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Modeling and Analysis of Strategic Entrepreneurship Factors With a Cultural Approach in the Rural Tourism Industry (Case Study: West Azerbaijan Tourist Villages)

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship serves as a pivotal solution to address the economic challenges faced by nations. Given the positive impacts of tourism activities in rural areas, experts recognize it as a cultural instrument for fostering entrepreneurship in villages. This study aims to develop a strategic entrepreneurship model for the rural tourism industry through a cultural lens. Employing a mixed-methods approach (qualitative and quantitative) with grounded theory, the research gathered quantitative data from a statistical population of 384 participants, while qualitative insights were derived from 20 semi-structured interviews. Data analysis utilized SPSS25 for structural exploration and AMOS for composite reliability (CR) assessment via structural equation modeling. Key findings identified causal factors (e.g., value creation in rural tourism, effective rural tourism promotion, risk-taking, self-efficacy, and innovation among villagers and farmers), contextual factors (e.g., cultural interactions, awareness of cultural heritage, cultural development, and cultural education), intervening factors (e.g., environmental-regional infrastructure, social dynamics, and motivational drivers), and strategic pillars (e.g., essential R&D, organizational support, and management planning). The implementation of these strategies yielded outcomes such as rural income diversification, enhanced competitiveness of small businesses, employment generation, and increased productivity and revenue growth. This study concludes that a culturally informed approach to rural tourism entrepreneurship offers a novel strategy for rural economic development, effectively diversifying income sources and fostering sustainable progress.

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Introduction

Participation in rural tourism contributes to a reduction in both objective and subjective dimensions of relative poverty. However, it does not directly influence subjective poverty; instead, its impact is mediated through the alleviation of objective poverty. In essence, engaging in rural tourism activities lowers the likelihood of experiencing relative poverty among participants (Dang et al., 2023). Moreover, rural tourism development plays a vital role in enhancing rural culture. Villages with a more advanced tourism sector demonstrate an 85.9% improvement in cultural indicators compared to those lacking tourism initiatives. This growth is facilitated through better household risk-sharing practices, enhancement of human capital, and strengthened self-identification. Both micro-level data (field surveys) and macro-level analysis (remote sensing) provide evidence of how rural tourism influences cultural development across diverse income brackets, demographic compositions, geographical settings, and topographical conditions (Wang et al., 2024). Although many emerging entrepreneurs establish new ventures each year, only a small fraction succeed in building sustainable enterprises. A significant number of them withdraw when confronted with the inherent challenges of starting a business. Nevertheless, entrepreneurs who possess stronger entrepreneurial personality traits are more likely to initiate new ventures despite recognizing these barriers (Amiri et al., 2009). Strategic entrepreneurship (SE) encompasses a broad and rich field of study, integrating insights from various disciplines such as economics, psychology, and sociology, along with key management subfields including organizational behavior and organization theory (Hitt et al., 2011). Entrepreneurship in rural areas has emerged as an important strategy for fostering social and economic development. But, the success of rural businesses is shaped by many factors, among which local culture and values have a pivotal role. Culture is a collective system of beliefs, values, and norms which can facilitate entrepreneurial development (Dorri Sede et al., 2024). It plays a pivotal role in transforming cultural capital into sustainable economic ventures. However, conventional models often overlook the sociocultural intricacies that shape entrepreneurial behavior in rural environments (Utami et al., 2023). For instance, in West Azerbaijan, cultural practices such as Kurdish carpet-weaving and Azeri agro-tourism are not merely economic activities but are deeply embedded in the social fabric of these communities (Karimi et al., 2023). These cultural dimensions not only differentiate the region's tourism offerings but also influence local engagement, resource mobilization, and sustainable business practices (Earl, 2021). Recent studies advocate for culturally grounded entrepreneurship strategies to counteract rural depopulation and economic disparities (Rastego et al., 2021). However, operationalizing cultural elements—such as indigenous knowledge, social cohesion, and heritage conservation—into practical entrepreneurship models remains a significant research gap (Stirzaker et al., 2021). Addressing this gap, the present study

seeks to explore: How can strategic entrepreneurship factors be modeled to leverage cultural assets for sustainable rural tourism development in West Azerbaijan?

In West Azerbaijan Province, Iran, villages which are rich in cultural assets—such as Kurdish carpet-weaving traditions, ancient historical sites, and vibrant indigenous festivals—hold untapped potential for entrepreneurship-driven tourism. Despite global recognition of rural tourism's role in poverty alleviation, the integration of cultural values into strategic entrepreneurship frameworks remains underexplored, particularly in non-Western contexts where sociocultural dynamics uniquely shape economic activities (Smallbone & Welter, 2003). This gap underscores the need for context-specific models that harmonize cultural preservation with entrepreneurial innovation. By integrating cultural heritage into entrepreneurship frameworks, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how rural tourism can serve as both a preservation mechanism for cultural traditions and a viable economic development strategy. Through a critical examination of entrepreneurial strategies that incorporate local cultural elements, this research contributes to the broader discourse on sustainable tourism and rural resilience.

Rural tourism has emerged as a transformative force for sustainable economic development, particularly in regions where cultural heritage intersects with socioeconomic challenges (Zhao et al., 2019). In West Azerbaijan Province, Iran, villages rich in cultural assets—such as Kurdish carpet-weaving traditions, ancient historical sites, and vibrant indigenous festivals—hold untapped potential for entrepreneurship-driven tourism. Despite global recognition of rural tourism's role in poverty alleviation (Su & Wall, 2020), the integration of cultural values into strategic entrepreneurship frameworks remains underexplored, particularly in non-Western contexts where sociocultural dynamics uniquely shape economic activities (Smallbone & Welter, 2003). This gap underscores the need for context-specific models that harmonize cultural preservation with entrepreneurial innovation. After the advent of industrial changes, human life was based on new definitions of values.

Background/literature Review

Rural tourism has emerged as a transformative force for sustainable economic development, particularly in regions where cultural heritage intersects with socioeconomic challenges (Zhao et al., 2019). Despite global recognition of rural tourism's role in poverty alleviation, the integration of cultural values into strategic entrepreneurship frameworks remains underexplored, particularly in non-Western contexts where sociocultural dynamics uniquely shape economic activities (Smallbone & Welter, 2003). This gap underscores the need for context-specific models that harmonize cultural preservation with entrepreneurial innovation.

