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The Rational–Social Action Model of Hijab in Iran: A Grounded Theory Study

Taghi Akbari [a], Ahmed jwaid [b]

[a] Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, Ardabil, Iran.
[b] Ph.D. Student in Educational Sciences – Iraq

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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*Corresponding author: Taghi Akbari, Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, Ardabil, Iran..
Email : Akbari-Ta@uma.ac.ir

ABSTRACT

The issue of hijab in contemporary Iran has transcended its status as merely a religious injunction and, through ongoing social and cultural transformations, has evolved into a multi-layered and contested social phenomenon. Despite the multiplicity of policies and interventions implemented in this domain, significant ambiguity and tension persist in both the theoretical framing and practical governance of hijab. This article aims to examine and critically analyze the conceptual, organizational, and methodological shortcomings in the analysis and policymaking of hijab, as well as their social consequences.

The study adopts a descriptive–analytical approach and is based on documentary research and critical analysis of existing theoretical works and viewpoints, with particular emphasis on domestic (Iranian) sources. The findings indicate that the lack of conceptual coherence in defining hijab, the conflation of individual, social, and institutional levels of analysis, and the misalignment between theoretical premises and operational practices constitute some of the primary factors contributing to policy inefficacy and the intensification of social tensions surrounding hijab.

The article concludes that a critical rethinking of prevailing theoretical frameworks and the establishment of a coherent and integrated approach to cultural policymaking can provide the groundwork for a more rational, socially responsive, and less conflictual engagement with the issue of hijab.

KEYWORD: Hijab; Practical Rationality; Social Action; Social Responsibility; Grounded Theory

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1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary Iranian society, hijab has evolved beyond a purely religious injunction or an individual moral norm and has become a social, cultural, and institutional issue whose meaning is shaped through its interaction with lifestyle transformations, generational changes, and cultural policymaking. In recent decades, approaches to the issue of hijab have largely taken the form of executive packages, prescriptive discourses, and episodic reactions. However, the persistence of challenges and the escalation of social tensions indicate that this issue continues to face serious ambiguities at both the theoretical and organizational levels. A one-sided emphasis on coercive instruments, without sufficient attention to the social and cultural layers of the phenomenon, has caused hijab to be reproduced not as a meaningful social action, but at times as a field of social conflict.

Domestic research and analyses have addressed the issue of hijab from various perspectives. Some studies emphasize its jurisprudential and normative dimensions [1], others examine it within the context of cultural and identity transformations [2], and a number of works focus on critiquing executive policies and their social consequences [3]. Nonetheless, a review of these studies shows that most remain either descriptive in nature or privilege a single level of analysis, while

neglecting the coherent linkage between individual, institutional, and macro-social levels. As a result, a comprehensive framework capable of simultaneously addressing the conceptual, theoretical, and practical dimensions of hijab has received limited scholarly attention [4].

From this perspective, the core issue is not merely the "presence or absence of hijab," but rather the manner in which hijab is defined, organized, and governed within its social context. The lack of conceptual coherence in defining hijab, the conflation of cultural objectives with executive instruments, and the misalignment between theoretical foundations and institutional practices have contributed to policy inefficacy and the intensification of social sensitivities. Accordingly, this article adopts a descriptive–analytical approach to examine the theoretical, organizational, and methodological challenges in confronting the issue of hijab and argues that without a critical rethinking of theoretical frameworks and a reform of cultural policymaking trajectories, the rational and low-conflict management of this issue will remain unattainable.

1.1. Research Background

A review of the research literature on hijab in Iran indicates that a substantial portion of existing studies relies on normative, jurisprudential, or legal approaches, framing hijab primarily in terms of "dos and don'ts" or levels of compliance with official requirements. Although such studies have played an important role in explicating the legitimacy of norms, religious justifications, and legal frameworks, they have often failed to explain how these norms are realized within the everyday lifeworlds of social actors and how actors practically navigate them across diverse social situations. In other words, the dominant focus on the prescriptive and official level has produced a significant gap between theoretical formulations and the reality of social action.

