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Developing a Commercialization Model to Enhance the Socio-Economic Impact of South Africa's Smallholder Farming Sector

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Abstract : This study develops a comprehensive commercialization model aimed at enhancing the economic viability of South Africa's smallholder farming sector. The model is designed to address structural and operational inefficiencies, with the broader goal of contributing to national GDP, poverty alleviation, and reduced unemployment rates. Employing a sequential, multi-phase mixed-method research design, the first phase involved qualitative focus group sessions to delineate key research dimensions. This was followed by quantitative face-to-face interviews using a structured, closed-ended questionnaire. The data, collected from a randomly selected sample of 1,115 participants—comprising 560 females (50.22%) and 555 males (49.78%)—were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM). The results underscore the significance of entrepreneurial leadership, social capital, and competitive advantage as crucial factors for enhancing smallholder enterprise performance. Notably, enterprise performance emerged as a mediating variable influencing the commercialization outcomes of smallholder farming enterprises. The study offers theoretical and practical insights, advocating for strategic interventions, including policy amendments and land reform adjustments, to facilitate the sustainable commercialization of this sector. These recommendations emphasize a holistic approach to empowering smallholder farmers, positioning them as vital contributors to South Africa's socio-economic development.

Keywords: commercialization, smallholder farming, entrepreneurial leadership, social capital, economic development.

Introduction

Commercialisation of agriculture was a 1960s development sociology perspective, while commoditisation of production was a 1970s and 1980s school (Vandergeest 1988, Adio et al., 2016, Bush et al., 2018, and Sangwana et al., 2024). Both themes were connected with Third World peasants. Smallholders dominate developing world agriculture (Henderson, H., 2014). In 2005, Nagayets estimated that 85% of the 525 million farms worldwide are operated by smallholders, who cultivate less than two hectares. Henderson (2014) and Gray & Jones (2022) reports that 87% of small-scale producers are in Asia and 8% in Africa. Smallholder farmers in Africa struggle to commercialise their output for many reasons. By de-commercializing smallholder farming, apartheid, a brutal government that institutionalised race-based development, promoted black peasants farming from 1948 to 1991 (Makombe 2018). Mbeki (1964) acknowledged that apartheid was designed to severely limit the commercialisation of South Africa's smallholder farming sector.

This restriction restricted smallholder farmers to resource-poor farming conditions, making commercial farming unfeasible. According to Hall and Cousins (2018), agrarian development in South Africa over the past two decades has consolidated large-scale commercial farming and corporate agribusiness in agro-food systems. The consolidation of commercial farming has always excluded smallholder farmers and marginalised them in terms of market access and land resources. Black farmers still face poverty and overcrowding in land reserves (Cascovadia, 2017), while

commercial counterparts are unaware of land inequalities where minority (0.3% of South African population) white South Africans owned more than 70% of productive farmland (von Loeper et al., 2018; Moller 2015).This author claims that commercial agriculture and business know that agriculture reduces poverty 3.2 times better than non-agricultural enterprise. Farming contributes 1% to GDP and 6% to the income of the poorest, employing 668 582 semi- and skilled workers compared to 607 788 in manufacturing and 383 542 in mining (Statistic South Africa, 2016). According to Mbeki (1964), Van Rooyen and Botha (1998), apartheid purposely decreased the number of smallholder farmers who could commercialise their farms. According to Mbeki (1964), the Tomlinson Commission found that black families in South Africa needed less land (averaged 52.5 morgen for a £70 annual income) than white families, who needed a minimum of 250 morgen for successful grain production. Overall, the Tomlinson commission found that South African smallholder black families' land is grossly inadequate for commercialisation and requires dramatic adjustment (Mbeki, 1964).The majority of apartheid beneficiaries view the radical economic transformation to redistribute land ownership as political rhetoric to temper macro-economic growth rather than an attempt to commercialise smallholder black farming (Jankielsohn and Duvenhage 2018). This project intends to establish a commercialisation model to promote their economic viability, which might boost GDP, reduce poverty, and unemployment.

A theoretical foundation and hypothesis formulation

Entrepreneurial leadership (EL) allows organisations to seize opportunities and acquire a competitive edge (Roomi and Harrison, 2011, Zainol et al., 2018). Cohen (2004) described EL as leadership that fosters entrepreneurial conduct that the organisation needs to prosper. This proves that entrepreneurial leadership is based on entrepreneurship and leadership. Entrepreneurship is considered crucial to organisational development and economic growth (Antoncic and Hisrich 2001; Drucker 2014; Erasmus and Scheepers 2008; Supriyadi et al., 2018), and entrepreneurial behaviours and attitudes are known to help established businesses survive and thrive. Both startups and established companies grow through entrepreneurship, according to these authors. Thus, enterprise success and growth demand entrepreneurial leaders who can guide in a dynamic, complex, and uncertain competitive environment (Cohen 2004; Yang 2008). According to Supriyadi et al. (2018), a skilled entrepreneurial leader positively impacts business performance ($\beta = 0.070$, $p < 0.01$), as leadership is crucial for successful corporate strategy management. Loshali and Krishnan (2013) and Luxmi (2014) defined enterprise performance as an organization's actual outputs versus its projected outputs. Tseng and Lee (2014) defined enterprise performance as the efficacy and efficiency of individuals, groups, and organisations, which demand entrepreneurial leadership.

