

## ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

# The Entrepreneurial Leap: Social Capital's Role in Moving Beyond Side-Hustle Entrepreneurship in South Africa

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## ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship is broadly recognised as a driver of innovation and entrepreneurial success. Within the entrepreneurial landscape, many individuals initially embark on their journey as 'side-hustle' entrepreneurs, engaging in small, part-time ventures. Eventually, some of these entrepreneurs make the leap to full-time entrepreneurs. However, the specific factors that facilitate this critical transition are not fully understood.

This study investigates the role social capital plays in facilitating the transition from side-hustle entrepreneurship to full-time entrepreneurship in South Africa. The study adopts an inductive research approach and employs a qualitative exploratory methodology, collecting data from semi-structured interviews with side-hustle entrepreneurs who have either transitioned to full-time entrepreneurship or are considering doing so. The findings reveal that mentorship and trusted networks are pivotal in providing the necessary support, resources and opportunities for transitioning to full-time entrepreneurship.

By delving into the dynamics of social capital in an entrepreneurship context, the study can potentially inform South African policies on entrepreneurship promotion, education and development, helping to stimulate much-needed economic growth in South Africa.

## 1 | Introduction and Aim

Entrepreneurship is regarded as a pathway to innovation and economic success (Jansen and Fourie 2024). However, the journey from side-hustle to full-time entrepreneurship in South Africa is full of challenges, including low levels of education, inadequate skills development, limited access to networks and negative cultural attitudes towards entrepreneurship (Omoniyi and Bongani 2022). These challenges contribute to the high rate of entrepreneurial failure, underscoring the need for effective support systems (Khanin et al. 2022).

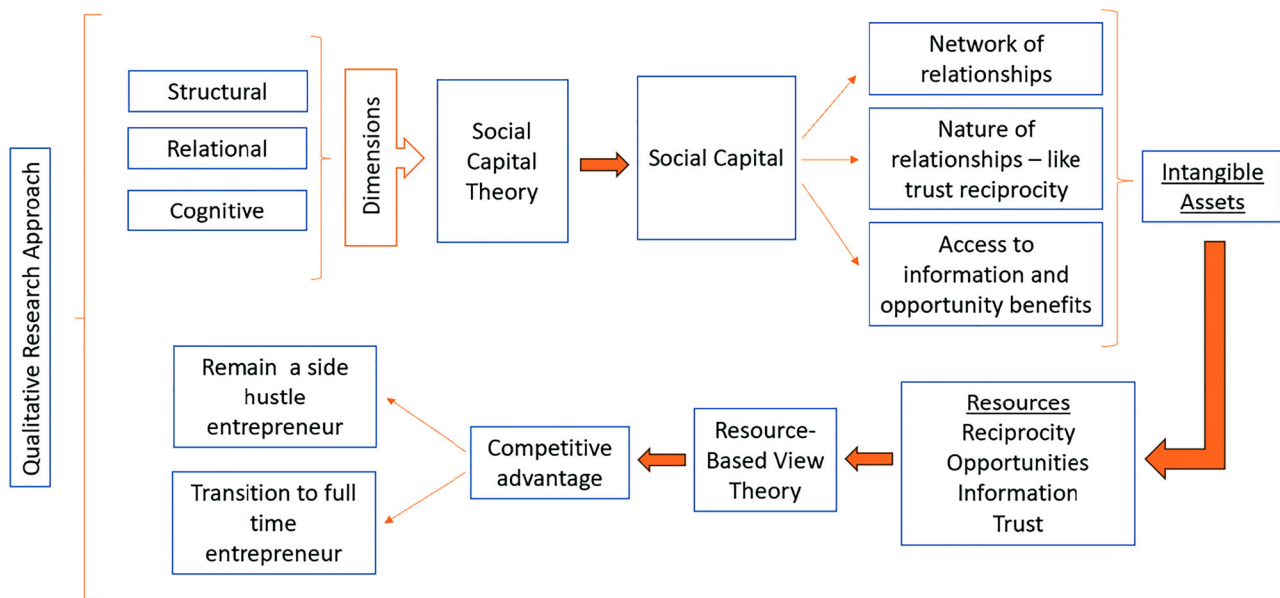
In the midst of this complex landscape, social capital is a critical consideration. The concept of 'social capital' is grounded

in collectivism and economic theory, which emphasises the importance of social connections in facilitating access to high-quality resources (Gannon and Roberts 2018). Social capital focuses on developing social connections that lead to efficient organisations with shared standards and values (Musavengane and Kloppers 2020). More than just facilitating resource access, social capital, encompassing trust and relationships, can help entrepreneurs overcome common barriers by identifying and potentially capitalising on opportunities (Sahasranamam and Nandakumar 2020; Setini et al. 2020).

Despite the recognised role of social capital in supporting entrepreneurship, little research has focused on its specific impact on the transition from side-hustle entrepreneurship to full-time

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**FIGURE 1** | Conceptual framework used for the qualitative research. *Source:* Author's compilation. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

entrepreneurship. Scholars like Block and Landgraf (2016) and Ferreira (2020) have hinted at various influencing factors beyond financial considerations, yet these insights remain superficial, leaving a gap in our understanding. Consequently, there is insufficient understanding of what actions could be taken to assist entrepreneurs in making the transition, given that the majority of entrepreneurs start off as side-hustle entrepreneurs, often supported by informal networks, including family and community, whose roles in fostering entrepreneurial success are not well explored (Hidalgo et al. 2024).

This study builds on prior research, which suggests that a lack of social capital is a hindrance to entrepreneurial activity (Hidalgo et al. 2024). It examines the various dimensions of social capital and how they provide access to essential opportunities and information, potentially easing this transition. This study primarily focuses on how social capital facilitates the transition from side-hustle entrepreneurship to full-time entrepreneurship.

The structure of this article includes a conceptual framework (Section 2), theoretical frameworks (Section 3), relevant literature (Section 4), research methodology (Section 5), findings and discussion (Section 6) and conclusion, research gaps and limitations (Section 7).

