

EFFECTS OF GENDER ON ANTECEDENTS TO SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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–Abstract–

Social inequality is on the rise globally despite the efforts that developing economies are making to reduce the gap. Social entrepreneurship (SE) has become a fashionable construct known for its mission to address the social exclusion of persons in vulnerable situations. The debate on SE has reached various institutions and research networks around the world. Scientific research in the field is growing, as is evident from the proliferation of publications on the topic. However, empirical investigations on the antecedents to social entrepreneurial intentions in South Africa are still rare. This study aimed at investigating the influence of gender on antecedents to social entrepreneurial intentions among university students and professionals in South Africa and Germany. A questionnaire was administered to 703 students from a selection of universities in South Africa and Germany. ANOVA was applied to examine the differences regarding the influence of gender on social and commercial entrepreneurial intentions. Significant differences were found regarding gender and both types of entrepreneurial intentions in a way that social entrepreneurial intention levels were higher among women, and

commercial entrepreneurial intention levels were higher among men in both samples. It may therefore be concluded that entrepreneurship is still a rather gendered career in a way that attributes linked to commercial entrepreneurship are usually stereotypically male, whereas attributes linked to social entrepreneurship are usually stereotypically female. Furthermore, given the predominantly moderate to high effect sizes of gender, it is argued that the effect of gender in the entrepreneurial intention formation process is too substantial to be limited to a control variable.

Key Words: Social entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurial intentions, gender

JEL Classification: M00

1. INTRODUCTION

Social inequality is on the rise globally despite the efforts that economies are making to reduce the gap (Mackebach, 2017). Social entrepreneurship (SE) has become a fashionable construct known for its mission to address the social exclusion of persons in vulnerable situations (Terziev, 2016). Not only is a business-like discipline that combines social mission, innovation and determination well suited for the current times (Dees, 1998), SE has become an important social/economic spectacle for both developed and developing countries (Dacin, Dacin & Matear, 2010). The need for SE research in South Africa cannot be overemphasised. South Africa has been unable to address the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality (Karanda & Toledano, 2012). Considering unemployment alone, the figures are constantly on the rise, irrespective of the measures adopted. For example, the 2019 Quarterly Labour Force Survey by the National Treasury reported a national unemployment level that stagnated at 27.6 percent. Similar trends prior to 2011 show unemployment levels of thirty percent (30%) among youths between 15 and 24 years, and forty percent (40%) among youths between 25 and 34 years (Fatoki & Chindoga, 2011). Many of these unemployed youths express their anger and frustrations by either committing crime or indulging in substance abuse, which further exacerbates the many social ills plaguing the country (Viviers, Venter & Solomon, 2012). Therefore, encouraging the study of social entrepreneurship among university students in South Africa could serve as a catalyst for the many social ills plaguing the country (Viviers *et al.*, 2012).

Although the debate around SE has expanded to various institutions and research networks around the world (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010), it is only in the recent past that scientific research in the field has mushroomed (Kraus *et al.*, 2014). However, a number of recent reviews highlight that SE research has a substantial lack of quantitative research despite the exponential growth of published papers in

the field (Sassmannshausen & Volkmann, 2018). Largely, SE research has mainly focused on a conceptual understanding of the phenomenon (e.g. Bacq & Janssen, 2011; Mair & Noboa, 2006) with minimal empirical investigation (Short *et al.*, 2009). Accordingly, there is little empirical evidence to substantiate the factors that influence social entrepreneurial intentions among university students in South Africa. Most surveyed work on social entrepreneurship has been conducted in the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) (Short *et al.*, 2009; Mair & Naboa, 2006) with little to no attention received in developing countries such as South Africa (Viviers *et al.*, 2012; Urban, 2008). Such failures demonstrate that there are research gaps that need to be addressed in the study of SE. Consequently, the focus of this study is on delineating the factors that influence SE intentions through a thorough focused literature review and identifying the gender effect on the identified factors. Demographic variables such as gender, age, level of education and ethnic group have often been included as control variables within prior research, and only a few studies have explored their direct effect in determining entrepreneurial intentions (e.g. Wilson, Kickul & Marlino, 2007). Therefore, taking the foregoing into account, this study empirically investigates the influence of gender on the antecedents to social entrepreneurial intentions using a sample of South African and German university students ($N_{\text{total}} = 703$).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Like entrepreneurship, the study of SE is riddled with definitional ambiguities. Competing definitions and conceptual frameworks that exist (Cukier *et al.*, 2011; Mair & Marti, 2006) challenge advanced research of SE as a legitimate field of study (Nicholls, 2010; Saebi, Foss & Linder, 2019). However, scholars in the field have become more interested in the theoretical development of the intentions towards the formation of SE (Mair & Noboa, 2006). SE intentions may refer to the motivation to identify opportunities to create social impact. Founding a social enterprise is usually considered the result of translating SE intentions into action (Hockerts & Wüstenhagen, 2010). To a certain degree, the resulting action of forming a social enterprise mitigates the previously mentioned SE definition issues, even though the perception of what a social enterprise is remains vague (Hockerts, 2017).

