4	Entitlement-based distribution	Collection of revenues from those who are not poor and possess surplus income, and provision of benefits exclusively to those who are truly entitled.

Based on the aforementioned discussions and the findings of the reviewed studies, the responsibilities of governance in social security policymaking from an Islamic perspective can be summarized in the following diagram:

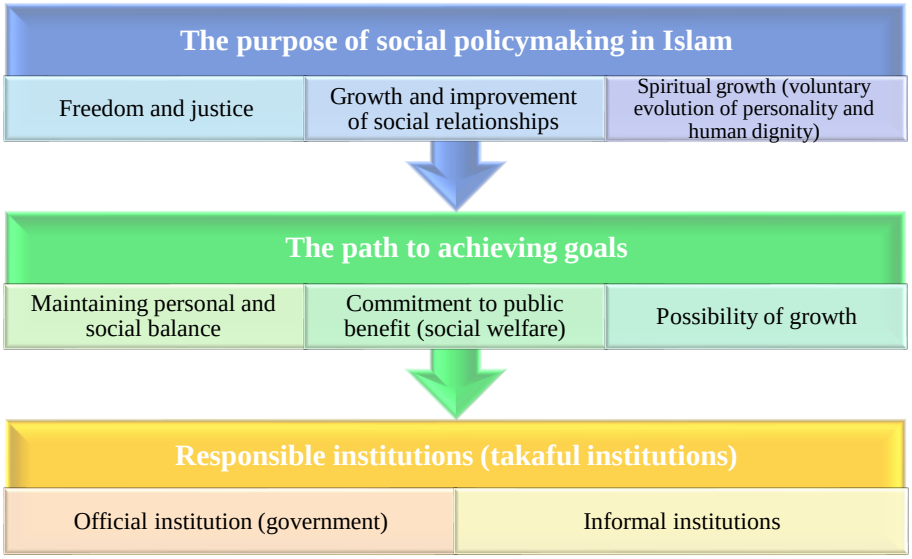

Figure 4. A conceptual model of Islamic social security policymaking based on the objectives, implementation pathways, and institutional structure of Social Takāful

Table 9. Social Security Policy Pattern with an Islamic Approach

Establishment and consolidation of informal institutions	Government responsibilities regarding informal institutions	Principles of Social Policies (Government Responsibilities within the Three Institutions)
Purification of informal institutions, including the market, from disruptive factors and prevention of hoarding and waste of resources		
Adoption of appropriate policies to support low-income groups in the process of resource allocation		
Promotion of a work culture and facilitation of employment		
Creating opportunities for participation of individuals and institutions, and ensuring equal access to opportunities		
Moral education of market participants to foster altruism		
Optimal use of private insurance capacity to cover the life risks of capable individuals		
Supervision of proper implementation of supportive laws		
Encouragement of public-benefit activities through incentives and tax exemptions	Government responsibilities in the field of social security	
Empowerment of individuals		
Provision of a legal framework		

Provision of necessary infrastructure for the activities of individuals and institutions		
Monitoring and inspection of institutions and policy implementation		
Establishing a protective umbrella to ensure subsistence for those below the poverty line and to secure people's basic dignity and sufficiency	Government responsibilities in direct provision of social security services	
Providing healthcare, medical services, and housing		
Settling debts and compensating for financial and human losses of incapacitated individuals		
Offering marriage facilities and supporting family cohesion		
Providing employment and supporting the unemployed		
Paying pensions to the needy who are unable to work		

Understanding a concept correctly is the prerequisite for any judgment about it. To the extent that a concept is not accurately explained and its various dimensions are not carefully examined, we will encounter problems and pitfalls in operationalizing it and establishing it as a discourse. The concept of Social Takaful—as one of the most important social notions in Islam—requires a comprehensive conceptual framework for its understanding and implementation.

Although the term Social Takaful does not explicitly appear in the Holy Qur'an, Islamic thinkers have elaborated a collection of Qur'anic commands and the sayings of the Infallible Imams (peace be upon them) under this heading. Unfortunately, this discourse has not been sufficiently developed independently in Persian, and most of the existing works in Arabic have not even been translated. Therefore, addressing the concept of Social Takaful as a comprehensive and widespread discourse within the field of social security policymaking is essential.

Every individual, in pursuit of their own growth and felicity, has needs that they strive to fulfill. If obstacles arise on this path, they encounter problems. The first question, then, is: Who is responsible for fulfilling these needs and addressing these problems? The Islamic answer is that each person is initially responsible for meeting their own needs and solving their own problems—what is referred to as self-help.

The second question arises: If, for any reason, a person is unable to achieve self-help, who bears responsibility for aiding them? Many liberal thinkers argue that if one citizen fails to achieve self-help, the state is primarily responsible for providing assistance and fulfilling their needs. This

creates a binary between the individual and the state: if the individual fails, then the government must intervene. However, Islam's perspective on society reveals that individuals are responsible toward one another, introducing a new model of Social Takaful.

For this reason, the duties of conventional social security systems differ from those of Social Takaful in an Islamic government. In the West, where governments are bound by the will and votes of the people, social security systems have at times functioned minimally. With shifts in public opinion, the responsibilities of governments also change. In short, the duties of Western governments in social security can be summarized as follows:

- Management of endowments (waqf)
- Support for retirees and provision of health services
- Unemployment insurance
- Family allowance support

By contrast, the Islamic state, in addition to public will, is bound by Islamic law (sharīʿa) and must implement the people's will within its framework. Islam has laid down specific responsibilities for the Islamic ruler and government, which must be fulfilled. Caring for the people and supporting them in times of hardship is a central feature of the Islamic state. The emphasis is such that the ruler is obliged to live at the standard of society's weakest members to understand their struggles and act promptly to resolve them.

Accordingly, the duties of an Islamic government in the field of Social Takaful, as prescribed by Islamic law, include:

- Paying off the debts of debtors
- Managing religious endowments (waqf)
- Meeting the needs of the poor—both Muslim and non-Muslim
- Raising orphans
- Providing for the livelihood of those unable to work (Muslims and non-Muslims alike)
- Paying the blood-money (diyah) of a murdered person when the killer is unknown or has no responsible guardian (ʿāqilah)

Active institutions in the field of Social Takaful: Based on the level of bonds, affiliations, and reciprocal responsibilities, the institutions relevant to Social Takaful can be categorized. As Qutb (n.d., p. 53) states: *"Social Takaful can exist between a person and themselves, between a person and their kin, between the individual and society, between one community and*

another, and between one generation and the next." The literature review identifies several institutions that play roles in this context: the family, kinship, clan, neighborhood, friendship, and the institution of brotherhood.

4. Conclusion

Through a systematic review, this study examined the religious requirements of social policy in the field of Social Takaful. Although a substantial body of research addresses Social Takaful from an Islamic perspective, much of it remains fragmented, and a comprehensive, systematic framework for Islamic policymaking in this domain is still lacking. The reviewed works converge on core principles—social justice, human dignity, public welfare, broad-based participation, and the mobilization of Islamic financial instruments (e.g., zakat, khums, waqf)—as foundational to an Islamic model of Social Takaful.

Importantly, Social Takaful in Islam encompasses not only material provision but also spiritual, moral, and educational dimensions, aiming at the flourishing of individuals and society. Responsibility is shared: while the government plays a crucial role, families, communities, and religious institutions are complementary actors in realization and oversight.

Accordingly, designing Social Takaful policies within an Islamic framework requires simultaneous attention to jurisprudential and value-based foundations, contemporary needs, and institutional capacities. Such an approach offers a distinctive alternative to conventional Western arrangements—one that couples economic and social justice with spiritual development and human dignity. Contextualizing and operationalizing these religious requisites in social policymaking is therefore essential to achieving just and sustainable welfare in Islamic societies.

In conclusion, it must be emphasized that within the spectrum of Islamic studies, jurisprudential (fiqhī-ijtihādī) research occupies a particularly important position. Such studies, by arriving at Islam's definitive and precise position in a given domain, stand at the summit of Islamic scholarship and deserve serious attention.

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Human Capital Management in Extreme Crises: A Sensemaking-Driven Framework of Leadership, Strategic Communication, and Behavioral Coherence (The 12-Day War Case Study)

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Abstract

Purpose: This study develops an operational model of human capital management in severe crises grounded in leadership sensemaking and strategic communication. Using the twelve-day Iran–Israel war as an empirical case, it examines how leadership interpretations and crisis communication mechanisms shape the management of human resources and contribute to maintaining behavioral coherence at the societal level during high-intensity crises.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The research adopts a qualitative design based on Thematic Analysis. A corpus of 40 official documents, speeches, and statements issued by key political, military, and socio-cultural actors during the crisis was systematically analyzed. Through an inductive multi-stage coding process, 563 semantic units were extracted and organized into 20 basic themes, 9 organizing themes, and 4 overarching dimensions representing the causal structure of crisis-stage human capital management.

Findings: The results reveal a multi-layered causal model linking leadership cognition, communication processes, organizational practices, and collective behavior. Leadership sensemaking functions as the initiating layer by framing the crisis through enemy construction, identity reinforcement, and legitimacy management. This interpretive layer informs strategic communication processes that manage public perception, construct crisis narratives, and conduct psychological signaling. These communicative mechanisms enable operational human capital management practices focused on personnel continuity, succession mechanisms, and symbolic support for human resources. Together, these processes generate behavioral coherence manifested in societal calmness, reassurance, and strengthened national cohesion.

Originality/Value: By deriving a crisis-stage human capital management model directly from real-time crisis discourse, the study extends existing literature beyond administrative HR perspectives and demonstrates how leadership meaning-making and strategic communication jointly shape collective behavior in severe crises.

Keywords

Human Capital Management in Crisis, Leadership Sensemaking, Strategic Communication, Behavioral Coherence, Crisis Leadership.

Introduction

In contemporary high-stakes crisis environments—characterized by heightened intensity, informational ambiguity, and severe time pressure—the central challenge for human–organizational systems is not merely responding to the crisis, but preventing behavioral divergence and sustaining the continuity of critical functions (Edvardsson & Durst, 2021; Gleibs, 2025). Severe crises often generate interpretive ambiguity and disrupt existing sensemaking systems, thereby weakening shared understanding among organizational actors and increasing volatility in decisions and actions. Under such conditions, a fundamental question arises: how can ambiguity be transformed into coordinated and reliable action (Taylor et al., 2025)?

Within this context, the concept of behavioral coherence constitutes the analytical core of the present study. Behavioral coherence refers to the stability and alignment of operational behaviors under conditions of extreme pressure and high uncertainty, where decisions, roles, and actions remain oriented toward sustaining vital system functions and preventing functional breakdown. This perspective aligns with the crisis-leadership literature, which conceptualizes leadership effectiveness during crises as the capacity to create stability and manage collective responses (Kreamer et al., 2025; Gleibs, 2025).

However, behavioral coherence during crises does not emerge automatically; it requires specific organizational and managerial mechanisms. In this regard, human resource management (HRM) assumes a role that extends beyond routine administrative functions, evolving into a system for structuring roles, stabilizing critical functions, and aligning human behaviors under extreme conditions (Edvardsson & Durst, 2021). From this perspective, human capital management in crises can be understood as the capacity to design and implement mechanisms that prevent behavioral divergence and ensure the sustained functioning of the system.

A central driver of such coherence is leadership sensemaking. Sensemaking theory suggests that when actors confront ambiguous situations, they actively construct and reconstruct interpretations of events to develop a workable understanding that guides their actions (Taylor et al., 2025). In severe crises, leaders play a crucial role in shaping collective responses by structuring ambiguous information, aligning collective interpretations, and managing emotional responses within the organization (Jing & Yang, 2025; Gleibs, 2025). Consequently, leadership sensemaking can be considered a key mechanism through which behavioral coherence becomes possible.

Despite these insights, the existing literature has primarily focused either on crisis leadership or on organizational-level HRM practices. The mechanisms through which leadership sensemaking translates into behavioral coherence through concrete human-capital management processes have received limited integrated attention. The lack of a comprehensive framework explaining how leadership sensemaking contributes to the stabilization of vital behaviors through human-capital management during severe crises, therefore, represents an important theoretical and practical gap.

The twelve-day military confrontation between Iran and Israel in 2025 represents a salient example of a short-duration, high-intensity crisis characterized by intense time pressure, informational ambiguity, and heightened societal sensitivity. This context provides an appropriate empirical setting to examine how behavioral coherence and the continuity of critical functions can be maintained at a macro-system level in the face of extreme threat. Analyzing this case allows for the development of a conceptual model grounded in documentary evidence that clarifies the logic of human-capital management in extreme environments.

Accordingly, the present study seeks to develop a human-capital management model for severe crises grounded in leadership sensemaking and behavioral coherence. The central research question guiding this study is: How can human-capital management, through leadership sensemaking, generate behavioral coherence and ensure the continuity of critical functions during a severe crisis?

1. Theoretical Foundations and Research Background

1-1. Human Capital Management in Severe Crises

In classical literature, human capital management (HCM) has predominantly evolved within stable contexts, emphasizing the development, retention, and optimization of performance (Edvardsson & Durst, 2021). However, severe crises—characterized by heightened uncertainty, time pressure, and disruptions in organizational routines—fundamentally alter these assumptions and expose organizations to complex human-resource challenges (Collings et al., 2021). In such situations, HCM transforms from a supportive function into a vital capability for ensuring operational continuity.

Empirical studies indicate that organizations in crisis settings often oscillate between short-term reductive measures and supportive or developmental interventions (Edvardsson & Durst, 2021). The predominance of cost-cutting strategies can erode trust, lower morale, and diminish

employee commitment (Crayenstein et al., 2025). Conversely, a systemic view of HCM emphasizes complementary bundles of practices that act synergistically, enabling the organization to convey consistent behavioral signals to its employees (Adikaram et al., 2021). Within this framework, the core issue of human capital management during crises lies not merely in cost control but in designing mechanisms that maintain the continuity of critical functions and prevent behavioral divergence (Collings et al., 2021).

1-2. Leadership Sensemaking in Crisis Conditions

Crises generate polysemy and cognitive ambiguity, thereby disrupting existing interpretive systems and prompting employees to redefine their understanding of the situation (Taylor et al., 2025). Sensemaking theory posits that individuals, when confronted with ambiguous events, engage in interpretive and re-interpretive processes to arrive at a plausible understanding that guides subsequent action (Jing & Yang, 2025). Under severe crisis conditions, individual sensemaking capacity may be overwhelmed, leading to interpretive voids.

In such contexts, leadership plays a pivotal role in structuring the chaos. Leaders shape the course of collective responses by framing events, highlighting critical cues, and articulating coherent narratives (Jing & Yang, 2025; Gigliotti & Alvarez-Robinson, 2025). Clear and transparent communication from leaders reduces uncertainty and strengthens employee trust and readiness for coordinated action (Gigliotti & Alvarez-Robinson, 2025). Furthermore, from a social identity perspective, leaders enhance cohesion and collective efficacy by reinforcing a shared sense of "we" and aligning group identity with common organizational goals (Gleibs, 2025). Consequently, leadership sensemaking functions as a mechanism through which interpretive alignment and collective behavioral coordination become possible during crises (Adamu et al., 2024).

1-3. Behavioral Coherence and Communicative Mechanisms

Behavioral coherence refers to the stability and alignment of operational behaviors under conditions of pressure and uncertainty—a state in which both individual and collective actions remain oriented toward maintaining critical system functions. Internal crisis communication represents one of the key mechanisms for fostering such coherence (Adamu et al., 2024). These communications encompass intra-organizational interactions that occur before, during, and after a crisis, aimed at achieving shared understanding and behavioral coordination through processes of sensemaking and meaning construction (Adamu et al., 2024; Taylor et al., 2025).

Research suggests that effective internal crisis communication strengthens trust, commitment, and supportive employee behaviors, whereas deficiencies in this domain lead to confusion and response fragmentation (Adamu et al., 2024). Perceived organizational support also plays a critical role in enhancing commitment and reducing turnover intention in high-risk contexts, thereby contributing to behavioral coherence (Crayenstein et al., 2025).

Overall, the extant literature indicates that behavioral coherence in crises emerges from the interaction of three core elements: systemic design of human capital management practices, leadership sensemaking, and coherent communicative mechanisms (Adikaram et al., 2021; Jing & Yang, 2025; Adamu et al., 2024). Nevertheless, an integrated framework that models these three components as a unified structure for managing severe crises remains underdeveloped—a gap that the present study seeks to address.

1-4. Literature Review

To review the research background relevant to the topic of the present study, similar themes and titles were examined in reputable domestic and international academic databases. Based on this search process, the following studies were identified and selected for further analysis.

Table 1. Literature Review

No.	Research Title	Year	Researchers	Research Findings
1	The Battle of Narratives in the Middle East: Examining the Role of Media in the 12–Day Iran–Israel War	2026	Resalat, Mohammad Amin; Erfani, Sayid Tahir	Media are not neutral transmitters but active agents of legitimation. Each outlet uses ideological language, contrastive framing, highlighting and magnifying, self/other dualization, and selective omission of information to construct its own narrative of the war. Iranian media emphasize Israeli aggression and Iran's legitimate defense; Israeli and some Western media frame Iran as a threat and present Israel's actions as necessary/preemptive for security. This narrative struggle produces a broader discursive battle over political and moral legitimacy in the Middle East.
2	Crisis Leadership, Organizational	2025	Jing & Yang	Using sensemaking theory and multi-wave survey data from 482 Chinese enterprises, the study finds that crisis

No.	Research Title	Year	Researchers	Research Findings
	Sensemaking, and Organizational Resilience: The Moderating Effect of Environmental Turbulence			leadership positively predicts organizational resilience, with organizational sensemaking partially mediating this relationship. Environmental turbulence strengthens both the direct effect of crisis leadership on resilience and the indirect effect via sensemaking (moderated mediation). It defines crises as urgent, disruptive, unexpected events that can trigger defensive employee behaviors and undermine coordination, and frames crisis leadership around rapid decisions, strategic alignment, clear communication, and mobilizing collective effort.
3	Exploring the Role of Internal Communication in Facilitating Employee Ethical and Unethical Endorsements in an Organisational Crisis	2025	Zeng & Odufuwa	Taking a follower-centric view, the study treats employees as both sense-receivers and sense-givers and defines internal crisis communication as managing crisis information and meanings to activate employee behaviors and create realistic expectations. Survey results (N=296) show internal crisis communication positively predicts both ethical and unethical employee endorsements; perceived organizational ethics enhances ethical endorsement but has no significant effect on unethical endorsement. The paper cautions that crisis urgency and survival framing may short-circuit sensemaking and unintentionally push employees beyond ethical boundaries while defending the organization.
4	Leadership in a Crisis: A Social Network Perspective on Leader Brokerage	2025	Li, Zheng, Ni, Kirkman, Zhang, Xu, & Liu	Using multi-wave network surveys in 111 chain restaurants (3,000+ employees) during early COVID-19, the study shows that leaders who bridge (rather than create) structural holes (brokerage decreases/tertius

No.	Research Title	Year	Researchers	Research Findings
	Strategy, Intra-Organizational Communication Patterns, and Business Recovery			iungens) build more effective intra-unit communication networks with higher efficiency (shorter path length) and greater cohesion (density; clustering). Network efficiency and global cohesion relate to collective adaptation, which in turn predicts business recovery trajectories (faster customer growth and decreasing personnel costs).
5	Managerial Roles in Internal Crisis Communication Across High-Risk Industries: Toward a Comparative Framework and Measurement Tool	2025	Mohamad, Abdul Hamid, Adamu, & Wolf	Based on in-depth interviews with 19 crisis managers (oil & gas=9; power generation=10), the study shows ICC in high-risk industries must balance operational precision with psychological sensitivity. It reveals sector-specific adaptations: centralized power generation favors protocol-driven communication and vetted platforms, whereas decentralized oil & gas prioritizes adaptive messaging and consumer-grade tools; organizational structure mediates crisis sensemaking. The paper proposes a 7-dimensional managerial ICC framework/measurement tool and highlights measurable indicators such as clarity, response speed, message consistency, and employee compliance rates.
6	Senselistening and the Reorganisation of Collective Action During Crisis Management: The Notre-Dame de Paris Fire	2025	Cros, Tiberghien, & Bertolucci	Based on microethnographic research of the Paris Fire Brigade, the study introduces "senselistening" as a central mechanism in crisis sensemaking. A "free electron" actor triggered a turning point by voicing situational cues, leading to the reorientation of ongoing action. Senselistening integrates attitudinal openness (situated humility, confidence) and pragmatic verification (epistemic action, recognition of peer expertise), enabling the transition from individual

No.	Research Title	Year	Researchers	Research Findings
				to collective sensemaking under extreme conditions.
7	Sense-making the Aftermath of Crises: The Emergence of Adaptive and Transformative Resilience amid Conflicting Institutional Logics	2025	Deepa, Jaiswal, & Shagirbasha	Based on qualitative interviews with 26 HR leaders, the study identifies staged strategic responses (defiance, buffering, balancing, and acquiescence) to conflicting institutional logics during crises. It reveals three aggregate dimensions: managing conflicting logics, synergizing logics for adaptive resilience (agility, redesigned governance, wellbeing, upskilling), and balancing logics for transformative resilience (distributed work model, engagement, future-of-work sensemaking). The study highlights HR leaders as institutional change agents shaping organizational resilience.
8	A social identity approach to crisis leadership	2025	Gleibs	The paper advances a social identity perspective on crisis leadership, emphasizing a shift from individualistic views to collective crisis responses. Crises are defined as unexpected, salient, potentially disruptive events that demand collective responses and behavioral/policy change. Leadership is framed as social influence through creating "we-ness," with effectiveness tied to representing the group, advancing group interests, crafting shared identity content, and building structures that make the group matter. It highlights aligning identity content with required behaviors, sustaining transparency/trust over time, and accounting for diverse group experiences during crises.
9	The Role of Leadership Communication	2025	Gigliotti & Alvarez-Robinson	The study examines leaders' crisis-related communication narratives and argues that leadership communication

No.	Research Title	Year	Researchers	Research Findings
	in Building Crisis Readiness and Resilient Leadership in Times of Disruption: An Exploratory Study			can build trust, convey stability, and strengthen institutional cohesion during disruption. It conceptualizes crisis readiness as an action-oriented mindset and distinguishes it from preparedness (plans/resources) and resilience (adapting/withstanding/recovering). Drawing on the Communication Theory of Resilience, it frames resilience as a collective, communicative process and highlights how narratives fill meaning deficits and shape sensemaking during crises.
10	Organizational resilience in turbulent times—social capital as a mechanism for successfully adapting human resources practices that lead to resilience	2025	Ben-Hador & Yitshaki	Based on 72 interviews with Israeli HR managers, the study shows that crises force rapid HRP adaptation and that HR managers' social capital is the key mechanism enabling HRP adaptation to attain resilience. It conceptualizes social capital at three levels (personal, intra-organizational, extra-organizational) and links these levels to how HRP (e.g., work arrangements, retention/welfare, development, recruitment, performance appraisal) are adapted during turbulent times through strengthened connections, coordination structures, and communication channels.
11	Designing a Model of Strategic Resilience: The Case of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the 12-Day War	2025	Kordanaij, Asadollah	This qualitative study uses thematic analysis of 37 official statements and documents issued by senior political, military, and socio-cultural actors during the 12-day war to develop an operational, empirically grounded model of strategic resilience for the Islamic Republic of Iran. The findings show that strategic resilience is not a static capacity for endurance but a dynamic, hierarchical capability centered on strategic agency. The

No.	Research Title	Year	Researchers	Research Findings
				resulting model identifies three interrelated dimensions: (1) Socio-Political Resilience (25.9%), providing the enabling foundation through integrated leadership, unity of command, and national cohesion; (2) Resilience in Strategic Agency (54.7%) as the core dimension, characterized by active deterrence, demonstration of response capability, strategic justification, and narrative management via public diplomacy; and (3) Resilience in Foundational Dimensions (19.4%), supporting resilience through continuity of critical governmental and economic functions, support for affected populations, and the mobilization of semantic and psychological capital. Overall, resilience is conceptualized as a capability activated by a central strategic actor that aligns leadership, hard power, soft power, and social capital into a coherent crisis response.
12	The How and Why of Organizational Resilience: A Mixed-Methods Study on Facilitators and Consequences of Organizational Resilience Throughout a Crisis	2024	Hollands, Haensse, & Lin-Hi	A mixed-methods study in the Pakistani textile industry examines organizational resilience as a dynamic meta-capability throughout an ongoing crisis. Qualitative findings identify three content-based internal facilitator themes (Assets & Resourcefulness; Dynamic Competitiveness; Learning & Culture) and three temporal classes (readiness-before, robustness-during, reaction-in-response). "Learning & Culture" highlights soft, people- and learning-oriented facilitators such as employee protection, leader and cross-level communication, HR development, and planning/forecasting. Longitudinal quantitative results emphasize the pivotal role of soft facilitators and link

No.	Research Title	Year	Researchers	Research Findings
				resilience to business success and reduced emotional exhaustion during crisis.
13	High involvement work system and organizational and employee resilience: Impact of digitalisation in crisis situations	2024	Nguyen, Malik, Sharma, Kingshott, & Gugnani	The paper argues that crisis-driven digitalisation creates both opportunities (technology-enabled communication/collaboration) and pressures (job redesign, skills demands, displacement fears). It conceptualizes HIWS (teamwork, training) as an HR bundle that strengthens employee perceptions of PIRK (power, information, rewards, knowledge sharing), which then links to organizational resilience and employee outcomes (performance, satisfaction, positive mental health, retention), with transformational leadership moderating key relationships.
14	Staying emotionally connected while being physically apart – Exploring what teleworkers need to stay committed and how internal communication can contribute	2024	Stranzl, Ruppel, & Einwiller	A qualitative interview study identifies eight job-related resources that foster teleworkers' organizational commitment and highlights the strategic role of internal communication in addressing informational and relational needs.
15	Organizational resilience: Unveiling the role of strategic internal crisis management on employee sensemaking and sensegiving	2024	Adamu, Raza, & Mohamad	Using an online survey of 483 full-time employees in Pakistan and SEM, the study finds that internal crisis communication (ICC) positively predicts job engagement, OCBE, and employees' communicative behaviors for sensemaking and sensegiving, with downstream positive effects on organizational resilience. It defines ICC as manager–employee communicative interaction before/during/after crises, treats

No.	Research Title	Year	Researchers	Research Findings
				sensemaking as the cognitive meaning-construction process, and sensegiving as the communicative meaning-transmission process.
16	Examining employees' affective and behavioral responses to internal crisis communication in times of COVID-19	2023	Liu-Lastres, Wen, & Okumus	The paper distinguishes internal from external crisis communication and explains an integrated framework with two dimensions: leadership communication (vertical) and coworker communication (horizontal). It defines coworker communication and defines psychological safety as a shared belief about the safety of interpersonal risk-taking at work, noting examples such as speaking up and seeking feedback.
17	Strategic human resource management in the context of environmental crises: A COVID-19 test	2023	Minbaeva & Navrbjerg	Using Danish evidence and a mixed-methods sequential design, the article identifies gaps in SHRM revealed by COVID-19. Effective crisis handling is described as combining rapid top-management decisions and clear communication with delegated authority to line managers ("centralized decentralization"). It highlights HRM system strength/signaling and stresses communication as a meta-feature that sends clear signals, builds a strong/resilient climate, and supports collective sensemaking during environmental crises.
18	Battling COVID-19 with human resource management bundling	2021	Adikaram, Naotunna, & Priyankara	The qualitative study reports three internally consistent and mutually reinforcing HRM bundles during COVID-19: health & safety, cost-saving, and employee motivation & engagement. It argues that bundling HR practices can generate synergistic effects, and highlights the need for timely, transparent communication to explain cost-saving decisions and secure employee buy-in.

No.	Research Title	Year	Researchers	Research Findings
19	Leading through paradox in a COVID-19 world: Human resources comes of age	2021	Collings, Nyberg, Wright, & McMackin	The invited review frames COVID-19 as a fundamentally human crisis, placing HR leaders at the center of enabling organizations to navigate and exit the crisis. Using paradox theory, it emphasizes both/and thinking over either/or and illustrates two core paradoxes shaping HR leadership: the people–profit paradox and the short-term–long-term paradox in top management people decisions (e.g., downsizing and its implications for commitment). It also outlines a mutuality lens for higher-quality employment relationships (capability, commitment, contribution).
20	COVID-19 and the uncertain future of HRM: Furlough, job retention and reform	2021	Stuart, Spencer, McLachlan, & Forde	The review argues that job retention should be treated as a core HRM practice during a crisis (not merely an outcome). Drawing on strategic HR planning and labour economics (labour hoarding), it outlines firm benefits (reduced recruitment/training costs; retention of firm-specific skills and organizational memory) and worker benefits (reduced redundancy risk and adverse well-being effects). It also highlights three key challenges for embedding job retention: job security, good work, and worker voice.
21	Human Resource Management in Crisis Situations: A Systematic Literature Review	2021	Edvardsson & Durst	A systematic review of 56 empirical WoS-indexed studies (2008–2021) identifies four themes: economic crisis/health crisis/natural disasters/political instability, and HRM. It defines crises as high-uncertainty events with urgent decision-making and highlights common elements (surprise, threat, short response time). Findings suggest soft HRM and management support are more prevalent in life/health-threatening crises, whereas economic

No.	Research Title	Year	Researchers	Research Findings
				crises more often trigger hard HRM (cost-cutting, downsizing, pay freezes, etc.).
22	Identifying and Prioritizing Effective Human Resource Management Actions in Crisis Conditions Using a Hybrid ANP–DEMATEL Approach	2013	Parhizgar, Mohammad Mehdi; Rahmani, Nima	Using ANP and DEMATEL to prioritize 14 HRM actions grouped into five domains, the study ranks "communication and information disclosure" as the top priority, followed by "empowering managers for crisis" and "human resource development." Downsizing and personnel cost management are considered effective only when implemented after other prior actions.

To examine the research background relevant to the present study, related studies were reviewed in reputable domestic and international academic databases. Based on this search process, the studies presented in Table 1 were identified as the most relevant contributions addressing crisis leadership, internal crisis communication, organizational resilience, and human capital management during crises.

The international literature on crisis management consistently identifies human capital as one of the most critical resources for maintaining organizational and social stability during periods of disruption. Crises are generally characterized by high levels of uncertainty, perceived threat, and severe time pressure, conditions that require the rapid mobilization and coordination of human and social resources (Edvardsson & Durst, 2021). Within this body of research, a significant number of studies emphasize the role of leadership communication and sensemaking processes in guiding collective behavior. Findings indicate that during crises, leaders help reduce ambiguity and shape collective interpretations by providing interpretive frameworks and meaning-making narratives. Through these mechanisms, leaders facilitate behavioral coordination and strengthen collective responses to disruptive events (Gigliotti & Alvarez-Robinson, 2025; Jing & Yang, 2025).

In addition, research drawing on the social identity approach to crisis leadership highlights the importance of constructing a shared sense of collective identity. The formation of a "we-ness" among members of an organization or community has been shown to play a crucial role in mobilizing participation, strengthening solidarity, and fostering coordinated behavior during crises (Gleibs, 2025). Complementary research within the

human resource management literature further emphasizes that supportive HR practices—such as strengthening psychological safety, encouraging teamwork, and facilitating transparent internal communication—can significantly enhance employee commitment and resilience in crisis contexts (Adikaram et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2024).

