

Driving Mechanisms and Success Logic of Senior Entrepreneurship: A Three-Dimensional Integrative Framework Based on the SOC Model, Push–Pull Theory, and Socioemotional Selectivity Theory

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Abstract

Against the macro-level backdrop of population aging and the national strategy of active aging, senior entrepreneurship has emerged as an important pathway for mobilizing older adults' human capital and integrating individual fulfillment with broader social value creation. Consequently, it has attracted growing scholarly and societal attention. However, existing studies tend to examine senior entrepreneurship from a single theoretical perspective, lacking a systematic and integrative analysis of this multifaceted phenomenon. Through a comprehensive review of relevant domestic and international literature, this study develops an innovative three-dimensional analytical framework centered on "emotional goals–entrepreneurial motivation–action strategies." Drawing upon Push–Pull Theory, the Selection–Optimization–Compensation (SOC) Model, and Socioemotional Selectivity Theory, the paper integrates these three theoretical perspectives to construct a coherent explanatory model of senior entrepreneurial behavior. This study represents one of the first attempts to synthesize these frameworks to illuminate the underlying logic of entrepreneurship among older adults, thereby offering a distinctive theoretical lens for understanding the driving mechanisms and success pathways of senior entrepreneurs. From a practical perspective, the proposed framework provides systematic and operational guidance for policymakers in designing targeted and tiered entrepreneurship policies for older adults, for markets in building age-friendly entrepreneurial ecosystems, and for seniors themselves in preparing for entrepreneurial engagement and strategic decision-making. Ultimately, this research contributes to promoting sustainable development in an aging society.

Keywords

Senior entrepreneurship; driving mechanisms; success logic; Socioemotional Selectivity Theory; Push–Pull Theory; Selection–Optimization–Compensation (SOC) Model

1 Introduction

According to data from the Seventh National Population Census released by the National Bureau of Statistics of China, the population aged 60 and above has reached 264 million, accounting for 18.7% of the total population—an increase of 5.44 percentage points compared with the Sixth National Population Census conducted in 2010 [1]. In August 2022, the China Senior Talent Network, established by the China Association on Aging, was officially launched. Under the implementation of the national Active Aging strategy, various sectors have introduced initiatives encouraging retirees to reenter the workforce, thereby creating structural opportunities for senior entrepreneurship [2]. As the concept of active aging continues to gain traction in China, senior entrepreneurship has increasingly attracted scholarly and public attention [3][4].

Within the broader policy framework promoting active aging, senior entrepreneurship has emerged as a vital pathway for mobilizing older adults' human capital. According to United Nations demographic projections, by 2035 individuals aged 60–69 will constitute a substantial proportion of China's older population. Many in this cohort retain strong physical capacity and professional competence, enabling continued social and economic participation [5]. Drawing on Kautonen's (2013) OECD report, this study defines senior entrepreneurs as individuals aged 50 and above who actively engage in entrepreneurial activities. This definition aligns with the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) standards and encompasses not only founders of new ventures but also individuals engaged in self-employment. Senior entrepreneurship thus includes diverse forms such as community-based entrepreneurship, part-time ventures, and independent self-employment [6]. Such entrepreneurial activity often transcends traditional business-startup models. Compared with younger entrepreneurs, older individuals may possess distinctive advantages, including accumulated experience, social capital, and financial stability [7]. Existing studies widely acknowledge that the driving forces behind senior entrepreneurship are multifaceted and complex, involving both intrinsic psychological motivations [8] and external environmental or structural factors [9].

In recent years, propelled by the growth of the “silver economy” and the advancement of active aging policies, academic interest in senior entrepreneurship has steadily increased. However, a review of the literature reveals that domestic research remains fragmented. Most studies concentrate on entrepreneurial motivation [10], policy support, or influencing factors [11][12], while relatively little attention has been paid to the determinants of entrepreneurial success. In particular, analyses of the driving mechanisms and success logic of senior entrepreneurs tend to be disconnected, lacking an integrated and dynamic theoretical framework. Moreover, limited theoretical explanation exists regarding how older adults leverage their unique strengths to achieve entrepreneurial success. In response to these gaps, this study systematically synthesizes the Selection–Optimization–Compensation (SOC) Model, Push–Pull Theory, and Socioemotional Selectivity Theory to construct a three-dimensional integrative analytical framework for understanding the driving mechanisms and success logic of senior entrepreneurship.

