



The Role of Social Capital in the Sustainability of Rural Entrepreneurship (Case Study: The Eastern Margin of Zayandeh River, Isfahan)

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Abstract

Purpose- This research examines the impact of social factors on the sustainability and success of rural entrepreneurship in the eastern border of Zayandeh River, Isfahan, Iran.

Design/methodology/approach- Using a qualitative grounded theory approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 40 key stakeholders, including rural entrepreneurs, local managers, agricultural jihad managers and experts, entrepreneurship experts, and rural development specialists. MAXQDA software was used for data analysis.

Findings- The findings of this research show that trust, support, social participation and teamwork are very important for the success and sustainability of rural entrepreneurship. Mutual trust between entrepreneurs and communities, active participation in economic initiatives and joint efforts, increases innovation, productivity and adaptability in rural businesses. In addition, cultural norms and local power dynamics significantly influence entrepreneurial behaviors.

Practical implications- Policymakers should prioritize strengthening local financial institutions, fostering entrepreneurial culture, and adopting participatory methods for designing and implementing entrepreneurship programs. These measures can help to increase the economic capabilities of rural communities. Creating equal opportunities for all members of society and rebuilding trust between rural communities and government institutions is necessary and mandatory. This trust can lead to improved collaborations and effective partnerships. Also, strategies to remove the cultural barriers of entrepreneurship are also necessary to create a suitable environment for innovation and growth and to encourage more people to engage in entrepreneurial activities.

Originality/value- This study contributes to the existing literature by providing an integrated conceptual model of social factors affecting the sustainability of rural entrepreneurship. It enhances understanding of the social dynamics that shape entrepreneurial ecosystems in rural areas, particularly areas facing environmental and economic challenges. The obtained insights can provide effective policies and interventions aimed at promoting sustainable rural entrepreneurship in similar contexts.

Keywords- Social capital, Rural entrepreneurship, Social participation, Social support, Teamwork.

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, rural entrepreneurship has gained attention as an effective approach for sustainable development and economic growth in rural areas (Korsgaard et al., 2015). This approach not only contributes to job creation and poverty reduction but also leads to the empowerment of local communities (Bao et al., 2022). However, the success and sustainability of rural entrepreneurship initiatives are influenced by various social, economic, and environmental factors (Yang et al., 2022). Among these factors, social capital, social support, and local networks have increasingly been recognized as key elements in determining the long-term success of entrepreneurial activities (Zhao & Li, 2021). This research aims to examine the impact of social factors on the sustainability of rural entrepreneurship in the eastern margin of Zayandeh-Rud in Isfahan. Due to environmental and economic challenges caused by water scarcity, this region presents an interesting case study for examining the dynamics of rural entrepreneurship. The role of social factors in rural entrepreneurship has been extensively studied in global literature. Studies show that high social capital can strengthen entrepreneurial networks and increase innovation and flexibility in rural businesses (Afzali et al., 2015).

Robert Putnam's social capital theory emphasizes the importance of trust and social connections in economic development (Prince, 2024). Woolcock (2001) also emphasizes the important role of social capital in promoting economic activities by fostering trust and cooperation between entrepreneurs and other community members. Ritchie and Brindley (2005) argue that a sense of belonging and trust in rural communities creates a conducive environment for entrepreneurial activities. Zhao and Li (2021) emphasize that social capital empowers rural entrepreneurs to access market information, secure financial support, and establish business partnerships. In Iran, Bagheri et al. (2018) have demonstrated that rural entrepreneurs benefit from strong social capital, as local trust and kinship ties facilitate access to resources and knowledge sharing. Despite extensive studies on the role of social factors in rural entrepreneurship, significant gaps exist in the

current literature that this research aims to address. Most previous studies have examined social factors separately, while there is a need for an integrated model that demonstrates the complex interaction between these factors (Fitzpatrick et al., 2023). Additionally, limited research has been conducted on the role of these factors in environmental crisis conditions such as drought (Yang et al., 2022) and the impact of cultural norms and local power structures on the sustainability of rural entrepreneurship (Amblard, 2021). Furthermore, there is limited understanding of how the role of social factors changes over time and across different stages of rural entrepreneurship development (Li et al., 2022).

This research, by presenting an integrated conceptual model that covers these gaps, will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of social factors in the sustainability of rural entrepreneurship, especially in challenging environmental and economic conditions. This research aims to present an integrated conceptual model of the role of social factors in the sustainability of rural entrepreneurship, particularly in challenging environmental conditions. The main objectives include: 1) identifying and analyzing key social factors affecting the sustainability of rural entrepreneurship, 2) examining the interaction of these factors with each other and with environmental and economic conditions, and 3) proposing strategies to strengthen these factors to improve the sustainability of rural entrepreneurship. This study contributes to the expansion of existing literature by combining various theoretical perspectives including social capital theory, community-based development, and team entrepreneurship. The theoretical implications of this research include providing a comprehensive framework for understanding the social dynamics of rural entrepreneurship, developing the concept of "social-entrepreneurial resilience" in the face of environmental crises, and offering new insights into the interaction between government policies, social factors, and the sustainability of rural entrepreneurship. These findings can provide a basis for developing new theories in the field of sustainable rural entrepreneurship in challenging conditions.

2. Research Theoretical Literature

Rural entrepreneurship plays a significant role in fostering sustainable economic development, particularly in developing countries. This type of entrepreneurship not only contributes to job creation and poverty reduction but also empowers local communities (Fernández Bellver et al., 2023). However, the sustainability of rural entrepreneurship is influenced by a multitude of factors, including social, economic, and environmental variables. Among these, social factors such as social support, social capital, and local networks are increasingly recognized as key elements in determining the long-term success of entrepreneurial activities (Bao et al., 2022;

Suguna et al., 2024). The role of these social factors in rural entrepreneurship has been extensively examined in the global literature, particularly in the areas of rural development, socioeconomic sustainability, and community well-being (Jannesari et al., 2022). Results from these studies indicate that high social capital can strengthen entrepreneurial networks and enhance innovation and resilience in rural businesses. Social capital refers to the existence of networks of relationships, trust, and norms that form within a community (Afzali et al., 2015; Lin et al., 2024). Robert Putnam's social capital theory emphasizes the importance of trust and social connections in economic development and suggests that communities with high levels of social capital are more successful in creating and sustaining innovative and social enterprises (Morrow & Scorgie-Porter, 2017). Woolcock (2001) also believes that social capital plays a significant role in promoting economic activities by fostering trust and cooperation between entrepreneurs and other community members. Similarly, Ritchie and Brindley (2005) argue that a sense of belonging and trust in rural communities fosters an environment conducive to entrepreneurial activities. This sense of belonging not only strengthens the entrepreneurial spirit but can also help reduce youth migration. In fact, it can be said that strong local networks, trust, social cohesion, access to resources, knowledge sharing, and participatory opportunities facilitate these factors, all contributing to the sustainability of rural entrepreneurship (Prince, 2024). In this regard, Zhao & Li (2021) emphasizes that social capital empowers rural entrepreneurs to access market

information, secure financial support, and establish business partnerships, thereby enhancing their resilience to economic fluctuations. Particularly in resource-constrained regions, strong social networks can provide the necessary support to overcome entry barriers and sustain investments. Bagheri et al. (2018) have demonstrated that rural entrepreneurs in Iran benefit from strong social capital, as local trust and kinship ties facilitate access to resources and knowledge sharing these social structures provide a framework that strengthens the long-term sustainability of entrepreneurial investments. The research of Salehi Kakhki et al. (2019) shows that social and cultural factors, such as traditional beliefs and distrust of government programs, can reduce participation and cooperation in rural communities, thus hindering entrepreneurial development. In addition to trust, community engagement emerges as another critical factor (Mehdi et al., 2018). Entrepreneurs who actively involve their local communities tend to experience higher levels of business sustainability. These interactions enable businesses to better understand local needs and consequently offer products and services that more closely align with community preferences (Korsgaard et al., 2015). This collaborative approach fosters a supportive environment that strengthens both economic and social resilience. Community engagement and social cohesion are vital for the sustainability of rural entrepreneurship. Rural entrepreneurs typically rely on the support of local communities to provide labor, resources, and customers (Fitzpatrick et al., 2023).

