



## Social Capital Construction in Informal Strategic Alliances in Micro Enterprises: The Role of MSME (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) Companions as External Facilitators

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**Abstract**

**Background:** Micro businesses have been recognised globally for their contribution to wealth and job creation, but they continue to face sustainability challenges due to limited resources, networks, and managerial capacity. An approach to overcome these limitations is to create informal strategic alliances through collaborative efforts. Most studies, however, assume that social capital in business networks evolves naturally, thus overlooking the role of external facilitation in intentionally constructing social capital, especially in the context of developing countries with the proliferation of micro-enterprises.

**Objective:** The purpose of this study is to examine the social construction process of social capital in informal strategic alliances in microenterprises, with particular attention to the role of MSME companions as external facilitators.

**Methods:** A qualitative approach with a case study design focusing on the *Gerai Jajanan Turki* (GJT) community in Depok City. A combination of methods was used to collect data, including semi-structured interviews with business actors and customers, a survey, and document analysis. NVivo 15 was used for thematic analysis.

**Results:** This research found that informal alliances and social capital were constructed in GJT through the facilitation of MSME companions. Companions aided in establishing connections between business actors and assisted in communication, role allocation, and dispute resolution, resulting in partnerships replete with trust and stable business alliances.

**Conclusion:** The construction of collaborative networks can be facilitated by external facilitators. This study builds upon the social capital construction framework by proposing that trust and cooperative norms may be purposefully created through facilitative means.

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### INTRODUCTION

Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) play an important role in encouraging economic growth, job creation, and strengthening local economic resilience in various developing countries (Fazal et al., 2022; Nursini, 2020). Central to this study are three interrelated theoretical constructs that recur throughout the analysis: (1) social capital—the network of relationships, norms, and trust that enable collective economic action; (2) the role of external facilitators as bridging actors who actively construct new relational architectures among previously unconnected business actors; and (3) trust and collaboration as both the process and outcome of

sustained facilitated interaction. While discussed extensively in the literature, these constructs are rarely examined together in the context of externally constructed alliance formation in micro-enterprises.

In the midst of increasingly competitive and dynamic economic conditions, micro business actors often face various limitations, such as access to resources, business networks, technology, and managerial capacity. These limitations encourage business actors to develop various forms of collaborative strategies to strengthen competitiveness and increase business sustainability (Lotfi et al., 2022; Worimegbe et al., 2022). One form of strategy that is increasingly discussed in the management literature is the formation of informal strategic alliances among small business actors.

Informal strategic alliances refer to cooperation between business actors that are not always based on formal contracts, but develop through social relationships, trust, and common economic interests (de Sena Silva et al., 2025; Urban & Mutendadzamera, 2022). In micro businesses, this kind of alliance often appears in response to the limited resources owned by each business actor. Through horizontal collaboration, business actors can share resources, expand market networks, and increase innovation capacity collectively (Babu et al., 2020; Lotfi et al., 2022). Previous research has shown that this kind of collaboration is able to create relational rents, which are mutual benefits that cannot be obtained if business actors operate individually (Lotfi et al., 2022).

In many studies of small business collaboration, the success of informal alliances is often attributed to the existence of social capital. Social capital refers to a network of relationships, shared norms, and levels of trust that allow individuals and organizations to work together effectively (Roxas, 2021; Urban & Mutendadzamera, 2022). Social capital plays an important role in strengthening coordination, reducing uncertainty, and facilitating the exchange of information and resources among members of business networks (Urban & Moti, 2025; Zhao et al., 2022). In micro-enterprises that generally have limited access to formal resources, social capital is often the main foundation for the formation of sustainable business cooperation.

However, most of the literature on social capital in business networks still assumes that these social relationships develop organically, i.e., through social interactions that occur naturally within pre-existing communities or business networks (Roxas, 2021). This approach places social capital as a result of interpersonal relationships that are formed gradually through shared experiences, social closeness, or similar community backgrounds. In entrepreneurial practice, especially in micro businesses, business networks are not always formed spontaneously, but can emerge through the process of facilitation or intervention from external parties.