2. Literature Collection and Review Process

To ensure both breadth and relevance in the literature review, this study conducted systematic searches in two major academic databases: China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) and Web of Science. Initial



searches employed both Chinese and English keywords, including “Senior Entrepreneurship,” “Older Entrepreneur/Entrepreneurship,” “Third-Age Entrepreneurship,” and “Grey Entrepreneurship.” Given the broader contextual relevance of active aging, additional keywords were incorporated, such as “Active Aging,” “Aging Population,” “Entrepreneurial Motivation,” “Push–Pull Theory,” “Selection–Optimization–Compensation (SOC) Model,” and “Socioemotional Selectivity Theory.” This multi-keyword search strategy yielded more than 300 publications.

To ensure the inclusion of high-quality and highly relevant studies, further screening was conducted based on abstracts, research focus, and journal impact factor (greater than 1.0). Studies were retained if their core themes addressed senior entrepreneurship in terms of motivation, driving mechanisms, success logic, influencing factors, policy frameworks, or entrepreneurial processes. General studies on reemployment unrelated to entrepreneurship or research involving age groups outside the defined scope were excluded. Particular attention was given to studies that explicitly connected senior entrepreneurial behavior with Push–Pull Theory, the SOC Model, or Socioemotional Selectivity Theory. Following this rigorous selection process, 72 publications were identified as the core analytical corpus for this study.

3. Theoretical Foundations and Literature Review

Building on the foregoing review, this study develops its analytical framework upon three well-established theoretical foundations: Push–Pull Theory, the SOC Model, and Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (SST). From these complementary perspectives, existing scholarship is systematically integrated to elucidate the driving mechanisms and success logic of senior entrepreneurship. On this basis, a multi-level integrative model is constructed.

3.1 Theoretical Foundations

3.1.1 Push–Pull Theory

Push–Pull Theory originated in migration studies. Its intellectual roots can be traced to the work of Ernst Georg Ravenstein, whose *The Laws of Migration* laid the conceptual groundwork for later theoretical elaboration.[13] The framework was subsequently systematized by Donald J. Bogue and further refined by Everett S. Lee, who introduced the concept of “intervening obstacles,” thereby establishing a robust explanatory model for various forms of social mobility.[14][15] In the 1980s, Albert Shapero and Lawrence Sokol creatively extended the theory to entrepreneurship research, applying it to analyze the socio-psychological antecedents of entrepreneurial events.[16] During the 1990s, Raphael Amit and Eitan Muller formally distinguished between “push-type” and “pull-type” entrepreneurship, marking the consolidation of the framework as a mature analytical paradigm within entrepreneurial motivation research.[17] Recent studies have increasingly contextualized and group-specificized the theory, focusing on women, youth, and return migrants. However, systematic exploration of senior entrepreneurship—particularly within the Chinese context—remains limited. In this domain, push factors typically refer to external pressures or adverse conditions that compel older adults to start businesses, such as financial strain, inadequate pensions, or concerns over post-retirement income security. Applying the push–pull framework to senior entrepreneurship enables the identification and interpretation of both coercive (push) and opportunity-driven (pull) dynamics shaping entrepreneurial engagement in later life.

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3.1.2 Socioemotional Selectivity Theory

Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (SST), proposed by Laura L. Carstensen, emphasizes the influence of perceived time horizons on goal selection. When individuals perceive their remaining lifetime as limited, they prioritize emotionally meaningful goals over knowledge acquisition or future-oriented instrumental objectives.[19] Within the context of senior entrepreneurship, SST offers a critical lens for understanding motivational transformation. Many older entrepreneurs view venture creation as a pathway to emotional fulfillment and existential meaning rather than solely economic gain.[20] When future time is perceived as constrained, goal orientation shifts from long-term investments in career advancement or network expansion toward present-oriented pursuits such as emotional satisfaction, relational depth, and life meaning. Thus, senior entrepreneurship is not merely an economic activity; it may represent a proactive quest for purpose, connection, and legacy.[21][22] SST therefore provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how the value orientations of older entrepreneurs differ substantively from those of their younger counterparts.

