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Empowering Communities through Social Entrepreneurship for Inclusive Growth

Renu Chaudhary

Research Scholar, Department of Commerce, Bir Tikendrajit University, Imphal West, Manipur, India

Dr. A K Choudhary

Professor, Department of Commerce, Bir Tikendrajit University, Imphal West, Manipur, India

Abstract

Social entrepreneurship is a new innovative means of solving intractable world problems such as poverty, inequality, joblessness, poor health, and poor education. Unlike conventional methods that prioritize maximizing profits, social entrepreneurship integrates economic, social, and environmental objectives to establish enduring value for the society. This study looks at how social entrepreneurship contributes to inclusive growth and community empowerment, with a young people's perspective on social enterprise. Data from 182 undergraduate students in Malaysia were analyzed using a quantitative, cross-sectional survey technique and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Perceived capability, civic consciousness, community support, and previous enterprise experience are found to bear strong impacts on youth social enterprise predisposition, whereas emotional sensitivity exerts weaker influence. The findings underscore the multi-dimensional drivers of young people's participation in social enterprises and reinforce the capacity of social entrepreneurship as a driver of equity, participation, and sustainable development. Theory and practice are both enhanced by the presentation of insights into how social entrepreneurship contributes towards enhancing structural disparities, enhancing community resilience, and supplementing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Keywords- Social Entrepreneurship; Inclusive Development; Community Empowerment; Youth Social Enterprise Orientation (YSEO); Civic Awareness; Perceived Competence;

1. Introduction

A novel approach to tackling major societal issues like poverty, inequality, unemployment, inadequate healthcare, and restricted educational opportunities is social entrepreneurship. Compared to the conventional business models that target profit maximization, social entrepreneurship integrates economic, social, and environmental elements to generate sustainable community value [1].Operating as hybrid organizations, social enterprises balance financial sustainability with social mission, thus filling important gaps frequently left unfilled by government programs and conventional charity efforts.

However, the focus of community development is on community empowerment and involvement, which enables people and communities to communicate their needs and collaborate to create solutions that optimize their overall quality of life. The intersection of social entrepreneurship and community development has garnered significant attention globally since the 1980s, particularly through initiatives such as microfinance, fair trade, recycling, and renewable energy companies. These methods support social justice, resilience, environmental stewardship, and inclusive economic growth in addition to reducing poverty. According to this, social entrepreneurship appears to be a cluster idea that also intersects with related concepts such as commercial and sustainable entrepreneurship, as illustrated in figure 1.

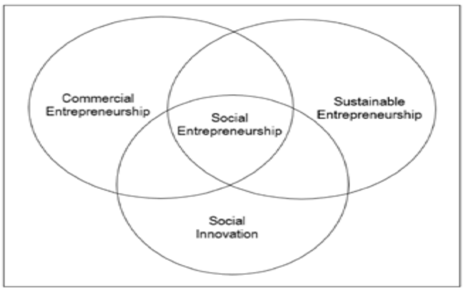

Figure 1. Social entrepreneurship as a cluster concept

The practice of social entrepreneurship, however, varies across regions. In Asia and Africa, it often emerges out of necessity to meet fundamental human needs, while in Europe it is closely associated with welfare systems and cooperative traditions. Despite these contextual variations, the unifying principle remains the simultaneous pursuit of social value and financial sustainability. Increasingly, social entrepreneurship is recognized as a key driver of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), aligning innovative business practices with community empowerment and inclusive growth [2]. Historically, the emergence of social entrepreneurship has been directly related to seeking sustainable options for alternatives to government welfare programs and mainstream charitable systems, both of which tended to offer short-term relief but no system of long-term empowerment. Starting from the 1980s, social enterprises have proliferated, addressing issues from access to healthcare, alleviation of poverty, women's empowerment, and environmental protection. Models such as microfinance institutions, fair-trade cooperatives, renewable energy start-ups, and recycling-based business ventures demonstrated that social commitment and profitability had a place in the same organizational framework [3]. These models were a paradigm because they placed social entrepreneurship as an inclusive and sustainable driver of development.