2.1. Entrepreneurial intentions

Intention theory is founded on cognitive psychology and is described as the glue that links beliefs and attitudes to subsequent behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). When applied to entrepreneurship, intentionality as a psychological thought

process directs one's attitude towards a way of thinking that emphasises opportunities over threats (Krueger *et al.*, 2000). This application of the intentional theory to the field of entrepreneurship has yielded fruitful avenues for broadening entrepreneurship research (Boyd & Vozikis, 1994; Krueger & Brazeal, 1994; Ajzen, 1991). For example, Bird (1988) contends that entrepreneurs' ideas and intentions form part of the initial strategic template that guides goal setting, communication, commitment, and organisation in the process of new business development. Accordingly, Bird (1988) proposes a model that argues for situational and cognitive factors such as politics, economical context, personality, and ability to act as antecedents that trigger entrepreneurial intentions. In another study, Boyd and Vozikis (1994) further developed Bird's model and suggested individual self-efficacy as an intentional trigger that guides a person's belief in his/her capability to perform an entrepreneurial task. As discussions of entrepreneurial intentions evolved, numerous models were developed. Of particular interest is Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behaviour (TPB). The conceptual model was developed suggesting that intentions to engage in a particular behaviour result from three independent antecedents, namely attitudes towards behaviour, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. In other words, intentions towards behaviour are determined by the perceptions of the personal desirability of performing a particular behaviour based on intrinsic and extrinsic personal outcomes (attitude towards behaviour); the extra-personal influences on the decision-maker (subjective norm); and the personal perception of the feasibility of behaviour (perceived behavioural control) (Ajzen, 1991). Accordingly, the stronger the intention to engage in particular behaviour is, the more likely it would be that the behaviour would manifest.

2.2. Social entrepreneurial intention

In a recent meta-analysis study, Kruse, Wach and Wegge (2018) highlight the model of SE intention prediction as the main theoretical approach used to determine antecedents to SE intentions. The social entrepreneurial intentions model was first developed by Mair and Noboa (2006) to explain how social entrepreneurial intentions get formed. While gaining insights from existing entrepreneurial intentions theories, Mair and Noboa (2006) suggest that intentions to start a social business develop from perceptions of perceived desirability and perceived feasibility. More specifically, Mair and Noboa (2006) opine that perceptions of desirability or the motives to establish a social business are triggered by the presence of empathy and moral judgement. On the other hand, perceived feasibility or the probability that a social business will manifest depends on an individual's self-efficacy and moral judgement. Besides recognising a set of

dynamic variables to explain behavioural intentions, Mair and Noboa (2006) arrived at a conclusion that their study was merely speculative and that additional conceptual and empirical work is needed to substantiate the claims.

Recently, research on intentions formation became an empirical driver of quantitative research in the field of SE. So far, a number of empirical studies have investigated factors influencing social entrepreneurial intentions (Hockerts, 2017; Tiwari, Bhat & Tikoria, 2017), with some addressing the recommendations made by Short et al. (2009) and applied established theories (Dacin *et al.*, 2010) such as the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen 1991). For example, in a study that aimed at developing and validating a scale to measure antecedents of SE intention, Hockerts (2017) found that SE intentions antecedents are measured according to empathy, moral obligation, self-efficacy and social support. In another study, Urban and Teise (2015) proposed several key variables that are important antecedents to social entrepreneurial intentions. While building on Mair and Noboa's model, Urban and Teise (2015:37) analysed the influence of independence, achievement, self-efficacy, empathy and moral judgement, vision, social support and innovativeness on SE intentions. Among the factors that were tested, achievement, moral judgement and empathy, and self-efficacy revealed the greatest amount of variance in explaining social entrepreneurial intentions. However, existing research hardly pays attention to investigating the role of social demographic factors in determining SE intentions.

