

A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION

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Abstract

The emerging concept of social entrepreneurship (SE) has attracted the attention of researchers in the last few years. Social entrepreneurs are motivated to tackle social problems via business technics, the problems that neither the government nor the non-profit sector could solve to date. In fact, they are considered important actors of the economic system and change-makers in the world. Hence, it is very timely to investigate factors that determine the intention of individuals to be a social entrepreneur. Drawing from the theory of social entrepreneurial behaviour this paper aims to formulate a new conceptual model by reviewing the literature and identifying existing gaps. We suggest that first; the intention of social entrepreneurs are influenced by empathy, proactively and religiosity as the proxy to attitude, and then, by social entrepreneurial self-efficacy and subjective norms. Additionally, the relationship between empathy and social entrepreneurial intention (SEI) is moderated by gender. The proposed conceptual model contributes to the body of knowledge by extending theory and new relationships.

Keywords: Empathy, religion, proactive personality, subjective norms, social entrepreneurial self-efficacy, social entrepreneurial intention

Introduction

Nowadays the world is facing numerous problems and challenges that are affecting and damaging society. We can write an exhaustive list of social problems such as poverty, inequity, global warming and climate change, corruption, homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse, lone parenting, and so forth which require immediate attention. All these issues raise concerns among socially conscious people to come up with solutions and to find a way to uplift society to higher levels. It is fortunate that social entrepreneurs have emerged to combine their entrepreneurial skills and business technics with innovative ideas in order to help society and improve the quality of life (Huster et al., 2017; Macke, Sarate, Domeneghini, & Silva, 2018). A large and growing body of literature has emphasized on SE as a phenomenon that can bring sustainable solutions for persistent environmental and social problems (Alvord, Brown, & Letts, 2004; Bikse, Rivza, & Riemere, 2015; Dees, 2012; Kachlami, 2016; Olinsson, 2017; Wry & York, 2017; Zahra, Gedajlovic, Neubaum, & Shulman, 2009).

Nevertheless, thus far variety of definitions has emerged for SE but we are still far from an integrated framework (Choi & Majumdar, 2014). According to the market failure theory, social entrepreneurs are born when the government is not able to satisfy the unmet needs of the society (McMullen, 2011). SE is an important tool to tackle social challenges and to respond to them when the market and public sector do not. The available body of facts and evidence have shown that government couldn't cope with all social problems (Dees, 2007). Therefore, social entrepreneurs have a critical role to fill this gap in the market (Bernardino, Santos, & Ribeiro, 2015) by innovative ideas for serving the vulnerable portion of society (Tukamushaba, Orobia, & George, 2011). For the purpose of this study, SE is considered as finding new and creative ideas to solve social problems by combining entrepreneurial skills, experience and resources.

The number of publications on SE has increased gradually since 2003 (Rey-Marti, Ribeiro-Soriano, & Palacios-Marqués, 2016) and scholars approached this concept from different angles. However, there is a current dearth of research on predictors of SEI (Tran & Korfflesch, 2016; Urban & Kujinga, 2017). The first seminal work on antecedents of SEI is done by Mair and No boia a few years ago in 2006. Recently in 2017, Hockerts tested their model and added prior experience as a predictor of SEI. According to Tran and Korfflesch (2016), SEI is influenced by "personality traits" (Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Neuroticism and Openness), "contextual factors" (role models, education and perceived supports), "outcome expectation" and "social entrepreneurial self-efficacy".

Surprisingly, in spite of evidences that shows proactive personality has an important role in decision making to become a social entrepreneur (Jain, 2009; Kedmenec, Rebernik, & Peric, 2015; Weerawardena & Sullivan Mort, 2006), few published studies attempt to explore influence on SE (Dell & Amadu, 2015; Steiner & Teasdale, 2016). The existing literature mostly focuses on big five personality traits (Koe, Sa'ari, Majid, & Ismail, 2012; Obschonka, Silbereisen, & Schmitt-Rodermund, 2010), locus of control (Lüthje & Franke, 2003), risk-taking (Oh, Wang, & Mount, 2011) and so on. Moreover, generally, there is still dearth of research on the impact of perceived barriers on entrepreneurial intention (Liñán & Fayolle, 2015) and researchers haven't paid any attention in the realm of social entrepreneurship. Eventually, despite evidence that proves religious values have an undeniable role in exhibiting social entrepreneurial behaviour (Roundy, Taylor, & Evans, 2015; Salarzahi, Armesh, & Nikbin, 2010) there is the scarcity of research on the role of religious values in this field (Mulyaningsih & Ramadani, 2017). Therefore, the objective of the present work paper is to address these gaps by proposing a new conceptual framework grounded in the theory of social entrepreneurial behaviour.

