

Socio-Cultural Factors and Intention towards Sustainable Entrepreneurship

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Abstract

In order to rectify environmental degradation, government has encouraged sustainable management among businesses. In addition, researchers have also suggested a new breed of study called “sustainable entrepreneurship”, which links sustainability management to entrepreneurial activities. However, the participation of entrepreneurial firms in sustainability management is still far from satisfactory. Past studies also have found that SMEs are less active in sustainability initiatives and many issues related to the intention of firms for sustainability entrepreneurship is still unanswered. Therefore, this study was carried out to examine the influence of socio-cultural factors on intention towards sustainable entrepreneurship among SMEs. A total of 404 SMEs in Malaysia were surveyed by using questionnaire. Based on the statistical analyses performed, this study found that three socio-cultural factors, namely time orientation, sustainability orientation and social norm significantly influenced intention towards sustainable entrepreneurship among SMEs. Thus, in order to develop true sustainable entrepreneurs in the country, the effects of non-economic factors such as socio-cultural factors should not be underestimated. Lastly, some recommendations for future researchers have also been put forth in this paper.

Keywords: Culture, Entrepreneurship, Intention, Social, Sustainability.

JEL Code Classification: L26, M13

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1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship has always been linked to wealth generation and economic growth in the modern society (Tilley & Young, 2009). However, due to market failure, entrepreneurial activities have contributed to environmental degradation (Cohen & Winn, 2007). Such degradation could leave a disastrous effect to us and also our future generations. Thus, linking entrepreneurship to sustainability development has been promoted as a resolution of environmental problems (Dean & McMullen, 2007). Nowadays, it is important for business operators to balance between economic gains and environmental concerns (Palazzi & Starcher, 2006) and all business leaders should pay substantial attention to it (Schaltegger & Synnestvedt, 2001). This practice has produced a new field of study known as “sustainable entrepreneurship”.

In Malaysia, although the government has encouraged sustainable entrepreneurship through various efforts, the number of business firms participated in sustainable management still remains low. For instance, it was reported that there were just 28% of large non-financial firms revealed their environment information (Buniamin *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, it was found that small and medium enterprises (SMEs) were far behind their larger counterparts in exercising sustainable practices (Omar & Samuel, 2011; 2012). Specifically, Buniamin *et al.* (2011) pointed out that no information of environmental reporting was found from SMEs. Since sustainable entrepreneurship is considered as something new, there is a lack of such research especially among the SMEs (Dixon & Clifford, 2007) in developing countries (Rasi *et al.*, 2010; Nowduri, 2012).

From the theoretical perspective, most of the extant entrepreneurship literatures are focusing on entrepreneurs’ characteristics or performances of firms (Stevenson & Jarillo, 1990; Fayolle, 2007). Entrepreneurship researchers have ignored the cognitive or psychological dimension for long (Casrud & Brännback, 2011). In particular, entrepreneurs’ cognition such as their intention has not been fully explored. As Schwartz *et al.* (2009) asserted, it is critical to understand what factors affect the entrepreneurial intention. Therefore, investigating determinants of intention for sustainable entrepreneurship is a crucial step in identifying ways to develop competitive sustainable entrepreneurs.

The existing entrepreneurship studies which attempted to address the cognitive aspects have focused mainly on internal dimensions, such as individual characteristics (Devonish *et al.*, 2010; Birdthisle, 2008; Ismail *et al.*, 2009). The external context, such as socio-cultural has been neglected by researchers in most psychological- or cognitive-based studies. It is well understood that socio-cultural factors are not only capable in influencing large-size business firms but also SMEs. However, research in regards to influence of socio-cultural factors on SMEs is still low. This has caused the lacking of understanding about the roles of socio-cultural factors on business practitioners’ intention towards sustainable entrepreneurial

