International Journal Publishing
INFLUENCE: International Journal of Science Review
Volume 7, No. 2, 2025
https://influence-journal.com/index.php/influence/index

The Role of Social Networks in Strengthening Market Access and Distribution of Organic Agricultural Products

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Abstract. Organic farming continues to grow rapidly, driven by growing public awareness of health and environmental sustainability. However, significant challenges remain, including limited market access and product distribution, which often fall short of increasing demand. Furthermore, the emergence of social networks in the digital era opens up new opportunities to strengthen connections between farmers, consumers, and various stakeholders in the organic agricultural supply chain. This study aims to analyze the role of social networks in expanding market access and strengthening the distribution of organic agricultural products through the use of digital technology. The research method employed a qualitative approach, employing literature analysis, data collection from secondary sources, and exploring social network optimization practices implemented in the organic agricultural sector. The analysis identified shifts in social interactions resulting from digital transformation and opportunities for integrating traditional networks with technology-based networks. The results indicate that digital social networks can expand the marketing reach of organic agricultural products more quickly, efficiently, and effectively. The integration of digital community applications plays a crucial role in building close relationships between farmers and consumers, thereby increasing trust and loyalty. Changing interaction patterns within social networks also encourages the creation of new distribution models that are more adaptive to market needs. Therefore, optimizing social networks in the digital era is a key strategy for strengthening the sustainability and competitiveness of organic agricultural products in the modern marketplace.

Keywords: *Social networks, Access, Distribution, Organic Agricultural Products.*

A. INTRODUCTION

Organic farming is gaining widespread attention as public awareness of health, the environment, and sustainability grows. In recent years, demand for organic products has continued to rise, both domestically and internationally. However, this growing demand is not always accompanied by the ability of organic farmers, especially small-scale farmers, to access broader markets (Kharel et al., 2022). Many organic farmers still rely on traditional distribution channels, which are often limited to the local area and are unable to reach consumers optimally. These obstacles are compounded when distribution infrastructure, logistics costs, and limited access to market information become impediments. This situation creates a gap between the vast market potential and the limitations farmers have in exploiting it (Milford et al., 2021).

Amidst these conditions, social networks have emerged as a force capable of bridging existing formal limitations. Relationships between farmers, farmer groups, cooperatives, community organizations, and even interactions with consumers form networks that informally open up distribution and marketing opportunities. Through social networks, information about market needs, prices, and distribution opportunities can spread more quickly, eliminating the need for farmers to rely solely on conventional distribution channels (Chaudhuri et al., 2021). In many communities, social networks have become a primary means of expanding the market for organic products, whether through community membership systems, social media platforms, or collaborations with organic stores and modern markets. Thus, social networks offer a real alternative to the limitations of formal distribution systems, which often disadvantage smallholder farmers (Xie et al., 2024).

The importance of social networks is further emphasized when we consider that market access is not only related to the ability to produce quality products, but also to the ability to reach the right consumers. Many organic farmers achieve good harvests but struggle to find effective distribution channels (Wu et al., 2022). This often results in products that should have high economic value being sold at lower prices in local markets, or even being completely unavailable. At this point, social networks become a mechanism that connects farmers with consumers who care about organic products, thereby making the distribution chain shorter, more transparent, and more efficient (Van Hoyweghen et al., 2021).

The development of digital technology has also expanded the dimensions of social networks in supporting the distribution of organic agricultural products. Social media, digital trading platforms, and community-based applications have opened up new opportunities for farmers to expand their networks. Interactions that were previously limited to the local sphere can now expand to national and even global scales (Ma et al., 2022). Through these networks, farmers can access information on consumption trends, build direct relationships with consumers, and find a wider range of distribution partners. This connectedness creates significant opportunities to strengthen organic farmers' bargaining position in an increasingly competitive market (Hyland & Macken-Walsh, 2022).

Furthermore, social networks also play a role in building solidarity and support among fellow farmers. Many organic farming communities have come together to build collective distribution systems, share logistics information, and conduct joint promotions to expand market reach. This type of collaboration not only reduces distribution costs but also strengthens their position in facing market challenges. More broadly, social networks help create an ecosystem that supports organic farming, making it more sustainable and less susceptible to the dominance of modern distribution systems concentrated by large players (McDaniel et al., 2021).