Though much has been achieved in international development, prevailing economic ideologies continue to prioritize efficiency and profit maximization over fairness and equity. Policy-making is usually top-down and does not consider the local needs of communities, and private sector action generally favours shareholder value over stakeholder welfare. This results in marginalized people being trapped in a cycle of poverty and marginalization since they are frequently denied access to resources like capital, education, technology, and voice.

Social entrepreneurship emerges as a paradigm alternative by redefining the creation of value and going beyond the traditional trade-off between profit and impact. Rather, it creates a synergy-based relationship where economic and social goals enhance each other. Nevertheless, though the potential for change offered by social entrepreneurship is far-reaching, empirical research on its contribution toward enabling communities and promoting inclusive growth is still limited. There is thus an urgent need to rigorously examine the conditions and mechanisms by which social entrepreneurship can be an effective driver of equity, participation, and empowerment

Rationale

For these reasons, establishing a connection between social entrepreneurship and inclusive growth is essential. By guaranteeing that economic growth contributes to the reduction of inequality rather than its exacerbation, it first meets the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations. Second, it emphasizes alternative approaches to development that empower communities as active agents rather than passive beneficiaries. Third, such an inquiry can inform policymakers and practitioners in designing strategies that integrate efficiency with fairness, and sustainability with innovation. Social enterprises not only address immediate challenges such as limited healthcare, unemployment, or inadequate education, but they also tackle structural barriers by building local capacity, fostering civic participation, and strengthening community resilience. By embedding inclusivity into the development process, social entrepreneurship provides a pathway toward sustainable socio-economic transformation, particularly for marginalized populations

Objectives and Research Questions

1. To look at how social entrepreneurship helps people become more economically empowered and less impoverished. How can social entrepreneurship help people and communities become more financially stable and less impoverished?
2. To find out how social entrepreneurship promotes inclusivity, justice, and active involvement among underrepresented groups in order to better understand how it might improve social equality and community participation.
3. To examine how social entrepreneurship contributes to environmental sustainability: What programs and customs assist societies in striking a balance between ecological responsibility and economic growth?
4. To evaluate how empowerment and involvement in inclusive growth function as mediators and how they affect the connection between social entrepreneurship and fair, sustainable development

2. Literature Review

Social entrepreneurship has increasingly been recognized as an innovative approach that blends economic, social, and environmental goals to address persistent societal challenges. Scholars have highlighted its evolution from a marginal concept to a mainstream paradigm, emphasizing its role in poverty alleviation, unemployment reduction, education, healthcare access, and environmental sustainability (Kamaludin et al., 2021; Monteiro et al., 2022; Bruder, 2020).. Early research framed social entrepreneurship within nonprofit and charity contexts, while more recent studies expand its scope to hybrid organizational models that combine commercial viability with social missions.

A key strand of literature connects social entrepreneurship with sustainability and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By uniting new business models with social value creation, social enterprises are viewed as critical in creating inclusive growth and resilience, particularly in developing economies where state systems tend to be short-sighted. Evidence proves that models like microfinance, fair trade, renewable energy firms, and waste management schemes all at once generate revenue, empower poor communities, and protect the environment (Teasdale et al., 2022; Hlady-Rispal & Servantie, 2018; Ho & Yoon, 2021).

Theoretical literature also highlights social entrepreneurship's pluralistic and hybrid nature, and various meanings coexist with others within scholarly fields such as management, sociology, and political science. The relationship between social and financial objectives, the legitimacy of hybrid organizations, and how scaling and sustaining social impacts are attained have been topics of controversy among scholars (Hervieux & Voltan, 2019; Hota et al., 2019; Jung et al., 2018). More recent conceptualization positions social entrepreneurship as a standalone field that takes lessons from stakeholder theory, institutional theory, and innovation studies, enriching both the theoretical literature and actual practice (Ferreira et al., 2019; Kruse et al., 2023). The most prevalent theme across the literature is the alignment of social entrepreneurship with sustainability. According to experts, social companies have long-term effects since they integrate sustainability techniques into their operations in addition to addressing current societal issues. Companies that successfully integrate financial sustainability with community development and environmental conservation include microfinance institutions, fair-trade cooperatives, and renewable energy companies (Teasdale et al., 2022; Ho & Yoon, 2021; Hlady-Rispal & Servantie, 2018). These studies suggest that social entrepreneurship is an effective way to accomplish the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN, particularly those pertaining to gender equality, education, poverty alleviation, and conservation. An further body of literature focuses on the complex nature of social responsibility.

