

Development of a Sustainable Rural Tourism Model with a Focus on Social Capital and Competitive Advantage

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Abstract

Rural tourism, with careful planning, can enhance the quality of life and create economic, social, and cultural benefits. The aim of this research was to present a sustainable rural tourism model with a focus on social capital. The research was applied in terms of its goal and qualitative in terms of methodology, based on the foundation data theory. The research was framed using a cognitive approach, utilizing various data collection methods such as library research, examination of specialized sources and texts, as well as semi-structured interviews. Fourteen elites, experts, and managers in tourism and rural area management were interviewed in 2023. The conducted interviews were coded using Atlas .t i software. To validate the results, data were evaluated and analyzed narratively based on triangulation. The research findings were categorized into five themes: environmental conditions, contextual conditions, interveners, strategies, and outcomes. A model with six themes and 19 axial codes based on 112 identified codes was developed. Environmental conditions included agricultural conditions, cultural and social conditions, rural conditions, tourist attractions, and financial conditions. Strategies comprised marketing strategies, support and assistance, local empowerment, tourism management and planning, and rural product development. Outcomes involved value creation, entrepreneurship, social capital development, and regional development. Contextual conditions included participation and collaboration, and regional infrastructure. Intervenors encompassed policymaking and laws, public attitudes, and tourist behaviors. The sustainable rural tourism model with a social capital approach was designed to promote the sustainable development of villages and strengthen social connections within them. The use of the social capital approach in the sustainable rural tourism model enhances relationships among locals, youth, and tourists, leading to improvements in rural life, increased social cohesion, and participatory development in decisions related to rural tourism.

Keywords: Rural tourism, rural business, Competitive advantage, Social capital

Introduction

Sustainable rural tourism has gained significant attention as a strategy for economic and social development in rural areas (Lane et al., 2022; Rezai Arefi et al, 2024). This tourism model, emphasizing the preservation of natural resources, environmental protection, and social development, seeks to bring about sustainable improvements in the living conditions of rural communities. On the one

hand, social capital and competitive advantage play crucial roles in the creation and development of sustainable rural tourism (Stylidis et al., 2021).

Social capital refers to the collection of relationships, networks, and social institutions existing within a society. This capital includes trust, social cohesion, communication networks, and social interactions. In the context of sustainable rural tourism, social capital, as a critical

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factor, has a significant impact on the success and sustainability of this industry. Community trust in various aspects of tourism, positive interactions between the local community and tourists, the presence of local communication networks, and the power of social cohesion are factors contributing to the development of sustainable rural tourism (Dimitriadou et al., 2021; Kiadaliri et al., 2024).

Additionally, competitive advantage plays a crucial role in the development of sustainable rural tourism. Competitive advantage refers to the ability of a tourism product, service, or destination to attract tourists and compete with other tourist destinations. In this regard, sustainable rural tourism must be able to compete effectively with other destinations and showcase its unique features (Shojaee Ara et al., 2022). Competitive advantages of sustainable rural tourism include exceptional natural landscapes, local culture and art, local lifestyle experiences, local products, and handicrafts (Tse & Tung, 2022).

Therefore, in this tourism model, social capital and competitive advantage coexist and interact with each other to contribute to the development of sustainable rural tourism. Through the use of social capital, local communities can establish stronger connections with tourists, build community trust, and strengthen local communication networks. These factors contribute to providing a positive experience for tourists and enhancing cross-cultural interactions, ultimately leading to the sustainable development of rural tourism (Barros et al., 2011; Rezaei-Rouzbahani, 2024).

Furthermore, competitive advantage holds great significance in the development of sustainable rural tourism. Competitive advantage refers to the capability of a tourism product, service, or destination to attract tourists and compete with other tourist destinations. In this context, sustainable rural tourism must effectively compete with other destinations and showcase its distinctive features. Competitive advantages of sustainable rural tourism include exceptional

natural landscapes, local culture and art, local lifestyle experiences, local products, and handicrafts (Tse & Tung, 2022).

