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THE INFLUENCE OF PERSONAL FACTORS ON SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION IN THE CONTEXT OF MALAYSIA

Parisa Mohammadi¹

AHIBS, UTM, kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Email: parisa.mohamadi68@gmail.com

Suzilawati Kamarudin²

AHIBS, UTM, kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Email: suzilawati@ibs.utm.my

Zeinab Babo³

AHIBS, UTM, kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Email: zeinabbabo@gmail.com

Rosmini Binti Omar⁴

AHIBS, UTM, kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Email: rosmini@ibs.utm.my

Abstract

Over the last decades, social entrepreneurship has received increasing attention and become popular among actors of the economic system, politicians, scholars, and general public. Social entrepreneurs are active agents who play a significant role in solving social and environmental problems. Therefore, it is necessary to be aware of factors that influence intention of the young generation to become a social entrepreneur in future. However, to date, very little attention has been paid to this phenomenon. The aim of this paper is to validate the instrument to measure theimpact of empathy, proactivity, attitude, social entrepreneurial self-efficacy and perceived subjective norm on social entrepreneurial intention (SEI) among students in Malaysia. In order to achieve this goal, content and face validity, reliability and normality of the data have been examined using experts' opinion and SPSS software. Findings indicate that all the scales are reliable and data are distributed normally.

Key words: Social entrepreneurship, Proactivity, Empathy, Attitude, Intention

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Introduction

Notwithstanding numerous activities of humankind, the world is still facing wicked problems (Dees, 2007)such as poverty, air and water pollution, unemployment, women's right, discrimination, illiteracy(UNSD, 2016), drug abuse, homelessness (Dees, 2007), natural disasters, diseases, crime and corruption (Tran & Korflesch, 2016). We may not have a unique interpretation from an ideal world but we all may agree that it is too far to reach (Dees, 2007). Such kind of world must create "enabling environment" that let every single person to unleash his/her potential and energy (Yunus, 2007). Unfortunately, in such a space that going to school is still unreachable dream of 260 million children(World Bank, 2017), not only "enabling environment" is not available but also people are deprived of the basic human right.

Many scholars and practitioners believe that social entrepreneurship can help to solve persistent social and environmental problems (Alvord, Brown, & Letts, 2004; Bikse, Rivza, & Riemere, 2015; Dees, 1998, 2007; Kachlami, 2016; Light, 2009; Olinsson, 2017; Pathak & Muralidharan, 2017; Tran & Korflesch, 2016; Wry & York, 2017; Zahra, Gedajlovic, Neubaum, & Shulman, 2009). SE can be defined as "realisation of social change or meeting the social needs via making use of opportunity and creating social values" (Konaklı, 2015). Social entrepreneurs are individuals who find a solution for significant social problems and their main goal is social value creation prior to making the profit (Santos, 2012). They believe building a better world and improving the quality of life is more important than making money (Carraher, Welsh, & Svilokos, 2016).

If we agree social entrepreneurs are the golden key to solve complex social and environmental problems; then there is a need to promote and foster social entrepreneurship. In order to achieve this goal, we must know what kind of people is more likely to have SEI, to equip them with the necessary skills, knowledge and other resources(Prieto, 2010). Therefore, it is essential to determine personal factors that influence the intention to start a social venture.

However, there is a current paucity of research that seeks to identify predictors of SEI (Ayob, Yap, Sapuan, & Rashi, 2013; Omorede, 2014; Politis, Ketikidis, & Lazuras, 2016; Tran & Korflesch, 2016; Urban & Kujinga, 2017). Among personal factors, evidences show that proactive personality have important role in decision making to become a social entrepreneur (Jain, 2009; Kedmenec, Rebernik, & Peric, 2015; Weerawardena & Sullivan Mort, 2006), even though researchers overlooked to investigate the influence of proactivity in the realm of social entrepreneurship(Dell & Amadu, 2015; Steiner & Teasdale, 2016). Additionally, despite studies that acknowledged empathy as the main characteristic of social entrepreneurs (Dees, 2012; Mair & Noboa, 2006) the empirical research is lacking(Petrovskaya & Mirakyan, 2018). Bearing in mind the overall dearth of research in this area, the current study inclined to examine the relationship between empathy, proactivity, attitudes, social entrepreneurial self-efficacy, subjective norm and SEI. In the next sections, theoretical background has been explained and few hypotheses are developed on the basis of theory, followed by research methodology and data analysis. The research ends with a conclusion and recommendations for future research.

