

# Social Entrepreneur Intention: A Review and Research Direction

Khairun Najihah Sabri<sup>a</sup>, Siti Fatimah Mohamad<sup>b</sup>, Ungku Fatimah Ungku Zainal Abidin<sup>c</sup>, Hazrina Ghazali<sup>d</sup>, Mass Hareeza Ali@Hamid<sup>e</sup>

<sup>a, b, c, d</sup>Department of Food Service Management, Faculty of Food Science and Management, Universiti Putra Malaysia, <sup>e</sup>Department of Management and Marketing, School of Business and Economics, Universiti Putra Malaysia

Corresponding Author Email: s\_fatimah@upm.edu.my

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## Abstract

Social entrepreneurship is a burgeoning research area that has recently garnered significant attention. Consequently, the concept of social entrepreneurial intention (SEI) has emerged as a topic of considerable interest. This paper aims to explore the factors influencing the intention to become a social entrepreneur in Malaysia. While SEI is deemed a crucial precursor to launching a social enterprise, existing empirical research on SEI factors lacks a structured and quantitatively integrated approach. Furthermore, most studies have centered on commercial enterprises rather than social ones. The dearth of research on social entrepreneurial behaviors necessitates an exploration of the critical elements that drive such behaviors and actions. A comprehensive literature review has been employed to organize existing research and establish the study's research direction, which focuses on the intentions of social entrepreneurs. This study is expected to provide insights for both society and policymakers, thereby contributing to the advancement of social entrepreneurship in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** Social Entrepreneurship, Intention, Mindset, Malaysia, Entrepreneurial Behaviours

## Introduction

The field of entrepreneurial intention has had significant growth in study output during the 1990s, as evidenced by the substantial body of literature on the subject (Dolhey, 2019; Donaldson et al., 2021; Liñán & Fayolle, 2015). According to Krueger et al (2000), intentions serve as the most reliable indicator for predicting intended behaviors, including entrepreneurship. The prevailing models in this field consist of Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behaviour and Shapero's entrepreneurial event model (Shapero, 1984; Shapero & Sokol, 1982). Although various models exist, there is evidence suggesting the compatibility of these intention-based models (Liñán & Fayolle, 2015). In order to inspire a greater number of

individuals to participate in social entrepreneurship, policymakers and educators must have a profound understanding of the factors that precede social entrepreneurial intentions.

The field of social entrepreneurship has had substantial growth in the past few decades, as evidenced by the works of (Apadula and Predmore, 2019; Bhushan, 2020; Gupta et al., 2020; Sarkar and Sinha, 2015). The notion of social entrepreneurship has arisen as a subsequent iteration of entrepreneurship, with a significant role in enhancing and promoting societal progress and welfare (Abu-Saifan, 2012; Celebi et al., 2020). Social entrepreneurship and commercial entrepreneurship are distinct in their objectives. Social entrepreneurship involves the establishment of businesses that address societal needs, whereas commercial entrepreneurship focuses on meeting consumer wants (Booth et al., 2020). The field of social entrepreneurship is a burgeoning area of scholarly inquiry that has yet to be comprehensively investigated, leaving ample room for further exploration (Hidalgo et al., 2020; Majumdar & Ganesh, 2019).

The impact of entrepreneurship on the economic and social development of nations has been extensively studied and documented (Li et al., 2020; Neneh, 2020). Prior research has indicated that the inclusion of entrepreneurial education, the cultivation of an entrepreneurial mindset, and the fostering of creativity are effective in nurturing young talent and enhancing individuals' intention to engage in entrepreneurial activities (Hu et al., 2018; Jena, 2020; Pan et al., 2018; Westhead & Solesvik, 2016). These studies have also highlighted the growing concern within the higher education system regarding the challenge of facilitating satisfactory job placement for an expanding population of university graduates. The authors Liguori et al (2019); Vanevenhoven and Liguori (2013) have found a strong and persistent correlation between past entrepreneurial experiences and individuals' goals and mindsets towards entrepreneurship.

