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#### **Aims and Scope:**

Changing Societies & Personalities is an international, peer-reviewed quarterly journal, published in English by the Ural Federal University. *CS&P* examines how rapid societal-level changes are reshaping individual-level beliefs, motivations and values – and how these individual-level changes in turn are reshaping societies. The interplay of personality traits and sociocultural factors in defining motivation, deliberation, action and reflection of individuals requires a combination of theoretical and empirical knowledge. Since an interdisciplinary approach is needed to understand the causes and consequences of the contemporary world's changing socio-political institutions, moral values, and religious beliefs, the journal welcomes theoretical and empirical contributions from a wide range of perspectives in the context of value pluralism and social heterogeneity of (post)modern society.

Topics of interest include, but are not limited to

- value implications of interactions between socio-political transformations and personal self-identity;
- changes in value orientations, materialist and post-materialist values;
- moral reasoning and behavior;
- variability and continuity in the election of styles of moral regime and/or religious identity;
- the moral bases of political preferences and their elimination:
- social exclusion and inclusion;
- post-secular religious individualism;
- tolerance and merely "tolerating": their meanings, varieties and fundamental bases;
- ideologies of gender and age as variables in political, moral, religious and social change;
- educational strategies as training for specific social competences;
- social and existential security.

The journal publishes original research articles, forum discussions, review articles and book reviews.

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#### **EDITORIAL**

#### **Editor's Note**

The current issue of *Changing Societies & Personalities* discusses questions pertaining to undergoing transformations in value systems investigated from diverse perspectives, such as the impact of community education; the individual ability to blend and flexibly engage with different time horizons; the psychology of leadership; the factors of inclusive social development; the role of women in the local governments and civic services; dissemination of fake news and their consequences; contemporary art galleries as a special type of museum space; sociocultural factors of positive body image; etc.

Klara Kožar Rosulnik, Mojca Blažič, Petra Javrh, and Nives Ličen in the ARTICLE Community Education and Resilience: Making Knowledge, Making Community state that the role of community education is defined by addressing a fundamental human need for belonging, connection, and transcendence. The authors selected Slovenia as a case study. Here, the community-based adult education is implemented in various communities, cultural institutions, nature parks, adult education centers, religious organizations, and universities for older adults. In this country, community education has a historical presence, dating back to the 19th century when it was linked to national identity. Compared to other contexts, Slovenia's linguistic and geographic compactness allows for the distinctive characteristics of community education, particularly aimed at the inclusion of older adults as a vulnerable target group. Finally, Slovenia reports below-average outcomes in functional literacy among vulnerable groups. The study examines how community education in local contexts relates to community resilience. Individual resilience is generally understood as the ability to recover from crises or stressful life changes, associated with endurance and self-organization amidst change. In addition to individual resilience, community resilience incorporates physical and socioeconomic factors that influence recovery from natural and other disasters. According to the authors, the research aims to explore how the actors of community-based adult education connect community adult education to community resilience within their local environments. To that end, a qualitative research paradigm was employed. Data collection occurred in Slovenia between 2020 and 2022 using semi-structured interviews and participant observation across three community-based organizations.

The ARTICLE Balanced Time Perspective as a Pathway to Flourishing: Examining the Role of Gratitude and Sense of Positive Agency by Peeyush Anand and Rabindra Kumar Pradhan deals with the concept of time as a crucial and finite resource, and the way individuals manage this valuable asset. The authors rely upon the theoretical concept of Balanced Time Perspective (BTP), which refers to the ability to blend and flexibly engage with different time horizons depending on the situational demands and needs, goals, and values of the individual. The authors believe that individuals with a BTP tend to exhibit higher sense of positive agency beliefs (SoPA), as they can effectively integrate past experiences, present decision-making, and future planning." The study posits that BTP can play a crucial role in fostering flourishing by nurturing temporal flexibility and cultivating a sense of gratitude and positive agency. The authors rely on the Construal Level Theory (CLT). This is understood as a cognitive ability, which posits that while individuals exist in the present, their thoughts, emotions, and actions are shaped by past experiences, future projections, and imagined alternatives through abstract mental constructs. The study involved 521 respondents (66.6% males and 33.4% females) between 18 and 29 of age, being proficient in English, with degrees in college and university education.

Fadi Abdelfattah, Mohammed Salah, Khalid Dahleez, and Hussam Al Halbusi in their ARTICLE Psychology of Leadership: Understanding Al Adoption, Self-Efficacy, Green Creativity, and Risk Perception Among Oman's Business Bosses note that although the adoption of AI promises innovation and competitive advantage, the broader implications of this technology are multifaceted, affecting not only the economic and technological spheres but also the domains of psychology and culture. With a blend of traditional wisdom and modern ambition, Oman's context presents an intriguing landscape for exploring these dynamics. However, there remains a critical gap in understanding how Omani business leaders psychologically perceive and integrate such a technology, particularly regarding self-efficacy, risk perception, green creativity, and positive mental well-being. The research literature offers limited insights into the subject, thus leaving an opportunity to examine how collective cultural values, leadership beliefs, and organizational goals intersect. The authors underline that the cultural considerations intrinsic to Oman, which emphasize communal goals and traditional norms, formed an essential background to their study. The analysis of Al adoption in interaction with cultural nuances sheds light on technology acceptance at the highest managerial level. The study involved 214 top management members representing diverse industries and firms.

In the ARTICLE Social Financial Grants in Thailand: A Catalyst for Inclusive Development and Economic Stability, Mohamad Zreik and Nazatul Faizah Haron analyze grants aimed at providing financial support to marginalized and vulnerable populations. They mention that "the evolution of social financial grants in Thailand is deeply intertwined with the country's broader socioeconomic development and its efforts to address poverty and inequality," evolving from basic welfare provisions to more sophisticated programs designed to empower communities, reduce poverty, and enhance social justice. The authors explore challenges,

which face the effectiveness of social financial grants, their long-term viability, as well as the influence of external factors, including economic fluctuations and political dynamics, which can either enhance or undermine their impact. The study is based on a comprehensive analysis of secondary empirical data and an extensive literature review of policy reports, governmental documents, and academic sources. The concepts of Inclusive Development understood as a holistic approach to economic growth, and Social Justice, which is concerned with the fair and equitable distribution of resources, opportunities, and privileges within a society, serve as the foundational pillars for understanding the role and impact of social financial grants in Thailand.

Denis B. Litvintsev in his ARTICLE Housing Precarity in Russia: Measurements in Regions and Federal Districts argues that housing precarity has become a new research focus: "This shift is driven, on the one hand, by the rise of housing sociology as an independent field, and on the other, by growing interest in labor precarity, which plays a key role in driving housing insecurity worldwide." In contemporary Russia, housing precarity reflects wider socioeconomic disparities across regions and federal districts having a significant impact on individual well-being and social stability. However, systematic regional comparisons remain scarce. By developing an index-based method to evaluate housing affordability, security, and quality, the study tends to explore regional differences in housing precarity and examine how they are related to people's satisfaction with their living conditions and their plans to improve them. The study takes into consideration a distinct feature of the Russian housing sector, namely private ownership of housing, ranging from individual houses to apartments. Therefore, Russia's primary issues revolve around housing affordability, quality, and security. The research is based on an interdisciplinary economic and sociological framework.

In the ARTICLE Exploratory Sequential Analysis on the Factors Affecting the Leadership of Women in Local Governments, Ronel Geraldizo Dagohoy and Mervin G. Gascon stress the importance of women's participation, because "a more inclusive administration will more clearly reflect the demographic characteristics of society and be able to pull policy levers for the widest possible range of societal needs". The authors note that despite global advancements in promoting gender equality, women remain underrepresented in leadership roles, particularly in local governance. They base their research on the Capability Approach Theory, which highlights the need for people to be able to enhance their potential, by examining their existing capabilities, and explore the factors influencing the leadership of women in local governments, aiming to provide a deeper understanding of the unique challenges and motivators they encounter. Specifically, the article seeks to answer the following questions: What are the common responses of women regarding the factors that affect their leadership? What structure of such factors can be developed based on these responses? The participants of this study were women holding at least "second level positions" in the local governments of Davao del Norte Province, Philippines. The authors provide recommendations for local governments, employees, female leaders, and researchers.

Hemlata Vivek Gaikwad and Suruchi Pandey in the ARTICLE Gendered Societies and Leadership Trajectories: A Qualitative Study of Women in the Indian Civil Services argue that in India, where women comprise 48% of the population, their more pronounced leadership is essential for the country's future and development. The Constitution of India ensures equal rights to a satisfactory livelihood and equal pay for men and women. However, the Indian public services show an underrepresentation of women. Thus, in Indian government services, women's representation is only 15%. The study "intends to fill this gap by studying the lived experiences of women who have successfully navigated their leadership trajectories" and pose the research questions: How do women navigate their leadership trajectories? What are the factors contributing to their success despite challenges? The study involved women professionals from the urban, semi-urban, and rural areas of India across different religions, languages, and Indian caste systems, concentrating on the lived experiences of women leaders in the Indian civil services. Qualitative data were collected by conducting in-depth semistructured interviews. According to the authors, despite intersectional backgrounds, the respondents shared highly similar experiences.

The ARTICLE Thematic Horizons of Regional Contemporary Art Exhibitions: Existential Values, Micro- and Macro-History, Humanistic Ideals by Elena S. Kochukhova and Evgenia A. Vakhrusheva focuses specifically on contemporary art galleries as a specific type of museum space. They hold thematic exhibitions addressing issues that are relevant to contemporary social institutions and employ interactive practices that help shape the meaning of these exhibitions. Exhibitions under the study were held at four galleries in Yekaterinburg between 2020 and 2023: the Ural Branch of the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, the Yeltsin Center Art Gallery, the Sinara Art Gallery, and the Museum of the Underground. All these galleries contribute to the broader context of contemporary cultural landscape. The study aims to identify the themes that galleries consider important for their audience, as well as the key meanings and value orientations in their interpretation of these themes. As the authors state, contemporary art is designed to reflect on the most pressing issues of the current moment and the associated value transformations. At the same time, the themes of these exhibitions reveal not only the significant issues of the present but also the values that extend beyond the current moment.

Milen Filipov, Adel Askarkyzy, and Mehdi Aqarabi in the ARTICLE Sociocultural Factors Hindering Public Communication of Positive Body Image in Kazakhstan note that body perception plays a significant role in shaping women's mental and emotional well-being. Cultural and societal influences from the media, fashion, and family reinforce and exacerbate their adverse effects on female well-being. Comparing oneself to the unrealistic body standards disseminated by the media can lead to dissatisfaction and a distorted view of one's body. The authors believe that Kazakhstan presents an exciting research case due to the increasing studies on women's roles and gender equality. However, they argue that insufficient attention has been given to Kazakhstani women's body image, particularly positive ones. The research aims to bridge that gap by exploring the following question: What are the strongest factors

hindering public communication of positive body image in Kazakhstan? The survey involved 94 female respondents from Almaty and Astana.

In the ARTICLE Influence of Social Capital on Community Participation With Community Development as an Intervening Variable: A Systematic Literature Review and Path Analysis Study, Moh. Dulkiah and Anggi Saeful Majid arque that social capital plays a significant role in sustainable community development, as networks of trust and interpersonal interactions invariably enable effective collaboration. Their study aims to comprehensively examine how the dimensions of social capital (trust, network, and value) influence community development and community participation. The authors use a systematic literature review approach and path analysis in order to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to understanding the multidimensional dynamics of social capital. In particular, the abovementioned approach was selected by the authors with the specific aim of offering valuable insights for academics and policymakers who are interested in designing more effective interventions to enhance social capital and identify the role of university students in strengthening community participation in development programs. The results of the study reflect how trust and social networks served as the key components driving social dynamics within community, and how social values had no direct impact on community development and participation.

Azahah Abu Hassan Shaari, Mohammad Rahim Kamaluddin, Zainal Abidin, Muhammad Adnan Pitchan, and Shalini Munusamy in the ARTICLE What Motivates Social Media Users to Share Fake News, and What Are Its Impacts? A Systematic Literature Review define online fake news as "deliberately spread to deceive the public, manipulate opinions, or promote specific agendas; users are often encouraged users to share it widely across platforms." The authors note that misinformation spread significantly influences public discourse and societal perceptions, leading to widespread discord among diverse communities. The dissemination of fake news has far-reaching consequences, influencing various aspects of the society, such as public health, political stability, and social trust. In the political sphere, fake news can disrupt democratic processes by influencing voter behavior and polarizing public opinion. Misinformation campaigns during elections have been used to manipulate perceptions, spread conspiracy theories, and delegitimize political opposition. In particular, authors stress that the spread of fake news is influenced by psychological and cognitive factors. The study highlights the motivations behind fake news dissemination, its societal impacts, and the trends shaping its evolution from 2018 to 2023, offering a valuable resource for addressing this global challenge.

The BOOK REVIEW section includes a review by Sergey V. Moshkin of Dmitrii Travin's book *Kak my zhili v SSSR* [How we lived in the USSR], 2024. The author of the book under review supplements his own reminiscences with interviews from numerous eyewitnesses, whose testimonies add dimension and versatility to his depiction of everyday life in the USSR. As Sergey Moshkin notes, "by weaving together these descriptions, Travin unveils the reality far removed from the official exterior of that time and difficult to comprehend from today's perspective."

Discussions around the topics raised in the present issue will be continued in the subsequent issues of our journal. In planning to introduce new interesting themes, we welcome suggestions from our readers and prospective authors for thematic issues, debate sections, or book reviews.

For more information, please visit our journal web-site: <a href="https://changing-sp.com/">https://changing-sp.com/</a>

Elena A. Stepanova, Editor-in-Chief Ural Federal University, Yekaterinburg, Russia

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#### **ARTICLE**

## Community Education and Resilience: Making Knowledge, Making Community

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This exploratory qualitative study focuses on the importance of community education in fostering community resilience. The research is grounded in a conceptual framework that encompasses resilience, well-being, and community education. The data were collected in Slovenia between 2020 and 2022 through two cycles based on the principles of participatory qualitative research involving 18 community education actors. Semi-structured interviews and participant observation were employed. A thematic content analysis of the interviews identified key themes and categories. Additional anecdotal data were gathered through participant observation in three selected community organizations and informal conversations with program providers, such as teachers. These anecdotal data served as a means of source triangulation and category validation. The findings indicated that community education enhances resilience and cohesion through knowledge co-creation, the development of social and emotional well-being, motivational programs, and emancipatory engagement. It empowers communities to build their capacity to respond to unpredictable challenges. The participants emphasized the need to develop new forms of community education, characterized as a pedagogy of contingency.

#### **KEYWORDS**

community, adult education, knowledge co-creation, pedagogy of contingency

#### Introduction

Recent years have seen a growing interest in community education, driven by increased insecurity stemming from the pandemic, natural disasters, precarious work, longevity, and evolving global-local dynamics. Community education practices focus on developing education related to health and environmentalism and enhancing social, emotional, and spiritual capabilities (Albanesi et al., 2019; Mayo, 2020). Innovations in community education seek participatory modalities of community activities that empower local populations. A key concept related to community education is a resilient community (Berkes & Ross, 2013; Chou & Huang, 2021; Ross & Berkes, 2014).

Community education is a practice conducted within a community for its benefit, resisting trends toward the marketization of adult education and the commodification of knowledge. It addresses a fundamental human need for belonging, connection, and transcendence. This approach is inclusive, fostering education within local environments and prioritizing the education of vulnerable groups (Javrh, 2012, 2021). In Slovenia, where this study was conducted, community-based adult education occurs in various societies, cultural institutions, nature parks, adult education centers, religious organizations, and universities for older adults (Furlan, 2021; Ličen et al., 2019, 2020; Valič, 2019).

Slovenia was selected as a case study for several reasons. Firstly, community education has a historical presence in Slovenia, dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century when it was linked to the development of national identity, as well as some practical skills, e.g., fire-fighting, agriculture, and beekeeping. This education occurred in associations, libraries, and museums (Govekar Okoliš, 2024, pp. 141–145). While the tradition has been maintained, new goals and content addressing contemporary challenges have emerged, similar to trends in other countries (Belete et al., 2022; White et al., 2023).

Secondly, compared to other contexts, such as community learning in Scotland (White et al., 2023) and Ireland (Smith & Jackson, 2025), Slovenia's linguistic and geographic compactness allows for the distinctive characteristics of community education to permeate the non-formal education system, including people's universities, counseling networks, and universities for older adults.

Thirdly, Slovenia is experiencing rapid aging, contributing to unpredictable changes and challenges for community education, particularly concerning the inclusion of older adults as a vulnerable target group.

Finally, Slovenia reports below-average outcomes in functional literacy among vulnerable groups, as indicated by The Survey of Adult Skills, a product of The Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (OECD, 2016).

Community education must go beyond merely reproducing existing solutions; it must address uncertainties and new challenges, prompting the search for innovative strategies. The advancement of community education relies on knowledge from a variety of fields, including community psychology, health sciences, educational sciences, cultural studies, philosophy, and theology (Bezboruah, 2021; Dinham, 2020; Heagele, 2017; Riemer et al., 2020, p. 3). While the role of community education has been previously researched (Kroth & Cranton, 2014), new questions arise concerning practices that effectively respond to contemporary challenges.

This study examines how community education in local contexts relates to community resilience.

#### Resilience

Resilience is commonly understood as the ability to recover from crises or stressful life changes, associated with endurance and self-organization amidst change. Research on resilience encompasses both individuals and communities. The World Health Organization defines resilience as the capacity of an individual to cope with stress, describing it as "the state in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to make a contribution to his or her own community" (Herrman et al., 2005). This definition emphasizes individual resilience as the ability to manage normal stress, while other definitions highlight the capacity to navigate unexpected challenges (Allen et al., 2011; Barton et al., 2020). Thus, resilience encompasses the ability to cope with both predictable and unpredictable life transitions and stresses. In addition to individual resilience, community resilience is also defined, incorporating physical and socioeconomic factors that influence recovery from natural and other disasters (Koliou et al., 2020) and life transitions (Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2017).

Resilience represents the capability of individuals or communities to undergo transitions and transformations. It reflects the ability of people within a given environment to respond to challenges and losses stemming from accidents, risks, epidemics, and disruptions. Understanding resilience as a proactive approach to transitions is crucial for this study. Resilience is not merely a static quality; it is an ongoing process that develops through positive adaptation (Allen et al., 2011). Individuals cultivate resilience across physical, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual dimensions, underscoring the vital role of education (Barton et al., 2020; Mansfield et al., 2016).

#### Community Resilience

Research on community resilience has highlighted the significant roles of planners, community activists, and educators in actualizing resilient communities (Abramson et al., 2015; Chou & Huang, 2021). Community resilience has been examined across various disciplines, often in the context of natural disasters (Koliou et al., 2020; Patel

et al., 2017). Integrating insights from different studies has led to the identification of common characteristics shared by resilient communities (Patel et al., 2017; Pfefferbaum et al., 2015; von Kotze, 2023). One of the most critical elements is local knowledge, encompassing diverse types of knowledge, competencies, and experiences, including both general and specialized knowledge (e.g., first aid). Additionally, the mental perspectives of community members, including their viewpoints, values, and emotions, are vital for enhancing community resilience. In this regard, hope, the pedagogy of hope, and positive education play particularly important roles.

Alongside local knowledge, the following elements are essential:

- (a) community networks and relationships that help identify community strengths and assets;
- (b) communication and community narratives;
- (c) public health and the organization of health services, along with awareness of physical and mental health needs during crises;
- (d) collaborative governance and community self-organization;
- (e) resources necessary for survival (e.g., food and water) and those essential for a good quality of life (e.g., economic resources);
- (f) preparedness for uncertain situations.

Community resilience can be analyzed from two perspectives: one is based on socioecological systems, while the other focuses on developmental psychological characteristics and mental health concepts. Both approaches emphasize learning and education, along with memory, unpredictability, agency, values, and connections between people and places. Furthermore, community resilience is linked to the concept of well-being, which can be defined as either the outcome of resilience or its precursor (Dodge et al., 2012, p. 230). Following the 2008 financial crisis, economic and environmental well-being were extensively studied. However, with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a notable increase in health-related research. Well-being encompasses economic, living, and educational conditions.

Community resilience is also viewed as a component of social sustainability. It is understood as an integrative process within complex socioecological systems, such as local communities, involving both explicit social strengths and people—place connections, which are activated and developed through agency and effective organization (Berkes & Ross, 2013; Ross & Berkes, 2014). The fundamental premise of this study is that resilience serves as a personal and/or community resource, comprising a set of action-oriented characteristics and strategies that are protective and can be cultivated.

#### **Research Problem and Methodology**

Given that community resilience is constantly evolving, the community education practices that shape it should be identified. The research aims to explore how community-based adult education actors connect community adult education to community resilience within their local environments.

Thus, the following research question was formulated: What are the key areas and elements that, according to the research participants, are important for fostering a positive link between community education in local environments during uncertain times and the development of community resilience? A qualitative research paradigm was employed to address this question (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Flick, 2019).

#### Data Collection

Data collection occurred in Slovenia between 2020 and 2022 using two methods: semi-structured interviews and participant observation across three community-based organizations.

Interviews with each participant were conducted in a setting of their choice, lasting between 40 and 60 minutes. These were recorded and subsequently transcribed. Interview preparation included a pilot interview (Interview 0 in Table 1), the findings of which informed the development of a set of guiding questions for the main interviews. The participants were not asked about resilience using the specific term, as the pilot interview indicated that the respondents did not fully understand it; instead, they were asked about resilience indirectly through descriptions. All the interviews were performed in Slovenian.

Data collection adhered to the principles of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/2000) and followed a cyclical process. The first phase involved six interviews (Interviews 1 to 6, Table 1) with individuals employed at adult education centers in various towns across Slovenia. The interviews were analyzed to develop initial themes. This was followed by an interview with an expert (Interview 7) from an institute focused on research and development in adult education. During the second phase, additional 11 interviews were conducted (Interviews 8 to 18, Table 1).

Additional anecdotal data were gathered through participant observations in three organizations (a university of the third age, an adult education center, and a society), which also included informal/unstructured interviews with educators.

Unstructured participant observations were conducted following the principles of ethnographic research in adult education (Pastuhov & Sivenius, 2020). A brief unstructured observation was carried out in October 2020 at the selected organization to develop the initial guiding questions for the interviews. After the interviews concluded, unstructured observations were conducted in three community education settings, guided by the four research themes developed in the study. Anecdotal notes were taken.

In each organization, participant observation occurred for one day between October and December 2022. The anecdotal data contributed to data source triangulation and the validation of categories derived from the interview analysis.

#### Research Participants

The study involved 18 people who were selected through purposeful sampling. The selection criteria included being active in the field of community-based adult education, possessing a minimum of three years of experience in non-formal adult education, and voluntarily joining the study.

The participants were chosen from the most prevalent community education providers in Slovenia, including adult education centers, societies, libraries, consultancy services, and universities of the third age. This ensured diversity in the sample regarding the organizations represented and the roles of participants (head, mentor, expert, chair of a society).

Research ethics were upheld by obtaining informed consent from all participants. In addition, anonymity was guaranteed, and the participants had the option of withdrawing from the study at any time. All data obtained were anonymized, with only the interview code appearing in the statements.

Table 1
Sociodemographic Characteristics of Research Participants

Interview code	Organization	Gender	Educational attainment, field of study	Field of activity, years of experience in adult education	
0	Society Pilot interview	F	BA, Education	Society member, 5	
1	Adult education center	F	MA, Social Sciences	Head of the center, 20	
2	Adult education center	F	MA, Social Sciences	Head of the center, 19	
3	Adult education center	F	MA, Social Sciences	Head of the center, 15	
4	Adult education center	F	MA, Social Sciences	Head of the center, 33	
5	Adult education center	F	MA, Social Sciences	Head of the center, 30	
6	Adult education center	М	MA, Social Sciences	Head of the center, 10	
7	Research institute	F	PhD, Education	Expert Follow-up interview after the first cycle	
8	Adult education center	M	MSc, Technical Studies	Group mentor, 5 Retired secondary- school teacher	
9	Society	M	BSc, Computer and Information Science	ICT literacy program provider in a local society, 7	
10	Energy Efficiency Association	М	MSc, Technical Studies	Energy efficiency consultant (consultancy network), 20	
11	U3A society	F	MA, Humanities	Self-employed in the field of culture Study circle mentor at a U3A, 7	
12	U3A society	F	BA, Education	Unemployed Study circle mentor at a U3A, 9	

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Interview code	Organization	Gender	Educational attainment, field of study	Field of activity, years of experience in adult education
13	U3A society	М	Secondary school, Computer Science	Self-employed Study circle mentor at a U3A, 20
14	Study circles network	F	MA, Humanities	Study circle mentor, 6
15	Library	F	MA, Tourism	Self-employed Study group mentor at a local library, 6
16	U3A society	F	MA, Education	Retired head of a society, 15
17	Educational institute	F	MA, Education	Head of an educational institute, 15
18	Society for religious education	F	PhD, Theology	Chair of a society for religious education, 3

Note. F = Female; M = Male; BA = Bachelor of Arts; MA = Master of Arts; PhD = Doctor of Philosophy; MSc = Master of Science; U3A = University of the Third Age.

#### Data Processing

The transcribed interviews and anecdotal notes from the field were processed according to the rules of thematic content analysis, which was conducted to describe the material in relation to the research question (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Schreier, 2012). The transcript analysis involved the following stages: (a) detailed familiarization with the transcripts to gain insight into the whole; (b) uncovering key messages and meanings from the text through coding; (c) grouping codes into categories and themes. Following the thematic analysis of the transcripts, the data were organized into categories, which were finalized after considering the participant observation notes.

#### Results

The findings were categorized into four thematic units that characterize the impact of community education on the development of resilience in the local environment. Further, each theme is subcategorized.

#### Theme 1: Social and Emotional Well-Being

This theme comprises the following categories: hope, trust, relationships, identification with the environment, and a sense of belonging to the local community.

Each community enters the process of resilience development with specific characteristics. The interviewed respondents highlighted the importance of community education for developing social and emotional competencies, which are essential for social and emotional well-being. The quality of shared life depends on how people

manage their relationships and emotions. The respondents noted that, due to past events and political divides, there is significant division among the people in Slovenia, making it necessary to offer activities that foster connection.

Adult education center programs aimed at different target groups foster self-confidence and hope. The head of an adult education center mentioned a project titled *Priložnosti so!* [Opportunities Exist]¹. In 2014, films for the project were produced as part of training programs for the unemployed. During times of uncertainty (unemployment, air pollution, the COVID-19 pandemic), both adult education centers and universities of the third age developed specific programs, such as those for migrants, which nurtured the art of hope and operated according to the principles of pedagogy of hope.

There are several programs aimed at bridging generational gaps within the local environment, such as *Festival Znanja in Kulture Starejših* [Festival of Older Adults' Culture and Knowledge], organized by the Slovenian Third Age University, which promotes positive feelings of belonging and connection (Festival Znanja in Kulture Starejših, n.d.). One respondent (Interview 5) mentioned a film festival with a similar purpose, entitled *Festivity in Play*, which brings people together in a shared sense of well-being. This is supported by the following statement:

Interview 11: People need to work together. It seems that they need this more and more, but they don't know how to connect [emphasis added]. There used to be many societies, but now other forms of social connections work better. For older adults, U3A education seems to be a good way of building connections. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, they took part in distance learning. (Trans. by Klara Kožar Rosulnik, Mojca Blažič, Petra Javrh, & Nives Ličen—K. K. R., M. B., P. J., & N. L.)

New forms of social connection are being developed, fostering a sense of belonging to the environment. The respondents stated that education allows people to get to know and understand one another, thereby building trust.

Interview 2: A programme for Albanian-speaking women was well received and evolved into a study circle, where the women started connecting with other women in the environment. As a result, trust was built among them. (Trans. by K. K. R., M. B., P. J., & N. L.)

Trust and hope are nurtured as socio-emotional competencies through programs that use the arts to promote social change, as well as through basic literacy programs. The respondents highlighted the need to develop emotional literacy. Given the perceived positive impacts, they expressed a desire to involve more individuals in various programs within the local environment, particularly older adults (65+), who are seen as a group in need of social connections.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Video in Slovenian available at <a href="https://tvu.acs.si/paradaucenja/video1/">https://tvu.acs.si/paradaucenja/video1/</a>

### Theme 2: Development of Programs and Strategies That Are Adaptive and Motivating

This theme comprises the following categories: motivation, vulnerable groups, inclusion, and process-based and interactive planning.

According to the respondents, one characteristic of community education programs that impacts community resilience is the participants' positive shared experiences. Positive experiences are possible when appropriate strategies are employed to organize and deliver education. It is crucial to choose didactic strategies that lead to participant satisfaction, achievement, and engagement in the learning process. The respondents stressed that both adult education centers and universities of the third age pay attention to individuals from vulnerable groups and emphasized the need to further develop inclusive programs for these groups. They also highlighted the use of active and arts-based methods.

Interview 14: Adults want to be active. For us, research or project methods have always worked well, because people look for knowledge themselves. We've made films. And there's always an action goal we work towards. (Trans. by K. K. R., M. B., P. J., & N. L.)

While organized programs are accessible, attendance is not as high as desired. Regarding the *Training for Success in Life* programs<sup>2</sup> (literacy programs), the participants believed that additional motivation should be cultivated, as supported by expert opinions (Javrh, 2012). Individuals from vulnerable groups often have negative experiences with education and only consider their educational needs during times of great scarcity, e.g., when facing energy poverty as mentioned in Interview 10. However, they may not know how to find information and often have unrealistic expectations, e.g., financial ones. Therefore, it is essential to develop outreach programs or offer one-to-one consultations.

A resilient community includes all target groups, with particular attention devoted to vulnerable individuals who often possess low basic skills (literacy and basic abilities). Programs must first address the perceived needs of these groups, for instance, advising them on more efficient use of water, wood, and forest resources. In Interview 10, there were mentioned programs aimed at addressing energy poverty that provide one-to-one consultations in people's homes.

People's experiences with education and consultancy must be positive, as this will encourage them to seek further consultations and necessary knowledge. New educational needs are emerging, and adult educators are encouraging and motivating individuals to engage in new educational programs, as highlighted by the interviewed expert (Interview 7).

In times of uncertainty, education requires different planning approaches. Process-based planning is becoming more important than predictable educational goals. The respondents emphasized that programs are continually adapted and exist

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> https://pismenost.acs.si/en/programs/programs-for-adults/

in a space between the known and the unknown (Interview 4). Such planning leads to unpredictable outcomes as knowledge is formed within the individual.

Interview 17: We used the theatre of the oppressed to raise awareness of sexism and ageism. At first, I was full of doubt about this method, but then I realised that by experiencing the theatre of the oppressed, you form a new ontological state. It is not just realising something; it is a new way of existing. And what is more: the invisible becomes visible. (Trans. by K. K. R., M. B., P. J., & N. L.)

The interviewed respondents identified several strategies that promote education as a "practice of freedom" (Freire, 1968/2018) and contribute to a resilient community. These strategies include various creative methods, such as creative writing and photovoice; media-related approaches, e.g., local radio, websites, and gamification that encourages participation, particularly among those with low educational attainment; methods involving active engagement in public spaces, e.g., graffiti and filmmaking; reflective practices including life stories and storytelling; learning about biblical narratives (Interview 18). One respondent (Interview 3) discussed exploring the life stories of local migrant women who had traveled to Egypt and Argentina in the past, linking these narratives to those of migrant women currently arriving in the local area.

#### Theme 3: Knowledge Co-Creation

This theme encompasses the following categories: participation, dominant epistemology, narrative knowledge, and the interconnectedness of knowledge types.

The respondents highlighted that community education is grounded in scientific knowledge, which must be supplemented by other forms of knowledge. New divisions of experiences and knowledge are employed in relation to individuals' activities within the community and the development of resilience: embodied, situated, and narrative knowledge.

In addition to considering different types of knowledge, the research participants believe it is crucial for individuals to engage actively in the knowledge creation process. People are more committed and engaged when they are co-creators of knowledge.

Interview 2: Things are no longer as simple as they once were. Everything is more complicated. In education, using reason alone is not enough; you have to consider emotions, wisdom, all kinds of knowledge and morals when making decisions. And religious beliefs as well. Imparting information is not enough. There is already too much information as it is. False information in particular is a problem ... It is difficult to reach people in the usual ways by providing information. (Trans. by K. K. R., M. B., P. J., & N. L.)

The study circle system/network was cited as an effective example of participatory knowledge creation that incorporates local and narrative knowledge, among others (Interview 14). Respondents from adult education centers believe that study circles

foster shared knowledge and resist "epistemological hegemony," referring to the dominance of knowledge linked to social power. Local knowledge has proven invaluable in addressing natural disasters, such as communities organizing to tackle glaze ice and flooding. Study circles are rooted in dialogical learning and participation, thus accounting for local knowledge.

In Interview 6, a respondent noted that knowledge is regulated similarly to corporate contexts and reflects marketplace demands, revealing the influence of market principles. However, most respondents felt that mechanization is not the appropriate approach to community development. They pointed to the hierarchical nature of knowledge based on marketplace needs and the authorities involved in knowledge hierarchy, namely financial organizations. Many community education actors believe that market-recognized knowledge is not the only valuable form of knowledge. In fact, local knowledge can be beneficial in environmentally friendly initiatives and in the pursuit of intangible commodities such as wisdom, rituals, spiritual practices, and memories.

Critical epistemological awareness should be a component of community education, as it encourages all participants to remain open to diverse ways of acquiring and constructing knowledge. Connective strategies in knowledge co-creation processes can also include participatory action research strategies (local projects) and citizen science, which have been utilized in climate change awareness programs.

Various inclusive knowledge-sharing platforms that unite local communities are also highly beneficial. One such platform mentioned by respondents is FACE<sup>3</sup>, which facilitates intergenerational knowledge sharing between older and younger individuals.

In the local context, people learn through problem-solving. The research participants identified two main challenges in knowledge co-creation: people and processes.

Interview 5: As adult educators, we need to be aware of this and organize (create, develop) programs that won't just reproduce/perpetuate social and knowledge differences. New educational strategies that will make it possible for people to create knowledge together need to be "invented" [emphasis added]. In our environment, it is difficult to bring together Roma and non-Roma people. (Trans. by K. K. R., M. B., P. J., & N. L.)

Knowledge co-creation is also fostered through consultations on various topics, such as nutrition, energy, and health. Citizens choose to participate in consultancy processes for various reasons, including accessing state subsidies for low-cost energy solutions (Interview 10). However, engaging people in activities that offer no direct benefit proves more challenging, particularly for specific target groups, such as those with low functional literacy. For these groups, personalized strategies tailored to their needs should be employed. According to the research participants, education that actively involves a large number of individuals as co-creators of knowledge is crucial for community development.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> https://www.mismoface.si

#### Theme 4: Emancipatory Engagement

This theme includes the following categories: environment, critical community education, empowerment, and contact with nature.

The research participants indicated that contemporary emancipatory practices are frequently linked to environmental issues.

Interview 2: I think that in this day and age, green programs are the best ones for empowering and encouraging everyone in the environment. At our adult education center, female farmers and also immigrants have been included in green programs. Water is important for all of us and everyone was really devoted to the cause. (Trans. by K. K. R., M. B., P. J., & N. L.)

In local contexts, community education often enhances resilience concerning environmental challenges that people can face. Community-based environmental education emphasizes the dynamics of domination over nature and animals, as well as over human groups, and underscores the importance of cultivating a post-anthropocentric mindset. It highlights environmental and energy literacy as essential components (Interviews 3 and 10).

Community-based environmental education promotes empowerment and resilience by raising awareness of the significance of active citizenship for sustainable development. Community education actors assert that it is essential to comprehend the "repressive structures and practices" that lead to suffering for both humans and animals. Instead, they aim to develop emancipatory practices that engage local individuals and foster community partnerships, e.g., collaborations between faith-based organizations and educational institutions. The research participants emphasized the importance of individuals' commitment and willingness to participate in local community engagement.

Local community engagement is a model not explicitly mentioned by the respondents; however, they did refer to its elements: volunteering in various areas, e.g., working with abandoned pets; participation in sports and tradition-related local events such as feast days and local festivals; local activism; and community care, e.g., environmental workshops, clean-up efforts, and protests against hazardous waste. Community education is linked to all these elements. This type of learning and knowledge ecology significantly impacts the development of community resilience.

#### **Discussion**

The aim of this study was to identify key areas and elements that are important for establishing a positive connection between community education and the development of community resilience. The research participants believe that community education and its characteristics (such as being part of the environment and participation) foster community resilience. These findings align with research conducted by Pfefferbaum et al. (2013), Pfefferbaum et al. (2015), and Shultz et al. (2017); however, they also highlight additional areas that have been less extensively researched.

Social and emotional well-being was identified as one of the most significant factors contributing to community resilience. Although the interviewed respondents did not explicitly mention the concept of well-being, their responses imply that community education supports the development of social and emotional well-being. This can be explained through the frameworks of the pedagogy of hope (Freire, 1992/2014), pedagogy of contingency (von Kotze, 2023), critical pedagogy, and positive education, all of which are associated with fostering social and emotional competencies and critical thinking. Social and emotional competence is foundational for positive social interactions that promote human development, as confirmed by Schneider et al. (2021) in their research on emotional intelligence and wise decision-making. Considering the elements characteristic of a resilient community, as outlined by Patel et al. (2017), it can be affirmed that community education contributes to local knowledge, social networks, communication, preparedness, and a sense of belonging.

The study revealed the need to develop programs that motivate individuals and prepare them for uncertainty, which is supported by other studies, e.g., Maksimović & Nišavić (2019), who particularly highlighted the potential of liminality. Liminality refers to transitional periods when a community exists between two worlds. During these times of transition, transitional learning occurs, fostering the development of new competencies for embracing the new and uncertain. Programs should prioritize interactivity and models of pedagogy that address the unknown, which include the transformative potential of experiences during transitions. Community education programs that promote resilience counter educational practices that shape individuals according to the dominant discourses of power, as these practices control and normalize individuals according to current social power dynamics.

Given the inherent uncertainties in future social practices, the pedagogy of the unknown is primarily linked to arts-based education, such as the theatre of the oppressed (Salini & Durand, 2020). Maksimović and Nišavić (2019, p. 43) cited Atkinson, who argues that learning is essentially the production of new subjectivities. Therefore, programs should focus on both the creation of new knowledge and innovative ways of thinking and feeling, which in community education can be associated with positive psychology and psychological well-being.

Research participants shared their experiences with community education, highlighting resilience through various practices. This aligns with findings by von Kotze (2023), who argues that resilience can be interpreted in multiple ways; thus, community education contributes to various types of resilience, including absorptive, restorative, adaptive, transformative, and equitable resilience. According to the interviewed expert (Interview 7), equitable resilience is particularly significant, as it addresses the challenges of social vulnerability.

An important element fostering community resilience through community education, as revealed by the research findings, is knowledge co-creation. When people co-create knowledge, they generate meaning and build community. Insights into the importance of knowledge co-creation are supported by various theoretical approaches. In recent years, knowledge-related discourse has included critical discussions about the hegemony of specific types of knowledge (de Sousa Santos,

2014, 2018; de Sousa Santos & Menses, 2020; Desmet, 2022). For resilience to develop, rational behavior alone is insufficient; building resilience also requires critical judgment and the capacity to challenge dominant views of knowledge, the world, and global relations. Darlaston-Jones (2015) argues that the dominant trend in adult education leans toward the commodification of knowledge, illustrating how the market influences knowledge value. However, the research participants do not prioritize marketability (only one respondent mentioned the need for education to align with market trends); instead, they believe that the value of knowledge created within community education is tied to its contributions to individual and community well-being and its ability to bring people together and empower them.

Emancipatory transformation through community education is predicated on co-creation and cannot rely solely on one type of knowledge or the knowledge of a single group. It encompasses experiences, traditional knowledge, narrative knowledge, vernacular knowledge, spiritual practices, beliefs, memories, daydreams, and local narratives.

The findings on the significance of participatory knowledge co-creation, based on interview analysis, can be interpreted through the lens of transformative learning theory and transformative projects (Kroth & Cranton, 2014; Law & Ramos, 2017), as well as participatory research and education methodologies. Participatory action research engages researchers and local residents as research participants, fostering innovative competencies. Participatory epistemology involves collaboration between practitioners and participants in various forms of action research with the aim of co-creating new practices. Participation is evident in cyclical evaluations of local projects conducted by various organizations and adult education centers, as well as in needs analyses and presentations (Pelacho et al., 2021) and the application of citizen science methods.

Research into the importance of community education for developing resilience revealed a dualism in the respondents' statements. Some emphasized learning's role in enabling individuals to adapt, accept uncertainty and change, and build resilience, all linked to their experiences and knowledge. The aim of learning should be adaptability to change, fostering absorptive and adaptive resilience. Other statements focused on counteraction and learning aimed at promoting activism, which cultivates transformative resilience. This perspective is particularly pronounced among respondents discussing environmental education, prevalent in adult education centers and various organizations. This aligns with research conducted by Orlović Lovren (2021), which explores engaged participatory education for sustainable development. Emancipatory engagement is a practice that encourages the development of informed and critical action. Integrating community education with environmental education, ecopsychology, and sustainable development promotes the development of sustainable practices (Law & Ramos, 2017, p. 61). Emancipatory engagement is rooted in critical community education, which critiques traditional views of hierarchical power systems, knowledge, and social power that contribute to "a wounded landscape" and "a wounded community." This study confirms the significance of critical community education for fostering a resilient community.

Engaged emancipatory community education broadens the traditional concept of community. While traditional definitions emphasize similarities in values and practices, emancipatory community education considers contemporary definitions that highlight tolerance, diversity, empathy, and acceptance of otherness. The concept of otherness (and its associated lesser worth) is a construct, as noted by post-colonial theories. In Slovenia, attitudes towards the "other" akin to those found in colonial contexts have not developed; however, there are attitudes towards groups labeled as different and potentially marginalized. Groups with social power often portray other groups as needing guidance and direction. Respondents from universities of the third age indicated that older adults belong to the "other" group, and therefore, universities of the third age are developing critical pedagogy and engaged education for older adults within the community.

Modern concepts of community also include groups that differ in various ways, advocating for an inclusive community through engaged education.

#### Conclusion

The primary finding of the study is that, according to the research participants, community education fosters resilience and builds knowledge and skills within the local community, empowering it to respond to uncertainties and unpredictable challenges. This is partly achieved through the development of educational models such as the pedagogy of contingency.

The study provides the following insights:

- Community education is a vital practice in uncertain times for fostering a sense of belonging and local identity, which serves as the foundation for resilience.
- In an era of neoliberalism, where individuals are often reduced to consumers and the suffering of many is overlooked, community education serves as a practice for developing empowerment and emancipatory engagement, which are essential for resilience.
- Community education is grounded in an ethic of care and knowledge co-creation practices, necessitating well-organized innovative programs that include vulnerable and excluded groups.

Community resilience research aligns with what Barry (2002, p. 61) describes as contemporary radical uncertainty, relating to (a) understanding resilience, (b) fostering resilience through education and research, and (c) developing methods for resilience monitoring. This study focused on understanding the connection between community education and community resilience, based on the premise that community education is central to adult education centers, universities of the third age, and adult education in cultural institutions, and grounded in the definition that resilience is a dynamic and evolving process. Community resilience and community education can be enhanced through positive educational models.

The focus was not solely on the negative outcomes of transitions but also on comprehending transitions and related experiences in terms of transformation. Resilience is a multidimensional construct influenced by various factors, one of which

is community education that contributes protective and stabilizing attributes when knowledge is applied in stressful situations.

The key elements for building resilience through community education include developing socio-emotional well-being, creating innovative programs and strategies, co-creating knowledge, and fostering emancipatory engagement. The study revealed that participants support community education aimed at enhancing resilience by transforming it into a practice of freedom and engaging in the continuous co-creation of knowledge within the community.

The study's limitations are primarily methodological. All interviewed respondents were middle-class, highly educated individuals involved in community education as leaders, teachers, or researchers. Future research should include individuals with lower educational attainment and members from different generations. Additionally, community resilience requires further investigation, particularly through newer research approaches such as citizen science strategies.

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#### **ARTICLE**

# Balanced Time Perspective as a Pathway to Flourishing: Examining the Role of Gratitude and Sense of Positive Agency

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Time is a human's biggest ally. Balanced Time Perspective (BTP) is one of the crucial variables in the psychological exploration of time. BTP is characterized by a balance between past, present, and future times. essential for flourishing. Using the construal level theory, the present study investigates the influence of BTP on flourishing. The study also examines the mediating role of gratitude and a sense of positive agency in the above-mentioned relationship. Data were collected from 521 respondents (66.6% male, 33.4% female) aged 18 to 29 years across various regions as well as belonging to different residential settings, with 48.6% residing in urban areas, 25.9% in semi-urban areas, and 25.5% in rural areas of India using a purposive sampling method. The sample consisted of individuals with diverse educational qualifications, including undergraduate, postgraduate, and PhD degree holders, and represented both working and non-working individuals. Wellstandardized instruments were used to measure the study variables. The data were analyzed using Jamovi software (Version 2.3.26). The results revealed that BTP significantly predicted flourishing both directly and indirectly via gratitude and a sense of positive agency. This study is among the first to explore these mediating relationships, advancing scholarly understanding of how BTP facilitates flourishing. Implications of the study are discussed in the light of study findings.

#### **KEYWORDS**

Balanced Time Perspective, gratitude, sense of positive agency, flourishing, Construal Level Theory

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#### Introduction

Time is an essential aspect of human existence, including both objective (clock time) and subjective (personal time). Time perspective (TP), one of the most robust constructs in the psychological manifestation of time, gained traction after the seminal work of Zimbardo and Boyd (1999). These researchers emphasized temporal flexibility and proposed a theoretical concept called Balanced Time Perspective (BTP), which refers to the ability to blend and flexibly engage with different time horizons depending on the situational demands and needs, goals, and values of the individual. BTP has been linked with various correlates of flourishing, such as subjective well-being (Boniwell et al., 2010; Drake et al., 2008), life satisfaction (Ballabrera & Pérez-Burriel, 2022), emotional intelligence (Stolarski et al., 2011), happiness and more positive effects (Webster et al., 2021). Individuals with BTP engage with time flexibly, drawing from past experiences, making present-moment decisions, and planning effectively for the future. This adaptability is crucial in promoting flourishing, a holistic state of well-being encompassing positive mental health, life satisfaction, purpose, and psychological growth (Keyes, 2002; VanderWeele, 2017).

Flourishing represents an optimal state of functioning, integrating emotional, psychological, and social well-being (Diener et al., 2010). It extends beyond happiness and encompasses purpose, resilience, and meaningful relationships (Huppert & So, 2013). Time is a crucial and finite resource, and the way individuals manage it significantly impacts their well-being and performance. As Robinson and Godbey noted, "time has become the most precious commodity and the ultimate scarcity" (1999, p. 25). This highlights the growing need for individuals to develop an adaptive and flexible approach to time that optimizes psychological functioning. BTP provides such a framework, enabling individuals to flexibly shift between temporal orientations in response to situational demands, serving as a crucial mechanism for fostering flourishing (Stolarski et al., 2015).

Despite theoretical links between BTP and flourishing, research on the mechanisms underlying this association remains limited (Burzynska & Stolarski, 2020). Cunningham et al. (2015) proposed a dual pathway framework arguing that BPTs have both direct and indirect effects on well-being outcomes, i.e., flourishing, which makes it imperative to study the role of mediating variables in the relationship between these two concepts.

BTP significantly predicts gratitude, that is a disposition marked by appreciative reflection on past experiences and mindful engagement with the present (Szczęśniak & Timoszyk-Tomczak, 2018). This gratitude functions as a psychological resource that amplifies positive affect and perceptions of abundance, thereby enhancing flourishing through elevated well-being and life satisfaction (Valdez & Datu, 2021).

Additionally, how individuals perceive and balance their time can significantly influence their sense of positive agency beliefs (SoPA), perceived control over life events, and decision-making processes (Germano & Brenlla, 2021). SoPA, the belief in one's ability to control life outcomes, is crucial in the psychological resilience and optimal functioning of the individual (Bandura, 2001; Tapal et al., 2017). Individuals with a BTP tend to exhibit higher SoPA, as they can effectively integrate past experiences, present decision-making, and future planning. This ability fosters self-regulation, explaining their tendency to postpone immediate gratification in favor of long-term goals and aspirations, ultimately leading to optimal functioning (Boniwell & Zimbardo, 2015).

Based on these recommendations and literature, the present study examines the impact of BTP on flourishing both directly and indirectly through the mediating roles of gratitude and SoPA. The Construal Level Theory, or CLT (Trope & Liberman, 2010) has been used to explain the relationship among the study variables. CLT posits that optimal psychological functioning arises from the synergistic integration of high- and low-level construal as high construal helps in setting and planning for distant goals, feeling grateful regarding the past, and low-level construal characterizes present-mindedness and reaping the benefit of current situations (Alfalah & Alganem, 2020; Trope & Liberman, 2010). By elucidating how BTP harmonizes these temporal construals, this study empirically validates a dual-pathway mechanism—grounded in gratitude and SoPA—through which adaptive temporal cognition fosters flourishing.

#### **Theory and Hypotheses**

The Construal Level Theory has been used to delineate the associations between BTP, gratitude, SoPA, and flourishing. CLT posits that while individuals exist in the present, their thoughts, emotions, and actions are shaped by past experiences, future projections, and imagined alternatives through abstract mental construals (Trope & Liberman, 2010). This cognitive ability allows individuals to reflect on past events, plan for the future, anticipate social reactions, and engage in counterfactual thinking despite the irreversible nature of time. Such mental representations, which do not exist in reality, are structured through an egocentric concept known as psychological distance. The farther an object is from immediate experience (high psychological distance), the more abstract its mental construal, whereas closer objects are represented in more concrete terms (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Different TPs can be conceptualized differently on the level of abstract mental construal in a way that present TPs can reflect more concrete construal. In contrast, the future and past reflect more abstract temporal construal (Stolarski et al., 2018). The ability to switch between now and then, from abstract to concrete, characterizes BTP (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999).

Cognitive and motivational processes such as BTP are crucial in maintaining and elevating overall well-being (Lyubomirsky, 2001). Individuals with BTP can switch effectively between a high level of abstraction when reflecting on their future goals and aspirations to a lower level while dealing with current experiences and events (Stolarski et al., 2018). Individuals who possess temporal plasticity, an ability to experience a sense of positivity and gratitude toward their past, maintain an optimistic

outlook toward the future, and remain attentive to the present, are more likely to be in a state of flourishing (Burzynska & Stolarski, 2020). BTP also characterizes self-control, proactiveness, and an efficacious belief, enabling individuals to set meaningful goals, navigate present challenges, and cultivate optimal functioning (Boniwell & Zimbardo, 2015). Based on these theoretical foundations, the current study posits that BTP can play a crucial role in fostering flourishing by nurturing temporal flexibility and cultivating a sense of gratitude and positive agency.

#### BTP and Flourishing

Zimbardo and Boyd (2008) conceptualized TP as "the often-nonconscious process whereby the continual flows of personal and social experiences are assigned to temporal categories, or time frames, that help to give order, coherence, and meaning to those events." TP encompasses affective, cognitive, and social components and is influenced by various psychological, social, and situational factors (Boniwell & Zimbardo, 2015).