It is generally defined as operating side by side on economic, social, and environmental fronts (Muñoz & Cohen, 2018; Phillips et al., 2017; Qamar et al., 2020). Economically, social enterprises create employment and stimulate innovation; socially, they empower the poor and increase access to health and education; environmentally, they decrease degradation through sustainable practices such as recycling, upcycling, and using renewable energy. A number of scholars are convinced that the real power of social entrepreneurship lies in its potential to integrate these dimensions, resulting in holistic and scalable solutions to interconnected social problems. Theorized conflicts remain the essence of scholarly examination.

While there is general agreement on the transformative potential of social entrepreneurship, it is contested among researchers concerning its limits of definition and normative underpinnings. Some focus on individual entrepreneurs as heroic change agents, while others highlight collective or institutional avenues by positioning social entrepreneurship in broader socio-political contexts (Hervieux & Voltan, 2019; Hota et al., 2019; Jung et al., 2018). Hybrid organizations that combine nonprofit and for-profit logics raise legitimacy and sustainability issues in terms of how they are accepted by stakeholders. Institutional theory, stakeholder theory, and legitimacy approaches have been applied to explain how social enterprises resolve the tensions and balance competing priorities. 3. Theoretical Framework Institutional Theory

Institutional theory describes how social enterprises operate in environments that involve poor governance or exclusionary arrangements [18]. Institutional voids create opportunities for innovation as well as challenges of legitimacy and sustainability, it illustrates.

Social Capital Theory

Social capital theory highlights networks, trust, and norms that enable collective action [19]. Social entrepreneurship flourishes where social capital exists to mobilize resources, establish credibility, and encourage participation.

Sustainable Development Theory

Sustainable development theory frames social entrepreneurship as a mechanism to balance economic, social, and environmental goals [20]. It positions social enterprises as vehicles for advancing holistic and intergenerational well-being.

Proposed Conceptual Model

The model posits that social entrepreneurship influences inclusive growth through mediators such as empowerment and participation. By strengthening community agency and involvement, social enterprises create pathways to equity and sustainability.

4. Research Methodology

The primary methodological framework of this study was a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. Because it enabled the researcher to record young people's attitudes, behaviors, and views of social entrepreneurship at one particular moment in time, a cross-sectional technique was deemed suitable. In addition to being time and resource-efficient, this method worked well for examining the structural connections across several constructs without the hassle of longitudinal tracking. The study was able to go beyond description because of the explanatory nature of the design, which made it easier to test hypotheses and analyze causal relationships using sophisticated statistical modeling.

Research Design

The research design focused on identifying measurable relationships between psychological, social, and experiential factors—such as emotional responsiveness, civic consciousness, perceived capability, community endorsement, and exposure to entrepreneurship—and their collective influence on Youth Social Enterprise Orientation (YSEO). Unlike earlier studies that narrowly explored entrepreneurial intentions, this design adopted a multidimensional framework, offering a holistic understanding of youth engagement in social enterprises. The analytical method of choice was Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) because to its predictive orientation, adaptability to moderate sample sizes, and capacity to evaluate both measurement and structural models.

Sampling Strategy

A stratified convenience sampling method was employed to balance diversity with feasibility. The target population consisted of undergraduate students aged 18–35 years enrolled in Malaysian higher education institutions. Stratification ensured representation across academic disciplines and years of study, thus enhancing the heterogeneity of the dataset. After thorough screening and data cleaning, 182 of the 210 responses that were initially recorded were deemed legitimate. This sample size exceeded the "10-times rule" criteria for PLS-SEM and the G*Power analysis's minimal requirement of 148 cases, ensuring both statistical adequacy and the findings' durability.