## 2 | Conceptual Framework

To explore the role of social capital in the transition from side-hustle entrepreneurship to full-time entrepreneurship, the researchers utilised a conceptual framework set out in Figure 1 below. This framework outlines the key dimensions of social capital theory: structural, relational and cognitive. Recognised as an intangible asset within the resource-based view of the firm, social capital, grounded in social capital theory, is crucial for gaining comparative advantages. It is a fundamental resource

that enhances the capabilities of side-hustle entrepreneurs, contributing to their success and growth.

The next section will consider the theoretical frameworks mentioned in Figure 1 applicable to this research and will explore the dimensions of social capital theory and the resource-based view theory.

## 3 | Theoretical Frameworks

Social capital is grounded in social capital theory and is a resource derived from social structures (Sahasranamam and Nandakumar 2020). It is defined along three primary dimensions: structural, relational and cognitive, each contributing to the social capital framework (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998; Thomas and Gupta 2021).

The dimensions of social capital refer to the networks of relationships among various actors, essentially mapping the connective structures that facilitate interactions (Musavengane and Kloppers 2020). The relational dimension focuses on the emotional depth and significant aspects of the relationships, highlighting the significance of personal connections among individuals (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998; Thomas and Gupta 2021). Lastly, the cognitive dimension involves the shared norms, values and understanding that arise from these networks, showcasing the collective insights and beliefs among actors (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998; Thomas and Gupta 2021).

Together, these dimensions underscore that social capital is not just about connections but also about the quality and cohesion of these connections. It involves (i) a network of relationships which can either bridge (linking different social groups) or bond (strengthening ties within a group); (ii) access to information and opportunities facilitated by these networks; and (iii) the nature of the relationships and is built on trust and reciprocity.

When considered collectively, these elements of social capital—the network of relationships, access to information and opportunities and the nature of the relationships among actors—form intangible assets and are valuable to entrepreneurs (Sahasranamam and Nandakumar 2020). These elements are central to the resource-based view theory, which posits that a firm's tangible and intangible internal resources are critical tools for success and in securing a competitive advantage (Chisholm and Nielsen 2009). Intangible assets are considered to be resources of greater value because they give a firm its distinctiveness due to their uniqueness and specialised nature and the difficulty in aggregating and replicating them. An example of an intangible asset is social capital (Chisholm and Nielsen 2009; Gibson et al. 2021).

Ultimately, social capital theory refers to the sum of the actual and potential resources that emanate from the network of relationships that an individual or social unit enjoys, and it reinforces the fact that social connections and relationships between individuals are valuable resources (Thomas and Gupta 2021). The fundamental proposition of social capital theory is that network ties provide access to resources; therefore, social capital constitutes a valuable source of information benefits (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998).

Adopting the resource-based view theory lens, social capital allows an entrepreneur to apply value-creating business strategies that are unavailable to competitors. For illustrative purposes, social capital can be considered to take the form of social structures and relational links as components of an entrepreneur's asset base. It provides valuable services that capitalise on market possibilities and continues to generate new market opportunities by creating new goods and services (Chisholm and Nielsen 2009).

The next section will focus on the literature that is relevant to social capital within the context of side-hustle entrepreneurship. It will consider the role of social capital as a resource of the side-hustle entrepreneur and how this resource either facilitates their transition to full-time entrepreneurship or encourages them to remain as a side-hustle entrepreneur.

#### 4 | Relevant Literature

Social capital functions as a resource, similar to economic capital in that it can be invested in with the expectation of future returns. It can also be owned and covered and necessitates maintenance to preserve its value (Musavengane and Kloppers 2020). However, social capital is distinct from traditional forms of capital in that it is based on social connections rather than individual ownership and places an emphasis on trust and the capacity of relationships to enhance the effectiveness of social trade, which is evidenced in the correlation between the density of the network and the value of reputation and trust (Gannon and Roberts 2018; Musavengane and Kloppers 2020).

Scholars have suggested that the real value of social capital is leveraged by combining the different components of social capital, as this creates an environment that is conducive to entrepreneurship, providing access to resources, information and support structures (Westlund and Bolton 2003; Patulny and

Svendsen 2007; Salehi et al. 2019). Figure 2 depicts the different dimensions of social capital, which contribute to the social capital ecosystem, and the overlapping nature of specific components of social capital and where the latter's real value is realised.

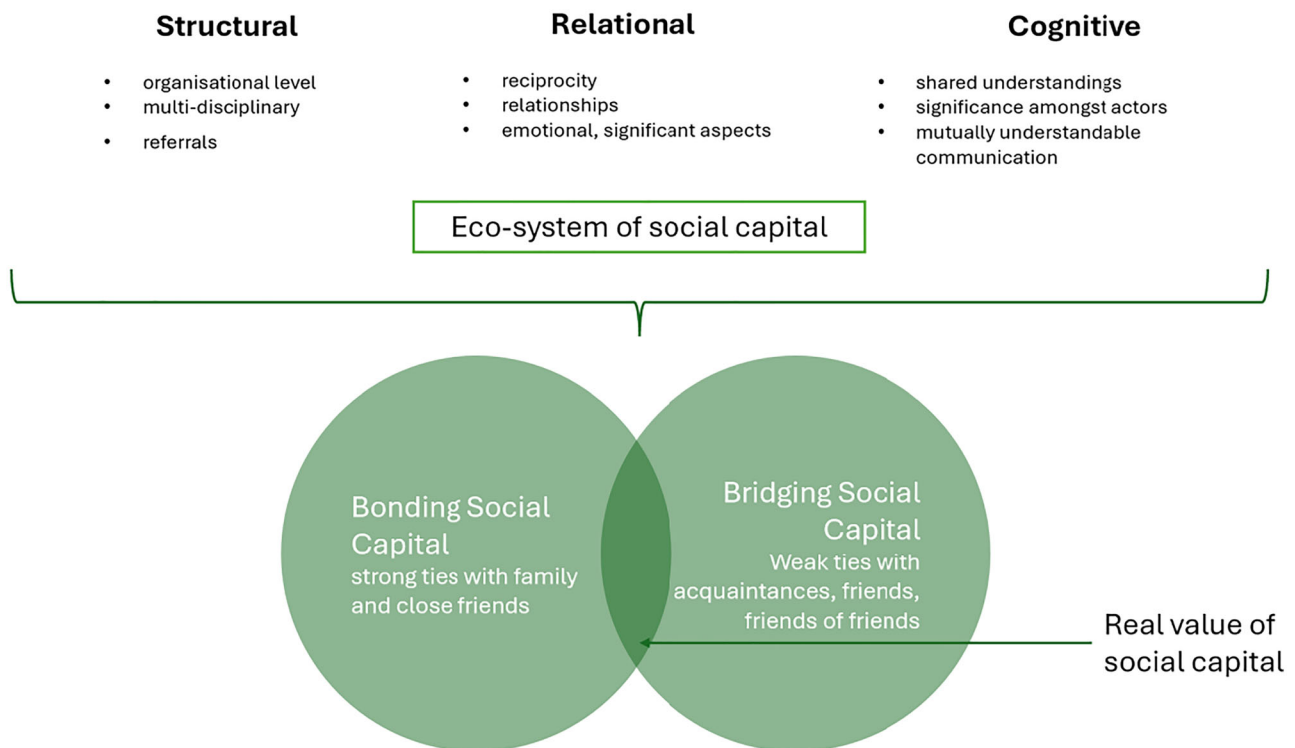
With reference to each of these components, bonding social capital refers to the interpersonal relationships between family members, friends and/or community members and to the relationships and associations between these individuals, which are premised on shared characteristics (Westlund and Bolton 2003; Patulny and Svendsen 2007; Salehi et al. 2019). These relationships are typically horizontal connections, geographically limited and characterised by high levels of trust (Hmieleski et al. 2015; Musavengane and Kloppers 2020). Bonding social capital provides a sense of acceptance and understanding, which are essential for resilience and self-efficacy (Boudreaux and Nikolaev 2018; Salehi et al. 2019).

