



Exploring the Influencing Factors of Social Entrepreneurship Intention among University Volunteers

Aiwen Wang^{1,2,*}, Cheok Mui Yee²

¹Department of Entrepreneurship Education, Guangzhou City Construction College, Guangzhou, Guangdong, China.

²Graduate School of Business, University Tun Abdul Razak, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

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***Corresponding author:** Aiwen Wang, Department of Entrepreneurship Education, Guangzhou City Construction College, Guangzhou, Guangdong, China; Graduate School of Business, University Tun Abdul Razak, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Abstract

With the vigorous development of university volunteers who has achieved good social benefits in the aspects of helping people in danger and distress, community service, environmental protection, employment promotion, rescue and disaster relief, etc. The emergence of social entrepreneurship is mainly due to the further prosperity and development of non-profit sectors such as voluntary services and charitable organizations. The process of the germination, exploration and development of college students' voluntary service is the development and evolution process from the pursuit of moral experience to social benefits. This study examined how the factors are associated with social entrepreneurial intentions. Factor analyses supported that the antecedents of social entrepreneurial intentions could be divided into dimensions of moral obligation, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, attitude towards behavior and perceived social support. Through a survey, a sample of 317 university volunteers was used for analyses. Multiple regression analysis results indicated that entrepreneurial self-efficacy was the most prominent antecedent of social entrepreneurial intentions, followed by attitude towards behaviour, perceived social support and moral obligation.

Keywords

Moral obligation, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, attitude towards behaviour, perceived social support, social entrepreneurial intentions, university volunteers

1. Introduction

Social entrepreneurship has made some achievements in eliminating poverty, lower unemployment rate and environmental enhancement, and is expected to contribute more to solving social problems in the new era (Liu, 2020). Social entrepreneurship intentions is a topic that attracts more and more attention in social entrepreneurship research. Traditional entrepreneurial intentions only refers to the intention to start a new business While social entrepreneurial intentions refers to the intention to complete a social mission (solve a social problem or meet a social need) by starting a new business (Parker, 2006).

University volunteers who participated the social service groups provide a suitable research context for the social entrepreneurial behaviors. There are two reasons. From the development of volunteer service and the previous scholars' definition of the concept of volunteer service, we can see that dedication, altruism, mutual assistance, universal love and charity, which is the core themes of volunteers. American scholar Ken Allen in his article "Universal Voluntary Service Management Model" (Allen, 2003) pointed out volunteer is a comprehensive concept, is on the basis of altruism and voluntary, do not expect any material reward.

With the vigorous development of university volunteers who has achieved good social benefits in the aspects of

helping people in danger and distress, community service, environmental protection, employment promotion, rescue and disaster relief, etc. With the well organized of university volunteers in China, some voluntary organizations have begun to seek dependent development, and social entrepreneurship has naturally become their primary choices. In the 21st century, social entrepreneurship of university volunteers began to enter the eyes of Chinese people. The emergence of social entrepreneurship is mainly due to the further prosperity and development of non-profit sectors such as voluntary services and charitable organizations. The process of the germination, exploration and development of college students' voluntary service is the development and evolution process from the pursuit of moral experience to social benefits (Zhang, 2016).

Social entrepreneurship intentions is defined as the entrepreneur's commitment to the expected behavior and determines to a large extent whether or not the entrepreneur acts to start a business, company or organization (Krueger & Brazeal, 1994). Social entrepreneurship among university students is a special phenomenon in entrepreneurial activities. They provide services to the public in an innovative way, which not only realizes the growth of social benefits, but also maintains the improvement of social value (Du, 2011). Hockerts (2017) suggest that interventions that bring individuals in direct contact with social problems are likely to elicit an increase in social entrepreneurial intentions. Optional volunteering programs, required service learning components, project work in locations with high degrees of social problems would suggest themselves as a measure schools and universities might undertake.

University volunteers social entrepreneurship has just started. Less and limit research in China. This paper follow the footsteps of social entrepreneurship seminal studies and draw on the theory of planned behavior (TPB), the entrepreneurship, and the behavioral psychology literatures to examine the influence of volunteers' traits on social entrepreneurial intentions (Trajano et al., 2022). TPB has been widely used to develop models of pro-social behaviors as key antecedents of social entrepreneurial intentions. This paper takes university volunteers who participated in the social service programmers as the research object, to investigate the factors influence the intention of volunteers to become social entrepreneurs. The hypothesis of four dimensions is moral obligation, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, perceived social support and attitude towards behaviour.

