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The Impact of Social Capital and Innovative Activities on Business Performance with the Mediating Role of Intellectual Capital in Women's Health-Oriented Businesses

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to determine the effect of social capital and innovative activities on the performance of women's health-oriented businesses, with the mediating role of intellectual capital. From the perspective of its objective, the study is classified as applied research, while methodologically it is a survey and, in terms of nature, descriptive research. After formulating the research objectives and questions, a questionnaire consisting of 20 items was prepared and distributed among the statistical population. In designing the questionnaire items, measures were adopted that not only covered the theoretical foundations of the study but were also aligned with the general context governing the subject under investigation. To assess the validity of the questionnaire, construct validity was examined through confirmatory factor analysis, which yielded highly satisfactory results. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to calculate reliability, and the questionnaire reliability was also evaluated as highly satisfactory. The statistical population consisted of 135 employees of Naana Health Solutions Company in Tehran. Based on the Morgan–Krejcie table, a sample size of 100 participants was selected. Given the availability of employees' names, simple random sampling was employed. To analyze the collected data and determine the relationships among the variables, structural equation modeling and path analysis techniques were used. Data analysis was performed using SPSS 26 and Smart PLS 3 statistical software. The results of the hypothesis testing indicated that: social capital has a significant and positive effect on innovative activities; social capital has a significant and positive effect on intellectual capital; social capital has a significant and positive effect on the performance of women's health-oriented businesses; innovative activities have a significant and positive effect on intellectual capital; intellectual capital has a significant and positive effect on the performance of women's health-oriented businesses; innovative activities have a significant and positive effect on the performance of women's health-oriented businesses; social capital has a significant and positive effect on the performance of women's health-oriented businesses through the mediating role of intellectual capital; social capital has a significant and positive effect on the performance of women's health-oriented businesses through the mediating role of innovative activities; and innovative activities have a significant and positive effect on the performance of women's health-oriented businesses through the mediating role of intellectual capital.

Keywords: Social capital, Innovative activities, Intellectual capital, Business performance.

Introduction

In the contemporary business environment, the performance of organizations—particularly those operating in highly dynamic and competitive sectors—depends increasingly on their ability to leverage intangible assets such as social capital, intellectual capital, and innovative activities. The integration of these components into strategic and operational processes

has emerged as a critical determinant of organizational sustainability, resilience, and competitive advantage [1, 2]. Within this context, the role of social capital as a relational and structural asset that facilitates knowledge exchange, trust-building, and collaborative synergies has gained significant academic and managerial attention [3, 4]. Social capital enables organizations to develop strong inter-organizational linkages and intra-organizational networks, which are essential for fostering innovation, enhancing operational efficiency, and achieving long-term strategic goals [5, 6].

The increasing emphasis on intangible resources has prompted a parallel focus on intellectual capital as a multidimensional construct encompassing human, structural, and relational capital [7, 8]. Intellectual capital contributes directly to organizational performance by enabling knowledge creation, transfer, and utilization [9, 10]. This resource-based perspective underscores that organizations capable of systematically managing and expanding their intellectual capital can adapt more effectively to environmental changes and outperform competitors [11, 12]. Furthermore, the interplay between social and intellectual capital creates a reinforcing cycle: strong social networks support the generation of new knowledge, while accumulated intellectual capital strengthens relational trust and collaboration [13, 14].

Innovative activities constitute another core driver of organizational competitiveness, particularly in industries where rapid technological change and evolving customer expectations demand continual product, process, and service innovation [11, 15]. Innovation requires not only technical and financial resources but also a supportive social infrastructure that fosters creativity, risk-taking, and knowledge sharing [16, 17]. Empirical research has demonstrated that organizations with strong social capital are more likely to engage in effective innovative practices, as networks provide access to diverse perspectives, reduce uncertainty, and facilitate the diffusion of novel ideas [3, 18]. Similarly, intellectual capital plays a critical mediating role between innovative activities and performance outcomes, translating creative ideas into tangible value [1, 8].

