

Explaining the Influence of Local and Cultural Characteristics of Mazandaran Province on the Emergence and Continuity of Hybrid Entrepreneurship

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Abstract

This study aims to explain the indigenous and cultural characteristics influencing the formation and development of hybrid entrepreneurship in Mazandaran province, with a particular focus on the integration of tourism and agriculture. A qualitative research approach, specifically phenomenology using Colaizzi's method, was employed to deeply understand the lived experiences of local hybrid entrepreneurs and to identify the cultural and indigenous factors shaping their entrepreneurial paths. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, using purposive and snowball sampling among 25 local tourism-agriculture entrepreneurs, and continued until data saturation. Data analysis followed Colaizzi's seven-step process, emphasizing the extraction of fundamental concepts and thematic clusters. Research findings were categorized into three main themes: environmental and local variables, hybrid entrepreneurship-related variables, and facilitating factors. The results indicate that the interplay of cultural, geographical, and climatic characteristics, along with local networks and support structures, provides a suitable foundation for the emergence and continuity of hybrid entrepreneurship in Mazandaran. Accordingly, strengthening support infrastructures, focusing on education and knowledge transfer, and leveraging indigenous cultural capital are recommended as practical strategies.

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

In recent years, hybrid entrepreneurship, as a new approach in which individuals engage in entrepreneurial activities alongside their main job, has attracted much attention in Iran and the world. Despite the significant development of this type of entrepreneurship, the role of environmental, social, and cultural factors in the formation and success of hybrid entrepreneurs has not yet been fully elucidated. Mazandaran Province, with its specific local and cultural characteristics (such as cooperative culture, family values, strong social connections, and ethnic diversity), has created a unique context for examining the impact of these variables on entrepreneurial behavior. However, most of the research conducted so far has focused more on economic or motivational factors and has paid less attention to explaining regional cultural and indigenous characteristics on the behavior and sustainability of hybrid entrepreneurs. This research gap becomes more serious when tangible differences in the success rate, motivations, barriers, and opportunities of hybrid entrepreneurship are observed among different regions of Iran. As a result, the main issue of the present study is to explain the specific cultural and indigenous characteristics of Mazandaran province, the path of formation and continuation of hybrid entrepreneurship. The answer can, in addition to enriching the theoretical literature, also provide the necessary basis for policymaking, empowerment, and targeted support for hybrid entrepreneurs in Mazandaran.

Theoretical Framework

Hybrid Entrepreneurship

Hybrid entrepreneurship refers to the situation of individuals who simultaneously work in a formal job (either full-time or part-time) and launch or manage an independent entrepreneurial business (Uriarte et al., 2024). The distinctive feature of this type of entrepreneurship is the dual employment of individuals, the reduction of risk arising from the failure of a new business by maintaining a fixed job income, and the possibility of flexible planning for dividing time and resources between organizational and entrepreneurial activities (Crider et al., 2024). Hybrid entrepreneurs, by utilizing the knowledge and experiences gained in both fields, can transfer learnings and skills between their main job and their business and benefit from the profits of both. The process of forming hybrid entrepreneurship usually proceeds gradually; in such a way that the individual first works with his main job, then starts a new business on a small scale or as a side project, and then continuously evaluates the success of the new business by managing both activities in parallel (Carr et al., 2023). If the new business is established and profitable, some of these individuals decide to leave their main job and enter the entrepreneurial field completely. This gradual nature of the path, reduced risk, and the possibility of continuous assessment of conditions have made hybrid entrepreneurship a desirable option in societies with unstable economic conditions or conservative work cultures, and has led many entrepreneurs to prefer this path to full-time entrepreneurship (Demir et al., 2020).

