

Navigating networks: Exploring the social ties among fish farmers in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Social capital is a valuable and essential asset to achieve better outcomes in business. In this study, the researcher investigated the nature of the social ties of the fish farmers in Bangladesh. Descriptive analyses were conducted on social capital variables contrasted to business performance metrics, using a sample of 320 fish farmers from Mymensingh and Bogura districts of Bangladesh. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews with a structured interview schedule. In this study, a respondent had the opportunity to name the top seven people who are most important to his business. The number of persons mentioned by the respondents is classified into seven categories. It shows that most of the respondents (45.9%), have two social ties that are most important to their business. Descriptive statistics revealed that farmers have more bridging ties than bonding ties and a limited number of linking ties. Therefore, the study recommends that fish farmers take advantage of their various social ties.

Key Words: Social capital, Business performance, Fish farmers, Bonding ties, Bridging ties and Linking ties.

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I. Introduction

In a country like Bangladesh, where poverty is widespread, social capital is essential for sustaining and improving people's livelihoods, coping with adversities, and avoiding vulnerability. The Fisheries sub-sector of Bangladesh has been playing a vital role in the country's socio-economic development. Fisheries sub-sector accounts for 2.08 percent of national GDP and 21.83 percent of the country's overall agricultural GDP (BER, 2022). A person's social network is determined by his or her chances to interact with others and personal characteristics. Literature has highlighted social capital as a way to improve business performance. An entrepreneur's social capital appears to impact their business

performance significantly. As a result, simple access to cognitive, financial and cultural capital resources, which are critical for effective business performance, is assured through social capital (Bourdieu et al., 1986). According to Serageldin et al. (1994), social capital influences development assistance such as growth, fairness and poverty reduction, focusing on sustainable output and stable income for consumption smoothing and food security.

Because of the numerous and overlapping encounters that individuals have with others, the distinction between bonding, bridging and linking social capital is difficult (Healy, 2002). Bonding social capital refers to relationships within a group and community marked by a high degree of similarity in demographic attributes, attitudes, knowledge and resources. Bonding social capital occurs between "those like us," who are "in it together" and often have very close relationships. Family members, intimate friends, and neighbors are all examples. Bridging social capital is a sort of social capital that represents connections that bring people together in a societal gap. Associations are the "bridges" that connect individuals, groups, and organizations. The third sort of social capital is linking social capital, which extends beyond the typical bonding and bridging differentiation used throughout the network theory emphasis on social capital. Linking social capital described as the standards of respect and structures of reliable relationships which exist across people that connect beyond explicit, legal and formalized power or authority hierarchies in society (Szreter and Woolcock, 2004). The quantity and strength of ties can serve as a precaution not only when launching a farm but also while accelerating its performance (Acquaah, 2007).

II. Materials and Methods

From Bangladesh's perspective, this research topic is uncommon, and people have limited knowledge of it. According to the objective of the study, Mymensingh and Bogura districts were selected as the study areas and respondents were selected through random sampling based on the study's objective. The researcher obtained the necessary primary data through a personal interview with an individual fish farmer from September to October 2021. Each participant was given a summary of the study's nature and objective before the interview began. Then, the questions were asked simply, with clarifications provided where needed. The data provided by the farmers was immediately noted on the interview schedules. Interviewers were asked to provide as much accurate information as possible. Descriptive statistics used to accomplish the objectives and generate an output of the research.

III. Results and Discussion

Overview of social ties of the respondents

In this study, social ties have been divided into three parts: bonding, bridging, and linking social ties. According to Healy (2002), this distinction is not easy because of individuals' many overlapping interactions with others. Bonding social ties describe relationships with a high degree of similarity, including family members, friends, and relatives. In contrast to bonding social ties, bridging social ties describes relationships between people with common interests but different social identities. Other fish farmers, buyers, customers, and input suppliers are critical examples of bridging social ties. The term "linking social ties" refers to the connections between people or institutions at different levels of authority. Someone from supporting institutions like government research institutes, non-government research organizations, non-government credit organizations, government extension services, universities, government banks, and commercial banks can be an excellent example.