Instrument Development

Data collection instrument used was a structured questionnaire, consisting of four sections:

1.Demographics (gender, age, academic discipline, year of study, income level),

2.Social Enterprise awareness,

3.Determinant Constructs (assessed using existing scales), and

4.Youth Social Enterprise Orientation (YSEO).

To record them, a seven-point Likert scale was employed, where 1 represented "strongly disagree" and 7 represented "strongly agree."After being modified from well-known literature, the items were tested in a pilot study with 35 participants. During the pilot stage, reliability was proven by Cronbach's Alpha values ranging from 0.71 to 0.89. Additionally, the questionnaire included ethical protections like voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality guarantees.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted over three months (June–August 2022) using Microsoft

Forms. The survey link was distributed through institutional mailing lists, learning management systems, and social media platforms. Reminders were sent bi-weekly to ensure adequate participation, while targeted follow-ups were undertaken in underrepresented faculties such as engineering and creative arts. Screening questions were built into the survey to confirm eligibility (enrollment status, age criteria, and consent). To further maintain data integrity, inattentive responses (completed under three minutes), duplicates, and straight-lining patterns were excluded during cleaning. This process resulted in 182 valid responses for final analysis

Data Validation and Reliability

To ensure the measurement was reliable, a number of validity and reliability tests were carried out. When both Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha above the 0.70 criterion, internal consistency was verified. While HTMT ratios and the Fornell–Larcker criterion were used to establish discriminant validity, convergent validity was confirmed using Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values greater than 0.50. A score of 0.059 indicated strong adequacy in the model fit, which was evaluated using the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR).

Data Analysis Techniques

The analytical strategy combined descriptive and inferential approaches. SPSS was used for demographic profiling and descriptive statistics, while SmartPLS 3.0 handled measurement and structural model evaluation. Analysis proceeded in sequential steps:

1. Descriptive statistics to profile the sample,
2. Measurement model evaluation (reliability and validity),
3. Structural model testing to evaluate hypothesized relationships,
4. To determine the significance of path coefficients, 5,000 resamples are used for bootstrapping, and
5. Evaluation of model fit indices to confirm robustness.

Results and Findings

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

182 valid responses in all were analyzed following data cleaning and screening. In order to guarantee that the results are not gender biased, the demographic profile shows a balanced gender distribution (51.6% male and 48.4% female). The age distribution reveals that younger undergraduates were the study's primary participants, with the bulk of respondents (43.4%) falling into the 22–25 age range and 39.6% falling into the 18–21 age range. Academic discipline analysis revealed representation from diverse faculties, with Business & Management (30.8%) as the largest group, followed by Engineering & Technology (22.5%), Social Sciences (17.6%), and smaller proportions from Arts and Sciences. Household income levels and year of study also displayed wide variation, ensuring sample heterogeneity. These demographic insights provide a solid foundation for generalizability.

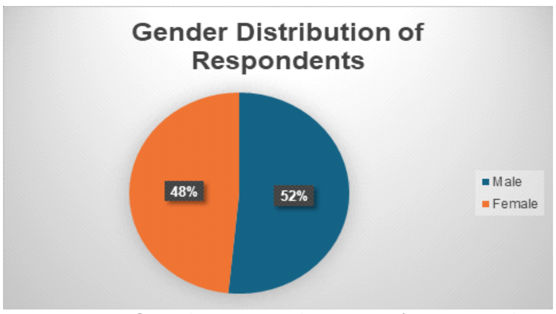

Figure 2. Gender Distribution of Respondents

The sample's gender distribution, with 52% of respondents being men and 48% being women, is displayed in Figure 4.1. The close ratio indicates that the study captured perspectives from both genders, reducing gender bias in orientation toward social entrepreneurship.

