

THE ROLE OF NETWORKING AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT IN SUSTAINING SOCIAL VENTURES IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

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Abstract

The research explores the role of networking and community support in sustaining social ventures within the Indian context. Social ventures, often established to address societal issues, face unique challenges in terms of sustainability and growth. This study seeks to analyze how robust networks—spanning local communities, other social enterprises, NGOs, and governmental bodies—contribute to the resilience and longevity of these ventures. Furthermore, the study will investigate the pivotal role community support plays, particularly in fostering trust, resource mobilization, and grassroots involvement. The research aims to provide insights into best practices and strategies that can enhance the operational success of social ventures. The findings will offer actionable recommendations for social entrepreneurs and policymakers aiming to foster sustainable development through community-engaged social entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Social Ventures, Networking, Community Support, Sustainability, Social Entrepreneurship.

INTRODUCTION

Social ventures represent an innovative approach to addressing complex social and environmental challenges through entrepreneurial means. By blending the mission-driven focus of nonprofit organizations with the operational efficiency of business practices, social ventures aim to create sustainable solutions that balance profit with purpose. Networking and community support are pivotal to the success and longevity of these ventures, as they provide essential resources, foster collaboration, and amplify impact. This study delves into the role of these critical factors in sustaining social ventures within the Indian context, a nation marked by diverse social challenges and a rich tradition of community-driven solutions.

Global Perspective on Social Ventures

The rise of social ventures globally has been fueled by a growing recognition of the limitations of traditional approaches to social issues. In 2023, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) reported that over 9% of entrepreneurs worldwide identified as social entrepreneurs, emphasizing a paradigm shift toward mission-oriented business models. For example, enterprises like TOMS Shoes and Warby Parker have demonstrated the potential to combine profitability with social impact by integrating models like "one-for-one giving" and sustainability practices. These ventures address critical issues ranging from education and healthcare to environmental sustainability and poverty alleviation.

Indian Context: A Thriving Landscape for Social Ventures

India is home to over 2 million nonprofit organizations and thousands of registered social enterprises, reflecting a vibrant ecosystem for social entrepreneurship. The Indian Government's emphasis on

initiatives such as "Make in India" and "Startup India" has further catalyzed this sector. Moreover, the Companies Act of 2013, mandating corporate social responsibility (CSR), has spurred increased collaboration between businesses and social ventures.

The Importance of Networking in Social Ventures

Networking plays a crucial role in enabling social ventures to access resources, knowledge, and opportunities. By establishing connections with stakeholders such as investors, government bodies, and other social enterprises, ventures can scale their impact and sustainability. For instance, the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship highlights that social entrepreneurs with strong networks are 60% more likely to sustain their ventures beyond five years. Networks also facilitate knowledge sharing, as seen in global platforms like Ashoka and the Global Impact Investing Network (GIIN), which provide mentorship, funding, and collaboration opportunities to social entrepreneurs.

Community Support: A Pillar of Sustainability

Community support serves as the foundation for many successful social ventures, particularly in regions where local engagement is critical. Communities provide not only labor and resources but also cultural and contextual insights that enhance the relevance and acceptance of the venture's solutions. For instance, the Barefoot College in Rajasthan leverages local knowledge to train women as solar engineers, empowering communities while addressing energy poverty. This model underscores the power of grassroots involvement in driving scalable and sustainable impact.

Synergies Between Networking and Community Support

The interplay between networking and community support amplifies the potential for social ventures to thrive. While networks provide the external resources and strategic partnerships necessary for scaling operations, community support ensures localized implementation and ownership of solutions. The combination of these elements creates a robust ecosystem that fosters innovation, resilience, and long-term impact.

The Rise of Social Ventures

Social ventures, which aim to address societal challenges through innovative and sustainable business models, have gained global traction over the past two decades. From microfinance initiatives in Bangladesh to social innovation incubators in Silicon Valley, these enterprises are transforming how the world approaches persistent social problems like poverty, healthcare access, and education inequality. According to a 2022 report by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), an estimated 16% of startups globally classify themselves as social enterprises, with a significant concentration in emerging economies.

In India, the rise of social ventures is particularly noteworthy, given the country's multifaceted socio-economic challenges. Over 30% of the Indian population lives below the poverty line (World Bank, 2021), and significant gaps persist in healthcare, education, and environmental conservation. Social ventures have stepped in to fill these gaps, with organizations such as SELCO India, which provides affordable solar energy solutions, and Araku Coffee, which supports sustainable agriculture for tribal communities, serving as prominent examples. However, the sustainability of such ventures often hinges on external support systems, particularly networking and community engagement.