According to Peredo & Chrisman (2006), community-based entrepreneurship leverages local resources and is embedded in social structures that ensure shared benefits and local control. This is particularly impactful for rural businesses as it fosters local support and ensures businesses are responsive to community needs. Javan et al. (2011) studies reveal that, in the absence of strong financial and governmental support, participation and social networks assist rural entrepreneurs in accessing necessary resources such as capital, knowledge, and labor. This research highlights the critical importance of locality in communities facing environmental and economic challenges, such as those near the eastern edge of the Zayandeh Rud, where water scarcity has exacerbated rural problems. In addition, Farahani et al. (2014)

specifically investigated the factors influencing entrepreneurial growth in the rural areas of Abadan, Iran. These researchers emphasized the importance of local participation and community involvement in overcoming the lack of formal infrastructure and government support and demonstrated that in rural areas, community participation can be a suitable substitute for the absence of government support and contribute to entrepreneurial growth. Beyond trust, participation, and social support, teamwork and collective action have also been identified as key factors in the success of rural businesses and entrepreneurship in challenging environments (Zamzami, 2021). Team entrepreneurship theory emphasizes that entrepreneurial success is highly dependent on a team's ability to collaborate and complement each other's skills. In rural settings often characterized by limited financial, human, and infrastructural resources, teamwork can serve as a solution to overcome these constraints (Cardon et al., 2017). Collective action also holds a special place in Robert Putnam's social capital theory. This theory emphasizes the importance of individuals collaborating and participating in group activities to achieve common goals. In rural communities, collective action can enhance the flexibility and innovation of businesses and increase efficiency through task division and knowledge sharing among individuals (Claridge, 2018). Theories related to collective action and teamwork believe that forming entrepreneurial teams that combine different skills and expertise can lead to greater innovation and resilience in the face of challenges (Linhardt & Salas, 2023). Especially in rural communities with limited resources, entrepreneurial teams can benefit from diverse expertise and, by dividing tasks and utilizing social networks, increase the efficiency of their businesses (Wei et al., 2023). Additionally, Adam Smith's theory of the division of labor points to the

importance of specialization and division of labor in improving economic efficiency. This theory suggests that by dividing work among individuals, they can specialize in different areas and consequently experience greater productivity in production and businesses (Figart, 2004). This concept is particularly important in rural communities where human resources and expertise are limited. However, teamwork and collective action in rural areas face specific challenges. For instance, in areas with higher social trust, entrepreneurs and community members can achieve better results through greater cooperation and active participation (W. Li et al., 2022). Moreover, cultural challenges and misconceptions may hinder cooperation and collective action among rural communities (Amblard, 2021). However, by promoting a culture of cooperation and participation and providing appropriate training, these challenges can be mitigated and a foundation can be laid for the success of team-based businesses (Dominici et al., 2022). This is important because collective action and teamwork, due to their ability to enhance innovation and create social cohesion, are among the most important factors in the success of rural businesses (Steiner et al., 2023). Collaboration between entrepreneurs and community members can lead to the transfer of knowledge and experiences, the division of responsibilities, and consequently, increased self-confidence and psychological empowerment of individuals (Chenavaz et al., 2023). Literature reviews indicate that social factors, particularly trust, social capital, social participation, and teamwork, play a pivotal role in the success and sustainability of rural entrepreneurship. These factors, especially in regions facing environmental and economic challenges, can have a significant impact on improving economic and social conditions (Figure 1).

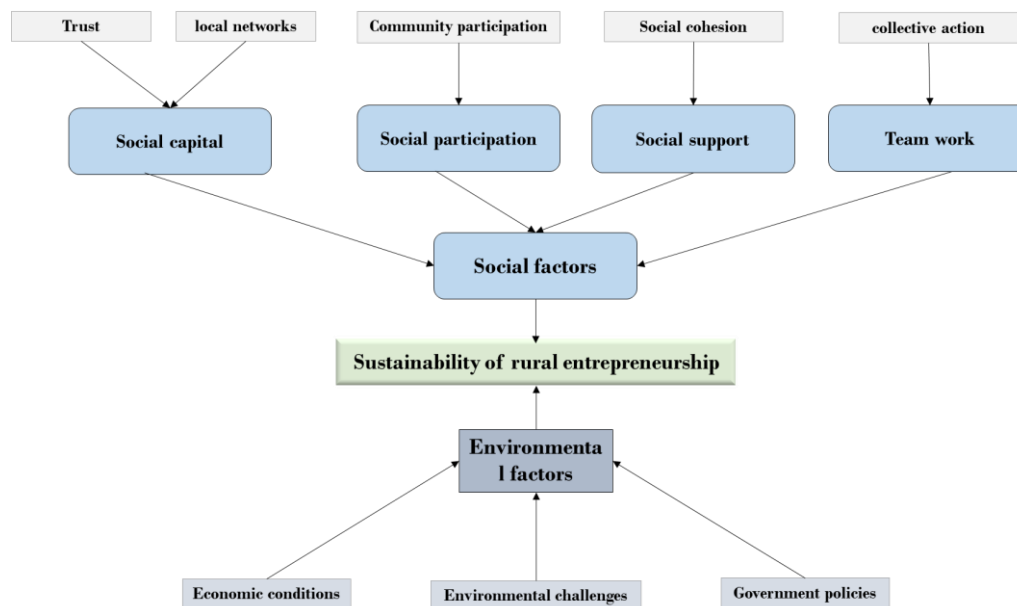


Figure 1. Social factors affecting the sustainability of rural entrepreneurship

Therefore, this research examines and analyzes the role of social factors in rural entrepreneurship with a focus on the eastern margin of Zayandeh Rud in Isfahan; a region that has unique conditions for rural entrepreneurship due to water scarcity and environmental challenges. The sustainability of rural entrepreneurship is complexly linked to these social factors and requires a comprehensive framework to understand how social dynamics affect the sustainability of entrepreneurship in resource-constrained environments (X. Li et al., 2022). Additionally, the role of government policies and local institutions in strengthening these social factors cannot be ignored. By adopting comprehensive policy approaches based on socio-cultural capacities, increasing the sustainability of rural businesses and achieving sustainable development in these areas will be possible (Yang et al., 2022). Therefore, Social capital has emerged as a critical yet understudied factor in the sustainability of rural entrepreneurship, particularly in regions facing environmental and economic challenges. While traditional approaches to rural development have primarily focused on physical and financial capital, the role of social relationships, trust networks, and community cooperation in supporting entrepreneurial activities has gained increasing recognition. In resource-constrained rural environments like the eastern margin of Zayandeh River, social capital—comprising networks of relationships, trust, and

shared norms within communities—can facilitate access to resources, knowledge sharing, and market opportunities that are essential for entrepreneurial success. However, the specific mechanisms through which social capital influences rural entrepreneurship outcomes, especially in environmentally stressed areas where traditional agricultural livelihoods are under threat, require deeper investigation. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing effective policies and interventions to support sustainable rural entrepreneurship in similar contexts. Figure 1 provides an overview of factors identified in the literature as influencing the sustainability of rural entrepreneurship. These factors include social capital, social participation, social support, and teamwork, which have been identified in various studies as key components in the success and sustainability of rural entrepreneurship. This figure also shows the interactions of these factors and the role of economic and environmental contexts in entrepreneurial processes. However, it should be emphasized that this figure is not a fixed theoretical framework but rather a tool for better understanding the relationships between these factors based on a literature review. This research will use a qualitative approach to explore and analyze these relationships from the perspective of local stakeholders in the eastern region of Zayandeh Rud. The results from the qualitative data analysis may reveal new patterns and

relationships that contribute to enriching and completing this conceptual framework.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Geographical Scope of the Research

The downstream section of the Zayandeh Rud watershed in Isfahan Province, known as the eastern margin of Zayandeh Rud River, encompasses three counties: Isfahan, Varzaneh, and Herend. This area is divided into 5 districts and

14 rural districts, and it is home to 133 villages with a total population of 104,607. With a rich historical background spanning approximately 500 years in utilizing the river's water for agriculture and livestock farming, this region is renowned as one of Iran's agricultural hubs and a center for water-related activities. However, over the past decade, the region has faced serious challenges due to the drought crisis and a significant decrease in the flow of Zayandeh Rud (Figure 2).

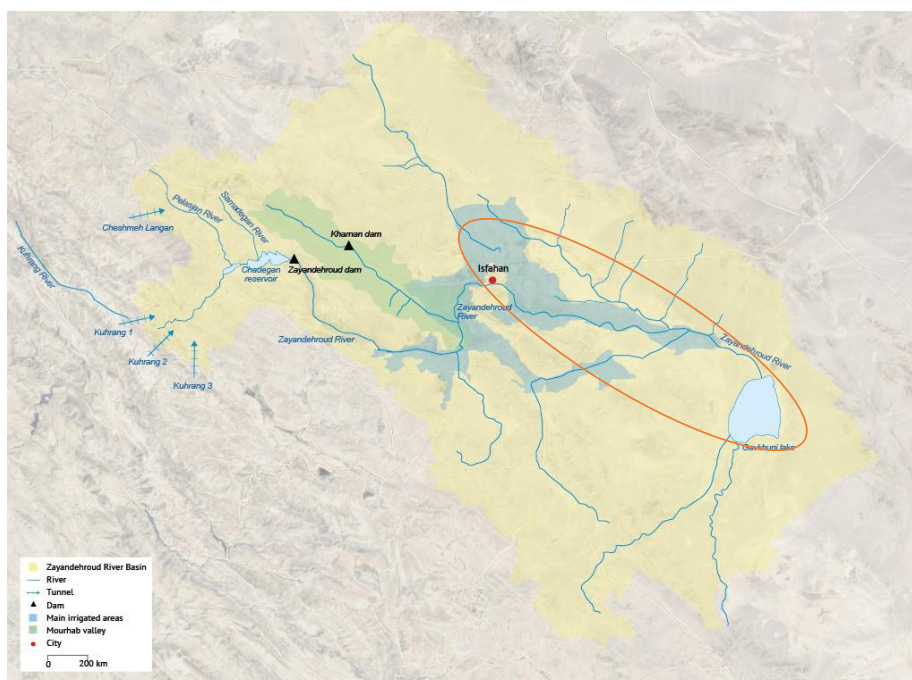


Figure 2. Map of Zayandeh River watershed of Isfahan and its main tributaries.