As a result, in this tourism model, social capital and competitive advantage coexist and interact to contribute to the development of sustainable rural tourism. Through the utilization of social capital, local communities can establish stronger connections with tourists, build community trust, and reinforce local communication networks. These elements contribute to providing a positive experience for tourists and enhancing cross-cultural interactions, ultimately leading to the sustainable development of rural tourism (Barros et al., 2011).

From the perspective of sustainable development, social capital, along with natural capital, human capital, and self-capital of human resources, has become a pivotal determinant of a country's well-being (Karampela et al., 2021). These factors are also crucial for regional development to overcome emerging inequalities. Various studies have demonstrated that social capital is a fundamental factor for initiating and sustaining the resilience of a country's or a specific region's socio-economic development (Wolf et al., 2015). Although there is no universal definition of social capital, experts unanimously agree that it fundamentally involves trust and dynamic relationships within a group or community. In social capital, there exists a relational aspect for mutual recognition, understanding, assistance, information exchange, and collaboration to achieve common goals. The benefits of this relationship, whether deliberate or unconscious, occasionally lead to the establishment and encouragement of trust, which is enduring and beneficial for creating both physical and non-physical advantages. This interconnected relationship continually enhances the ability of an individual or collective actor. If the relationship expands sufficiently, it will have a positive impact on increasing the overall operational capacity of the social system (Madani, 2022).

Nevertheless, social capital alone is not always sufficient for the preservation and development of initiatives within the local community. Coordinated government policies to further develop social capital and create a conducive environment for community development are essential (Ramaano, 2021). Its importance has been established in areas such as human capital formation, innovation, sustainable development, economic growth, democracy, poverty reduction, and environmental sustainability. The core idea of social capital - that social relationships have value as they promote collaboration towards common goals - holds true in many fields, and tourism is no exception (Sidali et al., 2015).

Considering the significance of social capital and competitive advantage in sustainable rural tourism, this tourism model strives to utilize the existing social capital within the local community and create and develop competitive advantages. The aim is to contribute to the sustainable development of rural tourism and bring about improvements in the living conditions of rural communities. Therefore, this research, taking into account rural areas in Iran, examines the model of rural tourism based on social capital and the creation of competitive advantages, seeking an answer to the question: What is the model of sustainable rural tourism with a focus on social capital and competitive advantage?

Research Background and Theoretical Foundations

Sustainable Rural Tourism

The economic development of rural areas faces challenges that are specific to them (Pato et al., 2021). One of the main obstacles is population decline and aging, which has intensified in recent decades and serves as a limiting factor for actors and promoters that could initiate economic development. Small-scale agriculture, crucial for the rural economy and society, suffers from reduced economic viability, and the low educational attainment of the population, coupled with a lack of educational centers, implies limited

job alternatives for residents in these regions (Scuttari et al., 2021). This situation is exacerbated by weak commercial and institutional structures, low investment attractiveness, and deficiencies in services and infrastructure, characteristic of these areas. These conditions intensify rural migration, leading to loss of self-esteem, a sense of belonging, and identity crises among those left behind (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015). Consequently, rural areas face serious social and economic challenges (Liu et al., 2020).

This type of tourism development, through the multiple effects it generates, has the potential to stimulate economic growth, create employment, generate additional income, and address or even reverse the problem of population decline. It holds the potential to initiate the revitalization of rural areas. Furthermore, it can contribute to the preservation of natural and cultural heritage, enhancing the quality of life for the local population and thereby encouraging them to stay in the region (Milano et al., 2019).

Social Capital

Social capital also refers to the value of bonds and trust within a group of people or a community and is at least one of the five essential elements: human, social, physical, financial, and natural. Social capital encourages the sustainability of life (Kishi, 2019). Defined as an institution or entity, it encompasses relationships, attitudes, and values that govern interactions between individuals and contributes to economic and social development. In developed countries, social capital has become a vital asset for generating sustainable development. Dale and Newman (2018) demonstrated in their research in Canada and Australia that social capital is a prerequisite for the necessary conditions for sustainable community development, connecting access to resources beyond the community and enhancing them (Scuttari et al., 2022).