According to Perugini and Bagozzi (2001), entrepreneurial intention can be described as an individual's intention to initiate a new business venture. It is widely acknowledged among scholars that entrepreneurial intention encompasses the aspiration to possess or initiate a commercial venture (Bae et al., 2014; Ozaralli & Rivenburgh, 2016). The significance of personal entrepreneurial intention in initiating a new business has been demonstrated in previous research (Thompson, 2009). The measurement of intention holds significant significance in the realm of forecasting real new venture formation activity (Palalic et al., 2017; Schwarte & Song, 2019). Comprehending the precursors of social entrepreneurial ambitions holds significant importance for policymakers and educators seeking to inspire greater participation in social entrepreneurship.

Hence, this research aims to identify the factors that influence intention to become social entrepreneurs within the context of Malaysia. This article focuses on the factors that influence individuals' intentions to engage in social entrepreneurship. This research is crucial as policy makers and educators are increasingly involved in initiatives to encourage more individuals to participate in social entrepreneurship. Without a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that lead to social entrepreneurial goals, such endeavors run the danger of not achieving the desired objective. It delves into elements such as entrepreneurial education, mindset, creativity, and their influence on individuals' intentions to engage in entrepreneurial activities. Additionally, it discusses the importance of empathy, social impact, and various entrepreneurial factors in shaping intentions. The paper also touches on the role of government and educators in supporting and fostering an environment conducive to entrepreneurial endeavors, particularly in the context of social entrepreneurship.

**Literature Review**

The two predominant models of entrepreneurial intentions are Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour (1991) and Shapero's entrepreneurial event model (Shapero, 1984; Shapero & Sokol, 1982). Previous research has found a relationship between mindset and intention (Chipeta & Surujlal, 2017; Kedmenec et al., 2015; Politis et al., 2016; Tiwari et al., 2017a; Wu et al., 2020). Furthermore, entrepreneurial self-efficacy has been found to have a positive effect on social entrepreneurial intentions (Ip et al., 2017; Li et al., 2020).

Therefore, it can be expected that students with a corresponding attitude have a higher intention to become social entrepreneurs. Based on the literature, the study hypothesises the following relationship between attitude and the intention to become a social entrepreneur. Thus, it can be assumed that students with an appropriate mindset are more likely to have the intention to become social entrepreneurs.

Previous scholars indicated that several supportive dimensions such as entrepreneurial education Barba-Sánchez & Atienza-Sahuquillo (2018), entrepreneurial passion Karimi (2020), entrepreneurial orientation Cho & Lee (2018), entrepreneurial self-efficacy (Schmutzler et al., 2019) and entrepreneurial mindset Cui et al (2019) as well as creativity are associated with the development of entrepreneurial intention to start a new business.

Hsu et al (2019) define entrepreneurial intention as a self-admitted desire to begin a new job. Furthermore, research has found that entrepreneurial purpose is linked to the identification, evaluation, and exploitation of new opportunities through the use of planning, organization, procedures, and raw materials (Barba-Sánchez & Atienza-Sahuquillo, 2018; Miranda et al., 2017). Previous research has found that entrepreneurial attitude is related to entrepreneurial intention (Cui et al., 2019; Handayati et al., 2020). Individual commitment to entrepreneurial activity is referred to as an entrepreneurial mindset (Kuratko et al., 2020). An entrepreneurial mindset is defined as an individual's proclivity to start a new firm and design, plan, and organize projects to attain entrepreneurial goals (Bosman & Fernhaber, 2019).

Several studies have been conducted to investigate the impact of the entrepreneurial mindset on the various stages of the entrepreneurial process, which culminates in an individual's decision to start a new firm. According to Zur (2015), social entrepreneurs use their entrepreneurial mindset to perceive possibilities where most people see social problems, enhancing their capacity to finally deliver a market-based solution. Similarly, in their study on social entrepreneurs, Ghalwash et al (2017) argue that social entrepreneurs have an entrepreneurial mindset that they use to address societal issues through the formation of a social venture. Outsios and Kittler (2018) demonstrated an empirical link between the entrepreneurial attitude and the decision to launch a new enterprise, while also acknowledging the role of resources and circumstances.