This has resulted in a decline in the production capacity of agricultural lands and traditional orchards, leading to widespread unemployment, rural-to-urban migration, and a sharp decline in income levels and welfare in these rural communities. In such circumstances, the government has turned to developing rural entrepreneurship as a suitable solution to address these areas' economic and social challenges. However, despite allocating specific budgets and implementing numerous projects, satisfactory results have not been achieved. Studies show that one of the most important barriers to the development of rural entrepreneurship in these areas is the existence of cultural challenges. These challenges can reinforce norms and beliefs that exacerbate inequalities and consequently lead to an unfair distribution of access to facilities and

resources. In other words, cultural beliefs and norms can act as barriers that prevent equal access to opportunities and resources for all members of society.

3.2 Methodology

Given the research objective to investigate the social challenges and their impact on the success and sustainability of rural businesses (rural entrepreneurship) in the study area, this research has adopted a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2017). Adopting this approach offers distinct advantages over other methodologies for studying complex social phenomena in the realm of rural entrepreneurship. Unlike quantitative methods that test predetermined hypotheses, grounded theory enables the emergence of new theoretical insights directly from the data, making it particularly valuable for understanding the nuanced

interactions between social capital and entrepreneurship in rural settings. The method's iterative nature and systematic coding process, supported by MAXQDA software, allows researchers to capture complex social relationships and cultural dynamics that might be overlooked by more structured approaches, while simultaneously maintaining the flexibility to adapt as new insights emerge. This methodology is especially suited for the current study as it enables researchers to understand the contextual specificity of social capital formation in rural areas, generate theory directly grounded in local realities, and account for the simultaneous influence of multiple variables and their relationships—capabilities that are particularly crucial when studying dynamic social processes in rural communities. This qualitative approach enables a deep understanding and analysis of social challenges and obstacles faced by rural entrepreneurs. Additionally, this method contributes to a better understanding of how social norms and beliefs can act as barriers or facilitators to the development of rural businesses. Therefore, qualitative thematic analysis in this research is considered a suitable tool for a thorough examination of institutional challenges and their consequences for rural entrepreneurship development in the study area. This qualitative analysis provides valuable insights for designing targeted policy solutions to improve, educate, and change the local community's behaviors, beliefs, and values and support entrepreneurship in these rural areas. In this research, the researcher has also conducted a preliminary review of the existing literature at the beginning of the study to gain initial understanding and develop theoretical sensitivity regarding the key concepts of rural entrepreneurship, empowerment, and its spatial dimensions. This has helped identify research gaps, design interview questions, and select initial samples. Furthermore, familiarity with some existing concepts and theories has provided a foundation for conceptualization and categorization during data analysis. However, it is important to note that despite this initial study, the researcher has strived to maintain an open mind and avoid imposing pre-existing frameworks, allowing new categories and concepts to emerge from the data. In other words, the literature has been used only to create sensitivity and not as a theoretical requirement. Accordingly, during the data collection and

analysis process, whenever new concepts and categories that were not present in the initial literature emerged, the researcher immediately took steps to develop and deepen the literature in that specific area. Thus, this research uses the literature and data in an interactive and cyclical process. As the analyses progressed and new concepts and relationships emerged, the research literature was gradually completed and enriched. This approach is fully consistent with the principles of grounded theory, which emphasizes continuous and flexible movement between data and literature (Charmaz, 2017; RADFORD, 1977; Stebbins, 2006).

3.3 Sampling and Participants

Snowball Sampling was employed to identify respondents. This method, also known as chain referral sampling, is widely used in qualitative research where new participants are identified through existing ones. Ghadiri Masoom et al. (2015) argue that snowball sampling is particularly suitable in the Iranian context where accessing the study population can be challenging. Given the sensitivity and impact of the research topic, potential respondents, especially stakeholders, might be reluctant to participate unless they trust the research process. Interviews related to cultural challenges and their impact on entrepreneurial activities in rural areas can be challenging, and interviewees may be cautious in this regard. This requires a sensitive and respectful approach to gain the necessary trust and obtain valid and useful information from the target population. If questions are framed in a way that makes the research topic sensitive or puts individuals' interests at risk, they may refuse to cooperate with the research team. In particular, if government employees feel that revealing certain facts may affect their position, they may resist the research team. Therefore, significant time was needed to build trust with potential respondents.

Interviews were conducted over a two-month period, from late January to late March 2024, with the cooperation of participants, through on-site visits and trips to several villages. During each visit and field trip, researchers spent significant time with respondents to gain their trust in participating in the interview. For this reason, most interviews were conducted in person and by phone. Initially, government officials were asked to help introduce potential respondents through referral chains. We

approached 50 potential participants, 40 of whom agreed to be interviewed. We tried to select potential participants from individuals with various job positions and responsibilities to obtain stronger results and avoid any potential bias. As a result, local managers, entrepreneurs, rural entrepreneurs, government managers and staff, small business and rural business trainers and consultants, and rural development professors and researchers participated in this study.

3.4 Data Collection

Interviews were conducted with participants either in person at their workplaces or by telephone following scheduled appointments. Potential participants were initially contacted by phone and invited to participate in the study. The interview guide consisted of 14 semi-structured questions focusing on various topics related to the study's objectives. All interviews were audio-recorded

except for six respondents who were unwilling to have their voices recorded. The researchers recorded conversations and responses in writing for those who did not want the interview session to be recorded. Data was collected in Persian and then translated into English. Before starting the interview, the research objective was explained to the participants, and they were assured that the information obtained would not be shared with others. In this research, the data collection process continued until theoretical saturation was reached and the point of diminishing returns for the available information was attained (Collier, 1975). Data collection spanned from early February to late April 2024. After conducting this number of interviews (40 interviews), the research team concluded that while a satisfactory understanding had been achieved, no further information could be obtained. The descriptive information of the participants can be seen in Tables 1-3.

Table 1. Demographic Distribution

Characteristic	Category	Number	%
Gender	Male	23	57.5
	Female	17	42.5
Age Groups	30-39	12	30.0
	40-49	18	45.0
	50-59	8	20.0
	≥60	2	5.0
	Married	36	90.0
Marital Status	Single	4	10.0

Table 1, presents the fundamental demographic distribution of the research participants (N=40), revealing a relatively balanced gender representation with a slight male majority (57.5% male, 42.5% female). The age distribution indicates a concentration in the middle-age brackets, with 45% of participants falling within

the 40-49 age range, followed by 30% in the 30-39 age bracket. This age distribution suggests a sample of participants with substantial life and professional experience. The marital status data shows a strong predominance of married participants (90%), which could reflect the broader social patterns in rural Iranian communities.

Table 2. Educational and Professional Profile

Characteristic	Category	Number	%
Education Level	Ph.D.	4	10.0
	Master's	6	15.0
	Bachelor's	18	45.0
	Associate/Diploma	11	27.5
	Below Diploma	1	2.5
	Rural Entrepreneurs	13	32.5
Primary Occupation	Government Employees	8	20.0
	Local Officials	6	15.0
	Consultants/Experts	7	17.5
	Academics	2	5.0
	Other Professionals	4	10.0

Table 2, illuminates the educational and professional composition of the sample, demonstrating a noteworthy educational attainment profile. The majority of participants (70%) held higher education qualifications (Bachelor's degree or above), with 25% possessing postgraduate degrees (Master's or Ph.D.). This educational profile suggests a well-qualified participant pool capable of providing informed perspectives on rural entrepreneurship dynamics. The occupational distribution reveals a strategic mix of stakeholders, with rural entrepreneurs forming the largest single group (32.5%), followed by government employees (20%), and a balanced representation of consultants/experts (17.5%) and local officials (15%). This diverse occupational composition enhances the study's ability to capture multiple perspectives on rural entrepreneurship challenges and opportunities.

Table 3. Interview Characteristics

Characteristic	Mean	Range
Years of Experience	14.6	4-30
Interview Duration (minutes)	56.4	30-98

Table 3, provides crucial methodological insights regarding the participants' experience levels and the depth of data collection. The mean professional experience of 14.6 years (range: 4-30 years) indicates a sample with substantial domain expertise. The interview duration data (mean: 56.4 minutes, range: 30-98 minutes) suggests thorough engagement with participants, allowing for in-depth exploration of research themes. The considerable variation in interview duration reflects the semi-structured nature of the interviews and the participants' varying levels of engagement with the research topics.

3.5 Data Analysis

Initially, the recorded interview transcripts were listened to multiple times to develop a familiarity with the underlying concepts and gain a deeper understanding of the themes and patterns within the data. This preliminary stage allowed the researchers to become acquainted with the context and nuances of the interviews, identifying their strengths and weaknesses. Following this, the recorded conversations were transcribed into written text. This transcription process was conducted with meticulous attention to detail to

accurately reflect any changes in tone and sentiment expressed by the respondents. To ensure the accuracy of these transcripts, the text was read through multiple times from beginning to end. At this stage, researchers aided in identifying initial patterns and key themes within the text, developing a summary of the entire interview and its underlying flow. To analyze the collected data, thematic analysis was employed. This method enabled us to identify the main patterns and themes within the data. The transcribed data was carefully read word by word by the researchers, who had the ability to review the process and content up to four times. This repeated reading of the text helped researchers engage more deeply with the data and extract the main themes. Additionally, MAXQDA version 20 software was used to systematically code the data for thematic analysis. This software allowed researchers to code the data organized and systematically and identify patterns and connections between different themes. Using MAXQDA facilitated the coding process and enabled us to utilize its capabilities for deeper data analysis. Finally, by combining the results obtained from reading the text and systematic coding, we identified the main themes and patterns within the data, which significantly contributed to the theoretical and practical richness of the research. These steps helped us gain a better understanding of the data and enhanced the credibility and validity of the results (Rädiker, 2023).