Zimbardo and Boyd's (1999) conceptualization of TP comprises five temporal categories having a dynamic influence on an individual's thoughts, actions, motivation, and emotions. These temporal frames are *Past Positive*, wherein individuals have a positive and warm attitude towards their life; *Past Negative*, depicting an aversive and negative towards past life, which can be real or imagined traumatic experiences; *Present Hedonistic* characterizing immediate gratification, inability to resist to the temptations, sensation seeking, and little concerns towards future; *Present Fatalistic* relates to the belief that future is already pre-determined and a state of hopelessness and helplessness towards future. Theoretical development and empirical investigation led to further distinctions in *Future* as *Future Positive* and *Future Negative* (Košťál et al., 2016). *Future Positive* thinking prioritizes personal goals and considers the long-term effects of current choices, whereas *Future Negative* refers to worrying about the future and anticipating unpleasant events. An individual can only focus on one TP at a time, leading to the ignorance of other TPs due to our limited attentional capacity (Stolarski et al., 2018).

Every individual has a unique combination of TPs to define the world and develop expectations, goals, contingencies, and various alternatives (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). Generally, individuals tend to use one TP more frequently than others, forming temporal biases (Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008). These temporal biases become increasingly dominant and consistent, eventually integrating into an individual's personality, i.e., functioning as a character trait (Boyd & Zimbardo, 2005). Excessive use of one particular TP while ignoring others is detrimental to an individual's overall functioning (Boniwell & Zimbardo, 2015). Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) emphasized BTP, which is characterized by the ability to blend and flexibly engage with different time horizons depending on the individual's situational needs, goals, and values. In BTP, an individual is not a "slave" to any particular TP and can easily switch between various time frames at ease (Stolarski et al., 2018). Zimbardo and Boyd (2008) argued that individuals should strive for temporal balance to achieve optimal well-being and psychological health.

BTP has been empirically operationalized in various statistical ways over the years, including cluster analysis (Boniwell et al., 2010), the cutoff point approach (Drake et al., 2008), and Deviation from Balanced Time Perspective, or DBTP (Stolarski et al., 2011), Although each method has its advantages and disadvantages, DBTP has been recognized as the most reliable and widely used approach for assessing BTP (Stolarski et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2014). Importantly, BTP is inversely related to DBTP, meaning that higher DBTP values indicate a less balanced time perspective. Zhang et al. (2014) further emphasized that, rather than classifying people as balanced or unbalanced, DBTP provides a more meaningful assessment by quantifying the degree of imbalance; thus, the researchers concluded that DBTP is a better predictor of wellbeing outcomes and a more practical indicator of BTP, as it reflects the degree of imbalance rather than simply determining balance. In a recent development, Jankowski et al. (2020) proposed a new ideal time profile. They proposed that the calculation of deviation from a balanced time perspective from their ideal time profile predicts wellbeing more robustly than the earlier values proposed by Zimbardo and Boyd (2008). This study uses DBTP to assess BTP, measuring deviations from a balanced time perspective with ideal time profile values obtained from both Zimbardo and Boyd (2008) and Jankowski et al. (2020). In addition, the study analyzes which model better predicts flourishing. DBTP is based on the assumption that each TP measurement has an "optimal" point. BTP depends on a person's proximity to these ideal points.

The study of flourishing has gained popularity in various academic fields to the point that it is now part of mainstream discourse, as it provides a holistic view of wellness. Currently, most mental health research focuses on flourishing (Willen et al., 2022). Flourishing has been defined in positive psychology in many ways as a state of "complete mental health" and "high levels of well-being" (Keyes, 2002). VanderWeele (2017) interchangeably used the terms "flourishing" and "well-being" defining the former as "the state in which all aspects of person's life are good." Huppert and So (2013) conceptualized flourishing as "the experience of life going well and functioning efficiently and optimally." All these definitions of flourishing have one common thread: flourishing corresponds to a high level of mental well-being, socio-psychological prosperity, and a state of positive functioning (Willen et al., 2022). Flourishing is a much broader concept than psychological well-being and encompasses positive relationships, purpose in life, feeling of competence, and optimal coping resources (Diener et al., 2010).

Previous research has examined the role of BTP on different aspects of well-being, but scant literature is available that examines the role of BTP in flourishing. BTP significantly correlates with positive and negative well-being dimensions (Diaconu-Gherasim et al., 2021). Individuals with BTP were reported to have more happiness, life satisfaction, more positive effects, meaning in life, and less depression and anxiety (Webster et al., 2021; Zhang & Howell, 2011). DBTP was the highest contributor to life satisfaction and well-being among the other personality variables (Stolarski & Matthews, 2016; Zhang & Howell, 2011). BTP has demonstrated superior predictive power for flourishing compared to other TPs when considered independently (Webster et al., 2021). Recent theoretical models, such as the 3P model of well-being

(Durayappah, 2011) and CLT theory (Trope & Liberman, 2010), emphasize that an individual's flourishing depends on how they construe their past, present, and future. The 3P model emphasizes the importance of temporal balance in fostering well-being, as it offers a sense of continuity that enables individuals to engage with the present, plan for the future, and reflect and appreciate their past experiences (Durayappah, 2011). Hence, **Hypothesis 1 (H1)** is as follows: BTP will positively predict flourishing, or DBTP will negatively predict flourishing.

#### Gratitude as a Mediator

Gratitude is one of the most indispensable and prized social emotions that significantly contribute to a good life. Emmons (2004) defined gratitude as a "social glue" that strengthens relationships and acts as a backbone of human society. Furthermore, gratitude has been conceptualized as (a) the dispositional tendency of people to respond, recognize, and appreciate the benevolence of others (McCullough et al., 2004); (b) "passing emotions" resulting from a particular event (Watkins & Bell, 2017); (c) as a wider life orientation that values the good in life (Wood et al., 2010). Researchers have tried to link gratitude and TPs by proposing that gratitude can be fostered via past positives (e.g., Szczęśniak & Timoszyk-Tomczak, 2018; Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008). When individuals feel appreciative, they magnify the positive aspects of their memories, dwell on happy times, and pay more attention to what they have rather than focusing on what they lack (Roberts et al., 2015; Watkins & Bell, 2017).

Promoting and cultivating gratitude can considerably affect human flourishing. Valdez and Datu (2021) reported a significant positive association between gratitude and flourishing. Previous researchers have reported significant associations between gratitude and well-being outcomes such as happiness, positive effect, life satisfaction, positive life orientation, meaning in life, reduced stress, and improved self-esteem (Roberts et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2010). Burzynska and Stolarski (2020) proposed a trait-behavior model explaining how TPs lead to well-being via well-being boosters such as gratitude. Individuals who reflect on positive past experiences are more likely to cultivate and express gratitude (Zhang et al., 2014), a key contributor to flourishing (Valdez & Datu, 2021). In summary, BTP characterizes a positive and appreciative view of the past, present, and future, fostering a grateful orientation towards life and enhancing individuals' propensity to flourish. Therefore, **Hypothesis 2 (H2)** is the following: Gratitude will mediate the relationship between BTP and flourishing.

#### SoPA as a Mediator

Sense of agency (SoA) refers to the belief that individuals initiate their own actions and exert control over both their behaviors and the resulting outcomes (Synofzik et al., 2013). Nomological terms similar to SoA are "freedom," "free will," "control," and "authorship" (Tapal et al., 2017). SoA encompasses the belief that an individual is not just a slave of their situations but have control over their body, thoughts, and

environment. SoA is deeply embedded in the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001), highlighting the dynamic interplay of personal characteristics, contextual factors, and behaviors. Tapal et al. (2017) postulate two moderately correlated facets of SoA as a Sense of Positive Agency (SoPA) and a Sense of Negative Agency (SoNA). SoPA beliefs are characterized by a sense of control over thoughts, body, and environment, whereas SoNA corresponds to a state of hopelessness and helplessness (Tapal et al., 2017). TPs such as *Future* and *Present Hedonistic* showed positive and negative associations with the ability to self-control (Germano & Brenlla, 2021). Limited research has examined the association between BTP and SoPA, though theoretically, they seem correlated. Individuals with a BTP will likely have the mental abilities needed to maintain a positive sense of control over their lives, allowing them to set meaningful goals, persist in the face of difficulties, and flexibly adjust their behavior to achieve desired results (Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008).

The perceptions of SoPA are essential for maintaining well-being (Tapal et al., 2017). The concept of agency is crucial for self-regulatory behavior that can elevate the happiness and well-being of the individual (Renes & Aarts, 2017). The absense of SoPA beliefs is linked with negative well-being outcomes such as increased stress, anxiety, and feelings of hopelessness (Moore & Fletcher, 2012). On the contrary, SoPA was a positive predictor of positive function, life satisfaction, and a positive outlook toward life (Bandura, 2001). In summary, by adopting temporal flexibility, individuals will have greater control and agency over themselves, which creates a virtuous cycle of flourishing. Consequently, **Hypothesis 3 (H3):** SoPA will mediate the relationship between BTP and flourishing.

#### Gratitude and SoPA as a Parallel Mediator

BTP fosters flourishing through two distinct yet complementary pathways: gratitude and SoPA. BTP is characterized by a high past-positive orientation, fostering a sense of gratitude and appreciation for both past and present experiences, which ultimately contributes to flourishing (Valdez & Datu, 2021). Additionally, BTP is marked by a strong future orientation and a low present-fatalistic perspective, promoting agentic beliefs that empower individuals with a greater sense of control over their lives. This sense of empowerment and ability to be the life navigator leads to an elevated flourishing state (Tapal et al., 2017). Based on this, **Hypothesis 4 (H4)** is as follows: Gratitude and SoPA will parallel mediate the relationship between BTP and flourishing.

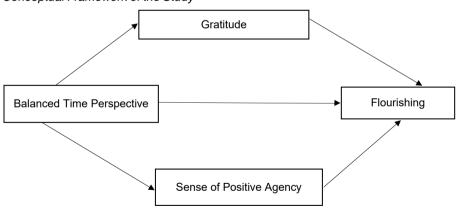
#### Gap Analysis and Current Study

BTP is among the strongest predictors of various flourishing indicators (Boniwell & Zimbardo, 2015; Diaconu-Gherasim et al., 2021; Stolarski et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2014). However, there is a lack of research exploring the intermediary mechanism behind the association between BTP and flourishing (Burzynska & Stolarski, 2020; Osin & Boniwell, 2024). Cunningham et al. (2015) introduced a dual-pathway model to explain the connection between BTP and flourishing. According to this model, BTP enhances flourishing through two distinct mechanisms: a top-down pathway, where

BTP directly fosters flourishing by shaping positive perceptions of past experiences and overall life evaluation, and a bottom-up pathway, where BTP indirectly promotes flourishing by nurturing positive traits such as gratitude and self-efficacy. The current study empirically examines the Cunningham et al. (2015) dual-pathway model by testing both the direct and indirect effects (via gratitude and SoPA) of BTP on flourishing. The present study aims to examine the relationship between BTP, flourishing, gratitude, and SoPA. Based on the recommendations of previous research, e.g., Zhang et al. (2014) and Jankowski et al. (2020), deviation from balance time perspective is used for the assessment of BTP. As mentioned before, DBTP represents the inverse of BTP. Therefore, a negative association between DBTP and focal variables implies that BTP is positively associated with these outcomes.

Furthermore, the present study empirically examines the trait–behavior model introduced by Burzynska and Stolarski (2020), where BTP influences overall well-being via such well-being boosters as gratitude. To our knowledge, the current study is one of the first to analyze the mediating role of gratitude and SoPA in the association between BTP and flourishing. We try to extend flourishing research in the present study by incorporating BTP as a temporal flexibility and plasticity that fosters flourishing using the Construal Level Theory. Based on the extant literature and the above arguments, the study's conceptual model is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework of the Study



Note. Source: developed by the authors.

# Method

#### Sample Characteristics and Data Collection Procedure

The study involved 521 respondents (66.6% men and 33.4% women) selected using a purposive, or subjective, sampling. This method allows researchers to intentionally select participants in accordance with the study objectives. The criteria for inclusion of respondents were age between 18 and 29 (average age 23.6) and proficiency

in English. An a priori sample size was also calculated to determine the minimum number of samples required to detect effects, which was 342 individuals. In terms of educational attainment, 58.2% of participants had a Bachelor's/Master's degree, 30.7% had a postgraduate degree (including Master's and PG diplomas), and 11.1% had a PhD degree. Both online and offline methods were used for data collection. Of the participants, 66.8% had no previous work experience, while 33.2% were employed. Regarding their living conditions, 48.6% of the participants resided in urban settings, 25.9% in semi-urban settings, and 25.5% in rural settings. The participants were thoroughly informed about the objectives and design of the study. After the participants gave their informed consent, the online participants got a link to a Google¹ form with questions about demographic data and study variables. The offline participants got a printed copy of the booklet with the questionnaire. Any questions the participants had were answered, and they got the proper instructions.

#### Measures

Study variables were measured using the following measures for data collection:

Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory–Short, or ZTPI–Short (Košťál et al., 2016). TP was assessed using a short version of ZTPI (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). The scale consists of 18 items rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Very untrue to 5 = Very true. The scale has six underlying factors: Past Positive (PP), Past Negative (PN), Present Fatalist (PF), Present Hedonist (PH), Future Positive (FP), and Future Negative (FN). The scale showed adequate psychometric properties and easy administration (Košťál et al., 2016). In the present study, the McDonald's omega ( $\omega$ ) for PP, PN, PF, PH, FP, and FN were .72, .78, .72, .76, .75, and .78, respectively.

BTP was measured using DBTP coefficients based on the recommendations of Stolarski et al. (2011) and Zhang et al. (2014). This coefficient measures the degree of deviation of an individual from BTP. DBTP is calculated by subtracting the mean score of individuals from the optimal mean square of TP factors and then squaring it to obtain the DBTP score according to the quadratic Euclidean distance metric. The higher the DBTP score, the more unbalanced the time perspectives will be. The DBTP formula is as follows:

DBTP = 
$$\sqrt{(oPP - ePP)^2 + (oPN - ePN)^2 + (oPH - ePH)^2 + (oPF - ePF)^2 + (oF - ePF)^2}$$
,

where "o" represents the optimal mean scores of TP factors and "e" stands for the empirical mean scores of each TP factor. The optimal scores of each TP factor were taken from the recommendation of Zimbardo and Boyd (2008) and Jankowski et al. (2020). Zimbardo and Boyd's (2008) optimal TP mean scores were high scores on PP (4.60), moderately high scores on PH (3.90) and FP (4.0), and low scores on PN (1.95) and PF (1.50). Jankowski et al. (2020) revised the optimal TP factors for maximizing well-being as high scores on PP (5.0), FP (5.0), moderately high scores on PH (3.4), and low scores on PN (1.0), PF (1), and FN (1.0). Jankowski et al. (2020) recommended that future studies examine the cultural specificity and generality of their optimal TP scores for different population groups to test which of them is a better predictor of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Google™ and the Google Logo are trademarks of Google Inc. in the U.S. and other countries.

well-being: the optimal TP scores recommended by Zimbardo and Boyd (2008) or Jankowski et al. (2020). In the current study, DBTPS denotes deviation from the balance time perspective score as per the recommendation of Zimbardo and Boyd (2008), and DBTPR denotes deviation from the balance time perspective score as per the recommendation of Jankowski et al. (2020). Both DBTPS and DBTPR were assessed using the ZTPI-Short. Higher DBTPS and DBTPR scores indicate greater deviation from an optimal balance from a time perspective. Given that both DBTPS and DBTPR are measure of imbalance, their negative associations with focal variables should be interpreted as evidence that BTP is positively associated with these variables.

The Gratitude Questionnaire: Six Item Form, GQ-6 (McCullough et al., 2002). The GQ-6 was used to measure gratitude among the participants. It is a six-item scale rated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree. A higher score indicates a high propensity for grateful feelings. Item 6 was removed from the analysis due to poor factor loadings. The McDonald's omega  $\omega$  for the current scale after removing item 6 was .80, indicating acceptable reliability.

The Sense of Agency Scale (Tapal et al., 2017). The sense of positive agency was measured using the sense of agency scale. The scale consists of two dimensions: sense of positive agency (SoPA) and sense of negative agency (SoNA). Only SoPA items were used in the current study. SoPA consists of five items rated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree. In the present study, the McDonald's omega  $\omega$  for SoPA dimensions was .83, indicating acceptable reliability.

Flourishing Scale, or FS (Diener et al., 2010). Flourishing scale was used to measure the self-perceived extent of flourishing among the participants. The scale consists of eight items rated on a seven-point Likert scale from 1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree. High scores indicate high levels of success in various domains of life. In the present study, the McDonald's omega  $\omega$  for FS was .87, indicating acceptable reliability.

#### Result

The Jamovi software (Version 2.3.26) was used to perform all statistical analyses, including the (a) descriptive analysis of demographic characteristics such as mean and standard deviation; (b) computation of McDonald's omega  $\omega$  for reliability coefficients; (c) confirmatory factor analysis was performed for measurement model validation; (d) GLM mediation model using maximum likelihood regression with 5,000 bootstrap estimates were used to examining the structural model.

#### Common Method Bias

Harman's single-factor test was performed to examine common method variance in the study (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Exploratory factor analysis with a Principal axis factoring method, including an unrotated factor solution, was performed to assess the variance explained by a single factor. The obtained one factor explained 21.4% of the variance well below the cutoff value of 50%, indicating common method bias was not a problem for the study (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The common latent factor method

was also used to estimate the common method bias. The confirmatory analysis of the common one-factor model showed a poor model fit ( $\chi^2/df = 5.86$ , confirmatory fit index (CFI) = 0.54, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = 0.52, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.10, and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.097 indicating common method bias was not an issue for the study.

# Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelation Among Variables

The mean and standard deviation of all the study variables is mentioned in Table 1. All the correlations were on the expected line except those between DBTPS and Present Hedonistic, which were statistically insignificant, paving the way for further higher-order analysis.

 Table 1

 Mean, Standard Deviation, and Intercorrelations Among Variable

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
PP	3.77	0.71											
PN	3.47	0.84	-0.22**										
PF	2.75	0.83	-0.12**	0.23***									
PH	3.66	0.68	0.38***	0.30***	-0.12**								
FN	2.85	0.86	-0.15**	0.48***	0.47***	-0.14**							
FP	3.57	0.76	0.27***	-0.10*	-0.11*	0.25***	-0.23***						
DBTPS	2.96	0.93	-0.25***	0.53***	0.57***	0.003	0.69** <u>*</u>	-0.31***					
DBTPR	4.34	1.02	-0.21***	0.64***	0.57***	0.19**	0.77***	-0.42**	0.96***				
GRAT	5.70	0.96	0.31***-	-0.14**–	0.30***	0.20***	-0.39***	0.31***	-0.38** <del>*</del>	-0.41***			
SOPA	5.13	1.11	0.22***	-0.15** -	-0.09*	0.22***	-0.20***	0.37***	-0.22***	-0.26***	0.37***		
FLU	5.54	0.92	0.32***	-0.13** -	-0.12**	0.25***	-0.40***	0.55***	-0.37***	-0.43***	0.56***	0.51**	*

*Note.* N = 521, GRAT = Gratitude; SOPA = Sense of Positive Agency; FLU = Flourishing; \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001

#### Comparison of DBTPS and DBTPR as a Better Predictor of Flourishing

In order to define a better flourishing predictor, DBTPS and DBTPR variables were compared. Both DBTPS (t = -8.98, p < .001) and DBTPR (t = -10.9, p < .001) were significant predictors of flourishing. The  $R^2$  value for DBTPR was greater than DBTPS, indicating that DBTPR was a better predictor of flourishing. Based on the result, all the higher-order analyses were performed using DBTPR (Table 2). The findings indicate that DBTP, based on Jankowski et al.'s (2020) optimal TP mean scores (DBTPR), is a stronger predictor of flourishing than Zimbardo and Boyd's (2008) model (DBTPS).

Compara	ive Analys	13					
Predictor	β-value	SE R² t-value p			R² t-value p		ence Interval
Tredictor	p-value	<u> </u>	••	1-value	Ρ	Lower Limit	Upper Limit
DBTPR	43	0.03	0.18	-10.9	< .001	46	32
DBTPS	38	0.04	0.13	-8.98	< .001	44	28

Table 2
Comparative Analysis

Note. Model Coefficients – Flourishing; SE = Standard Error.

#### Measurement Model

Multiple CFAs were conducted to assess the scale's construct validity and fit indices in the current context.

# Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Constructs

DBTPR was operationalized as a single-item composite index derived via Euclidean distance, making CFA analysis inapplicable. The individual CFA was done to examine the model fit of gratitude, SoPA, and flourishing scales. Items with low factor loadings (below 0.40) (Hair et al., 2019) and large modification indices were removed to attain an acceptable model fit. After deleting item 6 of the gratitude scale, a desirable model fit for the gratitude scale was achieved (Table 3).

**Table 3**Goodness-of-Fit Indices of Study Variables

Construct	Model	χ²	χ²/df	р	NFI	TLI	CFI	SRMR	RMSEA	Item Deleted	Reason for Deletion
Gratitude	CFA1	103	11.44	0.01	0.88	0.82	0.89	0.09	0.14		
	CFA2	13.9	2.78	0.16	0.98	0.97	0.98	0.02	0.05	GRAT6	LFL and LMI
SoPA	CFA1	16.4	3.28	0.06	0.98	0.97	0.98	0.02	0.06		
Flourishing	CFA1	81.3	4.06	0.01	0.94	0.94	0.96	0.03	0.07		

*Note.* LFL = low factor loading; LMI = large modification index; NFI = normed fit index.

*Overall Measurement Model.* After examining the model fit of individual constructs, the CFA of the full measurement model comprising DBTPR, gratitude, SoPA, and flourishing was assessed. DBPTR, a single-item measure, was also included in the overall measurement model as single indicator variables can also increase the testability of the final model. The model showed acceptable model fit with  $\chi^2 = 519$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 3.53$ , CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.98, NFI = 0.98, SRMR = 0.059, RMSEA = 0.061 indicating that data fits the model well. Figure 2 depicts the overall measurement model.

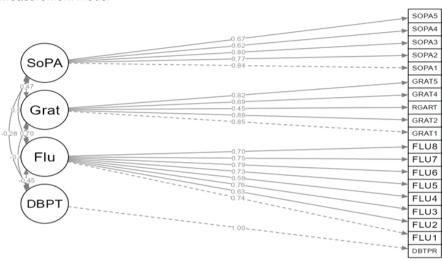


Figure 2
Measurement Model

*Note.* SoPA= Sense of Positive Agency, GRAT = Gratitude, FLU = Flourishing. Source: developed by the authors.

#### Construct Validity

The measurement model comprised DBTPR, gratitude, SoPA, and flourishing. Since DBTPR consisted of a single-item composite index, there were no validity concerns for this construct. The construct validity of the remaining constructs was assessed using convergent and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2019). For all the constructs, the average value extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) values were greater than 0.50 and 0.70, indicating convergent validity was established. Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio was used to establish discriminant validity. The HTMT values were below 0.85, confirming the discriminant validity (Table 4).

Table 4
Construct Validity

Construct	CR	AVE	1	2	3
1. Gratitude	0.87	0.57			
2. Sense of Positive Agency	0.86	0.55	0.46		
3. Flourishing	0.89	0.51	0.70	0.62	

#### Structural Model

In the first model, DBTPR acted as an independent variable and flourishing as a dependent variable. The model showed good fit indices with  $\chi^2 = 60.7$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 3.03$ , CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.99, NFI = 0.96, SRMR = 0.042, RMSEA = 0.063.

In the second model, gratitude and SoPA were added as parallel mediators in the relationship between DBTPR and flourishing. The model also showed acceptable fit indices ( $\chi^2 = 515$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 3.50$ , CFI = 0.91, TLI = 0.90, SRMR = 0.047, RMSEA = 0.059).

The result of path analysis suggested that DBTPR negatively predicted flourishing ( $\beta = -.19$ , p < .001), leading to acceptance of H1. Furthermore, DBTPR negatively predicted gratitude ( $\beta = -.41$ , p < .001) and SoPA ( $\beta = -.26$ , p < .001). Both gratitude ( $\beta = .36$ , p < .001) and SoPA ( $\beta = .34$ , p < .001) positively predicted flourishing (Table 5).

# Mediating Effect of Gratitude and SoPA

Gratitude and SoPA acted as a parallel partial mediator in the relationship between DBPTR and flourishing as DBPTR predicted flourishing both directly ( $\beta = -0.19$ , p < .001) and indirectly via gratitude ( $\beta = -0.15$ , p < .001) and SoPA ( $\beta = -0.09$ , p < .001). Based on the result, **H2** and **H3** were accepted (Table 5).

Table 5
Direct and Indirect Effects

Type	Effect	Estimate	SE	95% (	C.I. (a)	0	z
Туре	Ellect	Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper	β	2
Component	DBTPR ⇒ Gratitude	-0.39	0.04	-0.46	-0.32	-0.41	-10.34
	DBTPR⇒ SOPA	-0.28	0.05	-0.37	-0.19	-0.26	-6.17
	Gratitude ⇒ Flourishing	0.35	0.04	0.28	0.42	0.36	9.99
	SOPA ⇒ Flourishing	0.29	0.03	0.23	0.34	0.34	10.01
Direct	DBTPR ⇒ Flourishing	-0.18	0.03	-0.24	-0.11	-0.19	-5.39
Indirect	DBTPR ⇒ Gratitude ⇒ Flourishing	-0.14	0.02	-0.17	-0.10	-0.15	-7.18
	DBTPR ⇒ SOPA ⇒ Flourishing	-0.08	0.02	-0.11	-0.05	-0.09	-5.25
Total	DBTPR ⇒ Flourishing	-0.39	0.04	-0.46	-0.32	-0.43	-10.93

*Note.* N = 521; SOPA = Sense of Positive Agency; p < .001.

While the overall SEM model indicated that DBTP significantly predicted flourishing both directly and indirectly via Gratitude and SoPA, further analysis was conducted to examine potential differences across gender, work experience (having work experience vs. no work experience), and location groups. A Multi-Group SEM (MGA) analysis was performed, and the results indicated no significant variations in path coefficients across gender ( $\Delta \chi^2 = 8.59$ , p = .13), work experience ( $\Delta \chi^2 = 3.13$ , p = .40), and location ( $\Delta \chi^2 = 4.41$ , p = .19) suggesting that the overall model is invariant

across gender, work experience, and location, indicating that factor loadings and structural paths do not significantly differ between groups (Table 6).

 Table 6

 Multi-Group Invariance Testing Across Residence, Gender, and Work Experience

Model Comparison	Configural χ2(df)	Metric χ2(df)	Scalar χ2(df)	Structural $\chi 2(df)$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	Δχ2 (Δ <i>df</i> )	p
Gender (Male/ Female)	39.86(2)	40.95 (3)	44.95(5)	53.54(10)	0.92	0.93	0.05	8.59 (5)	.13
Work Experience (Yes/No)	33.57 (2)	34.49 (5)	36.12 (7)	39.60 (10)	0.93	0.96	0.06	3.13 (5)	.40
Location (Urban/Semi- Urban/Rural)	36.69 (7)	42.50 (12)	44.51 (15)	48.92 (18)	0.93	0.94	0.07	4.41 (3)	.19

*Note.* CFI = Comparative Fit Index, TLI = Tucker–Lewis Index, RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation,  $\Delta \chi^2$  = Chi-square difference test. Configural invariance tests whether the model structure holds across groups, metric invariance tests whether factor loadings are equivalent across groups, scalar invariance tests whether item intercepts are equivalent, and structural invariance tests whether regression paths are equivalent.

#### Discussion

The study examines whether the presence of BTP leads to flourishing, and whether gratitude and SoPA can act as a possible mediating mechanism explaining the aforementioned relationships. As the results show, DBTP negatively predicted flourishing, and since DBTP is the inverse of BTP, the findings confirm that BTP was a positive predictor of flourishing, thus supporting H1. This conclusion is consistent with previous studies, such as Diaconu-Gherasim et al. (2021) and Webster et al. (2021), where BTP, which involves being flexible and adaptable, was positively linked to well-being. BTP is the strongest predictor of overall well-being (Stolarski et al., 2018). BTP facilitates individuals' positive progression into the future, grounding them in their present experiences and allowing them to reconcile with their past, which increases an individual propensity to be in a flourishing state (Ballabrera & Pérez-Burriel, 2022; Drake et al., 2008). Similarly, Zhang et al. (2014) reported that maintaining a healthy balance of TP and optimizing its use based on the situations and reward structure creates a virtuous cycle of elevated well-being outcomes.

The association between BTP and flourishing can be explained using CLT theory (Trope & Liberman, 2010). An individual achieves flourishing by balancing high-level construal (related to past and future considerations) and low-level construal (focused on the present moment). High-level construal aids in goal attainment, while low-level construal enhances the ability to enjoy and benefit from current situations through present-mindedness (Alfalah & Alganem, 2020).

The study additionally demonstrated that gratitude acted as a partial mediator for the relationship between BTP and flourishing, which supports **H2**. Individuals with a BTP exhibit a sense of acceptance and satisfaction with their past experiences,

fostering gratitude toward people, places, and events. This heightened sense of gratitude, in turn, promotes greater flourishing (Szczęśniak & Timoszyk-Tomczak, 2018; Zhang et al., 2014). The mediating role of gratitude in the relationship between BTP and flourishing provides empirical support for Cunningham's dual-pathway framework, which posits that TPs influence well-being indicators both directly and indirectly. Additionally, these findings align with Burzynska and Stolarski's (2020) Trait-Behavior Model, suggesting that TPs contribute to well-being through wellbeing boosters such as gratitude. A BTP is characterized by a high score on Past Positive and a low score on Past Negative. BTP helps in the cultivation of gratitude by encouraging individuals to focus on positive past experiences while minimizing negative recollections. This grateful orientation enhances the ability to recognize and appreciate life's blessings and an expansion of the thought-action repertoire, which in turn leads to elevated flourishing (Stolarski et al., 2018; Valdez & Datu, 2021). SoPA mediated the path from BTP to flourishing, leading to the acceptance of H3. SoPA indicates a belief that one is in control of one's life and an efficacious belief regarding the ability to alter life situations to attain desired outcomes and goals (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Maintaining temporal harmony between the past, present, and future allows individuals to exert better control over their mind, body, and environment as they are liberated from temporal biases (Stolarski & Mathews, 2016). Individuals with BTP have a sense of mastery and competence in handling environmental needs and demands. According to Social Cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001), an individual's belief in their ability to control their environment and confidence in achieving the desired goals plays a significant role in their overall well-being. BTP fosters the development of agency beliefs by harmoniously integrating different time zones, where an individual learns from past experiences, sets realistic goals for the future, and proactively works to achieve present goals (Germano & Brenlla, 2021). Individuals with BTP are identified by agency and efficacy beliefs, leading to elevated flourishing (Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008).

A multi-group analysis was performed to determine whether the relationship between the study variables differed by gender, location, and work experience. The results indicated no significant difference in structural paths across the different groups, suggesting that the model is invariant with respect to gender, location, and work experience. These findings indicate that the relationship between BTP and flourishing reflects universal psychological mechanisms that transcend key sociodemographic factors as temporal harmony addresses universal human needs for environmental mastery (Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008).

The importance of BTP for fostering various components of well-being is solidly established, though its specific link to prosperity continues to be unexplored. This study is among the first to examine the relationship between BTP and flourishing, while also identifying gratitude and SoPA as key psychological pathways underlying this association. Together, gratitude and SoPA provide different explanations of how BTP leads to flourishing: gratitude roots individuals in appreciation, while SoPA instills a sense of control over one's life, collectively fostering flourishing through adaptive temporal cognition.

# **Implications**

The present study offers several implications for researchers. Theoretically, drawing on the Construal Level Theory, the study demonstrates that having adaptive temporal flexibility leads to a flourishing state. The current study empirically verifies Cunningham's dual pathway framework, which postulates that TPs influence well-being outcomes (flourishing) directly and indirectly (via the mediating mechanism of gratitude and SoPA). This study bridges a critical gap in understanding the psychological mechanisms linking BTP to flourishing. By establishing gratitude and SoPA as parallel mediators, the current study illuminates distinct psychological pathways through which BTP enhances flourishing. These findings advance foundational knowledge for future research on how temporal self-regulation fosters flourishing.

This study provides novel insights into fostering flourishing by cultivating a BTP characterized by adaptive integration of temporal frame and by mitigating maladaptive temporal biases (Stolarski et al., 2015; Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008). Clinicians and educators should prioritize interventions that nurture gratitude and agentic self-beliefs, mechanisms empirically validated here as critical pathways linking BTP to flourishing. For instance, time perspective therapy (Sword et al., 2015) and structured practices like gratitude journaling (Burzynska & Stolarski, 2020) or future-oriented goal-setting (Przepiorka & Sobol-Kwapinska, 2021) equip youth to harmonize temporal cognition, positioning them as proactive navigators of their life trajectories rather than passive observers of time. A balanced TP has great promise for clinical and vocational psychology interventions. In clinical contexts, BTP-aligned interventions, such as reframing past adversities into narratives of learning experiences, can alleviate recurrent depression by countering maladaptive temporal biases, particularly pervasive negative past orientations. For instance, guiding individuals to reinterpret distressing memories as formative learning experiences fosters reconciliation with their past, a process critical for the attainment of a flourishing state (Sword et al., 2015). Interventions such as TP coaching are gaining traction in organizational psychology and life coaching domains (Boniwell & Zimbardo, 2015) for establishing adaptive temporal orientations and positive time use (Osin & Boniwell, 2024).

#### **Limitations & Future Directions**

Despite its contribution, the study has several limitations. First, the study used a cross-sectional research design, due to which necessary conditions for establishing causality were not established. Second, self-report measures were used to measure the study variables, which might have led to social-desirability bias.

The study opens up some new research avenues. Future studies should utilize different research designs, such as experimental methods, event sampling methods, or longitudinal designs, to verify the causal mechanism between BTP and flourishing. Different sets of populations should be used to increase the generalizability of the study findings. More mediators, such as savoring and prioritizing positivity (Burzynska & Stolarski, 2020), and moderators, such as age and culture variables, should be examined in future research.

#### Conclusion

Drawing on Construal Level Theory, this study examines how a BTP enhances flourishing through the dual mediating pathways of gratitude and SoPA. Results revealed that BTP significantly predicted flourishing, with both gratitude and SoPA operating as parallel mediators. Individuals characterized by adaptive temporal flexibility lead a life where they have made peace with their past, enjoy the present at its fullest, and strategically pursue future goals, demonstrating higher flourishing tendencies. BTP fosters gratitude through reflective appreciation toward life and cultivates an empowering agentic control over life trajectory, nurturing greater flourishing.

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# **ARTICLE**

# Psychology of Leadership: Understanding Al Adoption, Self-Efficacy, Green Creativity, and Risk Perception Among Oman's Business Bosses

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# **ABSTRACT**

Artificial intelligence (AI) is at the forefront of transformative changes in organizational innovation. This study examines the social psychology underpinning AI adoption among Oman's top business leaders, including CEOs, founders, and senior executives, to explore how green creativity, positive mental well-being, and risk perception converge with self-efficacy as a critical moderating force. Significant positive correlations were identified between most variables in the data set of 214 prominent Omani leaders using structural equation modeling and SmartPLS 4 software. The findings illustrated how Oman's business leaders harnessed AI to align technological capabilities with deeply ingrained cultural values and communal aspirations. By situating these insights within Oman's strategic vision of economic diversification and sustainability, this study underscored AI's potential to catalyze organizational performance and environmentally conscious innovation. In addition, the moderating role of self-efficacy highlighted the

Received 17 August 2024 Accepted 19 May 2025 Published online 12 July 2025 importance of leadership confidence in navigating the complexities of AI integration. These discoveries have important implications for scholars, policymakers, and industry practitioners in Oman and other collectivist and emerging markets. By combining technology and human psychology, this study accentuates the need for thoughtful integration of AI, ensuring that rapid digital transformations remain culturally resonant, ethically grounded, and person-centered in an era of continuous change.

#### **KEYWORDS**

top management, artificial intelligence adoption, self-efficacy, green creativity, Structural Equation Modeling, Oman

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#### Introduction

In a world redefining itself in the wake of technological progress and global upheavals, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, integrating artificial intelligence (Al) into organizational operations is no longer a novelty but a necessity (Salah et al., 2023). Although the adoption of Al promises innovation and competitive advantage, the broader implications of this technology are multifaceted, affecting not only the economic and technological spheres but also the domains of psychology and culture. With a blend of traditional wisdom and modern ambition, Oman's context presents an intriguing landscape for exploring these dynamics (Puthukulam et al., 2021).

Despite Al's growing significance, a critical gap remains in understanding how Omani business leaders psychologically perceive and integrate such technology, particularly regarding self-efficacy, risk perception, green creativity, and positive mental well-being. Oman's Vision 2040 underscores economic diversification and technological advancement, aligning Al adoption with national strategic priorities (Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, n.d.). However, the existing literature offers limited insights into the psychological impacts of Al adoption on top business leaders in Oman, leaving an opportunity to examine how collective cultural values, leadership beliefs, and organizational goals intersect.

Addressing this gap is vital, since such psychological constructs as self-efficacy, risk perception, ecological creativity, and mental well-being play a key role in shaping leadership behavior and making technology-related decisions. In emerging economies, e.g., Oman, the relationship between technology adoption and leadership psychology remains insufficiently explored, particularly within conservative

or collectivist cultures (Hassan et al., 2023; Saxena & Al-Tamimi, 2018). By bridging technology adoption research with leadership psychology, this study examines how Al can be integrated seamlessly into business strategies while resonating with traditional values and communal norms.

To achieve this aim, we focused on 214 CEOs, founders, and top management personnel in Oman to investigate the interplay between Al adoption and key psychological dimensions. The study's unique emphasis on self-efficacy as a moderating variable reflects leaders' ability to achieve goals and overcome barriers to Al adoption. Self-efficacy can amplify or dampen how leaders perceive Al-related risks, engage in green creativity initiatives, and maintain positive mental health, making it central to understanding effective Al integration.

The cultural considerations intrinsic to Oman, which emphasize communal goals and traditional norms, formed an essential backdrop to this study. These collective cultural elements significantly shape leaders' risk tolerance, creativity, and receptivity to Al-driven changes. Thus, analyzing how Al adoption interacts with these cultural nuances sheds light on technology acceptance at the highest managerial level.

This study contributes to the geographic diversity of studies on Al adoption by drawing on Bandura's theories of self-efficacy and acceptance and use of technology. It explored the confluence of technology, psychology, and culture, shaping organizational behavior and strategic decision-making within Oman's unique context (Bandura, 1986; Williams et al., 2015). The subsequent sections present a comprehensive literature review, define the theoretical foundations, and outline the research questions and hypotheses. We responded to the pressing need for culturally situated insights by explicitly linking these constructs to the Omani context.

This study addresses the limited understanding of the psychological dynamics of AI adoption in Oman and illuminates how leaders navigate technology, human values, and societal norms during an era of rapid change. By examining AI adoption through the distinctive lens of social psychology in Oman, we offer actionable insights for practitioners, policymakers, and academics seeking to harmonize technological ambitions with deeply ingrained human and cultural factors. Thus, this study contributes to broader international discussions on how emerging economies can leverage AI for sustainable innovation and strategic growth.

Therefore, this study addresses an empirical gap and sets the stage for a deeper exploration of regions where technology adaptation and leadership psychology are intertwined.

#### **Literature Review**

Al has revolutionized the global business landscape and transformed various sectors with unparalleled potential. This study explores three dimensions of Al adoption in business: global trends, adoption barriers, and the intersection of sustainability and green creativity (Salah, Al Halbusi, et al., 2024). In addition, it integrates psychological frameworks, notably Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT), to contextualize how leadership beliefs and organizational culture shape Al adoption.

# Theoretical Foundations: Bandura's Theories of Self-Efficacy and Technology Acceptance Model

Theory of Self-Efficacy. Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, rooted in social cognitive theory, plays a pivotal role in the present study. This theory emphasizes an individual's belief in their ability to achieve specific goals (Bandura, 1977). Moreover, according to this theory self-efficacy influences the challenges that people undertake, the effort they expend, and the persistence and resilience they display in the face of obstacles (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998).

In the context of technology adoption, Compeau & Higgins (1995) revealed that self-efficacy significantly affects technology acceptance and usage behaviors. By shaping an individual's confidence in using new technological tools, self-efficacy determines their willingness to explore, learn, and utilize them to their fullest potential (Venkatesh & Davis, 1996). Recent studies in emerging markets suggest that high self-efficacy can bolster readiness to embrace innovative platforms, even when cultural or infrastructural barriers exist (Gharib et al., 2016; Ghouse, Barber, & Alipour, 2024).

In the Omani context, applying self-efficacy theory to understand the moderating effect of this construct on the relationship between Al adoption and other dependent variables, such as risk perception, green creativity, and positive mental health, presents a novel research avenue. Oman's Vision 2040, which underscores digital transformation, makes leaders' self-beliefs particularly relevant for navigating technological complexities and cultural expectations within organizations.

Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology. This study primarily relied on the principles stemming from the technology acceptance theory as presented by Venkatesh et al. (2003). The theory consolidates various technology adoption models (TAM), thus having become a widely recognized framework for understanding user acceptance and utilization. The model posits that performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions influence technology acceptance. The theory provides insights into the interplay between user perceptions, organizational culture, technological attributes, and the broader business landscape (Alsheddi, 2020). Given Oman's Vision 2040 goals, aligning Al adoption with national strategic goals adds another layer to this dynamic, making the TAM a relevant theoretical framework.

Recent adaptations of the TAM have considered additional variables such as self-efficacy and risk perception (Upadhyay et al., 2022), highlighting the evolving nature of technology adoption theories and their relevance to contemporary challenges such as Al integration in diverse cultural and economic contexts. By merging Bandura's self-efficacy theory with the UTAUT perspective, this study investigates how organizational leaders in Oman balance cultural expectations, personal beliefs, and strategic objectives when adopting Al.

Bandura's self-efficacy theory and the technology acceptance model offer comprehensive frameworks to explore the multifaceted relationships between Al adoption, self-efficacy, risk perception, green creativity, and positive mental health within the unique Omani context (Ghouse & Chaudhary, 2024). Drawing on these well-established theories, this study contributes to the ongoing dialogue on how technology shapes organizational strategies, leadership beliefs, and cultural considerations.

#### Global Trends in Al Adoption

The rise of AI in various industries reflects its expansive application and potential for a transformative impact. Rather than improving operational efficiency or automating routine tasks, AI is now a strategic tool that provides a competitive advantage. AI further enables the creation of innovative products and services, as well as the personalization of customer experience. Leading organizations leverage AI to enhance decision-making processes and forecast market trends (Davenport & Ronanki, 2018).

Government-driven initiatives in emerging markets often spur AI integration by emphasizing technological readiness and skill development. Oman's Vision 2040 exemplifies this trend by cultivating technologically proficient industries that compete globally. However, the speed and depth of AI adoption can vary dramatically across organizations depending on leadership orientation, cultural norms, and infrastructure.

# Challenges and Barriers to Al Adoption

Despite its promises, Al adoption faces several challenges that impede its seamless integration into organizational practices. Its technological complexity requires a substantial understanding of data science and related technologies. This complexity often translates into high implementation costs, including investments in hardware, software, and training (Ransbotham et al., 2019). The scarcity of skilled Al professionals further compounds these challenges (Accenture, 2024).

Additionally, cultural resistance within organizations and misalignment with corporate objectives can hinder fully embracing AI, particularly in more conservative contexts (Ghouse, Shekhar, et al., 2024). Ethical considerations, including data privacy, security, and legal compliance, add further complexity (Salah et al., 2023). Business leaders in Oman must navigate these technical and ethical complexities while aligning AI adoption with national goals, a delicate balance that underscores the psychological dimensions of adoption decisions.

# Al and Sustainability: The Path to Green Creativity

The intersection of AI and sustainability is an emerging critical area of interest. AI has been identified as a vital tool for promoting green creativity by designing products and processes that minimize environmental impact (Kumar et al., 2022). In addition, AI algorithms contribute to energy optimization in various sectors, thereby reducing carbon footprints (Delanoë et al., 2023). AI applications extend to environmental monitoring, threat prediction, and conservation efforts (Salah, AI Halbusi, et al., 2024).

Recognizing the role of AI in achieving social responsibility aligns with global sustainability efforts such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (Di Vaio et al., 2020). In Oman, where preserving ecological balance forms part of the national development vision, green creativity facilitated by AI can drive innovation that merges economic objectives with environmental stewardship. Such a dual emphasis also resonates with leaders with high self-efficacy, who may be more willing to explore AI-enabled sustainable solutions.

### Psychological Aspects of Al Adoption

Psychological factors often play a significant though overlooked role in Al adoption. This section examines three vital psychological aspects influencing Al adoption: positive mental health, self-efficacy, and risk perception (Simons & Peterson, 2000; Yap et al., 2021).

Positive Mental Health. The mental well-being of top management, including CEOs and founders, is crucial to an organization's success (Shipman et al., 2023). As the importance of AI grows in modern business, aligning AI adoption with personal and organizational goals can enhance leaders' mental well-being. Resilience and optimism developed by successfully navigating AI's complexity can positively influence overall organizational morale and effectiveness. Galluch (2015) suggested that mental well-being may be closely tied to how technological adoption aligns with personal aspirations and corporate strategies. In Oman, leaders who interpret AI as a strategic opportunity rather than as a disruptive force may experience reduced stress and higher satisfaction.

Self-Efficacy in Overcoming Barriers to Al Adoption. Self-efficacy, which is the belief in one's capability to achieve goals, is the cornerstone of understanding human behavior and motivation. Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory has been applied in various contexts, including technology adoption. In Al, high self-efficacy can amplify a leader's ability to overcome barriers such as technical complexity, financial costs, and organizational resistance (Compeau & Higgins, 1995). According to these findings, fostering self-efficacy among leaders and key stakeholders can lead to more effective decision-making, implementation, and utilization of Al technologies. In conservative cultural settings such as Oman, leaders with robust self-beliefs may also galvanize employee support and improve adoption outcomes.

Risk Perception in AI Adoption Decisions. Perception and risk evaluation are essential components of the decision-making process for technology adoption. Risk perception significantly influences technology acceptance (Ahmed et al., 2022). Adopting AI, its inherent complexities and unknowns, is fraught with various perceived risks, including financial investments, ethical dilemmas, and sociocultural impacts (Salah, AI Halbusi, et al., 2024). Although studies on leaders' risk evaluations of AI adoption are emerging, the research remains limited. Understanding how risk perception shapes AI adoption can reveal why specific organizations are more receptive to AI, and how these risks can be mitigated or managed. Risk perception can significantly sway organizational consensus on AI projects in Oman, where leadership decisions may be influenced collectively.

These psychological aspects (positive mental health, self-efficacy, and risk perception) offer a richer understanding of the human factors guiding organizational technological integration. Organizations can build a robust and resilient framework for successful Al adoption by prioritizing mental well-being, encouraging self-efficacy, and carefully managing risks.

# Al Adoption in Oman: Economic Diversification, Cultural Considerations, and Government Policy

Adopting AI in the Omani business landscape presents a multifaceted challenge that intertwines with Vision 2040, cultural norms, and government policies. This section explores these dimensions, illustrating how AI aligns with Oman's broader strategic objectives and shapes leadership behavior in a culturally rich setting (Abdelfattah, Dahleez, et al., 2025).

Oman's Vision 2040 strongly emphasizes economic diversification and technological advancement as key pathways for sustainable development (Al Balushi et al., 2019). Seeking to reduce reliance on oil revenues, the Vision champions innovation in various sectors, including healthcare, education, finance, and logistics. Al is critical for this transformation as it offers improved efficiency, predictive analytics, and data-driven decision-making solutions.

Despite this strategic emphasis, empirical studies examining how Al concretely aligns with Oman's development goals remain limited, creating a research gap in understanding the potential impact of Al initiatives on national growth and organizational performance (Ghouse, Shekhar, et al., 2024). Moreover, top management in Omani firms may weigh risk perceptions and cultural considerations differently from leaders in other regions, thus affecting Al uptake. Addressing these gaps could illuminate the synergy between technology-driven policies and Oman's vision of a knowledge-based economy.

The cultural context of Oman is characterized by communal goals, respect for tradition, and adherence to social norms. These collective values influence how Al is perceived, adapted, or resisted in the Omani business environment (Al-Azri, 2012). Aligning Al initiatives with cultural values may foster smoother acceptance and integration (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Conversely, technological solutions perceived as clashing with traditional norms or lacking cultural sensitivity could face significant pushback, hindering their widespread implementation (Salah, Abdelfattah, & Al Halbusi, 2024).

Business leaders' self-efficacy and risk perceptions further shape this cultural dynamic. When leaders feel confident in their ability to navigate cultural sensitivities, they may champion Al to enhance communal well-being, thus garnering organizational and societal support.

Alternatively, if leaders perceive a high risk to social harmony or cultural heritage, they may delay or limit their adoption of Al. Understanding these cultural undercurrents is essential for tailoring Al strategies to resonate with local values and gain broader acceptance.

The Omani government has demonstrated a strong commitment to nurturing Al innovation, as reflected in its investments in education, digital infrastructure, and regulatory frameworks (Ordoñez de Pablos, 2023). Government-led initiatives like national Al strategies and start-up incubators aim to catalyze technology adoption across sectors. For instance, programs targeting data literacy and STEM education ensure a skilled workforce, while policies encouraging public-private partnerships can accelerate Al diffusion (Al Harrasi et al., 2021).

However, government policies must align with the business community's needs and societal expectations for success. Misalignment or a lack of clear regulations may create barriers, leading to confusion regarding data governance, ethical usage, and legal responsibilities (Salah, Al Halbusi, et al., 2024). Thus, the pace and success of Al integration in Oman significantly depend on cohesive strategies involving government agencies, private enterprises, and academic institutions (Al Zadjali, 2020). This collaboration ensures that Al-driven advancements align with Vision 2040, cultural imperatives, and leadership perspectives in the Omani context.

# **Research Gap and Hypothesis Development**

Al adoption in Oman is a complex and multifaceted process that requires careful consideration of Vision 2040, cultural values, and government policies. When Al strategies align with Omani economic goals and cultural ethos, they can catalyze innovation and growth. Simultaneously, neglecting cultural or policy dimensions can hamper local relevance and acceptance of Al initiatives.

The literature review unveiled essential themes shaping the understanding of Al adoption, its psychological correlates, and the specific dynamics within Oman (Abdelfattah, Salah, et al., 2025). Although extensive global research exists, studies exploring Al adoption in Oman are relatively sparse. Therefore, this study examines how Al adoption interacts with green creativity, mental well-being, risk perception, and self-efficacy among top Omani business leaders. Since the cultural and economic context of Oman introduces unique considerations, studying leadership behaviors in this environment adds a fresh lens to the broader discourse on technology–human interaction.

Based on these gaps and conceptual frameworks, the following hypotheses were proposed:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1):** A positive relationship will be observed between Al adoption and green creativity among business leaders in Oman.

**Hypothesis 2 (H2):** All adoption will correlate positively with the mental health of Oman's top management, founders, and CEOs.

**Hypothesis 3 (H3):** A positive relationship between Al adoption and risk perception in Omani organizations' leadership will be observed.

**Hypothesis 4 (H4):** Self-efficacy will moderate the relationship between Al adoption and green creativity, making the relationship more robust when self-efficacy is higher.

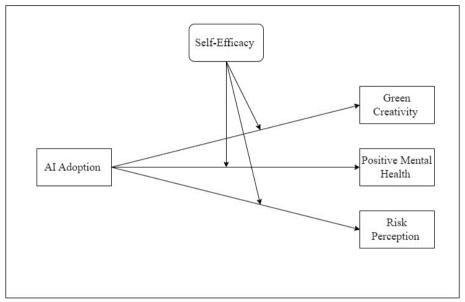
**Hypothesis 5 (H5):** Self-efficacy will moderate the relationship between Al adoption and positive mental well-being, strengthening the relationship when self-efficacy is higher.

