Innovations

Analysis of the Effects of Relationship Quality on Entrepreneurial Orientation of Agricultural Marketing Cooperative Unions in Western Oromia, Ethiopia

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Abstract

The study intended to analyze the effect of relationship quality (RQ) on entrepreneurial orientation (EO) of agricultural marketing cooperative (AMC) in western Oromia State of Ethiopia. For achieving this research objective, explanatory research design was used to explain the relationship and then the effects of the predictor variables on the response variable. Data was collected from sample AMC using semi-structured question for respondents, in-depth interview for key informants and discussion checklist for focused group discussion. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used for data analyses using SPSS Amos version 23. Consequently, model identification, model fitting test and parameter estimates were analyzed. From this, the specified model was identified and accurately fitting to the collected data for the fact that all the model identification and model fit testing requirements were met as per the standard. From the study findings, all the predicting variable of cooperative RQ such as cooperative member commitment (CMC); member trust (CMT); member satisfaction (CMS) and member loyalty (CML) have statistically significant and positive associations with the EO of AMC for all p-value < 0.001and the parameter estimates are positive. The results of the study indicated that CML and CMC are the most influencing EO among the dimensions of RQ considered by this research. Based on the study findings the study concluded that improving CMC, CMT, CMS and CML enhancing EO of AMC for ensuring innovativeness and competency of the marketing cooperatives

Keywords: *1.Agricultural cooperative, 2.marketing cooperative, 3.cooperative members, 4.relationship quality, 5.entrepreneurial orientation.*

1. Introduction

Modern cooperative society emanated from conventional cooperation among human society. It was emerged in Europe in early 19th century to counteract the exploitation of consumers by capitalists (Mazzarol, *et al*, 2018; Forno, 2013). It was arisen as a tool through which individual people meet their economic and social needs (White and Boland, 2016) and are of increasing importance to economies and societies throughout the world irrespective of their level of development (Altman, 2010).

Nowadays, the main purpose of cooperatives is prospering its members' socially and economically which can be achieved by creating optimal business performance both in terms of financial and non-financial aspects

(Giri *et al*, 2022; Guzman, *et.al,* 2020) through integration with its member and then with other cooperative society. This comprises cooperative societies are a strategic alliance of members at grassroots level based on relationship and hierarchical integration of the cooperative societies of similar objective to serve member-owners at cost effective business model (Debebe and Mesfin, 2020; Zakaria *et al*, 2019). Therefore, it is certain that cooperatives in any context established with a goal of serving member owners maintaining entrepreneurial orientation (EO) for fostering business operation and ensuring innovative capability (Daneluz *et al* 2021; Khan *et al*, 2021; Situma, 2021; Setyawati *et. al*, 2020; Wales *et al*, 2019).

With the contemporary business operation EO is given attention by cooperative for serving member through enhancing marketing innovatively. Indeed, EO has influence on the efficiency, performance and survival of agricultural marketing cooperative (AMC) (Sari *et al*, 2022; Habtamu, 2021; Sofoluwe, 2020; Tehseen *et al*, 2020). This effect of EO is through the application of its dimensions of innovativeness, proactive, risk-taking, autonomy and entrepreneurial managerial competency (Giri *et al*, 2022**;** Kaluarachchige *et al*, 2021;Situma, 2021; Guzman, *et.al,* 2020). This entails that EO has direct effect on business performance in general and AMC in particular however it is influenced by the relationships in marketing cooperative.

Relationship in business especially marketing cooperative is one of the component of social capital that describes good quality and social relations leading to mutual benefits of the members of the cooperatives (Adomako *et al*, 2019;Marcos-Matas *et al*, 2017). According to Rakhal (2017); Hidayati *et al* (2016) the relationship in the cooperative which is explained in terms of relationship quality (RQ) proved to affect the capability and competency of the AMC which in their turn explain EO.