A number of recent studies have begun to show that social capital can also be constructed intentionally (constructed social capital) through various external mechanisms, such as business mentoring programs, business incubators, and community-based entrepreneurship development initiatives (Mastintianto et al., 2025; Nie et al., 2025; Urban & Mutendadzamera, 2022). In this situation, external actors such as mentors, facilitators, or business assistants can act as liaisons or bridging actors that bring together business actors who previously did not have social relationships or business networks. The facilitation process allows for the formation of new collaborative networks that open up opportunities for knowledge exchange, emotional support, and access to markets (Hafiz et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2024).

The role of external mentors or facilitators in the entrepreneurial ecosystem is receiving increasing attention in recent literature. Research shows that mentors not only serve as providers of entrepreneurial knowledge or skills, but also act as catalysts in the formation of new business networks (Klyver et al., 2026; Urban & Mutendadzamera, 2022). Through the mentoring process, mentors can bring together business actors who previously did not know each other, help build initial trust, and facilitate the process of communication and coordination among network members (Nie et al., 2025). In addition, mentors can also act as mediators in managing conflicts that arise during the collaboration process, thereby helping to maintain the stability of cooperative relationships (Kamarudin & Murad, 2025; Nahar et al., 2026).

In informal business networks, conflict is an unavoidable phenomenon due to differences in interests, perceptions, and business strategies among business actors. In the absence of formal

mechanisms such as contracts or a clear organizational structure, conflict resolution in informal alliances relies heavily on interpersonal communication, trust, and the presence of a mediator who is able to balance the interests of the parties (Giordino et al., 2025; Seow et al., 2024). In these situations, external facilitators often act as gatekeepers of the stability of the collaboration, helping to ensure that disagreements do not develop into conflicts that undermine the cooperative relationship.

The existence of external facilitators is also related to the trust-building process among business actors who previously did not have social relationships. Research shows that trust in new business networks can develop through various mechanisms, such as repetitive interactions, shared cooperation experiences, and the existence of trusted third parties as intermediaries (Bolzani et al., 2025; Jones et al., 2021). In situations where business actors have not had interpersonal relationships before, the role of third parties is very important to create a sense of security and legitimacy for the collaboration process that is being built.

Although a number of studies have addressed the importance of mentors and social networks in entrepreneurship, studies that specifically examine how social capital is constructed through external interventions in the formation of informal strategic alliances in micro-enterprises are still relatively limited. Most research focuses more on the impact of social networks on business performance or innovation, without delving deeply into the process of forming these networks (Klyver et al., 2026; Urban & Mutendadzamera, 2022). Other research also studies more entrepreneurial networks that develop from pre-existing social relationships, such as family relationships, local communities, or business networks that have been formed naturally (Roxas, 2021; Zhao et al., 2022).

These limitations show that the process of forming collaborative networks mediated by external actors is still not widely understood, especially in micro businesses whose business actors do not have previous social relations. In fact, in various entrepreneurship development programs, MSME companions often play the role of facilitators who bring together business actors, mediate initial communication, and help build trust in new business networks. The lack of studies on the mechanism of social capital construction in this situation has led to an incomplete understanding of the formation of informal strategic alliances in micro-enterprises.

This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the process of social capital construction in informal strategic alliances of micro enterprises by highlighting the role of MSME companions as external facilitators. This study uses a case study approach on the micro business community of Gerai Jajanan Turki (GJT) in Depok City, Indonesia. This community was formed from the collaboration of several culinary business actors who previously did not know each other, but then built a joint business through a mentoring process facilitated by an MSME companion.

The analysis of the dynamics of collaboration at GJT is directed to explain how MSME facilitators play a role in bringing together business actors, facilitating communication, building initial trust, and maintaining the stability of cooperative relationships in the informal business alliance. Theoretically, this research advances the concept of constructed social capital by providing empirical evidence that trust and cooperative norms can be deliberately engineered through external facilitation—extending Putnam's social capital framework and Dyer and Singh's (1998) relational view into the micro-enterprise context. This represents a meaningful departure from studies that treat social capital as an organically emergent phenomenon.

