

Research Paper: Impact of Social Capital on Villagers' Perceptions of Participation in Rural Livability Projects (Case Study in Central Jiroft County)

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Social capital is a fundamental starting point for achieving rural livability. Consequently, its analysis has received much attention within rural settlements' planning and policy systems. Furthermore, as one of the cornerstones of rural development and transformation, social capital provides a strong foundation for improving villagers' positive and compatible perception of and participation in socio-economic development projects and initiatives that enhance the ecological environment and overall livability of rural communities.

Methods: This study employed a quantitative and descriptive-analytical method, utilizing a questionnaire distributed across 30 villages and targeting 400 households as samples. To explore the relationship between social capital and villagers' adaptation to participation in projects aimed at improving rural livability in the central district of Jiroft County, a conceptual model was developed for structural equation modeling using AMOS (or other appropriate software).

Results: The findings revealed a consistently positive effect of social capital on villagers' adaptive perception and participation in rural living plans and programs. Regarding the social capital dimensions within the study area's rural settlements, respondents' perspectives indicated that social cohesion had the lowest average score (2.83), while social organization had the highest average score (3.42). Examining the livability dimensions, the economic dimension had the lowest average score (3.15), whereas the environmental-ecological dimension had the highest average score (3.59).

Conclusion: This study's findings consistently demonstrate a positive effect of social capital on villagers' participation in rural livability plans and projects. In essence, higher levels of social capital correlate with a more positive and collaborative perception among villagers regarding implementing environmental-ecological, social, and economic projects. Conversely, lower social capital translates to decreased villager participation. These findings align with existing research on the subject. It becomes clear that social capital serves as a crucial foundation for enhancing rural livability across all dimensions. Therefore, policymakers and planners should prioritize strategies that increase social capital in rural areas. This will provide the necessary groundwork for achieving sustainable rural development and improved livability for all residents.

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1. Introduction

Social solid capital, characterized by robust relationships, trust, and collaboration among villagers, is a cornerstone for rural livability (Aboud & Helfaya, 2020).

It fosters a positive environmental outlook and increases creativity in rural settlements, encouraging participation in socio-economic and environmental-ecological development projects. As social capital improves, villagers become more collaborative towards rural development initiatives. This leads to increased participation in social, economic, and environmental projects to enhance rural livability (Leach et al., 2017). As social capital improves, villagers become more collaborative towards rural development initiatives. This increases participation in social, economic, and environmental projects to enhance rural livability. Therefore, social capital serves as a foundational pillar for rural development, acting as both a facilitator and a capacity-builder for improving the quality of life in rural communities. By strengthening social capital, we can build a foundation for improved living facilities and empower villagers to co-create solutions for a more vibrant and sustainable rural future (Shafieisabet & Khaksar, 2020).

Researchers suggest that solid social capital, marked by the formation of solid relationships, trust, and commitment, improves cooperation and coordination during societal change. Social capital is now considered critical in creating livable communities during housing planning. (Simpson et al., 2018). Social solid capital benefits rural communities by fostering cooperation and revealing the complexities of livability (Shafieisabet & Khaksar, 2020). Villagers with strong social ties can collaborate more easily, forming networks that spark innovation and improved environmental awareness. This, in turn, encourages participation in plans and projects to enhance rural livability (Badland et al., 2016). Furthermore, social capital fosters coordination within rural communities, ensuring their voices are heard in planning and project development (Bourdieu, 2020). As social capital strengthens, villagers can share knowledge and resources more effectively. This collective understanding empowers them to contribute to a thriving and sustainable rural future (Chaker & Impedovo, 2021).

Social capital holds immense value in achieving the facilities and capacities needed for a thriving rural environment (Xiao et al., 2020). Strengthening its dimensions fosters strong connections among villagers, ensuring consistent participation and a shared vision in develop-

ment plans and projects. This, in turn, facilitates close communication and participation in rural initiatives (Wijijayanti et al., 2020).

In villages with solid social capital, residents share a more consistent perception of the environment, leading to a higher level of sustainable rural livability (Becker et al., 2019). Social capital thus plays an unquestionable role in raising livability, which is the ultimate goal of all planning. After all, creating habitable environments is the core ideal for planners implementing socio-economic plans. Social capital is a fundamental pillar in this regard, directly and indirectly influencing a space's livability's objective and subjective dimensions (Khorasani & Zarghamfard, 2017). Therefore, incorporating efforts to improve social capital indicators becomes an essential and valuable aspect of the development process. This approach ensures rural livability meets the villagers' material and spiritual needs.

Understanding how social capital influences villagers' willingness to participate in projects and improve rural livability presents a unique challenge in each region. Investigating this topic in-depth can provide valuable knowledge to reduce poverty, migration, and inequality while enhancing rural livability. This knowledge is precious, given the ongoing development plans in the central part of Jiroft. By studying social capital's impact, villagers and development actors can identify strengths and weaknesses, leading to more practical steps for improving rural life in this area.

The fundamental questions of the present study are as follows: How does social capital influence villagers' environmental perception, participation in projects, and overall improvement of rural livability in the study area? To what extent are environmental-ecological, social, and economic compatible perceptions affected by the improvement of social capital dimensions, affecting the participation of villagers in projects and the improvement of rural livability in the study area?

2. Literature Review

The concept of social capital is a relatively recent development in social sciences. Introduced in the 1980s across sociology, economics, politics, education, and social geography, it gained its current form in the 1990s. Scholars like Pierre Bourdieu (1997), James Coleman (1988), and Robert Putnam (2000) have significantly contributed to its development. Each has proposed various definitions, with most emphasizing the role of social assets in addressing public challenges. These assets in-

clude social awareness, trust, cohesion, networks, organizations, and participation (Petrakis & Kostis, 2020).

