

The Role of Social Entrepreneurship: A Comparative Study of Chinese Youth

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Abstract: This study examines the concept of social entrepreneurship and social enterprises by investigating how Chinese youths perceive them and whether there is any difference between male and female Chinese youths regarding their perceptions. According to the results, the participants had favorable view of social enterprises. Male participants were more likely than female participants to have the favorable view. The participants had favorable view of social enterprises. Female participants were slightly more likely than male participants to favorably view careers in social entrepreneurship. The results have important policy implications.

Keywords: Social Entrepreneurship, Chinese Youth, Social Enterprise, Perception, Attitude, Gender.

I. INTRODUCTION

Social enterprises such as Grameen Bank, Fair Trade USA, SEWA, Me to We, TeachAIDS, Aarong, Change.org, and BRAC have been hailed for their efforts to achieve social goals through business activity [1]. In contrast to NGOs, social enterprises enter business ventures to address various social issues such as unemployment, pollution, poverty, and malnutrition, among others. This merger of economic activity and social orientation has attracted special attention to social entrepreneurship. That is, the business model of social enterprises aims at generating income by trade to be used for social welfare. In this way, social entrepreneurship adds value to society and is a growing global trend.

Studies have found that social enterprises have existed in diverse but relatively inaccessible ways [1]. Many researchers have observed that the term "social enterprise" came into existence in the 1970s but that it was in the 1980s that closer attention was paid to them. In the beginning, social enterprises were a new concept and focused mainly on comprehensive transparency and ethical practices for some predefined social goals or missions. Many studies have stated that social enterprises focus on business ideas that keep society in mind [2]. Together with transparency and accountability, sound ethical practices, social missions, and full control over business operations, social enterprises also seek to minimize reliance on external funds, both private and public [4], which addresses the issue of uncertainty and unreliability facing many NGOs [3].

Many countries have encouraged social entrepreneurship. For instance, the U.K. and other European countries have looked to social enterprises to address the unemployment crisis since the 1970s, with some representative social enterprises being Charity Bank and Camara. Finland (2004), Italy (2005), and the Czech Republic (2008) have recognized and defined social enterprises [4]. Similarly, the U.S. has embraced social enterprises since the 1970s, allowing the concept of "social or environmental undertaking by means of business approaches" with particular guidelines.

Given the potential of social enterprises, including missions with social values, respective opportunities, innovation, freedom of financial resources, all-inclusive transparency, and accountability, many Asian and African countries have also promoted social entrepreneurship, including Zambia, Kenya, Ghana, China, Thailand, and the Philippines.

Some studies have found that people perceive social entrepreneurship differently. For example, women may be more likely to appreciate social enterprises [6], and some reasons may be the capability of social enterprises to address important social issues such as poverty and malnutrition [7]. According to a survey, 70% of people appreciate social enterprises for their daily consumption [8]. Many marketing studies have revealed that women set their sights more on the company when making purchases [5] and seek specific reasons for going with a particular company [7]. Many experiments have been conducted to measure buying patterns [6], but various factors such as economics, social attitudes, gender, and race, among others, make it difficult to arrive at a general consensus [8]. In addition, variables such as product quality, company reputation, word-of-mouth from customers, and price affect people's willingness to buy products/services from certain companies [8]. In terms of product quality and company reputation, people prefer products or services that go beyond their expectations [10]. People even spend more than necessary to receive higher quality [1]. For example, women emphasize quality when it comes to produces and services for their children [2]. In fact, many studies have shown that quality consciousness is a core dimension [7]. On the other hand, the notion of company reputation is crucial in marketing [3]. For example, Apple's iPhone is a product that can demonstrate the financial status of the user [9]. Positive ratings and consistent performance increase company reputation, which in turn increases sales of the company's products or services [15]. In terms of word-of-mouth from customers, 85% of all transactions take place as a result of word-of-mouth (referral) activity [11]. On the other hand, negative word-of-mouth publicity about the company or products can be detrimental [12]. Further, price plays a key role in affecting buying decisions [18]. For example, developing nations or poor people may be more likely to seek social enterprises for lower prices [13]. By contrast, rich people may be willing to pay extra for goods or services from a particular company. In this way, price plays a big part in consumers' purchase decisions [14].