Practically, this research provides actionable insights for policymakers and MSME program designers: companion programs should be explicitly structured to include network-bridging activities that create inter-actor connections, not only individual capacity building. This reframing has direct implications for entrepreneurial ecosystem development policy in Indonesia and comparable developing-country contexts.

## Literature Review

### Strategic Alliances in Micro Enterprises

Strategic alliances are a form of cooperation between organizations that aim to achieve common economic goals using complementary resources. In large companies, strategic alliances are usually realized through formal contracts, clear governance structures, and structured

coordination mechanisms. In micro and small businesses, these forms of cooperation often develop more flexibly and informally due to the limited organizational capacity and resources available to business actors (Lotfi et al., 2022).

Research on horizontal collaboration shows that micro enterprises can improve business performance through cooperation that allows for the exchange of resources, the development of joint innovations, and the expansion of market access (Babu et al., 2020; Worimegbe et al., 2022). Such collaboration is not always based on formal contracts, but rather develops through interpersonal relationships built between business actors. These relationships allow for the creation of collective economic value — what Dyer and Singh (1998) term relational rents — that cannot be generated if businesses operate individually.

The literature on the relational view also explains that competitive advantage can arise from relationships between organizations that are able to make effective use of shared resources (Dyer & Singh, 1998). In micro-businesses, collaborative relationships often serve as a mechanism to overcome limited capital, skills, and distribution networks. Collaboration between business actors allows them to share risks, improve operational efficiency, and create innovation opportunities through knowledge exchange (Seow et al., 2024).

In addition to providing economic benefits, informal strategic alliances also present their own challenges. In the absence of a formal contract, the stability of the cooperative relationship is highly dependent on trust and communication between network members. When there is a difference in interests or perceptions, conflicts can arise and affect the sustainability of the collaboration. Research shows that the ability of business networks to manage conflicts constructively is an important factor in maintaining long-term cooperation (Giordino et al., 2025).

### **Social Capital in Entrepreneurial Networks**

Social capital is one of the concepts widely used to explain how social relations can affect economic activities. This concept refers to a network of relationships, social norms, and levels of trust that allow individuals or organizations to work together effectively (Roxas, 2021). In entrepreneurial networks, social capital serves as a resource that facilitates the exchange of information, access to business opportunities, and coordination between business actors (Urban & Moti, 2025).

Previous research has shown that a strong social network can improve the ability of small businesses to access resources that are not available internally. Social relationships also allow business actors to obtain informational support, business recommendations, and collaboration opportunities that contribute to business growth (Zhao et al., 2022). Therefore, social capital is often considered one of the important factors that influence the success of small and medium-sized businesses.

The literature on entrepreneurship also distinguishes between two main forms of social capital, namely bonding social capital and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital refers to relationships formed between individuals who share social closeness, such as family members or local communities. Bridging social capital refers to relationships that connect individuals or groups that previously had no existing social ties (Urban & Moti, 2025). The two forms of relationships play different roles in supporting economic activities and innovation.

In newly formed entrepreneurial networks, bridging social capital plays an important role because it allows the formation of new business relationships among business actors who previously did not know each other. These relationships can expand access to information, resources, and market opportunities that were previously unavailable to business actors (Klyver et al., 2026).

### **Constructed Social Capital in Micro Business Collaboration**

Much of the early literature on social capital assumes that social relationships develop naturally through interactions that take place within specific communities. This approach treats social capital as an outcome of pre-existing social relations. Recent developments in the literature suggest that social relationships can also be formed intentionally through various institutional mechanisms and entrepreneurial development programs (Nie et al., 2025).

Constructed social capital refers to the process of forming a social network that is actively facilitated by certain parties, such as facilitating actors, business incubators, or entrepreneurship development organizations. Social relationships in such networks do not always stem from pre-existing ties, but can arise through a process of meeting and interaction that is facilitated intentionally (Urban & Mutendadzamera, 2022).

