

# Conceptualizing "Job Leadership in the Marketing Mix" for Success and Knowledge Transfer in Small Businesses Distant from Consumer Markets (Case Study: Employment Projects of Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation, Ilam Province)

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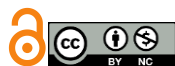
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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The present study was conducted to examine the conceptualization of "Job Leadership in the Marketing Mix" for success and knowledge transfer in small businesses distant from consumer markets (case study: employment projects of Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation, Ilam Province).

**Methodology:** Data were collected through interviews with 15 managers, experts in the field of job leadership, and officials in the relevant domain at the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation. In this study, participants were selected using two non-probability sampling methods: purposive (judgmental) sampling and snowball sampling. The data were analyzed through three stages of open, axial, and selective coding. During the three stages of coding, the primary and secondary categories of job leadership in the marketing mix were identified. Data analysis was performed using MAXQDA qualitative software.

**Findings:** The findings of the study (165 initial codes or concepts, 115 subcategories, and 22 main categories) included presenting a model comprising causal, contextual, and intervening conditions, introducing the central phenomenon, presenting strategies for job leadership in the marketing mix, and identifying its outcomes.

**Conclusion:** The results indicate that conceptualizing "Job Leadership in the Marketing Mix" in the employment projects of the Relief Foundation has certain outcomes, including improving the welfare and livelihoods of households, strengthening family foundations, and enhancing skill training and empowerment.

**Keywords:** job leadership, marketing mix, business, Relief Foundation, employment.

## 1 Introduction

Small businesses around the world are considered the cornerstone of any country's economy. These businesses act as catalysts for economic growth, creating new job opportunities and increasing productivity. Small businesses foster innovation and entrepreneurship, leading to the development of new products, services, and business strategies. They also have the potential to expand markets beyond domestic boundaries, thereby contributing to economic growth. Small businesses can exploit markets to expand their reach, creating new opportunities and strengthening their resilience in the face of economic challenges (Bisht et al., 2024).

In emerging economies, small businesses are critical drivers of economic growth and poverty reduction because they provide opportunities for individuals from various segments of society to participate in economic activities and engage actively in the workplace (Storey, 2016). These businesses play a vital role in economic development, innovation, competitiveness, and unemployment reduction, contributing significantly to sustainability, economic growth, and income generation. In developing economies, small businesses account for approximately 90% of all enterprises. They represent the most dynamic and vibrant organizational sector for creating and launching new jobs (Manzoor et al., 2021).

Small businesses are essential for any well-functioning economy. For instance, in the United Kingdom, there are approximately 5.5 million small businesses (defined as businesses with fewer than 10 to 50 employees). This constitutes over 99% of the total business population. As of January 2022, small businesses accounted for 48% of employment and 34% of turnover in the UK's private sector (Hutton & Ward, 2022). Furthermore, small businesses integrate into financial and global supply chains while offering opportunities for entrepreneurship and innovation (Urbano et al., 2019). According to Lorincová et al. (2022), small businesses make a significant contribution to global economic growth. By providing goods and services, they reduce consumer costs and increase demand. They are also crucial drivers of job creation and employment opportunities, fostering entrepreneurship and innovation, and advancing economic growth (Lorincová et al., 2022).

Today, small businesses operate in a marketing environment characterized by rapid and qualitative changes, offering new opportunities to enhance their competitive position (Czinkota et al., 2021). As such, small businesses

face an environment of intense competition, diverse consumer preferences, and high-risk markets. Businesses that leverage new market opportunities to better understand their customers and expand their consumer base are more likely to survive. Therefore, understanding the use of consumer information in small businesses is a key topic for business development (Yawson, 2020).

On the other hand, the marketing mix is an important tool for small businesses as it determines the most suitable marketing strategies for these businesses. Marketing involves creating demand and supply (or value). To address market challenges, the marketing mix has emerged as one of the oldest and most popular marketing concepts and tools, widely utilized today. Essentially, the marketing mix encompasses a combination of key elements controlled by marketers to influence customers to choose their products (e.g., goods, services) over competitors' offerings. These key elements include actions and tactics that can be planned to achieve a business's marketing goals within its target market. Thus, the marketing mix is a strategic tool that helps marketers better understand a product and plan for its successful delivery (Lim, 2023; Tang & Mesfin, 2020).

