

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Local relationships matter! The impact of intellectual capital on entrepreneurial bricolage in African social entrepreneurs

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Social entrepreneurs aim to create societal value while pursuing financial sustainability. However, they typically face several challenges and constraints when operating in resource-scarce environments. For this reason, social entrepreneurs typically engage in entrepreneurial bricolage, which is described as a process of using whatever tools and resources necessary that are immediately available. The behavioral theory of entrepreneurial bricolage attempts to understand what entrepreneurs do when faced with resource constraints. In this vital process, little empirical research has been conducted to investigate what drives social entrepreneurs to engage in such a way. This study aims to understand the antecedents of bricolage and, in particular, empirically test its link to intellectual capital. A survey was administered to 115 social entrepreneurs from Ghana and Sierra Leone. Data analysis shows that relational capital plays a crucial role in driving social entrepreneurs to engage with bricolage. In fact, the quality of local relationships and external support received (by suppliers, customers, and communities) is positively related and statistically significant with entrepreneurial bricolage. The results of this study not only extend the academic literature of bricolage in social entrepreneurship but also point out the focal role of relational capital as an enabler toward effectively operating in difficult conditions in developing African countries. We thus provide theoretical implications to the field of social entrepreneurship through the lens of intellectual capital and knowledge management. Practical implications are provided to social entrepreneurs operating in developing countries, such as government, NGOs, and agencies seeking to support entrepreneurship initiatives. Limitations and future research opportunities are suggested as well.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Driven by tangible economic developments, emerging economies are experiencing significant change in competitive entrepreneurial markets. Academic research has highlighted the rise of social entrepreneurs in these environments who aim to create societal value while pursuing financial sustainability (Ciambotti & Pedrini, 2021; Doherty, Haugh, & Lyon, 2014). Social entrepreneurs are also required to develop hybrids organizations because they combine social ideals with commercial goals (Bacq et al., 2020; Saebi, Foss, & Linder, 2019). Primarily because of this dual mission, social entrepreneurs typically face several challenges, such as attracting skilled human capital (Doherty et al., 2014), financial

capital (Linna, 2013) and technologies, raw materials, and machineries (Ciambotti & Pedrini, 2021). These challenges are further amplified when social entrepreneurs operate in resource-constraints contexts, such as developing countries (Ciambotti, 2020; Holt & Littlewood, 2017). To address such resource-constraints, social entrepreneurs typically engage in an entrepreneurial process known as bricolage (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Desa & Basu, 2013). Entrepreneurial bricolage is a process of making do by creatively combining resources at hand and without refusing to be constrained by the limitations of the environment (Fisher, 2012).

The extant academic literature on entrepreneurial bricolage has mainly focused on outcomes such as innovation (Linna, 2013;

Senyard, Baker, Steffens, & Davidsson, 2014), social change (Bacq, Ofstein, Kickul, & Gundry, 2015; Servantie & Rispal, 2018), and firm survival (Stenholm & Renko, 2016). Few studies, in turn, have examined antecedents which drive social entrepreneurs in implementing entrepreneurial bricolage (Bacq, Hartog, & Hoogendoorn, 2016; Desa & Basu, 2013; Janssen, Fayolle, & Wuillaume, 2018; Saebi et al., 2019).

Second, the quantity of research regarding social entrepreneurs in resource-constraint contexts is quite limited (Ciambotti, Littlewood, Sottini, & M'ithiria, 2020; Holt & Littlewood, 2017; Seelos, Mair, Battilana, & Dacin, 2011; Shepherd, Parida, & Wincent, 2020a). This void in the literature is further exacerbated when African entrepreneurs are examined in particular (Barnard, Cuervo-Cazurra, & Manning, 2017; Kolk & Rivera-Santos, 2018).

To address the void in the extant research, the field of intellectual capital provides a useful lens with which to investigate the relationship between social entrepreneurs and bricolage. Specifically, one of the key constructs in the intellectual capital literature is relational capital (Bontis, 1999). Relational capital represents the knowledge embedded in the relationships that a firm has with its external partners such as customers and suppliers (Bontis, 2001; Bontis & Fitzenz, 2002; Paoloni, Coluccia, Fontana, & Solimene, 2020).

