

Determinants of Collective Marketing Action and Profitability of Smallholder Farmers Enterprise in Uganda

John Ariko Okelai, Alain Vilard Ndi Isoh, & Gladies Angundaru

Abstract

This paper explores the theoretical underpinnings of Collective Market as a practical Marketing model promoted to address the problem of social and economic inclusion into global agro-commodity market supply chains of smallholder farmers in Africa. A qualitative study based on the grounded theory approach was used supported by the philosophical underpinnings of objectivism ontology and interpretivism epistemology. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore the perspectives of farmers and stakeholders participating in collective marketing and export programs. Data was analyzed using the provisions of Grounded Theory and the concept of Theoretical Saturation guided the determination of sample size and sampling adequacy. Data validity was established through credibility, dependability, conformability and transferability parameters. This study is purely based on a qualitative research design. It does not attempt to provide a quantitative empirical test for the proposed theory. The has provided a theoretical explanation of the relationship between collective marketing and profitability of smallholder farmer's and offers a practical understanding for academia, promoters of collective marketing and policy markers concerned with integration of smallholder farmers into global supply chains. It will enable better planning of collective marketing for smallholder farmers, with the potential to focus efforts towards commercializing smallholder agriculture, advance inclusion into global markets and achieve poverty eradication goals. The study makes the first known attempt to construct a Theory of Collective Marketing" to systematize the understanding of collective marketing. The theory proposed is grounded on original data.

Keywords: Collective marketing, Economic exclusion, Market integration, Social entrepreneurship, Smallholder farmers.



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The practice of subsistence farming in Africa is highly individualistic and as such, smallholder farmers are unable to achieve the required level of competitiveness to participate in formal markets and negotiate formal trade contracts (Magingxa, 2009; IITA 2001; Heinmann 2002; Poole et al., 1998:7). This condemns them to the unregulated and exploitative black markets. In recent years, collective marketing has emerged as an alternative to fill the gap left by traditional cooperative organisations, most of which became dysfunctional. It has emerged as one of the models of “Social Entrepreneurship” championed with the objectives to organize and promote participation of smallholder farmers in formal agro-commodity markets. Collective marketing is considered a practical response to social and economic exclusion of smallholder farmers in Africa. Globally, it has been promoted as a viable alternative to the AID based model for poverty eradication in Africa (Wyn et al., 2012). Conceptually, advocating for favorable trade terms and market integration of smallholder farmers will lead to inclusion and positive market participation of farmers from poor countries (Markelova & Mwangi 2010).

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been a strong call for development workers and multinational corporations to invest significant resources to integrate smallholder farmers from poor countries into the global agro-commodity supply chains (Philip et al, 2006). The motivation for collective marketing actions of smallholder farmers have been attributed to; the need to reduce transaction costs, manage and spread risk, transactions involving bulk commodities to attract credible buyers and benefit from transactional economies of scale (Paurmagarten et al., 2012). In Uganda, Collective marketing is practiced by farmers, working together in a “farmers’ producer organizations”. The commitments to participate are often driven by the shared goal to create an institutional framework for effective involvement in the agro-commodity markets. Other justifications include; creating better market opportunities and maximizing profitability (Gruere et al., 2009; Markelova & Mwangi, 2010). The nature and quality of marketing channels and the agro-commodity markets used by smallholder farmers is proven to have direct effects on profitability. Access to markets is a key determinant of smallholder farmer profitability, and has the motivational effect of increasing production (Litha et al., 2009). The absence of an effective marketing system has negative effect on production, adoption of technologies to enhance productivity and compliance to quality standards (Van Schalkwyk et al., 2003).

Collective Marketing has gained wide application in project interventions involving smallholder farmers in Uganda. A similar trend is observed in East African region, Southern and West Africa. Governments in East Africa together with development partners see it as a strategy to integrate smallholder farmers into the formal economy and increase their contributions to national economic growth. This further attracted the attention of multinational, regional and local private sector firms trading in agro-commodities who view it as a vehicle for sustainable market inclusion and commercial orientation of smallholder farmers (Ashraff et al., 2008, Paumgarten, 2012). One major driver of collective marketing is the shift by large corporations from free market procurement systems to supply chain based procurement systems (Philip et al., 2006; Reardon et al., 2005; Whetherspoon & Reardon, 2003). Despite the positive outlook, collective marketing organizations have faced several management and functional challenges including; “side selling” a phrase used to describe selling by farmers outside the collective marketing structure and institutional dis-