Bridging social capital, in contrast, refers to the connections and associations that exist between different groups or communities, which are characterised by weak ties (Hmieleski et al. 2015). Bridging social ties, often characterised by lower levels of trust, facilitates the establishment of connections with diverse social groups, promoting innovation, collaboration and social cohesion (Westlund and Bolton 2003; Patulny and Svendsen 2007; Salehi et al. 2019; Musavengane and Kloppers 2020). Despite the negative connotation, weak ties are crucial in the social capital matrix as they provide valuable information inputs for entrepreneurs, enabling them to recognise opportunities that others may not (Hmieleski et al. 2015). Moreover, they could be critical in the transition to full-time entrepreneurship.

In the context of entrepreneurship, social capital is defined as access to resources and the quality thereof, which are enhanced through social relationships (Gannon and Roberts 2018). This concept underscores the notion that fostering social connections is vital for establishing effective and successful organisations (Musavengane and Kloppers 2020). Various studies in the fields of economics and finance have explored the factors impacting entrepreneurship, including access to financial resources, market access and social relationships (Kong et al. 2021). The significance of social capital lies in its ability to provide access to information, opportunities and support, which can lower transaction costs, reduce uncertainty and facilitate essential resources for business creation and growth (Bauernschuster et al. 2010).

Typically, entrepreneurship is an activity that is performed to identify and create opportunities to reach potential consumers. It is often underpinned by uncertainty and is often binary, in that someone is either an entrepreneur or is not (Ferreira 2020). However, a more appropriate perspective of entrepreneurship is that it is an evolutionary experience and process that takes place over a period of time, with several elements forming part of the process. Thus, it is neither static nor linear (Kuratko et al. 2023). One of the milestones in this evolutionary journey is early-stage entrepreneurship, which is usually the entry point of this journey.

Early-stage entrepreneurship is often characterised by side-hustle entrepreneurship, which is pursued on a part-time basis, whereas the entrepreneur remains employed (Walsh and Stephens 2022). In recent years, side-hustle entrepreneurship has gained



**FIGURE 2** | Overlapping nature of social capital. *Source:* Author’s compilation. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]

prominence globally in the wake of the gig economy, the shifts in employment patterns resulting from COVID-19 (Bates et al. 2019; Walsh and Stephens 2022) and rapid technology advancements, market disruptions and evolving consumer preferences (Kuratko et al. 2023). These shifting patterns have all resulted in greater employee flexibility and autonomy (Bates et al. 2019), allowing for entrepreneurial employees with flexibility to engage in side-hustle entrepreneurship. Side-hustle entrepreneurship could also be viewed as a protection mechanism where volatile macroeconomic conditions prevail (Gartner 1990; Bates et al. 2019). Therefore, entrepreneurial motives evolve as the side-hustle evolves and allow for greater autonomy and flexibility (Bates et al. 2019).

Entrepreneurial employees often start as side-hustle entrepreneurs given their background, mindset and current employment rationale, gradually transitioning into full-time entrepreneurship (Walsh and Stephens 2022). In this regard, side-hustle entrepreneurship provides an opportunity to gauge the demand and appetite for the relevant goods or services being offered—enabling would-be entrepreneurs to ‘test the waters’ and to refine their skills in relation to potential clients. Notwithstanding this, some entrepreneurial employees engage in a side-hustle simply to supplement their income (Bates et al. 2019; Walsh and Stephens 2022), to develop networks, skills and resources that will aid them in their careers (Walsh and Stephens 2022) and for the purpose of self-transcendence, which entails improving the welfare of others through the formation of relationships and which may also be a motivating factor in side-hustles (Sessions et al. 2021).

Scholars have postulated various factors that may drive entrepreneurs to act in situations that are characterised by a lack of certainty. Sarasvathy (2005) proposed the concept

of effective thinking, whereas McMullen and Shepherd (2006) theorised that entrepreneurs deal with uncertainty by transitioning from opportunities that are relevant to others (third-person opportunities) to opportunities that are relevant to themselves (first-person opportunities). According to McMullen and Shepherd (2006), this transition is achieved by applying their knowledge and motivation to the specific opportunity that presents itself. However, Alvarez and Barney (2007) express a divergent view, contending that entrepreneurs can better manage difficult situations by actively creating opportunities through their own activities by applying the principles of enactment and social construction.