Theoretical Foundations of Strategic Entrepreneurship

Strategic entrepreneurship, defined as the symbiotic interplay between opportunity-seeking (exploiting new ventures) and advantage-seeking (sustaining competitive edges), is pivotal for creating long-term organizational value (Amit & Zott, 2001; Hitt et al., 2001). Entrepreneurial knowledge, particularly prior experience, significantly influences business outcomes, as evidenced by its role in enhancing decision-making agility and risk management (Ucbasaran et al., 2008). For rural communities, aligning entrepreneurial initiatives with societal needs—such as economic diversification and environmental sustainability—is critical to achieving organizational effectiveness (Hariyadi et al., 2024).

Cultural Dynamics and Rural Tourism

The cultural fabric of rural regions like West Azerbaijan serves as both a catalyst and a constraint for entrepreneurship. Practices such as Azeri agro-tourism and Kurdish handicraft production are deeply rooted in community identity, offering unique value propositions for tourists (Karimi et al., 2010). Rural tourism, when strategically designed, can diversify income sources and empower communities to steward their natural and cultural resources (Richards, 2018). For instance, agro-tourism initiatives in West Azerbaijan's villages have demonstrated potential to enhance food security and improve livelihoods (Sharpley, 2002). The rural environment serves as a critical arena for leveraging entrepreneurial opportunities, particularly in tourism, which can act as an engine for economic growth and community development (Sharpley, 2002). However, despite the vast potential of rural tourism in regions like West Azerbaijan Province—home to one million hectares of rural land and 5% of Iran's agricultural output—strategic initiatives to harness these opportunities remain underdeveloped. Investigations reveal a lack of targeted programs by local authorities to promote rural tourism, resulting in unsustainable practices and unfulfilled socioeconomic potential (Rastego et al., 2021).

The absence of strategic entrepreneurship in this sector exacerbates challenges such as unemployment, rural-urban migration, and dissatisfaction with agricultural incomes (UNWTO, 2023). For instance, farmers in West Azerbaijan face declining profitability due to market fluctuations, a issue that could be mitigated through tourism-driven income diversification (Toffolini et al., 2021). Rural tourism entrepreneurship, if strategically planned, could enhance livelihoods, preserve cultural heritage, and reduce migration by creating localized employment. However, current efforts fail to address systemic barriers such as fragmented policies, inadequate infrastructure, and limited community engagement (Smallbone & Welter, 2003). This research posits that a culturally informed strategic entrepreneurship model is essential to unlock West Azerbaijan's rural tourism potential. By identifying regional advantages (e.g., handicrafts, agro-tourism) and constraints (e.g., institutional neglect), such a model could foster sustainable development aligned with global best practices (Swedberg, 2022). In rural

tourism, Shirmohammadi and Mavouni (2021) developed a strategic model showing that agricultural tourism can empower rural women economically when supported by training and market access.

Entrepreneurship as a Catalyst for Organizational and Regional Development

Entrepreneurship remains a pivotal driver of organizational efficiency, innovation, and socioeconomic growth (Khyareh, 2023). Defined as the ability to transform ideas into actionable ventures, entrepreneurship prioritizes proactive behavior, future-oriented problem-solving, and value creation for stakeholders (Baron & Ensley, 2006; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000).

In the context of rural tourism. While definitions vary across literature, Schumpeter's seminal work positions entrepreneurship as synonymous with innovation—introducing novel products, markets, or organizational structures to disrupt economic equilibria (Schumpeter, 2008). This conceptualization aligns with modern interpretations that emphasize entrepreneurship as a strategic tool for overcoming crises and sustaining competitive advantage (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2019; Ireland et al., 2003).

Strategic Entrepreneurship: Beyond Conventional Paradigms

Strategic entrepreneurship integrates opportunity-seeking (exploiting new ventures) and advantage-seeking (sustaining competitiveness), enabling organizations to navigate dynamic environments (Hitt et al., 2001). In rural contexts, such as West Azerbaijan's tourism sector, this duality is critical. For instance, leveraging cultural assets like traditional handicrafts or agro-tourism requires both innovative market creation (opportunity-seeking) and institutional collaboration to preserve heritage (advantage-seeking) (Alvarez & Barney, 2007; Zahra et al., 2006).

Cultural Entrepreneurship in Rural Tourism

The rural tourism industry, particularly in culturally rich regions like West Azerbaijan, demands entrepreneurship models that harmonize economic objectives with cultural preservation. Here, entrepreneurship transcends mere profit generation—it fosters community empowerment, reduces migration, and revitalizes marginalized economies (UNWTO, 2023). A culturally informed strategic framework can thus serve as a blueprint for sustainable development, addressing gaps in policy and infrastructure while amplifying local identity (Peredo & McLean, 2006). For example, agro-tourism initiatives in West Azerbaijan's villages have demonstrated potential to enhance food security and improve livelihoods through diversified income streams (Sharpley, 2002).

The integration of strategic entrepreneurship with cultural dynamics in rural tourism has emerged as a critical pathway for sustainable development, particularly in regions rich in cultural heritage but challenged by economic marginalization (Hitt et al., 2001; Alvarez & Barney, 2007). Strategic entrepreneurship, defined as the fusion of opportunity-seeking (innovation-driven ventures) and advantage-seeking (sustaining competitive edges), enables rural communities to transform cultural

assets into economic value while preserving authenticity (Amit & Zott, 2001; Zahra et al., 2006). In West Azerbaijan, Iran, villages endowed with unique traditions—such as Kurdish handicrafts and Azeri agro-tourism—exemplify the interplay between cultural continuity and entrepreneurial strategy. However, tourism expansion often triggers cultural discontinuity, manifesting in commodified heritage, altered social norms, and behavioral shifts among locals (Sharpley, 2002; Uentin et al., 2021). For instance, rural residents report diminished social cohesion and cultural authenticity due to unmanaged tourism activities, highlighting the need for frameworks that balance economic gains with cultural safeguarding (Taleb et al., 2018).

