
THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS ON SMALLHOLDER FARMING

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship is not only found in all fields including the field of smallholder farming but it is also instrumental in stimulation of economic growth through employment generation and poverty reduction in a country. Globally smallholder farming supports one third of humanity. In view of the importance of smallholder farming entrepreneurship, it is importance to establish the factors that influence it. The aim of this study was therefore to determine the influence of social networks on smallholder farming entrepreneurship. Data for the study was derived from secondary sources which included; books, previous researches and analyses by scholars as well as journal articles that are related to the subject. The study established that majority of smallholder farmers in the developing countries are in the pre- entrepreneurial stage and although they may be entrepreneurial in spirit, they have limited opportunities to farm as entrepreneurs and that networking is among the crucial factor that influence smallholder farming entrepreneurship. In conclusion, the study recommended for promotion and nurturing of entrepreneurial network skills among smallholder farmers by all relevant institutions in the countries including governments as a measure of enhancing entrepreneurship in agriculture sector. Further, governments should create the necessary legislative and regulatory frameworks that promote social networks platforms among smallholder farming entrepreneurs such as digital platforms among other platforms

Key Words: Employment generation, Economic growth, Entrepreneurship, Poverty reduction smallholder farming entrepreneurship, social networks

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1.0. Introduction

With the ever increasing population, the world has to contend with a number of economic challenges key among them being unemployment. Almost 202 million people around the world were unemployed in 2013, an increase of almost 5 million compared with the year before. This shows that employment is not expanding sufficiently fast to keep up with the growing labour force and if appropriate employment creation measures are not put in place, there will be 215 million job seekers by 2018 (Ekkehard, Christian, & Steven, 2014). Entrepreneurship has been found to be a catalyst for economic growth and development through job creation, income generation and poverty reduction (Audretsch & Keilbach, 2011). Audretsch and Keilbach (2011), argue that entrepreneurship is the process by which new enterprises are founded and become viable.

In this approach, the most common way of measuring entrepreneurship is to look at new firm formation, that is, entry flows minus exit flows. Indeed, according to the OECD (2009), industrial dynamics (i.e. the entry and exit of firms) would account for about 30-40% of total productivity growth in the OECD countries. This is further supported by IMF (2011), which identified a direct relationship between a country's rate of entrepreneurial activity and its level of economic development. This relationship between a country's rate of entrepreneurial activity and its level of economic development supports the idea that entrepreneurship represents one of the driving forces of economic growth, employment generation and unemployment reduction both in developed and developing countries (Foster, Haltiwanger & Syverson, 2008; Fritsch, 2011).

However, to extend the culture of entrepreneurial thinking and promote entrepreneurship in an economy, it is imperative for the countries of the world to more than ever before focus on promotion of creativity and innovation (or entrepreneurship) in all sectors of their economies (Haugh, 2007). Creativity and innovation propel entrepreneurship in any sector of the economy (Okpara, 2006). According to Chakravorti (2006), entrepreneurship is the continuing generation of innovation in response to perceived opportunities in the business environment and innovation is thus a tool of entrepreneurship. Since innovation is the process that transforms new ideas into new value, both innovation and entrepreneurship demand creativity (Friday, 2007). An entrepreneurial economy, whether at the national, regional or community level, differs significantly from a non-entrepreneurial economy in many respects, not only by its economic structure and its economic vigorousness, but also by the social vitality and quality of life which it offers with a consequent attractiveness to the people (Bruton, Ahlstrom, & Obloj, 2008). For realization of an entrepreneurial economy Pathak (2008), observes that policy measures and intervention programmes consistent with the objective of creation of high-income job generating opportunities through entrepreneurship are critical.