When analysing the dynamics applicable to entrepreneurial activities and economic transformation in South Africa, these matters were found to be inversely related (Mahadea and Kaseeram 2018), with most entrepreneurial ventures failing due to the dynamic challenges that entrepreneurs face, including the scarcity of resources available to them (Kalyanasundaram 2018). When looking at why side-hustle entrepreneurs transition to full-time entrepreneurship, motivation has been found to be a decisive factor (Block and Landgraf 2016), with risk perception (such as the risk of failure), self-efficacy, and the development and growth of entrepreneurial competencies being the critical factors that feed the motivation of an entrepreneur to transition from side-hustle to full-time entrepreneurship (Ferreira 2020).

Side-hustle entrepreneurship offers valuable insights and learning on the transition into full-time entrepreneurship, which are underpinned by the experimental learning that takes place throughout the lifespan of the side-hustle enterprise (Ferreira 2020). Ferreira (2020), building on the work of other scholars in this field of research, posits that the learning that a side-hustle

entrepreneur acquires while operating the side-hustle mitigate some of the apparent risks associated with transitioning to full-time entrepreneurship, such as fear of failure and the perceived risk of being an entrepreneur. Notwithstanding these risks and fears, Ferreira (2020)—furthering Block and Landgraf's (2016) work—contends that the learning that takes place, whereas engaged in the side-hustle enables the side-hustle entrepreneur to develop the skills and competencies required to successfully transition into full-time entrepreneurship. However, this internal learning is not the only factor that feeds into the transition matrix. As indicated in Figure 2, the social capital ecosystem supports the ways in which social capital is cultivated.

Looking externally, research supports the view that organisational structures, demographics and social attributes, human and social capital, job satisfaction and salary and race and gender are pertinent factors that side-hustle entrepreneurs have to successfully navigate when transitioning to full-time entrepreneurship (Dobrev and Barnett 2005). Furthermore, experienced individuals are most likely to transition into full-time entrepreneurship, as they are more willing to incur the costs associated with business formation, which is intricately linked to available career choices.

Taking a step beyond the internal and external environments, networks also have a role to play in the entrepreneurial journey. Scholars focusing on this aspect argue that a network provides tangible benefits to an entrepreneur and can even provide visibility and legitimacy within a social structure, which can be of importance to potential clients and funders (Elsafy et al. 2020) and, in some instances, can help to dispel the liability of 'newness' that entrepreneurs face. However, the counter to this view is that diversified networks could be ineffective, as they could divert attention and resources away from key contacts (Batjargal 2003). Research shows that trust levels in society positively impact economic growth and stability, determining the types of organisations that thrive (Allan and Persson 2020). Cultivating communities with a culture firmly rooted in trust is crucial for fostering entrepreneurial activities and overcoming market friction (Chan and Mustafa 2021).

A further consideration in transitioning from a side-hustle entrepreneurs to a full-time entrepreneurs are the barriers that side-hustle entrepreneurs face. These barriers are significant because they threaten the side-hustle entrepreneur's ability and/or willingness to transition to full-time entrepreneurship. For example, access, location and legitimacy barriers often prevent the establishment and/or pursuit of entrepreneurial activities (Khanin et al. 2022). Khanin et al. (2022) submit that social-institutional factors, such as a lack of access to information and opportunities, are common barriers to entry in emerging markets, which serve to further constrain entrepreneurial activity—whether of a side-hustle or full-time nature.

Understanding the various levers at play in such a transition is crucial for designing and implementing policies that grow the base of full-time entrepreneurs (Ferreira 2020). A more dynamic and vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem can be established by addressing the barriers entrepreneurs face. This will play a

crucial role in addressing South Africa's unemployment crisis by generating more formal employment opportunities and jobs in South Africa, particularly among the youth.

On the basis of the above discussion, it appears that entrepreneurs—whether side-hustle or full-time entrepreneurs—are faced with a lacklustre environment, which is made more difficult by the financial and non-financial resource constraints that entrepreneurs typically have to contend with. With reference to the role of social-institutional factors highlighted above and how the lack of access to information and opportunities impedes entrepreneurship, it is important to determine the role of social capital in transitioning from side-hustle to full-time entrepreneurship in South Africa.

## 5 | Research Methodology

### 5.1 | Research Design

This study aims to deepen the understanding of social capital from the perspective of the side-hustle entrepreneur. To achieve this, a bottom-up, exploratory research approach was utilised to generate new insights and re-evaluate familiar topics from a new perspective (Khan 2014; Saunders and Lewis 2018). This objective was supported by employing a qualitative methodology to delve into the lived experiences of each research participant. Consequently, a qualitative exploratory research design was adopted for its effectiveness in exploring behaviours, perspectives and life experiences, thus providing a comprehensive understanding of the complex issues under study (Khan 2014).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with side-hustle entrepreneurs who had transitioned to full-time entrepreneurship or were considering such a transition. This provided an opportunity to investigate important aspects of social capital and the role it plays in the transition of a side-hustle entrepreneur and provided an in-depth understanding of the participants' motivations as well as detailed insights into their behaviour and attitudes regarding social capital (Meurer et al. 2007).

The study employed a purposive sampling method to identify participants uniquely positioned to explore the role of social capital in transitioning from side-hustle to full-time entrepreneurship. Given the study's relational dynamics, the researchers engaged in their professional networks using social media platforms such as LinkedIn to locate side-hustle entrepreneurs. Eligible participants were screened to meet two criteria: (1) active engagement in a side-hustle and (2) either having transitioned to full-time entrepreneurship or actively considering it. In addition to purposive sampling, snowball sampling was utilised, with participants referring peers from their networks, ensuring diversity across industries, backgrounds and transition stages. Sampling continued until data saturation was achieved at  $n = 20$ .

After collecting and transcribing the data using the transcription functionality offered by Microsoft Teams and the researchers were familiar with the transcripts, inductive qualitative coding was performed on the transcripts using ATLAS.ti software. The researchers used these first-order codes and grouped them on the basis of the insights gained from conducting the interviews and



**TABLE 1** | Descriptive data on the study participants.

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Per cent
Gender	Female	7	35
	Male	13	65
Age range	30–39	5	25
	40–49	10	50
	50–59	5	25
Geography	Eastern Cape	1	5
	Free State	1	5
	Gauteng	13	65
	KwaZulu-Natal	4	20
	Western Cape	1	5
Further education	Yes	19	95
	No	1	5
Race	African	6	30
	Indian	7	35
	White	7	35
Industry	Professional services	9	45
	Logistics	3	15
	Consumer goods and services	8	40
Transitioned from side-hustle entrepreneur to full-time entrepreneur	Yes	14	70
	No	6	30

Source: Author's compilation.

business spirit and collaboration. These terms emerged as significant factors for the research participants and were relevant to the themes that emerged from this study and that impact entrepreneurs.

