

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND COOPERATIVE MEMBERS' BEHAVIOUR IN SELECTED HIGHER INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

This study seeks to investigate the various aspects of social capital in selected higher institutions in Nigeria as well as examine the effects of social capital on cooperative members' behaviors. Conceptual definitions as well as empirical reviews were done across several scholarly lines. The study is hinged on the Collective Action Theory. Using a survey design, the research focused on 379 cooperative members from tertiary institutions in South East Nigeria, with data collected from State Directorates of Cooperatives in 2019. A structured questionnaire was used to gather primary data, which was validated for content and construct. Reliability was tested with a pilot sample, yielding a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.74 and a standardized alpha of 0.82. The findings show that relational social capital, characterized by trust and reciprocity among members, significantly influences cooperative behavior. However, the external dimension (linkages beyond the cooperative) and the cognitive dimension (shared understanding of the cooperative's mission) showed no significant effects. These results highlight the importance of relational connections in fostering member participation, while the other dimensions need strategic enhancement. The study recommends increased cooperative education to boost awareness and social capital potential among members.

Keywords: Social Capital, Cooperative Members, Higher Institutions, Nigeria

Introduction

Social capital concern situations where networks, norms, and trust exist to facilitate collective action among group members end up impacting the way cooperative members behave. Wesley and Erlaine (2016) citing (Fukuyama, 2000), defines social capital as being an informal norm that promotes cooperation between two or more individuals, possibly those norms varying from reciprocity between two friends. Indeed, cooperatives play a vital role in the higher institutions in Nigeria by fostering financial inclusion, economic empowerment, and social welfare for their members. However, the differences in participation, commitment, and adherence to cooperative norms remain disparities. While the importance of social capital to improve cooperative performance has increased, there is very little knowledge on how

various aspects of social capital-trust, networks, and reciprocity-affect member behavior within higher education institutions in Nigeria (Putnam, 2000; Fukuyama, 1995).

Low participation and commitment in cooperatives can usually be traced back to weakened trust and ruptured social networks; this becomes a hindrance to group cohesiveness and leads to less than optimum outcomes. For example, disparities in socio-economic and cultural background among members cause constraints on the promotion of social capital. Low levels of trust coupled with poor channels of communication have been shown in various studies to significantly dip member contributions towards common objectives (Onyeagocha et al., 2012; Ibekwe et al., 2020). In a locus like higher institutions characterized by highly diverse socio-economic realities, these factors form loch roadblocks to prolonged survival and functionality of cooperatives.

With the increasing dependence on cooperatives to address the socio-economic challenges facing Nigerian institutions of higher learning, it is imperative to define how social capital affects the behavior of members. The scope of the study was limited to higher institutions in south east, Nigeria. This study will fill the gap by investigating the relationship between social capital and the behaviors of cooperative members in selected higher institutions in Nigeria with a focus on trust, networks, and reciprocity as key dimensions. Hence, we seek to analyze social capital and cooperative members' behaviour in higher institutions in Nigeria. Specific objectives include to;

1. Evaluate various aspects of social capital and
2. Examine the effects of social capital on cooperative members' behaviors in selected higher institutions in South East Nigeria.

Research questions

1. What are the various aspects of social capital dimensions in existence in selected higher institutions in South East Nigeria?
2. What are the effects of social capital on cooperative members' behaviors in selected higher institutions in South East Nigeria?

Conceptual Review

Social Capital

Social capital has been defined by various scholars from diver perspectives. Putnam (2000, p.67) defines "Social capital refers to the features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions." Another perspective to social capital was submitted as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources linked to the possession of a durable network of institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248) and "Social capital embodies the trust and mutual understanding that facilitates cooperation within or among groups for mutual benefit" (Coleman, 1988, p. 96). Similarly, (World Bank, 1999) sees social capital as a relationship, defining it as "encompassing the institutions, relationships, attitudes, and values that govern interactions among people and contribute to economic and social development". Another scholar submits that social capital is about goodwill. Adler & Kwon, (2002, p. 18) defined social capital as the goodwill available to individuals or groups, which includes networks, norms, and relationships that can be mobilized to achieve individual or collective goals".

Dimensions of Social Capital

External Dimension of Social Capital

This refers to the social ties of the cooperative management committee with other organizations and people; which are roughly taken as the external dimension of social capital. That is social ties with stakeholders like; input suppliers, managers of other cooperatives, wholesalers or clients or land vendors or Creditors, officials from the government, and managers of cooperative unions or associations.