For many years, the role of entrepreneurship and innovation has been given little emphasis in agriculture. However, in the last few years, governments have recognized the need for a more entrepreneurial culture in farming as a critical aspect of job creation and income generation in the rural areas (Davidsson, 2008). According to the World Bank (2005), about two thirds of the world population poor are mainly concentrated in rural areas, which are predominantly agriculture-oriented areas. Therefore, in order to eradicate poverty and raise the welfare standards of the population; more focus should be put on entrepreneurship in agriculture and particularly in smallholder farming. This is supported by the fact that there are about 500 million smallholder farms in the developing countries supporting almost 2 billion people – one third of humanity- with about 36 million of them being in the continent of Africa (Christina, 2013; Jaeger, 2010; Nagayets, 2005)

In the UK for example business Farming is an important part of the small to medium-sized enterprise (SME) sector, and is currently part of the discussions on small business development and entrepreneurship (McMillan, & Rodrik, 2011) In response to the changing business environment, there is increasing diversity with regard to farms' strategic orientation- where in addition to focusing on conventional primary production, many farms add value to agricultural products by means of processing, direct sales niche products or have diversified their activities in the farm into non-agriculture businesses. These changes bring with them new opportunities for farm business. Entrepreneurship is therefore needed to exploit these opportunities (Bruton, Ahlstrom, & Obloj, 2008). This will in turn create employment in the rural areas and thus contribute towards rural-urban balancing and help to bring about equity in distribution of incomes (Carter, Alsos, Ljunggren, & Welter, 2011).

Effective creation of jobs and poverty reduction in developing countries, where about 80% of rural households are engaged in agriculture, will involve the development of in-country processing and value-adding of agricultural produce and hence the diversification of the rural economy. Experience to date indicates that, by enabling market opportunities for these local resources, significant livelihood options for otherwise marginalised farmers and producers can be facilitated (Binswanger, McCalla, & Patel, 2010). However low entrepreneurship activities still continue to be witnessed in the developing countries as demonstrated by their low creativity index compared to those of the developed countries. For example in 2014 Kenya registered a creativity index of 0.417; Colombia 0.140; Cameron 0.408; Senegal 0.355; Uganda 0.197; Morocco 0.178 and Tanzania 0.125 compared to U.S 0.95; Singapore 0.896 and U.K 0.881. This state of affairs in the developing countries is posing a number of economic challenges among them being increasing poverty and unemployment (Richard, Charlotta, Kevin, Kimberly, Zara, & Michelle, 2014).

2.0 Objectives of the study

The objective of the study was to examine the influence of social network on Smallholder farming entrepreneurship.

3.0. Theoretical Review

In this paper, Thomas Cochran's social theory and McClelland's achievement motivation theory are exhaustively discussed to bring the issue of social networks and smallholder entrepreneurship into perspective.

3.1. Thomas Cochran's Social Theory

This theory Start with the premise that fundamental problems of economic development are none economic and emphasizes cultural values, role expectations, and social sanctions as the key elements that determines the supply of entrepreneurs in the society. In this theory Cochran(1960) observes that an entrepreneur is neither a super-normal individual nor a deviant person but represents a society's model personality and that an individual in a society plays a social role partly shaped by the model of personality that comes from the social conditioning of his generation. Cochran (1960) further argues that, the individual's mode of personality is largely molded by the type of child-rearing and schooling practices common in a given culture. These assertions assume that entrepreneurial practice is largely inherited and offspring's of entrepreneurial parents are more likely to be entrepreneurs and be more successful compared to others (Kwabena, 2011). Individuals who grow up in a community that is entrepreneurial are likely to benefit from the entrepreneurial skills, accumulated experiences, existing social

networks, better access to advice, credit, established markets and sources of inputs that will make it easier for him or her to start a business and suggests that a strong grounding in business and ownership ethic at an early age is a useful and powerful driving force for children as they choose their future careers (Freytag & Thurik, 2010). Although in any society a few unusual individuals that will always depart from the norm exist, this theory assumes that general invention and innovation will tend to be along lines congenial to the type of social conditioning (Sriram, Mersha & Herron, 2007).

Cochran (1960) social theory further advances the view that societies have clear social expectations through which groups and entrepreneurial role are closely defined. This framework of an entrepreneurial role is defined by the personality of the individual, the role expectations of the social groups/society with power to sanction deviations from expected behavior and the operational needs of the function to be performed. Thus the individual's performance as an entrepreneur will be influenced by his own attitude toward his venture, the role expectations held by sanctioning groups and the operational requirements of his undertaking. The former two elements are determined largely by the society's values, while the last element will be influenced by changes over time in such exogenous variables as population, technology, consumer demand or merely cumulative institutional drift. The Cochran (1960) social theory can be used to guide in determining how social networks can influence smallholder entrepreneurship.

