

# Bridging The Intention–Action Gap: Psychological And Contextual Determinants Of Social Entrepreneurial Intention Among University Students



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## Abstract

Despite increasing interest in social entrepreneurship, many students who express prosocial values do not translate intention into venture creation. Drawing on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Social Cognitive Theory, this study examines psychological and contextual antecedents associated with Social Entrepreneurial Intention (SEI)-related dispositions among 713 university students. Exploratory factor analysis identifies four constructs: Empathy, Moral Obligation, Self-Efficacy, and Perceived Support. The overall scale demonstrates good reliability ( $\alpha = .833$ ), though factor-level reliability varies. Students report strong moral obligation ( $M = 3.984$ ) and self-efficacy ( $M = 3.917$ ), but lower perceived support ( $M = 3.459$ ). Correlation analysis shows moderate positive associations among all constructs, indicating theoretical coherence but construct distinctiveness. Findings reveal a clear intention–action gap, where internal motivation is not matched by perceived environmental support. The study contributes by positioning perceived support as a critical environmental enabler within SEI models and offers implications for entrepreneurship education, institutional design, and youth policy.

**Keywords:** Social entrepreneurial intention, empathy, moral obligation, self-efficacy, perceived support, TPB.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Social entrepreneurship is increasingly recognized as a mechanism for addressing complex societal challenges through market-based and hybrid solutions. Universities play a central role in cultivating future social entrepreneurs; however, strong prosocial orientation among students does not consistently translate into venture creation. This gap between intention and action remains underexplored in student populations.

Within this context, higher education institutions occupy a position of strategic importance. Beyond their traditional roles in knowledge transmission and disciplinary training, universities are increasingly recognized as engines for social transformation, charged with cultivating graduates who possess not only technical competence but also ethical grounding, critical consciousness, and commitment to the common good. This expanded mandate aligns naturally with the imperative to foster social entrepreneurship.

Existing research highlights empathy, moral values, and self-efficacy as important drivers of SEI, yet comparatively less attention has been given to perceived environmental support — a factor that may determine whether intention becomes behavior. This study addresses the following research question:

**RQ: What psychological and contextual factors shape students' readiness for social entrepreneurship, and where does the key constraint lie?**

By integrating TPB and Social Cognitive Theory, this research develops and empirically examines a four-factor model underlying SEI-related dispositions.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Extensive literature examines factors predicting entrepreneurial intention, primarily grounded in Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). TPB proposes that intention to perform a behavior is determined by: (1) attitudes toward the behavior (evaluation of likely outcomes), (2) subjective norms (perceived social pressure), and (3) perceived behavioral control (belief in capacity to execute the behavior).

Subsequent extensions of TPB have incorporated additional variables including personality characteristics, prior experience, environmental factors, and educational influences. This literature consistently demonstrates that entrepreneurial education positively predicts entrepreneurial intention.

However, limited research specifically examines how particular educational philosophies or value systems influence entrepreneurial intention. Most studies focus on discrete entrepreneurship courses rather than holistic educational traditions.

**Literature on Social Entrepreneurial Intention (SEI)** Research specifically on social entrepreneurial intention has flourished recently, with growing recognition that different factors may predict social versus traditional entrepreneurship.

A landmark study by Hockerts (2017) identified that prior experience with social organizations influences social entrepreneurial intention, mediated by four antecedent factors: empathy, self-efficacy, moral obligation, and perceived social support. This framework has been validated and extended in subsequent studies.

**Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses**

**Theory of Planned Behavior**

TPB proposes that intention is predicted by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991) In social entrepreneurship:

- Attitude → Empathy toward social issues
- Subjective norms → Moral obligation
- Perceived behavioral control → Self-efficacy

**Social Cognitive Theory**

Self-efficacy influences whether individuals believe they can perform entrepreneurial tasks (Bandura, 1986)

**Extending TPB: Perceived Support**

While TPB emphasizes social norms, SEI requires tangible backing (mentors, investors, institutions). Thus, perceived support is conceptualized as an environmental feasibility belief.

**Hypotheses Development**

Empathy provides affective motivation for social value creation.

**H1:** Empathy is positively associated with moral obligation.

**H2:** Empathy is positively associated with self-efficacy.

Moral obligation represents internalized social norms.

**H3:** Moral obligation is positively associated with self-efficacy.

**H4:** Moral obligation is positively associated with perceived support.

Self-efficacy strengthens confidence in mobilizing resources.

**H5:** Self-efficacy is positively associated with perceived support.

**3. METHODOLOGY**

**Sample and Procedure**

Data were collected from 713 university students using an 18-item questionnaire on a 5-point Likert scale. Data quality checks showed no missing values or duplicates

Exploratory factor analysis identified four constructs:

Five

Construct	Items	Description
Empathy	3	Emotional responsiveness toward disadvantaged people
Moral Obligation	4	Ethical responsibility to help others
Self-Efficacy	3	Belief in one's ability to address social problems
Perceived Support	3	Belief that others would support social ventures

items were reverse coded to control response bias

Reliability

Construct	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Empathy	.677
Moral Obligation	.713
Self-Efficacy	.605
Perceived Support	.592
Overall Scale	.833

**4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

**Descriptive Statistics**

Construct	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Moral Obligation	3.984	.582	High
Self-Efficacy	3.917	.546	Moderate-High
Empathy	3.731	.697	Moderate-High
Perceived Support	3.459	.611	Moderate (Lowest)

Students exhibit strong normative commitment and confidence but weaker belief in external support

**Correlation Analysis**

Constructs	R
Empathy – Moral Obligation	.519
Moral Obligation – Self-Efficacy	.576
Self-Efficacy – Perceived Support	.461
Empathy – Perceived Support	.344

All correlations are positive and moderate, supporting hypotheses H1–H5 and construct distinctiveness

All factors show positive correlations, supporting their collective role in predicting social entrepreneurial intention - Moderate correlations (no correlations exceeding 0.60) support discriminant validity—factors represent distinct constructs - Strongest correlation between Moral Obligation and Self-Efficacy suggests students who feel ethical obligation also believe in capacity to act - Weakest correlation between Empathy and Perceived Support suggests that emotional response to suffering does not necessarily translate to expectation of institutional support

## 5. DISCUSSION

### **The findings reveal a classic intention–action gap:**

students possess internal drivers (values, empathy, confidence) but perceive weaker external backing. Perceived support emerges as the weakest construct, suggesting institutional ecosystems play a pivotal enabling role.

This research carries particular significance for India's development trajectory

**Employment Challenge:** India faces acute unemployment affecting hundreds of millions. While traditional employment growth has slowed, social entrepreneurship offers distinctive pathway to inclusive employment creation, particularly for marginalized populations. Research demonstrates that Jesuit institutions can systematically prepare students for this pathway.

**Educational Innovation:** As Indian higher education expands to accommodate population growth, quality concerns emerge regarding whether students develop capacities for independent thinking, innovation, and social responsibility. This research demonstrates that value-based education grounded in explicit commitment to social justice can address these concerns while maintaining academic rigor.

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