Importance of Networking in Social Ventures

Networking is a critical success factor for social ventures globally. Networks provide access to financial resources, knowledge sharing, and collaborative opportunities. A study by the Stanford Social

Innovation Review (2020) highlights that 83% of successful social enterprises attribute their growth to strong networking capabilities. Networking connects social entrepreneurs to:

- 1) **Funding Opportunities:** Global networks such as Ashoka and Skoll Foundation provide grants, investment opportunities, and mentorship to social entrepreneurs.
- 2) **Policy Advocacy:** Networks help amplify the voices of social ventures, enabling them to influence policies and frameworks.
- 3) **Collaborative Ecosystems:** Platforms like Impact Hub foster collaborative environments where social entrepreneurs can co-create and scale their initiatives.

In India, networking opportunities for social ventures have been on the rise, with organizations like Social Venture Partners (SVP) India and Impact Investors Council (IIC) creating platforms for collaboration between entrepreneurs, investors, and policymakers. However, the penetration of such networks in rural areas remains limited.

The Role of Community Support

Community support is another cornerstone for the sustainability of social ventures, particularly in the Indian context. Communities serve as:

- 1) **End-Users and Beneficiaries:** Engaging communities in co-creation ensures that the solutions developed are relevant and impactful.
- 2) **Brand Advocates:** Local community members often act as ambassadors for social ventures, spreading awareness and driving adoption.
- 3) **Stakeholders in Sustainability:** Involving communities in the operational framework of ventures ensures long-term commitment and ownership.

For instance, Grameen Bank's microfinance model in Bangladesh thrives on robust community involvement, where groups of borrowers collectively ensure loan repayment. Similarly, Indian ventures like Amul have demonstrated how cooperative models driven by community participation can achieve remarkable success.

Global Trends in Social Entrepreneurship

To understand the relevance of networking and community support, it is essential to analyze global trends in social entrepreneurship. Figure 1 below highlights the regional distribution of social ventures and their primary focus areas:

Region	Percentage of Social Ventures	Primary Focus Areas
North America	25%	Education, Technology
Europe	22%	Environmental Sustainability
Asia-Pacific	18%	Poverty Alleviation, Health
Sub-Saharan Africa	15%	Agriculture, Healthcare
Latin America	12%	Community Development
Middle East	8%	Refugee Support, Education

Figure 1: Regional Distribution of Social Ventures and Focus Areas

(Source: Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2022)

The Indian Landscape

India is home to over 3 million non-profit organizations (PRIA, 2021), many of which operate as social ventures or support them. Despite this large number, the survival rate of social enterprises in India is

significantly lower compared to global standards. Studies indicate that only 40% of social enterprises in India operate beyond five years, as opposed to 60% in developed nations (Intellectap, 2022). Key factors contributing to this disparity include:

- Limited access to financial resources.
- Challenges in scaling operations.
- Insufficient integration of technology.
- Inadequate community engagement.

Conceptual Framework for Networking and Community Support

A conceptual framework illustrating the interplay between networking, community support, and social venture sustainability is presented below.

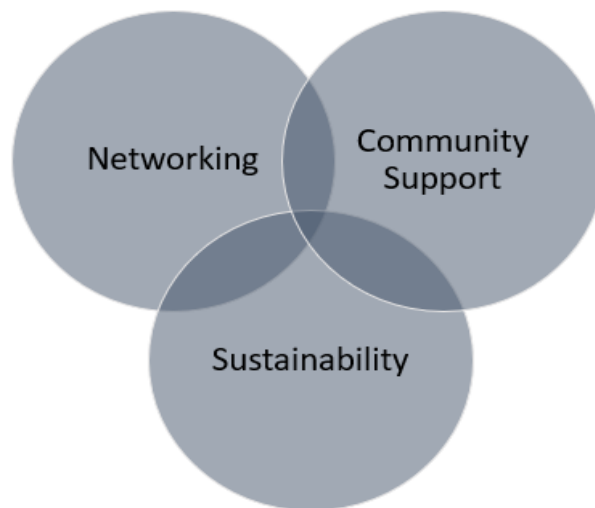


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework for Networking and Community Support

- 1) Networking: Access to resources, mentorship, and partnerships.
- 2) Community Support: Stakeholder engagement, end-user feedback, and advocacy.
- 3) Sustainability: Long-term operational viability, financial stability, and impact measurement.