**Hypothesis 6 (H6):** Self-efficacy will moderate the relationship between Al adoption and risk perception, making the relationship more potent when self-efficacy is higher.

This study aims to address the knowledge gap regarding how Al adoption interacts with leadership psychology in Oman by testing these hypotheses. Research

framework is presented in Figure 1. The study further contributes to strategic insights that can inform policymakers, business leaders, and academics seeking to harness the transformative potential of AI within a culturally grounded framework.

Figure 1
Research Framework



Note. Source: developed by the authors.

# Methodology

#### Sampling and Procedure

The target population consisted of top management personnel from various firms in Oman, including founders, presidents, vice presidents, and other C-level executives. This study involved 214 top management members representing diverse industries and firms. Owing to time and resource constraints, a non-probability convenience sampling method was employed, allowing researchers to access these high-level respondents more efficiently.

Although convenience sampling can expedite data collection and facilitate access to specialized groups, it introduces limitations regarding the generalizability of the findings. Specifically, voluntary participation and the potential exclusion of specific industries or smaller firms may have skewed the sample, rendering it less representative of Omani's top management population. Future research should use probability or multistage sampling to capture a more inclusive perspective of Al adoption across different organizational contexts.

Data was collected through an online survey featuring structured questionnaires designed to measure the constructs of interest (e.g., self-efficacy, risk perception, and

Al adoption). Before initiating the survey, the participants were briefed on the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Informed consent was obtained from all participants to ensure ethical adherence and privacy.

#### Measurement

The variables under investigation were obtained from previous studies. The concepts of self-efficacy and risk perception were incorporated based on Hassan et al. (2023). The Al adoption construct is adapted from Venkatesh et al. (2003). The concept of green creativity was sourced from Chen and Chang (2013). Finally, the concept of positive mental health was adopted by Lukat et al. (2016). All variables were measured using a five-point Likert scale.

#### Data Analysis and Results

The research model was analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) with partial least squares (PLS) methodology. In line with Ringle et al. (2014), the SmartPLS 4 was selected due to its robustness in dealing with non-normal data, moderate sample sizes, and complex causal relationships including higher-order constructs (Hair et al., 2017). As compared to SEM covariance tools, PLS-SEM does not require strict normality assumptions, making it suitable for exploring the model used in this study.

Following the best-practice guidelines (Hair et al., 2017), we performed a PLS analysis by generating 5,000 bootstrap subsamples to evaluate the statistical significance of the path coefficients (Mohammed et al., 2021a). These subsamples yielded bootstrap t-statistics based on n-1 degrees of freedom (where n represents the number of subsamples). This resampling approach enhanced the reliability of our parameter estimates and provided robust confidence intervals, thereby mitigating concerns about non-normal data distributions.

The flexibility and ability of SmartPLS 4 to accommodate first- and second-order constructs made PLS-SEM the ideal approach for analyzing multifaceted relationships in our study. This methodology aligned with the study's objective of examining direct and moderating effects within a culturally nuanced and theoretically rich framework.

*Demographic Profiles of Respondents*. The age distribution of participants indicated that the majority were between 25 and 50 years old. More than half of the respondents (53.3%, n = 114) fell within the 25–30 age bracket, while 41.1% (n = 88) were between 41 and 50. A smaller proportion, 5.6% (n = 12), were under 25.

The sample was fairly balanced in terms of gender, with male respondents comprising 52.3% (n = 112) and females making up 47.7% (n = 102).

Concerning professional experience, half of the respondents (50.5%, n=108) reported having between six and 10 years of work experience. Another 29% (n=62) had been in their roles for 11 to 15 years, while the remaining 20.6% (n=44) had three to five years of experience.

Concerning occupational roles, most participants (80.4%, n=172) held senior executive positions such as Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Operating Officer (COO), or Chief Financial Officer (CFO). Additionally, 12.6% (n=27) served as presidents or vice presidents, and 7% (n=15) identified themselves as company founders.

In terms of educational qualifications, 70.1% (n = 150) of the respondents had obtained a Bachelor's degree, while the remaining 29.9% (n = 64) held postgraduate qualifications, including Master's or doctoral degrees.

Common Method Bias. The potential issue of standard method bias was acknowledged due to the single-source nature of the data, in which both the independent and dependent variables stem from a single survey. Following N. Podsakoff et al. (2003), a twofold approach encompassing procedural and statistical methods was employed to address this concern. For procedural aspects, the survey instrument incorporated multiple measuring scales, and participants were assured that their responses carried no inherent correctness and that their identities would remain confidential, thus reducing social desirability bias. From a statistical standpoint, although standard method bias was deemed unlikely to affect the interaction terms (P. M. Podsakoff et al., 2012), a thorough evaluation was conducted to confirm the absence of bias.

Harman's single-factor analysis examined whether a single factor could account for a significant portion of the covariation among all study items, revealing five factors with eigenvalues exceeding one, collectively explaining 68% of the variance. The most significant factor was 23%, which was well below the 50% threshold (Mohammed et al., 2021b; N. Podsakoff et al., 2003).

In addition, variance inflation factors (VIFs) were analyzed to detect vertical and lateral collinearity (Kock & Lynn, 2012). As shown in Table 1, the VIF values for Al adoption (2.113), green creativity (1.221), positive mental health (1.127), risk perception (1.223), and self-efficacy (2.231) were below 3.3, indicating no pathological collinearity or CMV contamination. These results confirm no significant multicollinearity among the variables, corroborating the conclusion that common method bias does not seriously threaten the study's findings (Hair et al., 2022).

 Table 1

 Measurement Model, Item Loadings, Construct Reliability, and Convergent Validity

Constructs		Items	Loading (> 0.5)	CA (> 0.7)	CR (> 0.7)	AVE (>0.5)
Al Adoption	Al1	A timely Al technical implementation and application migration plan has been developed in our organization.	0.6780	0.834	0.879	0.579
	Al2	Our management has formally endorsed the Al adoption plan.	0.805			
	Al3	A dedicated financial budget and implementation schedule for Al adoption have been approved.	0.836			

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Constructs		Items	Loading (> 0.5)	CA (> 0.7)	CR (> 0.7)	AVE (>0.5)
	Al4	Our customers show strong acceptance of our new products and services enabled by Al innovations.	0.784			
	AI5	Our competitive position has improved since adopting Al technologies.	0.758			
Green Creativity	GC1	The members of the green product development project suggest new ways to achieve environmental goals.	0.767	0.843	0.906	0.763
	GC2	The members of the green product development project propose new green ideas to improve environmental performance.	0.803			
	GC3	The members of the green product development project promote and champion new green ideas to others.	0.790			
	GC4	The members of the green product development project develop adequate plans for the implementation of new green ideas.	0.851			
	GC5	The members of the green product development project would rethink new green ideas.	0.727			
	GC6	The members of the green product development project would find out creative solutions to environmental problems.	0.882			
Positive Mental Health	PMH1	I am often carefree and in good spirits.	0.816	0.829	0.911	0.623
	PMH2	I enjoy my life.	0.821			
	РМН3	All in all, I am satisfied with my life.	0.732			
	PMH4	In general, I am confident.	0.841			
	PMH5	I manage well to fulfill my needs.	0.812			

Table 1 Co	ontinued
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Constructs		Items	Loading (> 0.5)	CA (> 0.7)	CR (> 0.7)	AVE (>0.5)
	РМН6	I am in good physical and emotional condition.	0.823			
	PMH7	I feel that I am actually well equipped to deal with life and its difficulties.	0.871			
	PMH8	l am a calm, balanced human being.	0.818			
	РМН9	Much of what I do brings me joy.	0.731			,
Risk Perception	RP1	If we do not adopt AI, our organization may fall behind competitors.	0.823	0.832	0.922	0.747
	RP2	I feel I have limited control over the risks associated with Al adoption.	0.871			
	RP3	Adopting Al could pose serious operational challenges for our business.	0.816			
	RP4	If AI is not implemented properly, it could have major consequences for our organization.	0.850			
	RP5	The risks associated with adopting AI are minor and manageable. z	0.885			
	RP6	Al adoption could significantly disrupt current business processes.	0.784			
	RP7	Poor Al implementation could lead to financial losses for the organization.	0.781			
	RP8	Misuse or failure of Al could negatively affect key stakeholders or customers.	0.755			
Self-Efficacy	SF1	I am confident in my ability to understand and make informed decisions about Al adoption.	0.818	0.835	0.887	0.659
	SF2	I am certain that I will take the necessary actions to implement AI, even if they are difficult or unfamiliar.	0.740			
	SF3	I have the determination to lead my organization through Al-driven change.	0.709			

Table 1 Contil	iueu					
Constructs		Items	Loading (> 0.5)	CA (> 0.7)	CR (> 0.7)	AVE (>0.5)
	SF4	I am confident that I can overcome challenges associated with integrating Al into business operations.	0.782			
	SF5	I believe I can guide others in using AI tools effectively to achieve strategic goals.	0.731			

Table 1 Continued

Note. CA = Cronbach's alpha; CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted.

Assessment of the Measurement Model. To evaluate the soundness of the measurement model, an in-depth analysis of internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity was conducted (Table 2). Most items exceeded the threshold of 0.707, as recommended by Hair et al. (2019), indicating favorable performance.

First, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were assessed to examine internal consistency. The results in Table 1 demonstrate values surpassing 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019), affirming the construct's robustness.

Next, the average variance extracted (AVE) was used as the primary metric for convergent validity. Notably, each construct's AVE exceeded 0.50, meeting the prescribed threshold (Hair et al., 2019) and underscoring the convergence of the measures (see Table 1).

Finally, the examination was extended to discriminant validity, which was unblemished. As indicated in Table 2, the AVE values for each construct surpassed the variance shared by other latent constructs (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics, Correlation Matrix, and Discriminant Validity

Constructs	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Al Adoption	3.112	0.540	0.571	0.707 [0.612; 0.739]	0.321 [0.324; 0.481]	0.677 [0.630; 0.741]	0.194 [0.147; 0.245]
2. Green Creativity	3.831	0.441	0.316	0.841	0.544 [0.492; 0.609]	0.794 [0.758; 0.827]	0.175 [0.156; 0.239]
3. Positive Mental Health	4.406	0.709	0.339	0.164	0.446	0.570 [0.510; 0.631]	0.127 [0.103; 0.203]
4. Risk Perception	1.374	0.447	0.554	0.292	0.246	0.675	0.180 [0.152; 0.247]
5. Self-Efficacy	2.711	0.767	0.049	0.074	0.454	0.074	n.a.

Note. AVE values are in bold, Heterotrait-Monotrait values are in italics; n.a. = not applicable.

Furthermore, Heterotrait–Monotrait ratios were below 0.90 and did not enclose 1 within their 95% confidence intervals, reinforcing the distinctness of each pair of variables (Henseler et al., 2015). Table 3 outlines the Heterotrait–Monotrait values in detail.

 Table 3

 Structural Path Analysis: Direct Effect

<u>.s.</u>	hip				<u>.</u>	Bias and Corrected Bootstrap		
Hypothesis	Relationship	SB	SD	<i>t</i> -value	p-value	95% CI [Lower Level; Upper Level]	Decision	VIF
H1	Al Adoption > Green Creativity	0.386	0.060	6.467	.000	[0.275; 0.475]	Supported	1.664
H2	Al Adoption > Positive Mental Health	0.198	0.066	3.019	.001	[0.075; 0.293]	Supported	2.275
Н3	Al Adoption > Risk Perception	0.280	0.070	3.990	.000	[0.166; 0.404]	Supported	1.834

Note. VIF = variance inflation factor.

#### Assessment of the Structural Model

The findings pertinent to **H1–H3** are presented in Table 3. Notably, these hypotheses encountered no complications linked to multicollinearity, considering that the VIF values remained comfortably below the 5.0 threshold established to flag such issues (Hair et al., 2017).

Supporting **H1**, the data revealed a significant and positive relationship between Al adoption and green creativity ( $\beta = 0.386$ , t = 6.467, p < .000, Table 3), offering compelling support for the hypothesis. Regarding **H2**, it became evident that Al adoption significantly impacted positive mental health ( $\beta = 0.198$ , t = 3.019, p < .001). Furthermore, **H3** was supported, with Al adoption exhibiting a positive and substantial correlation with risk perception ( $\beta = 0.280$ , t = 3.990, p < .000). Consequently, all direct predictions associated with these hypotheses were robust, as shown in Table 3.

The moderation analysis (Table 4) represented a pivotal dimension of this study. It aimed to determine whether self-efficacy moderates the relationship between Al adoption (the independent variable) and the three dependent variables: green creativity, positive mental health, and risk perception. With this objective, we closely examined the interaction effects of self-efficacy.

First, when evaluating the interaction of AI adoption and self-efficacy on green creativity, results indicated a substantial interaction ( $\beta$  = 0.142, t = 4.530, p < .000). This outcome supports **H4**, suggesting that high self-efficacy amplified the positive impact of AI adoption on green creativity. In contrast, the second interaction—encompassing

Al adoption, self-efficacy, and positive mental health—yielded an insignificant effect  $(\beta = 0.055, t = 1.024, p = .153)$ , thereby not supporting **H5**.

The third interaction explored the relationship between Al adoption, self-efficacy, and risk perception; the results revealed a positive and significant interaction ( $\beta$  = 0.089, t = 3.166, p < .001). This supports **H6**, indicating that leaders with higher self-efficacy exhibit different and more pronounced risk perceptions in response to Al adoption.

Table 4 provides detailed coefficients and corresponding statistical indicators for a comprehensive summary of these moderation findings.

 Table 4

 Structural Path Analysis: The Interaction Effect (Moderation)

Hypothesis	Relationship	S S	SD	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value		Corrected istrap Decision	VIF
H4	Al Adoption  × Self-  Efficacy  > Green  Creativity	0.142	0.052	4.530	.000	[0.041; 0.203]	Supported	1.148
H5	Al Adoption  × Self-  Efficacy  > Positive  Mental  Health	0.055	0.044	1.024	.153	[-0.117; 0.020]	Not supported	1.568
H6	Al Adoption  × Self-  Efficacy  > Risk  Perception	0.089	0.046	3.166	.001	[0.027; 0.176]	Supported	1.072

*Note.* VIF = variance inflation factor.

In line with Dawson's (2014) recommendation, interaction plots were employed to explore how self-efficacy moderates the relationship between Al adoption and the outcome variables. By visualizing the gradient of slopes for each interaction, these plots provided a clearer picture of the differences in effect sizes between high and low levels of self-efficacy.

Figure 2 shows that the first interaction plot highlights the differential slopes of Al adoption and green creativity in the high- and low-self-efficacy groups. Notably, the high self-efficacy line exhibits a steeper incline than the low self-efficacy line, indicating that the positive link between Al adoption and green creativity was more pronounced when self-efficacy is high.

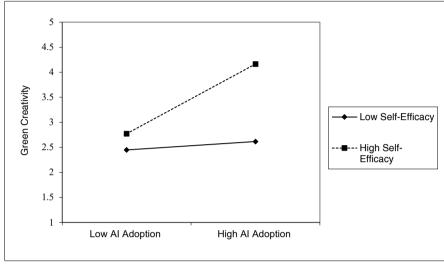
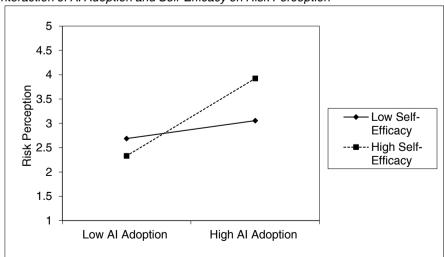


Figure 2
Interaction of Al Adoption and Self-Efficacy on Green Creativity

Note. Source: developed by the authors.

As shown in Figure 3, which depicts the second interaction involving Al adoption, self-efficacy, and risk perception, the plot demonstrates that risk perception increased more strongly under high self-efficacy conditions. Specifically, leaders with higher self-efficacy displayed a sharper increase in their perceived risk as Al adoption intensified, suggesting that self-efficacy amplifies their evaluations of uncertainties and potential threats.





Note. Source: developed by the authors.

Figures 2 and 3 show these interactions, enhancing understanding the nuanced dynamics within the study's framework. They revealed how self-efficacy can shift the direction or strength of AI adoption's impact on green creativity and risk perception, offering more profound insights into the role of leadership beliefs in technology implementation.

#### **Discussion**

This study explored the relationships among Al adoption, green creativity, positive mental health, risk perception, and the moderating effect of self-efficacy in 214 CEOs, founders, and top management in Oman. The findings offer valuable insights and contribute significantly to the theoretical and practical discourse on how Al shapes organizational strategies, particularly in collectivist and culturally rich business environments.

Al adoption has emerged as a pivotal factor driving global business strategies in this rapidly advancing technological era. One of its most intriguing dimensions is the positive relationship between Al adoption and green creativity (Tawfik et al., 2023), which is evident in the Omani business context. This finding underscores how embracing Al can spur eco-friendly innovation, which is a priority in many emerging economies that strive to balance economic progress with environmental sustainability (Kulkarni et al., 2025).

In Oman, this synergy has a heightened significance. Vision 2040 explicitly calls for economic diversification beyond traditional oil revenues, sustainability, and responsible resource management (Yigitcanlar et al., 2021). Implementing AI aligns with these objectives, offering data-driven and predictive capabilities that enable companies to minimize waste, optimize energy consumption, and create value consistent with cultural norms that emphasize communal well-being. For instance, AI algorithms help Omani businesses forecast supply chain demand, monitor environmental impacts, and design innovative and eco-friendly products (Gupta et al., 2022).

Moreover, Al-powered creativity drives the development of new green products, materials, and business models, promoting profitability and social responsibility (Ghobakhloo et al., 2021). Nevertheless, organizations face limited Al expertise, cultural alignment, and technical readiness (Allioui & Mourdi, 2023; Salah, Al Halbusi, et al., 2024). Thus, top management must cultivate an innovative-friendly culture that embraces advanced technology while respecting local traditions and collective norms.

From a comparative standpoint, these findings mirror global research linking Al adoption to sustainable initiatives. However, the Omani setting, with its strong emphasis on Vision 2040 and communal values, offers a unique perspective. The positive link between Al adoption and green creativity enriches the international dialogue on how technology can catalyze sustainable development. Local policymakers and business leaders can leverage these insights to incentivize green Al projects, train talent in data science, and promote success stories that highlight environmental stewardship. Doing so may deepen Oman's commitment to responsible innovation and reinforce its trajectory toward a greener, more diversified economy.

Beyond operational efficiency and productivity gains, this study revealed a noteworthy positive correlation between Al adoption and the mental well-being of CEOs and top management (Dwivedi et al., 2021). This insight underscores the human dimension of technological adoption, which is often overshadowed by technical and financial considerations.

This connection stems from leaders' sense of accomplishment and control when AI is leveraged to enhance decision-making, streamline processes, and foster innovation (Tambe et al., 2019). This alignment between organizational goals and personal efficacy fosters psychological fulfillment, manifested as increased mastery over complex issues and greater clarity in strategic direction (Bruch & Vogel, 2011; Salah, AI Halbusi, et al., 2024). Such well-being in the upper echelons often cascades to a broader workforce, cultivating a collaborative and data-driven organizational culture (Zahoor et al., 2022).

In Oman, where collectivism and respect for hierarchical leadership play pivotal roles in corporate culture, the mental well-being of CEOs can significantly influence employee engagement and acceptance of technology-driven changes. Oman's broader vision of economic diversification and social development also emphasize human capital enhancement, suggesting that leaders' psychological health could serve as a cornerstone for effective AI integration. However, challenges exist, such as limited technical training and cultural norms around work stress, and addressing them requires holistic strategies that blend technical readiness with well-being initiatives (Dwivedi et al., 2023).

The positive correlation between Al adoption and mental health represents a new perspective beyond viewing Al as merely a set of tools. Comparatively, research in other collectivist or emerging markets has indicated that technological empowerment can increase leadership morale. However, the Omani setting offers additional nuances given the weight placed on harmony and community values (Zaidan et al., 2019). By recognizing Al's role as a strategic partner rather than as a threat or automation engine, managers can shape a work environment that is conducive to positive mental health and resilience.

In practice, business leaders should invest in skill-development programs, foster Al literacy at multiple organizational levels, and actively encourage open dialogue regarding Al implementation to relieve anxiety. Such measures can sustain a healthier workplace and bolster top management's confidence, as they guide their companies through technological transitions in alignment with Vision 2040.

Integrating AI into business operations entails opportunities and challenges, often accompanied by inherent risks. This study identified a positive association between AI adoption and risk perception, indicating that leaders who engage more deeply with AI do not necessarily perceive fewer risks; instead, they recognize and illuminate them (Rodway & Schepman, 2023).

This may seem counterintuitive as one would expect familiarity with AI to reduce perceived risk. However, leaders actively engaging in sophisticated AI technologies often develop greater awareness of their limitations, uncertainties, and potential pitfalls (Wijayati et al., 2022). This heightened consciousness reflects a mature approach to

technological adoption wherein risk is managed rather than avoided. This risk literacy aligns with Featherman and Pavlou's (2003) argument that informed leaders make more resilient decisions.

In Oman, where economic diversification is paramount (Al Zuheimi, 2025), leaders balancing enthusiasm for Al with a cautious assessment of risks can better align investment strategies with the overarching goals of Vision 2040. Culturally, Omani business leaders often exhibit collective responsibility and feel compelled to protect shareholders' interests and societal welfare. This perspective may amplify emphasis on responsible Al deployment, transparency, and ethical considerations.

From a global standpoint, this nuanced view of risk perception fosters a balanced stance on Al adoption, wherein innovation coexists with due diligence (Kaplan & Mikes, 2012). For managers and policymakers, the practical takeaway is clear: educational programs, collaboration, and transparent communication regarding the risks and benefits of Al help build trust among stakeholders. Business leaders in Oman and other emerging markets may thus adopt structured risk assessment frameworks to ensure that optimism regarding Al capabilities is tempered by foresight and robust governance.

Integrating AI into business practices reshapes industries and unlocks innovation frontiers. This study's central contribution is revealing the moderating role of self-efficacy, highlighting how leaders' confidence and beliefs in their capabilities can amplify or temper the effects of AI adoption on green creativity, positive mental health, and risk perception (Marr, 2019).

In Omani organizations, self-efficacy may merge with collective cultural values, such as communal responsibility and respect for hierarchical structures, to influence technology adoption. Highly self-efficacious leaders are more likely to embrace Al's potential, pursue eco-innovations, and constructively address balanced risk concerns. This expanded understanding of Bandura's self-efficacy theory underscores how cultural norms and individual belief systems interlock and shape the trajectory of Aldriven transformations.

By investing in training programs, mentorship, and an organizational climate that encourages experimentation and supports learning, businesses can foster self-efficacy among top management and key stakeholders. This approach resonates with the emphasis of Vision 2040 on human capital development and the positioning of self-efficacy as a strategic asset for sustainable AI integration.

Business leaders in other collectivist societies exhibit similar dynamics in which individual confidence intersects with community-oriented values (Ghouse & Chaudhary, 2024). Thus, the moderating effect of self-efficacy is neither purely individualistic nor merely an organizational concern; it arises from the complex interplay of personal beliefs, social influences, and national objectives.

Ultimately, cultivating self-efficacy offers practical benefits for navigating Al's evolving landscape. It empowers leaders to evaluate the capabilities and limitations of Al realistically, enabling more strategic adoption patterns that capitalize on innovation while managing the associated risks.

## **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

Integrating AI within the business domain poses complex challenges and opportunities that intersect with various organizational and psychological aspects. Situating this integration within the unique Omani context, the present study offers vital theoretical and practical insights that address the gap between the abstract and the tangible, particularly as Oman navigates Vision 2040 and strives for economic diversification and technological modernization.

The theoretical implications of this research extend beyond conventional understanding. By providing empirical evidence supporting Bandura's self-efficacy theory in the context of Al adoption, this study expands this psychological construct to new and relatively unexplored fields. The positive relationships observed between Al adoption, green creativity, positive mental health, risk perception, and the moderating role of self-efficacy paint a multifaceted picture of how technology interfaces with the kaleidoscope of organizational and psychological dynamics.

Moreover, placing the study in Oman's cultural setting adds depth to the theoretical conversation, emphasizing how collectivist norms, respect for tradition, and communal goals influence technology acceptance. This cultural lens underscores the diversity of human behavior within organizational structures, inviting further investigation in emerging markets and other collectivist societies. Scholars may also extend these findings by comparing Omani leadership behaviors to those in different cultural or economic contexts, thereby enriching global research on technology and human interactions.

From a practical standpoint, this study illuminates viable pathways for organizations to realize the benefits of Al. Recognizing the potential to enhance Al integration through targeted training programs will pave the way for innovation, efficiency, and well-being that align seamlessly with Oman's Vision 2040. Companies can foster cultures of resilience, creative experimentation, and sustainable progress by cultivating self-efficacy among CEOs and key stakeholders.

Acknowledging the dynamic relationship between AI adoption and risk perception is equally important to provide a practical roadmap for strategic risk management. Leaders with high self-efficacy are better prepared to identify, assess, and respond to potential pitfalls, thus ensuring that enthusiasm for AI remains anchored in realistic and ethical considerations. As Omani businesses strive to diversify and modernize, this risk-aware approach can support long-term stability and public trust in AI-driven initiatives.

The study finds that AI can promote green creativity and resonate with global imperatives around environmental responsibility. It illustrates how organizations can harness AI's potential in a nurturing environment that cultivates self-efficacy, forming a bridge between creativity and sustainability. This alignment allows companies to innovate in eco-friendly ways, dovetailing with international sustainability goals and Oman's cultural focus on communal welfare and the stewardship of natural resources.

Finally, the link between Al adoption and positive mental health opens a new chapter in organizational support systems. Understanding that Al adoption can

be perceived not as an added stressor but as an empowering tool sets the stage for environments that prioritize employee well-being. This holistic view extends to recognizing how cultural norms can facilitate or hinder the mental resilience of leaders and employees. Consequently, Omani firms seeking to adopt AI may benefit from leadership training, mental health support, and change management strategies that simultaneously engage cultural and psychological elements.

In conclusion, this study revealed the intricate tapestry of technology, individual psychology, organizational strategy, and cultural contexts. Insights drawn from the Omani business landscape are not merely academic contributions but provide key insights for modern businesses seeking to combine technology with cultural sensitivity and human-centered values. Using theory and practice, this study depicts the multifaceted role of technology in shaping organizational success and individual fulfillment. Its implications resonate with academia and businesses alike, offering valuable perspectives on the transformative power of AI, particularly in emerging markets that balance rapid change with a rich cultural heritage.

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## **ARTICLE**

# Social Financial Grants in Thailand: A Catalyst for Inclusive Development and Economic Stability

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#### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of social financial grants in fostering inclusive development and economic stability in Thailand. Drawing from both historical and contemporary perspectives, the study explores the impact of these grants on marginalized communities, with a particular focus on their ability to alleviate poverty, support education, and promote social justice. Through a critical analysis of the Thai government's policies and the involvement of international organizations, the paper highlights the challenges and successes of implementing social financial grants in a developing country context. The findings underscore the importance of sustainable funding mechanisms and transparent governance in ensuring the long-term effectiveness of social financial grants as tools for socioeconomic empowerment.

## **KEYWORDS**

social financial grants, Thailand, inclusive development, poverty alleviation, sustainable funding

## Introduction

The increasing focus on social financial grants in Thailand has marked a significant shift in the country's approach to addressing socioeconomic disparities. These grants, aimed at providing financial support to marginalized and vulnerable populations, have become a pivotal tool in the Thai government's strategy to foster

inclusive development and economic stability. Social financial grants in Thailand have played a crucial role in reducing poverty and promoting social justice (Mitlin & Satterthwaite, 2013; Moore & Donaldson, 2016; Rimpeng, 2022). A World Bank study revealed that these grants, particularly the State Welfare Card program, contributed to a 15% reduction in poverty among beneficiaries between 2017 and 2022, lifting approximately 800,000 people out of extreme poverty (Ariyapruchya et al., 2023). As Thailand continues to navigate the complexities of globalization and economic transitions, social financial grants offer a critical lifeline to those left behind by conventional economic policies.

Social financial grants in Thailand have evolved from basic welfare provisions to more sophisticated programs designed to empower communities, reduce poverty, and enhance social justice. These grants, which range from direct cash transfers to educational scholarships and healthcare subsidies, are not merely financial aid but also mechanisms for promoting social inclusion and equity (de la Brière & Rawlings, 2006). The impact of these grants on the lives of beneficiaries, particularly in rural areas and among ethnic minorities, has been profound, leading to improved living standards and greater access to essential services (Chomik & Piggott, 2015; Porst & Sakdapolrak, 2020).

However, the effectiveness of social financial grants in Thailand is not without challenges. Issues such as the sustainability of funding, governance, and transparency have raised questions about the long-term viability of these programs. Moreover, the success of these grants is often influenced by external factors, including economic fluctuations and political dynamics, which can either enhance or undermine their impact.

This paper seeks to explore the role of social financial grants in fostering inclusive development and economic stability in Thailand. It is based on a comprehensive analysis of secondary empirical data and an extensive literature review of policy reports, governmental documents, and academic sources. While the study references statistical findings from organizations such as the World Bank, Transparency International, and the Ministry of Social Development in Thailand, it does not include new primary data collection. Instead, it critically examines existing data to assess the role of social financial grants in fostering economic stability and social inclusion. Given this approach, the research employs qualitative content analysis and comparative literature analysis to explore the socioeconomic impact of these grants.

This study examines how sociopolitical transformations in Thailand, particularly in the realm of social financial grants, shape individual well-being, economic motivations, and social inclusion. By investigating the impact of these grants on marginalized communities, this paper explores the interplay between state policies and personal socioeconomic agency, shedding light on how individuals' economic behaviors and values shift in response to welfare policies. The study further contributes to discussions on social exclusion and inclusion, economic and existential security, and the broader moral reasoning behind social welfare policies, thereby offering an interdisciplinary perspective on the evolving nature of economic stability and social justice in a post-materialist society.

## **Literature Review**

Numerous studies have highlighted the role of social financial grants in reducing poverty and stimulating economic development. For instance, studies by Verme (2011) and Devereux et al. (2017) have demonstrated that social transfers, including grants, can significantly reduce poverty by providing financial resources to the poorest households. These studies underscore the importance of grants in enhancing the economic security of vulnerable populations, a finding that aligns with the success of Thailand's State Welfare Card program in reducing poverty by 15% between 2017 and 2022 (Ariyapruchya et al., 2023).

The impact of social financial grants on educational attainment has also been widely studied. Dearden et al. (2009) found that conditional cash transfer programs have been effective in increasing school enrollment and reducing dropout rates in Latin America. Similarly, Meier and Wood (2004) observed that such programs could improve educational outcomes by alleviating the financial burdens that often force children to leave school. These findings are consistent with the positive effects observed in Thailand, where the Education Equality Fund has led to a 20% increase in secondary school completion rates in disadvantaged areas (Ministry of Education of Thailand, 2024).

However, the success of social financial grants is often contingent on the effectiveness of governance and the transparency of grant administration. Transparency International has emphasized the need for robust oversight mechanisms to prevent corruption and ensure that funds reach intended beneficiaries (Corruption Perceptions Index, 2020). Studies by scholars like Campos & Pradhan (2007) and Fritzen (2007) have highlighted the challenges of implementing social programs in contexts where governance structures are weak or prone to corruption. These concerns are reflected in Thailand, where 25% of funds from the State Welfare Card program were found to be misallocated or unaccounted for (Corruption Perceptions Index, 2023).

The sustainability of funding for social financial grants is another critical area of concern in the literature. Barnes et al. (2015) and Carroll & Stater (2009) argue that the long-term viability of social grants depends on stable and diversified funding sources. They point out that reliance on government budgets, which are often subject to political and economic fluctuations, can jeopardize the continuity of such programs. This perspective is relevant to the Thai context, where programs like the Education Equality Fund have struggled with consistent funding, particularly during economic downturns (Equitable Education Fund, 2023).

Finally, the literature on social justice and inclusive development underscores the importance of social financial grants in addressing structural inequalities. Hanlon et al. (2012) and Goldsmith (2010) argue that social grants can play a crucial role in promoting equity by providing disadvantaged groups with the resources needed to participate fully in society. In Thailand, this is evident in the impact of grants on marginalized communities, such as ethnic minorities in rural areas, where grants have improved access to education and healthcare (United Nations Development Programme, 2024).

## **Historical Background**

The evolution of social financial grants in Thailand is deeply intertwined with the country's broader socioeconomic development and its efforts to address poverty and inequality. Initially, social financial grants in Thailand were limited in scope and largely focused on providing basic welfare support to the most vulnerable segments of the population (Cook & Kwon, 2007; Kwon, 2009). These early initiatives were often reactive, designed to address immediate needs rather than long-term socioeconomic challenges. However, as Thailand's economy began to grow and diversify, particularly in the latter half of the 20th century, there was a gradual recognition of the need for more structured and sustainable social support systems (Pananond, 2007).

The first significant milestone in the evolution of social financial grants in Thailand came with the implementation of the National Economic and Social Development Plans, which began in the 1960s (Teerawattananon et al., 2009). These plans laid the foundation for more comprehensive social welfare policies, including the introduction of targeted financial assistance programs aimed at reducing poverty and improving living standards. The introduction of the Universal Health Coverage Scheme in 2002 marked a major turning point, as it provided a broad-based safety net that included financial support for healthcare services, significantly reducing out-of-pocket expenses for low-income families (Luk, 2014).

Over the past two decades, the Thai government has launched several key initiatives to expand and refine the scope of social financial grants. One of the most notable of these is the State Welfare Card program, introduced in 2017 (Phumma & Vechsuruck, 2022). This program provides low-income individuals with financial assistance through a cashless system that can be used to purchase essential goods and services. The State Welfare Card program represents a shift towards more modern, technology-driven approaches to social financial grants, allowing for better targeting and monitoring of beneficiaries.

Another significant initiative is the Education Equality Fund, established in 2018, which aims to reduce educational disparities by providing financial support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Gauthier & Punyasavatsut, 2019). This program has played a crucial role in increasing access to education in rural and underserved areas, helping to break the cycle of poverty by investing in the next generation. The Thai government has also partnered with international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to enhance the reach and impact of these grants, particularly in areas affected by natural disasters or economic downturns (Coate et al., 2006).

These milestones illustrate the Thai government's evolving approach to social financial grants, from basic welfare provision to more comprehensive and targeted programs that address the underlying causes of poverty and inequality. However, while significant progress has been made, challenges remain in ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of these grants, particularly in the face of economic uncertainties and changing political landscapes.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

The concepts of Inclusive Development and Social Justice serve as the foundational pillars for understanding the role and impact of social financial grants in Thailand. Inclusive development is a holistic approach to economic growth that aims to ensure that all members of society, particularly the marginalized and vulnerable, benefit from development efforts. Unlike traditional development models, which often focus solely on economic indicators such as GDP growth, inclusive development emphasizes the importance of equity, access, and opportunity for all (Gupta & Vegelin, 2016). This approach seeks to address the structural inequalities that prevent certain groups from participating fully in economic and social life. In addition to their direct financial support, social financial grants have acted as economic stimulants in rural Thailand. The Asian Development Bank reports that these grants have increased consumer spending by 12% and created approximately 50,000 new jobs in the agricultural and service sectors over the past three years, demonstrating their broader economic impact (Elhan-Kayalar & Oum, 2022).

Social justice, closely related to inclusive development, is concerned with the fair and equitable distribution of resources, opportunities, and privileges within a society. It advocates for the removal of barriers that perpetuate inequality and the establishment of systems that promote the well-being of all individuals, regardless of their socioeconomic status. In the context of Thailand, social justice involves addressing the disparities that exist between different regions, ethnic groups, and social classes, and ensuring that all citizens have equal access to basic needs such as education, healthcare, and financial security.

Social financial grants play a critical role in promoting the concepts of inclusive development and social justice by directly addressing the financial barriers that prevent marginalized populations from accessing essential services and opportunities. By providing targeted financial assistance to low-income individuals and communities, these grants help to level the playing field, allowing all members of society to participate in and benefit from economic growth. For instance, educational grants help reduce the financial burden on families, enabling children from disadvantaged backgrounds to pursue their education and improve their future prospects (Salmi & D'Addio, 2021). Similarly, healthcare grants ensure that low-income individuals have access to necessary medical services, thereby reducing health disparities and improving overall public health outcomes (Kominski et al., 2017).

In Thailand, the implementation of social financial grants has been instrumental in bridging the gap between the rich and the poor, particularly in rural and underserved areas. These grants are designed not only to provide immediate relief but also to empower recipients by enhancing their capacity to improve their socioeconomic status. For example, grants aimed at supporting small-scale entrepreneurs in rural communities help to stimulate local economies, create jobs, and reduce poverty (Moore & Donaldson, 2016). Moreover, social financial grants contribute to social cohesion by reducing the economic inequalities that can lead to social unrest and conflict (Eizaguirre et al., 2012).

The theoretical framework of inclusive development and social justice provides a lens through which the effectiveness of social financial grants can be evaluated.

By aligning these grants with the broader goals of equity and inclusion, policymakers can ensure that they contribute to sustainable development and social stability. However, achieving these goals requires careful design and implementation of grant programs, as well as ongoing monitoring and evaluation to assess their impact and address any emerging challenges.

## **Case Studies**

The effectiveness of social financial grants in Thailand can be best understood through an analysis of specific programs that have been implemented across the country. One prominent example is the State Welfare Card program, introduced in 2017, which has become a cornerstone of Thailand's efforts to support its low-income population (Ariyapruchya et al., 2019). The program provides financial assistance to eligible individuals through a cashless card system that can be used to purchase essential goods and services, including food, healthcare, and transportation. This initiative has been particularly impactful in rural areas, where access to basic necessities is often limited, and the economic disparities between urban and rural populations are most pronounced.

Another significant program is the Education Equality Fund, launched in 2018 to address educational disparities across Thailand (Shaeffer, 2019). This fund provides financial grants to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly in rural and ethnic minority communities, enabling them to continue their education and pursue higher studies (Table 1). The success of this program is evident in the increased enrollment rates in schools and universities among students from these marginalized groups, which has, in turn, contributed to reducing poverty and promoting social mobility in these areas. One of the most significant successes of the Education Equality Fund has been its impact on educational attainment in rural areas. Over the period from 2018 to 2023, secondary school completion rates in these regions have increased by 20%, while the dropout rate among disadvantaged students has decreased by 30%, according to the Ministry of Education of Thailand (2024).

**Table 1**Impact of the Education Equality Fund on School Enrollment Rates

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Year	Enrollment Rate in Disadvantaged Areas (%)	National Enrollment Rate (%)	
2018	68	85	
2019	72	87	
2020	74	88	
2021	76	89	
2022	79	90	
2023	81	91	

Note. Source: Ministry of Education of Thailand, 2024.

While these programs have had notable successes, they also face significant challenges. The State Welfare Card program, for instance, has been criticized for its limited reach and the adequacy of the financial assistance provided. Many beneficiaries report that the amount they receive is insufficient to cover their basic needs, particularly in times of economic crisis or rising living costs (Nawarat, 2019; Townsend, 2011). Additionally, the program's reliance on digital technology has posed barriers for older adults and individuals in remote areas who may lack access to or familiarity with digital tools.

The Education Equality Fund has also encountered obstacles, particularly in terms of sustainability and the adequacy of resources. While the program has successfully increased access to education, it has struggled to maintain consistent funding levels, which has led to concerns about its long-term viability. Furthermore, the fund's focus on financial assistance does not always address the broader systemic issues that contribute to educational disparities, such as inadequate school infrastructure and the quality of teaching in rural areas (Durongkaveroj, 2023; Fry & Bi, 2013; Gauthier & Punyasavatsut, 2019).

The impact of these social financial grant programs on marginalized communities in Thailand has been significant, particularly in rural areas and among ethnic minorities. For example, in the northeastern provinces of Thailand, which are predominantly rural and have some of the highest poverty rates in the country, the State Welfare Card program has provided much-needed financial relief to thousands of households (Table 2). This has helped to stabilize local economies, reduce migration to urban centers, and improve the overall quality of life for residents.

**Table 2**Distribution of State Welfare Card Recipients by Region (2023)

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Region	Number of Recipients, persons	Percentage of Total Recipients, %	
Northern Thailand	1,500,000	25	
Northeastern Thailand	2,200,000	37	
Central Thailand	1,000,000	17	
Southern Thailand	1,300,000	21	
Total	6,000,000	100	

Note. Source: Department of Older Persons, 2024.

Among ethnic minority communities, such as the Karen and Hmong in northern Thailand, the Education Equality Fund has played a crucial role in breaking down barriers to education (Draper & Selway, 2019). By providing financial support to students from these communities, the fund has helped to close the educational gap between ethnic minorities and the broader population, fostering greater inclusion and social cohesion. However, challenges remain in ensuring that these communities

receive the full benefits of the grants, particularly in terms of addressing language barriers and cultural differences that can affect their access to education and other services.

## **Challenges and Barriers**

While social financial grants have become an essential tool for promoting inclusive development and social justice in Thailand, several challenges and barriers threaten their effectiveness and long-term sustainability. One of the most pressing issues is related to governance and transparency. The administration of these grants, particularly at the local level, has often been criticized for lacking transparency and accountability (Gunawong, 2015; Sachdev et al., 2022; Tangcharoensathien et al., 2015). Instances of misallocation of funds, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and corruption have undermined public trust in these programs. For example, there have been reports of favoritism in the distribution of State Welfare Cards, where certain individuals or communities receive more substantial benefits due to their connections with local officials (Puracan et al., 2024). Such practices not only diminish the impact of these grants but also exacerbate existing inequalities, defeating the very purpose of these programs. Transparency International found that 25% of the funds allocated through the State Welfare Card program were either misallocated or not accounted for, highlighting significant challenges in oversight and the need for more stringent anticorruption measures (Corruption Perceptions Index, 2023).

The effectiveness of social financial grants in Thailand can be evaluated through quantitative measures. According to the annal report of the Equitable Education Fund (2023), the average monthly benefit provided by the State Welfare Card is approximately 600 THB (USD 17 per month) per recipient. However, based on poverty gap estimations, this amount covers only 12% of the minimum cost of living for low-income households in rural areas, which may explain why grant recipients still struggle with financial insecurity (United Nations Development Programme, 2024). Comparatively, Brazil's Bolsa Família provides an average of USD 34 per month, representing a higher share of essential expenses, and has been associated with a 21% reduction in extreme poverty over a decade (Martins & Monteiro, 2016). This suggests that while Thailand's grant system has a positive impact, its effectiveness might be constrained by insufficient funding per recipient and a lack of indexation to inflation and living costs.

The sustainability of funding mechanisms for social financial grants is another critical concern. Many of these programs are heavily reliant on government budgets, which can be volatile and subject to political shifts. Economic downturns, changes in government priorities, or reduced revenue collection can lead to budget cuts that directly impact the availability and effectiveness of these grants. For instance, the Education Equality Fund has faced significant challenges in maintaining consistent funding, particularly during economic crises (Maitrarat et al., 2021). Without a stable and sustainable funding base, these programs risk becoming short-term solutions rather than long-term strategies for addressing poverty and inequality.

External factors also play a significant role in influencing the effectiveness of social financial grants in Thailand. The country's economic landscape, political environment, and social dynamics all contribute to the challenges these programs face. Economic instability, such as the downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, has placed additional strain on government resources, leading to a reduction in the funds available for social financial grants (Wicaksono & Rinaldi, 2021). Additionally, political instability or changes in government can result in shifts in policy priorities, leading to the scaling back or discontinuation of certain programs. For example, political changes in Thailand have at times resulted in the reallocation of resources away from social programs, affecting the continuity and impact of social financial grants (Yuda et al., 2022).

Moreover, social and cultural factors, such as regional disparities, ethnic tensions, and societal attitudes towards welfare, can influence the success of these grants. In regions with deep-seated mistrust of government initiatives, or where there is resistance to external interventions, the implementation of social financial grants may face significant obstacles. Similarly, in areas with high levels of poverty or social exclusion, such as in ethnic minority communities, the effectiveness of these grants may be limited by broader systemic issues that are not addressed by financial assistance alone (Pothipala et al., 2021).

The instability of government funding for social financial grants has been observed in multiple contexts beyond Thailand. For instance, in Indonesia, social welfare programs like the Program Keluarga Harapan [Family Hope Program], or PKH, have faced similar issues, leading the government to establish public-private partnerships and donor-funded reserves to sustain long-term social assistance (Najidah & Lestari, 2019). Likewise, in South Africa, the Child Support Grant has incorporated international funding mechanisms and non-state contributions to reduce reliance on fluctuating national budgets. These cases illustrate that while state funding remains the backbone of social grants, a hybrid model involving international aid, corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds, and social impact bonds can enhance sustainability (Hopkins, 2007).

## **Policy Implications**

To maximize the impact of social financial grants in Thailand, several key policy recommendations must be considered. First and foremost, improving the governance and transparency of these programs is essential. Implementing stricter oversight mechanisms and ensuring greater accountability at all levels of administration can help address issues of corruption and misallocation of funds (Table 3). This could involve establishing independent monitoring bodies that regularly audit the distribution and use of social financial grants, as well as creating more transparent reporting systems that allow the public to track how funds are being utilized. Additionally, training local officials on best practices in grant management and promoting community involvement in the decision-making process can help build trust and ensure that the grants reach those who need them most.

Challenge	Description	Example
Governance Issues	Lack of transparency and accountability in the distribution of grants	Reports of favoritism in the State Welfare Card program (Department of Older Persons, 2024)
Funding Sustainability	Dependence on volatile government budgets and lack of diversified funding sources	Budget cuts during economic downturns affecting the Education Equality Fund (Equitable Education Fund, 2023)
External Factors	Economic and political instability impacting grant effectiveness	COVID-19 pandemic leading to reduced funding availability (United Nations Development Programme, 2024)

 Table 3

 Challenges Faced by Social Financial Grants in Thailand

Note. Source: developed by the authors.

Another critical recommendation is to secure more sustainable funding mechanisms for social financial grants. Rather than relying solely on government budgets, which are often subject to economic fluctuations and political changes, efforts should be made to diversify funding sources. These could include establishing public-private partnerships, encouraging CSR initiatives, and seeking support from international organizations. In addition, creating endowment funds or establishing reserve funds during periods of economic growth could provide a buffer during economic downturns, ensuring that social financial grants remain available even in challenging times.

To mitigate financial instability, Thailand could adopt alternative funding mechanisms seen in other countries with similar welfare challenges. For example, Brazil's Bolsa Família program successfully leveraged conditional cash transfers (CCTs) funded through financial transaction taxes and partnerships with private donors (Hall, 2008). Meanwhile, Mexico's Prospera program sustained long-term funding by integrating contributions from multilateral organizations such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (Martínez-Martínez et al., 2020). Similarly, in the Philippines, the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) has received support from the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank, allowing it to expand beyond government budgets (Bustos et al., 2023). These examples suggest that Thailand could explore mechanisms such as social impact bonds, donor-matched grants, or dedicated tax levies to secure long-term funding stability.

Moreover, while NGO involvement has been suggested as a potential solution, evidence from Bangladesh's BRAC microfinance program indicates that NGO-led financial assistance schemes can complement government grants by providing targeted micro-loans and skill-building initiatives (Chowdhury et al., 2014). Thailand could leverage similar collaborations by formalizing NGO participation in rural entrepreneurship programs, financial literacy training, and small-scale business grants for welfare cardholders.

Additionally, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has played a key role in supporting social financial grants globally. Programs such as UNDP's cash transfer initiatives in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America have demonstrated how strategic funding and governance reforms can enhance grant effectiveness (Hunter et al., 2021). Thailand could benefit from further collaboration with UNDP in optimizing fund allocation, implementing digital payment mechanisms, and strengthening monitoring frameworks to improve the transparency and reach of its social financial grants.

International organizations and NGOs have a significant role to play in enhancing the effectiveness of social financial grants in Thailand. These organizations can provide technical assistance, funding, and expertise in designing and implementing grant programs. For example, international development agencies could collaborate with the Thai government to introduce innovative funding mechanisms or to pilot new grant initiatives aimed at reaching underserved populations. NGOs, with their grassroots connections and experience in community development, can help bridge the gap between government programs and the needs of local communities. They can also serve as watchdogs, advocating for greater transparency and accountability in the administration of social financial grants.

The success of certain social financial grant programs in Thailand offers valuable lessons that could be replicated in other Southeast Asian countries facing similar challenges (Table 4). For instance, the State Welfare Card program's use of technology to streamline the distribution of financial assistance could be adapted in countries with large rural populations and limited access to financial services. Similarly, the Education Equality Fund's focus on supporting disadvantaged students could serve as a model for other nations looking to address educational disparities. Regional collaboration and knowledge-sharing among Southeast Asian countries could facilitate the transfer of best practices and the adaptation of successful models to different national contexts. Thailand's social financial grant programs have been notably more effective in reducing poverty and improving social equity compared to similar initiatives in neighboring countries. A UNDP study (2023) attributes this success to Thailand's stronger institutional framework and higher investment in social programs, suggesting that these factors could be crucial for replicating success in other Southeast Asian nations.

Table 4
Comparative Analysis of Social Financial Grant Models in Southeast Asia

Country	Key Social Financial Grant Program	Successes	Challenges
Thailand	State Welfare Card, Education Equality Fund	Increased access to basic needs and education	Governance and sustainability issues
Indonesia	PKH (Family Hope Program)	Significant poverty reduction, improved health outcomes	Complex bureaucracy, uneven distribution
Vietnam	Social Protection Program	Widespread coverage of vulnerable populations	Limited funding, regional disparities
Malaysia	Bantuan Sara Hidup (Cost of Living Aid)	Effective in urban areas, reduced income inequality	Rural outreach challenges, dependency concerns

Note. Source: developed by the authors based on government reports and UNDP (2023).

### Conclusion

The exploration of social financial grants in Thailand reveals their significant potential as instruments of inclusive development and social justice. These grants have proven to be vital in bridging the gap between the rich and the poor, particularly in rural areas and among marginalized communities. Programs such as the State Welfare Card and the Education Equality Fund have already made considerable strides in improving access to essential services and opportunities for those who need them most. However, as this paper has highlighted, the full impact of these grants is often limited by challenges related to governance, transparency, and the sustainability of funding mechanisms.

To ensure that social financial grants continue to serve as effective tools for socioeconomic empowerment, it is imperative to address these challenges head-on. Strengthening governance and enhancing transparency are critical steps toward building public trust and ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently and equitably. Furthermore, securing sustainable funding through diversified sources, including public-private partnerships and international collaboration, will be essential in safeguarding the long-term viability of these programs.

The analysis of social financial grants in Thailand highlights their potential as instruments for poverty alleviation and inclusive development. However, to ensure their long-term effectiveness, Thailand can look to successful models from other countries. For instance, Brazil's Bolsa Família program has demonstrated the effectiveness of conditional cash transfers funded through financial transaction taxes, ensuring consistent financial resources for welfare initiatives. Similarly, Mexico's Prospera program has successfully secured multilateral funding from institutions like the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, providing a model for diversifying financial support. In Indonesia, the PKH (Program Keluarga Harapan) program has integrated public-private partnerships to enhance sustainability, while South Africa's Child Support Grant has benefited from blended funding sources, including international donors and domestic taxation.

Furthermore, Thailand can learn from Bangladesh's BRAC initiative, where NGOs play a critical role in supplementing government welfare programs through microfinance, education grants, and skill-building initiatives. These cases provide concrete examples of how Thailand might structure its own funding mechanisms and policy frameworks to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of social financial grants.

By drawing on these successful models, Thailand can transition from a primarily state-funded welfare approach to a more diversified system that leverages international aid, CSR funding, and public-private partnerships. International collaboration (such as partnering with international organizations like the World Bank or UNDP) can also be a valuable source of funding, expertise, and support for the long-term stability of these programs.

