

International Journal of Agriculture Extension and Social Development

Volume 9; Issue 3; March 2026; Page No. 185-191

Received: 17-01-2026
Accepted: 13-03-2026

Indexed Journal
Peer Reviewed Journal

Branding dynamics in Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs): Determinants and pathways for entrepreneurial upscaling in the agribusiness ecosystem

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DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.33545/26180723.2026.v9.i3c.3355>

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Abstract

Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) have emerged as important institutional mechanisms for strengthening smallholder farmers' market participation and enhancing agribusiness competitiveness. Among the various strategic functions of FPOs, branding plays a crucial role in improving product visibility, value addition and market differentiation. The present study examines the determinants and dynamics of branding within Farmer Producer Organizations and explores its implications for entrepreneurial upscaling in the rural agribusiness ecosystem. The study was conducted in Nadia district of West Bengal, India, covering 150 member farmers associated with two selected FPOs, Probha FPO and Spandan Trust. A blended research design incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches was employed to capture socio economic, institutional and entrepreneurial dimensions influencing branding performance. Primary data were collected during August 2023 through structured interviews. Nineteen independent variables were analyzed in relation to branding (y_1), namely experiential profile (x_1), functional education (x_2), size of family (x_3), family education (x_4), gender proportion (x_5), number of land fragments (x_6), size of landholding (x_7), cropping intensity (x_8), yield (x_9), marketable surplus (x_{10}), marketed surplus (x_{11}), expenditure (x_{12}), income (x_{13}), risk perception (x_{14}), crop diversity index (x_{15}), family labour (x_{16}), entrepreneurial motivation (x_{17}), entrepreneurial behaviour (x_{18}) and entrepreneurial communication (x_{19}). Advanced analytical techniques including correlation analysis, step wise regression and path analysis were applied to identify the determinants of branding performance. The results indicate that branding in FPOs is significantly influenced by production, economic and entrepreneurial factors. Correlation analysis showed significant relationships with variables such as functional education, gender proportion, landholding size, yield, marketable surplus, marketed surplus, expenditure and income. Stepwise regression identified yield, gender proportion, entrepreneurial behaviour, functional education, family labour, income, entrepreneurial motivation and family size as key predictors of branding. Path analysis further revealed that marketed surplus had the highest direct effect on branding, highlighting the importance of effective market participation for strengthening FPO brand development.

Keywords: Farmer Producer Organization (FPO), branding, agribusiness ecosystem, entrepreneurial upscaling, rural entrepreneurship

Introduction

Agriculture plays a vital role in ensuring food security, employment generation and rural livelihood sustainability in developing countries. In India, a large share of agricultural production is carried out by small and marginal farmers who face challenges such as fragmented landholdings, limited market access, weak bargaining power and inadequate institutional support (Bairagya *et al.*, 2026) [3]. These constraints often result in reduced profitability and limited participation in organized value chains. To address these issues, collective institutional mechanisms such as Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) have emerged as an important strategy to strengthen the economic position of smallholder farmers and facilitate their integration into

competitive markets (Ramappa and Yashashwini, 2028) [11]. Farmer Producer Organizations enable farmers to aggregate produce, access inputs collectively, improve bargaining power and participate more effectively in marketing and value addition activities (Shiferaw *et al.*, 2011) [15]. As farmer owned and farmer governed enterprises, FPOs promote economies of scale, enhance access to credit, facilitate technology adoption and strengthen market linkages (Manaswi, 2018) [7]. In recent years, the Government of India has actively promoted FPO development through several policy initiatives including the central sector scheme for the formation and promotion of 10,000 FPOs, recognizing them as instruments for rural enterprise development and agribusiness transformation.

While the organizational role of FPOs in improving agricultural marketing has been widely discussed, one important dimension that remains relatively underexplored is branding. Branding has become a crucial strategy in modern agribusiness systems where product differentiation, identity and market visibility determine competitiveness (Munteanu, 2024)^[8]. In agricultural markets, branding helps build consumer trust, enhance recognition and enable better price realization through quality assurance and product differentiation (Chaturvedi and Sinha, 2024)^[4]. For farmer collectives, branding can transform traditional commodity marketing into value oriented agribusiness ventures by linking production systems with consumer preferences, market standards and supply chains.