From a strategic perspective, the capacity to integrate social capital, intellectual capital, and innovation into a cohesive framework of organizational capabilities is increasingly recognized as a source of sustainable competitive advantage [19, 20]. Theories of knowledge-based firms suggest that these intangible resources are complementary rather than substitutive, implying that their combined effect on performance is greater than the sum of their individual contributions [10, 21]. For instance, intellectual capital provides the organizational memory, codified processes, and human expertise necessary to transform social relationships into innovative outputs [7, 9]. In turn, innovation reinforces the value of both social and intellectual capital by introducing new products, services, and operational efficiencies that strengthen organizational reputation and stakeholder relationships [2, 5].

The healthcare and wellness business sector, especially those enterprises led or operated by women, offers a particularly relevant context for examining these dynamics. This sector is characterized by intensive knowledge use, service personalization, and high levels of trust and relational engagement between providers and clients [12, 22]. In such settings, social capital enables the development of strong client relationships, collaborations with suppliers, and partnerships with other service providers [4, 23]. These relationships, in turn, facilitate access to new ideas, best practices, and market intelligence, which can fuel innovation [3, 11]. At the same time, intellectual capital—through well-trained personnel, codified treatment protocols, and knowledge management systems—supports consistent service quality and operational effectiveness [8, 10].

Prior studies have highlighted the role of teamwork as both an outcome and a driver of social capital, contributing to improved organizational performance and innovation capacity [6, 17]. In the context of multidisciplinary and collaborative

environments, effective teamwork enhances problem-solving, fosters mutual learning, and builds a culture of trust and openness [16, 24]. In health-related businesses, these dynamics are particularly valuable, as service delivery often requires coordinated inputs from multiple specialists, suppliers, and partners [20, 25]. Moreover, digital technologies and social media platforms have expanded opportunities for building and maintaining social capital, facilitating both formal and informal interactions among stakeholders [12, 15].

At the intersection of these concepts lies the notion that social capital not only directly influences organizational performance but also operates indirectly through its impact on intellectual capital and innovative activities [13, 14]. The mediating role of intellectual capital suggests that the knowledge, skills, and organizational routines derived from social networks are transformed into tangible performance improvements through structured knowledge management and organizational learning processes [9, 10]. Similarly, innovative activities may serve as a conduit through which social capital enhances performance, as strong networks facilitate idea generation, resource mobilization, and market adaptation [3, 11]. The complementary mediating effects of intellectual capital and innovation thus represent an important area for empirical investigation [7, 8].

In addition to theoretical contributions, examining these relationships in the context of women-led health-oriented businesses addresses an important gap in the literature. While prior research has explored the role of social and intellectual capital in various sectors [1, 2], there is limited empirical evidence on how these factors interact to influence performance in gender-specific entrepreneurial settings [12, 22]. Furthermore, the integration of grounded theoretical perspectives with practical managerial insights can inform targeted interventions to enhance competitiveness and sustainability in this growing sector [21, 26].

Given the increasing volatility of market conditions, particularly in the aftermath of global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the resilience of women-led health enterprises is contingent upon their ability to leverage both tangible and intangible resources [12, 27]. Social capital offers a pathway for securing resources, accessing markets, and sustaining client trust during periods of uncertainty [5, 23]. Concurrently, intellectual capital provides the strategic and operational capabilities necessary to innovate, adapt, and maintain high-quality service delivery [7, 19]. This interplay underscores the strategic significance of studying the mediating roles of intellectual capital and innovation in the relationship between social capital and business performance.

Accordingly, the present study seeks to address these research gaps by empirically examining the effects of social capital and innovative activities on the performance of women's health-oriented businesses, with intellectual capital as a mediating variable.