Additionally, Loshali and Krishnan (2013) found that entrepreneurial leadership is important for enterprise performance and that its transformational nature has a high propensity to significantly increase enterprise performance from a strategic management perspective. Other research have found that this finding is crucial for business success (Masa'deh et al., 2018). However, Kim, et al. (2016) said EL is a dynamic vision, transformation, and production process. Thus, without these dynamic elements of entrepreneurial leadership, growth may be limited. According to Zainol et al. (2018), entrepreneurial leadership requires the willingness to take calculated risks, the creation of an effective venture team, the creative ability to marshal resources, the ability to build a strong business plan, and the vision to see opportunity where others see chaos, contradiction, and confusion. This study examines how entrepreneurial leadership affects entrepreneurial performance to commercialise smallholder farming in South Africa. Developed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis (H1): Entrepreneurial leadership (EL) mediates entrepreneurial performance in South African smallholder farming.

Enterprise performance and competitive advantage

Competitive advantage is durable consumer preference dominance over competitors (Palandeng et al., 2018). These authors define competitive advantage as a company's capacity to differentiate itself in product costing and services. Porter (2008) also believed that technology, distinctive products, and services made a company competitive. Porter and Sakakibara (2004) noted that competitive advantage increases product market share and value. Thus, increasing a company's competitive edge may mean retaining business performance and competitiveness for competitive firms (Porter and Teisberg 2004). Competitive companies may be able to achieve their goals and missions, making them effective performers. Performance, according to Bernardin and Russell (2000), is the record of job function or activity outcomes across time. Performance is a record of work responsibilities or activities over time, according to these

authors. Gibson, et al. (2003) also view enterprise performance as the outcome of organisational goals, mission, efficiency, and effectiveness.

In South Africa, where smallholder farming's institutionalisation is uncertain due to disorganisation, lack of farming infrastructure, market access, market intelligence, and land (Jordaan et al., 2014, Okunlola et al., 2016), their product and services have low competitive advantage. This implies that South African smallholder farmers lack technical and administrative skills notwithstanding their lack of infrastructure to participate in formal markets. Unfortunately, farmers cannot make smart farming decisions without the latter. The study knew that smallholder farming in South Africa has low competitiveness and enterprise performance, but it wanted to know if farmers knew about the relationship between competitive advantage and enterprise performance.

Hypothesis (H2): Competitive advantage (CA) mediates enterprise success in South African smallholder farming.

Business performance and social capital

Barr (1998) states that sub-Saharan African businesses can benefit from social capital in the form of networks. This author saw the consequent enterprise performance as necessary capital for the enterprise's growth and sustainability because it may boost its income and competitiveness. Networks mitigate revenue volatility risks for enterprises (Barr (1998)).
Network relationships provide collectivity-owned money and credential that allows members to take out company loans, according to social capital theory. It also appeared that networks play an important role in disseminating information about innovations, lowering transactions costs, increasing the potential for enterprise division of labour, and fostering collective action (Barr, 1998), which could directly affect enterprise performance by providing entrepreneurs with world information, especially about technologies and markets.

According to Coleman (1988), relational social capital focusses on norms, obligations, reciprocity, and trustworthiness. Cognitive and structural capital enable interchange and combination, but relational capital does not, according to Kumi and Sabherwal (2018). Social capital improves individual and organisational performance, according to these researchers. Glaveli and Geormas (2018) discovered that cohesive/shared vision positively affects corporate social effectiveness and profitability. Social capital improved the performance of small and medium firms (Lawal et al., 2018). None of the research have examined social capital and smallholder agricultural enterprise performance. This led to the following theory on social capital's impact on South African farming.

Hypothesis (H3): Social capital mediates firm performance in South African smallholder farming.

Entrepreneurship and edge

Renko et al. (2015) defined entrepreneurial leadership as a blend of leadership and entrepreneurship, where leadership influences organisational performance and entrepreneurial behaviour (Yukl 2008) and entrepreneurship provides opportunities. Entrepreneurs need unique skills and personalities to help their companies succeed (Beattie 2016). Endogenous growth models use entrepreneurial leadership to drive technological advances to boost competitiveness (De Dominicis et al., 2013). Entrepreneurial leadership involves responsibility, accountability, analytical thinking, and emotional intelligence, according to Beattie (2016). Such qualities helped micro-enterprises perform and survive, giving them competitive advantages (Beattie 2016). In knowledge-based economies, innovation helps countries, regions, and companies compete (De Dominicis et al., 2013). Resource-based theory discusses how venture leadership can foster and retain competitive advantages to deploy and accumulate venture-specific resources and skills.

The development of resources to build competitive advantages through innovation has been a focus of current research. Today, innovative ventures need competitive resources to obtain a competitive edge and grow (Grant 1991, Johansson and Malmstrom 2013). This approach holds that a venture's resources must be valuable, imperfectly imitable, uncommon, and without strategically equivalent substitutes to create enduring competitive advantages (Barney 1991; Barney and Hesterly 1996; Johansson and Malmstrom 2013). Mircevska (2015) reported that new and better industrial competition methods can boost competitive advantage. Webb et al. (2013) also believed resources may give a firm a competitive edge. Given the aforementioned, South African smallholder farmers lack land and agricultural infrastructure (Mmbengwa et al., 2011).The study hypothesises the following.