In the following sections, a brief review of literature, propositions and theoretical framework will be described. The paper ends with a conclusion and recommendations for future research.

Theoretical framework and propositions

Research into entrepreneurial intention has a long history and various theories exist for the description of this concept. Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behaviour (TPB) is one of the most

well-known theories which have been tested widely. According to TPB intention is predicted by attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. Attitudes refer to the extent to which individuals feel positive or negative about outcomes of certain behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), while subjective norms deal with the influence of existing norms in society (social environment) on the intention of people toward behaviour (Politis et al., 2016). Perceived behavioural control is a dichotomous concept with external and internal dimensions (Ajzen, 1991). External control is person's perception about support or barriers that exist in the environment (Hockerts, 2017) whereas internal control is paralleled with the concept of perceived self-efficacy (Ajzen, 1991; Hockerts, 2017; Krueger & Brazeal, 1994). Tiwari et al (2017) applied TPB to find determinants of SEI in the context of India. They suggested that emotional intelligence, creativity and moral obligation positively influence SEI.

Another significant model on entrepreneurial intention was presented by Shapero and Sokol (1982), entitled entrepreneurial event model (EEM). The authors suggested the following constructs as the most influential determinants of intention:

- 1) Perceived desirability: attractiveness of starting a new venture from person's perspective (Krueger, Reilly, & Carsrud, 2000)
- 2) Perceived feasibility: person's belief about capabilities to carry out a certain action (Tukamushaba et al., 2011).
- 3) Propensity to act: a personal disposition that reflects "volitional aspects of intention". The statements such as; "I will do it" exhibits the violation of person to do a particular task (Shapero & Sokol, 1982).

However, critical review of literature proved that some constructs of TPB and EEM are parallel. For instance, perceived feasibility has overlap with self-efficacy in TPB (Liñán & Chen, 2009). That is, both concepts refer to the extent to which person believes he or she is capable to perform a certain behaviour. Ayob et al (2013) applied entrepreneurial event model to find out determinants of entrepreneurial intention and they stated that empathy and social entrepreneurship exposure are predictors of perceived desirability and perceived feasibility, which in turn affect SEI.

The first study on determinants of SEI was published by Mair and Noboa in 2006. The model is rooted in the theory of planned behaviour and Shapero and Sokol's (1982) model. Empathy, moral judgment (existing moral norms in society), self-efficacy and perceived social support were introduced as main predictors of SEI. Nevertheless, the authors believe that all these concepts influence intention through perceived desirability and feasibility.

In 2013, El Ebrashi proposed a grounded theory which is the extension of TPB. In the extended version of TPB, the theory of social entrepreneurial behaviour, personal factors are proposed as antecedents of attitude. In other words, personal factors are considered as causes of attitudes and attitudes are predictors of intention (Kolvereid & Isaksen, 2006). Personality is a key factor that forms the intention to become an entrepreneur and consequent behaviour. Entrepreneurship

process starts with the entrepreneur's personality and intention is rooted in personal factors (Boyd & Vozikis, 1994).

This study extends the theory of social entrepreneurial behaviour by suggesting empathy, proactive personality and religiosity as personal factors that predict attitudes towards SE. Additionally; we offer subjective norms, perceived barriers and self-efficacy to be predictors of SEI. In the following section, detailed argument and propositions are explained.

Empathy

Empathy is a multidimensional concept including both cognitive and affective aspects (Davis, 1983). While former point out to an ability to *understand* other people's emotions, the latter refers to the *affective reaction* of the person to the emotion of others. Additionally, empathy consists of dispositional and situational dimensions which distinguish between empathy as a stable personality trait or emotion aroused due to a particular situation (Davis, 1980). This personality trait is a key element that distinguishes social entrepreneurs from commercial entrepreneurs (Bacq & Alt, 2018).