Findings from several domestic social studies suggest that social actors, in their engagement with hijab, neither necessarily operate within a framework of full compliance with official norms nor invariably position themselves in overt opposition. Rather, their actions are largely grounded in a form of situational and practical rationality in which identity considerations, social consequences, contextual pressures, and objective situational conditions are taken into account simultaneously [5] This analytical perspective shifts attention away from binary models of compliance versus violation toward a fluid, situational, and meaning-oriented understanding of social action.

Nevertheless, a review of prior research demonstrates that studies focusing on the lived experiences of social actors and their everyday decision-making logics constitute only a small proportion of the domestic research corpus. In most studies, social actors are treated merely as respondents to quantitative instruments, while the narratives, interpretations, and meanings that individuals attribute to their own actions remain largely unanalyzed. This is particularly problematic given that actions related to hijab are inherently interpretive, fluid, and context-dependent. Without attention to actors' subjective meanings and practical rationality, it is difficult to achieve a deep and realistic understanding of this social phenomenon [5,6].

From a methodological standpoint, the literature review also indicates that the application of exploratory qualitative methods—especially grounded theory—to the study of hijab in Iran has been relatively limited. This is despite the fact that grounded theory, with its emphasis on generating concepts and theoretical patterns directly from field data and avoiding the imposition of preconceived conceptual frameworks, offers considerable potential for identifying the actual logic of social action in everyday life[7] Through systematic coding and progressive analysis of actors' lived experiences, this approach enables the identification of latent patterns of rational–social action—an outcome that is rarely achieved in survey-based or prescriptive studies.

The absence of such research has meant that portions of theoretical analyses and cultural and social policymaking efforts—including educational programs, media strategies, and legal interventions—are not sufficiently grounded in an accurate understanding of social actors' practical rationalities. Consequently, these interventions often exhibit limited congruence with the realities of everyday life.

Despite the breadth of studies conducted on hijab in Iran, the literature reveals that most research remains confined to prescriptive and normative levels or relies on quantitative approaches to measuring attitudes and levels of adherence. As a result, the logic of social action and the practical

rationality of actors—particularly within diverse everyday-life situations—have seldom been examined using qualitative and interpretive approaches. This research gap, especially from a methodological perspective and in the absence of grounded theory studies, has prevented a full articulation of the link between theoretical analysis and lived social realities. In response, the present study seeks to reconstruct patterns of rational–social action related to hijab in the Iranian social context through a qualitative, lived-experience–based approach.

1.2. Conceptual Framework

In this study, the conceptual framework is not treated as a set of hypotheses or a predefined theoretical model, but rather as a tool for enhancing the researcher's theoretical sensitivity during data collection and analysis. Within the logic of grounded theory methodology, theoretical concepts serve a guiding and sensitizing function, while the final explanation of the phenomenon is constructed based on categories and relationships extracted directly from field data and actors' lived experiences. Accordingly, the concepts employed here provide a flexible and non-impositional framework and do not replace data-driven analysis.

1.2.1. Social Action and the Meaningfulness of Behavior

In Max Weber's theory, social action refers to behavior to which the actor attaches a subjective meaning, a meaning that is formed in relation to others' behavior and within a social context. Weber emphasizes that social action is not a mechanical reaction to structures but the outcome of an interpretive and meaningful process [7,8,9]. This conception enables an understanding of social behavior from the internal perspective of actors and in connection with social contexts.

Applying this concept to the study of hijab is particularly important because actions related to dress are always shaped through interaction with social expectations, the gaze of others, and the symbolic and social consequences of action. As demonstrates, social action in Iranian society is deeply context-dependent, and actors' behaviors derive meaning from historical, cultural, and situational contexts. From this standpoint, diversity—and even conflict—in hijab-related actions does not indicate an absence of rationality, but rather reflects differences in situational interpretation and meaning-making among social actors [7].