The insights gained from Thailand's experience with social financial grants offer valuable lessons for other Southeast Asian countries. By replicating and adapting successful models, the region can work collectively toward reducing poverty and

promoting social inclusion. The role of international organizations and NGOs in supporting these efforts cannot be overstated; their expertise and resources will be key in driving innovation and ensuring the successful implementation of grant programs across different contexts.

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## **ARTICLE**

# Housing Precarity in Russia: Measurements in Regions and Federal Districtss

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Housing precarity has become an increasingly prominent issue over the past two decades, attracting sustained attention from researchers across multiple disciplines. While much of the existing work has focused on labor market precarization and the emergence of the precariat as a new social class, similar patterns are also evident in the housing sector, contributing to growing feelings of instability and uncertainty about the future. As a multidimensional phenomenon, housing precarity affects both renters and homeowners in various ways, depending on social and institutional contexts. This article draws on international experience with index-based assessments of housing precarity, particularly in Europe, the United States, and Australia, to develop a methodology for measuring housing precarity across regions of Russia. The preliminary findings of the correlational analysis reveal a strong relationship between housing precarity, quality of life. and net migration, since regional mobility is mostly driven by people's desire to secure better housing. Cluster analysis identifies four regional categories—low, moderate, advanced, and high levels of housing precarity—revealing substantial differences in living conditions across the country. The results also point to significant spatial disparities in the distribution of housing precarity among Russia's federal districts. The article concludes by outlining the limitations of the proposed method and suggesting directions for future research.

## **KEYWORDS**

sociology of housing, housing precarity, precarious housing, Russian Federation, housing satisfaction, housing mobility, Regional Index of Housing Precarity, RIHP

#### Introduction

Although housing has long been one of the widely discussed topics in economics, sociology, and other disciplines, it remains far from exhausted. What keeps it relevant is that each study brings a fresh perspective—shaped not only by the researchers' interests but also by the institutional contexts of housing systems in different countries. Issues like affordability, living conditions, and residential mobility reflect different facets of the broader housing question. In recent years, however, a new focus has come to the forefront: precarity. This shift is driven, on the one hand, by the rise of housing sociology as an independent field, and on the other, by growing interest in labor precarity, which plays a key role in driving housing insecurity worldwide. While sociology has made significant progress in conceptualizing the precariat and studying labor precarization empirically, the concept of housing precarity remains largely unfamiliar in Russia. Meanwhile, in regions such as Europe, the United States, and Australia, housing precarity has become a central theme in contemporary research (Litvintsev, 2024c).

In contemporary Russia, housing precarity has gained increasing prominence as a critical issue, reflecting wider socioeconomic disparities across regions and federal districts. Even though housing precarity has a significant impact on individual well-being and social stability, its comprehensive assessments—especially systematic regional comparisons—are still scarce. This study aims to fill that gap by developing an index-based method to evaluate housing affordability, security, and quality. The main goal is to explore regional differences in housing precarity and examine how they are related to people's satisfaction with their living conditions and their plans to improve them. Using an interdisciplinary economic and sociological approach, this research offers a clear methodology for assessing housing vulnerabilities and sheds light on their wider socioeconomic consequences.

This study is based on international research on housing precarity, drawing from the theoretical frameworks of Bourdieu (1998) and Standing (2014). Their analyses of structural insecurity and labor precarity offer a foundation for understanding broader socioeconomic vulnerabilities, including those related to housing. At the same time, the research embraces the contemporary paradigm of housing sociology, which is consistent with the multiparadigmatic nature of sociology, thus viewing housing conditions as a fundamental determinant of social life (McCabe & Rosen, 2023). This perspective underscores how access to stable, secure, and adequate housing shapes individuals' opportunities, social mobility, and overall well-being, placing housing precarity at the center of the analysis of socioeconomic inequalities.

This article provides an interdisciplinary analysis of housing precarity in Russia. While focusing on objective indicators, the analysis takes into account the fact that housing decisions also involve economic, sociological, and psychological factors (Mulyadi & Ubaidillah, 2024). By highlighting the structural influences behind these decisions, the research offers empirical insights into the socioeconomic aspects of housing precarity, particularly housing safety as a key part of social security. Given the broader social impact of precarious housing, the findings contribute to understanding its role in social stability and processes of inclusion and exclusion.

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## **Literature Review**

Precarity is a complex phenomenon deeply rooted in legal and institutional frameworks (Litvintsev, 2024a). In contemporary society, it manifests not only in the labor sphere but also in social, cultural, financial, economic, and housing dimensions (Han et al., 2023). Housing precarity, which garners increasing attention in international research, refers to a condition of uncertainty that arises from the risk of experiencing adverse outcomes related to housing providers, dwelling quality, affordability, security, and access to essential services (Clair et al., 2016).

In several developed countries, homeownership rates have declined while unaffordable and unsafe private rental housing has become increasingly common (Waldron, 2023). This pattern is also observed in Russia, where policy focus is gradually shifting from encouraging responsible homeownership toward developing the rental market and its institutional frameworks. In this evolving context, housing precarity heightens anxiety not only about individuals' own living conditions but also about their relationships with cohabitants, neighbors, and the broader community (Owens & Green, 2020). Although housing precarity is often associated with rental housing, particularly in Western countries, it is not exclusive to it; homeowners can also experience precarious conditions. While renters in Europe tend to face more pronounced housing precarity, a significant portion of homeowners also encounter these challenges. Thus, across Europe, regardless of economic development or political regime, precarious housing affects a notable share of the population (Clair et al., 2016).

There is international evidence that housing precariousness is largely influenced by social institutions, state structures, and other factors (Dotsey & Ambrosini, 2023), such as the characteristics of the dwelling itself (physical factors) and rental or housing costs (economic factors) (Pendall et al., 2012). Furthermore, non-standard forms of employment are also associated with housing precariousness, constraining the ability of the precariat, as a newly emerging social class, to address housing issues effectively (Bobek et al., 2021). Additionally, a phenomenon termed "double precariousness" can occur when individuals face the simultaneous risk of losing both employment and housing, such as employer-provided accommodation (Bayurgil, 2022). Those without stable housing or in difficult socioeconomic circumstances are at greater risk of homelessness, which adversely affects their physical health and mental well-being (Bezgrebelna et al., 2021). Importantly, housing precariousness is not solely a consequence of poverty; it also reflects the erosion of safety nets traditionally offered by families and the state (Dietrich-Ragon, 2015). Additionally, factors such as marital status, housing location, and layout can intensify housing precariousness, especially among women who have recently relocated (Seremet et al., 2024).

Challenges in accessing adequate housing may be closely tied to an individual's migration status, which limits housing options and exacerbates poor living conditions in environments that are unsafe and harmful to health (Barrera, 2023). This can lead to prolonged housing precariousness among migrants and the emergence of diverse survival strategies (Dotsey & Ambrosini, 2023). Contemporary household practices

and evolving notions of home contribute to a "culture of housing precariousness," often reflected in co-living arrangements (Bergan et al., 2021).

Housing precariousness is largely shaped and sustained by institutional frameworks, where the state plays a central role (Dotsey & Chiodelli, 2021). Poor policy choices can worsen housing conditions for vulnerable groups and alter societal perceptions of what constitutes a "good home" (Davey, 2020; Finnerty & O'Connell, 2017). For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, mandates to stay at home frequently clashed with realities of inaccessibility, exclusion, and instability in the housing sector (Sakali & Karyotis, 2022). In this context, scholars argue that policies addressing housing precariousness should be grounded in human rights rather than market logic or economic growth objectives (D'Adda, 2021).

Critics also note that current understandings of precarity primarily focused on unstable employment fail to adequately reflect housing-related vulnerabilities. There is a call to shift attention from employment insecurity to precarious living conditions (Banki, 2013). From this perspective, precarity can be examined not only at the level of individual housing units but also in relation to entire neighborhoods or territories (Bates et al., 2019), highlighting the value of a socio-spatial approach (Jaatsi & Kymäläinen, 2023).

Early studies on housing precarity often focused on the assessment of individual indicators, such as arrears in rent payments or the length of homeownership (Clair et al., 2016). However, contemporary scholars increasingly favor index-based methods for more comprehensive measurements (Litvintsev, 2024b). The index-based method can be considered a mixed approach, as it incorporates both absolute and relative dimensions of precarity. Absolute housing precarity is reflected in indicators that capture severe housing inadequacies, such as the lack of access to basic utilities, the presence of hazardous living conditions, or homelessness. Relative housing precarity is measured by indicators such as affordability, overcrowding, and tenure insecurity, assessed against societal norms and economic conditions. Index-based approaches that combine these elements offer a comprehensive view of housing precarity, capturing both structural shortcomings and socioeconomic inequalities.

This approach, however, does not preclude the analysis of sub-indices that cannot be reduced to a single composite measure. In 2021, a study was conducted across major cities in Europe and the United States, employing five distinct scales to measure housing precarity: housing affordability, security of tenure, housing satisfaction, neighborhood quality, and community cohesion (Debrunner et al., 2024). Clair et al. (2019) identify four categories of indicators to measure housing precariousness (Housing Precariousness Measure, HPM) in European countries: housing affordability (financial burden), housing security (risk of displacement), housing quality (access to utilities, overcrowding, etc.), and infrastructure availability (access to shops, public transport, and other amenities). Later, Waldron (2023) proposed a Housing Precarity Index (HPI) based on this model, which, instead of infrastructure indicators, incorporates measures of household financial capacity in Ireland.

Thus, housing precariousness encompasses a broad spectrum of insecurities within a single measure, capturing various dimensions of housing instability. Unlike housing deprivation, which primarily focuses on housing quality and specific

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deficiencies such as dampness, inadequate lighting, or overcrowding, precariousness is typically assessed along a continuum rather than through binary classifications (e.g., adequate/inadequate conditions). This approach provides a more nuanced representation of individuals' housing experiences within the complexities of contemporary housing markets (Clair et al., 2019).

In 2021, a team of researchers from the Urban Displacement Project introduced the Housing Precarity Risk Model (HPRM) in the United States. This model takes into account the risk of eviction for individual households, the vulnerability of entire communities to displacement, unemployment rates and their changes compared to the previous year, as well as racial group segregation (Chapple et al., 2021). In the same year, the Healthy Housing Centre of Research Excellence developed the Neighborhood Employment and Housing Precarity (NEHP) Index in Australia. This index, designed to assess housing precarity and employment conditions during the pandemic, measures factors such as the ability to work from home, proximity to others in the workplace, access to emergency funds, and the precariousness of housing conditions (Mansour et al., 2021).

The Australian Urban Observatory developed and tested specialized housing indicators between 2022 and 2023, one of which is the Precarity Index for Neighborhood and City Housing (PINCH). This index primarily incorporates economic indicators that influence household mobility and social exclusion, including household income, rental and housing maintenance costs, and housing affordability (Davern, 2023). In 2022, researchers from the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute introduced the Index of Precarious Housing (IPH), which encompasses both indicators of housing precariousness—forced displacement, housing unaffordability, and overcrowding—as well as indicators of territorial precariousness, including neighborhood crime and social hostility (Ong ViforJ et al., 2022). Residents' perceived safety in their neighborhood may matter more than actual security reflected in objective data, even though this aspect is difficult to measure using available statistics.

An analysis of international index-based approaches to housing precarity reveals three key indicator domains: affordability, security, and quality (Table 1). Variations in indicator use stem from reliance on national statistics with country-specific metrics and from differing research focuses, e.g., studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic (Litvintsev, 2024b).

**Table 1**Indicators of Housing Precarity in Various Indices

Index	Housing affordability	Housing security	Quality of housing	Other indicators
НРМ	Financial burden	Immediate risk of housing mobility, with at least one housing change in the past five years	Leaks/dampness/ rot, lack of space/ overcrowding, availability of a private bathtub/shower and toilet, comfortable temperature (warm/ cold)	Access to essential services

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Index	Housing affordability	Housing security	Quality of housing	Other indicators
HPI	Housing expenses and the presence of debt, difficulty making ends meet, inability to afford unforeseen expenses	Crime, violence, or vandalism in the residential area	Leaks or dampness; insufficient lighting; pollution or environmental issues in the neighborhood; availability of central heating	_
HPRM	Vulnerability of low-income households to displacement, unemployment rate and its change compared to the previous year	Risk of eviction	_	_
PINCH	Housing affordability and housing maintenance costs, household income	_	Type of housing	_
NEHP	Access to emergency funds	_		Remote work feasibility and workplace density
IPH	The 30/40 rule is applied to measure housing unaffordability	Threat of eviction, residency in publicly owned housing, local crime prevalence, and neighborhood- level social tensions	Overcrowding	_

The variety of housing precarity indices reflects not only differences in national data availability but also in how the concept is theoretically understood. In academic discourse, housing precarity is explored through lenses such as social inequality, economic vulnerability, and spatial segregation—each shaping distinct methodologies. For example, the HPRM index highlights eviction risk and community vulnerability, while the NEHP links precarious employment with unstable housing. The PINCH index focuses on affordability, and the IPH emphasizes territorial insecurity. These methodological differences aim not to fragment the concept but to capture its complexity and adapt to local contexts. Overall, we can distinguish three main research traditions: (a) an economic approach centered on affordability; (b) a socio-

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spatial perspective focused on exclusion and mobility; and (c) a comprehensive model combining housing and territorial risks.

Waldron (2023) rightly notes that the index he developed for Ireland likely does not capture all potential indicators of housing precarity. This assertion holds true for any composite indices developed in different national contexts. The omission or limitation of key socioeconomic indicators, the challenges inherent in measuring specific dimensions, and the insufficient coverage of diverse population groups may lead to an underestimation of the true extent of housing precarity (Münch & Siede, 2022). Thus, although existing indices provide valuable insights, their variations arise from differences in theoretical perspectives as well as limitations in available data, which means that measuring housing precarity requires a critical approach that carefully considers the specific context. For a detailed overview of international approaches and indices, see Litvintsev (2024a).

#### **Materials and Methods**

Today in Russia, most housing is privately owned—ranging from individual houses to apartments—reflecting the impact of large-scale privatization. This distinct feature of the Russian housing sector suggests that the main concerns about housing precarity differ from those in Western countries. While international methods often focus on risks like eviction or displacement, which are common in rental-heavy housing markets, Russia's primary issues revolve around housing affordability, quality, and security. These factors intensify overall housing challenges. Due to these unique features, a tailored approach is needed to measure housing precarity in Russia. Thus, the Regional Index of Housing Precarity (RIHP) is proposed, which captures both absolute and relative aspects of housing precarity. For 2022, standardized indicators of affordability, security, and quality were selected for Russia's constituent entities (Table 2).

It should be noted, however, that existing methods, including the RIHP, are designed for normal, peacetime conditions. They do not account for extraordinary situations like martial law or counterterrorism operations, which can cause forced evictions, housing destruction, and other severe impacts. To address such scenarios, complex mathematical or computer simulations would be required, which is a limitation that also applies to the RIHP.

Existing indices cannot be directly applied to Russia due to differences in data availability and measurement frameworks. Therefore, the study builds on Clair et al. (2019) by adapting both specific indicators and measurement methods to better reflect the Russian context. Many key indicators used abroad such as eviction risk or neighborhood segregation are often missing or inconsistently recorded in Russian statistics, making direct adaptation impractical. Furthermore, most international indices tend to focus on isolated aspects of housing precarity rather than offering a comprehensive assessment. In response, the proposed index captures housing precarity as a multidimensional phenomenon, encompassing affordability, security, and quality, while ensuring empirical applicability within Russia.

Thus, although the selection of housing precarity indicators for this study is primarily guided by international measurement practices (Table 1), it has been adapted to fit the specific data available from Russian governmental sources. These indicators have been modified to account for the particularities of the Russian housing sector. Data for this study were drawn from the Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat, n.d.), Central Bank of the Russian Federation (Pokazateli rynka zhilishchnogo, 2025), Prosecutor General's Office of the Russian Federation (Prestupnost' v regionakh, n.d.), and Ministry of the Russian Federation for Civil Defence, Emergencies and Elimination of Consequences of Natural Disasters (Itogi deiatel'nosti MChS Rossii, n.d.).

**Table 2**Indicators of Housing Precarity in RIHP

Domain	Indicator
	Share of household expenditure on housing services, water, electricity, gas and other fuels (Rosstat, n.d.)
	Household debt for housing, major repairs, and utilities, measured as the difference between accruals and actual payments per 10,000 people (Rosstat, n.d.)
Housing affordability	Debt on housing loans granted to resident individuals per 10,000 people (Pokazateli rynka zhilishchnogo, 2025)
,	Number of citizens receiving social housing and utility payment support per 10,000 people (Rosstat, n.d.)
	Number of families receiving cash subsidies for housing and utilities in the reporting period per 10,000 people (Rosstat, n.d.)
	Unemployment rate of population aged 15 years and over (Rosstat, n.d.)
	Number of registered crimes, per 10,000 permanent population on average per year (Prestupnost' v regionakh, n.d.)
Housing security	Number of flooded residential buildings per 1,000 square meters of living space (Itogi deiatel'nosti MChS Rossii, n.d.)
	Number of fires in the residential sector (per 1,000 square meters of living space) (Itogi deiatel'nosti MChS Rossii, n.d.)
	Proportion of residential premises equipped with water, sewerage, heating, hot water, gas, or electric stoves (Rosstat, n.d.)
Overlite of the society	Total area of residential premises per inhabitant on average (Rosstat, n.d.)
Quality of housing	Percentage of residential premises with over 65% wear and tear per 1,000 square meters of total area of residential premises) (Rosstat, n.d.)
	Share of families provided with housing out of those registered as eligible (Rosstat, n.d.)

Housing affordability is operationalized through six key indicators. First, the share of household expenditures on housing services, water, electricity, gas, and other fuels is a critical indicator of housing precarity, reflecting the financial burden on households.

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A high proportion of these costs can increase the risk of arrears and housing loss for renters, while for homeowners, it may constrain their ability to repay mortgages and maintain housing conditions. This financial strain can ultimately contribute to housing deterioration and broader social instability.

Second, household debt for housing, major repairs, and utilities serves as an indicator of housing precarity by reflecting financial strain and the ability to meet recurring obligations. While subject to seasonal fluctuations, a high level of arrears signals financial difficulties for both homeowners and renters, increasing institutional pressures through legal enforcement and potential service restrictions. This highlights the precarious housing situation of households unable to make timely utility payments.

Third, household mortgage debt is a key indicator of housing precarity, reflecting financial obligations primarily tied to home loans. This metric captures regional disparities in debt burdens and highlights financial instability that may threaten both homeowners and renters. When considered alongside utility arrears, it provides a more comprehensive assessment of household financial resilience and housing-related risks.

Fourth, the number of citizens receiving social housing and utility payment support reflects state efforts to reduce housing precarity by aiding vulnerable populations. While high support levels show active government intervention, they may also reveal underlying structural problems in the regional housing system.

Fifth, the number of families receiving monetary subsidies for housing and utility payments indicates state support for those facing financial difficulties. While a high number reflects efforts to ease housing costs, it may also highlight broader social issues needing policy attention.

Finally, the unemployment rate is a key indicator of housing precarity, reflecting the economic stability of households. High unemployment reduces renters' ability to pay rent and increases the risk of housing loss, while for homeowners, it can lead to difficulties in meeting mortgage and housing expenses. In regions with high unemployment, housing quality may deteriorate due to limited financial resources for maintenance, exacerbating social instability.

Housing security can be understood through three primary indicators. First, the number of registered crimes is an important indicator of housing precarity, as it directly impacts the level of instability within a region. An increase in crime rates creates an atmosphere of uncertainty, prompting residents to relocate within or outside the region, particularly in border areas. High crime rates can also reduce property values and deter investment in the housing sector, exacerbating issues of housing accessibility and stability. Additionally, the constant stress and anxiety associated with high crime rates can negatively affect residents' mental well-being and their sense of security in their homes.

Second, the number of flooded residential buildings is a significant indicator of housing precarity, reflecting the ongoing issue of floods in certain regions. Frequent flooding causes substantial damage to residential structures, reducing housing quality and, in some cases, rendering homes uninhabitable, which, in turn, creates a risk of forced relocation and worsens living conditions. Additionally, the need for repairs and rebuilding increases financial burdens on households, further exacerbating economic instability.

Third, the number of fires in residential areas is a key indicator of housing precarity, as fires threaten residents' safety and cause property damage. High fire risk worsens housing insecurity and living conditions, increasing financial hardship for affected households.

The quality of housing encompasses four key indicators. First, the share of residential space equipped with plumbing, sewage, heating, hot water supply, gas, or electric stoves is a significant indicator of housing precarity. Access to modern engineering systems and essential utilities reduces housing insecurity and improves living conditions, especially in urban areas. These amenities enhance safety, comfort, and residents' overall well-being.

Second, the average residential space per person is a considerable indicator of housing precarity and overcrowding. A higher value indicates fewer households in need of better living conditions, lowering housing instability risk. This measure reflects both physical housing quality and social factors like comfort and well-being. Even small changes can highlight regional issues in housing accessibility, quality, and economic conditions.

Third, the percentage of residential buildings with more than 65% wear and tear is an essential indicator of housing precarity. Aging housing stock raises the share of unsafe homes, threatening residents' health and safety. While deteriorated buildings may be renovated, such processes often require resident relocation, increasing housing insecurity in the region.

The fourth key indicator of housing precarity is the share of families provided with housing out of those registered as eligible. This metric shows how housing improvements reduce insecurity and benefit individual households. It reflects the effectiveness of housing programs and access for vulnerable groups, supporting regional social stability and well-being.

Certain indicators were grouped according to their thematic relevance: incidents in the residential sector (e.g., floods and fires), debt (housing and communal services, mortgage loans), and state support including social assistance and subsidies for housing and utility payments. To address the issue of multicollinearity, a correlation matrix was constructed, revealing no strong relationships between variables (correlation coefficients did not exceed 0.7). To standardize scales, all absolute indicator values were recalculated per 10,000 residents of the region or per 10,000 square meters of living space, as presented in Table 2. For a detailed discussion of these indicators and the methodology, see (Litvintsev, 2025).

The index was constructed using min–max normalization to derive an arithmetic mean on a scale from 0 = No housing precarity to 1 = Maximum housing precarity. For indicators that contribute to housing precarity, a standard normalization formula was applied, while for those mitigating precarity, an inverse formula was used. To classify Russian regions, cluster analysis was conducted using the k-means method. Pearson correlation analysis was employed to examine relationships between housing precarity and other variables, with statistical significance assessed using Student's t-test. Regression analysis was applied to evaluate the impact of one variable (RIHP) on another (migration, quality of life).

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For the purposes of correlation analysis, the study employs data from a monitoring survey on housing conditions in Russia, conducted by the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM) in 2022 (Svoia krysha nad golovoi, 2023). The survey used a stratified random sampling method, drawing from a comprehensive database of mobile phone numbers registered in the Russian Federation. A total of 1,600 respondents aged 18 and older participated in telephone interviews. The dataset was weighted according to key socio-demographic parameters to ensure representativeness. The sampling error does not exceed 2.5% at a 95% confidence level.

Additionally, the analysis utilized data from the Comprehensive Monitoring of Living Conditions in Russia, conducted by the Federal State Statistics Service in 2022 (Rosstat, 2022). This large-scale survey employed a stratified random sampling method to assess living conditions across all Russian regions, encompassing a representative sample of 60,000 households. The household selection process adhered to principles of randomization in each region to ensure statistical validity. Data collection was carried out through face-to-face interviews with respondents at their place of residence.

Furthermore, the analysis incorporated data on regional quality of life assessments in Russia, as reported by RIA Rating (part of the Rossiya Segodnya International Media Group) in 2022 (Reiting regionov, 2023). This 1-to-100 ranking is based on a comprehensive evaluation of 67 indicators across 11 categories, reflecting living conditions and the socio-economic environment in Russia's regions.

## **Results**

Until October 2022, Russia consisted of 85 constituent entities. As a result of the cluster analysis, four groups of regions with low, moderate, medium, and high housing precarity were identified (Table 3). The best values of the RIHP are demonstrated by Kursk (0.303) and Belgorod (0.319) Oblasts, as well as the federal cities of St. Petersburg (0.349) and Moscow (0.36). The regions with the worst values are the Republic of Tuva (0.711), the Republic of Altai (0.69) and Trans-Baikal Territory (0.678). The difference between the best and worst RIHP score is 0.408. Most Russian regions exhibit moderate levels of housing precarity (Litvintsev, 2025). This study did not calculate regional sub-indices for affordability, security, and quality, which could be a focus for future research.

**Table 3**Results of Custering of Russian Regions by RIHP

Cluster		Number of cases	Regions
Low Precarity	0.378	20	Kursk Oblast, Belgorod Oblast, Saint Petersburg, Moscow, Penza Oblast, Republic of Tatarstan, Lipetsk Oblast, Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, Republic of North Ossetia– Alania, Kostroma Oblast, Ryazan Oblast, Republic of Bashkortostan, Bryansk Oblast, Stavropol Krai, Moscow Oblast, Ulyanovsk Oblast, Kaluga Oblast, Kaliningrad Oblast, Voronezh Oblast, Tambov Oblast

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Cluster	Cluster center	Number of cases	Regions
Moderate Precarity	0.437	33	Republic of Mari El, Republic of Adygea, Vladimir Oblast, Chuvash Republic, Oryol Oblast, Samara Oblast, Orenburg Oblast, Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug—Yugra, Rostov Oblast, Saratov Oblast, Tver Oblast, Volgograd Oblast, Nizhny Novgorod Oblast, Astrakhan Oblast, Chelyabinsk Oblast, Sverdlovsk Oblast, Krasnodar Krai, Kabardino-Balkarian Republic, Republic of Mordovia, Tula Oblast, Republic of Kalmykia, Sevastopol, Yaroslavl Oblast, Vologda Oblast, Republic of Khakassia, Ivanovo Oblast, Murmansk Oblast, Sakhalin Oblast, Karachay-Cherkess Republic, Kemerovo Oblast, Kamchatka Krai, Chechen Republic, Kirov Oblast
Average Precarity	0.514	26	Udmurt Republic, Tyumen Oblast, Arkhangelsk Oblast, Omsk Oblast, Republic of Dagestan, Leningrad Oblast, Smolensk Oblast, Khabarovsk Krai, Irkutsk Oblast, Novosibirsk Oblast, Pskov Oblast, Republic of Ingushetia, Krasnoyarsk Krai, Perm Krai, Tomsk Oblast, Chukotka Autonomous Okrug, Republic of Crimea, Altai Krai, Novgorod Oblast, Nenets Autonomous Okrug, Primorsky Krai, Amur Oblast, Komi Republic, Republic of Karelia, Kurgan Oblast, Magadan Oblast
High Precarity	0.654	6	Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), Jewish Autonomous Oblast, Republic of Buryatia, Zabaykalsky Krai, Altai Republic, Tuva Republic

Correlational analysis revealed a significant positive relationship (r = .55; p < .001) between housing precarity and households' intentions to improve their housing conditions, based on the Comprehensive Monitoring of Living Conditions at the regional level. In other words, the higher the level of housing precarity, the stronger people's intention to improve their living conditions.

At the federal district level, a significant correlation was also found between housing precarity and migration growth (Rosstat, n.d.), as well as the desire to improve housing conditions (Svoia krysha nad golovoi, 2023).

Higher levels of housing precarity are associated with stronger migration outflows, as shown by the negative correlation between the RIHP and net migration (r = -.72; p < .05), and the positive correlation with intentions to improve housing conditions (r = .75; p < .05). This relationship is even stronger when migration growth per 10,000 residents is considered (r = -.90; p < .01). Although a high degree of housing precarity also correlates with lower satisfaction with housing (r = -.49), this finding is not statistically significant (p = .15).

The Central Federal District shows the most favorable RIHP score (0.24), along with a net migration gain of 140,131 people in 2022 (Table 4). At the opposite end, the

Far Eastern Federal District had the highest housing precarity (RIHP = 0.67) and a net loss of 37,513 people. Other districts fall in between: Volga (RIHP = 0.33), Northwestern (0.36), Ural and Southern (0.4), Siberian (0.56), and North Caucasian (0.5). Notably, the Volga Federal District shows a net migration loss of 31,620 despite its relatively low RIHP, suggesting the need for further analysis. Polynomial regression results confirm a strong relationship between housing precarity and spatial mobility ( $R^2 = .73$ ).

**Table 4**RIHP Values and Migration in the Federal Districts of Russia

Federal districts	RIHP value	Net migration increase/ decrease
Central Federal District	0.24	140,131
Volga Federal District	0.33	-31,620
Northwestern Federal District	0.36	30,066
Ural Federal District	0.40	1,563
Southern Federal District	0.40	11,367
Siberian Federal District	0.56	-33,352
North Caucasian Federal District	0.50	-18,725
Far Eastern Federal District	0.67	-37,513

Ong ViforJ et al. (2022) explored the relationship between housing precarity and population well-being in Australia, noting a decline in the latter due to forced relocations, housing inaccessibility, and related factors. To assess the link between housing precarity and quality of life in Russia, a correlational analysis was conducted, revealing a significant negative correlation between the RIHP and the Quality of Life Index for 2022, according to RIA Rating (r = -.68; p < .01). The analysis of the linear regression model suggests that in nearly half of the cases, variations in regional quality of life in Russia may be associated with housing precarization ( $R^2 = .47$ ). The research findings and their limitations are discussed in more detail in (Litvintsev, 2025).

#### Discussion

Housing precarity is closely tied to unstable employment and shaped by both housing conditions (e.g., building age, access to utilities) and broader institutional and sectoral issues. Market-driven transformations, economic crises, and state policies that enable eviction and displacement have all fueled its rise. Both rental and owner-occupied housing can be precarious, though ownership tends to offer more stability. In Europe, housing precarity affects countries regardless of their development level and disproportionately impacts vulnerable groups, such as migrants. Its uneven spatial distribution, seen in countries like the U.S. and Australia, underscores the importance of addressing this problem on the regional level, with more attention being paid to housing mobility.

The RIHP, as an integral assessment of the housing situation, differs from other approaches by offering a comprehensive measurement not only of housing characteristics (e.g., housing quality) but also of related indicators (housing affordability and security), which collectively influence spatial mobility, housing satisfaction, and intentions to improve housing conditions. The results of RIHP measurements across Russian regions revealed a significant difference, with Kursk Oblast showing the best indicator and the Republic of Tuva demonstrating the worst. Most regions of Russia exhibit moderate to average levels of housing precarity, and the intention to improve housing conditions is more prevalent in areas with higher levels of housing precarity.

The results of cluster analysis reveal significant disparities in the accessibility, security, and quality of housing, as measured by the RIHP, with a clear segmentation into groups with low, moderate, medium, and high levels of precarity. Leading regions exhibit superior RIHP outcomes, while residents of lagging regions face more acute housing challenges. The prevalence of moderate and medium housing precarity in most regions underscores the need for the development of targeted institutional measures for state support. The substantial differences in indicators call for further analysis of specific aspects of housing precarity to inform recommendations for improving housing conditions nationwide.

Housing precarity is a key factor affecting regional quality of life and it has direct and indirect effects on migration patterns. While economic conditions such as employment and wages are major drivers of mobility, the availability of adequate, secure housing is also crucial. For instance, the Far Eastern Federal District, which showed high housing precarity, experienced a net migration loss in 2022, whereas the Central Federal District—with the lowest precarity—saw a significant influx.

Although the RIHP offers useful insights, its reliance on aggregated regional data may obscure local variation, which reflects ongoing debates around applying a relatively new conceptual framework and adapting international measurement approaches to the Russian context. Still, the index can be refined by incorporating alternative data sources, comparing results, or combining methods to improve precision. Despite limitations, such as the lack of data on infrastructure access and the inability to distinguish between urban and rural areas, the RIHP draws on global best practices and reflects the distinct features of Russia's housing sector. As such, it provides a valuable foundation for further research and evidence-based housing policy development.

#### Conclusion

This study highlights the multidimensional nature of housing precarity, shaped by both structural and institutional factors. The RIHP provides a comprehensive measurement approach that reflects regional disparities in housing accessibility, security, and quality. The findings underscore the need for targeted policy interventions, particularly in regions with high housing precarity, where precarious living conditions intersect with migration trends and economic challenges. Given the pronounced regional

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disparities, future housing policies should adopt differentiated approaches to account for specific territorial contexts.

While the RIHP has some methodological constraints, it remains a valuable tool for assessing housing precarity and informing policy decisions in Russia. By integrating an interdisciplinary economic-sociological framework, this research contributes to a broader understanding of housing-related vulnerabilities as a dimension of socioeconomic inequality. Future studies should refine this approach by incorporating additional indicators, such as infrastructure accessibility and urban-rural differences, to enhance the accuracy of housing precarity assessments. Further comparative analyses with international indices may also strengthen methodological approaches and deepen insights into the mechanisms through which housing precarity shapes social inclusion and exclusion in different socioeconomic contexts.

By addressing the lack of systematic regional comparisons in Russia, this study advances the discourse on housing precarity and provides an empirical foundation for evidence-based housing policy. The results highlight the structural determinants of precarious housing conditions and their broader implications for social stability, reinforcing the need for continued interdisciplinary research in this field.

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## **ARTICLE**

# Exploratory Sequential Analysis on the Factors Affecting the Leadership of Women in Local Governments

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Inclusive governance fosters opportunities for women to contribute to societal advancement by serving in government roles. This paper explores the factors influencing women's leadership within the context of local government. To achieve this objective, an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design was employed, with a particular focus on Exploratory Factor Analysis. Data were collected from women employees in second-level, permanent positions among the local government units in the Province of Davao del Norte, Philippines. The findings revealed five key factors influencing women's leadership: empowering leadership, leadership challenges, leadership motivation, leadership development support, and effective leadership communication. These factors offer valuable insights into how to advance women's leadership, thereby promoting an inclusive environment and enhancing public service delivery. By understanding and addressing these factors, policymakers and local government authorities can create more supportive and empowering conditions for women leaders, eventually leading to more effective and equitable governance.

#### **KEYWORDS**

inclusive governance, gender and development, women empowerment, local government, leadership, mixed-methods analysis

### Introduction

Inclusive governance transforms societies, fostering responsiveness, equity, and resilience. Embracing inclusivity enables governments to tackle modern challenges effectively, paving the way for a fairer and more inclusive future for all citizens (Pouw & De Bruijne, 2015). However, women are often marginalized and are left out of the design and implementation of development decision systems (Gascon & McIntyre-Mills, 2018). In 2020, women accounted for just 21% of government ministers worldwide, and they were frequently given jobs in softer domains, such as health, social and family matters, as opposed to commanding roles in the economy or political power (Sabani & Romaniuk, 2023). This is due to the fact that in many cultures, traditional views about women's roles as caregivers and homemakers continue, limiting their opportunities to participate in development administration (Dugarova, 2018).

Inclusive governance ensures representation of all the people keeping in mind the development needs of different segments of society. The participation of women in governance helps to ensure their decision-making processes because they play a specific role. A more inclusive administration will more clearly reflect the demographic characteristics of society and be able to pull policy levers for the widest possible range of societal needs (Norris, 2011). Research also suggests that women make gender-specific policy choices, perhaps that underrepresented in male-dominated legislatures, for example, healthcare, education, and welfare to benefit families (Young, 2016).

The framework of this paper is based upon the Capability Approach Theory of Sen (1999). This theory highlights the need for people to be able to enhance their potential, by examining their existing capabilities—the real freedoms or opportunities to do and be what they value. In more specific cases of women, it is not as such a lack of resources enhancing their potentials but their un-ability to convert such resources into real opportunities. This is supported by the Intersectionality Theory of Crenshew (1989). This theory suggests that individual-level experience is the product of simultaneous intersections of multiple social identities and macro social-structural systems of privilege and oppression. This intersectionality affects the opportunities, challenges, and leadership experiences which people have.

Despite global advancements in promoting gender equality, women remain underrepresented in leadership roles, particularly in local governance. This underrepresentation limits the inclusivity and effectiveness of decision-making processes, as diverse perspectives are essential for addressing complex societal challenges (Sabani & Romaniuk, 2023). Research shows that women leaders often prioritize policies related to social welfare, education, and health, addressing critical gaps that male-dominated leadership structures may overlook (Young, 2016). However, barriers such as gender stereotypes, cultural biases, and systemic inequalities persist, creating significant obstacles for women seeking leadership

roles in local governments (Ridgeway, 2011). These barriers highlight the urgent need for research that examines the factors influencing women's leadership and identifies actionable strategies to support their development.

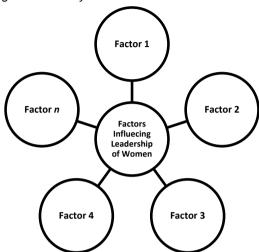
While existing studies on women's leadership have focused on corporate or national political settings, there is a noticeable gap in understanding the unique challenges faced by women in local governance (Ely & Rhode, 2010). Local governments are critical arenas for policymaking that directly affects communities; however, they often lack mechanisms to support women leaders. Programs aimed at promoting gender equality in leadership have largely focused on high-level political roles, neglecting the importance of fostering inclusivity at the local level (Dugarova, 2018). Furthermore, the intersectionality of social identities, such as gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity, remains underexplored in the context of women's leadership in local governance (Crenshaw, 1989). By addressing these gaps, the present study seeks to contribute to the development of inclusive governance structures that empower women leaders and enhance the overall effectiveness of local government operations.

Moreover, Alqahtani (2020) highlights the lack of gender-specific leadership strategies, particularly in local governance, as a persistent issue, emphasizing that women's unique leadership challenges are often overlooked in broader frameworks. Ely and Rhode (2010) critique the narrow focus of prior studies, which frequently examine women's leadership in corporate settings, leaving local governance underexplored. Similarly, Ridgeway (2011) underscores how gender stereotypes continue to marginalize women in leadership roles, yet little attention is given to how these dynamics manifest in local government contexts. Finally, Pick (2024) points out the absence of intersectional analysis in leadership studies, leaving unanswered questions about how overlapping identities, such as gender and socioeconomic status, shape women's leadership in local governance.

This synthesis of literature demonstrates the urgent need to investigate leadership factors specific to women in local government. Existing studies provide a foundation but fail to address the intersection of cultural, organizational, and personal barriers that uniquely affect women in these roles. By situating the research within these gaps, the study at hand contributes novel insights, particularly through its application of the Capability Approach Theory (Sen, 1999) and Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1989), bridging existing theoretical and empirical deficiencies.

Figure 1 presents the paper's conceptual framework, which encompasses multiple observed factors that describe the latent variable of women's leadership. This framework illustrates that these variables have causal components or dimensions, currently represented as Factor 1, Factor 2, Factor 3, and so forth. These observed latent variables are provisional, as further investigation will refine and generate specific dimensions, tagging them according to thematic commonalities identified through deeper analysis.

Figure 1
Conceptual Paradigm of the Study



Note. Source: developed by the authors.

This paper explores the factors influencing the leadership of women in local governments, aiming to provide a deeper understanding of the unique challenges and motivators they encounter. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions: What are the common responses of women regarding the factors that affect their leadership? What factor structure can be developed based on these responses? By addressing these questions, the study aims to identify key elements that shape women's leadership experiences and inform strategies to support and enhance their roles in local governance.

The factor structure developed in this paper will provide significant input to higher authorities involved in the operations of local government on how to advance the leadership of women, thereby promoting a culture of inclusivity. Additionally, it will offer valuable insights to women leaders on how to effectively address and overcome the challenges and issues they encounter within their organizations. By highlighting these factors, the study aims to foster an environment where women's leadership can thrive, contributing to more equitable and dynamic local governance.

## Methodology

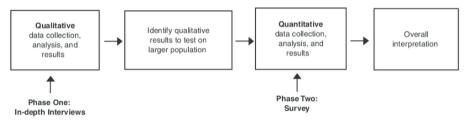
## Research Design

This scientific inquiry explored the factors influencing the leadership of women in local governments. This study employed a mixed-methods design that utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods. This is to determine the strictures for the determination of the extent and depth comprehension and validation of the phenomena (Bazeley, 2024). Specifically, the exploratory sequential mixed-methods

design wherein qualitative data is gathered and analyzed primarily as basis for the quantitative phase. With this, the researchers utilized the findings of the qualitative phase to design the quantitative phase by determining variables and developing an instrument (Creswell & Creswell 2017).

The process of the study, depicted in Figure 2, illustrates the implementation of an exploratory sequential mixed-methods approach as adopted from Hesse-Biber (2010). This methodology allowed for an initial qualitative exploration, which informed and shaped subsequent quantitative analysis, facilitating the development of a robust and comprehensive framework detailing the factors affecting women's leadership. Through this iterative process, the study was able to capture nuanced insights and validate them empirically, ensuring a thorough understanding of the complex dynamics at play in women's leadership within local governance contexts.

Figure 2
Exploratory Sequential Mixed-Methods Design



Note. Source: developed by the authors.

Firstly, the study employed qualitative methods to gather rich insights into the experiences and perspectives of women in leadership roles within local governments. This qualitative phase explored nuanced aspects of leadership, uncovering motivations, challenges, and contributing factors. Subsequently, quantitative data collection and analysis were conducted to systematically examine patterns and associations within the dataset. This phase involved the application of statistical techniques, such as factor analysis, to identify underlying factors and structures that define the leadership of women. Through this mixed-methods approach, the study was able to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of women's leadership in local governance.

Mixing of the qualitative and quantitative findings resulted, enabling a holistic understanding of leadership of women. Through this iterative process, the framework emerged, synthesizing qualitative narratives with quantitative evidences to provide a comprehensive depiction of the phenomenon (Hesse-Biber, 2010). Furthermore, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was employed, a multivariate statistical technique aimed at identifying the underlying constructs, also known as factors, latent variables, synthetic variables, internal attributes, or dimensions, which adequately explain the observed covariation among a set of measured variables (Watkins, 2018). Through this process, the determination of

the communal elements that elucidate the structure and order of the assessed variables is achieved.

## Participants and Sampling Method

The participants of this study were women holding at least "second level positions" in the local governments of Davao del Norte Province, Philippines. According to the Civil Service Policy in the Philippines, a "second level position" in the government refers to roles that typically require professional, technical, and scientific skills (Providing for the Organization, 1975). These positions are middle- to upper-level management roles demanding a higher level of expertise and involving supervisory responsibilities. For this study, five participants were purposively selected and interviewed through in-depth interviews (IDI). While the sample size may appear small, Hennink et al. (2017) argue that qualitative research within homogenous groups often requires fewer participants to reach data saturation due to shared experiences and perspectives. To ensure rigor, clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were established: participants must have held their positions for at least two years, ensuring adequate experience, and must be permanent (i.e., plantilla) employees, highlighting job stability and relevance to the study's focus. This aligns with Patton's (2014) emphasis on purposeful sampling to select participants with rich and relevant insights.

To ensure that the interview informants were suitably qualified to provide insightful responses, the study applied the following inclusion criteria: participants must have served in their respective positions for a minimum of two years, ensuring they had sufficient experience and familiarity with their roles. Additionally, they were required to hold plantilla permanent positions, which are regular, indicating job stability and a deeper engagement with their responsibilities. Lastly, participants needed to be biologically female to align with the study's focus on women's leadership experiences in local government.

In the quantitative phase of this study, the instrument was developed based on the thematic findings derived from the qualitative inquiry. These identified themes were translated into statements to construct the survey questionnaire. During the survey, 193 samples were collected, which is confirmed by the data of Hair et al. (2010). In addition, MacCallum et al. (1999) recommend a minimum of 100–200 participants for EFA, making 193 participants a reasonable number. These samples were different from the participants of the qualitative phase (interview) and were randomly selected from various local government units across the Province of Davao del Norte. Random sampling ensures that each local government unit has an equal chance of being represented in the study, helping to reduce bias and increase the generalizability of the findings (Emerson, 2015).

To ensure the reliability of the instrument used for EFA, a pilot test was conducted among selected municipal governments in Davao de Oro. Thirty women leaders participated in the pilot testing, which revealed a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .855, surpassing the required threshold of .70 for reliability. This indicates that the survey instrument effectively measured the study's variables. Additionally, the study employed a five-point Likert attitudinal scale, allowing respondents to express their

agreement or disagreement with given statements, as suggested by Jebb et al. (2021), thereby facilitating nuanced responses and comprehensive data collection.

The study employed data reduction via EFA to determine the pertinent domain structures characterizing the factors of leadership of women. The dimensionality of the constructs was determined using the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) method, selecting an eigenvalue threshold of at least 1.0. Coefficients exceeding +0.50 were considered significant upon factor rotation utilizing Promax rotation by Corner (2009). This method assists in identifying common factors elucidating the order and structure among measured variables (Brown, 2015).

The integration of qualitative and quantitative methods was guided by principles of methodological triangulation, which enhances validity through multiple data sources and analytical approaches (Fetters et al., 2013). The qualitative data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework, allowing for systematic identification of 38 core ideas that informed the quantitative phase. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was then employed, consistent with Watkins' (2018) recommendation for using factor analysis to validate and structure thematic insights. By connecting qualitative themes with quantitative constructs, this design ensures coherence and alignment with best practices in mixed-methods research. The methodological rigor demonstrated in this study strengthens its capacity to address the research problem comprehensively.

#### Results

#### Qualitative Findings

The study utilized a developed and validated interview guide questionnaire to conduct in-depth interviews with the five women leaders during the initial phase. Additionally, data gathered from this phase were transcribed and evaluated to identify potential topics for the survey questions to be developed in the quantitative phase. These themes were meticulously developed to align with the requirements of the survey instrument, resulting in the generation of 38 core ideas, as summarized in Table 1. This iterative process ensured that the survey questions effectively captured the breadth and depth of insights gathered during the qualitative phase, facilitating a comprehensive exploration of the factors influencing women's leadership in the local government context.

The qualitative phase of this study employed thematic analysis to derive core ideas, which later informed the development of the quantitative scale. Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework guided the process, ensuring a systematic and transparent identification of patterns within the data. This approach is well-suited for exploratory mixed-methods research as it allows the qualitative insights to directly inform subsequent quantitative phases (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Transcriptions of the in-depth interviews were iteratively coded, and 38 core ideas were identified. These ideas were then grouped into thematic categories, which were used to construct items for the quantitative instrument, reflecting the nuances and lived experiences of the participants.

**Table 1**Core Ideas Derived From the Interview Responses

ore i	deas Derived From the Interview Responses
No.	Core Ideas
1	Women leaders should prioritize understanding and considering the well-being of their colleagues
2	Traits like kindness, attentiveness, and nurturing can be effective assets in female leadership
3	Women leaders need to be decisive, make informed choices, and inspire confidence through their actions
4	Women face challenges in male-dominated workplaces: Bias against female leadership exists, leading to women being doubted or overlooked
5	Authenticity and good listening are important: Leaders, especially women, should be genuine, approachable, and actively listen to their team's ideas
6	Effective leaders foster a collaborative environment, value input from others, and encourage their team members' potential
7	There's a perception that women lack the skills or experience to handle leadership roles, leading to skepticism about their abilities
8	Challenges can be opportunities for growth, doubts can motivate women leaders to persevere and prove their capabilities
9	Leadership effectiveness goes beyond gender, effective leadership depends on management style and ability, not gender
10	Internal struggles like low self-esteem or fear of public speaking can hold women back from leadership opportunities
11	Non-gender-related challenges also exist in leadership, leaders, regardless of gender, face challenges like implementing changes, navigating office politics, and communication issues
12	Trust and encouragement from colleagues and family are strong motivators for women leaders
13	The desire to learn, grow, and contribute to a greater vision motivates some women leaders
14	Earning trust and fostering open communication is a motivator that can lead to effective leadership of women
15	Age, family needs, and the potential impact of decisions can influence how women leaders approach their roles
16	Personal experiences, a desire to help others, and even external circumstances can all push women into leadership roles
17	Gender and Development programs provide opportunities. These programs equip women with skills and knowledge to be effective leaders
18	Empowerment from superiors fosters confidence. Leaders who are trusted and given autonomy in their roles feel empowered and motivated
19	When colleagues don't fully understand or support an initiative, it can be challenging for a leader to implement it
20	Leaders who openly communicate with superiors can work through roadblocks and find solutions
21	Local government units with a high number of female leaders and supportive policies create an environment where women can thrive
22	Programs that provide learning and development opportunities empower women to become more effective leaders

**Table 1 Continued** 

No.	Core Ideas
NO.	Core ideas
23	Mentorship provides opportunities for both mentors and mentees to learn and grow from each other's experiences
24	Understanding one's role and responsibilities, along with a strong work ethic, are crucial ingredients for success in government work
25	Supportive mentors who believe in an individual's potential can play a significant role in their growth and development
26	Early work experiences can be a valuable training ground, shaping a person's work ethic, leadership style, and understanding of office dynamics
27	Regardless of gender, a shared vision and understanding of each other's roles are essential for effective collaboration
28	Some women leaders feel a sense of camaraderie and easier communication with other women due to shared experiences or communication styles
29	Gender stereotypes can create hesitancy, particularly for men working with women leaders, hindering open communication and feedback
30	Strong leaders can collaborate effectively with anyone, regardless of gender, by focusing on open communication and mutual respect
31	Frequent change in administration can lead to changes in priorities, making it difficult to implement long-term programs for women's development
32	Women leaders may face challenges if a new administration's focus areas do not align with women's programs, requiring them to advocate for continued support
33	Some women leaders may find it difficult to have their ideas heard or implemented, especially if they encounter resistance or a lack of openness to change from colleagues
34	Budget constraints can be a barrier for women leaders who want to implement new programs or systems to improve efficiency
35	Women leaders can counter doubts about their abilities by exceeding expectations and demonstrating strong performance
36	Persistence and a commitment to equal opportunity can empower women leaders to break down barriers in traditionally male-dominated roles
37	Active listening and clear communication are essential for building trust and leading effectively
38	Women leaders should value their unique perspectives and have confidence in their ability to contribute positively to their local government

The process of translating qualitative findings into a quantitative scale aligns with the recommendations of DeCuir-Gunby et al. (2011), who emphasize the importance of maintaining fidelity to the original qualitative themes when operationalizing them into measurable constructs. To ensure this, a structured process of theme refinement was employed. First, key themes were reviewed by an expert panel to validate their relevance and clarity, consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2022) approach to collaborative thematic refinement. Next, these validated themes were transformed into survey items using a Likert-scale format, guided by principles outlined by Clark and Watson (2016) for scale development. This iterative process ensured that the core ideas retained their contextual meaning while becoming accessible for statistical analysis.

## **Quantitative Findings**

In order to explore the factors affecting women's leadership in local government context, a series of assessments including the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test, Bartlett's test, and Principal Component Analysis (PCA) were conducted. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Index of Sampling Adequacy, employed to gauge the sample's adequacy, ranges from 0 to 1, with a suggested minimum threshold of 0.6 for satisfactory factor analysis continuation; values closer to 1 indicate better adequacy. The results of this criterion are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Test for Measure of Sample Adequacy (MSA)

Item	MSA	Item	MSA
Overall MSA	0.906	Overall MSA	0.906
1	0.966	20	0.943
2	0.904	21	0.922
3	0.922	22	0.913
4	0.821	23	0.921
5	0.876	24	0.866
6	0.898	25	0.954
7	0.901	26	0.923
8	0.888	27	0.932
9	0.919	28	0.919
10	0.911	29	0.943
11	0.976	30	0.832
12	0.932	31	0.932
13	0.943	32	0.916
14	0.903	33	0.821
15	0.912	34	0.934
16	0.843	35	0.936
17	0.911	36	0.877
18	0.856	37	0.893
19	0.904	38	0.898

According to the results presented in Table 2, the overall test outcome for this criterion is 0.906. This figure indicates that the sample size surpasses the recommended threshold of 0.6, as advocated by Nkansah (2018), signifying adequacy and excellence. This overarching index serves to affirm that the dataset is conducive to employing EFA, suggesting the potential to condense the data into smaller sets of underlying causal dimensions. Consequently, these findings validate the suitability of

the dataset for factor analysis, indicating its capacity to effectively explore and identify underlying factors or dimensions within the dataset.