In the context of globalization and a diminishing role for national governments, social capital presents a potentially powerful solution at the local level. Policymakers and social policy stakeholders increasingly recognize its value in addressing development challenges faced by local communities (Onyx & Bullen, 2018).

The concept of social capital gained significant traction in the 1980s, laying the groundwork for its integration into the “communicative-participatory theory” framework in the 1990s. This theory emphasizes the importance of social capital and villagers’ participation in development plans and projects for rural livability (Bourdieu, 2018; Edrisi et al., 2019). From the mid-1980s until now, rural development has always considered improving the dimensions of rural social capital to participate in development plans and projects (Elgar et al., 2020). Notably, organization and institutionalization have been recognized as crucial factors (Dale & Onyx, 2010). This explains the emphasis on decentralization frameworks, the formation of new rural organizations, and capacity-building initiatives aimed at strengthening social capital and participation (Borgonovi & Andrieu, 2020).

This explains the emphasis on decentralization frameworks, the formation of new rural organizations, and capacity-building initiatives aimed at strengthening social capital and participation. In essence, creating new opportunities for diverse rural groups to participate in implementing rural livability plans fosters the development of social capital among villagers (Bourdieu, 2020). Social capital is a positive attribute and a cornerstone for enhancing rural participation (Akçomak & TerWeel, 2009). As such, participation can be considered a social capital dimension, as a critical missing link in rural development (Steinfeld et al., 2013).

Research suggests a critical link between social capital, villager participation, and improved rural livability (Chen et al., 2021). By fostering social capital, which includes strong social networks and a sense of community (Bourdieu, 2018), villagers gain access to shared resources and develop trust-based relationships (Coleman, 1994). This social capital, in turn, acts as a springboard for participation in rural development projects (Cobbinah, 2015). Effective communication and coordination, facilitated by socially solid capital, enable villagers to collaborate on implementing plans that address their environmental, economic, and social needs (Durante et al.,

2021). Therefore, future research efforts should delve deeper into the specific dimensions of social capital that most effectively encourage villagers’ participation in rural development initiatives. This knowledge can inform strategies to enhance social capital and improve rural livability.

Social Awareness: A key component of participation in plans and projects

Social awareness, traditionally defined as being mindful of one’s surroundings and the needs of others, is increasingly recognized as a crucial dimension of social capital (Misopoulos, 2019). In the context of rural development, social awareness plays a critical role in fostering villagers’ participation in various projects. Social awareness promotes a sense of shared responsibility and understanding. Villagers become more receptive to diverse perspectives, leading to a more consistent and positive attitude toward participating in social, economic, and environmental initiatives (Norbutas, 2018).

Increased social awareness improves communication skills, allowing villagers to express their needs and concerns effectively. This fosters a more collaborative environment for planning and implementing rural development projects.

Social Trust: Building Confidence for Participation in plans and projects

Social trust, encompassing interpersonal trust, generalized trust, and trust in institutions, is a cornerstone of human interaction and collaboration (Imamura, 2016). Rural development plays a critical role in fostering villagers’ participation in various projects. Trusting relationships create a sense of security and promote collaboration among villagers. This fosters a more confident and supportive environment where individuals are more likely to participate in planning and implementing development initiatives. Social trust encourages villagers to consider the bigger picture and develop a more environmentally compatible perception of their community’s needs. This fosters a shared vision for sustainable development and increases their willingness to participate in projects with long-term benefits (Shafieisabet & Khaksar, 2020).

Social Cohesion: Fostering a Shared Vision to participate in plans and projects

Social cohesion, a key concept in social sciences, refers to unity, solidarity, and shared values within a com-

munity (Angelstam et al., 2021). It encompasses feelings of belonging, trust, and cooperation among villagers. In rural development, a strong sense of social cohesion plays a vital role in promoting villagers' participation in projects to improve rural livability. Social solid cohesion fosters a sense of shared identity and purpose within the village community. Villagers become more invested in the collective well-being, leading to a more compatible perception of their needs and goals for rural development projects. A cohesive community creates a supportive environment where individuals feel comfortable expressing their ideas and participating in decision-making. This fosters collaboration and encourages villagers to contribute their time, skills, and resources to development initiatives (Adeire, 2014).

Social Networks: Building Bridges for Participation in plans and projects

Social networks, consisting of interconnected relationships between individuals, are a crucial dimension of social capital (Shahpasand et al., 2013). Social networks provide a platform for villagers to share knowledge, experiences, and concerns related to rural development challenges. This collaborative exchange of information fosters a more unified understanding of the community's needs. It facilitates collective decision-making. Social solid networks nurture trust and a sense of reciprocity among villagers. Individuals are more likely to collaborate and participate in projects when they feel a sense of belonging and support within their network (Angelova, 2019). Strong social networks play a vital role in rural development initiatives, fostering villagers' participation in plans and projects.

Social Organization: Empowering Villagers to participate in plans and projects

Social organization is a crucial element of social capital, referring to the structured network of groups and relationships within a community. Formal and informal social groups within a village can act as a platform for collective action. These groups allow villagers to discuss issues, identify common goals, and develop strategies for participating in development initiatives (Fang, 2020). The social organization fosters the emergence of local leaders who can represent the community's interests and mobilize villagers for participation. Additionally, social groups can provide opportunities for skill development and capacity building within the community.

Social Participation: Fostering Ownership and Positive Perception in plans and projects

In today's world, participatory approaches are recognized as a cornerstone of effective rural development planning and promoting sustainability. Social participation, defined as active involvement in decision-making processes and community activities (Cobbinah, 2015), plays a critical role in fostering a positive perception among villagers and encouraging their participation in development plans and projects. Active participation gives villagers a say in decisions that affect their lives. This fosters a sense of ownership and agency, leading to a more positive perception of development initiatives. Social participation strengthens social networks and fosters a sense of community ownership. This, in turn, results in increased social cohesion and a more sustainable approach to development as villagers become invested in the long-term success of projects (Dai, 2021).