Social enterprises enhance lives of ordinary people [20], and therefore it is imperative to gain a better understanding of this increasingly important social trend. As such, this study examines the research questions of 1) how Chinese youths view social entrepreneurship, 2) whether there is any gender difference in this view, 3) whether Chinese youths are interested in pursuing social entrepreneurship as a career, and 4) what whether there is any gender difference in this view.

II. METHODS

A total of 68 Chinese youths below the age of 18 participated in this survey. These individuals included 38 males and 30 females. All participants were surveyed in Liaoning Province, China. The survey was conducted at a large railroad station targeting waiting passengers. A total of 90 individuals approached for the final sample (a 76% response rate). The survey was conducted in June 2016. The four items for the general view were as follows: "Using offerings from social enterprises would help society," "I would be satisfied using products from social enterprises," "I will use offerings of social enterprises," and "Social enterprises contribute to society." The four items for the career view were as follows: "I will consider a career in social entrepreneurship," "I would be satisfied with a career in social entrepreneurship," "A career in social entrepreneurship will contribute to society," and "People should pursue careers in social entrepreneurship."

Means and standard deviations were assessed, and the independent-samples t-test was conducted.

III. RESULTS

A. Q1

The participants had favorable view of social enterprises. The mean for the sample was 3.1728 (SD=.86198). The mean for male youths was 3.2829 (SD=.89701), whereas that for female youths was 3.0333 (SD=.80872). Table 1 shows the results. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (.880).

TABLE 1: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Score	68	1.00	4.75	3.1728	.86198
Valid N (listwise)	68				

gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
score male	38	3.2829	.89701	.14551
female	30	3.0333	.80872	.14765

B. Q2

Male participants (3.2829 (SD=.89701)) showed a higher mean than female participants (3.0333 (SD=.80872)). As shown in Table 2, the results of the independent-samples t-test indicate no significant difference between the two groups ($t(66)=1.189, p=.239$).

TABLE 2: THE INDEPENDENT-SAMPLES T-TEST

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper	
score Equal variances assumed	.037	.848	1.189	66	.239	.24956	.20988	-.16947	.66859	
Equal variances not assumed			1.204	64.788	.233	.24956	.20730	-.16448	.66360	

C. Q3

The participants had favorable view of social enterprises. The mean for the sample was 3.6029 (SD=.73459). The mean for male youths was 3.5855 (SD=.81431), whereas that for female youths was 3.6250 (SD=.63229). Table 3 shows the results. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (.870).

TABLE 3: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Score	68	1.00	4.75	3.6029	.73459
Valid N (listwise)	68				

gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
score male	38	3.5855	.81431	.13210
female	30	3.6250	.63229	.11544

D. Q4

Male participants (3.5855 (SD=.81431)) showed a lower mean than female participants (3.6250 (SD=.63229)). As shown in Table 4, the results of the independent-samples t-test indicate no significant difference between the two groups ($t(66)=-.218, p=.828$).

TABLE 4: THE INDEPENDENT-SAMPLES T-TEST

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper	

score	Equal variances assumed	.607	.439	-.218	66	.828	-.03947	.18070	-.40025	.32130
	Equal variances not assumed			-.225	65.989	.823	-.03947	.17543	-.38973	.31079

IV. CONCLUSIONS

This study examines the concept of social entrepreneurship and social enterprises by investigating how Chinese students perceive them and whether there is any difference between male and female Chinese students regarding their perceptions.

According to the results, The participants had favorable view of social enterprises (3.1728 (SD=.86198)). The mean for male youths was 3.2829 (SD=.89701), whereas that for female youths was 3.0333 (SD=.80872). There was no significant difference between the two groups ($t(66) = 1.189, p=.239$). The participants had favorable view of social enterprises (3.6029 (SD=.73459)). The mean for male youths was 3.5855 (SD=.81431), whereas that for female youths was 3.6250 (SD=.63229). There was no significant difference between the two groups ($t(66) = -.218, p=.828$).

The results suggest that the Chinese government should promote greater interest in social entrepreneurship among Chinese youths to further motivate their interest in the field for greater contributions to society. In addition, the government should implement more activities that promote social entrepreneurship among female youths because they are less likely than males to have favorable impression on social entrepreneurship. Further, both male and female youths have strong interest in pursuing careers in social entrepreneurship. Therefore, the government should focus on programs that can help them pursue such careers.

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