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity stands as a pivotal statistical measure within EFA, gauging the suitability of conducting factor analysis on a dataset. Its primary function lies in assessing whether the correlations between variables are substantial enough to warrant the application of EFA. A significant outcome in Bartlett's test signals notable correlations among variables, affirming the dataset's appropriateness for factor analysis. Therefore, Bartlett's test plays a critical role in guaranteeing the validity and reliability of the ensuing factor analysis outcomes. The specific result for this test is provided in Table 3.

 Table 3

 Bartlett's Test of Sphericity on the Variables for Women Leadership

χ²	df	p
2493.622	527.000	< .001

The test results revealed a substantial Chi-square value of 2493.622 ( $\chi^2$ ) with 527.000 degrees of freedom (df) and a p-value of < .001 (Table 3), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This outcome indicates that the dataset is indeed suitable for factor analysis. As per Hair et al. (2010), Bartlett's test of sphericity necessitates a significance value below .05 to reject the null hypothesis, further confirming the appropriateness of the data for factor analysis.

The Latent Roots Criterion holds significant importance in EFA, offering valuable insights into the significance of the results. It evaluates the overall value of the variances explained, with higher explained variances indicating more meaningful outcomes. This assessment is achieved by analyzing the eigenvalues of the factors and the variance attributed to each individual dimension, thereby elucidating the structure and significance of the factors identified through the analysis.

Table 4 offers comprehensive insights into the outcomes of the latent root criterion, a fundamental component of EFA. The criterion suggests that the dataset is conducive to extracting five distinct factors from the set of items utilized for factor analysis, representing underlying constructs or patterns within the data. Moreover, the collective explanation of 99.10% of the data variations by these five factors indicates their ability to capture a substantial portion of the variability present in the dataset. This suggests that the identified factors effectively encapsulate the key characteristics and structure of the dataset, providing valuable insights into the underlying relationships among the variables examined in the study.

The Rotated Component Matrix represents the outcome of principal component analysis, aimed at discerning the underlying factor structure within the data. Through PCA, the assessment focuses on determining whether specific items measure common factors. Additionally, factor rotation serves to streamline the rows and columns of the factor matrix, optimizing a variable's loading onto a single dimension to enhance interpretability (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 4
Latent Roots Criterion Analysis

Factors	Eigenvalues	Variance	Cumulative Variance
1	15.298	0.197	0.197
2	18.116	0.226	0.423
3	14.671	0.185	0.608
4	14.574	0.182	0.790
5	16.681	0.201	0.991

Table 5 presents the rotation results, demonstrating that all five factors for women's leadership exhibit significant loadings above  $\pm 0.50$ , meeting the standard coefficient value criteria when utilizing the Promax method. A total of 38 items were included in the analysis, resulting in the identification of five distinct factor structures or attributes. Subsequently, these five factors were labeled based on the nature of the items within each particular structure. This categorization reflects the underlying themes or constructs represented by the items within each factor, thereby offering a comprehensive understanding of the various aspects of women's leadership in local governments captured by the survey instrument.

**Table 5** *Factor Loadings* 

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Uniqueness
1	0.952					0.074
2	0.916					0.106
3	0.911					0.162
6	0.898					0.052
9	0.896					0.104
35	0.879					0.079
36	0.871					0.036
4		0.908				0.240
7		0.864				0.018
10		0.861				0.013
11		0.852				0.033
29		0.849				0.059
31		0.812				0.020
32		0.784				0.028
33		0.767				0.014

**Table 5 Continued** 

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Uniqueness
34		0.759				0.039
8			0.922			0.034
12			0.914			0.067
13			0.873			0.022
15			0.855			0.029
16			0.788			0.074
26			0.762			0.108
38			0.749			0.163
17				0.854		0.056
18				0.821		0.101
21				0.819		0.074
22				0.805		0.037
23				0.767		0.241
25				0.746		0.020
27				0.702		0.019
5					0.881	0.033
14					0.827	0.052
19					0.784	0.028
20					0.762	0.025
24					0.749	0.015
28					0.738	0.032
30					0.712	0.038
37					0.698	0.064

Note. Applied rotation method is Promax.

Table 6 reveals that Factor 1 extracted seven items, with coefficient patterns ranging from 0.871 to 0.952. Item 36, which states "Persistence and a commitment to equal opportunity can empower women leaders to break down barriers in traditionally male-dominated roles," had the lowest coefficient value at 0.871. Conversely, item 1, which states "Women leaders should prioritize understanding and considering the well-being of their colleagues," had the highest coefficient value at 0.952. All items in this factor exceed the minimum requirement of  $\pm 0.50$ , indicating their strong contributions to this factor.

 Table 6

 Constructs and Loadings Under Factor 1

Item	Constructs	Loadings
1	Women leaders should prioritize understanding and considering the well-being of their colleagues	0.952
2	Traits like kindness, attentiveness, and nurturing can be effective assets in female leadership	0.916
3	Women leaders need to be decisive, make informed choices, and inspire confidence through their actions	0.911
6	Effective leaders foster a collaborative environment, value input from others, and encourage their team members' potential	0.898
9	Leadership effectiveness goes beyond gender, effective leadership depends on management style and ability, not gender	0.896
35	Women leaders can counter doubts about their abilities by exceeding expectations and demonstrating strong performance	0.879
36	Persistence and a commitment to equal opportunity can empower women leaders to break down barriers in traditionally male-dominated roles	0.871

By examining the shared characteristics among the seven items, which include embodying traits such as kindness, attentiveness, and nurturing while also being decisive, making informed choices, and inspiring confidence, it is evident that effective leadership transcends gender. This effectiveness relies on management style and ability, fostering collaboration, valuing team input, and overcoming doubts and barriers through strong performance and a commitment to equal opportunity. Thus, this factor is suitably labeled as *empowering leadership*.

Table 7 reveals that Factor 2 extracted nine items, with coefficient patterns ranging from 0.759 to 0.908. Item 34, stating "Budget constraints can be a barrier for women leaders who want to implement new programs or systems to improve efficiency," had the lowest coefficient value at 0.759. Conversely, item 4, which states "Women face challenges in male-dominated workplaces: Bias against female leadership exists, leading to women being doubted or overlooked," had the highest coefficient value at 0.908. All the items in this factor exceed the minimum requirement of  $\pm 0.50$ . These nine items share a common theme centered on the challenges and biases women face in leadership roles, both internal (e.g., low self-esteem, fear of public speaking) and external (e.g., gender stereotypes, administrative changes). Additionally, women leaders must navigate non-gender-specific challenges, advocate for continued support amidst shifting priorities, and overcome budget constraints that hinder their ability to implement new programs. Thus, this factor is labelled, leadership challenges.

**Table 7**Constructs and Loadings Under Factor 2

Item	Constructs	Loadings
4	Women face challenges in male-dominated workplaces: Bias against female leadership exists, leading to women being doubted or overlooked	0.908
7	There's a perception that women lack the skills or experience to handle leadership roles, leading to skepticism about their abilities	0.864
10	Internal struggles like low self-esteem or fear of public speaking can hold women back from leadership opportunities	0.861
11	Non-gender-related challenges also exist in leadership, leaders, regardless of gender, face challenges like implementing changes, navigating office politics, and communication issues	0.852
29	Gender stereotypes can create hesitancy, particularly for men working with women leaders, hindering open communication and feedback	0.849
31	Frequent change in administration can lead to changes in priorities, making it difficult to implement long-term programs for women's development	0.812
32	Women leaders may face challenges if a new administration's focus areas don't align with women's programs, requiring them to advocate for continued support	0.784
33	Some women leaders may find it difficult to have their ideas heard or implemented, especially if they encounter resistance or a lack of openness to change from colleagues	0.767
34	Budget constraints can be a barrier for women leaders who want to implement new programs or systems to improve efficiency	0.759

Table 8 indicates that Factor 3 encompasses seven items, with coefficient values ranging from 0.749 to 0.922. Item 38, which states "Women leaders should value their unique perspectives and have confidence in their ability to contribute positively to their local government," had the lowest coefficient value at 0.749. In contrast, item 8, which asserts "Challenges can be opportunities for growth, doubts can motivate women leaders to persevere and prove their capabilities," had the highest coefficient value at 0.922. All items within this factor surpass the minimum threshold of  $\pm 0.50$ . These seven items collectively emphasize the positive motivations and personal influences that propel women leaders, such as the drive for growth and the support and encouragement from others. They highlight the significance of personal experiences, family considerations, and confidence in their unique perspectives, which shape how women approach and succeed in leadership roles. Therefore, this factor is labeled leadership motivation.

**Table 8**Constructs and Loadings Under Factor 3

Item	Constructs	Loadings
8	Challenges can be opportunities for growth, doubts can motivate women leaders to persevere and prove their capabilities	0.922
12	Trust and encouragement from colleagues and family are strong motivators for women leaders	0.914
13	The desire to learn, grow, and contribute to a greater vision motivates some women leaders	0.873
15	Age, family needs, and the potential impact of decisions can influence how women leaders approach their roles	0.855
16	Personal experiences, a desire to help others, and even external circumstances can all push women into leadership roles	0.788
26	Early work experiences can be a valuable training ground, shaping a person's work ethic, leadership style, and understanding of office dynamics	0.762
38	Women leaders should value their unique perspectives and have confidence in their ability to contribute positively to their local government	0.749

Table 9 indicates that Factor 4 comprehends seven items, with coefficient values ranging from 0.702 to 0. 854. Item 27, which states "Regardless of gender, a shared vision and understanding of each other's roles are essential for effective collaboration," had the lowest coefficient value at 0.702. In contrast, item 17, which asserts "Gender and Development programs provide opportunities. These programs equip women with skills and knowledge to be effective leaders," had the highest coefficient value at 0.854. All items within this factor exceed the minimum threshold of ±0.50.

 Table 9

 Constructs and Loadings Under Factor 4

Item	Constructs	Loadings
17	Gender and Development programs provide opportunities. These programs equip women with skills and knowledge to be effective leaders	0.854
18	Empowerment from superiors fosters confidence. Leaders who are trusted and given autonomy in their roles feel empowered and motivated	0.821
21	Local government units with a high number of female leaders and supportive policies create an environment where women can thrive	0.819
22	Programs that provide learning and development opportunities empower women to become more effective leaders	0.805
23	Mentorship provides opportunities for both mentors and mentees to learn and grow from each other's experiences	0.767

Table 9 Continued

Item	Constructs	Loadings
25	Supportive mentors who believe in an individual's potential can play a significant role in their growth and development	0.746
27	Regardless of gender, a shared vision and understanding of each other's roles are essential for effective collaboration	0.702

These seven items mutually highlight the empowerment and development through structured programs, mentorship, and supportive environments. These elements collectively foster confidence, enhance leadership skills, and create thriving conditions for women leaders by providing opportunities for growth, learning, and effective collaboration. Hence, this factor is labeled *leadership development support*.

Table 10 presents Factor 5, which includes eight items with coefficients ranging from 0.698 to 0.881. Item 37, which states "Active listening and clear communication are essential for building trust and leading effectively," had the lowest coefficient value at 0.698. In contrast, item 5, which states "Authenticity and good listening are important: Leaders, especially women, should be genuine, approachable, and actively listen to their team's ideas," had the highest coefficient value at 0.881. All items within this factor exceed the minimum threshold of  $\pm 0.50$ . These eight items revolve around the importance of authenticity, open communication, and effective leadership practices. These highlight the significance of actively listening to team members, fostering trust, navigating challenges through communication, understanding roles and responsibilities, fostering camaraderie, and promoting collaboration and mutual respect. Therefore, this factor is labeled effective leadership communication.

**Table 10**Constructs and Loadings Under Factor 5

Item	Constructs	Loadings
5	Authenticity and good listening are important: Leaders, especially women, should be genuine, approachable, and actively listen to their team's ideas	0.881
14	Earning trust and fostering open communication is a motivator that can lead to effective leadership of women	0.827
19	When colleagues do not fully understand or support an initiative, it can be challenging for a leader to implement it	0.784
20	Leaders who openly communicate with superiors can work through roadblocks and find solutions	0.762
24	Understanding one's role and responsibilities, along with a strong work ethic, are crucial ingredients for success in government work	0.749
28	Some women leaders feel a sense of camaraderie and easier communication with other women due to shared experiences or communication styles	0.738

#### **Table 10 Continued**

Item	Constructs	Loadings
30	Strong leaders can collaborate effectively with anyone, regardless of gender, by focusing on open communication and mutual respect	0.712
37	Active listening and clear communication are essential for building trust and leading effectively	0.698

#### Discussion

The findings of this study underscore five critical factors influencing women's leadership in local governments: empowering leadership, leadership challenges, leadership motivation, leadership development support, and effective leadership communication. These factors provide a nuanced understanding of the barriers and opportunities women face, contributing to a broader discourse on gender-inclusive governance.

Empowering leadership is characterized by fostering an environment where women leaders can thrive through inclusivity and support. This approach aligns with the transformational leadership style, which emphasizes motivating and inspiring followers by appealing to their values and encouraging innovation (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Women often adopt transformational leadership traits such as empathy, attentiveness, and collaboration, which have been shown to improve organizational outcomes, particularly in environments that value equity (Eagly & Carli, 2007). These traits also align with the Capability Approach Theory (Sen, 1999), as they enable leaders to maximize their potential by transforming available resources into meaningful opportunities. Moreover, Northouse (2022) highlights the importance of empowering leadership styles that focus on valuing individual contributions and fostering a sense of collective purpose, further reinforcing the importance of this factor.

Additionally, research suggests that organizations benefit significantly from women leaders who exhibit empowering leadership traits. Morrison et al. (2011) found that companies with a higher proportion of women in leadership roles experience improved collaboration and increased employee satisfaction. Moreover, inclusive leadership practices have been linked to innovation, as diverse perspectives often foster creative problem-solving (Groysberg & Slind, 2012). However, to fully leverage the potential of empowering leadership, organizations must create cultures that prioritize gender equity by addressing structural barriers and biases. The development of mentorship programs and leadership training tailored to women is one effective strategy for fostering empowering leadership styles among female leaders (Ibarra et al., 2013).

Leadership Challenges: women in leadership roles often face systemic challenges, including institutional biases, limited resources, and persistent gender stereotypes. These issues significantly impede their ability to lead effectively and are often exacerbated by societal expectations that undervalue women's leadership

potential (Ridgeway, 2011). Research by Kanter (1977) highlights how women often face "tokenism," which isolates them in male-dominated environments, further limiting their access to informal networks and decision-making processes. Administrative challenges, such as budget constraints and frequent changes in priorities, further hinder the ability of women leaders to implement long-term programs (Sabani & Romaniuk, 2023). Additionally, internal struggles such as self-doubt and imposter syndrome reduce confidence and contribute to workplace inequalities (Dugarova, 2018).

Addressing these challenges requires systemic changes to organizational culture and governance structures. For instance, initiatives aimed at promoting gender equity within leadership pipelines have proven effective in reducing biases and providing women with equal opportunities to succeed (Ely & Rhode, 2010). Furthermore, studies by Eby et al. (2008) emphasize the importance of mentoring relationships in helping women navigate professional barriers and build resilience against systemic obstacles. Interventions must also address cultural norms that perpetuate stereotypes, such as training programs to combat unconscious bias and promote inclusivity. By tackling these barriers, organizations can create environments that support women's leadership aspirations and enable them to overcome challenges.

Leadership Motivation: Motivation is a critical driver of women's leadership aspirations, often rooted in intrinsic factors such as the desire for personal growth and social impact. Ryan and Deci (2000) argue that intrinsic motivations are essential for sustaining leadership development, as they foster resilience and long-term commitment. Women leaders often cite family support, encouragement from colleagues, and a desire to address societal inequities as key motivators (Young, 2016). These motivations align with Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1989), which highlights how overlapping social identities shape individual experiences. External motivators, such as the opportunity to contribute to community development, also play a significant role in shaping women's leadership trajectories, particularly in local governance contexts (Ely & Rhode, 2010).

To sustain leadership motivation, organizations and policymakers must create environments that recognize and support women's unique aspirations. Mentorship programs, for example, provide critical encouragement and guidance, reinforcing intrinsic motivations while offering practical tools for career advancement (Ibarra et al., 2013). Moreover, leadership development initiatives tailored to women should emphasize the alignment of individual values with organizational goals, as this enhances engagement and satisfaction (Pick, 2024). By fostering motivational pathways that address both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, local governments can support women leaders in realizing their potential and achieving long-term success.

Leadership Development Support: Leadership development is an essential factor in empowering women to navigate the complexities of local governance. Programs that focus on mentorship, training, and skill development provide women with the tools they need to succeed in leadership roles (Gascon & McIntyre-Mills, 2018). Mentorship, in particular, has been shown to play a pivotal role in fostering confidence and enhancing leadership capacity (Eby et al., 2008). Gender and Development

programs, which address structural barriers and offer targeted training, are especially effective in equipping women with the skills needed to overcome systemic challenges (Pick, 2024). Additionally, public service motivation has been linked to leadership efficacy, emphasizing the importance of aligning individual aspirations with the broader goals of local governance (Dagohoy & Dura, 2022).

Effective leadership development programs must address both individual and systemic barriers to ensure long-term impact. For instance, Ibarra et al. (2013) suggest that programs tailored to women's unique challenges—such as balancing professional and personal responsibilities—are more likely to yield positive outcomes. Organizational support, such as flexible work policies and access to networking opportunities, further enhances the effectiveness of these programs (Groysberg & Slind, 2012). By investing in comprehensive leadership development initiatives, local governments can create a pipeline of skilled women leaders equipped to address the complex challenges of governance.

Effective leadership communication is critical for fostering trust, collaboration, and team cohesion. Women leaders who exhibit strong communication skills—such as active listening, empathy, and transparency—are better equipped to navigate workplace challenges and build strong relationships with their teams (Goleman, 2004). Emotional intelligence, which encompasses these skills, has been shown to enhance leadership effectiveness, particularly in diverse and dynamic organizational contexts (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023). Authenticity and open communication further enable women leaders to foster trust and mutual respect, which are essential for successful collaboration (Vella, 2022).

Moreover, organizations that prioritize inclusive communication strategies benefit from improved employee engagement and innovation. Studies by Groysberg and Slind (2012) reveal that transparent communication practices not only enhance team performance but also create environments where diverse perspectives are valued. Training programs aimed at improving interpersonal skills, such as conflict resolution and negotiation, can further support women leaders in developing effective communication strategies (Northouse, 2022). By emphasizing the importance of communication in leadership development, local governments can empower women leaders to build stronger, more inclusive teams and foster a culture of collaboration.

## **Conclusion**

The study's findings on the factors influencing women's leadership in local governments strongly align with its theoretical foundations, specifically the Capability Approach Theory of Amartya Sen and the Intersectionality Theory of Kimberlé Crenshaw.

Capability Approach Theory: This theory emphasizes the importance of individuals having the freedom to achieve their desired outcomes by converting available resources into real opportunities (Sen, 1999). The study's findings on empowering leadership underscore that when women leaders embody traits such as kindness, attentiveness, and decisiveness, they are effectively utilizing their capabilities to foster inclusive and supportive work environments. This reflects the core idea of

Sen's theory that providing individuals with the right environment and support enables them to realize their potential. The research highlights that effective leadership is not inherently gender-specific but relies on the ability to convert capabilities into effective leadership practices.

Intersectionality Theory: Crenshaw's Intersectionality Theory posits that individual experiences are shaped by the intersection of multiple social identities and systemic structures of privilege and oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). The study's findings on leadership challenges reveal that women face both internal and external obstacles, including gender biases, administrative changes, and internal struggles such as low self-esteem. These challenges are compounded by the intersection of gender with other social identities and systemic barriers, highlighting the complexity of women's leadership experiences. The study confirms Crenshaw's theory by illustrating how multiple, overlapping identities and structures influence women's opportunities and challenges in leadership roles.

The theoretical frameworks also support the findings on leadership motivation, development support, and communication. Leadership Motivation emphasizes the role of personal motivations and support networks, aligning with the Capability Approach by highlighting the need for environments that foster personal growth and confidence. Leadership Development Support focuses on programs and policies that provide learning opportunities and mentorship, reflecting the importance of systemic support in enabling women to convert their capabilities into effective leadership. Effective Leadership Communication underscores the importance of interpersonal skills such as authenticity and active listening, aligning with both theories by showing how individual capabilities and social contexts interact to shape leadership practices.

Overall, the study demonstrates that by understanding and addressing the multifaceted factors influencing women's leadership, as illuminated by these theoretical foundations, local governments can create more supportive and empowering conditions. This, in turn, leads to more effective and equitable governance, allowing women leaders to thrive and contribute significantly to societal advancement.

#### **Recommendations**

For the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), it is recommended to develop and implement policies that specifically target the reduction of gender biases within local governments. This could include mandatory training programs on gender sensitivity and leadership for all employees. Additionally, the DILG should establish and fund comprehensive support programs that focus on leadership development for women. These programs should include mentorship, professional development workshops, and networking opportunities to empower women leaders and create a more inclusive governance environment.

For local government units, it is essential to implement regular leadership training sessions that emphasize inclusivity, empathy, and effective communication skills for all leaders. Local governments should create and enforce policies that support women leaders, such as flexible working hours, parental leave, and safe reporting

mechanisms for discrimination or bias. By fostering a supportive environment, local governments can help women leaders overcome challenges and thrive in their roles, contributing to more effective and equitable governance.

For women leaders, engaging in continuous learning and professional development opportunities is crucial to enhance leadership skills. Women leaders should actively seek out mentorship and peer support networks to navigate challenges and share best practices. Additionally, they should advocate for and support the implementation of policies that promote gender equality within their organizations. Using their positions to mentor and empower aspiring women leaders within their teams will also help create a culture of inclusivity and support.

For employees in general, participation in training programs focused on gender sensitivity and the importance of inclusive leadership is recommended. Supporting and respecting women leaders and colleagues by fostering an environment of mutual respect and collaboration is essential. Employees should provide constructive feedback and support to women leaders and aspiring leaders, promoting an inclusive culture that values diverse perspectives and contributions.

For aspiring women leaders, proactively seeking opportunities for skill development and leadership training is key. Participation in programs offered by local governments or external organizations that focus on building leadership capabilities will be beneficial. Building a strong professional network of mentors, peers, and other women leaders who can provide guidance, support, and opportunities for growth is also crucial for aspiring women leaders to succeed in their career paths.

For future researchers, it is recommended to conduct further studies to explore the nuances of women's leadership in different cultural and organizational contexts. Investigating the long-term impact of leadership development programs on women's career trajectories will provide valuable insights. Utilizing an interdisciplinary approach to understand the intersectionality of gender, culture, and leadership, and collaborating with policymakers and practitioners to ensure research findings are translated into actionable strategies, will enhance the effectiveness of future research efforts in supporting women in leadership roles.

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## **ARTICLE**

# Gendered Societies and Leadership Trajectories: A Qualitative Study of Women in the Indian Civil Services

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative study explores the lived experiences of women leaders in the Indian Civil Services. Through in-depth interviews this research aims to uncover the success code of the selected 12 women leaders. The study identified six broad themes with subthemes which acted as enablers or deterrents for these women. The findings reveal a complex interplay between personal qualities, success mantras, social and organizational facilitators, and the barriers and challenges in shaping their leadership journeys. By providing rich, narrative insights, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the unique dynamics at play for women in the Indian Civil Services and offers recommendations for fostering a more inclusive environment which can enable more women to reach top positions. The implications of this research underscore the need for targeted interventions to support and enhance the leadership capacities of women in this critical sector.

## **KEYWORDS**

women, civil services, Indian society, intersectionality, qualitative research, leadership

#### Introduction

The women's underrepresentation in leadership roles is a widespread problem that affects organizations globally. Research has illustrated that increasing the proportion of women in leadership roles can lead to more diverse and inclusive leadership teams,

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which in turn contributes to improved organizational performance. Various means should be applied for achieving this purpose, e.g., mentorship, training, and providing equal opportunities. By having a diverse leadership team, organizations can benefit from a wider range of perspectives, ideas, and approaches, thereby resulting in better decision-making, critique and problem-solving, and overall success. According to Zenger and Folkman (2019), when compared to men, women perform better in terms of initiative, resilience, honesty and integrity, and drive for results.

However, in corporate India, women hold only 17% of positions marking an increase of only 8.6% since 2012 (Soledad et al., 2020). The 2020 Global Board Diversity Tracker report also indicates that only 11% of them are committee chairs, with the number standing at 23% globally (Soledad et al., 2020). As far as in India, women comprise 48% of the world's population (World Bank, 2024), increasing number of women in leadership is essential for the country's future and development. However, the Indian public services in particular show an underrepresentation of women. As an example, in 2015, only 12% and 6.4% of women comprised the administrative services and the police in India, respectively (Beniwal & James, 2019). The present study aims to examine women's experiences in top leadership in these fields, thus helping to develop possible pathways for women in future. This can be a catalyst for designing leadership development programs for replicating their success. Specifically, the study will help identify the critical areas to be addressed for bringing more women into leadership roles and bridging the gap.

Articles 14, 15, 15(3), and 16 of the Constitution of India discuss gender equality, prohibiting discrimination, and equal employment opportunities (Legislative Department, n.d.). Article 39 ensures equal rights to a satisfactory livelihood and equal pay for men and women. Article 42 takes care of maintaining a humane environment for women by providing maternity relief. The 73rd, 74th, and 97th amendments in the Constitution of India ensure mandatory entry of women in various industries and government jobs by providing reservations. Moreover, the Preamble itself contains the term "gender equality." Even though there are laws, quotas, and increased access to education, the percentage of women occupying leadership positions is still lacking. According to the Global Gender Gap Report, India positions 112th in a survey of 153 countries in terms of gender equality (Crotti et al., 2019). According to this report, India observed a slip of 3% in providing equal gender opportunities. Researchers in the field state that no significant differences exist in the leadership styles concerning gender (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Oshagbemi & Gill, 2003) and the behaviors perceived in the male and female leadership (Dobbins & Platz, 1986; Manning, 2002). However, what complicates the situation is a vast disparity between the percentage of men and women occupying top positions across each sphere, such as industries, politics, academics, and government offices. In Indian government services, women's representation is only 15%, compared with the percentage of women entering at initial entry levels.

This under-representation signifies the presence of a narrow and leaky pipeline for women's advancement to leadership roles upwards. Around fifty percent of the women entering the workforce, move out of it even before reaching middle management levels because of various issues related to work or non-work. Undoubtedly, the

persistence of women in their work is subject to several barriers which impede their advancement to a stage where they prefer to opt-out. India, a predominantly patriarchal society, mandates female subordination to men, inflicting social roles on women and recognizing that their primary role is to take care of the home and family members. Despite all the challenges, few women have overcome all the barriers and proved themselves as successful leaders. When it comes to women in top leadership positions, significant improvement remains to be accomplished.

Previous studies have shown the challenges and struggles faced by female professionals and leaders in government services (Gaikwad & Pandey, 2022; Johannes et al., 2022; Kuzhabekova et al., 2018; McLaren et al., 2023). Kumari (2014) emphasizes the barriers women have to overcome in leadership positions, as well as the harassment, discrimination, and exclusion they experience. In government services, the male-to-female ratio at the entry level only is highly biased, which becomes almost negligible with rise of leadership levels. Furthermore, the hegemonic masculinity has affected the prevalent sociocultural perceptions in India considering women to be better suited to handle domestic or lower levels of administrative responsibilities. Although in some cases women leaders received equal treatment in recruitment, selection, and payment, they consistently were subjected to opposition from their male counterparts, which affected their performance (Yaday & Lata, 2018). The stereotyped notions and sociocultural perception of the Indian society about gender roles have resulted in women experiencing a higher level of scrutiny of their daily work performances compared to their male counterparts. Ramgutty-Wong (2000) shared a view similar with Yadav & Lata (2018) while discussing the case of women in the Indian/Hindu culture-dominant island nation of Mauritius.

While holding a leading position, women in India often have a wide range of responsibilities, fulfilling several different roles in the family and society, such as running the household and caring for the husband and children. Due to the lack of proper support systems in place for female employees, their work-life balance was greatly affected, leading to negative consequences for their families. Despite some instances of women defying through the glass ceiling successfully and achieving top leadership roles, there are still limited opportunities, exposure, and understanding of leadership rights by many women academicians while rising to leadership ranks (Gandhi & Sen, 2020; Sargam & Mahal, 2018; Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017). Another barrier that prevents the progression and maintenance of female academics is the societal and cultural beliefs of families, management and even the female educators themselves (Sandberg, 2013). Even though many female educators in the country have equal or higher education levels compared to men, they are not seeking leadership positions due to a lack of support and mentorship. They also tend to prioritize family responsibilities over professional development and networking, which are crucial for gaining resources and access to new opportunities for career advancement (Gandhi & Sen, 2020).

There is a paucity of research on the challenges that women experience while holding leadership positions, both in terms of organizational and societal/cultural factors, and how these challenges relate to their personal identities. Previous studies,

although few, have highlighted the numerous organizational and individual challenges faced by women while trying to achieve or maintain positions of power, though have not considered the impact of women's intersecting identities on these struggles. Previous studies have only looked at women of Indian culture as a whole, without taking into account the different factors like caste, region, race, and language that shape gender perceptions and beliefs about leadership roles for both genders. As a consequence, there is a lack of knowledge and appropriate strategies, including policies, training, mentorship, and governance structures, to tackle the diverse and complex barriers that women encounter when striving for leadership positions. Hence, the present study intends to fill this gap by studying the lived experiences of women who have successfully navigated their leadership trajectories.

#### Methods

The research questions guiding the study are as follows: How do women navigate their leadership trajectories? What are the factors contributing to their success despite challenges?

As a complex, socially constructed, multi-level process, leadership is challenging to study (Gardner et al., 2010). Researchers argue that qualitative and quantitative methods represent two legitimate ways to research leadership. In the qualitative methods, researchers use an inductive approach by letting the data discover the meanings referred to as a "lantern," meaning shedding light in the dark corners (Shank, 2002). Leadership is a multifaceted and complex concept; merely relying on quantitative methods is insufficient for its full appreciation (Conger, 1998). Hence, a qualitative phenomenological study was conducted.

To maintain an intersectional perspective, the study involved women professionals from the urban, semi-urban, and rural areas of India across different religions, languages, and Indian caste systems. An individual's social identity plays a significant role in their leadership perceptions, contributing to the intersectional perspective of identity across various social class groups (Gangadharan et al., 2016). Besides, the literature argues that that the Indian caste system has significant implications for the emergence and performance of women as leaders (Sutar, 2007; Viswanath, 2009). Participants were identified through purposive sampling method. The criteria selected were women who had at least 15 years of work experience and had received not less than two promotions. As many as 17 women in senior leadership positions in the public services were identified and interviewed. Of these, 14 consented to participate in the study. All participants were married, belonged to the age group of 38 to 54 years, and only one of them belonged to a social minority. A total of 14 participants had educated parents and 11 of them had educated grandparents. The data collected through interviews were then analyzed using Atlasti software to identify the themes and subthemes.

The qualitative data were collected by conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews as it provides the interviewer greater flexibility to pose specific questions arising from the respondent's response. Bentz & Shapiro (1998) mention that the

researcher should allow the data to emerge. Conducting phenomenological study means capturing rich, meaningful descriptions of the phenomena and their settings. None of the participants were offered any financial or material incentive to facilitate their participation. Interviews were conducted via Skype¹, telephone, or personal visits, depending upon the convenience of the participants. Each interview session, on average, lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. The interview questions were "addressed to the participant's beliefs, experiences, convictions, and feelings about research questions identified" (Welman & Kruger, 2001). To initiate the narration, the participants were invited to discuss the topics of childhood trivia, like their upbringing, their siblings, school education, and the role of parents, friends, other people, and society in developing their leadership skills. The participants were encouraged to discuss the support they receive from their families, including parents and in-laws, in regards to their educational goals and leadership abilities. The conversation also covered their perceptions of what makes a successful leader, their ambition, role models, attitudes towards society and societal norms, experiences with discrimination, and emotional stability.

Finally, they talked about factors within their organizations that aid in career development and leadership success, such as the attitudes of colleagues and mentors and opportunities for growth. The interviewees could express their true opinions freely to the researcher (Groenewald, 2004). In the course of the in-depth interviews, we collected information about the difficulties and obstacles faced by participants in their leadership roles, as well as the methods they used to overcome them. As two of the total number of participants did not give their consent for the interviews to be audiotaped, notes were taken instead.

During the interviews with participants, the researcher used memos and reflective notes to record stories, thoughts, and ideas, as well as to capture non-verbal cues and observations. Qualitative notes are not easy to take in parallel with interviewing the participants (Bernard & Ryan, 2010); the researcher wrote the field notes immediately after completing the interview. This helped in reducing the data loss and minimizing the error. Moustakas (1994) recommends using epoche during qualitative data collection, which helps create a conducive atmosphere during the interview, keeping aside the personal preconceptions of the interviewer. Davidson and Cosgrove (2002) mention that to appreciate the experience in its own expressions, we must understand it in its own expressions by bracketing their own notions of causality. They further elaborate that epoche provides a clear direction free from reification, as the qualitative method is very vulnerable to naturalistic thinking without a phenomenological epoche (Morley, 2012).

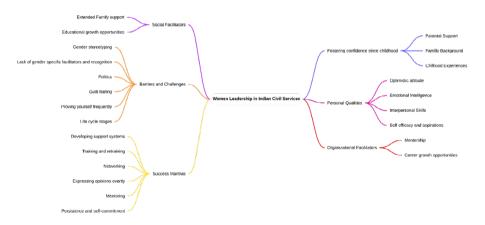
# **Findings and Discussion**

A cross-case analysis of the experiences of 12 women leaders from different universities and autonomous institutions in India revealed specific individual and organizational factors that played a critical role in their progression towards success in attaining and maintaining a leadership position. A descriptive analysis of each of these 12 cases, that aimed to determine whether they followed parallel developments,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> www.skype.com

led to the identification of subthemes that were further organized into broader themes. Six broader themes emerged from the analysis: Fostering confidence since childhood, Personal qualities, Social facilitators, Organizational facilitators, Workplace and sociocultural challenges, and Success mantra. Three themes completely and two themes partially reflected 14 subthemes (12 enablers and two deterrents) reflecting individual factors. Three themes displayed seven subthemes partially (five enablers and two deterrents) associated with organizational factors. Despite having heterogeneous backgrounds, including religion, culture, geographical location, castes, languages, and socioeconomic conditions, their experiences revealed similar patterns across the identified themes and subthemes. Few exceptions in the experiences also emerged which are discussed later. The experiences of women leaders from academia and government services were analyzed separately for identifying the emerging themes and subthemes. The thematic map shows the common themes and subthemes emerged from the experiences of women leaders in Indian Civil Services (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**Thematic Map of the Themes and Subthemes Generated



Note. Source: developed by the authors.

# Theme 1: Fostering Confidence Since Childhood

Social Cognitive Learning Theory (Bandura, 1986) and Bronfenbrenner's (1977) Ecological Systems Theory support that family especially parents play a pivotal role in career choices and development of an individual's capabilities. The analysis of the data collected also revealed that childhood experiences of the respondents played a very important role in developing their self-confidence and leadership qualities. All respondents unanimously agreed that their parent's support, family education, gender perception, and role models identified during childhood years. The parental support kept on emerging quite frequently in the discussions. The socialization practices of parents impact the motivational characteristics of their children (Eccles, 1987, 1994; Patridge et al., 2008). Eccles' Expectancy Value Theory at its core emphasizes the

fundamental role played by parents not only in providing achievement experiences and developing the self-confidence of their children but also helping them in interpreting the outcomes of these experiences. Thus, the children's belief systems are moulded by the combined effect of the experiences and their feedback provided to them by their parents The same was supported by all the participants. The upbringing and parent's support was reflected as a very important pillar in their leadership development.

Participant PG 3: We are three sisters and my parents taught us that nothing is impossible. This attitude has helped me a long way in achieving my dreams. (Trans. by Hemlata Vivek Gaikwad & Suruchi Pandey—H. V. G. & S. P.)

Participant PG 8: My parents are my first source of inspiration. My father was a primary teacher and my mother was a home maker. They have supported me at every step. Both were of the opinion that children should be free to do whatever they want to do if it is worth doing, even when it wasn't in agreement what they wanted us to do. This developed my decision-making capabilities since a very young age. (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.)

Another participant replied the following:

Participant PG 6: I used to stay with my grandparents. Indigenous individuals, such as Jyotiba Phule, would frequently visit my grandfather at our home. From a very young age I used to talk to all those people to understand what they do, what challenges they face and how do they overcome them. All these discussions always kept on motivating me to do something in my life. (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.)

The participant's views indicated a similarity of experiences during their childhood. They all enjoyed an environment free of gender bias, supportive parents, and a healthy upbringing. This helped them develop confidence since childhood and boosted their self-esteem.

#### Theme 2: Personal Qualities

Personal qualities emerged out strongly in the analysis of the interviews of women leaders from both fields. All of them struggled hard to work on the personal traits to reach to the position they are at present today. Some personality traits were inherited while others were learnt during the leadership development process, as taking on new responsibilities pose new job demands. These new demands and expectations required women to develop new traits to perform effectively (Tannenbaum, 2002). Researchers across globe have also emphasized the role of personality in effective leadership (Antonakis et al., 2012; Parr et al., 2016) and bringing positive outcomes. At the same time, leaders often derail on their job by not developing the required traits or living up to their full potential (Hogan et al., 2011; Kaiser & Hogan, 2011). The female participants in the study also emphasized the importance of personal characteristics and a robust personality in their success. Specific traits that were identified as crucial included having a positive outlook, emotional stability, strong interpersonal skills, self-efficacy, and a clear sense of ambition. This is evident from the following statements made by the participants during their interviews.

Participant PG 2: I work in a male-dominated bureaucratic organization, where you face challenges every day, which puts a lot of stress on you. You need to emotionally strong and stable to survive here. Like, getting work done from your subordinates, who are all male and having service experience even more than you is really a herculean task. And you know, we are transferred frequently, and the people change, bringing you back to square one. Your emotional strength is a must to handle all this. (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.)

Surprisingly, one participant came out with a very different perspective:

Participant PG 9: I was really troubled by my husband and in-laws in initial years whenever I was late at home. They expected me to work nine to five and used to question and trouble out of suspicion whenever I was late. Now they are a way much understanding, but those years haunt me even today. (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.)

Though an exception, it reflects the trouble faced by Indian women, irrespective of their being independent and educated. Indian society being patriarchal lays the domestic responsibilities on women. A working woman has to handle dual responsibilities, taking care of home and work, making her feel stressed out. To perform successfully, they should learn to be more emotionally stable, optimistic, and have positive mental attitude. The participants also confirmed the same while sharing their experiences.

Emotional stability is an asset for better performance, and helped the participants to cope with time pressures, stress, uncertainty, and issues like discouragement and internal politics. Being composed helped them communicate professionalism in their career. The positive and optimistic attitude present in these women acted as a catalyst. All the participants always maintained a positive attitude. Despite phenomenal challenges the participants remained optimistic and kept performing and rising.

Participant PG 12 agrees and says that being optimistic and having a positive attitude will take you a long way.

Participant PG 12: If you are hopeful things will start falling in line. Getting promotions and higher responsibilities is not a cake walk in our field. You have to prove yourself at every step and if you are not positive about your competencies, you cannot win. My optimism and positive attitude towards things proved important in achieving what I wanted to. (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.)

The above quotes made apparent that being optimistic and maintaining a positive attitude proved to be a key factor in their journey upwards. Participants also reflected experiences pertaining to their interpersonal skills. Each of the participants believed that effective leadership is about effective communication and people skills. Research also shows that leaders not only need to communicate well, but that much of their success is determined by their communication skills (Stroh et al., 2002). This helps them develop networks, encourage upward and downward communication, and apply power effectively (Harris & Nelson, 2018).

According to the study by Khallad (2000), various factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, parents' occupation, educational level, and expectations can influence career aspirations. The study participants agreed that having strong aspiration for reaching leadership positions played a vital role in their success. The study's participants also noted that their belief in their own ability was a crucial factor in achieving leadership positions.

Participant PG 6: My class teacher was a great source of inspiration for me. Whenever I was given an important task, she would always tell me that I was capable of leading and succeeding in my leadership role. This support and encouragement helped me gain more confidence in my leadership abilities, which has been an ongoing asset in my ongoing journey as a successful leader. (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.)

Two other participants also shared their views endorsing the self-aspiration playing a vital role in making themselves develop as a leader since childhood.

Participant PG 2: Ever since my school days, I have had a desire to be a leader. I took on various leadership roles such as classroom monitor and event organizer during my school years, and continued to do so during my college years as well. I firmly believe that one does not need an official position to be a leader, and this mindset has been something that I have consistently applied in practice. (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.)

Participant PG 3: To be a part of the eminent and prestigious defense forces, one must pass the SSB interview, a five-day evaluation that assesses one's leadership qualities. I had this dream every day, and I have been continually working to develop my leadership skills by reading various articles on leadership development and continue to do so even now. And I was able to achieve it because I have always had the desire to become a leader. (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.)

This indicates that women themselves must work a lot for developing the personal qualities and aspire for leadership positions. The important thing to be noticed is that the women participants were from different cultural, social, geographical, and religious backgrounds. In addition, they differed in the castes, though all of them were of the similar opinion that developing oneself is of utmost importance. The level of optimism, positive attitude, self-efficacy, and aspiration an individual possesses decides their growth upwards.

#### Theme 3: Social Facilitators

The theme reflects the social facilitators catalyzing the success of women leader participants. The participants described that family and social support played a very important role in making them reach this position. They shared that their education, society where they were brought up also contributed positively to their growth. Two subthemes emerged from the analysis: Extended family support and Educational growth opportunities. The participants emphatically mentioned that if their families would not have supported them, it would have been impossible for them to become

what they are. These women mentioned that their kids learnt to be more independent, while their husbands were sharing household work.

An interesting experience was shared:

Participant PG 2: Me and my spouse are in the same field and similar ranks, and it was rare that we both got the same postings, except for a few years when we were at the same station. I used to stay my posting station along with my kids" I had to manage multiple responsibilities, such as cooking, taking my children to school, helping them with their homework, taking care of them when they were sick, and fulfilling my professional obligations all at the same time. However, I was able to find balance and enjoy both my personal and professional life. Even though my husband was often away on work assignments, his support always motivated me to advance in my career. (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.)

She added with a happy note,

Participant PG 2: At an early stage of my career, I realized the significance of teamwork, both in my personal and professional life. "I" must be replaced by "WE" in order to move from "Illness" to "Wellness." It is important to invest time in building a strong team, and to recognize and appreciate the contributions of each member. Teamwork should enhance individual intelligence. Additionally, having focus, maintaining balance, and effectively managing time are crucial elements in achieving this. (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.)

With a parallel note, Participant PG 6 shared,

Participant PG 6: My job requires me to be on duty at any time, day or night, without warning. I am grateful to my husband and mother for taking care of my daughter while I am away. They allow me to focus on my work without worry, knowing that she is in good hands. This morning, for example, I had to leave early in the morning for an urgent incident in a nearby village. I didn't return home until 10 a.m. I quickly changed my uniform and went to my daughter's parent-teacher meeting. I am glad that I was able to do this because there was someone there to take care of her. (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.)

All the participants stated having a supportive partner and mother-in-law, and interestingly one of the participants also emphasized the emotional support she received from her children.

Participant PG 8: I belong to a rural area and the society is not much in favor of girl's getting educated and even more they feel that if a woman works, who will take care of the household responsibilities. Because of my parents' determination, I had got the opportunity to pursue till my post-graduation before marriage only.

After my marriage, I got the opportunity to pursue advanced courses which helped me keep a competitive edge above my competitors. (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.)

Chaturvedi & Sahai (2019) in their study had found that aspirations of women from different geographical areas were varying. They said women from semi-urban areas recognize their aspirations more confidently as compared to those from rural areas. They also found that educational outcomes of tribal women are low as compared to non-tribal. However, the participants proved the exactly opposite. Irrespective of their geographical locations, all the participants demonstrated a high level of the aspirations to reach leadership positions. In support of the study findings, Valk & Srinivasan (2011) and Quesenberry et al. (2006) also revealed that an empathetic husband plays a vital role in balancing the work–life of a woman. The support of husband and parents-in-laws helped female participants and avail the educational growth opportunities to advance in their career.

#### Theme 4: Organizational Facilitators

The participants shared that organizational facilitator helped their career advancement. They expressed that these factors kept them inspired and motivated towards their goals. These facilitators were categorized in two subthemes, mentorship and career growth opportunities. The participants narrated positive experiences regarding their mentors and the career growth opportunities in their organizations. Mentorship is very important as mentors having advanced knowledge and experience and who are devoted to supporting the development of their mentees can create a huge difference in the career of aspiring women leaders in their organizations (Satter & Russ, 2016; Shen & Kram, 2011).

The participants always felt that it helps women in ideating what they want to become. They also mentioned that mentors were critical in developing them at both professional and personal level. Each participant in the study identified a mentor in her life who influenced and shaped their personality and even their identity as a leader as well.

Participant PG 10 said that in a job profile like theirs, it is important to have a mentor and God father. She shared,

Participant PG 10: We have to work along with people from different walks of life like politicians, government officials from different fields, social workers etc. My mentor, who was my immediate senior guided me to handle the work effectively, to understand what type of problems can crop up in the area where I was serving and how to proactively plan for the same. (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.)

The promotions are seniority, merit, and time based. They are promoted every three–five years.

Participant PG 3: Our promotions are usually time based. We have to identify our own learning opportunities and prove our merit. Our work profile, the way we

handle situations and perform our duties are all considered for our growth. But yes, if we want to study higher or do some certifications to enhance our work, we are always supported. (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.)

Participant PG 10: When I joined the services, I was only a postgraduate. I completed doctorate when I was in service, as we are always provided with the opportunity to pursue higher education in best universities of India and abroad. (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.)

## Theme 5: Barriers and Challenges

This theme reflects the barriers and challenges faced by the participants since childhood till present day. The participants often had to bear discrimination and differential treatment by the society and the organizational colleagues or management. It comprises five subthemes. The participants reported common experiences of facing gender stereotyping, a lack of gender-specific resources and recognition, and family members holding stereotypical attitudes towards women's responsibilities similar to those identified by Galsanjigmed and Sekiguchi (2023). They also shared feeling guilty for balancing work and personal responsibilities. All participants agreed that they had to put in more effort than their male colleagues to demonstrate their competence and that earning the trust and respect of their superiors and male colleagues was a constant struggle for them. This can be due to the societal and workplace bias that women are less competent, capable, and committed to their work than men. This bias can lead to women facing more barriers to prove themselves and advance in their careers. Furthermore, the lack of female role models in leadership positions can make it difficult for women to envision themselves in those roles and to gain the support and mentorship they need to succeed. During their journey to top, each of them faced some barriers and challenges which impacted their work and personal life. The transition to top was difficult due to stereotyped outlook of men towards women especially in government services. The women participant perceived a lack of women leaders in their fields at higher positions. They agreed that the man's world is full of challenges for women to earn recognition and respect for them.

As participants endorsed gender stereotyping is still creating problems in the advancement of women. For example, Participant PG 5 shared an incident where she was remarked as being emotionally unstable and weak.

Participant PG 5: During a critical incidence of violence in our area, I was preparing a team to go for the assignment and I heard a comment: "yeh nayi nayi aayi hain, aisi kar paayigi kya? Kisi aur saheb ko bhejna chahiye saath mein" [She has come new; will she be able to handle the situation? Some male officer should be sent along with her]. I was surprised to see that I am tagged as not strong and being unable to handle? (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.)

Participant PG 7 endorsed the same saying,

Participant PG 7: During my previous posting to a terrorist active area, I had to make a presentation of a plan, when I went for the meeting, the coordinator said,

"Aapke saath presentation karne koi saheb nahin aaye kya?" [Has no male officer accompanied you for making presentation]. He couldn't imagine that I have prepared the plan and will be presenting the same. And you know, I was the only female officer there. (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.)

Due to stereotypic attitudes, the decision-making bodies compositions were also biased. The participants especially from academics mentioned prevalence of tokenism in their organizations. As generally every committee to be constituted is required to have a women nominee, there is hardly more than one woman in the committees like governing councils, academic councils, and management councils. As a result, when policies are designed, the female perspectives are missing in them bringing in lack of gender-specific (female specific to be more particular) facilitators and recognition.

Indian society is a patriarchal society where women are expected to do household chores and take care of their families. Indian women are brought up in a way that the women themselves feel that they should be good mothers, good wives, good daughters, and daughters-in-law. At the same time, they strive hard to give their best at job. The participants described similar experiences. They mentioned their juggling between family and work. The families expected them to take care of the household work. Though they said all of them were very supportive, but they were still expected to do the household work.

Participant PG 6 was interviewed just after she had returned from her daughter's parent teachers meet. She started the interview, simultaneously instructing the serving cook to give food to her daughter who was nagging for lunch. Answering the question about how a superintendent of police is able to manage her family and job, she humbly smiled and said,

Participant PG 6: I feel I must take care of my kids as my mother took care of me. May it be stereotypical, but I cook and serve the food myself. My husband is also in a similar job, and I don't mind offering water or tea to him, when we come back home together or even if I or he comes first. (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.)

They said we used to feel guilty whenever we couldn't pay attention to children and their studies or whenever they had to stay at office longer and their kids were sick.

Participant PG 2: My daughter had won a dance competition, and the award ceremony was to be held a week later. She was continuously after me saying I must come to the ceremony. But because of some urgent assignments I kept saying, will see ... And finally, I couldn't go. She was very upset. You know I also feel to be there for my daughter like other mothers, but ... [The researchers could see tears in her eyes]. (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.)

The participants strongly felt that these guilts are strong blockers for them, but agreed it proved difficult to come out of it.

The women participants also shared that their job demanded frequent transfers. After every two or three years, they were in a different place, handling different portfolio, different team, and different people. And every new place they went, they had to start generally fresh.

Participant PG 6: I am in Police Services which is truly a man's world. Let go off public, the people from the department also are unable to believe that a woman can handle police job effectively. You must prove yourself to win the trust. Nevertheless, it is just the reverse for men. People trust them first, and doubt their capabilities only in case there is some issue or they are unable to handle some situation. When I was posted as Superintendent of police, my male staff even tried to avoid saluting me. One of them used to come to my cabin without uniform cap to avoid saluting me, as you should have your cap on to salute. They will think of all such short cuts, but will not accept you easily. (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.)

Participant PG 4: It was a big challenge being in the man's world. People used to monitor my every move. Wherever I was transferred, by luck or bad luck, I was the first woman to reach there, and each time I ended up proving myself first to earn trust. (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.)

Life cycle stages were reported as a barrier by women participants. The stages of life cycle are similar for men and women. The participants emphasized that even though both men and women may experience similar life stages such as marriage and childbirth, the impact on the career progression of women is greater. These stages have a more significant impact on women's careers, particularly in terms of taking time off for maternity leave and the challenges of balancing work and family responsibilities. The societal expectation for women to prioritize family responsibilities over their career can make it more difficult for them to return to work or advance in their careers after taking time off for these life events.