Competitive Advantage

Competitive advantage in the sustainable rural tourism development refers to the

power of a specific village or rural area that distinguishes it from other tourist destinations and has the capability to attract tourists. Competitive advantage in this context can be shaped based on unique features and resources available in the village, as well as their optimal utilization (Algieri et al., 2018). Competitive advantage in sustainable rural tourism can be highlighted from various perspectives (Taherinezhad et al., 2024). One of the competitive advantages in the development of sustainable rural tourism is the production of local products and handicrafts. These products and handicrafts can be produced based on the natural resources available in the region, as well as local culture and traditions. By offering local products and handicrafts to tourists, villages can assist in attracting travelers interested in experiencing local culture and simultaneously boost the local economy. Villages focusing on sustainable tourism and participating in the conservation of the local environment and natural resources can have a strong competitive advantage in this field. Ecotourism and sustainable tourism allow tourists to directly engage with the local environment and nature while ensuring their preservation. This approach aids villages in attracting tourists and differentiates them from other tourist destinations (Wang et al., 2022).

Research Background

Abbasi et al. (2022) conducted a qualitative study titled "Designing a Model for Rural Ecotourism Entrepreneurship Development" with the aim of developing a model for rural ecotourism entrepreneurship in Dezful County. This research employed a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative content analysis and the Delphi technique. The results indicate that the combination of social responsibility, environmental responsibility, growth, and development through ecotourism, along with innovations and creativity in rural ecotourism, facilitates entrepreneurship development. Additionally, physical-infrastructure, economic, educational and informational, institutional,

environmental, social-cultural, and individual factors were identified as the most influential factors in rural ecotourism entrepreneurship development.

Mehdipour et al. (2022) presented a research paper titled "Assessment of Second Homes in Rural Areas of Lahijan County in the Last Two Decades." Lahijan County, with its abundant natural and cultural attractions, has always been considered a tourism hub in Gilan Province. The data analysis results showed a significant relationship between all sustainability components and second home tourism. The expansion of second homes in mountainous and forested areas was more prominent than in coastal areas, and the impacts on the physical-structural aspect of second home tourism were more significant than other aspects.

Asgari et al. (2022) conducted a research study titled "Identification of Competitive Advantage Factors in Historical Tourism of Yazd City with a Creative Destruction Approach." Based on the references made, factors such as existing conditions for attracting the creative class, the presence of historical and cultural attractions and their identity preservation, creative industries, value creation through interaction and co-creation, attention to creativity and innovation, and emphasis on research and development were determined as the top competitive advantages of the studied area compared to competitors.

Shayan et al. (2022) presented a research study titled "Behavioral Economics of Tourism Supply and Demand Based on Capitalism Trends." According to this research, behavioral changes in tourism demand are defined based on three components: planning, tourism products, and characteristics. Similarly, behavioral changes in tourism supply are defined based on four components: economic, planning, tourism products, and definable structure and function. By assessing and evaluating the proposed model of behavioral economics of tourism supply and demand based on capitalist trends, this research provides the necessary groundwork for understanding the

behavioral patterns of tourism supply and demand, guiding tourism development in various regions.

Miri and Hossein Zahi (2021) conducted a research study titled "Assessment of the Status of Creative Tourism Components in Chabahar City and Its Role in Urban Sustainable Development." The results of multivariable regression showed that the financial variable had the most significant impact with a beta value of 0.371 on urban sustainable development, while the tourism variable had the least impact with a beta value of 0.132.

Lane et al. (2022) presented a research paper titled "Rural Tourism and Sustainability: A Special Theme, Review, and Update for the Early Years of the Twenty-First Century." Rural tourism has evolved into a globally significant and growing activity. Initially perceived by many interpreters as a relatively insignificant activity that might fade away in the near future, it has proven to be crucial in the overall development of tourism. It is now leading the way in creating entirely new forms of tourism based on rapidly growing niche markets. Additionally, it has become the cornerstone of sustainable tourism development and plays a vital role in regional revitalization initiatives in many countries and contexts. This introduction explains the development of rural tourism and reviews articles published in this special issue, eagerly anticipating possible futures for rural tourism in the early years of the twenty-first century.