In respect of those participants who had transitioned from side-hustle entrepreneurship to full-time entrepreneurship, the consensus was that several factors had underpinned such a transition. For example, for some participants, the flexibility and work-life balance offered by full-time entrepreneurship were cited as major contributing factors. For other participants, leaving a family legacy and using their entrepreneurial spirit provided the required justification for transitioning to full-time entrepreneurship. For the remaining participants who had not transitioned to full-time entrepreneurship, maintaining their side-hustle activity offered them a way to contribute to their respective passions while retaining full-time employment.

## 6.2 | Thematic Analysis

For the purposes of this research, the thematic analysis centred on understanding the role of social capital in the transition from side-hustle entrepreneurship to full-time entrepreneurship. The process began with the coding of participants' responses. This involved the researchers becoming familiar with the transcripts and identifying and labelling key concepts and ideas that emerged

from their narratives. The results of this exercise were the first-order codes, as set out below.

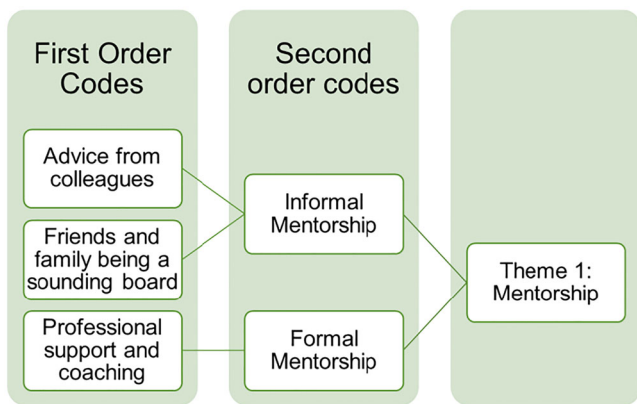
This initial coding was followed by a more detailed sorting process, where the researchers carefully examined the coded data to ensure that the participants' experiences and interactions with social capital were accurately represented in the context of their entrepreneurial journeys. The results of this secondary sorting exercise were the second-order codes. Here the researchers focused on grouping the first-order codes into categories that were relevant to the study. As a final step in the data analysis, the researchers used the second-order codes to uncover the themes emerging from the dataset.

The thematic analysis revealed three prominent themes: mentorship, trusted networks and opportunities.

### 6.2.1 | Theme 1: Mentorship

The theme of mentorship was supported by the sub-codes of formal and informal mentorship, as illustrated in Figure 4, which were provided as a resource by various actors in the social capital ecosystem.

Of the sample, at least 50% of participants highlighted the importance of mentorship in their entrepreneurial journey. The data also illustrates that mentorship can be both formal and



**FIGURE 4** | Thematic analysis that resulted in Theme 1. *Source:* Author's compilation. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]

informal and, as a form of social capital, can, in this case, assist side-hustle entrepreneurs with expertise, opportunities, connections and advice.

Mentorship emerged as a critical form of social capital for side-hustle entrepreneurs, providing guidance, confidence and strategic insights crucial for their entrepreneurial journey. For many, a mentor's belief in their potential offered the encouragement they needed to overcome self-doubt. At the same time, practical advice in areas like revenue management and forecasting helped professionalise their business operations. Participant 9's experience, detailed below, highlights the influence a mentor can have by fostering both personal growth and business acumen.

[Participant 9: 'I had [a] mentor. She helped me like she also, pushed me because she saw the potential. You know, you kind of like doubt yourself. Somewhere, somehow. And she was that type of a person that really pushed me because also being a person who is in marketing and advertising, that type of a thing. I think she also saw a loophole for me. She really helped me, you know, with setting things [up] more like your business side of things on you know, what you need to know, you know, looking at your revenue, looking at your KPI's, looking at your forecast, the importance of all those aspects in their business, how important [they] are'.]

Participant 9 highlighted the importance of informal mentorship in the transition from side-hustle entrepreneurship to full-time entrepreneurship, in contrast to the work of Alvarez and Barney (2007), which posits that entrepreneurs can create their own opportunities.

Participant 15's entrepreneurial venture was focused on the provision of services, which were heavily reliant on referrals, particularly where client demand was high. Here social capital was provided in the form of guidance around pricing and connections, which ultimately resulted in Participant 15 transitioning

from a career in education to full-time entrepreneurship. This confirms Elsafty et al. (2020) work—that social capital offers entrepreneurs significant benefits which are crucial for attracting clients and providing insights that aid in the transition to full-time entrepreneurship. Such benefits are driven by the experiential learning gained during the side-hustle, as indicated by Ferreira (2020).

[Participant 15: 'She's also a fellow entrepreneur, but she [is] basically my, like, lifelong mentor. I just feel like there is no one, besides for my mentor, that I can discuss business matters, like pricing with. So initially I think I built my network with my mentor'.]

Participant 19 highlighted the importance of support in the entrepreneurial journey in the face of business challenges that entrepreneurs typically face. This illustrated how informal mentorship can provide important guidance in the entrepreneurial journey and how advice from a friend assisted Participant 19 from a business perspective. These insights illustrate the factors that drive entrepreneurs to act when uncertain and support Sarasvathy's (2005) theory of effective thinking.

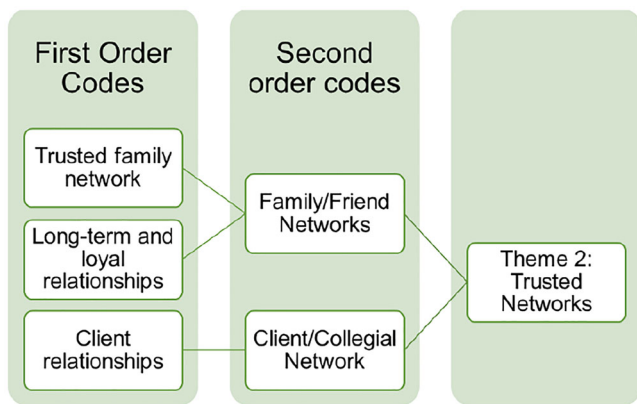
[Participant 19: 'He's a personal friend. He's someone you could sit with him and have a, you know, a drink at the bar and laugh and talk and go out. He's a mentor in terms of business, in terms of guiding me because he's been forever in the industry and I look back at all the advice that he's given me. And I think most of it is has resulted in positivity for the business. But he's a friend. You need support structures in place and you need good people who are going to give you good advice at the time, and sort of hold your hand through certain issues because your business can become challenging and that's where your support structures come in and, you know that, that's where the value add comes in'.]