#### Theme 6: Success Mantras

The participants shared various strategies adopted by them to overcome the barriers and challenges faced. Five subthemes were identified as the strategies for development: Building support systems, Providing training and retraining, Openly expressing opinions, Networking, mentoring, and Maintaining persistence and self-commitment. The participants echoed about some success mantras which helped them to break the barriers, overcome the challenges and step up.

The biggest challenge that women face is managing their kids, family, and career all at the same time. While men also have to balance their personal and professional lives, women typically bear the majority of the responsibilities for managing the household and caring for children. This can be overcome by seeking help from various sources such as relatives and friends, hiring paid domestic help, sharing responsibilities with their partners, or utilizing childcare facilities. It is important to note that finding ways to balance work and family is not exclusive to women and men also face similar challenges. However, societal expectations and traditional gender roles often place more burden on women to take care of the home and children.

Participant PG 6: I strongly believe that balancing both roles and handle them effectively requires good planning. The two years of arduous training as an IAS officer have sharpened my planning skills. During that training I had to wake up early, meditate and exercise for some time before beginning the regular routine for the day. This training has helped me balance all the different roles: mother, wife, daughter, and IAS officer into one. At the same time, I developed my support system, my mother, and my sister. They willingly offered to safeguard my daughter and take care of her whenever I had to go out of station. (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.)

Participant PG 9: In our field, you cannot predict when will you be required to go on emergency. Many times, you don't even have time to do arrangements. Hence, I had arranged for a full-time domestic help. And not even at home, you need a support system at organization too. I had identified some people whom I could trust to care of some emergencies, in case, I got late to attend. (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.)

The participants also strongly felt that making a successful leadership requires building a strategic network which crosses organizational and functional boundaries.

Participant PG 7: I was always good in interpersonal skills, which helped in building effective networks. My networks are fluid, as a new project or new transfer requires deemphasizing the old ones to build new networks. But, one thing is for sure, my networks have always helped me reaching my goals. (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.)

All the participants agreed that women should be more vocal about their feelings and opinions, and be more assertive in expressing themselves. They should learn to say no when needed, and be more proactive in seeking promotions and taking responsibility for their own careers, rather than relying on mentors or bosses to shape their careers for them.

Participant PG 4: When I was posted immediately, my first meeting consisted of 14 members, 13 males and I was the only woman (Which is still mostly) ... [Laughing]. The agenda was important and while taking opinion our chairman took everyone's opinion except me. At the end of a meeting or discussion, the chairman was preparing to summarize and conclude when I politely interjected and asked to express my opposing viewpoint. He gave me an annoyed look but allowed me to speak. After hearing my perspective, they paused for a moment before agreeing to bring it up for further discussion with higher-ups. As a result, my viewpoint was eventually implemented. If I hadn't spoken up, it would have been overlooked and likely become the accepted norm. (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.)

Participant PG 1 also mentioned strongly that speaking up is very important.

Participant PG 1: During my practical training days there were a few incidents. For example, once there was dacoity in a village which was far from headquarters. As a trainee we were supposed to visit all important events and it is the responsibility

of in charge to ensure that trainee is given exposure to all types of policing work, however, I was not taken to visit the scene of crime for whatever reason. I complained about it to my superior, and he gave strict instructions to all not to leave me out of all important events. After that I was never left out of anything. So, speaking up is very important. (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.)

Participant PG 10: The profile I handle is having good and bad times for you. You have to deal with normal public, politicians, higher authorities and many more. Learning to do this requires continuous support, and identifying a right true mentor is of utmost importance. (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.)

The same was supported by *Participant PG 4:* "You have to stick in the game, the minute you lose your commitment, and you will lose the game. Persistence is the key to tackle the challenges coming your way" (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.).

Participant PG 9: At each transfer, I always had the feeling that should try even more to prove myself. And for that the key was developing that confidence and not doubting your Indigeneity and for being a woman. It's difficult to admit that. Persistence is the solution. (Trans. by H. V. G. & S. P.)

#### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The themes and subthemes reflect that women who understand themselves and realize what they want to do in life, who persist, nurture supportive relationships professionally and personally, who can assess the impact of organizational and sociocultural factors on their ability to perform, and take the right steps to overcome barriers and challenges succeed in life, and the same is proven by the participants. The study looked at the leadership trajectory of successful women leaders from various backgrounds, including race, caste, location, and religion. The findings revealed that despite intersectional backgrounds the experiences were similar. One thing prominently stood out was only one women participant from minority community indicating possibility of them facing additional layers of prejudice rooted in caste-based stereotypes like discrimination which influences their access to education, career progression, and leadership roles.

Additionally, the participant's experiences analysis revealed the following competencies possessed by them which proved important in their career path to the top. The common competencies identified through the experiences are as follows: problem solving skills, networking, interpersonal skills, persistence, adaptability, determination, ability to learn, and communication skills. The intersectional study on women leaders across varying socioeconomic, religious, linguistic, and educational backgrounds, along with their rural or urban belongingness, developed the background of leadership development from their early years. The six broader themes, namely, Confidence fostered since childhood, Personal qualities, Social facilitators, Organizational facilitators, Workplace and sociocultural challenges, and Success mantra, reflected the development of perceived leadership definition among these women leaders through some enablers and deterrents. In their

journey to the leadership position and achieving it, the participants faced several familial, personal and professional challenges, primarily due to their gender. For instance, unsupportive spouses, mothers' guilt, internal politics based on gender-stereotyped notions, and others formed challenges for the women leaders to face and rise to the intended position.

The presence of gender-stereotyped challenges in bureaucracy, despite inclusive policy-making and implementation, implies the need for strong organizational intervention in the form of awareness among male and female professionals and their engagement in gender-equality practices, mentoring and networking, leadership development and support tools (Mousa et al., 2021). In other words, organizational change implementation and management are required to address gender discrimination, and associated challenges women leaders face just because of their gender and not their capabilities or performance. Leadership commitment and accountability in ensuring organizational intervention are critical in building a positive culture to deliver opportunities and optimize motivation for women.

Similarly, organizational process change through optimizing work-life integration; active and transparent support for gender equity in leader selection and promotion; structured opportunities for formal and informal professional development; equal access to resources; fairness in processes is considered effective in minimizing gender bias in organizations. Moreover, workforce engagement and promoting awareness of gender barriers and their impact, alongside organizational mitigation strategies, are important in advancing women in leadership. The findings revealed the juggling position of the women leaders between being the primary caregiver to their children and parents and managing professional responsibilities like ensuring "anytime, anywhere" availability at work as a norm for accelerated career progression. Such difficulty in managing both ends often leads to a mid-career break despite knowing the disadvantages associated with comebacks. Therefore, the governmental organizations, following examples from multinational organizations like Genpact, American Express, and Genesis, can open up opportunities to join back after their mid-career breaks and provide flexible timings and a choice to work from a more convenient office location for women joining after post-maternity leaves (Shrivastava & Rajesh, 2017). Besides, organizations need to clarify the strengthening of women's leadership and greater representation of both male and female professionals.

Thus, to make change happen at the workplace, the findings implied a change in mindset towards gender roles and stereotyped notions on mother/wife's duties at home through equal responsibilities and clarity on the importance of carrying out career aspirations by both the parents among children. The study provided valuable insights into the state of Indian society, where the girl child is often neglected and denied access to education. This highlights the importance of addressing this issue in order to empower women and promote gender equality. Additionally, the study highlights the challenges faced by women in leadership positions, such as lack of gender-specific facilities, inclusive environments, and gender stereotypes in job recognition endorsing the challenges highlighted by Oblova (2024). Addressing these challenges will be crucial in creating a more inclusive and supportive environment

for women in leadership positions. Organizations, educational institutions, and governments should take into account these findings in order to design policies The interpretation of women's accounts indicates that much learning central to negotiating power and gender relations remains hidden. There is, therefore, the scope for further work in identifying methodologies that enable more developed understandings of how gender and power organize and shape women's leadership learning.

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# **ARTICLE**

# Thematic Horizons of Regional Contemporary Art Exhibitions: Existential Values, Microand Macro-History, Humanistic Ideals

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines contemporary art institutions as spaces of cultural production that exert a normative influence on their audiences. Although contemporary art galleries in Russia are receiving growing attention from social scientists, these studies often concentrate mainly on audience profiles. The study aims to identify the themes that galleries consider important for their audiences, as well as the semantic and value-based emphases in their interpretation of these themes. A content analysis of exhibition announcements from four galleries in Yekaterinburg between 2020 and 2023 was conducted based on grounded theory. The three-stage coding of these announcements allowed us to identify the themes that galleries consider important for their audiences and to reveal the conceptual and value-based emphases in interpreting these themes. We found that exhibitions most frequently address three themes: existential values, micro- and macro-history, and humanistic ideals. The study also describes institutional conditions that influence the exhibition policies of galleries.

#### **KEYWORDS**

sociology of culture, construction of meanings, value orientations, contemporary art, exhibition, Yekaterinburg

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#### Introduction

Contemporary art institutions play a pivotal role in shaping societal values, making it essential to explore the messages they convey and the tools they employ. Such an examination offers profound insights into the broader social and cultural dynamics at work. We approach this question from a social constructivist perspective, which suggests that the communities that individuals belong to have a considerable impact on their values. As Pierre Bourdieu showed, the need to belong to certain social groups and publicly embrace their values and practices plays a crucial role in a person's life (Bourdieu & Darbel, 1969/1991). While contemporary society is more segmented and fluid than post-war French society, Bourdieu's idea remains relevant: individuals who are part of multiple social groups tend to adopt and reproduce the distinct values and practices associated with each group. Individual interests align with the values and meanings of broader social fields through various mechanisms, including cultural consumption. Public spaces of cultural production, such as schools, universities, churches, and cultural venues, play a key role in shaping these values.

This study focuses specifically on contemporary art galleries. These institutions were selected as the object of study for three reasons. First, contemporary art is designed to reflect on the most pressing issues of the current moment and the associated value transformations (Groys, 2008). Second, Russian audiences often perceive museums as legitimate spaces for generating meaning and values (Culture of happiness, n.d.). Third, in Russia, contemporary art institutions were among the first to employ participatory practices to engage with audiences. These efforts aim to enhance audience loyalty to the institution and facilitate the internalization of the meanings embedded in exhibitions (Malikova, 2019). Finally, examining the themes of these exhibitions enables us to identify not only the significant issues of the present but also the values that extend beyond the current moment.

The study aims to identify the themes that galleries consider important for their audience, as well as the key meanings and value orientations in their interpretation of these themes. Exhibition announcements provided the material for analysis. The emphasis is on their role in describing the event (Titscher et al., 2000, p. 32); announcements are viewed as institutional statements about exhibitions intended to attract visitors. The language of these announcements reflects the thematic and conceptual landscape relevant to the audience, shaping elements of the social reality they seek to engage with. Unlike curatorial texts in the exhibition space, announcements reach a broader audience, helping both actual and potential visitors navigate the key issues, meanings, and values foregrounded by contemporary art.

Exhibitions under the study were held at four galleries in Yekaterinburg between 2020 and 2023: the Ural Branch of the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts<sup>1</sup>, the Yeltsin Center Art Gallery<sup>2</sup>, the Sinara Art Gallery<sup>3</sup>, and the Museum of the Underground<sup>4</sup>. Brief

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> https://ural.pushkinmuseum.art/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> https://yeltsin.ru/artgallery

<sup>3</sup> https://sinara-center.com/gallery

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> https://ugmuseum-ekb.ru

information about the institutions available on their websites has been supplemented with data from anonymized interviews with experts in Russian contemporary art. These interviews provided insights into art funding, exhibition planning processes, and attitudes toward audiences.

Each of these galleries has its unique identity. The Ural Branch of the Pushkin Museum traces its origins to the Ural Branch of the State Center for Contemporary Art, which was established in Yekaterinburg in 1999. With no permanent collection or dedicated exhibition budget, the museum primarily focuses on contemporary art and the support of local artists. The Sinara Art Gallery, which evolved from the Yekaterinburg Gallery of Contemporary Art founded in 2004, became a new brand when it moved to the Sinara Center in 2019. Its collection owned by businessman Dmitry Pumpyansky mainly comprises the pieces of contemporary Ural and Russian art. The Yeltsin Center Art Gallery, which opened in 2015, does not have a permanent collection. Instead, it operates on exhibition budgets that support showcases of notable Russian artists. Some exhibitions address social issues and values related to Boris Yeltsin, the first President of Russia, and his political career. The Museum of the Underground, established in 2022, features a collection including unofficial art from the 1960s to the 1980s, primarily sourced from the Sverdlovsk5 underground movement. The owner of the collection is Ural businessman Pavel Neganov. The Museum's exhibitions are primarily centered around this unique collection.

There is a consensus among gallery professionals that contemporary art represents a collection of artistic practices that emerged in the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. Furthermore, contemporary art is recognized as meeting the demands and requirements of the present day, both in terms of content and form of expression. Art directors pay particular attention to engaging audiences through active public programs such as workshops, lectures, art mediation, clubs, and schools. As a rule, exhibition schedules are developed by gallery teams a year in advance. They are usually approved without significant changes in accordance with the procedures established by their founders. All these galleries contribute to the broader context of contemporary cultural landscape (Galeeva, 2017; Kudriavtseva, 2022), meeting the needs of the general audience. Therefore, the themes of their exhibition announcements can be examined together. The following section presents the way this topic is reflected in contemporary research, description of the methods used in the study, as well as the analysis of the data collected.

## Conceptual and Methodological Framework

The notion of a museum as a space for the production of meanings has developed under the influence of Foucault's ideas (1975/1979). The concept of the disciplinary museum suggests that the modern museum, which has replaced *wunderkammers* [cabinets of curiosities], is meant not to entertain but to educate and train the viewer. This function is realized through the development of classifications, typologies, and distinctions that the viewer observes in the exhibitions, through the creation of a specific museum

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> The name of the Yekaterinburg city during the Soviet period.

space akin to a panopticon, where viewers, observing one another, assimilate certain ideas and notions of publicity (Bennett, 1995). As a result of recent developments in museum theory (Maximova, 2019), museums have come to be viewed as spaces for communication. Contemporary practices, such as mediation and participation, actively engage viewers in understanding and creating the meanings and content of exhibitions (Simon, 2010). This approach facilitates a deeper internalization of these meanings by the audience.

Contemporary art galleries, as a special type of museum space, are of interest to cultural sociology for two main reasons: first, the galleries hold thematic exhibitions addressing issues that are relevant to contemporary social institutions; second, they employ interactive practices that help shape the meaning of these exhibitions. Russian studies mainly consider contemporary art galleries from the perspective of art history and cultural studies, exploring either specific projects (Borzenkova, 2023; Galkin & Kuklina, 2019; Kakurkina, 2019; Kostina, 2015; Sidorova, 2022; Yankovskaya, 2021; Zheleznyak, 2022), or methods of interaction with the audience (Kochukhova, 2019; Malikova, 2019; Melnikova et al., 2023), or the history of the art process (Galeeva, 2017; Kolesnik et al., 2022; Kudriavtseva, 2022; Kuklina, 2022; Kuznetsova, 2021; Lukina, 2021).

Social research is most often dedicated to the profile of the audience of contemporary art institutions. Museums and galleries are primarily seen as active participants in cultural consumption, and a special focus is made on studying their audiences. Standardized surveys of visitors to contemporary art exhibitions in Yekaterinburg, Perm, and Nizhny Novgorod reveal the following demographic data: 65% of the audience are women, and 74% of all visitors are under 35 years old. Additionally, audience segmentation has been proposed, categorizing visitors into core, peripheral, and prospective groups (Petrova & Burlutskaya, 2020). Interviews with visitors to exhibition venues in Tyumen identified four cultural audience profiles that differ in their leisure strategies and understanding of contemporary art (Chistyakova & Pupysheva, 2022). A comparison of audience attitudes toward contemporary art at the Hermitage and the Russian Museum over the past two decades shows that both institutions have experienced similar dynamics, shifting from curiosity and confusion (and occasionally rejection) to genuine interest (Bogacheva & levleva, 2011).

Only a limited number of social studies examine other aspects of the work of contemporary art institutions. For instance, Kuleva (2015, 2017) explores labor organization in "new cultural institutions." Sorokin and Afanaseva (2025) analyze the issue of agency in contemporary Russian art. Petrova (2023) examines the museum as an institution of solidarity, where socially significant meanings and relationships are produced and reinforced, and norms of mutual understanding and consensus are developed. From this perspective, Petrova analyzes the themes of exhibitions in three contemporary art museums (two in the capital and one in a regional city). Although her study is conceptually close to the present one, its focus on the quantitative analysis of exhibition themes limits the exploration of the contexts in which these themes are interpreted.

In contrast to existing sociological research, this study shifts the focus from audience profiling to the key themes that contemporary art galleries present to their visitors. As opposed to cultural studies and art history research, the study does not analyze the artistic specifics of theme representation or engage with questions of aesthetics and cultural theory. Rather, it examines the broader thematic and conceptual framework that shapes contemporary art audiences' engagement.

Qualitative content analysis is employed to reconstruct the thematic and semantic landscape presented by contemporary art galleries to their audience. The research methodology is based on grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In the open coding phase, each of the 107 exhibition announcements from 2020 to 2023 was assigned primary codes (keywords) reflecting its content. These announcements were retrieved from official websites of the Ural Branch of the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts and its official page<sup>6</sup> in the VK<sup>7</sup> social network, the Yeltsin Center Art Gallery, the Sinara Art Gallery, and the Museum of Underground Art. Since our main focus is exhibition themes, certain details in the announcements, such as exhibition duration, artist and curator names, artistic techniques and genres, were recorded as metadata though not coded.

During axial coding, the semantic meaning of key terms was clarified based on their context, keyword frequency was analyzed, and codes were selected to group similar terms by meaning. In the selective coding phase, connections between different coding levels were examined, which allowed us to identify the thematic contexts in which the axial codes were interpreted. Additionally, selective coding revealed a high density of connections between frequently occurring axial codes, enabling us to consolidate key exhibition themes into three overarching narratives: existential values, micro- and macro-history, and humanistic ideals.

As a result, 258 unique keywords were identified across 107 announcements. In the phase of axial coding, the following key themes were identified, frequently addressed in the exhibitions: the Artistic Process, Human Existence, the Urals, Yekaterinburg, Personal Stories, the Past, and Family. In the following section, the semantic and value dimensions are further explored in order to describe these themes and the connections they have.

#### **Results and Discussion**

Seven axial codes identified in the previous stage were selected for more detailed consideration. Quotes from exhibition announcements are provided to illustrate the connection between the themes.

The axial code "Artistic Process" encompasses two types of themes. First, it includes the exploration of universal human experiences through the artist's personal journey, such as finding one's path, mentorship, and the challenges of precarity. These themes relate to self-discovery, self-expression, and the creation of personal narratives. Second, it addresses the professional aspects of creative work, raising questions about the search for relevant artistic methods, the ethics of art,

<sup>6</sup> https://vk.com/pushkinmuseum\_ural

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> VK (short for its original name VKontakte) is a Russian online social media and social networking service. https://vk.com VK™ is a trademark of VK.com Ltd.

the institutional conditions surrounding contemporary art, and the subjectivity of the audience. While some of these questions may align more closely with art historical research, our primary concern is that contemporary audiences actively engage in discussions about its principles, techniques, and organizational features.

The axial code "Human Existence" thematically unites the codes "Person," "Self," "Body," and "Values". Within this macro-theme, the focus is made on the modern city dweller, an abstracted subject whose experience is likely familiar to that of the viewer.

The relationship of this subject with the external world is considered in three aspects: digital, material, and social. The digital aspect raises questions about the extent to which individuals control digital technologies, accentuating the anxiety caused by the awareness of the limits of this control. The interpretation of the human relationship with the material environment creates a certain dualism: nature is seen as an object of care, while the city is viewed as a space of alienation. Social relationships are problematized as (im)possible communication, as the individual confrontation with social norms. The theme of overcoming alienation in urban life is addressed in the exhibition *Preimushchestvo Vstrechnykh Sblizhenii* [The Advantage of Counter Convergences] that was held from April 12, 2023 to June 11, 2023 in The Sinara Art Gallery. The exhibition announcement formulates questions, encouraging the audience to seek answers:

Streams of people who do not notice each other converge and disperse in the same places every day. We walk toward each other but do not get closer. However, the advantage is always in community. How can we overcome alienation? (Vorobyeva, 2023; Trans. by Elena Kochukhova & Evgenia Vakhrusheva—E. K. & E. V.)

This individual's self-reflection is evident in their search for a personal path, recognition of their feelings, and choice of self-support practices such as self-care, self-love, and self-belief. The interdisciplinary project *SEANS* [SEANCE] was described as "an experiment involving a psychotherapeutic performance format," in which the main subject of the performance "becomes the viewer, who, for an hour, enters the space of contemporary art exhibitions and, armed with an interactive audio guide, moves from hall to hall, performing various actions" (Ural'skii filial Pushkinskogo muzeia, 2020; Trans. by E. K. & E. V.). Each hall of the exhibition is dedicated to a specific theme: mindful treatment of nature, caring for one's own body, communication with society. The format of an individual journey through these themes will provoke the viewer to interact more sensitively with themselves and the world around them.

The theme of self-reflection in exhibition announcements is often linked to creativity, particularly artistic creativity. It is presented both as a way of being and as a therapeutic practice. For example, the exhibition *Ne Vremia dlia Poletov* [No Time for Flying] invites reflection on the theme of finding individuality, the freedom of one's own flight, and art as one of the main languages of communication in the modern world (Borzenkova, 2022). The theme of creativity is also closely intertwined with the issue of cultural diversity as a source of meaning and a foundation for identities.

Cultural diversity, in turn, at one of the exhibitions, serves as an important context for understanding human corporeality. The body is also considered in terms of the dynamic forms of its expression (dance, movement) and its interaction with space. For instance, in the exhibition *Ostorozhno, Khrupkoe* [Fragile, Handle With Care], the artist

experiments with space, intentionally placing objects closer to the viewers' bodies—for you to enter the exhibition space, you literally have to come into contact with Ekaterina's works, and to view the artist's video, you lie down on a soft mat, on which the artist's works are reproduced, becoming part of her total installation for a few minutes. (Komleva-Kollontay, 2022; Trans. by E. K. & E. V.)

The axial code "Human Existence" also reflects on freedom, human rights, and the intrinsic value of human life. These values have been placed in a historical context, highlighting their relevance. The discourse surrounding them is thematically hermetic, effectively confined to two exhibitions organized at the Art Gallery of the Yeltsin Center (Narinskaya, 2021; Plotnikov, 2022).

The axial code "Personal History" is also related to humanity, though focusing on exhibitions that emphasize the individual destinies of specific people and the complex relationship between humans and time. This axial code comprises three main thematic fields. Firstly, it addresses existential questions regarding key reference points and anchors in life, the meaning of existence, and relationships with eternity. By reflecting on their own histories, contemporary artists also consider the meaning of creativity and the significance of being an artist. Secondly, it involves approaches to understanding generational connections and family trajectories as the foundation of a personal history. The interpretation of family history serves as a valuable source of meaning for individual existence and identity, establishing one's connection to eternity. At the same time, it problematizes the perception of family history as a single narrative, as it consists of separate memories and testimonies of varying significance that transform over time. For instance, in the exhibition Esh'. Poka Estsia, i Pei, Poka P'etsia [Eat While You Feel Like Eating, and Drink While You Feel Like Drinking], the exhibits visualize the mechanisms of individual and family memory: some memories are hyperbolized, others erased, while some are endlessly produced. Miniature dolphin figurines, a common souvenir from Russian resorts and the main exhibits in a grandmother's cabinet, transform into a two-meter sculpture (Sycheva, 2022).

Third, it refers to a series of historical events and narratives that shape the framework within which personal histories develop. There is a particular interest in the experience of growing up in the 1990s<sup>8</sup>, closely tied to the personal experiences of contemporary artists whose childhood or youth coincided with that time, and to the experience of the audience, largely represented by young people. The exhibition

<sup>8</sup> The 1990s in Russia were a period marked by the transition from a Soviet-controlled economy to a market-oriented system, resulting in severe economic hardship and political instability. This era also saw cultural experimentation alongside widespread disillusionment and nostalgia for the perceived stability of the Soviet period.

*Devianostye Detei* [Children's Nineties] was held in The Yeltsin Centre from February 17, 2023 to April 16, 2023. As the announcement says,

the exhibition invites viewers to reflect on the experience of growing up in the nineties. How did children perceive that time? How do they remember it as adults? The works of fifteen Russian artists create fragmented and non-nostalgic images of the era and life in in that era. (Sokolovskaia et al., 2023; Trans. by E. K. & E. V.)

Significant reference points for contemporary art also include the Great Patriotic War and the preceding period of repression, capturing their lasting impact on individuals here and now. Alongside other events, these form a temporal continuum of past–present–future in which personal histories unfold.

The connections of the axial code "Family" are limited to two themes already mentioned above: the search for personal identity, the construction of personal history, and the reflection on the influence of national history on family history.

The axial code "Past" most frequently appears in the context of family history and personal narratives. A particularly striking example is the announcement for the playinstallation *Dym* [Smoke], inspired by Olga Lavrentieva's graphic novel *Survilo*:

Valentina Vikentyevna was born in 1925 in Leningrad. She faced the fate shared by millions of her contemporaries—exile, war, blockade. The storyline of *Survilo*, along with dates and facts, can be found in any history textbook. However, experiencing them, feeling them, and mourning them is quite another matter. It means, if only for a moment, becoming the grandchild to whom this story is addressed. (Tutak, 2022; Trans. by E. K. & E. V.)

Additionally, exhibition announcements coded as "Past" often feature reflections on abstract concepts such as the interplay between past and future, the connections and ruptures between them, as well as references to key events in 20th-century Russian history. Memory forms, which reflect the past, are portrayed as complex and unstable. The situational nature of how they are handled is also emphasized—family histories are preserved or lost in retellings, and archives are selectively maintained and only partially explored. Rational approaches (archiving, analysis) and emotional approaches (mourning, emotional processing) to the past are not mixed within a single exhibition. From a non-anthropological perspective, the question of the past is raised in the exhibition *Mesto Strakha* [Place of Fear], whose main subject is an abandoned NKVD9 building in Magnitogorsk. According to the exhibition announcement, "the artists ask: can a place be a witness to forgotten history and bear traces of past events? Do walls, stones, and trees remember?" (Shusharichev, 2021; Trans. by E. K. & E. V.).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> The NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) was a Soviet government agency responsible for internal security, secret police activities, and law enforcement from 1934 to 1946. It played a key role in political repression, including overseeing the Gulag labor camps and conducting mass arrests during the Great Purge under Stalin.

The prominence of the axial codes "Ural" and "Yekaterinburg" is largely a result of our research focus, as the study centered on art galleries within a specific city and region. These codes represent the space in which processes of interest to artists and curators unfold. While the region or city itself rarely became the central theme of an exhibition, it often influenced the direction of the work presented. For instance, Ural art provides a lens to explore the logic and challenges of the artistic process, including the social connections between artists, the influence of collectors and institutional archives, the role of the audience, and the rise of prominent cultural figures. Similarly, the Ural offers examples for discussions on memory and forgetting, both collective and family, within the context of Old Believer history or Stalinist repressions, as well as conversations on religious, national, and linguistic diversity, and the variety of ways of life.

On the other hand, the Ural is personified as a kind of mystical force, endowed with such qualities as strength of character and freedom. This force leaves its complex imprint on everything that happens within its space, making people confront pain and reflect on questions about good and evil, the eternal and the fleeting (and curators and artists position themselves as the conduits of this force).

Yekaterinburg is primarily depicted as a site for social experiments, discussions on urban development, and struggles for space. The focus extends beyond the processes accompanying urban transformation to consider their impact on individuals. On the one hand, this influence can be framed positively, as seen in the exhibition *Chto Delaet Nas Luchshe* [What Makes Us Better], part of a project on the Youth Housing Complex (YHC), a Soviet-era initiative where young people collectively built apartment housing in the 1980s. Examining this initiative in Sverdlovsk, the exhibition's curator concludes:

For each participant, joining or supporting the YHC became a way to express the best in themselves. And while the construction of YHCs ended with socialism, the people from these communities carried on, proving to be better prepared than others for the challenges that awaited the country after the collapse of the Soviet world. (Starostova, 2021; Trans. by E. K. & E. V.)

On the other hand, the ambiguous and mixed emotions triggered by changes in the urban landscape are also explored. Alena Gur'eva's exhibition Ia—Gorod, Khotia i ne Znaiu, Kuda Mne Idti [I Am the City, Though I Do Not Know Where to Go], which examines transformations in the Elmash district of northern Yekaterinburg where large-scale residential construction began in the 1950s, captures a sense of emptiness and loss: "The renovation program and the work of developers are reshaping the district. As old buildings are demolished, the area loses part of its unique character. Where once life was, now there's emptiness" (Shusharichev, 2023; Trans. by E. K. & E. V.). The heightened focus on Yekaterinburg as a subject of artistic interpretation and a thematic framework for exhibitions became particularly pronounced in 2023, coinciding with the city's  $300^{th}$  anniversary celebrations. Yekaterinburg is not simply representative of the Ural region, nor is it understood solely through that lens.

#### Conclusion

Overall, the key themes of the exhibitions under consideration and the contexts in which they are interpreted align with the broader conceptual horizons of global contemporary art, which frequently engages with topics such as identity, the body, time, memory, place, language, science, and spiritual exploration (Robertson & McDaniel, 2016).

In the Russian context, a quantitative study of exhibition themes in Erarta Museum of Contemporary Art (St. Petersburg), Garage Museum of Contemporary Art (Moscow), and the Ural branch of the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts (Yekaterinburg) for 2021–2022 found that one of the most frequent themes was art itself (Petrova, 2023). This finding partially aligns with our own analysis, which identified artistic process as the most frequently occurring axial code in Yekaterinburg gallery announcements. However, a direct comparison of our results is challenging, as Petrova's coding includes not only thematic categories but also artistic techniques (e.g., photography, gilding). Furthermore, her study does not establish relationships between codes or clarify their contexts, and the results are presented as a word cloud, which does not provide precise information about the prominence of specific themes.

For example, in these visualizations, the code "Human Existence," which is central to our study, appears less significant than installation, while codes related to personal history or the past are entirely absent. These discrepancies stem from differences in research objectives, sampling principles, and coding practices.

Engaging with the experiences of contemporary urban dwellers, their personal histories, and the past, the exhibitions address three main themes: existential values, micro- and macro-history, and humanistic ideals. Existential values are highlighted through the exploration of human existence in the modern world. Contemporary art engages with themes such as the meaning of life, personal growth, self-belief and self-care, encounters with others, and maintaining control over one's life in an increasingly digitalized environment. Overall, the exhibition announcements reflect the portrayal of a person as an unfinished subject, a bearer of memory and emotions. Family as a value is primarily understood in the context of existential guests, as it gives meaning to existence in the present, serves as a link to eternity, and a source of personal identity. Communal values, which emphasize a person's connection to local communities and processes, on the one hand, are linked to reflections on the cultural diversity of the Ural, and on the other, to urban transformation practices. Values associated with historical heritage and collective memory are conveyed through discussions of specific events or periods in Russian history and their lasting impact on contemporary life. Prominent topics include the Great Patriotic War, the preceding period of persecutions, and coming of age in the 1990s. The connection between individuals and local communities is represented in two ways: through artistic exploration of the cultural diversity of the Urals and through the archiving and critical examination of urban transformation practices. Humanistic ideals touched upon in the exhibitions include human rights, freedom, the value of human life, and the inherent worth of individuals.

The discussion of these main themes does not follow the traditional approach of transmitting grand, well-articulated value narratives typical of modern museums. Instead, the galleries in question use horizontal forms of communication, actively involving the audience in discussions on topics that matter to them, often through personal and local stories. Exhibition announcements emphasize the significance of personal experience as a source of inspiration, often inviting reflection and discussion. This emphasis on collaborative meaning-making is further reinforced through public programs and mediation efforts, thus reflecting one of the notable trends in museum practice, that is, engaging the viewer through emotional connections. By using stories that resonate with visitors' experiences, museums create new experiences and emotions (Maximova, 2019, p. 132). In this context, it is understandable why direct discussions of universal values (freedom, life, human rights) are relatively limited.

Our analysis of the codes brought to light the key themes in the announcements of contemporary art exhibitions in Yekaterinburg. Additionally, the limitations that shape the thematic and value spectrum of gallery offerings were identified. First, each gallery's exhibition program is compiled by its director and curators. Curators select exhibition themes depending on both micro- and macro-social contexts. On a microlevel, choices are influenced by professional interests, artistic value judgments, and audience preferences. On a macrolevel, external pressures play a significant role. The increasing scrutiny of exhibition content by regulatory bodies (Kuleva, 2022; V rabote eks-direktora, 2025; Vagner, 2023) and the phenomenon of protest-driven responses to contemporary art (Gomes & Kruglova, 2021; Heinich, 2000) contribute to institutional concerns about preserving a legitimate space for artistic expression. The need to maintain this space is framed as a responsibility toward both the audience and the broader artistic community. Second, the galleries in question have limited material and organizational resources: their teams are small, two of the four galleries lack their own collections, and one does not have a budget for exhibition activities. Consequently, they are restricted in terms of project scale and the geographical diversity of represented artists.

These two reasons narrow the possibility of expression, though the variety of themes that are identified in exhibition announcements does not suggest that institutionalized contemporary art is confined to a narrow thematic corridor. The key themes of the exhibition announcements—Artistic Process, Human Existence, Personal History, The Individual, The Past, Family, The Ural, and Yekaterinburg—form a significant shared framework that brings together the interests of contemporary art audiences. Although there is an emphasis on the Ural, this topic is explored through an interest in its cultural diversity and relationship between people and the place where their lives unfold. This attention to one's immediate environment, the ability to engage in dialogue with it and understand one's connection to it, is regarded as a positive example of a non-confrontational narrative.

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# **ARTICLE**

# Sociocultural Factors Hindering Public Communication of Positive Body Image in Kazakhstan

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This research investigated the obstacles hindering the promotion of positive body image among women in Kazakhstan by focusing on sociocultural factors influencing their perceptions. Using a network sampling method, this descriptive study surveyed women aged 18-50 in Almaty and Astana, Kazakhstan's two largest cities. Participants were recruited through a questionnaire link shared on Instagram<sup>1</sup> by four enablers, which reached 1,000 potential respondents and resulted in 135 returned questionnaires of which 94 were fully completed, thus achieving a 13.5% response rate and a 9.4% completion rate. The study was conducted with a 90% confidence level. The findings indicated that social media, family influence, and the fashion industry were primary obstacles to promoting positive body image in Kazakhstan. While there has been some progress in accepting positive body image in Almaty and Astana, entrenched cultural norms continue to heavily influence perceptions. Young Kazakhstani women often face negative scrutiny if their bodies do not conform to the thin ideal.

¹ Instagram™ is a trademark of Instagram Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Instagram полностью заблокирована в России как экстремистская организация.

### **KEYWORDS**

Kazakh sociocultural factors, public communication barriers, positive body image, mainstream media, social media, family influence

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## Introduction

Body perception plays a significant role in shaping women's mental and emotional well-being and influences various aspects of their lives, including self-esteem, interpersonal relationships, and overall quality of life. Cultural and societal influences from the media, fashion, and family reinforce unrealistic body standards and exacerbate their adverse effects on female well-being (Nazarali & Majumdar, 2020). Comparing oneself to these standards can lead to dissatisfaction and a distorted view of one's body. The existing literature on positive body image has primarily examined the phenomenon from psychological perspectives and explored the influence of media and social media. In modern psychology, the term "body image" typically encompasses four main components: perceptual (apprehension), affective (feelings), cognitive (thoughts), and behavioral (actions) related to one's body (Tylka, 2019).

Body image includes two mutually exclusive aspects: negative and positive (Rogers et al., 2018). Tantleff-Dunn et al. (2011) connected negative body image with normative discontent. It is characterized by persistent dissatisfaction and preoccupation with one's body, decreased self-esteem, disgust, and disappointment with appearance (Hewitt & Murray, 2024). The sociocultural model of body image is critical in developing and maintaining a negative body image by internalizing an ideal thin body standard (Thompson & Stice, 2001). Developing negative body image was more likely for women than men (Swami & Knowles, 2014).

Tort-Nasarre et al. (2023) defined the positive body image as a "multidimensional construct that represents love and respect, acceptance and appreciation of individuals and feeling comfortable with their body, independently of their actual physical appearance, as well as their ability to interpret messages in a way that protects the body" (p. 2).

Positive body image became a focus of psychological research at the turn of the 21st century. Wood-Barcalow et al. (2010) identified several attributes of a positive body image: appreciation of individual uniqueness, lack of responsiveness to negative comments and media standards, and a focus on one's body positive features. When women focused mainly on positive information and disregarded negative influences, their investment in their bodies lessened, leading to an improved body image, which demonstrates its fluidity. Women also influenced each other positively by encouraging body appreciation, surrounding themselves with supportive individuals, and maintaining their health, which increased positive input.

Mainstream media and social media images significantly influence body image. Polivy and Herman (2002) suggested that media representations of the ideal body contribute to the internalization of thin body ideals and lead to body dissatisfaction (Wood-Barcalow et al., 2010). Traditional media, such as television programs, magazines, music videos, and films, typically emphasize ideal body shapes. Tiggemann (2005) found that reading fashion magazines leads to a more robust internalization of a thin body, whereas watching television influenced behavioral intentions regarding dieting and excessive exercise. Consistent with Tiggemann's (2005) findings, Grabe and Hyde (2009) found that television shows often featured characters and celebrities with ideal bodies. However, according to Bonfanti et al. (2025) in social comparison theory, people compare themselves with peers rather than models, making social media's peer comparisons especially relevant to body image issues (Levine & Murnen, 2009; Tiggemann et al., 2018; Want, 2009).

Kazakhstan presents an exciting research case due to the increasing studies on women's roles and gender equality. However, little scientific attention has been given to Kazakhstani women's body image, particularly positive ones. The only two relevant studies are by Imankulova and Kudaibergenova (2021), who examined the connection between age, self-esteem, and body image satisfaction. They found that age is not a defining factor in how women perceive their bodies. Instead, what emerged as a norm across demographics is a sense of "normative body dissatisfaction," that was largely influenced by societal and media ideals of beauty. Although higher self-esteem tends to correlate positively with a more favorable body image, self-confidence alone does not guarantee high satisfaction with one's appearance, as even women with high self-esteem may still hold moderate views of their own attractiveness. Interestingly, body satisfaction appeared to be unaffected by family or social status, with no significant relationship to being married or having children. Instead, effective coping strategies and a positive self-perception played a crucial role in fostering a healthier body image and response to criticism.

The second relevant research study was performed by Amantayeva et al. (2019), who investigated body corrections in plastic surgery and cosmetic improvements. In the sociocultural and business contexts, the researchers investigated the evolving beauty industry in contemporary Kazakhstani society, where beauty ideals encompass physical attributes and broader societal perceptions. They emphasized that beauty is increasingly viewed as an advantage in the competition for social acceptance and success. The study noted a significant role of Kazakh men in assessing women's attractiveness, influencing societal beauty standards and pressuring women to conform.

However, neither study addressed the sociocultural barriers to building a positive body image in Kazakhstan. This research aims to bridge that gap by exploring the following question: What are the strongest factors hindering public communication of positive body image in Kazakhstan? Additional research questions (RQ) are included:

RQ1: Which type of media—mainstream or social media—in Kazakhstan exerts stronger hindering effects on positive body image?

RQ2: Is the family circle hindering or helping the positive body image in Kazakhstan?

RQ3: What influence does the fashion industry in Kazakhstan exert on positive body image?

To address the research questions, the following research objectives were set:

- To conduct an extensive literature review on positive body image;
- To describe the sociocultural context in Kazakhstan, which impacts the Kazakh female body.

## **Literature Review**

## The Female Body in the Sociocultural Context of Kazakhstan

The portrayal of women and their appearance in Kazakh society has deep historical roots, which is reflected in Kazakh proverbs or idioms. For example, Khanipova (2021) in her study of the image of women in folklore and myths cites the following proverb: "Erkektiń sulýlyģy-aqylda, áıeldin aqyly-sulýlyqta" [The beauty of a man is in his mind, the mind of a woman is in her beauty]. This suggests that women should cultivate inner and outer beauty, possessing intelligence, patience, hard work, generosity, wisdom, and household efficiency while remaining attractive and well-groomed.

In Kazakh folklore, the beauty of Kazakh women and girls is often characterized by white skin, symbolizing aristocracy and the absence of physical labor, as well as physical attributes such as long necks, thin waists, delicate hands, thick hair, and almond-shaped eyes (Ibadullaeva, 2022). Brovkina (2016) notes that the physical characteristics of Kazakh women have evolved due to changes in lifestyle and diet. Historically, the harsh conditions of the steppe required women to have well-developed muscle mass, short stature, and strong physique. Contemporary Kazakhstani women show meticulous care in household management, emphasizing good health, resilience, and the ability to endure. Modern Kazakh beauty standards have changed significantly under the influence of the media during the Soviet era. In Russianlanguage media, positive descriptors such as "luxurious," "ideal," "stunning," and "fantastic" are common, which promote a slender woman as the standard of beauty. Conversely, terms such as "gained weight" and "non-model figure" are often used in a negative way (Isina & Beysembayeva, 2023).

## Media and Positive Body Image

Mainstream and social media play a crucial role in shaping perceptions of body image, with both flourishing in Kazakhstan. Mainstream media in Kazakhstan benefits from significant opportunities, driven by the fact that political and business elites and the upper echelons of the national intelligentsia and bureaucracy engage with these media platforms (Akhmetova et al., 2020). Additionally, "3,432 periodicals, 660 online media and 249 electronic media were registered in Kazakhstan as of October 19, 2020" (Bokayev et al., 2022, p. 5). Therefore, it can be inferred that the mainstream media could strongly influence attitudes toward positive body image in Kazakhstan.

Van Vonderen and Kinnally (2012) examined the relation between media consumption and body dissatisfaction among female undergraduate students focusing on the internal factor of self-esteem and such external factors as peer and parental

attitudes. Their findings revealed that while comparing oneself to media figures was associated with internalizing the thin ideal, this was less significant compared to the influence of peer attitudes and self-esteem. Peer comparison and self-esteem were found to be stronger predictors of body dissatisfaction, which underscores the significant impact of social and environmental factors on body image perceptions.

David et al. (2009) explored the influence of images of thin models on individuals' body perceptions and self-esteem. This mixed-method study revealed that exposure to thin fashion images increased participants' body dissatisfaction and negatively affected their perceptions of others' bodies, resulting in perceived pressure to conform to media stereotypes. This underscores the importance of media literacy initiatives to help individuals critically evaluate and challenge unrealistic beauty standards.

Martin and Gentry (1997) investigated how idealized models in magazine advertising impact preteen and adolescent girls' self-perceptions and body image. The study revealed that these images negatively affected the girls' self-esteem and body image, with many expressing a desire to emulate the models despite recognizing the unrealistic nature of the beauty standards. However, Halliwell and Dittmar (2004) found that advertisements featuring thin models increased body-focused anxiety more than those with average-sized models or no models. As a result, advertisers can use more diverse body types without compromising ad effectiveness. This study indicated prospects for more inclusive advertising practices in order to reduce the negative impact of idealized body standards on women's psychological well-being.

## Social Media

Kazakhstan demonstrates substantial digital connectivity with 18.19 million Internet users and a 92.3% Internet penetration rate. The country has 14.10 million active social media users, which represents almost 72% of the total population. Social media has thus surpassed mainstream media in influence. TikTok² and Instagram³ are the two dominant social networks, with 14.10 million users aged 18 and above on TikTok and 12.10 million on Instagram³ (Kemp, 2024). Consequently, social media arguably exert a stronger and more rapid influence on positive body image than traditional media.

Kudaibergenova (2019) explored the influence of social networks, particularly Instagram³, on body image and sexual identity within authoritarian contexts, focusing on the interplay with national concepts of power and individual identity in post-Soviet states, particularly in Russia and Kazakhstan. The study analyzed Instagram³ accounts of popular Kazakhstani and Russian bloggers to examine how these platforms blend globalized gender norms with traditional practices. It highlighted the role of social networks in shaping perceptions and opinions and noted governmental efforts to control access and regulate online discussions because of their significant societal influence.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> TikTok is a trademark of ByteDance, registered in China and other countries. TikTok has suspended all new posting and live-streaming for users in the Russian Federation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Instagram™ is a trademark of Instagram Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Instagram полностью заблокирована в России как экстремистская организация.

Ayupova et al. (2018) compared the impact of Facebook<sup>4</sup> on body image and eating disorders in Kazakhstan and the USA highlighting the differential influence of social media across cultural contexts. Through surveys and interviews, they discovered that increased Facebook<sup>4</sup> usage correlated with higher body dissatisfaction and a greater risk of disordered eating behaviors in both Kazakhstani and American participants. However, the mechanisms and cultural influences differed: Kazakhstani participants were swayed by both Facebook<sup>4</sup> imagery and local beauty standards, whereas American participants were more affected by the competitive nature of social media's portrayal of perfection. These results underscore the complex relationship between social media use, societal norms, and self-esteem issues, and stress the importance of culturally tailored programs to enhance self-esteem and promote healthy eating habits to counteract social media's adverse effects.

In a different sociocultural context, Belogai et al. (2022) investigated how societal and media stereotypes promoting unrealistically thin bodies impact the perceptions of preschool girls during their early stages of body image formation. The study emphasizes the role of sociocultural and educational factors, including media and the Internet, in shaping individuals' body image perceptions, mainly by disseminating unattainable beauty standards. The findings indicated that exposure to images of unrealistically thin bodies influenced the girls' preferences; they showed a distorted perception of their bodies and ideals as early as ages 5–6. This study underscores the significant impact of societal and media influences on shaping young children's early perceptions of body image.

Kraus and Martins (2017) conducted a systematic content analysis of body images in online fashion blogs in proposing that these platforms might present a healthier alternative to the idealized images in traditional media. By examining images of 481 individuals from five street-style blogs, the study focused on authentic style, featuring ordinary people without Photoshop<sup>5</sup> who were not professional models or celebrities. The analysis revealed that a majority of women (72%) and men (62%) were below-average weight, and 60% of women conformed to traditional gender stereotypes (Kraus & Martins, 2017, p. 360). The study concluded that, despite their reputation for featuring "regular people," these blogs perpetuated the same beauty ideals as mainstream media.

## Family and Positive Body Image

The Kazakh family, the nuclear family and the extended family, is a complex system of interpersonal relations. The nuclear family connections prevail due to the individual's recognition, respect, and identification among family members. "This is manifested in the prevailing family- and children-centric orientation, respect and veneration of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Facebook™ is a trademark of Facebook Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Facebook в России признана экстремистской организацией и заблокирована.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Photoshop <sup>™</sup> is a trademark of Adobe Systems Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. https://www.adobe.com/products/photoshop.html

older family members ... and on the degree of relationship to the father, mother or the spouse" (Kabakova & Maulsharif, 2012, p. 640). Therefore, it can be assumed that the opinion and comments of elderly nuclear family members, particularly the mother, on young women's body image has significantly influence. In a different cultural context, this assertion is also true. For example, Deek et al. (2023) examined the impact of family dynamics and sociocultural factors on young women's body image and eating habits. The research focused on the roles of mothers and sisters in fostering body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviors in Australia. Their findings revealed the significant influence of mothers and sisters highlighting the impact of "fat talk" on young women's body image and eating behaviors. This research emphasized the importance of familial factors in shaping body image and eating habits and suggested the potential for family-based interventions to foster positive body image and healthy eating practices among young women.

Arroyo and Andersen (2016) focused their research on the effects of conversations about appearance between mothers and daughters on body image outcomes. They aimed to understand how discussing weight and age between mothers and daughters influences their behaviors and perceptions of body image. The study specifically examined the role of family communication dynamics within mother–daughter relationships. The researchers applied actor–partner interdependence models to analyze the data. Their study revealed significant correlations between mothers' and daughters' fat talk, indicating a shared pattern of appearance-related discussions with negative body image outcomes. Moreover, mothers' fat talk was positively correlated with daughters' bulimia and body dissatisfaction. These findings underscore the detrimental impact of appearance-related communication within mother–daughter relationships on body image outcomes.

Pareek and Rema (2023) studied the connection between family dynamics and body image among young adults. They examined how the family, as a core institution that offers emotional support and influences social development, affects the formation of body image perceptions. The research emphasized that positive elements of the family environment, including emotional support through praise and encouragement, can protect against negative sociocultural influences and promote a positive body image in adolescents. In contrast, critical comments about appearance from family members were associated with negative body image and low self-esteem, which could adversely affect eating behaviors and overall well-being.

Curtis and Loomans (2014) investigated body image dissatisfaction among young women in New Zealand and noted its prevalence and adverse effects were akin to those in other Western countries. The study found that body image dissatisfaction, defined as a discrepancy between perceived and ideal body appearance, extends beyond traditional concerns of being "overweight." The study participants reported that comments from friends, familial critiques, well-meaning advice, and the internalization of societal ideals all contributed to their body dissatisfaction. Despite the small sample size, this research underscored the complex interplay of familial and peer influences on body image perceptions among young women.

Akbar et al. (2022) examined the impact of family, peer, and media pressures on body image dissatisfaction among employed women. They surveyed 250 employed women to evaluate how these sociocultural influences predict body image dissatisfaction within this demographic. The findings highlighted the socially constructed and dynamic nature of cultural influences demonstrating that societal pressures regarding appearance increase the likelihood of body dissatisfaction in this group. Additionally, the study emphasized the role of self-esteem and showed that women with lower self-esteem were more susceptible to body dissatisfaction than those with higher self-esteem. This research highlighted the influence of family dynamics, social pressures, and psychological factors on body image perceptions among employed women.

# Fashion and Positive Body Image

The fashion phenomenon significantly shapes social life by designating particular objects and individuals as culturally significant, which influence behavioral norms and various social dimensions. Fashion trends dominate diverse spheres of life and are pivotal in molding societal behaviors and norms (Ayupova et al., 2018; Hollett et al., 2023). Regrettably, these influences often lead women to perceive their bodies through societal expectations, which negatively impacts their body image, as underscored by various studies.

For instance, Ajwani (2020) explored the connection between clothing psychology and body image perception to reveal that attire serves multiple functions beyond mere protection and influences how others perceive individuals and provides psychological satisfaction. The study highlighted how societal norms frequently link clothing choices with body image projection, even though individual perceptions may not always align with societal standards. Ajwani emphasized that positive body image correlates with self-acceptance and emotional well-being, while negative body image can result in reduced self-confidence and potential depressive states. Similarly, Rudd and Lennon (2001) illustrated how women's dissatisfaction with their bodies affects their clothing choices, particularly in larger sizes that often lack fashionable options tailored to prevailing ideals.

The rise of virtual fashion influencers has perpetuated stereotypes and gender hierarchies (Shin & Lee, 2023) by examining and critiquing their portrayal of bodies in the digital realm. Shin and Lee found that virtual fashion influencers utilize social platforms to affect fashion trends and ideals, thus blurring the distinction between virtual and real identities. The virtual interactions facilitated by online shopping channels have also influenced women's perceptions of body image (Hollett et al., 2023).

## **Methods**

This descriptive research examined the factors hindering the public communication of positive body image in Kazakhstan. Given the understudied nature of this phenomenon, the research aimed to identify and describe these barriers by surveying a convenient sample of women aged 18–50 residing in Almaty and Astana, the two

largest cities in Kazakhstan. The age limit was selected due to cultural perception of Kazakh women should conform to a socially acceptable standard of slimness throughout life. Unlike older women, who experience a degree of cultural acceptance for weight gain with age, younger women face stricter expectations to maintain a slim figure. However, even as they age, women are still expected to retain a feminine appearance (Kosherbayeva, 2019).