However, despite the crucial role of social networks, some challenges must be addressed. Not all farmers have the same capacity to build and utilize social networks. Factors such as limited knowledge, limited access to technology, and even geographical constraints can hinder network expansion (Rust et al., 2022). Furthermore, the sustainability of social networks depends heavily on the trust, solidarity, and consistent participation of their members. If these factors are not maintained, the social networks that should strengthen market access can actually weaken or not function optimally (Baka et al., 2024).

This phenomenon demonstrates that social networks have a dual role: as a practical means of expanding product distribution and as a strategic instrument for strengthening farmers' position in the market. In an era where consumer behavior is increasingly shifting toward healthy and sustainable products, social networks can be a crucial bridge connecting organic farmers with consumers with specific needs. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how social networks operate in the context of organic farming, the extent to which they can strengthen market access, and how these networks can be optimized to address product distribution challenges that have historically limited the growth of organic farmers.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Social Network

A social network is a special type of network where the ties connecting one point to another within the network are social relationships. Based on this type of bond, the members of a social network are, directly or indirectly, humans (persons). The lines connecting one point to another represent social relationships between individuals, friendships, kinship, exchanges, superordinate-subordinate relationships, interorganizational relationships, military alliances, and so on (Sánchez-Arrieta et al., 2021). According to Van Zanden, social relationships, or

interdependence, are ongoing (relatively long-lasting and permanent) social interactions that ultimately bind individuals to one another through a relatively stable set of expectations. Social relationships can be viewed as something like a path or channel connecting one person (point) to another, through which goods, services, or information can flow (Rabelová et al., 2024). Social networks view the relationships between individuals as beneficial and impact the strength of the network because the goals achieved by all actors are the same, and through these relationships, mutually beneficial exchanges occur, both in terms of goods and non-goods, such as the exchange of information and knowledge (Hajli et al., 2022).

The emergence of social networks also assumes that humans are social beings connected to other humans. These relationships are limited and tailored to the needs or interests of the individual concerned. Many variations form networks, such as mutual knowledge, mutual information, mutual reminders, and mutual assistance in implementing or overcoming problems. Networks themselves can be formed from interpersonal relationships between individuals and institutions, and between groups and surrounding institutions or media, which serve as both a part and a binding force within the network. This cannot be achieved without a foundation of norms and mutual trust (Carstensen et al., 2021).

2. Organic Farming

According to the Research and Development Agency (R&D), organic farming is a cultivation technique that relies on natural ingredients without the use of synthetic chemicals. The primary goal of organic farming is to provide agricultural products, especially food, that are safe for the health of producers and consumers and do not harm the environment (Akanmu et al., 2023). This healthy lifestyle has become an international institution, requiring assurance that agricultural products must have food safety attributes, high nutritional content, and eco-labeling attributes. These consumer preferences have led to a rapid increase in global demand for organic agricultural products (Țigan et al., 2021).

Organic farming is an agricultural system that maintains harmony between agricultural activities and the environment by maximizing the use of natural processes, avoiding the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, and, where possible, utilizing organic waste generated by organic farming activities. The implementation of organic farming is one approach to sustainable development; therefore, its development is inseparable from the overall agricultural development program (Durham & Mizik, 2021). Sustainable agricultural development does not mean that the use of agricultural chemicals (agrochemicals) is completely prohibited, but it is still possible to a certain extent. Organic farming is an environmentally friendly production method. Organic production systems are based on precise and specific production standards aimed at developing socially and ecologically sustainable agroecosystems (Singh et al., 2021).

Organic farming is an agricultural system that minimizes the use of external inputs, avoiding synthetic fertilizers, synthetic pesticides (herbicides, fungicides), synthetic microbes, synthetic additives and preservatives, and irradiation. Modern agricultural products that use chemicals and genetic engineering have raised concerns among many people (Folina et al., 2025). Consumption patterns in certain communities are shifting, with many choosing foods considered safe, healthy, natural, fresh, varied, and easy to prepare. The back-to-nature movement is gaining popularity, with demand for foods with less sugar, less salt, less oil/fat/cholesterol, less pesticide and antibiotic residues, less hormones, less synthetic fertilizers, no irradiated foods, and no Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) (Noort et al., 2022).