The emerging empirical literature evidenced that AMCs have a wide range of socioeconomic importance in which RQ can play greater role on the effectiveness of the society in practicing EO (Hernandez-Espallardo *et al*, 2022; Grashuis and Su, 2018; Saisset and Ceccaldi, 2018). According to study by Morshidi *et, al*, (2021); Debebe and Mesfin (2020): Mwebia (2020); Solomon *et al*, 2020; Mazzarol, *et al*, (2018) social and economic business success of cooperative is through maintaining member-board relationship and management and members' commitment as well.

These empirical findings have been given attention to effects of RQ on member, management and board of direct relation in marketing cooperative operation success; nevertheless, failed to include RQ such as member commitment, trust and member satisfaction and loyalty as crucial factors for affecting EO by AMC. Therefore, this study intended to analyze the effect of RQ on EO of AMC in western Oromia national regional state of Ethiopia by considering these cooperative RQ dimensions.

2. Empirical Review

Cooperatives are enterprises characterized by principles of open membership, democratic decision-making, economic participation, cooperation and training. These principles are eacted through EO of cooperative society to realize its goal (Situma, 2021; Guzman *et al*, 2020; Rakhal, 2017). However, study findings indicated that EO of cooperative influenced by RQ in cooperative. In this regard according to Mwebia (2020), Solomon *et al*, 2020; Mazzarol, *et al*, (2018); Marcos-Matas *et al* (2017) RQ in cooperative which defined in terms of member commitment is contributed to EO. Hence, it is hypothesized as;

H_1: There is significant and positive relationship between cooperative member commitment and EO of AMC

This hypothesis is postulated due to that member commitment is essential driver for EO which ensure the efficiency and survival of member-based economic organizations like AMC and determine its strategic orientation (Sari *et al*, 2022; Habtamu, 2021; Morshidi *et, al*, 2021; Sieczko *et al*, 2021). Besides, empirical

studies concluded that EO has given consideration by cooperative for improving marketing operation innovatively, autonomously and proactively (Sari *et al*, 2022; Kaluarachchige *et al*, 2021; Tehseen *et al*, 2020; Marcos-Matas *et al*, 2017). Consequently, it is noted that member trust as measurement of RQ in cooperative contributed to the EO such as managerial entrepreneurial orientation and risk taking (Sieczko *et al*, 2021; Solomon, *et al*, 2020;Hao *et al*, 2019). Based on this the following relationship is postulated.

H_2: Cooperative member trust has positive and significant influence on EO of AMC.

This is assumed indeed, member trust in cooperative is contributes for member participation to be innovative leader, collectively taking risks and managerial competency orientation (Habtamu, 2021; Sieczko *et al*, 2021; Simamba, 2018). Furthermore, EO is strategy to gain sustainable advantage for the designed business by cooperative tracking to success through innovativeness, regaining autonomy and ensuring managerial competency(Kaluarachchige *et al*, 2021; Khan *et al*, 2021;Ojiagu and Ezemba, 2021). According to study by Prasertsaeng *et al*, (2020); Zinashbizu *et. al*, (2020); Ernest *et, al*, (2017) this approach of cooperative effected by member satisfaction indeed, the satisfied members of AMC strive for EO for which the following assumption is drawn for the study.

H_3: Cooperative member satisfaction has significant and positive effect on EO of AMC.

This assumption is hypothesized by the study based on that the satisfied member on the service and goods supplied by AMC are activate members to provide feedback information, mutual control and truthfulness which contribute to creativity, autonomy and risk taking as they are explaining EO in cooperative (Debebe and Mesfin 2020; Lucas-Martiınez, *et al*, 2020; Simamba, 2018). Moreover, EO has become an enormously significant constructs in cooperative for it is enlightening members and users so as improving creativity, forecast, dealing with the risk of business (Khan *et al*, 2021; Guzman, *et al*, 2020; Sutrisno, 2019; Wales, *et. al*, 2019). Scholars indicated that such EO practices of AMC related with cooperative member loyalty (Prasertsaeng *et al*, 2020; Ernest *et, al*, 2017; Bricci *et al*, 2016). With this perspective the following assumption is hypothesized by the study.

