








How Does University Support Influence Social Entrepreneurship Intention Among Malaysian University Students?

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Abstract. Scholars have acknowledged the influence of university support on students' entrepreneurial intention and behavior. However, the extended literature showed the relationship between university support and social entrepreneurship intention to be inconsistent. To further the understanding of this issue, this paper attempts to examine how university support influences social entrepreneurship intention among 206 university students in Malaysia. Through a structural equation modelling analysis, the authors confirmed that university support - business development support, concept support and education support directly and indirectly related to attitudinal constructs and intention. Overall, this research suggests university should be a great platform for students not only to excel in entrepreneurial theory but also in practicality to capture entrepreneurial opportunities.

Keywords: Business Development Support · Social Entrepreneurship · University Support

1 Introduction

Social entrepreneurship (SE) is an innovative entrepreneurial approach that uses business skills to undertake entrepreneurial activities that address socioeconomic problems and pursue social values. However, the prevalence rate of SE activities in Malaysia is less than 2% of the entire population which is far behind compared to other regions. The fact that SE levels are low is a 'problem' for society, as the country may be missing out on an innovative way to support its citizens. To be a developed nation, innovation will be one indicator to ensure the country achieves its aims. Although SE is useful, involvement is very low. One demanding question emerges: how can the level of SE commitment and

participation be increased? The dominant views of [1–4] suggest that entrepreneurship can be boosted via empowerment among potential social entrepreneurs.

Besides educating citizens to be innovative, the role of social support in stimulating behavioral intentions to be a social entrepreneur needs to be accentuated. In general, every social entrepreneur requires support before starting up a new enterprise. In Malaysia, most social entrepreneurs use networks (i.e., universities and structure) to generate, discuss and exchange new ideas [5]. Therefore, the enthusiasm of the social entrepreneur's network often influences idea development and solution discussions for social enterprise creation. Notably, support is an important factor for university students to become social entrepreneurs. The extended literature showed the relationship between US and SEI to be inconsistent. Some attempted to produce positive findings [6] whilst others demonstrated there is no significant relationship between US elements and students' intentions [7]. Furthermore, [2] fails to recognize the type of support the student will obtain from their university if they choose SE as a career preference [3]. The incapability of universities to thoroughly recognize the support can negatively impact students' intentions as well as students' involvement in entrepreneurial activities [8]. This may fail the institutional efforts to support entrepreneurial ecosystems [6] since students are the prime candidates for entrepreneurial activities as they prepare to enroll in the job market [9].

To help bring clarity to the literature regarding the relationship between support and university students' entrepreneurial intention, we expanded the existing SEI model to identify support elements that may influence university students' SE inclinations. Prior research has documented the US as the main factor that may affect students' SE attitudes and intentions [10]. In this article, we aim to make two main contributions to the SEI literature. First, we examine how the presence of the US influences SE attitudes and intentions in Malaysia. This contribution may enrich the understanding to facilitate student entrepreneurship by providing them with more useful and effective support networks. Further, the findings of this research may help explain previous inconsistent research results on the relationship between support and university students' SEI. From the practical perspective, we identify support may help in designing more effective SE educational programs and policies that may foster the desired entrepreneurial actions from university students.

2 Theoretical Background and Hypothesis

Past studies have introduced several conceptual models to understand SEI. Among these models is the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) [11] and the SEI Model [12]. Both models have been robustly tested and validated in the literature and these theories provide comparable interpretations of SEI. TRA is broadly accepted and used. TRA is a theory that has been used in the entrepreneurship intention domain and views intentions as significant predictors of behavior, mainly in the case of planned and goal-oriented behavior. Drawing the TRA as the domain, it is adequate to function as the theoretical background for SEI formation [2, 3, 13, 14]. In this study, we identified TRA-based constructs namely Attitude toward SE (ATSE) and Subjective Norm (SN) as mediators [15]. Following a similar trend, [3] and [9] have added one or more additional exogenous variables combined with TRA-based constructs in predicting SEI.

[12] model is the first model introduced in the SE context. Drawing [12] model into the domain of SE research, it seems to be suitable as the supportive model for SEI formation. Although [12] constructs were being accessed as the proxy of the TRA model, to date, no empirical evidence fully validates the model, but [14] has partially validated the model with varied findings. Yet even when [11] TRA and [12] SEI Models are homologous, the two models are not identical. A key distinction might be found in the way both models assess the likelihood of action. As we know entrepreneurial intentions are determined by entrepreneurial attitudes, which in turn are affected by exogenous influences. But [15, 16] suggested that two factors (ATSE and SN) in TRA, in as much as perceived desirability and perceived feasibility in [12] SEI Model are also collectively regarded as entrepreneurial attitudes in the context of entrepreneurship [17]. Therefore, the combination of both theories is important in establishing the support, attitude, and credibility of entrepreneurial action for the students.