2.3. Gender and social entrepreneurial intentions

The influence of personal attributes on entrepreneurial activity is well documented in the literature. Scholars who argue that social demographic factors matter in determining entrepreneurial aspiration have focused on understanding the role of factors such as gender, age, level of education and income (Chipeta, Surujlal & Koloba, 2016; Sailus; 2015; Sánchez Cañizares & Fuentes García, 2010). For example, in a study that investigated gender differences in entrepreneurial attitudes, Sánchez and Fuentes (2010) found that women are less prone to initiate entrepreneurial activity and that fear of failure is a major obstacle to starting a business. In another study that aimed at investigating the elements that play the most influential role in determining entrepreneurial behaviour among the youth in MENA countries, Setti (2017) found a positive influence of gender, education, occupation and income on entrepreneurial intentions. Similarly, Sailus (2015) found that males were predominantly involved in economic activities and public life, while females were restricted to taking care of the household activities. This prevented them from being part of the economic involvement or participating as

economic equals in many countries (Jayachandran, 2014). Despite the constraints they experienced, females slowly began contributing to the economy by embarking on entrepreneurial ventures. Such findings highlight the significance of understanding the influence of demographic variables on entrepreneurial intentions.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sampling and data collection

The target population of the study comprised all university students in South Africa. A non-probability convenience sampling technique was employed. The sample size of $N_{total} = 703$ ($N_{South\ Africa} = 514$; $N_{Germany} = 189$) was determined based on historical methods where a justification of a particular sample size is used in previous studies (Hockerts, 2017; Tiwari et al., 2017; Nga & Shamuganathan, 2010), the sample size can be considered suitable for this study's purpose.

3.2. Measuring instrument and data collection

A questionnaire was developed to investigate antecedents to social entrepreneurial intentions. Section A requested of participants to provide demographic data. Section B comprised items relating to antecedents of social entrepreneurial intentions. Factors that were used to measure antecedents to social entrepreneurial intentions include a social entrepreneurial intentions scale that was developed by Kruse, Chipeta, Surujlal and Wegge (2019), and a commercial entrepreneurial intentions scale adapted from a commonly used commercial entrepreneurial intentions scale, the entrepreneurial intention questionnaire (EIQ) by Liñán and Chen (2009). The items such as, "*I will make every effort to start and run my own commercial enterprise*" were measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). A pilot study was conducted among 95 students from a university in South Africa to determine internal consistency of the measuring instrument. The data for the main survey was collected from students at selected universities in South Africa. Furthermore, a sample with a higher occupational diversity was drawn in Germany. The questionnaire was administered face to face by the authors.

3.3. Reliability and validity

Cronbach's alpha was used to determine internal consistency of the questionnaire. According to Malhotra (2010), values below 0.6 indicate unsatisfactory internal consistency and values above 0.6 indicate satisfactory internal consistency. The

questionnaire used to measure antecedents to social entrepreneurial intentions was reliable with an overall Cronbach's alpha value $\alpha_{\text{Pilot}} = .74$, which demonstrated satisfactory reliability of the questionnaire.

3.4. Data analysis

Using the statistics software IBM SPSS 25, descriptive statistics and correlations were calculated to provide a first overview of the data. Furthermore, analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were used to check the hypotheses separately for commercial and social entrepreneurial intention and the South African and the German sample.

3.5. Ethical considerations

The study was in line with the ethical guidelines of North-West University. Participation in the survey was voluntary. Confidentiality and anonymity of the information provided by the respondents were strictly safeguarded

4. RESULTS

4.1. Demographic profile of the samples

Demographic data for the study was collected from university students from South Africa. A total number of 514 university students from South Africa participated in the survey. 280 (54.5%) were female and 234 (45.53%) were male. Their age distribution ranged between 17 and 35 years. The majority of the participants were between the ages of 18 and 23 years. In terms of occupation, 514 (100%) of the participants were students. Particularly, 462 (89.9%) were undergraduate students, 39 (7.6%) were studying towards an honours degree, 7 (1.4%) were pursuing a master's degree, and 5 (0.2%) were PhD students. Regarding the German sample, a total of 189 subjects participated in the study. A total of 73.16% (138) participants were female. The mean age of the participants was 28.00 years (SD 11.67 years) and the majority of them were studying (67.37%). The rest comprised employed people (23.68%) and people with other occupations or unemployed people (8.95%).

4.2. Correlation analysis

A correlation analysis was conducted to check for discriminant validity of the scales measuring social entrepreneurial intention and commercial entrepreneurial intentions. The correlation coefficient between the two measurement scales was $r = .01$, an indication of a low to almost no correlation (Cohen, 1988). These results also indicate that these two factors are independent factors.