Methods and Materials

From the perspective of its objective, the present research falls within the category of applied studies, as its aim is to develop practical knowledge in the field of improving business performance through the variables of social capital, innovative activities, and intellectual capital. In terms of nature and implementation method, this research is descriptive–survey in type. In descriptive research, the objective is to examine and analyze the characteristics of a community or phenomenon, with the researcher aiming to describe the existing situation. Furthermore, since this research examines the relationships among variables, it is also classified as a correlational study.

The statistical population of this research consists of all employees of Naana Health Solutions Company, totaling 135 individuals. To determine the sample size, the Morgan and Krejcie table was used, according to which, for this population size, a sample of 100 individuals was deemed appropriate. The sampling method was simple random sampling, as the researcher had access to the list of employees' names, enabling random selection.

In this research, social capital and innovative activities were considered as independent (predictor) variables. Intellectual capital played the role of a mediating variable, and business performance was regarded as the dependent (criterion) variable. The primary objective of this study is to examine the mediating role of intellectual capital in the relationship between social capital and innovative activities with business performance.

For data collection, two methods—library and field—were employed. In the library section, scientific sources including books, articles, theses, and credible databases were used to review the theoretical foundations and research background. In the field section, standard questionnaires were used to collect the data necessary to test the research hypotheses. The primary data collection instrument was a questionnaire, which, after assessing its validity and reliability, was distributed among the statistical sample.

Findings and Results

To assess the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was employed. The results obtained for all research variables were above 0.70, indicating acceptable internal consistency and reliability of the instrument. To examine content validity, the questionnaire was provided to a group of academic experts and specialists, and the necessary revisions were made based on their feedback. Furthermore, to assess construct validity and confirm the measurement model, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using SmartPLS software, and the factor loadings of all items were reported to be above 0.6, indicating the adequacy of the indicators in measuring the constructs. The collected data were first processed using SPSS software for initial descriptive analyses. Subsequently, to test the hypotheses and assess the fit of the conceptual model, structural equation modeling (SEM) with the partial least squares (PLS) approach was applied using SmartPLS software. This method was chosen due to its suitability for advanced behavioral research and its capability to analyze complex multivariate models with a medium sample size (Table 1).

Table 1.

Cronbach's Alpha for Variables

Result	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items	Variable
Acceptable – Reliable	0.785	5	Social Capital
Acceptable – Reliable	0.772	5	Innovative Activities
Acceptable – Reliable	0.758	5	Intellectual Capital
Acceptable – Reliable	0.763	5	Business Performance

To examine the research hypotheses, the data distribution was analyzed in the first step. Before conducting statistical tests and analyzing the relationships between variables, it is essential to determine the type of data distribution (normal or non-normal), as the type of statistical tests depends on this. To determine this, the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was used, which is one of the common methods for examining the normality of data distribution in continuous variables. In this test, the null hypothesis assumes the data are normally distributed, while the alternative hypothesis assumes they are not. If the significance level (Sig) is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the data are considered non-normal (Table 2).

Table 2.