2.1 The Relationship Between ATSE, SN, and SEI

A vast amount of research has considered the relationship concerning these attitudinal constructs of TPB as the determinant of SEI [9, 15]. First, ATSE is the favorable or unfavorable attitude shown by the respondent to dealing with the tested SE behavior. Much empirical evidence confirms that ATSE has a positive effect on SEI. The effect of attitude on SEI is significantly stronger for individuals who stay in the USA than for those in China. This signifies that attitude is less significant in China than in the USA in determining SEI. In line with the empirical evidence, this present study understands the ATSE as the degree to which the individual holds a positive or negative personal evaluation of becoming a social entrepreneur. Therefore, the classical TRA assumes a positive effect exists between attitude toward a specific behavior (i.e., social entrepreneurship) and intentions-related work here.

SN is the controversial construct of TRA. Some empirical analyses showed that SN is a significant predictor of intention and behavior. Other studies have shown the opposite. It is also verified that SN influences SEI among university students [9]. Students have always been influenced by those who are close to them; therefore, choosing the right surroundings (i.e., reference group) will assist them to rise the SN. These reference groups could be lecturers, parents, friends, classmates, or other relatives [18]. This present study measures how far these reference groups can encourage students' opinions, ideas, and desire to participate or not participate in SE activities. Based on the preceding discussion and applying it to SE, the following hypotheses were developed:

H1: There is a positive relationship between ATSE and SEI.

H2: There is a positive relationship between SN and SEI.

2.2 The Relationship Between University Support, ATSE, SN, and SEI

University support (US) refers to the students' perceptions of being assisted by their university to foster entrepreneurial activity. It is confirmed that university support plays an important role in promoting entrepreneurship. Reference [19] for instance, documented that university students who took entrepreneurship classes reported a higher interest in

becoming entrepreneurs than those who did not take it. Moreover, she found that participation in entrepreneurship programs during university raises students' entrepreneurial attitudes and intentions. There are three dimensions reflecting the university support namely educational support, concept development support and business development support. All elements significantly influence entrepreneurial attitudes and intentions [8].

Educational support (ES) refers to the provision of general knowledge and skills needed to start a new business. For instance, the entrepreneurial curriculum that is designed and developed in the syllabus should be able to support the student's survivor. Thus, it must include the extant views of university knowledge support. Concept development support (CDS) refers to the provision of awareness, motivation, and business ideas in the early stages of the entrepreneurial process such as preparation for business registration and discussion of new ideas. Meanwhile, business development support (BDS) refers to the provision of support given to start-ups in the later stages of the entrepreneurial process including business incubators and physical resources.

Empirically, the relationship between US and ATSE has varied depending on the study's setting and types of support [20]. For example, [6] confirmed that support and ATSE are positively related among 281 respondents. On the other hand, [2] claimed that university support has its limitations but can have a role in offering valuable insight into the challenges involved in becoming an entrepreneur. Similarly, [20] mention that university courses also guide, justify, and explain a student's attitude and subsequent behaviors.

In a different development, SN is the perception of social pressure whether to engage or not to engage in the behavior [11]. The literature on entrepreneurship distinguishes the support based on the network among the entrepreneurial circles. It means that those who have close personal relationships and interact frequently with others are considered to have strong networks. On the other hand, those who have a big gap emotionally and have infrequent interactions with others are considered to have weaker network ties. The students believe the support from the university will help them in dealing with a new situation or behavior. Likewise, the authors assume that SN contributes to intermediate the interplay between university support and the intention to become a social entrepreneur.

The role of SN is important in influencing an individual's association between intention and behavior. At the same time, SN is also identified as a mediator [5]. The literature confirmed that the strength of contextual factors (i.e., support) as a predictor of behavioral intentions (or actual behavior) is mediated through SN [6]. It is likely that support effectively satisfies an entrepreneur's social needs. In other words, without university support (i.e., exposure to entrepreneurial class, entrepreneurial exhibition, industrial-university engagement), the students have no guidance or intention to becoming a social entrepreneurs.

In a separate study, [21] illustrated a direct relationship between support and personal attraction towards entrepreneurship. Another empirical study by [22], contended that social support has an indirect effect on the entrepreneurial intention of individuals. They found that the occurrence of support indirectly affects entrepreneurial intention. As such, it was advised that support directly affects the 'perceived desirability towards

entrepreneurship' (i.e., ATSE), and subsequently positively affects entrepreneurial intentions.