behavior. The poor understanding of such concept could lead to improper planning for sustainable entrepreneurship development and further prohibit the business operators to engage in it. Thus, to close the above mentioned gaps, this study was carried out to address the question of “To what extent do socio-cultural factors influence the intention towards sustainable entrepreneurship among SMEs?” Particularly, it aimed to determine the influence of socio-cultural factors such as time orientation, sustainability orientation and social norms on intention towards sustainable entrepreneurship.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Intention towards Sustainable Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship has been widely accepted as a process in which individuals discover, create and exploit business opportunities (Venkataraman, 1997) through creation of new organizations (Gartner, 1989). The entrepreneurial activities have undoubtedly contributed to a nation’s economic growth and development, but they have caused many negative impacts to the environment as a result from market failure (Cohen & Winn, 2007; Dean & McMullen, 2007). As such, several scholars have suggested that entrepreneurs should play an active role in balancing business gains and sustainability management (Hockerts & Wüstenhagen, 2010; Parrish, 2010; Tilley & Young, 2009).

Consequently, sustainable entrepreneurship has emerged as an important area in the study of entrepreneurship. Sustainability management emerged in 1970s and it has altered the ways people perceived in environmental resources issue (Graham, 2010). However, linking the concept of sustainable management to entrepreneurship is still considered as something new and many areas still require further investigations (Nowduri, 2012; Shepherd & Patzelt, 2011; Hall *et al.*, 2010).

Some researchers have used the term “environmental/green entrepreneurship” interchangeably with “sustainable entrepreneurship” (e.g.: Cohen & Winn, 2007; Dean & McMullen, 2007; Dixon & Clifford, 2007). However, these terms are simply overlapping (Gibbs, 2009) and ambiguous (Hall *et al.*, 2010). As such, this study adopts the definition of sustainable entrepreneurship as suggested by Majid and Koe (2012: 300) “a process in which entrepreneurs exploit the opportunities in an innovative manner for economic gains, society equity, environmental quality and cultural preservation on an equal footing”.

Since sustainable entrepreneurship is a process, it requires human interaction. Ajzen (1991) has argued that intention is a great predictor of human behavior. Moreover, measuring behavior could be difficult (Wu, 2010). Thus, this study focused on intention rather than the actual behavior.

2.2 Socio-Cultural Factors

As discussed earlier, sustainable entrepreneurship is a process which is not only to emphasize on harvesting economic gains, but also to demonstrate concerns towards environmental quality, society equity and cultural preservation. Thus, economic factor is definitely not the main motivating factors for individuals to engage in sustainable entrepreneurship. Non-economic factors such as socio-cultural factors have well been accepted as influential drivers for entrepreneurship (Shivani *et al.*, 2006). Indeed, Thornton *et al.* (2011) have also delineated that both entrepreneurship practitioners and public policy-makers are rendering growing interest on the contextual factors that drive entrepreneurial activities. They further pointed out two specific contexts, i.e.: culture and social are worth examining.

The influences of cultural pressures on organizational decisions have been well discussed in institutional theory (Delmas & Toffel, 2004). The theory describes that cultural pressures influence the managerial decisions and the ways firms are being operated. As O'Neill *et al.* (2009) mentioned, culture influences all aspects of organization, such as management, leadership, decision making and sustainability entrepreneurship process. However, cultural factors are still scarcely analyzed and discussed in the literature. Specifically, discussion in regards to influence of cultural factors on sustainable entrepreneurship development still remains low.

Hofstede's (1980) Cultural Dimension Model has been widely accepted as a model to explain cultural factors. One of the dimensions discussed in the model which relates to sustainable management is time orientation. This dimension consists of two poles: short-term orientation and long-term orientation. Another well-known cultural model is Trompenaars' (1993) Seven Dimensions of Culture. This model describes that people are being "past-", "present-" or "future-orientated". Since sustainable management requires a long-term effort, people who have different orientation on time would react differently to it.