Recent studies indicate that branding can significantly enhance the market position of farmer organizations. A well developed brand identity enables FPOs to differentiate products, communicate quality attributes and build relationships with consumers and institutional buyers (Panigrahy *et al.*, 2020)^[9]. Branding also supports value addition, geographical identity based marketing and improved packaging and labeling practices, thereby increasing market visibility and consumer confidence. As agricultural markets become more integrated and consumers increasingly demand quality assurance, traceability and sustainability, branding strategies have become essential for competitive agribusiness models (Ziggers and Trienekens, 1999)^[18].

However, many Farmer Producer Organizations still face difficulties in establishing strong brand identities due to limited managerial capacity, weak entrepreneurial orientation, inadequate market intelligence and poor communication strategies (Patil *et al.*, 2025)^[10]. Socio economic and institutional characteristics of farmers may also influence the ability of FPOs to adopt branding initiatives. Roy *et al.* (2026)^[14] stated that the economic condition and agricultural resource base of farm households are key factors shaping farmers' perceived uncertainty. Factors such as education, farm size, income, risk perception and entrepreneurial motivation can shape farmers' capacity to adopt market oriented innovations including branding and value addition practices (Anim *et al.*, 2025)^[2].

Materials and Methods

The present investigation was undertaken to analyze the determinants influencing branding within Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs). The study examined the relationship between nineteen independent variables and the dependent variable branding (y_1). The independent variables included experiential profile (x_1), functional education (x_2), size of family (x_3), family education (x_4), gender proportion (x_5), number of land fragments (x_6), size of landholding (x_7), cropping intensity (x_8), yield (x_9), marketable surplus (x_{10}),

marketed surplus (x_{11}), expenditure (x_{12}), income (x_{13}), risk perception (x_{14}), crop diversity index (x_{15}), family labour (x_{16}), entrepreneurial motivation (x_{17}), entrepreneurial behaviour (x_{18}) and entrepreneurial communication (x_{19}).

The study was conducted in Nadia district of West Bengal, India, an important agricultural region characterized by diversified cropping systems and the growing presence of farmer collectives. Two Farmer Producer Organizations, namely Probha FPO and Spandan Trust, were purposively selected for the investigation to explore the dynamics of branding development within grassroots agricultural enterprises.

A total of 150 respondents were selected from among the member farmers associated with the selected FPOs. The respondents were chosen using a purposive sampling technique to ensure representation of farmers actively involved in FPO activities. Primary data were collected during August 2023 through a structured interview schedule designed to capture socio-economic, institutional and entrepreneurial characteristics of the respondents along with information related to branding practices within the FPOs. Prior to the final survey, the interview schedule was pre-tested to ensure clarity, reliability and suitability of the questions.

The collected data were coded, classified and tabulated for systematic analysis. Both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were employed to analyze the data and identify factors influencing branding performance within the FPO ecosystem.

To examine the relationships between the independent variables and branding (y_1), coefficient of correlation analysis was applied. Stepwise multiple regression analysis was further used to identify the most significant predictors contributing to branding performance by determining the relative influence of different independent variables. In addition, path analysis was conducted to examine the direct and indirect effects among variables, enabling the decomposition of correlation into direct and mediated effects. This approach facilitated a deeper understanding of the causal relationships influencing branding development within Farmer Producer Organizations.

All statistical analyses were carried out using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25.0, while additional computations were performed using the web-based statistical software OPSTAT to ensure accuracy and validation of the results. The analytical framework adopted in this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic, institutional and entrepreneurial determinants influencing branding capacity in FPOs.

The findings of the study are expected to contribute to the discourse on rural entrepreneurship and agribusiness management by providing policy insights for strengthening marketing capabilities, promoting value addition and improving the competitiveness of farmer collectives.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Coefficient of Correlation (r): Branding (y_1) vs. 19 Independent Variables

	Independent Variables	'r' value	Remarks
1	Experiential profile (x_1)	0.203	*
2	Functional educational (x_2)	0.291	**
3	Size of family (x_3)	-0.004	
4	Family education (x_4)	-0.167	
5	Gender proportion (x_5)	0.414	**
6	No. of land fragments (x_6)	0.389	**
7	Size of land holding (x_7)	0.582	**
8	Cropping intensity (x_8)	0.244	*
9	Yield (x_9)	0.676	**
10	Marketable surplus (x_{10})	0.661	**
11	Marketed surplus (x_{11})	0.644	**
12	Expenditure (x_{12})	0.629	**
13	Income (on farm & off-farm) (x_{13})	0.570	**
14	Risk perception (x_{14})	0.080	
15	Crop diversity index (x_{15})	-0.022	
16	Family labour (x_{16})	0.227	*
17	Entrepreneurial motivation (x_{17})	-0.010	
18	Entrepreneurial behaviour (x_{18})	0.181	
19	Entrepreneurial communication (x_{19})	0.172	