Relational Dimension of Social Capital

The mutual trust between cooperative managers (management committee) and members and the trust among members represent the relational dimension of social capital.

Cognitive Dimension

The cognitive dimension refers to a shared vision that facilitates the understanding of collective orientation and missions and ways of acting in an organization.

Cooperative Member Behaviour

Cooperative societies are autonomous associations of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise" (International Cooperative Alliance, 1995). Other scholarly definitions include; "A cooperative society is an organization formed by individuals who pool their resources together to achieve common goals that they cannot achieve individually" (Birchall, 2003, p. 5). Also, another defined it as, "a user-owned and user-controlled organizations that distribute benefits equitably based on the participation of members" (Levi & Davis, 2008, p. 10). Zeuli & Cropp, (2004) defined "Cooperatives as people-centered enterprises characterized by shared values of self-help, equity, and solidarity, serving as vehicles for economic empowerment and social cohesion" (Zeuli & Cropp, 2004).

From the forementioned definitions, cooperatives as a business organisation are member-welfare—centered, therefore member behaviour is critical for the progress of the society at large.

The behavior of members in a group reflects their level of commitment, participation, and adherence to the group's goals and rules. Behavior of members of cooperatives encompasses the activities and interactions of individuals that align with or deviate from established cooperative group norms, values, and expectations (Hackman, 1992; Meyer & Allen, 1997). Cooperative member behavior reflects the extent of trust, reciprocity, and social networks among members in promoting the cooperative's objectives, member behavior in cooperatives is influenced by social capital, as trust and shared values motivate individuals to contribute to the cooperative's sustainability (Fukuyama, 1995; Onyeagocha et al., 2012).

Members' behaviour towards their cooperative societies can be categorized into; behaviour as concerning financial transactions and behaviour as concerning management. FINANCIAL TRANSACTIONS refers to financing share contribution of members and financing any other

transactions. MANAGEMENT - this refers to members' behaviour towards involvement in decision making of their cooperative.

Empirical Studies

Qiao, Zuhui, Haiyang and Xinxin (2015), analyzed social capital, member participation, and cooperative Performance with evidence from China's Zhejiang. This study seeks to develop a framework for defining and clarifying various aspects of social capital and examines the effects of social capital on members' participation in collective activities and on the economic performance of farmer cooperatives. Social capital is indicated in terms of three dimensions, i.e., the external, relational, and cognitive dimensions. A statistical model is applied to a database consisting of 147 farmer cooperatives in China's Zhejiang province. The results demonstrate a positive relationship between certain dimensions of social capital and members' participation in training and general meetings. In addition, each dimension of social capital has a significant and positive impact on the economic performance of cooperatives.

Agahi, and Karami (2012) studied "A study of Factors Effecting Social Capital Management and its Impact on Success of Production Cooperatives". The purpose of this research, which conducted by descriptive-correlation methodology with members of production cooperatives of out of season products at Kermanshah province of Iran, is to study the role of social capital management on success and development of production cooperatives. The statistical samples consisted of 220 persons; who have been selected on random sampling basis, and studied by questionnaire. The validity of questionnaire conducted by panel of experts and its reliability calculated by Cronbach's alpha coefficient and resulted 0.83. Data were analyzed by SPSS software. The results showed that the rate of the following factors effect success of production cooperatives: individual motivation 97%, members active participation 96.4%, cooperation spirit among members 93.6%, goodwill among cooperative members 92.4%, willingness for upgrading occupational know-how 91%, attention for upgrading quality of products 90.2%, relation with other cooperative societies 89.6%, using experiences of other cooperative societies 88.4%, disposal of own experiences to other cooperative societies 87.8%, awareness about global markets 87%, attention for development new products 86.8%,

concern for community and interaction with society 86.2%, mutual trust among cooperative members 85%, common image of future among members 84.4%. Therefore, it is recommended that enhancement of effective factors of social capital management should be taken in to account for the purpose of increase in success and development of cooperatives more than ever.