1.2.2. Practical Rationality and Situational Decision-Making

The concept of practical rationality, rooted in the Aristotelian philosophical tradition, refers to a form of judgment and decision-making oriented toward action that emerges within real-life social situations. Practical rationality enables actors to strike a situational balance between moral values, personal beliefs, and social requirements in ways that are appropriate to the specific conditions of each situation [10]. Unlike formal or instrumental rationality, this form of rationality is deeply intertwined with lived experience and social contexts.

In contemporary Iranian social thought [6], conceptualizes practical rationality as a mediating mechanism between general norms and everyday actions. From this perspective, when confronting cultural policies and norms—such as those related to hijab—actors neither fully accept nor outright reject them. Instead, through practical rationality, they adopt strategies such as adaptation, reinterpretation, or adjustment of their conduct. This approach facilitates an understanding of seemingly contradictory actions as expressions of situationally rational patterns of behavior.

1.2.3. Social Responsibility as Situational Action

In this study, social responsibility is not conceived as a fixed or uniform attribute, but as a form of situational social action. In this sense, social responsibility arises from actors' judgments about the consequences of their actions for others and for social order—judgments that are shaped through interaction with temporal, spatial, and relational conditions [12,5].

In the context of hijab, actors may hold different interpretations of social responsibility across different situations. Choices regarding dress may be influenced by occupational position, family relations, social identity, or specific interactional contexts. This understanding of social responsibility enables a qualitative, grounded analysis of diverse hijab-related actions and allows the researcher to reconstruct actors' internal logics within real-life social situations.

2. INNOVATION OF THE STUDY

The innovation of this research lies in its conceptual and methodological approach to the issue of hijab. Unlike many previous studies that examine hijab primarily through prescriptive norms, value orientations, or measures of adherence, the present study focuses on the logic of social action and conceptualizes hijab as a meaningful, context-dependent, and situational practice.

Conceptually, the study's contribution lies in integrating the three concepts of social action, practical rationality, and situational social responsibility. These concepts are employed not as imposed theoretical models, but as sensitizing devices that enable the reconstruction of actors' decision-making logics within real everyday contexts. This conceptual integration allows diverse and occasionally conflicting hijab-related actions to be understood not as normlessness, but as patterns of situational rationality [5,6,7].

Methodologically, the study's novelty lies in applying grounded theory to the study of hijab within the Iranian social context. Rather than testing predefined hypotheses, this approach emphasizes theory generation from empirical data and actors' lived experiences, enabling the extraction of a rational–social action model of hijab—a model that has not yet been systematically addressed in domestic scholarship.

Overall, the three concepts of social action, practical rationality, and situational social responsibility provide a flexible, non-impositional conceptual framework fully compatible with the logic of grounded theory methodology. This framework enhances theoretical sensitivity and allows the rational–social action pattern surrounding hijab to emerge directly from field data and social actors' lived experiences. Accordingly, the present study employs a qualitative grounded theory approach to reconstruct patterns of rational–social action in everyday life.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study is a qualitative research conducted using the grounded theory strategy. This approach was selected in view of the interpretive, contextual, and situational nature of hijab-related actions—actions whose understanding requires close attention to lived experiences, subjective meanings, and the practical judgments of social actors. The study follows the Strauss and Corbin approach to grounded theory, which emphasizes theory generation grounded in empirical data, a constant back-and-forth movement between data collection and analysis, and the avoidance of imposing pre-existing theoretical frameworks on the data [13].

It should be noted that the theoretical concepts employed in the theoretical background section were not used as imposed analytical frameworks; rather, they functioned as forms of *theoretical sensitivity*. These concepts merely supported a deeper engagement with the data and helped guide the formulation of initial questions. The emergence of concepts, categories, and the core category was entirely rooted in the inductive analytical process of grounded theory and derived from the data themselves [14].