In a study, Brown (2020) stated that implementing marketing strategies can have a significant impact on the ability of small businesses to remain competitive and profitable (Brown, 2020). According to Mu et al. (2018), market sensing refers to a business's ability to predict future market developments and identify emerging opportunities based on information gathered from its business environment. Customer engagement refers to a business's ability to establish long-term relationships with its customers. In this context, businesses must enhance their marketing capabilities (Mu et al., 2018). In the evolving landscape of marketing, the role of effective leadership and continuous career development cannot be underestimated. In this context, a leader acts as an economic agent and entrepreneur who has acquired significant expertise and successful experiences within a business.

Findings from studies (Amin, 2015; Amin et al., 2016; Zehir et al., 2015) indicate that entrepreneur-centric approaches influence the performance of small businesses. Therefore, entrepreneurs can employ precise marketing strategies, such as the marketing mix strategy, to attract consumer interest. Researchers (Kim et al., 2016; Maftuchach & Kusunuranti, 2021) state that the marketing mix includes interconnected and organized marketing elements that are appropriately utilized, enabling businesses

to effectively achieve marketing objectives while meeting consumer needs and desires.

The literature on entrepreneurial and job leadership models highlights various aspects of their influence on organizational and economic performance. Zeinali (2023) demonstrated that entrepreneur-centric networks significantly impact adaptability and absorptive capacities, which mediate the relationship between such networks and geographical scope (Zeinali, 2023). Safari and Moghli (2022) identified seven dimensions of social entrepreneurship in NGOs, including flexible structures, entrepreneurial culture, social value creation, and community-driven leadership (Safari & Moghli, 2022). Similarly, Abdulmaleki et al. (2022) emphasized the critical role of entrepreneurial conditions and facilitation management in shaping business outcomes, where interactive facilitation management led to distinct outcomes such as empowerment and structural improvements (Abdulmaleki et al., 2022). Gholard et al. (2022) focused on self-sufficiency and employment as central concepts, proposing a model that integrates causal, contextual, and intervening factors alongside strategies and outcomes, showing alignment between quantitative and qualitative findings (Golard et al., 2022). Kakayi et al. (2021) confirmed a positive relationship between marketing mix elements—product, place, price, and promotion—and competitive advantage creation (Kakayi et al., 2021). Zeraei et al. (2018) highlighted the role of relational marketing in building trust and commitment among donors in charitable organizations, with religious beliefs moderating the relationship between donor commitment and contributions (Zarei et al., 2018). Finally, Mahboubi et al. (2018) identified key opportunities in employment-generating programs, such as enhancing beneficiaries' growth and protecting family structures, alongside threats like inadequate cooperative support and challenges in branding and market access (Mahbubi et al., 2018). These studies collectively underline the interplay between entrepreneurship, marketing strategies, and socio-economic outcomes, offering actionable insights for policymakers and practitioners.

The career leadership model, or entrepreneur-centric approach, is a novel strategy for employment generation established by the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation. This initiative is one of the employment and self-sufficiency programs designed to empower individuals supported by the Relief Foundation. The goal of this initiative is to leverage the capacity, experience, and scientific and practical expertise of entrepreneurs, economic centers, and science

and technology parks in various fields such as production, services, industry, and agriculture to create employment for the individuals supported by the organization. In this plan, a beneficiary, after receiving financial support, begins producing goods under the supervision of a career leader and works as a part of the entrepreneur's network. In other words, the career leadership initiative of the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation involves introducing beneficiaries who seek financial support and employment to an entrepreneur who oversees all stages of employment creation for the beneficiary, including aptitude assessment, counseling, project selection, loan processing and disbursement, project implementation, and product marketing. This initiative enhances the efficiency of financial aid, job creation, and sustainability of the jobs created for beneficiaries. Economic empowerment and income generation for needy families is one of the key approaches emphasized by the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation. By empowering the target community and promoting economic independence, the organization aims to reduce the number of individuals under its support and prevent further poverty through job creation. Given the importance of this issue, this study proposes a model for examining "Job Leadership in the Marketing Mix" for success and knowledge transfer in small businesses distant from consumer markets. Several studies in Iran have explored the marketing mix and small businesses. However, these studies have not focused on the critical role of small businesses in the success and knowledge transfer of businesses distant from consumer markets. Considering this gap, this study seeks to answer the following question: How can the conceptual model of job leadership in the marketing mix contribute to the success and knowledge transfer in small businesses distant from consumer markets?