Although these findings confirm the work of Elsafty et al. (2020) and Ferreira (2020), they highlight the importance of informal mentorship, which has been previously discredited by Alvarez and Barney (2007). Another dimension of mentorship as a form of social capital is that it has the potential to provide access to networks. This dovetails with the theme of trusted networks, which is considered below.

### 6.2.2 | Theme 2: Trusted Networks

Given that social capital theory is centred on networks and the resources that may come from such networks, as argued by Thomas and Gupta (2021), it is unsurprising that networks emerged as a theme for purposes of this study.

From the analysis of the data collected, networks emerged as a crucial aspect of social capital for the entrepreneurs interviewed. Trust in the relevant network is closely tied to this, which is a theme supported by the first- and second-order codes, as illustrated in Figure 5.



**FIGURE 5** | Thematic analysis that resulted in Theme 2. *Source:* Author's compilation. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.com)]

Almost all the participants indicated the importance of having a trusted network if one is to succeed in the entrepreneurial community. This demonstrates that the true value of social capital lies in integrating its various components, thereby enhancing entrepreneurship (Westlund and Bolton 2003; Patulny and Svendsen 2007; Salehi et al. 2019).

Most participants indicated that their networks were built on trust and that they could rely on the various networks that each had been able to build. Participant 12 explained this issue eloquently by saying: [‘The thing I’ve learnt, is that your network becomes your net-worth’]. This theme was supported by several sub-codes, including network connections, relationships and trust. The continuous reference to trust emphasised the bonding nature of the social capital experienced by the research participants (Hmieleski et al. 2015; Musavengane and Kloppers 2020).

Networks and trust were also cited to assist participants in establishing a client base and managing cash flow, which supports the classification of social capital as an intangible asset. These findings align with existing literature on social capital theory and the resource-based view theory (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998; Chisholm and Nielsen 2009; Thomas and Gupta 2021). A network, as a form of social capital, was experienced by the participants as follows:

[Participant 2: ‘I was very fortunate in terms of my career and being in the right place, the right time and as a consequence of that was able to build quite a deep network over a long period of time. It’s important to have a network to succeed in this community and trust is a big element of my network and the relationships I’ve built. You know your track record, but also a function of the relationships that you built over time and you know there’s that fantastic saying that that trust is built up over ages, but it’s destroyed in an instant’.]

[Participant 3: ‘I never was a believer in a network or anything like that or never thought that I had one until I left [employment] and went to my own. Now I’m such a believer in networking. I wish I could shout from the rooftops how important networking is and social capital is. I mean, thankfully I seem to have done a good enough job throughout my career to be in this point, but if I had known at the beginning of my career how important it was, I would have started a long time ago and I think it’s something that professionals need to understand from the get-go is how important it is to network’.]

[Participant 14: ‘My network helped me to manage cash flows issue from a way of accessing capital and managing cash flow and secondly by providing access to the markets’.]

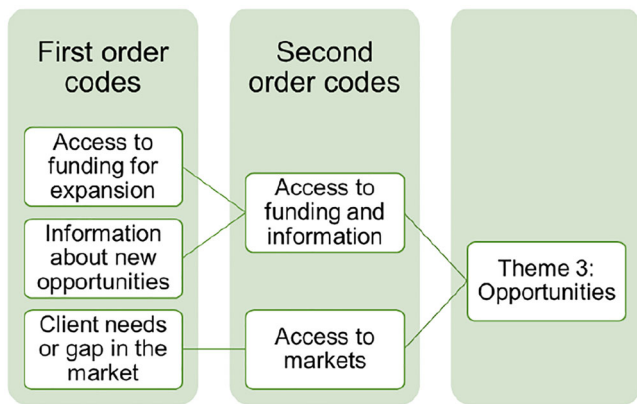
These findings accord with what has previously been contributed to the research in respect of social capital. The findings from the current study support the work of Patulny and Svendsen (2007), Salehi et al. (2019) and Westlund and Bolton (2003) that networks are an essential component of social capital, and when the various aspects of social capital are combined, they serve as a valuable resource for entrepreneurs. These networks, when used appropriately and coloured by trust, become a more useful tool for entrepreneurs in that they enhance visibility and legitimacy within social structures, which positively impacts economic growth and stability (Allan and Persson 2020). Together, networks and trust create a synergistic effect that enhances social capital, ultimately contributing to entrepreneurial success (Chan and Mustafa 2021).

Of the sample, there was an outlier—Participant 8. This participant transitioned from side-hustle entrepreneur to full-time entrepreneur without a large or quality network, commenting as follows:

[Participant 8: ‘I’d say network is probably one of the most important things.

But you know, we work with what we have. Yeah, I believe [my transition to full-time entrepreneurship] would have been easier because, having access to more eyes and ears and mouths, you know, along the way it compounds quite a lot’.]

The study’s discovery of networks as a key aspect of social capital emerged as a strong theme, particularly emphasising how trusted networks influenced side-hustle entrepreneurs. This influence was notable among those entrepreneurs transitioning to full-time roles. Contrary to conventional views, which suggest that high-density networks lead to high-value reputation and trust (Gannon and Roberts 2018; Musavengane and Kloppers 2020). Our findings indicate that even less dense but highly trusted towers can be equally, if not more, effective.



**FIGURE 6** | Thematic analysis that resulted in Theme 3. *Source:* Author's compilation. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

The following aspects became apparent about networks: (i) the sample confirmed that quality over quantity was preferred. Because the quality of networks was the focal point, it allowed meaningful connections to be built over time and the side-hustle entrepreneur to build credibility with their network, thus reflecting the importance of relational social capital (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998); and (ii) networks provided not only opportunities to market various products and services but also offered access to financial resources, advice and potential clients, facilitating stable revenue streams and growth opportunities, which aligns with the work of Elsafty et al. (2020) and Chisholm and Nielsen (2009). This provides a segway into the next theme identified, being opportunities.