4.3. Analysis of variance: Gender and social entrepreneurial intentions

An ANOVA test was employed to examine gender difference regarding social entrepreneurial intentions. With the total sample size of $n = 514$ in South Africa and $n = 189$ in Germany, two Levene tests of homogeneity of variance were conducted. The Levene tests yielded no indication of heterogeneity of variances in the South African sample. However, in the German sample, variance heterogeneity was detected for commercial entrepreneurial intention. Consequently, for further analyses, we applied a basic ANOVA for the South African sample and for the SE intention investigation in the German sample, but a more robust Welch-ANOVA was applied to investigate gender differences on commercial entrepreneurial intention among the German sample. The ANOVA results are shown in Tables 1 to 4.

Table 1: ANOVA on gender and SE intentions for the South African sample

	Sum of squares	df.	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	469.876	1	469.876	9.110	.003
Within groups	26408.492	512	51.579		
Total	26878.368	513			

Table 1 shows ANOVA results indicating significant gender differences on social entrepreneurial intentions for the South African sample. The test revealed that the means between the groups are significantly different. Considering the group means of SE intention among the male ($M = 5.12$; $SD = 1.21$) and the female participants ($M = 5.44$; $SD = 1.18$), these results imply that women have significantly higher SE intentions compared to men in the sample of South African university students. The effect size of this mean difference (partial $\eta^2 = .02$) can be labelled as small to moderate (Cohen, 1988).

Table 2: ANOVA on gender and SE intentions for the German sample

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	43,884	1	43,884	17,245	,000
Within groups	475,869	187	2,545		
Total	519,752	188			

As displayed in Table 2, there is also a significant gender difference regarding SE intention in the German sample. Given the smaller means among the male ($M = 3.21$; $SD = 1.66$) compared to the female sample ($M = 4.31$; $SD = 1.57$), women have a significantly higher level of SE intention compared to men in the German

sample. The effect size (partial $\eta^2 = .08$) indicates a moderate effect (Cohen, 1988).

4.4. Analysis of variance: Gender and commercial entrepreneurial intentions

Table 3: ANOVA on gender and CE intentions for the South African sample

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	91.138	1	91.138	31.296	.000
Within groups	1490.989	512	2.912		
Total	1582.127	513			

As illustrated in Table 3, statistically significant differences were found regarding gender on CE intentions among university students in South Africa. There were significant mean differences comparing male ($M = 4.85$; $SD = 1.61$) and female participants ($M = 4.00$; $SD = 1.79$). Therefore, men were found to have significantly higher CE intentions compared to women. The effect size (partial $\eta^2 = .06$) can be labelled as moderate (Cohen, 1988).

Table 4: Welch-ANOVA on gender and CE intentions for the German sample

	Welch's F	df ₁	df ₂	Sig.
Welch-ANOVA	17.479	1	61,667	.000

Table 4 shows the results of the Welch-ANOVA when investigating gender differences regarding CE intention levels among males and females in the German sample. Considering the significant difference and the mean SE intention level among males ($M = 3.02$; $SD = 1.90$) and females ($M = 1.83$; $SD = 1.12$), men have significantly higher CE intention levels compared to women in the German sample. The effect size (partial $\eta^2 = .13$) can be labelled as moderate to high (Cohen, 1988).

5. DISCUSSION

This study investigated the effect of gender on social and commercial entrepreneurial intention levels using a samples drawn from a selection of South African universities and different occupational groups in Germany. Significant gender differences were found for social entrepreneurial intentions and commercial entrepreneurial intentions. On a general basis, this finding is in line with both recent qualitative and quantitative research and large-scale surveys on career preferences and entrepreneurial levels worldwide, such as the Global

Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM). Following the reasoning of Bruni, Gherardi and Poggio (2004), entrepreneurship has long been considered and still is rather a gendered career path. They argue that due to the image of an entrepreneur as “the conqueror of unexplored territories, the lonely hero, the patriarch” (p. 407), there is a male bias concerning the career choice of becoming an entrepreneur. They opine that despite new scientific developments such as research on female entrepreneurship, these developments only contribute to “a process of “othering” the non-male” (p. 407). These views received support in two recent studies by Hechavarria and Ingram (2016) and Gupta, Wieland and Turban (2019). However, both studies are not only of note due to their high sample sizes based on GEM data (Hechavarria & Ingram, 2016) and their sophisticated experimental and methodological design (Gupta *et al.*, 2019), they have also contrasted commercial and social ventures regarding gender from two different perspectives. The former study focused on the perspective of female entrepreneurs themselves and found that women are more likely to found social compared to commercial enterprises. The latter study could show that in line with the social role theory (Eagly, 1987), social entrepreneurship is more associated with female than male entrepreneurs due to the social and caring element in social entrepreneurship, which is stereotypically female (Hechavarría *et al.*, 2012). To elaborate further concerning the current investigation in this paper, additional evidence was found for a gender gap regarding social and commercial entrepreneurial intentions. Regardless of the cultural background of the participants, it was revealed that social entrepreneurial intentions were higher for females compared to males and that commercial entrepreneurial intentions were higher for males compared to females. This study also offers additional evidence for a culturally independent gender gap considering that the apparent cultural differences between South Africa and Germany (Gupta, Hanges, & Dorfman, 2002) have not impacted the gap. This supports the assumption that personal values rather than an individual’s cultural background explain gender differences in entrepreneurial career intentions (Hechavarria & Ingram, 2016) even though one should not neglect the interrelation of culture and values as there is large consensus that the former has an effect on the latter (Diefendorff & Chandler, 2011).