Trompenaars' (1993) model has also discussed about the human-nature relationship orientation. This dimension regards to natural resources exploitation. He explained that people's beliefs on controlling nature varies, some prefer to maintain a harmony with nature; while some like to dominate it. In addition, Yoon and Tello (2009) showed culture that entrepreneurs are in can affect their orientation towards corporate social responsibility (CSR). Spence *et al.* (2008) also posited that a strong sustainability orientation can affect the business owners/manages to involve in sustainable practices.

Entrepreneurship can be deemed as a social phenomenon (Thornton *et al.*, 2011). Thus, the role of social influence should not be neglected. Social pressures can influence a person's behavior, as discussed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) and Ajzen (1991). They further named such social pressures as social norm. Various social pressures, for examples opinions of family, friends, colleagues or business partners can be a significant influential factor for sustainable behavior (Vermeir & Verbeke,

2008). In addition, Meek *et al.* (2010) found that entrepreneurs who behaved sustainably were influenced by social norms. Furthermore, embarkation of individuals on sustainable business was also influenced by social pressures from spouse (Yaacob, 2010) or other industry players (De Clercq & Voronov, 2011).

2.3 Research Framework and Hypotheses

From the above discussion, both cultural and social pressures were regarded as influential factors for intention towards sustainable entrepreneurship. Thus, the following research framework and hypotheses were suggested:

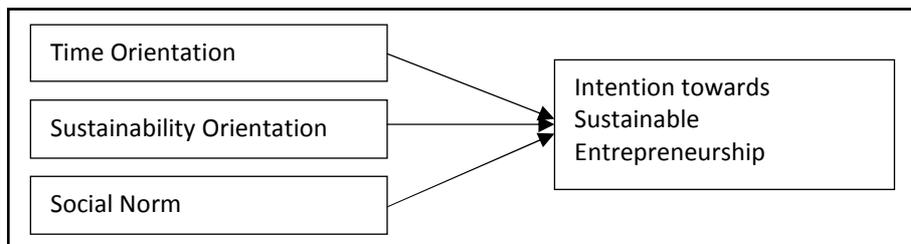


Figure 1: Research Framework

H1: Time orientation positively influences intention for sustainability entrepreneurship.

H2: Sustainability orientation positively influences intention for sustainability entrepreneurship.

H3: Social norm positively influences intention for sustainability entrepreneurship.

3. Research Methodology

The population of this study comprised of SMEs in Malaysia. The respondents of this study were the owner-managers of SMEs. The list of SMEs registered in the directory of SME Corp Malaysia (formerly known as SMEDEC, a reliable SME management body in Malaysia) was used as the population frame. The sample was selected based on stratified sampling, according to the geographical location. It was done so to ensure an efficient representation of each important segment of the population (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009). From the 1600 questionnaires sent out, there were 411 returned. However, only 404 responses were deemed usable, thus it yielded a response rate of 25.25%

The instrument used in this study was a self-administered questionnaire. All items in questionnaires were adapted from Yoo *et al.* (2011), Trompenaars (1993), Kurkertz and Wagner (2010), Kennedy *et al.* (2003), Nasurdin *et al.* (2009) and Liñán and Chen (2009). Specifically, ten-point Likert-scale questions were used. Prior to the full scale data collection, a pilot test was carried out and found that all variables recorded Cronbach alpha > 0.7. This showed the questionnaire were reliable.

Data were collected via posted mails, emails and hand-delivery. It was done so to ensure that respondents were given enough time to answer the questions and to obtain a high response rate. All data collected were keyed into computer for further analysis by using SPSS 20. Specifically, descriptive analyses and statistical tests were performed to test the hypotheses.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1. Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 summarizes the profiles of respondents. Most of the SMEs were owned by male (F = 320; 79.21%). Servicing firms (F = 255; 63.12%) dominated the SMEs sector, followed by manufacturing firms (F = 123; 30.45%) while construction, agriculture and others firms made up about 6.44% of total SMEs. In terms of form of business, about three quarters (F = 298; 73.76%) of the SMEs were sole proprietorship, 74 firms (18.32%) were corporations and the rest were partnership. More than half of the SMEs were considered as small (F = 232; 57.43%), about quarter of them were medium in size (F = 105; 25.99%) and 67 firms (16.58%) were deemed as micro. As for their years of establishment, most of the firms had five to 15 years of history (F = 262; 64.85%).