Research on entrepreneurship in developing countries shows that external interventions can help businesses build new business networks that support business growth. Mentoring programs, entrepreneurship training, and business networking activities often function as meeting spaces that bring together business actors from different backgrounds (Hafiz et al., 2023). The interaction that takes place in these activities can serve as the starting point for the formation of business relationships that then develop into business collaborations.

The development of digital technology also expands the possibilities for the formation of deliberately constructed social capital. Digital platforms and social media allow business actors to build new business networks through interactions that are not limited to a specific geographical environment (Mastintianto et al., 2025). This transformation shows that social capital does not always depend on pre-existing social proximity.

### **The Role of MSME Companions in the Formation of Business Alliances**

MSME companions often play the role of facilitators who help business actors develop entrepreneurial capacity while expanding business networks. MSME companions can provide support in the form of training, management consulting, and access to a wider business network (Lee et al., 2024). This role not only focuses on improving the individual capabilities of business actors, but also on strengthening social relationships among business actors involved in mentoring programs.

Research on mentoring shows that MSME companions can function as a liaison who brings together business actors with potential business partners. This process helps business actors build cooperative relationships that were previously unavailable in their social networks (Klyver et al., 2026). Interaction facilitated by MSME companions can accelerate the process of building trust and coordination among network members.

In addition to acting as a liaison, MSME companions can also serve as mediators in collaborative relationships. When there are differences of interest or conflict between business actors, the presence of a trusted third party can help maintain the stability of the cooperative relationship (Nahar et al., 2026). This role becomes especially important in informal business networks that do not have formal governance mechanisms.

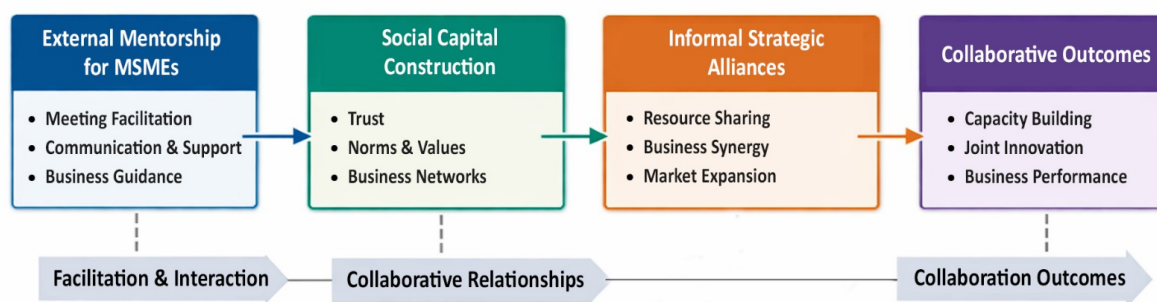
MSME companions also contribute to building initial legitimacy for newly formed collaborative networks. The presence of trusted facilitators can increase a sense of security among business actors who have not yet established interpersonal relationships with one another. This helps create a cooperative environment that allows for the formation of trust and long-term commitment.

### **Research Conceptual Framework**

Based on a literature review, the formation of informal strategic alliances in micro enterprises can be understood as a process influenced by the interaction between external facilitation and the formation of social capital among business actors. MSME companions act as facilitators who bring together business actors, facilitate communication, and help build initial relationships among network members.

The interaction that takes place through the mentoring process allows for the formation of social capital that supports business collaboration. The social capital that develops within the network then serves as a foundation for the formation of informal strategic alliances that allow business actors to share resources, expand markets, and increase business capacity collectively.

The conceptual framework of this research positions MSME companions as actors who facilitate the process of social capital construction among business actors who previously had no social relationships. This process results in a collaborative network that becomes the basis for the formation of informal strategic alliances in micro enterprises.