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THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

According to the theory of planned behaviour (TPB), intention is best predictable through three main components encompassing attitudes, perceived behavioural control and subjective norms (Ajzen, 1991). In 2013, El Ebrashi extended TPB and developed theory of social entrepreneurial behaviour. According to this theory ,attitude is shaped by personal and psychological factors(El Ebrashi, 2013). This study intends to rely on this theory in order to predict antecedents of attitude as well as SEI. Accordingly, empathy and proactive personality are proposed as personal characteristics that influence attitude. Furthermore, the influence of attitudes toward social entrepreneurship, subjective norms and social entrepreneurial self-efficacy is tested.

Attitude

According to Ajzen (1991), attitudes refer the degree to which individuals find certain behaviour desirable or undesirable. In other words, attitudes are the evaluation of people about the world, which is affected by their beliefs and feelings. A certain action or behaviour will happen if only person has positive attitudes about it (Hogg & Vaughan, 2010).

Ernst (2011) defined attitudes toward social entrepreneurship as "the degree to which the individual holds a positive or negative personal valuation about becoming a social entrepreneur". She examined the influence of attitudes toward social entrepreneurship on social entrepreneurial intention. It has shown a significant positive relationship with SEI (Ernst, 2011). That is to say, those who have positive attitudes toward social entrepreneurship are more likely to form SEI.

Although scholars paid sufficient attention to discover influence of attitude on intention to become an entrepreneur, there is dearth of research in the space of social entrepreneurship. This study is among few studies that target to bridge this gap by investigating this relationship. Consequently, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1. Attitude is positively associated with SEI

Proactive personality

Proactive personality is introduced by Bateman and Crant in (1993) as a personal disposition that ranges from passive to proactive. People with proactive personality tend to affect and change the surrounding environment by identifying opportunity and taking necessary actions(Bateman & Crant, 1993; Crant, 1996, 2000). Proactive individuals actively seek information and opportunities to improve things; they don't passively wait for information and opportunities to come to them (Crant, 2000)but they are able to proactivity impact the context of their living (Morossanova, 2010).

Social needs are considered as an opportunity and a social entrepreneur feel responsible to take the opportunity for solving a social problem. While we believe there are some other

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characteristics that lead to exhibiting social entrepreneurial behaviour, it is necessary to possess proactive personality to establish a social venture (Bargsted, Picon, Salazar, & Rojas, 2013).

From the other side, there are pieces of evidence that show personality traits have a strong influence on attitudes toward entrepreneurship(Kolvereid & Isaksen, 2006). In other words, personal factors are considered as causes of attitudes. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are formed:

- H2. Proactivity positively influence attitudes toward social entrepreneurship
- H3. Proactivity positively influence SEI

Empathy

Empathy is a personal characteristic (Bacq & Alt, 2018; Petrovskaya & Mirakyan, 2018) that differentiates social entrepreneurs from other entrepreneurs (Petrovskaya & Mirakyan, 2018). Several scholars and experts believe that empathy is a major driver of social entrepreneurship (Dees, 2012; Drayton, 2011; Mair & Noboa, 2006). Dees (2012) posited that teaching empathy is necessary in order to foster social entrepreneurship in society.

To date, the empirical research on the influence of certain characteristics such as empathy on social entrepreneurship is lacking (Petrovskaya & Mirakyan, 2018). In order to bridge this gap, this study intents to investigate influence of empathy on attitudes and SEI. We believe a person who has empathic traits will have positive attitudes towards social entrepreneurship in order to help disadvantaged people and pull them out of bad situation. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is developed:

- H4. Empathy is positively associated with attitude toward social entrepreneurship
- H5. Empathy is positively associated with SEI

Social entrepreneurial self-efficacy

Social entrepreneurial self-efficacy (SE-SE) refers to the individual's belief and perception about their own ability to carry out a certain action(Bandura, 1977). In the realm of social entrepreneurship self-efficacy explains the perception of people about capacity to stablish and run a social venture successfully (Tran & Korflesch, 2016).

There are some empirical evidences that prove positive influence of high SE-SE on SEI. For instance, Politis et al., (2016) found SE-SE as most significant predictor of SEI. This finding is supported by other studies conducted by(Lacap, Mulyaningsih, & Ramadani, 2018; Tiwari, Bhat, & Tikoria, 2017). However, the influence of SE-SE on intention in the context of Malaysia is still lacking. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formed:

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H6. Social entrepreneurial self-efficacy is positively associated with SEI

Subjective norms

According to Ajzen (1991), subjective norm is an important predictor of intention. This concept refers to the perceived social pressure from important others such as friends, family and colleagues(Liñán & Chen, 2009). Applying to the realm of social entrepreneurship, subjective norms can be defined as influence of norms on perception of desirability to be (or not to be) a social entrepreneur. To illustrate, if person perceive a supportive environment so he or she is more likely to have intention to be social entrepreneur.