According to Tuna and Karantininis (2017), while investigating cooperatives as agents of social capital: An evidence from a post-socialist country. Agricultural cooperatives in post-socialistic countries often fail to justify their purpose. Lack of trust and social capital are plausible reasons. The aim of this paper is to map the relationship structure of farmers in region where operational cooperative exists. The Social network analysis demonstrates low levels of social capital however, the cooperative acts as valuable information provider for its members, serving as information mediator to the rural development program's resources, required for farmers' investment initiatives. This is positive evidence for small-scale farmers and a step forward in motivating changes of farmer's attitudes towards cooperation and re-establishment of agricultural cooperatives.

Wesley & Erlaine (2016) worked on cooperatives and social capital: The Copasul case, Mato Grosso do Sul state. According to them the term Social Capital has been used with some frequency to explain the social and economic development of communities and the cooperation between people. Thus this study aims to identify the existence of social interactions based on trust that give rise to Social Capital at an agricultural cooperative. It is a descriptive, exploratory, qualitative research complemented with quantitative data. The case study was conducted at the 'Cooperativa Agrícola SulMatogrossense' - Copasul, located in the municipality of Naviraí, Mato Grosso do Sul state. Interviews with 12 managers and 10 cooperative members, as well as document analysis were carried out. The survey data show that the Social Capital can be acquired through social interactions within and outside of the cooperative and the Communities of Practice can be very important sources of the origin of this capital. Relationships of trust, cooperation and informal norms are the basis for the accumulation of Social Capital in the cooperative organization. The actions of the cooperative based on upright principles such as honesty, transparency and reliability, as well as the fidelity of the cooperative producers, make the cooperative hold the postures of a cooperative group. Through the present study, we concluded that cooperativism, when well

conducted and based on cooperative principles, constitutes a model for creating a large volume of Social Capital which can determine the success of the cooperative.

Linden and Hanson (1995), studied Social Capital and Economic Cooperation. They posit that socioeconomic movement is an effort to better explain human behavior by combining insights of economists and sociologists. This paper contributes to the socioeconomic literature by including the influence of relationships, values, and social bonds in the neoclassical economic model by introducing social capital coefficients. The usefulness of the resulting social capital model is demonstrated theoretically in a two-firm cooperative model and tested empirically using data from a survey of students who allocate their time between individual and joint projects. The results of the study shows an increasing amount of evidence suggests that relationships matter. This paper has also shown how important new policy insights may be deduced from the social capital model. One important conclusion is that the success of a society's economic plan may be limited by its social capital. Since relationship is important, the study recommends building and maintaining social capital. Clearly, economists have much to learn about what determines social capital and suggests the need to study its influence in economics in cooperation with sociologists or other social scientists.

Also, Kaloga (2017) studied the role of social capital in cooperative groups focusing on mixed-methods study of women's collective savings groups in Conakry, Guinea. The study posits that as private investment funds begin to dominate microfinance funding streams, there is debate about the benefits of microcredit for the population most targeted with these funds: women in the Global South. One aspect of this debate concerns the need for social capital, resources embedded in social networks, for the success of microcredit lending. While its necessity is acknowledged, the way that social capital is created, structured, and employed in women's groups is not adequately understood. By better understanding these aspects of social capital, microcredit programs can be better designed, and the ethical implications of expanding microfinance services can be better understood. Employing a mixed methodology of qualitative interviewing and social network analysis, this study explores the phenomenon of social capital across a diverse sample of 12 women's collective financial groups, including both informal savings clubs and micro-credit groups located in the West African urban capital of Conakry, Guinea. A multi-dimensional model of social capital developed by the World Bank was modified for use with this research population and included six domains:

Access to Resources, Trust, Communication, Cooperation, Social Cohesion, and Empowerment. In depth qualitative interviews with 84 members of collective finance groups were analyzed. Qualitative analysis yielded a typology of collaborative financial groups as well as a set of principles in groups that supported solidarity. Djamakourou, a Guinean concept related to the promotion of social relationships, emerged as foundational to participants' ability to create and sustain the groups. Results of social network analyses show that social capital in Guinean women's groups is built from the inside out, relying on strong relationships between a core set of group members. These results provide a contextualized perspective of individual members, illustrating the heterogeneity of experiences within the groups.

In the same vain, Vladislav (2004) studied the topic "Towards a Social Capital Theory of Cooperative Organisation". The researcher aimed to continue the tradition of comparative analysis of co-operative and capitalistic organisation by focusing on social capital as the distinctive foundation of the former. The major argument of this paper is that the co-operative represents the social capital-based organisation in the sense that it is based on social capital in the same way as market and hierarchical governance is respectively based on prices and authority relations as the major organisational principles. Social capital is the major resource of organisations governed on the basis of co-operative principles.