Despite these insights, much of the international literature has primarily focused on crises occurring within economic organizations, particularly in contexts such as pandemics or economic downturns. Consequently, the application of these insights to severe crises occurring at broader societal or national levels remains relatively underexplored.

Within the domestic literature, crisis-related studies have largely concentrated on macro-level issues such as social resilience, narrative construction, and the management of public perceptions. Some studies suggest that communicative transparency and trust-building are key factors in maintaining social cohesion and cooperation during crises (Parhizgar & Rahmani, 2013). Other research highlights the influential role of media narratives and discursive framing in shaping public perceptions and directing collective responses during crises (Resalat & Erfani, 2025). More recent studies have also examined dimensions of resilience in the context of security and geopolitical crises. For example, Kardanaeij (2025), analyzing official statements issued during the twelve-day war, identified narrative management, national cohesion, and unified leadership as central factors strengthening societal resilience.

Overall, the reviewed literature reveals an important gap. While international studies highlight the roles of leadership communication, sensemaking processes, and HRM practices in crisis contexts, most of this research remains confined to organizational settings and crisis types such as pandemics or economic disruptions. Conversely, domestic research tends to focus on discursive, media-related, or macro-level aspects of crises, with limited attention to the managerial mechanisms through which leadership sensemaking can translate into coordinated human capital behavior at the societal level.

Therefore, despite the identification of several relevant components in previous research, an integrated and context-sensitive framework explaining the relationship between leadership sensemaking, human capital management mechanisms, and the emergence of behavioral coherence at the societal level remains underdeveloped. Addressing this gap, the present study draws on the experience of the twelve-day war to identify the key components and relationships involved in managing human capital under

conditions of severe crisis. The study ultimately seeks to propose a conceptual model explaining how leadership sensemaking, through specific managerial mechanisms, can strengthen behavioral coherence and enhance social coordination during extreme crises.

2. Materials & Methods

The present study is applied in purpose and qualitative in approach. To extract the components and develop a human capital management model for severe crises—based on leadership sensemaking and behavioral coherence—the method of Thematic Analysis was employed. Thematic Analysis is a systematic approach for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns of meaning within qualitative data, enabling the researcher to extract and interpret the underlying concepts and themes embedded in texts in a structured manner (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method is particularly suitable for studies aimed at developing conceptual frameworks or designing models grounded in textual data (Boyatzis, 1998).

The data analysis process in this study was conducted in three stages. In the first stage, the collected texts and documents were read multiple times in detail to gain a comprehensive understanding of their content. Meaningful segments were then identified and extracted, and each segment was coded as an initial unit based on its core concept. Efforts were made to ensure that the codes remained as close as possible to the actual meaning of the data, preventing the imposition of the researcher's subjective interpretations.

In the second stage, the initial codes were compared and reviewed, and then organized into broader categories based on conceptual similarities. Through this process, a set of organizing themes emerged, each explaining a particular dimension of the phenomenon under investigation. These themes contributed to understanding how human capital is managed under crisis conditions and how leadership sensemaking mechanisms influence collective behavioral direction.

In the third stage, the identified themes were integrated and synthesized to form a coherent conceptual structure. Relationships among the themes were examined, resulting in the extraction of an overarching theme that served as the core of the analysis. This overarching theme was ultimately represented in the form of a conceptual model of human capital management in severe crises, grounded in leadership sensemaking and behavioral coherence.

To assess the reliability of the analysis, a portion of the data was independently coded by a second researcher, and the results were compared

with the initial coding. The level of agreement between coders indicated acceptable stability in the data analysis process.

The statistical population of the study consisted of texts, statements, and official positions issued by key political, military, and elite actors of the Islamic Republic of Iran during the twelve-day crisis period. Given the qualitative nature of the research, purposive sampling was used to select the sources—meaning that documents were chosen based on their substantive relevance to crisis management and social direction-setting during the crisis. Data collection was conducted through document mining and by consulting official and credible sources. In total, 40 documents—including speeches, statements, and official positions—were analyzed, with their distribution among key actors presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Profile of Analyzed Documents

No.	Name	Position (Title)	Number of Documents
1	Ayatollah Khamenei	Leader of the Islamic Revolution	8
2	Masoud Pezeshkian	President	5
3	Seyed Abbas Araghchi	Minister of Foreign Affairs	3
4	Ali Larijani	Advisor to the Leader of the Revolution	3
5	Major General Pakpour	Commander-in-Chief of the IRGC	6
6	Major General Hatami	Commander-in-Chief of the Army	5
7	Major General Mousavi	Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces	3
8	(A group of artists and writers)	Elites and Cultural-Social Actors	8
Total			**40**

3. Research Findings

The analysis of the collected documents concerning human capital management, leadership sensemaking, and behavioral coherence during the twelve-day crisis resulted in the extraction of a wide range of conceptual indicators. In the open-coding stage, a total of 563 distinct meaning units were identified across 40 authoritative documents. These meaning units reflected a diverse spectrum of cognitive, communicative, and behavioral actions expressed by key actors during the crisis. Examples of initial codes—along with the corresponding key textual excerpts and the extracted meaning units—are presented in the table below:

Table 3. Sample of the Open Coding Process

Code	Key Text Excerpt	Meaning Unit
D0209	"I extend my congratulations and condolences to the great nation of Iran and to the families of the martyrs…"	Expression of sympathy and honoring of martyrs
D0302	"The act of the female television host… chanting takbir… presenting a symbol of national strength…"	Highlighting symbolic individual actions
D0512	"Their design was that, on this day, the country's senior officials… would be eliminated, and then they would move toward targeting the leadership."	Revealing the enemy's plan to incapacitate the governance structure
D1509	"Support for the high-level policies of the system."	Declaration of alignment with macro-level decisions
D1003	"He commended the patience, solidarity, and national cohesion of the resilient people of Islamic Iran."	Acknowledgment of national cohesion
D1807	"Expanding the battlefield to the Persian Gulf would be a major strategic mistake."	Warning about escalation of conflict to the Persian Gulf
D2709	"They should not become victims of Netanyahu's animalistic ambitions."	Personalizing responsibility for the war (Netanyahu)
D4026	"The next day, they sat down to discuss a replacement for the Islamic Republic."	Claim of external planning for regime change

These examples represent only a portion of the broad range of meaning units extracted during the first stage of analysis. Based on the recurrence, conceptual overlap, and thematic consistency observed across the documents, theoretical saturation was achieved. Subsequently, the extracted meaning units were organized into coherent analytical constructs.

In the next stage of analysis, the meaning units were categorized into 20 basic themes. Following a detailed review and refinement process, these 20 basic themes were then consolidated into 9 organizing themes and ultimately into 4 overarching themes. Collectively, these themes represent multiple layers of leadership sensemaking, human capital management, behavioral coherence, and strategic communication during the crisis. Table 4 presents the overall structure of the thematic framework.

Table 4. Network of Themes Extracted from Documents

Global Theme	Organizing Theme	Basic Theme	Frequency of Semantic Phrases
Leadership Sensemaking	Framing the nature, behavior, and consequences of the opponent's actions	Exposing the nature and inherent characteristics of the adversary	104
		Establishing deterrence equations and imposing costs on the adversary	67
		Framing the adversary's action as a strategic mistake	12
	Redefining victory, defeat, and identity	Redefining the meaning of victory and defeat	21
		Constructing a self-identity of resilience, morality, and triumph	97
		Narrating religion and knowledge as pillars of resilient identity	4
	Managing external legitimacy and accountability	Discrediting international criticisms	1
		Regulating norms of political criticism	7
Human Capital Management in Crisis	Ensuring continuity and succession of human resources	Framing and accepting human loss (martyrdom, casualties)	10
		Maintaining organizational continuity and succession	3
	Symbolic support and care	Honoring martyrs, personnel, and their families	7
		Providing symbolic and psychological support to personnel	1
Behavioral Coherence	Managing calmness and reducing collective anxiety	Demonstrating collective maturity and composure	9
		Normalizing conditions and containing public fear	3
	Behavioral reassurance and strengthening cohesion	Providing behavioral reassurance (decisiveness, control, planning)	40
		Reinforcing national unity and cohesion	77
Communication (Strategic–Psychological	Perception management and	Constructing narratives of war and diplomacy	66
		Countering the adversary's	23

Global Theme	Organizing Theme	Basic Theme	Frequency of Semantic Phrases
Operations)	psychological operations	psychological warfare	
	Multilevel warning and communicative deterrence	Shaping public perception by announcing costs and penalties	4
		Issuing deterrent warnings and threats	7
Total			**563**

The integration of basic and organizing themes ultimately led to the formation of the conceptual network of the research. This network demonstrates that crisis management during the twelve-day war was not merely a set of temporary or ad hoc actions; rather, it constituted a system of meaning-making, human capital support, cohesion-building, and communicative practices that mutually reinforced one another.

3.1- Elucidating the Dimensions of the Human Capital Management Model in Severe Crisis Based on Leadership Sensemaking, Strategic Communication, and Behavioral Coherence

Dimension 1: Leadership Sensemaking

The findings indicate that leadership sensemaking, with 313 semantic statements, represents the most significant component in organizing societal perceptions during the twelve-day crisis and played a central role in shaping cognitive resilience. This dimension manifested in three major axes: enemy framing, redefinition of victory and identity, and legitimacy regulation.

In the first axis—framing the nature, behavior, and consequences of the enemy's actions—with 183 statements (58.47%), leadership attempted to render the crisis understandable and controllable. The principal component within this axis is the exposure of the enemy's nature and character, comprising 104 statements (33.22%), which portrays the adversary as an actor with a historical record of violence and lawlessness. This representation transforms the threat from an ambiguous and fear-inducing phenomenon into an analyzable pattern. Furthermore, the construction of a deterrence–cost equation, with 67 statements (21.40%), presents Iran's defensive actions as purposeful and deterrent, thereby strengthening the sense of social security. The theme of the enemy's strategic miscalculation, represented by 12 statements (3.83%), depicts the attack as a consequence of ignorance and misjudgment, thus reframing the danger as a manageable

situation. Consequently, this axis primarily performs the function of initial sensemaking and reduction of collective anxiety.

The second axis—redefining victory, defeat, and identity—with 122 statements (38.98%), constitutes the motivational and identity-forming dimension of sensemaking. Redefining victory, with 21 statements (6.71%), interprets victory not merely in military terms but as the preservation of national dignity, stability, and the enemy's retreat from its initial objectives. The dominant component of this axis is resilient and ethical identity, comprising 97 statements (30.99%), which portrays the Iranian nation as possessing a morally grounded and triumphant identity, thereby reproducing social cohesion. Additionally, religion and knowledge as a resilient identity, with 4 statements (1.27%), frames the combination of rationality and spirituality as the foundation of societal endurance. Through this process, the paradigm of victory shifts from the battlefield to the domain of ethics and collective identity.

The third axis—legitimacy regulation and external accountability—with 8 statements (2.55%), although numerically limited, plays a complementary role in consolidating the legitimacy of defensive decisions. Within this axis, delegitimizing international criticism (0.31%) highlights the perceived double standards in global norms, while regulating the norms of political criticism (2.23%) emphasizes the boundary between constructive critique and the weakening of national cohesion.

In summary, leadership sensemaking—through enemy framing (58.47%), redefinition of identity and victory (38.98%), and legitimacy regulation (2.55%)—establishes a mechanism for the cognitive management of crisis and the reproduction of hope, trust, and social cohesion within society. Within this mechanism, the crisis is transformed from an existential threat into an opportunity for identity formation and deterrence.

Dimension 2: Communication (Strategic–Psychological Operations)

The dimension of Communication (Strategic–Psychological Operations) with 103 semantic statements (18.30% of the total data), represents the layer through which crisis management moves from the level of action to the level of perception. At this level, the organization engineers the domain of public understanding and global perception through language, narrative, and threat to control public opinion and secure psychological initiative within the crisis environment.

Within this framework, communication is not merely an instrument of information dissemination but a mechanism for shaping perceived reality—a reality in which the crisis is represented as a contest of wills rather than a

fragile or accidental event. This dimension fulfills two fundamental functions: perception management and psychological operations (86.41%), and multi-level warning and communicative deterrence (10.68%).

In the first axis—perception management and psychological operations, which accounts for more than four-fifths of the dimension—the organization attempts to reconstruct the cognitive equation of the crisis in its favor. Two processes unfold simultaneously: narrative construction of war and diplomacy (64.08%) and countering the enemy's psychological warfare (22.33%).

In the first process, narrative construction becomes the primary arena of symbolic struggle. Here, the enemy's actions are framed as aggression, strategic miscalculation, or a violation of diplomacy, while the organization's actions are represented as a legitimate response, defense of peace, and a strategic shift toward the logic of resistance. Through these narratives, the enemy is portrayed as a source of instability, whereas the organization is depicted as a force of rationality and restraint. Even diplomatic initiatives are framed as reinforcing this overarching narrative.

In the second process, the organization directly engages in countering the enemy's psychological warfare. The aim is to expose the adversary's media manipulation and neutralize the psychological effects of its threats. Emphasis on the ineffectiveness of enemy propaganda, public awareness, and the exposure of the enemy's exaggerated narratives functions to restore the psychological resilience of society. At this level, communication assumes a therapeutic role, reconstructing public trust amid psychological aggression. Thus, perception management extends beyond responding to enemy messaging and becomes the design of a communicative cycle that transforms the perception of threat into evidence of the adversary's weakness.

The second axis—multi-level warning and communicative deterrence, with 11 semantic statements (10.68% of the dimension)—constitutes the complementary layer of this mechanism. Through calculated language of threat and strategic messaging, deterrent signals are conveyed.

Two sub-components operate within this axis. The first is regulating public opinion through the announcement of costs and punishment (3.88%), where warning messages are deliberately directed toward society to foster internal cohesion and strengthen collective resolve. Statements emphasizing loyalty, support for national policies, and disciplined public discourse exemplify messages that situate domestic audiences within a framework of intellectual and behavioral deterrence.

The second component is deterrent warning and threat (6.8%), representing the outward-facing aspect of this dimension. At this level,

communication becomes the language of power. Messages referring to the certainty of punishment and stronger responses in the event of continued hostility are designed not merely to execute threats but to transform them into deterrent shields. In this logic, the threatening tone does not signify uncontrolled anger but rather calculated control—a language aimed at preventing escalation while affirming the will to respond.

Dimension 3: Human Capital Management in Crisis

The dimension of human capital management in crisis, with 21 semantic statements (3.73% of the total data), plays a complementary yet critical role in maintaining organizational functionality and the resilience of human resources under conditions of severe threat. Unlike the first dimension, which primarily performs cognitive and narrative functions, this dimension directly addresses the operational and human layer of crisis management.

It manifests through two main axes: ensuring continuity and succession of human resources and symbolic support and care.

The first axis—ensuring continuity and succession of human resources, with 13 semantic statements (61.9% of the dimension)—constitutes the central mechanism of this construct. The most prominent element within this axis is the acceptance and meaning-making of human cost, with 10 statements (47.6%). In this representation, casualties and martyrdom are interpreted not as disruptions or ruptures but as integral components of the path of resistance and the natural consequence of national steadfastness. Losses, therefore, do not generate organizational disintegration; instead, they reinforce the continuity of purpose and motivational meaning.

Alongside this, maintaining organizational continuity and succession, with 3 statements (14.3%), highlights mechanisms through which the loss of commanders or key personnel is immediately compensated by prepared successors. Emphasis on uninterrupted duties and the rapid replacement of commanders within twenty-four hours demonstrates that continuity of performance is the central message of this axis. This dual mechanism transforms perceptions of disruption into continuity and damage into rapid reconfiguration, presenting the crisis structure as controllable.

The second axis—symbolic support and care, with 8 statements (38.1% of the dimension)—constitutes the emotional and communicative layer of human capital management. The largest share in this axis belongs to honoring martyrs, personnel, and their families, with 7 statements (33.3%). Expressions of empathy, respect, and recognition of the dignity of families

and personnel serve as mechanisms for preserving motivation, meaning, and emotional connection between human resources and leadership structures.

Symbolic and psychological care for personnel, with 1 statement (4.8%), although numerically limited, reflects attention to symbolic gestures that sustain morale—such as highlighting small yet inspiring actions that reinforce collective capability and self-confidence. Overall, this axis seeks to prevent psychological erosion and maintain the emotional–organizational network of crisis resilience.

In summary, although human capital management in crisis constitutes only 3.73% of the total data, its role in sustaining the crisis structure is critical. On one hand, it guarantees operational continuity and rapid succession, and on the other hand, through recognition, symbolic attention, and psychological support, it reproduces the bond between personnel and organization. Consequently, human capital management not only prevents the collapse of human structures under threat but also transforms them into a source of endurance, resilience, and strategic continuity.

Dimension 4: Behavioral Coherence

The dimension of Behavioral Coherence, with 83 semantic statements (14.74% of the total data), represents one of the most significant constructs for reproducing social stability and calmness within the crisis environment. Unlike the previous dimension, which focuses on the operational human layer, this dimension functions at the level of collective behavior and public perception.

Behavioral Coherence attempts to manage the crisis through the display of calmness, control, and unified behavior. In other words, it is the layer through which the organization simultaneously contains social anxiety and transforms its conduct into a source of reassurance and solidarity.

This dimension manifests in two key axes: managing calmness and reducing collective anxiety, and behavioral reassurance and strengthening cohesion.

The first axis—managing calmness and reducing collective anxiety, with 12 statements (14.46% of the dimension)—plays an essential role in regulating the psychological state of society. The most prominent component is the display of collective maturity and calmness, with 9 statements (10.84%), where the organization demonstrates restraint, measured responses, and the avoidance of impulsive reactions. This calmness is represented not merely as temperament but as an indicator of organizational mastery over the situation. Organizational composure thus becomes an implicit signal of crisis management capability.

Additionally, normalizing conditions and containing collective fear, with 3 statements (3.62%), refers to the process through which the crisis is described within manageable trajectories. Through this approach, the crisis is reframed from a disruptive threat into an event situated within the sphere of control. This normalization breaks the cycle of anxiety and gradually shifts the environment toward psychological stability.

The second axis—behavioral reassurance and strengthening cohesion, with 71 statements (85.54% of the dimension)—constitutes the structural core of this dimension. The most significant component is behavioral reassurance, with 40 statements (48.19%), which is grounded in the display of decisiveness, control, and preparedness. In these narratives, organizational behavior itself—rather than mere statements—becomes the source of reassurance.

Repeated emphasis on initiative, prior planning, and decisive responses conveys that the organization is not acting reactively but is implementing a pre-designed strategy. Simultaneously, strengthening national unity and cohesion, with 31 statements (37.35%), demonstrates that the organization assumes a role as a social integrator during a crisis.

This cohesion extends beyond symbolic calls for solidarity and manifests behaviorally through coordination of forces, disciplined action, and visible alignment among organizational components. In this perspective, organizational behavior possesses not only operational significance but also social and trust-building functions.

In summary, although Behavioral Coherence constitutes 14.74% of the total data, its function within the model exceeds its quantitative share. This dimension manages the crisis through behavior: behavior that reproduces calmness, contains anxiety, stabilizes trust, and reinforces social unity. Within the broader logic of the model, Behavioral Coherence functions as a psychological–social shield that both prevents the spread of instability and generates the trust necessary for subsequent stages of crisis management.

Integrated Model Interpretation

The four extracted dimensions form a coherent chain of crisis management. This chain begins with leadership sensemaking, where the crisis is cognitively framed, and collective identity is reinterpreted. This cognitive foundation is subsequently translated into strategic communication, which stabilizes the field of public understanding through narrative construction and perception management. The resulting perceptual orientation is then operationalized at the organizational level through human capital management, ensuring continuity of performance, succession, and symbolic

support. Finally, this continuum culminates at the societal level in Behavioral Coherence, where calming processes, reassurance, and the demonstration of unity stabilize collective behavior.

The overall logic of the model follows a unidirectional causal pathway, whose outcome is the continuity of vital organizational and societal functions under conditions of severe crisis.

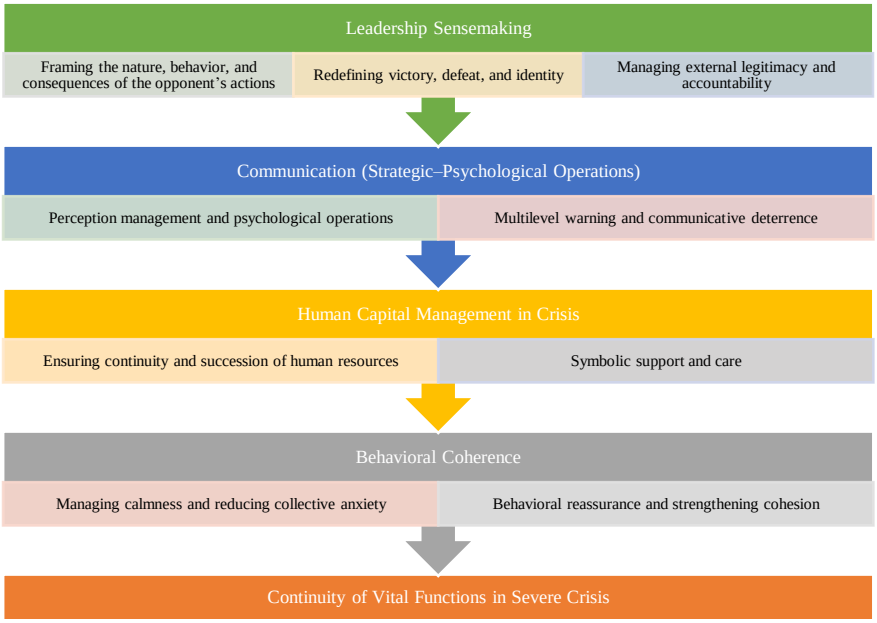

Figure 1. Final Model of Human Capital Management Model in Severe Crisis

4. Discussion & Conclusion

This study was conducted with the aim of designing a model for human capital management in the Islamic Republic of Iran during severe crises, with particular emphasis on leadership sensemaking and Behavioral Coherence. Using thematic analysis and reviewing 40 official documents related to key actors involved in the twelve-day war crisis, a rich and credible body of qualitative data was collected. Through a systematic coding process, 563 semantic statements were extracted and ultimately structured into a hierarchical model comprising basic themes, organizing themes, and four overarching dimensions.

The findings reveal that Iran's model of human capital management in severe crisis is a dynamic, multi-level, and causally structured system. Contrary to reductionist approaches to crisis-stage HRM, the model is fundamentally

grounded in leadership sensemaking. Frequency analysis demonstrated that leadership sensemaking (55.6%) plays the pivotal, overarching role; it rests upon a layer of Communication (Strategic–Psychological Operations) (18.30%), is activated through human capital management in crisis (3.73%), and ultimately materializes at the societal level through Behavioral Coherence (14.74%). This architecture shows that these dimensions do not operate in parallel but rather within a causal–interpretive–behavioral chain, which constitutes the central innovation of this study.

The extracted model maintains a strong relationship with the theoretical literature while simultaneously extending and operationalizing it. At the national level, previous research, such as Abdollahi (2020) and Safari (2022), has highlighted the role of communication, human resource management, and social cohesion in crisis conditions. The present findings not only confirm this multi-dimensionality but also move beyond it by clarifying the causal logic among the dimensions. Unlike many domestic studies that examine these dimensions independently or horizontally, our results show that leadership sensemaking is the activating layer: leadership's cognitive–identity framing enables communicative coherence; strategic communication provides the foundation for HRM implementation; and HRM, in turn, paves the way for Behavioral Coherence.

At the international level as well, the findings align with prominent models while extending them. The crisis management literature emphasizes that strategic, operational, and functional layers are effective only when guided by a central sensemaking core. Our findings demonstrate that leadership sensemaking is precisely this central guiding layer. Moreover, crisis leadership scholarship highlights the role of collective meaning-making and the creation of cognitive coherence under conditions of instability (Gigliotti & Alvarez-Robinson, 2025; Jing & Yang, 2025; Liu-Lastres et al., 2023). Likewise, research by Gleibs (2025) and Hollands et al. (2024) shows that constructing we-ness is a prerequisite for leadership effectiveness. The present findings both confirm and extend these theoretical patterns, showing that leadership sensemaking is not a parallel dimension but the mother layer of the model.

In the field of crisis communication, the link between the findings and the existing literature is also evident. Contemporary research stresses the importance of narrative construction, framing, and perceptual operations in shaping public understanding (Stranzl et al., 2024; Adamu et al., 2024; Zeng & Odufuwa, 2025). Similarly, Minbaeva and Navrbjerg (2023) conceptualize communication as the meta-structure of HRM—a necessary condition for Behavioral Coherence. The findings of this study indicate that these communicative mechanisms attain strategic functionality only when

embedded within the leadership sensemaking framework, operating as the middle layer of a causal chain.

Within the HRM-in-crisis literature, studies such as Adikaram et al. (2021), Stuart et al. (2021), Edvardsson and Durst (2021), Nguyen et al. (2024), and Ben-Hador and Yitshaki (2025) emphasize the necessity of support packages, psychological resilience, succession planning, and human networks. Yet, most of these studies conceptualize HRM as a relatively independent system. Our findings show that HRM becomes effective only when located within the sequential chain of sensemaking → communication → HRM → Behavioral Coherence, and not when treated in isolation.

Finally, the literature on collective behavior and cohesion supports the conclusions of this research. Studies by Li et al. (2025) and Deepa et al. (2025) demonstrate that social cohesion is sustainable only when alignment among meaning, narrative, and action is established. The present findings confirm this proposition and provide a clear causal framework for understanding it.

In sum, human capital management in severe crisis is not a scattered set of operational actions; rather, it is an integrated, multi-level system that begins with leadership sensemaking, is consolidated through strategic communication, becomes operationalized via HRM, and ultimately culminates in Behavioral Coherence at the societal level. Contrary to purely technical approaches to HRM, the results illustrate that the sustainability of human capital in crisis requires narrative–semantic guidance and the strengthening of communicative mechanisms. The model demonstrates that Behavioral Coherence is the final output of a semantic–communicative–organizational process, and cannot emerge or endure without leadership sensemaking. Accordingly, the proposed model can serve as a basis for policy-making, designing HRM protocols for crisis conditions, and developing cohesion-building mechanisms under severe threats—providing a coherent linkage between meaning (leadership), narrative (communication), action (HRM), and behavior (cohesion).

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Exploring the Role of Shiite Jurisprudents in Strengthening National Production Resilience: A Historical–Analytical Study

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to elucidate the role of Shiite jurisprudents in strengthening the resilience of national production. Drawing on theoretical frameworks of economic resilience, economic nationalism, and the resistance-economy paradigm, the research seeks to analyze the mechanisms through which Shiite jurisprudents have historically and socially contributed to sustaining and reinforcing national production. Accordingly, the study proposes a conceptual model of "Economic-Resistance Jurisprudence," illustrating how religious leadership and jurisprudential action can enhance the institutional, social, and economic capacities necessary for safeguarding and developing national production.

Design/Methodology/Approach: This research employs a qualitative methodology using a historical–analytical approach. Data were collected through the examination of historical documents, statements, and fatwas issued by prominent Shiite jurisprudents, relevant scholarly works, and historical sources. The data were then organized and systematized through qualitative content analysis and subsequently analyzed to derive meaningful insights. Ultimately, the findings were classified into two main dimensions: (1) the personal and social characteristics of the jurisprudents, and (2) the practical instruments through which they exert influence on economic affairs and national production.

Findings: The results indicate that Shiite jurisprudents have played a multidimensional role in strengthening the resilience of national production. In terms of soft attributes, individual and social qualities—such as innovation-oriented thinking, social responsibility, comprehensive vision, jurisprudential precision, foresight, courage in taking positions, social influence, representational networks and communication, and people-centeredness—have enabled impactful economic engagement. In terms of instrumental mechanisms, processes such as issuing fatwas and statements related to production resilience, initiating and guiding social movements, establishing economic institutions, system-building, and promoting the discourse of the resistance economy have significantly supported domestic production and reinforced economic cohesion. Collectively, these mechanisms have enhanced social trust, increased public participation in the economy, and strengthened the resilience capacity of national production.

Originality/Value: The primary contribution of this research lies in linking the theoretical literature on economic resilience with the historical analysis of the role of Shiite jurisprudents in economic developments. By introducing the concept of "Economic-Resistance Jurisprudence," the study demonstrates that religious leadership and jurisprudential authority can function as important institutional and social capacities for enhancing national production resilience and supporting indigenous economic structures.

Keywords

national production resilience; Shiite jurisprudents; economic independence; economic resilience; economic-resistance jurisprudence.

Introduction

The interrelation between wealth, power, and economic security constitutes one of the most fundamental questions in the history of economic thought and public policy. Global experience demonstrates that countries capable of strengthening their productive foundations not only attain higher levels of economic and political power but also exhibit greater structural resilience in the face of external shocks and crises. From classical mercantilism to contemporary neo-mercantilist theories, scholars have emphasized that "national production" and "domestic wealth accumulation" form the cornerstone of national power and security (Ahmadian, Rostami, & Cheraghi, 2019; Smith, 1776). Within this perspective, states seek to safeguard economic security—the bedrock of national power—through instruments such as protecting domestic industries, controlling imports, promoting strategic exports, and managing foreign-exchange reserves.

In Iran, the nexus between the economy, national power, and independence has a long history. From the Safavid to the Qajar eras, political and economic actors increasingly recognized that dependency on foreign powers—particularly in strategic sectors such as tobacco, shipping, and textiles—created avenues for political penetration and weakened national security (Katouzian, 2003). In this context, Shiite jurisprudents, who have historically maintained a deep and organic presence within society, emerged as influential social and political actors. A historical review of collective clerical activism over the past two centuries reveals that, through both effective jurisprudential reasoning and the mobilization of social capacities, Shiite scholars have played a decisive role in safeguarding the economic dignity and independence of the Muslim community.

One of the most prominent examples is the Tobacco Protest, during which Mirza Shirazi's fatwa terminated the operations of the British "Regie" company in Iran. This not only halted a colonial concession but also, for the first time in modern Iranian history, produced a "native model of economic resistance" (Nazemian, 2007). The event is widely regarded in Iranian political literature as "the first organized effort to defend the national economy."

Historical evidence regarding the role of Shiite jurisprudents in strengthening national production resilience demonstrates that the institution of religious authority—rooted in its unique characteristics and deep social embeddedness—has consistently defended the inherent economic rights of the Iranian nation. After establishing this foundational assumption through multiple historical cases in the first part of the study, the research proceeds to address two central questions:

1. What personal characteristics distinguish the Shiite jurisprudents who have contributed to enhancing national production resilience?
2. Through what instruments have these jurisprudents influenced the resilience of national production?

The present study seeks to uncover, through an examination of historical documents from recent centuries, the specific personal traits and practical mechanisms through which Shiite jurisprudential leadership has contributed to national production resilience. Within this framework, jurisprudents have employed various social, economic, jurisprudential, and cultural mechanisms. Leveraging extensive social capital, broad public networks, and the intellectual capacities of ijtihad, the institution of religious authority has shaped economic behavior across different historical junctures. Identifying these characteristics and mechanisms, therefore, offers a clearer understanding of the indigenous pattern through which national production and economic resistance have been strengthened in Iranian society.