H_4: There is positive and significant relationship between member loyalty and EO of AMC.

This hypothesis is postulated for it is certain that loyal member and leaders of cooperative remain within their cooperative existing networks. This is defined by they preferred for future, recommend need fulfilment and value the cooperative (Ernest *et, al*, 2017; Bricci *et al*, 2016). These measures of loyalty in cooperative enhance pro-activeness, creativity, and autonomous as a dimensions of EO (Linton, 2019; Sofoluwe, 2020). These empirical evidences entail that dimensions of RQ in cooperative explained by member commitment, trust, satisfaction and loyalty of cooperative have relationship with EO of AMC.

3. Research Methodology

Research design

The study used explanatory research design for explaining the relationship that RQ dimensions have with the EO in AMC. Thereby it was used for explaining the extent of the influences those explanatory variables have on the response variable. The study also used mixed qualitative and quantitative research approach indeed, quantified Likert scale responses and qualitative data from interview and discuss were used in this study.

Sampling design

With respect to sampling design, the study specified target population, determined sample size and sampling techniques. Accordingly, the study was conducted in western Oromia, Ethiopia which includes four zones from which six AMC unions were selected. The general assembly meeting members of the sample AMC

unions that account for 926 is the target population of the study. Based on the defined target population for the study, it is certain to determine sample size for the research. Therefore, the study used Kothari (2004) sample size determination formula as

$$n = \frac{N * p * q * z^2}{e^2(N-1) + p * q * z^2}$$

Where:
n is sample size for the study
N is target population of the study (N = 926)
e is acceptable error term (0.05 for 95% confidence interval)
z is standard variate for normal curve (1.96 for 95% confidence interval)
p is the proportion to be included in the sample. The study has given equal opportunity for the study population to be selected. Hence, p = 0.5)
q is the proportion not to be included in the sample (1-p = 0.5)

Consequently, the sample size of the study is

$$n = \frac{926 * 0.5 * 0.5 * 1.96^2}{0.05^2(926-1) + 0.5 * 0.5 * 1.96^2} = \frac{804.8152}{3.2729} = 284.408 \cong 284$$

This demonstrated that sample size of the study was 284 respondents. Once the sample size for the study is determined the next step is indicating sampling techniques. The study had used purposive sampling methods for selecting AMC unions. As a result, Gibe Didessa, Chaffe Bulluk, Jorgo Birbir, Dilla Alaltu, Malka Gudina and Torban Anfillo AMC union were selected based on they are in the operation for the more than ten years and relatively operating in agricultural marketing potential area.

Respondents for the study were sampled form sample AMC unions using systematic sampling method. In order to proceed with this sampling procedure sampling interval was determined by using the formula $I = \frac{N}{n}$ Where I" is sampling interval, N is target population and n is sample size of the study. Hence, the I^{th} respondents were selected from the lists of general assembly meeting members of each sample AMC unions proportionally. Key informants encompasses chairperson and general manager and focus group discussion member that included board of directors' member and management excluding the those who were sampled as key informant. These participants of the study were sampled using judgement sampling method. The rationale of using this sampling technique was to include those who are believed to have adequate information on the required data from their respective AMC union.