functionalities. The determinants of effective collective marketing action among farmers is still not well understood with respect to its contribution to profitability and growth of smallholder farmers and the potential to achieve sustainable market participation (Markelova et al., 2009). The absence of a clear theoretical framework for evaluating the performance of collective marketing capabilities of farmer organizations, institutionalizing collective marketing as a vehicle for market integration of smallholder farmers and designing interventions to achieve effective outcomes has further undermined the level of success from collective marketing programs. This paper seeks to model a framework of the determinants of effective collective marketing system with the intention to guarantee sustainability of smallholder farmers' enterprises.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in the Northern part of Uganda among farmers participating in collective market in fifteen (15) districts. A qualitative strategy was adopted using the grounded theory approach as described by Creswell (2009). It provided a systematic inductive process of qualitative inquiry required for theory development. Creswell (2009) defines grounded theory as a qualitative strategy, which permits researchers to build theory through iterations grounded on participants' perspectives involved in a study. The grounded theory approach allowed the continuous development of theorized ideas from the open coding to selective coding processes specifically to categorize codes. This was achieved through memo writing and allowing themes to emerge as the interviews progress till theoretical saturation was established. This cross-sectional study involved a total of fifteen (15) interviews; including Twelve (12) focus group discussions (FGDs) with farmers and three (3) with experts engaged in promoting collective marketing interventions. Data was analyzed through a continuous process following the approaches recommended by Charmaz, (2006; 2008), Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998). The analysis involved a three step process of; initial/open coding, then axial coding to identify categories and then refinement and re-grouping of the codes to clarify categories and sub-categories.

4.0 DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Data Analysis and Presentation of Results

The axial coding process as shown below was obtained from open coding process. The grouping of codes then resulted to the development of categories that explain the determinants of successful collective marketing of smallholder farmer associations. Members' altitude is the "theme" that can be used to determine the success or failure of collective marketing action as shown on table 2 below. Attitudes determined the presence or absence of a shared vision among members of a collective marketing organization and significantly influence the effectiveness of collective marketing action. The core determinant "theme" on table 2 in collective marketing is Shared vision (SHARED VISION; 100%) which is determined by the attitude of members towards collective marketing action. However other determinants of collective marketing that emerged from the study were; Market competitiveness (MARKET COMP; 88%) which was explained by the sub-theme production management, the nature of Governance and organizational structures (GOV. & STRUCT. 81%) explained by the organizational capacity; Market availability (MARKET AVAIL; 81%) explained by the presence of a ready buyer, Profitability (PROFITABILITY 81%) as determined by the benefits associated with collective marketing and Access business development services (BDS ACCESS; 63%) explained by levels of financial literacy and risk management. The theme of the analysis is as shown on the table 3 below:

Table 1: Category variables generated from the Axial coding process.

Interview Question	Sub-category	Category		
What determines successful collective marketing action among smallholder farmer producer associations?	1. Attitudes of members	Shared vision		
	2. Effective communication			
	3. Transparency			
	1. Commitment of leaders	2. Strong Marketing committees	Governance and marketing structures	
				2. Strong Marketing committees
				3. Organizational capacity
	1. Buyer relations Management	2. Availability of ready buyer	Market Availability	
				2. Availability of ready buyer
				3. Pricing factors
	1. Storage facilities and Marketing Infrastructure	2. Access to financing	Market Competitiveness	
				2. Access to financing
				3. Production Management
1. Entrepreneurial training	2. Financial Literacy & Risk management	Access to BDS		
			2. Financial Literacy & Risk management	
What factors determine the profitability of farmers participating in collective marketing action?	1. Price of the commodity	Profitability		
	2. Timeliness of payment			
	3. Benefits and services received			

Source: Field Data (2019)

Table 2: Cross case comparison of the reduced data codes

CATEGORIES	Sub-categories	% score
Shared vision	Attitudes of members	100%
	Effective communication	63%
	Transparency	88%
Governance and marketing structures	Commitment of leaders	69%
	Strong Marketing committees	19%
	Organizational capacity	81%
Market Availability	Buyer relations Management	50%
	Availability of ready buyer	81%
	Pricing factors	19%
Market Competitiveness	Storage facilities and Marketing Infrastructure	75%
	Access to financing	50%
	Production Management	88%
Access to BDS	Entrepreneurial training	50%
	Financial Literacy & Risk management	63%
Profitability	Price of the commodity	69%
	Timeliness of payment	38%
	Benefits and services received	81%