2. Theory and Hypothesis

2.1 Moral obligation and Social entrepreneurship intentions

Fishbein selected moral obligation, attitudes and subjective norms to predict intentions (Fishbein, 1967). Later, many researchers believe that social entrepreneurs have a stronger sense of social moral responsibility and hold the stricter standards. For example, Bornstein (1998) argued that social entrepreneurs have a strong moral obligation, and Hemingway (2005) point out personal ethical values are the important driver of social enterprise. Mair and Noboa (2006) added moral obligation to behavioral planning theory and defined that most people would regulate their actions according to perceived social behavior standards. Plaskoff (2012) found that being a social entrepreneur requires a high degree of moral wisdom. Dion (2012) studied the ethical slogans of 11 social enterprises and found that these organizations seem to favor universal values (e.g., trust, accountability and fairness). Hockerts (2015), draws on Haines et al. (2008) who identify a belief of moral obligation as being positioned between the act of moral judgment and the formation of moral intent. University volunteers who have received higher education, have higher sensitivity and perception of moral obligations, so they feel the responsibility to restrain themselves according to their social norms of behavior, and are more likely to conceive the will to uphold justice in the face of moral challenges. Therefore, it is important to understand how moral obligations affect the social entrepreneurship intentions of university volunteers. Based on the above theory, the following assumptions are made in this paper:

H1: Moral obligation positively affects university volunteers' intentions to start a social enterprise.

2.2 Attitude towards behaviour and social entrepreneurial intentions

Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) define attitude towards behaviour (ATB) as "attitude is personal attachment positive or negative assessment of a particular behavior." In the study of social entrepreneurship among university students, whether or not entrepreneurial behavior leads to results is considered to some extent for entrepreneurial individuals. Ruhle, et al. (2010) updated the definition of ATB, arguing that it is the attraction perceived by the subject from the target behavior (Autio et al., 2001). This level of attraction is composed of emotional tendencies or rational assessments (Crites et al., 1994; Volkmann & Grunhagen, 2010). Linan and Chen (2009) describe ATB as positive or negative assessments that individuals hold about being a social entrepreneur. Lukman noted that attitudes show a positive relationship with social entrepreneurial intentions (Lukman et al., 2020). Chao and Yu (2022) used the

theory of planned behavior to collect empirical data from 969 students from the Business/Management School of Taiwan University, and found that attitudes had a positive impact on social entrepreneurship intention. According to these literatures, ATB can be interpreted as university volunteers personal assessment of being a social entrepreneur. Thus, the more positive university volunteers' attitude towards social entrepreneurship, the more obviously of their intention.

H2: Attitude towards behaviour positively affects university volunteers' intentions to start a social enterprise

2.3 Entrepreneurial self-efficacy and social entrepreneurial intentions

Bandura (1986) in his research found that although individual's practical skills have a certain influence on individual behavior, but this influence is not complete, the important factor affecting the individual motivation and behavior is the individual's self-efficacy. After this concept was proposed, entrepreneurial self-efficacy was widely recognized as a key prerequisite for the establishment of new businesses. Chen et al. (1998), based on the entrepreneurial process theory, regarded it as the belief that entrepreneurs can complete various entrepreneurial tasks and play an entrepreneurial role. De Noble (1999) believed that self-efficacy is the premise of entrepreneurial intention and an important characteristic of entrepreneurs. Harp et al. (2017) demonstrated that self-efficacy is also significant, as when comparing volunteers with lower and higher levels of self-efficacy. Social entrepreneurship education for university students can awaken the student's inner sense of social responsibility and stimulate their entrepreneurial spirit. Students can create more value after their sense of self-efficacy is improved (Zhang, 2020). Therefore, it provides support for us to link social entrepreneurial self-efficacy with social entrepreneurial intention. Based on this, the following assumptions are made in this paper.