This research ultimately demonstrates that Shiite jurisprudence has played a decisive role not only in theoretical deliberations but also in practice and policy-making related to protecting the national economy and reinforcing the structural resilience of society. Such an approach can contribute to formulating an indigenous model of economic resilience—one rooted in the intellectual heritage of Islamic-Iranian tradition and responsive to the contemporary needs of the country.

1. Theoretical Foundations and Research Background

1-1. Economic Resilience and National Production within Complex Systems

In recent decades, the concept of resilience has migrated from ecology and systems theory into the literature of social sciences and economics, where it has become a key analytical concept for understanding the stability and sustainability of economic systems. In contemporary scholarship, economic resilience refers to the capacity of an economy to withstand shocks, absorb disruptions, recover its functionality, and reorganize structurally under crisis conditions (Briguglio, Cordina, Farrugia, & Vella, 2009; Rose, 2017). From this perspective, the national economy is understood as a complex and interconnected system exposed to both external shocks—such as sanctions, global financial crises, and trade conflicts—and internal disturbances, including corruption, institutional inefficiency, and policy instability.

Within this framework, national production resilience constitutes a strategic subset of economic resilience. National production—serving as a central pillar of employment, income generation, technological development, and economic power—plays a decisive role in determining whether an economy remains vulnerable or resilient. Recent studies indicate that countries characterized by diversified production structures, robust domestic supply chains, and strong innovation capacities tend to demonstrate more stable performance during periods of crisis (OECD, 2020; UNCTAD, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted that excessive dependence on imports of strategic goods can expose economies to serious vulnerabilities.

From a theoretical standpoint, national production resilience can be examined across three interrelated dimensions:

- Structural dimension: diversification of production and reduction of strategic dependencies
- Institutional dimension: quality of governance and stability of economic rules
- Social dimension: public trust and societal participation

These dimensions illustrate that resilience is not merely the product of economic policy; rather, it emerges from the interaction between economic structures, institutional arrangements, and socio-cultural dynamics.

1-2. Economic Security, Political Economy, and the Logic of Supporting Domestic Production

In the literature of international political economy, economic security refers to a country's capacity to preserve autonomy in economic decision-making and to resist structural pressure exerted by external actors (Farrell & Newman, 2019). Under conditions of deep economic interdependence, financial, trade, and technological networks may become instruments of political leverage. Consequently, national production and industrial capability are increasingly recognized as essential components of national security infrastructure.

Recent transformations in the global economic order—including trade conflicts, technological competition, and renewed industrial policies—reflect a resurgence of protection-oriented strategies in the form of strategic industrial policy (Aiginger & Rodrik, 2020; UNCTAD, 2022). Within this framework, governments employ instruments such as targeted subsidies, selective trade restrictions, and production incentives to strengthen key industries, reduce dependency, and enhance their bargaining power in the international system.

The theoretical rationale underlying these policies is rooted in traditions of infant-industry protection and endogenous development, yet contemporary versions emphasize intelligent support mechanisms aimed at improving productivity and competitiveness. In this context, supporting domestic production is no longer viewed merely as a temporary policy response but rather as an integral component of economic security strategy.

Accordingly, any social, institutional, or normative action that contributes to reducing structural dependency and strengthening domestic production can be analytically situated within the theoretical frameworks of economic security and political economy. This perspective also enables scholars to examine the role of non-state actors—including religious institutions—in processes aimed at reinforcing economic security.

1-3. Institutionalism, Social Capital, and the Role of Social Actors in Resilience

Institutional economics emphasizes that economic performance is shaped less by natural resources or physical capital than by the quality of institutions and the rules governing economic interaction (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; North, 1990). By structuring expectations, reducing uncertainty, and regulating behavior, institutions create the conditions necessary for the stability of productive activities. Economies characterized by transparent, accountable, and efficient institutions tend to demonstrate greater flexibility and adaptability in response to shocks.

Alongside formal institutions, social capital plays a critical role in economic resilience. Social capital refers to networks of trust, shared norms, and cooperation that reduce transaction costs and facilitate economic coordination (Putnam, 1993). Empirical research suggests that societies with higher levels of social capital are able to restore economic equilibrium more rapidly during crises and tend to exhibit stronger patterns of cooperative behavior (OECD, 2020).

Within this analytical framework, religious institutions and clerical authority can be understood as forms of organized social capital. Through extensive social networks, normative legitimacy, and public trust, such institutions possess the capacity to influence economic behavior. When a religious authority expresses a position regarding consumption patterns, production practices, or the support of domestic goods, it effectively mobilizes social capital to shape collective economic action. Particularly in contexts where formal policy instruments are limited or ineffective, this mechanism can contribute significantly to strengthening national production resilience.

1-4. Indigenous Formulations of Resilience: The Resistance Economy and Jurisprudential Foundations

Within Iranian scholarly discourse, the concept of the Resistance Economy can be understood as an indigenous formulation of economic resilience theory. Emerging in response to structural pressures in the global economy and international sanctions, this framework emphasizes endogenous development, public participation, justice-oriented economic organization, and knowledge-based production. Within this paradigm, national production occupies a central position, since economic independence and stability cannot be achieved without strengthening domestic productive capacities (Khamenei, 2013).

From a jurisprudential perspective, strengthening national production and resisting harmful economic dependency may be interpreted through the lens of the objectives of Islamic law (The purposes of Sharia). Principles such as preserving social order, safeguarding public wealth, preventing foreign domination, and averting widespread social harm provide normative grounds for supporting domestic production. Jurisprudential principles such as "nafy_e sabil" (the rejection of domination), "la darar" (the prohibition of harm), and "sadd_e dhara'ye" (blocking harmful pathways)[1] possess economic interpretive potential and may serve as foundations for preventing detrimental dependency and structural vulnerability.

Within this context, it is possible to articulate a concept that may be termed "*economic-resistance jurisprudence*"—an approach in which economic independence, strengthening domestic production, combating corruption, and supporting indigenous capacities are interpreted as normative obligations aligned with the protection of public welfare. This conceptualization enables the historical economic actions of Shiite jurisprudents to be understood not merely as episodic responses to specific events but as components of a broader normative-institutional logic aimed at reinforcing national production resilience.

1-5. Mercantilism, Neo-Mercantilism, and Their Relationship with National Production Resilience

Mercantilism, one of the earliest frameworks in political economy, emphasizes the strengthening of national power through the development of domestic production, accumulation of wealth, restriction of imports, and protection of domestic industries (Magnusson, 2002). In this perspective, the state assumes an active role in managing foreign trade, establishing

1. Rules in Shiite jurisprudence

indigenous industries, and regulating capital flows. The central question of mercantilist thought concerns how a country can enhance its economic power in the face of external threats; consequently, domestic production and economic independence occupy a central position in this paradigm.

During the twentieth century, a more refined and contemporary variant of mercantilist thinking emerged, often described as neo-mercantilism. While retaining the core principles of strengthening domestic production, promoting exports, and managing strategic imports, neo-mercantilism reinterprets these ideas within the context of the modern global economy and international trade regimes (Helleiner, 2002). Unlike its classical predecessor, neo-mercantilism relies on more sophisticated instruments, including:

- strategic industrial policy
- technological support mechanisms
- exchange-rate management
- accumulation of large foreign-exchange reserves
- development of domestic supply chains
- management of strategic dependencies in sensitive industries

Rather than simply restricting trade, this approach emphasizes the strategic management of engagement with the global economy.

In recent decades, the rise of new economic powers—particularly China, South Korea, and several Southeast Asian economies—has renewed scholarly interest in neo-mercantilist strategies. China's development model, characterized by extensive industrial policy and large foreign-exchange reserves, is frequently analyzed in the literature as a prominent example of "Asian neo-mercantilism" (Aizenman & Lee, 2008).

This perspective is closely connected to the concept of economic resilience and national production. By emphasizing the strengthening of productive infrastructures and the reduction of dependency, neo-mercantilism provides mechanisms for mitigating economic vulnerability. Empirical research indicates that countries pursuing neo-mercantilist strategies—such as production diversification, strategic resource management, and the development of foundational industries—have demonstrated greater capacity to absorb international shocks (Blyth & Matthijs, 2017).

Within the theoretical framework of the present study, mercantilism and neo-mercantilism have two key implications. First, both approaches conceptualize domestic production as a fundamental basis of economic

power. From this standpoint, strengthening national production is not merely an economic policy but a strategic security measure that enhances national independence and resilience. Second, while classical mercantilism emphasizes the role of the state, neo-mercantilism expands the range of relevant actors. In contemporary interpretations, social, cultural, and even religious institutions may play a role in mobilizing societal support for domestic production. This connection provides a suitable theoretical foundation for analyzing the role of Shiite jurisprudents in strengthening national production resilience.

Taken together, these discussions indicate that national production resilience is a multilayered concept situated at the intersection of economic resilience theory, economic security and political economy, institutionalism and social capital, and the indigenous framework of the Resistance Economy. Within this perspective, national production is not merely an economic indicator but a strategic element linking power, security, social institutions, and normative foundations. Such a theoretical framework makes it possible to analyze the role of Shiite jurisprudents—as actors endowed with social capital and normative legitimacy—in strengthening national production resilience in a systematic and analytical manner.

1-6. Literature Review

In recent decades, the concept of national production resilience has become a central theme in political economy and strategic studies. In the contemporary world, a nation's economic power is measured not merely by the volume of its assets but by its capacity to withstand shocks, external pressures, and structural crises. Societies that have succeeded in organizing their national production around endogenous capabilities, public participation, and efficient institutions have consequently enjoyed greater economic security and political independence. Iranian history likewise demonstrates that national production and economic independence have consistently occupied a prominent place in the concerns of scholars, policymakers, and Shiite jurisprudents. From the Tobacco Protest to the nationalization of the oil industry, and from the establishment of popular economic organizations such as the" Sherkat-e Mokhammas[1]" theorization of the Resistance Economy,

1. The mechanism of Mokhammas was established by Ayatollah Shahabadi. The term "partnership" in this term means participation in the jurisprudential sense, not the term "company". Mokhammas is also rooted in the meaning of profit sharing among the five groups. This mechanism was designed in the form of individual shares and based on the principle of cooperation, in such a way that people faithfully

the Shiite scholarly establishment has played a significant role in safeguarding the national economy.

This role has not been confined to issuing fatwas or engaging in political activism; rather, it has emerged from a set of intellectual foundations, jurisprudential approaches, and social mechanisms that have developed over time and culminated in what may be termed an "indigenous model of economic resistance." The present study seeks to explore this model by examining how Shiite jurisprudents have contributed to strengthening national production resilience through historical, theoretical, and institutional lenses, thereby providing a clearer understanding of the instruments, logic, and functions that shape this intellectual tradition.

Table 1. Literature Review

No.	Research Title	Year	Researchers	Research Findings
1	A Theoretical and Practical Examination of Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Shah Abadi's Economic and Social Reform Approach	2019	Ghorbi	The study shows that Ayatollah Shah Abadi developed a comprehensive view of economic reform grounded in Islamic jurisprudence and ethical principles. His approach emphasizes social justice, public welfare, and the responsibility of the state and society in regulating economic life. The findings indicate that Shah Abadi considered economic independence, support for domestic production, and public participation in economic activities as essential elements for strengthening the economic structure of society. The study concludes that his ideas provide a framework for integrating religious values with modern economic governance.

entrusted a part of their assets to it within the framework of Islamic standards. "So that after the company's expenses, they can estimate its profits."

No.	Research Title	Year	Researchers	Research Findings
2	The Role of Grand Ayatollah Boroujerdi in the Nationalization of the Oil Industry	2019	Sadri, Zibakalam, Taheri, & Abtahi	The findings demonstrate that Ayatollah Boroujerdi adopted a cautious and indirect strategy in political-economic affairs during the oil nationalization movement. Rather than direct political activism, he sought to preserve the authority and stability of the religious institution (marja‘iyya). His role was mainly reflected in legitimizing national movements, encouraging unity among religious and political actors, and preventing internal divisions. The study concludes that his approach contributed to strengthening social solidarity and indirectly supporting the nationalization movement.
3	Explaining the Economic Views of the Supreme Leader	2023	Ehteshami & Shaigan	This study identifies a systematic economic framework in the Supreme Leader’s speeches and writings. The findings show that his economic vision is organized around several key principles, including support for domestic production, promotion of a knowledge-based economy, avoidance of wastefulness, financial transparency, economic justice, and the doctrine of the Resistance Economy. The study concludes that this framework aims to strengthen economic independence, reduce vulnerability to external shocks, and increase national economic resilience.

No.	Research Title	Year	Researchers	Research Findings
4	Analyzing the Economic Model of Ayatollah Shah Abadi	2015	Yousefi	The study reconstructs Shah Abadi's economic model based on Islamic ethical foundations such as justice, cooperation, social responsibility, and the rejection of exploitative economic practices like usury. The findings show that Shah Abadi considered agriculture, industry, and trade as the three structural pillars of economic development. He emphasized the importance of productive labor, fair distribution of wealth, and strengthening domestic economic capacities to achieve sustainable economic growth.
5	Threats to National Production in the Islamic Political System from the Perspective of Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Shah Abadi	2019	Ghorbi & Jamshidiha	The findings identify several major threats to national production, including economic dependency on foreign powers, neglect of domestic production capacities, dominance of consumerism, and deviation from Islamic economic values. The study argues that ignoring domestic production weakens economic independence and undermines social justice. It concludes that strengthening national production requires reinforcing moral values, improving economic policies, and mobilizing social and institutional capacities.
6	Strategies for Strengthening the Economic Foundations of the Islamic Political	2020	Jamshidiha & Ghorbi	The findings highlight a set of strategies for building a strong and resilient economic system. These include strengthening internal economic capacities,

No.	Research Title	Year	Researchers	Research Findings
	System from the Perspective of Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Shah Abadi			promoting self-reliance, supporting domestic production, ensuring economic justice, and reducing dependence on external economic actors. The study also emphasizes the role of ethical governance, public participation, and institutional coordination in building a stable economic structure capable of resisting external pressures.
7	An Analysis of the Economic Actions of Iranian Rulers and Their Connection to Power and Security	2018	Mousavi Dalini	The study shows that economic policy in Iranian political history has often been closely linked to issues of power, legitimacy, and national security. Rulers used economic tools such as taxation policies, control of resources, and trade regulation to strengthen political authority and maintain social stability. The findings indicate that economic management has historically functioned as a strategic instrument for consolidating state power and ensuring political security.

2. Materials & Methods

This study employs a descriptive–analytical research design, a widely used approach in the humanities and social sciences aimed at providing an accurate account of concepts, phenomena, and perspectives, followed by their systematic interpretation. In this method, the researcher does not manipulate variables or conduct experimental interventions; rather, the analysis is grounded in the critical examination of existing data and scholarly sources. The descriptive phase focuses on identifying and outlining the current state of knowledge, while the analytical phase involves interpreting, comparing, and synthesizing the collected information to generate a coherent understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2014).

Data collection was conducted using the library-based (documentary) method, which relies on a systematic review of written and digital sources. These sources include academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, and materials retrieved from reputable scientific databases and scholarly websites. The documentary method enables the researcher to build a rigorous conceptual foundation by drawing on prior studies, established theories, and verified empirical findings (Neuman, 2014).

The research process unfolded in several stages. First, relevant literature about the topic was identified and compiled. In the second stage, key concepts, arguments, and empirical findings were extracted and organized according to the thematic structure of the study. Subsequently, the collected information was subjected to analytical evaluation with the aim of clarifying relationships among concepts, comparing divergent viewpoints, and synthesizing insights across different sources. Through this systematic process, the study seeks to develop an integrated and analytically grounded account of the subject under investigation.

Throughout the research, particular attention was given to the credibility and scholarly validity of the sources. Priority was placed on using peer-reviewed articles, specialized monographs, and materials published by reputable academic institutions to ensure the reliability, rigor, and scientific robustness of the findings. Overall, the combination of a descriptive–analytical approach with comprehensive documentary data collection provides a structured and evidence-based framework for examining the research problem and deriving substantiated conclusions.

3. Research Findings

Based on the preceding discussions, the influence of Shiite jurisprudents on strengthening national production resilience can be examined across two major domains: (1) internal, personality-based attributes, (2) external, socially embedded effects, and (3) the practical instruments they employed. Although the methodological foundations of their jurisprudential reasoning did not undergo a radical shift compared with earlier scholars, several factors enabled these jurisprudents to address emergent economic questions and mobilize society toward supporting domestic production. The findings are presented below.

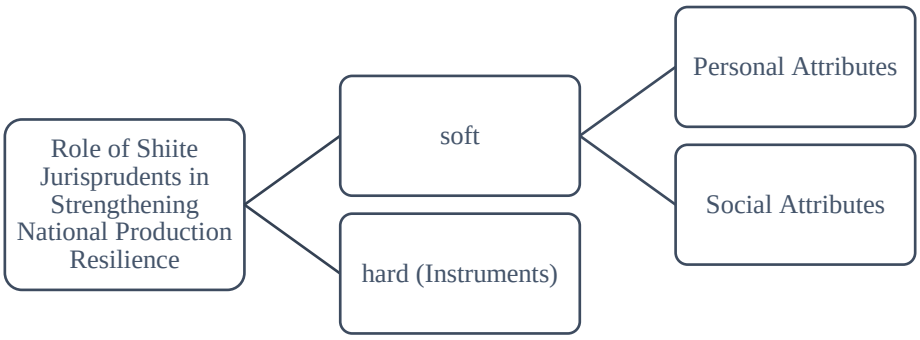

Figure 1. Classification of the role of Shiite jurists in strengthening the resilience of national production (research findings)

A. Personality-Based Attributes

1. Innovative Perspectives on Emerging Issues: Many influential Islamic scholars approached socio-economic matters with a creative and forward-looking mindset. Their engagement with issues such as the promotion of locally produced paper and fabric, the tobacco boycott, the nationalization of oil, and the design of cooperative structures like the "Sherkat-e Mokhammas" reflected a new angle for protecting the independence and dignity of Muslim communities. Recognizing that economic weakness could undermine collective honor and lead to dependency on foreign powers, they applied classical jurisprudential methods—rooted in the Jafari tradition—to novel economic circumstances in order to safeguard societal autonomy.

For these scholars, national production was not merely an economic activity but a strategic instrument for realizing a higher goal: the empowerment of the Muslim community. Drawing on principles such as *" Islam is above all, and there is no one above it,"* they interpreted support for domestic production as a religious and social obligation aimed at preserving the dignity of believers.

2. Strong Sense of Social Responsibility: These jurisprudents demonstrated a heightened sensitivity toward public welfare, moving beyond individual-centric jurisprudence. Particularly during periods of crisis, they provided religiously grounded guidance with the aim of protecting society from humiliation and preserving collective honor. Their engagement with socio-economic issues reflected a belief in the broader moral responsibility of religious leadership.

3. Holistic Vision: Operating from the premise that Islam is a comprehensive guide for human life, these scholars adopted an integrative outlook that encompassed economic, political, and social dimensions. Their analyses did not confine themselves to ritual or spiritual concerns; rather, they considered material well-being, social cohesion, and the long-term independence of the Muslim community as interrelated elements of a unified worldview.

4. Jurisprudential Precision and Scholarly Depth: A distinguishing characteristic of these scholars was their deep familiarity with scriptural sources—honed over decades of engagement with the Qur'an, Prophetic traditions, and the teachings of the Imams. Through rigorous application of the four principal sources of Shiite jurisprudence—Qur'an, Sunnah, reason, and consensus—they employed jurisprudential rules such as "*nafy_e sabil"* and "*sadd_e dhara'ye"* to address economic vulnerabilities and to formulate positions supporting national production.

5. Long-Term Strategic Thinking: These jurisprudents prioritized long-term societal interests over short-term conveniences. They recognized that neglecting domestic production might yield immediate benefits but would ultimately deepen dependency and weaken the economic autonomy of the Muslim community.

6. Courage and Moral Resolve :A key feature of socially influential jurisprudents was their courage in articulating and upholding positions that served public interests, even under conditions of political pressure or foreign influence. Their bravery manifested not only in issuing bold religious rulings but also in steadfastly defending them and accepting the associated risks.

This moral courage enabled them to act as agents of collective guidance during critical historical junctures, mobilizing society in defense of economic independence and contributing directly to the translation of jurisprudential reasoning into effective social action.

B. Social Attributes

1. Social Influence and Public Trust : Since the advent of Islam and throughout subsequent centuries, Iranian society has maintained deep emotional and religious ties with Islamic scholars. With the institutionalization of the marja'iyya and, later, the doctrinal model of guardianship during occultation, the pronouncements of jurisprudents—especially leading authorities—enjoyed broad societal compliance.

In questions related to national production resilience, the public frequently aligned its behavior with the guidance of scholars who were perceived as morally authoritative and aligned with communal interests.

2. Representative Networks and Communication Channels : Historically, the system of authorized representatives—particularly during periods such as the Safavid era—created a robust communication infrastructure through which religious rulings and guidance could be disseminated. In an era lacking modern mass media, these networks facilitated the rapid transmission of scholarly directives, thereby enabling jurisprudents to exert wide social influence and promote collective economic action consistent with religious norms.

3. Community-Centered Economic Engagement: These scholars emphasized the importance of grassroots participation in economic reform. The longstanding legitimacy of the marja'iyya nurtured broad social cohesion, and their directives were generally met with strong public responsiveness. This alignment between religious leadership and community members strengthened self-reliance, social trust, and the mobilization of internal capacities to address economic challenges.

C. Instruments and Mechanisms Employed

Beyond personal and social attributes, jurisprudents made strategic use of practical tools rooted in the institutional traditions of Shiite scholarship. These instruments enabled them to influence economic behavior and reinforce national production resilience.

1. Issuing Fatwas and Public Declarations: A central function of the Shiite religious establishment has always been issuing legal opinions. Over time, this function evolved from addressing individual inquiries to encompassing societal, economic, and cultural domains.

A notable example is the collective declaration of thirteen prominent scholars of Isfahan advocating support for domestic production. This document—arguably one of the earliest examples of "jurisprudentially informed social policy"—called for the boycott of foreign goods, encouraged consumption of domestic products, and urged religious leaders to model economic patriotism. This initiative played a significant role in strengthening local industries and reducing dependency.

2. Leading Social Movements: In several historical contexts, jurisprudents initiated or supported public movements against economically harmful governmental decisions. For instance, Ayatollah Kashani's leadership

against the Gass–Golshā'iyān[1] Agreement and his pivotal role in the nationalization of oil illustrate how religious authority could mobilize societal resistance and shape national economic outcomes.

3. Institutional Innovation and Organizational Development: One of the most significant contributions of these scholars was the creation of new institutional structures aimed at bolstering domestic production.

Examples include:

• the "Sherkat-e Mokhammas", conceptualized by Ayatollah Shah-Abadi to promote domestic trade, assist the poor, and reduce foreign dependency;

• the "*Islamiyyeh Company*[2]" in Isfahan, established through collaboration between local merchants and leading scholars such as Aqa Najafi and Haj-Aqa Nourullah Najafi.

These initiatives demonstrate an effort not merely to offer jurisprudential guidance but to design practical mechanisms for economic strengthening.

4. System Building and Intellectual Advancement of Islamic Economic Thought: The foundational efforts of scholars such as Ayatollah Muhammad-Baqir al-Sadr—particularly in *Iqtisaduna*—represent an attempt to articulate a comprehensive Islamic economic system rooted in principles such as distributive justice, diversified ownership, state responsibility, and social welfare.

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1. At the end of November 1948, AbbasGholi Golshaian was appointed Minister of Finance in the cabinet of Mohammad Saed Maraghe. After the rejection of the Russian request for the Northern Oil Contract in the parliament, the British, in order to maintain their dominance over the Southern Oil, entered into negotiations with Iranian authorities to sign an agreement to confirm and complete the 1933 contract. Therefore, Golshaian, representing the Iranian government, and Gas, representing the British Oil Company, signed an agreement that became known as the Supplementary Agreement to the 1933 Contract or the Gas-Golshaian Agreement. According to this agreement, Britain's dominance over Iran's oil resources was extended for 33 years so that this country could dominate Iran's oil resources until 1361 AH.

2. Islamiyyeh Company was founded in 1898 (1316 AH) in Isfahan by a group of local merchants with the strong support of prominent Shiite scholars, including Ayatollah Aqa Najafi and Ayatollah Haj Aqa Nourollah Najafi. The company aimed to promote domestic textile production and reduce dependence on foreign goods, reflecting an early form of economic self-reliance. Within less than a decade, it expanded rapidly and established commercial representatives in major international cities such as London, Bombay, Cairo, Istanbul, and Moscow. Supported by religious authorities and public trust, the enterprise became a successful model of indigenous economic development and national production, though it eventually declined amid the political upheavals of the Constitutional period and the rise of Reza Shah.

In later periods, particularly under the intellectual leadership of Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, these ideas evolved into formal policy frameworks emphasizing concepts such as “resistance economy,” “national production,” “domestic empowerment,” “justice-oriented development,” and “economic resilience.” Academic and religious institutions were tasked with operationalizing and updating Islamic economic principles within national development strategies.

This intellectual and institutional trajectory transformed Islamic economic thought from a theoretical paradigm into a practical framework for strengthening national production resilience.

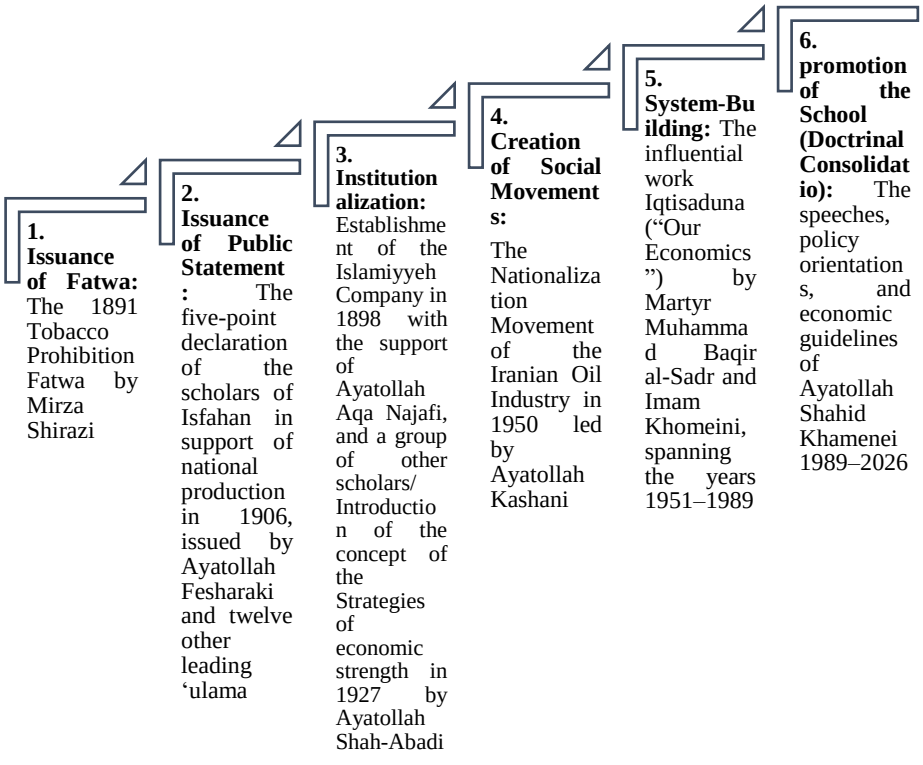

Figure 2. The evolution of the role of jurists in the resilience of national production (research findings)

4. Discussion & Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that Shiite jurisprudents, beyond their ritual and doctrinal functions, have historically played a structural and influential role in economic and social arenas. The findings reveal that their impact on strengthening national production resilience emerges through two major dimensions: the personal and jurisprudential attributes of influential scholars, and their social and institutional instruments.

On the personal level, leading jurisprudents—equipped with innovative perspectives, strong social responsibility, holistic thinking, jurisprudential precision, long-term strategic insight, and deep engagement with society—addressed issues directly related to the preservation of collective dignity and the independence of the Muslim community. Contrary to the common assumption that they merely interpret individual legal rulings, these scholars employed their jurisprudential foundations and their contextual understanding of socio-economic realities to analyze economic concerns such as production, trade, dependency, and self-reliance within a coherent religious framework. Their sensitivity to the long-term implications of economic decisions and their awareness of how such decisions influence communal security and independence, played a decisive role in guiding society during pivotal moments.

On the social level, Shiite jurisprudents effectively utilized grassroots networks, broad social legitimacy, traditional channels of communication within religious seminaries, and innovative institutional practices to influence the economic behavior of society. Historical examples—including the Tobacco Prohibition Fatwa, Ayatollah Shah_abadi's economic strengthening strategies, the Isfahan scholars' declaration in support of national production, the clerical role in the nationalization of oil, and the ongoing economic guidance of religious leaders in recent decades—demonstrate the capacity of the Shiite juristic tradition to employ religious resources in strengthening social cohesion and enhancing economic resilience. These events clearly indicate that national production and economic independence are not merely economic concerns; within the Shiite legal tradition, they are deeply tied to foundational principles such as the preservation of Muslim dignity, the rejection of foreign domination, the prevention of harm, and the protection of communal wealth.

From the perspective of applied instruments, the historical record shows that a wide spectrum of jurisprudential, social, and institutional tools have been used or devised to reinforce national production resilience. These tools have gradually evolved in response to changing socio-economic conditions,

becoming more sophisticated and comprehensive over time. Yet, the central pillar underlying all these developments has been the role of ijtihad and ifta as the intellectual core guiding social action. Analysis of historical cases suggests that the economic thought of Shiite jurisprudents follows a coherent underlying logic that may be described as "jurisprudence of economic resistance." This logic emphasizes strengthening domestic production, reducing dependency on foreign powers, democratizing economic participation, combating corruption, and safeguarding national resources and capacities. Historical experience further indicates that whenever these principles have been applied in practice, the overall level of economic resilience and national resistance has increased.

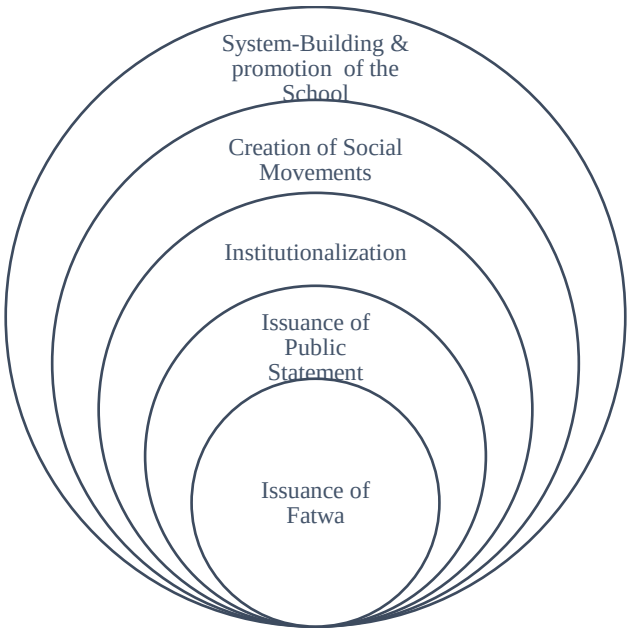

Figure 3. Levels of role of Jurisprudents in the resilience of national production (each layer includes more internal layers) (research findings)

Thus, the role of Shiite jurisprudents in fostering national production resilience cannot be understood merely as individual behavior; it represents a long-standing intellectual, institutional, and social tradition shaped over centuries. This tradition emphasizes the interrelationship between wealth, justice, independence, and economic security, framing national production as a foundational pillar of autonomy and dignity for the Muslim community. Examining this historical experience offers a valuable indigenous model for economic policymaking—one grounded in internal capacities, public

participation, religious institutionalization, and structural transparency—and can inform contemporary strategies for enhancing national production and strengthening economic resilience.