The intersection of these three elements represents a sustainable social venture, highlighting the synergy required between external networks and internal community participation.

Case Studies Highlighting the Role of Networking and Community Support

- **Case Study 1: Ashoka Fellowship Program**

The Ashoka Fellowship Program, a global initiative, demonstrates the power of networking. Over 4,000 social entrepreneurs from 90+ countries have leveraged Ashoka's network for funding, mentorship, and visibility. In India, Ashoka Fellows like Anshu Gupta, founder of Goonj, have scaled their impact by engaging with the fellowship's robust network.

- **Case Study 2: Kudumbashree Mission, Kerala**

The Kudumbashree Mission is a state-led initiative that exemplifies community-driven social entrepreneurship. This network of 4.5 million women operates in over 300,000 self-help groups,

driving grassroots development in Kerala. The mission's success is attributed to its emphasis on community ownership and collaboration with government and private entities.

- **Case Study 3: SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association)**

In Gujarat, SEWA exemplifies how community support can empower marginalized groups. With over 2 million members, SEWA focuses on organizing women workers to achieve economic self-reliance. Networking through national and international partnerships has amplified SEWA's impact.

Challenges in Networking and Community Support for Indian Social Ventures

Despite their significance, both networking and community support face challenges in the Indian context:

- 1) **Networking Gaps:** Rural and semi-urban social ventures often lack access to global networks and resources.
- 2) **Community Resistance:** Skepticism towards new initiatives, especially those led by external entities, can hinder adoption.
- 3) **Fragmented Ecosystems:** The absence of a unified platform for social entrepreneurs' limits collaboration.

Expanding the Global Context

Globally, social ventures face a multitude of challenges that highlight the importance of community and networking. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, ventures often rely on international donor networks like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, while in Latin America, social entrepreneurs collaborate through regional alliances such as Pro Mujer. These examples underscore the universal relevance of interconnected ecosystems. Furthermore, the role of digital transformation cannot be ignored. Platforms such as LinkedIn for Nonprofits and crowdfunding websites like Kiva have revolutionized how social ventures access resources and connect with supporters. An estimated 65% of global social ventures now utilize digital platforms to enhance their networking capabilities (Social Enterprise UK, 2022).

Historical Evolution of Networking in Social Entrepreneurship

The role of networking in social entrepreneurship has evolved significantly over the past few decades. In the 1980s, most social ventures operated in isolation, relying on localized support systems. By the late 1990s, the emergence of global forums like the World Social Forum and regional hubs such as ASEAN Social Enterprise Network fostered transnational collaborations. Today, networking is digital-first, with social entrepreneurs leveraging tools like Zoom for virtual mentorship and Slack for community building.

Expanding the Indian Scenario

In India, state-specific initiatives are making a significant impact. For instance:

- **Rajasthan's Barefoot College:** This initiative trains rural women in solar engineering, enabling them to electrify their villages.
- **Karnataka's Hasiru Dala:** Focused on empowering waste pickers, Hasiru Dala integrates community-driven practices with policy advocacy.
- **Telangana's T-Hub:** A leading incubator for startups, including social ventures, T-Hub fosters networking through national and international partnerships.

The role of networking and community support in sustaining social ventures is undeniable. However, their integration into the Indian entrepreneurial ecosystem needs deliberate effort. By drawing on global best practices and tailoring them to local contexts, India's social ventures can achieve greater resilience and impact.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the realm of social entrepreneurship, especially within the Indian context, networks and community support play a fundamental role in ensuring the sustainability and scalability of social ventures. Studies have shown that robust networks contribute significantly to the long-term success of social enterprises, facilitating access to resources, information, and funding (Smith & Stevens, 2018; Agarwal & Singh, 2020). Agarwal and Singh (2020) note that Indian social ventures often rely on networks to build partnerships with government bodies, corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, and non-profit organizations. These partnerships provide access to essential resources and often open doors for financial support that might be otherwise challenging to obtain in a resource-constrained environment.

