How social entrepreneurial intentions are formed

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"Social entrepreneurs are not content just to give a fish or teach how to fish. They will not rest until they have revolutionized the fishing industry." — Bill Drayton.

Introduction

The objectives of this study are twofold. The main goal is to identify the most critical antecedents that affect the formation of social entrepreneurial intention through research surveys conducted among undergraduate students of technical universities in India. The second objective of validating the derived social entrepreneurial intention formation model was attained by sampling nascent entrepreneurs. Social entrepreneurial intentions are defined as a person’s conviction to start a social venture in the near future. Understanding the pre-entrepreneurial stage is crucial for policymakers and educators who want to encourage social entrepreneurship. In academic literature, social enterprises are defined as a form of hybrid venture that integrates social mission to profit. Rather than maximizing profits for external shareholders, these entities make a social impact and improve human and environmental well-being[1]. Social Enterprise/Entrepreneurship represents different things, depending on from which perspective one is looking at an enterprise. However, this research study understands social entrepreneurial behavior as using entrepreneurial behavior for social ends rather than mere profit maximization.

Even after more than two decades, research on the concept of social entrepreneurship is still considered to be in its infancy with minimal progress in theory development. Why do people opt for social entrepreneurship as a career choice? How is the intention to become a social entrepreneur formed? Are specific personality characteristics uniquely associated with social entrepreneurs? These questions remain largely unanswered in the area of social entrepreneurship. The extant literature indeed identifies the utility of intentions in predicting social entrepreneurial behavior. This research argues that a more promising theoretical model focusing on individual and external factors will prove to help understand the process of social entrepreneurship.

Methodology

Data Collection and Sample

Entrepreneurial academic literature suggests that to measure entrepreneurial intentions accurately, the sample should be selected from a population of those who are currently facing major career decisions [2]. Students on the verge of completing their studies (e.g., Bachelor of Engineering students in the third or fourth year of their program) face career decisions, have a wide array of ideas and attitudes, and although they may not have clear business ideas, most have global perspectives regarding their future profession[3]. Therefore, primary data was collected from the students of three premier technical universities in India.

For the second objective of this study, the data was collected from a sample of nascent social entrepreneurs. The rationale for using this second sample is the following: in entrepreneurial intentions’ study, intentions are the dependent variable, and there is a possibility of not differentiating between ‘dreamers’ and ‘doers.’ Therefore, validating the results of undergraduate student samples on a sample of nascent social entrepreneurs who have taken a behavioral step is always advised. Hence, this study validates the results on nascent social entrepreneurs samples.

Conclusion

This research study has attempted to develop a model explaining the process that depicts antecedents to the formation of social entrepreneurial intentions in an individual. This study tried to offer a theory-driven approach to social entrepreneurship research by taking the theory of planned behavior as our basic research framework. A unique aspect of this research study is that besides taking a sample of students for empirically testing the proposed model, this research study has also taken a sample from the population of nascent social entrepreneurs to validate the results.

The findings of the study have provided significant and valuable implications for the policymakers. As self-efficacy, perceived social support, and empathy are the most critical antecedents, policymakers and educators can offer various skill development programs for the individuals to be trained, challenged to take up entrepreneurial activities and sensitized towards social problems. Universities can provide them with minimum resource support to come up with solutions that address social issues. Furthermore, subjective norms should be taken as the central factor that affects the intention process and controls other factors’ interaction in future research studies on social entrepreneurship.

Within this context, collaborative efforts between academic institutions, corporations, and societies are required to provide inputs towards a more comprehensive education system that addresses the relevant modus operandi for sustainable development. Once students know about social entrepreneurship, this will encourage them to be self-employed. To facilitate new social ventures created by the younger generation, the government should provide supporting infrastructure and remove the impediments to the social entrepreneurial career path. If policies don’t change, social entrepreneurs can’t thrive.

This study provides an extended theoretical model to the scholars for investigating entrepreneurial intentions among students of higher learning institutions. The proposed theoretical framework may be referred to by other researchers in their future studies. Eventually, it would be interesting to use the measures developed here to test the model in longitudinal studies for measuring the impact of entrepreneurial social education in the creation of social ventures.
References


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