## 2 Methods and Materials

This study is qualitative, applied in nature, and conducted using the grounded theory method. Grounded theory is a research methodology aimed at generating theory inductively from data, where data collection, organization, and analysis occur simultaneously and interdependently. The statistical population of the study included managers, experts in the field of job leadership, and officials in the relevant domain at the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation in 2023. Purposeful sampling, specifically snowball sampling, was used to select the participants, and sampling continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. Theoretical saturation refers to the point at which data collection ceases

to produce new features or concepts. In this study, the researchers reached saturation after conducting 13 interviews.

In the present study, data were collected through in-depth interviews with managers, experts in job leadership, and officials in the relevant domain at the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation. The interview guide was developed after extensive review and consultation with experts. The interviews were conducted in 2023, with each interview lasting approximately 60 minutes.

The data analysis was carried out using MAXQDA10 software and grounded theory coding (open, axial, and selective coding). During the interviews, information was recorded and then transcribed into text for analysis in the software. In grounded theory studies, data collection and analysis are conducted in parallel and simultaneously. Data analysis began after the initial steps of data collection, with the extracted perspectives guiding further data collection and analysis. This iterative process continued throughout the study.

The three stages of coding, employed to develop a coherent, systematic, and detailed theory, are described below:

#### Step 1: Open Coding

Open coding involves the process of breaking down, comparing, naming, conceptualizing, and categorizing data. During this phase, the data are fragmented into smaller parts and examined to identify similarities and differences.

#### Step 2: Axial Coding

Axial coding, the second stage of analysis in grounded theory, aims to establish relationships between the categories generated during open coding. It is termed "axial" because it revolves around a central category. Axial coding focuses on identifying a central category and linking other subcategories to it. After defining the central category, data are re-coded to identify the influencing conditions, including causal conditions, context, intervening conditions, actions/reactions (strategies), and their outcomes. These relationships are illustrated within a paradigm model.

- **Central Phenomenon:** This refers to the core idea, event, or phenomenon that actions/reactions are directed towards to manage, control, or respond to it. It is associated with the key question: "What do the data indicate?" The central phenomenon must be abstract enough to relate other main categories to it.
- **Causal Conditions:** These are the events or incidents that lead to the occurrence or

development of the phenomenon. Causal conditions are identified through systematic examination of data and temporal sequences preceding the phenomenon.

- **Contextual Conditions:** These are the specific characteristics or settings where the phenomenon occurs. They define the environment where actions/reactions take place.
- **Intervening Conditions:** These are structural conditions influencing strategies, either facilitating or constraining them. Examples include time, space, socioeconomic status, occupation, age, gender, and history.
- **Strategies:** These are deliberate and goal-oriented actions/reactions employed to manage or address the phenomenon. Strategies may be identified through actions and statements within the data.
- **Outcomes:** These are the results of actions/reactions. Outcomes may not always be predictable, intentional, or immediate, and they could manifest as events or consequences in the present or future.

#### Step 3: Selective Coding and Theory Development

The purpose of this study is to generate theory, not merely to describe the phenomenon. For analysis to transition into theory, concepts must be directly related to one another. Selective coding is the core stage of theory development, systematically linking the central category to other categories and clarifying these relationships through a narrative or storyline. It also refines categories requiring further development.

Selective coding involves:

1. Articulating the main storyline.
2. Linking supplementary categories to the central category using a model.
3. Connecting each category to its dimensions.
4. Validating these relationships using the data.
5. Refining categories needing modification or expansion.