**Results/Findings**

In line with the basic findings of the general entrepreneurship literature, the intention to start a business is seen as one of the most important prerequisites for future entrepreneurial behaviour, because before there can be entrepreneurship, there must be the potential for entrepreneurship (Krueger & Brazeal, 1994). Therefore, there has been increasing interest among social entrepreneurship scholars in the preconditions for an individual's intention to start a social enterprise, which has led to the identification of a variety of variables that potentially influence the intention to start a social enterprise (Hockerts, 2017; Kruse, 2019). However, an overarching framework that systematises these antecedents is still lacking.

**Entrepreneurial Mindset**

According to Hsu et al (2019), the intention to become entrepreneur is defined as a self-confessed conviction to start a new career. Studies have indicated that entrepreneurial intention is linked with the identification, evaluation and exploitation of new opportunities using planning, organisation, processes and raw materials (Barba-Sánchez & Atienza-Sahuquillo, 2018; Miranda et al., 2017). Previous studies have shown that entrepreneurial mindset is positively associated with entrepreneurial intention (Cui et al., 2019; Handayati et al., 2020).

An entrepreneurial mindset reflects an individual's commitment to entrepreneurial activities (Kuratko et al., 2020), encompassing a combination of risk-taking, a need for achievement, and passion to initiate a new venture. It involves the development, planning, and organisation of projects aimed at achieving entrepreneurial goals (Bosman & Fernhaber, 2019). Notably, Handayati et al (2020) conducted a study on the entrepreneurial mindset of vocational students in Indonesia, revealing a positive and significant influence of the entrepreneurial mindset on entrepreneurial intention.

Additionally, Wardana et al (2020) conducted a study involving 390 university students to explore the relationship between entrepreneurial mindset and entrepreneurial intention, revealing a positive correlation between the two. Similarly, Jung and Lee (2020) investigated the entrepreneurial mindset of South Korean university students and its influence on entrepreneurial intention. Their findings indicated that entrepreneurial traits like innovativeness, autonomy, and proactivity positively impacted students' inclination towards entrepreneurship.

The development of an entrepreneurial mindset, as suggested by Aima et al (2020), is an evolving process that requires regular application. Kaffka and Krueger (2018) highlight the necessity for individuals to sharpen their minds for increased efficiency in everyday life and to remain vigilant towards opportunities. Drawing from these studies, it is evident that individuals possessing an entrepreneurial mindset are more inclined to actively engage in entrepreneurial activities compared to others.

**Attitude toward Entrepreneurship (ATE)**

According to the theory planned behavior, attitude is defined as a learned predisposition to respond to a particular behaviour Fishbein et al (1975) Within entrepreneurship literature, an individual's inclination towards starting a business tends to increase in tandem with their attitude towards entrepreneurship (Sancho et al., 2020; Van Gelderen et al., 2015). A study examining university students' attitudes in Oman revealed several influential factors shaping their inclination towards starting their own businesses, including entrepreneurial knowledge, familial experiences, acceptance of risk, entrepreneurship education, and involvement in decision-making (Ibrahim et al., 2017). These elements significantly impacted their attitudes towards entrepreneurship.

**Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO)**

Entrepreneurial orientation has traditionally been a focus at the organisational level Hanifah et al (2021); Vafaei-Zadeh et al (2019a), leading to less emphasis on evaluating it at the individual level (Anderson et al., 2015). At the individual level, there exists another form known as Individual Entrepreneurial Orientation (IEO) (Bernoster et al., 2020). This orientation refers to an individual's readiness to take risks and exhibit proactivity in managing

personal businesses, traits deemed significant not only in business but also in various life domains (Bolton & Lane, 2012).