Source: Open codes compiled from field data

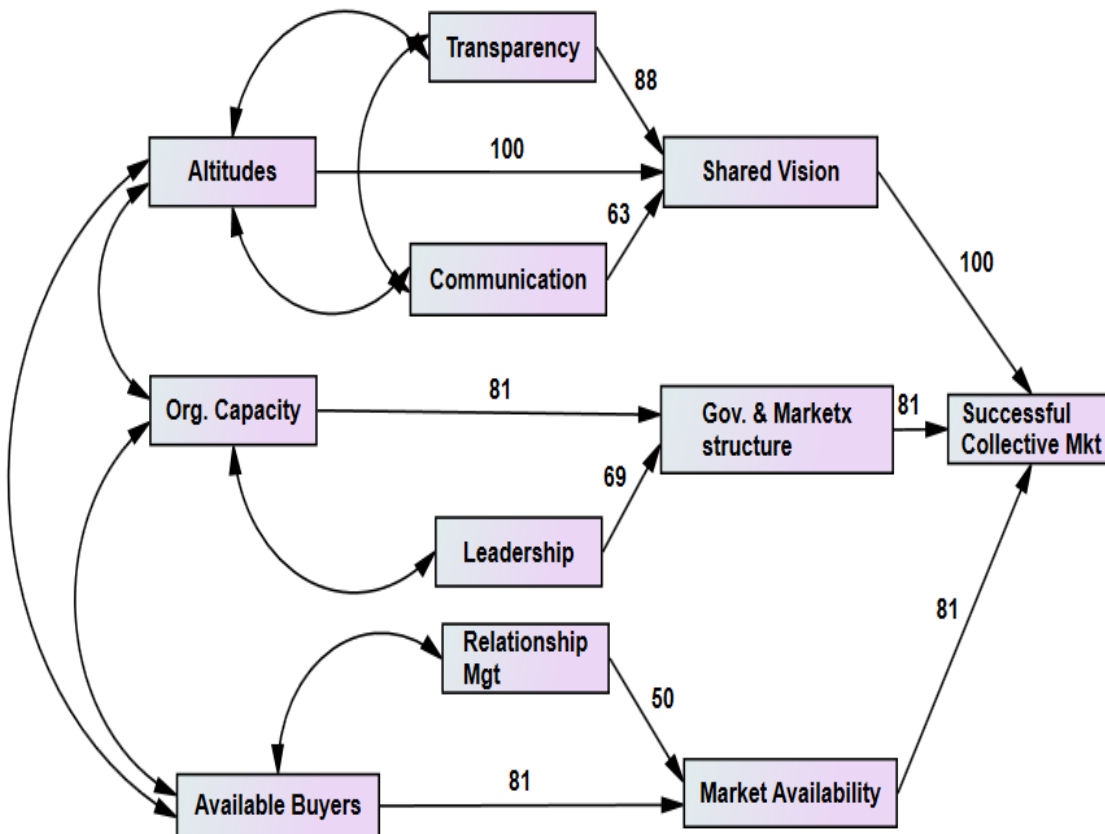
Table 3. Selective Category and Theme emerging from the study

CATEGORIES	SUB-CATEGORIES /CODES	RATING (%)	SELECT CAT. %	THEME
Shared vision (1)	a. Attitudes of members	100	(a/SHARED VISION;100%)	(a/1)
	b. Transparency	88		
	c. Effective communication	63		
Governance and marketing structures (2)	d. Committed leadership	69	(f/GOV.& STRUCT.;81%)	
	e. Strong Marketing Comm.	19		
	f. Organizational capacity	81		
Market Availability (3)	g. Buyer relations Management	50	(h/MARKET AVAIL.;81%)	
	h. Availability of ready buyer	81		
	i. Pricing factors	19		

Source: Field Data (2019)

The emerged categories and relationships were used to conceptualize a model grounded on the data collected from interviews. Credibility of the data and subsequent findings were established through concurrent data collection and analyses as well as members check (Birks & Mills, 2011; Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 2002b; Elliott and Lazenbatt, 2005; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This process led to the conclusion that the effectiveness of collective marketing action among smallholder farmers can be explained by five categories including: Shared Vision (SHV), Governance & Organizational Structures (GOV. and STRUCT.), Market Availability (MKT. AVAIL.), Market Competitiveness (MKT. COMP.) and Business Development Services (BDS ACCESS) as should on the model below:

Figure 1: Determinants of Effective Collective Market



Source: Field Data (2019)

These five categories were explained by a set of sub-category codes detailed in table 3. The analysis showed that all the respondents (100%) concurred on the idea that member attitudes are responsible for building a shared vision. Further (81%) indicated that governance and organizational structures were important in effective collective marketing action. A similar proportion (81%) indicated Market availability determined effective collective marketing, a significant proportion (88%) indicated market competitiveness of smallholder farmers as a determinant of collective marketing and (63%) mentioned Access to Business Development Services. The ultimate goal of farmer engagement in market oriented farm enterprise is to earn a profit. Profit in the context of the study population was conceptualized in terms of the perceived benefits (81%) accruing from collective actions.

4.2 Modeling an Effective Collective Market Framework for Smallholder Farmers

Further analysis revealed three core categories that influence the effectiveness of collective marketing action among smallholder farmers as shown on table 4 below:

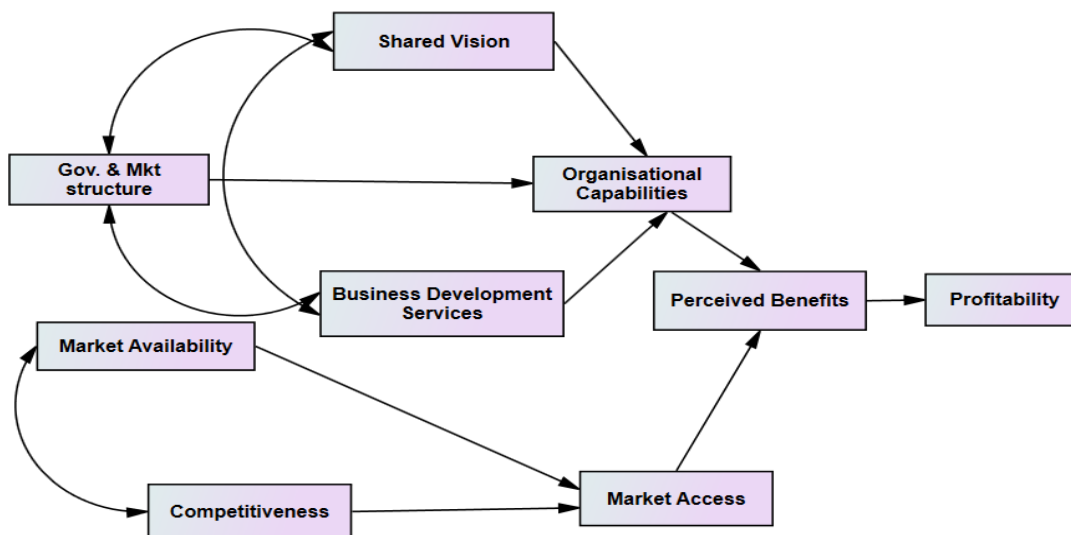
Table 4: Re-grouped category codes indicating the Core-category

Interview Question	Sub-Category	Core-category
What determines successful collective marketing action among smallholder farmer producer associations?	1. Shared Vision	Organizational Capabilities
	2. Governance & marketing Structures	
	3. Access to BDS	
	1. Market availability	Market access
	2. Competitiveness	
What factors determine the profitability of farmers participating in collective marketing action?	1. Price of the commodity	Profitability
	2. Timeliness of payment	
	3. Member benefits and services	