Cultural entrepreneurship theory posits that leveraging indigenous knowledge and communal networks can mitigate these risks (Peredo & McLean, 2006). By prioritizing community-led initiatives—such as religious festivals or traditional craft workshops—rural areas like Soleqan village in West Azerbaijan have reduced adverse cultural impacts while enhancing economic resilience (UNWTO, 2023). Such strategies align with Schumpeter's (2008) emphasis on innovation as a driver of economic development, where entrepreneurial actions disrupt stagnant equilibria through novel market creation (e.g., experiential tourism) and institutional collaboration (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). Empirical studies further underscore tourism's dual role: it fosters cross-cultural exchanges and employment opportunities (Kazemi et al., 2024) yet risks homogenizing local identities if mismanaged (Cohen & Cohen, 2012). A synthesis of these insights reveals that strategic entrepreneurship in rural tourism hinges on three pillars: (1) cultural innovation capacity (adapting traditions to market demands), (2) institutional support (policy frameworks for heritage conservation), and (3) community agency (participatory decision-making) (Alvarez & Barney, 2007). This tripartite model not only addresses gaps in existing literature but also offers actionable insights for policymakers aiming to harmonize economic growth with cultural preservation in marginalized regions.

Recent studies underscore the critical role of strategic entrepreneurship in revitalizing rural tourism, particularly when integrated with cultural preservation frameworks. Recent study highlight that West Azerbaijan's rural villages, despite their rich cultural assets (e.g., Kurdish handicrafts, Azeri agro-tourism), face systemic barriers such as fragmented policies and insufficient infrastructure, which hinder sustainable tourism growth. Their findings align with (Toffolini et al., 2021) who emphasize that digitizing traditional crafts while preserving authenticity can drive economic resilience and reduce rural-urban migration. Shirmohammadi and Mavouni (2021) proposed a strategic model of entrepreneurship tailored for rural women, demonstrating that agricultural tourism can act as a catalyst for women's economic empowerment when supported by appropriate training, cultural inclusion, and market access. Kazemi et al. (2024) identify community-led governance as a cornerstone for mitigating cultural erosion in Iranian rural tourism. They argue that participatory models, such as co-designed heritage festivals,

enhance local agency and foster equitable benefit-sharing. Similarly, UNWTO (2023) reports that culturally informed tourism strategies can increase rural employment by 23% in marginalized regions, provided institutional support aligns with community needs.

Shirmohammadi and Choobdar (2023) found that proactive strategies significantly improve performance and adaptability in rural tourism businesses. The concept of cultural fertility—defined as the dynamic interplay between heritage conservation and entrepreneurial innovation—is pivotal in this discourse. Lounsbury & Glynn (2019) posit that cultural fertility enables rural communities to transform intangible heritage (e.g., oral traditions, rituals) into marketable experiences without commodification, Karubi (2003) reveal that tourism-driven cultural exchanges have paradoxically both revitalized traditional practices (e.g., Nowruz celebrations) and introduced tensions, such as generational divides over heritage interpretation. To address this, Carrillo et al. (2019) advocates for hybrid financing models, blending public grants with community microfunds, to scale culturally sustainable tourism initiatives.

Emerging frameworks also stress technology's role in cultural entrepreneurship. Falter & Jóhannesson (2023) showcase how AI-driven platforms can market rural tourism while educating visitors on local customs, reducing cultural misunderstandings. Conversely, Aquino (2022) warn that over-reliance on digital tools risks diluting authentic human interactions, a cornerstone of rural tourism's appeal. Future Directions: A synthesis of recent literature reveals gaps in scalable models that harmonize cultural preservation with entrepreneurial scalability. This study addresses this by proposing a Culturally Anchored Strategic Entrepreneurship (CASE) framework, tested in West Azerbaijan's villages, to balance economic growth with heritage safeguarding. Shirmohammadi and Ghanbari (2023) showed that during COVID-19, spiritual experiences at religious sites strongly shaped visitors' behavior by influencing norms and risk attitudes. Lounsbury & Glynn (2019) demonstrated that culturally grounded entrepreneurship models, which transform intangible assets (e.g., traditions) into economic opportunities, can generate sustainable value. Similarly, Toffolini et al., (2021) emphasized that digital marketing of these products, combined with community training, preserves cultural authenticity and fosters sustainable employment. Kazemi et al. (2024), examining rural tourism in Iran, identified community participation in strategy design as key to mitigating cultural erosion. Their research revealed that culturally rooted programs (e.g., local festivals) not only generate income but also strengthen collective identity. The UNWTO (2023) reported that rural areas leveraging local culture can increase employment by 30%, provided policies align with community needs. From a technological perspective, Falter & Jóhannesson (2023) showed that AI-driven platforms can enhance rural tourism's marketability but cautioned that over-reliance on technology might dilute human interactions. These findings align with Aquino (2022), who stressed that "authenticity" remains central to rural tourism's appeal and that technology should complement—not replace—it. In policy, the Carrillo et al(2019) advocated hybrid

financing models (public grants + local investments) to develop tourism infrastructure. Conversely, Shirmohammadi and Mavouni (2020) developed a strategic entrepreneurship model for the tourism industry, highlighting the role of innovation, managerial planning, and institutional support in enhancing business performance and promoting sustainable development.

Methodology

Methodologically, this research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining structural equation modeling (SEM) with qualitative case studies across 12 villages in West Azerbaijan (Hair et al., 2011). Data from 384 local stakeholders and 20 semi-structured interviews are analyzed to identify key drivers, including cultural innovation capacity, community-led branding, and institutional collaboration (Falter & Jóhannesson, 2023). This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Rooted in the action originality paradigm and guided by an inductive, exploratory framework, it follows grounded theory methodology to generate hypotheses through systematic analysis. The research employs a three-stage coding process: open coding (identifying discrete concepts), axial coding (establishing relationships between categories), and selective coding (integrating a theoretical framework).