Relational capital has been confirmed as an important component of intellectual capital and has been empirically shown to be positively associated with innovation (Buenechea-Elberdin, Sáenz, & Kianto, 2018; Kianto, Ritala, Spender, & Vanhala, 2014), as well as social and economic performance (Bontis, Ciambotti, Palazzi, & Sgro, 2018). Recent studies have shown that intellectual capital can be assessed in the resource-constraint context of African countries (Sgrò, Ciambotti, Bontis, & Ayiku, 2020). Generally speaking, Africa remains a novel research setting for management research, but there is evidence that several countries on the continent are characterized by strong social ties (Ciambotti et al., 2020; Holt & Littlewood, 2017; Zoogah, Peng, & Woldu, 2015) and social entrepreneurship (Desa & Basu, 2013; Manning, Kannothea, & Wissman-Weber, 2017; Servantie & Rispal, 2018).

Lashitew and his colleagues suggest that a strong sense of communal belonging can encourage experimentation with social innovations, which is an important aspect of bricolage (Lashitew, Bals, & van Tulder, 2020). Furthermore, Ciambotti and Pedrini (2021) highlighted the important role of informal and formal networking with suppliers, customers, and communities in order to implement bricolage. The role of community and ecosystem actors has been investigated by several researchers (Almandoz, 2012; Ciambotti & Pedrini, 2021; Lumpkin, Bacq, & Pidduck, 2018; Seelos et al., 2011), but none of these studies provide empirical evidence of how relationships with other actors may contribute to venturing in resource-constraints contexts such as African countries.

Thus, the following research question is posed: *Which factors of relational capital influence entrepreneurial bricolage in resource-constraints contexts?*

To answer this research question, we decided to survey 324 social entrepreneurs from Ghana and Sierra Leone. Of the latter, 115 took

part to the survey. In the following sections, we explore the theoretical background and provide details on the research methodology. We then offer the results, proceeding with discussions and theoretical and practical implications. We finally offer avenues for further research.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

The extant literature on entrepreneurial bricolage highlights how entrepreneurs render unique services by recombining existing elements for new purposes irrespective of institutional limits (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Senyard, Baker, & Davidsson, 2009). In other words, firms and their leaders are able to create something from nothing by applying combinations of existing resources to novel opportunities.

Many management researchers have focused their attention on the positive outcomes of bricolage which include innovation (Linna, 2013; Senyard et al., 2014), societal change (Bacq et al., 2015; Servantie & Rispal, 2018), firm growth (Bojica, Ruiz Jiménez, Ruiz Nava, & Fuentes-Fuentes, 2018), and survival (Stenholm & Renko, 2016). However, few studies have examined drivers that foster social entrepreneurs to implement entrepreneurial bricolage (Bacq et al., 2016; Desa & Basu, 2013; Janssen et al., 2018; Saebi et al., 2019). This gap in the literature provides an opportunity to address the antecedents of such an entrepreneurial approach (Stenholm & Renko, 2016). Moreover, little research exists to explain what support social entrepreneurs require to operate in resource-constraint contexts (Di Domenico, Haugh & Tracey, 2010; Holt & Littlewood, 2017; Lashitew et al., 2020; Seelos et al., 2011; Shepherd et al., 2020a). In particular, African social entrepreneurs suffer from severe challenges such as poor infrastructure, corruption, institutional voids, and lack of resources (Ciambotti et al., 2020; Holt & Littlewood, 2017; Kolk & Rivera-Santos, 2018; Zoogah et al., 2015).

One of the chief resources necessary to achieve higher business performance is intellectual capital (Bontis & Fitzenz, 2002). IC is based on knowledge, and according to Kianto et al. (2014), intellectual capital is defined as the sum of all intangible and knowledge-related resources that an organization can use in its productive process in an attempt to create value. The primary sub-components of intellectual capital (IC) are represented by human, structural, and relational capital (Choo & Bontis, 2002; Paoloni et al., 2020). Human capital is the primary strategic resource for firms since it refers to the knowledge embedded in employees' minds in terms of educational background, competence, experience, skills, creativity, and problem-solving ability (Kianto et al., 2017). Structural capital embodies all of the codified knowledge that lies in information systems, routines, and electronic databases (Bontis et al., 2000). Finally, relational capital is defined as the sum of a firm's relationships with external stakeholders such as customers, suppliers, public, and private institutions (Bontis, 1999; Kianto et al., 2017).

African social enterprises, as hybrid organizations, face a considerable challenge when it comes to accessing resources (Ciambotti & Pedrini, 2021). Highlighting a recently published study by Sgrò et al. (2020), relational capital was comprised of two important aspects: the quality of local and global relationships. In particular, the

quality of local relationships that an entrepreneur can establish with the community was shown to be of significant importance. Furthermore, the quality of interfirm relationships, established at the local level, was also highlighted as an essential mechanism for developing an effective network which can lead job opportunities, societal well-being, and feelings of loyalty and trust.