3.2. McClelland's Achievement Motivation Theory

In this theory McClelland (1971) holds the view that regardless of one's gender, culture, or age people have three motives for accomplishing things identified as: a need for achievement, a need for affiliation, and a need for power and that people will have different characteristics depending on their dominant motivator. According to McClelland, these motivators are learned (which is why this theory is sometimes called the learned needs theory). The McClelland (1971) theory of achievement motivation emphasizes the relationship of achievement motivation or need for achievement (symbolically written as n_{Ach}) to entrepreneurship and puts forward the claim that a relatively greater amount of entrepreneurship is found in a society with a relatively high need for achievement. In this achievement motivation theory individuals with the need to achieve attitude develop personality stable enduring qualities or potentials such as self-confidence, enthusiasm, inner control, aspiration to independence, self-efficiency, creativity/innovative character, target orientation, inclination towards risk-taking and tolerance to uncertainties among others that can naturally make an individual an entrepreneur (Coon, 2005; Thompson, 2009).

Borrowing from this theory smallholder farming entrepreneurs have a higher internal locus of control than other smallholder farming population and that risk taking and innovativeness, need for achievement, and tolerance for ambiguity has positive and significant influence on their entrepreneurial inclination (Mohar, Singh, & Kishore, 2007). The theory further contents that economic actions of the smallholder farmers are primarily determined by their personality.

4.0. Methodology

This study is descriptive in nature and the data was derived from secondary sources which included; books, previous researches and analyses by scholars as well as journal articles that are related to the subject. The study involved extensive literature review which critically analyzed the subject of entrepreneurship/smallholder farming entrepreneurship and how it is influenced by social network.

5.0. Smallholder Farming Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is a dynamic force in the development of small business in general and its relevance in smallholder farming is associated with recognition and exploitation of new farm business opportunities. Smallholder farming entrepreneurship means a change of quality of management in the process of farming. It involves diversifying away from the production of crops and livestock as raw commodities to transformation further up the supply chain (Sharma, Tiwari, & Sharma, 2010). Smallholder farming entrepreneurship include production of specialty food products for niche markets; the provision of services to other farmers and the use of agricultural assets such as the farm house and the farm animals to attract paying visitors (De Wolf & Schoorlemmer, 2007).

Entrepreneurs as innovators are always looking for better and more efficient and profitable ways to do things. Smallholder farmer-entrepreneur needs to be innovative to survive strong competition from large and developed farms and the rapidly changing environment (De Wolf, & Schoorlemmer, 2007). For Ahmad and Hoffman (2008), smallholder farmers should generate value, through creation, expansion or innovation of economic activity by identification and exploitation of new agricultural products, agro-processes or markets. Gou, Jolly, and Zhu (2007) concur with this observation by pointing out that smallholder farmer needs innovative market practices such as contract farming arrangements with large farms, marketing/processing agents or marketing cooperatives for a successful market-oriented farming.

Smallholder farming entrepreneurship is critical in the face of the developing trend of free market economy that is intensifying business competition for the agricultural commodities in the local, regional and the global market arena as it equates to all the activities, which help the farmers to adjust to the emerging competition in the business environment (Carter, Alsos, Ljunggren, & Welter, 2011; Kari & Jarkko, 2008). It helps smallholder farmers to develop competitive enhancing entrepreneurial traits such as adaptability, flexibility, speed, aggressiveness and innovativeness. Small-scale farmers in the developed economies show a remarkable ability to adapt. They look for better ways to organize their farms. They try new crop cultivars, better animals, and alternative technologies to increase productivity, diversify production to reduce risk and to increase profits. They have become more market oriented and have learned to take calculated risks to open or create new markets for their product (Grilo, & Thurik, 2008). Rudmann (2008) acknowledges that the entrepreneurial environment smallholder farmer-entrepreneurs operate in is a complex and dynamic one where the farmers are part of a larger collection of stakeholders that include other farmers, input suppliers, traders, transporters, processors, financial service providers and business service providers among others. Each one of these stakeholders need to be a entrepreneurs as they all have a role in production and moving the farm products through to the market. They also need to respect each other and work together to make the whole production system profitable.