The study population consisted of social actors who were actively engaged with the phenomenon of hijab in the context of everyday life. Sampling was carried out through sequential theoretical sampling, with participant selection proceeding simultaneously with data analysis and in response to the evolving theoretical needs of the study. Participants and situations were chosen with the aim of maximizing informational richness and facilitating the development of emergent concepts. As the processes of open, axial, and selective coding progressed, the sampling strategy was continuously refined and increasingly focused on achieving maximum conceptual variation. Accordingly, participants varied in terms of gender, age, and social roles. Sampling continued until theoretical

saturation was reached—that is, until no new meaningful data were generated and the properties and dimensions of the categories were sufficiently elaborated. Ultimately, sampling was concluded after interviewing 22 participants.

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. This method enabled access to participants' subjective meanings, situational experiences, and forms of practical rational judgment. The average duration of interviews ranged from 45 to 75 minutes. The interview guide was applied flexibly and was continuously revised and expanded in parallel with the ongoing data analysis. All interviews were conducted with the participants' informed consent, audio-recorded, and fully transcribed verbatim.

Data analysis was carried out concurrently with data collection and followed the systematic procedures of grounded theory. The data were analyzed in three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. During open coding, initial concepts were extracted directly from the raw data. In the axial coding stage, relationships among categories were organized in terms of causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, action/interaction strategies, and consequences. Finally, during selective coding, a core category was identified, through which a rational–social action model of hijab was developed. MAXQDA 2020 software was used to manage, organize, and retrieve the data throughout the analysis process.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability [15,16] .Credibility was enhanced through repeated return to raw data and constant comparative analysis. In addition, the analysis process was subject to analytic supervision and peer review by experts familiar with grounded theory methodology. Preliminary findings were also validated through participant review and confirmation. Furthermore, data collection and analysis continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, such that no new concepts emerged and no substantive elaboration of categories occurred. Collectively, these measures strengthened the dependability and confirmability of the theoretical explanation developed in this study.

To maintain methodological coherence, the coding process was conducted systematically across the three stages of open, axial, and selective coding. During open coding, initial concepts were derived directly from the data. In axial coding, continuous comparison facilitated the identification and organization of relationships among concepts. In the selective coding stage, the core category—possessing the greatest explanatory power in relation to other categories—was identified. This analytical process involved a continual back-and-forth movement between data, concepts, and categories, allowing for ongoing refinement and revision of the analysis.

To facilitate data management and enhance analytical precision, MAXQDA 2020 software was employed. The software enabled systematic organization of qualitative data and continuous review of relationships among concepts and categories throughout the analytical process. It is emphasized, however, that the role of the software was strictly supportive; the final interpretation of the data was based on the researcher's analytical judgment.

Overall, adherence to the inductive logic of grounded theory, the sustained use of constant comparative analysis across data, concepts, and categories, and observance of recognized criteria for rigor and trustworthiness provided the necessary conditions for developing a coherent theoretical explanation of the phenomenon under study.

Based on the methodological process outlined above, data analysis emerged directly from participants' experiences and actions, guided by the logic of grounded theory. The outcome of this analytical process was the gradual extraction and organization of a set of concepts and categories that, through interaction with one another, made it possible to explain the phenomenon at a level beyond mere description. In the following section, the study's findings are presented in the form of main and subcategories, with particular attention to the relationships among them, so that the trajectory of theory development from empirical data can be clearly traced.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study indicate that hijab-related action, as reflected in the lived experiences of participants, is grounded less in the acceptance or rejection of official normative values and more in a rational, situational, and regulatory logic. These findings were derived using the Strauss and Corbin grounded theory approach through the processes of open, axial, and selective coding. In this section, the contextual characteristics of the participants are first described; subsequently, open codes, axial categories, and finally the core category are presented in order to analyze the dominant action pattern among participants.