Scholars have also depicted entrepreneurial orientation as comprising traits crucial in driving action within new product development (Ladd et al., 2019; Rauch & Frese, 2007), highlighting five dimensions: aggressiveness, autonomy, innovativeness, proactivity, and risk-taking. Studies conducted within university contexts revealed that students with a comprehensive entrepreneurial education demonstrated higher levels of entrepreneurial orientation, subsequently influencing their entrepreneurial intentions (Frunzaru & Cismaru, 2018).

### **Entrepreneurial Self-efficacy (ESE)**

Bandura (1997) coined the term 'entrepreneurial self-efficacy' (ESE) to describe the belief in one's ability to accomplish tasks and attain set goals. Within entrepreneurship, ESE refers to the level of confidence individuals hold in their entrepreneurial abilities, often serving as a predictor of entrepreneurial intention. One study investigating the influence of immediate and broader sociocultural contexts on the established relationship between ESE and entrepreneurial intentions found that recognizing young entrepreneurs as catalysts for entrepreneurial intentions significantly impacted individuals with strong ESE, compared to those lacking confidence in their ability to launch a business venture (Schmutzler et al., 2019). A recent study by Fragoso et al (2020) aimed to comprehend entrepreneurial intentions among students and initially hypothesized that self-efficacy would not significantly impact entrepreneurial intentions. Contrary to this hypothesis, the results demonstrated a positive relationship between high self-efficacy and entrepreneurial intentions. Arshad et al (2016) examined the varying impact of ESE on individuals' behaviours by mediating entrepreneurship attitude, integrating the structure of gender schema theory with anticipated behaviours.

### **Perceived Social Impact**

Social Impact refers to the overall effect of an activity on a community and the well-being of individuals and families, a definition commonly echoed in the literature (Center for Social Impact (CSI)). This concept aligns with various conceptualizations found in scholarly works (Mair and Martí, 2006; Martin and Osberg, 2007; Zahra et al., 2009). While traditional entrepreneurs historically focused on economic returns (Knight, 1921; Schumpeter, 1983), social entrepreneurs, as noted by Dacin et al. (2010), Peredo & McLean (2006), and Zahra et al. (2009), consider both social and economic returns to generate social value, a concept known as pro-social motivation theorized by (Grant, 2007).

Referring to the influential model of social entrepreneurial intention outlined by Mair and Noboa (2006), social impact (perceived desirability) is proposed as an antecedent to social entrepreneurial intentions. This mirrors earlier research where the intention for commercial entrepreneurship typically rises when individuals perceive higher personal economic profit.

### **Empathy**

Empathy stands as a pivotal element within social entrepreneurial intentions, highlighted by early researchers (Dees, 2012; Groch et al., 2012; London, 2010; Mair and Noboa, 2006; Sullivan Mort et al., 2003; Wood, 2012). Defined as the capacity to share and understand others' emotions Decety & Jackson (2004), empathy comprises two facets: cognitive empathy, involving the ability to envision the feelings of others, and emotional empathy, entailing responding with compassion and concern. Both are fundamental in shaping perceived desirability Mair and Noboa (2003), enabling individuals to envisage and

emotionally respond to others' emotions (Preston et al., 2007; Mehrabian & Epstein, 1972; Hockerts, 2015).

Empathy plays a crucial role in guiding the behaviour of social entrepreneurs, who aim to produce goods that bring social value, drawing from their empathetic experiences of others' feelings (Lazarus, 1991). Given the priority of social value over economic gain in the pursuits of social entrepreneurs (Dacin et al., 2011), they are often characterised by philanthropic attributes (Roberts & Woods, 2005). Moreover, empathy not only sustains momentum in the entrepreneurial process but also distinguishes social entrepreneurs from their traditional counterparts (Austin et al., 2006; Mair & Noboa, 2003).