C. METHOD

This research was conducted using a qualitative approach, deemed appropriate for exploring the role of social networks in strengthening market access and distribution of organic agricultural products. Through this approach, the research seeks to understand the phenomenon contextually, emphasizing experiences, interactions, and dynamics occurring in the field. Data were obtained from various sources, including relevant previous research findings, literature reviews, and documents related to the research focus. Therefore, this research does not rely solely on one type of information but rather combines various complementary data sources to produce a more comprehensive picture. After data collection, the next step was to systematically process the data to clearly identify the research findings. Analysis was conducted using a thematic approach, allowing each piece of information to be categorized according to the main research issues. In this way, the research is expected to yield a deeper understanding of the role of social networks in expanding market access and contribute to both academic literature and organic farming practices in the field.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Social Networks as a Means of Accessing Market Information

Social networks play a crucial role in facilitating the flow of information needed by organic farmers, particularly regarding prices and consumer demand. In dynamic market conditions, where prices for organic agricultural products can fluctuate according to seasons, consumption trends, or supply availability, social networks provide a means for the rapid dissemination of this information. Through interactions between farmers, traders, community groups, and consumers, information about market needs can be obtained earlier than if relying solely on formal mechanisms. This rapid access to information provides a strategic advantage for farmers, as they can anticipate price changes and adjust production volumes or distribution strategies according to evolving demand. Without social networks, many farmers would struggle to access accurate market information, risking making incorrect decisions regarding product marketing.

In addition to providing a means for disseminating information on prices and consumer demand, social networks also accelerate communication between farmers and communities. Intensive interactions allow farmers to exchange experiences, share information on marketing opportunities, and even provide support in penetrating broader markets. Close relationships between farmers, both locally and regionally, foster sustainable communication patterns (Simon et al., 2021). Through this communication pattern, information previously limited to a small circle can develop into collective knowledge that benefits many parties. For example, when one farmer learns about the increasing demand for organic products in a city, that information can be quickly disseminated to other network members, enabling them to collectively meet that demand. This mechanism demonstrates that social networks are not simply platforms for interaction but also instruments that accelerate the circulation of important information that influences the success of product distribution.

However, this accelerated flow of information will not be effective without trust and maintained communication within the network. Trust is the primary foundation that allows network members to share information openly without fear of manipulation or misuse. When trust is strong, communication between farmers is smoother, the information shared is more reliable, and the willingness to cooperate increases. This is crucial because not all market information is stable; some information is susceptible to sudden changes that can cause losses if not properly verified. With strong trust, network members can verify information with each other before making decisions, thus ensuring its accuracy. The sustainability of social networks in providing access to market information is also significantly influenced by the quality of

communication established. If communication weakens or trust is lost, the network's effectiveness will decrease, ultimately reducing its capacity to support the marketing of organic agricultural products.

Information obtained through social networks ultimately has a significant impact on organic farmers' marketing strategies. With better knowledge of market conditions, farmers can determine more appropriate pricing strategies, select the most efficient distribution channels, and target consumers according to demand trends. Information about consumer preferences, such as the tendency to purchase organic produce in small but regular quantities, can change the way farmers market their products. Instead of selling on a large scale through intermediaries, they can utilize direct distribution systems to consumers, either through communities or digital platforms. Well-managed market information also enables farmers to adjust production patterns to better align with market needs, thereby reducing the risk of overstocking or losses due to unsold products. Thus, marketing strategies designed based on information from social networks will be more responsive, adaptive, and in line with the ever-evolving dynamics of consumer demand.

Furthermore, the existence of social networks as a means of accessing market information also encourages innovation in the marketing of organic agricultural products. Farmers with extensive networks are more likely to adopt new methods of selling their products, such as using weekly subscription systems, marketing through social media, and offering products in more attractive packages to consumers. All of this begins with the information flowing within the network, which broadens farmers' horizons regarding various marketing strategy possibilities. Information about the success of certain methods employed by network members can inspire other farmers to do the same or even develop them further. In this way, social networks serve not only as a means of disseminating information but also as a platform for collective innovation that strengthens organic farmers' position in the market.