4.1. Description of Participants(Descriptive–Contextual Model)

The participants of the study consisted of 22 social actors selected through purposive sampling, exhibiting diversity in terms of gender, age, level of education, and social position. This diversity was intentionally sought to achieve maximum conceptual saturation and to represent varied experiences of hijab-related action across different social contexts.

Analysis of the participants' contextual characteristics indicates that the experience of hijab is consistently constructed in relation to social roles, family relations, and everyday situations, and therefore cannot be reduced to a purely individual choice. This contextual diversity demonstrates that hijab is not a homogeneous phenomenon, but rather a multilayered and context-dependent one, whose meanings and functions are continuously reproduced through interaction with diverse social roles and settings like table 1.

Table 1. Contextual Characteristics of the Study Participants

Participant Code	Gender	Age Group (years)	Education Level	Occupational Status / Social Role	Dominant Social Context
P1	Female	20–30	Bachelor's degree	Student	Academic setting
P2	Female	30–40	Master's degree	Employee	Administrative setting
P3	Male	20–30	Bachelor's degree	Self-employed	Public setting
P4	Female	40–50	PhD	Faculty member	Academic setting
P5	Female	30–40	Diploma	Homemaker	Family setting
P6	Male	40–50	Bachelor's degree	Manager	Administrative setting
P22	Female	20–30	Master's degree	Researcher	Cultural–social setting

Source: Findings of the present study

4.2. Open Codes

At the open coding stage, data obtained from in-depth interviews were analyzed line by line, and initial concepts were extracted based on the participants' own language and expressions. These codes capture participants' modes of judgment, action, and evaluation when confronting official rules and social expectations surrounding hijab.

Among the most frequently occurring codes were calculating social cost, avoiding labeling, preserving family respect, minimal compliance with official rules, and situational behavioral adjustment. These codes reflect a form of lived and situational rationality operating at the level of everyday action. Analysis of the open codes indicates that participants make sense of hijab through everyday judgments, anticipation of consequences, and the regulation of action in accordance with different social contexts. These codes do not represent isolated individual reactions; rather, they reflect a shared pattern of lived rationality that is formed and reproduced within social interactions table 2.

Table 2. Examples of Open Codes and Empirical Evidence Extracted from the Interviews

Open Code	Conceptual Description	Illustrative Empirical Evidence (Participant Quotations)
Calculating social cost	Assessing the potential social consequences of hijab-related behavior prior to action	"You always calculate where and what to wear so that it doesn't create trouble."
Avoiding labeling	Efforts to prevent the attribution of negative identities or social judgments	"I don't want people to label me as someone who causes trouble or goes against norms."
Preserving family respect	Considering the impact of individual behavior on family status and reputation	"More than myself, I worry about what people might say about my family."
Minimal compliance with official rules	Observing rules at a minimal level without deep value-based acceptance	"It's not that I agree with it, but I at least comply with the minimum."
Situational behavioral regulation	Adjusting behavior based on spatial and social contexts	"A university is one place, the street is another—it makes a difference."
Avoidance of direct confrontation	Refraining from overtly confrontational or protest-oriented actions	"Getting into conflicts eventually works against you."
Prioritizing psychological calm	Preferring mental stability over high-cost or stressful actions	"People are looking for peace of mind, not constant agitation."

Source: Data derived from in-depth interviews conducted in the present study.

4.3. Content Analysis of Open Codes

The content analysis of the open codes indicates that prior to engaging in any hijab-related action, actors enter a gradual process of assessment and evaluation. In this process, action is not an immediate reaction but rather the outcome of repeated judgments formed within diverse social contexts. These judgments are primarily based on anticipating others' reactions, estimating possible consequences of behavior, and considering the impact of action on personal and familial psychological well-being.

Within this framework, calculating social cost reflects a form of rational judgment through which actors assess the symbolic and practical consequences of their behavior across different social spaces. Avoiding labeling, in turn, refers to conscious efforts to manage one's social image and prevent the attribution of negative identities. These processes demonstrate that actors continuously regulate their actions in accordance with contextual expectations.