Li (2022) conducted a research study titled "Investigating the Pattern of Smart Rural Tourism Development Based on the Internet of Things Background." Smart tourism has emerged as a shining model in this field. It is an operational low-carbon intelligent model that integrates technology and management, utilizing big data technology as the foundation to make traditional rural tourism smarter and digitally transform it. Smart tourism can play a significant role in improving rural tourism management, rural economic development, and enhancing

tourism management and services. In this way, it contributes to the overall development of the tourism industry. The aim of this research is to construct and develop a strategic model for smart rural tourism based on big data technology. By examining real smart rural tourism along with relevant literature, the innovative application of big data is described and analyzed. Comprehensive analysis of tourist attractions through big data helps tourists choose routes according to density, effectively manages congestion, and thereby prevents various risks associated with excessive traffic while strengthening tourist management. It also proposes countermeasures for the development of smart rural tourism, such as improving the smart rural tourism information platform, formulating smart service standards, creating a platform for intelligent talent services, and developing a new model for smart rural tourism marketing.

Madani (2022) conducted a research study titled "Investigating the Role of Rural Tourism in Sustainable Employment Development for Residents in the Post-COVID Era with a Scenario-Based Approach." The article employs thematic analysis and scenario planning. The study population consists of experts in rural management and planning, rural tourism, government management, social work, sociology, and rural geography. They were selected using purposive sampling. Based on the findings of the first phase, which involved thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with 48 core themes, 14 organizing themes, and 4 global themes were identified for use in the next phase to identify driving factors. After quantitative results, four scenarios were identified, including open economic gates, second-home tourism, economic defense barrier, and economic isolation. Rural tourism not only contributes to sustainable employment development but also impacts residents, especially in terms of employment and income generation. Rural tourism, by enriching job choices and diversifying sustainable rural employment,

has led to a significant change in labor mobility in rural areas. As evident from the research background, no study has previously presented a model for sustainable rural tourism modeling with a social capital approach. The research methodology used in this study has not been applied in any similar foreign research. Therefore, this research is entirely novel in Iran, and its innovation in title, approach, and research method clearly demonstrates its innovative aspect.

Results and Discussion

In terms of the purpose of the present research, it was an applied research and in terms of the method, it was a qualitative one with the data theory approach of the Baroikord Foundation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this research, the methodological angle was observed using different methods of data collection, such as the method of library study and review of sources and specialized texts, as well as semi-structured interviews. Data angularization, which means controlling the compatibility of different data sources, in the same method, was also noticed by researchers in this research, and more than one data source was used. Its potential contributors were all experts, elites, experts and managers of tourism and management of rural areas in 1402. The sampling method was purposeful and people were selected. This group was selected to do the qualitative part of the research and participated in the interview process. To determine the samples of this research and to determine this group of experts, the purposeful sampling method was used (Tabatabaee, Hasani, Mortazavy & Tabatabaieichehr, 2013). In this research, the main sources of data were interviews, so that the initial interviews were exploratory and descriptive, and gradually, after each interview, the coding of the data obtained from the interviews was done, and by the method of constant data comparison, theoretical codes were created through Coding will emerge again, and in the same way, the coding of 14 interviews was done, and concepts and sub- and main classes

emerged; It should be noted that the concentration and saturation of the core classes was done based on theoretical sampling, so that by conducting interviews with the statistical population, the research continued until the concepts of that category were condensed and enriched, for example, with the first 8 interviews that were conducted, the category The type of change was condensed. In other categories such as results and consequences, there was not enough data, so the interviews were continued based on theoretical sampling to saturate the desired category. It should be noted that theoretical sampling for interviews was not based on the number of interviewees, but based on their role in condensing the categories. Until the 14th interview, the interviews reached theoretical saturation. The duration of the interview was between 30 and 50 minutes. Grounded theory was used to analyze qualitative research data in ATLAS TI software. In this project, the steps of analyzing the collected qualitative data were done in three stages: open coding, central coding, and selective coding. Interviews were conducted based on the following questions from the selected people in the qualitative sample:

1. The role of social capital in sustainable rural tourism: What is it, and how can it impact the sustainable development of this industry?
2. What types of data and indicators are used to measure social capital in rural tourism
3. Can you provide successful examples from other countries or specific regions that have utilized social capital for the sustainable development of rural tourism?
4. What are the main challenges and obstacles in using social capital for the sustainable development of rural tourism?
5. What roles do the government, people, and local communities play in enhancing and developing social capital in rural society to support sustainable rural tourism?
6. Does your experience indicate that social capital can contribute to improving the quality of life for local residents and the social and economic balance in rural areas?

7. What strategies and tools do you propose to encourage social participation and increase social capital in sustainable rural tourism?
8. What measures do you take to increase awareness and educate local residents and stakeholders in the rural tourism industry to optimally harness social capital?
9. Have you examined the impact of social capital on the experience of tourists and their satisfaction with their trips to rural areas?

Discussion and Research Findings

A descriptive summary of the characteristics of the participants in the field section is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
Demographic Characteristics of Interview Participants

Demographic Characteristics	Classification	frequency	Frequency
Gender	Female	6	43%
	Man	8	57%
Education	Masters	10	71%
	PhD and above	4	29%

Table 2.
Coded interviews

interviews	code
<p>The role of social capital in the field of sustainable rural tourism is very important as an important factor for the sustainable development of this industry. Social capital includes networks, communication and human relations in the local community. This social capital can affect a number of the following things:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Increasing the participation of local people in the development of rural tourism. •Encouraging the development of local culture and cultural heritage. •Increasing tourists' satisfaction with their experiences. •Building strong connections between participants in the rural tourism industry. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Networks, communication and human relations - Increasing the participation of local people in the development of rural tourism - Encouraging the development of local culture and cultural heritage. - Increasing tourists' satisfaction with their experiences. - Creating strong connections between participants in the rural tourism industry.
<p>Measuring social capital in rural tourism can use various criteria and indicators. Some of these indicators are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number and type of local social networks. The level of social participation in tourism-related decisions. The level of trust and solidarity in the local community. The number and quality of local social events and activities. <p>Measuring the impact of social participation in the development of tourism projects.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The number and type of local social networks. -The level of social participation in tourism-related decisions. -The level of trust and solidarity in the local community. -The number and quality of local social events and activities. -Measuring the impact of social participation in the development of tourism projects

Demographic Characteristics	Classification	frequency	Frequency
Experience	15-20	5	36%
	20-25	7	50%
	25 and above	2	14%
Age	30-40	6	43%
	40-50	6	43%
	50 and above	2	14%

In order to open coding, all the interviews were entered in the Atlasti software. Necessary checks were done and desired codes were extracted. The labeling of the codes has been done based on the interviews and the researcher has tried to adhere to the insight of the people regarding the given answer as much as necessary in order to avoid any possible and unwanted bias as much as possible. In the entire process of coding, the researcher has adhered to the theoretical sensitivity which is one of the principles of data theory research and has done this to enrich the research as much as possible. Table 2 shows an example of the coding of the conducted interviews.