4. Research Findings

social capital factors play a vital role in the success and sustainability of rural entrepreneurship, significantly influencing business outcomes in these areas. Qualitative data analysis reveals that trust between entrepreneurs and the rural community is fundamental to creating a sustainable entrepreneurial environment. When entrepreneurs trust the community and this trust is reciprocated, increased participation and effective collaboration can be observed. Active community involvement in economic and entrepreneurial projects contributes to the success and sustainability of these initiatives, facilitating equal access to resources and opportunities, strengthening local support networks, and fostering a sense of ownership and commitment to the community. Furthermore, teamwork and collective action are key factors in the success of rural entrepreneurship. Collaboration among entrepreneurs, sharing

resources and experiences, and collective learning can lead to increased innovation and productivity. This type of collaboration also contributes to building resilience and flexibility in the face of challenges and crises. The combination of these social factors can contribute to the creation of a strong and sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem in rural communities. Improving social

relationships and creating an environment filled with trust and cooperation can lead to the success and sustainability of entrepreneurship in these areas. To visually represent these findings, Figure 3 presents the themes, categories, and concepts extracted from the MAXQDA software, effectively illustrating the relationships between social elements and entrepreneurial success."



Figure 3. Output of themes, categories and concepts from MAXQDA software

Table 4 clearly shows the impact of social factors on entrepreneurial success by providing a comprehensive matrix of social theme codes related to rural entrepreneurship studies. This table categorizes key themes such as trust, participation and social support, and teamwork and collective action, and explains specific concepts within each category. In particular, trust as a foundation for

building sustainable relationships between entrepreneurs and society plays a fundamental role in increasing participation and cooperation. Also, emphasizing the importance of support networks and education in strengthening the sense of ownership and commitment to society, shows the necessity of creating a successful and sustainable entrepreneurial environment in rural communities.

Table4. Extracted Matrix of social Theme Codes for Rural Entrepreneurial Studies (MAXQDA)

theme	category	Concepts
social Factors in Rural Entrepreneurship	Trust	Trust between entrepreneurs and rural communities
		Trust between entrepreneurs and government institutions
		Trust within entrepreneurial networks
		Decrease or increase in participation
		Inter-organizational coordination
		Transparency and accountability
		Ongoing dialogue and interaction
	Participation and Social Support	Collaboration in economic and entrepreneurial projects
		Participation in decision-making processes
		Equal access to education, resources, and opportunities
		Strengthening and supporting local networks and associations
		Increasing sense of ownership and commitment to the community

theme	category	Concepts
	Teamwork and Collective Action	Promoting awareness and education regarding the outcomes of participation
		Addressing cultural norms
		Increasing Innovation
		Increasing productivity
		Psychological empowerment (responsibility, increased self-confidence, sense of competence, meaning, self-belief)
		Skill and experience transfer
		Collective learning and knowledge exchange
		Increasing flexibility and resilience
		Combining various skills and expertise

Table 5 and Figure 4 further emphasize the comprehensive matrix of social themes codes, highlighting key findings related to the impact of social factors on entrepreneurial success. Based on this data, the category of 'trust,' occurring 20 times in the data, indicates the importance of establishing sustainable relationships between entrepreneurs and the community. Trust, as the foundation of social interactions, facilitates increased participation and strengthens cooperation within the rural community. The category of 'social participation and support,' with the highest frequency of 44 occurrences in the data, highlights

the critical role of social participation and support in creating synergies and advancing entrepreneurial goals. This can lead to a strengthened sense of ownership and commitment among community members. Finally, the category of 'teamwork and collective action,' with a frequency of 27, underscores the importance of convergence and group actions in achieving entrepreneurial objectives. Teamwork, especially in rural communities with limited resources, can help optimize resource utilization and develop economic opportunities.

Table 5. A quantitative analysis of social factors influencing rural entrepreneurship

Theme	Category	Frequency
social	Trust	20
	Social Participation and Support	44
	Teamwork and Collective Action	27

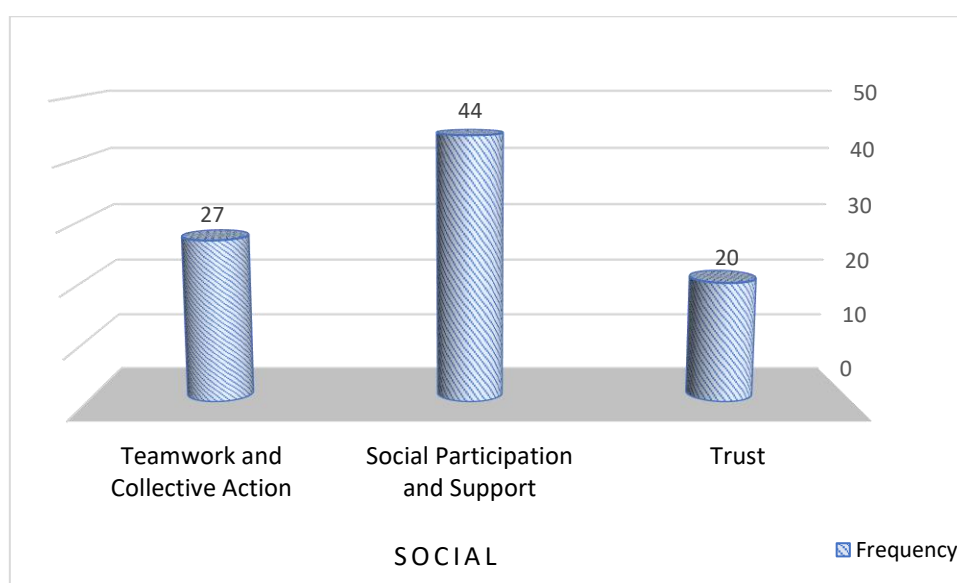


Figure 4. A quantitative analysis of social factors influencing rural entrepreneurship

4.1 trust

This research has revealed that trust is a fundamental and complex challenge in the path of developing and sustaining rural entrepreneurship. This finding aligns with Robert Putnam's social capital theory, which emphasizes the importance of trust as a cornerstone of social capital and its role in economic development. In the context of rural entrepreneurship, trust can be examined at three levels: trust between entrepreneurs and the rural community, trust between entrepreneurs and government institutions, and trust within entrepreneurial networks. One small business and rural business coach highlighted a crucial point:

"Entrepreneurship hasn't taken root well in our country, and everyone thinks that creating a job means entrepreneurship. Many have taken advantage of this confusion, creating the simplest of businesses and labeling them as entrepreneurial ventures to obtain benefits and funding from the government and organizations. This has led to the exploitation of rural people, causing them to lose trust and become wary of the term 'entrepreneurship.' This lack of trust has resulted in instability in rural areas regarding entrepreneurship."

This quote effectively demonstrates how the misuse of the concept of entrepreneurship and the improper implementation of support programs can erode trust in rural communities. This issue is connected to the concept of institutional trust in social capital theory, which emphasizes the importance of citizens' trust in formal institutions. When institutional trust is weakened, participation in development programs and acceptance of new policies become problematic. Another expert pointed to the issue of inadequate training and projects without outcomes:

"Inadequate training, without considering the capacity of the rural region or market conditions, or defining entrepreneurial projects or employment creation projects based on incorrect assessments (solely to generate statistics and reports for higher-ups) and ultimately concluding the project without any

benefits for the village, leads to frustration and a lack of trust in the government, organizations, and community-based institutions."

This observation aligns with the concept of policy failure in rural development theories. When development policies and programs fail to achieve their objectives or even create negative impacts, not only are resources wasted, but the target community's trust is also undermined. This can lead to a vicious cycle where a lack of trust reduces participation in future programs, resulting in further failures of these programs. A village head emphasized the importance of building trust and the role of dialogue in this process:

"Building trust is crucial in the current situation. Now that the water has been taken from the eastern part of Zayandeh Rud due to poor management, there is no choice but to engage in dialogue between the people and representatives of organizations and the government (by raising the tolerance level of government representatives). Through dialogue, explaining the situation, outlining the existing solutions and processes to overcome the obstacles, we might be able to restore lost trust and engage people in solutions such as creating entrepreneurship based on local capacities."

This perspective aligns with the communication for development theory, which emphasizes the importance of dialogue and two-way interaction in the development process. This approach believes that sustainable development is only possible when the target community actively participates in the decision-making and implementation processes, and this participation requires mutual trust. Experts in agriculture, extension, and entrepreneurship at the Ministry of Jihad-e-Agriculture pointed to the issue of the entry of unqualified organizations and their consequences:

"The entry of irrelevant and unqualified organizations such as governor's offices, welfare organizations, and which have entered this field under slogans like job creation and without considering

the capacities of villages and existing resources, have only sought to increase statistics and pass these statistics on to higher-level organizations. They have conducted business training and sometimes talent identification in rural areas, and then left the trained individuals to fend for themselves with dozens of problems in businesses that were created due to these unsupported trainings. The ultimate result is confusion and frustration imposed on the rural community, leading to a lack of trust in the government."