It has been discovered that essential bonding ties for the respondents are their father, mother, brothers, and sometimes their wives. Most respondents expected that their parents and elder brothers would assist them in preserving their livelihood. This commitment is still recognized, even though it is not as powerful as it formerly was. Friendships are especially crucial in distress because they give moral and financial assistance. Kinship ties are essential for borrowing money and food, seeking guidance and dealing with adversity. Furthermore, family disputes over property succession are widespread, leading to strained relationships between sisters and brothers and brothers and uncles. Conflicts like this have the potential to spill over into the next generation, which can be an example of social capital gone badly.

The researcher also observed that some respondent's place more value on family, while others value neighbors and other fish farmers (bridging ties). This differs from person to person and therefore determined by one's relationship with his or her neighbors and kin group. Neighbours are critical when the bond with the kin group is disrupted. Because of religious and societal commitments, people strive to preserve positive relationships. Even so, disagreements with neighbours exist, particularly over boundaries and cattle destruction of property.

The number of linking ties among respondents is minimal as most of their financial problems are solved by family, friends, or other fish farmers. Most respondents are associated with cooperative organizations with other fish farmers to solve their problems through discussion. In addition, many of them are also associated with various government and non-government financial and research organizations.

Social ties of the respondents

The decision-making and working activities are influenced mainly by the number of social ties they maintain. A business owner solves all his business problems through his social ties. In this study, a respondent had the opportunity to name the top seven people who are most important to his business. The number of persons mentioned by the respondents is classified into seven categories, shown in [Table 01](#). It shows that 147 (45.9%) out of 320 respondents named the two most important people in their business. Among the respondents, about 40.6% mentioned three people, 6.9% mentioned four people, 3.1% mentioned one person, and 1.6% mentioned five. Only 1.3% and 0.6% of respondents who mentioned seven and six people who are important to their business, respectively.

Table 01. Total number of ties mentioned by respondents

No. of ties	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	10	3.1
2	147	45.9
3	130	40.6
4	22	6.9
5	4	1.6
6	2	0.6
7	4	1.3
Total	320	100

Bonding ties of the respondents

As noted previously, bonding social ties relates to ties with people who share particular demographic characteristics, such as family, friends, and kinship. Cooperation results from partnership inside a homogenous entity ([Woolcock and Sweetser, 2002](#)). [Table 02](#) shows the number of bonding ties most important for respondents in operating their business. From [Table 02](#), we notice that a large portion of the respondents mentioned "zero" bonding ties, which is 37.2% of the total respondents. Among the other respondents, 26.6% mentioned two bonding ties, 25.9% mentioned one bonding tie, and 9.4% mentioned three bonding ties. Only 0.9% of respondents mentioned four bonding ties with whom they discussed the general issues of their business.

Table 02. Number of bonding ties mentioned by respondents

No. of ties	Frequency	Percentage (%)
0	119	37.2
1	83	25.9
2	85	26.6
3	30	9.4
4	3	0.9
Total	320	100

Bridging ties of the respondent

Bridging social ties refers to relationships with people who are not like each other in some demographic sense ([Woolcock and Sweetser, 2002](#)). According to [Field \(2003\)](#), it also draws individuals together across broad social boundaries. [Table 03](#) reveals the number of bridging ties the respondents consider most important for their business. According to the table, a more significant

portion of the respondents (88) alluded to zero bridging ties, 27.5% of the total respondents. Of the other respondents, 25.0% mentioned one bridging tie, 24.7% mentioned two bridging ties, 17.5% mentioned three, and 3.4% mentioned four. Only 0.9% mentioned each of the five and six bridging ties among the respondents. Table 03 also indicates that the frequency of bridging ties decreases as the number of people increases.

Table 03. Number of bridging ties mentioned by respondents

No. of ties	Frequency	Percentage (%)
0	88	27.5
1	80	25.0
2	79	24.7
3	56	17.5
4	11	3.4
5	3	0.9
6	3	0.9
Total	320	100

Linking ties of the respondents

As per Woolcock and Sweetser (2002), linking social capital refers to relationships with people in positions of power, unless politically or financially powerful. Vertical links to formal institutions are also parts of linking social capital. The number of linking ties among the respondents was meagre in this study. Table 04 indicates the number of linking ties of the respondents. From Table 04, about 314 (98.1%) respondents mentioned zero linking ties. Furthermore, five respondents (1.6%) mentioned one linking tie and only one respondent (0.3%) alluded to the highest number of linking ties four.