We believe that both affective and cognitive empathy is necessary to influence behaviour. If people simply comprehend others feelings without any response, therefore, it will never transform into the actual behaviour of helping or doing something for improving the situation. Moreover, we refer to empathy as a stable character which is stable over time regardless of the situation. Therefore, for the purpose of this study empathy is defined as sensitivity to others feeling, understanding it and taking action to pull people out of bad situation.

From empirical perspective, Ip et al. (2017) set up a quantitative study on 252 students in the context of Hong Kong. He found empathy is positively associated with social entrepreneurial intentions (Ip, Wu, Liu, & Liang, 2017). These findings were supported by empirical results obtained by Ayob et al (2013).

To sum up, empathy is an important personality trait and proxy for attitudes toward behaviour. That is, people who have empathic concerns will have positive attitudes towards SE which in turn leads to higher levels of SEI in comparison to those who don't have this temperament. Consequently, we propose:

P1. Empathy is positively associated with social entrepreneurial intention

Although empathy is known as a significant predictor of SEI (Ayob et al., 2013; Kedmenec et al., 2015), this relationship remained inconsistent to date. For instance, Bacq and Alt (2018) couldn't find any direct link between empathy and SEI. They found the empirical evidence to confidently suggest that some other factors influence the relationship. Ernst (2011) tested antecedents of SEI with the sample size of 203 students in Germany. She failed to find any link between SEI and empathy (Ernst, 2011).

From the other side, there is empirical evidence that supports the moderating role of gender between personal factors and entrepreneurial intention (Lopa, 2017). Male entrepreneurs emphasize economic wealth creation while the female entrepreneur's top priority is social and environmental value creation (Hechavarría et al., 2017; Hechavarria, Ingram, Justo, & Terjesen, 2012). According to Hechavarria (2012) males are more inclined to be active in the domain of traditional or commercial entrepreneurship whereas females are more likely to be a social entrepreneur because they give higher priority to social value goals with the purpose of improving society.

One of the reasons for abovementioned differences is because women are more likely to exhibit helping (Eagly et al., 1986; Havens, O'Herlihy, & Schervish, 2006) and altruistic behaviour (Themudo, 2009). That is to say, women possess stronger empathic attitudes which lead to higher SEI. Therefore we propose:

P2. Gender moderates the relationship between empathy and SEI

Proactively

Proactively is a tendency to find new ways to begin things rather than wait-and-see approach. People with proactive personality are volunteer and willing to take new challenges and responsibilities (Schmit, Kihm, & Robie, 2000). Crant (1996) studied the relationship between proactive personality and entrepreneurial intention and stated that intention is determined by the desire to influence and change the environment (Crant, 1996). Proactively as a character and proxy to attitude plays an important role in decision making to become a social entrepreneur (Kedmenec et al., 2015).

In (2009) Jain interviewed nine social entrepreneurs and stated that there was evidence of proactive personality among all of them (Jain, 2009). With the same methodology, Weerawardena and Mort (2006) conducted in-depth interviews with social entrepreneurs who are involved in the not-for-profit section. The results indicated that all social entrepreneurs have a proactive personality (Weerawardena & Sullivan Mort, 2006). Recently Nsereko et al (2018) found empirical proofs that pro-activeness has a positive and significant impact on the creation of social venture or SE behaviour (Nsereko, Balunywa, Munene, Orobias, & Muhammed, 2018).

To conclude, Social needs are considered as an opportunity and an entrepreneur feel responsible to take the opportunity for solving a social problem. While we believe there are some other characteristics that may influence SEI, it is necessary to possess a proactive personality to establish a social venture. Accordingly, the following propositions are formed:

P3. Proactively is positively associated with social entrepreneurial intention

Religiosity

Religion is a set of certain beliefs that affect individuals' life since childhood and commitment towards these beliefs gradually increase by the better understanding of its guidelines. Religious values have a strong influence on shaping followers' belief, attitudes (Ateeq-ur-Rehman & Shabbir, 2010), values (Mokhlis, 2009) and economic behaviour (Lehrer, 2004). Religious values affect decision making to be (or not to be) entrepreneur (Balog, Baker, & Walker, 2014; Drakopoulou Dodd & Seaman, 1998; Gursoy, Altinay, & Kenebayeva, 2017; Hoogendoorn, 2016) because it has potential to encourage or discourage entrepreneurial efforts (Hoogendoorn, 2016).