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Shariah-Governed Data Branding: Integrating Islamic Marketing Values with Algorithmic Governance

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Abstract

Background: The rapid expansion of the halal economy and the rise of data-driven marketing have created a strategic and ethical tension for halal and national brands operating in digital environments. Islamic marketing is grounded in value-based principles such as justice, transparency, and social welfare, whereas contemporary marketing increasingly relies on analytics, artificial intelligence, and algorithmic optimization. While data-driven systems enhance efficiency, personalization, and predictive accuracy, they also introduce concerns related to privacy, manipulation, and governance. Existing literature has largely treated Islamic marketing and data-driven marketing as separate domains, leaving a conceptual gap regarding their integration.

Purpose: This study develops a governance-oriented conceptual framework—Shariah-Governed Data Branding (SGDB)—to reconcile these paradigms.

Method/Approach: Drawing on Islamic marketing theory, brand equity literature, and research on marketing analytics and data ethics, the framework proposes a three-layer architecture consisting of (1) Shariah governance, (2) responsible data infrastructure, and (3) Islamic brand expression. The model conceptualizes data governance not merely as regulatory compliance but as a strategic mechanism for sustaining trust capital and reinforcing brand legitimacy.

Findings: The paper contributes theoretically by bridging value rationality and algorithmic rationality within a unified governance structure. Managerially, it positions ethical data practices as a source of competitive differentiation for halal and national brands.

Conclusion: The study concludes by outlining avenues for empirical testing and policy development in digitally transforming Islamic markets.

Keywords

Islamic marketing; Halal branding; Data-driven marketing; Artificial intelligence; Algorithmic governance; Brand equity; Digital ethics; Shariah governance.

Introduction

The rapid expansion of the halal economy and the growing visibility of Muslim consumers have made Islamic marketing and halal branding central topics in contemporary marketing research and practice. Beyond product permissibility, "halal" increasingly operates as a trust-based market signal and a brand meaning system that shapes consumer perceptions, loyalty, and legitimacy across local and global markets (Wilson & Liu, 2010). In this context, Islamic marketing is not simply a segmentation approach toward a religious group; rather, it is grounded in a value-based paradigm that emphasizes ethical conduct, transparency, fairness, and social welfare as integral to exchange relationships (Alserhan, 2011). These foundations matter even more when halal and national brands attempt to scale: the credibility of a halal claim, and the cultural legitimacy of a national brand, are often judged through institutional trust and perceived moral consistency rather than through functional attributes alone (El-Bassiouny, 2014).

At the same time, marketing practice is being reshaped by digital transformation. Firms now operate in data-rich environments in which customer journeys are increasingly mediated by platforms, analytics, and algorithmic decision-making (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). Data-driven marketing—enabled by large-scale consumer data, advanced analytics, and AI—promises superior targeting, personalization, demand forecasting, and marketing efficiency (Wedel & Kannan, 2016). In parallel, artificial intelligence is accelerating changes in marketing capabilities, from automated content generation and dynamic pricing to recommendation systems and conversational interfaces (Davenport et al., 2020). This shift has led scholars to frame the next phase of marketing as a reconfiguration of strategy, organization, and customer interaction, where data becomes a core strategic asset (Rust, 2020).

However, the convergence of Islamic marketing and data-driven marketing creates a fundamental tension that is still under-theorized. Islamic marketing literature includes strong normative commitments—values and principles that define what constitutes legitimate marketing behavior in Islamic contexts (Alserhan, 2011), and critical perspectives that highlight the risks of reducing religious identity to a commercial tool (Jafari, 2012). Meanwhile, data-driven marketing often privileges instrumental rationality: optimizing click-through rates, conversion, retention, and lifetime value using behavioral traces and predictive models (Wedel & Kannan, 2016). When these logics collide, halal and national brands face a strategic challenge: how can they adopt data-centric and AI-enabled marketing

without undermining the moral legitimacy and authenticity that constitute their distinctive brand equity (Wilson, 2012; El-Bassiouny, 2014)?

This problem becomes more pressing given the ethical risks associated with data-intensive marketing. Privacy is not only a compliance issue; it is increasingly central to consumer trust and long-term brand value, especially in contexts where moral expectations are salient (Martin & Murphy, 2017). Data-driven marketing can generate value, but it can also enable opaque tracking, manipulative targeting, and asymmetries of power between firms and consumers—dynamics that have been characterized as a broader system of surveillance-based commercial extraction (Zuboff, 2019). In addition, the use of AI introduces concerns regarding accountability, bias, and transparency in automated decision-making, raising governance questions about how algorithmic systems should be designed, monitored, and constrained (Calo, 2017). These issues are not peripheral for halal and Islamic brands; they strike at the heart of "trust capital" and the credibility of value-based positioning.

Accordingly, the central purpose of this paper is to develop a governance-oriented conceptual framework that integrates Islamic marketing principles with a data-driven strategy for halal and national branding. Specifically, the paper addresses the following research question:

RQ: How can halal and national brands implement data-driven and AI-enabled marketing in a manner that remains consistent with Islamic marketing principles and sustains trust-based brand equity?

To answer this question, the study adopts a conceptual approach that synthesizes scholarship in Islamic marketing and halal branding (Alserhan, 2011; Wilson & Liu, 2010; Jafari, 2012), contemporary branding theory and brand equity (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2013), and data-driven marketing and digital transformation (Wedel & Kannan, 2016; Lamberton & Stephen, 2016; Davenport et al., 2020). It also draws on marketing ethics and privacy research to articulate governance requirements for responsible data use and legitimacy preservation (Martin, 2019; Culnan & Bies, 2003).

The contribution of this paper is twofold. First, it reframes the integration challenge as a governance problem—linking faith-based normative commitments to concrete decision rights, accountability mechanisms, and transparency requirements for data and AI in marketing (Martin & Murphy, 2017; Calo, 2017). Second, it proposes a structured framework—Shariah-Governed Data Branding (SGDB)—to guide halal and national brands in aligning data infrastructure, ethical constraints, and brand expression in digital markets.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. The next section reviews the conceptual foundations of Islamic marketing and halal branding and highlights the role of authenticity and institutional trust in brand legitimacy (Wilson & Liu, 2010; El-Bassiouny, 2014). The subsequent section examines data-driven marketing and AI-enabled marketing capabilities and the ethical challenges they introduce (Wedel & Kannan, 2016; Davenport et al., 2020; Zuboff, 2019). The paper then articulates the theoretical gap between normative and algorithmic rationalities (Jafari, 2012; Martin, 2019) and introduces the SGDB framework as an integrative solution, followed by managerial and policy implications and directions for future research.

1. Theoretical Foundations of Islamic Marketing and Halal Branding

1-1. Normative Foundations of Islamic Marketing

Islamic marketing is grounded in a normative framework that extends beyond conventional market exchange logic. Unlike purely profit-driven paradigms, Islamic marketing draws upon ethical principles derived from Islamic jurisprudence and moral philosophy, embedding commercial activities within a broader value system (Alserhan, 2011). Core principles such as justice (Adl), trustworthiness (Amanah), and social welfare (Maslahah) shape expectations regarding transparency, fairness, and responsibility in marketing practices. In this view, marketing is not ethically neutral; it is a moral activity that must align with religious and societal norms.

Wilson (2012) argues that Islamic marketing should be understood as transformational rather than transactional. That is, it seeks not merely to influence buying behavior but to structure market interactions in a way that reinforces moral identity and communal well-being. This perspective positions Islamic marketing within a broader socio-cultural system, where legitimacy depends on alignment with shared values rather than solely on economic performance.

However, scholars have cautioned against reducing Islamic marketing to a superficial branding tool. Jafari (2012) highlights the risk of commodifying religious identity when firms instrumentalize Islamic symbols purely for competitive advantage. From a critical perspective, Islamic marketing must avoid becoming a tactical overlay on conventional capitalism; instead, it requires a rethinking of governance structures, decision criteria, and accountability mechanisms in line with Islamic ethical commitments.

Corporate responsibility is similarly central. Research in Islamic banking contexts shows that ethical positioning, transparency, and socially

responsible behavior significantly affect stakeholder trust and long-term performance (Hassan & Harahap, 2010). Thus, the normative foundation of Islamic marketing directly connects to governance, not merely communication strategy. It defines boundaries for acceptable persuasion, data use, product design, and customer engagement.

In consumer behavior research, religiosity has been found to influence purchase intention toward Islamic brands (Khan & Kirmani, 2018). Consumers often evaluate halal brands not only on quality and price but also on perceived adherence to religious principles. Mukhtar and Butt (2012) demonstrate that intention to choose halal products is significantly shaped by perceived compliance and religious commitment, suggesting that brand credibility in Islamic markets is closely tied to moral alignment.

Furthermore, religious value orientation influences perceived value and satisfaction in service contexts such as tourism (Eid & El-Gohary, 2015). This reinforces the argument that Islamic marketing operates within a trust-based relational framework. Sandikci (2018) expands this discussion by examining how religion interacts with marketplace dynamics, showing that Muslim consumer identity is negotiated through consumption practices that blend faith, modernity, and global branding.

Collectively, this literature suggests that Islamic marketing rests on a value-rational logic. Legitimacy, trust, and authenticity are not peripheral branding variables; they are central determinants of brand equity in Islamic contexts.

1-2. Halal Branding and Institutional Trust

Halal branding extends the normative foundation of Islamic marketing into a recognizable market signal. While halal certification initially functioned as a regulatory mechanism ensuring compliance with dietary laws, it has evolved into a broader symbolic and reputational asset (Wilson & Liu, 2010). Halal now communicates safety, ethical sourcing, and cultural alignment to both Muslim and non-Muslim consumers.

El-Bassiouny (2014) argues that Islamic consumers have historically been marginalized in mainstream marketing theory and calls for a more contextually grounded understanding of their motivations and identity structures. In halal markets, brand meaning is closely linked to collective identity and institutional trust. A halal brand that fails to demonstrate transparency or consistency risks rapid erosion of credibility.

Brand equity theory offers a useful analytical lens here. According to Aaker (1996), brand equity derives from brand awareness, perceived quality,

associations, and loyalty. In halal contexts, perceived Shariah compliance and ethical consistency become additional layers of brand association. Keller (2013) similarly emphasizes that strong brands build favorable, strong, and unique associations in memory; for halal and national brands, these associations often revolve around trustworthiness and cultural authenticity.

Kapferer (2012) underscores that brand identity must be coherent across internal governance and external communication. If internal practices contradict declared values, the brand identity fractures. This insight is especially relevant for Islamic brands operating in digital ecosystems, where transparency is amplified, and reputational risks escalate rapidly.

From a cultural branding perspective, Holt (2004) argues that iconic brands succeed when they embody collective myths and resolve cultural tensions. Halal and national brands frequently serve as carriers of collective identity, positioning themselves as guardians of ethical production and cultural continuity. At the national level, branding strategies also intersect with place identity and economic diplomacy (Anholt, 2007; Dinnie, 2016). Thus, halal and national branding are not isolated marketing tactics but institutional projects embedded within broader socio-political narratives.

Consequently, brand governance becomes inseparable from ethical governance. The strength of a halal or Islamic brand is contingent upon the consistency between declared values, operational practices, and stakeholder expectations. This consistency forms what may be described as "trust capital"—an intangible asset that can be strengthened through transparency and eroded through perceived misconduct.

1-3. From Value-Rational Marketing to Digital Pressures

The normative and institutional foundations outlined above position Islamic marketing within a value-rational framework. However, contemporary competitive environments introduce increasing pressure for efficiency, speed, and optimization. Retail and platform ecosystems are being reshaped by digitalization, automation, and real-time analytics (Grewal et al.,2017). Firms are compelled to leverage customer data, predictive modeling, and algorithmic personalization to remain competitive.

This structural shift raises a conceptual tension. Islamic marketing emphasizes fairness, transparency, and moral intention (Alserhan, 2011; Jafari, 2012), while digital marketing ecosystems increasingly operate through data extraction, behavioral tracking, and algorithmic optimization (Wedel & Kannan, 2016). The two logics are not necessarily incompatible, but their integration requires explicit governance mechanisms.

The next section, therefore, turns to the rise of data-driven marketing and AI-enabled systems, examining both their strategic advantages and the ethical challenges they pose for halal and national brands.

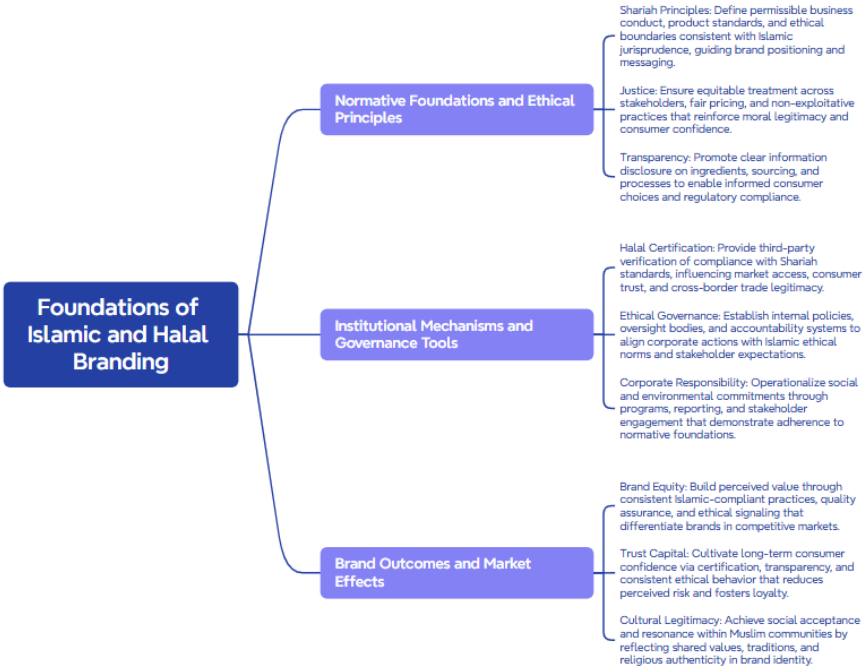

Figure 1. Islamic Branding Architecture

2. Data-Driven Marketing, Artificial Intelligence, and Algorithmic Governance

2-1. The Rise of Data-Driven Marketing

Marketing has entered what many scholars describe as a data-intensive era, in which decision-making is increasingly grounded in real-time analytics, large-scale customer data, and predictive modeling (Wedel & Kannan, 2016). Rather than relying primarily on demographic segmentation or intuition-based strategy, firms now integrate transactional, behavioral, and contextual data to optimize targeting, personalization, pricing, and communication strategies. Data becomes not merely supportive but constitutive of marketing strategy.

Lamberton and Stephen (2016) trace the evolution of digital marketing from early online presence toward integrated ecosystems in which firms continuously monitor and adjust consumer interactions across channels. In

such environments, value creation depends on the firm's ability to translate raw data into actionable insights. Marketing analytics, machine learning, and automation enable firms to experiment, test, and refine campaigns at unprecedented speed and scale.

Artificial intelligence (AI) accelerates this transformation. Davenport et al. (2020) argue that AI is reshaping marketing capabilities by automating content generation, optimizing media allocation, predicting customer churn, and enhancing customer service through intelligent interfaces. AI systems can identify patterns that exceed human cognitive limits, creating efficiencies in segmentation and personalization. Rust (2020) further suggests that the future of marketing lies in integrating AI across the customer journey, allowing firms to move from reactive marketing toward predictive and adaptive systems.

In service contexts, AI influences both front-end and back-end operations. Huang and Rust (2021) highlight that AI can augment or replace human service agents, improving consistency and scalability while also raising questions about empathy, accountability, and relational authenticity. Similarly, Luo et al. (2019) compare machine versus human performance in service environments, showing that while machines can outperform in certain analytical tasks, relational perceptions remain critical in shaping customer trust.

Collectively, these developments reflect a shift toward what may be described as algorithmic rationality: a logic in which optimization, prediction, and measurable performance indicators guide strategic decisions. In data-driven marketing, the primary evaluative criteria often include conversion rates, customer lifetime value, engagement metrics, and return on marketing investment (Wedel & Kannan, 2016). This instrumental orientation prioritizes efficiency and performance outcomes.

2-2. Ethical and Governance Challenges in Data-Intensive Marketing

While data-driven marketing offers strategic advantages, it also introduces significant ethical and governance challenges. Privacy concerns have become central to contemporary marketing debates. Martin and Murphy (2017) argue that data privacy is not merely a regulatory issue but a relational one; consumer trust depends on perceptions of fairness, transparency, and responsible data use. When firms collect and process personal data without clear disclosure or meaningful consent, they risk undermining long-term brand equity.

Martin (2019) further contends that data-driven marketing creates ethical dilemmas regarding consumer manipulation, information asymmetry, and power

imbalances. Advanced analytics may enable firms to anticipate vulnerabilities or exploit behavioral biases, raising normative questions about the limits of persuasive strategy. Culnan and Bies (2003) earlier framed privacy in terms of distributive and procedural justice, emphasizing that fairness perceptions influence whether consumers accept or resist data practices.

At a systemic level, Zuboff (2019) characterizes contemporary digital capitalism as structured around surveillance and behavioral prediction, in which personal data becomes a raw material for commercial exploitation. While this account is critical and macro-structural, it underscores the reputational risks firms face if consumers perceive their data practices as extractive rather than mutually beneficial.

AI intensifies governance challenges. Automated systems may reproduce bias, obscure accountability, and complicate regulatory oversight. Calo (2017) highlights the need for policy frameworks addressing transparency, explainability, and responsibility in AI-enabled decision systems. In marketing contexts, opaque algorithms can determine which consumers see which offers, at what price, and under what conditions—decisions that directly affect perceptions of fairness.

These governance challenges are not peripheral in Islamic and halal branding contexts. As established in the previous section, halal and Islamic brands derive legitimacy from trust, ethical consistency, and perceived adherence to normative commitments (Alserhan, 2011; Wilson & Liu, 2010). If data-driven practices are perceived as intrusive, manipulative, or unjust, they may contradict the very principles that underpin brand equity in Islamic markets.

2-3. Algorithmic Rationality versus Value-Rational Marketing

The contrast between Islamic marketing and data-driven marketing can be analytically framed as a tension between value rationality and instrumental rationality. Islamic marketing emphasizes moral intention, fairness, and communal welfare (Alserhan, 2011; Jafari, 2012). Its evaluative framework asks not only "Does this strategy work?" but also "Is this strategy just, transparent, and socially responsible?"

By contrast, data-driven marketing tends to evaluate success through measurable performance indicators and optimization criteria (Wedel & Kannan, 2016). While such metrics are not inherently unethical, they may marginalize normative considerations unless governance mechanisms explicitly integrate ethical constraints.

For halal and national brands, the stakes are higher. These brands are often positioned as custodians of cultural and moral identity. As brand equity

theory suggests, trust and favorable associations are central to brand strength (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2013). If algorithmic practices undermine trust, they erode a core dimension of brand equity. Furthermore, in national branding contexts, digital governance failures can have reputational spillovers beyond individual firms, affecting broader perceptions of institutional credibility (Anholt, 2007; Dinnie, 2016).

Therefore, the integration of data-driven marketing into Islamic branding contexts cannot be treated as a purely technical upgrade. It must be conceptualized as a governance challenge: how to embed algorithmic systems within ethical oversight structures that preserve trust capital and normative legitimacy.

The following section addresses this gap directly by articulating a conceptual integration and proposing a governance-oriented framework—Shariah-Governed Data Branding (SGDB)—to reconcile these logics.

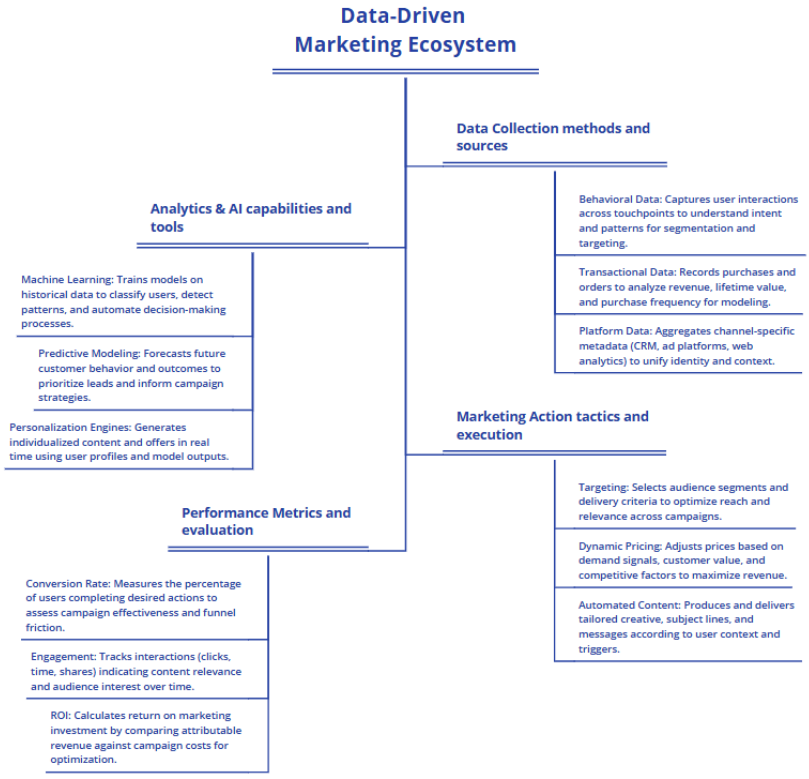

Figure 2. Data-Driven Marketing System

3. Theoretical Gap: Reconciling Value Rationality and Algorithmic Rationality

3-1. The Unresolved Tension in the Literature

Although Islamic marketing and data-driven marketing have each developed substantial bodies of literature, they have largely evolved in parallel rather than in dialogue. Islamic marketing scholarship emphasizes normative commitments, moral boundaries, and legitimacy anchored in religious principles (Alserhan, 2011; Wilson, 2012). It highlights that marketing activities must be evaluated not only by their outcomes but also by their ethical alignment and social consequences (Jafari, 2012). Trust, authenticity, and communal welfare are central evaluative criteria.

In contrast, data-driven marketing research has focused primarily on performance optimization, technological capabilities, and strategic advantage (Wedel & Kannan, 2016; Davenport et al., 2020). Success is typically measured through predictive accuracy, conversion efficiency, and revenue maximization. Even when ethical concerns are acknowledged (Martin, 2019), they often appear as constraints on an otherwise instrumental logic rather than as foundational principles.

This divergence creates an unresolved theoretical tension. On one side, Islamic marketing is grounded in value rationality—decisions are justified by their consistency with moral principles. On the other side, algorithmic marketing is grounded in instrumental rationality—decisions are justified by their efficiency and measurable outcomes. Existing literature does not provide a structured framework that integrates these logics in the specific context of halal and national branding.

3-2. The Brand Legitimacy Problem

The absence of integration becomes particularly problematic at the level of brand legitimacy. Brand equity theory suggests that strong brands are built on consistent, favorable, and distinctive associations (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2013). In halal and Islamic branding contexts, these associations include Shariah compliance, ethical transparency, and trustworthiness (Wilson & Liu, 2010). If digital practices contradict these associations, the brand risks internal incoherence.

Moreover, cultural branding theory emphasizes that brands gain strength when they resolve societal tensions and embody shared narratives (Holt, 2004). Halal and national brands frequently position themselves as symbols of ethical production, cultural authenticity, or national integrity. Algorithmic

opacity, perceived surveillance, or manipulative personalization may undermine these narratives.

At the systemic level, data governance failures can erode not only firm-level brand equity but also broader institutional credibility. Nation branding scholarship shows that reputation and competitive identity depend on consistent signaling across policy, culture, and market behavior (Anholt, 2007; Dinnie, 2016). In digital markets, governance misalignment can generate reputational spillovers.

Thus, the theoretical gap is not merely conceptual; it has strategic consequences. Without an integrative framework, halal and national brands risk either technological lag (by avoiding data-driven tools) or moral dilution (by adopting them without normative safeguards).

3-3. Toward a Governance-Oriented Integration

Bridging this gap requires reframing the problem. Rather than asking whether data-driven marketing is compatible with Islamic marketing, the more productive question is: under what governance conditions can algorithmic systems operate within a value-based normative structure?

Marketing ethics research provides part of the answer. Martin and Murphy (2017) emphasize that transparency, fairness, and accountability mechanisms are essential for sustaining consumer trust in data-intensive environments. Martin (2019) similarly argues that firms must embed ethical reflection into data strategy rather than treating it as an afterthought. Culnan and Bies (2003) show that perceptions of procedural and distributive justice influence acceptance of data practices.

AI governance literature reinforces this direction. Calo (2017) highlights the need for policy frameworks addressing explainability, oversight, and accountability in automated decision systems. From a macro perspective, Zuboff (2019) warns that unregulated data extraction can undermine social trust and autonomy. These insights suggest that governance—rather than technology alone—is the key variable.

When placed alongside Islamic marketing's normative foundations (Alserhan, 2011; Jafari, 2012), a conceptual opportunity emerges: halal and national brands can differentiate themselves not merely through product compliance, but through ethically governed data practices. In other words, responsible data governance can become part of brand identity rather than a compliance burden.

This reframing leads to the central proposition of this paper: the integration of Islamic marketing and data-driven marketing requires a

structured governance architecture that aligns normative commitments with technological infrastructure and brand communication.

The next section develops this architecture in detail through the proposed framework of Shariah-Governed Data Branding (SGDB).

4. The Shariah-Governed Data Branding (SGDB) Framework

4-1. Conceptual Overview

Building upon the identified tension between value rationality and algorithmic rationality, this paper proposes the Shariah-Governed Data Branding (SGDB) framework. The central premise of SGDB is that data-driven marketing in halal and national branding contexts must operate within a structured governance architecture that integrates ethical oversight, technological infrastructure, and brand expression.

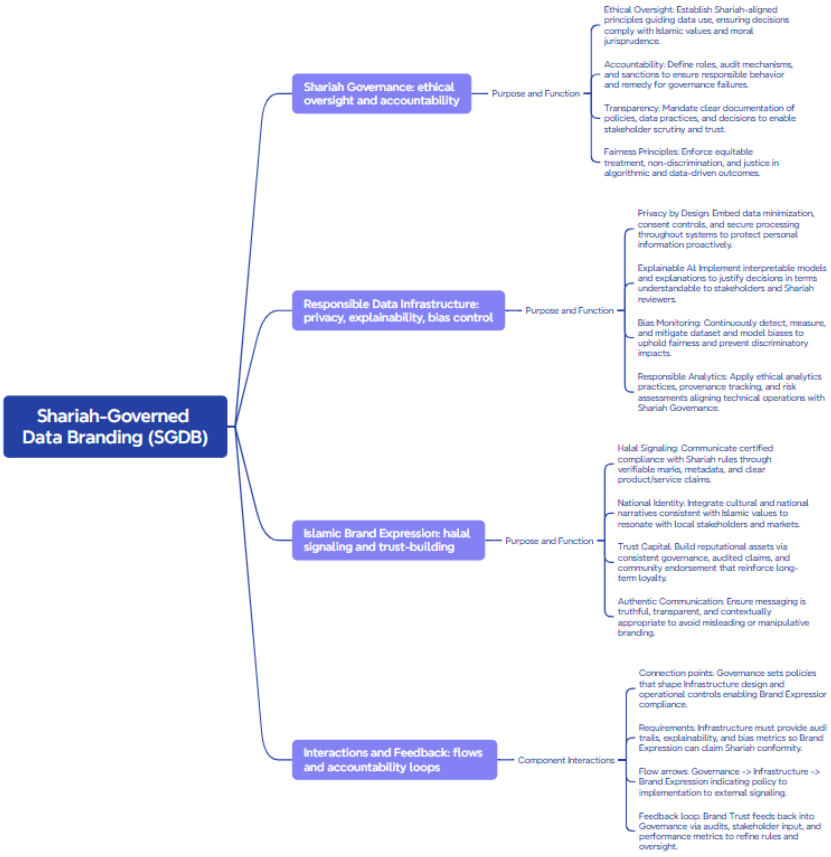

Figure 3. SGDB Framework

Rather than treating Islamic principles as symbolic positioning tools, SGDB embeds them into decision rights, accountability mechanisms, and data practices. The framework conceptualizes integration across three interdependent layers:

1. Shariah Governance Layer
2. Responsible Data Infrastructure Layer
3. Islamic Brand Expression Layer

These layers are sequential yet mutually reinforcing. Governance defines constraints and objectives; infrastructure operationalizes them; brand expression communicates them to stakeholders.

4-2. Layer 1: Shariah Governance

The first layer establishes normative oversight. Islamic marketing principles—justice, transparency, trustworthiness, and social welfare—serve as evaluative criteria for strategic decisions (Alserhan, 2011; Wilson, 2012). In SGDB, these principles are translated into governance structures that regulate data collection, processing, and algorithmic deployment.

This includes:

- Explicit ethical guidelines for data usage
- Clear accountability for AI decision systems
- Oversight mechanisms ensuring fairness and non-exploitation

Marketing ethics research supports this integration. Martin and Murphy (2017) emphasize that consumer trust depends on perceived fairness and transparency in data handling. Similarly, Martin (2019) argues that ethical reflection must be embedded into strategic processes. Culnan and Bies (2003) highlight the importance of procedural justice in shaping acceptance of data practices.

AI governance scholarship further reinforces the need for oversight. Calo (2017) notes that automated systems require regulatory and organizational accountability mechanisms. Without such safeguards, algorithmic opacity can undermine legitimacy.

In Islamic branding contexts, governance alignment is not optional. Jafari (2012) warns that instrumentalizing religion for commercial gain risks moral incoherence. Therefore, SGDB positions Shariah governance as a structural constraint rather than a symbolic layer.

4-3. Layer 2: Responsible Data Infrastructure

The second layer concerns technological implementation. Data-driven marketing relies on analytics, personalization engines, and predictive models

(Wedel & Kannan, 2016). AI enhances these capabilities by automating optimization processes (Davenport et al., 2020; Rust, 2020).

However, SGDB requires that infrastructure design incorporate ethical constraints:

- Privacy-by-design architectures
- Transparent algorithmic logic
- Bias monitoring mechanisms
- Explainable AI interfaces

Huang and Rust (2021) demonstrate that AI in service environments must balance efficiency with relational trust. Luo et al. (2019) similarly show that while machines can outperform in certain tasks, trust perceptions remain decisive.