H3: Entrepreneurial self-efficacy positively affects university volunteers' intentions to start a social enterprise

2.4 Perceived social support and social entrepreneurship intentions

When evaluating the feasibility of entrepreneurial activity, people not only consider their own aspirations and ideas, but also consider the social policy resources, networks, and likelihood of achieving targeted outcomes that will exist. Therefore, the degree of perceived social support affects the incubation of entrepreneurial ideas and the final implementation of entrepreneurial behavior. Luthje and Franke (2003) showed a statistically significant correlation between perceived support and attitudes towards social entrepreneurship. Mair and Noboa (2006) suggest that social support is needed to trigger the creation of social entrepreneurship. For social entrepreneurs who are university students, they lack experience and networks. Especially in the early stages of entrepreneurship, they need to tap into a variety of resources to activate their thinking and create new solutions. Further, Linan's (2007) latest research confirms that environmental support is closely related to attractiveness to social entrepreneurs. Regarding the relationship between perceived social support and volunteerism, Lacap et al. (2018) showed this construct positively influences SEI, and engagement in volunteer work. Pham and Bui (2022) demonstrated that perceived social support enabled entrepreneurs to exhibit higher self-efficacy in forming social entrepreneurship intentions. Thus, perceived social support in terms of financial, policy, advisory support and information resources theoretically plays a crucial role in encouraging individuals to engage in social entrepreneurship. Therefore, the following assumptions are made in this paper:

H4: Perceived social support positively affects university volunteers' intentions to start a social enterprise.

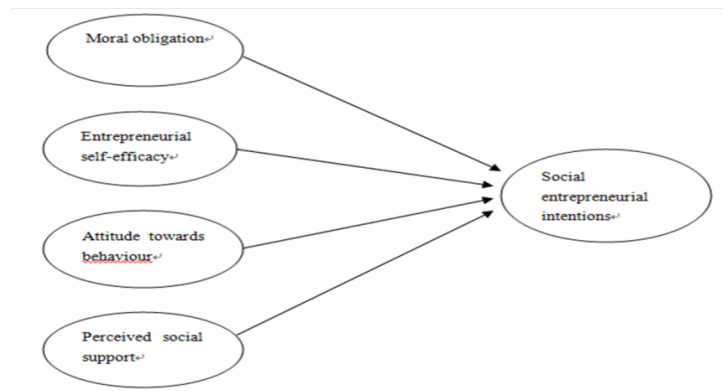


Figure 1. Research Model.

3. Measurement

In this paper, university volunteers are taken as the research object and four variables, namely moral obligation, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, perceived social support, attitude towards behaviour, are taken as explanatory variables of social entrepreneurial intention. Further, interviews and pre-tests were conducted to assess the appropriateness of the questionnaire design and measurement items in terms of content. The questionnaire was refined based on feedback from interviews and pre-test. Moral obligation selected five items of the measurement by Hockerts (2017); Five items of the measurement scale of Al-Jubari, I. (2019) were used for social entrepreneurship attitudes. The measurement of entrepreneurial self-efficacy adopted 9 items of Wang (2012), Jiang (2013) and Zhang (2020). The measurement of perceived social support based on Ernst (2001) and Malebana et al. (2014), including 5 items. The measurement of social entrepreneurial intention which contains 6 items, developed by Zhang (2020) with reference to Bacq and Alt (2018) et al. The sample was selected from the measurement items in the questionnaire, and the Likert five-point scale was used for scoring. Respondents were asked to select the only answer that they thought was most consistent with each item. Five control variables were set: gender, major, grade, family entrepreneurial background and part-time experience. A total of 380 questionnaires were sent out and 317 were recovered, with a recovery rate of 83.4%.

4. Result and Analysis

4.1 Descriptive statistical analysis

In this paper, SPSS27.0 was used to make statistics on valid questionnaires. The characteristics of entrepreneurs are described by the gender, major, grade, Family entrepreneurial experience (FEE) and part-time job experience (PTE) of university volunteers selected to participate in social volunteer service. Sample frequency statistics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic details of the respondents

Demographics	Items	Frequency	(%)
gender	male	152	47.9
	female	165	52.1
major	Economics and management	56	17.7
	Science and technology	120	37.9
	Literature, history and philosophy education	23	7.3
	Arts, sports and medicine	30	9.5
grade	Freshman year	64	20.2
	Sophomore year	142	44.8
	Junior year	103	32.5
	Senior year	8	2.5
FEE	Yes	144	45.4
	No	173	54.6
	Never	79	24.9
PTE	Once or twice	157	49.5
	Three times or more	81	25.6

In terms of the gender of the university volunteers participating in the social volunteer programs, 47.9% were male and 52.1% were female, with a relatively high proportion of females. In terms of the majors, 62.1 percent are

humanities and social sciences and 37.9 percent are engineering. Humanities and social sciences majors are familiar with social factors and have a relative advantage. Among the grades 20.2 percent of freshmen, 44.8 percent of sophomores and 32.5 percent of juniors participated. Only a small number of seniors participate in social volunteer activities, and senior students are less likely to participate in volunteer programs because they are preparing for job hunting or entrance. 45.4% of students had an entrepreneurial background, 75.1% had part-time experience, 49.5% had part-time experience once or twice and 25.6% had part-time experience more than three times.