Data collection methods

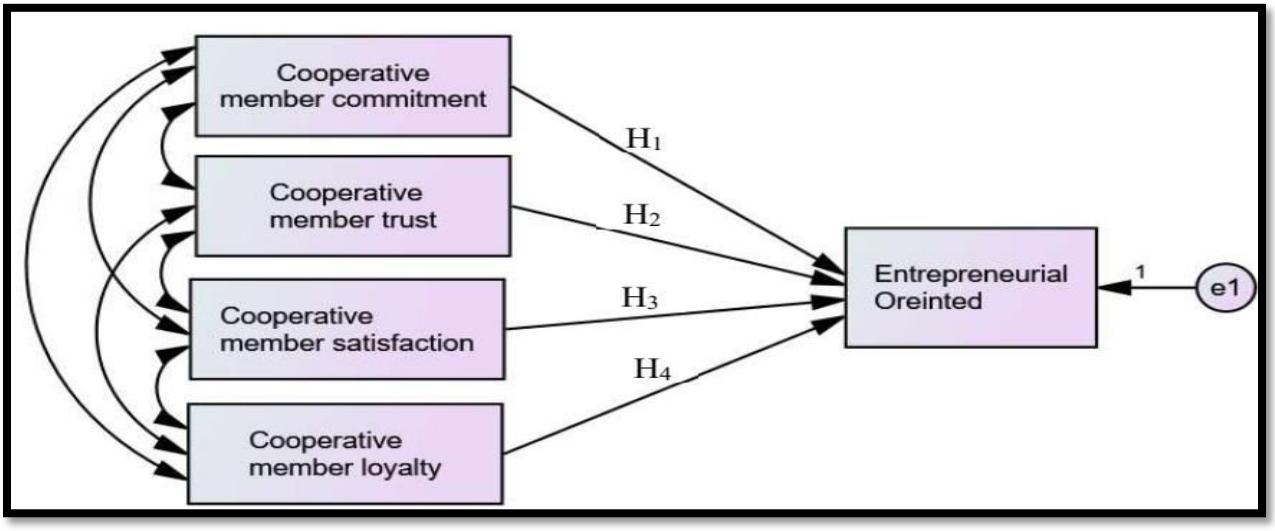
The study had employed different data collection methods for different sources of primary data that was used by the study. It employed semi-structured questionnaire to collect data from respondents. The closed-ended parts of the questionnaire were in dichotomous and five-point Likert scale questions. Whereas open-ended questionnaires were posed for respondents to collect data which could not be captured by closed-ended questionnaires. The in-depth and face-to-face interview and discussion checklist were used for collecting data from key informant and focus group discussion respectively which was used to supplement findings from respondents.

Data analysis method

The collected and sorted data was analyzed using structural equation model (SEM) using SPSS Amos software Vesion 23 for modeling the relationship of the hypothesized variable; RQ dimensions as causal factors and EO as effect variable of AMC (Arbuckle 2019; Byrne, 2010). The basis of using SEM by this study is for it enables the researcher to test a set of regression models simultaneously. Furthermore, SEM is used for it is statistical

technique specifying and determining model that illustrates the hypothesized causal relationship among variables (García-Alcaraz, *et al*, 2014; Kline, 2016).

Accordingly, the conceptual model specification that defines the hypothesized relationships between the predicting and response variables is illustrated as in the following figure 1.



Source: Model specified by researcher (2022) based on empirical review

Figur 1. Conceptual model specification for SEM analysis

4. Results and Discussions

The results and discussion section of the article is concerned with presenting the analysis of model fit and study results. Analysis of model fit concern for ensuring SEM model identified and model fitting. Interpretation of the findings is regarding significant and hypothesis testing using parameter estimates to certify that the objective of the study has achieved.

In order to proceed with data analysis, it is deemed necessary to test the consistency of the data. Coefficient of Cronbach's alpha with the cut-off value 0.60 is used for testing the reliability of the research tools (Gitomer *et al*., 2021; Smith and Smith, 2018; Mohamad *et al.* 2015). Table 1 presents the reliability statistics of the data collection items.