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level, *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Results: The table 1 elucidates the coefficient of correlation between branding (y_1) and 19 independent variables. It has been found that the following experiential profile (x_1), cropping intensity (x_8) and family labour (x_{16}) were found significant at 5% significance level. Furthermore, functional

education (x_2), gender proportion (x_5), no. of land fragments (x_6), size of land holding (x_7), yield (x_9), marketable surplus (x_{10}), marketed surplus (x_{11}), expenditure (x_{12}) and income (on farm & off-farm) (x_{13}) were revealed as significant at 1% significance level.

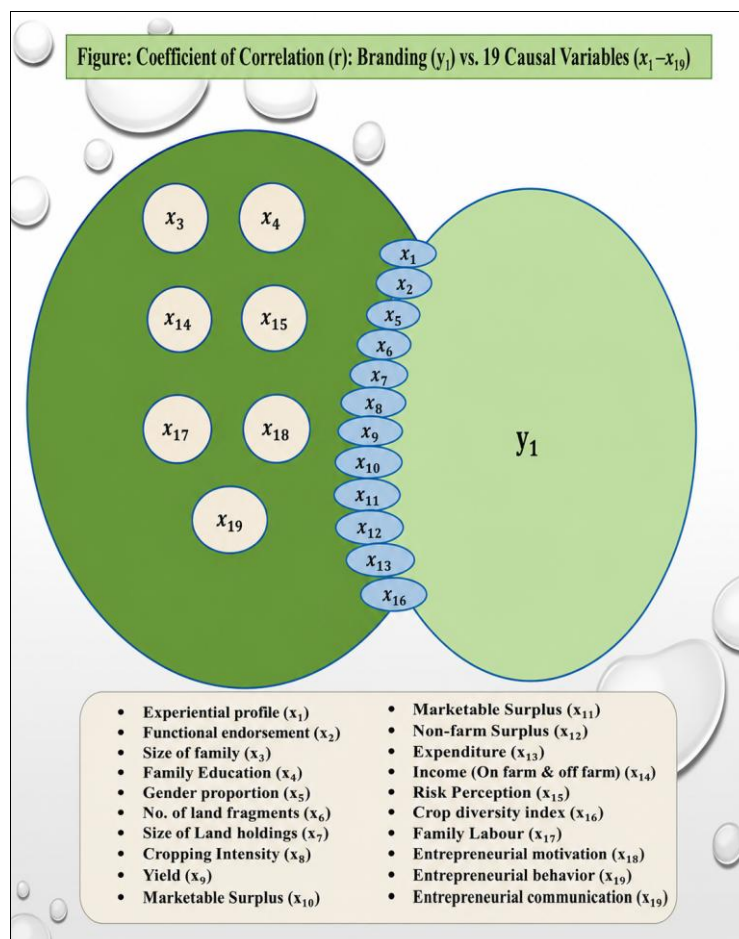


Fig 1: Coefficient of correlation (r): Branding (y_1) vs. 19 Independent Variables

Revelation

The correlation analysis revealed that branding of FPOs had significant and positive interrelationships with several production, economic and structural characteristics of member farmers. Variables such as functional education (x_2), gender proportion (x_5), number of land fragments (x_6), size of landholding (x_7), yield (x_9), marketable surplus (x_{10}), marketed surplus (x_{11}), expenditure (x_{12}) and income from on-farm and off-farm sources (x_{13}) were found to be significant at the 0.01 level. This indicates that FPOs possessing stronger resource bases, higher production volumes and greater market engagement tend to achieve more effective branding outcomes. The strong association of marketed and marketable surplus particularly underscores the role of consistent product availability and market participation in building and sustaining FPO brands (Patil *et al.*, 2025)^[10].