From a reputational perspective, unregulated data extraction can damage long-term legitimacy (Zuboff, 2019). Therefore, the infrastructure layer must operationalize normative constraints defined at the governance level.

In SGDB, technology is not neutral; it is normatively configured. Data systems are evaluated not solely by predictive accuracy but also by their alignment with fairness and transparency criteria.

4-4. Layer 3: Islamic Brand Expression and Trust Capital

The third layer concerns brand communication and symbolic positioning. Branding theory suggests that strong brands derive equity from consistent and credible associations (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2013). In halal contexts, these associations include Shariah compliance, ethical sourcing, and cultural authenticity (Wilson & Liu, 2010).

Kapferer (2012) emphasizes that brand identity must be coherent across internal practice and external messaging. If governance and infrastructure contradict brand claims, trust deteriorates. Holt (2004) further argues that brands succeed when they resolve cultural tensions. SGDB enables halal and national brands to position themselves as ethically governed digital actors, differentiating them from purely profit-driven competitors.

At the national level, digital governance can influence broader competitive identity (Anholt, 2007; Dinnie, 2016). Responsible data governance can thus become part of national brand strategy, reinforcing institutional credibility.

Under SGDB, responsible data practices become part of brand narrative:

- Transparent data policies

- Public ethical commitments
- Shariah-aligned AI deployment
- Social accountability reporting

These practices strengthen what may be described as trust capital—a strategic asset that sustains brand equity in morally sensitive markets.

4-5. Propositions of the SGDB Framework

To structure future empirical research, the framework yields several conceptual propositions:

P1: Shariah-based governance mechanisms positively moderate the relationship between data-driven marketing practices and consumer trust.

P2: Responsible data infrastructure mediates the relationship between algorithmic personalization and perceived brand authenticity.

P3: Transparent AI governance positively influences brand equity in halal and national branding contexts.

P4: Alignment between normative commitments and technological practices strengthens long-term brand loyalty.

These propositions create a research agenda linking Islamic marketing theory, branding theory, and marketing analytics.

4-6. Theoretical Contribution

The SGDB framework contributes to the literature in three ways:

1. It bridges Islamic marketing and data-driven marketing, which have largely evolved separately.
2. It reframes technological adoption as a governance challenge rather than a purely operational decision.
3. It integrates brand equity theory with ethical data governance in Islamic contexts.

By embedding algorithmic systems within normative oversight, SGDB resolves the identified tension between value rationality and instrumental rationality.

5. Managerial and Policy Implications

5-1. Managerial Implications for Halal and National Brands

The Shariah-Governed Data Branding (SGDB) framework offers several actionable implications for managers operating in halal and national branding contexts.

First, firms should treat data governance as a strategic capability rather than a compliance obligation. In value-sensitive markets, trust and legitimacy are critical components of brand equity (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2013). Managers must therefore ensure that data collection, personalization, and AI deployment align with declared ethical commitments. This requires integrating Shariah-based ethical guidelines into marketing decision processes rather than confining them to symbolic messaging (Alserhan, 2011; Wilson, 2012).

Second, organizations should establish cross-functional governance structures that connect marketing, IT, compliance, and, where relevant, Shariah advisory boards. Such structures can institutionalize accountability and reduce the risk of algorithmic misalignment. As marketing analytics becomes more sophisticated (Wedel & Kannan, 2016), the risk of opaque decision-making increases. Transparent oversight mechanisms help mitigate these risks and reinforce consumer trust (Martin & Murphy, 2017).

Third, managers should adopt a "trust-by-design" approach to digital strategy. AI systems and analytics tools must incorporate fairness, explainability, and bias monitoring from the design stage (Calo, 2017; Huang & Rust, 2021). In halal and Islamic branding contexts, ethical missteps may have amplified reputational consequences because consumers evaluate brands through moral as well as functional criteria (Khan & Kirmani, 2018).

Fourth, responsible data governance can be leveraged as a source of competitive differentiation. In environments characterized by surveillance capitalism and aggressive data extraction (Zuboff,2019), halal and national brands can position themselves as ethically governed digital actors. Such positioning reinforces authenticity and strengthens trust capital.

Finally, managers must ensure internal-external coherence. Brand narratives emphasizing ethical conduct and social responsibility must be supported by actual operational practices (Kapferer, 2012; Holt, 2004). Any gap between promise and practice can quickly erode credibility in digitally networked markets.

5-2. Policy and Regulatory Implications

Beyond firm-level strategy, SGDB has policy implications. Regulators in Muslim-majority countries and emerging halal markets face the challenge of fostering digital innovation while preserving ethical and cultural values. The integration of Shariah principles with modern data governance can inform regulatory design.

First, policymakers may consider developing guidelines for ethical AI in marketing that incorporate transparency, accountability, and fairness criteria (Calo, 2017). These guidelines could be aligned with broader consumer protection frameworks and adapted to local normative contexts.

Second, halal certification bodies could expand their scope beyond product compliance to include digital governance standards. If halal certification becomes associated not only with production practices but also with responsible data handling, it could strengthen institutional trust (Wilson & Liu, 2010).

Third, nation branding strategies should incorporate digital ethics as part of competitive identity. As Anholt (2007) and Dinnie (2016) suggest, national reputation depends on consistent signaling across economic, political, and cultural domains. Responsible data governance in domestic firms can enhance perceptions of institutional reliability in global markets.

6. Conclusion

This paper addressed the growing tension between Islamic marketing principles and data-driven marketing practices in the context of halal and national branding. While Islamic marketing is grounded in value rationality—emphasizing justice, transparency, and social welfare (Alserhan, 2011; Jafari, 2012)—data-driven marketing often operates within an instrumental rationality focused on optimization and measurable performance (Wedel & Kannan, 2016; Davenport et al., 2020). The absence of an integrative framework creates strategic and ethical risks for halal and national brands.

To bridge this gap, the paper proposed the Shariah-Governed Data Branding (SGDB) framework. By structuring integration across three layers—Shariah governance, responsible data infrastructure, and Islamic brand expression—the framework aligns technological innovation with normative commitments. In doing so, it reframes digital transformation as a governance challenge rather than a purely technical upgrade.

The theoretical contribution lies in linking Islamic marketing theory, brand equity theory, and data governance scholarship into a coherent architecture. The managerial contribution lies in demonstrating how ethical data practices can become a source of differentiation and trust capital rather than a constraint. The policy contribution lies in suggesting that digital ethics can strengthen institutional credibility in halal and national branding contexts.

Future research may empirically test the proposed propositions across different industries and national settings, examine consumer responses to

ethically governed AI systems, and explore cross-cultural variations in trust perceptions. Quantitative studies using structural equation modeling or experimental designs could validate the moderating and mediating relationships proposed in the SGDB model.

As digital ecosystems continue to evolve, halal and national brands face a strategic crossroads. They may adopt algorithmic marketing uncritically and risk moral dilution, or they may resist technological change and lose competitiveness. The SGDB framework offers a third path: technologically advanced yet normatively anchored branding—where data intelligence operates under ethical governance and strengthens, rather than weakens, trust-based brand equity.

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Looking at the Trees to See the Forest: Construal Level Shifting in General Qasem Soleimani's Opportunity Creation

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper explores how an exceptional geopolitical leader systematically converts pervasive threats into actionable opportunities in prolonged high-uncertainty environments by introducing and elaborating the concept of Strategic Construal-Level Shifting (SCLS).

Design/methodology/approach – The study conducts a reflexive, theory-driven secondary thematic analysis of a rich qualitative dataset originally collected through grounded theory work, including authenticated biographies, field memoirs, speeches and three semi-structured interviews with close associates of the late Iranian Major-General Qasem Soleimani, triangulated across textual and interview sources.

Findings – The analysis identifies four interrelated organizing themes that together constitute SCLS as a dynamic cognitive capability: (1) Field-Level Micro Situational Awareness through embodied immersion and sensitivity to weak signals; (2) Sensemaking and Pattern Synthesis that connects fragmented cues into coherent strategic narratives; (3) Cognitive Altitude Switching Ability that enables deliberate low-to-high shifts between concrete and abstract mental representations; and (4) Decision-Making Without Detail Paralysis that translates insight into timely, focused action. The findings illustrate how Soleimani repeatedly reframed existential crises—such as the emergence of ISIS and multi-front proxy conflicts—into strategic openings by sequencing immersion in local realities with higher-order abstraction grounded in spiritual conviction and frontline proximity.

Originality/value – By extending construal-level-shift theory from controlled organizational settings to an extreme, non-Western geopolitical context, the paper broadens the boundary conditions of construal-level theory and conceptualizes SCLS as a novel framework for understanding opportunity creation under asymmetric warfare, sacred meaning-making and persistent existential threat. The study offers theoretically grounded implications for developing cognitive flexibility and opportunity-creation capabilities among strategic leaders facing volatility, moral burden and ideological stakes.

Keywords

Strategic Construal-Level Shifting, Martyr Qasem Soleimani, Strategic management, Opportunity Creation, Jihadi management.

Introduction

Throughout history, the development of strategic knowledge has been deeply influenced by the lived experience and reflective practice of exceptional leaders—many of whom understood strategy not merely as a technique, but as a form of wisdom shaped by worldview, purpose, and responsibility (Edwards, 2014). From the biblical narrative of Moses delegating authority after crossing the Red Sea (Kennedy, 2020) to Sun Tzu's *Art of War*—written circa 340 BCE and later embedded in modern business curricula (Taybi Abolhassani & Khashaei Varnamkhasti, 2021)—strategy has repeatedly evolved from leaders confronting uncertainty, moral burden, and existential risk.

Historical examples demonstrate this enduring pattern: King Arthur (Perkins, 2003), Niccolò Machiavelli (Machiavelli & Brennan, 2015), Napoleon Bonaparte (Esdaile, 2008), Carl von Clausewitz (Kornberger & Engberg-Pedersen, 2019), Mao Zedong (Weng, 1998), and General George C. Marshall (Nelsen, 2022) all left intellectual and practical legacies that continue to shape how leadership, power, and long-term decision-making are conceptualized. Within the Islamic Republic of Iran, the presence of distinguished strategic leaders represents a similarly rich but still underutilized source of indigenous knowledge (Dehghani Poudeh & Pashaei Hoolasoo, 2020). Engaging with this lived reservoir is not merely an exercise in historical analysis; it aligns with ongoing calls to develop Islamic-Iranian frameworks of management grounded in spiritual worldview, contextual realities, and contemporary strategic challenges (Moqaddas & Saeidian, 2018; Qanadan Zadeh et al., 2022).

In this light, the strategic thought and practice of Martyr Major-General Qasem Soleimani offer a rare empirical case: a leader repeatedly described by Iran's Supreme Leader as exemplary, awarded the Order of Zolfaghar, and introduced by Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah as a "complete strategist." His well-known statement—"the amount of opportunity contained in crises exceeds that found in ordinary circumstances, provided we do not fear and do not allow fear to be imposed"—reflects not only tactical insight, but a spiritual orientation toward uncertainty grounded in conviction, responsibility, and trust.

Recent experimental work by Park, Baer, and Nickerson (2025) provides a theoretical lens that helps explain how such transformations occur cognitively. Across studies involving working adults, mid-level managers, and senior executives, they found that comprehensive strategic problem formulation emerges most reliably when decision-makers first adopt a low

(concrete) construal level—attending to contextual cues without premature cognitive filtering—and then shift to a high (abstract) construal level, enabling the integration of those cues into novel causal theories. High-level thinking alone risks abstraction-induced blind spots, while staying solely at a concrete level confines leaders to detail without synthesis (Park et al., 2025; see also Trope & Liberman, 2010; Wiesenfeld et al., 2017). Their construal-level-shift model thus clarifies a longstanding paradox in strategic cognition: flexibility requires distance, yet insight requires immersion.

This study applies and extends Park et al.'s (2025) framework to the case of General Soleimani, examining his strategic cognition through thematic re-analysis of qualitative data originally collected using grounded theory, including interviews with close companions, biographies, field reports, and his own statements. The findings suggest that Soleimani's opportunity-creation capability emerged from systematic low-to-high construal shifts enacted under extreme uncertainty, asymmetric warfare, and a spiritual worldview that shaped meaning-making, resolve, and strategic judgment. By doing so, the study (1) provides the first empirical application of construal-level-shift theory to a non-Western geopolitical leader, (2) bridges Western strategic cognition research with the emerging indigenous and spiritually informed "Soleimani school" of Iranian strategic thought, and (3) offers actionable implications for cultivating cognitive flexibility and opportunity recognition in prolonged, high-stakes environments.

1. Theoretical Background

1-1. Construal Level Theory

Construal level theory (CLT) proposes that psychological distance shapes how individuals mentally represent events, objects, and decisions (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Low-level construals generate concrete, context-specific representations oriented toward feasibility and situational detail. In contrast, high-level construals yield abstract, generalized representations that emphasize desirability, meaning, and long-term objectives. Importantly, the relationship operates bidirectionally: concrete thinking reduces perceived distance, whereas abstract thinking increases it (Wiesenfeld et al., 2017). Although CLT has been applied across domains such as negotiation, creativity, and ethical judgment, its implications for strategic problem framing and opportunity creation remain insufficiently examined.

1-2. Construal Level Shift in Strategic Problem Framing and Formulation

Strategic problems are typically ambiguous and ill-structured, presenting themselves not as clearly defined causal chains but as observable deviations

or symptoms whose underlying sources are initially uncertain (Cyert & March, 1963; Simon, 1991; Nickerson & Argyres, 2018). Consequently, the strategic process often begins not with solution design, but with problem formulation—constructing a sufficiently comprehensive causal map of the problem space (Camuffo et al., 2020; Park & Baer, 2022).

Recent evidence suggests that neither purely abstract nor purely concrete thinking alone supports such comprehensiveness (Park, Baer, & Nickerson, 2025). High-level construals promote flexibility and non-obvious causal inference yet risk filtering out cues that do not fit existing schemas (Ocasio, 2011; Joseph & Wilson, 2018). Low-level construals, conversely, enhance sensitivity to situational signals and anomalous patterns but risk cognitive fixation on detail without synthesis (Gilbert et al., 2010).

Across three controlled studies involving different managerial experience levels, Park et al. (2025) found that the most robust strategic formulation occurred when individuals first adopted a low construal level during early framing—maximizing the detection of both typical and atypical symptoms—and subsequently shifted into a high construal level during theorizing. This construal-level shift model helps reconcile the longstanding paradox that visionary strategic thinking enables creativity yet can induce blind spots, whereas attention to granular detail is necessary yet insufficient for insight.

1-3. Opportunity Creation and the Role of Cognition

Opportunity has long been a central yet contested construct in strategic management and entrepreneurship. Early conceptualizations framed opportunities either as pre-existing market anomalies awaiting discovery (Kirzner, 1978) or as outputs of deliberate creative action (Schumpeter, 1934; Alvarez & Barney, 2007). More recent perspectives position opportunity as emergent—co-created through the dynamic interaction of cognition, environment, interpretation, and action (Ramoglou & Gartner, 2023).

A persistent conceptual gap centers on the cognitive mechanisms through which leaders reframe threats into opportunities under extreme uncertainty (Gaglio & Dimov, 2018; Wyrtki et al., 2021). While attention-based and effectuation frameworks highlight flexibility and iterative sensemaking (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006; Sarasvathy, 2001), they leave open the question of how leaders attend to fine-grained threat cues while simultaneously constructing higher-order strategic meaning. This unresolved tension suggests a need for frameworks capable of linking perceptual precision with integrative abstract reasoning.

1-4. General Qasem Soleimani as a Real-World Exemplar

The strategic practice of Martyr Major-General Qasem Soleimani provides a unique empirical case of deliberate threat-to-opportunity transformation amid ongoing crisis and geopolitical complexity. Across nearly three decades leading the Quds Force and coordinating the Axis of Resistance, Soleimani repeatedly converted emergent threats—including the rise of ISIS and multi-layered proxy warfare—into strategic openings that reshaped the regional balance of power (Qanadan Zadeh et al., 2022; Dehghani Poudeh & Pashaei Hoolasoo, 2020). Consistent accounts by observers, including Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, describe a cognitive style marked by deep proximity to field-level realities combined with clarity of purpose, long-term orientation, and a meaning framework grounded in moral commitment and spiritual responsibility (Morakabi, 2024).

1-5. Present Study

Although Park et al.'s (2025) construal-level-shift model has demonstrated empirical validity in organizational contexts, it has not been examined in high-stakes geopolitical environments or through qualitative analysis of real strategic practice. This study addresses that gap by applying the model to General Soleimani's strategic cognition and practice. We argue that Soleimani's opportunity-creating capacity emerged through systematic low-to-high construal sequencing: immersion in detailed, context-rich field intelligence followed by abstraction that transformed symptoms into strategic meaning and possibility under persistent threat.

Although Park et al.'s (2025) construal-level-shift model was developed and validated in controlled experimental settings with Western managerial samples facing structured strategic problems, the present study extends its application to an extreme context characterized by prolonged asymmetric warfare, high ideological commitment, life-or-death stakes, and a non-Western spiritual worldview. These boundary conditions—particularly the presence of existential threat, sacred meaning-making, and extreme uncertainty—represent significant departures from prior laboratory studies, potentially amplifying both the necessity and the efficacy of deliberate low-to-high construal shifting. By demonstrating the model's robustness in such a radically different setting, this research theoretically extends construal-level theory from a primarily psychological mechanism observed in organizational decision-making to a strategic capability deployable in geopolitical and ideological conflicts. This extension suggests that construal-level shifting may be especially potent when cognitive flexibility is fused

with deep moral conviction and embodied field exposure, conditions rarely replicable in experimental designs.

2. Method

2-1. Research Design

Drawing on Danaee-Fard, Alvani, and Azar's (2015) layered framework of research design, this study is philosophically interpretive, developmental-applied in purpose, inductive in logic, qualitative in methodological nature, and both library- and field-based in data orientation. The primary analytic strategy is thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The study adopts a descriptive–exploratory orientation aimed at identifying and interpreting patterns of construal level shifting in the strategic cognition of General Qasem Soleimani. It extends Park et al.'s (2025) experimentally grounded model into a high-stakes lived context characterized by prolonged asymmetric warfare, moral injury, ideological conviction, and sacred motivational framing. The present study conducts a theory-driven secondary analysis of a rich qualitative dataset originally collected by the author for a Master's thesis. Such secondary re-analysis is methodologically legitimate and theoretically valuable when a new conceptual lens yields additional explanatory utility (Bansal et al., 2018; Gehman et al., 2018).

2-2. Data Sources

The data corpus comprises triangulated sources collected between 2022 and 2024 to ensure depth, authenticity, and theoretical sufficiency (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). The first layer consists of four primary biographical and autobiographical works selected in consultation with the Foundation for the Preservation and Publication of Sacred Defense Heritage and the Maktab-e Haj Qasem Center:

Book Title	Author(s) & Publication Year	Core Theme in the Haj Qasem School of Thought
Sarbaz-e Qasem Soleimani	(Rahimi, 2023)	comprehensive biography
Meydan-haye Sakht	(Rozi-Talab & Noripour, 2020)	curated speeches and field reflections
Hamrah-e Ma Bood	(Morakabi, 2024)	Nasrallah's interpretive narrative of Soleimani's strategic character
Mara Bepazir	(Sedaqat-Nejad, 2022)	intimate account of strategic conduct and interpersonal style

Supplementary textual sources included memoirs, speeches, unfinished personal writings such as *Az Chizi Nemitaridam*, and curated volumes including *Haj Qasemi ke Man Mishenasam* and *Soleimani-ye Aziz*.

The second layer of data includes three semi-structured interviews conducted with individuals who had direct long-term operational, personal, or organizational relationships with Soleimani:

- Mahmoud Soleimani (family and early-life context)
- Brigadier Anjum-Shoa'a (Iran–Iraq War experiences)
- Major-General Abolhasani (operational and strategic assistantship during command years)

Sampling followed purposive-theoretical logic to capture diverse vantage points—personal, operational, doctrinal, and strategic—and to surface both explicit reasoning and tacit cognitive style.

2-3. Analytic Strategy: Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis was selected for its compatibility with interpretive epistemology and its flexibility in supporting inductive, deductive, and hybrid coding pathways (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Drawing on Attride-Stirling (2001), a theme is understood as a patterned meaning-making structure that moves beyond description toward interpretive abstraction.

The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2021) six iterative phases with a hybrid inductive–deductive orientation:

1. Familiarization: Immersive, repeated reading of all texts and interview transcripts.
2. Initial Coding: Independent open coding by two researchers focusing on threat perception, opportunity emergence, problem construal, and decision structure.
3. Theory-Guided Coding: Deductive application of Park et al.'s (2025) constructs—including low-level situational attention, cognitive shift triggers, high-level causal abstraction, and opportunity formation—while remaining open to emergent dimensions.
4. Theme Construction: Iterative categorization of codes into basic, organizing, and global themes through analytical meetings with a three-member expert committee.

5. Review and Refinement: Verification of thematic coherence against the full dataset, resolving discrepancies through deliberative consensus.
6. Reporting: Integration of theoretically saturated excerpts into an interpretive model.

Coding was supported by Microsoft Excel to ensure transparency and traceability. Thematic saturation was determined when no new conceptual properties of construal-level dynamics emerged (Saunders et al., 2018).

Table 1. Global & Organizing & Basic Themes Derived from the Data

Global Theme	Organizing Themes	Basic Themes
Strategic Construal Level Shifting	Field-Level Micro Situational Awareness	• Direct Field Immersion • Listening to Ground Realities • Sensitivity to Weak Signals • Cultural-Contextual Understanding • Human-Centric Operational Awareness • Delayed Judgement
	Sensemaking & Pattern Synthesis	• Connecting Disparate Cues • Detecting Hidden Patterns • Contextual Interpretation • Transforming Experience into Insight • Meaning Construction Before Crisis Escalation
	Cognitive Altitude Switching Ability	• Timing the Cognitive Shift • Analytical Flexibility • Adaptive Distance Regulation (zoom in/zoom out) • Identifying Signal vs Noise • Balancing Speed and Accuracy
	Decision-Making Without Detail Paralysis	• Action Over Excessive Analysis • Future-Oriented Posture • Simplicity in Execution, Depth in Thought

2-4. Trustworthiness and Rigor

Rigor was ensured through prolonged engagement, multi-source triangulation, and detailed documentation of analytic decisions. Dependability and confirmability were strengthened via an auditable research trail including codebooks, memos, and decision logs. Although direct member-checking with all informants was constrained due to security restrictions, publicly authenticated archival material provided reliable external corroboration. Reflexivity was systematically maintained through researcher memos recording interpretive assumptions and theoretical positionality (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

3. Findings

3-1. Global Theme Overview

The core theme that emerged from the data — consistently and across contexts — is a cognitive pattern we conceptualize as Strategic Construal-Level Switching (SCLS). This phenomenon refers to General Qasem Soleimani's ability to dynamically shift between micro-level situational engagement and macro-level strategic abstraction, depending on the demands of the environment. Unlike ordinary tactical responsiveness or conventional strategic planning, SCLS is characterized by intentional alternation between levels of cognitive framing — a behavioral expression aligned with recent theoretical discussions on construal-level shifting in high-stakes decision environments (Park, Baer, & Nickerson, 2025).

This dynamic oscillation was not accidental or personality-driven; rather, it operated as a deliberate strategic capability. Data repeatedly show that Soleimani engaged first-hand with ground realities, immersing himself in field-level detail before elevating to abstraction for decision-making. One direct account states:

"He never relied only on briefings — he went to the field, spoke to ordinary fighters, listened, watched." (Rahimi, 2023)

Another eyewitness similarly emphasized this capability during combat operations:

"He was always among the soldiers before decisions were made — he needed to see with his own eyes." (Rahimi, 2023)

These excerpts illustrate the first half of the switching pattern — the anchoring of perception in concrete, sensory-rich cues rather than distant abstraction. Yet the shift to high-level cognitive processing was equally visible. For instance, after extensive field scanning, he transitioned to broader meaning-making and strategic prioritization:

"He didn't get lost in detail — he understood the essence fast and moved to what mattered." (Rahimi, 2023)

This pattern reflects not only situational awareness, but also a meta-cognitive command over the level of mental representation — the ability to "zoom in and zoom out" deliberately, depending on the strategic need.

Taken together, these coded meanings represent the empirical foundation of the framework; however, the organizing themes do not operate in isolation — their explanatory power becomes clearer when examined in relation to one another and interpreted through the theoretical lens guiding this study.

3-2. Organizing Theme 1: Field-Level Micro Situational Awareness

The first organizing theme underlying Strategic Construal-Level Switching is Field-Level Micro Situational Awareness, referring to Soleimani's deliberate immersion in local context, human dynamics, operational constraints, and subtle emotional climates before making judgments or forming strategic interpretations. This construct aligns with literature on *micro-foundations of strategic cognition* (Felin, Foss & Ployhart, 2015) and theories suggesting that effective strategic reasoning begins with accurate perception of the environment rather than conceptual abstraction (Baer et al., 2013). Soleimani's approach was not passive observation—it was a methodical and intentional process of acquiring ground-level sensory, cultural, relational, and emotional data before shifting toward abstraction.

This theme describes a patterned behavior in which presence preceded judgment and listening preceded planning, supporting recent organizational scholarship suggesting that leaders who begin with low-construal sensory engagement formulate more integrated and comprehensive strategic representations (Park et al., 2025).

The six basic themes within this cluster—direct immersion, listening to ground realities, sensitivity to weak signals, cultural contextual tuning, human-condition attention, and delayed judgement—form a coherent system because they share a common function:

They are mechanisms of accurate field-level data acquisition before meaning-making begins.

Rather than disparate behaviors, these elements represent a consistent cognitive discipline: Soleimani's refusal to rely on mediated reports or abstractions until he had personally encountered the lived reality of a situation. Together, they reflect a holistic situational sensing architecture—a

behavioral framework through which he built the ecological foundation necessary for later high-level strategic reasoning.

Basic Theme 1: Direct Field Immersion

Soleimani routinely positioned himself physically in operational spaces, often at personal risk, demonstrating a belief that strategic awareness required firsthand sensory engagement.

"To address problems in Darreh, Qassem Soleimani first immersed himself in the situation—praying and eating with soldiers, working alongside local farmers, and personally inspecting the border—showing that understanding the issue up close was his first step toward restoring security." (Sedaqat-Nejad, 2022)

This quote illustrates both proximity and intentionality. Rather than adopting a distant command posture, he entered unstable environments to absorb context directly. In contemporary cognitive strategy literature, this behavior parallels what Reyt & Wiesenfeld (2015) term "embodied information scanning" — where leaders collect unfiltered cues unavailable through mediated reports.

Basic Theme 2: Listening to Ground Realities

Accounts show he did not merely observe — he engaged in active inquiry, often with those closest to uncertainty and risk.

"I rushed out to stop Soleimani from going on reconnaissance, fearing for his safety. Under the moonlight, I found him and warned that the fate of the resistance depended on him. With calm determination, he explained that if he didn't go, casualties could double, and he couldn't allow young fighters' blood to be wasted. Realizing his decision was firm, I simply asked him to take care—and watched him walk into the darkness." (Rahimi, 2023)

This behavior reflects a distributed information model, where front-line voices serve as primary inputs rather than supplementary commentary. It also aligns with Gigerenzer's (2022) concept of *ecological rationality* — decision-making that respects the structure of real environments rather than abstract ideal forms.

Basic Theme 3: Sensitivity to Weak Signals

Several passages reveal that he noticed faint cues—emotional tone, subtle behavioral shifts, anxieties of fighters, and morale conditions—that many leaders would overlook.

"In half an hour of meeting him, you felt he had known you for years… his attention to people was real and deep." (Morakabi, 2024)

Weak signals are foundational in crisis strategy (Camillus, 2008), and Soleimani's sensitivity enabled anticipatory rather than reactive decision-making.

Basic Theme 4: Cultural-Contextual Understanding

Unlike leaders who treat cultural environments as background noise, he treated them as strategic terrain.

"He spoke with Afghan, Syrian, Iraqi, and Lebanese fighters in their languages, knowing their emotional codes." (Rahimi, 2023)

This illustrates not simply multilingual communication but cultural resonance as a strategic competence—supporting Baer & Dirks' (2013) argument that relational perception enables more accurate strategic framing.

Basic Theme 5: Human-Centric Operational Awareness

Multiple excerpts demonstrate his commitment to understanding the emotional, social, and psychological conditions of individuals before making operational decisions.

"Soleimani's firm approach caused fear among outlaws, leading nearly 400 of them to surrender and the collection of around 2,000 weapons, bringing major change to the region. But he didn't stop at security; he focused on livelihoods. With the help of agricultural and tribal organizations, he facilitated the digging of hundreds of wells and allocated them to families so they could farm instead of returning to violence. Similar economic programs were later implemented in other regions, including Jiroft and Kahnuj. Alongside military action, he prioritized dignity and care for people—especially the families of martyrs. He urged officials to treat them like their own children, support them emotionally, solve their problems, avoid politicization, and serve them with patience, humility, and genuine love, seeing this service as a sacred responsibility." (Rahimi, 2023)

This goes beyond empathy: it signals a belief that morale and emotional continuity are strategic resources, not merely humanitarian considerations.

Basic Theme 6: Delayed Judgement

Finally, Soleimani avoided premature interpretation, demonstrating cognitive restraint in ambiguous contexts.

"He wrote plans only after sitting, observing, and thinking — not before." (Rahimi, 2023)

This aligns with Park & Baer's (2022) finding that high strategic performance is associated with leaders who resist early closure and allow the environment to inform their construal level.

Collectively, these behaviors demonstrate that Soleimani's strategic reasoning began not from abstraction but from immersion. His sensory-grounded engagement formed the epistemic foundation necessary for later construal elevation, supporting the broader theoretical proposition of this study:

Strategic intelligence is not merely the capacity to think abstractly, but the capacity to know *when*abstraction is appropriate and when reality must first be touched, seen, and understood.

3-3. Organizing Theme 2: Sensemaking & Pattern Synthesis

The second organizing theme emerging from the data is Sensemaking and Pattern Synthesis, referring to Soleimani's ability to transform fragmented, ambiguous, or contradictory field-level information into coherent strategic meaning. This capability extends beyond mere situational awareness; it represents a higher-order cognitive process through which scattered signals, cultural nuances, enemy behavior, geopolitical shifts, and emotional atmospheres were integrated into a unified interpretive framework.

In contemporary strategic cognition literature, this ability aligns with Weick's (1995) concept of sensemaking, Snowden's Cynefin framework (Snowden & Boone, 2007) on interpreting complexity, and recent applications of pattern-based strategic reasoning (Park et al., 2025). Soleimani's decision-making did not rely on linear analytical models; instead, he appeared to "see the emerging structure before others could recognize its pieces."

This theme reflects the moment at which Soleimani's cognition moves upward from raw perception to meaning — the cognitive bridge between immersion and strategic elevation.

The basic themes clustered here—connecting disparate cues, detecting hidden patterns, contextual interpretation, transforming experience into strategic insight, and meaning construction before crisis escalation—function as interdependent stages of cognitive integration.