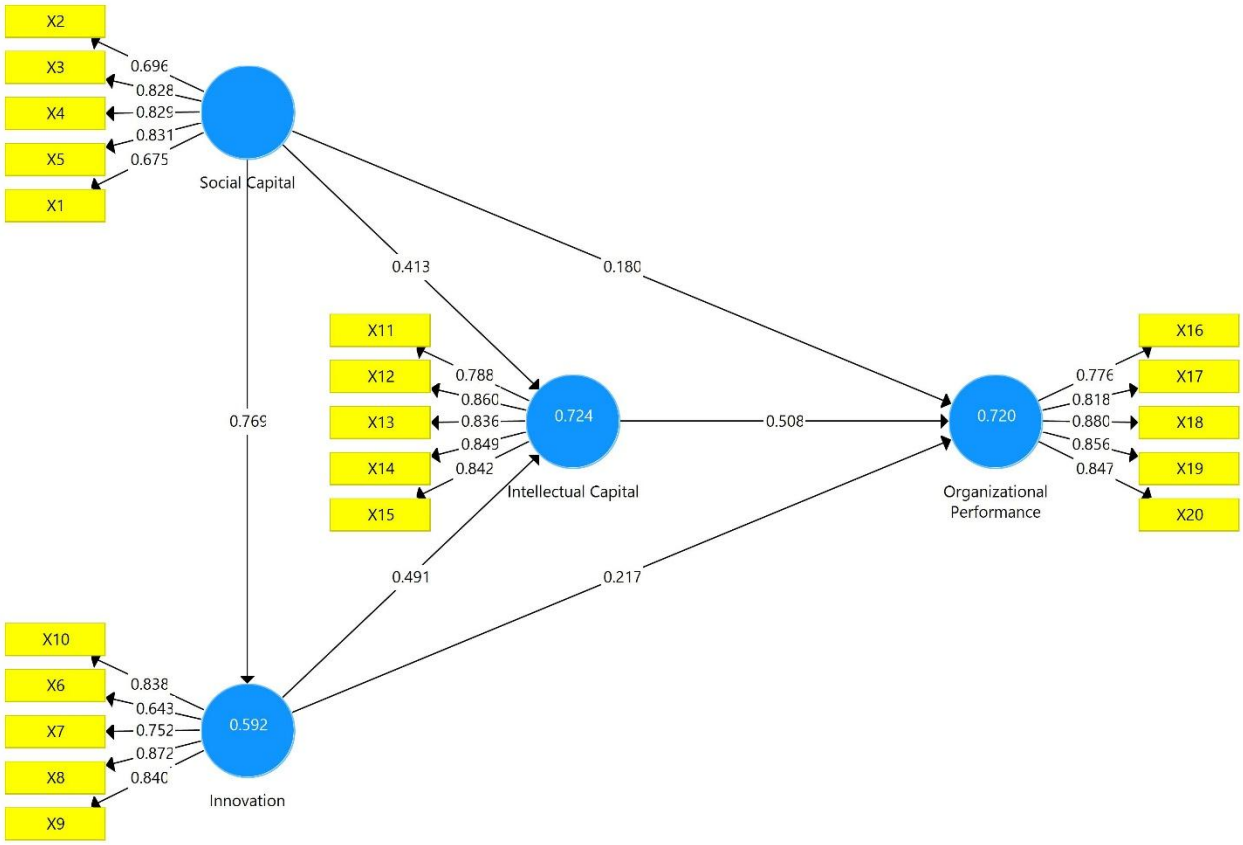
Results of Data Distribution Analysis

Variable	Z Value	Significance Level	Result
Social Capital	0.079	0.000	Non-normal
Innovation	0.101	0.000	Non-normal
Intellectual Capital	0.125	0.000	Non-normal
Business Performance	0.090	0.000	Non-normal

To investigate the relationships among the research variables and test the formulated hypotheses, structural equation modeling (SEM) with the partial least squares (PLS) approach was used. Given the applied–survey nature of the study, the complexity of the conceptual model, and the non-normal distribution of the data (based on the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test), this method was deemed appropriate and reliable.

Figure 1.