Enhancing Social Capital for Positive Participation in Rural Livability Schemes

Research on social capital highlights its multifaceted influence on rural development. Social solid capital, characterized by robust relationships, social cohesion, and shared interests among villagers, fosters increased participation in development projects (Dale, 2016). Social solid capital promotes a sense of community ownership and a collaborative environment. Villagers feel more invested in projects in which they have a say, leading to a more positive perception and increased willingness to participate (Anthias, 2007). Social capital empowers villagers through access to information and resources shared within. This fosters a sense of self-efficacy and a more positive perception of their ability to contribute meaningfully to development initiatives. Social networks facilitate communication within the village, allowing villagers to discuss project details, understand their interests, and voice their concerns (Popovych, 2018). This fosters a positive perception of the project's goals and potential benefits.

Social solid capital, encompassing dimensions like social networks, trust, and shared values, fosters a positive mental outlook among villagers. This, in turn, stimulates their capacity for self-improvement and active participation in rural development initiatives. It empowers them to move beyond a passive "working-class villager" role and become active stakeholders in shaping their community's future (Galli, 2020). Effective communication channels within strong social networks allow villagers to understand their interests within the rural environment (Rivera, 2019), and by improving their perception of implementing projects, more cooperation and participation are formed among them. Social capital promotes a

collaborative environment where villagers feel a sense of ownership over development initiatives. This positive perception leads to an increased willingness to participate and contribute ideas (Hornig & Wu, 2020). This fosters a sense of self-efficacy and a more positive perception of their ability to contribute meaningfully to development initiatives.

Numerous studies highlight the positive correlation between social capital and villager participation in socio-economic development. Research in Thailand, for example, demonstrates that improving social capital coincides with enhanced participation in development projects and improved socio-economic outcomes within villages (Minamoto, 2021). Social solid capital, characterized by trust and social cohesion, fosters a collaborative environment within rural communities (Setini et al., 2020).

Thus, various research studies have revealed that improving the dimensions of rural social capital as an ideal tool to increase the environmentally-ecologically, socially, and economically compatible perception of rural livability plans and projects is a good ground for participation. I will follow in such plans. It was also revealed that improving rural participation is a reasonable basis for the success of plans and projects and will be necessary for improving rural livability.

Previous research within social geography has investigated social capital as a distinct category of specific development types or spatial changes in rural settlements. However, there is a paucity of research examining the combined effects of improved social capital and the development of positive and compatible perceptions among villagers regarding their participation in development projects. This study aims to address this gap in the literature by exploring a novel research question: How does social capital influence the development of compatible and positive perceptions among villagers regarding their participation in rural livability plans and projects?

The study seeks to contribute new knowledge to the field by investigating this question. The literature review and established research background inform the following conceptual framework and research hypotheses (Figure 1).

Research Hypotheses

This study proposes the following hypotheses to examine the relationships between social capital, villager perception, and participation in rural livability initiatives:

H1. Social capital dimensions positively influence villagers' development of a compatible and positive perception of rural livability plans and projects' environmental, economic, and social aspects.

H2. A compatible and positive environmentally ecological perception of rural livability plans and projects developed by villagers indirectly positively affects their participation in these initiatives. This suggests that a positive perception acts as a mediator between social capital and participation.

3. Methodology

This study employs a quantitative approach, utilizing survey research methods and analyzing data statistically to address the research questions and test the proposed hypotheses. Data collection for this research followed a two-pronged approach: Library Research: Theoretical foundations and research background were established through a comprehensive review of relevant academic literature obtained from library resources. Field Research: Data about the research's indicators, items, and critical metrics were collected through fieldwork within the target population. The study's target population encompasses all 178 villages in the central part of Jiroft City, Iran (data obtained from the Statistical Center of Iran, 2016).

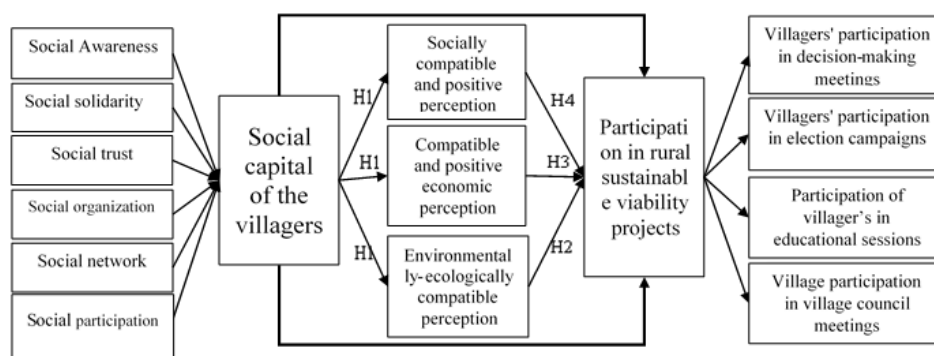


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework. Source: Adapted from literature review and research background (2020)

Thirty villages were chosen randomly. Due to the normal distribution and the central limit theorem (Sarai, 2010), a sample size of 30 or more from each village was deemed sufficient. Cochran’s formula was employed to calculate the sample size for random households, considering a 95% confidence level, an estimated variance of 0.25, and a 5% margin of error. This resulted in a target of 352 households.

However, the Proportional Probability to Size (PPS)¹ The method was unsuitable for some villages due to the limited number of questionnaires required. Consequently, the sample size was increased to 400 households to ensure adequate data collection across all villages.