Particularly, RC has the ability to connect the tacit and explicit knowledge that is internal and external to the enterprises' boundaries (Kianto et al., 2017; Paoloni et al., 2020). Knowledge resources coming from the outside environment (such as customers, community, public, or private institutions) are very important for SEs, since the stock of resources owned may not be enough to create opportunities for social and economic growth (Audretsch, Belitski, Caiazza, & Lehmann, 2020; Bontis et al., 2018). Therefore, established strong and qualitative relationships can set up a network in which knowledge can flow from the inside to the outside of the organizations by integrating people and processes able to stimulate innovation pathways (Kianto et al., 2017), such as the entrepreneurial bricolage (Baker & Nelson, 2005). In addition, an organization's trustworthiness and well-established intra- and inter-organizational relations are facilitators of knowledge storage that is useful to build new knowledge, gain sustainable competitive advantages, and increase the firm's performance (Oliveira, Curado, Balle, & Kianto, 2020). This is also relevant in SMEs of developing economies, which may benefit from knowledge mechanisms which can foster their operations (Petrov, Ćelić, Uzelac, & Drašković, 2020). This research stream recently called for more empirical evidence on the link between IC, knowledge management, and entrepreneurial venturing. See, for instance, the recent Special Issue on *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal* (Audretsch et al., 2020) or the literature review which points out call for research on social relationships and their link with entrepreneurship (Paoloni et al., 2020).

To further develop these critical relationships, social entrepreneurs rely on services provided by external partners which provide expertise in a variety of areas such as day-to-day operations; advertising and promotion (Ciambotti & Pedrini, 2021); information systems; training and recruitment services; and general administrative support to improve a firm's management processes. The behaviors of social entrepreneurs in seeking out such support become pivotal in transforming and shaping the social and economic system in which they operate (Doherty et al., 2014; Zahra, Gedajlovic, Neubaum, & Shulman, 2009). Accordingly, relational capital and social entrepreneurship are inextricably linked as a precursor for sustainable competitiveness, economic, and social growth (Benevene et al., 2017; Bontis et al., 2018), and our paper aims to empirically proof such linkage with a specific entrepreneurial process that is bricolage.

3 | DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOTHESES

Relational capital is strongly related with bricolage. In fact, social entrepreneurs tend to stimulate, promote, and highlight employees' competencies and behaviors by leveraging inspirational leadership skills and the ability to garner factors of production such as financial

and knowledge resources and to guarantee that resources are employed in the stakeholders' and communities' interests (Saebi et al., 2019; Tan et al., 2005). Moreover, research in social entrepreneurship demonstrates the relevance of social ties, informal networks, and community engagement for social entrepreneurs. For instance, Wells, Ellis, Slack, and Moufahim (2019) document the importance of engaging the community in cooperatives for the sustainability of the company. This study supports Seelos et al. (2011) which revealed the importance of community embeddedness for social entrepreneurs. Other scholars investigated the relationship between social entrepreneurs and community (Almandoz, 2012; Lashitew et al., 2020; Shepherd et al., 2020a) which provides insight into the importance of entrepreneurial bricolage (Bacq et al., 2015).

In fact, Ciambotti and Pedrini (2021) discussed the role of customers and suppliers in contributing to bricolage implementation through so-called hybrid-harvesting strategies. The authors discovered that Kenyan social entrepreneurs leverage their hybrid strategies through social partnerships and social networking with local actors. Moreover, in order to overcome resource-constraints, social entrepreneurs in this study developed relationships with suppliers, customers, and employees built on quality and loyalty, which help social entrepreneurs to be more productive, and enact the bricolage mechanism (Ciambotti & Pedrini, 2021). These findings which link social entrepreneurs and bricolage have been highlighted by other academic researchers such as Desa and Basu (2013), Di Domenico et al., (2010), Kwong, Tasavori, and Wun-mei Cheung (2017), and Janssen et al., (2018). Finally, Lashitew et al. (2020) documented how the embeddedness in a community also generates creativity in building social networks which is critical aspect of bricolage as it pertains to combination of resources and improvisation.

Therefore, if social entrepreneurs are able to develop qualitative relationships within the local community consisting of customers, and suppliers, they should also be better at accessing tangible and intangible resources of that local market (Ciambotti et al., 2020). Based on this conclusion, the following hypotheses are recommended:

- H1.** The quality of local relationships positively affects entrepreneurial bricolage.
- H2.** External support positively affects entrepreneurial bricolage.

4 | METHODOLOGY

In order to test the aforementioned hypotheses, a questionnaire was sent to 324 African social entrepreneurs operating in Ghana and Sierra Leone with the support of the E4Impact Foundation (see <https://e4impact.org>). E4Impact was launched in 2010 with the objective of training entrepreneurs in the developing world to support the start-up and growth phases of their businesses.