This observation is related to the concept of inter-organizational coordination in public administration theories. A lack of coordination between different organizations and the entry of unqualified institutions into specialized areas can lead to resource waste, duplication of efforts, and ultimately a decrease in the effectiveness of development programs. This not only wastes

resources but also undermines the trust of the target community. A former local manager referred to the issue of drought and its impact on trust between the people and the government:

"Trust between the people and the government has been lost. Improper responses to water protests and the government's failure to respond to the drought, which was caused by mismanagement, have severed the connection between the people and the government."

This quote effectively shows how the mismanagement of environmental crises can undermine trust between people and government. This issue is related to the concept of environmental governance, which emphasizes the importance of participatory and transparent management of natural resources. In order to better understand the impact of trust in rural entrepreneurship, Figure 5 examines this concept and their relationships.

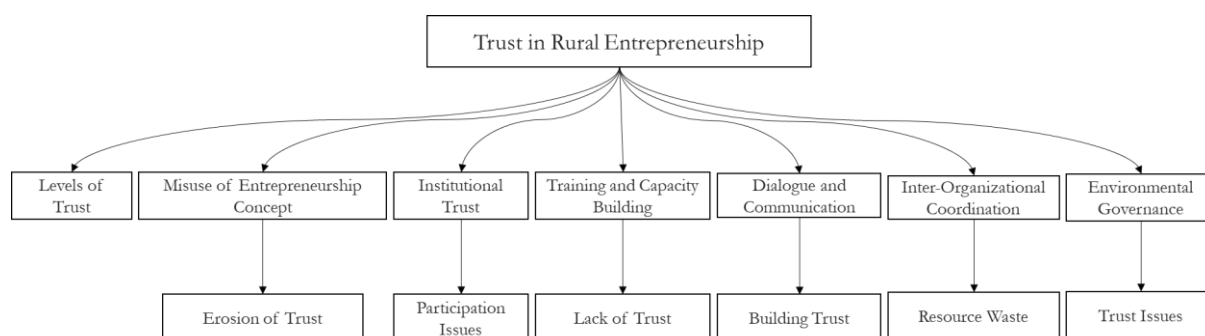


Figure 5. Key relationships and different levels of trust in the development and sustainability of entrepreneurship in rural communities

This figure includes different levels of trust, including trust between entrepreneurs and the rural community, as well as trust between entrepreneurs and government institutions. Also, it depicts the effects of misuse of the concept of entrepreneurship and weakness in institutional trust that can lead to reduced participation in development programs. In addition, the importance of dialogue and coordination between organizations has been emphasized as vital factors in building and maintaining trust in rural communities. These relationships represent a cycle of trust and distrust that can affect sustainable development in rural areas. In short, the analysis of

the findings shows that the issue of trust in rural entrepreneurship is a multifaceted and complex challenge that is rooted in various factors. These factors include incorrect use of the concept of entrepreneurship, improper implementation of development programs, lack of inter-organizational coordination and improper management of environmental crises. To solve this problem, a comprehensive and systematic approach is needed, which includes:

1. Redefining the concept of rural entrepreneurship and providing a clear and operational definition of it.

2. Designing and implementing development programs based on the real needs and capacities of rural communities.
3. Establishing inter-organizational coordination and determining specific institutions for rural entrepreneurship programs.
4. Creating transparent mechanisms for accountability and monitoring the performance of responsible institutions.
5. Development of collaborative approaches in the management of natural resources and environmental crises.
6. Creating platforms for dialogue and continuous interaction between rural entrepreneurs, local community and government institutions.

By implementing these strategies, we can hope to restore part of the lost trust and create a platform for the sustainable development of rural entrepreneurship. But it should be noted that rebuilding trust is a time-consuming process and requires long-term commitment and sustainability in the implementation of policies and programs.

4.2 Social Participation and Support

This research indicates that social participation and culture play a vital role in the development and sustainability of rural entrepreneurship. These findings align with Robert Putnam's social capital theory and the community-based development theory, which emphasize the importance of social relationships, mutual trust, and collective participation in economic development. In the context of rural entrepreneurship, social participation and culture can be examined from several perspectives: cooperation in economic projects, participation in local decision-making, and the influence of cultural norms on entrepreneurial activities. An agricultural extension worker highlighted an important point about rural microfinance institutions:

"The lack of participation and cohesion among rural groups has led to the failure of rural microfinance institutions, which are essential for meeting the financial needs at the beginning of rural businesses, in most villages."

This observation shows how a lack of participation can hinder the formation of local financial institutions that are essential for supporting entrepreneurship. Rural microfinance institutions are examples of community-based financial

institutions that can play a significant role in financing small rural businesses. However, the success of these institutions depends on mutual trust and the active participation of community members. The failure of these institutions can be a sign of weak social capital in the rural community. Experts in agricultural education, extension, and entrepreneurship have pointed to the influence of subcultures on participation:

"Unfortunately, due to differences in beliefs and the existence of incorrect subcultures among villagers, it is not possible to create group businesses in the region."

This observation aligns with the theory of entrepreneurial culture, which emphasizes the impact of cultural values and norms on entrepreneurial behaviors. Subcultures can act both as barriers and as facilitators of entrepreneurship. In this case, it seems that some subcultures prevent the formation of group collaborations that are necessary for the success of rural businesses. One agricultural manager refers to a change in approach in entrepreneurship programs:

"In recent years, the participation of rural people has increased compared to the past. The reason is that in the past, entrepreneurial programs were implemented top-down in a mandatory manner, but now most programs are bottom-up and in line with the demands of the people."

This shift from top-down to participatory planning aligns with new rural development theories that emphasize the importance of the participation of local communities in the development process. This approach can lead to increased feelings of ownership and commitment to the community regarding entrepreneurial projects. The village head of one village pointed to differences in the level of participation in different projects:

"People's participation in work related to solving village problems or religious ceremonies is very good, but when entrepreneurial and employment projects are announced to the village council or related organizations, people are not willing to participate. The reason is the lack of trust in these projects because they have not had good results in the past."

This observation shows that past experiences and trust in government institutions play a significant role in the willingness to participate in entrepreneurial projects. This finding aligns with the theory of institutional trust, which emphasizes the importance of citizens' trust in formal institutions for the success of public policies. One expert and rural business coach emphasizes the importance of social support for entrepreneurs:

"For the sustainability of rural entrepreneurship, we need social support and participation, and for the rural community to believe in entrepreneurship and view an entrepreneur as a developer of the local economy and provide the necessary support."

This view aligns with the theory of social networks in entrepreneurship, which emphasizes the importance of social relationships and community support in the success of entrepreneurs. Regarding the impact of culture on entrepreneurship, one

entrepreneur and rural development expert refers to cultural challenges:

"Incorrect subcultures, patriarchy, tribalism, and lack of participation, lack of independence among young people and women, and lack of cooperation and participation in these areas create instability."

This observation shows how cultural norms can hinder widespread participation in entrepreneurial activities. This finding aligns with the institutional theory of entrepreneurship, which emphasizes the impact of formal and informal institutions (including cultural norms) on entrepreneurial behaviors. An entrepreneur in the tourism sector refers to discrimination at the local level:

"There is a traditional view of issues and sometimes even discrimination in the village council and council. For example, if a creative and capable person is from a weak family, they are less willing to cooperate and support them."

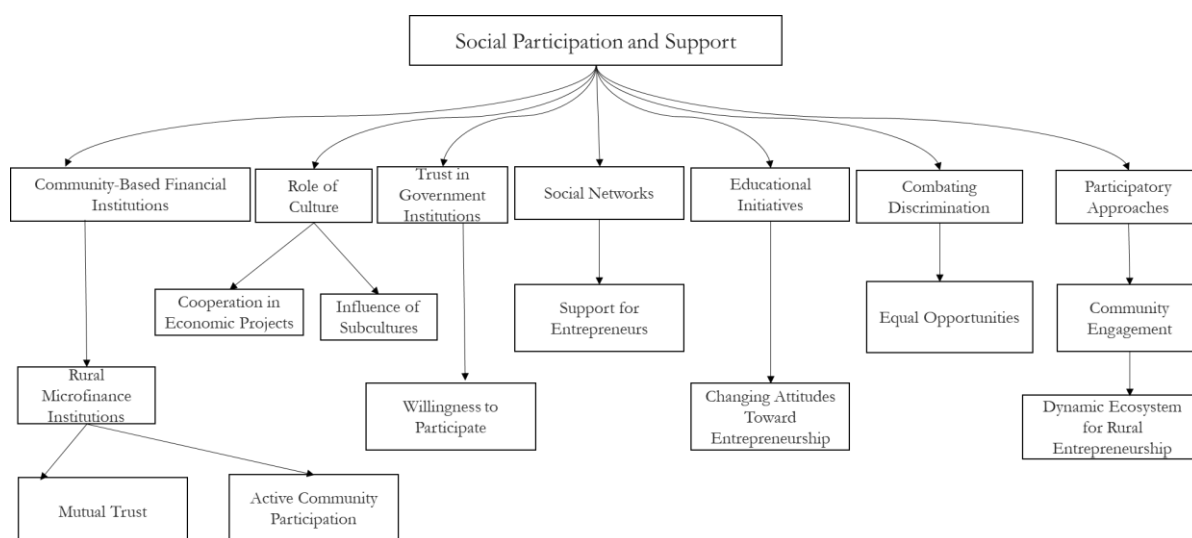


Figure 6. Key relationships and different levels of Social Participation and Support in the development and sustainability of entrepreneurship in rural communities

