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The Effects of Marketing Strategies on Maize Sales Performance: A Case of Cereals and Other Produce Board (CPB) in Iringa Municipality

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ABSTRACT

The marketing of staple crops such as maize is often shaped by social networks, which in many contexts enhance trust, reputation, and information sharing. Yet the extent to which these networks influence sales performance in Tanzania remains unclear. This study assessed the effects of social networks on maize sales performance in Iringa Municipality, focusing on trust, reputation, cultural norms, and digital connectivity. Guided by Social Network Theory (SNT), a mixed-methods cross-sectional design was employed, integrating survey data from 70 respondents including farmers, traders, and CPB officials with qualitative insights from interviews. Results reveal that, contrary to global evidence, social networks play only a marginal role in maize marketing in the study area. Quantitative findings show strong disagreement that trust, reputation, or cultural norms significantly shape sales, while the use of social media platforms for marketing remains limited. Instead, respondents consistently emphasised the dominance of middlemen as the principal determinant of sales outcomes. Qualitative evidence highlights structural barriers such as weak farmer cooperatives, limited digital literacy, and insufficient institutional support, which restrict the effectiveness of networks. Findings suggest that without stronger cooperatives, better digital engagement, and institutional support, social networks cannot enhance maize sales performance in Iringa.

***KEYWORDS**-Maize sales, Marketing strategies, Social Networks*

1. Introduction

Marketing strategies are central to agricultural sales performance, particularly for staple crops like maize that support both household food security and farmer incomes. Among such strategies, social networks both traditional and digital are often highlighted for their potential to improve market access, reduce transaction costs, and strengthen bargaining power. Social Network Theory (SNT), developed by Barnes (1954) and later advanced by Granovetter (1973), explains how ties among individuals and groups determine the flow of information, trust, and economic opportunities. In agricultural markets, these networks influence pricing, quality assurance, and buyer–seller relationships.

In contexts such as China, South Korea, and Mexico, studies show that social networks increase cereal crop sales by between 29% and 38% due to enhanced trust and access to wider markets. Similar studies in Africa highlight their role in collective bargaining and market efficiency. However, in Tanzania, particularly within the Cereals and Other Produce Board (CPB), empirical evidence on the role of social networks in maize marketing remains scarce. This gap makes it difficult to assess whether social capital is being effectively harnessed to improve sales performance.

The purpose of this paper is therefore to assess the effects of social networks on maize sales performance in Iringa Municipality. Specifically, it examines how trust and reputation, cultural norms, and the use of digital platforms influence marketing outcomes.

The contribution of this paper is twofold. First, it provides empirical insights into the under-researched context of Tanzania's maize sector, thereby filling a gap in the agricultural marketing literature. Second, it offers practical recommendations for policymakers, farmer associations, and CPB management on how to strengthen social capital to enhance market efficiency. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 outlines the methodology, Section 3 presents the results, Section 4 discusses the findings in relation to previous work, and Section 5 concludes with key implications.

2. Methodology

The study adopted a convergent mixed-methods design, which enabled the simultaneous collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. This approach was chosen to allow triangulation of findings, thereby increasing validity and providing a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of social networks on maize sales performance.

A sample size of 70 respondents was selected, guided by Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table and comparable studies in agricultural marketing that used small but representative samples. Respondents were drawn from different strata of the maize value chain, including

farmers, traders, and CPB officials, using stratified sampling to ensure representativeness across groups. Within each stratum, purposive sampling was employed to capture individuals with direct experience in maize marketing.

Data were collected through structured questionnaires (for quantitative data) and semi-structured interviews (for qualitative insights). The questionnaires captured measurable indicators such as trust and reputation, cultural norms and social values, and use of social media/digital networks in marketing. The interviews provided in-depth narratives that explained patterns observed in the quantitative data.

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 26, applying descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) to summarise the responses. Reliability of the instruments was checked through Cronbach's alpha, while validity was ensured through expert review and a pilot test with a small group of respondents. Qualitative data were thematically coded, and inter-coder reliability was maintained by cross-checking codes across two independent reviewers. The results from both strands were compared and integrated during interpretation to identify areas of convergence and divergence, consistent with the mixed-methods design.