Hypothesis (H4): Entrepreneurial leadership mediates competitive advantage (CA) and vice versa in South African smallholder farming.

Smallholder farming commercialisation model development

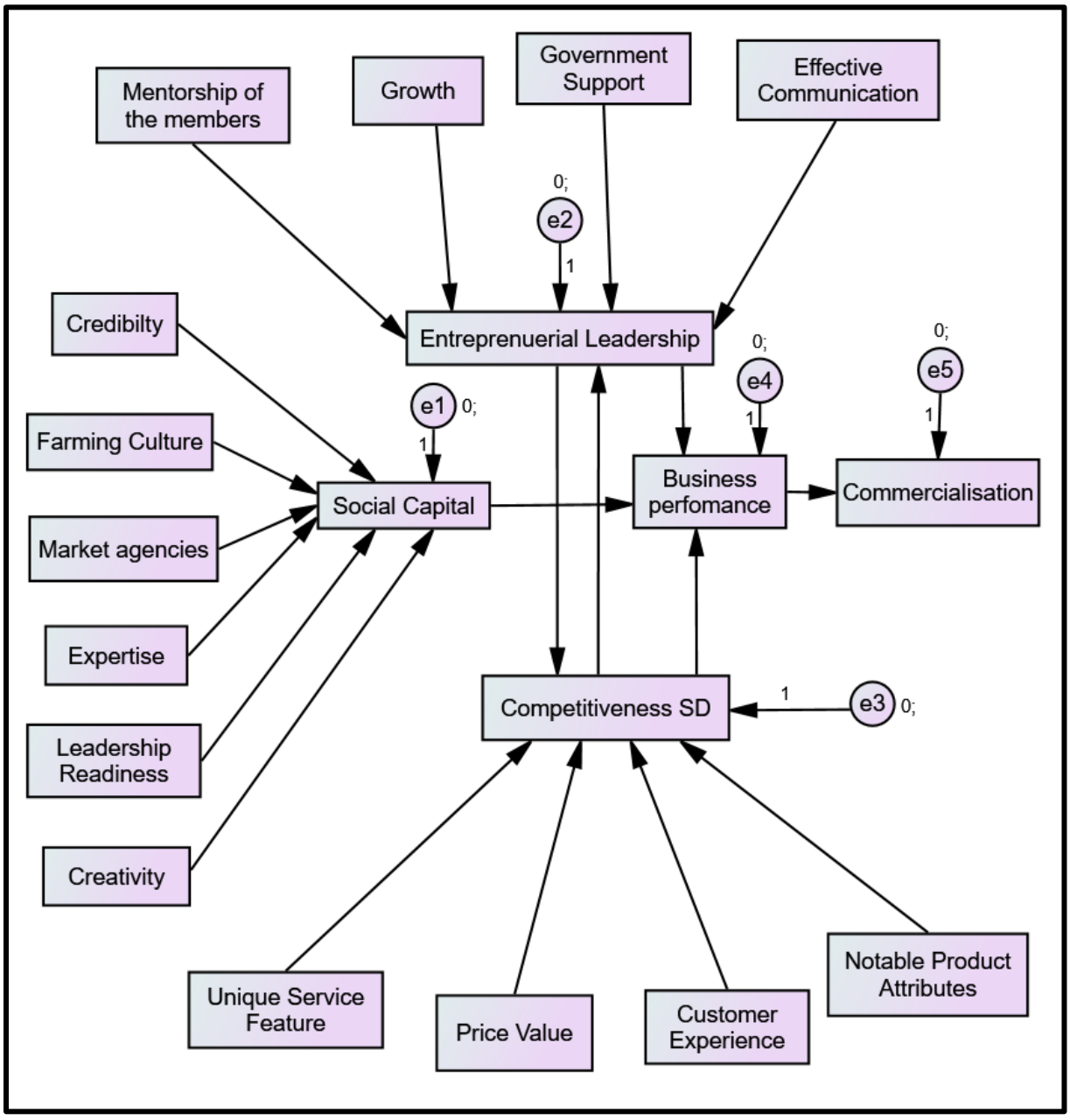

Figure 8.1: Conceptual entrepreneurship framework for the economic commercialisation of smallholder farming

Conceptual entrepreneurial framework for smallholder agricultural economic commercialisation (Figure 8.1). Nieman et al. (2003) identified a South African entrepreneurial business growth framework. They identified social capital (SC), entrepreneurial leadership (EL), and competitive advantage (CA) as factors affecting entrepreneurial performance. Economic advancement was mediated by the latter. EA is considered commercialisation in this study, making smallholder farmers commercially viable. South African government hopes to integrate smallholder and commercial agriculture by commercialising smallholder farming (Aliber and Hall 2012). Improving smallholder farmer productivity and commercialisation is a major strategy for rural development, poverty reduction, and food security in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank 2008, Abate et al., 2014).