Descriptive research was the most appropriate as it allowed for a detailed depiction of a phenomenon and its characteristics (Nassaji, 2015) without focusing on causal relationships (Aggarwal & Ranganathan, 2019).

## Data Collection Instruments

A structured 4-point Likert scale questionnaire was developed to gather data on respondents' perceptions of sociocultural influences, the impact of mainstream and social media, and the fashion industry's influence on positive body image in Kazakhstan. The 4-point Likert scale was selected due to the limited funding of this pilot research and compliance with the study's objectives. By removing the neutral option, the researchers aimed to minimize central tendency bias. Following Garland's (1991) recommendation, they increased response clarity by requiring the convenient sample to commit to specific attitudinal or behavioral responses. Consequently, the researchers intentionally avoided a 5-point or 7-point Likert scale, despite Croasmun and Ostrom's (2011) findings on the high internal reliability these options typically offer.

The questionnaire consisted of four sections:

- 1. Demographics: Age, city of residence, and occupation.
- Media Consumption: Frequency and type of media consumed (mainstream vs. social media).
- 3. Sociocultural Influences: Perceptions of body image-related comments and behaviors from family, friends, and significant others, as well as the cultural acceptance of body types outside the thin standard in Kazakhstan.
- 4. Fashion Industry Impact: Attitudes of Kazakhstani designers toward bodies outside the thin standard and the importance of clothing for self-concept determination.

## Sampling and Data Collection

A convenience sample was used to conduct the survey due to resource and time constraints; therefore, representativeness was not the primary objective. According to the Kazakhstan National Bureau of Statistics, Almaty has a population of 2,228,677, of which 1.1 million are women, and Astana has a population of 1,430,117, with 724,200 women (Bureau of National Statistics, 2024).

Participants were recruited with a network sampling strategy. Four enablers were selected to share the Google<sup>6</sup> Forms survey link with their followers. To qualify as an enabler, individuals had to be female, within the specified age range,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Google™ and the Google Logo are trademarks of Google Inc. in the U.S. and other countries.

and have at least 100 female Instagram<sup>7</sup> followers. Two of the enablers were required to be between the ages of 18 and 32, who were acquaintances of one of the researchers. The other two needed to be between 33 and 50 and were close relatives of the same researcher. Thus, the researchers tried to cover the age range of the sample. The survey was administered via Google Forms. The questionnaire link was shared on the Instagram<sup>7</sup> pages of the four enablers, reaching a total of 1,000 potential respondents. The study period was the second week of March 2024. The study focused on Instagram<sup>7</sup> for its large user base in Kazakhstan, with 12.1 million users, representing 61.4% of the population, and 59.9% of its audience being women (Kemp, 2024). By comparison, Facebook<sup>8</sup> had only 2.6 million users during the same period in early 2024. Despite TikTok's popularity, particularly among 18-24-year-olds with a reach of 63.4% in that age group, it was not selected for this study. Although specific data on the overlap of TikTok and Instagram<sup>7</sup> users in Kazakhstan is unavailable, the high popularity of both platforms suggests that many TikTok users likely also have Instagram<sup>7</sup> profiles, especially among younger audiences who frequently use multiple platforms.

The survey took approximately seven minutes to complete. A total of 135 responses were received, of which 41 were incomplete (31 from men and 10 from women) and excluded from the data. Consequently, 94 fully completed questionnaires were collected, yielding a response rate of 13.5% and a 9.4% completion rate. The confidence level was set at 90%, respectively, and the margin of error was 8.10%.

## Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

The survey involved 94 female respondents from Almaty and Astana. Of these, slightly more than 69% (n = 65) resided in Astana, while 31% (n = 29) were from Almaty.

In terms of age distribution, the largest group of respondents were women aged 21–23, who accounted for more than 33% (n=31) of the total number of survey participants. This was followed by women aged 18–20, who constituted 17% (n=16) of the participants. Approximately 12% (n=11) of the respondents were aged 48–50. Women aged 30–32 and 42–44 years represented slightly more than 8% (n=8) of the total. Women aged 24–26 comprised slightly more than 7% (n=7) of the sample, while those aged 33–35 constituted slightly above 6% (n=6). The smallest groups were women aged 36–38 and 45–47 years, each accounting for about 2% (n=2) of the respondents (Table 1).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Instagram™ is a trademark of Instagram Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Instagram полностью заблокирована в России как экстремистская организация.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Facebook™ is a trademark of Facebook Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Facebook в России признана экстремистской организацией и заблокирована.

Table 1
The Distribution of the Respondents by Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18–20	16	17.0
21–23	31	33.0
24-26	7	7.4
27–29	3	3.2
30-32	8	8.5
33-35	6	6.4
36-38	2	2.1
39-41	0	0
42-44	8	8.5
45-47	2	2.1
48-50	11	11.7
Total	94	100.0

Regarding employment status, a majority of respondents, 55.3% (n = 52), worked full-time. Approximately 27% (n = 25) were university students. Freelancers comprised 7% (n = 7) of the sample, and just over 6% (n = 6) were housewives. Only 3% (n = 3) of the participants were engaged in part-time work, and one respondent was unemployed.

## Results

**Sociocultural Background for Acceptance of Positive Body Image in Kazakhstan** Of the respondents, 67% (n = 61) agreed (34%) or fully agreed (33%) that there is a tendency toward accepting positive body image in Kazakhstan. However, 29.8% (n = 28) disagreed with the statement, and 3.2% absolutely disagreed with it (Table 2).

Table 2
Tendency Toward Accepting Positive Body Image in Kazakhstan

Answer Option	Frequency	Percentage
Absolutely disagree	3	3.2
Disagree	28	29.8
Agree	32	33.0
Absolutely agree	31	34.0
Total	94	100.0

Regarding location distribution, nearly 56% (n=17) of the Almaty respondents and 70% (n=46) of the Astana respondents agreed or absolutely agreed with the above statement. However, nearly 38% of Almaty respondents (n=11) disagreed with the statement compared. From the total of Astana respondents, 35% (n=23) agreed that there was a tendency toward positive body image, whereas 26% (n=17) disagreed (Table 3).

Table 3
Tendency Towards Accepting Positive Body Image in Kazakhstan Across Almaty
and Astana

<b>Answer Option</b>	Almaty	Astana	<b>Both Cities</b>
Absolutely disagree	1	2	3
Disagree	11	17	28
Agree	9	23	32
Absolutely agree	8	23	31
Total	29	65	94

Nearly 61% (n=57) of the respondents concurred that cultural norms in Kazakhstan affect the acceptance of a positive body image. Of these, 50% (n=47) agreed, and almost 11% (n=10) absolutely agreed. Only 34% (n=32) disagreed, and slightly more than 5% (n=5) absolutely disagreed (Table 4).

**Table 4** *Impact of Cultural Norms Across the Age Categories of Respondents* 

Answer Option		21-			30-	Age 33-	36-	39-			48-	Total by answer option
	20	23	26	29	32	35	38	41	44	47	50	•
Absolutely disagree	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Disagree	6	17	3	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	32
Agree	7	10	3	1	4	4	1	0	6	2	9	47
Absolutely agree	1	3	0	0	1	2	1	0	1	0	1	10
Total by age category	16	31	7	3	8	6	2	0	8	2	11	94

The highest disagreement regarding the cultural influence on positive body image was observed among the 21–23-year-old respondents. Specifically, 18% (n = 17) of this age group disagreed, representing nearly 55% of all respondents (n = 31) within this age range.

Despite the emerging tendency toward accepting positive body image in Kazakhstan, nearly 65% (n=61) expressed the opinion that Kazakhstani women are negatively judged if their body goes against the thin body ideal; 35% (n=33) held an opposing opinion (Table 5). The data also indicated that young respondents aged 18–29 concurred that women were judged if their bodies did not conform to the thin body standard prevalent in Kazakhstan. In contrast, female respondents over 30 years old disagreed with this perspective. However, approximately 60% of the respondents did not feel compelled to believe that they should dislike their bodies if they did not conform to the thin body ideal. Nevertheless, nearly 40% of the respondents concurred with this statement.

**Table 5**Answers to the Questionnaire Statement "Kazakhstani Women Are Negatively Judged If They Do Not Fit Into the Thin Body Ideal"

<b>Answer Option</b>	Frequency	Percentage
Absolutely disagree	4	4.3
Disagree	29	30.9
Agree	43	45.7
Absolutely agree	18	19.1
Total	94	100.0

Although approximately 40% of the respondents did not report feeling pressured to dislike their bodies if they did not conform to the thin body ideal (Table 6), nearly 80% (n = 75) indicated that they edit their body discrepancies in visual or video content shared on Instagram<sup>9</sup>. In contrast, slightly more than 20% did not edit their bodies in pictures or videos for social media. Notably, the largest group of women who agreed with using filters for their visual or video content were aged 18-29, most of whom were university students. Conversely, 20% of participants disagreed with this practice. The majority of female respondents who disagreed were over 40 years old.

Table 6

Answers to the Questionnaire Statement "Kazakhstani Women Do Not Feel Pressured to Dislike Theis Bodies If They Do Not Conform to the Thin Body Ideal"

<b>Answer Option</b>	Frequency	Percentage
Absolutely disagree	6	6.4
Disagree	50	53.2
Agree	28	29.8
Absolutely agree	10	10.6
Total	94	100.0

## Kazakhstani Media and Positive Body Image

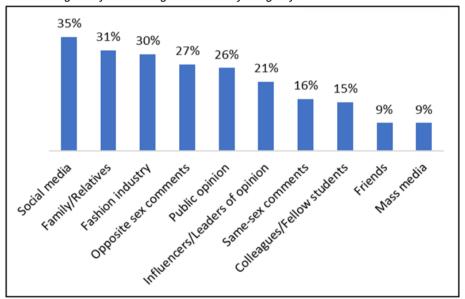
The data yielded inconclusive results regarding whether Kazakhstani mass media promotes the acceptance and appreciation of diverse female body types, distinct from the thin body ideal. This uncertainty arose because nearly 47% (n=44) of the respondents did not engage with mass media. Among those who did consume mass media content, approximately 27% expressed disagreement, while an equal percentage (27%) agreed that Kazakhstani mass media promoted positive body image. However, nearly 80% (n=75) of respondents agreed that women in Kazakhstan edit their body mismatch with the thin body standard for social media (Instagram<sup>9</sup>, TikTok).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Instagram™ is a trademark of Instagram Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Instagram полностью заблокирована в России как экстремистская организация.

# Factors Negatively Impacting the Positive Body Image

The survey results identified three primary factors contributing to a negative impact on positive body image among Kazakhstani women. *Social media* (Instagram<sup>10</sup>, TikTok) was indicated by 35% (n = 33) of respondents, *family/relatives* by 31% (n = 29), and the *fashion industry* by 30% (n = 28). *Comments from the opposite sex* were cited by 27% (n = 25) of respondents. *Public opinion* was highlighted as a significant barrier by 26% (n = 24) of participants, while influencers were mentioned by 21% (n = 20). Additionally, 16% (n = 15) of respondents indicated that *comments from the same sex* had a negative impact. *Colleagues/fellow students* were considered a factor by 15% (n = 14) of respondents. The *mass media* and *friends* were reported to have the least negative impact on positive body image, with each indicated by nearly 9% (n = 8) of the respondents (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Factors Negatively Influencing Positive Body Image by Kazakhstani Women



Note. Source: developed by the authors.

## Fashion Industry in Kazakhstan and Positive Body Image

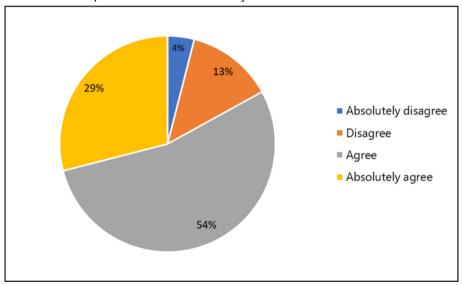
In the survey, 57% (n=54) of the respondents agreed that Kazakhstani fashion designers prefer bodies that conform to the thin body ideal, while 42% (n=40) disagreed. Notably, more respondents absolutely agreed (n=16) than those who absolutely disagreed (n=1). The age group 18-23 had the highest agreement, with many respondents indicating that fashion designers favor the thin body ideal. Moreover, the data showed that 61% (n=57) of respondents confirmed that Kazakhstani fashion

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Instagram™ is a trademark of Instagram Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Instagram полностью заблокирована в России как экстремистская организация.

promotes the thin body stereotypes, while 39% disagreed. There was a 14% difference between the two extremes.

Fashion was indicated as a primary factor affecting positive body image, as respondents considered clothing an essential factor for the perception of their bodies. The data revealed that 83% (n = 78) of the respondents considered clothing a critical factor in their perception of their bodies. For 43% (n = 40), clothes were absolutely essential, and for 41% (n = 38), clothes were essential. Conversely, 17% (n = 16) of the respondents indicated that clothing was not significant for their body perception, with 12% (n = 11) stating it was unimportant and 5% (n = 5) indicating it was absolutely unimportant. Moreover, 83% (n = 76) of respondents considered clothing an expression of a woman's body perception. In contrast, just over 17% (n = 16) disagreed with this statement (Figure 2). Additionally, 47% (n = 44) of respondents expressed a desire to have a body as thin as the models hired by fashion designers to promote their clothes, while 53% (n = 50) did not share this desire.

Figure 2
Clothes as an Expression of the Female Body in Kazakhstan



Note. Source: developed by the authors.

## **Discussion**

This research aimed to identify the most influential factors hindering the public communication of positive body image in Kazakhstan. While there is some progress toward acceptance of positive body image, particularly in Almaty and Astana, this trend is heavily influenced by prevailing cultural norms. Unfortunately, young Kazakhstani women, particularly those in their 20s, often face negative judgment if their bodies deviate from the thin body ideal. Within this sociocultural context, the survey results indicated that social media, family/relatives, and the fashion industry are the three most significant barriers to promoting positive body image in Kazakhstan. Social pressure

frequently compels women to be concerned about their appearance and pushes them to strive to conform to societal ideals of beauty (Runfola et al., 2013).

## Social Media

RQ1: Which type of media—mainstream or social media—in Kazakhstan exerts stronger hindering effects on positive body image? Social media emerged as the leading barrier to public communication of positive body image, which is consistent with findings by Fardouly et al. (2018), who suggested that Instagram¹¹ use may distort women's beliefs and attitudes toward their appearance. Our research found that nearly 80% of respondents edited their pictures to minimize discrepancies with the thin body standard before uploading them on Instagram¹¹ or TikTok. The study results were inconclusive regarding the role of Kazakhstani mass media in promoting acceptance and appreciation of positive body image distinct from the thin body ideal. However, the fact that half of the respondents did not consume traditional media content suggested that mainstream media in Kazakhstan played a marginal role.

# Family/Relatives

RQ2: Is the family circle hindering or helping the positive body image in Kazakhstan? The immediate and extended family members strongly influenced the body's appearance in Kazakhstan. This finding aligns with Abraczinskas et al. (2012), who suggested that family dynamics significantly influence fostering a child's positive body image, with mothers playing a crucial role in shaping their children's body image perceptions and beliefs (Bäck, 2011). Therefore, public communication about positive body image can face strong opposition. This opposition is intensified by judgmental comments of the opposite sex, particularly for young women, and the general public opinion.

# Fashion and Positive Body Image in Kazakhstan

RQ3: What influence does the fashion industry in Kazakhstan exert on positive body image? Fashion was identified as the third factor hindering positive body image in Kazakhstan. Fashion designers were believed to favor models who conform to the thin body ideal, thereby promoting thin body stereotypes. Consequently, nearly half of the respondents expressed a desire to have a body as thin as the models used by fashion designers. This finding is consistent with Rudd and Lennon's (2001) observations regarding women's dissatisfaction with their bodies related to difficulties in finding clothing and accessories that enhance their appearance. Most respondents considered clothing an essential factor in their perception of their bodies. This aligns with the findings of Guy and Banim (2000) regarding the sense of self-expression women experienced with their clothing choices. Additionally, respondents viewed clothes as an expression of who they were as women, which was in line with the role clothing played in priming self-knowledge and self-perception (Adam & Galinsky, 2012).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Instagram™ is a trademark of Instagram Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Instagram полностью заблокирована в России как экстремистская организация.

# **Practical Implications**

There are multiple practical implications of promoting a body image among women in Kazakhstan. Targeted interventions and strategic initiatives are crucial to overcoming the communication barriers identified in media, family relationships, and the fashion industry.

Regarding social media interventions, it is vital to create campaigns that advocate for body positivity and diversity because of the media's influence on shaping body image perceptions. Encouraging social media platforms to implement policies that discourage body standards is essential. Collaborating with Kazakhstani influencers who support body positivity can be instrumental in reshaping the narrative around body image. Health organizations, educational institutions, and influencers can also produce content that educates the public on the importance of body image and the risks associated with pursuing thin body ideals. Additionally, educational programs focused on enhancing media literacy among women can empower them to critically evaluate the content they consume and alleviate the pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty standards.

Regarding family and community education, recognizing family members' role in shaping body image underscores the importance of implementing family-based education programs. These initiatives can equip parents with resources to foster body perceptions in their children. Workshops and presentations can be arranged to inform families about the effects of body conversations and the significance of creating a supportive household environment.

The perceptions and consumption habits related to fashion and beauty have undergone changes in Kazakhstan. These changes illustrate relationships among clothing, body image perception, and digital portrayals within Kazakh society. The intricate interplay between values and global beauty standards underscores the importance of the fashion sector in Kazakhstan in accepting and advocating for body diversity. Encouraging fashion designers and brands to showcase models with body types and sizes different than the thin body standard is essential. Collaborations with fashion schools can incorporate body positivity into the curriculum, influencing designers to embrace different approaches. Furthermore, fashion campaigns that celebrate body shapes can help alter perceptions and lessen the pressure to conform to a slim physique ideal.

## Limitations

There are limitations to this study. The small sample size of 94 participants was exclusively taken from Kazakhstan's two largest cities, Almaty and Astana. This restricted sample concentrated geographically, along with a distribution of participants from each city, limits the applicability of the results. As a result, these findings may not accurately represent Kazakhstan's population. Nevertheless, despite these constraints, the research laid the groundwork for further comprehensive studies in the future.

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# **ARTICLE**

# Influence of Social Capital on Community Participation With Community Development as an Intervening Variable

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to analyze the influence of social capital comprising trust, social networks, and social values on community development and community participation. Additionally, it explores the mediating role of community development in the relationship between the dimensions of social capital and community participation. A mixedmethod approach was employed, combining a systematic literature review with path analysis, to provide both conceptual and empirical insights into the dynamics of social capital in community empowerment. The obtained results showed that trust and network had a positive and significant impact on community development and community participation while social values had no significant influence, possibly due to the abstract nature of the associated values and the time required to influence community dynamics. Accordingly, community development was observed to effectively mediate influence of trust and network on community participation by fostering productive interactions and enhancing collective awareness. Regardless of the fact that social values had no direct impact, reinforcing these values remains very important for building solidarity and collective awareness. These results offer valuable contributions to the understanding of social capital's multidimensional role in supporting participatory and sustainable community development initiatives.

## **KEYWORDS**

social capital, trust, social networks, social values, community development, community participation

## Introduction

Community development is a multidimensional process aimed at improving the well-being and quality of life within communities in a specific geographical area. This process typically comprises the organization of various programs and interventions designed specifically to address diverse social, economic, and environmental issues (Bahri et al., 2023). Its primary goal is to foster sustainable growth and enhance the capacity and participation of communities (Prince, 2024). In this context, community development is not limited to physical aspects but also includes strengthening social structures and interactions among individuals within community (Parker, 2012).

Social capital refers to resources embedded in social networks, including trust, norms/values, and interactions that facilitate collaboration among individuals within community (Enderle, 2024). This form of capital is generally categorized into two types, namely bonding social capital, which strengthens ties within homogeneous groups, and bridging social capital, which connects diverse groups (Halstead et al., 2022). Moreover, strong social capital within community enhanced members' participation in social and developmental activities. This is confirmed by the fact that trust and interpersonal relationships have significantly contributed to the adoption of collective measures capable of strengthening cohesion and achieving common goals (Carmen et al., 2022). Another study has also reported that strengthening social capital contributed to more effective cooperation within communities, thereby improving the quality and sustainability of various community development initiatives (Onyx & Leonard, 2010).

On a global scale, community development has been observed to be carried out using various unique approaches with the aim of addressing the distinct social, economic, and political challenges faced by different nations. For instance, in the United Kingdom, a decentralized and participatory governance approach is adopted, known as the "Big Society" initiative, which promotes social action despite facing budget cuts (Marleni et al., 2018; Prince, 2024). In Japan, the concept of *machizukuri* [community planning] is adopted. This concept emphasizes collaborative decision-making to address demographic challenges and strengthen communities through social exchange programs such as *fureai kippu* [caring relationship tickets] (Kusakabe, 2013). Accordingly, in Africa, microfinance programs and women's cooperatives are organized with the primary aim of reducing poverty and enhancing food security, despite facing challenges such as conflicts and climate change (Abdulai & Tewari, 2017).

Based on observation, social capital plays a significant role in sustainable community development, as networks of trust and interpersonal interactions invariably enable effective collaboration. To further support this observation, Marleni et al. (2018) emphasized how globalization dynamics affected rural communities, and how profit-oriented values reduced participation in social organizations. Beausaert et al. (2023) reported that support from colleagues and supervisors (external social capital) positively influenced the well-being of students over time.

Bahri et al. (2023) examined social and cultural capital in Tapong Village, and showed how traditional norms and values, which were maintained by customary institutions, strengthened community relationships and promoted inclusive decision-making through collective discussions. Across different regions, the interaction between social and cultural capital has been observed to support sustainable development by reinforcing community identity and harmony. For instance, in India, Dineshappa (2022) reported how social capital bridged social groups, thereby reducing inequalities and fostering societal integration. The investigation showed how social capital facilitated inclusive collective decision-making and ensured community needs were comprehensively addressed. Similarly, Suhaeb & Kaseng (2023) found that social capital not only comprised relational networks but also included norms and values with the capability of binding communities to productivity and economic growth, particularly in rural areas.

Bakari (2022) further emphasized the role of social capital in inclusive decision-making, particularly in capitalist communities requiring equality. The study recommended investing in social capital through inclusive policies to strengthen community participation. Furthermore, Prince (2024) suggested that fundamental mechanisms of social capital, such as trust and civic engagement, had consistent adaptable principles across contexts. Based on these elucidations, an inference can be made that social capital is a priority in inclusive and sustainable development.

The aforementioned discussions consistently showed that social capital is a foundational element in community development, both locally and broadly. Among various social groups, students act as significant agents of change (Saz-Gil et al., 2021), as alongside their educational processes, they actively participate in community activities, which invariably impacts socioeconomic development. The role of students as change agents is essential in community development, as the group acts as catalysts driving social change and inspiring community inclusiveness (Abada et al., 2023). Social interaction has been reported to be a powerful element in the mobilization of social actors (Hidalgo et al., 2021). Within this form of interaction, students were observed to not only provide understanding but also strengthen social capital within communities, which in turn increases public participation in development processes (Budowle et al., 2021). Based on this insight, an inference can be made that the presence of students as catalysts enhances social capital, expands networks, and facilitates collaborations that support community development.

Aldrich and Meyer (2015) have shown that social capital influenced community participation in various aspects of development. Further, Nugrahani et al.(2019) reported that the *trust* component facilitates positive interpersonal relationships, the *networks* component elucidates to act as channels for communication and coordination, and the *values* component creates shared norms that guide collective actions. Despite the widely recognized importance of social capital, gaps remain in understanding how it mediates the relationship between community development and community participation. Specifically, the role of students as change agents in local communities has not been extensively explored, even though the contributions made by the demographic are recognized as driving factors in community development initiatives.

The current study aims to comprehensively examine how the dimensions of social capital (trust, network, and value) influence community development and community participation. Furthermore, it explores the role of community development as a mediator in the relationship between social capital and community participation. By adopting a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach and path analysis, this investigation is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to understanding the multidimensional dynamics of social capital in the context of sustainable community development. The adopted approach was selected with the specific aim of offering valuable insights for academics and policymakers who are interested in designing more effective interventions to enhance social capital and identify the role of university students in strengthening community participation in development programs.

To deepen the analysis, the study proposes the following question in the SLR approach: How do the dimensions of social capital—trust, network, and value—affect community development and participation in the context of sustainable community development? This study is designed based on the following hypotheses, all of which are to be tested using path analysis:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1):** Trust (X1) has a positive and significant effect on Community Development (Y1).

**Hypothesis 2 (H2):** Network (X2) has a positive and significant effect on Community Development (Y1).

**Hypothesis 3 (H3):** Value (X3) has a positive and significant effect on Community Development (Y1).

**Hypothesis 4 (H4):** Community Development (Y1) has a positive and significant effect on Community Participation (Y2).

**Hypothesis 5 (H5):** Trust (X1) has a positive and significant effect on Community Participation (Y2).

**Hypothesis 6 (H6):** Network (X2) has a positive and significant effect on Community Participation (Y2).

**Hypothesis 7 (H7):** Value (X3) has a positive and significant effect on Community Participation (Y2).

Three hypotheses were formulated regarding the mediating role of community development in the relationship between social capital and community participation. These hypotheses are as follows:

**Hypothesis 8 (H8):** Community Development (Y1) mediates the effect of Trust (X1) on Community participation (Y2).

**Hypothesis 9 (H9):** Community Development (Y1) mediates the effect of Network (X2) on Community Participation (Y2).

**Hypothesis 10 (H10):** Community Development (Y1) mediates the effect of Value (X3) on Community Participation (Y2).

The comprehensive approach through SLR and path analysis is expected to make a significant theoretical contribution to understanding the complexity of social capital and its multidimensional role in community development. Therefore, this study offers a deeper perspective for further investigations in the field of community development,

particularly concerning the role of social capital in driving participation and ensuring the sustainability of community initiatives.

## **Literature Review**

Social capital has been observed to play a significant role in supporting community development and enhancing community participation. The significance of this capital lies in its ability to strengthen social relationships, foster trust, and facilitate cooperation among community members. Accordingly, Bakari (2022) emphasized that social capital enabled individuals within community to access resources more easily, share information, and initiate collective actions to address shared challenges. This invariably contributed to increased social cohesion and community resilience.

The concept of social capital, as introduced by Putnam (1993), includes networks, norms, and trust as the foundational elements for achieving shared goals. As observed, the factor invariably enhanced connections among community members and supported effective collaboration by establishing strong networks (Halstead et al., 2022). Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) divided social capital into three dimensions, namely structural, cognitive, and relational. The structural dimension comprised patterns of interaction and social networks, while the cognitive dimension focused on shared visions and norms that facilitate collaboration. The relational dimension, on the other hand, played a substantial role in building trust and loyalty, which are generally essential for maintaining sustainable relationships within community (Prakasa, 2018).

In the context of community development, social capital significantly impacts the quality of life within communities. Prince (2024) showed that social capital strengthened social norms and collective identity, thereby enhancing solidarity and creating a sense of belonging among community members. Social capital was also found to serve as a catalyst for resolving conflicts peacefully, strengthening advocacy, and empowering communities to meet respective needs independently.

Marleni et al. (2018) further stated how the cultural elements inherent in social capital possessed traditional legitimacy that supported the success of development efforts. In community development, solid networks, norms, and organizations provide access for communities to actively engage in the planning and implementation of development policies. Moreover, Coleman (1988) explained that social capital comprised obligations, information channels, as well as norms and sanctions capable of effectively regulating social interactions. As reported, this structure enabled more efficient cooperation and reduced potential conflicts within community.

Community participation, as an outcome of social capital, is a considerable factor in community-based development. Strong social capital can enhance community inclusiveness in sustainable development projects, such as cooperatives or local infrastructure initiatives. According to Apuke and Omar (2021), social interaction ties, sense of belonging, reciprocity, homophily, and trust served as effective predictive factors of behavior.

## Methods

The current study was carried out using a mixed-methods approach, combining two methodologies, namely SLR and quantitative analysis. This approach was selected with the primary aim of achieving a comprehensive understanding of the study topic while quantitatively measuring influence between variables studied.

# Systematic Literature Review

A SLR approach is defined as a systematic process used for identifying, evaluating, and interpreting all relevant investigations related to the topic of influence of social capital on community development, particularly in the context of community empowerment systems. Generally, the SLR aims to provide a comprehensive answer to the study questions.

In accordance with the SLR approach, data collection was carried out in this study through a literature review technique using the "Publish or Perish" application on the Google Scholar¹ platform. The search keywords include "social capital," "community empowerment," and "community development." Google Scholar was selected as the study database due to its broad accessibility and its capability to avail various articles from both international and national journals. This selection is based on the ease of access and the extensive coverage of results provided.

Subsequent to data collection, data filtering was carried out based on the publication year criteria, ranging from 2014 to 2024. It is also important to comprehend that the selection of data was in accordance with quality, relevance, and the reputation of the sources. The data extraction process adhered to principles of quality and relevance to the study topic. Regarding the types of publications analyzed, this study focused primarily on quality, relevance, and reputable journals. The reputation criterion was determined by the journals' indexation in reputable databases such as Scopus<sup>2</sup> or journals that have been nationally or internationally accredited.

For further analysis, this study adopted the use of VOSviewer<sup>3</sup> software (Version 1.6.20) for bibliometric analysis to examine study trends within the relevant publication years. Additionally, Mendeley<sup>4</sup> software (Version 1.19.8) was used to structure the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis) model, ensuring validity and accuracy in the literature selection process. The combination of VOSviewer and Mendeley ensured that the data used were of high quality and effectively supported answering the study questions. This approach is expected to provide an in-depth understanding of the role of social capital in community empowerment systems.

<sup>1</sup> https://scholar.google.com

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> https://www.scopus.com

<sup>3</sup> https://www.vosviewer.com

<sup>4</sup> https://www.mendeley.com

# Path Analysis

The path analysis approach was adopted in this study to examine causal relationships between independent and dependent variables, where these effects may occur either directly or indirectly through an intervening variable. In the context of the observed subject matter, the analyzed variables include Trust (X1), Network (X2), and Value (X3) as independent variables, with Community Development (Y1) as the intervening variable, and Community Participation (Y2) as the dependent variable.

The influence of social capital (trust, network, and values) on community development is represented in Substructural Equation 1.

$$Y_1 = pY_1X_1 + pY_1X_2 + pY_1X_3 + \varepsilon_1, \tag{1}$$

where  $Y_1 = Community Development$ ,  $X_1 = Trust$ ,  $X_2 = Network$ ,  $X_3 = Value$ ,  $\varepsilon_1 = Residual$ .

The influence of Social Capital (Trust, Network, and Value) and Community Development on Community Participation is represented in Substructural Equation 2:

$$Y_2 = pY_2X_1 + pY_2X_2 + pY_2X_3 + pY_2Y_1 + \varepsilon_2,$$
 (2)

where  $Y_2$  = Community Participation,  $X_1$  = Trust,  $X_2$  = Network,  $X_3$  = Value,  $Y_1$  = Community Development,  $\varepsilon_2$  = Residual.

Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS statistical software (Version 4.1.1.1), a comprehensive tool for calculating path coefficients and assessing the significance of relationships among variables under investigation. Based on observation, this software has the capability to effectively determine whether trust, networks, and values variables significantly impact community development and community participation. Accordingly, to ensure the reliability and validity of the results, comprehensive validity and reliability tests of the instruments were conducted, ensuring that the data analyzed meets high-quality standards.

Hypothesis testing was conducted based on the structural model that has been developed, where each relationship between variables was tested to determine the significance of respective effects. This testing includes an analysis of the direct effects of trust, network, and value on community development and community participation. Furthermore, the analysis also comprised testing mediation effects by assessing the role of community development as a mediating variable in the relationship between social capital and community participation.

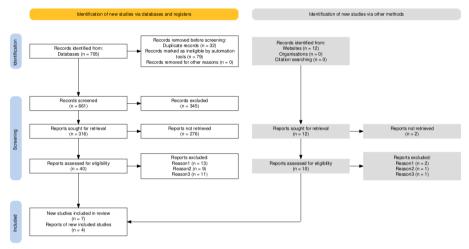
The aforementioned approaches were selected primarily because each is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the relationships between variables in the context of community empowerment. By adopting the approaches, the current investigation aims to answer the study questions comprehensively and provide empirical evidence on influence of social capital in enhancing community development and participation.

## **Results and Discussion**

## Network Visualization Analysis

Based on the data collection for this study, a total of 717 records were retrieved from the Google Scholar database using the specified search criteria. These records were subsequently analyzed (Figure 1).

Figure 1
PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis)



Note. Source: developed by the authors.

The results of the network visualization analysis emphasized the key dynamics of the topic "Influence of Social Capital on Community Participation through Community Development" across three main clusters namely "Social Capital," "Community Development," and "Study" (Figure 2). The "Social Capital" cluster emphasized the essential role of social capital in strengthening community participation, as reported by Marleni et al. (2018), who stated the importance of fostering social bonds and inclusivity in collective decision-making. Concerning the "Community Development" cluster, Suhaeb and Kaseng (2023) and Bahri et al. (2023) reported that community development enhanced citizen engagement and collaboration rooted in social norms. Lastly, the "Study" cluster stressed the significance of investigating social capital to improve participation. As discussed by Bakari (2022) and Prince (2024), the factors of trust and civic engagement significantly influenced the adoption of inclusive development. This analysis showed that community development driven by social capital is effective in fostering sustainable participation and generating significant social impact.

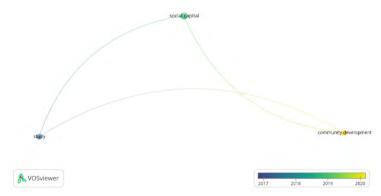




Note. Source: developed by the authors.

The overlay visualization showed the dynamic progression of the themes "Social Capital," "Community Development," and "Study" from 2014 to 2024 (Figure 3). During 2014–2017, the "Study" cluster (in purple) dominated, marking an initial focus on conceptual studies regarding the interaction between social capital and community development. Subsequently, from 2018–2019, attention shifted to core elements of social capital, such as trust and social networks, in fostering community cohesion (in green). From 2020 to 2024, the focus transitioned to "Community Development" (in yellow), which effectively emphasized the role of community development as an effective bridge for enhancing community participation. This visualization shows a shift from conceptual understanding to practical application, showcasing the contribution of each cluster in comprehending influence of social capital through community development.

Figure 3
Results of Overlay Visualization Analysis (Social Capital on Community Development)

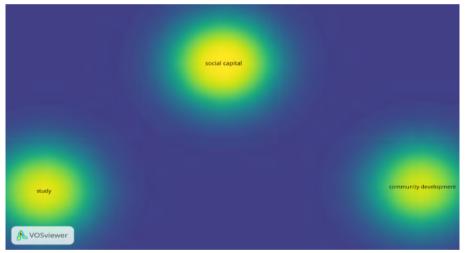


Note. Source: developed by the authors.

# Density Visualization Analysis

The density visualization laid emphasis on the high study intensity on "Social Capital," "Community Development," and "Study" (Figure 4). The bright green color in the "Social Capital" cluster shows a primary focus on trust, norms, and social networks in strengthening social cohesion. The bright yellow surrounding "Community Development" constitutes its role as a bridge between social capital and more active Community Participation. Meanwhile, the bright purple in the "Study" cluster reflects the significance of conceptual studies as a foundation for understanding the interaction between social capital and Community Development. This visualization showed a strong study trend aimed at applying the outlined concepts to enhance community engagement.

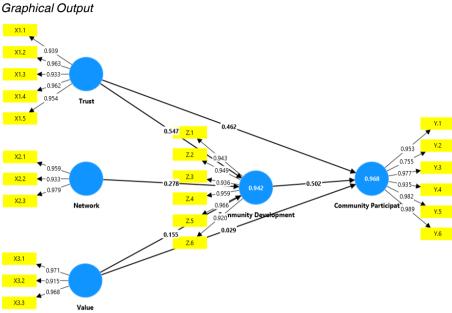
**Figure 4**Results of Density Visualization Analysis (Social Capital on Community Development)



Note. Source: developed by the authors.

## **Graphical Output**

Figure 5 presents the graphical output of the path analysis conducted using SmartPLS. The diagram illustrates the causal relationships among the studied variables: Trust, Social Network, Social Value, Community Development, and Community Participation. The arrows indicate the direction of influence between variables, while the numbers shown represent the path coefficient values for each relationship. This visualization facilitates a clearer understanding of the strength and direction of the relationships within the tested model.



Note. Source: developed by the authors.

Figure 5

# Construct Reliability and Validity

Table 2 presents the results of the construct reliability and validity measurements for variables Community Development, Community Participation, Network, Trust, and Value. Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (rho\_a and rho\_c) were used to assess the internal consistency of the constructs, where values above .7 implied high reliability. All variables achieved Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability values exceeding .9, signifying that the constructs used were high reliable and consistent in measuring respective variables.

 Table 2

 Construct Reliability and Validity

Variable	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted
Community Development	.976	.977	.981	.894
Community Participation	.970	.979	.977	.875
Network	.954	.957	.970	.916
Trust	.973	.974	.979	.903
Value	.948	.948	.966	.906

Note. Source: developed by the authors.

The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was used to assess convergent validity. According to predefined standards, an AVE value above .5 signifies that the construct explained more than half of the variance of its indicators. The AVE values for all the constructs observed in this investigation exceeded .87, implying that each possessed strong validity and served as a comprehensive representation of its indicators. In essence, the table shows that all variables in the model had excellent reliability and validity.

# Discriminant Validity Cross-Loadings

Table 3 demonstrates the results of discriminant validity testing through cross-loadings between indicators alongside respective constructs, namely Community Development, Community Participation, Network, Trust, and Value. Generally, when testing for discriminant validity, each indicator is expected to have the highest loading value on the construct it represents compared to other constructs.

**Table 3**Discriminant Validity Cross-Loadings

Indicator	Community Development	Community Participation	Network	Trust	Value
X1.1	0.906	0.914	0.894	0.939	0.872
X1.2	0.956	0.966	0.962	0.963	0.923
X1.3	0.878	0.896	0.936	0.933	0.955
X1.4	0.935	0.937	0.945	0.962	0.882
X1.5	0.915	0.918	0.908	0.954	0.898
X2.1	0.930	0.943	0.959	0.937	0.886
X2.2	0.867	0.877	0.933	0.916	0.943
X2.3	0.959	0.965	0.979	0.955	0.917
X3.1	0.874	0.884	0.914	0.910	0.971
X3.2	0.927	0.922	0.893	0.892	0.915
X3.3	0.884	0.880	0.917	0.916	0.968
Y.1	0.921	0.953	0.910	0.930	0.887
Y.2	0.685	0.755	0.689	0.686	0.664
Y.3	0.963	0.977	0.965	0.967	0.922
Y.4	0.936	0.935	0.902	0.905	0.913
Y.5	0.966	0.982	0.970	0.972	0.933
Y.6	0.972	0.989	0.976	0.977	0.936
Z.1	0.943	0.927	0.894	0.903	0.917
Z.2	0.949	0.905	0.902	0.906	0.876
Z.3	0.936	0.925	0.889	0.898	0.916
Z.4	0.959	0.940	0.925	0.939	0.889
Z.5	0.966	0.957	0.946	0.949	0.902
Z.6	0.920	0.883	0.896	0.888	0.843

*Note.* Source: developed by the authors.

Table 3 presents the indicators used in this study to measure the main variables. The Trust variable (X1) consists of five indicators, labeled X1.1 to X1.5. The Social Network variable (X2) is measured by three indicators, namely X2.1 to X2.3. The Social Value variable (X3) consists of three indicators, X3.1 to X3.3. The Community Development variable (Z) has six indicators, Z1 to Z6, and the Community Participation variable (Y) is also measured using six indicators, Y1 to Y6. This labeling facilitates data management and path analysis conducted using the SmartPLS software.

In line with the established criteria, the results presented in the table show that most indicators have the highest loading values on their respective constructs. Indicators Y1 to Y6 exhibit the highest loadings on the Community Participation construct, while indicators X3.1 to X3.3 show the highest loadings on the Social Network construct. These results indicate that each indicator more strongly measures its intended construct compared to others, thereby fulfilling the criteria for discriminant validity. Overall, the cross-loading results confirm that the model possesses adequate discriminant validity by ensuring each construct is accurately measured by its indicators without overlap with other constructs.

## Path Coefficients

Table 4 presents the results of the analysis of relationships between variables in the model, measuring the strength and significance of the effects between variables. Each row represents a relationship between variables, with values including the original sample (O), sample mean (M), standard deviation (SD), t-statistics (the absolute value of O divided by SD), and p-values.

Table 4
Path Coefficients

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Variable	Original sample (O)	М	SD	t-statistics (IO/SDI)	p-values
Community Development– Community Participation	0.502	0.536	0.158	3.174	.002
Network–Community Development	0.278	0.276	0.105	2.636	.009
Trust–Community Development	0.547	0.546	0.112	4.884	.000
Trust–Community Participation	0.462	0.432	0.147	3.139	.002
Value–Community Development	0.155	0.158	0.115	1.351	.177
Value-Community Participation	0.029	0.025	0.069	0.423	.672

Note. Source: developed by the authors.

Based on the observations made, the relationship between Community Development and Community Participation showed a significant positive effect with a path coefficient of 0.502, supported by a *t*-statistic greater than 2 (3.174) and a *p*-value less than .05 (.002). Similarly, the Network reflected a significant positive

effect on Community Development with a path coefficient of 0.278, a *t*-statistic of 2.636, and a *p*-value of .009, indicating significance at the .05 level.

Trust similarly showed a strong and significant effect on Community Development, with a path coefficient of 0.547, a very high *t*-statistic (4.884), and a very small *p*-value (.000). Furthermore, Trust was also observed to have a significant positive influence on Community Participation with a path coefficient of 0.462, a *t*-statistic of 3.139, and a *p*-value of .002, emphasizing its critical role in influencing Community Participation.

Value showed a positive though non-significant effect on Community Development, with a path coefficient of 0.155, a *t*-statistic of 1.351, and a *p*-value of .177, exceeding the .05 threshold. Influence of Value on Community Participation was also observed to be minimal and insignificant, as evidenced by a very small path coefficient (0.029), a *t*-statistic of 0.423, and a *p*-value of .672.

Essentially, the table shows that the relationships between Community Development and Community Participation, as well as between Trust and both variables, were highly significant. In contrast, influence of Value on both variables was not statistically significant.

## Indirect Effects

Table 5 shows the results of the indirect influence of variables Network, Trust, and Value on Community Participation, with Community Development acting as an intervening variable. Based on the observations made, network had an indirect effect of 0.139, signifying that social networks positively influenced Community Participation through the role of Community Development. Trust showed a larger indirect effect of 0.275, showing that trust was a crucial factor in enhancing Community Participation through Community Development. Meanwhile, Value had an indirect effect of 0.078, meaning that values or norms within community also contributed, although to a lesser extent compared to social networks and trust.

Table 5
Indirect Effects

Variable	Specific indirect effects
Network–Community Development–Community Participation	0.139
Trust–Community Development–Community Participation	0.275
Value–Community Development–Community Participation	0.078

Note. Source: developed by the authors.

## R-Square

Table 6 shows the *R*-square and adjusted *R*-square values for variables Community Development and Community Participation. *R*-square is a measure that reflects how much the independent variables in the model can explain the dependent variable. The *R*-square value of 0.942 for Community Development suggested that 94.2% of the variation in Community Development could be explained by the independent variables

in the model, while the adjusted *R*-square of 0.941 confirms the consistency of this value, accounting for the number of variables in the model.

**Table 6**Results of R<sup>2</sup> and Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> Calculations

Variable	R-square	R-square adjusted	
Community Development	0.942	0.941	
Community Participation	0.968	0.968	

Note. Source: developed by the authors.

For Community Participation, both the *R*-square and adjusted *R*-square values were 0.968, meaning that 96.8% of the variation in Community Participation could be explained by the independent variables in the model. The high *R*-square values for both variables showed that the model was highly effective in explaining the relationships between variables in the context of Community Development and participation.

## **Total Effects**

Table 7 shows the entire influence between variables in the model, including path coefficients, sample mean, standard deviation, *t*-statistics (the absolute value of the coefficient divided by the standard deviation), and *p*-values.

Table 7
Total Effects

	Original sample (O)	М	SD	t-statistics (IO/SDI)	<i>p</i> -value
Community Development -> Community Participation	0.502	0.536	0.158	3.174	.002
Network -> Community Development	0.278	0.276	0.105	2.636	.009
Network -> Community Participation	0.139	0.151	0.080	1.747	.081
Trust -> Community Development	0.547	0.546	0.112	4.884	.000
Trust -> Community Participation	0.737	0.728	0.102	7.238	.000
Value -> Community Development	0.155	0.158	0.115	1.351	.177
Value -> Community Participation	0.107	0.104	0.108	0.990	.323

Note. Source: developed by the authors.

The path coefficient between Community Development and Community Participation was 0.502, implying a significant positive effect. With a *t*-statistics value of 3.174 and a *p*-value of .002, this effect is significant at the .05 level. The path

coefficient between Network and Community Development was similarly observed to be 0.278, also reflecting a significant positive effect, with a *t*-statistics value of 2.636 and a *p*-value of .009, making this relationship significant. However, the path coefficient between Network and Community Participation was 0.139, with a *t*-statistics value of 1.747 and a *p*-value of .081, which is greater than .05. This signified that the effect is not significant at the .05 level.

The observed path coefficient between Trust and Community Development was 0.547, implying a strong and highly significant positive effect, as evidenced by the presence of a very high *t*-statistics value of 4.884 and a *p*-value of .000. The path coefficient between Trust and Community Participation was found to be 0.737, showing a very strong and significant positive effect at the .05 level, as confirmed by the observed *t*-statistics value of 7.238 and *p*-value of .000.

For Value and Community Development, the path coefficient observed was 0.155, signifying a positive effect, but with a t-statistics value of 1.351 and a p-value of .177, the effect was insignificant. Similarly, for Value and Community Participation, the path coefficient was 0.107, but with a t-statistics value of 0.990 and a p-value of .323, this effect was also not significant at the .05 level.

Trust had a highly significant effect on both Community Development and Community Participation, while the effect of Network on Community Development is significant. However, the effect of Value on both variables was observed to be insignificant. Based on the path analysis results presented, each hypothesis was tested and evaluated for acceptance or rejection.

The results of the hypothesis testing in this study provide substantial insights into the relationships between key variables, including Trust (X1), Network (X2), Value (X3), Community Development (Y1), and Community Participation (Y2). The analysis of the main hypotheses (H1–H7) showed several significant and non-significant results, which contributed to a deeper understanding of how these variables interact in the context of Community Development and participation.

Starting with **H1**, the hypothesis that Trust has a positive and significant effect on Community Development was accepted. This acceptance was because the statistical analysis showed a highly significant path coefficient with a *t*-statistics value of 4.884 and a *p*-value of .000, signifying that Trust played a very substantial role in influencing development of community. The obtained result in this regard corresponds with theoretical expectations that trust fosters collaboration and positive relationships within communities, thereby enhancing development.

Following **H1**, **H2** was similarly accepted, as Network showed a positive and significant effect on Community Development. The path coefficient for this relationship is 0.278, with a *t*-statistics value of 2.636 and a *p*-value of .009. This reflected the significance of networks of social connections in driving Community Development, supporting the idea that access to resources, information, and support through networks is a key factor in the advancement of community initiatives.

Dissimilar to **H1** and **H2**, **H3** was rejected. This was because the hypothesis, which suggested that Value has a positive and significant effect on Community Development was not supported by the data. The *p*-value for this relationship is .177, which exceeded

the threshold of .05 for statistical significance. These observations suggest that, in the context of the present study, the values or norms within a community may not have as strong an impact on the community's development as anticipated. However, it may reflect that other factors, such as Trust and Network, have a more substantial influence on development process.

**H4**, supposing that Community Development positively influence Community Participation was accepted. This was primarily because the data showed a significant relationship with a *t*-statistics value of 3.174 and a *p*-value of .002, signifying that as Community Development progresses, participation of community members increases. The results made in this regard support the notion that successful Community Development initiatives create more opportunities and motivations for individuals to engage in activities contributing to the growth of respective communities.

Similarly, **H5**, which posits that Trust has a positive and significant effect on Community Participation, was accepted due to the results showing a strong and significant path coefficient of 0.462, with a *t*-statistics of 3.139 and *p*-value of .002. The result further emphasizes that Trust was a vital factor in motivating community members to participate actively in community-driven efforts. Trust builds confidence and cooperation, which are essential for individuals to engage in collective action and contribute to community goals.

On the other hand, **H6** was rejected, as Network did not significantly affect Community Participation. The obtained *p*-value of .081 was above the .05 significance threshold, indicating that, in this model, the Network had no direct substantial impact on participation levels. While networks are essential for Community Development, the factor may not necessarily translate directly into greater participation, suggesting that other factors, such as individual motivation or trust, may play more important roles in promoting active inclusiveness.

**H7** was rejected as Value did not significantly influence Community Participation. With a p-value of .323, this result suggests that the values and norms of communities may not directly drive individuals to participate in community activities. This may reflect the complexity of the factors influencing participation, where values alone may not be sufficient without the underlying structures of trust and development.

Concerning the mediation hypotheses (**H8–H10**), the analysis showed that **H8**, which suggested that Community Development mediates the relationship between Trust and Community Participation, is accepted. The total effects analysis reflected that Community Development played a significant mediating role in the relationship between Trust and Community Participation, with a *t*-statistics value of 7.238 and a *p*-value of .000. This result suggests that Trust enhances Community Development, which in turn fosters greater Community Participation. Based on these observations, an inference can be made that the role of Community Development is very significant in channelling the effects of Trust into increased participation.

**H9** was similarly accepted, as Community Development was observed to effectively mediate the effect of Network on Community Participation. Although the direct effect of Network on Community Participation was not significant (*p*-value = .081), the mediation effect of Community Development remained significant. This showed

that even though Network alone may not directly influence participation, the factor possessed significant indirect effects by contributing to Community Development, which then drives participation. This emphasizes the importance of intermediary variables such as Community Development in translating influence of networks into meaningful community engagement.

Lastly, **H10** was rejected, since Value was found to act as an insignificant mediator in the relationship between Trust and Community Participation. Considering the fact that Value had no significant direct effect on either Community Development or Community Participation, it became clear also failed to act as a significant mediator in the observed relationships. This suggests that, within the study model, Value was less influential in shaping the dynamics of Community Development and participation compared to other factors such as Trust and Network.

In essence, the results of this study emphasize the significant roles that Trust and Network play in both Community Development and Community Participation. Based on the observations made, Trust was shown to be particularly influential in both fostering Community Development and promoting active participation. Community Development, in turn, acted as an important mediator in translating these effects into greater participation. However, Value did not show a significant impact on these outcomes, signifying that the dynamics of community engagement and development were more influenced by relational and structural factors, such as Trust and Network, rather than by community values alone. These insights provide a comprehensive understanding of the key drivers of Community Development and participation, offering valuable implications for community policies and interventions.

### Discussion

The results of this analysis showed that social capital, particularly trust and social networks, had a significant influence on community development and community participation. Meanwhile, social values did not show a significant impact on either variable. Community development was observed to act as an effective mediator, which strengthened influence of trust and social networks on community participation. This section will further discuss the roles and relationships between these variables in the context of social capital-based Community Development.

### Influence of Trust on Community Development and Participation

In this study, trust within community was observed to have a significant impact on community development and participation. Trust variable showed high t-statistic values of 4.884 (p < .05) for Community Development and 7.238 (p < .05) for Community Participation. These results are in line with Colemans' (1988) theory, which posits that trust is foundational in building strong social relationships and supporting productive collective action. Trust facilitates information exchange, strengthens social cohesion, and increases community engagement in joint activities.