**Figure 1.** Research Conceptual Framework

## METHOD

### Research Design

This study used a qualitative approach with a case study design that focused on the dynamics of informal strategic alliance formation in the Gerai Jajanan Turki (GJT) micro business community in Depok City. The case study approach was chosen because it allowed researchers to gain a deep understanding of social processes, inter-stakeholder interactions, and trust formation mechanisms in real situations involving cooperative relationships between business actors. This design is relevant when research aims to explain how a social phenomenon is formed and why it develops under certain conditions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Yin, 2018).

The focus of the research was not only to examine the results of business collaboration, but to place the main attention on the process of forming social relationships that allowed such cooperation to take place. This study analyzed how micro business actors who previously did not have social relationships could build business cooperation through interactions mediated by MSME companions. MSME companions were positioned as external actors who played a role in initiating meetings between business actors, facilitating initial communication, and helping to maintain the stability of cooperative relations during the collaboration process. This approach allowed the research to trace the process of social capital construction that underlay the formation of informal strategic alliances in the micro-enterprise community.

### Research Subjects and Informant Selection Techniques

The research subjects consisted of four micro business actors who were members of the Gerai Jajanan Turki (GJT) community and were involved from the early stages of forming the joint business. The four business actors previously had no social relationships or work experience together before meeting in MSME mentoring activities. This situation provided an opportunity to observe how cooperative relationships developed from initial conditions in which no social ties existed.

The selection of informants was carried out using a purposive sampling technique by considering several criteria. Informants were chosen because they were directly involved in the process of forming and managing the business community, experienced the dynamics of cooperation that took place within the group, and interacted intensively with MSME companions during the business development process. These criteria allowed informants to provide relevant information about the process of forming business alliances and the dynamics of relationships between community members.

To strengthen the validity of the data, this study also involved three customers of Gerai Jajanan Turki (GJT) who were selected through incidental sampling techniques. Information from customers was used as additional data to understand how the business community was perceived by consumers. In addition to customer interviews, this study also utilized survey data from twenty customers who had made purchases at GJT. Customer data were not used as the focus of the analysis but served as an additional source of information to understand the sustainability of business activities resulting from the collaboration.

### Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews, customer surveys,

and analysis of supporting documents. Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face with four business actors and three customers. The interview guide was structured flexibly so that informants could explain their experiences more openly. The interviews were directed to explore information about the initial process of forming collaborations, the division of roles in the business community, the dynamics of communication between members, experiences in dealing with internal conflicts, and the role of MSME companions in facilitating cooperation.

The entire interview process was carried out with the consent of the informants and recorded in audio form to maintain data accuracy. The recordings were then transcribed verbatim so that all informant statements could be analyzed systematically. In addition to interviews, this study also utilized customer survey data involving twenty respondents. The survey aimed to obtain an overview of customer perception of service quality, product quality, and the existence of the Gerai Jajanan Turki (GJT) business community.

This study also utilized document analysis as an additional data source. The documents analyzed included records of business activities, the division of roles among community members, and documentation of mentoring activities related to business development. The documents helped to provide an overview of the development of collaborative activities taking place within the community. The process of transcribing interviews and processing data yielded 284 coded references, which then became the basis of the qualitative analysis.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

Data analysis was carried out using a thematic analysis approach combined with procedural analysis to understand the dynamics of social relationship formation in business alliances. The analysis process was assisted by NVivo 15 software, which was used to organize data, conduct coding, and trace the relationships between themes that emerged from the interview results and research documents. The use of this software helped researchers manage qualitative data systematically so that patterns of relationships between concepts could be identified more clearly.

The initial stage of analysis began with the open coding process. At this stage, the researcher identified units of meaning from the interview transcripts related to the informants' experiences during the process of forming the business community. The units of meaning included the conditions before the collaboration was formed, the initiation of activities by MSME companions, the initial interaction between business actors, the division of roles, the emergence of conflicts, and indications of the development of trust among group members. This process generated several initial codes that represented the various experiences and events the informants had undergone.