4.2 Reliability

To evaluate the stability and reliability of the questionnaire, the reliability of each dimension of the questionnaire was measured, and the reliability of the questionnaire was evaluated by referring to Cronbach's Alpha given by the results. The specific values are listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Reliability Statistics

Factors	Cronbach's Alpha	Items
Moral obligation	.968	5
Attitude	.954	5
Entrepreneurial self-efficacy	.984	9
Perceived Social Support	.966	5
Social Entrepreneurial Intentions	.971	6

In the exploratory analysis, Cronbach's alpha greater than 0.6 indicates considerable stability of the scale. As shown in Table 2, the reliability is greater than 0.6 for all variable dimensions, indicating that the scale is acceptable. Cronbach's Alpha for all dimensions of the questionnaire was above 0.9, indicating strong internal consistency of the questionnaire items.

4.3 Correlation analysis

Table 3. Correlation analysis of factors affecting SEI

Constructs	SEI	MO	ATD	ESE	PSS
SEI	1				
MO	.649**	1			
ATD	.838**	.601**	1		
ESE	.855**	.602**	.835**	1	
PSS	.829**	.604**	.862**	.815**	1

Notes: $p < 0.05$; $p < 0.01$ **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In Table 3, a significant correlation is found among the factors. The Pearson simple correlation coefficient between MO and SEI is above 0.5, indicating a strong correlation between the two factors. Therefore, if the ATD increases, the SEI also increases. This also means that if ESE helps in developing SEI. Moreover, growing an PSS affects how students develop SEI.

4.4 Multiple regression analysis

In order to explore which factors significantly influence the formation of social entrepreneurship intentions among university volunteers who participate in social voluntary service activities, moral obligation, self-efficacy, perceived social support, and entrepreneurial attitude are analyzed as variables. Five control variables, such as gender, major, grade, Family entrepreneurial experience (FEE) and part-time job experience (PTE), are set. Social entrepreneurial intention is taken as the dependent variable. The results of the multiple regression are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Multiple regression analysis

Variables	Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics		
	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF	
(Constant)		-.055	.956			
MO	.135	4.185	.000	.593	1.687	
ATB	.232	4.196	.000	.202	4.961	
ESE	.397	8.158	.000	.260	3.849	
Antecedents	PSS	.224	4.260	.000	.222	4.503
	R Square	.808				
	Adjusted R Square	.805				
	Durbin-Watson	2.040				
	p	.000 ^b				

According to Table 4, multiple regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the intensity of the relationship between the dependent variables social entrepreneurial intentions and independent variables moral obligation, attitude towards behaviour, entrepreneurial self-efficacy and perceived social support. The multi-collinearity test showed that the variance inflation factors VIF of all variables were below 10, and also Tolerance of all variables were below 1.0, which means that there are no multi-collinearity problems amongst the variables. The Durbin-Watson value is found 2.040, which is in the satisfactory range. Although adjusted R^2 is found .808 which is above 0.5, it means the regression fits the sample data. And the results of the F-test reached the level of significance ($p < .001$), implying that the regression model was appropriate. It also indicated that MO ($b = 0.135$, $p < 0.01$), ATB ($b = .232$, $p < 0.01$), ESE ($b = .397$, $p < 0.01$) and PSS ($b = .224$, $p < 0.05$) are found significantly related to SEI respectively. Because moral obligation, attitude towards behaviour, entrepreneurial self-efficacy and perceived social support. Therefore, hypotheses H1, H2, H3 and H4 are accepted.

5. Conclusion

Moral obligation positively influence the generation of university volunteers intentions to start a social entrepreneurship, and moral obligation encourage individuals to help others. Moral obligation is not only the important characteristic of social entrepreneurship and can help distinguish between traditional and social entrepreneurs, but also can make individuals feel morally obligated to help reduce social problems by forming social enterprises. A high level of moral values can positively influence an individual's intention to start a business in society.