Bhandari, and Yasunobu (2009). Sort to find out "What is Social Capital?" employing a comprehensive review of the concept by first asserting that social capital as an old concept entered into academic and policy debates only in 1990s. Its importance in explaining economic and social phenomena have been increasingly felt in recent years. Literature on theoretical and empirical aspects of social capital grew significantly during last decade. The whole notion of social capital is centred on social relationships and its major elements include social networks, civic engagement, norms of reciprocity, and generalised trust. Broadly speaking, it is defined as a collective asset in the form of shared norms, values, beliefs, trust, networks, social relations, and institutions that facilitate cooperation and collective action for mutual benefits. It is a complex multidimensional concept having different dimensions, types, and levels of measurement. Common types of social capital include: structure and cognitive; bonding, bridging, and linking; strong and weak; and horizontal and vertical. It can be measured and analysed at individual- and collective-levels in terms of social perspective and

micro-, meso- and macro-levels in terms of geographic perspective. The properties of social capital, such as capacity to appear in as an explanatory variable in the production function, accumulation over time, capability of improving economic performance, investment with expected future returns, convertibility, and the need of maintenance, make it qualify as a form of capital, though there are some criticisms about the use of term 'capital' in social capital. Research on social capital remains in its initial stage and the concept is still elusive, prone to contextual definition, deficient in common measurement indicators, inability to explicitly quantify effects, and subject to various criticisms. Conceptual and measurement imprecision has led the concept prone to vague interpretation, less empirical application, and underestimation of its value. More empirical studies and testing of the concept on the ground is needed to develop a commonly accepted definition and measurement indicators that can explicitly disentangle and quantify its effects on overall development processes. Better conceptualisation and operationalisation of social capital theory is helpful to attract more investment on its development, design appropriate social policies, and promote sustainable development.

Theoretical Framework

Collective Action Theory

The collective action theory was first published by Mancur Olson in 1965. He argues that any group of individuals attempting to provide a public good has troubles in doing so efficiently. On the one hand, individuals have incentives to "free-ride" on the efforts of others in certain groups and on the other hand, the size of a group is of high importance and difficult to optimally determine. Olson's theory of collective action posits that a single individual barely has influence on an organization's situation, but every individual is able to rejoice in every improvement, regardless of whether he/she has contributed to it, a "conflict between collectively and individually best action" is existing. Collective action can be seen as forms of organized activities carried out by a group of people in order to solve their common needs to bring about a positive change. It is often times a change, action or change effort aimed at addressing some form of inequality examples of which include cooperatives in which social capital is a sustaining element.

Methodology

Research Design

The researcher adopted a descriptive survey research method. The study was carried out across selected higher institutions in South East, as the scope of the study was limited to higher institutions in south east, Nigeria. The study was carried out in selected higher institution in South East, Nigeria. Selections were purposive because it has a high number of active cooperative societies. The data was generated from the various State Directorate of Cooperatives in 2019, with which the sample size of three hundred and seventy-nine (379) cooperative members in tertiary institutions in South East States. This was statistically generated using Taro Yamane formula. The study sourced data from a primary source through a structured questionnaire. The instrument was content and construct validated. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained through a pilot sample. The questionnaire was separately administered on a sample of 20 cooperative members. The scores were analyzed using Cronbach Alpha reliability analysis scale. A coefficient of 0.74 was obtained with a standardized alpha of 0.82.

Data and Results

Descriptive Results of Data

This section presents the descriptive results of the data and the statistical results. All the variables, as well as the mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum values of each variable, are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Description	Mean	S.D.	Min	Max
Member Behaviour	Members participating in trainings	0.831	0.201	0	1
	(%)	0.723	0.323	0	1
	Members participating in general meetings (%)				
Social Capital					
External Dimension	Factor yielded by factor analysis of the six initial variables	-0.000	0.765	-	1.89
				2.062	
Relational	Factor yielded by factor analysis of	-0.000	0.776	-	0.598

Dimension	the six initial variables				1.329
Cognitive Dimension	A common understanding of the collective orientation and mission of the cooperative=1, otherwise=0	0.578	0.484	0	1
Control Variables					
Size	Number of members	46.871	48.675	4	379
Foundation	Year	5.467	3.243	1	10
Gender of Chairperson	Male=1, Female=0	0.786	0.479	0	1
Education of Chairperson	Year	11.967	3.876	0	14
Age of Chairperson	Year	42.828	6.789	22	57
Working experience of Chairperson	Experience = 1, otherwise = 0	0.766	0.545	0	1