Putnam (2000) further reported how trust was a key factor in the success of social programs. This report was considered plausible because individuals who

trust one another typically possess more tendency to cooperate and participate in collective projects. Therefore, an inference was made that the success of community development heavily depends on the the level of trust community members have for each other. These results support the notion that trust plays a very important role in creating an environment conducive to collective action in development and participation.

### Influence of Social Networks on Community Development and Participation

Social networks were similarly observed to significantly influence Community Development, with a t-statistic of 2.636 (p < .05). However, the direct impact of variable on Community Participation was not significant (t-statistic = 1.747; p > .05). This suggests that while social networks strengthen connections among community members and enhance social solidarity, the impact of the factor on participation depends on the success of Community Development process.

Within this context, Granovetter (1973) elucidated that weak ties in social networks were often more effective in disseminating information and expanding collaborative opportunities. However, without strong structural support, social networks may not optimally enhance participation. Aldrich & Meyer (2015) also emphasized how social networks acted as bridges for resource exchange, even though the effectiveness of the factor in facilitating participation relied heavily on the manner in which communities organize and direct social engagement.

### The Mediating Role of Community Development in Enhancing Participation

Community Development acted as an effective mediator by amplifying influence of trust and social networks on participation. Following the results of the path analysis conducted, community development served as a link that strengthened the impact of social capital on participation. This is in line with the Woolcock's (1998) concept of social capital, where it was emphasized that effective community development enhanced participation through more productive and collaborative social interactions.

Narayan (1999) stressed the importance of integrating social capital with concrete development programs. According to the study, the success of community development initiatives depends on the cooperation of individuals and groups within community, driven by strong trust and social networks. Based on this insight, community development should be viewed as a platform facilitating social interactions to promote active participation.

### The Limited Impact of Values on Community Development and Participation

Although social values are often considered essential in building strong communities, this study found that values did not significantly influence community development (t-statistic = 1.351; p > .05) or participation (t-statistic = 0.990; p > .05). Presumably, social values promoted within community may be perceived as irrelevant or lacking direct benefits by its members.

According to Inglehart (1997), social values are shaped by the sociocultural context of community. Therefore, the promotion of specific values in development

programs must be carried out in line with local conditions and aspirations. If the promoted values do not resonate with community needs or experiences, they are unlikely to encourage participation. Thus, value-based community development programs should be tailored to the specific context and needs of the target population.

### Theoretical and Practical Contributions

Theoretically, these results reinforce social capital frameworks proposed by Coleman (1988) and Putnam (2000), which emphasize the role of trust and networks in building productive social relationships. As elucidated by the investigations, trust facilitates cooperation and drives participation in collective efforts. The current study also provides empirical evidence that trust and networks play essential roles in community development and emphasizes how community development strengthens social capital's impact on participation.

The present study supports the mediation concept proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986), where community development was reported to be an effective mediating variable that enhanced the relationship between social capital (independent variable) and participation (dependent variable). Following this, Marleni et al. (2018) stated that despite rising materialism in globalization, social capital could still drove participation, specifically in rural communities where trust-based values were retained.

This investigation offers relevant practical insights for policymakers designing community development programs. Policymakers are advised to prioritize strategies that build trust and strengthen social networks, as these factors significantly contribute to enhancing participation. Moreover, community development should be integrated into social initiatives to optimize the role of social capital in collective action.

These results invariably reaffirm the importance of social capital in strengthening community relationships. Based on the observations made, trust among members played a central role in fostering collective action that drives participation Putnam (2000). Meanwhile, social networks served as tools to expand collaborative opportunities, though the factor's effectiveness was found to depend solely on well-organized community development structures. With socially and culturally structured approaches, the positive impact of social capital on participation can be maximized.

### Conclusion

This study, which was conducted using the SLR approach and path analysis, showed that social capital had a significant influence on community development and participation. The obtained results reflected how trust and social networks served as key components driving social dynamics within community, and how social values had no direct impact on community development and participation. Path analysis was carried out during the course of the investigation and the results showed that trust played the most dominant role in driving community development and enhancing participation. The factor was observed to serve as the foundation for building strong relationships, facilitating collaboration, and fostering collective engagement. Accordingly, social networks contribute to community development by accelerating the

flow of information and resource distribution. Regardless of the contributions made by this factor, its influence on participation was indirect and solely dependent on how well community development initiatives could manage and integrate these networks. In this study, community development acted as an effective mediator between social capital and participation. This process strengthened the outcomes of social interactions and expanded opportunities for collaboration within community. This result suggested that well-structured and inclusive development processes could optimize the benefits of social capital, promote broader participation, and drive sustainable social change. It also showed that social values had no significant impact on Community Development and participation. Further investigations are recommended to explore the conditions under which social values may become more relevant in fostering engagement and social dynamics within community.

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### **ARTICLE**

# What Motivates Social Media Users to Share Fake News, and What Are Its Impacts? A Systematic Literature Review

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### **ABSTRACT**

The use of fake news to deceive the public, manipulate opinions, and advance various agendas has posed significant challenges in its dissemination online. This study systematically examines the motivations for and effects of online fake news dissemination based on English-language articles published in international peer-reviewed journals between 2018 and 2023. These articles were identified through a systematic search of the Scopus and Web of Science databases, conducted between July 1, 2023, and to January 31, 2024, following PRISMA guidelines. Twenty-one studies met the eligibility criteria, their methodologies included quantitative, qualitative, systematic literature reviews, and mixed methods. Thematic analysis revealed four key factors contributing to fake news dissemination: (a) psychological drives, such as the need for validation and sensation-seeking; (b) technological influences, including bots and clickbait; (c) political motives, particularly during

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azahah@ukm.edu.my, rahimk@ukm.edu.my, Zainal. abidin@unpad.ac.id, adnan85@ukm.edu.my, shalinimunusamy@imu.edu.my elections; and (d) the role of media literacy in mitigating or exacerbating misinformation spread. The effects of fake news dissemination were categorized into public health concerns, socioeconomic consequences, and conflict. This review helps explain the dynamics of fake news dissemination within five years, aiding individuals and organizations in understanding the online misinformation spreads online. These insights will help stakeholders with knowledge to count fake news and reduce its societal harm.

### **KEYWORDS**

consequences, fake news, media literacy, motivation, propaganda, psychological influence, social media, social influence, spread of fake news

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### Introduction

The rapid growth of digital connectivity across the world has exacerbated the issue of misinformation (Muhammed & Mathew, 2022). In 2024, the global population was 8.08 billion; 69.4% of individuals (5.61 billion) used mobile phones and 5.35 billion had internet access (Kemp, 2024). Over half of the world population (5.04 billion people) are now active social media users, spending an average of two hours and 23 minutes daily on these platforms (Rajendra-Nicolucci & Zuckerman, 2021). Platforms such as Facebook¹, YouTube², WhatsApp³, Instagram⁴, and X (formerly known as Twitter⁵) collectively engage billions of users, enabling genuine interactions but also facilitating rapid dissemination of misinformation (Rodríguez-Ferrándiz, 2023). Given the widespread use of digital platforms, the challenges posed by misinformation spread demand closer examination⁶.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> WhatsApp is a trademark of WhatsApp Inc., registered in the US and other countries.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> The mention of specific social media platforms in this article, including platforms that may be restricted or banned in certain jurisdictions, such as the Russian Federation, is solely for academic and illustrative purposes. The authors acknowledge the legal sensitivities and advise compliance with all local laws regarding access and use.

### Dissemination of Fake News

Fake news is characterized by fabricated details, false headlines, and selective use of facts (Vosoughi et al., 2018). Online fake news is deliberately spread to deceive the public, manipulate opinions, or promote specific agendas; users are often encouraged users to share it widely across platforms. Misinformation spread significantly influences public discourse and societal perceptions, leading to widespread discord among diverse communities (Aïmeur et al., 2023). Globally, 60% of individuals believe that their compatriots prioritize belief over factual accuracy in political and societal contexts (Konopliov, 2024). This sentiment is particularly pronounced in countries such as Peru (71%), Serbia (70%), Turkey (69%), and the United States (68%).

Fake news spread is influenced by psychological and cognitive factors. Biases (e.g., the need for social validation) and cognitive mechanisms (e.g., intuition) are critical roles in motivating individuals to share misinformation (Pennycook & Rand, 2019; Vosoughi et al., 2018). Additionally, emotional triggers, such as fear, surprise, and disgust, have been identified as key drivers of engagement with false narratives (Shao et al., 2018). Although individual biases are important, the rapid misinformation spread is further amplified by technological tools (Muhammed & Mathew, 2022).

Bots and automated algorithms inflate engagement metrics; consequently, fake news appears more credible or viral (Saini & Khatarkar, 2023). Algorithmic factors, such as engagement-driven prioritization, also contribute to misinformation dissemination (Friggeri et al., 2014; Shu et al., 2019). However, emerging technological solutions, such as sophisticated detection models incorporating machine learning techniques, show promise in addressing this issue (Saini & Khatarkar, 2023).

### Societal Effects of Fake News

The dissemination of fake news has far-reaching consequences, influencing various aspects of society, such as public health, political stability, and social trust. During the COVID-19 pandemic, misinformation about prevention methods, treatments, and vaccination fueled panic and confusion and undermined public health initiatives (Thanh et al., 2021; Yao, 2020). For instance, unverified claims about the efficacy of home remedies or the dangers of vaccines caused hesitancy and delayed efforts to curb the spread of the virus. The amplification of such misinformation exacerbated public health challenges and strained healthcare systems globally (Rocha et al., 2023).

In the political sphere, fake news can disrupt democratic processes by influencing voter behavior and polarizing public opinion. Misinformation campaigns during elections have been used to manipulate perceptions, spread conspiracy theories, and delegitimize political opposition (Ahmad & Murad, 2020; Habes et al., 2023). Additionally, the strategic use of fake news may disrupt political discourse and result in long-term damage to democratic institutions by fostering distrust and division (Metzger et al., 2021).

The proliferation of fake news erodes social trust by diminishing confidence in media and institutions through conflicting narratives and misinformation. This creates echo chambers; individuals seek information that confirms their beliefs, deepening societal divides and disproportionately affecting marginalized communities (Habes

et al., 2023; Rodríguez-Ferrándiz, 2023). Furthermore, the economic consequences are significant, as fake news damages reputations, disrupts markets, and causes financial losses (Petratos, 2021). During the pandemic, misinformation about supply shortages sparked panic buying and disrupted supply chains, highlighting its broad effects on consumer behavior and economic stability (Sarraf et al., 2024). Emerging technologies, such as augmented reality, the metaverse, and deepfake tools, worsen misinformation spread by creating realistic yet fake content, making truth harder to discern and requiring adaptive strategies to protect public trust (Mansur et al., 2021).

Uses and gratifications theory explains how individuals seek media to fulfill needs such as information sharing and social interaction, which drives fake news dissemination. Motivations for sharing fake news often include self-promotion and social interaction (Dan & Sannusi, 2024; Dan et al., 2022). Similarly, social control theory emphasizes the role of observational learning and social influence in shaping behavior; Rajendra-Nicolucci and Zuckerman (2021) demonstrated the significance of group identity and echo chambers in reinforcing misinformation.

### The Present Study

This systematic review highlights the motivations behind fake news dissemination, its societal impacts, and the trends shaping its evolution from 2018 to 2023, offering a valuable resource for addressing this global challenge. Building on past studies including those exploring emotional triggers (Dan & Sannusi, 2024; Munusamy et al., 2024), media literacy (Lu et al., 2024), and emerging technologies (e.g., deepfakes; Ürmösné Simon & Nyitrai, 2021), this review integrates diverse perspectives into a cohesive analysis. By providing a comprehensive understanding of fake news trends, it offers actionable insights to empower policymakers, educators, and technology developers in fostering informed and resilient societies.

The study objectives are as follows:

- To explore the motivations behind fake news dissemination from 2018 to 2023;
- To assess the societal impacts of fake news on trust and polarization.

### **Materials and Methods**

### Research Question

The research questions were developed using the PICo framework, a structured approach focusing on Population or Problem (P), Interest (I), and Context (Co). Adapted for this study, P is fake news dissemination by social media users (2018–2023), I refers to motivations for sharing fake news and its impacts, and Co refers to trends in fake news dissemination on social media platforms.

### Literature Search

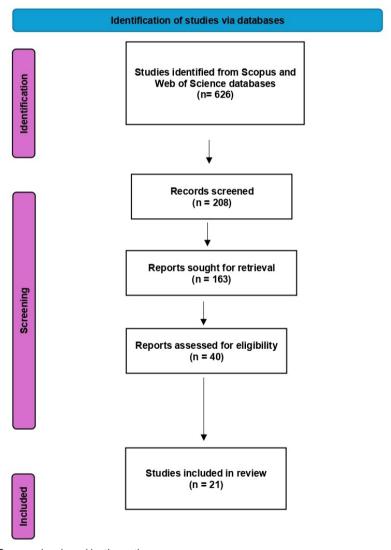
As shown in Figure 1, three main strategies were used: identification, screening, and eligibility. This systematic review used Scopus<sup>7</sup> and Web of Science<sup>8</sup> as the search

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> https://www.scopus.com

<sup>8</sup> https://www.webofscience.com

databases due to their extensive collection of peer-reviewed papers in fields such of behavioral science, medicine, mass communication, and psychology.

Figure 1
PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram



Note. Source: developed by the authors.

To ensure methodological consistency, we limited the search to English-language studies published in international peer-reviewed journals from 2018 to 2023; the articles in the final selection were published between 2020 and 2023. Articles written not in English were excluded to avoid translation issues.

To identify relevant articles, key search terms and their variations were strategically employed using wildcard operators and Boolean logic. The key terms focused on three main themes: "motivation," including variations such as "motivation," "gratification," "determinants," and "influencing factors"; "fake news sharing," with terms like "fake news sharing," "false news sharing," and "misinformation sharing"; and "social media," encompassing "social media" and "social network." The search strategy, including string and keyword calculations, is detailed in Table 1.

**Table 1** *The Search Strings* 

Database	Search strings
Web of Science	"fake news" OR "false news" OR "misinformation" (Topic) and "motivation*" OR "gratification" OR "determinants" OR "influencing factors" (Topic) and "social media" OR "social network" (Topic)
Scopus	(TITLE-ABS-KEY ("fake news") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("motivation") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("social media") OR ALL ("false news") OR ALL ("misinformation") OR ALL ("determinants") OR ALL ("influencing factors") OR ALL ("gratification") OR ALL ("social network") AND PUBYEAR > 2017 AND PUBYEAR < 2024

Note. Source: developed by the authors.

### Identification

A total of 615 relevant articles were retrieved, including 236 from Scopus and 379 from the Web of Science. Titles, abstracts, keywords, author names, journal names, and publication years were exported to MS Excel for screening.

### Screening

The screening process narrowed the retrieved articles to those relevant to the research focus, ensuring reliability and transparency in the systematic review. Articles published in peer-reviewed journals were included, whereas articles from books and other document reviews were excluded. Full-text access was prioritized, and 40 open-access articles were retrieved for detailed analysis. From an initial pool of 5,432 articles, 236 were retrieved from Scopus and 379 from the Web of Science database.

### **Eligibility**

After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 2), duplicate or irrelevant articles were removed, and the remaining articles were subjected to further manual screening. These articles were then reviewed to ensure they focused specifically on online fake news dissemination and trends. Articles emphasizing fake news detection, comparisons between fake and trusted news, or software development to prevent dissemination were excluded.

Table 2	
Inclusion and Exclusion Crit	eria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication timeline	2018–2023	2018 and before
Types of articles	Journal (research articles)	Articles other than research articles (e.g., reviews, books, conference proceedings, etc.)
Language	English	Languages other than English
Types of findings	Empirical data	Non-empirical
Focus findings	Factors and impacts	Computer software to detect fake news, fake news model

Note. Source: developed by the authors.

### Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The methodology used to select studies included in the systematic search is shown in Table 2. This systematic review had four inclusion criteria:

- The articles are written in English and published in international peer-reviewed journals.
- The articles are associated with the driving factors related to fake news sharing on social media.
- 3. The publication period was from 2018 to 2023.
- Gray literature was excluded from the review (informally or noncommercially published or unpublished articles).

### Data Abstraction and Analysis

Themes and subthemes were developed following the six-phase framework of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2014). Key details such as author names, participants, study design, and factors and impacts of fake news dissemination were extracted. A critical quality assessment ensured reliability and rigor, followed by data synthesis to identify patterns and gaps. The analysis revealed three main themes: (a) psychological dimensions of fake news, (b) media literacy, and (c) community manipulation. Results are discussed in the next section.

### Results

### Study Characteristics

Our initial search yielded 626 articles (Figure 1). After screening and applying eligibility criteria, 21 articles were included in the final review. The detailed characteristics of the included articles are summarized in Appendix. Of the 21 datasets, 13 used quantitative study designs, four were systematic literature reviews, two were content data analyses, one was qualitative, and one was a mixed-methods study. Thirteen studies collected

and used data from a country, whereas seven studies involved participants or data from more than two countries, including the United States, Spain, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe. Among these, 35% were cross-national studies. Eighteen studies reported using multiple platforms as sources of fake news content: X (formerly known as Twitter<sup>9</sup>) (37.5%), Facebook<sup>10</sup> (34%), and Instagram<sup>11</sup> (22%). Some studies (6.5%) included general online social media users across multiple platforms.

### Factors Contributing to Online Fake News Dissemination

Psychological Drive. Psychological factors are important in the spread of online fake news, as evidenced by 11 studies (Ajina et al., 2024; Azzimonti & Fernandes, 2023; Bryanov & Vziatysheva, 2021; Cano-Marin et al., 2023; Daunt et al., 2023; Lewandowsky et al., 2017; Luo et al., 2023; Pennycook & Rand, 2019; Rahmanian & Esfidani, 2023; Rocha et al., 2023; Shao et al., 2018). In Malaysia and in Vietnam, motives such as socialization, information sharing, self-promotion, and entertainment were identified (Cano-Marin et al., 2023; Pennycook & Rand, 2019). Socialization and self-promotion were the most influential motives among 869 respondents in the study by Cano-Marin et al. (2023), as well as among 200 social media users in Hanoi (Pennycook & Rand, 2019). Furthermore, social approval and enjoyment drive fake news dissemination: social approval was identified as a key motive among 1,160 young Iranian users (Daunt et al., 2023); a similar pattern was found among Instagram<sup>11</sup> and WhatsApp users (Rahmanian & Esfidani, 2023). In addition, 59.8% of 102 Weibo<sup>12</sup> users shared fake news for social recognition (Macarrón Máñez et al., 2024). Finally, status-seeking and the influence of public figures were significant drivers across Facebook<sup>10</sup>, X (Twitter<sup>9</sup>), and Instagram<sup>11</sup> (Cano-Marin et al., 2023).

Emotional triggers such as fear, curiosity, and anxiety reinforce fake news sharing. Group identity and echo chambers further exacerbate this trend, emphasizing conformity to group norms (Mansur et al., 2021). Additionally, sensation-seeking and the need for validation motivate users (Daunt et al., 2023). Several studies noted the complex interplay between psychological motives, emotional manipulation, and societal pressures, including the role of cognitive biases and social identity in shaping online behavior (An et al., 2025; Munusamy et al., 2024; Ürmösné Simon & Nyitrai, 2021).

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<sup>12</sup> https://weibo.com/

Technological Influence. Simultaneously, technological influences such as Internet bots or clickbaits tactics drive the online fake news (Aïmeur et al, 2023; Bryanov & Vziatysheva, 2021). Bots artificially inflate engagement, making fake news appear more popular and credible. A study in the United States revealed that fake news swayed people away from trusted news sources and toward misinformation (Azzimonti & Fernandes, 2023). Additionally, a review of 61 articles determined that although clickbait increased website traffic, it was often used to deceive audiences using hoaxes, rumors, satire, and propaganda on social media (Aïmeur et al, 2023). Another review of 26 experimental studies identified several message characteristics that contribute to fake news sharing among Facebook<sup>13</sup> users. These characteristics included source credibility, content inconsistencies, subjectivity, sensationalism, and the presence of manipulated images (Bryanov & Vziatysheva, 2021).

Political Motives. Three articles reported political motives as the main reason that influenced the dissemination of online fake news among users (Daunt et al. 2023; Metzger et al., 2021; Rocha et al., 2023) which has a significant impact on shaping the landscape of misinformation dissemination. An analysis of 5,303 fact-checked claims and comments from Facebook<sup>13</sup>, X (Twitter<sup>14</sup>), and YouTube in the United States revealed a significant finding (Metzger et al., 2021). The intent to disrupt political dialogue during elections was identified as a key factor contributing to individuals' fake news sharing behaviors. Furthermore, sharing political fake news online was perceived as a way for social media users to act as opinion leaders and advocates for their beliefs (Habes et al., 2023). Propaganda is a form of disinformation created by politicians or politically affiliated individuals that aims to influence public opinion and maintain or alter power dynamics for their benefit (Sukumaran et al., 2023). However, online fake news sharing not only disrupts political dialogues but also provides opportunities for a legitimate political debate (Metzger et al., 2021). Additionally, Rocha et al. (2023) examined the role of conspiracy, mentality, patriotism, perceived threat to freedom, media literacy, and concern for disinformation by interviewing ten participants and conducting a survey with 722 respondents in the United Kingdom. In the interviews, respondents elaborated that sharing political news, whether fake or trusted, is part of expressing their sense of freedom. The sharing of fake news reached its peak during the COVID-19 lockdown and vaccine period. Finally, the study found that the dissemination of fake political motives promoted dilemmas and posed threats to both political parties and the public (Rocha et al., 2023). People were more likely to believe online fake news because they did not trust the COVID-19 information that political leaders shared in traditional media, such as newspapers and television (Uwalaka, 2023).

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Lack of Media Literacy. Media illiteracy is pivotal role in motivating online social media users to propagate fake news within digital environments. The lack of critical skills to evaluate the credibility of information exposes individuals to the risk of falling victim to misinformation. Results from two online focus group discussions with participants from various countries, including the United Kingdom, Zimbabwe, Benin, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria, indicated that individuals who lack media literacy skills often struggle to critically evaluate the credibility and accuracy of the information they encounter online (Macarrón Máñez et al., 2024). Additionally, media illiteracy can contribute to confirmation bias, which means that individuals seek and share information that aligns with their preexisting beliefs and opinions (Daunt et al., 2023). By contrast, media literacy refers to the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media in various forms. Fortunately, those equipped with media literacy skills are less likely to spread and believe in fake news (Habes et al., 2023). This connection between social dynamics and media literacy shows the complexity of the problems caused by fake news. People's actions in social settings and their lack of basic literacy skills combine to facilitate the spread of false information (Daunt et al., 2023; Habes et al., 2023).

### Effect of Online Fake News Dissemination

Public Health Concerns. Research on the impact of sharing fake news on social media has highlighted several key points. Online fake news often reinforces existing beliefs and biases, leading to confirmation bias among individuals who seek out information that aligns with their preconceived notions. Sharing of fake news on social media promoted inaccurate information related to COVID-19 prevention and treatment (Kong et al., 2023; Rocha et al., 2023; Thanh et al., 2021; Uwalaka, 2023) and fear, uncertainty, and panic among the public during COVID-19 (Rocha et al., 2023). Therefore, it posed a risk to the health and safety of COVID-19 patients. Furthermore, the spread of fake news online exacerbated public health issues during the COVID-19 pandemic by undermining trust in vaccination efforts and health guidelines (Thanh et al., 2021). Misinformation about COVID-19 treatments and preventative measures hindered effective pandemic response efforts, prolonging the crisis and endangering lives. Additionally, fake news during COVID-19 incited panic and unrest within communities by spreading rumors and ethnic-based information (Sarraf et al., 2024). Fake news regarding COVID-19 virus transmission led to an increase in physical and emotional attacks on people of Asian origin in the United States.

Socioeconomic Consequences. The dissemination of fake news on social media has significant economic consequences. A secondary data analysis of articles from North America (439), Europe (1,202), and Asia (2,152) revealed that online fake news sharing on platforms such as X (Twitter<sup>15</sup>), Facebook<sup>16</sup>,

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Facebook™ is a trademark of Facebook Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Facebook в России признана экстремистской организацией и заблокирована.

and Instagram<sup>17</sup> contributed to information overload, unverified information sharing, and supply chain disruptions caused by panic buying during COVID-19 (Bryanov & Vziatysheva, 2021). In addition to supply chain disruption, fake news can harm the reputation of businesses and impact their marketing efforts, as consumers may mistrust brands associated with false information. Additionally, fake news sharing behaviors on social media extends to politics and governance (Diepeveen & Pinet, 2022). Fake news has the potential to shape public opinion, influence election outcomes, and challenge the political transition in countries like Nigeria (An et al., 2025).

Social Division. The effect of fake news on social media is not limited to individuals; it can affect entire societies. For example, the dissemination of fake news can undermine trust in leaders and create social divisions (Balakrishnan et al., 2021; Bryanov & Vziatysheva, 2021). Compared with the older generation, younger social media users tend to believe in fake news more, and they heavily depend on social media to receive and share information (Bryanov & Vziatysheva, 2021). Eventually, the heavy dependence on social media among younger users and the dissemination of fake news will affect the sustainability of society (Balakrishnan et al., 2021). A quantitative study among X (Twitter<sup>18</sup>) users in the United States found that the effect of fake news on social media extends beyond misinformation (Azzimonti & Fernandes, 2023). Based on their analysis of 4,000 nods from Twitter<sup>18</sup>, fake news sharing contributes to the polarization of society, as individuals are exposed to biased and misleading information that reinforces their preexisting beliefs. Consequently, the proliferation of fake news online can exacerbate societal polarization by amplifying echo chambers and diminishing opportunities for constructive dialogue and mutual understanding (Diepeveen & Pinet, 2022). The dissemination of online fake news on social media, particularly among WhatsApp, Facebook<sup>19</sup>, X (Twitter<sup>18</sup>), and Instagram<sup>17</sup> users, created a lack of mindfulness among Nigerians with a low level of trust in online news, regardless of the trustworthiness of the source (An et al., 2025).

### **Discussion**

This review analyzed trends, factors, and effects of online fake news dissemination from 2018 to 2023, synthesizing insights from 21 studies conducted across diverse countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Vietnam, and Nigeria. The findings highlight a complex interplay of psychological, technological, political, and societal factors driving the spread of misinformation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Instagram™ is a trademark of Instagram Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Instagram полностью заблокирована в России как экстремистская организация.

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Psychological motivations, such as socialization, self-promotion, and the need for social approval were identified as key drivers, consistent with the uses and gratifications theory (Mansur et al., 2021; Rahmanian & Esfidani, 2023). Emotional triggers, such as fear and curiosity, as framed by social control theory, further amplify fake news sharing by weakening self-regulation and social norms, particularly during crises. These psychological vulnerabilities illustrate how individuals are drawn into the misinformation cycle through emotional manipulation.

Moreover, technological factors are important in amplifying misinformation. Algorithms, bots, and clickbait strategies inflate the perceived credibility and engagement of fake news, often deceiving audiences (Aïmeur et al., 2023; Saini & Khatarkar, 2023). Although machine learning tools, such as FastNewsTracker<sup>20</sup>, show promise in detecting misinformation, challenges remain in scaling and adapting these tools to evolving platforms and content (Ürmösné Simon & Nyitrai, 2021). Political motives, particularly during elections and crises (e.g., COVID-19), weaponize fake news to manipulate opinions, polarize communities, and undermine trust in governance. These findings emphasize the disruptive potential of misinformation in eroding public trust and democratic processes (Metzger et al., 2021; Rocha et al., 2023).

Media illiteracy further compounds the issue, as individuals lacking critical evaluation skills are more susceptible to confirmation bias and the spread of misinformation (Macarrón Máñez et al., 2024). However, media literacy interventions have shown encouraging results in reducing vulnerability to fake news and fostering critical thinking. Expanding these educational initiatives is crucial for empowering users to navigate the digital landscape effectively (Habes et al., 2023; Pennycook & Rand, 2019).

The societal impacts of fake news are profound and far-reaching. During the COVID-19 pandemic, misinformation undermined public health campaigns, contributed to panic buying, and disrupted supply chains. Moreover, fake news erodes trust in businesses and institutions while polarizing societies by reinforcing echo chambers and deepening divisions, particularly among younger, digitally dependent users. These impacts illustrate the urgent need for strategies to counter misinformation and its adverse societal effects (Azzimonti & Fernandes, 2023; Bryanov & Vziatysheva, 2021). Addressing these challenges requires a multidimensional approach that integrates psychological, technological, and educational strategies. Collaborative efforts among policymakers, educators, and technology developers are essential to mitigate the adverse impacts of fake news and build resilience against its consequences. Future research should prioritize the development of adaptive detection systems and explore the influence of emerging technologies, such as augmented reality and the metaverse, on the misinformation landscape.

Although the reviewed literature generally supports key drivers such as psychological needs, media illiteracy, and political motives, not all studies align with these dominant narratives. For example, some studies indicated that increased

<sup>20</sup> http://fastnewstracker.com

media exposure does not necessarily lead to belief in fake news, especially when users apply critical thinking or rely on trusted social networks (Pennycook & Rand, 2019). Other studies reported that not all fake news dissemination is harmful—certain satirical or parodic content, although false, can serve as a tool for social or political critique (Bryanov & Vziatysheva, 2021). Moreover, the effectiveness of media literacy interventions remains contested, with mixed evidence on their real-world impact in reducing fake news sharing. These contradictory findings underscore the complexity of misinformation behavior and caution against overly deterministic conclusions. By incorporating diverse and critical viewpoints, this review moves beyond affirmation and invites deeper inquiry into the multifaceted motivations and societal consequences of fake news dissemination.

### Limitations

This review only included English-language peer-reviewed articles, excluding potentially valuable insights from gray literature and non-English studies. The reliance on Scopus and Web of Science may have restricted the scope, as relevant studies in other databases were not captured. Additionally, differences in methodologies and definitions of fake news across studies made synthesis challenging.

Another important limitation is the risk of reinforcing an "echo chamber" effect, in which similar findings and dominant perspectives are overrepresented due to the selection of frequently cited sources. Although efforts were made to include diverse viewpoints, the limited presence of dissenting or critical studies in the literature posed a challenge. Future reviews should include studies that contradict or complicate the prevailing assumptions to ensure a more balanced analysis.

Furthermore, only full-text versions of publicly available articles were included in the final review. This decision was made to ensure transparency, accessibility, and completeness of data extraction; however, it may have excluded relevant studies that were behind paywalls or had restricted access, thus limiting the scope and comprehensiveness of the review.

### Conclusion

Fake news dissemination is driven by psychological, technological, political, and societal factors, with motivations including validation, social approval, and political agendas, and exploits digital platforms and engagement metrics. Media illiteracy amplifies the problem, leaving individuals vulnerable to misinformation and deepening polarization. The impacts are wide-reaching, disrupting public health responses, economic stability, and social cohesion while eroding trust and democratic processes. This review highlights the urgent need to address misinformation through enhancing media literacy and robust strategies to protect the integrity of online information ecosystems, fostering a more informed and resilient society.

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**Appendix**Characteristics of the Articles Included in the Study

Author, Year	Methodology applied	Factor of fake news dissemination	Impact	Fake news source	Country	Sample size	Respondents
1. Thanh et al., 2021	Quantitative Cross- sectional	Altruism, entertainment, socialization, self- promotion, and instant information most substantial impact	Confusion and complicating COVID-19 situation	Facebook <sup>22</sup> , Tiktok <sup>23</sup> , Twitter <sup>24</sup> , Zalo <sup>25</sup>	Hanoi, Vietnam	200 participants	Adults
2. Habes et al., 2023	Quantitative Cross- sectional experimental design	Behavioral intentions related to interested to share what they viewed and received.	Impact legacy and sustainability of the society in the long term	Facebook <sup>23</sup> , YouTube, Twitter <sup>24</sup> , Instagram <sup>26</sup>	Jordan	350 participants	Educated/ university students
3. Metzger et al., 2021		Interested to share posts from Twitter	Increase sense of mistrust among society	Twitter <sup>24</sup>	United States	6,809 Twitter <sup>24</sup> posts (commen- tary)	Twitter <sup>24</sup> posts that have at least some misinformation (each post had > 50 comments

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> TikTok is a trademark of ByteDance, registered in China and other countries. TikTok has suspended all new posting and live-streaming for users in the Russian Federation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Twitter® is a trademark of Twitter Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Twitter полностью заблокирована в России как организация, занимающаяся распространением запрещенного контента.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> https://chat.zalo.me

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Instagram™ is a trademark of Instagram Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Instagram полностью заблокирована в России как экстремистская организация.

Author, Year	Methodology applied	Factor of fake news dissemination	Impact	Fake news source	Country	Sample size	Respondents
4. Sarraf et al., 2024	Computation- ally intensive big data- driven	Wanted to share news about products at the market (scarcity and fear)	Threat to the society, i.e., disruption in supply chain (panic buying.)	Twitter <sup>27</sup> , Facebook <sup>28</sup> , and Instagram <sup>29</sup> posts	27 countries (USA, European countries, India)	7,588 articles	Product ratings and user experience reviews of 7 popular e-com healthcare platforms
5. Apuke & Omar, 2020	Quantitative	Altruism, entertainment, socialization, pass time, information sharing, and information seeking		WhatsApp, Facebook <sup>28</sup> , Twitter <sup>27</sup> , Instagram <sup>29</sup> , others	Nigeria	385 participants	General social media users (WhatsApp, Facebook <sup>28</sup> , Twitter <sup>27</sup> , Instagram <sup>29</sup> , other)
6. Kong et al., 2023	Systematic literature review	Individual: information sharing, socialization, altruism, self- promotion, status seeking, instant information sharing, information seeking and self- expression	Cultural, religious factors, and news content characteristics linked to sharing, i.e, damaged reputation, especially among leaders	Facebook <sup>28</sup> , WhatsApp, Twitter <sup>27</sup> , Instagram <sup>29</sup> , and WeChat <sup>30</sup>	Nigeria America, Bangladesh, Malaysia, China, India, Australia, Canada, German, Jordan, Korea, Singapore, Sultanate of Oman, Taiwan, and the United Kingdom	27 articles	Articles

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<sup>30</sup> https://www.wechat.com

Author, Year	Methodology applied	Factor of fake news dissemination	Impact	Fake news source	Country	Sample size	Respondents
		Cognitive and emotional factors: trust in online, perceived information overload and social media exposure					
7. Diepeveen & Pinet, 2022	Qualitative (Two online consultations)	Cultural and religious factors Heavy dependency towards social media and unable to differentiate between fake versus true news	Contribute to identity-based divisions	Facebook <sup>31</sup> , WhatsApp	Participants from 12 countries: Benin, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda, the United Kingdom (UK), and Zimbabwe	,	Anonymous
8. An et al., 2025	Quantitative	Lack of mindfulness, religiosity, instant news sharing, and self-expression	Decrease level of trust on online news	WhatApp, Facebook <sup>31</sup> , Twitter <sup>32</sup> , Instagram <sup>33</sup> , others	Nigeria	385 social participants	18 years and above

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Facebook™ is a trademark of Facebook Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Facebook в России признана экстремистской организацией и заблокирована.

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Author, Year	Methodology applied	Factor of fake news dissemination	Impact	Fake news source	Country	Sample size	Respondents
9. Macarrón Máñez et al., 2024	Mixed method	Motive to share: to manipulate others		Twitter <sup>34</sup> , WhatsApp, Facebook <sup>35</sup> , and others	Spain	720 posts	General social media users
10. Uwalaka, 2023	Mixed method	Political motives and heavy dependency on social media during COVID-19	Create public health issues	Facebook <sup>35</sup> , Twitter <sup>34</sup> , Instagram <sup>36</sup> , and Nairaland <sup>37</sup>	Nigeria	254 participants and 10,408 Twitter contents	18 years old and above
11. Daunt et al., 2023	Mixed method	Quantitative: Conspiracy mentality and patriotism	Perceived threat to freedom	No information	United Kingdom	10 interviews and 722 surveys	Qualitative 40% male, 25–67 years old Quantitative:
		Qualitative: media literacy and patriotism.					49.3% male, 18 years and over 70 years old
12. Luo et al., 2023	Quantitative	Information seeking, emotional content, sensationalism, and provocative headlines	Decrease level of trust towards online news	Weibo	China	102 participants	University students

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Twitter® is a trademark of Twitter Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Twitter полностью заблокирована в России как организация, занимающаяся распространением запрещенного контента.

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<sup>37</sup> https://www.nairaland.com

Author, Year	Methodology applied	Factor of fake news dissemination	Impact	Fake news source	Country	Sample size	Respondents
13. Ajina et al., 2024	Quantitative (cross- sectional)	Intention towards sharing: Social interaction Social presence Info sharing Info seeking Cognitive attitude Affective attitude	Heavy dependency on social media	Facebook <sup>38</sup> , WhatsApp, Instagram <sup>39</sup> , and others	Pakistan	327 participants	Adults
14. Rocha et al., 2023	Systematic literature review (SLR)	Spread propaganda	Psychological distress, fear, uncertainty, panic	Facebook <sup>38</sup> , YouTube, WhatsApp, Twitter <sup>40</sup>	14 countries: Spain, Bangladesh, India, Jordan, Poland, Romania, Palestine, China, Iraq, Mexico, the USA, the UK, Ireland, South Africa	14 studies	Majority 18 years and above
15.Rah- manian & Esfidani, 2023	Quantitative (online survey)	Social approval, overclaiming, and cognitive reflection	Decrease level of trust towards online news	Four Instagram <sup>39</sup> posts	Iran	1160 participants	University of Tehran students
16. Dan & Sannusi, 2024	Systematic literature review	Positive gratification	Mental health of the public during COVID-19	Social media platforms	14 countries	15 articles from Scholar, PubMed, and Web of Science	Adults

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Facebook™ is a trademark of Facebook Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Facebook в России признана экстремистской организацией и заблокирована.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Instagram<sup>™</sup> is a trademark of Instagram Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Instagram полностью заблокирована в России как экстремистская организация.

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Author, Year	Methodology applied	Factor of fake news dissemination	Impact	Fake news source	Country	Sample size	Respondents
17. Cano- Marin et al., 2023	Systematic literature review	Spread misinformation about health	Create public health issues	Twitter⁴1	56 different countries	492 articles from Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect	Tweets between March 2006 and November 2021
18. Munusamy et al., 2024	Systematic literature review	Cognitive biases, emotional appeals, and social identity	No information	Social media platforms	11 countries	23 studies	Adults
19. Bry- anov & Vziatyshe- va, 2021	Systematic literature review	Message characteristics, cognitive styles, predisposition, differences in news and info literacy	No information	Social media platforms	4 countries (U.S, German, Spain, and India)	26 articles from Scopus and WoS	Adults
20. Bal- akrishnan et al., 2021	Quantitative	Altruism, ignorance, and entertainment, availability/effort, pass time and fear of missing out	Confusion and complicating COVID-19 situation		Malaysia	869 participants	Adults

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Twitter® is a trademark of Twitter Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Twitter полностью заблокирована в России как организация, занимающаяся распространением запрещенного контента.

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Author, Year	Methodology applied	Factor of fake news dissemination	Impact	Fake news source	Country	Sample size	Respondents
21. Azzimonti & Fernandes, 2023	Quantitative (regression analysis)	Misinformation and polarization increase with 15% belief in fake news	Higher bot centrality raises polarization and lowers misinformation. Bots spread fake news, influencing misinformation and polarization	Twitter <sup>42</sup>	United States	400 tweets	Dynamic model

<sup>42</sup> Twitter® is a trademark of Twitter Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Twitter полностью заблокирована в России как организация, занимающаяся распространением запрещенного контента.



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### **BOOK REVIEW**

# Lingering Aftertaste of the USSR. Review of Dmitrii Travin (2024). Kak my zhili v SSSR [How we lived in the USSR]. Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie

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If a person has never tasted an orange, there is no way to describe its flavor to them. If a person has never lived in the USSR, they cannot fully understand what it was like. Such knowledge is acquired only through personal experience and perception. Thus, attempting to describe "our life in the USSR" seems futile. For those who lived it, any account would feel incomplete and fragmented; for those who did not, it would appear detached and impersonal. Nevertheless, Dmitrii Travin made a leap of faith. As he states, it took him ten years to complete the book, which was published by Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie [New Literary Review] as part of the series "Chto takoe Rossiia" [What Russia Is]. The title of the series subtly alludes to Fyodor Tyutchev's famous poem¹, which asserts that Russia cannot be conceived by the intellect. At the same time, the series' name seems to tentatively claim the opposite, that is, that Russia can, in fact, be understood through reason.

The author identifies as a Soviet "Seventier," though it would be more accurate to call him an "Eightier," since it was in the 1980s that those born in the early 1960s, including Travin, became actively engaged in social life and co-authored Gorbachev's Perestroika and later Yeltsin's reforms. In the 1970s, they were still in school—passive but thirsty for knowledge witnesses to the final years of socialism. Given that the life they observed unfolded in the 1970s and 1980s, a more appropriate title for the book might have been *How We Lived in the Late USSR*.

<sup>1</sup> Russia is a thing of which

The intellect cannot conceive.

Hers is no common yardstick.

You measure her uniquely:

In Russia you believe (Jude, 2000).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Similarly to "the Sixtiers," prominent representatives of culture and politics with progressive views active in the 1960s.

At first glance, the book's title might suggest a 500-page nostalgic lament (grieving a loss) for the Soviet past. Some readers, however, may see it as an exercise in USSR-bashing. In reality, it is neither. The author sympathizes with those who mourn the loss of the Soviet system while simultaneously exposing its inherent frailty—often illustrating his points with hundreds of anecdotes, some of them quite funny. He writes:

To put it simply, we need to understand why we both miss the 1960s–1970s and condemn them at the same time. Which elements of our past were shaped by the social system, and which existed independently? What aspects of our heritage should have been discarded for the sake of progress, and what aspects of our cultural background must we preserve and cherish? (p. 11; Trans. by Sergey Moshkin—S. M.)

Culture receives special attention in the book. How can a young reader—the presumed target audience of the book—truly feel the vibe of Soviet life? Stories of ubiquitous and chronic shortages, "sausage trains," and under-the-table trade can only go so far. Soviet jokes, abundantly scattered throughout the text, cannot help either. Tasting that metaphorical orange is a solution. In a stroke of genius, Travin finds a way to make it possible: he intersperses his narrative with four so-called "movie halls," inviting his young contemporaries to discover the best Soviet films of the era. Indeed, only *those* films, now considered retro and obviously imperfect, can convey the Soviet atmosphere on a sensual level. The author seems to encourage readers to watch *those* films and reflect on *that* era, stating:

I think that the films created by the Sixtiers is a cultural miracle, whose significance is totally on par with the Russian nineteenth-century literature. I hope that, in the future, they become essential classics for every educated person, both within and beyond Russia. (p. 23; Trans. by S. M.)

For those who long for the Soviet past and imagine how idyllic their life would have been unless reformers like Gaydar and Chubais had demolished it, Travin, a qualified economist and an apt publicist, explains in layman terms why a state-planned socialist economy, once stripped of Stalin's non-economic coercive methods, was doomed to fail. The reason became evident during the "long seventies," the focal period of the book. Economic imbalance and chronic shortages under socialist state planning are not Travin's new discoveries, but not everyone has read works by János Kornai, who untangled the "mystery" of shortages pertaining to socialism. Travin's aim is more modest though equally important: using examples, painfully familiar to the general public, to clearly demonstrate why shortages were an intrinsic feature of the Soviet system. His argumentation is compelling.

During these "long seventies," the country not only exhausted the resources necessary for extensive economic growth—the immensity of the crisis was fully understood only during Perestroika—but also faced a challenge equally threatening to socialism: the embourgeoisement of its population. Alongside economic stagnation,

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the 1970s witnessed the rise of consumerism in the Soviet Union. This shift is easy to understand. A new generation had no memories of collectivization or the Great Terror, they had not experienced the war and the post-war famine. Their parents and grandparents struggled to ensure the most possible comfortable future for them. As a result, the Seventiers chose to fight for their personal smooth-running and cozy household rather than for reign of socialism all over the world. This aligned well with the global trend toward consumer society. A lucky purchase of a foreign-made sheepskin coat became much more exciting than those revolutions and their internationalism. The mythologized revolutionary romanticism that had still inspired the Sixtiers, had evaporated, replaced by conformism and pragmatism. Faith in socialism transformed into a watered-down senseless ritual. Travin accurately captures this demise of the 1970s generation, and mentions it throughout the book:

The allure of Western consumer standards may have angered the parents or grandparents, but the younger generation was nearly entirely captivated by it. (p. 68; Trans. by S. M.)

The market economy would not arrive for another twenty years, but a keen observer was sure that the Soviet system was living on borrowed time and that it was destined to collapse sooner or later under the weight of consumerism rapidly taking shape in new generations. (p. 301; Trans. by S. M.)

For Travin, a specific symbol of Soviet consumerism is Vladimir Menshov's celebrated 1980 film *Moskva Slezam ne Verit* [Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears]. Unlike traditional Soviet films, where success is measured in awards and career achievements, this film measures it in plain personal happiness. Travin writes:

Not just plain personal happiness, but to be honest, the happiness of a petit bourgeois, which seemed to be utterly unacceptable in Soviet ethic. *Moscow ...* legitimized this lifestyle on the Soviet screen, and it turned out to be beautiful. (p. 396; Trans. by S. M.)

Another key theme in Travin's book is the Soviet individual's acquisition of personal space, that is a literal "room for life." People started moving from miserable barracks and shabby kommunalkas³ (communal apartments) into private comfortable apartments. This transition started under Khrushchev and had lasted over the late years of socialism until its end. To Travin, communal apartments embodied collectivism at its most oppressive, where day and night one's personal life was observed by neighbors, where one was under constant surveillance and risked being informed on, and where all personal expression was stifled. Under such conditions, people would comply with collectivism, irrespective of aversion it could evoke in them, unwillingly adapting to the overcrowded apartment customs and relinquishing a part of themselves. And only

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Apartments where multiple families occupied separate rooms sharing a kitchen, bathroom, and hallway. As V. Vysotsky puts it, "na tridtsat' vosem' komnatok vsego odna ubornaya" [just a single bathroom for 38 tiny rooms].

availability of separate apartments in notorious Khrushchyovkas<sup>4</sup> had put an end to that communal-collectivist hell. As Travin notes,

privacy was a crucial factor in the emergence of a generational divide. Separate apartments ... were instrumental in creating the Seventiers, they dismantled the collectivism of the past, and laid the foundation for an unprecedented level of individualism in the USSR. (p. 131; Trans. by S. M.)

The above is supported by the first "movie hall," which features Yuliy Raizman's film *A Esli Eto Liubov*? [What If This Is Love?]. Travin sees it as more than just a school romance—a common plot in late Soviet cinema. To him, it is a story of "Soviet people claiming privacy, which enables them to preserve their soul, psyche, individuality from external interference" (p. 171; Trans. by S. M.). The film illustrates the growing resistance of the younger generation to Soviet preposterous collectivism reflected in the intrusive oversight of teachers and parents. And the story is set against the backdrop of newly built Khrushchyovkas, symbolizing the rise of personal space.

As a native of Leningrad/St. Petersburg, Dmitrii Travin inevitably offers a perspective shaped by life in a major city. Had the book been written by someone from a small Urals town or a remote steppe village, the retrospective picture of Soviet life would have been different. Certain topics, such as visits to fashionable restaurants and popular theaters, would be absent; while others, uncharacteristic of life in the capital, would take their place. Our lives varied too widely, and our country is too large. Keeping this in mind, the author supplements his own reminiscences with interviews from numerous eyewitnesses, whose testimonies add dimension and versatility to his depiction of everyday life in the USSR. This mosaic of mundane life is made up of sketches about school, military service, living in communal apartments, creative intelligentsia sorting vegetables in warehouses, and many other things. By weaving together these descriptions, Travin unveils the reality far removed from the official exterior of that time and difficult to comprehend from today's perspective. "I sought to strip away the veneer covering our past and reveal Soviet life as it truly was—not as it was proclaimed to be", he concludes (p. 495; Trans. by S. M.). And he succeeds. Upon finishing the book, the reader is left with a lingering aftertaste of the USSR.

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Jude, F. (2000). The complete poems of Tyutchev in an English translation: Nature, love and politics. Durham University.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Khrushchyovkas were standardized apartment buildings constructed en masse from the 1950s to the 1970s, prioritizing speed, affordability, and functionality over aesthetics or comfort.

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554 Ethical Code

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### **INSTRUCTION FOR AUTHORS**

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Manuscripts should be compiled in the following order: title page (including Acknowledgements as well as Funding and grant-awarding bodies); abstract; keywords; main text; acknowledgments; references; appendices (as appropriate); table(s) with caption(s) (on individual pages); figure caption(s) (as a list).

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Each manuscript should have 5 to 10 keywords.

Section headings should be concise.

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Page number	(Smith, 2012, p. 6)
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Not in English	Doutre, É. (2014). Mixité de genre et de métiers: Conséquences identitaires et relations de travail [Mixture of gender and trades: Consequences for identity and working relationships]. Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science/Revue canadienne des sciences du comportement, 46, 327–336. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0036218 For transliteration of Cyrillic letters please use the links: ALA-LC Romanization Tables at the web-site of The Library of Congress http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/roman.html
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Journal	
One author	Author, A. A. (2011). Title of the article. <i>Title of the Journal</i> , <i>22</i> (2), 123–231. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/xxxxxxxxxxx">https://doi.org/10.1080/xxxxxxxxxxxxx</a> Volume numbers in references should be italicized, but do not italicize the issue number, the parentheses, or the comma after the issue number. If there is no DOI and the reference was retrieved from an online database, give the database name and accession number or the database URL (no retrieval date is needed): Author, A. A. (2011). Title of the article. <i>Title of Journal</i> , <i>22</i> (2), 123–231. ( <i>The website name</i> ) <a href="https://www.w3.org">https://www.w3.org</a>
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Peer-reviewed article published online ahead of the issue	Author, A. A., & Author, B. B. (2012). Title of the article. <i>Title of the Journal</i> . Advance online publication. <a href="https://doi.org/xx.xxxxxxxxx">https://doi.org/xx.xxxxxxxxxx</a> If you can update the reference before publication, do so.
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Paper	Presenter, A. A. (2012, February). Title of the paper. <i>Paper presented at the meeting of Organization Name</i> , Location.
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Act	Mental Health Systems Act, 41 U.S.C. § 9403 (1988).
Audio and visual media	Taupin, B. (1975). Someone saved my life tonight [Recorded by Elton John]. On Captain fantastic and the brown dirt cowboy [CD]. London: Big Pig Music Limited (place of publication is optional).  Author, A. (Producer). (2009, December 2). <i>Title of podcast</i> [Audio podcast]. (The website name) <a href="https://www.w3.org">https://www.w3.org</a> Producer, P. P. (Producer), & Director, D. D. (Director). (Date of publication). <i>Title of motion picture</i> [Motion picture]. Country of origin: Studio or distributor.  Smith, A. (Writer), & Miller, R. (Director). (1989). Title of episode [Television series episode]. In A. Green (Executive Producer), Series. New York, NY: WNET.  Miller, R. (Producer). (1989). The mind [Television series]. New York, NY: WNET.
Database	Author, A. A., Author, B. B., & Author, A. A. (2002). A study of enjoyment of peas. <i>Title of the Journal</i> , 8(3). Retrieved February 20, 2003, from the PsycARTICLES database.
Dataset	Author. (2011). National Statistics Office monthly means and other derived variables [Data set]. Retrieved March 6, 2011, (The website name) https://www.w3.org If the dataset is updated regularly, use the year of retrieval in the reference, and using the retrieval date is also recommended.
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