3.1.3 The SOC Model

The SOC model (Selection–Optimization–Compensation), developed by Paul B. Baltes, is a foundational model of successful aging. It explains how individuals adapt to changing environments and age-related constraints through three interrelated strategies: selecting attainable goals, optimizing available resources, and compensating for losses or limitations. Through the dynamic interplay of these strategies, individuals maintain well-being and achieve a functional balance between personal capacities and environmental demands.[23] In senior entrepreneurship research, the SOC model effectively explains how older entrepreneurs adjust goals and strategies in response to evolving opportunities and constraints. It highlights their adaptive agency and resilience when facing age-related challenges and provides a nuanced analytical framework for understanding how they strategically manage distinctive resource endowments.[24]

3.2 A Multi-Level, Multi-Theoretical Integrative Model of Senior Entrepreneurship

Grounded in the three theoretical perspectives above, this study constructs a three-dimensional integrative framework across social, organizational, and individual levels. By synthesizing core insights from prior literature, the model systematically explains the driving forces, strategic pathways, and goal orientations underlying senior entrepreneurship.

3.2.1 Driving Mechanisms Under Push–Pull Theory

(1) Social-Level Push and Pull Forces

At the social level, institutional and structural factors shape entrepreneurial entry. In China, many individuals exit the labor market in their early sixties due to the mandatory retirement system, resulting in loss of occupational roles and income channels.[25] Meanwhile, rapid population aging has intensified pension burdens, with relatively low replacement rates and rising healthcare expenditures placing financial pressure on some retirees.[26] Insufficient social support and persistent age discrimination further exacerbate marginalization in the labor market.[27]



Conversely, policy initiatives—such as the 14th Five-Year Plan for the Development of the National Undertaking for the Aged and the Elderly Care Service System—have strengthened institutional support for senior entrepreneurship through subsidies, tax incentives, and the promotion of “active aging.”[28] The rise of the silver economy has generated expanding demand in eldercare, healthcare, and cultural services, creating substantial market opportunities.[29] International experiences in countries such as Japan, South Korea, and Finland also provide valuable reference points.[30] Senior entrepreneurship has increasingly been regarded as a vital pathway for realizing the “second demographic dividend” and responding proactively to the challenges of population aging.[31] Under supportive national policies, a number of high-profile cases have attracted widespread public attention and social recognition, generating strong demonstration effects.[32]

(2) Organizational-Level Push and Pull Forces

Age barriers have consistently existed in the labor market for older adults. Enterprises often set age and gender restrictions in recruitment, preventing many younger seniors from reentering the workplace through reemployment [33]. The workplace is predominantly structured around full-time, fixed-hour employment models, lacking flexible employment arrangements tailored to older adults [34]. In addition, their career development opportunities are highly limited; poor job conditions, low salaries, and restricted career prospects make it difficult to meet older adults’ needs for self-actualization [35]. As a result, entrepreneurship has become a flexible form of employment for older individuals.

In recent years, a growing number of senior-focused incubators, entrepreneurship parks, and other age-friendly institutions have emerged. These organizations provide senior entrepreneurs with innovative venture opportunities and efficient resource-matching services, helping to overcome barriers such as limited access to entrepreneurial resources and digital technology constraints [36]. In addition, they offer dedicated financial support programs and establish specialized investment funds to facilitate access to capital. Against the backdrop of accelerating population aging, enterprises targeting products and services for older adults have proliferated. The increasingly personalized and diversified needs of the elderly population have stimulated the development of numerous niche markets, thereby creating differentiated entrepreneurial opportunities for senior entrepreneurs [37]. To expand businesses related to aging and eldercare, it is particularly appropriate to entrust such endeavors to older individuals who possess firsthand understanding of this demographic. Consequently, senior entrepreneurial teams have become indispensable, generating industry-level pull forces within the value chain [38].