In addition, experiential profile (x_1), cropping intensity (x_8), and family labour (x_{16}) exhibited significant relationships at the 0.05 level. These relationships suggest that accumulated farming experience, intensive utilization of land resources and availability of household labour support branding efforts by ensuring production stability and continuity of supply (Ebanyat *et al.*, 2010)^[5]. Such factors contribute indirectly to brand recognition by enhancing reliability and operational efficiency of FPOs.

Conversely, variables related to family structure, crop diversity and entrepreneurial attributes showed weak or non significant correlations with branding. This implies that branding performance of FPOs is more closely aligned with tangible production capacity, economic strength and marketable output rather than with socio-personal or entrepreneurial characteristics of individual members (Reddy, 2021)^[13].

Table 2: Stepwise Regression Analysis: Branding (y_1) vs. 19 Independent Variables

Sl. No.	Variables	Reg. Coef.	S.E. B	Beta	't' value
1	Yield (x_9)	0.527	0.078	0.527	6.763
2	Gender proportion (x_5)	0.274	0.056	0.274	4.855
3	Entrepreneurial behaviour (x_{18})	0.209	0.057	0.209	3.677
4	Functional educational (x_2)	0.165	0.056	0.165	2.932
5	Family Labour (x_{16})	0.192	0.058	0.192	3.304
6	Income (On farm & off-farm) (x_{13})	0.230	0.076	0.230	3.006
7	Entrepreneurial motivation (x_{17})	0.190	0.060	0.190	3.175
8	Size of family (x_3)	0.138	0.059	0.138	2.356

R square value: 72.78%

The standard error of estimate: 0.544

Results: At the final step, eight variables viz. Yield (x_9), Gender proportion (x_5), entrepreneurial behaviour (x_{18}), functional education (x_2), family labour (x_{16}), income (on farm & off-farm) (x_{13}), entrepreneurial motivation and (x_{17})

and size of family (x_3) were retained. The model yielded an R^2 value of 72.78%. Collectively, these eight variables explained 94.72% of the total 76.84% variance accounted for in the dependent variable.

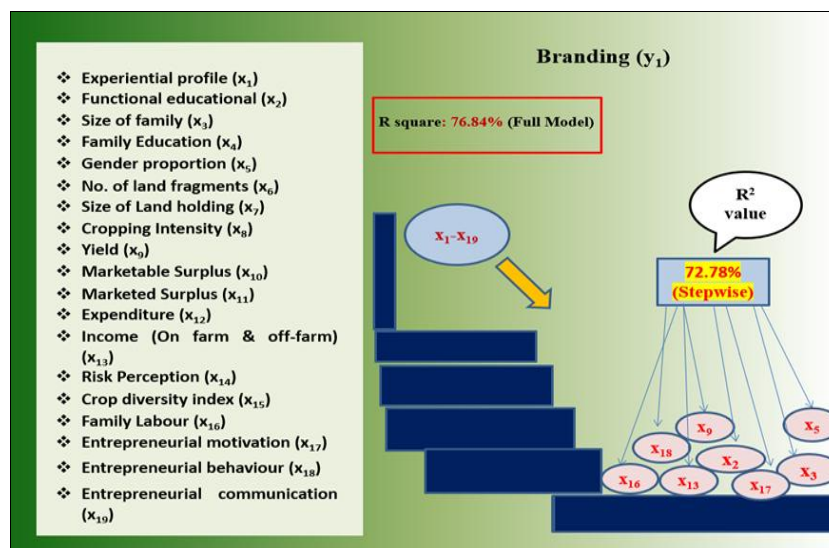


Fig 2: Stepwise regression analysis: Branding (y_1) vs. 19 Independent Variables

Revelation

The stepwise regression analysis revealed that eight variables collectively played a decisive role in explaining Branding of FPOs. Yield (x_9) emerged as the most influential determinant indicating that higher and consistent production volumes strengthen brand reliability and market presence of FPOs. Gender proportion (x_5) also showed a strong positive contribution, reflecting the importance of

inclusive participation and balanced involvement of members in branding related activities.

Entrepreneurial behaviour (x_{18}) and entrepreneurial motivation (x_{17}) were retained as significant predictors, underscoring the role of innovation, market responsiveness and proactive decision making in building and sustaining FPO brands. Functional education (x_2) further contributed significantly, suggesting that skill oriented knowledge

enhances branding through better quality management, packaging, and market communication (Malik *et al.*, 2012) [6].