The next stage was axial coding, which was the process of grouping the initial codes into categories that described the stages of collaboration development. At this stage, codes that shared a meaningful relationship were arranged into several procedural categories that described the development of cooperative relationships among business actors. These categories included the phase before collaboration was formed, the phase of initiation of cooperation, the phase of formation of informal work structures, the phase of the emergence of conflicts, and the phase of stabilization of collaborative relationships.

The final stage was selective coding, which aimed to integrate these various categories into a conceptual narrative about the process of social capital construction. At this stage, the researcher explored the relationships between categories to understand how social interaction, role sharing, and the intervention of MSME companions contributed to the formation of trust in the business community.

NVivo 15 was also used to analyze the relationships between codes through matrix coding queries and mapping of relationships between themes. This analysis helped identify the relationships between conflict events, companion interventions, and the development of cooperative relationships among business actors. This approach allowed the research not only to produce thematic descriptions, but also to explain the sequence of processes that constituted the formation of informal strategic alliances.

### Data Validity and Reliability

The validity of the data was maintained through several strategies to ensure that the research findings accurately represented actual conditions. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing information obtained from business actors, customers, and supporting documents related to business community activities. This approach helped ensure the consistency of information emerging from various data sources.

This research also applied an audit trail through systematic documentation of the entire analysis process carried out in NVivo 15. Each stage of coding and grouping of themes was kept in a structured manner so that the interpretation process could be traced back if needed. In addition, consistency of interpretation was maintained by ensuring that research findings were based on patterns of information that appeared repeatedly across the data. This approach aimed to increase the credibility, dependability, and transparency of the analysis process in this qualitative research.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

Data analysis reveals that the formation of informal strategic alliances in the Gerai Jajanan Turki (GJT) community develops through a structured sequence of social interactions involving business actors and MSME facilitators—a process that is theoretically significant because it operationalizes the concept of constructed social capital in a real-world micro-enterprise setting. What makes this case theoretically novel is the complete absence of prior social ties among the business actors: collaboration did not emerge from pre-existing relationships but was deliberately engineered through external facilitation. This directly challenges prevailing assumptions in the social capital literature that treat network formation as an organic process, and positions the MSME companion as a previously under-theorized actor in entrepreneurial network formation literature. NVivo coding identified several main themes related to the formation of business alliances, the dynamics of interaction between business actors, and the role of MSME companions in maintaining the stability of cooperative relationships.

Table 1 presents the thematic coding results from NVivo analysis across five major themes. Several patterns warrant explicit analytical attention. First, the highest-frequency sub-theme is "Support between members" (n = 20), indicating that mutual peer support—not formal institutional structures—emerges as the most robust relational foundation in the alliance. Second, "Divisions of business roles" (n = 18) and "Operational coordination" (n = 14) together confirm the emergence of an informal but functional work structure, consistent with Dyer and Singh's (1998) view that relational governance can substitute for formal contractual mechanisms. Third, the relatively low frequency of companion-led conflict mediation (n = 7) suggests that the companion's bridging function in early stages was more critical than their mediation function—distinguishing this study from mentoring literature that emphasizes conflict resolution as the primary companion role. Fourth, the "Emergence of trust" sub-theme (n = 12) confirms that social capital formation is an outcome of the facilitated process, not a precondition for it.

In general, the findings show that the process of forming informal strategic alliances in the GJT community can be understood through three main dimensions: the process of initiating collaboration, the dynamics of interaction between business actors, and the role of MSME companions in facilitating and stabilizing cooperative relationships. These dimensions are interrelated and form a process of social capital construction that allows business actors to build collaboration even though they did not previously have social relationships.