Ultimately, the mechanisms for disseminating information on prices and consumer demand, the role of relationships between farmers and communities, the importance of trust and communication, and the impact of information on marketing strategies demonstrate that social networks are a crucial factor in strengthening market access. Without social networks, organic farmers face significant limitations in understanding market dynamics and designing appropriate strategies. Conversely, with strong networks, information flows more smoothly, marketing strategies are more adaptive, and the competitiveness of organic products increases. This confirms that the role of social networks is not only limited to facilitating the distribution of information, but also forms the basis for the economic success and sustainability of organic farming businesses amidst increasingly complex market challenges.

2. The Role of Social Networks in Product Distribution Efficiency

The efficient distribution of organic agricultural products is one of the biggest challenges faced by farmers, primarily due to high logistics costs, limited infrastructure, and the dominance of conventional distribution channels, which often favor intermediaries over producers. In this situation, social networks emerge as a tool that can reduce costs while shortening the distribution chain. Through networks formed between farmers, consumers, small traders, and communities supporting organic farming, product distribution can be streamlined without having to go through too many intermediaries. The shorter the distribution chain, the greater the added value for farmers, while also lowering selling prices to consumers, thus increasing product competitiveness. This makes social networks not only a communication bridge but also a crucial mechanism in establishing a more efficient and equitable distribution system.

The role of social networks is also evident in supporting collaboration between farmers to utilize transportation and storage facilities together. Many organic farmers face similar challenges, namely high transportation costs and limited access to adequate storage facilities. Through solid networks, farmers can consolidate their harvests for collective delivery, thereby reducing distribution costs per unit of product (Ofolsha et al., 2022). Furthermore, the use of shared warehouses managed by farmer groups or communities allows products to last longer and maintain quality before reaching consumers. This shared facility mechanism not only reduces costs but also strengthens solidarity among farmers, who support each other in facing market challenges. Without social networks, such collaboration would be difficult, as it requires strong trust and coordination among members.

The distribution efficiency built through social networks is also reflected in farmers' ability to coordinate, both at the local and regional levels. Through regular meetings, informal communication, and the use of digital technology, farmers can develop more targeted distribution strategies. For example, they can determine the most efficient distribution routes, divide marketing areas to avoid internal competition, and adjust delivery schedules to align with market demand in various locations. This type of coordination creates a more organized distribution flow and reduces the risk of delays that can degrade the quality of organic products, which generally have a shorter shelf life. In this case, social networks function as coordination centers, not only streamlining distribution flows but also increasing farmers' resilience in the face of constantly changing market dynamics.

Furthermore, connectedness among network members significantly influences the timeliness and quality of product distribution. Strong relationships within the network enable farmers to remind each other of delivery schedules, provide information on road or transportation conditions, and share solutions when obstacles arise in the distribution process. This is crucial because organic products rely heavily on speedy distribution to maintain their freshness. Good connectivity also allows for a system of mutual assistance. For example, if one member experiences delivery problems, other members can immediately provide support, whether in the form of manpower, transportation, or alternative distribution contacts. Thus, social networks not only support the technical aspects of distribution but also ensure product quality through a robust collaborative mechanism among their members.

Social networks in organic product distribution have a long-term impact on the sustainability of farmers' businesses. Through cost efficiency, access to shared facilities, good coordination, and strong connections among members, farmers can build a more independent distribution system and reduce their reliance on external parties. This independence is crucial because it reduces the risk of monopoly from large intermediaries, who often profit more than producers. At the same time, consumers also benefit by being able to obtain products at more affordable prices without compromising quality. The reciprocal relationships built through these efficient distribution networks ultimately create a fairer and more sustainable market system. Thus, distribution efficiencies achieved through social networks not only impact short-term economic benefits but also strengthen the long-term position of organic farmers as key actors in a healthy and sustainable food system.