Qualitative Research

The qualitative phase involved in-depth semi-structured interviews with 20 participants, including academic experts, tourism managers, and entrepreneurship specialists. Participants were selected through purposive and theoretical sampling, ensuring diverse insights from professionals directly involved in rural tourism and entrepreneurship. The interviews continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, meaning no new themes emerged from additional data collection. Data analysis in this phase followed the systematic approach proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). The coding process included: Open Coding: The researcher meticulously examined interview transcripts line by line, marking key concepts and assigning labels. Through repeated readings, primary categories and subcategories emerged, providing a foundational framework for further analysis.

Axial Coding: Concepts identified during open coding were systematically grouped into broader categories. Relationships among categories were analyzed based on causal conditions, contextual and intervening factors, strategies, and consequences. A visual model was developed to illustrate these interconnections. Selective Coding: At this stage, a central phenomenon was identified, integrating the core categories into a cohesive theoretical framework. The final model was refined to encapsulate the entrepreneurial dynamics shaping rural tourism in West Azerbaijan. To ensure credibility, the researcher engaged in prolonged interaction with participants, maintained reflexive notes, and conducted pre-tests to refine interview questions.

Quantitative Research

The quantitative phase utilized structured questionnaires with a five-point Likert scale to collect data from 384 business owners and tourism stakeholders in rural villages of West Azerbaijan. The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula at a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error, ensuring statistical reliability. Stratified random sampling was employed to enhance geographic representation across various districts. Prior to full-scale distribution, a pilot study with 30 respondents was conducted to assess questionnaire reliability and refine unclear items. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to validate the construct validity, and composite reliability (CR) was calculated to ensure consistency in measurement.

Data Integration and Analysis

Data triangulation was performed by integrating primary and secondary sources to strengthen validity. Ethical considerations, including confidentiality, informed consent, and encrypted data storage, were strictly adhered to. The qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed separately and then integrated to provide a holistic understanding of strategic entrepreneurship in rural tourism. SPSS was used for descriptive statistical analysis, while AMOS facilitated structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine relationships between key variables. This rigorous methodological approach ensures comprehensive insights into the intersection of strategic entrepreneurship and rural tourism development, offering both theoretical contributions and practical implications.

Results

In this section, data analysis followed Strauss and Corbin's systematic grounded theory methodology, structured into three coding phases: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. During the open coding phase, interview transcripts were meticulously examined line by line, allowing for the identification, labeling, and categorization of key concepts into 19 primary codes and subcategories (e.g., "rural tourism advertising," "creativity and innovation"). Axial coding then integrated these codes into a coherent paradigm structured around causal conditions, strategies, contextual/intervening conditions, and consequences. The causal conditions driving the central phenomenon of strategic entrepreneurship included: (1) rural tourism advertising (promoting cultural assets such as festivals and handicrafts), (2) risk-taking and self-efficacy (villagers' willingness to invest despite uncertainties), (3) creativity and innovation (novel approaches to tourism services), and (4) value creation intent (prioritizing distinctive cultural value propositions). Contextual conditions encompassed cultural heritage awareness and community cohesion, while intervening conditions included external factors such as government policies and market fluctuations. The identified strategies focused on skill

development programs and collaborative partnerships, ultimately leading to consequences such as income diversification and sustainable revenue growth.

Selective coding synthesized these elements into a unified theoretical model, illustrating how cultural assets (e.g., Kurdish carpet-weaving traditions) act as catalysts for rural tourism development when aligned with entrepreneurial practices. Refinements to this section included enhanced structural clarity (e.g., delineating coding stages more explicitly), improved terminological precision (e.g., using "self-efficacy" instead of "self-confidence"), and contextualization with practical examples. Future enhancements could involve integrating a visual paradigm model (Figure 1) and cross-referencing quantitative findings (e.g., CR values from AMOS) to strengthen the validity and robustness of the results.

Intervening factors refer to distinctive situational elements that influence strategic decisions. This study identifies three key categories associated with these factors: environmental conditions, regional infrastructures, and external influences. These categories highlight how localized circumstances, such as the availability of resources and infrastructure, as well as broader environmental factors, can significantly shape the implementation of strategies.

Background conditions refer to the contextual factors within which strategies interact to manage or respond to the phenomenon. The results of the analysis reveal four distinct categories related to these conditions: 1) cultural interactions, 2) awareness of cultural capital, 3) cultural development, and 4) cultural education. These categories highlight the essential elements that shape strategic decisions in the context of rural tourism and cultural entrepreneurship. Additionally, a total of 25 codes were derived from the interview data, which are presented in the following table.

Strategies refer to the actions undertaken in response to the central phenomenon, aimed at controlling, managing, and addressing the desired outcome. The analysis identifies three key categories associated with these strategies: 1) necessary research and development, 2) support and organizational procedures, and 3) management and planning. Furthermore, 21 final codes were extracted from the interview data, which are presented in the following table.

Consequences refer to the outcomes resulting from the implementation of strategies. The analysis reveals four key categories related to these outcomes: 1) diversification of rural income, 2) enhanced competitiveness of small business units, 3) increased employment, and 4) growth in income and efficiency. Additionally, 17 final codes were extracted from the interview data, which are presented in Table 5.

Table 1. Axial coding of causal conditions (researcher's findings)

Dimensions	Categories	Concepts (final code) (open coding)
Causal factors	Advertising of agricultural tourism	Launching a festival of agricultural products
		Guide offices in the field of agritourism
		Advertisements of agricultural tourism on TV and radio
		Publishing magazines related to agritourism
	Risk tolerance and self-confidence	Being creative and pioneering
		Not afraid of failure in agricultural work
		Leaving the current job due to having a better job idea
		Welcoming new ideas instead of old ways
		Continuing the path of the untrustworthy Ali of those around him
	Creativity and innovation of villagers and farmers	Support creativity
		Establishing new approaches and information
		Utilization of available capacities in agricultural lands
		Development and planning of tourism
		Creativity in agricultural and rural methods
	Desire to create value in agritourism	The practical cooperation of rural areas in agricultural work attracts tourists.
		Formation of educational seminars on agritourism
		Organizing quarterly meetings
		Eliminating economic risks
		Knowing the joy of cooperation and visiting agricultural lands
Main category	Strategic efficiency	Creating sustainable value
		Strategies for growing market share
		Discover profitable points
	Rural tourism	Selection of target customers
		Changing commuting patterns
		Hosting rural tourists
		Exchange of ideas in the interactions of tourists and farmers
	Cultural factors	Cultural interactions
		Awareness of cultural assets
		Cultural development
		Cultural education