These findings underscore the pivotal role of social participation and local support in the formation and sustainability of rural entrepreneurship. As indicated, a lack of participation or low trust in entrepreneurial projects can hinder their success. To better understand this role, Figure 6 effectively illustrates the key interactions between various levels of social participation and support in the

development and sustainability of rural entrepreneurship. This Figure showcases the vital role of social participation and support at different levels in the development and sustainability of rural entrepreneurship. This figure demonstrates the intricate interplay between participation in local decision-making, collaboration on economic projects, and support from formal and informal

institutions. It also depicts key relationships among various stakeholders, including local councils, community-based financial institutions, and rural entrepreneurs. This diagram emphasizes the significance of mutual trust, cultural values, and collective efforts in ensuring the sustainability of entrepreneurial ventures. Furthermore, reveals that bottom-up approaches can enhance a community's sense of belonging and ownership of entrepreneurial projects. also highlights barriers such as discrimination, unfavorable subcultures, and institutional distrust that negatively impact the dynamics of the rural entrepreneurial ecosystem. To address these obstacles and achieve a sustainable ecosystem, it is essential to emphasize the importance of social participation and trust-building. This research indicates that local power structures and social inequalities can hinder the flourishing of entrepreneurial talents in rural areas. Thus, data analysis suggests that social participation and culture play a decisive role in shaping and sustaining rural entrepreneurship. These factors can serve as both facilitators and barriers. To strengthen rural entrepreneurship, a comprehensive and multidimensional approach is required, encompassing the following:

1. Strengthening community-based financial institutions such as rural microfinance institutions.
2. Promoting an entrepreneurial culture and cooperation in rural communities.
3. Adopting participatory approaches in designing and implementing entrepreneurship programs.
4. Restoring trust between rural communities and government institutions.
5. Combating discrimination and inequality at the local level and creating equal opportunities for all.
6. Supporting social networks that support entrepreneurs.
7. Education and awareness-raising to change negative attitudes towards entrepreneurship.

By implementing these solutions, we can hope to increase social participation and foster a culture that supports entrepreneurship in rural communities. This can lead to the creation of a dynamic and sustainable ecosystem for rural entrepreneurship".

4.3 Teamwork and Collective Action

The results of this research indicate that teamwork is a key factor in the success and sustainability of rural entrepreneurship. This finding aligns with modern entrepreneurship theories, including the team entrepreneurship theory and the social capital theory. In rural contexts, teamwork can serve as a powerful social mechanism to overcome resource constraints, enhance innovation, and create a competitive advantage. One small business and rural business coach notes:

"At the beginning of every entrepreneurial cycle, there must be an entrepreneur or an entrepreneurial team."

This statement suggests that teamwork is important from the very beginning of the entrepreneurial process. This view is consistent with the founder team theory which emphasizes the importance of combining different skills and expertise in the early stages of business formation. In rural environments, which typically face limited resources and access to various expertise, the formation of entrepreneurial teams can be a way to compensate for these limitations. An agricultural extension worker state:

"Instability in rural businesses and sometimes failure in them is due to various reasons, one of the most prominent of which is the lack of coordination, support, participation, and teamwork in villages".

This observation clearly demonstrates that the lack of teamwork can lead to the instability of rural businesses. This finding is consistent with Michael Porter's competitive advantage theory, which emphasizes the importance of internal cooperation and coordination to create a competitive advantage. In rural environments, which typically face numerous challenges, teamwork can serve as a strategy to increase business flexibility and resilience. Another small business and rural business coach states:

"To empower and create sustainable entrepreneurship, we need knowledge, skills, teamwork, and learning models for communication."

This perspective shows that teamwork is not only an operational strategy but also an essential social skill for rural entrepreneurs. This finding aligns with the organizational learning theory, which

emphasizes the importance of collective learning and knowledge sharing within organizations. In rural environments, which typically have limited access to formal educational resources, teamwork can serve as a mechanism for continuous learning and skill transfer. An agricultural extension worker - a rural business specialist - states:

"Lack of cooperation and participation due to beliefs and cultural conditions among villagers prevents everyone from taking advantage of the created opportunities."

This observation points to cultural challenges to teamwork. This finding is consistent with the organizational culture theory, which emphasizes the impact of cultural values and norms on organizational behavior. In rural environments, which typically have strong social and cultural structures, promoting a culture of teamwork may face challenges and require targeted efforts to change social attitudes and behaviors. The agricultural extension worker - a rural business specialist - adds:

"The existence of a work team in any business is considered one of the advantages of that business. Membership in a team empowers individuals and increases their self-confidence, something that we need in the villages of the eastern margin of the Zayandeh River at this time."

This perspective refers to the psychological aspects of teamwork. This finding is consistent

with the psychological empowerment theory, which emphasizes the importance of feelings of meaning, competence, autonomy, and impact in the workplace. In rural environments, where individuals may face challenges with self-confidence and self-belief, teamwork can serve as a mechanism to increase self-confidence and psychological empowerment. One entrepreneur says:

"I would really like to join a group or team where we can divide the work and each person takes on a responsibility, so that everyone can do their job based on their ability and not worry about other parts of the work and production."

These findings align with Adam Smith's theory of division of labor, highlighting the operational benefits of teamwork and specialized tasks for increased efficiency. In rural settings, often characterized by a limited supply of skilled labor, teamwork and division of labor can optimize the utilization of available human resources. To better understand the impact of teamwork and collective action on rural entrepreneurship, [Figure 7](#) explores these concepts and their interconnections. The figure emphasizes the importance of teamwork and collective action in the success and sustainability of rural entrepreneurial ventures. At the heart of this figure lies the concept of "teamwork," identified as a key factor in overcoming challenges and resource constraints.

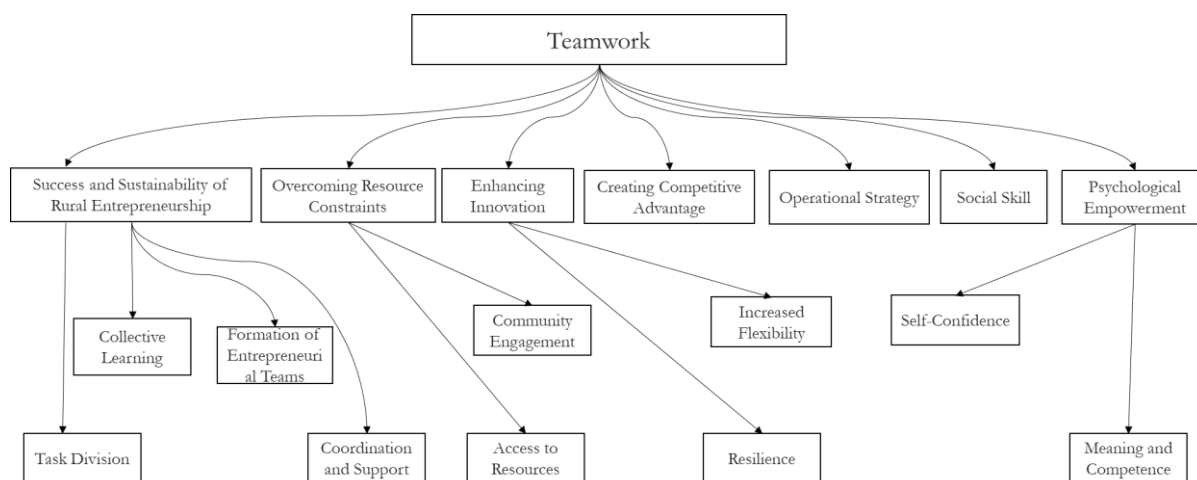


Figure 7: Key relationships and different levels Teamwork in the development and sustainability of entrepreneurship in rural communities

Teamwork fosters the creation of sustainable and successful businesses in rural communities, and collaboration within teams can facilitate better allocation and management of limited resources. This type of collaboration also stimulates innovation and the generation of creative ideas in the entrepreneurial realm, enabling businesses to gain a competitive edge. Moreover, teamwork enhances individuals' social and communication skills, and a sense of belonging to a team can boost self-confidence and motivation. Ultimately, the figure demonstrates that teamwork not only improves business performance but also creates a supportive and innovative environment in rural communities. In summary, the analysis of these findings reveals that teamwork is a vital component of the success and sustainability of rural entrepreneurship. It can serve as a social strategy to overcome resource constraints, foster innovation, improve efficiency, and empower individuals. However, promoting a culture of teamwork in rural settings may face challenges. To strengthen teamwork in rural entrepreneurship, the following strategies are suggested:

1. Providing teamwork skills training to rural entrepreneurs
2. Creating incentives for the formation of entrepreneurial teams in villages
3. Promoting a culture of cooperation and participation in rural communities
4. Supporting the formation of cooperatives and other forms of collective businesses in villages
5. Creating opportunities for experience exchange and mutual learning among rural entrepreneurs
6. Designing mentoring and coaching programs with an emphasis on teamwork skills

By implementing these strategies, it is hoped that a culture of teamwork can be fostered in rural communities, allowing rural entrepreneurs to leverage its benefits for the success and sustainability of their businesses.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Theoretical Implications of the Research

This research contributes significantly to the theoretical understanding of rural entrepreneurship

sustainability, particularly in the context of challenging environmental and economic conditions. The study's theoretical implications are multifaceted and offer novel insights into the complex interplay of social factors influencing rural entrepreneurship.