Smallholder farmers need higher technology and efficiency to increase commercial productivity (Abate et al., 2014). Additionally, Timmons and Spenelli (2004) found that entrepreneurial leadership (EL) can boost entrepreneurial business performance. These writers did not say if competitiveness (CA) may boost corporate growth. However, Wickham (2004) added that venture performance causes entrepreneurial leadership. This suggests a non-recursive relationship between competitive advantages (CA) and entrepreneurial leadership. Both seem to boost the business's economic viability (EA). Despite their apparent relationships, the smallholder farming sector's entrepreneurial leadership (EL), competitive advantages (CA), and economic advancement (EA) characteristics may be questioned. A model could examine the non-recursiveness of CA and EL and their causality effect on EA to clarify these elements. The research may help determine which elements drive commercialisation of these farming companies.

This empirical inquiry used the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis (H5): Enterprise performance (EP) mediates recursively over smallholder farming commercialisation in South Africa.

Methodology

Sample Size and Participants

The sample size comprised 1,115 smallholder farmers registered in the National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC) and Provincial Department of Agriculture (PDAs) databases. The sample was identified using purposive sampling methods (Kigatiira et al., 2018; Eiselen et al., 2005). The contestants originated from six provinces in South Africa. Key considerations during participant selection for the study included variability, precision, confidence, and cross-classification. The analysis of the sample revealed that a significant proportion originated from villages [n=742, (66%)], followed by individuals from farming communities [n=181, (16%)].

Participants from townships numbered [n=159, (14.3%)], suburbs [n=19, (1.7%)], and other areas [n=14, (1.3%)] constituted the smallest groups. The participants' proportions were determined to be significantly different at a 99% confidence interval. The individuals' ages in the sample varied from 18 to 89 years (M = 47.68, SD = 15.09). Among the participants, 49.8% were male and 50.2% were female, demonstrating a gender-balanced composition. Moreover, all participants possessed substantial business experience (M = 10.10, SD = 11.34) alongside modest sales experience (M = 6.84, SD = 9.37), both quantified in years.

Research protocols

Data was collected through surveys and focus sessions across various provinces of South Africa. The data was gathered by chosen and trained enumerators under the oversight of the researcher. The data collection was conducted using a paper questionnaire. The data editing occurred in the field, followed by central editing to check the participants' responses shortly after they completed the questionnaire. Conversely, central editing involved the study team performing quality control on the gathered data. The data were encoded and recorded in accordance with the specifications of a specific program utilised. Data collection was conducted via the administration of interview schedules during individual interviews with smallholder farmers. Twelve Focus Group sessions (FGSs) were conducted prior to the interviews. The principles governing the interviews were communicated to the participants prior to the commencement of the sessions (Kigatiira et al., 2018). The researcher provided the respondents with information regarding the study and assured them of ethical considerations, including confidentiality and anonymity. The researcher sought to establish rapport with the respondents before to the interview to facilitate their relaxation. Consent was obtained from the interviewee(s) to carry out the research. Upon concluding the interview, the researcher expressed gratitude to the respondents and enquired if they wished to provide any additional information (Kigatiira et al., 2018).

Metrics for Entrepreneurial Leadership

The average of entrepreneurial leadership was assessed using four indicators: mentorship, growth, government assistance, and effective communication. The indicators of entrepreneurial leadership and concept were assessed using ten-point semantic differential scales (Tustin et al., 2010), where scores of 1-4 indicated "no improvement," 5-6 represented "moderate improvement," and 7-10 denoted "higher improvement." Exploratory factor analysis was employed to assess entrepreneurial leadership, analysing factor loadings and Cronbach's alpha reliability (Kim et al., 2016). The latter was employed to demonstrate the proof of internal consistency for the extracted sub-dimensions (refer to Table 1).

Table 1: Measurement scales and reliabilities

Constructs and Indicators	Cronbach alpha (α)	Factor loading	KMO	Bartlett's Test of sphericity	
				Chi-Squared	P-value
Entrepreneurial Leadership	0.801		0.721	1700.755	0.000
Growth	0.824	0.634			
Mentorship	0.691	0.878			
Government Support	0.758	0.778			
Effective Communication	0.710	0.858			
Competitive advantage	0.900		0.828	2761.200	0.000
Unique Service Feature	0.873	0.875			
Price value	0.862	0.894			
Customer experience	0.877	0.867			
Notable Product Quality	0.874	0.873			
Social Capital	0.938		0.919	5595.758	0.000
Credibility	0.932	0.839			
Farming Culture	0.924	0.890			
Market agencies	0.931	0.849			
Expertise	0.923	0.897			
Leadership readiness	0.923	0.900			
Creativity	0.928	0.871			

Sources: Suvery data, 2022

Social Capital, Competitive Advantage, Organisational Performance, and Commercialisation

Social capital was assessed through six indicators: credibility, farming culture, market agencies, expertise, leadership readiness, and innovation. Both the indicators of social capital and the construct itself were assessed in the same manner as entrepreneurial leadership, utilising a ten-point scale semantic differential, where scores of 1-4 indicated "not important," scores of 5-6 denoted "moderately important," and scores of 7-10 represented "extremely important." Likewise, competitive advantage, firm performance, and commercialisation employed the identical measurement scale. The construct of competitive advantage was identified through four indicators: unique service features, product price value, customer experience, and distinctive product traits or quality (refer to Figure 1).