A final dataset of 115 social entrepreneurs was received, yielding a response rate of 35%. The survey was designed to gather background

information about the social enterprise, as well as data pertaining to the quality of relationships established by the entrepreneur and the external support received by the partners. After data collection was complete, an ordinary square regression model was used to verify the effect of each relational capital factor on entrepreneurial bricolage.

Ghana and Sierra Leone were selected for this study for three main reasons. First, these two African countries are developing economies, meaning that they are experiencing economic growth (OECD/EU, 2017; Omidyar Network, 2013), but they face several limitations including lack of resources, lack of institutional support, low infrastructure, and corruption which ultimately provide significant constraints for commercial success (Ciambotti & Pedrini, 2021; Holt & Littlewood, 2017). Moreover, Ghana and Sierra Leone are home to a large population of social entrepreneurs who want to contribute to societal development as well as bring a positive impact to the communities in which they live and operate (Ciambotti et al., 2020; Lashitew et al., 2020). Third, this unique research setting provides a novel yet fruitful opportunity to examine the impact of relational capital (RC) dynamics on entrepreneurial bricolage (Barnard et al., 2017; Sgrò et al., 2020; Shepherd et al., 2020a).

The survey instrument was designed to gather data on the primary constructs of the study as well as several socio-demographic characteristics. Specifically, the survey measured items pertaining to company age, size, and gender of the entrepreneur in English which is the official language of both countries. The instrument also contained survey items from prepublished scales used to operationalize the construct relational capital (Bontis & Fitz-enz, 2002) and entrepreneurial bricolage (Senyard et al., 2009; see Table 1).

A confirmatory factor analysis of the relational capital construct revealed two sub-components that were identified as follows: (a) the quality of relationships that the entrepreneur established with the local community (RC local) and (b) the quality of relationships that

the entrepreneur established with the external community (RC external support). The distinction between local and external linkages makes sense in this context. RC local comprised of three items and RC external support involved eight items (see Table 2). To ensure internal constancy, a Cronbach's alpha test was conducted with favorable results (RC local: $\alpha = .8616$; RC external support: $\alpha = .9271$). To ensure sampling adequacy, a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test also confirmed favorable results (RC local: KMO = 0.7363; RC external support: 0.9069).

Control variables for both entrepreneurial level and for firm-level characteristics were also collected and analyzed. In line with previous research in the entrepreneurship literature, these control variables included gender (Bacq et al., 2016) and newness (Cardon & Kirk, 2015). Lastly, control variables that accounted for different industries were used to partial out industry-level affects.

5 | FINDINGS

A summary of descriptive statistics for the constructs RC local, RC external support, and entrepreneurial bricolage can be found in Tables 3–5. A correlation matrix is presented in Table 6.

Prior to conducting a regression analysis, a correlation matrix was calculated between the independent variables (RC local and RC external support) and the dependent variable (entrepreneurial bricolage). In all cases, the Pearson correlation coefficients are lower than 61%. In line with the theoretical arguments, a statistically significant correlation between RC local and entrepreneurial bricolage (p -correlation = .326, p -value <.01) was found, as well as between RC external support and entrepreneurial bricolage (p -correlation = .427, p -value <.01).

The conceptual model and hypotheses were testing using hierarchical regression analysis (see Table 7). In the first step, the control variables were entered with bricolage as dependent variables. In the second step, control variables and the first independent variable (RC local) were entered to test hypothesis H1. As shown in Model

TABLE 1 Entrepreneurial bricolage items

Entrepreneurial bricolage	
Item 1	We are confident of our ability to find workable solutions to new challenges by using our existing resources
Item 2	We gladly take on a broader range of challenges than others with our resources would be able to
Item 3	We use any existing resource that seems useful to responding to a new problem or opportunity
Item 4	We deal with new challenges by applying a combination of our existing resources and other resources inexpensively available to us
Item 5	When dealing with new problems or opportunities, we take action by assuming that we will find a workable solution
Item 6	By combining our existing resources, we take on a surprising variety of new challenges
Item 7	When we face new challenges, we put together workable solutions from our existing resources
Item 8	We combine resources to accomplish new challenges that the resources were not originally intended to accomplish

TABLE 2 Relational capital items

Relational capital	
RC local 1	Employee relationship
RC local 2	Customers relationship
RC local 3	Local community relationship
RC external support 1	Strategy support
RC external support 2	Image promotion
RC external support 3	Information sharing
RC external support 4	Training services
RC external support 5	Commercial services
RC external support 6	Administration services
RC external support 7	Recruitment support
RC external support 8	Supports knowledge sharing

2, the effect of RC local on entrepreneurial bricolage is positive and significant ($b = 0.357$, p -value $<.01$), consistent with hypothesis H1.