1. Proportional probability to size

Amos software was used to analyze demographic data and explore relationships between variables based on the theoretical framework. To develop a valid questionnaire, we adapted questions from previous studies to measure social capital dimensions, villagers’ perceptions of rural livability plans, and rural participation. The questionnaire’s face and content validity were ensured through expert review by academics in rural planning from Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, and Kerman universities. Based on their feedback, minor revisions were made, including removing a few questions. The final questionnaire employed a Likert scale ranging from “very low” to “very high” for data collection.

Table 1. Hidden and overt variables of social capital

| Hidden variable | The obvious variable | signs | researchers |
|---------------------------------|---|-------|--|
| Social Awareness | Villagers’ awareness of their rights | AQ1 | Krause, 2015; Block 2016; Procter, 1999; Casay, 2017 |
| | Villagers’ awareness of governmental and non-governmental organizations | AQ2 | |
| | Villagers’ awareness of religious, social, and charitable activities | AQ3 | |
| | Awareness of villagers about participating in various village activities, including social activities and development projects | AQ4 | |
| Social trust | Increase villagers’ trust in vocational education and technical schools. | BQ1 | Simmel, 1950; Newton, 2002; Rothstein & stole, 2008 |
| | We are increasing the villagers’ trust in the mosque cleric, the religious boards, and the neighborhood board of trustees. | BQ2 | |
| | Increasing the trust of villagers in the agricultural service center of agricultural education organizations and social education organizations | BQ3 | |
| | Increase villagers’ trust in the Housing Foundation | BQ4 | |
| social solidarity | Respect of the villagers for the white beard, council members, village head, and district head | CQ1 | Karimi moghari, 2014; Soonhee Kim, 2012; Regis, 2016; MatthiasFink,2018; |
| | Reducing the number of disputes and conflicts among the villagers | CQ2 | |
| | Solidarity and cooperation of the villagers during troubles and problems with the neighboring village | CQ3 | |
| | Raising morale and sacrifice among the villagers | CQ4 | |
| Network and social relations | See your relatives, neighbors, and friends | DQ1 | Bakker, 2019; Ros-tami, 2013 |
| | Activity in sports groups | DQ2 | |
| | Increase your activity in the Gharz al-Hasna fund | DQ3 | |
| | Increase your activity in the Basij cultural institution | DQ4 | |
| | Participate in group parties. | DQ5 | |
| Organizations and social groups | Pursue the formation of different organizations by different organizations in the village. | EQ1 | Lekaota, 2015;Ryser, 2018 |
| | Formation of agricultural production organization in the village | EQ2 | |
| | Creating or expanding the activities of political organizations such as Basij, Islamic Association | EQ3 | |
| | Creating the necessary organizations for group dredging of aqueducts, streams, and water atmosphere | EQ4 | |
| Social participation | Participation of villagers in group work, celebrations, and ceremonies of friends and neighbors | FQ1 | Sun Ying, 2018; Yong-guilu, 2011; Durga, 2013 |
| | Participation of villagers in agricultural and non-agricultural activities | FQ2 | |

Source: Adapted from literature review and research background (2020).



Ten questions were developed based on compatible and positive social, economic, and environmental-ecological considerations (Table 2). These questions assess villagers' perceptions of rural livability plans and projects.

Cronbach's alpha (Ashtiani, 2010) was employed to assess the questionnaire's internal consistency. An alpha value of 0.829 was obtained, indicating good reliability. Additionally, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each indicator within the questionnaire, demonstrating acceptable reliability at the individual level (Table 4).

Table 2. Variables of compatible and positive perception of villagers of rural livability plans and projects

| Hidden variable | The obvious variable | signs | researchers |
|---|--|-------|---|
| Socially compatible and positive perception | Improving the facilities and space of health services, access to health services -Treatment | LQ1 | Lariz, 2019; Lestirni, 2018; Lekaota, 2015; Cahyo, 2018 |
| | Improving agricultural drinking water supply, improving the quality of roads and squares | LQ2 | |
| | Improving the quality of school buildings and school educational equipment | LQ3 | |
| | Holding various workshops to increase the knowledge and skills of the villagers | LQ4 | |
| Consistent economic perception | Improving job opportunities and income in the village | NQ1 | Lestarini, 2018; Robert Huckfeldt, 2019; Cahyo, 2018 |
| | Follow up and monitor the provision of loans and financial facilities to rural households to establish Various activities. | NQ2 | |
| | Improving the number of public vehicles and working hours of vehicles, creating industrial units, Small, craft, greenhouse | NQ3 | |
| Ecologically compatible perception | Improve natural landscapes and green spaces | GQ1 | Lestarini, 2018; Ryser, 2018; Cahyo, 2018 |
| | Dealing with drought events and natural and unnatural contingencies | GQ2 | |
| | Improving surface water collection, improving the landscape of passages and streets | GQ3 | |

Source: Adapted from literature review and research background (2020)



Table 3. Indicators and items of participation in rural livability projects

| Hidden variable | The obvious variable | signs | researchers |
|-------------------------------------|--|-------|--|
| Participation In livability schemes | Village participation in village council and village council meetings | YQ1 | Ranjan, 2008; Webster Dictionary, 2017 |
| | Village participation in agricultural and non-agricultural service center training sessions | YQ2 | |
| | Participation of villagers in carrying out development plans and projects in the village | YQ3 | |
| | Villagers' participation in election campaigns, political meetings, and support for national and local representatives | YQ4 | |

Source: Adapted from literature review and research background (2020)