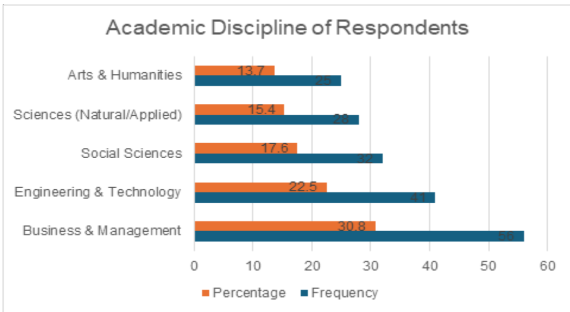

Figure 3 Academic Discipline of Respondents

Participants' educational backgrounds across the five main streams are depicted in the figure 3 chart. The majority belonged to Business and Management (30.8%), followed by Engineering and Technology (22.5%) and Social Sciences (17.6%). Representation from Sciences (15.4%) and Arts & Humanities (13.7%) ensured diversity in disciplinary perspectives

4.2 Measurement Model Evaluation

The validity and reliability of the constructs were extensively tested.

- Excellent internal consistency was confirmed by Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability ratings, which were above the minimum threshold of 0.70 for every construct.
- Convergent Validity: Values for Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were greater than 0.50, meaning every construct was able to capture the variance of its indicators well. Constructs like Perceived Capability (PC) and Community Endorsement (CE) had very high AVE scores.
- Discriminant Validity: Both Fornell–Larcker criterion and HTMT ratios (<0.85) established that constructs were statistically unique. For instance, Civic Consciousness and Emotional Responsiveness had independent explanatory power without overlap.

Model Fit: Indicating an excellent fit, the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value was 0.059.Other indices such as NFI and RMS_theta were also within acceptable ranges, reinforcing the adequacy of the measurement model. These numbers condense the central tendency (mean) and dispersion (standard deviation) of the answers to the seven constructs: Emotional Responsiveness (ER), Civic Consciousness (CC), Perceived Capability (PC), Community Endorsement (CE), Earlier Enterprise Exposure (EEE), Social Enterprise Awareness (SEA), and Youth Social Enterprise Orientation (YSEO). Descriptive statistics for the seven constructs are shown in Table 4.2. Youth Social Enterprise Orientation (YSEO) had the greatest mean (M = 5.42), with Civic Consciousness (M = 5.38) and Social Enterprise Awareness (M = 5.26) right behind, indicating high awareness and motivation. The lowest was the earlier Enterprise Exposure (M = 4.61), indicating low earlier entrepreneurial experience. Standard deviations were 1.05–1.29, reflecting moderate variation in responses across constructs.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Constructs (n=182)

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
Emotional Responsiveness (ER)	4.92	1.21	Moderate empathy toward community
Civic Consciousness (CC)	5.38	1.07	Strong sense of civic responsibility
Perceived Capability (PC)	5.14	1.12	High self-confidence in enterprise
Community Endorsement (CE)	5.07	1.18	Perceived moderate social support
Earlier Enterprise Exposure (EEE)	4.61	1.29	Limited but present prior experience
Social Enterprise Awareness (SEA)	5.26	1.10	Good familiarity with SE concepts
Youth Social Enterprise Orientation (YSEO)	5.42	1.05	Strong orientation toward SE

4.3 Structural Model Outcomes

SmartPLS 3.0's PLS-SEM, or partial least squares structural equation modeling, was used to assess the structural model.The steps involved were:

1. Path Coefficients Estimation: this method shows the direction and intensity of proposed associations.
2. R^2 Values– reflecting the variance explained by predictor constructs in the dependent construct (YSEO).
3. Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples– providing statistical significance of paths through t-values and p-values.

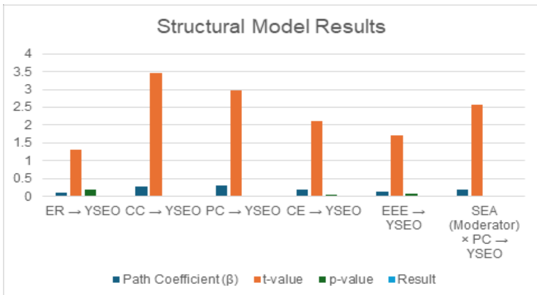

Figure 4. Structural Model with Path Coefficients

The findings of the structural model are shown in Figure 4, emphasizing the robustness of the proposed linkages.