interviews	code
There are successful examples from other countries that have utilized social capital to develop sustainable rural tourism. For example, Italy has been able to attract tourists to rural areas by holding local festivals and events. Also, Scandinavian countries have contributed to the development of tourism in villages by creating local social networks and promoting local culture.	-Organizing local celebrations and events -Creating local social networks and promoting local culture
The main obstacles in using social capital for the development of sustainable rural tourism may be: Lack of awareness and ability in the local community to participate in the tourism industry. Lack of necessary infrastructure for the development of rural tourism. Creating a balance between tourism development and protection of the environment and cultural heritage. Management of problems related to tourism density in rural areas.	-Lack of awareness and ability in the local community to participate in the tourism industry. -Lack of necessary infrastructure for the development of rural tourism. -Creating a balance between tourism development and protection of the environment and cultural heritage. -Management of problems related to tourism density in rural areas.
The government can contribute to a number of these roles by providing financial and policy support, promoting sustainable development, and enacting appropriate legislation. Local people can play an important role by participating in projects and marketing local cultural heritage. Community complexes can promote local programs and events and create local job opportunities.	-Financial and political support -Promoting sustainable development and developing appropriate laws -Participation in projects and marketing of local cultural heritage -Local programs and events
Yes, experiences show that social capital can help improve the lives of local people and social and economic balance in villages. By encouraging social participation and developing the skills of local people, a positive impact can be made on the local economy and employment.	-Improving the lives of local people and social and economic balance -Encouraging social participation and development of local people's skills

Next, based on the dimensions of the data model of the Strauss and Corbin Foundation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), the classification of identification codes is specified in Tables 3 to 7.

Table 3.

Open coding of qualitative data (causal conditions)

Code oriented	category	Initial code
Causal conditions	Agricultural conditions	product variety
		The diversity of the cultivation pattern according to the diversity of people groups
		The plurality of agricultural cultures
		Variety of culture media
		Diversity in agricultural and horticultural products
	Cultural and social conditions	The hospitality of the people
		The traditionality of the dominant thoughts of the village
		People's mentality towards strangers
		Identification of mass behaviors in the region
		The importance of religious relations
Village conditions	People's values and beliefs	
	Superstition and traditionalism in the region	
	Education level of people	
	Social modeling of the region	
	Definition and recognition of the village	
		Strengths and weaknesses of the village
		Identification of the number of households

Code oriented	category	Initial code
	Tourist Attractions	Having different rural and natural climates Peace and distance from the chaos of urban life Wild animals and unique plants Historical and architectural monuments Religious attractions and shrines Views of the sea, forest, diverse crops Soil diversity Vegetation and water content
	Financial conditions	Income level of the region Financial ability of farmers Income generating potential of the region Investment status Government financial support

Table 4.
Open coding of qualitative data (strategic conditions)

Code oriented	category	Initial code
Strategy	Marketing Strategies	Regional tourism branding Using new marketing and advertising tools Assessing the needs of tourists and realizing their needs in the region Brand management of rural products Use multiple social media
	Support	Building reputation in a specific field of tourism Organization of rural resources Stability in rural tourism protection laws Democracy and polling of villagers Supporting rural tourism Supporting the social values of the region Fair supervision and evaluation of rural tourism development procedure Financial support and creation of rural tourism investment fund Encouraging investors (exemption from taxes and the like)
	Local empowerment	Teaching entrepreneurial skills to people Development of teamwork and group work Cultivation for the development of tourism in the region Teaching new agricultural methods Teaching environmental laws and regulations Promoting cosmopolitanism (reducing local prejudices) Cultivation of preservation of social values
	Tourism management and planning	Creating rural tourism tours Creating amenities for international tourists Modeling successful tourism rural areas Creating active tourism institutions and organizations Improving the weaknesses of the region in terms of tourism Creating an inimitable competitive advantage in terms of tourism Creating a regional tourism site
	Development of rural products	Mat weaving and handicrafts Production of medicinal plants Creation of agricultural greenhouses Cultivation of local quality fruits

Code oriented	category	Initial code
		Dry fruit production and local dairy production
		Cultivation of new crops according to the needs of tourists

Table 5.

Open coding of qualitative data (consequences)

Code oriented	category	Initial code
consequences	value creation	Creating sustainable and added value in the village
		Fulfilling the goals of supporting national productions
		economical boom
		Increase in foreign exchange income
		profitability
		Cultivation and development of rural values
		Increasing the efficiency of rural strategic programs
		Increasing the efficiency of rural tourism laws and regulations
	Entrepreneurship	Improve livelihood
		Eliminate unemployment
		Increasing rural businesses
		Improving buying and selling of rural products
		Improving people's skills in providing manpower from the village
	Development of social capital	Increasing social security
		Increasing participation of villagers
		The bond of friendship and community
		Increase the feeling of trust
		Improving the position of social values
		A sense of belonging to the village
		Social cohesion and solidarity
	Development of the region	Development of green tourism in the region
		Preserving the natural and cultural resources of the region and preventing environmental degradation as a result of responsible tourism management
		Development of health tourism
		Development of recreational tourism
		The reputation of the rural tourism brand of the region

Table 6.