3. Results

Table 1: Effects of Social Networks on Sales Performance of Maize (N = 65)

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Trust and Reputation influence sales performance of cereal crop products	65	1.4000	.49371	Strongly disagreed
Social media and Digital Networks influence sales performance of cereal crop products	65	1.6154	.49029	Strongly disagreed
Cultural Norms and Social Values are considered to influence sales performance	65	1.7538	.75064	Strongly disagreed
Maize sales depend largely on middlemen	65	4.1692	.37787	Agreed

Table 1, presents the respondents' perceptions of the role of social networks in maize sales performance. The findings show that respondents strongly disagreed that trust and reputation influence maize sales (M = 1.40, SD = 0.49). Interview evidence supported this, with several farmers explaining that personal relationships had little effect on pricing or sales outcomes. As one farmer noted, *"Even if I know a buyer well, the price will not change; what matters is whether the middleman is ready to take the maize immediately."* This illustrates that reputation and trust, often emphasised in the literature, carry limited weight in Iringa's maize markets.

Similarly, the survey indicated minimal influence of social media and digital networks (M = 1.62, SD = 0.49). Qualitative accounts reinforced this picture, as traders reported that digital platforms were rarely used for agricultural transactions. A trader explained, *"Facebook is for young people in town, not for selling maize in the village,"* suggesting that face-to-face interactions remain dominant.

Cultural norms and social values were also not considered decisive, with respondents disagreeing that these factors shape maize sales (M = 1.75, SD = 0.75). Interviews confirmed this perception, with one CPB official stating, *"People do not buy maize because of tradition, they buy because they need food or profit."* This points to the transactional rather than cultural character of maize marketing in the study area.

In contrast, respondents strongly agreed that maize sales depend largely on middlemen (M = 4.17, SD = 0.38). The qualitative data highlighted both the necessity and the drawbacks of this reliance. Farmers explained that intermediaries provide the quickest and often the only outlet for bulk sales, with one respondent remarking, *"Without middlemen, the maize will stay in the store. They are the ones who connect us to Dar es Salaam and Dodoma."* While middlemen ensure immediate access to wider markets, their dominance reduces farmers' bargaining power and constrains opportunities for direct marketing, limiting profitability.

Taken together, these findings indicate that the role of social networks in Iringa Municipality is muted compared to global experiences. Trust, cultural values, and digital connectivity, which are often central to social capital in agricultural marketing, appear weak in this setting, while the dominance of intermediaries continues to define the structure and outcomes of maize sales.

4. Discussion

The results of this study show that social networks have only a limited effect on maize sales performance in Iringa Municipality. This finding differs from many global studies which highlight the positive role of networks in agricultural marketing. For example, research in Asia and Latin America has shown that trust, reputation, and digital platforms help farmers to reach wider markets and negotiate better terms. In Iringa, however, respondents strongly disagreed that such factors were influential, which suggests that social capital is not being fully translated into marketing advantages.

Several reasons explain this divergence. First, digital adoption among farmers remains low, meaning that platforms such as Facebook or WhatsApp are not widely used for maize marketing. As a result, the benefits of weak ties and wider connections, as suggested by Granovetter's Social Network Theory, are not realised. Second, the maize trade is heavily controlled by middlemen. These intermediaries dominate the value chain, which limits direct interactions between farmers and buyers and reduces the importance of trust or personal reputation. Third, institutions such as cooperatives and farmer associations are still underdeveloped in Iringa. Without strong organisational structures, farmers cannot easily pool resources, share information, or build collective bargaining power.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings suggest that while Social Network Theory emphasises the value of strong and weak ties, structural constraints in the Iringa maize market weaken this potential. Trust and reputation matter little when transactions are mediated by brokers, and digital platforms remain inaccessible to many smallholders.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that social networks currently play a limited role in shaping maize sales performance in Iringa Municipality. Although Social Network Theory highlights the potential of trust, reputation, and weak ties to improve market outcomes, the findings revealed that these elements had minimal influence in this context. Farmers and traders strongly disagreed that trust, cultural norms, or digital platforms significantly affected maize transactions, while expressing strong agreement that maize sales continue to depend heavily on intermediaries. This reliance on middlemen demonstrates how structural barriers in the value chain overshadow the potential benefits of social capital.

This research contributes to existing knowledge by showing that, unlike international cases where networks improve bargaining power and expand markets, the Tanzanian maize sector remains constrained by underdeveloped cooperatives, weak institutional support, and limited digital adoption. The findings therefore emphasise the importance of context in applying Social Network Theory to agricultural marketing, as structural dominance and institutional gaps can mute the benefits of networks.

In light of these findings, the study recommends a shift towards strengthening cooperative associations and farmer organisations as mechanisms for collective action and fairer market access. Expanding digital literacy among farmers is equally critical to enable them to utilise mobile money systems and online platforms for marketing. Policymakers and the Cereals and Other Produce Board should also play a more proactive role in integrating digital platforms into the maize value chain, thereby reducing reliance on intermediaries and opening pathways for direct farmer–buyer interactions. Finally, future research should investigate the effectiveness of digital trading systems and cooperative governance in transforming maize marketing practices in Tanzania.

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