Statistical evaluation

This study employed exploratory factor analysis (Table 1) and structural equation modelling (SEM) to analyse the impact of business performance on the commercialisation of the smallholder agricultural sector in South Africa (see Figure 2). The path analysis was employed to delineate the influence and impact of the components along the paths. The SEM-based methodologies were favoured due to their significant advantages over first-generation techniques, including principal components analysis, factor analysis, discriminant analysis, and multiple regression, owing to the enhanced flexibility they provide for the interaction between theory and data (Chin 1998). This author asserts that SEM offers researchers the capability to: (a) model relationships among various predictor and criterion variables, (b) construct latent variables, (c) model measurement errors for observed variables, and (d) statistically evaluate a priori substantive/theoretical and measurement assumptions against empirical data (i.e., confirmatory analysis). Rigdon (1998) and Ali et al. (2018) asserted that SEM is one of the most prominent research methodologies across multiple fields.

Summary of Factor Structure and Model Fit

Before the country-level investigation, comprehensive evaluations were conducted on the pathway structure. Factor analysis, sample adequacy tests, item reliability assessments, and model fit evaluations were performed to ascertain the impact of business performance on the commercialisation of the smallholder agricultural sector in South Africa. All these tests demonstrated that the aforementioned criteria were met. The likelihood ratio test (LR) indicated a significant chi-squared value [$\chi 2$ (df = 151) = 12166.734, $p < 0.000$], suggesting an issue with model fit (Fell et al., 2016). Conversely, the RMSE was determined to be less than 0.005, signifying that the model exhibited a good match. Other measures of model fit, such as CFI and TLI, were found to be equal to one, indicating that the model was generally well-fitted. Consequently, the model proved advantageous for analytical purposes.

Stability Index

The stability index for the non-recurrence between competitive advantages and the entrepreneurial leadership model was determined to be 0.001. The relationship was determined to be inconsequential with a probability value of 5%. This result indicates an absence of correlation between the two variables (refer to Table 1).

Results and discussion

Impact of Entrepreneurial Leadership on Enterprise Performance

Table 2 displays a segment of the data on the impact of entrepreneurial leadership measures, while Table 3 illustrates the mediating impacts of entrepreneurial performance and commercialisation. Table 4 presented the results of the study hypothesis. The results in Table 2 indicate that all measures of entrepreneurial leadership exhibited a substantial positive correlation with entrepreneurial leadership.Table 8.3 indicates that entrepreneurial leadership significantly influences entrepreneurial performance ($\beta = 0.154$, $p < 0.000$). The coefficient was determined to be positive, indicating that an increase of one unit in entrepreneurial leadership is associated with a 0.154 enhancement in the performance of smallholder agricultural businesses, assuming other variables remain constant. Consequently, the hypothesis that entrepreneurial leadership greatly impacts smallholder farming enterprises in the South African agricultural context was substantiated (refer to Table 4). The findings of this study were consistent with both management and leadership theories (Fayol 1930; Van Wart, M., 2013). All these theories affirm the essential role that leadership may play in enhancing organisational effectiveness. Teece (2014) observed that the entrepreneurial approach of leadership facilitated business growth. The importance of human capital was emphasised in endogenous growth theories (Tan 2014).

The findings indicated that the smallholder farming sector may enhance its performance by leveraging the capabilities of its entrepreneurial leaders. Furthermore, it has been reported that leadership is recognised as a crucial asset in organisational behaviour (Obiwuru et al., 2011). Moreover, Israel (2018) discovered that leadership styles significantly impact company performance results and exhibit considerable dynamism during interactions at both interpersonal and organisational levels (Obiwuru et al., 2011). Transformational leadership has been identified as a significant factor in enhancing sales, profits, employment growth, and owner satisfaction, whereas inspirational leadership has been acknowledged as a vital leadership style capable of motivating and fostering employment growth, profits, and owner satisfaction (Israel 2018). The impact of entrepreneurial leadership has garnered less academic focus, particularly regarding its influence on smallholder farming firms in South Africa.

Table 2: Effects of the indicators on entrepreneurial leadership, social capital and competitive advantages

Dependent Variables	Relationship	Indicators	β	Beta	S.E.	C.R.
Entrepreneurial Leadership	<---	Growth	,624***	,671	,020	31,311
Entrepreneurial Leadership	<---	Mentorship	,086***	,104	,018	4,861
Entrepreneurial Leadership	<---	Government Support	,128***	,150	,018	7,010
Entrepreneurial Leadership	<---	Effective Communication	,072***	,085	,018	3,955

Dependent Variables	Relationship	Indicators	β	Beta	S.E.	C.R.
Competitive Advantage	<---	Unique Service Feature	,352***	,446	,018	19,298
Competitive advantage	<---	Price value	,300***	,385	,018	16,638
Competitive advantage	<---	Customer experience	,051***	,064	,019	2,756
Competitive advantage	<---	Notable Product Quality	,181***	,233	,018	10,069
Social Capital	<---	Credibility	,383***	,463	,021	18,440
Social Capital	<---	Farming Culture	,081***	,102	,020	4,046
Social Capital	<---	Market agencies	,087***	,111	,020	4,434
Social Capital	<---	Expertise	,115***	,142	,020	5,662
Social Capital	<---	Leadership readiness	,120***	,148	,020	5,882
Social Capital	<---	Creativity	,111***	,138	,020	5,512

Notes: SE = standard error, CR = composite reliability.