Together, they indicate that Soleimani processed data not as isolated facts, but as relational signals pointing toward a broader structure. This aligns with research suggesting that effective strategic leaders operate using meaning architectures, not disconnected observations.

In this theme, Soleimani is no longer collecting information — he is *constructing meaning from it*.

Basic Theme 1: Connecting Disparate Cues

Multiple accounts demonstrate his ability to link signals that others perceived as unrelated, especially during geopolitical transitions such as the Arab Spring.

"On the second day of Hosni Mubarak's resignation, Egyptians celebrated in Cairo's Tahrir Square and elsewhere, with even other Arab nations rejoicing. We were happy too, in Dahieh, alongside Soleimani. But he said, "I'm worried." When I asked why, he replied, "I feel that a major project is being prepared against the region. The Americans want to exploit popular uprisings, using the so-called Arab Spring and the slogans in Egypt, Tunisia, and elsewhere as a pretext to target organizations, countries, and governments supporting the resistance. I have no doubt this project serves Israel, not the people. I believe this is a conspiracy against Syria." I want to emphasize this: the first person who recognized that a conspiracy was unfolding—specifically against Syria—was Qassem Soleimani." (Ghorbani, 2022)

This illustrates a high-level integrative reasoning ability: connecting region-level political shifts with tactical consequences before formal intelligence assessments are aligned.

Basic Theme 2: Detecting Hidden Patterns

Pattern detection emerged repeatedly as a cognitive signature. Witnesses describe him interpreting enemy behavior not solely from action, but from the absence of action — a hallmark of expert strategic pattern recognition.

"Once, we were standing with Haj Qassem on the heights of Mount Zayn al-Abidin. He picked up the binoculars and asked, "Where is the enemy's main axis of attack?" We replied, "They're coming from both sides." He paused, looked carefully again, and said: "No — the main attack is from the west of the river." I asked, "On what basis do you say that?" He answered: "Abu Baqer, the enemy can see Hama with the naked eye. Their machine gun fire reaches this position. They have a desire — an impatience — to take Hama, just like when we used to see the walls and palm groves of Khorramshahr and longed to reach them. How can you not recognize that?" His judgment was firm, fast, precise, and undeniable.

That same clarity showed itself again later — especially when the Americans warned us not to advance beyond a certain line. Beyond their military goals, our greatest concern was that if we halted, our allies — the Russians and the Syrians — might lose confidence and stop coordinating fully with us. That would eventually weaken the entire resistance front.

In those critical moments, Haj Qassem made the final call and said: "Do not pay attention to the American warning — continue forward."

Then he refined the plan even further. Instead of advancing on the paved road, he ordered: "Move from the Zaza route to Al-Alyaniyah, then continue to Halbah. From there go through Jabal Ghurab to Sharʿat al-Waʿr, and then all the way to the border."

That was him — he saw the battlefield and the future at the same time. And when he made a decision, it was swift, accurate, and decisive." (Rahimi, 2023).

This anticipatory insight aligns with Klein's (2011) *recognition-primed decision model*, where experts identify patterns before explicit evidence emerges.

Basic Theme 3: Contextual Interpretation

Rather than applying rigid analytical frameworks, Soleimani interpreted information within its cultural, ideological, emotional, and geopolitical context.

"When Haj Qassem took command of the Quds Force, he came personally to Lebanon from the start, demonstrating his commitment and blessing. He quickly built strong, genuine relationships with Hezbollah commanders and fighters across all levels, making everyone feel he was "one of us."

Despite being a high-ranking Iranian general, he disregarded protocol and formalities, learned Arabic quickly, and often joined his brothers on the frontlines. His presence was constant, close, and heartfelt—he shared in their joys and sorrows, earning deep affection and trust. Haj Qassem's relationship with the Lebanese resistance was exemplary, marked by sincerity, closeness, and mutual respect." (Morakabi, 2024)

This demonstrates a flexible, culturally-sensitive approach, consistent with situated cognition theory. His strategy was to fully immerse himself in the cultural context and become "one of us" with his target community. By doing so, people saw him as one of their own, which greatly amplified the impact of his words and decisions, while also providing him with far more accurate, nuanced, and reliable insights into the situation.

Basic Theme 4: Transforming Experience into Strategic Insight

Battlefield experiences were never isolated memories—they became strategic reference points.

"Haj Qassem Soleimani's leadership during operations like Karbala-5 turned near-defeat into decisive success. After Karbala-4's setbacks, he restored morale, reclaimed strategic ground, and inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. Under his command, small, resource-limited units performed

tasks that conventionally required multiple divisions — breaking lines, advancing, consolidating, and holding across hundreds of kilometers. With minimal heavy weapons, his forces advanced under intense fire, relying on creativity, improvisation, and deep battlefield experience.

Soleimani's brilliance lay in leveraging experience, anticipating enemy moves, and making precise, decisive choices. Every action — from selecting unconventional routes to synchronizing offensive and defensive objectives — reflected strategic insight and rapid adaptation. His command turned limited resources into overwhelming effectiveness, exemplifying tactical genius and the art of war." (Rozi-Talab & Noripour, 2020)

This reflects a dynamic learning loop, where operational experience is not archived but continually reinterpreted to refine future reasoning.

Basic Theme 5: Meaning Construction Before Crisis Escalation

Across multiple contexts — from Syria and Egypt to Afghanistan and Yemen — Haj Qassem Soleimani consistently demonstrated the ability to construct strategic meaning before crises fully escalated.

This anticipatory reasoning reflects a proactive cognitive approach: he did not simply react to events, but synthesized early signals into actionable insight. Whereas previous analyses show how he absorbed reality on the ground, this theme highlights how he interpreted patterns, inferred consequences, and shaped strategy. This forward-looking mindset became a guiding principle in his operations and decision-making across theaters of conflict.

Thus, this theme forms the interpretive core of SCLS: the moment where perception becomes meaning and raw data becomes strategic clarity — positioning him ahead of events, not inside them.

3-4. Organizing Theme 3: Cognitive Altitude Switching Ability

The third organizing theme captures Soleimani's ability to intentionally and rapidly shift mental altitude—moving from concrete, granular details to abstract strategic framing and vice versa. This switching was neither random nor emotional; it was a controlled cognitive maneuver governed by situational demands. In the strategic cognition literature, this reflects a phenomenon now referred to as Construal Level Shifting (Park et al., 2025), where leaders adjust mental distance to optimize decision quality in environments of uncertainty.

Unlike leaders who are trapped in either high-level abstraction or operational micromanagement, Soleimani demonstrated a dynamic bidirectional mental movement: he could be fully grounded in the field and

moments later frame the situation in terms of history, ideology, geopolitics, and long-term consequences.

This ability positions him in a category associated with "adaptive strategic thinkers", where cognition becomes altitude-responsive rather than altitude-fixed.

The basic components—timing the cognitive shift, analytical flexibility, adaptive distance regulation, identifying signal versus noise, and balancing speed with accuracy—reflect mechanisms of cognitive regulation rather than content.

Together, they represent the moment of transformation in the thinking process, where meaning (from the previous theme) is converted into an operational or strategic stance.

Put differently:

If the first two themes explain how Soleimani absorbs and understands reality, this theme explains how he decides *which level of thinking belongs to which moment*.

This regulatory function is what makes SCLS a capability—not just a trait.

Basic Theme 1: Timing the Cognitive Shift

Evidence across multiple accounts demonstrates that Soleimani did not remain at one cognitive altitude longer than necessary; rather, he shifted levels of thinking precisely when situational cues signaled the need for strategic elevation. A striking example of this occurred during the critical phase of the Syrian conflict, when numerous regional actors attempted—but failed—to convince Russia to intervene. Putin remained hesitant, aware that entering the war carried the potential of either a geopolitical failure or a decisive strategic breakthrough. In this context, Soleimani personally traveled to Moscow, and the very fact that such a meeting was arranged reflected his central role in shaping the military balance in Syria. As witnesses note, Russian leadership understood that he possessed intimate, ground-level knowledge of the battlefield and the strategic dynamics shaping it.

During a two-hour-and-twenty-minute closed-door meeting, Soleimani placed a detailed operational map on the table and explained the relative positions of the Syrian army, allied forces, and opposition militant groups. He then presented a broader geopolitical analysis, arguing that if Russia allowed Syria to fall—after already losing decisive influence in Iraq—it would not only forfeit its strategic depth in the Middle East but also surrender the Mediterranean theater to the United States. He articulated that the collapse of Assad's government would enable U.S. dominance across Iraq, Syria, and eventually Lebanon, reshaping the regional security

architecture to Russia's disadvantage. His reasoning did not rely on ideological persuasion or emotional appeal; instead, it was grounded in concrete operational evidence combined with clear strategic logic drawn from regional trends and power dynamics. By the end of the meeting, Putin reportedly responded: *"I am convinced."* (Rahimi, 2023)

This episode reflects not impulsivity but a cognitive threshold: once sufficient field-level cues had been integrated and translated into meaning, Soleimani elevated his reasoning to geopolitical altitude and acted decisively. The case illustrates the essence of timed mental shifting—a deliberate movement from tactical reality to strategic framing at precisely the moment when such elevation was required to shape rather than merely interpret unfolding events.

Basic Theme 2: Analytical Flexibility

Soleimani's reasoning was not constrained by a single framework—he moved fluidly between operational logic, cultural interpretation, religious meaning, geopolitical calculation, and historical referencing.

"Qassem Soleimani approached challenges with a comprehensive, multidimensional perspective. In eastern Iran, he combined strategic planning, intelligence, and tribal engagement to secure a 1,000-kilometer border, disarm outlaws, and restore stability. Simultaneously, he addressed the root causes of insecurity, developing local livelihoods through land distribution and well-digging projects. His ability to analyze complex problems and translate insight into concrete action exemplified his unique blend of strategic vision and hands-on leadership." (Rahimi, 2023)

Flexibility of reasoning is a key dimension of advanced strategic cognition, especially in volatile conditions.

Basic Theme 3: Adaptive Distance Regulation (Zoom In/Zoom Out)

Witnesses repeatedly described his ability to mentally "zoom out" to gain strategic clarity and then "zoom in" for action-level refinement.

"Qassem Soleimani, as a military figure, not only discussed strategic and large-scale issues while his plane was flying at high altitude, but even when the discussion reached the smallest details, his mind remained alert, creative, and sharp. He was not the type to become tired or disheartened. He was simultaneously a strategic and tactical personality—a man of reason, planning, and decision-making on the battlefield and the front lines, not just an operations-room officer behind the lines." (Morakabi, 2024)

This quote explicitly reflects perceptual modulation — the essence of construal-level switching.

Basic Theme 4: Identifying Signal vs Noise

A distinguishing feature of Soleimani's cognition was filtering irrelevant information quickly while retaining what mattered strategically.

"He was a political thinker with a multifaceted personality—not just a military commander. He didn't only read information; he could discern accurate, reliable intelligence from less trustworthy sources. With his broad regional awareness, connections, sharp reasoning, and creative analysis, he constantly arrived at important outcomes. His political insight was as crucial as his military role, and he always planned for years ahead, anticipating future events." (Morakabi, 2024)

This behavior parallels the skill of *strategic selective attention*—a competence found in expert commanders.

Basic Theme 5: Balancing Speed and Accuracy

Finally, his cognitive elevation was marked by a capacity to reach high-level clarity without sacrificing analytical discipline, maintaining precision under extreme time pressure.

"A remarkable example of Soleimani's leadership was the Kirkuk crisis. When Kurdish forces moved to claim Kirkuk, he acted swiftly, personally traveling to Suleimaniya. With precise reasoning and careful negotiation, he convinced Talabani and Barzani to withdraw, resolving the issue quickly and without bloodshed. Soleimani combined rapid action with strategic insight, ensuring both speed and quality in his decisions." (Rahimi, 2023)

This aligns with literature on *adaptive expertise*, where speed and accuracy are not opposites but mutually reinforcing outputs of cognitive mastery.

This theme represents the engine of SCLS: the moment where perception and meaning transition into a strategic stance. It reflects a mental ability seldom observed even in high-ranking leaders—the skill to regulate one's own cognitive altitude to match environmental complexity. In Soleimani's case, this switching was timely, deliberate, strategically purposeful, and responsive to context.

Thus, Cognitive Altitude Switching Ability is not simply a leadership trait — it is the functional core of how Soleimani generated strategic coherence from chaos.

3-5. Organizing Theme 4: Decision-Making Without Detail Paralysis

The fourth organizing theme reflects Soleimani's ability to convert situational awareness and synthesized meaning into decisive action without becoming overwhelmed by complexity, uncertainty, or excessive analysis. In the strategic

decision-making literature, this phenomenon is aligned with what scholars term actionable strategic reasoning (van der Hoek, Jamroga, & Wooldridge, 2005) or resolution under cognitive load (Kahneman & Klein, 2009).

Unlike leaders who either rush prematurely or freeze under the weight of detail, Soleimani demonstrated an ability to act at the right moment, with sufficient—but not exhaustive—information. The distinguishing characteristic of this theme is not speed alone, but a balance between:

In modern strategic cognition terminology, his approach represents a movement from construal to commitment — the moment when insight becomes execution.

The four basic themes — essence-based judgment, action over excessive analysis, future-oriented strategic posture, and simplicity in execution with depth in thought — collectively illustrate a consistent pattern:

Once Soleimani's cognitive altitude stabilized, he moved toward action with focus and precision.

These behaviors form a unified process, demonstrating that his decisions were not reactive nor impulsive, but the logical outcome of structured mental transitions observed in earlier themes.

In short:

- The first theme (Situational Awareness) explains what he perceived
- The second theme (Sensemaking) explains how he interpreted it
- The third theme (Cognitive Switching) explains how he positioned his mind in response
- This fourth theme explains how he acted without hesitation

Basic Theme 1: Action Over Excessive Analysis

Witnesses consistently mention he avoided analysis paralysis — acting when the strategic window was optimal rather than waiting for perfect clarity.

"Dahaneh Lar, a strategic point on the Iran-Afghanistan-Pakistan border, was the site of an unprecedented ambush by 50 outlaws led by Hamid Notani, supported by the U.S., Israel, and Saudi Arabia. They stopped two buses carrying Iranian soldiers to Zahedan and took 96 hostages to display Iran's weakness. Upon hearing the news, Qassem Soleimani immediately flew from Kerman at midnight with his team. Despite legal border

restrictions, they advanced 25 kilometers into Afghanistan. With air support destroying the outlaws' vehicles and ground forces from the 1st Seyyed al-Shohada Brigade taking control, 25 of 75 outlaws were killed, and the rest were surrounded. Afghan elders mediated, and Soleimani, on the condition of the hostages' safe release, pardoned the remaining outlaws. By 4 PM, all 96 soldiers were freed unharmed. The attackers later admitted they had aimed to execute the soldiers, but Soleimani's flawless management and decisive action demonstrated Iran's authority—an operation as glorious and honorable as Faw's Valfajr-8.'" (Rahimi, 2023)

This aligns with the principle of bounded rationality (Simon, 1982), where decision quality is optimized by timely sufficiency rather than academic completeness.

Basic Theme 3: Future-Oriented Posture

Unlike tactical commanders who respond to existing conditions, Soleimani made decisions based on the future he intended to shape — not merely the present he faced. Dr. Masoud Asadollahi said:

"Before Soleimani's presence, the perspective in Lebanon was limited—mostly small-scale guerrilla operations: 'hit and run." But with him, the outlook changed. He did not see objectives as small or short-term; his vision was broad, aiming at a serious confrontation with Israel—something previously unimaginable. Achieving this required coordination between Hezbollah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad, which was realized under his leadership and guidance. Soleimani consistently pursued and reinforced this higher strategic horizon.

One clear result of this elevated vision was the transformation of Hezbollah itself. He moved them from small-scale guerrilla tactics to a well-equipped, specialized force. The acquisition of advanced weapons, like the Kornet anti-tank missile, exemplified this change. During the 33-day war, these weapons proved decisive, countering Israel's armored strength. He also fortified the terrain, built shelters, and implemented numerous measures that, despite heavy Israeli bombardment, shifted the conflict into a new strategic arena."

This evidences what Mintzberg (1994) describes as strategy as intentioned shaping, rather than adaptation alone.

Basic Theme 4: Simplicity in Execution, Depth in Thought

Despite complex reasoning behind the scenes, his final decisions were clear, simple, and executable. Dr. Masoud Asadollahi said:

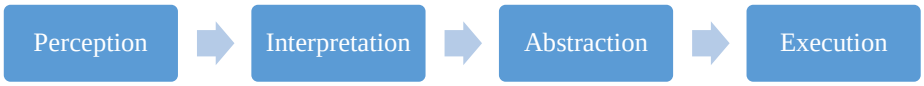
"One of Soleimani's innovations during the 33-day war was creating a tactical chart for Hezbollah fighters. This chart specified how many rockets

to fire each day, what type to use, and how to respond to every kind of attack. This was extremely helpful for Hezbollah because Soleimani had extensive experience in similar battles and operations. Through this plan, he ensured resource management, prevented emotional or impulsive decisions on the battlefield, and maintained strategic discipline. In the early days of the war, Israel destroyed bridges and logistical routes, cutting Hezbollah's communication with its supply lines. In such conditions, this system allowed fighters to know exactly what to do, even when they had no way to communicate with command headquarters."

This reflects an advanced leadership pattern seen in strategic commanders: the translation of cognitive complexity into operational simplicity.

Decision-Making Without Detail Paralysis completes the cognitive cycle of the SCLS framework: it is the point where awareness, meaning, and mental altitude converge into purposeful action.

This theme illustrates that Soleimani's strategic effectiveness did not stem solely from insight but from the ability to commit to action at the right cognitive moment. His decisions reflect a seamless integration of:



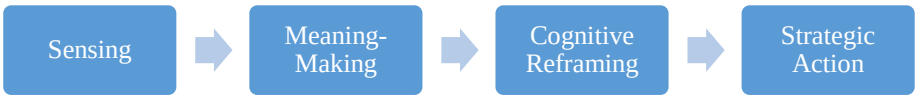
Thus, the fourth theme represents the operational expression of SCLS, demonstrating that construal shifting is not only a mental capacity but a behavioral capability deployed at decisive moments.

3-6. Integrative Synthesis: How the Themes Form a Strategic Cognition Model

The findings reveal that Strategic Construal-Level Shifting (SCLS) is not a single behavior nor a static leadership trait, but a dynamic cognitive process unfolding in four interdependent stages. Each organizing theme contributes to a sequential and adaptive mental progression through which Soleimani absorbed reality, created meaning, repositioned his mental altitude, and converted insight into decisive action.

The data show that SCLS is structured as a recursive, non-linear cognitive loop, rather than a fixed step-by-step sequence. While the process can begin at field immersion, it may repeatedly cycle depending on environmental uncertainty, time pressure, or shifting geopolitical variables.

The model can be conceptualized as:



This cognitive loop represents a living, evolving decision-making system operating under conditions of volatility and incomplete information.

3-6-1. The Model as a Coherent System

(1) Field-Level Micro Situational Awareness

This stage establishes ground truth—not through mediated intelligence but through embodied presence, cultural attunement, and direct engagement. It forms the epistemic foundation of the entire cognitive process.

Without this grounding, upper-level abstraction would lack fidelity and relevance.

(2) Sensemaking and Pattern Synthesis

Here, perception evolves into understanding. Data cease to exist as disconnected fragments and instead become a strategic narrative. This stage represents Soleimani's interpretive intelligence—the ability to "see what the information means," not simply what it says.

This is the transition from information → relevance → strategic coherence.

(3) Cognitive Altitude Switching Ability

This is the central pivot of the model—the moment the leader chooses the right mental altitude for the decision context. Switching is deliberate, not incidental; it is responsive to what the situation demands.

This capability allows the leader to see the forest without losing the trees, and see the trees without forgetting the forest.

(4) Decision-Making Without Detail Paralysis

Finally, meaning becomes action. Decision velocity and direction emerge not from impulsivity but from clarity. Execution becomes concise, intentional, and purpose-oriented — reflecting what to ignore, as much as what to act upon.

This stage embodies strategic agency: not reacting to the environment, but shaping it.

Based on the integrated analysis, this study proposes the following theoretical proposition:

Strategic effectiveness in volatile environments is not determined solely by access to information or analytical capacity, but by the leader's ability to

dynamically adjust cognitive altitude — shifting between concrete situational engagement and abstract strategic framing — and to translate this shifting into timely, directionally meaningful action.

This proposition extends existing construal-level theory by demonstrating that construal shifting can function as a strategic capability rather than merely a psychological tendency, that it operates across operational, cultural, and geopolitical layers simultaneously, and that, in high-stakes contexts, it becomes a mechanism for opportunity construction rather than passive interpretation.

In the case of General Soleimani, SCLS was not only a thinking pattern — it was a strategic engine through which he identified, shaped, and acted upon opportunities that others interpreted as threats, ambiguity, or immovable constraints.

Taken together, the four themes demonstrate that Soleimani's leadership cognition reflects a dynamic system in which:

Context grounds perception, perception produces meaning, meaning selects altitude, and altitude directs action.

This model explains how he operated with both precision and vision—maintaining fidelity to details while simultaneously holding a panoramic understanding of geopolitical landscapes.

His strategic cognition did not oscillate randomly; it shifted with purpose. And through that shifting, opportunities emerged where others saw only complexity or crisis.

4. Conclusion

This study explored how the late Major-General Qasem Soleimani cognitively transformed existential threats into strategic opportunities amid prolonged asymmetric warfare and geopolitical volatility. By applying and extending Park et al.'s (2025) construal-level-shift model through reflexive thematic re-analysis of a rich qualitative dataset—comprising authenticated biographies, field memoirs, speeches, and interviews with close associates—four interrelated organizing themes emerged that collectively constitute Strategic Construal-Level Shifting (SCLS): (1) Field-Level Micro Situational Awareness via embodied immersion in contextual cues; (2) Sensemaking and Pattern Synthesis that integrates fragmented signals into coherent strategic narratives; (3) Cognitive Altitude Switching Ability as deliberate regulation between concrete and abstract mental representations; and (4) Decision-Making Without Detail Paralysis that translates insight into timely, focused action.

These themes illustrate a recursive, adaptive cognitive process through which Soleimani repeatedly reframed crises—such as the rise of ISIS, the Arab Spring's geopolitical exploitation, and multi-front proxy conflicts—into openings that reshaped regional power dynamics. Grounded in frontline proximity and amplified by spiritual-ideological conviction, his systematic low-to-high construal shifts enabled opportunity construction rather than mere discovery or reaction.

Theoretically, this research makes three primary contributions. First, it extends construal-level theory beyond controlled laboratory and Western managerial settings by demonstrating its robustness in an extreme context of life-or-death stakes, sacred meaning-making, and non-Western worldview—conditions that both necessitate and potentiate deliberate construal shifting (Park et al., 2025). Second, it introduces SCLS as a novel integrative framework that bridges cognitive psychology with strategic leadership and security studies, clarifying how leaders actively co-create opportunities through dynamic mental-altitude regulation. Third, by centering a non-Western geopolitical exemplar, the study broadens the cultural and contextual boundaries of strategic cognition scholarship, countering the predominant Western bias and highlighting the universality of advanced cognitive mechanisms when fused with moral conviction and embodied experience.

Practically, SCLS offers actionable implications for cultivating cognitive flexibility in volatile environments. Leaders and organizations facing persistent uncertainty—whether in military, diplomatic, or corporate spheres—can foster this capability through deliberate practices: mandatory field immersion for senior decision-makers, training in rapid low-to-high construal transitions, and institutional tolerance for "sufficient" rather than exhaustive analysis before action. In an era of hybrid warfare, climate-induced crises, and technological disruption, the ability to intentionally shift cognitive altitude may distinguish those who merely survive ambiguity from those who shape it.

Like all qualitative single-case studies, this research has limitations that suggest avenues for future inquiry. The reliance on secondary analysis of archival and testimonial data, while ethically and securely appropriate, precludes direct observation or physiological measures of construal processes. Moreover, the unique interplay of ideological commitment and existential threat in Soleimani's context raises questions about generalizability to secular or low-stakes settings. Future studies could test SCLS propositions quantitatively across diverse leaders, employ neuroimaging to capture real-time construal shifts, or conduct comparative

cases with other non-Western strategists (e.g., Vo Nguyen Giap or modern Chinese military thinkers).

Ultimately, Soleimani's cognitive pattern reveals that strategic genius in extreme contexts is less about innate intuition or analytical horsepower alone and more about the disciplined, purposeful orchestration of mental distance. In environments where others see only threat and chaos, leaders capable of Strategic Construal-Level Shifting do not merely navigate uncertainty—they cognitively reconstruct it into possibility.

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Organizational Justice and Trust in Islamic Management: A Bibliometric Analysis

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to analyze the intellectual structure and trace the evolutionary trajectory of the concepts of trust and justice within the Islamic management field. Given the fragmentation of existing literature, this study aims to provide a comprehensive and holistic picture, mapping the paradigmatic transition of this field from abstract discussions to applied and empirical models, and identifying existing knowledge gaps.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Adopting a bibliometric analysis approach, this study examined 444 valid research documents indexed in the Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) databases over the period from 1999 to 2025. Data analysis was conducted using the Bibliometrix package in R across three levels: performance analysis, science mapping (keyword co-occurrence network), and evolutionary analysis (strategic map and trend topics).

Findings: The findings indicate a transition in the literature from "abstract normativism" to "empirical functionalism." Cluster analysis revealed that the keyword "Performance" plays a significant role in current research. Furthermore, the relationship between Islamic values and organizational outcomes is not linear but is mediated through the mechanisms of "Organizational Justice" and "Trust." Additionally, the exponential growth of scientific production after 2015 and the emergence of organizational justice as a trending topic demonstrate the empirical maturity and acceptance of this discourse within mainstream management.

Originality/Value: Moving beyond fragmented and case-based analyses, this research tried to integrate scattered literature and map the evolutionary path of concepts. By revealing the hidden links between these concepts, it provides a roadmap for guiding future research and bridging knowledge gaps.

Keywords

Islamic Management, Trust, Justice, Bibliometric.

Introduction

Organizational justice is defined as a subjective and personal evaluation of moral propriety and the alignment of managerial behaviors with ethical standards, playing a vital role in maintaining the cohesion of human structures (Cole et al., 2010; Cropanzano et al., 2007). In management literature, this concept is described as the "glue" that allows members to work together effectively; conversely, injustice acts as a destructive solvent, dissolving the bonds between employees and the organization (Cropanzano et al., 2007). Based on Social Exchange Theory (SET), when employees perceive their work environment as fair and supportive, a sense of reciprocal commitment is formed. Such perception, by creating psychological safety, encourages individuals to participate actively in achieving the organization's shared goals beyond their formal duties (Pisarska et al., 2025).

Parallel to justice, organizational trust is defined as a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of others (Six & Sorge, 2008). The formation of this trust, particularly in conditions of uncertainty and organizational change, often requires a "Leap of Faith," enabling employees to move from a pessimistic interpretation of reality toward favorable expectations despite existing risks (Saunders & Thornhill, 2003). Since the processes of trust and justice are rooted in social norms and individuals' internal values, researchers argue that these concepts have different interpretations across various cultural and ideological contexts. In other words, ontological assumptions and religious beliefs can fundamentally transform the foundations and expectations employees have regarding justice and trust (Cole et al., 2010; Saunders & Thornhill, 2003).

In this regard, the Islamic management paradigm, by introducing concepts such as "Adl" (Justice) and "Amanah" (Trust), offers a distinct and transcendent approach to organizational relations, where ethical behavior is considered not merely a managerial tactic but a divine duty. Although the last two decades have witnessed exponential growth in the publication of articles related to "ethics, justice, and trust in Islamic management," the existing literature in this field remains fragmented and isolated. Most previous studies have either focused on theoretical and jurisprudential foundations or have dealt with measuring relationships between variables in a specific geographical context on a case-by-case basis. The lack of a comprehensive and holistic picture that can trace the evolutionary course of this knowledge from abstract concepts to organizational applications has hindered the proper understanding of existing gaps and the guidance of future research.

The present study, aiming to fill this theoretical gap, utilizes a "Bibliometric Analysis" approach to explore the intellectual structure and evolutionary trends of trust and justice concepts in Islamic management. The main objective of this research is to provide a holistic and comprehensive picture of all studies conducted in the field of "Trust and Justice in Islamic Management."

1. Theoretical Foundations

In the Islamic management paradigm, justice (Adl) is defined beyond an administrative mechanism for resource distribution; it is an ontological obligation and a fundamental prerequisite for leadership legitimacy. Authoritative academic texts emphasize that in this model, respecting the rights of stakeholders is not a managerial choice but a "Divine Duty." Leaders are obliged to move beyond formal contracts to create a space based on human dignity (Sidani & Rowe, 2018). Furthermore, Islamic justice, by reducing ethical ambiguity, institutionalizes commitment in the underlying layers of the organization (Ali and Al-Owaihan, 2008; Beekun & Badawi, 2005; Rice, 1999).

The concept of trust in this framework is tied to the keyword "Amanah" (Trust), which elevates accountability from the level of answering to a superior to the level of accountability before God. Yousef (2001), in his research, proved that the institutionalization of Islamic Work Ethic (IWE) creates a type of spiritual psychological contract. In this space, employees consider betrayal of the organization's assets and time as a sin. Other studies also showed that this deep belief leads to the strengthening of organizational trust and reduces deviant and counterproductive behaviors without the need for severe external monitoring (Murtaza et al., 2016; Rokhman, 2010).

The synergy between procedural justice and organizational trust provides a vital platform for knowledge sharing and the emergence of innovative behaviors. Khan et al. (2015) demonstrated that organizational justice is a primary predictor of job outcomes, and Islamic Work Ethic plays a moderating role. When employees feel that the distribution of opportunities is fair, their motivation to participate in risk-taking decision-making increases. In fact, trust acts as a mediator that converts the perception of justice into extra-role behaviors and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), thereby enriching intra-organizational social capital (Salahudin et al., 2016; Tufail et al., 2017).

Finally, the strategic implications of justice and trust are revealed in organizational resilience and performance sustainability. Branine and Pollard (2010) argue in their research that human resource management based on

Islamic principles reduces turnover rates by creating alignment between individual and organizational values. Syed and Ali (2010) also emphasize that employment relations in Islam are built on justice and benevolence (Ihsan), leading to sustainable trust. This ethical atmosphere, by reducing role stress and increasing job attachment, makes the organization resistant to environmental shocks and creates a sustainable competitive advantage (Yousef, 2000).

2. Methodology

This research employs a "Bibliometric Analysis" approach to map the knowledge structure, identify hidden trends, and analyze the thematic evolution in the field of Islamic management with a focus on trust and justice concepts. Bibliometric analysis is a popular and rigorous method for exploring and analyzing large volumes of scientific data, enabling the examination of evolutionary nuances and the identification of emerging fields (Donthu et al., 2021). The reason for choosing this approach in the present study is its unique ability to provide a measure of "Objectivity" in literature evaluation; this method minimizes researcher bias—common in traditional reviews—and maps the intellectual and social structure of the field with transparency (Zupic & Čater, 2015).