3. Strengthening Farmers' Bargaining Position Through Social Networks

In an increasingly competitive market, organic farmers' bargaining position is often weak due to limited access to information, capital, and distribution channels. The presence of social networks provides an opportunity to strengthen this bargaining position through the collective power born of togetherness. When farmers unite in a network, they no longer face market challenges alone but instead have shared support that enables them to act as collective actors. This strength arises from the network's capacity to pool resources, align interests, and

forge consensus on market strategies. The greater the involvement of farmers in the network, the stronger their position in the face of competition from large business players. This makes social networks a crucial instrument in helping farmers maintain their existence in a market that tends to be unequal and favors those with large capital.

The strengthening of bargaining position through social networks is also evident in farmers' boldness in setting prices in line with the value of their products. In conventional distribution systems, farmers are often forced to sell their products at prices determined by intermediaries, without sufficient room for negotiation. However, social networks enable farmers to support each other in upholding fairer prices, as pricing decisions are no longer individual but rather the result of a collective agreement (Fudjaja et al., 2024). The existence of the network gives farmers confidence that they are not alone in striving to value the organic products they have produced with greater effort than conventional products. The prices determined collectively within the network reflect not only the economic value but also the social and environmental values inherent in organic products. Thus, the social network legitimizes farmers to confidently price their products at a price that reflects the quality and effort invested.

Furthermore, social networks serve as a bridge connecting farmers directly with consumers, bypassing numerous intermediaries. This direct relationship strengthens their bargaining power, as farmers can sell their products at higher prices than through long distribution chains, while consumers receive more affordable prices than they would through modern markets. Through the relationships established within these networks, farmers can build more personal interactions with consumers, introduce the values inherent in organic products, and foster consumer loyalty to their products. This direct distribution pattern is not only economically beneficial but also strengthens farmers' identities as producers who have control over their products and marketing channels. Thus, social networks act as a mechanism that shortens the distance between producers and consumers, which in turn increases farmers' bargaining power in the market.

The implications of this role of social networks in strengthening their bargaining power are significant for the economic independence of organic farmers. With these networks, farmers are no longer completely dependent on external parties for marketing, distribution, and pricing. This independence is reflected in their ability to set their own marketing strategies, set prices based on product value, and manage distribution through the networks they have established. Social networks provide a space for farmers to develop a more community-based economic system, where solidarity and cooperation are fundamental. This makes organic farmers more resilient in the face of market uncertainty, as they have the strong support of established networks. The economic independence gained through social networks ultimately improves not only the well-being of individual farmers but also strengthens the economic resilience of the organic farming community as a whole.

Thus, strengthening farmers' bargaining power through social networks encompasses various interrelated aspects. The collective strength born of togetherness, the courage to set prices, the ability to connect farmers directly with consumers, and the resulting economic independence all serve as foundations that empower organic farmers to navigate the market. Without social networks, farmers remain trapped in a weak position, easily exploited by unfair market mechanisms. Conversely, with strong networks, farmers have greater opportunities to control their harvests, improve their well-being, and contribute to creating a healthier and more sustainable food system. Social networks are thus not simply a means of interaction, but also an instrument of transformation that provides real power to organic farmers in strengthening their position in the market.

4. Optimizing Social Networks in the Digital Age

Optimizing social networks in the digital era has opened up significant opportunities for farmers to expand their reach within the modern agribusiness ecosystem. While previously, farmer interactions were largely limited to local communities and traditional markets, digital technology now enables them to connect with a broader and more diverse network. Social media and various digital platforms have become crucial instruments for building relationships, introducing products, and directly reaching consumers without geographical barriers. The presence of these virtual spaces not only expands the market but also provides a platform for farmers to share knowledge, experiences, and strategies for surviving in an increasingly competitive market. In this way, digital social networks can strengthen farmers' position in supply chains previously dominated by intermediaries or large market players.

Utilizing social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, or WhatsApp Groups, for example, has become a common practice to expand communication networks between farmers and between farmers and consumers. Through these platforms, farmers can showcase the advantages of their products visually and narratively, while also creating direct interactions with buyers seeking to ensure product quality (Dilleen et al., 2023). The transparency of information established through social media fosters new trust, allowing farmers to more freely position themselves as producers oriented toward quality and sustainability. This interaction pattern has a real impact on farmers' confidence in setting prices commensurate with the product's value, as consumers can directly observe the environmentally friendly cultivation process and the health benefits offered. Ultimately, social media has become not only a communication tool but also an empowerment instrument, transforming farmers from passive producers to active actors in marketing organic products.