It is worth to note that, farmers and indeed large scale farmers are traditionally entrepreneurial and their farms can be characterized as businesses (Grande & Madsen, 2011). To support this observation, Etriya, Victor, Emiel, and Onno (2012) assert that smallholder Farmer-entrepreneurs should also see their farms as a business and therefore as a means of earning profits. They also need to be passionate about their farm business and be willing to take calculated risks to make their farms profitable and to grow their farm businesses. However, majority of smallholder farmers in the developing countries are in the pre- entrepreneurial stage and although they may be entrepreneurial in spirit, they have limited opportunities to farm as entrepreneurs. They therefore need to be facilitated to change their resource mix and overcome access and risk issues so as to expand their entrepreneurial activities (Carter, Alsos, Ljunggren & Welter, 2011).

Access to finance, land, labour, information and knowledge among others factors are important in expansion of smallholder farming entrepreneurial activities (Kumar, 2008). For David (2012), successful Smallholder farmer-entrepreneurs are technically competent, innovative and plan ahead so they can steer their farm businesses through the stages of enterprise development – from establishment and survival to rapid growth and maturity. David (2012) further observes that there are many challenges that these farmers face that include social barriers, economic barriers, regulations, access to finance and information, and their own managerial capacity to cope with risks associated with seizing entrepreneurial opportunities. Specific studies to determine which of these factors limit entrepreneurship in smallholder farming in specific areas are necessary. The majority of studies on entrepreneurship and innovation focus on large farms. Not many studies are conducted on smallholder farmers' entrepreneurial orientation (Etriya, Victor, Emiel, & Onno, 2012).

Smallholder farming entrepreneurs can be categorized into economical entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurs. The economical entrepreneurs aim to try to keep monetary farming costs as low as possible while social entrepreneurs have more interest in nature and landscape conservation. Organic farming and minimum tillage are some examples of entrepreneurial practices by the smallholder farming social entrepreneurs (Kari & Jarkko, 2008). In Cuba farming entrepreneurs innovatively specialize in micro-units of intensive livestock raising and horticultural production, sometimes without the need of cultivated land (as in rooftop, hydroponic and container production). Perishable and "special niche" products dominate in this entrepreneurship practice, especially green vegetables, dairy products, poultry, pigs, mushrooms, ornamental plants, herbs and fish (Henk, 2007). The smallholder farmers in Cuba also undertake entrepreneurship through intensification of urban and peri-urban horticultural systems, which can be described as maximizing output from minimal space as well as application of bio-intensive gardening and permaculture practices (David, 2012). In Java, Indonesia, a study by Etriya, Victor, Emiel, and Onno (2012) that involved 282 smallholder vegetable farmers, indicated that, education, farm size, and network heterogeneity have a positive influence to entrepreneurial orientation, and somewhat influence innovation capacity of smallholder farmers.

In Nigeria, agribusiness enterprises span the entire agricultural production, processing, distribution and consumption spectrum from farm input supplies, food packers, food transporters, and food marketing companies and entrepreneurship has been recognized as one of the driving forces for market competitiveness (Mandam, 2010; Onyido, 2006). A study by Nwibo, and Okorie (2013) on the determinants of entrepreneurship among agribusiness investors in South-East, Nigeria which involved 360 agribusiness entrepreneurs selected through a purposive and multistage sampling techniques identified unemployment, profit motive, quest for financial independence, population of the investment area, experience in self-employment, and proximity to market as the major determinants of entrepreneurship in South-East, Nigeria. The study also observed that age, educational status, experience, annual income, household entrepreneurial history, and marital status were the identified entrepreneurs' socioeconomic characteristics that have significant effect on the decision to be an entrepreneur.

