

## Research Paper

## Representation of Farmers' Professional Identities in Shushtar District, Iran: A Study Based on Q-Methodology

Gholamreza Merdasi<sup>1</sup>, \*Masoud Yazdanpanah<sup>2</sup>, Masoud Baradaran<sup>3</sup>, Masoumeh Forouzani<sup>2</sup>

1. MSc., Department of Agriculture Extension and Education, Faculty of Agriculture Engineering and Rural Development, Ramin Agriculture and Natural Resources University, Khuzestan, Iran.

2. Assistant Professor, Department of Agriculture Extension and Education, Faculty of Agriculture Engineering and Rural Development, Ramin Agriculture and Natural Resources University, Khuzestan, Iran.

3. Associate Professor, Department of Agriculture Extension and Education, Faculty of Agriculture Engineering and Rural Development, Ramin Agriculture and Natural Resources University, Khuzestan, Iran.



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**ABSTRACT**

New policies for agricultural transition can only be effective if the policy is understood and adopted at the farm level. In countries such as Iran cultural factors embodied in identity can provide major obstacles to change because traditional and religious beliefs are important in everyday decision-making. Consequently the need to understand identity as a key factor is important in an Iranian context. self-beliefs about being a particular type of person, the roles that such a person should play and commitment to that particular identity play an important role in determining farmers' behavioral choice – particularly when 'new' behaviours challenge existing beliefs about "good farming" as in the case of regime change. Understanding these 'identities' and the roles associated with them can help us both address the issue of heterogeneity within the farming communities and identify which behaviours are culturally important and therefore may require specific consideration in policy formulation to promote transition. To address this, the aim of this study is to employ q-methodology as a means of generating a typology of farmers with specific identities. This study will be based on existing data gathered in a study of farmers in Khuzestan province, in southern Iran. Based on the review of the agricultural literature, interviews with farmers and interviews with agricultural specialists, the study constructed a concourse with 120 statements. Then, based on ranking by experts, we selected 43 q-samples from this expert ranking. Fifty farmers were selected through purposeful sampling (good farmers introduced by local agricultural officers) as a P-set, completed the Q-sort procedure. Data analysis identified a number of heterogeneous farmer groups based on their identity.

**Keywords:**

Identity, Farmers, Q methodology, Khuzestan

**Extended Abstract****1. Introduction**

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ew policies for agricultural transition can be only effective if the policy is understood and adopted at the farm level.

In countries such as Iran cultural factors embodied in identity can provide major obstacles to change because traditional and religious beliefs are important in everyday decision-making. Consequently, the need to understand identity as a key factor is important in an Iranian context. Self-beliefs about being a particular type of person, the roles that such a person should play, and commitment to

**\* Corresponding Author:**

**Masoud Yazdanpanah, PhD**

**Address:** Department of Agriculture Extension and Education, Faculty of Agriculture Engineering and Rural Development, Ramin Agriculture and Natural Resources University, Khuzestan, Iran.

**Tel:** +98 (61) 36524348

**E-mail:** masoudyazdan@gmail.com

that particular identity play important roles to determine farmers' behavioral choice; particularly when 'new' behaviors challenge the existing beliefs about "good farming" as in the case of regime change. To understand the influence of self-identity due to changing agricultural policy is a new approach proposed by Burton and Wilson based on the "identity theory" proposed by the social psychologist Sheldon Stryker (Stryker & Burke, 2000).

According to the Stryker theory, the self is a set of socially constructed roles that reflect the extent to which a person sees himself/herself as fulfilling the criteria for a particular societal role (Pelling & White, 2009). This social role arises from social experience (Mead, 1934; cited in Burton, 2004) and the people's responses to the formal and informal expectations (Stenholm & Hytti, 2014). Self-identity, therefore, is generally interpreted as a label that people use to describe themselves, as well as something that is expected to have an important influence on the behavior (Cook, Kerr, & Moore, 2002). It legitimizes the individuals' behaviors in society (Stenholm & Hytti, 2014) or adjusts the self with the rules of the game. However, identity is the theoretically broader construct, encompassing many other aspects of the self, such as self-image, and social roles (Stryker, 1980). Therefore, it is a complex concept used in different ways in diverse theoretical discourses (Vesala & Vesala, 2010) and can encompass all aspects of the self such as physical attributes, preferences, values, personal goals, habitual behavior, personality traits, and personal narratives.

Identity is established when experience is internalized and the individual accepts this particular understanding of the world as her/his own (Stryker, 1980). Stryker proposed different components of self for each of the roles occupied in life. As such people have multiple identities, the identities were fluid and context dependent (Stenholm & Hytti, 2014). Stryker argued that such multiple identities were managed through "hierarchy of salience". Stryker argued that self is influenced by the wider social structure, and in turn is an active creator of social behavior. Central to identity theory is the view that to understand action—or in more psychological terms, to understand and predict behavior—it is necessary to conceive of the self and a wider social structure as being inextricably linked.

Understanding such 'identities' and the roles associated with them can help to address the issue of heterogeneity within the farming communities and identify which behaviors are culturally important and, hence, may require specific consideration in policy formulation to promote transition.

To the authors best knowledge, no studies are conducted regarding farmers' identity. Therefore, the current study aimed at using Q-methodology to establish the perceptual frameworks of farmers for their perception about themselves and their activities in more details. In particular, it is concerned with outlining how farmers perceive themselves and their related value in their farming practice. These normative aspects are particularly relevant in the context of new policies aimed at encouraging farmers to adopt the best farming practices. This aspect is very important, as it is very hard to judge if such policies are socially acceptable and therefore capable of being implemented, until it is known what "discourses" farmers are using about themselves. Indeed, finding out how people understand an issue is essential to the whole process of "problem identification," both normatively and politically.

## 2. Methodology

To address this issue, the current study aimed at employing Q-methodology as a means of generating a typology of farmers with specific identities. The current study was based on the existing data gathered in a study of farmers in Khuzestan province, Southern Iran. Based on the review of the agricultural literature, interviews with farmers and interviews with agricultural specialists, the study constructed a concourse with 120 statements. Then, based on ranking the statements by the experts, 43 Q-samples were selected. Fifty farmers were selected through purposeful sampling (good farmers introduced by local agricultural officers) as a P-set, and completed the Q-sort procedure.

## 3. Results

Factor analysis of Q sorts revealed three major discourses among the 50 farmers: 1) who believed both production and safty2) who believed both production and traditional aspect 3) traditional farmers. Three farmers did not load on any factors and is not represented by these major viewpoints. The number of farmers (Q sorts) loading significantly on each factor, and level of variance explained by each factor, are 19%, 22% and 20% respectively. These factors represent a difference among farmers' identity.

## 4. Discussion

Current literature confirm that farmers have different identity that can influence their perception and finally their behaviour. Our result revealed that this assumption confirm between Iranian farmers too. This paper has found that this diversity can be grouped into three identities. Although these identities were analyzed for their contrasting features, they also have common character-

istics. There are similarities and also precise differences among them. As such, each identity produces an exactly different description of agriculture as whole and is linked with a distinctive set of rationalization for doing a given behaviour. Policy makers in their planning and policy in agriculture domain should consider these identities.

## 5. Conclusion

Data analysis identified a number of heterogeneous farmer groups based on their identity.