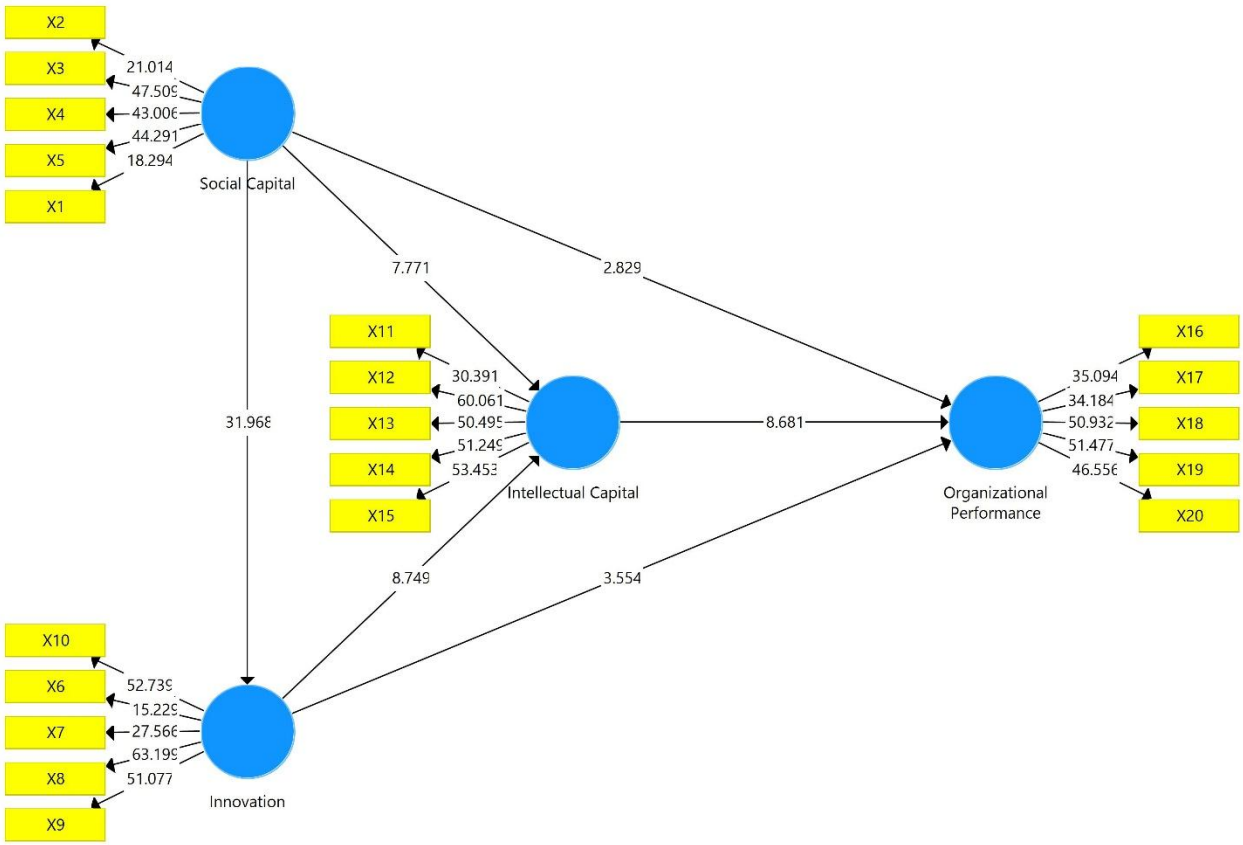
Overall Research Model in Standardized Form



In this research, SmartPLS version 3 software was used to analyze the measurement and structural models. With its advanced capabilities, this software enables the simultaneous evaluation of relationships between latent variables (constructs) and observed variables (indicators). It also allows the researcher to assess the theoretical validity of the proposed model by evaluating path coefficients, model fit indices, and factor loadings.

Figure 2.

Overall Research Model in Significance Form



The factor loadings showed that all indicators had loadings above 0.6; therefore, convergent validity was confirmed. The relationships between the latent variables corresponding to the research hypotheses were reported with positive path coefficients and T-statistics greater than 1.96 at the 95% confidence level. Accordingly, all research hypotheses were confirmed, and the findings indicate that customer co-creation experience, both directly and through brand attachment, has a significant and positive impact on the formation and dynamics of the online brand community (Table 3).

Table 3.