Ultimately, grounded theory may conclude with propositions or statements that clarify the relationships between categories within the paradigm model (Strauss & Corbin, 2014).

To ensure the credibility and reliability of the data, two methods were employed: participant review and expert review. The expert review included non-participant experts, one faculty member from a university, and two doctoral

students in business management. After incorporating their corrective feedback, the final model was presented.

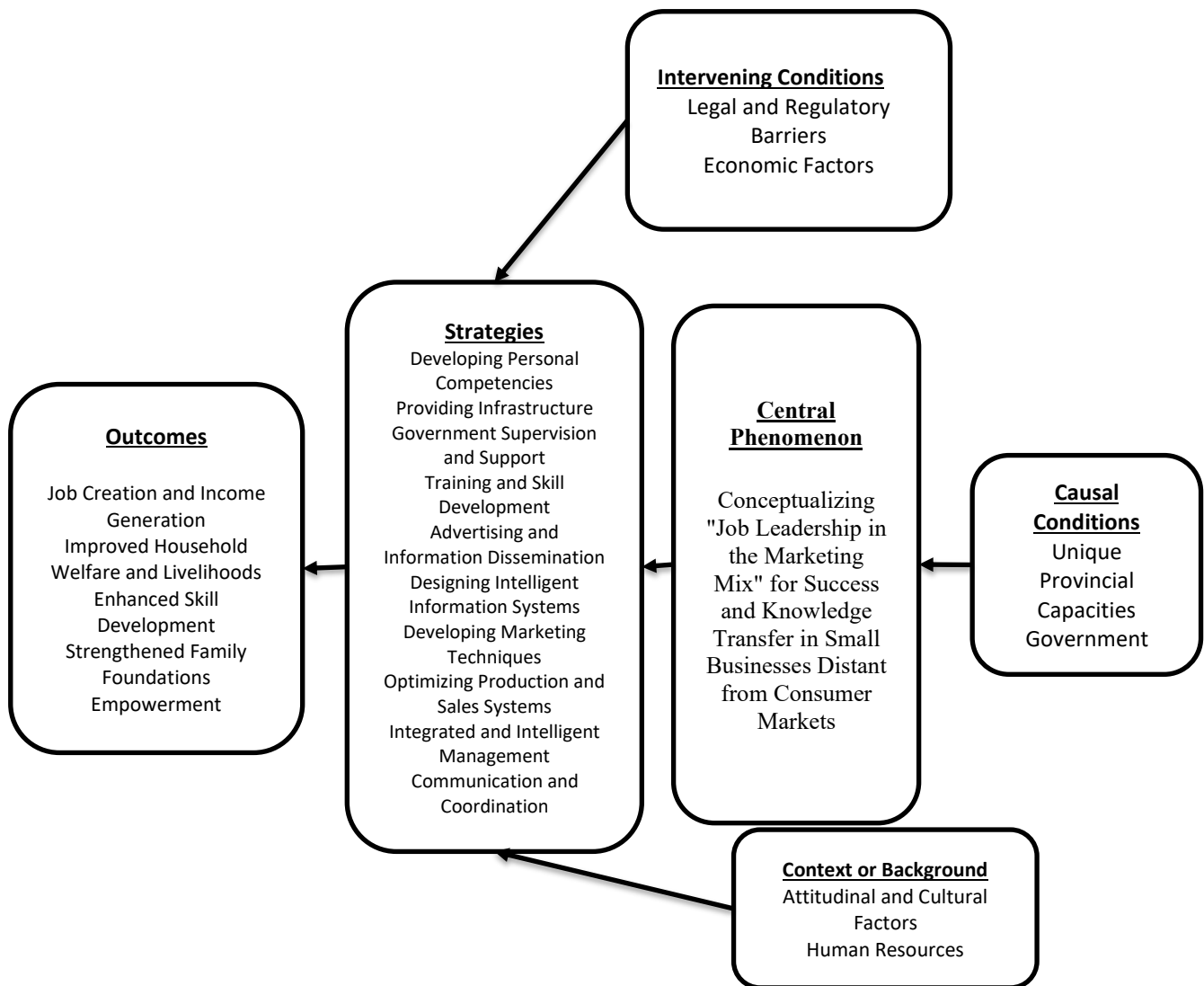
### 3 Findings and Results

Based on the analysis conducted through the three stages of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, a total of 165 codes were extracted from 15 interviews. These codes were analyzed to identify 115 subcategories, which were ultimately grouped into 22 main categories. The relationships between these categories, as reflected in the