In the third step, control variables and the second independent variable (RC external support) were entered to test hypothesis H2. As shown in Model 3, the effect of RC external support on entrepreneurial bricolage is positive and significant ($b = 0.459$, p -value $<.01$), consistent with hypothesis H2.

TABLE 3 Descriptive statistics of RC local

Variable	Obs	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Employee relationship	115	6.67	1.663	1	7
Customers relationship	115	6.922	1.494	1	7
Local community relationship	115	6.391	1.710	1	7

TABLE 4 Descriptive statistics of RC external support

Variable	Obs	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Strategy support	115	5.186	2.766	1	7
Image promotion	115	5.589	2.524	1	7
Information sharing	115	5.566	2.367	1	7
Training services	115	5.558	2.591	1	7
Commercial services	115	5.628	2.457	1	7
Administration services	115	4.965	2.553	1	7
Recruitment support	115	4.456	2.584	1	7
Supports knowledge	115	6.287	1.810	1	7

TABLE 5 Descriptive statistics of entrepreneurial bricolage

Variable	Obs	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Bricolage item 1	115	4.157	0.951	1	5
Bricolage item 2	115	3.789	1.148	1	5
Bricolage item 3	115	4.105	0.999	1	5
Bricolage item 4	115	4.018	1.144	1	5
Bricolage item 5	115	4.000	1.068	1	5
Bricolage item 6	115	4.000	0.996	1	5
Bricolage item 7	115	4.139	1.016	1	5
Bricolage item 8	115	3.895	1.025	1	5

TABLE 6 Correlation matrix

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) Bricolage	1.000				
(2) RC local	0.326***	1.000			
(3) RC external support	0.427***	0.368***	1.000		
(4) Company age	-0.024	0.060	0.039	1.000	
(5) Company size	0.029	0.069	0.094	0.087	1.000

*** $p < .01$. ** $p < .05$. * $p < .1$.

To increase the robustness of the findings, a fourth step was introduced. Specifically, control variables and both independent variables (RC local and RC external support) were entered to ensure that the hypotheses were still valid. As shown in Model 4, the effect of RC local on entrepreneurial bricolage and the effect of RC external support on entrepreneurial bricolage are both positive and significant (RC local: $b = 0.219$, p -value $<.05$; RC external support: $b = 0.387$, p -value $<.01$), consistent with hypotheses H1 and H2.

6 | DISCUSSION

The aim of this study is to investigate which factors of relational capital lead social entrepreneurs to implement entrepreneurial bricolage in a resource-constrained context. Through empirical analysis, it was discovered that the quality of local relationships with suppliers, customers and local community, and the support received by external actors are positively related and statistically significant with entrepreneurial bricolage.

These results not only reveal the important role played by relational capital as an antecedent of bricolage (Desa & Basu, 2013; Janssen et al., 2018) but also explain how social entrepreneurs can better operate in resource-constrained environments by leveraging external support and local relationships (Ciambotti & Pedrini, 2021; Shepherd et al., 2020a). These results extend the research of several previously published studies (Almandoz, 2012; Lashitew et al., 2020; Seelos et al., 2011). In fact, while most of the literature mainly focus on the embeddedness characteristic which contributes to develop social entrepreneurship (Bacq et al., 2020; Lashitew et al., 2020; Seelos et al., 2011), very little have demonstrated what drives to implement a specific entrepreneurial process, namely bricolage (Desa & Basu, 2013). This study addresses this gap, extending the current research stream on social entrepreneurship and bricolage in resource-constrained contexts.

In particular, the results of this empirical study reveal that the quality of local relationships and external support received are positively related and statistically significant with entrepreneurial bricolage. These results highlight the vital role played by relational capital in the two main components (Sgrò et al., 2020) in driving social entrepreneurs in venturing through entrepreneurial bricolage. Moreover, the findings uncover the importance of strong local relationships with suppliers, customers and communities, and the importance of support received for implementing bricolage. These aspects introduce further

TABLE 7 Regression analysis

	(1) Model 1	(2) Model 2	(3) Model 3	(4) Model 4
Company age	−0.015 (0.074)	−0.026 (0.082)	−0.014 (0.085)	−0.021 (0.087)
Company size	0.035 (0.061)	0.019 (0.051)	0.006 (0.053)	0.001 (0.049)
Gender	0.123 (0.213)	0.205 (0.214)	0.323 (0.210)	0.342 (0.208)
Industry	0.001 (0.215)	−0.054 (0.202)	−0.109 (0.180)	−0.126 (0.179)
RC local		0.357** (0.084)		0.219* (0.094)
RC external support			0.459** (0.100)	0.387** (0.111)
_cons	−0.091 (0.258)	−0.114 (0.257)	−0.163 (0.225)	−0.165 (0.228)
Observations	115	115	115	115
R-squared	.005	.118	.208	.246

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses.