The study presents an integrated conceptual model that combines various social factors affecting rural entrepreneurship sustainability. This model advances beyond the existing literature, which often examines these factors in isolation (Fitzpatrick et al., 2023). By demonstrating the interconnectedness of social capital, social participation, social support, and teamwork, the research provides a more holistic understanding of the social ecosystem surrounding rural entrepreneurship. This integrated approach allows for a more nuanced analysis of how these factors collectively contribute to entrepreneurial resilience and sustainability in rural areas. The research extends Robert Putnam's social capital theory by adapting it specifically to the context of rural entrepreneurship in environmentally challenged areas. While Putnam's theory emphasizes trust and social connections in economic development (Prince, 2024), this study demonstrates how these elements manifest uniquely in rural entrepreneurial settings facing environmental crises. This contextualization enhances our understanding of how social capital operates under resource constraints and environmental pressures.

A key theoretical contribution is the development of the "social-entrepreneurial resilience" concept. This novel construct bridges the gap between social resilience theories and entrepreneurship literature, offering a new perspective on how rural communities leverage social factors to maintain entrepreneurial activities in the face of environmental and economic challenges. This concept builds on existing resilience theories (Yang et al., 2022) but specifically focuses on the entrepreneurial context in rural areas. The research proposes a dynamic model that illustrates how the importance and role of social factors evolve throughout different stages of rural entrepreneurship development. This temporal perspective addresses a gap in the current literature, which often provides static views of social factors

(Li et al., 2022). By demonstrating the changing dynamics of social capital, participation, and teamwork over time, the study offers a more realistic and nuanced understanding of rural entrepreneurship processes. The study innovatively incorporates cultural norms and local power structures into the social capital framework for rural entrepreneurship. This integration extends beyond traditional social capital theories by highlighting how cultural factors and power dynamics uniquely shape the effectiveness of social capital in rural entrepreneurial contexts (Amblard, 2021). This expanded framework provides a more comprehensive understanding of the sociocultural environment in which rural entrepreneurship operates. A significant theoretical contribution lies in bridging the gap between government policies and social dynamics in rural entrepreneurship sustainability. The research develops a theoretical framework that explains how policy interventions interact with and influence social factors to affect entrepreneurial outcomes. This integration addresses a critical gap in the literature, which often treats policy and social factors as separate domains (Chenavaz et al., 2023). The study extends team entrepreneurship theory by adapting it to the unique context of rural areas. It demonstrates how collective action and teamwork operate differently in resource-constrained rural environments compared to urban settings. This adaptation provides new insights into how rural entrepreneurs leverage teamwork to overcome resource limitations and enhance innovation (Cardon et al., 2017). The research develops a theoretical framework for understanding how environmental crises, particularly water scarcity, impact the social dynamics of rural entrepreneurship. This framework extends existing theories on entrepreneurship in crisis situations by specifically focusing on the interplay between environmental challenges and social factors in rural contexts (Yang et al., 2022). This research significantly advances the theoretical understanding of rural entrepreneurship sustainability by offering an integrated, dynamic, and contextualized model of social factors. The development of the "social-entrepreneurial resilience" concept, the integration of cultural and power structures into social capital theory, and the bridging of policy with social dynamics represent novel contributions to the field.

These theoretical advancements provide a robust foundation for future research and offer valuable insights for developing more effective policies and interventions to support sustainable rural entrepreneurship, particularly in environmentally challenged areas.

5.2 Practical Implications of the Research

This research offers significant practical implications for policymakers, rural development practitioners, and entrepreneurs, particularly in addressing the challenges of sustainable rural entrepreneurship in environmentally stressed areas. The study's innovative approach provides actionable insights that can enhance the effectiveness of rural entrepreneurship initiatives. The integrated model of social factors developed in this study enables policymakers to design more targeted and effective interventions. By understanding the complex interplay between social capital, participation, support, and teamwork, policymakers can craft multifaceted strategies that address multiple dimensions simultaneously. For instance, policies could be designed to not only provide financial support but also to strengthen local social networks and encourage community participation (Zhao & Li, 2021). This holistic approach represents a significant advancement over traditional, single-faceted policy interventions. The research highlights the critical role of community engagement in sustaining rural entrepreneurship. Practitioners can use these findings to develop more effective community involvement strategies. For example, the study suggests innovative approaches to fostering trust and participation, such as creating local entrepreneurship councils that involve diverse community members in decision-making processes (Korsgaard et al., 2015). This approach goes beyond traditional top-down development models, emphasizing the importance of bottom-up, community-driven initiatives.

The dynamic model of social factors throughout the entrepreneurship lifecycle provides a framework for creating adaptive support mechanisms. Support programs can be tailored to the specific needs of entrepreneurs at different stages of their journey. For instance, early-stage support might focus on building social networks and trust, while later-stage support could emphasize collective action and knowledge sharing

(Li et al., 2022). This adaptive approach represents a novel shift from one-size-fits-all support programs. By integrating cultural norms and local power structures into the social capital framework, the study emphasizes the need for culturally sensitive entrepreneurship programs. Practitioners can use these insights to design initiatives that are better aligned with local cultural contexts, potentially increasing their acceptance and effectiveness. This could involve innovative approaches such as incorporating traditional leadership structures into modern entrepreneurial networks (Amblard, 2021). The concept of "social-entrepreneurial resilience" developed in this study offers practical tools for building resilience in rural entrepreneurial ecosystems. Practitioners can focus on strengthening the social fabric of communities as a means of enhancing their ability to withstand environmental and economic shocks. This could involve innovative resilience-building activities such as community-wide scenario planning exercises or the establishment of local resource-sharing networks (Yang et al., 2022). The research's findings on the importance of teamwork and collective action in rural settings provide a basis for developing new collaborative entrepreneurship models. Practitioners can use these insights to foster innovative forms of cooperation, such as rural entrepreneurship clusters or cooperative business models that leverage collective resources and skills (Cardon et al., 2017). The study's framework for understanding the interaction between government policies and social dynamics offers a new approach to policy implementation. Policymakers can use this insight to create more synergistic relationships between formal institutions and informal social structures. For example, this could involve innovative approaches to co-creating policies with local communities or establishing feedback mechanisms that allow for continuous policy refinement based on social impacts (Chenavaz et al., 2023). The research provides practical strategies for maintaining entrepreneurial activities in the face of environmental challenges, particularly water scarcity. This includes innovative approaches to resource management, such as community-based water conservation initiatives linked to entrepreneurial activities or the development of businesses that directly address environmental challenges (Bao et al., 2022).

The study's detailed analysis of social capital dynamics in rural entrepreneurship contexts provides a foundational framework for developing targeted assessment tools and interventions. This framework enables practitioners to systematically evaluate and monitor social capital formation in rural communities, particularly in areas facing environmental challenges like water scarcity. The research findings suggest innovative approaches for measuring social capital through participatory assessment methods that capture both structural elements (such as network relationships and institutional linkages) and cognitive components (including trust levels and shared norms) that influence entrepreneurial sustainability. The integrated conceptual model developed through this research emphasizes the critical role of multi-stakeholder collaboration in fostering sustainable rural entrepreneurship. This model can inform the development of coordinated support mechanisms that align government policies, private sector initiatives, and community-based organizations toward common entrepreneurial development goals. Such collaborative frameworks are especially relevant for regions like the eastern margin of Zayandeh River, where environmental pressures necessitate innovative approaches to rural economic development.

this research advances both theoretical understanding and practical applications in rural entrepreneurship development by revealing the complex interplay between social factors and entrepreneurial sustainability. By demonstrating how trust, social participation, and collective action influence entrepreneurial outcomes in environmentally challenged areas, the study provides policymakers and practitioners with evidence-based insights for designing context-appropriate interventions. These findings contribute to the broader goal of fostering resilient rural economies through socially embedded entrepreneurship initiatives that respond to local environmental and economic challenges

5.3 Research Limitations

Despite its efforts to provide a comprehensive view of the social factors affecting rural entrepreneurship, this study has faced several limitations. First, the focus on a specific region (east of Zayandeh Rud) may limit the generalizability of findings to other rural areas with different economic, social, and environmental

conditions. Second, while the qualitative nature of the research allows for a deeper understanding of phenomena, it may fall short in providing a quantitative and generalizable picture of the rural entrepreneurship situation. Third, the study's time constraints prevented examining long-term changes in entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviors in rural communities. Finally, despite efforts to include diverse perspectives, some key stakeholders or marginalized groups may have been overlooked in the sampling process. When interpreting the results and applying the findings to other contexts, these limitations should be considered.

5.4 Suggestions for Future Studies

Based on the findings and limitations of this research, several avenues for future studies are proposed. First, conducting comparative studies across different rural regions could enhance understanding of how local conditions impact rural entrepreneurship. Second, combining quantitative and qualitative methods in a mixed-methods research design could provide a more comprehensive picture of the rural entrepreneurship landscape. Third, longitudinal studies to examine changes in entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviors over time are

recommended. Fourth, a specific focus on particular groups such as rural women, youth, or ethnic minorities could provide valuable insights into the unique challenges and opportunities these groups face. Fifth, a more detailed examination of the relationship between government policies, support programs, and rural entrepreneurship success could help develop more effective strategies. Finally, studying the impact of new and digital technologies on rural entrepreneurship could offer fresh perspectives on rural development in the digital age. These suggested research directions could significantly contribute to a more nuanced and actionable understanding of rural entrepreneurship dynamics.