In all, full university support is expected to provide students with the knowledge, mastery experience, and resources to increase their self-efficacy, thus influencing their entrepreneurial attitude and intention to start a business [8]. Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

H3: There is a positive relationship between US and SEI.

H4: There is a positive relationship between the US and ATSE.

H5: There is a positive relationship between US and SN.

H6: ATSE mediates the relationship between US and SEI.

H7: SN mediates the relationship between US and SEI.

3 Methodology

The population is defined as “the complete number of components (i.e., organizations, individuals, or items) that are selected to be measured as the study sample” [23]. For this present study, approximately 1,266 registered for the entrepreneurship subject at Universiti Teknologi MARA, Melaka Branch, Malaysia session 2020/2021 students represent the population. The entire population consisted of undergraduate students from different disciplines. Selecting undergraduates is a good model because being an undergraduate is a precursor to being an entrepreneur [9] which is the primary reason why they are used as the sample population in investigating the SEI.

Numerous past studies have also surveyed students to develop SEI formation [1, 2, 9]. Online surveys were self-administrated for 250 students. Data collection took place in October 2020 and lasted for four weeks. We chose students who registered for the entrepreneurship subject as the sample because they have basic knowledge of entrepreneurial activities. Although SE definition and concept remain debated in the academic field, we believe by selecting these students helps to reduce non-response errors. The current study employs the probability sampling category. Probability sampling is an approach in which every member of the population listed in the sampling frame could be selected as a sample. In this study, a simple random sampling design is employed. It refers to sampling plans where the sample has an equal probability of being chosen. A simple random sample is meant to be an unbiased representation of a group [23]. We were able to get 206 responses from the respondents (see Table 1).

3.1 Measurement of the Theoretical Constructs

This study employed a self-reported questionnaire. The survey questionnaire was divided into 4 (four) sections. The questions in section A covered the University Support (US) reflecting the dimensions namely educational support, concept development support and business development support which was adapted and improvised from [8]. While in section B, the questions covered include attitudes towards social entrepreneurship (ATSE) and subjective norms (SN) which were adapted and modified from [2, 24]. Thereafter, it was edited to suit the context of this study. The questions in section C cover social entrepreneurship intentions (SEI), the items were borrowed and improvised from

Table 1. Demographic Profiles

| Category | Items | Total | Percentage |
|-------------------------|--------------|-------|------------|
| Gender | Male | 38 | 18.45 |
| | Female | 168 | 81.55 |
| Age | 18–22 | 82 | 39.80 |
| | 23–27 | 116 | 56.30 |
| | 28–32 | 6 | 2.91 |
| | 33 and above | 2 | 0.99 |
| Education Qualification | Diploma | 39 | 18.93 |
| | Degree | 167 | 81.07 |
| Family Background | Business | 79 | 38.35 |
| | Non-Business | 127 | 61.65 |

[24]. The instrument was using a 7-Likert scale ranging from 1 (Completely Disagree) to 7 (Completely Agree) which was used to measure the items. Lastly, Section D covers the demographic profile such as gender, age, education qualification, and family background.

4 Result and Discussion

Based on the initial assessment of the measurement model (outer model), it was discovered that the data met all the criteria for an appropriate assessment of the measurement model. The value for each construct in the Composite Reliability (CR) already exceeded the minimum threshold value of 0.7. In comparison, the Cronbach alpha values were likewise good, with all of them exceeding the model's threshold value of 0.6. As a result, all constructs are regarded as highly reliable. Adequate convergent validity is attained when a construct's Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value is at least 0.5 [25], suggesting that the construct can explain more than 50% of the variance among the scale indicators. According to Table 1, all the constructs have an AVE value greater than 0.5. Overall, the data and construct employed in the study meet all the requirements for evaluating the measurement model based on indicator reliability, internal consistency, and convergent validity.

The discriminant validity is shown in Table 3 using the Fornell-Lacker criterion. This criterion has been widely used to assess the degree of shared variance between the model's latent variables. According to the data in Table 3, the square root of AVE as diagonal elements is greater than the off-diagonal correlations in both rows and columns. The results show that each construct can capture a distinct phenomenon that is not represented by any other construct in the model. In other words, the construct is not strongly connected with other tests designed to assess theoretically distinct phenomena [25].