Table 2. Axial coding of intervening conditions (researcher's findings)

Dimensions	Categories	Concepts (final code) (open coding)
Intervening factors	Tourism infrastructures	The foundations of today's technologies
		Physical infrastructures such as roads, financial institutions, water and gas networks
		Antiquities
		Rural health centers and clinics
		The distance of access of agricultural areas to densely populated centers
		Agricultural tourism agencies
	Tourism attraction	Geographical conditions
		The presence of natural attractions and tourism
		The presence of cultural attractions in tourism
		Kurdish Carpet-Weaving Villages (cultural/artisanal tourism)
		Azeri Agro-Tourism Initiatives (vineyard tours, dairy farming experiences)
		Ancient Armenian Monasteries (e.g., St. Thaddeus)
		Lake Urmia (birdwatching, salt flats)
		Qara Kelisa (Black Church) (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
	social factors	Appropriate behavior of farmers with tourists
		The growth of tourism culture
		Creating a sense of cooperation between people
		Institutionalizing the culture of hospitality among the villagers
		Revival of religious ceremonies
		Improving the level of education of farmers due to tourism
		The existence of regional and local customs
	Motivating factors	Making people interested and creating attraction
		Using clean air in the natural environment of the village
		Motivate tourists
		How to host visitors
		The low price of agricultural and rural products
		The pleasantness of farmers in dealing with visitors
		Participation of visitors in agricultural and rural activities
		Comfort in agricultural ecosystems

Table 3. Axial coding of background conditions (researcher's findings)

Dimensions	Categories	Concepts (final code) (open coding)
Contextual factors	Host and guest community interaction	Host and guest community interaction
		Cultural similarities
		Alignment of cultural values
		Influence from other cultures
		Creating a cultural pattern
		A sense of social belonging
		Native management
		Preservation of cultural identity
	Cultural similarities	Revival of local languages
		Preservation of ethnicities
		Increase recreational opportunities
		Participation in the local community
		Holding cultural festivals
		Familiarity with tourism literature
		Getting away from everyday life
		Development of cultural products
		Creating an open cultural space
		Promote friendship
		Development of ancient values
		Increase travel motivation
		Increase self-confidence
		Educating local people
		Education of tourists
		Empowering employees of organizations related to cultural heritage
		Teaching tourism rules and regulations

Table 4. Core coding of strategies (researcher's findings)

Dimensions	Categories	Concepts (final code) (open coding)
Strategies	Necessary R&D research and development	Organizing regular training sessions
		Informing people based on standard training
		Speech of successful people in the field of wealth creation in agritourism
		Professional and specialized approach
		Research orientation and up-to-date training

Dimensions	Categories	Concepts (final code) (open coding)
	Organizational support and procedures	Officials' views on the economic benefits of agricultural tourism
		Cooperation and coordination between organizations involved in agritourism
		Government financial support for entrepreneurship in agritourism
		The foundation of private sector investment
		Political and comprehensive government support
		Payment of facilities with low bank interest
		Creating a sense of security in tourists
		Holding training classes in the field of value creation in agritourism
		Support for rural councils and village councils
		Tax exemptions for entrepreneurship in agritourism
	Management and planning	Organization of specialized and scientific seminars for up-to-date training
		The existence of order and coordination between decision-making organizations
		Advising visitors to tourist farms
		Attention to the financial benefits of agritourism
		Management abilities of people in agricultural tourism affairs
		Environmental analysis and recognition of strengths and weaknesses

Table 5. Axial coding of results (researcher's findings)

Dimensions	Categories	Concepts (final code) (open coding)
onsequences	Diversity of rural income	Biodiversity
		Supplementary income
		Agricultural Products
		Handicrafts and Artisanal Goods
		Tourism Services
		Homestays and guesthouses.
		Adventure tourism packages (trekking, horseback riding
	The competitive power of small business units	The existence of regional potential in the growth of agricultural tourism
		The capacity of agricultural land to welcome the additional activity of tourists
		The existence of local and interested people in the growth and development of agritourism
		The price of agricultural products in the market
		The amount of tourist demand for natural agricultural products and tourist areas

Dimensions	Categories	Concepts (final code) (open coding)
	Increasing employment	job creation
		Employment justice
		Growth of value creation culture
		permanent job
		Supply of handicrafts and rural products
		Trade growth
	Growth of income and efficiency	Benefiting from the potential capacities of farmers
		Farmers' income growth
		Being a pioneer in new affairs in agritourism

In this research, based on the components identified during the axial coding stage, the following propositions or theorems have been formulated:

Theorem 1: Do rural tourism advertising, risk tolerance, self-confidence, creativity and innovation among villagers and farmers, as well as the desire to create value in rural tourism, serve as causal conditions influencing the establishment of a strategic entrepreneurship model in the rural tourism industry with a cultural approach?

Theorem 2: Do cultural interactions, awareness of cultural assets, cultural development, and cultural education, as background conditions, affect the establishment of a strategic entrepreneurship model in the rural tourism industry with a cultural approach?

Theorem 3: Do environmental and regional infrastructures, social factors, and motivating factors influence the establishment of a strategic entrepreneurship model in the rural tourism industry with a cultural approach as intervening conditions?

Theorem 4: Are research and development, support and organizational procedures, and management and planning the primary strategies for establishing a strategic entrepreneurship model in the rural tourism industry with a cultural approach?

Theorem 5: Will the diversity of rural income, competitiveness of small business units, increased employment, and growth in income and efficiency be the consequences of establishing a strategic entrepreneurship model in the rural tourism industry with a cultural approach?

Therefore, the final model of strategic entrepreneurship in the agricultural tourism industry, based on the foundational data theory, is presented in Figure 1.

Findings of the Quantitative Section: Theoretical Insights

Causal Factors have a positive and significant impact on the main category.

The Main Category exhibits a positive and significant effect on strategies.

Intervening Factors significantly influence strategies in a positive direction.