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The current study has several implications for researchers and practitioners. Firstly, it has been shown that there are gender differences concerning male and female entrepreneurial intentions, which provide support for the assumption of entrepreneurship being a gendered career path. However, in contrast to earlier research linking entrepreneurial behaviour almost exclusively to stereotypically

male characteristics, the findings of this study highlight the need to differentiate between different forms of entrepreneurship regarding gender preferences, as social entrepreneurship and its social aspects seem to attract women more than men. Consequently, it is argued that future research should focus more on the role of gender in entrepreneurial intention formation, as there is increasing evidence that the impact of gender is more substantial than previously regarded as merely a control variable.

Secondly, adding to previous research showing a female preference for social entrepreneurship and a male preference for commercial entrepreneurship, this study shows that these preferences are, at least considering the two countries investigated, culturally invariant. In order to further consolidate this assumption, (i) gender needs to be investigated in more detail when conducting intercultural studies (see the first implication above); and (ii) there is a need to extend the cultural scope of scientific investigations particularly to countries with different levels of entrepreneurial activity.

Thirdly, practitioners can particularly benefit from these findings. Generally, past research highlights the assumption that entrepreneurship as a career lacks attractiveness for many females. Therefore, by focussing more on new forms of entrepreneurship linking the aspiration to generate income with a second mission, e.g. the generation of social value as in social entrepreneurship, a largely untapped potential of entrepreneurial activity can be uncovered. Considering that, particularly in developing and emerging countries where economic growth *and* social justice are necessary for further development, empowering women to pursue social entrepreneurial careers can serve as a means to (i) reduce the high poverty and unemployment levels particularly among youths; and (ii) better the perspectives of young graduates intending to make a living and help people in their surroundings. Therefore, we encourage policymakers to focus more on ‘tailor-made’ programmes to boost entrepreneurial activity going beyond a sole investment in traditional activity; therefore, commercial entrepreneurial activity that is less attractive for many females intending to pursue a career as a social entrepreneur.

7. LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings of this study should be viewed in light of limitations. The study was limited to a sample frame that consisted of university students from South Africa and Germany that were acquired through convenience sampling. The total sample size of 703 participants is consistent with previous studies in the field of SE. However, generalisation of the findings to a greater population should be

approached with caution. Future studies in the subject area are recommended to use bigger and particularly representative samples and to include institutions beyond South Africa and Germany. Future research could also focus on exploring the relationship between social and commercial entrepreneurship intentions and other variables such as entrepreneurial bias, cultural dimensions and work values that would contribute to a better understanding of the underpinnings of the persisting gender differences in entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial intention formation.

8. CONCLUSION

While investigating the gender difference regarding commercial and social entrepreneurial intentions in South Africa and Germany, the results of this study provide evidence that gender does influence one's intentions to engage in entrepreneurial ventures. In particular, females were found to have stronger intentions to engage in social entrepreneurial ventures than their male counterparts. The results also indicate a culturally invariant preference of entrepreneurial behaviour in the samples used. It was found that males preferred commercial entrepreneurship to social entrepreneurship, and *vice versa*, in relation to female preference. This is in line with previous research claiming that entrepreneurship is still a rather gendered career in a way that attributes linked to commercial entrepreneurship are usually stereotypically male, whereas attributes linked to social entrepreneurship are usually stereotypically female. Furthermore, given the predominantly moderate to high effect sizes of gender, it is argued that the effect of gender in the entrepreneurial intention formation process is too substantial to be limited to a control variable. As a result, and to consolidate our findings, future research is encouraged to extend the cultural scope of our work particularly to countries with different levels of entrepreneurship. Given the apparent gender differences regarding different entrepreneurial career paths, policymakers should pay more attention to a tailor-made support of entrepreneurial programmes and particularly focus on empowering women with social entrepreneurial intentions in order to increase entrepreneurial activity on the one hand and contribute to more social justice on the other hand.

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