data, showed that the derived model aligns with the original paradigm model proposed by Strauss and Corbin. In this model, the central phenomenon (conceptualizing "Job Leadership in the Marketing Mix" for success and knowledge transfer in small businesses distant from consumer markets) is influenced by causal conditions and, in turn, impacts the strategies. These strategies are shaped by contextual and intervening conditions, which then lead to outcomes related to the phenomenon under study. This paradigm model is illustrated in the following:

Figure 1

The Paradigm Model for Success and Knowledge Transfer in Small Businesses Distant from Consumer Markets



In grounded theory, the definition and explanation of categories are based on the concepts and key points that underpin them. In other words, since this method primarily relies on first-hand data and builds abstract concepts and

categories inductively from the key points of open coding, each concept and category is defined based on the process that led to its emergence. While some concepts or categories may already have a theoretical background in the literature,



the definitions derived in grounded theory differ because they originate from first-hand data rather than pre-existing theories or second-hand data. Thus, understanding the meaning of "concepts" and "categories" requires referring to the research data, especially during the open coding phase.

### 3.1 Causal Conditions

Causal conditions refer to the set of circumstances influencing the central role of developing the concept of job leadership in the marketing mix for small businesses. These conditions include the unique capacities of the province and government policies.

Based on the results of open and axial coding presented earlier, the unique capacities of the province include the presence of young, talented, and job-seeking individuals and the availability of natural and human resources for employment. Government policies include reducing distances, promoting exports, lowering costs, minimizing bureaucracy, implementing export incentives, eliminating intermediaries, strengthening distribution channels, and increasing the guarantee of transactions.

### 3.2 Contextual Conditions

Contextual conditions are the situational factors that provide a suitable environment for advancing strategies. Qualitative analysis of the interviews indicates that these conditions include attitudinal and cultural factors and human resources.

According to the results of open and axial coding, attitudinal and cultural factors include value creation, business culture, mastery of the value chain, organizational culture, and cultural promotion. Human resources include recognizing the workforce, managing human resources, identifying talented beneficiaries, enhancing the quality of human resources, and identifying successful entrepreneurs.

### 3.3 Intervening Conditions

Intervening conditions are factors that influence the advancement of strategies. Qualitative analysis of the interviews reveals that these conditions include legal and regulatory barriers and economic components.

Based on the results of open and axial coding, legal and regulatory factors include (directives and circulars, tax laws, regulations governing job leadership, drafting tax support laws for job leaders, removing administrative barriers, and enacting simplified laws). Economic components include

(customer return rates, productivity, increasing the guarantee of transactions, and high unemployment in the province).

### 3.4 Strategies

Strategies refer to specific actions or interactions resulting from the central phenomenon under the influence of contextual and intervening conditions. The qualitative analysis of the interviews indicates that the strategies include personal competency development, infrastructure provision, government supervision and support, innovation, training, advertising and information dissemination, designing intelligent information systems, marketing technique development, optimizing production and sales systems, communication and coordination, and intelligent management.

Based on the results of open and axial coding, strategies include:

- **Personal competency development:** Recognizing top leaders, using encouragement systems, enhancing confidence, fostering self-reliance, reducing fear, promoting intra-organizational collaboration, encouraging cooperation, assessing interests, abilities, and resources.
- **Infrastructure provision:** Ensuring the availability of raw materials, workplace hygiene, product quality, identifying major leaders and connecting small leaders to large production companies, identifying regions with employment potential, assessing regional comparative advantages, and conducting needs assessments.
- **Training:** Providing training, conducting scientific research, enhancing knowledge, offering career counseling, transferring technical expertise to practitioners, delivering specialized technical and vocational training, teaching virtual and online business practices, and organizing orientation sessions for employees, job leaders, and beneficiaries.
- **Government supervision and support:** Supporting job leadership activities, providing low-interest loans to beneficiaries, technical oversight of projects, quality monitoring, business guarantees, creating tax incentives, encouraging leaders to invest, and promoting activities in underprivileged regions.