(3) Individual-Level Push and Pull Forces

Many older adults are either approaching or have already entered retirement. Withdrawal from the workforce often results in the loss of established professional roles, prompting a strong desire to regain social identity and role recognition through entrepreneurship [39]. Some are dissatisfied with their pre-retirement work content or environment and seek to pursue more personally meaningful or ideal forms of work through venture creation. Others are motivated by concerns about their financial situation and hope to increase income and improve their quality of life through entrepreneurial activity [40]. At the same time, as individuals age, health concerns become increasingly salient. For some older adults, personal or family health needs stimulate entrepreneurial intentions in sectors such as healthcare or eldercare services [41].

The entrepreneurial engagement of older adults is also grounded in their comparative advantages. They possess substantial professional experience and specialized skills, and many aspire to translate accumulated expertise into tangible achievement, thereby enhancing life satisfaction and well-being [42]. Entrepreneurship provides a pathway for converting experiential capital into both economic returns and social value. Compared with the occupational constraints they faced earlier in life, older adults often value the autonomy and flexibility associated with entrepreneurship. Venture creation enables them to overcome temporal and spatial constraints typical of traditional employment, achieve a balance between work and later-life living [43], and experience emotional fulfillment. Some are particularly motivated to transform personal interests into meaningful careers, contribute to their communities or society, and derive a sense of joy and purpose from such engagement.

3.2.2. Success Strategies Under the SOC 2. Success Strategies Based on the SOC Model

It must be acknowledged that senior entrepreneurship follows distinctive pathways to success. A growing body of research has identified various dimensions of successful later-life venture creation. Drawing on scholarship on successful aging, particularly the work of Wang Yemei and colleagues [44], this study analyzes how senior entrepreneurs overcome personal and contextual constraints through strategic adaptation at the social, organizational, and individual levels. Within the SOC framework, selection strategies clarify entrepreneurial direction, optimization strategies strengthen core advantages, and compensation strategies address capability gaps. The dynamic integration of these three strategies constitutes the overarching strategic logic of senior entrepreneurship.

(1) Social-Level Supportive Factors

At the social level, policy guidance plays a critical role. Government announcements and initiatives related to the silver economy provide information about viable entrepreneurial tracks, encouraging senior entrepreneurs to enter sectors characterized by strong policy support and market potential. Targeted entrepreneurship training programs further enable older adults to identify their comparative strengths and align them with market demand, thereby facilitating informed and rational decision-making.

Research has shown that experience–demand matching platforms established by government and organizations help senior entrepreneurs accurately position themselves within the market and leverage their resource advantages [45]. In addition, senior universities and lifelong education programs offering entrepreneurship courses and skills training tailored to older learners can enhance their entrepreneurial competence and knowledge base [46].

Given that older adults may have a lower tolerance for risk in later life, scholars have advocated for the establishment of comprehensive risk-protection mechanisms, such as entrepreneurship insurance and risk subsidies [36]. Furthermore, fostering intergenerational entrepreneurial collaboration between older and younger individuals can promote the sharing and complementarity of knowledge and skills [47].

(2) Organizational-Level Supportive Factors

At the organizational level, business incubators play an essential role in market research and project evaluation for senior entrepreneurs. Careful screening of appropriate entrepreneurial tracks is particularly important



in order to prevent blind or ill-informed entry into competitive markets [48]. Beyond track selection, support organizations should assist senior entrepreneurs in developing differentiated market positioning strategies to avoid saturated “red ocean” competition. Industry associations and chambers of commerce can also provide valuable partnership information and networking opportunities.

Investment institutions and market actors should reassess the value of senior entrepreneurs’ soft capital—including experience and social networks—thereby expanding access to financing opportunities [49]. Large enterprises can further support senior ventures by offering flexible supply chain arrangements.

In the digital economy era, technological demands present significant challenges for older entrepreneurs. Professional service providers offering technical outsourcing can effectively mitigate digital skill gaps [50]. Likewise, support for forming complementary teams [51] and access to professional consulting services [52] can compensate for potential deficiencies in senior-led ventures.