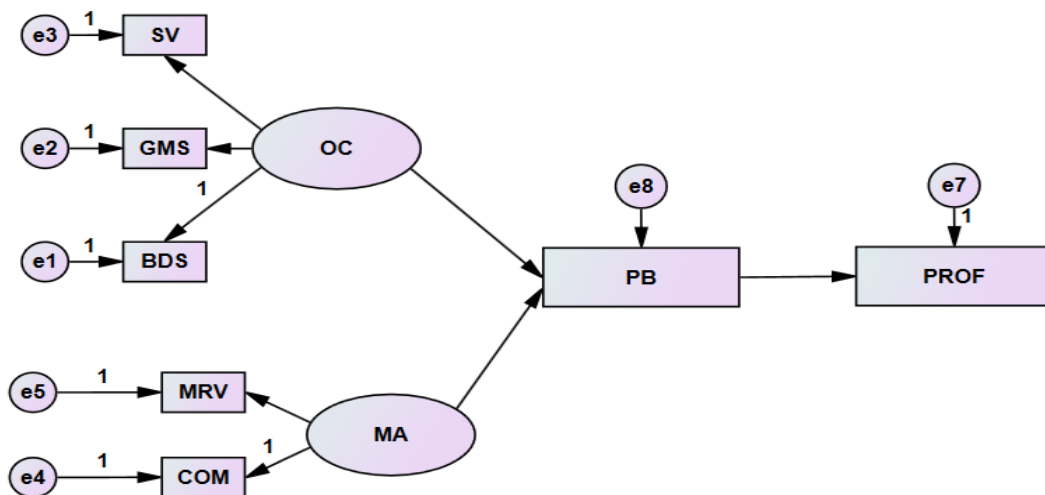
Source: Field Data (2019)

The re-grouped categorization was used to generate a theoretical framework for effective collective marketing. The framework posits that the success of collective marketing action by smallholder farmers is determined by the attitudes of farmers towards collective marketing. Organizational capabilities for collective marketing endeavors will be enhanced when there is a shared vision among farmers, good governance, organized marketing structures and access to business development services (BDS). Furthermore, access to agro-commodity markets is essential for influencing the level of perceived benefits that are likely to accrue from collective action. A sustainable market is a function of the competitiveness of small farmer enterprises and the availability of ready buyers or market for the commodities being marketed collectively. The level of perceived benefits is bound to influence the motivation of farmers to effectively engage in collective marketing and enhance profitability. The theoretical model as shown on figure 2 is constructed based on these findings.

Figure 2: Theoretical framework for collective marketing



Source: Field Data (2019)

Figure 3: Structural Equation Model for “theory of effective collective marketing”

Source: Field Data (2019)

Where;

SV	Share Vision
GMS	Governance and market Structure
BDS	Business Development Services
MRV	Market Availability
COM	Competitiveness
OC	Organizational Capacities
MA	Market Access
PB	Perceived Benefits
PROF	Profitability

5.0 DISCUSSION

Existing literature on collective marketing has presented evidence of the transformative effects of collective action among smallholder farmers on productivity. In Uganda there have been ongoing attempts to promote collective marketing among farmers to fill the gap created by the demise of traditional producer and marketing cooperatives in the 1990s. These attempts have registered mixed results in achieving the transformative effects expected on subsistence farming as vehicles for integration into profitable markets (Markelova and Mwangi, 2010); Miriam Vorlaufer et al, 2012). The effectiveness of collective marketing activities of smallholder farmers have often been undermined by a number of internal factors which include weak organizational and governance systems, mistrust, poor cohesion and limited commitment from members who opt to side-sell¹ and engage in free-riding behavior.

The role of individual farmer and organizations and external factors determining the effectiveness of collective marketing have been elucidated in this study (Asif Yaseen et al, 2018). In the context of collective marketing a shared vision refers to the common aspiration by the members of the collective marketing organization towards a desired future welfare and livelihood state, and what they agree to do to realize future goals through collective action. The shared vision provides motivation, inspiration, mutual trust, and the willingness

¹Selling outside the collective marketing arrangement

to pursue collective interest. This will also result in the accumulation of bonding Social capital (Kibirige, 2016). In Africa The subsistence approach is characterized by low internal (Bonding) social capital and almost lacks external social capital to access agricultural markets. Social capital in collective marketing is vital in boosting and ensuring efficient agricultural production and marketing (McAllister, 2010; Hongmei and Mangxian, 2011; Kibirige, 2016). The creation of social bonds under collective marketing arrangements is important for the development of organizational marketing capabilities which not only serve as vehicles for market integration but also facilitate strategies to mitigate future risks and absorb potential social and market shocks. Besides the shared vision, governance and organized marketing structures are important contributors to the organizational marketing capabilities build in collective marketing arrangements. The governance and marketing structures influence; the commercial orientation of the members and provide the institutional framework for collective action aimed at reducing transaction costs, managing uncertainties, and resolving market information asymmetries (Dorward et al., 2004; Torero, 2011). Organizations provide a support mechanism to members through which, they can address their short-term and long-term welfare interests in the context of collective marketing. This support is vital to foster loyalty, increase the intensity of member participation and facilitate the transition from subsistence to commercially oriented farming. Torero (2011) observed that farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa are dependent on the informal or formal organizations for welfare support to achieve low cost market exchanges and reduce market uncertainties. In both cases farmers acting alone have limited capacity to negotiate and project bargaining power in the agro-commodity market leaving them as price takers. In the absence of sound governance and strong marketing structures, collective marketing organizations face a major constraint to access markets (Ma. Lucila et al., 2006; Ruben et al., 2007; Reardon et al., 2005; 2009) and achieve effective participation by members (Torero, 2011; Van Schalkwyk et al., 2012; Zylberberg, 2013).