Table 1 Reliability Statistics of the Questionnaire

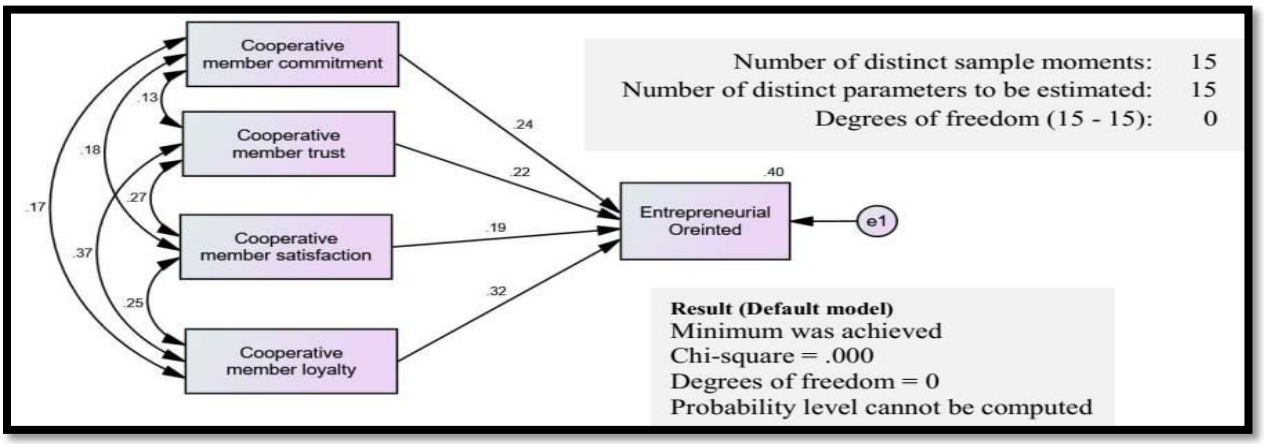
	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
Relationship quality (RQ)	.826	.850	24
Entrepreneurial orientation (EO)	.833	.847	41

Sources: Computed from field survey (2022)

The results of reliability statistics reveal that Cronbach's alpha for RQ is 0.826 (0.850 for standardized items) and that of EO is 0.833 (0.847 for standardized items) are indicating an acceptable consistency and stability of data collection instrument the study was used.

Model identification and fit test

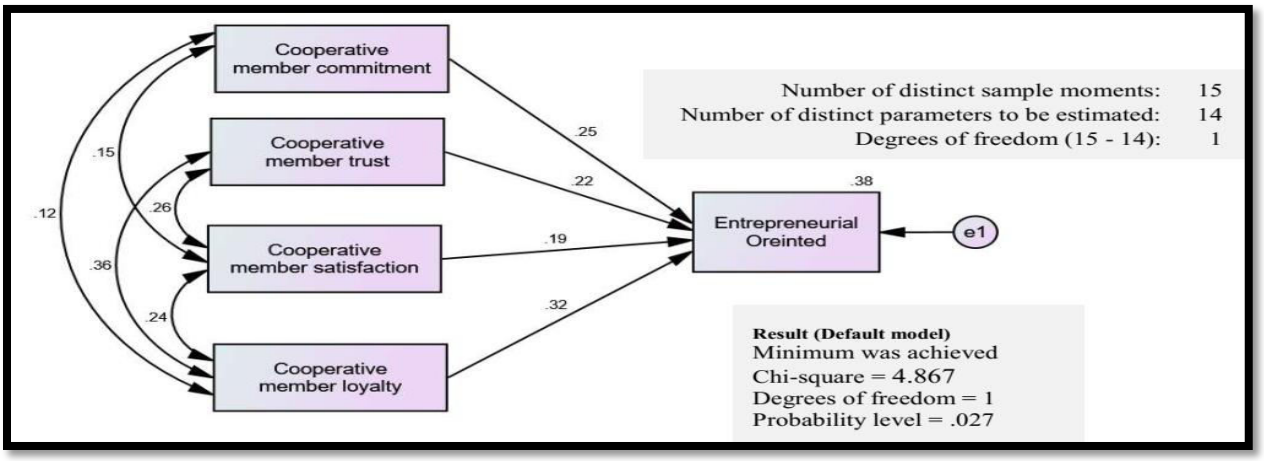
The study used SEM for data analysis to investigate the effects of RQ using its dimensions on EO for which testing model identification is the first step and then testing the hypothesized model fit using SPSS Amos version 23. The justification of testing these two approaches is to ensure the model is identified and the accuracy of the specified model fit for proceeding with parameter estimate calculation for testing the postulated hypotheses. According to (Kline,2016) the SEM is identified if number of distinct sample moments in the model is equal or greater than number of distinct parameters to be estimated which indicates df ≥ 0. Figure 2 below presents Amos output for testing model identification.