(3) Individual-Level Strategic Behaviors

At the individual level, senior entrepreneurs seeking rapid market entry should avoid industries characterized by high intensity, rapid technological iteration, or heavy digital dependence. Instead, they are better positioned to select sectors closely aligned with their prior experience, personal interests, and local community needs [42]. Such alignment enables them to maximize the value of accumulated industry knowledge, professional reputation, and social networks [53][54].

Given potential limitations in physical energy and stamina, collaboration with middle-aged or younger partners can generate complementarities in age, skills, and cognitive styles [55]. Moreover, actively learning and applying digital tools suited to their capacities [56], as well as cooperating with government agencies, enterprises, and social organizations [57], can significantly enhance their entrepreneurial competitiveness.

3.2.3 Goals and Preferences Under Socioemotional Selectivity Theory

(1) Social-Level Emotional Culture

At the societal level, emotional culture provides both affective support and value orientation for senior entrepreneurship. Central to this cultural dimension is the pursuit of life meaning and social contribution. With the widespread promotion of “active aging” policies, societal perceptions of older adults’ roles have gradually shifted; seniors are increasingly recognized not merely as dependents but as potential creators of social value.

In this context, entrepreneurship becomes an extension of life through which older adults seek meaning and self-fulfillment beyond purely economic interests. Emotional goals—such as preserving traditional skills, helping others, serving local communities, and earning social recognition and respect—often take precedence over profit maximization [58]. Moreover, societal tolerance and support for senior entrepreneurship can effectively alleviate entrepreneurial stress and anxiety among older adults, fostering a more positive emotional environment for venture creation [37].

(2) Organizational-Level Emotional Interaction

At the organizational level, emotional interaction is primarily reflected in the market’s recognition and re-

ward of the emotional value embedded in senior entrepreneurial projects, as well as in the affective support provided by the broader business ecosystem. Markets are increasingly acknowledging the distinctive value created by senior-led ventures—for example, cultural identity derived from traditional craftsmanship or trust cultivated through accumulated experience. Consumers recognize and are willing to pay for these emotionally resonant attributes, thereby generating emotionally oriented market demand [63].

Incubators, investment institutions [59], and business partners provide not only instrumental support but also trust-based emotional affirmation for senior entrepreneurs. Technical outsourcing services offered by professional organizations can help address digital or technological shortcomings [60], thereby enhancing entrepreneurs' confidence and emotional satisfaction [49]. For instance, customized services and personalized care provided by incubators significantly strengthen the persistence and sustainability of senior entrepreneurial efforts.

(3) Individual-Level Emotional Goals

At the individual level, emotional goals shape both the intensity of entrepreneurial motivation and the direction of strategic choice. Socioemotional Selectivity Theory offers a precise explanation for this phenomenon: because older adults perceive future time as limited, they prioritize the pursuit of personal value and subjective well-being in entrepreneurial engagement. This orientation is reflected in four primary dimensions: the search for life meaning [22], the maintenance of social relationships [61], the experience of positive emotions [53], and the reconstruction of self-identity [68]. These priorities differ markedly from younger entrepreneurs, who tend to emphasize financial growth and career advancement.

Based on these emotional objectives, senior entrepreneurs develop distinctive entrepreneurial preferences. First, in terms of venture models, they are more inclined toward community-based businesses and the transmission of traditional skills—models characterized by social value and emotional significance—rather than projects driven solely by profit maximization [62]. Second, regarding partnership selection, they place strong emphasis on trust, respect, and emotional resonance, preferring collaborators who share similar values and can provide affective support [64]. Third, in goal setting, they prioritize process satisfaction and social impact over rapid scale expansion or short-term profitability, focusing instead on whether the venture generates sustained emotional fulfillment and social recognition [65]. Finally, in terms of risk attitude, senior entrepreneurs tend to favor low-risk ventures and avoid aggressive strategies involving high investment and uncertainty, thereby safeguarding emotional stability throughout the entrepreneurial process.