Roundy (2014) found that one of the motivators of social entrepreneurs to create their own business is "desire to enact their personal values and beliefs, including religious and spiritual beliefs" (Roundy, 2014). In another study 50 interviews conducted with social entrepreneurs in order to find their motivation to become a social entrepreneur. Surprisingly, the common motivation was: "an aspiration to integrate their religious beliefs and work" (Roundy & Halstead, 2015). Zhao 2016 believes that most of the social ventures are rooted in religious beliefs and values (Zhao & Lounsbury, 2016).

The reason for the aforementioned positive relationship is justifiable through existing specific beliefs and values within different religions. In Islam, for instance, as a second most popular religion in the world, worship are encouraged to Ehsan, Waqf, Kindness, benevolence, helping vulnerable people and so on (Salarzahi et al., 2010). Therefore we propose that a highly religious person have positive attitudes toward SE which consequently lead to higher levels of SEI. Therefore:

P4: Religiosity is positively associated with social entrepreneurial intention

Subjective norms

This concept deals with our perception of *important others'* support to become a social entrepreneur, or not (Ernst, 2011). In other words, it can be defined as perceived social pressure from family, friends and colleagues (Liñán & Chen, 2009) regarding the decision to be (or not to be) a social entrepreneur.

Various studies demonstrate a significant influence of subjective norms on intention (Drewery, Nevison, & Pretti, 2016; Tsai, Chang, & Peng, 2016; Utami, 2017). In the context of social entrepreneurship, Hockerts (2017) found a large impact of perceived social support on SEI. In another study conducted by Zaremohzzabieh et al., (2019), a strong correlation found between SN and SEI. That is to say, people who are considered important in our life have the power to motivate or demotivate us to be a social entrepreneur. Accordingly, the following proposition is developed:

P5: Subjective norms are positively associated with social entrepreneurial intention

Perceived barriers

In addition to finding factors that positively influence intention, it is also important to know about barriers. Ioannis and Fotis (2016) in a systematic review categorized entrepreneurial barriers into internal and external factors. Internal factors refer to personality traits, educational skills and personal attitude, whereas external barriers deal with finance, resources, market barriers, law and regulation, and so on. Individual's perception of barriers influence intention negatively. In other words, with the stronger beliefs about barriers, the less entrepreneurial intention exists (Ismail et al., 2009; Pruett et al., 2009). Therefore, the following proposition is derived:

P6. Perception of barriers to entrepreneurship is negatively associated with SEI

Social entrepreneurial self-efficacy

Social entrepreneurial self-efficacy is similar to entrepreneurial self-efficacy with little difference in the outcome of behavior. This concept refers to "the dynamic set of beliefs about one's capacity to start a new social venture and succeed in carrying it out" (Tran & Korflesch, 2016).

Tiwari (2017) conducted research in the context of India about predictors of SEI. The results proved that intention toward social entrepreneurial activities is higher in students with high self-efficacy (Tiwari, Bhat, & Tikoria, 2017a). Some other scholars found positive a significant relationship between self-efficacy and SEI (Lacap, Mulyaningsih, & Ramadani, 2018; Tiwari, Bhat, & Tikoria, 2017b). From these findings, it can be concluded that people who believe they have potential skills, knowledge and capacity to establish a social venture are more likely to develop intention in comparison to those who less believe in themselves. Accordingly, we propose:

P7. High level of social entrepreneurial self-efficacy is positively associated with social entrepreneurial intention

Figure 2 illustrates the conceptual framework for social entrepreneurship intention build upon theory of social entrepreneurial behaviour. According to this framework SEI is influenced by the main three constructs namely attitudes, subjective norms and SE self-efficacy. However, authors extend the theory by proposing empathy, proactively and religiosity as proxy for attitude and predictor of SEI.