Family labour (x_{16}), income from on-farm and off-farm sources (x_{13}) and size of family (x_3) also exhibited meaningful associations, highlighting the supportive role of labour availability and financial capacity in sustaining branding efforts.

Overall, the model explained 72.78% of the total variation in branding with a low standard error of estimate (0.544) and the retained variables together accounted for nearly the entire explanatory power of the full regression model, indicating that FPO branding is driven by a focused set of production, participation and entrepreneurial factors (Acharya *et al.*, 2022) [1].

Table 3: Path Analysis: Decomposition of Total Effects into Direct, Indirect and Residual Effects of 19 Exogenous Variables on Branding (y_1)

Sl. No.	Variables	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Highest Individual Indirect Effect
1	Experiential profile (x_1)	0.203	0.055	0.148	0.099 (x_2)
2	Functional educational (x_2)	0.291	0.139	0.152	0.039 (x_1)
3	Size of family (x_3)	-0.004	0.093	-0.097	-0.047 (x_{11})
4	Family education (x_4)	-0.167	-0.053	-0.114	-0.045 (x_3)
5	Gender proportion (x_5)	0.414	0.278	0.136	0.047 (x_{11})
6	No. of land fragments (x_6)	0.389	0.134	0.255	0.154 (x_{11})
7	Size of land holding (x_7)	0.582	0.094	0.488	0.262 (x_{11})
8	Cropping intensity (x_8)	0.244	-0.009	0.253	0.050 (x_5)
9	Yield (x_9)	0.676	0.101	0.575	0.292 (x_{11})
10	Marketable surplus (x_{10})	0.661	-0.037	0.698	0.294 (x_{11})
11	Marketed surplus (x_{11})	0.644	0.308	0.336	0.103 (x_{13})
12	Expenditure (x_{12})	0.629	0.063	0.566	0.246 (x_{11})
13	Income (on farm & off-farm) (x_{13})	0.570	0.159	0.411	0.199 (x_{11})
14	Risk perception (x_{14})	0.080	0.081	-0.001	-0.055 (x_{17})
15	Crop diversity index (x_{15})	-0.022	-0.019	-0.003	0.026 (x_{19})
16	Family labour (x_{16})	0.227	0.187	0.040	0.044 (x_{11})
17	Entrepreneurial motivation (x_{17})	-0.010	0.181	-0.191	-0.075 (x_{11})
18	Entrepreneurial behaviour (x_{18})	0.181	0.225	-0.044	-0.045 (x_{11})
19	Entrepreneurial communication (x_{19})	0.172	0.158	0.014	0.047 (x_5)

Residual Effect= 0.232

Highest individual indirect effect: Marketed surplus (x_{11}), 11 times.

Results

Accordingly, table 3 illustrates the findings of the path analysis by systematically partitioning the direct, indirect

and residual effects of the exogenous variables on the dependent variable, i.e., the Branding (y_1).

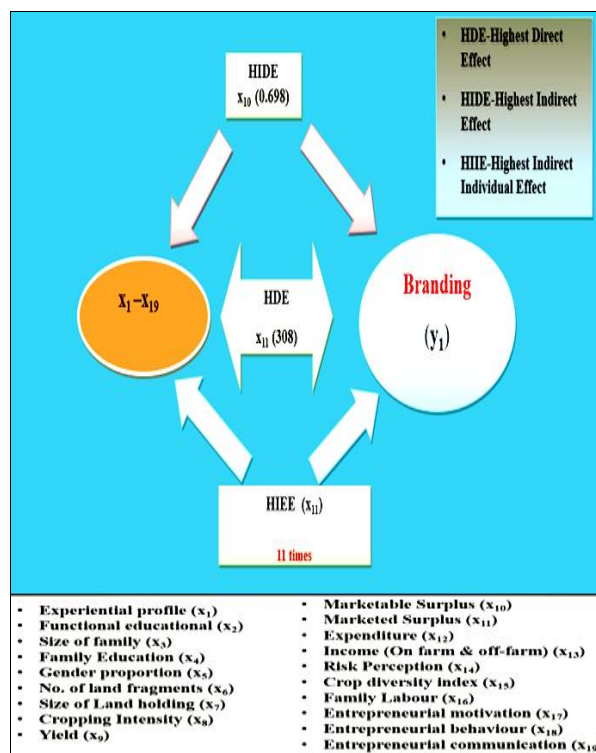


Fig 3: Path analysis: Decomposition of total effects into direct, indirect and residual effects of nineteen exogenous variables on the Branding (y_1)

Revelation

Highest direct effect

The path analysis reveals that marketed surplus (x_{11}) exerted the highest direct effect on FPO branding (y_1) (Direct effect = 0.308), highlighting that actual market participation and volume of sales play the most decisive role in strengthening FPO brand identity and visibility (Rani *et al.*, 2017)^[12].