Sources: Computed from field survey (2022)

Figure 2 Hypothesized SEM model for RQ-EO

The analysis result indicated the df is zero therefore, the model is identified (saturated). This illustrates that the minimum was achieved regarding model identification nonetheless, the probability level for chi-square (0.000) at df (0) could not be computed. Henceforth, it is designed to revise and re-estimate the specified model to improve the model for assessing its overall adequacy by removing any one of the covariance. Consequently, the following (figure 3) improved SEM model is obtained.



Sources: Computed from field survey (2022)

Figure 3 Revised SEM model for EO

As it can be observed from figure 3, the analysis result from revised improved model indicated the df is greater than zero and the probability level is determined. Hence, the model is improved and is identified

(saturated) which evidenced that it is accepted for the minimum was achieved for the probability level (0.027) of chi-square (4.867) at df (1) is computed.

These all validated that the model is identified and the probability level is computed ($p < 0.05$. as a result, the distributional assumptions are met for the specified model is correct. For the fact that the model is identified, the study is in a position to proceed with testing for model fit to ensure the feasibility of the model with collected data. According to Arbuckle (2019); Kline (2016) model fit is checked using the measures such as minimum sample discrepancy function (CMIN) and model fit indices with threshold level to accept the model as Root-Mean SquareResidual (RMR < 0.08); Goodness-of-Fit (GFI ≥ 0.95) and comparative fit indices (CFI ≥ 0.95) or nearer to these criteria for default model. From the Amos analysis model fit summary is presented in table 1 below.

Table 2 Model Fit Summary for default model

Model fit indices	Estimated	Benchmark	
		Values	Sources
CMIN	4.867	Near to 5	Arbuckle (2019) Kline (2016) García-Alcaraz, *et al* (2014) Byrne (2010)
CMIN/DF	4.867	Near to 5	
Df	1	≥ 0	
RMR	.022	< 0.08	
GFI	.993	>0.95	
CFI	.982	>0.95	

Sources: Computed from field survey (2022)

From the test analysis, the minimum value of the discrepancy (CMIN = 4.86; $p < 0.05$) and CMIN/DF (4.867) which is almost below the threshold, five for specified model (default model) in the AMOS Graphics diagram. This reveals that the assumed model fits the observed data perfectly indicate a strong relationship between RQ and EO of AMC. Besides, RMR 0.022; GFI 0.993 and CFI 0.982 indicated that these model fit indices are fulfilling all the required benchmarks so as meeting the standard. Consequently, it is validating that the identified model is well fit with the collected data for further analyses. This ensures the appropriateness of hypothesis testing with the model is fitting.

Significant test of parameters

Table 3 below presents the regression weights: (Default model) from SEM analysis that depicts the regression coefficients and associated test statistics. The standardized regression coefficient of SEM indicate the amount of change in the EO, response variable for each one percent change in the predicting variables. Besides, the small standard error (SE) from the model suggest that the estimate is accurate. For this study, standardized regression coefficients of SEM are used for estimating the changes in response variable as a result of changes in predicting variables.

Table 3 Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

Response Variable		Predicting Variables	Estimate		S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
			Unstandardized	Standardized				
EO	<---	CMC	.108	.247	.021	5.103	***	
EO	<---	CMT	.101	.223	.020	3.715	***	
EO	<---	CMS	.076	.223	.023	6.181	***	
EO	<---	CMT	.141	.322	.024	4.278	***	

Sources: Computed from field survey (2022)

The result reveal that there is a statistically positive and significant association between CMC and EO (β = 0.247; p < 0.001). This implies improvement of CMC by 1 percent related to corresponding improvement of EO by 24.7%. Likewise, the result from the analysis depict that there is positive and statistically significant relationship between CMT and entrepreneurial orientation (β = 0.223; p < 0.001). This result indicates that when CMT increased by 1%, EO of AMC enhanced by 22.3% in the study area

In similar way the result illustrates that there is significant and positive relationship between CMS and EO (β = 0.187; p < 0.001) of AMC under the study. This infers that an improvement of CMS by 1% result in the increasing EO by 18.7%. Furthermore, the result from SEM demonstrates that there is a statistically positive and significant association between CML and EO (β = 0.322; p < 0.001) of AMC in the study area. This portrays that an increasing CML by 1% could enhance EO by 32.2%.