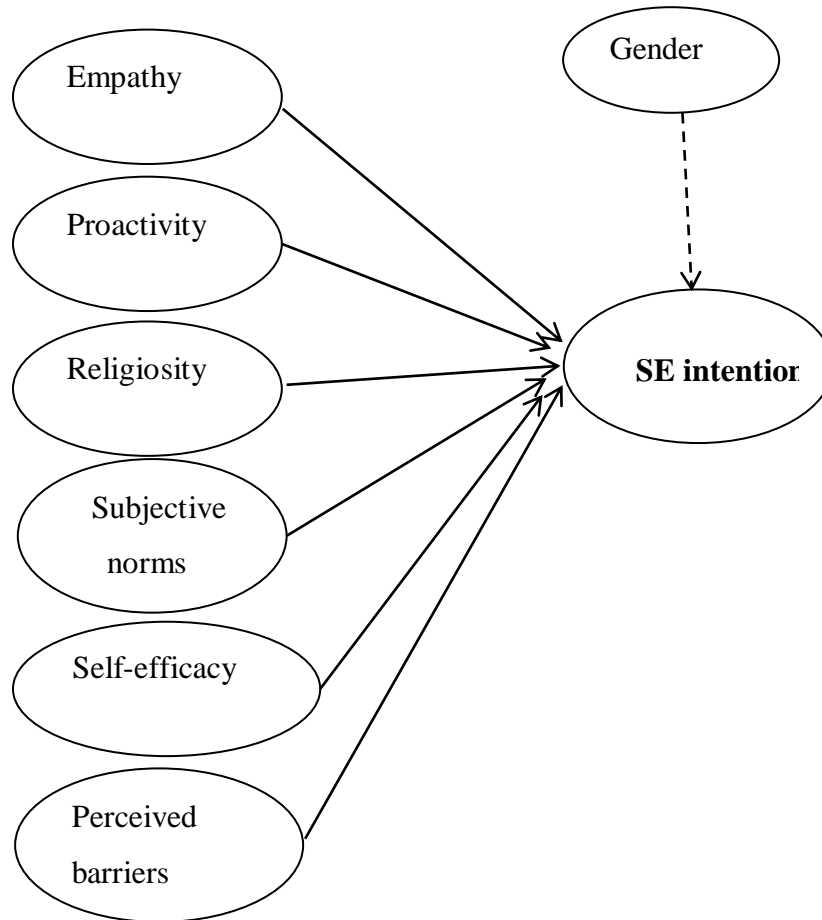


Figure 2 Proposed conceptual model

Conclusion

This study provides new insights into the SE literature by proposing a new conceptual model for SEI. Additionally, it contributes to the knowledge from the theoretical and practical point of view.

The concept of SE is still in its infancy and far from an integrated framework (Choi & Majumdar, 2014). Even the meaning and boundaries of the field are still vague and under-developed (Choi & Majumdar, 2014; Mair & Martí, 2006; Martin & Osberg, 2007; McAnany, 2012). For the first time, the theory of social entrepreneurial behaviour appeared to provide a clearer picture of SEI as well as behaviour. Applying this theory helped us to form a new model and determine factors that influence intention to become a social entrepreneur. The main idea of this model is to pay attention to personal factors (empathy, proactivity and religiosity) that shape attitude, and consequently influence SEI directly. On the other hand, social entrepreneurial self-efficacy, subjective norms and perceived barriers influence SE.

In a nutshell, the proposed model suggests new well-supported relationships between antecedents and SEI on the basis of both theory and empirical evidence. Furthermore, this study is among few studies that bring attention to “barriers”. Although few studies strived to find determinants of SEI, there is lack of research on perceived barriers. This is while barriers play an important negative role in the formation of the intention to be an entrepreneur as a general concept (Pruett et al., 2009).

Additionally, this study is significant from practical perspective. First, by knowing factors that influence intention, the policymakers will be able to organize effective plans for training the next generation of social entrepreneurs and increase SE rate. The government must emphasize developing personal dispositions that strongly affect SE behaviour. Second, being aware of barriers that hinder shaping SEI will be useful for policymakers in order to take effective steps for removing those barriers (Sandhu, Sidique, & Riaz, 2011). Third, universities, schools and ministry of education can identify personal characteristics, attitudes and values required for nurturing students and preparing them to build the future.

Future direction

Currently, most of the publications focus on intention and its determinants. Although the intention is a strong predictor of behaviour, some factors prevent shaping SEI. Thus, more qualitative studies are required to find out potential perceived barriers. Additionally, there are many other macro-level factors that have been excluded from the model. Future research can add environmental dimensions to the model. Eventually, it is suggested to test the proposed model in this study, empirically and in different contexts.

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