Table 3: Mediating effects of the indicators on entrepreneurial performance and commercialization

Dependent Variables	Relationship	Indicators	β	Beta	S.E.	C.R.
Entrepreneurial Performance	<---	Social Capital	,217***	,177	,035	6,237
Entrepreneurial Performance	<---	Competitive advantage	,265***	,228	,033	8,040
Entrepreneurial Performance	<---	Entrepreneurial Leadership	,154***	,143	,030	5,041
Commercialisation	<---	Entrepreneurial Performance	,280***	,276	,029	9,589
Competitive advantage	<---	Entrepreneurial Leadership	,037	,040	,026	1,446
Entrepreneurial Leadership	<---	Competitive advantage	-,036	-,033	,028	-1,289

Competitive Advantage and Organisational Performance

Table 3 reveals that competitive advantage has a significant impact on enterprise performance ($\beta = 0.265$, $p < 0.000$). A positive association was seen between competitive advantage and organisational performance. The findings confirmed that competitive advantage significantly influences organisational performance. According to resource-based theories, competitive advantage is derived from unique resource bundles, requiring a company to

have rare, valuable, inimitable, non-tradable, and non-substitutable resources to develop this advantage (Ma, 2000; Daunfeldt et al., 2013).

The results in Table 3 indicate that competitive advantage significantly influences enterprise performance ($\beta = 0.265$, $p < 0.000$). A favourable association was identified between competitive advantage and enterprise performance. The results validated the notion that competitive advantage substantially impacts enterprise performance. Within the framework of resource-based theories, competitive advantage is obtained from distinctive resources (resource bundles). To cultivate such an advantage, an organisation must possess resources that are rare, precious, inimitable, non-tradable, and non-substitutable (Ma, 2000; Daunfeldt et al., 2013). In the strategic management literature, comparative advantage (CA) and new venture performance (NVP) are two separate constructs that have a significant positive link (Ma, 2000; Ndofor et al., 2011). Multiple studies have established that competitive strategy substantially influences business performance (Anwar et al. 2018; González-Rodríguez et al. 2018; Lechner and Gudmundsson 2014). Furthermore, it was disclosed that these strategies were associated with the enhanced performance of SMEs (Parnell 2010). Anwar et al. (2018) identified a significant positive association between CA and NVP ($r = 0.49$, $p < 0.01$). Efrat et al. (2018) identified a favourable link between competitive advantage and export performance ($r = 0.28$, $p < 0.05$). Research has yet to ascertain the extent to which competitive advantage affects enterprise success in smallholder agriculture. Ma (2000) asserted that competitive advantage is context-dependent and not universal or generalisable.

Table 4: Research hypothesis of the smallholder farming commercialization

Hypothesis	**Assumptions**	**Results**
H1	Entrepreneurial Leadership significantly influences entrepreneurial performance	Confirmed
H2	Competitive advantage significantly influences entrepreneurial performance	Confirmed
H3	Social capital significantly influences entrepreneurial performance	Confirmed
H4	Entrepreneurial Leadership significantly influences competitive advantage	Not-confirmed
H5	Entrepreneurial Performance significantly influences commercialisation	Confirmed

The relationship between social capital and enterprise performance

This study examined the impact of social capital on the performance of smallholder farming enterprises in South Africa. The findings were displayed in Table 3 above. The findings indicate that social capital significantly impacts the performance of enterprises in the smallholder agricultural sector ($\beta = 0.217$, $p < 0.000$). This suggests that a unit increase in social capital might enhance smallholder agricultural enterprise performance by 0.217 units, assuming other conditions remain constant. Additionally, hypothesis 4 was validated, demonstrating that social capital substantially affects entrepreneurial performance. The results aligned with the findings of previous comparable research worldwide (Chunyan and Shuming 2006; Stam et al., 2014; Muniady et al., 2015; Kwahk and Park 2016).

Stam et al. (2014) emphasised that social capital, defined as the resources inherent in entrepreneurs' personal networks, is essential for the performance of small firms. These network connections facilitate entrepreneurs in recognising new business opportunities by acquiring resources at below-market prices and obtaining legitimacy from external stakeholders. The fundamental insight is that investments in social relationships cultivate goodwill that people and groups can leverage to accomplish specific objectives (Adler and Kwon, 2002). Social capital generates value by providing well-connected individuals with exclusive access to intellectual, financial, and cultural resources (Bourdieu,

1986). This study suggests that smallholder farming firms might enhance their performance by investing in social capital, hence facilitating the commercialisation of their production.

Entrepreneurial Leadership and Competitive Advantage

This study examined the impact of entrepreneurial leadership on the competitive advantage of smallholder farming firms. The outcomes of the aforementioned effect were displayed in table 8.3. The results indicate no significant recursive influence between the two parameters in South Africa's smallholder agricultural industry ($\beta = 0.037$, $p > 0.05$). Consequently, hypothesis 5 lacked evidence (see to Table 4). Furthermore, Al Mamun et al. (2018) discovered that leadership accountability, analytical thinking, and micro-enterprise performance significantly positively impacted the sustainability of micro-enterprises held by low-income households in Kelantan, Malaysia.

Entrepreneurial leadership encompasses organisational leadership aimed at enhancing competitiveness, sustainability, and adaptation within firms (Uhl-Bien and Arena 2018). While most leaders concentrate on how organisations should evolve to achieve their aims and objectives, entrepreneurial leaders frequently emphasise positioning the organisation for competitiveness and sustainability. These leaders were recognised for their vision and inspirational motivation (Griffith et al., 2015; Baur et al., 2016; Margolis and Ziegert, 2016).