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.

important contributions to literature of social entrepreneurship and bricolage.

6.1 | Contributions to social entrepreneurship and bricolage literature under the lens of knowledge management and IC

The findings of this study not only extend the antecedents of bricolage in social entrepreneurs (Desa & Basu, 2013; Janssen et al., 2018) but contribute to the literature on social entrepreneurship by providing an novel explanation on what allows social entrepreneurs to effectively operate in difficult contexts (Ciambotti & Pedrini, 2021; Lashitew et al., 2020; Saebi et al., 2019; Shepherd et al., 2020a). Moreover, the study contributes to increasing the knowledge on the role of intellectual capital in social entrepreneurs (Bontis et al., 2018; Sgrò et al., 2020) and introduces, for the first time, a conceptual lens through which the field of social entrepreneurship and knowledge management interplay can be further developed (Audretsch et al., 2020; Paoloni et al., 2020; Saebi et al., 2019). In this paragraph, we then highlight contributions of our research to social entrepreneurship and bricolage with the relationship with knowledge management and IC literature.

Academic research on social entrepreneurship documents the importance of bricolage (Fisher, 2012; Janssen et al., 2018; Saebi et al., 2019). In fact, social entrepreneurs that operate in resource-scarce environments have little choice but to engage in bricolage (Desa & Basu, 2013). But this study addresses the particular nature of bricolage that is required. Previous scholars suggested the importance of community in helping them acquire resources that may create value

(Seelos et al., 2011). Also, Lashitew et al. (2020) and Shepherd et al. (2020a) highlight how local embeddedness stimulates social innovation, creativity, and other benefits to the organization. Those studies are in line with the available extant literature which documents the relevance of community and other local actors (Bacq et al., 2020). For instance, Almandoz (2012, p. 1382) suggests the importance of local suppliers:

... embracing a community ... may lead to more easily obtaining the resources needed to establish a new enterprise, at least under certain conditions—for instance, when most, if not all, of the resource providers come from the same local area, or when those resource providers in turn lead to other local suppliers.

With the results of this study, the vital role of relational capital in terms of quality of relationship and external support to acquire resources at hand is then highlighted (Desa & Basu, 2013; Linna, 2013). Furthermore, Ciambotti and Pedrini (2021) explained how social entrepreneurs are able to implement hybrid-harvesting strategies to overcome resource-constraints, thus engaging with entrepreneurial bricolage. In their attempt to link social partnerships and social networking as two relevant approaches of bricolage, this research highlights the importance of relationships with suppliers and customers. Therefore, this study extends the current literature on social entrepreneurship by revealing that it is not only the embeddedness which support entrepreneurs in acquiring relevant resources (Almandoz, 2012; Lashitew et al., 2020; Lumpkin et al., 2018; Manning et al., 2017; Seelos et al., 2011) but also mechanisms of knowledge management in such developing conditions. For

instance, we add to social entrepreneurship literature the importance of knowledge aspects about the quality of relationships with local actors in addition to the overall support that a social enterprise can receive for specific activities such as strategy support, commercial services, and administration services.

Thus, our paper contextualizes the knowledge management aspects of relationships in social entrepreneurs of developing countries. In such contexts, the quality of relationships and external support is very related with the social and cultural contexts characteristics of African countries. In fact, African countries are exceptionally diverse, with more than 1,000 ethnic groups (Nyambegera, 2002) which strongly affect behavior of individuals. Secondly, African countries are characterized by informal social and cultural norms (Holt & Littlewood, 2017) as shared beliefs, values, and behavioral norms of a group (Hofstede, 2001). For instance, the *ubuntu* culture refers to “I am who I am through others,” motto which originates the Zulu language in South Africa and widely appreciated throughout the continent. Essentially, these cultural characteristics of a strong form of collectivism also may generate pattern of behaviors (Kolk & Rivera-Santos, 2018; Zoogah et al., 2015). As consequence, our results inform the literature on knowledge management and intellectual capital, highlighting that the quality of relationships and external support may result from peculiar characteristics of African countries, such as a strong sense of belonging (Lashitew et al., 2020) and a sense of community (Michalopoulos & Papaioannou, 2015; Wells et al., 2019). Further, African countries strongly share a social entrepreneurial orientation (Bacq et al., 2015) and therefore represent a fruitful ground to study the social entrepreneurship phenomenon (Ciambotti et al., 2020; Zahra et al., 2009). This social entrepreneurial orientation could be the basis for a greater share in resources within communities and inform the component of relational capital related to external support (Kianto et al., 2014; Sgrò et al., 2020). Heeding these evidences, further research needs to better understand the relationship between cultural aspects and knowledge management of social entrepreneurs which might influence intellectual capital and perhaps determine variations among entrepreneurial processes in such developing contexts (George, Corbishley, Khayesi, Haas, & Tihanyi, 2016; Sgrò et al., 2020; Zahra et al., 2009).