From Table 1, The variables measure the percentage of members participating in trainings (mean = 83.1%, S.D. = 20.1%) and general meetings (mean = 72.3%, S.D. = 32.3%). The high means suggest that a significant proportion of members actively engage in cooperative activities, though participation in trainings is slightly higher than in general meetings. The variability in member behaviour (participation), reflected in the standard deviations, highlights differences in member engagement, likely influenced by factors such as motivation, trust, or availability.

Concerning social capital in the form of external dimension was captured using factor analysis, the mean is centered around zero (mean = 0), indicating a normalized variable, with a wide spread (S.D. = 0.765) ranging from -2.062 to 1.89. This dimension likely reflects external linkages and connections critical for cooperative performance. Relation dimension variable was also captured and factor-analyzed (mean = 0, S.D. = 0.776) measures trust, reciprocity, and relationships among members, ranging from -1.329 to 0.598. The tighter range suggests relational aspects are less variable than external connections. And cognitive dimension defined as members' shared understanding of the cooperative's mission (binary variable, mean = 57.8%). The moderate mean reflects that just over half of the members align with the cooperative's mission, though some lack shared cognitive orientation.

Control variable analyzed showed the number of cooperative members (size) averages 46.87 but varies widely (S.D. = 48.675), with small cooperatives having as few as 4 members and larger ones as many as 379. The average cooperative age (foundation) is 5.47 years (S.D. = 3.24), suggesting most are relatively young, with a range of 1 to 10 years. The age of the cooperative could influence its stability, social capital development, and member behavior. The variable (chairperson gender) indicates that 78.6% of chairpersons are male, while 21.4% are female, reflecting a gender disparity in leadership. The mean chairperson education level is 11.97 years (approximately secondary school), suggesting moderate literacy levels among leaders, which might influence their managerial effectiveness. The mean chairperson age of 42.83 years (S.D. = 6.789) shows a leadership age range from early career to mid-career individuals and approximately 76.6% of chairpersons have prior experience in similar roles, indicating a high prevalence of experienced leadership, which may contribute to cooperative performance.

Implications for Analysis

The variables indicate that social capital dimensions and control variables likely influence member behavior. High participation rates suggest positive cooperative engagement, but variations highlight the importance of factors such as shared mission (cognitive dimension) and leadership attributes. Gender disparities in leadership, variability in group size, and differences in external and relational dimensions of social capital may provide areas for further analysis to enhance cooperative outcomes.

Table 2. OLS regression results regarding the effects of social capital on members' behaviors in cooperatives in higher institutions.

Variable	Model Member Behaviour
External Dimension	0.033 (0.56)
Relational Dimension	0.049* (1.64)
Cognitive Dimension	-0.003 (-0.05)

Size	-0.002*** (-3.22)
Foundation	-0.000 (-0.02)
Gender of Chairperson	-0.109 (-2.51)
Education of Chairperson	-0.024** (-2.54)
Age of Chairperson	-0.006 (-1.86)
Working experience Chairperson	-0.008 (-0.34)
Constant	1.662*** (5.23)
R²	0.235

Note: ***, ** and * represent significance at the 1%, 5% and 100% levels, respectively, with t-values in parentheses.

From Table 2, This table presents the results of an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression analysis investigating the effects of social capital and control variables on **member behavior** in cooperatives within higher institutions. The dependent variable, *member behavior*, reflects members' participation in cooperative activities, while the independent variables include dimensions of social capital and various control factors.

Concerning social capital in the form of external dimension the coefficient (0.033) is positive but not statistically significant ($t = 0.56$). This suggests that external connections and linkages have no measurable effect on member behavior in this model. Relational dimension has the coefficient (0.049) is significant at the 10% level ($t = 1.64$), indicating that stronger relational ties, such as trust and reciprocity among members, positively influence participation. This aligns with theoretical expectations that relational capital fosters cohesion and active engagement. Cognitive dimension has the coefficient (-0.003) is not significant ($t = -0.05$). This suggests that a shared understanding of the cooperative's mission does not have a

measurable impact on member behavior in this context, possibly reflecting limitations in members' alignment with collective goals.