Highest indirect effect

On the other hand, marketable surplus (x_{10}) recorded the highest indirect effect on branding (Indirect effect = 0.698), mainly operating through marketed surplus (x_{11}). This indicates that higher production potential enhances branding only when surplus is successfully converted into marketed output via the FPO (Vijayakumar, 2021)^[16].

Mixed direct and indirect effects

Other production and economic variables such as yield (x_9), size of landholding (x_7) and expenditure (x_{12}) also showed strong indirect influences, again predominantly mediated by marketed surplus. This confirms that branding is largely a market mediated outcome rather than a direct result of production alone (Willmott, 2010)^[17].

Overall, the relationship pattern suggests that marketed surplus acts as the key transmission channel, converting production strength and economic capacity into effective FPO branding.

Conclusion

The present study examined the determinants and dynamics of branding within Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) and their role in promoting entrepreneurial upscaling in the agribusiness ecosystem. The findings clearly indicate that branding in FPOs is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by production capacity, market participation, economic strength and entrepreneurial attributes of member farmers.

The correlation analysis revealed that several variables such as functional education, gender proportion, number of land fragments, size of landholding, yield, marketable surplus, marketed surplus, expenditure and income exhibited significant positive relationships with branding. These results suggest that FPOs possessing stronger resource bases, higher production potential and better economic capacity are more capable of developing effective branding strategies and achieving greater market visibility.

The stepwise regression analysis further confirmed that yield, gender proportion, entrepreneurial behaviour, functional education, family labour, income, entrepreneurial motivation and family size collectively explain a substantial proportion of variation in branding performance. Among these factors, yield and entrepreneurial attributes play a particularly important role in strengthening the operational capacity and market orientation of FPOs, thereby facilitating brand development.

The path analysis provided deeper insights into the causal relationships among variables. Marketed surplus emerged as the most influential factor exerting the highest direct effect on branding, indicating that actual market participation and the volume of produce sold through the organization are critical for establishing and sustaining FPO brands. Marketable surplus, yield and landholding size also

contributed significantly through indirect pathways, primarily mediated by marketed surplus. This highlights that production strength translates into effective branding only when it is successfully integrated with organized marketing channels.

Overall, the study demonstrates that successful branding in Farmer Producer Organizations is closely linked with enhanced production capacity, surplus generation, market participation and entrepreneurial orientation. Strengthening these dimensions through targeted capacity building, improved market linkages, institutional support and branding oriented training programs can significantly enhance the competitiveness of FPOs. Such initiatives will not only improve product identity and value realization but also foster sustainable rural entrepreneurship and inclusive agribusiness development among smallholder farmers.

Limitations of the Study

The present study was conducted in only two Farmer Producer Organizations in Nadia district of West Bengal, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or institutional contexts. The sample size was restricted to 150 member farmers, and therefore broader variations across different FPO structures and commodities might not be fully captured. In addition, the study relied primarily on cross sectional primary data collected at a single point in time, which may not adequately reflect long term changes in branding dynamics or market performance. Some behavioural and entrepreneurial variables were also measured through self-reported responses, which may involve subjective bias.

Policy Implications

The findings suggest that strengthening branding capacity in Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) requires focused policy support in the areas of entrepreneurial training, functional education and market oriented skill development. Government and development agencies should promote programs on packaging, labeling, quality assurance and brand promotion to enhance the market identity of FPO products. Additionally, improving market infrastructure, value addition facilities and access to credit can help FPOs increase marketed surplus, which is a key driver of branding performance. Integrating digital marketing and e-commerce platforms can further expand market reach and improve competitiveness of FPOs in the agribusiness ecosystem.

Disclaimer (Artificial Intelligence)

Author (s) hereby declares that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

Competing Interests

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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