**Table 1.** Themes and Frequency of NVivo Coding Results

Theme	Sub Theme	Frequency	Sample Quotes
Collaboration initiation	Initial meeting of business actors	11	"At first we didn't know each other, then we met in mentoring activities."
	The role of companions in	9	"The first companion proposed that this business be run together."

	bringing together business actors		
Establishment of an informal work structure	Divisions of business roles	18	"Everyone has different abilities, so the role is divided according to ability."
	Operational coordination	14	"Usually communication is done through groups so that everyone knows the progress of the business."
Social relationship dynamics	Support between members	20	"If there is a problem, it is usually discussed together so that the business can continue to run."
	Differences of opinion	15	"Sometimes there are differences of opinion about the product or how to sell."
The Role of MSMEs	Conflict mediation	7	"When there is a difference of opinion it is usually the companion who helps explain."
	Monitoring and evaluation of the business	6	"Companions often remind us how this business should be run together."
Indications of social capital	The emergence of trust	12	"Now we trust each other because we have been working together for a long time."

### Initiation of Collaboration and Meeting of Business Actors

The findings of the study show that the formation of the Gerai Jajanan Turki (GJT) community did not start from pre-existing social relationships. The four business actors involved in community formation did not have business relationships or personal relationships before the MSME mentoring activities took place. The initial meeting between business actors occurred through mentoring activities facilitated by MSME companions.

This process is the starting point for the formation of social interaction among business actors. The MSME companion proposed the idea of building a joint business by utilizing the product potential owned by each business actor. The proposal then became the basis for an initial discussion on the possibility of cooperation.

These findings suggest that the formation of collaborative networks does not always arise from social relationships that have developed before. Cooperative relationships can be formed through a facilitation process that brings together individuals who previously did not have social relations.

### Establishment of an Informal Work Structure

After the initial meeting process took place, business actors began to develop informal cooperation mechanisms. The work structure is not built through formal rules or written contracts, but rather through agreements that develop from mutual discussions.

The division of roles in the business community is adjusted to the ability of each business actor. Each member has certain responsibilities in operational activities, such as food production, sales management, and communication with customers. This division of roles develops gradually through the process of interaction that takes place during business activities.

Coordination of business activities is carried out through regular communication among community members. The communication takes place through direct meetings and through digital communication media such as messaging groups. Regular interactions help strengthen operational coordination and allow community members to share information about business developments.

### Dynamics of Social Relations and Internal Conflicts

The interaction that takes place between business actors does not always run without obstacles. Differences of opinion on business strategy, product quality, and responsibility sharing

often cause tension among community members.

These differences are part of the dynamics of social relations that develop in business cooperation. Discussion and exchange of views are the mechanisms used by community members to resolve these differences. In many situations, the conflict that arises does not escalate into a conflict that damages the cooperative relationship because community members have a common interest in maintaining the business that has been built.

### **The Role of MSME Companions in Maintaining Collaboration Stability**

MSME companions have an important role in maintaining the stability of cooperative relationships in the business community. Companions not only play a role in bringing together business actors in the early stages of community formation, but are also involved in facilitating communication and helping to resolve differences of opinion that arise during business activities.

In some situations, MSME companions act as mediators who help resolve differences of opinion among community members. The companion also provides direction on business management and encourages community members to maintain the cooperation that has been built. This role helps create a more stable cooperation environment so that business actors can focus on business development without being trapped in prolonged internal conflicts.

### **Discussion**

The results of the study show that the formation of informal strategic alliances in the Gerai Jajanan Turki (GJT) community is closely related to the process of social capital construction facilitated by MSME companions. This process shows that cooperative relationships among business actors do not always develop organically through pre-existing social networks. These relationships can be formed through a facilitation process that brings together individuals who previously did not have social relationships.

These findings broaden the understanding of social capital in entrepreneurial networks. Most previous research emphasizes that social capital develops through interpersonal relationships that form naturally within existing communities or business networks (Roxas, 2021; Zhao et al., 2022). This research shows that social capital can also emerge through construction processes mediated by external actors.

The role of MSME companions in this study shows a broader function than the role of mentoring that is widely discussed in the entrepreneurial literature. Previous literature generally placed mentors as a source of knowledge or support for business actors (Lee et al., 2024). The results of this study show that MSME companions also play a role as social liaisons that bring together business actors and facilitate the formation of cooperative relationships.