Research Hypothesis Results

Hypothesis	Path	Standard Coefficient	p-value	t-value	Result
First	Social capital affects innovative activities.	0.769	0.000	33.994	Accepted
Second	Social capital affects intellectual capital.	0.413	0.000	8.116	Accepted
Third	Social capital affects the performance of women's health-oriented businesses.	0.180	0.004	2.870	Accepted
Fourth	Innovative activities affect intellectual capital.	0.491	0.000	9.266	Accepted
Fifth	Intellectual capital affects the performance of women's health-oriented businesses.	0.217	0.000	3.401	Accepted
Sixth	Innovative activities affect the performance of women's health-oriented businesses.	0.508	0.000	9.312	Accepted
		Standard Coefficient	VAF	Z Value	Result
Seventh	Social capital affects the performance of women's health-oriented businesses through the mediating role of intellectual capital.	0.210	0.538	7.041	Accepted
Eighth	Social capital affects the performance of women's health-oriented businesses through the mediating role of innovative activities.	0.167	0.481	3.454	Accepted
Ninth	Innovative activities affect the performance of women's health-oriented businesses through the mediating role of intellectual capital.	0.250	0.535	5.866	Accepted

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study provide strong empirical support for the central hypothesis that social capital, innovative activities, and intellectual capital are interrelated drivers of organizational performance in women's health-oriented businesses. The results indicate that social capital exerts a significant and positive effect on innovative activities, intellectual capital, and overall business performance. These findings align with prior research emphasizing the role of social relationships, trust, and network structures in facilitating knowledge exchange and enabling creative problem-solving [3, 5]. In service-based sectors such as health and wellness, where customer trust and reputation are paramount, social capital becomes an essential asset that nurtures collaboration and fosters the sharing of tacit knowledge across organizational boundaries [4, 14]. The positive and significant link between social capital and innovative activities is also consistent with the argument that social networks provide access to diverse perspectives, information, and resources necessary for innovation [11, 15].

The observed effect of social capital on intellectual capital is in line with prior studies suggesting that relationships and networks enhance the organization's capacity to acquire, integrate, and apply knowledge [8, 9]. This finding is consistent with the knowledge-based theory of the firm, which posits that relational assets act as conduits for the accumulation and deployment of human, structural, and relational capital [2, 10]. In women-led health-oriented businesses, the accumulation of intellectual capital is particularly important, as it supports the codification of processes, enhances service quality, and reinforces organizational learning [18, 21]. The positive association found in this study further corroborates the view that strong social ties within and beyond the organization contribute to the enrichment of knowledge resources, which in turn provide the foundation for sustainable competitive advantage [1, 7].

The results also demonstrate a significant and positive impact of innovative activities on intellectual capital, suggesting that innovation not only depends on knowledge assets but also contributes to their growth and refinement [11, 22]. This reciprocal relationship has been documented in earlier works showing that the process of developing new products, services, and processes stimulates learning, encourages knowledge sharing, and leads to the creation of new organizational routines [12, 13]. In the specific context of health-oriented enterprises, innovative activities often require cross-disciplinary collaboration and the integration of client feedback, which enhances both explicit and tacit components of intellectual capital [17, 20].

Moreover, intellectual capital itself was found to have a significant and positive impact on the performance of women's health-oriented businesses, echoing previous studies that identify intellectual capital as a core determinant of organizational success [7, 8]. In this regard, human capital—comprising the skills, expertise, and motivation of employees—plays a crucial role in delivering high-quality, customized health services [16, 19]. Structural capital, such as process documentation, IT systems, and quality control mechanisms, provides the organizational backbone for consistent service delivery [2, 10]. Relational capital, encompassing relationships with clients, suppliers, and partners, extends the organization's reach and enhances its reputation [5, 23]. The present study's results thus reinforce the conceptualization of intellectual capital as a multidimensional construct whose components collectively enhance business performance [1, 9].

The significant direct effect of innovative activities on performance confirms that organizations capable of continuous innovation achieve superior outcomes in terms of customer satisfaction, market share, and operational efficiency [3, 11]. This is particularly true in sectors where consumer needs are dynamic and service differentiation is critical to competitive

positioning [15, 21]. The finding aligns with evidence suggesting that innovation enables firms to adapt quickly to environmental changes, introduce new value propositions, and create unique customer experiences [5, 12]. For women-led health-oriented businesses, innovative activities may encompass new service offerings, novel delivery methods, or the adoption of digital technologies to enhance client engagement [20, 25].