### **Creativity**

Creativity stands as a fundamental aspect of individual cognitive processes, generating novel and valuable ideas through information and knowledge integration (Zampetakis & Moustakis, 2006). Defined by Rodrigues et al (2019) as a skill inherent in individuals, creativity holds particular importance in entrepreneurial endeavours, often considered a creative pursuit in itself (Kumar & Shukla, 2019; Shi et al., 2020).

Hu et al (2018) explored the nexus between creativity and entrepreneurial alertness among Chinese university students, yielding significant results. Likewise, a recent study involving 330 university students in Pakistan discovered the influential role of creativity in mediating the relationship between entrepreneurial passion and intention (Murad et al., 2021). Additionally, Zampetakis et al (2011) found that undergraduate business students with higher creativity levels were more inclined towards entrepreneurship.

Examining specific demographics, Chia and Liang (2016) studied creativity's impact on entrepreneurial intention among Taiwanese university tourism students, noting a higher inclination towards starting new ventures among those perceiving greater creativity. Shi et al (2020), exploring the relationship between creativity, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), and entrepreneurial intention among 523 Chinese university students, established that heightened creativity positively influenced attitudes and self-belief in entrepreneurial activities.

### **Entrepreneurial Education**

Entrepreneurship education significantly impacts individuals' knowledge and abilities, fostering actions in favour of entrepreneurship (Liu et al., 2019). Research underscores its pivotal role in enhancing skills, thereby stimulating business activities (Sun et al., 2017). Yang (2014) identified two primary features of entrepreneurial education: firstly, it enables knowledge transfer, skill acquisition, and the sharing of entrepreneurial experiences. Secondly, through immersive experiences such as field studies, it inspires individuals towards future success.

Voda & Florea (2019) argued that entrepreneurial education aids in achieving entrepreneurial intentions by leveraging social networks and the experiences of successful entrepreneurs. It facilitates resource acquisition through knowledge-sharing and information transfer, encouraging those interested in entrepreneurship to engage with peers and promote the entrepreneurial image (Nowinski et al., 2019).

The significance of entrepreneurial education in shaping entrepreneurial intentions is evident in its impact on business education (Turner & Gianiodis, 2018). It enhances mindfulness and nurtures intentions towards an entrepreneurial career path (Kalyoncuoglu et al., 2017). Entrepreneurship education, focusing on enriching knowledge, skills, and attitudes, tends to

steer individuals towards pursuing entrepreneurial careers based on findings from existing studies.

### Conclusion and Future Research

This study investigated the impact of key entrepreneurial factors—education, mindset, and creativity—on entrepreneurial intention. The scales measuring entrepreneurial mindset aim to forecast entrepreneurial actions and intentions. Entrepreneurial intention, a precursor to action, signifies the cognitive state preceding the decision to commence a business venture (Krueger, 2017). Scholars have highlighted intentionality as pivotal in entrepreneurial behavior (Bird, 1988; Shapero, 1984), emphasizing its significance in the development of emerging ventures (Katz et al., 1988).

Studies have revealed significant associations between entrepreneurial intentionality and various factors, including proactive personality Crant (1996), perceived behavioral control, desirability (Schlaegel & Koenig, 2014), entrepreneurial identity striving, entrepreneurial self-efficacy Pfeifer et al (2016), extraversion, agreeableness, and openness to experience (Israr & Saleem, 2018). These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of entrepreneurial intentionality and its links to individual traits and perceptions.

This study offers valuable insights into the realm of social entrepreneurs and their entrepreneurial intentions. To enhance the preparation of future entrepreneurs, educators can bolster their expertise through dedicated entrepreneurship courses, in-house training sessions, participation in webinars focused on entrepreneurship, and the implementation of entrepreneurship certification programs.

Moreover, government initiatives can significantly impact the entrepreneurial landscape for university students. Establishing dedicated support programs for social entrepreneurship, offering accessible business capital, and providing free business spaces can greatly facilitate students in initiating their entrepreneurial ventures.

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