4. Core Logic of the Three-Dimensional Integrative Framework

Synthesizing the above analysis, this study positions Socioemotional Selectivity Theory as the foundational orientation (emotional goals), Push–Pull Theory as the motivational engine (entrepreneurial drivers), and the SOC model as the strategic mechanism (adaptive action strategies). Through the dynamic interaction of “emotional goals – entrepreneurial motivation – action strategies,” these three theoretical lenses jointly construct a comprehensive logical chain explaining the emergence, development, and realization of senior entrepreneurial success (see Figure 4-1).





Figure 4-1 Three-Dimensional Integrative Framework Model of Senior Entrepreneurship

Based on the preceding model, the core logic of the three-dimensional integrative framework can be summarized in three interrelated stages.

First, emotional goals guide the formation of entrepreneurial motivation. Drawing on Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (SST), older adults' perception of limited future time shifts their goal orientation toward emotional regulation, life meaning, social connectedness, and the pursuit of positive affect. This transformation fundamentally reshapes the push–pull dynamics underlying entrepreneurial engagement. Push forces arise not only from objective constraints such as financial pressure, but also from subjective experiences such as emotional emptiness or loss of identity. Pull forces stem not only from external opportunities, such as emerging market demand, but also from intrinsic aspirations for self-realization and value creation. The more closely a given factor aligns with emotionally meaningful goals, the stronger its motivational impact on entrepreneurial intention.

Second, entrepreneurial motivation influences the selection and deployment of strategies. The combined push and pull forces provide direction for the application of Selection–Optimization–Compensation (SOC) strategies. Entrepreneurs driven primarily by push factors are more likely to adopt compensatory strategies to offset resource constraints or capability gaps. In contrast, those motivated predominantly by pull factors tend to emphasize optimization strategies that strengthen existing advantages. Selection strategies, however, are foundational for all entrepreneurs, as clarifying direction is a prerequisite for effective action. Moreover, the intensity of entrepreneurial motivation directly affects the persistence and consistency with which strategies are implemented.

Finally, effective execution of SOC strategies enables the realization of emotional goals. By strategically selecting appropriate domains, optimizing core strengths, and compensating for limitations, senior entrepreneurs can achieve stable venture development. Entrepreneurial success yields not only financial returns but, more importantly, fulfillment of pre-established emotional objectives. These outcomes include attaining life meaning through social recognition, maintaining social relationships through interpersonal engagement, and experiencing positive emotions through meaningful participation in the entrepreneurial process. The realization of emotional goals, in turn, reinforces entrepreneurial motivation, forming a virtuous cycle: “Emotional Goals → Entrepreneurial Motivation → Action Strategies → Emotional Goals.” Throughout this dynamic process, support operates across social, organizational, and individual levels. Social-level policies and cul-

tural norms, organizational-level resources and opportunity structures, and individual-level endowments and personal traits collectively sustain senior entrepreneurship across its life cycle.

This framework clarifies the differentiated explanatory roles of the three theoretical lenses. Push–Pull Theory explains why older adults choose to engage in entrepreneurship by identifying structural pressures and opportunity-based attractions. The SOC model explains how senior entrepreneurs achieve success through adaptive strategies of selection, optimization, and compensation. Socioemotional Selectivity Theory explains for what ultimate purpose they pursue entrepreneurship, highlighting the shift toward emotional meaning and existential fulfillment resulting from changes in future time perception. These theories are not independent; rather, they form a circular and interactive mechanism. SST shapes the perceived intensity of push and pull forces and guides the direction of SOC strategy selection. Push–pull dynamics provide sustained motivational energy for strategic implementation. SOC strategies serve as the concrete pathways through which emotional goals are realized. This integrative perspective enables a more comprehensive and dynamic understanding of the complex process of senior entrepreneurship.