Table 4. Cronbach's alpha coefficient to determine the reliability of the research tool

| Research variables | Components | Number of items | Cronbach's alpha | Reliability rate |
|---|--|-----------------|------------------|------------------|
| Social capital | Social Awareness | 4 | 0.82 | Good |
| | social trust | 4 | 0.77 | acceptable |
| | social solidarity | 4 | 0.88 | Excellent |
| | Group and social relations | 5 | 0.80 | Good |
| | Social organization | 4 | 0.75 | acceptable |
| | social participation | 2 | 0.84 | Good |
| Consistent perception Villagers of Designs | Environmentally-ecologically compatible perception | 3 | 0.73 | acceptable |
| | Socially compatible and positive perception | 4 | 0.82 | Good |
| | Consistent economic perception | 3 | 0.71 | acceptable |
| Participation of villagers in Viability plans | Participation in plans and projects | 4 | 0.79 | acceptable |

Source: Research Findings, 2020



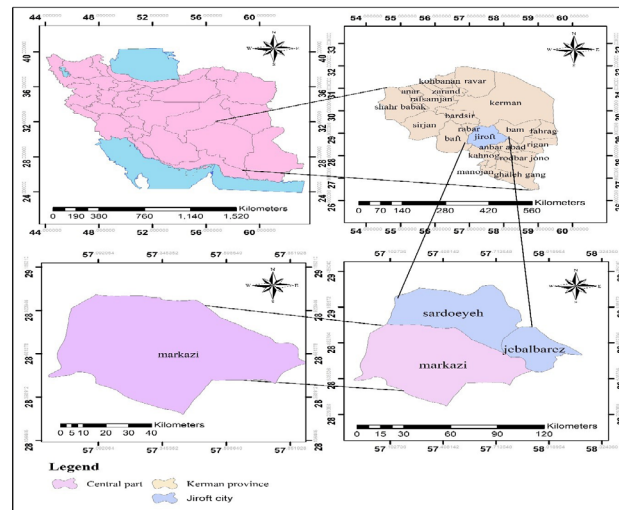


Figure 2. Study Area. Source: Digital map obtained from Iran’s Surveying and Mapping Organization, 2012



The geographic territory of research

The research was conducted in a 9513-square-kilometer region located in the southern half of Kerman province, Iran. This area, situated at an average elevation of 690 meters, overlooks several cities, including Kerman to the north, Bam to the east, and Rabar to the west. The region comprises 237 settlements, of which 178 villages have permanent residents.

4. Findings

A total of 400 households from rural areas participated in the survey. Among the respondents, 58.6% were male

and 41.4% were female. The highest level of education attained by respondents was primarily above associate degrees. Regarding occupation, 56.7% identified as farmers, 31.2% as business people, and 12.1% as artisans (Table 5).

Skewness and elongation values were calculated for the research data to assess normality. Since all data fell within the range of -2 to +2, the data were considered normally distributed. Based on this assumption, Table 6 presents the mean and standard deviation for each dimension of the research components.

Table 5. Demographic characteristics of the respondents in the study area

| Descriptive features | villagers | | Descriptive features | villagers | | |
|----------------------|-----------|------------|----------------------|-----------|------------|------|
| | Abundance | Percentage | | Abundance | Percentage | |
| Gender | Female | 163 | 41.4 | Primary | 62 | 16.2 |
| | Man | 237 | 58.6 | Tips | 80 | 17.7 |
| Total | | | High school | 90 | 21.4 | |
| | | | education | Resource | 90 | 21.4 |
| | | | Masters | 61 | 16.5 | |
| | | | Master and above | 17 | 4.6 | |
| | | | Total | 400 | 100 | |
| | | | Agriculture | 231 | 56.7 | |
| | | | Job | Business | 137 | 31.2 |
| | | | Industry | 32 | 12.1 | |
| | | | Total | 400 | 100 | |

Source: Research Findings, 2020



Table 6. Mean, standard deviation, skewness, and elongation of research variables

| | Component | Average | Standard deviation | The least | the most | Skewness | Elongation |
|--|--|---------|--------------------|-----------|----------|----------|------------|
| Social capital | Social Awareness | 13.276 | 3.1976 | 4.00 | 18.00 | 0.217- | 0.369 |
| | social trust | 23.9848 | 4.9987 | 15.00 | 37.00 | 0.377 | 0.678- |
| | Social cohesion | 17.4218 | 3.8643 | 5.00 | 23.00 | 0.641- | 1.522 |
| | Network and social relations | 27.2485 | 3.6854 | 18.00 | 34.00 | 0.465- | 0.441- |
| | Social organization | 16.7649 | 2.9868 | 10.00 | 23.00 | 0.430- | 0.192- |
| | social participation | 21.6321 | 4.7211 | 13.00 | 35.00 | 0.240 | 0.805- |
| Consistent perception of the villagers | Environmentally-ecologically compatible perception | 16.2586 | 3.5136 | 7.00 | 26.00 | 0.130 | 0.024- |
| | Consistent economic perception | 14.6878 | 2.9995 | 9.00 | 25.00 | 0.339 | 0.270- |
| | Socially compatible and positive perception | 25.9267 | 4.3812 | 17.00 | 38.00 | 0.197 | 0.566 |
| Village participation in projects | Participation of villagers in plans and projects | 13.5612 | 3.8911 | 6.00 | 19.00 | 0.096 | -0.427 |
| livability rural | Environmental-ecological | 16.7698 | 2.9986 | 6.00 | 25.00 | 0.128 | -0.026 |
| | social | 22.1211 | 3.1339 | 15.00 | 31.00 | 0.181 | 0.225 |
| | Economic | 15.5978 | 3.2416 | 10.00 | 27.00 | 0.437 | 0.343 |

Source: Research Findings, 2020



The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test confirmed the normality of the research data (Table 7). All significance levels for independent and dependent variables exceeded the alpha level (0.05), supporting the assumption of normal distribution. Table 7 also presents descriptive statistics for the study’s key dimensions. From the respondents’ perspective, social cohesion (mean = 2.83) and social organization (mean = 3.42) had the highest average scores within the social capital dimensions, indicating a relatively better state than others. Among the livability dimensions, the economic dimension had the lowest average score (mean = 3.15), while the ecological dimension scored the highest (mean = 3.59). Overall, Table 7

suggests that the villages in the central part of Jiroft City exhibit an average social capital score of 3.20 and an average livability score of 3.17.