Under such conditions, minimal compliance with official rules emerges as a tactical strategy—one that neither signifies full value-based acceptance of the rules nor implies explicit opposition to them. This pattern of action enables the continuation of everyday life while reducing social tensions.

Overall, the findings suggest that actors' rationality cannot be reduced to purely instrumental rationality or mere normative obedience. Rather, it reflects a form of situational and context-sensitive rationality that is shaped through social conditions, power relations, and material as well as emotional considerations.

4.4. Axial Categories (Analytical Model – Conceptualization)

At the axial coding stage, open codes were organized into higher-level categories based on conceptual similarities, meaningful connections, and recurrent patterns within the data. This stage aimed to conceptualize the relationships among actors' judgments, actions, and strategies, facilitating a transition from initial descriptions to more analytically grounded explanations.

Based on constant comparative analysis, three axial categories were identified as the main organizing dimensions of participants' action patterns:

3.4.1. Situational Rationality

This category refers to a pattern of action in which individuals regulate hijab-related behavior not according to fixed or pre-established rules, but in response to the specific conditions of each social situation. Data analysis shows that this form of rationality is constructed through continuous situational assessment, anticipation of others' reactions, and evaluation of the social consequences of action.

Within this action pattern, rationality is not understood as universal or stable, but as fluid, context-dependent, and embedded within social interactions. Participants redefine their decision-making criteria across different settings—such as family, workplace, university, or public spaces—and attempt to balance the preservation of personal identity with the avoidance of social tensions.

Accordingly, situational rationality can be understood as an agentic response to the heterogeneity of social contexts, enabling individuals to manage normative pressures, reduce social costs, and sustain everyday action.

3.4.2. Defensive Social Responsibility

This category refers to a form of social commitment primarily oriented toward minimizing situational tensions, preventing potential harm, and maintaining stability in social and familial relationships. Data analysis indicates that participants often regulate their actions with concern for avoiding the escalation of conflict, damage to close relationships, or disruption of everyday interactional order.

Within this pattern of action, social responsibility is not enacted as an active pursuit of structural change, but rather as the management of negative consequences and the containment of potential conflicts. By assessing different social contexts, actors select levels of conformity that allow for the continuation of familial, occupational, and social ties.

Thus, social responsibility in this category can be characterized as defensive and provisional in nature—aimed primarily at protecting existing social bonds and preventing the high costs associated with overtly divergent actions.

3.4.3. Tension Between Individual Identity and Social Order

This category functions as the contextual ground within which actions take shape and refers to the persistent experience of conflict between participants' self-understandings and the demands of the dominant social order. Data analysis shows that actors frequently encounter situations in which they must choose between personal preferences, individual beliefs, and formal or informal social expectations.

This tension is not episodic, but a recurring feature of everyday life, varying in intensity across different social contexts. Participants report that hijab-related action often takes the form of an attempt to manage this conflict—an effort aimed not at resolving the tension definitively, but at controlling its social consequences and reducing friction with the dominant order.

Accordingly, the tension between individual identity and social order constitutes the context within which situational rationality and defensive social responsibility acquire meaning and manifest as action strategies. This category links the experiential level of individual action to normative structures and social expectations.

4.5. Core Category *(Grounded Model – Selective Coding)*

At the selective coding stage, and through constant comparison of the data, it became evident that all axial categories converge around a central concept that explains the overall logic of participants' actions. This core category was identified as **"Rational Management of the Tension Between Individual Identity and Social Order."**

Data analysis indicates that actors neither seek to negate the social order nor aim to abandon their individual identity. Rather, by drawing on situational rationality, adopting forms of defensive social responsibility, and acting within the continuous tension between the self and dominant social

requirements, they choose minimal, flexible, and context-sensitive patterns of action that enable the continuation of everyday life and the reduction of social conflict.