Table 2. Measurement Model (Outer Model)

| Constructs | Items | Loading | Cronbach Alpha | CR | AVE |
|------------|-------|---------|----------------|-------|-------|
| SEI | SEI1 | 0.934 | 0.97 | 0.977 | 0.894 |
| | SEI2 | 0.938 | | | |
| | SEI3 | 0.949 | | | |
| | SEI4 | 0.952 | | | |
| | SEI5 | 0.955 | | | |
| US | US1 | 0.725 | 0.917 | 0.93 | 0.626 |
| | US2 | 0.841 | | | |
| | US3 | 0.852 | | | |
| | US4 | 0.677 | | | |
| | US5 | 0.810 | | | |
| | US6 | 0.893 | | | |
| | US7 | 0.848 | | | |
| | US8 | 0.829 | | | |
| | US9 | 0.828 | | | |
| | US10 | 0.857 | | | |
| | US11 | 0.894 | | | |
| | US12 | 0.883 | | | |
| ATSE | ATSE1 | 0.794 | 0.924 | 0.943 | 0.767 |
| | ATSE2 | 0.888 | | | |
| | ATSE3 | 0.901 | | | |
| | ATSE4 | 0.891 | | | |
| | ATSE5 | 0.902 | | | |
| SN | SN1 | 0.949 | 0.930 | 0.951 | 0.829 |
| | SN2 | 0.819 | | | |
| | SN3 | 0.925 | | | |
| | SN4 | 0.943 | | | |

Notes: SEI = Social Entrepreneurship, US = University Support, ATSE = Attitude Towards Social Entrepreneurship, SN = Subjective Norm, CR = Composite Reliability AVE = Average Variance Extracted

For the hypothesis testing, a bootstrapping analysis was performed based on the 206 (82.4%) completed returned questionnaires. Table 4 demonstrates that ATSE significantly and positively influences the SEI at a 1% level with a p-value equal to 0.000 and the value of LL and UL is between 0.502 and 0.728 which further supports the hypothesis (H1). The effect size analysis also shows that positive ATSE highly affects

Table 3. Fornell-Lacker Criterion

| Constructs | ATSE | SEI | SN | US |
|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| ATSE | 0.876 | | | |
| SEI | 0.824 | 0.946 | | |
| SN | 0.646 | 0.757 | 0.911 | |
| US | 0.572 | 0.648 | 0.502 | 0.725 |

Notes: SEI = Social Entrepreneurship, US = University Support, ATSE = Attitude Towards Social Entrepreneurship, SN = Subjective Norm

the SEI ($f^2 = 0.866$), hence H1 is supported. For the H2, findings from Table 4 display that SN positively and significantly influence the SEI at a 1% level with a p-value equal to 0.000 and the value of LL and UL is between 0.284 and 0.533. The effect size equal to 0.419 also further supports the significant effect of SN on the SEI.

From the analysis, it was found that university support which includes education support, concept development support and business development support has a significant positive relationship with SEI. University support significantly influences the SEI at a 5% level with a p-value equal to 0.016. Additional observations at the LL and UL corroborate the significant findings, indicating that the values of LL and UL for the US did not oscillate between 0 and 1. Despite showing a small effect size ($f^2 = 0.038$), university support was found to affect SEI significantly. Based on the H3 results, it can be presumed that all the variables are moving in the same direction. It indicates that an improvement in university support will eventually improve the student's SEI.

Likewise, the findings also show that the US significantly and positively influence the ATSE at a 1% level with a p-value equal to 0.000 (H4). The value of LL and UL further confirm the findings since the value between LL and UL did not hang between the value of 0 and 1, hence supporting Hypothesis 2. Table 5 also shows that the effect size for the relationship between the US and the ATSE is considered large since the value is more than 0.35. The larger the effect size, the stronger the link between the constructs, hence suggesting that university support highly influence the ATSE.

As for the H5, the result in Table 4 shows that the US significantly and positively influences the SN at a 1% level with a p-value equal to 0.000. To further confirm the findings, from the table, the value of LL and UL is between 0.372 and 0.602, hence suggesting that the value did not hang between the value of 0 and 1. Thus, H5 is supported. Further analysis of the effect size provides stronger evidence to support the relationship between US and SN. A larger effect size with a value of more than 0.3 demonstrates that university support does have a strong influence on SN. The strong relationship between the construct suggests that the stronger the university support would cause entrepreneurship to be perceived as a favorable career choice supported by society, thus enhancing students' attitude to start their own businesses.