2-1. Data Collection and Screening Protocol

The first and vital step in any bibliometric research is the selection of a reliable database. In this study, two databases, Scopus and Web of Science (WoS), were used as data sources. The simultaneous selection of these two databases was due to Scopus having broader coverage in social science journals, while WoS maintains stricter indexing standards; combining the two ensures the comprehensiveness of the research.

The search strategy was designed using Boolean Operators and a combination of keywords related to the three main axes of the research: the first axis included Islamic concepts (Islam, Islamic, Muslim), the second axis included managerial concepts (Management, Organization, Business), and the third axis included target variables (Trust, Justice, Amanah, Adl). The search was conducted in "Title, Abstract, and Keywords" without an initial time limit (from 1990 to 2025) to fully cover the evolutionary course of the topic.

To ensure transparency and reproducibility of the search process, the exact search strings used in both databases are presented in Table 1. In designing these queries, wildcards such as the asterisk (*) were used to cover all grammatical forms of words (e.g., Ethic, Ethics, Ethical). Additionally, to

increase search comprehensiveness, transliterations of Islamic concepts such as "Amanah" and "Adl" were used alongside English vocabulary.

Table 1. Search queries used in databases

Database	Search Query
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (("Islam*" OR "Muslim*") AND ("Management" OR "Business" OR "Organization*" OR "Administration") AND ("Trust" OR "Justice" OR "Ethic*" OR "Amanah" OR "Adl"))
Web of Science (WoS)	TS = (("Islam*" OR "Muslim*") AND ("Management" OR "Business" OR "Organization*" OR "Administration") AND ("Trust" OR "Justice" OR "Ethic*" OR "Amanah" OR "Adl"))

After extracting the data (including BibTeX files from Scopus and Plain Text from WoS), the main challenge was Data Merging. Due to the differences in the metadata structure of these two databases, the R programming language and the bibliometrix package were used to merge the files. At this stage, the software's smart algorithms identified and removed duplicates indexed in both databases.

The next stage was Manual Screening, which played a decisive role in data purity. All remaining records were transferred to a spreadsheet environment, and the monitoring process was carried out at two levels:

- **Inclusion Criteria:** Articles that explicitly addressed trust, justice, or ethics within the context of Organizational Behavior (OB) or Human Resource Management (HRM).
- **Exclusion Criteria:** A strict refinement was applied at this stage. First, articles with a purely jurisprudential/legal approach lacking managerial implications were removed. Second, articles in the fields of macroeconomics and banking without a focus on human resources were excluded. Third, and most importantly, articles in the field of Marketing and consumer behavior focusing on concepts such as "customer loyalty" or "branding" were removed from the final list to maintain the research focus on "intra-organizational relations" and "employees."

Ultimately, after passing through these multiple stages and quality control by the researcher, a final number of 444 research documents (including journal articles, early access articles, and book chapters) were selected for final analysis. This rigorous process ensures that the resulting findings are free of informational noise and accurately reflect the Islamic management

literature. The selection and screening process of the selected studies is visible in Figure 1 (PRISMA Flow Diagram).

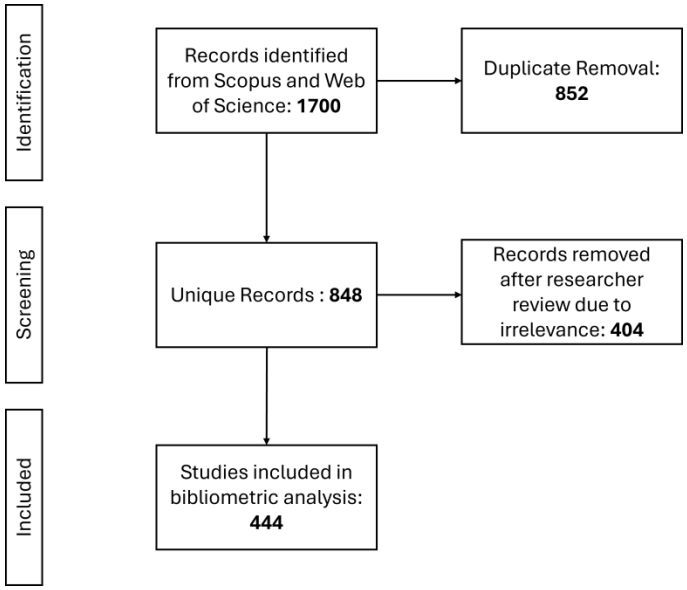

Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram

2-2. Data Analysis and Tool Choice

After finalizing the database, the processing and analysis stage was performed using the R statistical software, specifically the Bibliometrix package and its web-based interface, Biblioshiny. The reason for choosing R over other common software like VOSviewer or CiteSpace is its unique capabilities in conducting comprehensive and integrated analyses. This tool allows for the simultaneous coverage of three levels of analysis—"Descriptive," "Structural," and "Evolutionary"—within a single platform and provides the researcher with more advanced algorithms for data cleaning and drawing strategic maps.

Data analysis in this research was architected in three main layers:

- **Performance Analysis:** In this layer, standard quantitative indicators were used to evaluate productivity and impact. These indicators included the Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) for trend analysis, h-index and g-index for ranking journals and authors, and Citation Analysis to identify seminal papers. This section answers "who, where, and when" had the most impact on this field.

- **Science Mapping:** To understand the Conceptual Structure, the Keyword Co-occurrence technique was used. In this method, it is assumed that words appearing frequently together indicate a semantic or thematic link. The Louvain Clustering Algorithm, one of the most accurate methods for detecting communities in complex networks, was used to cluster the network and identify thematic sub-domains. Additionally, software parameters were set to normalize data based on Association Strength to control for biases resulting from the high volume of certain general words.
- **Strategic and Evolutionary Analysis:** In the third layer, to move beyond static description and understand the dynamics of the field, two techniques were used. First, a Thematic Map was drawn based on two dimensions: "Centrality" (Callon's Centrality - indicating the intensity of the link with other topics) and "Density" (Callon's Density - indicating the internal maturity of the topic), dividing topics into four categories: Motor, Basic, Niche, and Emerging themes. Second, Trend Topics analysis was used to track changes in keywords over time to determine how researchers' focus has shifted from general concepts to specialized variables such as organizational justice.

The combination of these tools and techniques within the R programming environment has led to the production of findings that not only map the current status but also offer deep insights into the future path of research.

3. Findings

The table below (Table 2) displays a summary of descriptive information for the 444 selected research documents published over 27 years (1999 to 2026). These data, extracted from 159 reputable sources (including journals, books, and conferences), demonstrate the breadth of publication channels and the interdisciplinary nature of the subject of trust and justice in Islamic management.

The analysis of scientific collaboration indicators in this table contains noteworthy points. The presence of 1,078 authors producing these works and an average of 2.84 authors per document indicates that the dominant pattern in this field is "team research," and the era of single-authorship (comprising only 73 documents) is declining. A highly significant point is the 35.14% rate of International Co-authorships. This high figure indicates that the discourse of Islamic management has crossed geographical borders, and a global network of researchers has formed to develop these concepts.

From the perspective of scientific impact, an average of 18.89 citations per document indicates a high impact factor and the quality of the selected sources. Furthermore, the average document age (6.48 years) suggests that we are facing a relatively "young and growing" field of study that still has high potential for theorizing. The diversity of keywords (1,278 authors' keywords) also confirms the content richness and multidimensionality of this field.

Table 2. Overview of general data and key metrics of the sample

Description	Results
MAIN INFORMATION ABOUT DATA	
Timespan	1999:2026
Sources (Journals, Books, etc.)	159
Documents	444
Annual Growth Rate %	-2.53
Document Average Age	6.48
Average citations per doc	18.89
References	0
DOCUMENT CONTENTS	
Keywords Plus (ID)	786
Author's Keywords (DE)	1278
AUTHORS	
Authors	1078
Authors of single-authored docs	69
AUTHORS COLLABORATION	
Single-authored docs	73
Co-Authors per Doc	2.84
International co-authorships %	35.14
DOCUMENT TYPES	
article	378
article; book chapter	20
article; early access	45
article; proceedings paper	1

3-1. Evolutionary Trend of Scientific Production

Statistical analysis of the final dataset, comprising 444 research documents over a 26-year period (1999 to 2025), offers a clear picture of the gradual maturation of the "Islamic Management, Trust, and Justice" field. As plotted in Figure 2, the article growth curve does not follow a simple linear pattern but represents Exponential Growth, which can be divided into three historical episodes.

Episode 1 (1999-2009): This can be termed the "Incubation Period." During this decade, the average publication was less than 3 articles per year, and the existing literature was mainly based on theoretical foundations and jurisprudential adaptation of concepts.

Episode 2 (2010-2014): The "Transitional Period" was accompanied by a mild increase in scientific production, likely a reaction to ethical crises in global financial markets and the need for alternative management paradigms.

Episode 3 (2015-2024): Termed the "Scientific Explosion Period," this phase is accompanied by a steep slope; notably, in 2024 alone, 55 articles were published, which is an unprecedented record. This volume of production in the last 5 years constitutes more than 60% of the total literature in this field.

The annual growth rate analysis shows that this field has passed the "emerging topic" stage and is now recognized as a "relatively dominant discourse" in management studies. The continuation of this upward trend in 2025 predicts that researchers' focus has shifted from proving the necessity of Islamic management to complex modeling and empirical measurements.

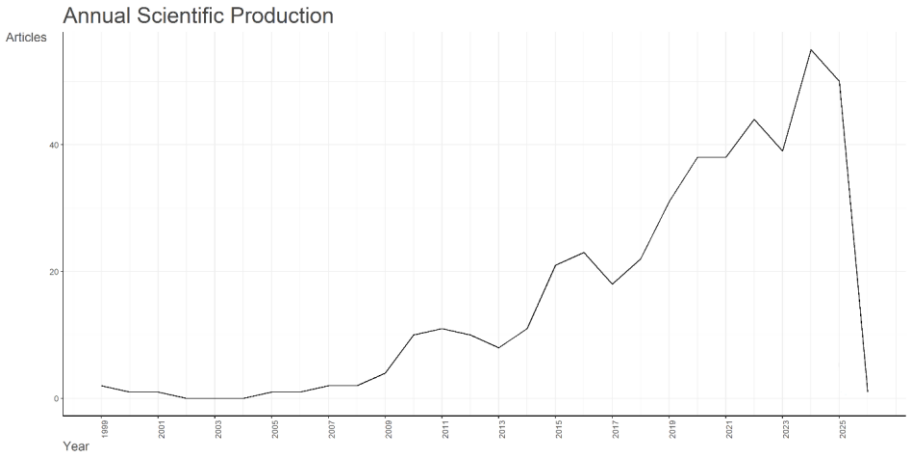

Figure 2. Annual scientific production

3-2. Geographical Distribution and Collaborative Networks

The geographical analysis of scientific production reveals the geopolitical map of knowledge in this field and indicates a significant asymmetry in research distribution. Based on the extracted data, Malaysia is identified as the "Central Hub" of this field by a wide margin. The macro-policies of the Malaysian government in developing the Islamic economy and supporting research-oriented universities have led to the production of the highest

volume of articles. Following Malaysia, countries such as Pakistan, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia rank next, indicating the concentration of research in Asia and the Middle East.

However, a highly significant point evident in the Collaboration Maps is the strong presence of Western countries such as the UK and the USA in the scientific collaboration network. This indicates that the subject of "Islamic justice and Trust in management" is no longer confined to the geography of Muslim countries but has also gained attention as a comparative subject in management departments of Western universities. The analysis of collaboration links shows that the strongest international collaboration links exist between "Malaysia-UK" and "Pakistan-China." This pattern reflects the flow of knowledge transfer from South to North and the effort to test Western theories in Islamic contexts (and vice versa), which has doubled the theoretical richness of this field.

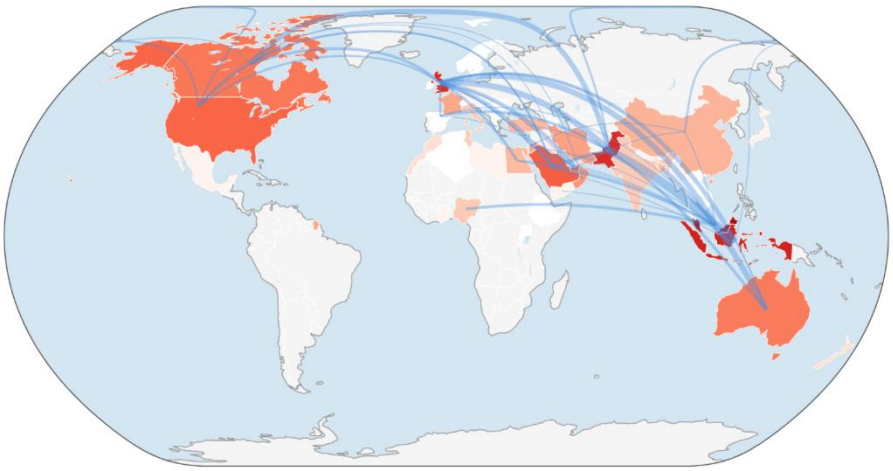

Figure 3. Geographical distribution and collaborative networks

3-3. Journal Ecosystem and Quality Assessment

An examination of the 159 sources publishing the articles shows that this field of study has managed to gain scientific legitimacy in both "specialized religious journals" and "general management journals." According to the data in Figure 4, the *Journal of Islamic Accounting and Business Research* ranks first with 55 articles (about 12.5% of the total data), focusing on accounting and business aspects.

However, an important finding is the placement of the highly prestigious *Journal of Business Ethics* in second place with 42 articles. This journal,

which is among the top journals in the field of management and business, possesses a high impact factor and rigorous peer-review standards. The extensive penetration of Islamic management articles into such a journal proves that concepts such as "Amanah," "Justice," and "Islamic Work Ethic" have sufficient theoretical solidity to pass through Western reviewers. Furthermore, the presence of journals such as *Personnel Review* and *International Journal of Ethics and Systems* in the top 10 sources indicates the interdisciplinary nature of this field, highlighting that this subject is simultaneously analyzed through the lenses of "Human Resource Management," "Economy," "Marketing," and "Accounting."

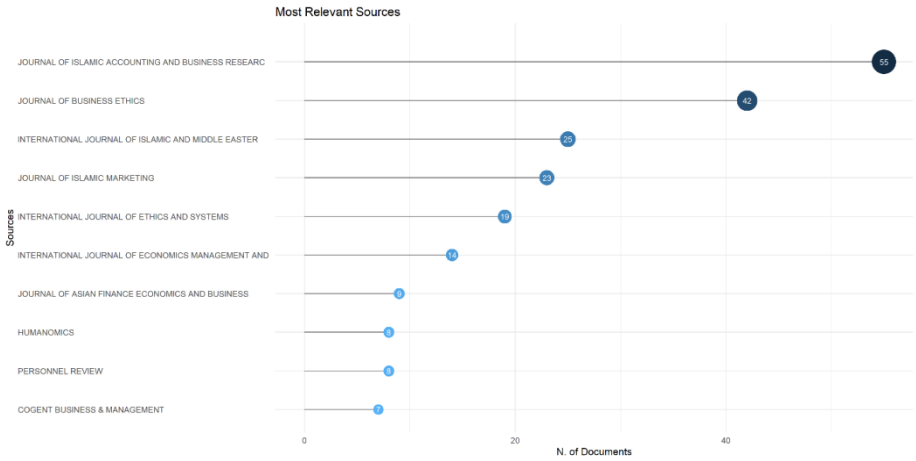

Figure 4. Journals publishing the most research in this field

3-4. Thematic Clusters and Keyword Co-occurrence

The analysis of the Keyword Co-occurrence Network serves as a tool to map the Intellectual Structure, revealing hidden relationships between concepts. The visualization of the word network in Figure 5 shows three distinct "Super-Clusters."

Cluster 1 (Red): This is the densest part of the network, formed around the keyword "Performance" (with 82 occurrences) and "Leadership." The absolute centrality of the word "Performance" in this network carries a clear message: researchers' concern has shifted from "describing ethical virtues" to "measuring material impacts." This cluster shows that leadership and Islamic ethics are tools for enhancing organizational performance.

Cluster 2 (Blue): Centered around keywords like "Ethics," "Islam," and "Values," this cluster represents the "Ontological Foundations" and deeper discussions in this field of study.

Cluster 3 (Green): Focused on implementation mechanisms, this cluster includes words such as "Organizational Justice," "Trust," and "Corporate Governance."

The Thick Links between the Blue Cluster (Values) and the Red Cluster (Performance), established through the Green Cluster (Justice/Trust), may suggest the proposition that Islamic values only lead to high performance when they pass through the channels of organizational justice and trust-building.

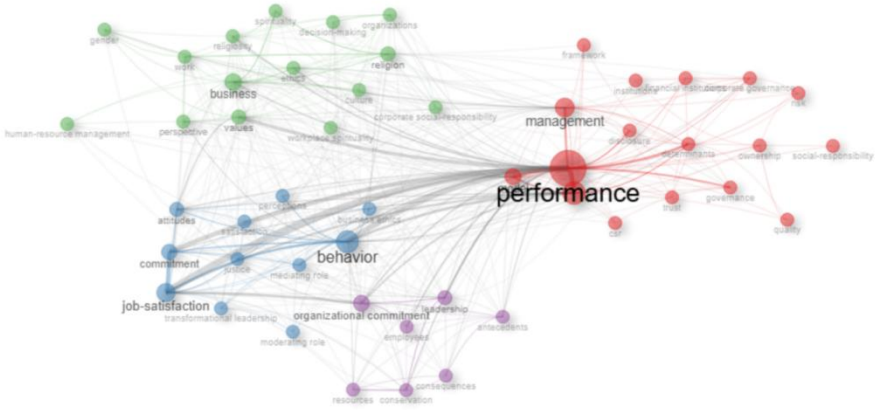

Figure 5. Thematic clusters and keyword co-occurrence

3-5. Strategic Thematic Analysis

To understand the strategic position of sub-domains in this field, a "Thematic Map" was used based on two indicators: "Centrality" and "Density".

The analysis of the four quadrants of this diagram (Figure 6) shows that the "Performance" cluster, which includes concepts such as "Impact" and "Behavior," is located in the Motor Theme quadrant (top-right). The placement of this cluster in this strategic area indicates that the subject of measuring employee performance and behavior has reached full maturity theoretically and has very strong connections with other parts of the network; a finding that confirms the mainstream of current research is completely result-oriented and focused on behavioral outcomes.

On the other hand, the "Ethics" and "Islam" cluster (including values and perspectives) is placed in the bottom-right quadrant, or the Basic Themes area. Although these topics have high centrality and are present in most articles as a theoretical basis, they have lower density compared to motor themes, indicating their foundational and prerequisite role in all studies. Additionally, smaller clusters scattered on the left side of the chart represent specialized or emerging currents that have not yet fully integrated with the main body of literature.

Overall, the structure of the strategic map suggests that this field of study has passed the stage of "pure theorizing" and is now in the stage of "application and measurement." Therefore, future researchers, to have the greatest scientific impact, must model new variables in relation to "Performance" and "Behavior."

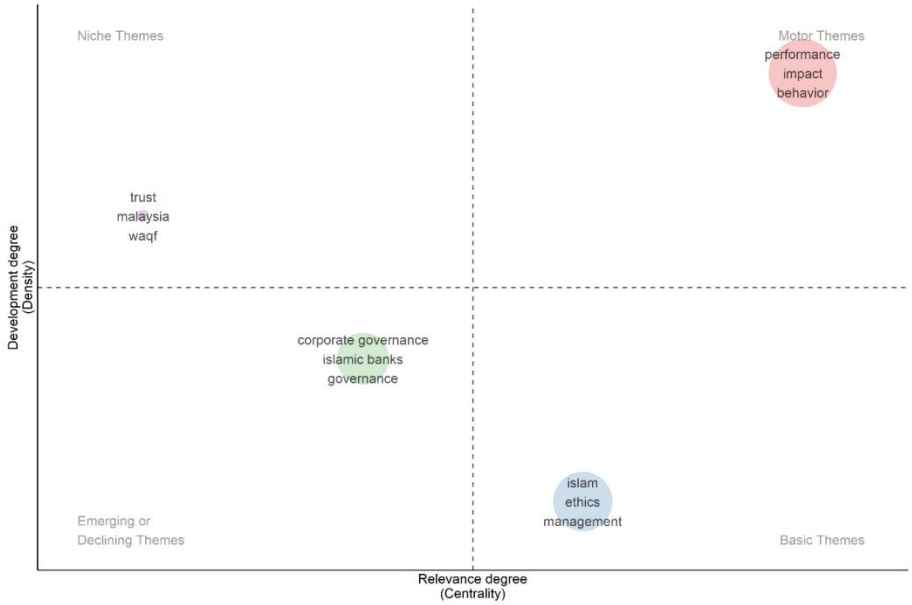

Figure 6. Thematic map

3-6. Evolutionary Trajectory and Trending Topics

Examining the time in the analysis of keywords (Trend Topics) reveals the changing research tastes of the scientific community over the past two decades. The trend topics chart (Figure 7) shows that the literature in this field has experienced a shift from abstract concepts to operational concepts.

In the period from 2007 to 2014, frequent keywords mainly included general concepts such as "Work Ethic" and "Religion," indicating researchers' efforts to define variables and build tools. However, from 2019 onwards, we witness the emergence of specialized and behavioral vocabulary such as "Organizational Justice" (with a median time of 2019), "Management," and "Employee Behavior."

The powerful emergence of the concept of "Organizational Justice" as one of the hottest topics in recent years indicates that the focus has shifted from "individual ethics" to "structural fairness." Furthermore, data shows that the keyword "Performance" has had a stable presence in all recent years, but its combination with modern variables such as "Knowledge Sharing" or "Organizational Citizenship Behavior" (OCB) is increasing. This evolutionary trend predicts that the next wave of research in this field will move towards examining the role of technology and digital platforms in Islamic trust and justice (E-Trust), which is still faint in current data.

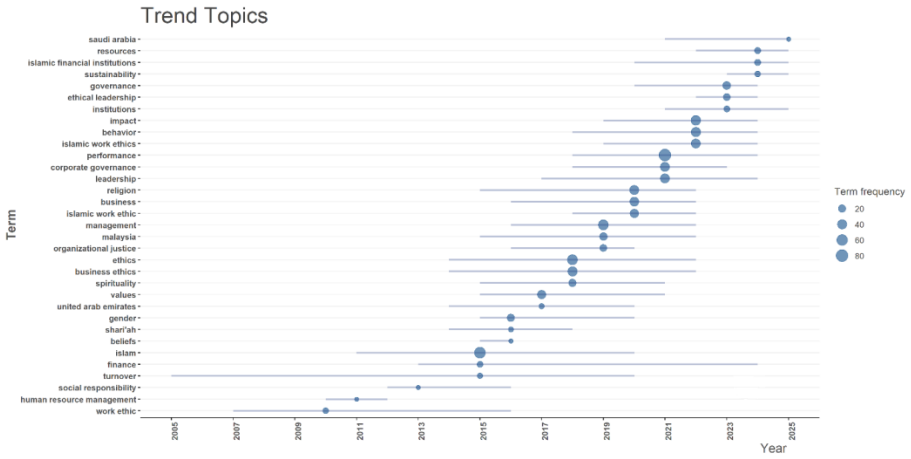

Figure 7. Trend Topics

4-7. Analysis of Seminal and High-Impact Documents

Identifying the Most Global Cited Documents provides a basis for understanding the intellectual roots and fundamental theories of the "Islamic Management and Trust" field. Citation analysis of the top 10 papers shows that this field rests on the shoulders of several influential works.

As seen in Figure 8, papers published in the early years (specifically 1999-2015) have received the highest volume of citations, indicating the consolidation of their status as "Reference Works." The content of these

seminal papers has largely focused on the "Conceptualization of Islamic Work Ethic (IWE)" and the "Development of Measurement Scales." In other words, these papers provided a theoretical foundation and measurement tools that subsequent research (the red and green clusters mentioned earlier) used to measure performance and justice.

The high citation rate of these works in recent years indicates that, despite the passage of more than a decade, the paradigms proposed in them remain valid, and new researchers are compelled to reference these focal works to legitimize their models.

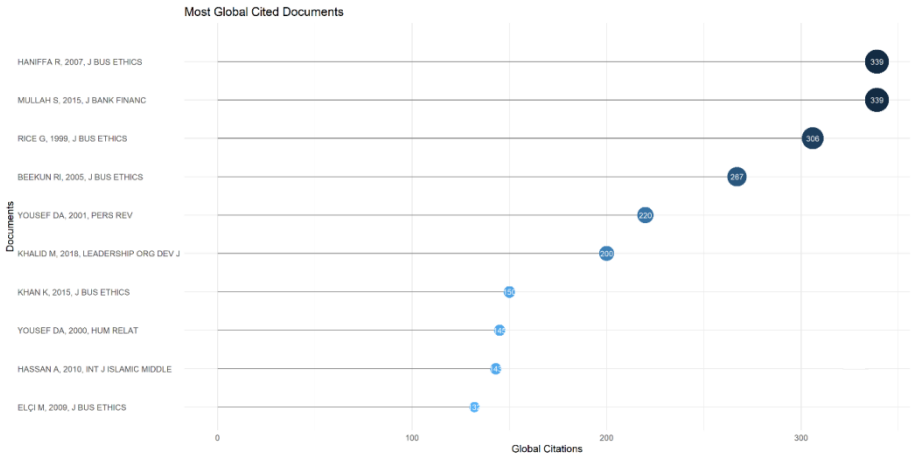

Figure 8. Most globally cited documents

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This research, aimed at analyzing the intellectual structure and tracing the evolutionary trajectory of the concepts of trust and justice in the Islamic management field, subjected 444 research documents indexed in reputable citation databases (Scopus and WoS) to bibliometric analysis. The findings of this study reveal a narrative of "Maturation" in the literature of this field. The most significant finding of the present research is the paradigmatic transition of literature from "abstract normativism" to "empirical functionalism." While studies in the first decade (1999-2010) mainly focused on theological explanations and proving the compatibility of Islam with modern management principles, the exponential jump in the number of articles after 2015 and the growing importance of concepts like "Performance" in the eyes of researchers show that the main concern of contemporary researchers in this field is measuring the "efficiency and effectiveness" of Islamic models in real business environments.

4-1. Findings Interpretation

The keyword co-occurrence analysis showed that the keyword "Performance" with 82 occurrences stands at the head of the semantic network, establishing thick links with "Leadership" and "Job Satisfaction." This finding may carry the message that Islamic management in contemporary literature is no longer merely an ideological or identity-seeking debate but has been redefined as a strategic tool for enhancing organizational productivity. Contrary to previous critiques accusing Islamic management literature of generalization, our results show that current research is precisely focused on outcome variables. This shift in approach indicates that researchers are attempting to prove the competitive advantage of the Islamic Work Ethic (IWE) using quantitative and robust evidence.

One of the deep insights of this research is the discovery of the structure of relationships between clusters. Scientific maps showed that the relationship between "Fundamental Islamic Values" (Blue Cluster) and "Organizational Performance" (Red Cluster) is not a direct and linear relationship; rather, this relationship passes through the channel of "Organizational Mechanisms" (Green Cluster: Justice and Trust). This finding confirms Social Exchange Theory (SET) in a spiritual context. In other words, Islamic values only lead to excellent performance when employees observe their objective manifestation in the form of "Organizational Justice" (distributive and procedural) and "Mutual Trust." The emergence of "Organizational Justice" as one of the Trending Topics from 2019 to 2024 testifies to the claim that researchers have realized that "Amanah" and "Adl" are essential infrastructures for converting religious beliefs into organizational citizenship behaviors.

4-2. Theoretical Implications

This research contributes to theoretical development in two aspects. First, it shows that Islamic management models must move away from a one-dimensional approach (purely ethical) and develop multi-level and mediator-moderator models. Existing literature shows that the variable of "trust" plays a key role in converting "belief" into "behavior." Second, this study, by highlighting the role of mainstream journals such as the *Journal of Business Ethics*, shows that indigenous and religious concepts have managed to break out of the confines of regional studies and engage in dialogue with global management literature. This strengthens the

scientific legitimacy of the Islamic paradigm as an alternative theory to Western secular models.

4-3. Managerial Implications

The results of this research contain the message that injecting religious slogans without implementing justice-centered structures is futile. Managers must know that Organizational Trust (Amanah) is not a mandatory construct but the output of employees' perception of justice. Our findings show that to enhance performance, focusing on procedural justice (transparency in decision-making) and meritocracy is much more effective than merely emphasizing doctrinal training. Organizations that want to benefit from the potential of Islamic Work Ethic must first treat "distrust" with the tool of "Justice."

4-4. Limitations and Future Research Agenda

Although this research tried to provide a comprehensive view, it also has limitations. The analysis focused solely on English-language articles indexed in Scopus and WoS, and rich articles in native languages (Arabic, Persian, Malay) may have been overlooked. Based on the analysis of gaps in the strategic map, three paths are suggested for future researchers:

- **Entering the Digital Age:** Given the relative absence of technological concepts in the main clusters, future research should examine the concept of "Digital Trust" (E-Trust) and the ethical challenges of Artificial Intelligence from an Islamic perspective.
- **Cross-Cultural Comparative Studies:** Most studies have been concentrated in Southeast Asia (Malaysia) and Pakistan. Conducting comparative research between Islamic and Western countries can help better understand the universality of these concepts.
- **Examining the Dark Side:** Current literature is largely optimistic. Examining challenges and potential abuses of religious concepts to justify injustice (hypocritical management) could open a new window for researchers.

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Identifying Factors Influencing the Dignity and Honor of Veterans

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Abstract

Purpose: The dignity and honor of veterans in the Islamic Republic of Iran is more than a professional or welfare priority; it is a fundamental pillar of social capital and national authority. Recent developments, including the 12-Day War, the events of December 2025, and the Ramadan War, have transformed the parameters governing the "dignity system," increasing the necessity of redesigning existing frameworks. This study aims to identify the factors influencing the dignity and honor of veterans and to provide a systemic framework for their enhancement.

Methodology: This research was conducted using a qualitative approach and the Grounded Theory method. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 10 families of veterans, retired combatants, and managers of the Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs. The analysis process was performed in three stages: open, axial, and selective coding.

Findings: The study identified 15 key concepts and five strategic bottlenecks: dominance of the operational/executive approach, the gap between service and perception of service, structural rigidity, lack of a monitoring system for organizational behavior, and inter-institutional misalignment. Furthermore, three paradigmatic shifts in the new generation of veterans were identified: the transition from conventional (hard) warfare to cognitive-social warfare, the phenomenon of digital character assassination, and motivation under ambiguous conditions.

Originality/Value: The proposed framework emphasizes a transition from a purely supportive approach to a resilient systemic model based on smart services, media empowerment of families, and the redesign of the social narrative of dignity.

Keywords

Dignity and Honor of Veterans, Grounded Theory, Social Stigma, Systemic Resilience.