- **Designing intelligent information systems:** Creating a database of eligible job-seekers and their skills, and designing a regulatory system.
- **Developing marketing techniques:** Understanding markets, conducting marketing activities, accessing consumer markets, identifying market needs, and branding.
- **Optimizing production and sales systems:** Identifying sales markets, eliminating intermediaries, and guaranteeing product purchases.
- **Communication and coordination:** Facilitating relationships between entrepreneurs and the workforce, simplifying interactions, and establishing virtual and non-virtual communication spaces between entrepreneurs and job-seekers.
- **Intelligent management:** Developing comprehensive plans for all stakeholders, experts, and sales agents, managing services for industry participants, and increasing managerial awareness of job leadership importance.
- **Advertising and information dissemination:** Conducting advertising campaigns, participating in exhibitions, promoting professional perspectives on job leadership, and introducing and explaining plans to stakeholders.
- **Innovation:** Fostering entrepreneurship, entering new professions and industries, and innovating in products.

### 3.5 Outcomes

Outcomes are the results of implementing the strategies. The qualitative analysis of the interviews suggests that if the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation employs the strategies outlined above, the outcomes will include income generation, job creation, empowerment, improved household welfare and livelihoods, enhanced skill development, and strengthened family foundations.

According to the results of open and axial coding, the outcomes include:

- **Job creation and income generation:** Generating employment, increasing income, establishing border markets for selling products, and exporting goods.
- **Improved household welfare and livelihoods:** Increasing welfare levels, supporting household

livelihoods, and improving living standards and quality of life.

- **Skill development enhancement:** Providing training, transferring skills and expertise.
- **Strengthened family foundations:** Promoting work motivation, individual well-being, family morale, family security, and a sense of responsibility.
- **Empowerment:** Encouraging self-reliance, fostering economic independence, increasing productivity, and ensuring the sustainability of projects.

## 4 Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to conceptualize "Job Leadership in the Marketing Mix" and its role in success and knowledge transfer in small businesses distant from consumer markets. The findings revealed that the central phenomenon of this model is the integration of job leadership within the marketing mix, which influences the sustainability and success of small businesses. The causal conditions, including unique provincial capacities and government policies, were identified as key drivers of this phenomenon. Contextual factors, such as attitudinal and cultural influences and human resource capabilities, were found to create an enabling environment for strategic implementation. Intervening conditions, including legal barriers and economic challenges, shaped the pathways through which strategies like infrastructure development, skill enhancement, and innovative marketing could effectively drive outcomes. Ultimately, the outcomes identified—job creation, income generation, empowerment, improved household welfare, and enhanced skills—highlighted the transformative potential of this integrated model.

The findings align with Zeinali's (2023) results, which emphasize that entrepreneurial networks significantly influence adaptability and absorptive capacities, mediating the relationship between such networks and their geographical impact (Zeinali, 2023). This study's recognition of provincial capacities, such as natural and human resources, mirrors these findings by underscoring how regional capabilities can create a fertile ground for entrepreneurship and market expansion. Similarly, Safari and Moghli (2022) identified dimensions such as entrepreneurial culture and community-driven leadership as critical for social entrepreneurship in NGOs (Safari & Moghli, 2022). These factors resonate with the role of

cultural and attitudinal influences in creating a supportive environment for job leadership in the marketing mix.

Furthermore, the study's identification of government policies as a causal condition aligns with Abdulmaleki et al. (2022), who emphasized the importance of facilitation management and structural improvements in entrepreneurial ecosystems (Abdulmaleki et al., 2022). The findings suggest that policies such as reducing administrative barriers, providing low-interest loans, and encouraging entrepreneurship in underserved regions can significantly enhance the effectiveness of job leadership initiatives. These policies not only enable business creation but also foster economic empowerment among underserved populations.