Development of commercialization model for the smallholder farming sector

The findings corroborate hypothesis 5, which asserts that entrepreneurial performance (EP) significantly influences commercialisation. The results corresponded with prior research findings (Scoones et al., 2018) and supported theories that highlight agricultural commercialisation, as articulated by the postwar modernisation school (Vandergeest 1988). The drive to enhance agriculture was a crucial goal for modernising agricultural techniques (Mosher 1966), resulting in a need for the transformation and marketing of traditional agriculture (Schultz 1964). Agricultural commercialisation refers to the practice of increasing the proportion of agricultural produce that farmers market (Pradhan et al., 2010; Martey et al., 2012). Govereh et al. (1999) proposed that commercialisation can be measured on a continuum from zero (only subsistence-oriented output) to one (100% of production sold).

The authors contend that the commercialisation of agriculture involves a transition from subsistence-oriented to increasingly market-driven production and resource utilisation. Capitalist infiltration of the market and competitiveness in agriculture through commercial agriculture is important to de-peasantize and differentiate small-holding produce (Lewis 1954). Ogutu and Qaim (2018) discovered that commercialisation markedly diminishes both income poverty and multidimensional poverty.

The authors indicated that the extent of income increases was positively associated with income level, suggesting that targeted market-linkage assistance for marginalised farms may be necessary to prevent escalating income inequality. Consequently, for smallholder agriculture to commercialise its output and satisfy formal market standards, alternative production methods, scaling strategies, and new institutional and legislative frameworks are necessary (Collier and Dercon 2014). Nkegbe et al. (2018) observed that farmers' non-farm engagement enhances market participation and commercialisation levels in Ghana, indicating that non-farm activities and agricultural commercialisation are complementary.

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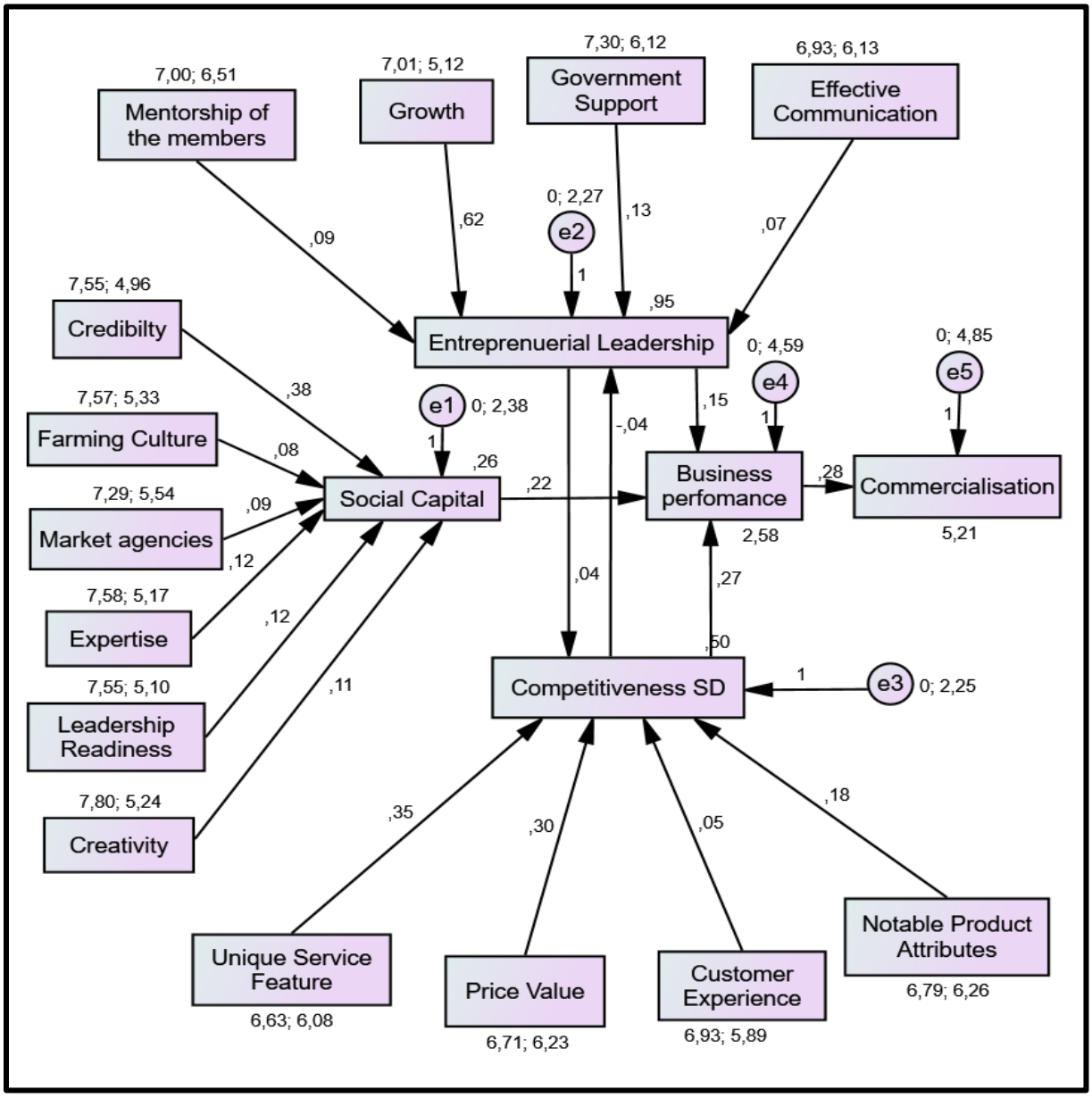