These inferential findings of the study also confirmed by the results from interview and discussion which reveals that the cooperative unions of the case are strive efforts to satisfy their members so as enhancing members' commitments, trust and loyalty. This on its turn motivate the AMC to be creativity, proactive and taking risk in serving member's needs.

Hypotheses testing

The study found out that there is statistically significant relationship between the predicting variables of RQ and EO of AMC in the study area. Based on this result the postulated hypotheses are tested as depicted in the table 4 below.

Table 4 path model coefficient

Hypotheses	Path	Standardized path Estimate	CR (t value)	P	Decision
H_1	CMC →EO	.247	5.103	***	Accepted
H2	CMT →EO	.223	4.278	***	Accepted
H3	CMS →EO	.187	3.715	***	Accepted
H4	CML→ EO	.322	6.181	***	Accepted

Sources: Computed from field survey (2022)

From the hypotheses testing, the result on CMC and EO suggested that effective cooperative member commitment improves EO of AMC in the study area. Hence, there is no evidence to reject H_1 which was stated as there is significant relationship between member commitment and EO of AMC. Correspondingly, finding on the relationship of CMT and EO reveal strong member trust enhances EO of AMC, consequently there is adequate evidence to accept the H_2 which was postulated as cooperative member trust has positive significant influence on EO of AMC.

The finding on CMS and EO advocated actual cooperative member satisfaction improves EO of AMC in western Oromia. Therefore, there is adequate confirmation to accept H_3 postulated as cooperative member satisfaction has significant and positive effect on EO of AMC. Furthermore, the finding from the SEM demonstrated that the built member loyalty by AMC union contributed to progresses in EO. Hence, there is no evidence to reject H_4 that hypothesized as there is positive and significant relationship between member loyalty and EO of AMC. Therefore, the findings of the study provided adequate evidence that RQ, through its dimensions has effect on the EO AMC. So as all the postulated hypotheses are supported for P < 0.05 and test statistics Critical Ratios (CR) or t-values are greater than ≥ ±1.96 consequently satisfied the hypothesis testing requirements.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study was designed to analyze the effects of RQ on EO of AMC in western Oromia national state of Ethiopia through its indicators of cooperative member commitment, trust, satisfaction and loyalty using SEM for analyzing the effects using SPSS Amos software.

Based on the findings from SEM analysis, the study concluded that the specified SEM was precisely identified and accurately fitting the data for explaining the relationship between RQ dimensions, the predicting variables and EO of AMC, the regressed variable of the study. This was confirmed by the model fit indices were meeting the required benchmarks or standards, hence the path model of SEM used by the study is validated.

The study results demonstrate that all the variables of RQ have positive and statistically significant effect on the EO of AMC. Consequently, it is concluded that increasing in commitment, trust, satisfaction and loyalty cooperative members by AMC are improving EO.

The study findings portray that among the four predicting variables of RQ, cooperative member loyalty is with relatively highest standardized estimate (regression coefficient) (0.322) followed by member commitment with 0.247 standardized estimate. Based on these results, the study concluded that AMC member loyalty and commitment are most influencing factors of EO among considered variable of RQ.

Based on the results and conclusion of the study this research recommended AMC particularly those in western Oromia, Ethiopia are required to further improving cooperative member commitment, trust, satisfaction and loyalty for further progressing in EO further for sustaining member service through enhancing creativity and pro-activeness as well as retaining autonomy and improving managerial competency of AMC.

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