In terms of strategies, this study identified a broad range of actions, including infrastructure provision, training, innovation, and marketing optimization, which drive the outcomes of job creation and skill enhancement. Gholard et al. (2022) similarly highlighted employment and self-sufficiency as central outcomes, emphasizing that targeted strategies addressing causal, contextual, and intervening factors are critical for sustainable success (Golard et al., 2022). The alignment between quantitative and qualitative data in their study also validates the robustness of strategy-based approaches in entrepreneurial initiatives, reinforcing the current study's findings.

The marketing mix was identified as a key element in the success of small businesses distant from consumer markets. This finding is consistent with Kakayi et al. (2021), who demonstrated a significant positive relationship between the elements of the marketing mix and competitive advantage creation (Kakayi et al., 2021). In this study, the marketing mix emerged as a pivotal strategy for addressing market challenges, improving product promotion, and fostering customer engagement. Effective marketing strategies not only enhance business visibility but also empower entrepreneurs to establish sustainable connections with their target audiences.

The importance of relational marketing was highlighted in this study, particularly in its potential to foster trust and commitment among stakeholders. This aligns with Zeraei et al. (2018), who demonstrated that relational marketing positively impacts donor trust and commitment in charitable organizations (Zarei et al., 2018). The application of these principles in small businesses suggests that fostering strong relationships with customers, partners, and other stakeholders can significantly enhance business success and sustainability.

Finally, the outcomes of this study, including improved household welfare, strengthened family foundations, and economic empowerment, align with the findings of Mahbubi et al. (2018). Their study emphasized the importance of employment-generating programs in enhancing beneficiaries' growth and protecting family structures (Mahbubi et al., 2018). By addressing challenges such as branding and market access, these programs can unlock new opportunities for small businesses, particularly those distant from consumer markets.

The alignment of this study's findings with prior research underscores the importance of integrating job leadership with marketing strategies to drive socio-economic outcomes. The results highlight that successful entrepreneurial initiatives require a holistic approach, considering both external factors (e.g., policies and market conditions) and internal capabilities (e.g., skills and infrastructure). By addressing these elements comprehensively, policymakers and practitioners can create a robust framework for supporting small businesses and fostering long-term sustainability.

This study has several limitations. First, the qualitative approach and reliance on interviews with 15 participants may limit the generalizability of the findings. While the grounded theory method provides in-depth insights, a larger and more diverse sample would strengthen the robustness of the conclusions. Second, the study focused on small businesses supported by the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation, which may not reflect the conditions of other types of small businesses or different organizational contexts. Third, the study relied on self-reported data, which could introduce biases such as social desirability or recall bias. Finally, the study did not incorporate quantitative validation of the proposed model, which would provide additional support for its applicability and reliability.

Future research should consider expanding the scope of the study to include a larger and more diverse sample of small businesses, both within and beyond the context of the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation. This would enhance the generalizability of the findings and provide a broader understanding of job leadership in the marketing mix. Quantitative studies could also be conducted to validate the proposed model and test its applicability across different regions and industries. Additionally, future research could explore the long-term impact of job leadership strategies on beneficiaries' economic stability and entrepreneurial growth. Comparative studies examining the effectiveness of different marketing mix elements in various contexts would



provide valuable insights into optimizing strategies for small businesses.

Policymakers and practitioners should focus on creating integrated strategies that address both the internal and external factors influencing small businesses. This includes fostering collaboration between government agencies, entrepreneurs, and local communities to leverage regional capacities and market opportunities. Training programs should be designed to enhance beneficiaries' skills in marketing, innovation, and business management, ensuring they are equipped to navigate competitive environments. Furthermore, efforts should be made to simplify regulatory processes and provide financial support through low-interest loans and tax incentives. Practitioners should also prioritize the development of robust marketing strategies, including leveraging digital platforms, branding initiatives, and customer relationship management, to enhance market access and visibility for small businesses.

### Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

### Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

### Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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### Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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### Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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