Figure 2: An unstandardized parameter estimates for hypothetical entrepreneurship framework for the economic commercialization of smallholder farming

Theoretical And Practical Implications

The present study proposes numerous significant theoretical and practical approaches for practitioners to consider when promoting the commercialisation of the smallholder farming sector in South Africa. Theoretically, the study indicated that this industry may have difficulties in commercialisation without optimising smallholder farming enterprises. The study indicates that enterprise performance serves as a mediator for commercialisation. Moreover, the study has identified that investment in entrepreneurial leadership, social capital, and competitive advantage may enhance firm success in this area. The commercialisation of the smallholder farming sector should be conceptualised only when the aforementioned essential factors are considered. This analysis indicates that stakeholders cannot solely rely on the development of commercialisation rules and expect the industry to commercialise autonomously without additional measures. Aliber and Hall (2012) claimed that the South African government developed policies aimed at

promoting the commercialisation of smallholder farming; nevertheless, four years later, it was determined that smallholder farming continued to struggle with commercialisation despite the provision of financial resources.

Other researchers (Antwi and Oladele 2013) posited that the commercialisation of this sector necessitated the provision of essential management skills and technical expertise to the farmers. Conversely, certain studies claimed that for this sector to achieve commercialisation, farmers must be integrated into agricultural value chains (Letsoalo and Van Averbeke, 2005). These findings seem beneficial; however, in the context of the current study, leadership, social networks, and competitive advantage are essential factors for achieving high production volumes, which could facilitate commercialisation.

Constraints and prospective investigations

Notwithstanding its contributions to the prevailing issues of smallholder farming in South Africa, this study possesses certain shortcomings that necessitate additional investigation. The study employed a cross-sectional design, which mostly cannot assess the long-term effects of the studied constructs. If the study had employed a longitudinal methodology, time series impacts might have been shown, significantly impacting the short- and long-term commercialisation strategies for this sector. While the reliability and validity of this study are commendable, it would have been preferable to examine constructs such as leadership, social networks, enterprise performance, and competitive advantage over time, as their influence may be linked to periodic dynamics (Ortega et al., 2014). Employing a cross-sectional design to investigate these constructs in any society may represent a potential weakness of the study, as it could overlook other significant findings.

Secondly, the sample size and sampling methodology may require enhancement, given the extensive population of smallholder farmers in South Africa. Okunlola et al. (2016) reported that the smallholder agricultural population in South Africa was roughly two million. Jordaan et al. (2014) emphasised that these farmers are classified as resource-poor individuals operating their agricultural enterprises in peri-urban and impoverished rural regions. These farmers are categorised into many typologies, including subsistence, small scale, emerging commercial, and smallholding society; nonetheless, they exhibit heterogeneity (Alavi 2006). Consequently, a sampling frame that cannot accommodate classification disparities and population size may have some limitations. This study has utilised data extracted from the National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC) and the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) databases. While these institutions are primary stakeholders, the agricultural sectors in South Africa also accommodate and assist certain smallholder farmers; hence, the omission of industry-supported smallholder farmers from the analysis represents a notable limitation. Future research could be derived from the findings of this study, albeit its limitations. The present study indicates that the commercialisation of smallholder farming in South Africa is feasible, provided that company leadership is effective and possesses essential business networks and a competitive advantage. Consequently, subsequent research may explore the institutional framework that could facilitate entrepreneurial leadership, networks, and competitive advantage in smallholder farming, which is characterised by limited resources such as land, inadequate production and marketing infrastructure, diverse cultural beliefs, and insufficient human capital. Future studies could examine the time and resources required to commercialise these farming approaches. Finally, future research should examine which goods are readily marketable within smallholder agricultural contexts, considering the availability of resource bundles.

Conclusion and recommendation

This study identified the factors that could facilitate the commercialisation of smallholder farming in South Africa. The results indicated that entrepreneurial leadership, social capital, and competitive advantage significantly influence the performance of smallholder farming enterprises. The enterprise performance of these farmers mediates the commercialisation of firms in this area. Consequently, agricultural stakeholders, including the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF), statutory entities such as the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) and the National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC), as well as the agricultural industry and other ancillary organisations, could leverage these findings to facilitate the commercialisation of smallholder farming sectors. Moreover, these stakeholders may utilise the empirical evidence from this study to amend policies aimed at promoting the commercialisation of this sector.

The National Development Plan and the Agricultural Black Economic Empowerment legislative framework (Agri-BEE) of South Africa aim to stimulate job creation within the agricultural sector, with smallholder farming anticipated to generate a significant number of jobs for impoverished rural areas. The absence of commercialisation will result in persistently poor and unsustainable job generation within smallholder farming. Consequently, it is strongly advised to

establish new institutional structures for smallholders that facilitate leadership, social networking, and competitive advantage to enhance enterprise performance, based on the current findings.

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