### 6.2.3 | Theme 3: Opportunities

The emergence of this theme was supported by codes pertaining to access to information, access to funding and access to opportunities, as illustrated in Figure 6, and is closely related to the aspects of networks and trust, as discussed above.

The emergence of opportunities as a theme was not anticipated by the researchers, who had not realised the value of how these opportunities had arisen and their practical importance in the context of transitioning to full-time entrepreneurship. However, logically, this all ties together—how would a side-hustle entrepreneur transition without an opportunity to do so? Opportunities, therefore, came across as the life blood of the transition from side-hustle entrepreneur to full-time entrepreneur. The emergence of opportunities as a theme, which is critical for the transition to full-time entrepreneurship, supports existing literature that relates to social capital theory (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998) and effectual thinking (Sarasvathy 2005) and demonstrates how acting on these opportunities can become an asset for the entrepreneur (Chisholm and Nielsen 2009).

The most compelling example of social capital in action among the sample was in respect of Participant 7 who was able to build a booming logistics enterprise out of the opportunity provided by his network while looking for full-time employment.

[Participant 7: 'So it turns out at that, a friend of a friend of a friend, you know the story, said hey you out of work and you were in logistics, you know, would you be able to move a box for me from Durban to Johannesburg? And I thought, there's so many guys out there. Why would you ask me? But he says no. If you wouldn't mind helping me, and I thought, OK, cool. So I took it. I charged R90 in 1997 and that's how it [my side-hustle] started. After I moved this shipment, I subcontracted with other people who are doing it and then I realised, oh, hang on, this guy wanted me to move a box every day, so it wasn't fireworks. But that's where it all began. And then I started this little journey where I found companies that will be a broker for me in Johannesburg and Cape Town because those are the major centres there. And yeah, it's been a journey that has been absolutely memorable'.]

From the opposite end of the spectrum, Participant 5 lamented:

[Participant 5: 'Yeah, I had to knock on quite a number of doors and access has not really been [there] that much except recently I'm getting very strange calls. People I've met years back. They are starting to give me access to their businesses now. I mean, yesterday I was submitting a proposal to someone whom I spoke to maybe five years ago to tell them about what we do, and only now they have given me access to come and present my proposal to their company. So yeah, I think it's a good step in the right direction, but it hasn't been there lot of those [opportunities] of what we have managed to build so far. Sometimes talking to someone in the garage and then you tell them what you do and you get to be blocked by that stranger as opposed to yes'.]

When comparing these perspectives on the opportunities that arise from social capital, Participant 7 was able to exploit the opportunities to transition to full-time entrepreneurship, whereas Participant 5 had remained a side-hustle entrepreneur on the prowl for that opportunity that would allow him to pivot to full-time entrepreneurship, yet he had continued to encounter opposition.

The final consideration under this theme of opportunities was that of Participant 10 who provided the following:

[Participant 10: 'When I meet clients, I get quite a lot of referrals. I estimate that about 55% of my workflow is generated from the opportunities afforded by my network. So for me it was always trying to identify what they need to unlock the opportunity. I come from, from an environment where you know during apartheid one of the key things how we survived was the social

capital. Because in the street and at most times people would understand what the next street and the next corner was up to and so the whole street will actually club together you know there was a survival element to it. So hence I'm saying that, that from a personal level, in particular from a side-hustling perspective social capital, it's quite powerful'.]

This quote provides great insight into the value that Participant 10 placed on opportunity generation. This was a side-hustle entrepreneur who transitioned, in no small part as a result of his social capital and ability to generate opportunities, from an executive role in a listed organisation to a full-time entrepreneur, thereby following his passion.

### 6.3 | Interconnectedness of Themes

This study identified three aspects of social capital as being pivotal to side-hustle entrepreneurs: mentorship, trusted networks and opportunities.

When placed side by side, these aspects do not compete with or contradict each other but rather support the side-hustle entrepreneur in transitioning to full-time entrepreneur. These aspects of social capital work together as a symphony in the following ways:

- Mentorship, whether formal or informal, plays a supporting role to the side-hustle entrepreneur and is usually the impetus to igniting the entrepreneurial spirit and often why many side-hustle entrepreneurs begin their entrepreneurial journey.
- Trusted networks play a crucial role in connecting side-hustle entrepreneurs to various client bases, providing credibility that overrides the liability of newness and uncovered opportunities.
- Opportunities and their exploitation provide a launch pad for transitioning to full-time entrepreneurship.

Ultimately, these aspects of social capital serve different purposes in the side-hustle entrepreneur's journey to success. Mentorship, whereas important, is viewed almost as a support function, whereas networks and trust are more commercial, as they could lead to revenue generation and opportunities, which are the keys to transitioning to full-time entrepreneurship. Participant 14's perspective provided the most compelling justification:

[Participant 14: 'I access different opportunities across the industry, interestingly enough, within the network, so the network referred me to the opportunities'.]

This was confirmed by Participant 10:

[Participant 10: 'So from a family perspective, you know not much is happening there from a social capital [perspective] other than support. You can't grow on the professional side in terms of getting business without a network. It's very important'.]

## 7 | Conclusion, Research Gaps and Limitations

### 7.1 | Conclusion and Recommendations

From the research undertaken in this study, it was found that social capital plays an important role in the transition from a side-hustle entrepreneur to a full-time entrepreneur, particularly in the interplay between mentorship, trusted networks and opportunities. However, social capital is not the only thing of importance. Although some side-hustle entrepreneurs have successfully transitioned to full-time entrepreneurship with little or sparse social capital, the access to opportunities that social capital provides appears to be of critical importance in the transition. This sentiment was perfectly articulated by Participant 5 as follows:

[Participant 5: 'Honestly, I believe that social capital plays a critical role and it's not the only thing that is important, but it is important. It just makes things a bit easier. When you've got social capital and to a certain extent it makes it easier to unlock some opportunities for you, because people always get to know the social capital that you have and they are more comfortable around you executing some business for them because they regard you as someone who's got muscles to execute'.]