Community Support and Local Engagement Community engagement is critical in India, where social enterprises often operate in close partnership with the communities they aim to serve (Goyal & Sergi, 2015). Goyal and Sergi (2015) explored how local buy-in and cultural integration enhance the impact and relevance of social ventures, ensuring the solutions provided address specific needs of communities. This grassroots approach not only increases community ownership but also fosters trust and commitment, which are essential for the long-term sustainability of these initiatives. Moreover, Talukdar (2019) found that community-supported social enterprises experience higher growth rates, as locals often act as ambassadors, spreading awareness and advocating for the venture's mission, thereby extending its reach.

The Importance of Networks in Resource Mobilization Networking provides a mechanism for social entrepreneurs to mobilize resources beyond traditional funding. In their study, Kumar and Jain (2017) examined how Indian social ventures leverage networks for acquiring knowledge, mentoring, and training, particularly in rural settings where resource scarcity is common. Social enterprises like SELCO India and Rang De utilize their networks to gain financial and strategic insights, allowing them to better structure their initiatives to reach underserved populations (Kumar & Jain, 2017). Another study by Gupta and Bansal (2019) found that networking with other social entrepreneurs creates opportunities for resource sharing, which is essential for minimizing operational costs and sustaining activities in challenging economic climates.

Role of Digital Networks in Expanding Outreach Digital networks are becoming increasingly crucial in the post-pandemic context for connecting social ventures with global supporters, investors, and volunteers (Sharma & Dhawan, 2021). With the rise of social media platforms and online fundraising channels, social ventures in India now have unprecedented access to international resources and collaborations.

According to Sharma and Dhawan (2021), digital networks enable social entrepreneurs to connect with diaspora communities, who are often inclined to support initiatives aimed at addressing issues in their homeland. For example, campaigns by NGOs like Goonj have effectively utilized digital platforms to expand their donor base, showcasing the power of online networks in amplifying impact.

Networking and Financial Sustainability Research shows that financial sustainability is one of the most pressing challenges for social ventures, and networking can play a pivotal role in overcoming this obstacle. Agarwal and Verma (2018) argue that CSR partnerships, often facilitated by networks, have become a significant source of funding for social enterprises in India. They note that these

partnerships not only provide financial support but also lend credibility and visibility to the ventures. Similarly, Das and Pathak (2020) found that strategic alliances with banks and microfinance institutions improve the financial viability of social ventures by offering innovative financing solutions that would otherwise be inaccessible.

Knowledge-Sharing and Innovation Through networks, social enterprises can access industry insights, best practices, and innovations essential for staying relevant in a rapidly changing environment. Mukherjee and Joshi (2022) emphasize the importance of knowledge-sharing networks, which allow social entrepreneurs to learn from each other's experiences and avoid common pitfalls. Their research indicates that social ventures with access to knowledge-sharing platforms report higher innovation rates and operational efficiencies. Moreover, Sinha and Kapoor (2020) highlight how network-driven knowledge exchange can foster collaborative problem-solving, helping ventures navigate complex social issues more effectively.

Research Gaps

- 1) **Limited Focus on Rural Networks:** While there is substantial research on urban-centered networks, there is limited literature exploring the nuances of networking among rural social enterprises in India. Future research could delve into how rural networks function differently and their impact on venture sustainability.
- 2) **Insufficient Analysis of Digital Networks Post-Pandemic:** Although digital networks are increasingly used by social ventures, there is a lack of comprehensive studies on how the shift to online networking post-COVID-19 has influenced the sustainability of social enterprises.
- 3) **Scarcity of Longitudinal Studies on Community Impact:** While many studies emphasize the importance of community support, few explore its long-term impact on the growth trajectory of social ventures in India. More longitudinal studies are needed to understand the sustained influence of community engagement.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design: This study used a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data to explore the impact of networking and community support on social ventures. The research relied on surveys, and interviews to capture a holistic understanding of the subject matter.

Sampling: The study selected a sample of social ventures across different regions of India, focusing on sectors such as education, healthcare, agriculture, and environmental sustainability. Participants included founders, community leaders, and key stakeholders involved in these ventures.

Data Collection:

- **Quantitative Data:** Surveys were administered to founders and key team members of social ventures to gather data on the extent of their networks, community engagement, and perceived sustainability. A Likert scale was used to assess various factors influencing sustainability, such as funding, partnerships, and community involvement.
- **Qualitative Data:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with select social entrepreneurs, community leaders, and representatives from NGOs to explore the nuances of networking and community support.