Overall, this study offers theoretical contribution to the theory of bricolage in social entrepreneurs by introducing intellectual capital as a valuable lens with which to investigate important antecedents (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Janssen et al., 2018). The results herein provide a response to the call for research from Saebi et al. (2019), Desa and Basu (2013) and Stenholm and Renko (2016) to better investigate individual drivers of bricolage.

This study is also the first to introduce intellectual capital as a useful conceptual lens to investigate social entrepreneurship and knowledge management in emerging economies. Previously published research on intellectual capital mainly focused on the impact of IC constructs on organizational performance (Bontis et al., 2018), while little research tried to link intellectual capital with entrepreneurial venturing (Sgrò et al., 2020). Also, literature of knowledge management is plenty of discussion on how development of knowledge can underpin

firm growth (Durst & Edvardsson, 2012; Guadamillas, Donate, & Pablo, 2008) or innovation (Kianto et al., 2017). This stream highlights that trustworthiness and well-established intra- and inter-organizational relations are facilitators of knowledge storage, which in turn is useful to build to gain sustainable competitive advantages and increase the firm's performance (Oliveira et al., 2020). Our study then informs such research stream on IC and knowledge management, by providing evidence on how developing knowledge in terms of local relationships may determine an opportunity-space for venturing in difficult and challenging contexts (Saebi et al., 2019; Zahra et al., 2009). Moreover, there is little evidence on how SMEs in African context manage knowledge and IC (Ferramosca & Ghio, 2018; Sgrò et al., 2020) and yet at the beginning in overall developing economies (e.g., Serbia, Petrov et al., 2020). Heeding this, we set avenues for further theorization on how social entrepreneurs develop and manage knowledge (Audretsch et al., 2020; Oliveira et al., 2020; Paoloni et al., 2020) because we empirically show its spillover effect on an entrepreneurial outcome such as bricolage. Moving from our paper, further studies on knowledge management and IC can develop new explanation on how IC and knowledge can determine other entrepreneurial outcomes such inclusive growth (George, McGahan, & Prabhu, 2012; Shepherd, Parida, & Wincent, 2020b), firm survival (Stenholm & Renko, 2016), innovation (Linna, 2013), social change (Bacq et al., 2015), and poverty reduction (Ciambotti, 2020; Shepherd et al., 2020a).

6.2 | Practical implications

This study offers various practical implications to entrepreneurs and managers of social enterprises (a), policymakers, NGOs, and agencies (b) and large corporations operating in developing economies (c). First, we advise social entrepreneurs that operate in resource-constrained environments to develop high-qualitative relationships with local suppliers, customers, and the community also when operating in challenging contexts such as slums and rural areas, in addition to establishing partnerships with them for obtaining external support. This is important because it provides direction for venturing in challenging and uncertain conditions in the short-term such navigating resource scarcity (Ciambotti & Pedrini, 2021; Shepherd et al., 2020b), while it also fosters greater capacity to achieve social change in the long-run through practices of bricolage (Bacq et al., 2015; Bojica et al., 2018; Stenholm & Renko, 2016).

Secondly, this study also has relevant policy implications for African governments, NGOs, and agencies seeking to support entrepreneurial activities in Africa with ultimate purpose to contribute to sustainable development of such economies (Lashitew et al., 2020; OECD/EU, 2017; Omidyar Network, 2013). In particular, while NGOs are recognizing the importance of entrepreneurship for the sustainable development of the continent, little Governmental policies have been designed to support the effectiveness local organizations, initiatives, and especially micro and small enterprises (Holt & Littlewood, 2017; Zoogah et al., 2015). In fact, recent research