Analysis of Relationships Between Variables

Given the normality and quantitative nature of the research variables, Pearson correlation coefficients were employed to assess the relationships between the social capital dimensions (independent variables) and villagers’ perceptions of livability (dependent variable). The results in Table 8 revealed statistically significant correlations between all variables.

Table 7. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for normality of the studied variables

| Component | Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistics | Significance level | Component | Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistics | Significance level |
|----------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------|---|------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Social Awareness | 0.28 | 0.706 | Ecologically compatible perception - ecological | 0.29 | 0.579 |
| Social trust | 0.32 | 0.269 | Consistent economic perception | 0.38 | 0.217 |
| Social solidarity | 0.25 | 0.922 | Socially compatible and positive perception | 0.27 | 0.921 |
| Social organization | 0.34 | 0.275 | Participation in livability projects | 0.23 | 0.949 |
| Community Relations | 0.37 | 0.371 | Environmental-ecological | 0.33 | 0.259 |
| Social participation | 0.31 | 0.369 | social | 0.26 | 0.586 |
| - | - | - | Economical | 0.35 | 0.352 |

Source: Research Findings, 2020



This finding justifies using path analysis or structural equation modeling for a more comprehensive examination. However, this study focused solely on determining the significance of the direct and indirect effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable.

Model Fit Evaluation

This section assesses the fit of the research model to the data, ensuring its compatibility with the observed results. A well-fitting model accurately reflects the relationships between variables.

The model fit analysis is conducted in two stages:

Measurement Model Fit: This step evaluates the adequacy of the measurement instruments used to capture the research variables.

Structural Model Fit: This step assesses the overall fit of the model structure, examining how well the hypothesized relationships between variables align with the data.

The following section will detail the results of both stages of the model fit analysis.

Conceptual Framework

The research is grounded in a theoretical framework that guides the development of the conceptual model (Figure 3). Path analysis is a statistical technique to assess the model’s fit with the data, verifying the alignment between theoretical assumptions and observed relationships.

Precedes Statistical Analysis: Building a conceptual model is crucial before conducting statistical analyses. Statistical methods do not create the model itself.

Solid Foundation: Strong theoretical reasoning is essential for developing a robust conceptual model. Complex statistical analyses rely on this foundation, not the other way around.

Table 8. Correlation between influential and influential variables of research¹

| Dimensions1 | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) | (9) |
|-------------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| (1) | 1 | 0.579 | 0.488 | 0.269 | 0.466 | 0.373 | 0.338 | 0.397 | 0.321 |
| (2) | | 1 | 0.575 | 0.370 | 0.413 | 0.213 | 0.168 | 0.365 | 0.275 |
| (3) | | | 1 | 0.446 | 0.557 | 0.345 | 0.329 | 0.527 | 0.387 |
| (4) | | | | 1 | 0.370 | 0.168 | 0.229 | 0.473 | 0.189 |
| (5) | | | | | 1 | 0.709 | 0.430 | 0.455 | 0.365 |
| (6) | | | | | | 1 | 0.474 | 0.433 | 0.408 |
| (7) | | | | | | | 1 | 0.427 | 0.405 |
| (8) | | | | | | | | 1 | 0.329 |
| (9) | | | | | | | | | 1 |

Source: Research Findings, 2020



1. Social awareness (1), social cohesion (2), social organization (3), relationships and social network (4), social trust (5), social participation (6), environmental-ecological effects (7), social effects (8), Economic effects (9)

Table 9. Model fit indicators

| Fitness index | Absolute fit indicators | | | | Compatible and positive fit indices | | | | | Affordable Fit Indicators | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------|------------|-------|-------|-------------------------------------|-----|-------|-------|-------|---------------------------|---------|-------|
| | chi-square | Chi-Square | GFI | AGFI | NFI | IF | CFI | AGFI | RFI | PNFI | CMIN/df | RMSEA |
| Admission scope | >2 | >0.05 | >0.90 | >0.90 | >0.90 | 1-0 | >0.90 | >0.90 | >0.90 | >0.05 | 3-1 | >0.05 |

Source: Research Findings, 2020



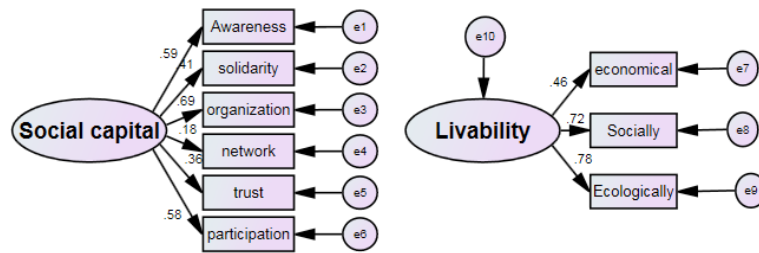


Figure 3. Standard estimates of con Source: Research Findings, 2020

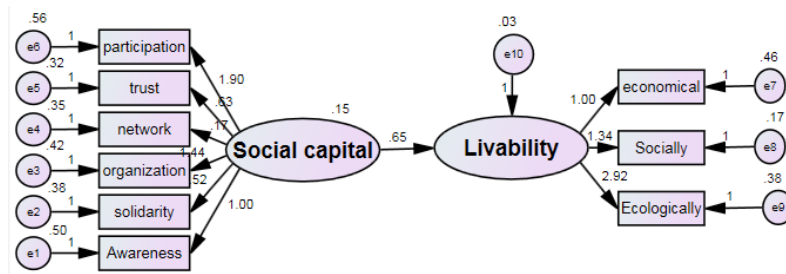


Figure 4. Non-standard estimates of path coefficients in the final structural model of social capital and rural livability. Source: Research Findings, 2020



Measurement Model and Model Fit

This section addresses two critical aspects of the analysis: measurement model development and assessment of model fit.