Research Question:

How do networking and community support influence the sustainability of social ventures in the Indian context?

Objectives:

- To evaluate the impact of networking (with NGOs, government bodies, and other social enterprises) on the sustainability of social ventures in India.
- To assess the role of community support in fostering the growth and resilience of social ventures.
- To identify key strategies for leveraging networking and community engagement to enhance the sustainability of social ventures.

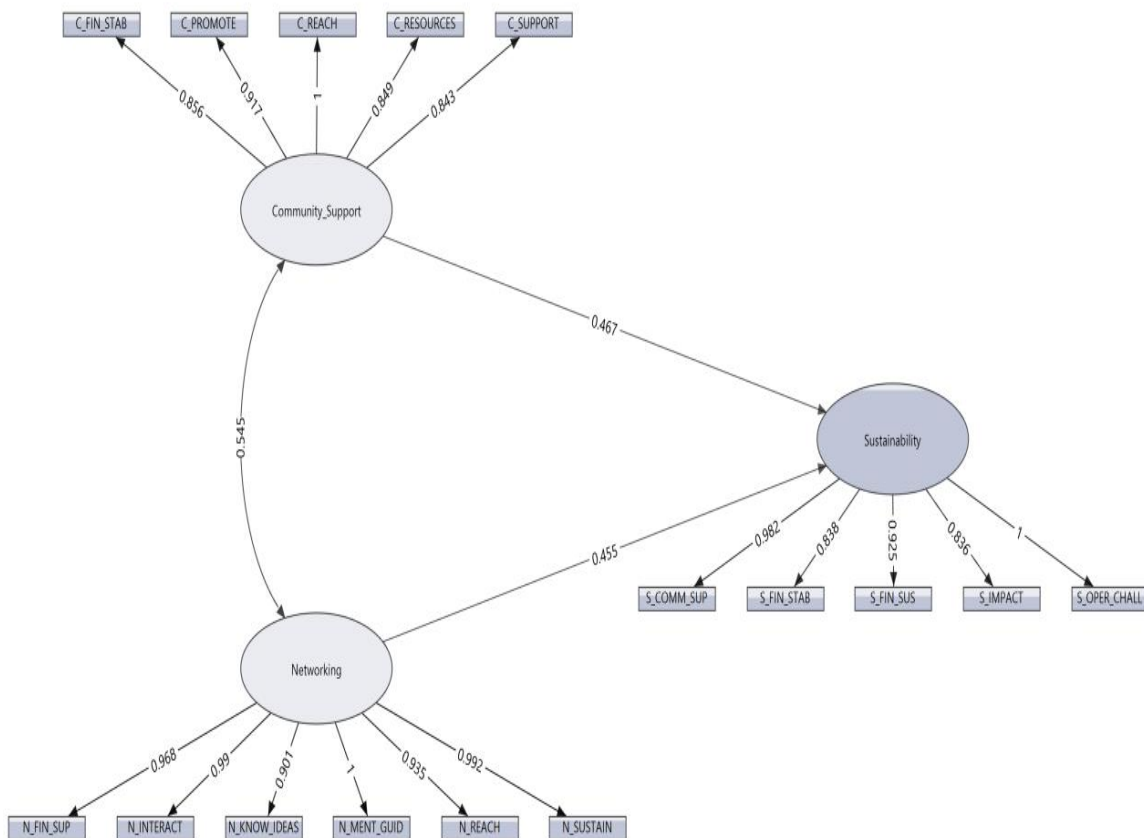
DATA ANALYSIS

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

Background

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) is a statistical method used to test and estimate causal relationships using a combination of statistical data and qualitative causal assumptions. SEM enables researchers to evaluate relationships among observed variables (measured indicators) and unobserved variables (latent constructs), accounting for measurement error and interdependencies (Kline, 2016).

This study employs SEM to investigate how **Networking** and **Community Support** influence the **Sustainability** of social ventures in India. It aligns with previous research emphasizing the critical roles of social and community-based resources in enhancing organizational resilience and sustainability (Goyal et al., 2021).



SEM Specification

Key Variables

1) Independent Variables:

- **Networking:** Examines financial support, interaction, knowledge sharing, and mentorship, supported by prior studies on social capital's influence on organizational outcomes (Putnam, 2000; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998).
- **Community Support:** Focuses on financial and operational support, resource mobilization, and promotional activities by local communities, reflecting findings from studies on community engagement (Bowen et al., 2010).