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Authors' contributions

The authors equally contributed to the preparation of this article.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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نقش سرمایه اجتماعی در پایداری کارآفرینی روستایی (مطالعه موردی: شرق حاشیه رودخانه زاینده‌رود، اصفهان)

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چکیده مبسوط

۱. مقدمه

این پژوهش به بررسی نقش سرمایه اجتماعی در پایداری کارآفرینی روستایی در حاشیه شرقی زاینده‌رود اصفهان می‌پردازد. با توجه به چالش‌های زیست‌محیطی و اقتصادی ناشی از کمبود آب در این منطقه، توسعه کارآفرینی روستایی به عنوان راهکاری برای تنوع‌بخشی به اقتصاد روستایی و ایجاد فرصت‌های درآمدی پایدار مطرح شده است. منطقه حاشیه شرقی زاینده‌رود با سابقه‌ای حدود ۵۰۰ ساله در بهره‌برداری از آب رودخانه برای کشاورزی و دامداری، یکی از قطب‌های کشاورزی ایران و مرکز فعالیت‌های مرتبط با آب بوده است. اما در دهه اخیر، به دلیل بحران خشکسالی و کاهش چشمگیر جریان زاینده‌رود، با چالش‌های جدی مواجه شده است. این وضعیت منجر به کاهش ظرفیت تولید اراضی کشاورزی و باغات سنتی، بیکاری گسترده، مهاجرت روستا-شهری و افت شدید سطح درآمد و رفاه در این جوامع روستایی شده است. در چنین شرایطی، دولت به توسعه کارآفرینی روستایی به عنوان راهحلی مناسب برای مقابله با چالش‌های اقتصادی و اجتماعی این مناطق روی آورده است. هدف این مطالعه، ارائه یک مدل مفهومی یکپارچه برای درک بهتر عوامل اجتماعی موثر بر پایداری کارآفرینی روستایی و ارائه راهکارهایی برای تقویت این عوامل است.

۲. مبانی نظری تحقیق

چارچوب نظری این پژوهش بر اساس نظریه سرمایه اجتماعی رابرت پاتنام، نظریه توسعه مبتنی بر اجتماع و نظریه‌های کارآفرینی تیمی شکل گرفته است. نظریه سرمایه اجتماعی پاتنام بر اهمیت اعتماد و ارتباطات اجتماعی در توسعه اقتصادی تأکید دارد و پیشنهاد می‌کند

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که جوامع با سطح بالای سرمایه اجتماعی در ایجاد و حفظ کسب و کارهای نوآورانه و اجتماعی موفق‌تر هستند. نظریه توسعه مبتنی بر اجتماع بر اهمیت مشارکت فعال جامعه محلی در فرآیندهای تصمیم‌گیری و اجرای پروژه‌های توسعه تأکید دارد. نظریه‌های کارآفرینی تیمی نیز بر اهمیت همکاری و ترکیب مهارت‌های مختلف در موفقیت کسب و کارها تأکید دارند. این چارچوب بر اهمیت اعتماد، مشارکت اجتماعی و کار تیمی در موفقیت و پایداری کسب و کارهای روستایی تأکید دارد. همچنین، نقش هنجارهای فرهنگی و ساختارهای قدرت محلی در شکل‌دهی به رفتارهای کارآفرینانه مورد توجه قرار گرفته است. این چارچوب نظری یکپارچه به ما کمک می‌کند تا درک جامع‌تری از پویایی‌های اجتماعی موثر بر کارآفرینی روستایی داشته باشیم.

۳. روش تحقیق

این مطالعه با رویکرد کیفی و با استفاده از روش نظریه زمینه‌ای انجام شده است. روش نظریه زمینه‌ای امکان کشف و توسعه نظریه‌های جدید بر اساس داده‌های واقعی را فراهم می‌کند و برای مطالعه پدیده‌های پیچیده اجتماعی مانند کارآفرینی روستایی مناسب است. داده‌ها از طریق مصاحبه‌های نیمه‌ساختاریافته با ۴۰ نفر از ذینفعان کلیدی شامل کارآفرینان روستایی، مدیران محلی، کارشناسان توسعه روستایی و مربیان کسب و کار جمع‌آوری شده است. نمونه‌گیری به روش گلوله برفی انجام شده و تا رسیدن به اشباع نظری ادامه یافته است. مصاحبه‌ها شامل ۱۴ سوال نیمه‌ساختاریافته بوده و به صورت حضوری یا تلفنی انجام شده است. تحلیل داده‌ها با استفاده از نرم‌افزار MAXQDA و روش کدگذاری باز، محوری و انتخابی انجام شده

است. در مرحله کدگذاری باز، مفاهیم اولیه از داده‌ها استخراج شده، در مرحله کدگذاری محوری، این مفاهیم در قالب مقوله‌های اصلی دسته‌بندی شده و در نهایت در مرحله کدگذاری انتخابی، ارتباط بین این مقوله‌ها در قالب یک مدل نظری ارائه شده است.

۴. یافته‌های تحقیق

یافته‌های پژوهش نشان می‌دهد که اعتماد، مشارکت اجتماعی و کار تیمی نقش کلیدی در موفقیت و پایداری کارآفرینی روستایی دارند. اعتماد بین کارآفرینان و جامعه روستایی، اعتماد بین کارآفرینان و نهادهای دولتی، و اعتماد درون شبکه‌های کارآفرینی از عوامل مهم در ایجاد محیط کارآفرینی پایدار هستند. نتایج نشان می‌دهد که سوء استفاده از مفهوم کارآفرینی و اجرای نادرست برنامه‌های حمایتی منجر به کاهش اعتماد در جوامع روستایی شده است. همچنین، مدیریت نادرست بحران‌های زیست‌محیطی مانند خشکسالی، اعتماد بین مردم و دولت را تضعیف کرده است. مشارکت فعال جامعه در پروژه‌های اقتصادی و کارآفرینی منجر به دسترسی برابر به منابع و فرصت‌ها، تقویت شبکه‌های حمایتی محلی و افزایش حس مالکیت و تعهد به جامعه می‌شود. با این حال، هنجارهای فرهنگی نامناسب مانند مردسالاری و قبیله‌گرایی مانع از مشارکت گسترده در فعالیت‌های کارآفرینانه می‌شوند. همکاری و کار تیمی بین کارآفرینان نیز منجر به افزایش نوآوری، بهره‌وری و انعطاف‌پذیری در مواجهه با چالش‌ها می‌شود. کار تیمی نه تنها یک استراتژی عملیاتی، بلکه یک مهارت اجتماعی ضروری برای کارآفرینان روستایی است که می‌تواند به عنوان مکانیسمی برای یادگیری مداوم و انتقال مهارت عمل کند.

۵. بحث و نتیجه‌گیری

بر اساس یافته‌های این پژوهش، راهکارهایی برای تقویت سرمایه

اجتماعی و بهبود پایداری کارآفرینی روستایی ارائه شده است. این راهکارها شامل تقویت نهادهای مالی اجتماع‌محور مانند صندوق‌های خرد روستایی، ترویج فرهنگ کارآفرینی و همکاری در جوامع روستایی، اتخاذ رویکردهای مشارکتی در طراحی و اجرای برنامه‌های کارآفرینی، بازسازی اعتماد بین جوامع روستایی و نهادهای دولتی، مبارزه با تبعیض و نابرابری در سطح محلی، حمایت از شبکه‌های اجتماعی حامی کارآفرینان و آموزش و آگاهی‌سازی برای تغییر نگرش‌های منفی نسبت به کارآفرینی است. همچنین، ایجاد پلتفرم‌هایی برای گفتگو و تعامل مداوم بین کارآفرینان روستایی، جامعه محلی و نهادهای دولتی پیشنهاد می‌شود. در زمینه کار تیمی، ارائه آموزش‌های مهارت‌های کار تیمی به کارآفرینان روستایی، ایجاد مشوق‌هایی برای تشکیل تیم‌های کارآفرینی در روستاها، حمایت از تشکیل تعاونی‌ها و دیگر اشکال کسب و کارهای جمعی در روستاها، و طراحی برنامه‌های منتورینگ و کوچینگ با تاکید بر مهارت‌های کار تیمی پیشنهاد می‌شود. اجرای این راهکارها می‌تواند به ایجاد یک اکوسیستم پویا و پایدار برای کارآفرینی روستایی کمک کند. با این حال، باید توجه داشت که بازسازی اعتماد و تغییر فرهنگی فرآیندی زمان‌بر است و نیازمند تعهد بلندمدت و پایداری در اجرای سیاست‌ها و برنامه‌هاست. همچنین، این مطالعه پیشنهاد می‌کند که سیاست‌گذاران باید رویکردهای جامع و چندبعدی را در توسعه کارآفرینی روستایی اتخاذ کنند که نه تنها جنبه‌های اقتصادی، بلکه ابعاد اجتماعی و فرهنگی را نیز در نظر بگیرند.

کلیدواژه‌ها: سرمایه اجتماعی، کارآفرینی روستایی، اعتماد، مشارکت اجتماعی، کار تیمی، زاینده‌رود.

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