Accordingly, the core category is not merely a synthesis of preceding categories, but the dominant organizing mechanism of action. It demonstrates that hijab-related action is less about value-based commitment or outright opposition, and more about a rational effort to manage structural tensions across diverse social settings.

The conceptual innovation of this core category lies in reframing hijab-related action not within a compliance–resistance dichotomy, but as a rational mechanism for managing structural tensions between individual identity and social order.

4.6. Paradigmatic Model of the Study

Based on the data analysis and within the paradigmatic model of Strauss and Corbin's grounded theory approach [13,14] the tension between individual identity and social order was identified as the central causal condition shaping participants' actions. This tension emerges in situations where actors, within the context of everyday life, are compelled to negotiate a balance between their personal self-understandings and the dominant normative expectations of society. In Iranian sociological studies, such tensions have been widely recognized as a core locus of social action conflicts [6,17].

The contextual conditions shaping these actions include the prevailing cultural–social environment, patterns of social surveillance, and the regulatory role of the family—factors that delineate the boundaries of legitimate and socially acceptable action within the social field [18]. Within this context, intervening conditions such as prior lived experiences, actors' perceptions of the social consequences of behavior, fear of labeling, and the nature of social space (formal versus informal) significantly influence the direction and intensity of actions. This finding aligns with sociological analyses of social control and the situational sensitivity of action [19].

In response to this constellation of conditions, participants primarily organize their action strategies around situational rationality and forms of defensive social responsibility. These strategies rely on consequence-oriented evaluation, caution, and behavioral flexibility, enabling actors to regulate their conduct in accordance with changing situational demands [16].

At both the individual and social levels, the consequences of these strategies include reduced friction with the dominant social order, preservation of a minimal sense of individual identity, and the continuation of everyday life. From this perspective, hijab-related actions are not best understood as instances of direct confrontation with social norms, but rather as rational processes aimed at managing structural tensions within the social field—an interpretation consistent with non-confrontational approaches to social action [6,17] for that like figure 1.

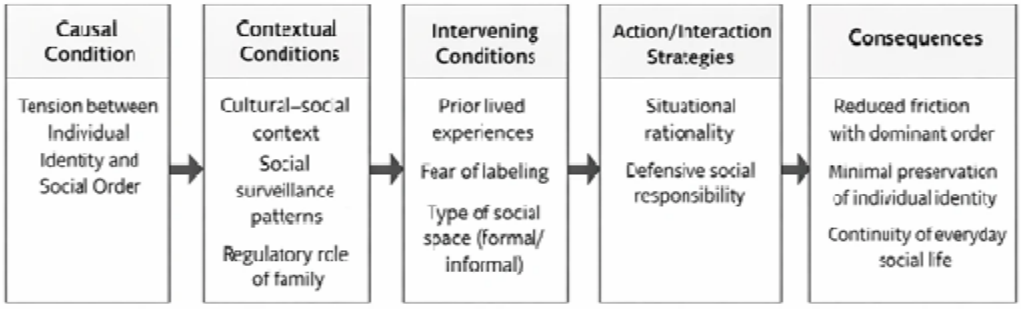

Figure 1. Paradigmatic Model of the Rational Management of Tension between Individual Identity and Social Order

4. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study indicate that actors confronting the issue of hijab do not organize their actions along a binary of absolute compliance with the established order or overt resistance. Rather, the dominant pattern of action is characterized by the rational, gradual, and situational management of existing conditions. This pattern is consistent with the paradigmatic model developed in the present study, in which hijab-related action emerges as a response to the tension between individual identity and social order and is operationalized through strategies aimed at reducing the costs of everyday life while maintaining social balance [20,21].

At the first level, hijab-related action is primarily individual-oriented and directed toward minimizing immediate social costs. At this stage, actors adopt minimal, flexible, and context-dependent behaviors in order to preserve psychological calm, social security, and family respect. This phase is accompanied by a form of lived rationality, in which the assessment of action consequences, fear of social labeling, and sensitivity to others' perceptions play a decisive role. As documented in Iranian studies on everyday social action, behavior at this level is less grounded in value-based or ideological judgments and more akin to a form of practical calculation embedded in daily life [22].