Contextual Factors demonstrate a positive and significant impact on the formulation and execution of strategies.

Strategies have a positive and significant effect on the subsequent consequences, driving measurable outcomes.

These findings provide strong empirical support for the theoretical model and highlight the critical role of each factor in shaping the development and success of strategic entrepreneurship in rural tourism.

In this study, the KMO index was greater than 0.6. The closer the index value is to 1, the more appropriate the data for the analysis.

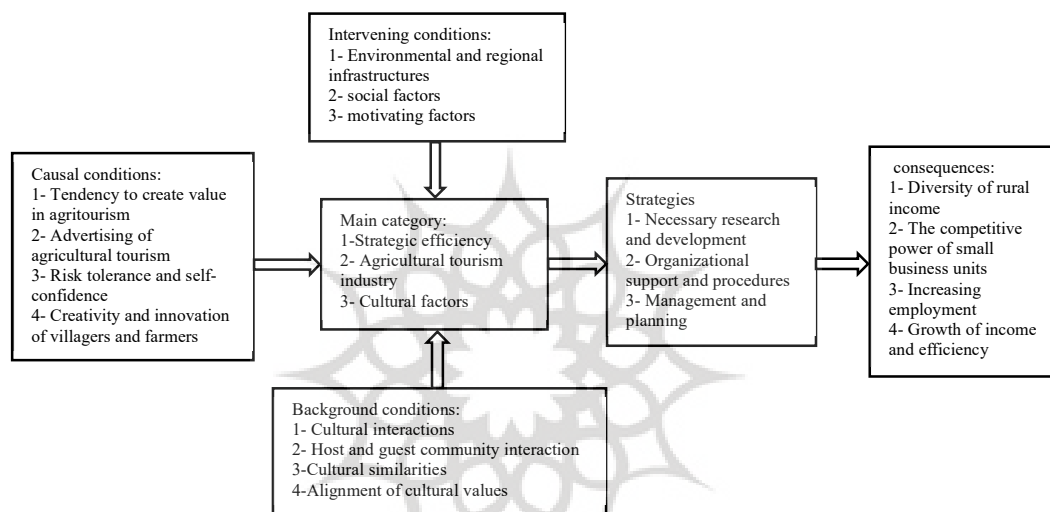


Figure 1. Conceptual model

Table 6. Questionnaire KMO-Bartlett reliability test

KMO Test		0.956
Bartlett test	Normalized Chi-Square	7462.684
	Degrees of freedom	210
	Significance level (sig)	0.000

The purpose of factor analysis is to test hypotheses about the underlying traits that influence a set of measured variables. Reliability refers to the consistency of results across time (test-retest reliability), across items (internal consistency), and across different researchers (interrater reliability). Validity indicates the extent to which the scores accurately represent the variable they are intended to measure. Table 6 presents the results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis along with validity and reliability indexes. To assess the content validity and reliability of the questionnaire, expert opinions were consulted.

Cronbach's alpha for all constructs in this study exceeds 0.70. SPSS software was used to calculate these validity measures. Descriptive information is provided in Table 6.

Table 7. Confirmatory Factor Analysis: validity and reliability indexes

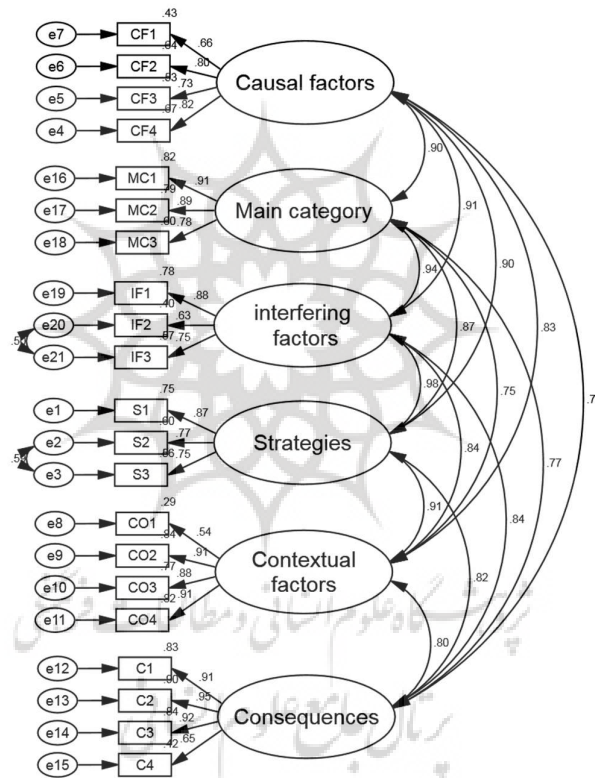
Variables	Items	Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Structural Validity (CR), over 60%	Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Over 5%
Causal factors	CF1	0.658	0.844	0.840	0.570
	CF2	0.803			
	CF3	0.731			
	CF4	0.817			
Main category	MC1	0.905	0.891	0.894	0.738
	MC2	0.890			
	MC3	0.776			
interfering factors	IF1	0.885	0.849	0.805	0.583
	IF2	0.633			
	IF3	0.752			
Strategies	S1	0.867	0.883	0.839	0.636
	S2	0.774			
	S3	0.746			
Contextual factors	CO1	0.539	0.863	0.891	0.679
	CO2	0.914			
	CO3	0.878			
	CO4	0.905			
Consequences	C1	0.913	0.909	0.920	0.583
	C2	0.946			
	C3	0.915			
	C4	0.646			

Model fit indices

To assess the validity and reliability of the measurement model, various indicators were employed to evaluate its adequacy. Analyzing the measurement model before testing the structural component is crucial to ensure the appropriateness of the indicators for subsequent analysis. Table 7 presents the model fit indices, which provide insights into the overall suitability of the model.