In addition, this study shows that the role of companions does not stop at the stage of forming a business network. Companions continue to play a role in maintaining the stability of collaborative relationships through the process of conflict mediation and strengthening communication between community members. These findings are in line with research that emphasizes the importance of the role of mediators in maintaining the sustainability of cooperative relationships in informal business networks (Giordino et al., 2025; Nahar et al., 2026).

The main difference between this study and most previous studies lies in the analytical focus on the process of forming social relationships in entrepreneurial networks. Much research on entrepreneurial networking focuses on the impact of networking on business performance or innovation. This research contributes by explaining how these social relationships are formed through the process of external facilitation.

The theoretical contribution of this research lies in the development of an understanding of constructed social capital in informal strategic alliances in micro enterprises. The results of the study show that the formation of social capital does not always depend on pre-existing social proximity. The facilitation process carried out by external actors can create conditions that allow the formation of new social relationships among business actors.

This research also makes a practical contribution to the development of MSME assistance programs. Mentoring programs not only serve to increase the individual capacity of business actors but can also act as a mechanism for forming collaborative networks that support business

development collectively. This shows that MSME mentoring can function as a means of forming a more collaborative entrepreneurial ecosystem.

### CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze the process of social capital construction in the formation of informal strategic alliances in micro-enterprises by highlighting the role of MSME companions as external facilitators. A case study on the Gerai Jajanan Turki (GJT) community in Depok City shows that business collaboration does not always develop from pre-existing social relationships. The four business actors involved in the formation of the community initially had no prior social relations or shared work experience with one another, though each brought their own individual business background. The initial meeting facilitated by MSME companions became the starting point for the formation of social interaction, which then developed into business cooperation. These findings show that the formation of informal strategic alliances in micro-enterprises can take place through the process of social capital construction mediated by external actors.

The process of building social capital in the Gerai Jajanan Turki (GJT) community develops through several interrelated stages. The initial stage began with the initiation of a meeting between business actors facilitated by MSME companions. The interaction that took place at this stage allowed business actors to start building communication and exploring the possibility of cooperation. The next stage was marked by the formation of an informal work structure through the division of business roles and the coordination of operational activities. Over time, regular interactions allowed for the development of more stable social relationships. These relationships not only created a work coordination mechanism, but also encouraged the emergence of trust among community members.

The role of MSME companions is an important element in maintaining the stability of collaborative relationships. Companions not only serve as liaisons who bring together business actors in the early stages of community formation but are also involved in facilitating communication and helping to resolve differences of perspective that arise during the cooperation process. The presence of a companion helps create an environment of interaction that allows business actors to build trust even though they previously had no social relationships. This process shows that the formation of social capital in entrepreneurial networks can occur through deliberate facilitation mechanisms, not solely through naturally developed social relations.

The findings of this study provide a theoretical contribution to the literature on strategic alliances in micro-enterprises and entrepreneurial networks. This research shows that social capital in business networks does not always develop organically through pre-existing social relationships. Social capital can also be constructed through the process of interaction facilitated by external factors such as MSME companions. This perspective broadens the understanding of how collaborative networks are formed in micro-enterprise environments that have limited resources and business networks.

From a practical perspective, this study shows that MSME mentoring programs have the potential to function as a mechanism for forming collaborative networks among business actors. Mentoring not only plays a role in increasing the individual capacity of business actors but can also help build cooperative relationships that support business development collectively. This approach can be an important strategy in developing a more collaborative entrepreneurial ecosystem, especially in the micro-business sector that often faces limited access to business networks.

This research has limitations that need to be considered. This study uses a case study approach on a single micro-enterprise community, so the research findings are not intended to be generalized broadly. Further research can develop comparative studies on various micro-enterprise communities to understand the variation in social capital construction processes within different entrepreneurial networks. Follow-up studies can also integrate quantitative approaches to analyze the relationship between social capital construction, collaborative sustainability, and micro-business performance more broadly.

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### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Author 1: Conceptualization, research methodology design, fieldwork and data collection, NVivo analysis, writing—original draft, and project administration. Author 2: Literature review, data validation, writing—review and editing, and supervision. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

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