5.1. Social Network and smallholder entrepreneurship

Smallholder farming entrepreneurs are part of the larger collection of individuals such as suppliers of farm inputs, transporters, marketers, processors and financial service providers among others whose network is critical for entrepreneurship development. Entrepreneur's network therefore, is the sum total of his or her relationships that involves all the connections with the other people. It is the process of enlarging the entrepreneur's circle of trust through a

negotiated process (Mathieu & Taylor, 2006; Gartner & Bellamy, 2009). Network is a patterned relationship between actors such as individuals, groups or organizations (Tornikoski & Newbert, 2007). Through networks entrepreneurs make use of resources that are external to the venture thus achieving the objective of gaining a competitive advantage by extending resource availability beyond the assets under their direct control (Kuratko & Welsh, 2006). It is rightfully argued that, successful entrepreneurial environments are characterized by thriving supportive networks that provide the institutional fabric; linking individual entrepreneurs to organized sources of learning and resources (Klyver & Hindle, 2006). Hence, individual social networking and inter-organizational strategic network activities are important for a successful start-up and for an ongoing competitive advantage, as they facilitate resource acquisition and the identification of opportunities (Beckert, 2010).

The individual social networking construct represents entrepreneurs engaging in networking activities to enhance his/her entrepreneurial venture (McAdam & McAdam, 2006). These entrepreneurial networking activities may occur with other entrepreneurs' contacts like other entrepreneurs, business development services, financial service providers, marketing agents and input suppliers among others (Beckert, 2010). The aim of those networking activities is to provide assistance to entrepreneurs in the form of expert opinions, counseling, shared experiences, role models, information resources and motivation (Schallenkamp & Smith, 2008). Inter-organizational networking consists of formal and/or informal collaborative networking activities among entrepreneurial advocates at the public, private, and civic levels that may facilitate the entrepreneurial process from an idea generating stage, to a development stage, and later to a strategic positioning one (Chen, Zou, & Wang, 2009).

The principle strength of the entrepreneurial network is its bridging function that involves; first, creation of new patterns of economic activity, assisting innovation, bridging supply and demand and helping integrate fields of activity that have previously been separated. Second, networks assist the entrepreneur in his/her efforts to scan the environment for opportunities that may be exploited in the future. Third, networks provide a type of governance for entrepreneurial behavior. Fourth, interaction within the network assists the entrepreneur in building his/her own fund of social capital within the market place specifically, they posit that networks provide a bridge between the social and economic dimensions of human conduct (Moraima, Jose, & Kalle, 2013). It is in record that, the larger the network, the better the access to outside resources—implying ultimate success of the firm might hinge on the size of the informal network (De Carolis, Donna, & Separatio, 2006). A significant resource sought by entrepreneurs from other members of the network in the start-up phase of business development, is capital (Zafir & Fazilah, 2011)

As entrepreneurship is embedded in networks, opening entrepreneurs to social networks may advance or constrain links to better resources and information, as well as offer faster responses to opportunities and challenges (Klyver & Hindle, 2006). The ability to utilize entrepreneurial network has been identified as one among the key skills needed by a person wishing to succeed in entrepreneurial activities (Corbett, 2005). Meanwhile, Kamisan and Kamal (2009) study on the influence of personal and socio-economic factors that motivate women in entrepreneurship in Malaysia found that social networking benefits entrepreneurship. These results are consistent with previous studies on entrepreneurship by Zafir and Fazilah (2011), which placed social networking among the crucial factors in influencing entrepreneurship.

6.0. Conclusions and Recommendations

From the study majority of smallholder farmers in the developing countries are in the pre-entrepreneurial stage and although they may be entrepreneurial in spirit, they have limited opportunities to farm as entrepreneurs. The study further showed social networking as one among the crucial factor that influence smallholder farming entrepreneurship and that successful entrepreneurial environments are characterized by thriving supportive networks that provide the institutional fabric; linking individual entrepreneurs to organized sources of learning and resources that are external to the venture. These social networks are important for a successful start-up and for an ongoing competitive advantage as they facilitate resource acquisition and the identification of opportunities. The larger the network, the better the access to outside resources—implying ultimate success of the firm might hinge on the size of the informal network.

In recommendation there is need for various institutions including governments to promote and nurture entrepreneurial network skills among smallholder farmers as a measure in enhancing entrepreneurship in agriculture sector. Governments create the necessary legislative and regulatory frameworks that promotes social networks platforms among smallholder farming entrepreneurs such as digital platforms among other platforms

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