Table 8. Model fit Indices

Fit indices	Index name	Allowance amount	obtained values
Absolute-fit	CMIN/DF(Normed Chi-square Index)	5<	3.487
	RMSEA (Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation)	0.08<	0.081
	GFI (Goodness of Fit Index)	0.70>	0.864
Incremental-fit index	AGFI (Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index)	0.70>	0.817
	CFI (Comparative Fit Index)	0.70>	0.942
	NFI (Normed Fit Index)	0.70>	0.921
	TLI (Non- Normed Fit Index)	0.70>	0.930

**Figure 2. Fit indices test of the conceptual model**

As previously mentioned, this study is based on five hypotheses. To evaluate these hypotheses, path analysis was conducted using AMOS software. The significance levels for hypothesis testing are provided in Table 8 and Figure 3. A hypothesis is considered confirmed if its significance level (p-value) is below 0.05 and the path coefficient is positive.

Hypotheses of research:

- 1- Causal factors have a positive and significant effect on the main category
- 2- Main category has a positive and significant effect on strategies
- 3- Intervening factors have a positive and significant effect on strategies
- 4- Contextual factors have a positive and significant effect on strategies
- 5- Strategies on Consequences have a positive and significant effect

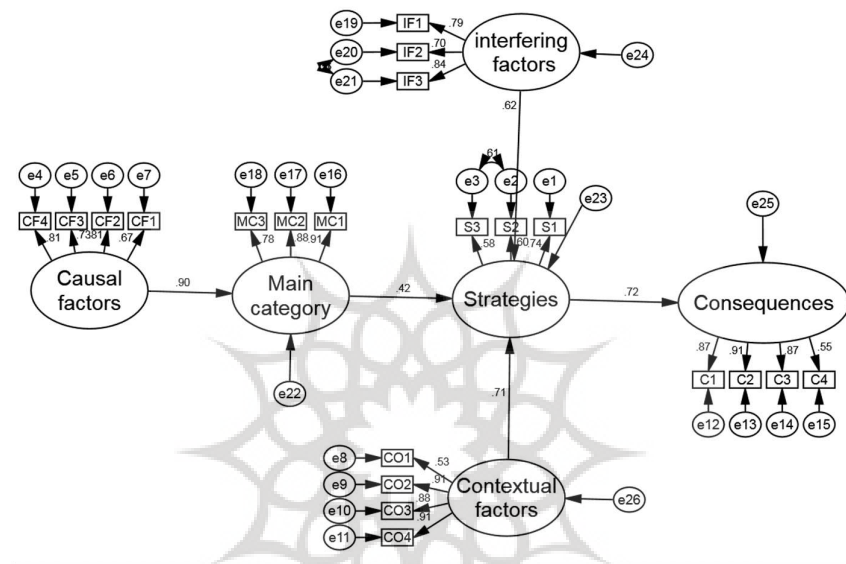


Figure 3. Research Hypotheses Test

Table 9. The Study of Research Hypotheses

Hypotheses	Path		Estimate	P	Results
1	Main category	<--- Causal factors	0.899	***	Confirmation
2	Strategies	<--- Main category	0.416	***	Confirmation
3	Strategies	<--- interfering factors	0.624	***	Confirmation
4	Strategies	<--- Contextual factor	0.706	***	Confirmation
5	Consequences	<--- Strategies	0.717	***	Confirmation

Discussion & Conclusion

This study set out to design a strategic entrepreneurship model for the rural tourism industry through a cultural lens. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach and grounded in a wide array of scholarly literature, the research identified four core components: causal conditions, background conditions, intervening conditions, and strategies. These components collectively inform how strategic

entrepreneurship can be effectively applied to promote rural tourism development, especially in culturally rich but economically challenged regions such as West Azerbaijan. The model not only aligns with a broad spectrum of existing studies but also contributes novel insights that extend the discourse on sustainable rural entrepreneurship. In terms of causal conditions, the study revealed four key factors: a strong drive toward value creation in rural tourism, effective promotion and information dissemination, a culture of risk-taking and self-confidence, and the creativity and innovation of rural inhabitants. These findings are in line with those of Shirmohammadi and Mavouni (2021), who illustrated how agricultural tourism initiatives thrive when rural communities are empowered through targeted support and training. Likewise, Toffolini et al. (2021) demonstrated that redefining stakeholder roles within rural innovation systems can enhance entrepreneurial capacities. The emphasis on creativity and self-efficacy also resonates with Dorri Sede et al. (2024), who underscored the role of cultural traits in enabling rural entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the theoretical perspectives of Amit and Zott (2001) and Baron and Ensley (2006) validate the importance of innovation and opportunity recognition as foundational elements of entrepreneurial action in rural contexts. Alvarez and Barney (2007) further enrich this perspective by distinguishing between discovery- and creation-oriented entrepreneurial approaches, both of which are relevant in culturally embedded rural settings. Interestingly, the present study diverges from purely economic interpretations of value creation by suggesting that the cultural embeddedness of entrepreneurship adds long-term sustainability to business models. This reflects the perspective of Lounsbury and Glynn (2019), who argue that cultural entrepreneurship transforms identity into economic value by integrating local narratives into enterprise creation. Similarly, Swedberg (2006) pointed out that the cultural entrepreneur's role is not merely economic but symbolic and social, highlighting how tradition, craft, and cultural meaning shape entrepreneurial opportunity. Regarding background conditions, this study identified cultural interaction, awareness of heritage, cultural development, and cultural education as pivotal to shaping a supportive environment for tourism entrepreneurship. This cultural orientation contrasts with the more structural emphasis found in the work of Shirmohammadi and Mavouni (2020), who focused on organizational culture and budgetary frameworks. Instead, our findings align with Dorri Sede et al. (2024), who highlighted the empowering potential of cultural knowledge and education in rural development. Richards (2018) likewise emphasized that cultural tourism succeeds when it draws upon local narratives and traditions. This view is supported by Karimi et al. (2023), whose research showed that enhancing cultural competencies through training increases the effectiveness of rural tourism facilitators. Karubi (2003) earlier argued that tourism without cultural sensitivity leads to alienation and inauthenticity, a concern that supports the study's emphasis on cultural development as a prerequisite for sustainable entrepreneurship. Furthermore, Utami et al. (2023) found that local cultural resources, when properly activated, mitigate

the risks of over-commercialization and can serve as anchors for entrepreneurial resilience. These findings suggest that culture must not be treated as a peripheral concern but rather as a central element of strategic entrepreneurship in rural destinations.