Unlike the traditional cooperatives, the governance and management structures in collective marketing organizations must be responsive to member interests and be dynamic. Loyalty is dependent on how members find the organization responsive and relevant to their individual goals and what benefits accrue from being an active member of the collective formation. In addition to the shared vision and governance aspects, the ability of the collective marketing organization to access business development services (BDS) contributes to the realization of the required organizational marketing capabilities. BDS services which include training activities in areas like financial literacy, risk management and entrepreneurship were indicated to provide knowledge and skills to farmers in order to improve governance, investment and productivity (Wongtschowski et al., 2013). Literature on collective marketing is consistent with the fact that collective marketing facilitates linkages that will increase opportunities and build capabilities for smallholder farmers to access markets. Market access in this study has been shown to be a function of a readily available buyer market and the competitiveness of smallholder farmer enterprise. Availability of a ready market from the study relates to the relationships built with the buyers, the existence of a targeted buyer or market and the pricing factors associated with the market in question. Other scholars have also noted that the availability of a ready market and the ability of farmers to access that market is an important factor for the commercialization of smallholder agriculture (Litha L. Magingx et al., 2009). Smallholder farmers have three potential agro-commodity markets where they can trade; 1) the local or rural market 2) the urban, corporate and industrial markets which spread out into national trading networks and 3) the regional and

international export markets which connect to global trading systems. The rural market is dominated by informal trading actions, operates in the less regulated end of the economy and leaves farmers susceptible to exploitation by unscrupulous dealers and is a poverty trap. The formal markets consist of the urban, corporate, industrial markets in the local economy and the regional and international export markets, which offer price premiums and higher profitability, but access by smallholder farmers is constrained by lack of competitiveness (Markelova et al, 2009; Wheatherspoon & Reardon, 2003; Schwentetius and Gomez, 2002). Key elements of market competitiveness identified in the study were; production management, ability to access production finance and availability of storage and marketing infrastructure to support collective marketing.

Acting individually, would mean that smallholder farmers stand little chance to directly participate in urban, corporate and export markets because they lack the ability to master the stringent quality and food safety standards and the cost of processing and obtaining necessary export certificates (Markelova & Mwangi, 2010; Barrett et al, 2002). The instrumentality of collective marketing in overcoming market failures and institutional hurdles has been supported by previous studies (Markelova & Mwangi, 2010; Markelova et al, 2009; Poulton & Lyne, 2009; Sayantan et al 2014; Bernard and Spielman, 2009; Wollni and Zeller, 2007). The principle elements of the theoretical framework generated from this study contribute to farmers' perception of the potential benefits that accrue from collective marketing.

The findings and proposed theory of collective marketing has provided a basis to understand the factors that determine effective collective marketing and profitability. From the study profitability has been explained as a function of the price charged for the commodity, the timeliness with which payments are made and other non-monetary benefits which accrue to members. There is a need to replicate this study in different smallholder farmer collective marketing environments to further validate the theoretical framework developed and to test it through a quantitative study to establish the strength of relationships between the variables in the theoretical model.

6.0 CONCLUSION

This theory is grounded on empirical data collected from farmers and experts involved in collective marketing in Uganda. It has provided a first attempt to theorize collective marketing action and profitability among smallholder farmers. It provides a solid framework for development workers and policy makers seeking to build interventions towards modernizing and commercializing smallholder agriculture. The simplicity with which the theory has been stated implies a direct application by policy makers and development workers towards designing focused interventions to build the capacity of farmers and farmer collective marketing organizations to achieve greater participation and performance. To the world of academia it provides a framework for further research and theory development in the field of smallholder farmer marketing models.

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