Research Methodology

The statistical population of this study consists of all hybrid entrepreneurs active in the field of agritourism in Mazandaran province. Hybrid entrepreneurs here are people who simultaneously play a role in two specific fields—i.e., agricultural activities (agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, and rural by-products) or tourism (such as setting up ecotourism lodges, agritourism, or ecotourism). This group plays an important role in developing the local economy and preserving the socio-cultural characteristics of the province by linking local businesses and the new wave of entrepreneurship based on regional

capacities. To select statistical samples for interviews, a purposive sampling method with maximum diversity was used, followed by a snowball sampling method to identify key individuals with diverse experiences. The inclusion criteria for samples included: simultaneous activity in two tourism or agriculture sectors, such that both sectors constitute a significant portion of the individual's time and income; a history of at least three years of continuous activity in both sectors; being native or long-term resident of Mazandaran province; willingness and readiness to participate in in-depth interviews and transfer lived experiences; geographical diversity (different cities/villages in the province), gender, education level, and age (to increase data richness). After initial identification of samples through local communication networks, unions, and recommendations from informed individuals; semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 entrepreneurs (based on the principle of data saturation). The data analysis process was conducted based on the seven stages of the Colaizzi's method: (repeated study of the collected data for general understanding, extraction of meaningful expressions, formulation of fundamental concepts and meanings, classification of meanings into conceptual clusters, formulation of a comprehensive description of the phenomenon under study, structural description (semantic construction) of experiences, validation of findings through feedback from participants). The validity and reliability of the research were ensured by criteria such as participant review, data richness, and use of a research collaborator. Specialized MAXQDA software was used to analyze textual data.

Research Findings

The findings of the present study are categorized into three main categories and several related clusters, each of which explains different aspects of the process of formation and continuation of hybrid entrepreneurship in Mazandaran Province. The first category, “Environmental and Local Variables,” emphasizes the role of indigenous cultural values and beliefs and the geographical and climatic conditions of the province in creating opportunities and shaping entrepreneurial behavior; in such a way that indigenous culture and natural conditions of the region provide a unique platform for the development of hybrid businesses and, as an advantage and sometimes a challenge, are influential in policymaking and the choice of business model. In the category of “Variables Related to Hybrid Entrepreneurship”, the motivations and incentives for entering this field are highlighted and show that individual preferences, livelihood requirements, the search for economic sustainability, and the desire to maintain and strengthen cultural identity have been among the most important factors driving entrepreneurs to launch and continue hybrid businesses. Also, the issue of business model and structure explains the diverse approaches in managing and organizing these activities, which are designed in accordance with the local characteristics of the region and the necessities of integrating the two fields of tourism and agriculture. Finally, the category of “enabling and facilitating factors” reveals the determining importance of government and local supports and facilities, as well as the role of education and knowledge transfer (formal and informal). These results imply that access to support facilities and the creation of appropriate learning platforms both lead to strengthening the individual capabilities of entrepreneurs and facilitate the sustainability, development and effectiveness of hybrid businesses at the regional level. In this way, the classification of findings reflects the systematic and multilayered link between cultural-environmental components, local management motivations and models, and the role of supporting policies and infrastructure.

Conclusion

According to the results of the present study and comparison with previous studies, it is suggested that training programs and specialized workshops focusing on the transfer of local knowledge, successful experiences, and new skills of hybrid entrepreneurship in the field of tourism-agriculture be held for activists and interested parties at the provincial level. This work can be done with the participation of universities, local entrepreneurs' networks, and institutions in charge of rural and urban development to facilitate the transfer of experience and practical knowledge to the new generation and interested parties. It is also suggested that by creating support packages based on the specific needs and characteristics of hybrid entrepreneurs (such as financial support, access to infrastructure, reducing bureaucracy, and receiving expert advice) and focusing on utilizing eco-oriented capacities; the formation and continuity of hybrid businesses can be facilitated. It is suggested that these supports, in addition to economic aspects, be applied in the field of market access, marketing, and facilitating networking. It is recommended that provincial policymakers and planners, when designing entrepreneurial development models, pay special attention to strengthening the link between hybrid businesses and indigenous values, beliefs, and rituals of Mazandaran, because strengthening local identity will increase the sustainability and differentiation of entrepreneurial models. Platforms for cooperation between business owners in different fields (tourism, agriculture, information technology, etc.) and the development of interdisciplinary networks along with local entrepreneurial clusters can pave the way for the transfer of experience, innovation, and acceleration of the growth of successful hybrid entrepreneurial models in the province. These networks, with the support of government and academic institutions, can play a facilitating role in interactions and social capital.