4. Future Research Directions and Multi-Dimensional Empowerment Strategies

4.1 Future Research Directions

4.1.1 Strengthening Empirical Examination of Mechanisms Across Theoretical Perspectives

Existing research on senior entrepreneurship has largely relied on qualitative approaches and descriptive analyses. Although such studies contribute to understanding the phenomenon, they often lack systematic empirical testing of underlying theoretical mechanisms. Findings derived from similar theoretical perspectives frequently diverge. For example, in the domain of entrepreneurial motivation, some studies emphasize push factors such as economic pressure [66], whereas empirical evidence from other research suggests that pull factors, including self-actualization, may possess stronger explanatory power [53]. With respect to entrepreneurial performance, certain studies highlight the advantages of experiential capital, while others point to the constraining effects of age discrimination [27]. Evaluations of policy effectiveness are similarly mixed: targeted training programs are widely regarded as beneficial [69], yet the effectiveness of direct financial subsidies remains contested [38]. Moreover, key theoretical constructs—such as “selection–optimization–compensation strategies” and “emotional goal orientation”—are frequently discussed in the literature, but their specific mechanisms of influence have not been sufficiently validated through rigorous empirical analysis. Future research should therefore conduct more systematic empirical investigations within the frameworks of Push–Pull Theory, the SOC model, and Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (SST), in order to clarify the mechanisms and interaction effects among relevant variables.



4.1.2 Exploring Synergistic Effects and Intervention Pathways Across Theoretical Perspectives

Push–Pull Theory, the SOC model, and SST respectively emphasize driving forces, strategic choice, and emotional goals. However, existing research has tended to examine these perspectives in isolation, overlooking their potential synergistic effects. For instance, gender may interact with age in shaping entrepreneurial motivation. Older female entrepreneurs may face compounded stereotypes, and this dual bias warrants further empirical examination [70]. It also remains unclear whether external policy support can mitigate individual resource constraints and thereby enhance entrepreneurial resilience. Some studies suggest that government-sponsored training and family support may serve as buffering mechanisms [48], yet the most effective combinations of policy instruments and individual strategies have not been systematically identified. Additionally, whether emotional goals moderate senior entrepreneurs' risk perceptions—and consequently influence strategic choice—requires further exploration. Future research should adopt an integrative perspective to examine how different configurations of driving factors jointly contribute to high entrepreneurial performance.

4.1.3 Uncovering Dynamic Interactions and Boundary Conditions Across Multiple Levels

Senior entrepreneurship is a dynamic process embedded within multi-level contexts encompassing society, organizations, and individuals. At the socio-cultural level, cross-national comparative studies are needed to examine how traditional values in collectivist cultures shape entrepreneurial motivation, and whether the pursuit of self-actualization differs in individualistic contexts [6]. At the organizational and market levels, industry characteristics may define the effective boundaries of particular strategies. For example, optimization strategies may be more effective in experience-intensive sectors such as consulting or craftsmanship [12], whereas rapidly evolving industries may require stronger compensatory mechanisms. At the individual and temporal levels, differences between younger-old and older-old adults in terms of health capital and perceived future time horizons may influence both motivational structures and strategic priorities. Longitudinal studies could track the evolution of goals and strategic adjustments as entrepreneurs transition from the retirement phase to stable venture operation. Furthermore, individual traits such as cognitive flexibility [71] and entrepreneurial resilience [72] may moderate the influence of external environmental factors on entrepreneurial behavior. Future research should therefore develop cross-level dynamic models to clarify the mechanisms through which various factors operate under different contextual conditions.

4.2 Multi-Dimensional Empowerment Strategies

As discussed above, senior entrepreneurship is the result of the combined influence of social, organizational, and individual-level factors. Interventions that focus on only one level or rely on a single theoretical perspective are unlikely to achieve optimal outcomes. It is therefore essential to construct a multi-level, multi-perspective empowerment ecosystem characterized by coordinated efforts across stakeholders. At the same time, existing research lacks systematic analysis of how factors across these levels interact within different cultural contexts. Drawing on an integrative framework, this study proposes the following practice-oriented policy directions. These recommendations should be adaptively adjusted in light of local cultural tradi-

tions, institutional environments, and economic development priorities.