Although influence of subjective norms on entrepreneurial intention has been studied extensively, there is still paucity of research on its influence on SEI. Therefore, we proposed:

H7. Subjective norms are positively associated with SEI.

Methodology

Data collection and sample

This study is conducted a cross-sectional survey design, obtaining data at one point in time. Respondents were students from Azman Hashim International Business School, University Technology Malaysia, selected by "purposive" sampling strategy. That is to say, only students who took "entrepreneurship course" were involved in this study. In December 2018 and January 2019 data was collected through online questionnaire in order to identify social entrepreneurial intention among students in Malaysia. To achieve this goal, the questionnaire has been sent to 50 students across all educational level but researchers received 33 emails, which shows 66 % response rate. However, in data screening process five questionnaires removed due to "straight-lining" pattern, meaning that respondent marked same answer for all the questions which showthey may not read questions properly. Finally, data analysis was done with 28 participants.

Profile of respondents

The results indicate that 35.7% (N=10) of the respondents were male and 64.3% (N=18) of them were female and 53.6% (N=15) of them were 25-34 years old. Additionally, 79.2% (N=19) were master students (see table 1).

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Table 1: profile of respondents

| Demographics | | | % | | | |
|-----------------|---------------|------------------------------|------|--|--|--|
| Gender | | Number of respondents (N=28) | | | | |
| 1) | Male | 10 | 35.7 | | | |
| 2) | Female | 18 | 64.3 | | | |
| Age | | | | | | |
| 1) | 18-24 | 2 | 7.1 | | | |
| 2) | 25-34 | 15 | 53.6 | | | |
| 3) | 35-44 | 6 | 21.4 | | | |
| 4) | 45 or above | 5 | 17.9 | | | |
| Education level | | | | | | |
| 1) | Undergraduate | 3 | 10.7 | | | |
| 2) | Master | 20 | 71.4 | | | |
| 3) | Phd | 5 | 17.9 | | | |

Instrumentation

The instruments of this study are borrowed from existing literature. However, in the validation process, some modifications have been done in order to simplify questions or remove some unnecessary items. Additionally, in some cases more important questions were mentioned earlier and less important ones were placed in the later part.

For the purpose of monitoring content validity, a team of experts investigated clarity and relevance of items to construct. This process was useful to ensure about validity and reliability of the questionnaire.

Measurement

As it has been mentioned earlier all the measurements are drawn from literature. Proactive personality was measured with the scale developed by Seibert, Grant, & Kraimer(1999) with 10 items, whereas empathy adapted by Hockerts (2015) including six items. This is the first scale that measures empathy in the context of social entrepreneurship.

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For attitude, a scale including five items has been taken from Liñán and Chen (2009) but to apply it to the context of social entrepreneurship, the word "social" has been added to the "entrepreneurship". Similarly, subjective norms are adapted from Liñán and Chen (2009). The original items include three questions; however in this study one item has been added in order to highlight importance of influence of lecturers on students. Bacq & Alt (2018) developed scale for the social entrepreneurial self-efficacy with 10 items. Eventually, for the independent variable of social entrepreneurial intention, a scale with 9 items has been used which was adapted by Urban & Kujinga (2017). However, based on expert's opinion the researchers exchanged the order of first and last question due to the level of their importance.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Validity and Reliability

Both content and face validity assessment have been done in this step. To do so two experts provided comments on wording, language, transparency as well as the extent to which items were able to measure construct. Additionally, some amendments were required after the pre-test stage, which conducted among four students. As an illustration, some words were detected to be ambiguous and needed further explanation or replacing synonyms. Accordingly, after doing all amendments the final version of the questionnaire was ready to be sent for respondents.

For the purpose of instrument reliability, Cronbach's coefficient alpha was measured. Table 2 indicates the reliability of scales which is acceptable at the value of .70 or above. Results showed that all the instruments that have been selected for this study are reliable.