As for the H6 and H7 for the mediation analysis, the results from the table demonstrate that ATSE and SN significantly explain the relationship between university support and SEI. In other words, after controlling for the ATSE and SN, the total effect of university

support is explained by the indirect effect through ATSE and SN. Based on the result, it can be implied that mediator variables not only have a significant relationship between them and the dependent variable but also to some extent has a direct relationship between the independent and dependent variable [25]. To increase the student’s intentions, ATSE and SN must be discharged and used in a way that is directly linked to potential influence on SEI, as based on the results, SEI among students cannot be improved without the significant influence of ATSE and SN.

Meanwhile, the adjusted R² for ATSE and SN and SEI shows the overall model predictive power of the model which is equal to 32.4%, 24.8% and 77.1% respectively. The results show that the US has a substantial influence on ATSE, SN, and SEI. According to [25], the values of 0.70, 0.50 and 0.25 respectively describe substantial, moderate, or weak levels of predictive accuracy. However, according to [25], an adjusted R² of more than 0.20 is regarded as highly acceptable in the field of social science studies because behaviors cannot be accurately predicted. Lastly, the current study also assesses the predictive relevance (Q²) of the path model. The result in Table 5 presents the value of Q² equal to 0.248 for ATSE, 0.203 for SN and 0.685 for SEI. Since the values of Q² are larger than 0, it signifies that the exogenous constructs have predictive relevance for the endogenous construct under investigation [25].

Table 4. Bootstrapping Analysis

| Hypothesis | Path | Beta | Standard Error | T-Value | P-Value | UL | LL |
|------------|---------------------|-------|----------------|---------|---------|-------|-------|
| H1 | ATSE - > SEI | 0.625 | 0.619 | 8.989 | 0.000 | 0.502 | 0.728 |
| H2 | SN - > SEI | 0.412 | 0.416 | 5.359 | 0.000 | 0.284 | 0.533 |
| H3 | US - > SEI | 0.116 | 0.113 | 2.145 | 0.016 | 0.209 | 0.032 |
| H4 | US - > ATSE | 0.572 | 0.574 | 9.812 | 0.000 | 0.461 | 0.655 |
| H5 | US - > SN | 0.502 | 0.505 | 7.324 | 0.000 | 0.372 | 0.602 |
| H6 | US - > ATSE - > SEI | 0.358 | 0.355 | 6.735 | 0.000 | 0.272 | 0.444 |
| H7 | US - > SN - > SEI | 0.207 | 0.209 | 4.610 | 0.000 | 0.139 | 0.288 |

Table 5. Adjusted R-SquareQ2

| Adjusted R-Square | | Q2 | |
|-------------------|-------|------|-------|
| ATSE | 0.324 | ATSE | 0.248 |
| SN | 0.248 | SN | 0.203 |
| SEI | 0.771 | US | 0.519 |
| | | SEI | 0.685 |

Notes:SEI = Social Entrepreneurship, US = University Support, ATSE = Attitude To-wards Social Entrepreneurship, SN = Subjective Norm

Table 6. Effect size (f²)

| Constructs | ATSE | SN | SEI |
|------------|-------|-------|-------|
| US | 0.487 | 0.337 | 0.038 |
| ATSE | | | 0.866 |
| SN | | | 0.419 |

Notes:SEI = Social Entrepreneurship, US = University Support, ATSE = Attitude Towards Social Entrepreneurship, SN = Subjective Norm

5 Conclusion

A prospective social entrepreneur like a university student should rely on the support provided by institutions for advice, knowledge, and resources. This knowledge of managerial and business processes might not be available in the public domain [5] and is anticipated to provide a competitive advantage and a better chance for those individuals' new business survival. Notably, the US is an important antecedent for students becoming social entrepreneurs. Previous evidence confirmed that ATSE and SN have a positive effect on SEI; presumably, people with 'strong' attitudes demonstrate a stronger association between their attitudes, norms, and behavior, while those with 'weak' attitudes tend to lack such association.

Despite the contributions yielded from this present study, the findings should be interpreted within the limitations of the methodology employed. Firstly, this present study applied the method of quantitative research design, and the data were collected via a questionnaire survey. Although quantitative research methods can be used to determine the degree to which students undertake behaviours, it limits the ability to examine the thoughts and feelings of research participants as well as the meaning that students ascribe to their experiences. It is recommended for future researchers use the mixed-method approach combining both quantitative and qualitative data to better explain SEI [26]. A combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses will reinforce findings related to support and students' entrepreneurial intention.

Secondly, this present study departed from prominent theories for understanding the SEI of TRA [11] and SEI Model [12]. The choice of these theories offers limited factors to be tested to understand SEI formation. It would be beneficial for future work to utilize other theories or models such as Social Cognitive Career Theory and Entrepreneurial Potential Model for understanding how intention should be formed.

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