Concerning the control variables, size has the coefficient (-0.002) is highly significant at the 1% level ($t = -3.22$), suggesting that larger cooperative size negatively impacts member behavior. This may reflect challenges in managing larger groups, including reduced cohesion and difficulties in coordination. Foundation has the coefficient (-0.000) is not significant ($t = -0.02$), indicating that the cooperative's age does not influence member participation in this model. Gender of the chairperson has the coefficient (-0.109) is significant at the 5% level ($t = -2.51$). This negative effect suggests that having a male chairperson is associated with lower member participation, potentially reflecting gendered leadership dynamics or differing leadership styles. Education of chairperson has the coefficient (-0.024) is significant at the 5% level ($t = -2.54$), indicating that higher levels of education among chairpersons negatively affect member behavior. This counterintuitive result may suggest that highly educated leaders are less effective in fostering inclusive participation. Age and working experience of the chairperson has the coefficient (-0.006) approaches significance at the 10% level ($t = -1.86$), and coefficient (-0.008) is not significant ($t = -0.34$), implying a weak negative association between chairperson age and member behavior. This might reflect generational differences in leadership style or relatability to members and suggesting that prior leadership experience does not directly influence member behavior respectively.

R^2 (0.235) indicates that 23.5% of the variability in member behavior is explained by the included predictors. While modest, this suggests that other unobserved factors may also play a significant role.

Implications for Analysis

Relational Dimension emerges as a key driver of member behavior, supporting the idea that trust and reciprocity foster cooperative engagement. Size negatively impacts participation, highlighting the need for strategies to maintain cohesion in larger cooperatives. Gender and education of the chairperson reveal unexpected negative effects, warranting further investigation into leadership dynamics and member perceptions. Finally, the low significance of external and cognitive dimensions underscores the need for tailored interventions to strengthen these forms of social capital in cooperatives in higher-institution across South East, Nigeria.

Summary of Findings

Based on the study analysis, the following summary of findings are put forth;

The descriptive analysis revealed distinct patterns across the three dimensions of social capital: external, relational, and cognitive. The external dimension, reflecting linkages and connections beyond the cooperative, showed significant variability (S.D. = 0.765) but no consistent impact on member behavior. The relational dimension, capturing trust and reciprocity among members, displayed variability (S.D. = 0.776) and emerged as a critical factor influencing cooperative participation, with significant positive effects while the cognitive dimension, which measures the shared understanding of the cooperative's mission, was only moderately aligned (57.8%) among members. Despite its conceptual importance, it had no significant influence on member behavior.

In order to examine the effects of social capital on cooperative members' behaviors, Regression analysis was used. Regression analysis revealed mixed results regarding the relationship between social capital and member behavior. The relational dimension had a significant positive effect, affirming its role in fostering engagement through trust and strong interpersonal connections. In contrast, the cognitive and external dimensions did not significantly affect participation, highlighting potential gaps in shared goals and external engagement that need to be addressed. While the control variables provided additional insights. Size negatively impacted member behavior, suggesting that larger cooperatives face challenges in maintaining cohesion and inclusivity. Leadership factors, including chairperson gender and education, revealed unexpected negative effects. Male leadership and higher education levels were associated with reduced member participation, pointing to potential disconnects in leadership styles or dynamics.

Other variables, such as cooperative age, chairperson experience, and age, had minimal or no significant effects.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study found that relational social capital—encompassing trust and reciprocity among members—had a significant positive effect on cooperative members' behaviors, indicating its critical role in fostering participation. However, the external dimension (linkages beyond the cooperative) and the cognitive dimension (shared

understanding of the cooperative's mission) showed no significant effects. These results suggest that while relational connections strongly influence member engagement, the other dimensions of social capital require strategic enhancement to realize their potential impact on cooperative behavior. Overall, relational social capital stands out as the most significant driver of member participation in cooperatives within higher institutions in South East Nigeria.

Recommendations

To enhance cooperative members' behaviors, stakeholders should focus on strengthening relational social capital by fostering trust, mutual respect, and interpersonal connections among members. Additionally, cooperative leadership should invest in building a shared understanding of collective goals (cognitive dimension) and enhancing external linkages with relevant networks and institutions. Tailored training programs and workshops that reinforce these dimensions can help align members' values, improve collaboration, and ultimately increase participation in cooperative activities.

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