Table 04. Number of linking ties mentioned by respondents

No. of ties	Frequency	Percentage (%)
0	314	98.1
1	5	1.6
4	1	.3
Total	320	100

Total number of discussions with the ties mentioned by respondents

This section displays how much discussion the respondents have discussed with their total tie numbers. At first, the total number of discussions with the ties is categorized into 8 types of activities. They are finance and credit issues; technology and equipment issues; market, customer and competition issues; firm inputs and product quality issues; employees and management issues; institutional and legal issues (license, tax); risk and uncertainty issues and emotional support.

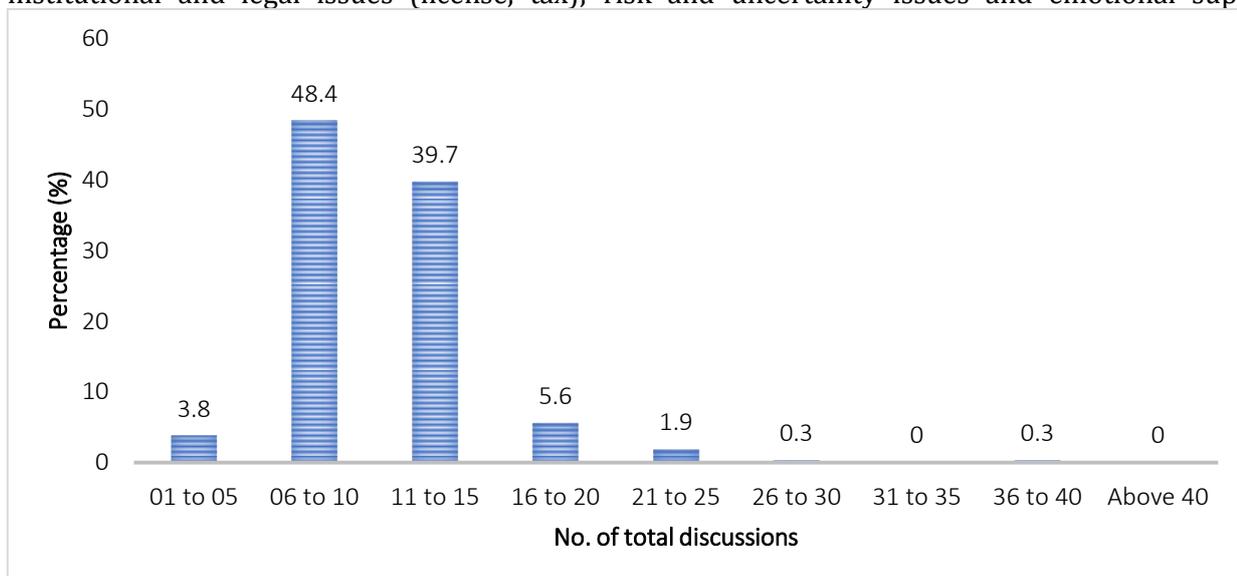


Figure 04. Total number of discussions with the ties

The numerator value ranges from 0 to 56; a respondent may have no ties (thus, 0) or seven participants discussing all eight issues (thus, 56). Figure 04 shows the total number of discussions with the ties mentioned by respondents. Sum of the total number of discussions for 48.4% of respondents lies between 6 and 10 with their total number of ties. Among other respondents, 39.7% discussed 11 to 15 types of issues, 5.6% discussed 16 to 20 issues, 3.8% discussed 1 to 5 issues, 1.9% discussed 21 to 25 issues, and only 0.3% discussed 26 to 30 and 36 to 40 types of issues, respectively. Furthermore, none of the respondents falls into the 31 to 35 and above 40 categories, respectively.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study's findings illuminate the nuanced dynamics of social ties within the entrepreneurial landscape. The prevalence of zero bonding ties and linking ties suggests a notable reliance on individual efforts and limited cross-sector connections. Conversely, the significance of two bonding ties and the scarcity of linking ties indicate a preference for a focused yet inward-facing network among respondents. The limited number of bridging ties further underscores a measured approach to external networking. It also portrays diverse engagement patterns, with a substantial portion discussing 6 to 10 issues, reflecting a moderate yet varied interaction. The rarity of respondents discussing over 40 issues highlights the infrequency of highly extensive discussions. These insights collectively underscore the multifaceted nature of entrepreneurial networking, emphasizing both the strategic curation of close ties and the selective utilization of external connections in navigating business challenges.

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