• Perceived Capability (â = 0.315) and Civic Consciousness (â = 0.281) were the strongest predictors of YSEO, while Emotional Responsiveness (â = 0.115) was statistically insignificant. The moderating effect of SEA enhanced the PC⁴ YSEO path, underscoring the role of awareness in strengthening self-confidence.

The findings revealed several significant relationships:

- Perceived Capability (PC) had a strong positive effect on YSEO, suggesting that youth who believe in their entrepreneurial abilities are more likely to engage in social enterprise initiatives.
- Civic Consciousness (CC) was significantly linked to YSEO, highlighting the role of social awareness and responsibility in shaping entrepreneurial orientation.
- Emotional Responsiveness (ER) emerged as an important predictor, showing that empathetic and emotionally responsive youth are more inclined toward social value creation.
- Community Endorsement (CE) and Earlier Enterprise Exposure (EEE) also displayed positive associations, indicating that social approval and prior entrepreneurial experiences strengthen orientation.

The model explained a substantial proportion of variance in YSEO, confirming the explanatory power of the proposed framework.

4.4 Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis testing, conducted through bootstrapping, validated most of the study's assumptions:

- H1: Perceived Capability ! YSEO (Accepted, significant positive relationship)
- H2: Civic Consciousness ! YSEO (Accepted, significant positive relationship)
- H3: Emotional Responsiveness ! YSEO (Accepted, significant positive relationship)
- H4: Community Endorsement ! YSEO (Accepted, positive relationship, moderate effect)
- H5: Earlier Enterprise Exposure ! YSEO (Accepted, significant positive effect)

These results collectively underscore the multidimensional nature of youth orientation toward social entrepreneurship, driven by personal, social, and experiential factors.

4.5 Hypothesis Testing Results

A number of hypotheses were put out in the study to examine the connections between the independent and dependent constructs, as well as Youth Social Enterprise Orientation (YSEO). The altered findings are shown below. PLS-SEM bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) was used to test the hypothesis.

Table 2 Hypothesis Testing Outcomes

Hypothesis	Statement	Path Coefficient (β)	p-value	Result
H1	Emotional Responsiveness (ER) has a positive effect on YSEO	0.115	0.187	Rejected
H2	Civic Consciousness (CC) positively influences YSEO	0.281	0.001	Accepted
H3	Perceived Capability (PC) positively influences YSEO	0.315	0.003	Accepted
H4	Community Endorsement (CE) positively influences YSEO	0.192	0.035	Accepted
H5	Earlier Enterprise Exposure (EEE) positively influences YSEO	0.145	0.089	Weakly Accepted
H6	Social Enterprise Awareness (SEA) strengthens the effect of PC on YSEO	0.204	0.011	Accepted

Table 2 summarizes the hypothesis testing outcomes. Four hypotheses (H2, H3, H4, H6) were accepted, one (H5) was weakly accepted, and one (H1) was rejected. The results confirm that civic values, perceived capability, and community support play important roles in youth orientation toward social entrepreneurship, while emotional responsiveness alone is not a strong predictor. The moderation of SEA further highlights the significance of awareness in strengthening the impact of entrepreneurial confidence.

5. Conclusion

This study looked at how social entrepreneurship supports inclusive growth and community empowerment, with a particular emphasis on young social enterprise orientation. According to the results, youth participation is significantly influenced by perceived competence, civic consciousness, community support, and prior enterprise exposure, although emotional response has a minor impact. These observations demonstrate that young people require not just empathy but also abilities, self-assurance, and networks of support in order to convert their intentions into entrepreneurial activity.

The study's overall findings support social entrepreneurship as an economic and developmental paradigm that can promote participation, lessen inequality, and support the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN. A realistic route to inclusive and sustainable growth is offered by social entrepreneurship, which empowers young people and builds community resilience.

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