Open coding of qualitative data (background conditions)

Code oriented	category	Initial code
Background conditions	Participation and cooperation	Cooperation of institutions related to the village
		Supervision of the tourism organization
		Cooperative companies for agricultural products
	Regional infrastructure	Access roads and communication lines
		Access to appropriate health conditions
		Access to necessary energy (water, electricity and gas)
		Broadband Internet
		Landfill location
		Access to the health center and emergency room

Table 7.

Open coding of qualitative data (intervening conditions)

Code oriented	category	Initial code
intervening conditions	Policy making and laws	The rules of the cultural heritage organization
		Laws of the Department of Environmental Protection

Code oriented	category	Initial code
		Rural planning and urban development laws
		Laws of industry, mining and trade
	Popular biases	Attitude of villagers towards strangers
		Migration of villagers
		People's attitude towards urbanization
		Reluctance and lack of motivation of the villagers
	Attitude of tourists	Perceived value of rural tourism by tourists
		Understanding the peace and health of rural tourism
		A sense of security in the rural tourism area
		Perceived risk of rural tourism compared to other types of tourism
		Previous experience of tourists and return
		Word of mouth advertising (negative or positive) from tourists to new people

After the analysis and measurement of various data, the final research model is presented as follows:

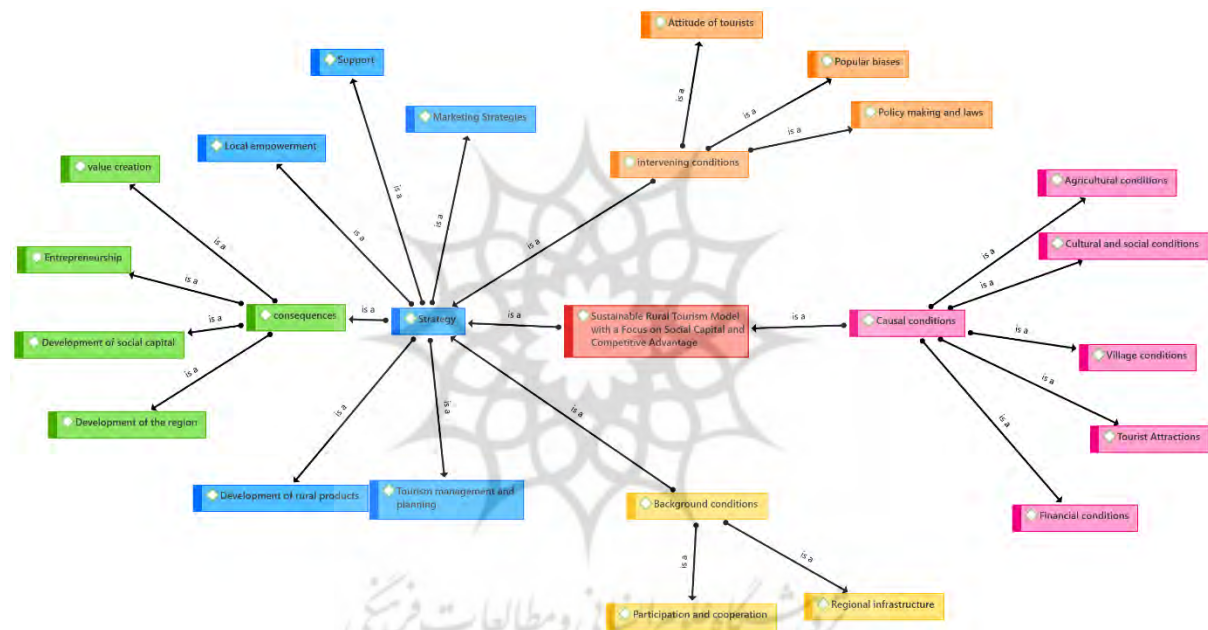


Figure 1. Data model of sustainable rural tourism foundation with social capital approach (output of ATLAS.TI software)