Introduction

The dignity and honor of veterans in the Islamic Republic of Iran, as one of the significant pillars of social capital and national authority, is considered a subject beyond a mere professional or cultural issue. Veterans and their families, as an influential group in the country's contemporary history, face challenges in various economic, social, cultural, and health dimensions that can affect their sense of social status and their perception of self-worth (Rajabi et al., 2020; Ahmadi & Yarmohammadian, 2019). At the international level, research has shown that the "meaning-making" of the war experience among veterans and combatants is a complex and dual process, such that this experience can simultaneously lead to a sense of loss, suffering, and vulnerability, while also providing a ground for emotional growth, deepening moral identity, and enhancing psychological resilience (Sendas et al., 2008; Valvano et al., 2013).

The importance of this issue becomes more prominent when considering that many veterans and combatants of long-term wars continue to face chronic problems such as poverty, livelihood limitations, social isolation, and inadequate access to medical services years after the end of conflicts (Ghamari-Tabrizi, n.d.). In Iran, despite the official discourse based on the veneration of veterans, field studies indicate a significant gap between supportive policies and the actual perception of veterans regarding the effectiveness of these policies (Shah-Nowrouzi et al., 2017; Safari, 2010; Yavand Abbasi, 2006). This gap can be analyzed within the framework of System Dynamics literature as a type of policy misalignment and the formation of negative reinforcing feedback loops, which can ultimately lead to the weakening of social trust and a decrease in the sense of status among veterans (Meadows & Wright, 2008).

The complexity of this issue has increased in recent years due to generational shifts and the transformation of war from a hardware-based arena to a cognitive and media-based one. The new generation of veterans (survivors of modern conflicts such as the 12-Day War[1], the security events of December 2025, and the Ramadan War), while being exposed to social polarizations and full-scale psychological warfare, possess different motivational patterns and expectations from supportive policies. However, it seems that most existing supportive laws are rooted in the traditional approaches of past decades and are not aligned with modern realities.

1. The 12-Day War was an armed conflict between Iran and Israel that lasted from June 13 to June 24, 2025. The conflict began with a series of surprise attacks by Israel on Iran on June 12, 2025.

Therefore, systematically identifying the factors influencing the dignity and honor of veterans and analyzing the relationships between them is a necessary step to move beyond the status quo and provide more effective policies.

Accordingly, the present study seeks to answer two fundamental questions:

What are the factors influencing the dignity and honor of veterans?

What are the relationships and prioritizations among these factors?

Furthermore, the goal of this research is to identify, analyze, and prioritize the factors influencing the dignity and honor of veterans through a systemic approach, and to provide a coherent picture of the relationships between these factors to assist in improving supportive policymaking in this field.

1. Theoretical Foundations and Literature Review

In Persian literature, honor (ʿezzat) is defined as a sense of inviolability, dignity, and self-respect (Dehkhoda, 1998). In psychological approaches, self-esteem is understood as an individual's evaluation of their own worth and plays a key role in mental health, resilience, and intrinsic motivation (Rosenberg, 1965; Orth & Robins, 2014). Studies have demonstrated that reduced self-esteem among veterans is associated with increased symptoms of depression, anxiety, and social shame (Valvano et al., 2013). Conversely, individuals with higher levels of self-esteem tend to exhibit greater adaptability when faced with psychological pressures and life challenges (Baumeister et al., 2003).

In contrast, dignity represents a broader concept than self-esteem, referring to the intrinsic value of human beings and the moral necessity of treating them with respect (Kant, 1785; Nussbaum, 2011). From a sociological viewpoint, dignity is not merely an individual attribute but is shaped and reproduced within the context of social relations and structures of power (Honneth, 1995; Sayer, 2011). Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, human dignity stems from the concept of humanity's divine vicegerency and the infusion of the divine spirit into human existence (Mesbah Yazdi, 2009). Accordingly, the dignity of veterans—beyond the inherent worth accorded to all human beings—derives from their role, sacrifice, and selflessness in defending societal values (Shah-Nowrouzi et al., 2017).

Under the legal framework of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the term veteran (Isargar) refers to individuals who, during the Iran–Iraq War, within the Resistance Front, or in security and law-enforcement arenas, have risked their lives and property in defense of state values (Foundation of Martyrs

and Veterans Affairs, 2020). This definition includes combatants, disabled veterans, former prisoners of war, and families of martyrs—each having borne significant burdens of sacrifice (Ahmadi & Yarmohammadian, 2019).

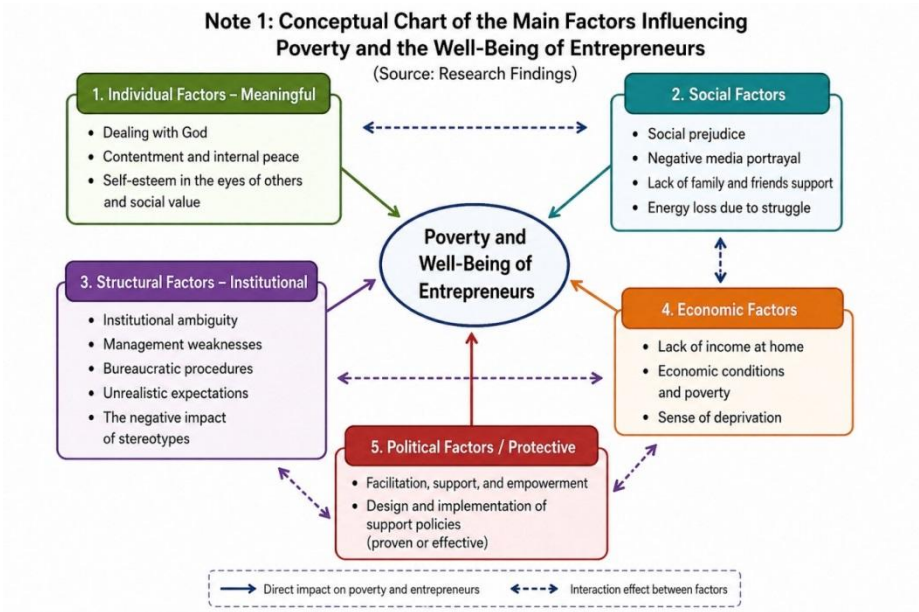

Figure 1. Initial Conceptual Framework of Factors Influencing the Dignity and Honor of Veterans

Explanation of Figure 1: The research framework proposes that the dignity and honor of veterans are influenced by five interrelated categories of factors—individual-spiritual, social, structural, economic, and policy-related—which dynamically interact and exert mutual influence on one another.

1-1. Literature Review

Numerous studies have examined diverse aspects of the lives of veterans and their families. At the international level, it has been established that low self-esteem constitutes a major risk factor for the persistence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms among veterans, underscoring the need to address dignity and self-worth alongside pharmacological interventions (Drapalski et al., 2008). Another study on veterans with spinal cord injuries found that the process of meaning-making in relation to war experiences plays a decisive role in psychological adjustment: veterans who were able to derive positive meaning from their

suffering reported fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety (Valvano et al., 2013). Furthermore, a qualitative study of Iranian veterans after the Iran–Iraq War revealed that, despite their symbolic status in official discourse, they continue to face practical challenges such as poverty, marginalization, and inadequate healthcare (Ghamari-Tabrizi, n.d.).

In Iran, several studies have also explored these issues. Research on the effectiveness of resilience training for veterans' spouses demonstrated significant improvements in both mental health and quality of life following such interventions (Ahmadi & Yarmohammadian, 2019). Another qualitative study investigated the challenges faced by the families of martyrs and veterans, identifying economic pressure, communication difficulties, and inadequate support services as principal obstacles (Rajabi et al., 2020). Likewise, studies analyzing the factors influencing the promotion of the culture of sacrifice and martyrdom emphasized the vital roles played by mass media, the educational system, and the family (Shah-Nowrouzi et al., 2017).

Despite these scholarly contributions, a comprehensive review of the existing literature reveals that most research has centered primarily on clinical dimensions—such as mental health and resilience—or on social welfare issues, including economic hardship and livelihood concerns. Significantly fewer studies have systematically identified the factors affecting the dignity and honor of veterans from their own perspectives. In other words, the major gap lies in the absence of systematic identification and prioritization of such factors based directly on the viewpoints of the target community, as well as the lack of clarity regarding the interrelationships among them.

The present study seeks to bridge this gap by employing the Grounded Theory approach and emphasizing veterans' self-perceptions as the central source of conceptual insight.

2. Materials & Methods

2-1. Research Approach and Strategy

The present study was conducted with the aim of identifying the factors influencing the dignity and honor of veterans using a qualitative research approach. Given the exploratory nature of the research problem and the need to obtain a deep understanding of the phenomenon under investigation from the veterans' own perspectives, the Grounded Theory strategy was selected as the primary research method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This method enables researchers to develop an original theory or

conceptual framework directly from field data without imposing prior assumptions (Danaeefard & Emami, 2007).

Among the various approaches to grounded theory, the systematic approach proposed by Strauss and Corbin—based on three stages of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding—was adopted as the methodological foundation of this study (Mehrabi et al., 2011). The application of grounded theory in research related to veterans and war-injured populations also has precedent. For example, a grounded theory approach was employed in designing a decision-making model based on Islamic principles (Razini & Azizi, 2015). Moreover, a qualitative study on the condition of Iranian veterans adopted an approach closely aligned with grounded theory (Ghamari-Tabrizi, n.d.).

2-2. Study Population and Sampling

The study population consisted of veterans (combatants, disabled veterans, and former prisoners of war), families of martyrs, as well as senior managers and experts from the Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs. Considering the qualitative nature of the study and the grounded theory approach, purposeful (theoretical) sampling was employed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this method, participants are selected not randomly but based on theoretical criteria and their capacity to enrich the data and contribute to the emerging theory (Mehrabi et al., 2011).

The inclusion criteria for veterans and their families included direct experience of veteran status (combatant, disabled veteran, or former prisoner of war) or having lived for at least ten years within a veteran's family (spouse or child of a martyr or disabled veteran), as well as willingness to participate actively in the interview process and in validating the findings. For managers at the Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs, the inclusion criteria consisted of at least ten years of managerial or executive experience in the Foundation and consent to audio recording and transcription of the interview.

The average age of participants was 50 years, and all possessed university-level education (at least a master's degree) along with significant managerial or executive experience. Snowball sampling was also used to complete the participant pool and to facilitate access to individuals who were not readily reachable (Danaeefard & Emami, 2007). The interviews were conducted across diverse geographic areas and varying socioeconomic conditions in order to ensure adequate heterogeneity in the data. In total, 10 in-depth interviews were conducted with families of veterans and senior combatants. The sampling process continued until theoretical saturation was

achieved—the point at which additional interviews no longer produced new insights or altered the relationships among the emerging categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Danaeefard & Emami, 2007). In addition to individual interviews, a series of expert panel meetings was also held with mid-level and senior managers of the Foundation.

2-3. Data Collection Instruments and Interview Procedure

The primary data collection instrument in this study was a semi-structured interview protocol developed under the title "Elite Interview Guidebook." This protocol comprised 12 strategic inquiry axes designed to move beyond surface-level responses and explore deeper causal layers in order to extract the key variables shaping the dignity and honor of veterans (Razini & Azizi, 2015). Before initiating the interviews, a series of internal training sessions was conducted for members of the research team. These sessions introduced techniques of exploratory interviewing and methods for accessing latent cognitive layers, ensuring procedural consistency within the team and enhancing the convergence of interview outputs.

To facilitate access to the target population and to build trust with participants, official letters of introduction were issued by Imam Sadiq University for each core team member. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format while adhering to ethical research principles, including informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any stage. Each participant took part in at least three separate sessions: the first session involved a preliminary discussion on the concepts of sacrifice and dignity as well as clarification of the research objectives; the second session constituted the main interview, which served as the foundation of the inquiry and lasted on average approximately 100 minutes; and the third session was a feedback meeting during which the outputs of the previous sessions were shared with the participant and corrective suggestions were incorporated.

All interviews were recorded with the participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim. The transcribed texts were then reviewed and confirmed by the participants (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

2-4. Data Analysis Method

The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using the Grounded Theory method based on the systematic approach of Strauss and Corbin (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and inspired by the study of Razini and Azizi (Razini & Azizi, 2015). The analytical process involved three successive stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In the open coding

stage, meaningful and significant statements from the participants were examined line by line and transformed into conceptual codes, resulting in the extraction of 15 key concepts from the 10 in-depth interviews. In the axial coding stage, the extracted concepts were organized and categorized into broader semantic groupings and analytical categories to identify relationships among them (Danaeefard & Emami, 2007). In the selective coding stage, the core categories were integrated around a central concept, leading to the formation of the four main dimensions of the research: influencing factors, contextual variables, inhibiting factors, and consequences (Razini & Azizi, 2015).

To ensure the validity of the research, the findings were shared with participants and their corrective feedback was incorporated into the analysis. In addition, focus group sessions were conducted with the authors and several interviewees to further develop the components derived from the extracted concepts. To enhance reliability, the coding process was conducted by two independent coders, and the level of agreement between them was assessed and found to be within an acceptable range (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

3. Research Findings

This section presents the results of the Grounded Theory analysis, structured to illustrate the factors and mechanisms influencing the dignity of veterans. The findings begin with the identification of key concepts, followed by their categorization into a systemic paradigm model. Furthermore, this section highlights critical strategic bottlenecks identified by experts and explores the evolving paradigmatic shifts within the new generation of veterans.

3-1. Key Concepts Extracted from the Interviews

Analysis of the interview data using the Grounded Theory approach—through the stages of open, axial, and selective coding—led to the identification of fifteen key concepts that shape the dignity and honor of veterans. These concepts represent the most recurrent themes in participants' narratives and reflect the complex interaction between individual beliefs, institutional structures, and broader socio-cultural conditions.

Among the most prominent concepts identified in the interviews were covenant with God, which participants described as a central spiritual source of resilience in coping with economic and social pressures, and contentment and avoidance of egoism, which moderates expectations regarding material benefits provided by institutional systems. Participants also referred to the reverse effect of quotas, suggesting that quota-based policies—such as

university admission quotas—may at times diminish perceived social self-esteem rather than enhance dignity.

Other concepts emerging from the interviews include social labeling, referring to negative public perceptions toward veterans due to the benefits they receive, and structural discrimination, which participants described as perceived inequalities in the distribution of services among combatants. Respondents also emphasized weak media representation, noting that veterans are often portrayed in films and television as dependent or suffering individuals rather than as active contributors to society. Closely related to this issue is historical amnesia, a concern regarding the gradual fading of the culture and philosophy of sacrifice among younger generations.

In addition, several concepts reflected pressures emerging from the immediate social environment of veterans. These included family and social pressure, referring to unrealistic expectations from relatives and social networks that undermine psychological well-being, and the managerial gap, which participants described as a lack of familiarity among officials of the Veterans Foundation with veterans' lived realities and everyday challenges. Administrative issues also appeared prominently, particularly exhausting bureaucracy, referring to the lengthy procedures involved in verifying veteran status and accessing medical services.

Economic conditions also influenced perceptions of dignity. Participants highlighted the priority of livelihood over dignity, indicating that during periods of economic hardship, basic financial needs often overshadow symbolic or value-based concerns. Another related concept was divine versus worldly valuation, reflecting the tension between expectations of spiritual reward and the practical demands of everyday life.

Finally, several concepts pointed to institutional and post-war challenges. These included empowering facilities, referring to veterans' preference for empowerment-oriented services rather than charity-based assistance; post-war isolation, which captures the sense of marginalization experienced during peacetime; and implementation oversight, indicating that the main challenge lies not in the design of policies but in the lack of effective supervision over their implementation.

Together, these fifteen concepts form the empirical basis for the analytical model presented in the following sections.

3-2. Categorization of Concepts within the Four Dimensions

To better understand the relationships among the extracted concepts, they were categorized into four analytical dimensions derived from the grounded

theory paradigm model: influencing factors, contextual variables, inhibiting factors, and consequences. Tables 1 to 4 present the classification of the initial codes into subthemes and broader thematic categories.

Table 1. Initial Codes, Subthemes, and Main Theme (Influencing Factors)

Initial Codes	Subthemes	Main Theme
Covenant with God; Contentment and avoidance of egoism; Divine versus worldly valuation	Spiritual beliefs and resilience	Spiritual–Individual Factors
Empowering facilities; Implementation oversight	Quality of support services	Structural–Executive Support Factors

As shown in Table 1, the primary drivers influencing veterans' dignity consist of two interrelated domains: spiritual–individual factors rooted in religious beliefs and personal values, and structural–executive factors related to the quality and effectiveness of institutional support systems.

Table 2. Initial Codes, Subthemes, and Main Theme (Contextual Variables)

Initial Codes	Subthemes	Main Theme
Historical amnesia	Generational and temporal transformations	Generational–Historical Context
Weak media representation; Social labeling	Media environment and public opinion	Media–Social Context
Priority of livelihood over dignity; Structural discrimination	Economic conditions and resource distribution	Economic–Structural Context

These contextual conditions highlight the broader socio-economic and cultural environment influencing veterans' social status. Media narratives, generational changes, and economic pressures collectively shape public perceptions and the lived experiences of veterans.

Table 3. Initial Codes, Subthemes, and Main Theme (Inhibiting Factors)

Initial Codes	Subthemes	Main Theme
Reverse effect of quotas; Social labeling	Inadequate design of support policies	Policy Barriers
Managerial gap; Exhausting bureaucracy	Weakness in executive and managerial structures	Executive–Structural Barriers
Family and social pressure	Unrealistic expectations from veterans	Social–Familial Barriers

These barriers demonstrate that policy design flaws, administrative inefficiencies, and social expectations can undermine the positive effects of existing support systems.

Finally, Table 4 presents the consequences emerging from the interaction of these factors.

Table 4. Initial Codes, Subthemes, and Main Theme (Consequences)

Initial Codes	Subthemes	Main Theme
Covenant with God; Contentment and avoidance of egoism	Individual resilience under pressure	Individual Consequences
Post-war isolation	Social exclusion and decline in social dignity	Social Consequences
Reverse effect of quotas; Priority of livelihood over dignity	Erosion of dignity due to flawed policies	Policy Consequences

The consequences of these factors manifest across multiple levels, ranging from individual psychological resilience to broader social and policy outcomes that affect the collective status of veterans. To synthesize these dimensions into a unified structure, Figure 2 presents the resulting paradigm model, which illustrates the dynamic interaction between influencing factors, contextual variables, and inhibiting factors.

Within this systemic framework, influencing factors serve as the primary drivers of the model, while contextual variables define the overarching environment in which dignity is experienced. Inhibiting factors act as barriers that restrict the realization of honor, leading to consequences that emerge at the individual, social, and policy levels. These elements interact in a mutually reinforcing manner to constitute the overall structure of the grounded theory model, reflecting the complex reality of veterans' status in the contemporary era (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

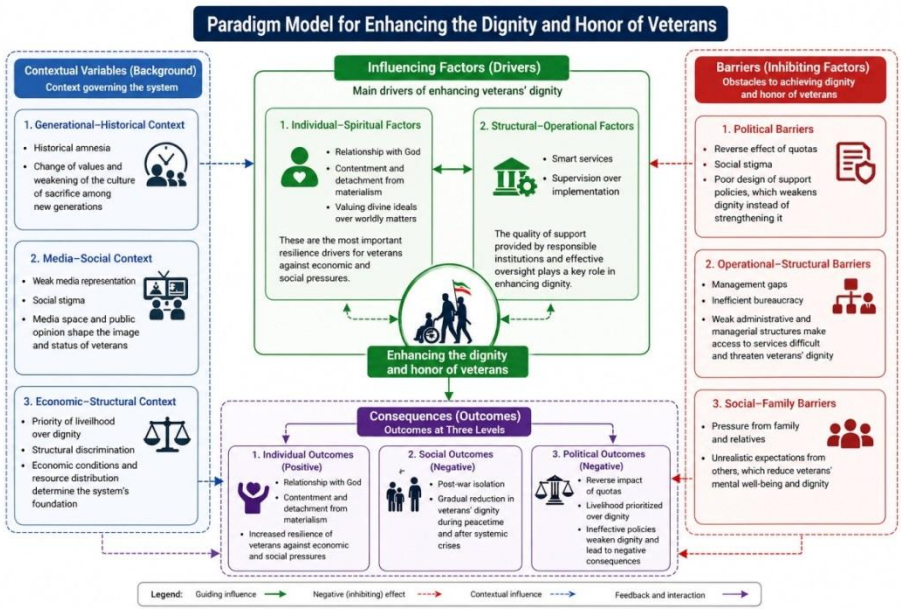

Figure 2. Paradigm Model of Factors Influencing the Dignity and Honor of Veterans

3-3. Five Strategic Bottlenecks

In addition to the conceptual model derived from the interviews, expert panel discussions with middle- and senior-level managers of the Veterans Foundation revealed five strategic bottlenecks that hinder the effective realization of veterans' dignity.

The first bottleneck is the dominance of a custodial approach over a strategic approach. According to experts, the Foundation has gradually become absorbed in routine livelihood issues and payment bureaucracy, which diverts attention from its broader cultural mission of promoting dignity. As a result, veterans are often treated primarily as administrative beneficiaries rather than as national symbols of sacrifice.

The second bottleneck concerns the gap between service delivery and service perception. Although various services are provided to veterans, weak media engagement and insufficient cultural communication have led segments of the public to interpret these services as forms of discrimination. Policymaking has therefore insufficiently accounted for feedback from the broader social environment.

The third barrier is structural rigidity and outdated regulations. Many existing rules were designed decades ago and are poorly aligned with the needs of the new generation of veterans or with current economic conditions.

The fourth bottleneck is the absence of systematic monitoring of organizational behavior. Even well-designed financial benefits may lose their positive impact when veterans encounter disrespectful treatment or bureaucratic indifference within administrative offices.

The fifth bottleneck relates to inter-agency misalignment. The relative isolation of the Veterans Foundation from other governmental and social institutions limits opportunities for effective collaboration and synergy and sometimes results in parallel policies that inadvertently harm the social image of veterans.

Taken together, these five bottlenecks represent the underlying structural roots of many inefficiencies in the current system. Addressing them is therefore essential for any meaningful policy intervention aimed at strengthening veterans' dignity and social status (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

3-4. Paradigmatic Shifts in the New Generation

The findings also reveal important generational changes in the experience of dignity among veterans. Specialized interviews with veterans and the families of martyrs from the 12-Day War and the events of December 2025 suggest the emergence of three paradigmatic shifts affecting the formation of dignity in the new generation.

The first shift involves a transition from hard warfare to cognitive–social warfare. Unlike veterans of the Sacred Defense, who operated within a relatively unified social environment, the new generation faces conditions characterized by social polarization and intense virtual debate. Consequently, their perceived self-esteem depends less on formal governmental recognition and more on societal attitudes and environmental pressures.

The second shift concerns the phenomenon of digital character assassination. Participants described the growing impact of organized criticism and labeling on social media platforms, which has introduced a new variable referred to as psychological and status security in cyberspace. In this context, families of recent martyrs often experience distress not primarily due to economic hardship but because of negative campaigns and stigmatization in digital environments.

The third transformation relates to changes in motivation patterns under ambiguous conditions. Whereas the first generation of veterans largely acted based on collective duty and ideological commitment, the new generation

often enters the field through individual awareness and conscious personal choice. As a result, traditional motivational mechanisms are less effective, and policies must increasingly focus on identity-building incentives tailored to the experiences and expectations of this generation.

Taken together, these shifts indicate that traditional frameworks for promoting veterans' dignity may no longer adequately address the realities faced by the new generation. A transition toward a revised strategic framework for managing and enhancing their social status, therefore, appears necessary.

4. Discussion & Conclusion

The primary objective of this study was to identify the factors influencing the dignity and honor of veterans within contemporary society. The findings demonstrate that veterans' dignity is neither a purely individual phenomenon nor solely the result of institutional support; rather, it emerges from the dynamic interaction of individual–spiritual, social, and structural–managerial factors. These dimensions jointly contribute to both the preservation and erosion of veterans' self-esteem and perceived social worth.

At the individual and attitudinal level, concepts such as bargaining with God, contentment and avoidance of ego, divine versus worldly valuation, and the preference for smart and empowering facilities—as opposed to charity-based services—were identified as key internal sources of dignity and resilience. These findings suggest that dignity is deeply rooted in meaning-making processes through which veterans interpret their sacrifices and life conditions. In particular, bargaining with God functions as a psychological and spiritual mechanism that enables veterans to endure economic hardship and social pressure without experiencing a collapse of self-esteem.

This interpretation is consistent with the Qur'anic perspective, which conceptualizes dignity as fundamentally linked to divine approval rather than material status. The verse "All dignity belongs to God" emphasizes that human honor derives from faith, righteous action, and moral integrity, while material resources merely function as secondary instruments (Mohammadalinezhad Omran & Kamalvand, 2016). Within this framework, contentment operates as a moderating variable that recalibrates expectations toward institutional support and prevents self-worth from becoming exclusively dependent on economic indicators. This finding aligns with Valvano et al. (2013), who demonstrated that meaning-making processes play a decisive role in the psychological adjustment of veterans. When

suffering and loss are integrated into a coherent horizon of meaning, dignity and resilience are more likely to be sustained.

The tension between divine valuation and worldly valuation further reinforces this interpretation. William James (2006) argued that religious faith generates an extraordinary inner force that enhances individuals' capacity to cope with life's hardships. Empirical studies have similarly shown that religiosity—through meaning, hope, belonging, and spiritual support—reduces vulnerability to stress and enhances self-esteem (Habibvand, 2008; Javanbakht et al., 2010; Rahimi, 2001). From this perspective, veterans' preference for empowering rather than charity-based facilities reflects a desire for recognition and respect consistent with the self-image of a morally valued and dignified individual. Charity-oriented support, by contrast, risks reinforcing dependency and undermining dignity.

At the social level, the findings highlight social labeling and weak media portrayal as major sources of diminished social dignity. Negative societal perceptions regarding veterans' access to benefits, combined with media narratives that depict them primarily as passive victims or objects of pity, conflict with veterans' lived identities as capable and socially engaged individuals. These findings strongly resonate with Honneth's (1995) Theory of Recognition, which conceptualizes dignity as dependent on social acknowledgment at emotional, legal, and social levels. When veterans are denied recognition as competent and morally worthy subjects, dignity is undermined both normatively and emotionally.

Family and social networks further shape this process in ambivalent ways. While supportive family relationships can foster psychological security and self-expression (Mohammadi, 2004), unrealistic expectations or instrumental views of quotas and privileges may generate pressure and erode self-esteem. Additionally, post-war isolation reflects broader dynamics of social exclusion that are well explained by Sociometer Theory. According to Leary and Baumeister (2000), self-esteem functions as an internal gauge of social acceptance, and experiences of rejection—whether through neglect, exclusion, or ostracism—lead to a decline in self-worth (Leary et al., 1995; Williams, 2007). The veterans' narratives in this study provide empirical support for this theoretical linkage.

At the structural and managerial level, the findings identify counterproductive quota effects, management gaps, and exhausting bureaucracy as the most significant institutional barriers to dignity. From the perspective of Social Identity Theory, quota-based mechanisms intended to compensate veterans may paradoxically reinforce stigmatizing labels that

signal incapacity rather than merit. Instead of enhancing self-esteem, such policies may therefore contribute to social devaluation.

The management gap reflects a disconnect between policymakers and veterans' lived realities. When decision-makers lack experiential understanding of veterans' everyday struggles, policies are more likely to be misaligned with actual needs. Furthermore, exhausting bureaucratic procedures for verifying veteran status or accessing medical services, combined with economic pressures that prioritize livelihood over dignity, reinforce a perception of institutional indifference. These findings are consistent with Ghamari-Tabrizi's (n.d.) analysis, which highlights poverty, marginalization, and inadequate care as persistent post-war challenges for Iranian veterans.

A central insight of this study is the discrepancy between official discourse and lived experience. Although veterans are frequently portrayed in official rhetoric as possessing the highest levels of dignity and moral status, everyday encounters with bureaucracy, social labeling, and economic hardship convey a contradictory message. Drawing on Honneth's (1995) framework, this gap can be interpreted as a form of institutional disrespect, whereby normative promises remain unfulfilled in practice, gradually eroding veterans' sense of honor and recognition.

Based on these findings, several policy implications emerge. First, quota- and support-based mechanisms should be redesigned. Rather than relying solely on traditional numerical quota systems, future initiatives may benefit from more flexible approaches—such as invisible supportive credits—that better align support with veterans' individualized needs while avoiding stigmatizing labels. Second, governments and relevant media stakeholders should develop media empowerment initiatives for veterans' families. Through media literacy training and the creation of virtual activism networks, families may strengthen their social positioning and create structured spaces for mutual support. Third, the administrative processes of the Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs require reengineering. Greater decentralization, process smartification, and stronger oversight of organizational behavior may help ensure that veterans' dignity is respected across all levels of service delivery.

Future research should also expand upon the present findings. One important direction is the design and validation of a comprehensive measurement scale for veterans' dignity, incorporating the fifteen dignity-related concepts identified in this study. Additionally, intergenerational comparative research could examine how motivational

patterns and dignity-related expectations vary across different cohorts of veterans. Another promising line of inquiry concerns the psychosocial consequences of the visibility trap, particularly by comparing the effects of visibility-based policies with invisible or traditional support mechanisms in shaping veterans' perceptions of dignity.

Despite its contributions, the study is subject to several limitations. The research was conducted primarily in Tehran, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future studies employing mixed methods across multiple provinces could strengthen the external validity of the model. Moreover, greater attention should be given to veterans living in deprived or remote areas, whose experiences may differ significantly from those represented in this study. Developing targeted strategies for identifying and supporting these groups—particularly among martyrs' families, liberated prisoners, and disabled veterans—could improve the effectiveness of dignity-enhancement policies.

Using a grounded theory approach, this study ultimately demonstrates that veterans' dignity and honor emerge from complex interactions among individual spiritual resources, social recognition processes, and structural–organizational conditions. Fifteen core concepts were identified and organized into four principal dimensions: influencing factors, contextual variables, inhibiting factors, and consequences. The analysis further revealed five strategic bottlenecks in the current system, including the dominance of a custodianship approach rather than empowerment, a perceptual gap between service provision and veterans' perceptions of those services, the structural rigidity of administrative processes, insufficient supervision of organizational behavior, and interinstitutional inconsistencies. Moreover, three paradigm shifts among the new generation of veterans indicate that traditional dignity-enhancement frameworks may no longer adequately respond to evolving expectations.

Overall, the results highlight the need to move beyond a purely supportive model toward a systemic resilient model that integrates empowerment, recognition, and institutional responsiveness. Achieving this transformation requires a comprehensive reorientation in policymaking, management practices, and future research agendas so that the symbolic recognition of veterans is meaningfully translated into lived dignity within society.

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحیم
وصلی الله علی محمد و آله الطاهرین

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دین، مدیریت و حکمرانی

دوفصلنامه علمی «دین، مدیریت و حکمرانی»
سال ٤، شماره ۲ (پیاپی ۸)، زمستان ۱٤۰٤ و بهار ۱٤۰۵
صاحب امتیاز: دانشگاه امام صادقعلیه‌السلام

مدیرمسئول: اسدالله گنجعلی دانشیار (تخصص: مدیریت منابع انسانی) دانشگاه امام صادق علیه‌السلام
سردبیر: میثم لطیفی دانشیار (تخصص: مدیریت منابع انسانی) دانشگاه امام صادق علیه‌السلام
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