At the societal level, the priority is to cultivate a supportive and inclusive macro-environment. In terms of cultural advocacy, the positive image of “senior entrepreneurs” should be promoted systematically through media campaigns that highlight successful cases, with particular emphasis on their social contributions and the intergenerational transmission of experience. Establishing national-level awards for senior entrepreneurship could create role models and help dismantle stereotypes regarding older adults’ innovative capacity. From an institutional perspective, mechanisms linking flexible retirement policies with entrepreneurial incentives should be explored, allowing retirees to experiment with entrepreneurship while retaining pension benefits. Dedicated funds for senior entrepreneurship could be established, alongside innovative guarantee models that incorporate soft assets—such as professional experience and certifications—into collateral evaluation systems. Tax incentives may also be offered to firms that employ older workers or engage in elderly care services. With regard to platform development, intergenerational co-creation spaces should be established to facilitate collaboration between younger and older entrepreneurs. Resources from universities and industry associations can be integrated to create regional mentor pools and experience-matching platforms, enabling more precise alignment of senior human capital with entrepreneurial opportunities.

At the organizational level, building professional support networks is essential. Financial institutions should develop age-friendly financial products that reduce reliance on rigid collateral requirements. Entrepreneurial insurance schemes and small, revolving microloans can help meet capital needs during the trial-and-error phase of venture creation. Entrepreneurial service providers should shift from standardized training models to more personalized services. Initial assessments should assist senior entrepreneurs in identifying core resources as well as areas requiring compensation. Training programs should balance remedial components—such as digital skills development—with strengths-based components that enhance the commercialization of accumulated experience. In terms of industrial collaboration, large enterprises could open segments of their supply chains and distribution channels to qualified senior entrepreneurial teams. Elderly care service providers might outsource selected community-based projects to senior-led teams, while manufacturing firms could engage retired engineers as technical consultants. Dedicated matchmaking events for senior-oriented products would further facilitate market entry.

At the individual level, the focus should be on activating intrinsic motivation among senior entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship education for older adults should emphasize guided self-reflection. Through workshops, participants can apply the Selection–Optimization–Compensation (SOC) framework to assess personal resources and design entrepreneurial plans that leverage strengths while mitigating weaknesses. Particular attention should be given to cultivating opportunity recognition and resource integration capabilities, enabling individuals to transform personal experience into viable business opportunities. Psychological support mechanisms, including group counseling and peer case sharing, can help alleviate age-related anxiety. A critical element is fostering an identity transition from “being supported” to “being creative and contributive,” thereby sustaining long-term intrinsic motivation. In addition, families should be encouraged to adopt supportive attitudes toward senior entrepreneurship. Community organizations can facilitate family exchange activities in which entrepreneurial households share experiences on balancing business pursuits and family life.



5. Conclusion

Addressing the fragmentation, superficiality, and static limitations of existing scholarship, this study integrates Push–Pull Theory, the SOC model, and Socioemotional Selectivity Theory to construct a three-dimensional framework centered on the triadic mechanism of “Emotional Goals – Entrepreneurial Motivation – Action Strategies.” Push–Pull Theory explains the driving force of entrepreneurial entry; the SOC model elucidates the strategic force underlying adaptive success; and SST provides the navigational force rooted in emotional and existential purpose. Through the dynamic chain of “emotional goals guiding motivation, motivation driving strategy selection, and strategy implementation realizing emotional goals,” the framework forms an organic and cyclical whole. The dynamic integration of the three strategies enables older adults to overcome constraints, leverage comparative advantages, and achieve entrepreneurial success. Importantly, success is defined not solely in economic terms, but also in the realization of life meaning, social connectedness, and positive emotional experience. While this study primarily relies on theoretical synthesis and literature review, the proposed mechanisms require empirical validation and refinement. Future research employing mixed methods can deepen theoretical–practical integration and enhance the role of senior entrepreneurship in addressing population aging and unlocking the “second demographic dividend.”

In sum, senior entrepreneurship represents a vital pathway for responding to demographic aging and generating both social and economic value. The three-dimensional integrative framework developed in this study provides a systematic theoretical lens for understanding this phenomenon. Continued theoretical development and empirical investigation will be essential to supporting sustainable and healthy development of senior entrepreneurship and advancing the broader goal of active aging.

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