In addition to the direct effects, this study confirms the mediating roles of intellectual capital and innovative activities in the relationship between social capital and performance. The mediating effect of intellectual capital suggests that social relationships and networks influence performance by enhancing the organization's knowledge base and capabilities [2, 10]. This aligns with the argument that social capital serves as a source of raw knowledge, while intellectual capital acts as the processing and application mechanism that transforms knowledge into performance gains [7, 9]. Similarly, the mediation by innovative activities indicates that social capital promotes performance by enabling the generation and implementation of new ideas [3, 11]. This reflects findings from studies on knowledge-intensive sectors where network connections provide the diversity of inputs and collaborative frameworks necessary for innovation [4, 5].

The dual mediation findings suggest a synergistic relationship among these variables: social capital builds the trust and communication channels needed for idea exchange, innovation transforms these ideas into practical solutions, and intellectual capital ensures that the resulting knowledge is institutionalized within the organization [1, 12]. This synergy resonates with prior integrated frameworks that emphasize the interplay between intangible resources in shaping organizational outcomes [13, 14]. In women's health-oriented enterprises, this process is particularly valuable because it supports both operational efficiency and the personalized, trust-based relationships essential to client retention [6, 17].

Furthermore, the results extend earlier findings by contextualizing the relationships within a specific demographic and sectoral setting—women-led health-oriented businesses—where intangible resources play a disproportionate role in driving performance [12, 22]. This contextualization responds to calls in the literature for sector-specific studies that recognize the unique challenges and opportunities faced by women entrepreneurs in service-oriented industries [21, 26]. The implications are that fostering social capital through networking, community engagement, and strategic partnerships, combined with systematic intellectual capital development and innovation management, can yield substantial improvements in performance [19, 25].

Although the study provides valuable insights into the interplay between social capital, intellectual capital, innovative activities, and performance, certain limitations should be acknowledged. First, the research is based on a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to establish causality among variables. Longitudinal data would provide a more robust basis for assessing how these relationships evolve over time. Second, the study focuses on a specific geographic and sectoral context—women-led health-oriented businesses in Tehran—which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other cultural, economic, or industry settings. Third, the reliance on self-reported measures raises the potential for common method bias, as respondents may overstate or understate their organization's capabilities or performance. Fourth, while the study employs validated instruments for measuring constructs, the complexity of intangible resources such as social and intellectual capital means that certain nuanced aspects may not have been fully captured by the quantitative approach.

Future research could build on these findings by adopting longitudinal designs to track changes in social capital, intellectual capital, and innovation over time, thereby clarifying causal relationships. Comparative studies across different sectors and cultural contexts would also be valuable for determining the extent to which these relationships are context-dependent.

Furthermore, qualitative approaches such as case studies or in-depth interviews could provide richer insights into the mechanisms through which social capital is transformed into intellectual capital and innovation. Future research might also explore potential moderating variables, such as leadership style, organizational culture, or market turbulence, which could influence the strength or direction of the observed relationships. Additionally, incorporating objective performance measures alongside self-reported data could help mitigate common method bias and enhance the robustness of findings.

From a managerial perspective, the results underscore the importance of cultivating strong social networks both within and outside the organization, as these networks provide the foundation for knowledge acquisition and innovation. Organizations should invest in structured programs to enhance intellectual capital, such as ongoing professional development, knowledge management systems, and process documentation. Encouraging a culture of innovation—where employees are empowered to experiment and share ideas—can further translate social connections into tangible performance gains. For women-led health-oriented businesses, participating in industry associations, forming strategic partnerships, and leveraging digital platforms for networking can strengthen social capital while also facilitating innovation and knowledge sharing. Finally, integrating these strategies into a coherent management framework that aligns social, intellectual, and innovation-related initiatives with organizational goals can yield sustained competitive advantages.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Written consent was obtained from all participants in the study.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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