The research findings confirm previous work done in this area by Khanin et al. (2022), Musavengane and Kloppers (2020), Patulny and Svendsen (2007), Salehi et al. (2019) and Westlund and Bolton (2003), which posits that social capital is a complex, multifaceted construct that is important, in its various forms, to side-hustle entrepreneurs and generally to full-time entrepreneurs once they have transitioned. Notably, these findings contribute to the analysis and understanding of the non-financial factors that influence the transition from side-hustle entrepreneur to full-time entrepreneur while also highlighting that social capital in the forms identified in this research is both a catalyst and an important aspect of that transition. It can therefore be argued that side-hustle entrepreneurs with access to social capital through mentorship, trusted networks and opportunities are more likely to transition to full-time entrepreneurship and succeed in this endeavour.

This study provides new insights into the role and importance of social capital to the side-hustle entrepreneur in the transition to full-time entrepreneurship. South Africa's policy framework regarding entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial education and development could be revised to recognise such insights. These revisions could include programmes aimed at side-hustle entrepreneurs. They could focus on the practicalities associated with building bridging capital and exploiting these weak ties for the benefit of the side-hustle entrepreneur. On the basis of these findings and insights, educational and practical training can be rolled out to promote entrepreneurial success, resulting in more side-hustle entrepreneurs willing to transition to full-time entrepreneurship. The more full-time entrepreneurs there are, the greater the likelihood of sustainable employment creation.

## 7.2 | Limitations

Although qualitative research lends itself to the collection of rich data and valuable insights into the phenomenality of human experiences (Van Manen 2017), it has limitations in its ability to generalise to larger population groups (Ochieng 2009). Consequently, the results of this study are not universally applicable, especially considering each participant's unique skills, experience, education and contexts. To mitigate the risks of overgeneralisations, the researchers focused on using the collected data to reflect the specific perspectives of the participants. This approach allowed for a detailed analysis of their individual experiences within the phenomenon under investigation (Austin and Sutton 2014).

In addition, this study was subject to further limitations. More specifically, the potential for interviewer bias, participants' reactivity, over-identification with study participants and limitations inherent in drawing causal conclusions. Additionally, this study was constrained by its focus on a sample size of 20 participants, all of whom are residents of South Africa. It was also limited to examining the specific role that social capital has played and continues to play in each participant's transition from side-hustle entrepreneurship to full-time entrepreneurship, thereby precluding any establishment of causal relationships between social capital and broader entrepreneurial success.

## 7.3 | Research Gaps/Future Opportunities

This study revealed a number of areas that warrant further research. For example, a quantitative study could be conducted on the link between social capital and the desire/ability of side-hustle entrepreneurs to transition to full-time entrepreneurship. Such a study would lend itself to comparison with other quantitative studies on the impact of social capital on other forms of economic activity (such as different industry sectors, like manufacturing, agriculture and services) and reduce the risk of the results being tainted by researchers' bias. In addition, a similar (qualitative) study to the current one could be conducted but with a larger sample, enhancing the generalisation potential of the results. Another interesting study (which could use a mixed-methods approach) would be on the various types of social capital that typically manifest at different stages of the entrepreneurial journey, which could inform a more tailored approach in providing public-and/or private-sector support to entrepreneurs.

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### Ethics Statement

Ethical clearance for Sanushka Chetty's research project has been approved, as per the notification from the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS), University of Pretoria. All ethical considerations have been met. For any questions or concerns regarding this clearance, the GIBS Research Admin team can be contacted. PriceG@gibs.co.za

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### Data Availability Statement

The data supporting this study are available in the form of interview recordings and transcriptions. Access to these materials can be provided upon reasonable request.

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<u>Construct</u>	<u>Question</u>	<u>Source</u>
Introduction, background, demographic and motives	<p>Could you tell me a bit about yourself, including your background and education?</p> <p>Are you currently (or have you ever been) a side-hustle entrepreneur?</p> <p>Could you tell me a bit about this and how this venture started?</p> <p>What were/are your reasons for this business?</p> <p>Could you summarise what your business does and how it is positioned relative to your ultimate goal for this business?</p>	Szivas (2001), Nyanchoka et al. (2019)
1. Structure, resources and relationships relating to social capital	<p>Do you consider yourself to be a person with a large number of contacts and acquaintances?</p> <p>Could you mention the names or pseudonyms of the people you used to consult, ask advice from, ask a favour of or just to get their impression about your business?</p> <p>Regarding the possibility of having better access to financing, did you have contacts or relationships that somehow provided access? Did you actually use relationships or contacts that somehow provided access?</p> <p>Regarding the possibility of having better market access, did you have contacts or relationships that somehow provided access? Did you actually use relationships or contacts that somehow provided access?</p> <p>Regarding the possibility of having better access to important information for project implementation, did you somehow have contacts or relationships that provided access? Did you actually use relationships or contacts that somehow provided access?</p>	Fornoni et al. (2011)

(Continues)

<u>Construct</u>	<u>Question</u>	<u>Source</u>
	<p>Do you consider your main contact (i.e. your most relevant contact providing advice or support during the start-up) to be a person with a large number of contacts and acquaintances?</p> <p>Your main contact—on what issues could she or he have helped? And finally, has she or he helped you?</p> <p>Would you share with your main contact any relevant or confidential information regarding your business project? And less critical information regarding your business idea?</p> <p>What type of relationship did you have with your main contact at that time (work/professional, friendship, family, other)?</p> <p>How long had you known your main contact?</p>	
2. Strength and depth of social capital	<p>How would you describe your relationship with members of those groups/members of your social networks?</p> <p>Do you discuss serious and personal matters with your network? If so, whom do you confide in? If not, why not?</p> <p>Do you feel it is important to have a network of acquaintances, relatives and friends to succeed in this community?</p> <p>Can you rely on the network that you have built?</p> <p>In what way have you been able to or do you want to utilise this network or the groups you are a member of?</p> <p>How would you describe your relationship with people outside of your inner circle?</p>	Kilders (2017)
How extensive is the influence you have on formal and informal institutions?	<p>Would you say certain groups have more influence than others? If so, how did that come about?</p> <p>Is there anything else you would like to share?</p>	