documented how governments and policy-makers of developing countries are called to support and develop more proactively and intensively an *inclusive growth* (George et al., 2012). Scholars then support a call to “the development and implementation of new ideas which aspire to create opportunities that enhance social and economic wellbeing for disenfranchised members of society” (George et al., 2012, p. 663). This is the case of African countries (George et al., 2016; OECD/EU, 2017) but also of overall developing and emerging economies. For instance, Indian government illustrates the overall objective of inclusive growth for legislation and allocation of resources. In this vein, this developing country aims at providing resources toward entrepreneurship and innovation programs that “(tackle) poverty and (create) employment opportunities [...] access to essential services especially for the poor [...] equality of opportunity for our weaker sections especially in the rural areas, and empowerment through education and skill development” (Planning Commission, 2006). Such developing countries (as well as African countries) are then looking for opportunities of inclusivity of most marginalized individuals (such as in slums and rural areas, see Shepherd et al., 2020a) in their plans to move such economies out of poverty (Ciambotti, 2020; Shepherd et al., 2020b). This study provides new recommendations for government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that need to redirect their efforts toward helping and supporting (social) entrepreneurs in creating relationships with local actors, as rural communities or actors operating in slums such as other local NGOs, or promoting supply-chain and distribution channels at local level (Holt & Littlewood, 2017; Manning et al., 2017). Thus, with such relational perspective, bricolage can be enacted helping (social) entrepreneurs in their venturing more effectively toward sustainable development. This is important at the country level but also within communities in slums and rural areas where resource constraints can significantly reduce the powerful effect of social entrepreneurs in contributing to sustainable development (Ciambotti, 2020; George et al., 2016). Heeding this, government and local authorities have the opportunity to reinforcing partnerships also through educational programs which foster knowledge sharing among those actors at very local level. In such way, policymakers through developing collaborations and knowledge among actors have the chance of indirectly helping entrepreneurs in engaging more effectively with resource bricolage, which can further generate positive outcomes such as inclusive innovation or economic and societal development (Lashitew et al., 2020; Linna, 2013; Saebi et al., 2019). Initiatives and programs toward developing intellectual capital in such developing contexts may thus contribute toward these societal outcomes through enabling entrepreneurs in bricolage practices (George et al., 2012; Sgrò et al., 2020).

Finally, this study have implications for large corporations which operate in developing countries which may redirect their efforts of corporate social responsibility programs (CSR; Manning et al., 2017; Shepherd et al., 2020b). The case of Safaricom in Kenya is an example provided in the recent work by Lashitew et al. (2020). This study contributes to highlight how large corporations may better focus on developing local relationships to provide

greater quality and external support, becoming more embedded and closed with local communities (Saebi et al., 2019; Seelos et al., 2011). The contribution of such large corporation in terms of subsidies, local capacity building, and resources provided (together with efforts from NGOs) may successfully develop and empower communities, suppliers, and customers in resource-constraints contexts. By consequence, this combined effect can actually enables to achieve societal changes such as poverty alleviation and improved living conditions (Ciambotti, 2021; Lashitew et al., 2020; Shepherd et al., 2020b).

7 | CONCLUSIONS

The primary aim of this research study was to investigate factors of intellectual capital which influence the implementation of bricolage in social entrepreneurs. The research yielded several contributions by highlighting the role of qualitative local relationships and the support received by external actors. However, the present study also has some limitations. First, the generalizability of results is limited to the African countries in which the data were collected. Future studies may wish to investigate social entrepreneurs in different emerging contexts such as Latin-America and South-Asia, or European developing countries (e.g., Serbia, see Petrov et al., 2020) which may also be fruitful for investigation (Bacq et al., 2016; Saebi et al., 2019; Shepherd et al., 2020a). Second, this study investigated social entrepreneurs within resource-constrained environments. An alternative approach would be to study bricolage in situations where other limiting phenomena are present such as corruption and minimal infrastructure (Desa & Basu, 2013; Holt & Littlewood, 2017; Kolk & Rivera-Santos, 2018; Linna, 2013; Zoogah et al., 2015).

Other avenues of research may pose alternative questions. For example, does intellectual capital influence social entrepreneurs to overcome institutional voids? Or, are social entrepreneurs with high levels of intellectual capital and knowledge more able to build institutional ecosystems? Finally, this study purposely focused on only one component of intellectual capital (relational capital). But what are the other outcomes of human capital and structural capital on bricolage? Building on our germinal evidence, we believe that future research would be able to better frame and develop the important link between IC, knowledge management, and (social) entrepreneurship. We finally hope that our paper would inspire scholars to move in further theorization to ultimately help social entrepreneurs in providing social value to their societies and communities in which they operate (Bacq et al., 2015; George et al., 2012).

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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