Measurement Model Development:

To ensure the adequacy of the measurement model, established criteria from the literature were employed to evaluate the relationships between the latent variables (social capital and livability) and their observed indicators.

This process verified whether the chosen indicators accurately captured the underlying constructs.

Model Fit Assessment:

The structural model’s fit, which reflects how well the hypothesized relationships between variables align with the data, was assessed using goodness-of-fit indices in Amos software. These indices encompass absolute, relative, and comparative fit measures (Table 10). Generally, a well-fitting model exhibits values closer to 1.0 for AGFI and GFI and a low RMSEA index (below 0.08).

Table 10. Indicators of model fit for measuring social capital and rural livability

| Index name | Abbreviation | Social capital | livability | Criterion | Interpretation |
|--|--------------|----------------|------------|----------------|----------------|
| | | Level | Level | | |
| Adjusted Fit Goodness Index | AGFI | 0.992 | 0.992 | More than 0.90 | Optimal fit |
| Fit goodness index | GFI | 0.98 | 0.98 | More than 0.90 | Optimal fit |
| Chi-square coverage level index | Chi-Square | 0.846 | 0.828 | More than 0.05 | Optimal fit |
| Incremental fit index | IF | 0.48 | 0.62 | Between 0-1 | Optimal fit |
| Relative fit index | RFI | 0.95 | 0.95 | More than 0.90 | Optimal fit |
| Compatible and positive Fit Index | CFI | 0.95 | 0.95 | More than 0.90 | Optimal fit |
| Normalized fit index | NFI | 0.93 | 0.97 | More than 0.90 | Optimal fit |
| Normalized square chi | CMIN/df | 2.14 | 2.14 | Between 1-3 | Optimal fit |
| The root of the mean squares of the estimation error | RMSEA | 0.826 | 0.721 | More than 0.05 | Optimal fit |
| Normalized fitting index | PNFI | 0.423 | 0.523 | More than 0.05 | Optimal fit |

Source: Research Findings, 2020



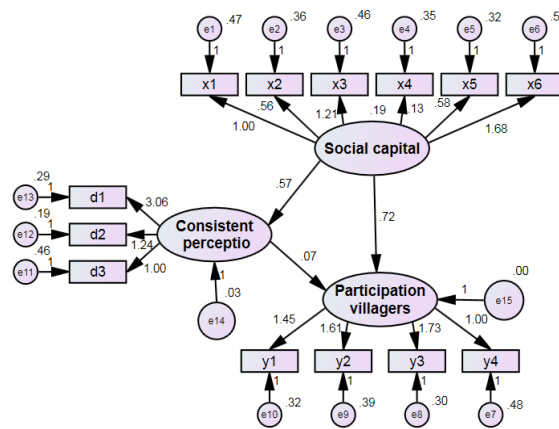


Figure 5. Conceptual framework. Source: Research Findings, 2020



Figure 5 presents the path analysis model designed to examine the influence of social capital on villagers’ positive perceptions and participation in rural livability plans and projects. This standard communication model explores social capital’s direct and indirect effects on villagers’ perceptions and livability in rural settlements. The analysis revealed social capital’s vivacious and significant impact on rural livability. However, the observed improvement in social capital itself remains modest. This finding suggests the need for further efforts to strengthen the dimensions of social capital within the study area’s villages.

Evaluation and performance of the model

Sometimes, the evaluation and performance of the model can be determined by the insignificance of the chi-square. However, there is a general rule that if the ratio between chi-square and the degree of freedom is less than 2, the model is appropriate. : $\frac{\chi^2}{d.f} < 2$

In this study, the chi-square statistic is 81.34, and the degree of freedom is 41. Then $\frac{\chi^2}{d.f} = \frac{81.34}{41} = 1.98 < 2$

As mentioned earlier, a chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio is helpful, but a more comprehensive evaluation benefits from considering other fit indices (Table 11).

Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Normed Fit Index (NFI): These indices compare the proposed model to a baseline model, assuming no relationships between variables. In this study, CFI and NFI were 0.922 and 0.951, respectively. Values closer to 1.0 indicate a better fit, and both indices suggest an acceptable fit for the model.

Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA): This index reflects the average discrepancy between the

observed and model-predicted covariances. Following Lohlin’s recommendation, a value below 0.08 suggests a good fit. The RMSEA value in your study indicates a good fit.

Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI): This index assesses the relative amount of variance the model explains. Values closer to 1.0 indicate a better fit. Your study’s GFI value of 0.944 suggests a desirable fit.

Overall Model Fit: Considering the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio alongside CFI, NFI, RMSEA, and GFI, the model demonstrates an acceptable fit to the data, suggesting a reasonable representation of the relationships between social capital and rural livability in the study area.

Answering questions and research hypotheses

The path analysis results (presented in Table 12) revealed a significant indirect effect of social capital on villagers’ environmentally-ecological perceptions of plans and projects. This effect was mediated by participation. Specifically, a one-unit increase in social capital is estimated to lead to a 0.19-unit increase in villagers’ environmentally ecological perceptions, which are indirectly influenced by their participation in plans and projects.

The path analysis results (presented in Table 12) revealed significant effects of social capital on villagers’ perceptions of plans and projects.

Indirect Effects: Social capital significantly affects villagers’ environmentally-ecological perceptions mediated by participation (effect size = 0.19). This suggests that increased social capital leads to more favorable environmental perceptions, indirectly influenced by participation in plans and projects.