The study also identified intervening conditions that mediate the relationship between strategic action and entrepreneurial outcomes. These include environmental and regional infrastructure, social dynamics, and motivational factors. In line with Hariyadi et al. (2024), the research highlights how transportation access, localized planning, and strong community ties contribute to the resilience of tourism villages. Toffolini et al. (2021) reinforced this by showing how inclusive stakeholder engagement can either facilitate or hinder rural tourism progress. Similarly, Rastego et al. (2021) discussed how governance fragmentation and weak infrastructure can stall innovation in rural tourism. The present study builds on these insights by emphasizing the interplay between material conditions and socio-cultural motivation in shaping tourism entrepreneurship.

These findings also connect with the work of Dang et al. (2023), who showed that structural poverty alleviation via rural tourism is more effective when aligned with cultural and motivational engagement. The current model suggests that infrastructure alone is insufficient without active community participation and localized motivation, echoing the cultural integration advocated by Peredo and McLean (2006) in the context of social entrepreneurship. The interdependence of physical and symbolic capital emerges as a central insight, reinforcing the idea that tourism must be embedded in community identity to yield lasting impacts. On the strategic front, the model outlines three essential dimensions: research and development, organizational support mechanisms, and management and planning. These findings resonate with the theoretical framework of Hitt et al. (2001) and Ireland et al. (2003), who emphasized the importance of strategic orientation and internal capability in entrepreneurship. Zahra et al. (2006) further elaborated that dynamic capabilities and continuous innovation are vital to sustaining competitiveness. In rural tourism, Shirmohammadi and Mavouni (2020) demonstrated the significance of coordinated management and institutional backing in supporting entrepreneurial ventures. Meanwhile, Rastego et al. (2021) advocated for platform-based models that combine local engagement with technological and institutional innovation.

This study, however, adds a distinct layer by proposing that cultural heritage should not only be a resource but also a guide for strategy formulation. The model proposes that cultural identity can act as a strategic asset, enabling rural entrepreneurs to develop offerings that differentiate them in a competitive tourism market. This perspective also echoes the empirical findings of Karimi et al. (2010), who emphasized the need for cultural alignment in Iranian entrepreneurship education. The outcomes of implementing this culturally informed strategic model are substantial. The study found that effective execution can lead to diversified rural income, improved competitiveness of small businesses, increased

employment opportunities, and broader economic resilience. These results are consistent with the findings of Zhao and Xia (2019), who reported that tourism reduces rural poverty by expanding employment and income streams. Dang et al. (2023) confirmed that tourism development increases household resilience and enhances social well-being. Shirmohammadi and Mavouni (2021) similarly observed that strategic entrepreneurship aligned with cultural practices empowers communities and stimulates economic growth. Importantly, this study goes further by asserting that cultural preservation, identity reinforcement, and local pride are not secondary outcomes but integral components of a holistic development strategy. This is consistent with the work of Richards (2018) and Peredo and McLean (2006), who both noted that social and cultural returns from tourism are as important as economic metrics. The role of tourism in reinforcing self-perception and pride among rural communities is vital, especially in areas facing cultural erosion due to globalization and migration.

Ultimately, this research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on rural tourism and strategic entrepreneurship by proposing a model that balances cultural integrity with economic imperatives. It reinforces the notion that tourism in rural areas should not be commodified in ways that strip communities of their uniqueness. Rather, strategic entrepreneurship should serve as a tool to celebrate and sustain local identity while fostering inclusive growth. The findings also imply that policy frameworks must be reoriented to support cultural education, infrastructure development, and community-led initiatives. As global tourism continues to evolve toward more meaningful and responsible experiences, culturally grounded entrepreneurship offers a resilient and adaptive pathway for rural development. This study thus provides both theoretical insight and practical guidance for policymakers, development practitioners, and entrepreneurs aiming to revitalize rural economies through culturally respectful tourism strategies.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study have several practical implications for policymakers, local authorities, and entrepreneurs in rural tourism. Firstly, by adopting a cultural approach to rural tourism entrepreneurship, stakeholders can diversify income sources, enhance local economies, and contribute to sustainable development in rural areas. Local governments and tourism organizations should focus on creating an enabling environment that encourages investment in cultural and historical infrastructure, as well as developing policies that support the integration of traditional knowledge and practices with modern tourism services. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of community involvement in tourism planning and the necessity of training local residents to engage effectively with tourists. Training programs should focus on hospitality skills, cultural awareness, and conflict resolution to ensure positive interactions between tourists and local communities. This can ultimately lead to the sustainable growth

of the rural tourism sector and improve the social fabric of rural communities. Additionally, strategic entrepreneurs can benefit from the findings by identifying and leveraging the cultural uniqueness of their regions as a competitive advantage in attracting tourists.

Theoretical Implications

The study contributes to the theoretical understanding of strategic entrepreneurship in rural tourism by developing a comprehensive model that integrates cultural factors within the entrepreneurial process. By applying the foundation's data theory, this research expands the theoretical framework of rural tourism entrepreneurship, highlighting the role of cultural factors, such as cultural interactions, awareness of cultural assets, and cultural education, as fundamental elements of strategic decision-making. This research also offers new insights into the complex relationship between entrepreneurial actions and rural tourism development, suggesting that cultural entrepreneurship can drive economic growth and social sustainability in rural areas. The findings align with and extend the work of previous studies, such as those Toffolini et al. (2021), providing a cultural dimension to their models and theories. Future studies can build upon this model to explore the dynamic interplay between entrepreneurship, culture, and tourism development in various rural contexts, further enriching the theoretical discourse in the field.

limitations/recommendation for future studies

While this study offers valuable insights into the role of cultural entrepreneurship in rural tourism, there is still ample room for future research. Future studies could explore the long-term effects of rural tourism on cultural preservation and the broader socio-economic development of rural areas. Additionally, comparative studies across different regions and countries could shed light on the diverse strategies employed in rural tourism development and their effectiveness in various cultural contexts.

Furthermore, more research is needed to understand the potential challenges and barriers to implementing strategic entrepreneurship in rural tourism, especially in less developed regions. Investigating how external factors, such as political instability or global crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, affect rural tourism development will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the risks and opportunities inherent in this sector

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