In the subsequent stage, when actors accumulate relatively low-cost or successful experiences of behavioral adjustment and perceive the social environment as at least partially predictable, hijab-related action transitions to a more socially oriented level. Here, individuals seek to preserve a minimum sense of personal identity while aligning their behavior with prevailing social expectations. Such actions are not oriented toward overtly transforming the dominant order but rather toward reducing social tension and enabling the continuity of everyday life. In this phase, the role of the family, the intensity of social surveillance, and the distinction between formal and informal social spaces become particularly salient.

The findings further demonstrate that prior experiences of action play a crucial role in the continuity or modification of hijab-related behaviors. Actors who encounter less tense consequences tend to experience a greater sense of control over their situation and exhibit more stable patterns of action. Conversely, costly or conflict-laden experiences often lead to the adoption of more conservative strategies, invisible forms of action, or situational withdrawal. This pattern suggests that hijab-related action is a dynamic, learning-oriented, and interaction-dependent process, rather than a fixed or predetermined response.

The analysis also reveals a meaningful incongruity between actors' attitudes and behaviors. Several participants articulated strong critical views toward official hijab policies at the attitudinal level, yet adopted accommodative and low-conflict behaviors in practice. This finding accords with Iranian research demonstrating that subjective judgments do not necessarily translate into confrontational actions and that practical rationality often mediates between personal beliefs and social action [19].

Overall, the findings indicate that hijab-related action should be understood as a gradual, situational, and lived-rational process that takes shape through the interaction of identity-related aspirations, accumulated experiences, and social structures. Policy approaches that reduce the hijab issue to a simplistic compliance–resistance dichotomy fail to capture the complexity of everyday social action. In contrast, approaches that emphasize social predictability, the reduction of action costs, and the strengthening of mechanisms of social regulation possess greater capacity to mitigate tension and achieve more realistic forms of governance over the hijab [6,17].

Accordingly, the management of the hijab issue is not achievable through intensifying normative confrontation, but rather through recognizing situational forms of action, reinforcing social rationality, and accepting the inherent complexity of social life.

5. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND STUDY LIMITATIONS

By proposing a conceptual model of rational–social action, this study provides an analytical framework for understanding the regulation of social norms within the cultural context of Iran. To enhance the generalizability and testability of this model, future research is encouraged to adopt mixed-methods approaches, allowing for empirical validation of the model in larger samples while

preserving the interpretive depth of qualitative data. Such designs can facilitate a transition from primarily descriptive analyses toward more robust explanatory frameworks in the study of normative social action.

In further developing the model, focused attention on specific social groups—such as Generation Z, professionally employed women, and migrant populations—as well as the implementation of comparative cross-cultural studies (for example, between Iran and Turkey) may help distinguish culturally specific components of social action from relatively universal elements. These lines of inquiry hold substantial potential for strengthening the shift from control-oriented approaches toward interactive and context-sensitive social regulation, thereby offering a more precise understanding of action logic across diverse social settings.

Nevertheless, the present study is subject to certain limitations. First, the relative reliance on self-reported data—despite efforts to build trust, employ indirect questioning, and triangulate findings with field observations—does not entirely eliminate the possibility of self-presentation bias. Second, while the study's focus on the micro-level of social action was essential for elucidating everyday practices, it did not explicitly address micro–macro linkages, including the roles of political, economic, and media institutions.

Furthermore, although theoretical saturation was achieved through 22 interviews, the experiences of certain social groups—particularly lower-income populations and ethnic minorities—were not fully represented. These limitations may be addressed in future research through broader purposive sampling strategies, the integration of qualitative data with institutional-level analyses, and the adoption of multi-level research designs.

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