Table 11. Model fit indicators

| Fit indicators | the amount of |
|---|---------------|
| Good GFI Fit Index | 0.929 |
| CFI | 0.931 |
| AGFI adjusted good fit index | 0.922 |
| RMSEA approximate residual root square | 0.071 |
| NFI standardized fitness index | 0.951 |
| LFI Compatible and positive Fitness Index | 0.927 |
| Incremental Fitness Index LFI | 0.912 |
| Tucker-Lewis TLI Index | 0.99 |
| CMIN/DF | 1.983 |

Source: Research Findings, 2020



Social capital also significantly indirectly affects villagers' socially compatible and positive perceptions mediated by participation (effect size = 0.24). This indicates that higher social capital is associated with more positive social perceptions of plans and projects, again influenced by participation.

The indirect effect of social capital on villagers' economic perceptions is also significant (effect size = 0.11). This suggests that social capital can lead to modestly more positive economic perceptions, indirectly influenced by participation.

Direct Effect: Social capital significantly directly affects villagers' compatible and positive perceptions (effect size = 0.39). This indicates that independent of participation, social capital is positively associated with villagers' overall perceptions of plans and projects.

5. Discussion

This study examined the influence of social capital on villagers' willingness to participate in rural livability initiatives within Jiroft City's central region. A review of relevant literature and background information was conducted to establish the research context. A theoretical framework was then developed to guide the research questions and hypotheses.

The study employed a rural livability index to assess villagers' perceptions (environmental, ecological, economic, and social) and social capital. The findings suggest that improvements in social capital indicators lead to more positive perceptions of rural sustainability plans by villagers, ultimately fostering a more supportive environment for their participation in plan implementation. This, in turn, can contribute to positive changes and advancements in rural livability.

The first hypothesis proposed a significant relationship between social capital dimensions and villagers' positive perceptions regarding participation in rural livability plans and projects. The analysis confirmed this hypothesis, aligning with the findings of Elgar et al (2020) and Aaboud et al (2020). These studies highlight the crucial role of social capital in enhancing rural livability. More robust social capital fosters social bonds and collaboration within rural communities, ultimately facilitating greater villager participation in implementing social, economic, and environmental plans (Elgar et al. 2020) further emphasize that increasing social capital, with the involvement of villagers and rural institutions, leads to more positive perceptions and improved rural livability. The study also suggests a potential feedback loop between social capital and rural livability. Improvements in rural livability dimensions, such as access to resources and infrastructure, may encourage villagers to share their various forms of capital (natural, financial, human) and strengthen social capital within the community.

The second hypothesis examined the relationship between social capital, villagers' positive perceptions of environmental, social, and economic projects, and their participation. The findings (Table 12) demonstrated that improved perceptions increased participation, ultimately contributing to enhanced rural livability. The analysis revealed that more robust social capital led to more positive perceptions of environmental project implementation, aligning with the notion that trust and collaboration fostered by social capital encourage participation. This increased participation in social, economic, and environmental projects is likely due to the social capital-built trust between individuals and groups, as mentioned by Cobbinah (2015). Cobbinah (2015) highlights that cultivating trust in rural communities fosters participation

and idea-sharing, ultimately contributing to rural development.

This study investigated the influence of social capital on villagers' participation in rural livability initiatives. The findings consistently demonstrated a positive and significant relationship between social capital and participation (Table 12). Villagers with higher social capital exhibited more positive perceptions of environmental, social, and economic projects within their communities. This, in turn, led to increased participation in these projects, potentially contributing to advancements in rural livability. These findings highlight the critical role of social capital in fostering rural development. Improving social capital within rural communities should be considered a cornerstone of sustainable rural livability strategies. Policymakers and planners can play a vital role by developing initiatives strengthening social networks, trust, and collaboration among villagers. Such initiatives can provide the foundation for more effective participation in rural development projects, ultimately improving living conditions and well-being in rural areas.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

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Table 12. Estimation of direct and indirect impact coefficients and the whole model

| Description | Direct effects | | Indirect effects | | Total effects | | | |
|--|----------------|--|------------------|------------|---------------|------------|-------|-------|
| | Coefficient | meaningful | Coefficient | meaningful | Coefficient | meaningful | | |
| In plans and projects --> Environmentally-ecological compatible perception -> Social capital | - | - | 0.119 | 0.092 | 0.119 | 0.092 | | |
| In plans and projects--> Socially compatible and positive perception -->Social capital | - | - | 0.124 | 0.036 | 0.124 | 0.036 | | |
| Social capital<-- economic compatible and positive perception <-- In plans and projects | - | - | 0.111 | 0.481 | 0.111 | 0.481 | | |
| Social capital <-- Consistent perception of villagers in plans and projects | - | - | 0.139 | *** | 0.139 | *** | | |
| Socially compatible and positive perception <-- In the process of livability | <- - | Social capital | 0.632 | *** | - | - | 0.632 | *** |
| Environmentally-ecological compatible and positive perception <-- In the process of livability | <- - | Social capital | 0.522 | *** | - | - | 0.522 | *** |
| economic compatible and positive perception <-- In the process of livability | <- - | Social capital | 0.171 | *** | - | - | 0.171 | *** |
| Participation in the process of livability projects | <- - | Environmentally-ecological compatible perception of plans and projects | 0.159 | 0.025 | - | - | 0.159 | 0.025 |
| Participation in the process of livability projects | <- - | Socially consistent perception of plans and projects | 0.266 | 0.020 | - | - | 0.266 | 0.020 |
| Participation in the process of livability projects | <- - | Consistent economic perception of plans and projects | 0.156 | 0.077 | - | - | 0.156 | 0.077 |

Source: Research Findings, 2020



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