In addition to social media, community-based digital applications also play a crucial role in strengthening farmer networks. Community-based platforms enable discussion spaces, collaboration, and even resource-sharing systems among farmers. These applications foster more concrete solidarity, as farmers not only interact but also gain tangible benefits in terms of market access, logistics, and capital. Some applications even integrate marketplace features that enable farmers to transact directly with consumers, thereby cutting out lengthy and often disadvantageous distribution chains. This network model demonstrates how digital technology can replace the role of intermediaries with a more efficient, fair, and transparent system. Thus, digital-based social networks are not simply communication forums, but ecosystems that support the growth of economic independence for organic farmers.

Changes in interaction patterns brought about by advances in information technology have also transformed social dynamics among farmers. Interactions that were once primarily face-to-face are now shifting toward faster, more concise, and more widespread virtual communication. This shift not only transforms the way information is exchanged but also expands the scope for collaboration, previously limited by time and location. Through digital networks, farmers in remote villages can easily communicate with consumers in large cities or even abroad, without encountering physical barriers or distribution bureaucracy. This phenomenon demonstrates that the digitalization of social networks has the potential to accelerate the socio-economic transformation of farmers, while simultaneously enhancing their ability to understand global market trends. At this point, digital social networks serve as a bridge connecting local needs with global demand, enabling organic products to be more competitive.

Although digital networks present significant opportunities, integration with traditional networks remains crucial for increased effectiveness. Traditionally established social networks, such as farmer groups, cooperatives, or associations, still hold strategic value in maintaining collective cohesion and solidarity at the local level. When these traditional networks are

combined with digital networks, farmers can enjoy dual strengths: the emotional closeness and solidarity of face-to-face interactions, and the efficiency, openness, and expanded market access afforded by digital technology. This collaboration can create a more robust system, where farmers maintain a strong community base while expanding their market through digital channels. In this way, the integration of traditional and digital networks creates a beneficial balance, preventing farmers from becoming dependent on a single network model.

Opportunities for optimizing social networks in the digital era also pave the way for the development of new, more inclusive and participatory business models. For example, the emergence of storytelling-based marketing trends that connect consumers with the life stories of farmers, or subscription-based sales systems that allow consumers to regularly purchase organic products directly from farmers. All of these innovations are born from digital social networks, which provide greater space for creativity and cross-sector collaboration. As this model evolves, farmers no longer play the role of producers but also as brand managers, community developers, and innovators, creating more equitable distribution patterns. This directly increases farmers' capacity to survive in increasingly complex market competition while maintaining the sustainability of their businesses.

With these potentials, optimizing social networks in the digital era is not merely about expanding markets or accelerating information distribution, but also involves a fundamental transformation of farmers' position within the economic system. Digital networks enable farmers to become more independent, have stronger bargaining power, and can more freely determine the direction of their business development. Furthermore, these networks also provide consumers with the opportunity to connect more closely with their food sources, creating a more equitable and sustainable relationship. Ultimately, the combination of the strengths of traditional networks and the opportunities offered by digital technology is key to building an organic agribusiness system that is not only productive but also resilient in facing future challenges.

E. CONCLUSION

Collective strength is a key asset in facing an increasingly competitive market. Social networks can provide a space for farmers to unite, support each other, and build solidarity in determining prices in accordance with the value of their products. Through network support, farmers can also minimize dependence on intermediaries, thereby making distribution channels more efficient and generating fairer profits. This has direct implications for the economic independence of farmers, particularly organic farmers, who are increasingly able to build sustainable businesses based on principles of justice and shared empowerment. In the context of the digital era, social networks are undergoing significant transformations, opening up new opportunities for market expansion and broader interactions between farmers and consumers. The use of social media, digital community platforms, and the integration of traditional networks with modern technology make product marketing processes faster, more transparent, and more inclusive. Changes in interaction patterns due to information technology not only expand consumer reach but also strengthen more direct and personal relationships between producers and buyers. Therefore, optimizing social networks in the digital realm can be an effective strategy for strengthening farmer competitiveness, expanding the consumer base, and maintaining the sustainability of the organic product market amidst increasingly complex economic dynamics.

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