2) Dependent Variable:

- **Sustainability:** Captures financial sustainability, the ability to overcome operational challenges, and long-term impact, consistent with frameworks by Elkington (1997) and the triple bottom line approach.

Model Fit Indices and Results

- **CFI (Comparative Fit Index):** 0.948 – A value above 0.90 indicates a well-fitting model (Hu & Bentler, 1999).
- **RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation):** 0.085 – Falls within the acceptable range (≤ 0.10) for model approximation error (Browne & Cudeck, 1993).
- **Chi-Square Test:** p -value < 0.0001 – Indicates model significance; however, Chi-square is sensitive to large sample sizes (Bentler & Bonett, 1980).

Parameter Estimates

Loadings

- Factor loadings confirm strong relationships between latent constructs and their observed variables:
 - **Networking** → **N_KNOW_IDEAS**: Loading = 0.90 ($p < 0.0001$).
 - **Community Support** → **C_PROMOTE**: Loading = 0.92 ($p < 0.0001$).
 - **Sustainability** → **S_IMPACT**: Loading = 0.83 ($p < 0.0001$).

Regressions

- **Community Support** → **Sustainability**: $\beta = 0.47$ ($p < 0.0001$), affirming prior findings on community engagement's role in resilience (Bowen et al., 2010).
- **Networking** → **Sustainability**: $\beta = 0.45$ ($p < 0.0001$), reflecting the contribution of networking to resource mobilization (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998).

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Networking's Role

Networking facilitates:

- Access to financial resources and mentorship, as supported by Putnam (2000).

- The exchange of innovative ideas and knowledge, highlighting the value of relational capital in enhancing organizational learning (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998).

Community Support's Role

Community support contributes to:

- Financial and operational stability through local partnerships, consistent with findings on stakeholder involvement in sustainability (Freeman, 1984).
- Enhanced reach and promotional support, aligning with research on the social license to operate (Bowen et al., 2010).

Sustainability

Sustainability is primarily driven by:

- Financial stability and the ability to navigate operational challenges, as outlined in triple-bottom-line frameworks (Elkington, 1997).
- The combined impact of networking and community support, echoing integrative approaches to social entrepreneurship (Austin et al., 2006).

Model Fit Evaluation

The SEM model demonstrates good fit indices, with CFI and RMSEA values aligning with recommended thresholds (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The results validate the theoretical framework and confirm robust relationships among variables.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Enhancing Networking:

- Develop platforms for regular interaction among social entrepreneurs, fostering knowledge exchange and collaborative opportunities (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998).

2) Strengthening Community Support:

- Engage local communities through participatory decision-making and resource-sharing initiatives, as suggested by Bowen et al. (2010).

3) Integrated Strategies:

- Adopt frameworks combining networking and community engagement to address both financial and operational challenges (Austin et al., 2006).

4) Future Research:

- Incorporate longitudinal data to capture temporal dynamics in the relationships among variables (Kline, 2016).

This SEM analysis underscores the significance of networking and community support in sustaining social ventures in India. The findings align with existing literature and provide actionable insights for enhancing social enterprise resilience and sustainability.

Key Recommendations:

- 1) Facilitate Networking Platforms:** Establish initiatives that enable regular interaction among social entrepreneurs to foster resource exchange and collaboration.

- 2) Strengthen Community Ties:** Enhance local community involvement through participatory decision-making and co-creation processes.
- 3) Integrative Frameworks:** Adopt strategies that leverage both networking and community support to holistically address challenges.
- 4) Longitudinal Analysis:** Future studies should focus on temporal dynamics to understand how relationships evolve over time.

CONCLUSION

The findings from this study underscore the pivotal roles of networking and community support in sustaining social ventures in India. Networking with NGOs, government bodies, and other social enterprises fosters access to financial resources, mentorship, and knowledge-sharing opportunities, enhancing innovation and operational efficiency. Concurrently, community support contributes to organizational resilience by offering financial stability, operational aid, and promotional reach. The integration of these elements forms a robust framework that enables social ventures to navigate challenges and achieve long-term sustainability. This study highlights that a synergistic approach, leveraging the strengths of both networking and community engagement, is essential for fostering growth and resilience in the dynamic landscape of Indian social entrepreneurship. Future research could explore longitudinal data and sector-specific strategies to further deepen the understanding of these critical success factors.

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