Conclusion

The aim of the current research was to model sustainable rural tourism with a social capital and competitive advantage approach in Fars province. Using a qualitative data-driven method, research concepts were extracted in six dimensions. The conditions refer to events or incidents that occur or spread a phenomenon. In this study, based on participants' perspectives, agricultural conditions, cultural and social conditions, rural conditions, tourist attractions, and financial conditions were identified and

collectively referred to as broader conditions named "interfering conditions." Strategies are based on actions and reactions to control, manage, and provide feedback on the phenomenon under investigation. Strategies are purposeful and take place for a reason. Intervention conditions are always present, facilitating or limiting strategies. The identified strategies include marketing strategies, support and assistance, local empowerment, tourism management and planning, and rural product development. Results emerge as a result of strategies.

Outcomes are the results of actions and reactions. Outcomes cannot always be predicted and are not necessarily what individuals intended. Outcomes may be events and incidents, take a negative form, be real or incidental, and occur in the present or future. The identified outcomes include value creation, entrepreneurship, social capital development, and regional development. The context or background is a set of specific characteristics that refer to the phenomenon of interest; that is, the place of events and incidents related to the phenomenon. The background indicates a set of specific conditions in which action and reaction strategies take place. Participation, collaboration, and regional infrastructure were identified as foundational conditions. Structural conditions related to a phenomenon and influencing action and reaction strategies. They either facilitate or restrict strategies within a specific context. Policy and legislative components, public biases, and tourists' attitudes were identified as intervening conditions.

The sustainable rural tourism model is designed with the social capital approach for the sustainable development of villages and strengthening social connections in them. The use of the social capital approach in the sustainable rural tourism model leads to the strengthening of communication between local residents, youth and tourists. These social connections bring improvement in the lives of villagers, increasing social solidarity and collaborative development in decisions related to rural tourism. In addition, due to the importance of social capital, local residents can strengthen solidarity and cooperation in various fields such as environmental protection, preservation and promotion of local culture and economic development of the village. As a result, sustainable rural tourism model with social capital approach can help sustainable development and improve the quality of life in villages. Based on the obtained results, the following suggestions are provided:

Competitive advantage in the development of sustainable rural tourism refers to the

strength of a village or rural area in question, which distinguishes it from other tourist destinations and has the ability to attract tourists. Competitive advantage in this area can be formed based on the unique features and resources available in the village as well as their optimal use. Competitive advantage in sustainable rural tourism can be highlighted from different aspects. Based on the obtained results, the following suggestions are provided:

- Villages and rural areas can have unique natural landscapes and natural beauties that are highly attractive for tourists. These natural landscapes can include mountains, lakes, rivers, forests, etc., which provide a unique experience for tourists.

- Villages often have a unique culture and history that serve as tourist attractions. Elements such as local customs, music, dance, handicrafts, ideals and myths play an important role in attracting tourists and give villages a competitive advantage.

- Villages can provide an opportunity to experience local life and get involved in daily activities. This includes participation in agricultural processes, handicrafts, local education and other similar activities that allow tourists to directly interact with the local community and have a unique experience.

- Villages are usually producers. One of the competitive advantages in the development of sustainable rural tourism is the production of local products and handicrafts. These products and handicrafts can be produced based on the natural resources available in the region, local culture and traditions. By offering local products and handicrafts to tourists, villages can help attract travelers interested in experiencing local culture while boosting the local economy.

- Villages that focus on sustainable tourism and participate in preserving the environment and local natural resources can have a strong competitive advantage in this field. Ecotourism and sustainable tourism allow tourists to directly connect with the local environment and nature while providing for their protection. This approach helps villages

attract tourists and distinguishes them from other tourist destinations.

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