Table 2Reliability analysis: Cronbach's Alpha

| Variables | Cronbach's Alpha | Number of items | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|--|
| Empathy | .770 | 6 | |
| Proactivity | .781 | 9 | |
| Attitude | .870 | 5 | |
| Subjective norms | 0.889 | 4 | |
| Social entrepreneurial self-efficacy | 0.910 | 10 | |
| Social entrepreneurial intention | .949 | 9 | |
| | | | |

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Descriptive and correlation matrix

The results of mean, standard deviation and values of Pearson's correlation are depicted in table 3. The correlation between entrepreneurial intention, attitude and proactivity are significant at p < 0.01. Additionally, it has been found that empathy and proactivity are correlated.

Table 3Descriptive and correlation matrix

| Scale | Mean | S.D | Empathy | PP | Attitude | SN | SE-SE | SEI |
|----------|-------|-------|-----------|--------|----------|------|------------------------|-----|
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Empathy | 24.79 | 3.32 | 1 | | | | | |
| DD | 24.00 | 1.16 | 57 | 1 | | | | |
| PP | 34.00 | 4.46 | .5/6 | 1 | | | | |
| Attitude | 20.11 | 3.11 | .416* | .293 | 1 | | | |
| Attitude | 20.11 | 3.11 | .410 | .273 | 1 | | | |
| SN | 15.86 | 3.308 | .445** | .421* | .576** | 1 | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| SE-SE | 37.89 | 6.088 | .162 | .492** | .334* | .347 | 1 | |
| | | | | | | * | | |
| an. | 21.22 | 7.00 | 202 | ** | 700** | 600 | 7 0 7 ** | |
| SEI | 31.32 | 7.80 | .302 | .571** | .723** | .698 | .707** | 1 |
| | | | | | | | | |

^{*}Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed), ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)

Normality

Normality test of Shapiro-Wilk showed that data were approximately distributed normally, with a skewness of -.664 (SE .687) and kurtosis of -.601 (SE= 1.334) for males and skewness of -.620 (SE= 1.536) and kurtosis of -.552 (SE= 1.038) for females.

Hypotheses Testing

According to the literature and underpinning theory, it has been postulated that empathy, proactivity and attitudes are predictors of SEI. Additionally, attitude is considered as predictor to empathy and proactivity. In order to test all the relationships path analysis has been employed, meaning that multiple regression analysis has been done two times and separately for both parts of the model. The results indicate that attitude has the most important influence on SEI with the beta level of .688. Therefore, hypothesis 1 is supported. However, there is no significant relationship between proactivity and empathy with attitude, meaning that H2 and H4 are not supported. Additionally, it has been found that there is a significant relationship between

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proactive personality and SEI, thus H3 is supported. Surprisingly, empathy and SEI has shown a negative relationship, hence H5 is not supported. Eventually, subjective norms and social entrepreneurial intention have shown significant positive influence on SEI, thus H6 and H7 are supported. Table 4 demonstrates the results of path analysis.

Table 4. Results of path analysis

| Hypotheses | Path coefficient | Sig. | Decision |
|--|------------------|------|---------------|
| | Beta | | |
| Attitude - SEI | .688 | .000 | Supported |
| Proactivity - Attitude | .079 | .725 | Not supported |
| Proactivity - SEI | .540 | .000 | Supported |
| Empathy - Attitude | .371 | .107 | Not supported |
| Subjective norms - SEI | .308 | .006 | Supported |
| Social entrepreneurial self- efficacy - SEI | .357 | .001 | Supported |
| Empathy - SEI | 295 | .046 | Not supported |

Conclusion

This study empirically tests the influence of empathy and proactivity on attitude as well as SEI. Additionally, determinants of SEI including attitude toward SE, subjective norms and social entrepreneurial self-efficacy has been investigated. The results indicate that proactivity, attitudes, subjective norms and social entrepreneurial self-efficacy significantly and positively influence SEI. However, the other hypotheses regarding the impact of empathy and proclivity (as antecedents) on attitude has not been supported. Additionally, the researchers failed to find evidence to support influence of empathy on SEI. This is while empathy emerged as an important characteristic of social entrepreneurs in the past literature. From this contradictory finding it can be concluded that some factors may moderate this relationship. We suggest scholars to examine role of moderators such as gender on aforementioned relationship. Moreover, the sample size of this study is limited, therefore we encourage researchers to test model in bigger sample size. The output of current study is beneficiary for the government, policy makers and universities in Malaysia. Government must pay unique attention to the factors that lead young generation towards higher level of intention to become a social entrepreneur. Particularly, ministry of higher education and universities can play significant role in nurturing future social entrepreneurs by initiating some constructive programs or even bringing this concept to curriculums.

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