Entrepreneurial attitudes positively influenced the social entrepreneurial intentions of university volunteers, indicating that the more positive the entrepreneurial attitudes of volunteers, the more pronounced their social entrepreneurial intentions to achieve economic independence, recognize personal value, gain social recognition and contribute to social development. The more positive their entrepreneurial attitudes, the stronger their psychological identification with the role of social entrepreneur. This psychological identity will encourage students to be more active in understanding the relevant information of social entrepreneurship, to make psychological commitments to achieve their personal goals through social entrepreneurship, and to develop the confidence to achieve entrepreneurial success. Finally, attitude towards behaviour will guide their goal-oriented behavioral intentions, effectively predicting the generation of social entrepreneurship.

The study concluded that entrepreneurial self-efficacy has a positive effect on the intentions of university volunteers to start a business, which can be explained in combination with the characteristics of entrepreneurial self-efficacy. First, volunteers with higher levels of entrepreneurial self-efficacy were able to view the advantages and possible difficulties of social entrepreneurship more clearly and rationally. Second, volunteers with higher levels of entrepreneurial self-efficacy were more positive and optimistic about social entrepreneurship. They believed that they could overcome the difficulties encountered in the entrepreneurial process. Finally, university volunteers with high entrepreneurial self-efficacy are more willing to engage in challenging entrepreneurial activities and believe that the environment is full of potential entrepreneurial opportunities, thus generating the tendency of social

entrepreneurship.

Perceived social support positively affects the intentions of university volunteers to start their own businesses. Universities offer support for social entrepreneurship like a combination of public welfare education, entrepreneurship education and the social entrepreneurship curriculum, building a public service platform and holding a social entrepreneurship design competition. Students could further deepen their understanding of social entrepreneurship in practice, and effectively enhance the intentions to start social entrepreneurship. The more support from various aspects of the social environment, the more in-depth the cultivation of university volunteers entrepreneurial ability.

6. Discussion

University volunteers often engage in social volunteer service programs and make positive changes for the community. As a potential group for social entrepreneurship, university volunteers start from social service programs to the formation of social entrepreneurship intentions. They come to understand how business opportunities can be harnessed to create positive economic and social value. The empirical study of this paper shows that in the annual continuous social entrepreneurship activities, the moral obligation of university volunteers, attitude toward behaviour, entrepreneurial self-efficacy and perceived social support are significant positive correlation with social entrepreneurship intention, It is helpful to understand the attribution of university volunteers' social entrepreneurial behavior, and explain the formation and development of social entrepreneurial intention.

According to the regression results, entrepreneurial self-efficacy has the largest explanatory power on social entrepreneurial intentions among the four explanatory variables. Meyer et al. noted that entrepreneurial self-efficacy helps predict opportunities and is an important factor in generating self-employment intentions. As an attribution of individual behavior in a particular situation, self-efficacy can be well applied to the study of entrepreneurial intentions. Using the ESE model, it found that entrepreneurs with strong entrepreneurial self-efficacy are more sensitive to opportunity perception when faced with the same deterministic environment, while those with weak entrepreneurial self-efficacy are more likely to perceive risk. The primary purpose of social entrepreneurship is to solve social problems and continuously improve the social environment. Thus, entrepreneurs' perception of their own integrated capabilities and their impact on entrepreneurial intentions may be particularly important. Self-efficacy positively affects the intention of social entrepreneurship. The reason that individuals tend to feel that they have an advantage in social entrepreneurship in terms of psychological perceptions. As a result, university volunteers with high self-efficacy have greater confidence in their ability to be socially entrepreneurial and thus have higher intentions to be social entrepreneurs. Moreover, university volunteers with low self-efficacy are worried about risks when faced with intractable problems in the social environment, while with high self-efficacy tend to believe that they have the ability to solve problems and look for opportunities more systematically. As a result, they with high self-efficacy have a stronger intention to become social entrepreneurs.

Social entrepreneurship is indeed a beneficial form of university volunteers. Currently, social entrepreneurs among university volunteers are just beginning. Despite the rapid development in recent years, the difficulties and problems such as unsound policies and regulations, financial difficulties and talent shortages, should not be overlooked. All these issues should be paid more attention by government and society as soon as possible. If they would be provided more favorable policy environment and social atmosphere, the more rapidly development of social entrepreneurship among university volunteers.

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