Table 1: Respondents' Profiles

Characteristics	N = 404	
	F	%
Owner's Gender		
Male	320	79.21
Female	84	20.79
Sector of Firm		
Servicing	255	63.12
Manufacturing	123	30.45
Construction	15	3.71
Agriculture	7	1.73
Others	4	1.00
Form of Business		
Sole proprietorship	298	73.76
Partnership	32	7.92
Corporations	74	18.32
Size of Firm (No. of Employees)		
Less than 5 (Micro)	67	16.58
5 – 50 (Small)	232	57.43
51 – 150 (Medium)	105	25.99
Age of Firm (Years)		
Less than 5	90	22.27
5 – 10	153	37.87
11 – 15	109	26.98
More than 15	52	12.87

4.2. Data Exploration

In testing the normal distribution of data, all skewness and kurtosis values were between ± 1.0 (Table 2), which indicated that the variables were “at least approximately normal” (Leech *et al.*, 2008). In addition, the ratios of skewness and kurtosis to their respective standard error (skewness ratio and kurtosis ratio) were between ± 2.58 , confirmed that the data obtained a reasonable approximation to normality (Burns & Burns, 2008; Hair, *et al.*, 2006; Leech *et al.*, 2008). The results indicated that the data were suitable for parametric analysis.

Table 2: Kurtosis and Skewness

Variable	Skewness	Skewness Ratio	Kurtosis	Kurtosis Ratio
SN	-0.024	-0.194	-0.498	-2.016
TO	-0.301	-2.427	-0.294	-1.190
SO	-0.297	-2.395	-0.347	-1.405
IN	-0.197	-1.589	-0.314	-1.271
Standard Error	0.124		0.247	

4.3. Goodness of Measure

It is important to verify the validity and reliability of instrument used in the study. Factor analysis with Varimax rotation was performed to determine the construct validity; while Cronbach’s alpha was used to identify the internal consistency of the items in questionnaire. Factor analysis of socio-cultural factors revealed that the KMO was 0.916 and the Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant at 0.000. The socio-cultural factors identified in this study were grouped into three factors, namely (i) sustainability orientation (SO); (ii) time orientation (TO) and; (iii) social norms (SN). All of them recorded Eigenvalue >1 and they accounted for 63.047% of the variance. Three items were omitted because one in SO and two in SN were double-loaded. As for intention to sustainable entrepreneurship (IN), all six items were successfully loaded into one factor (KMO = 0.835; Bartlett’s test of sphericity = 0.000). From the reliability analysis performed, Cronbach’s alpha (Table 3) for all variables were above the acceptable threshold of 0.7 (Pallant, 2011).

Table 3: Reliability Test

Variables	No. of Items	Cronbach’s α
SO	8	0.901
TO	6	0.925
SN	6	0.855
IN	6	0.920

4.4. Mean, Correlation and Regression Analysis

Table 4 depicts the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) for the four variables. SO scored the highest mean (7.609) with SD = 1.237. It was followed by SN (M = 7.311; SD = 1.343) and TO (M = 7.262; SD = 1.568). While IN obtained the lowest mean

(7.045) with SD = 1.337. In regards to correlation analysis, the results revealed that all pairs of independent variables recorded significant correlations (p -value < 0.01). It also found that all independent variables, i.e.: TO ($r = 0.467$), SO ($r = 0.448$) and SN ($r = 0.475$) were positively correlated to the dependent variable (IN) significantly (P -value < 0.01). Furthermore, no multicollinearity was found because all r -values were well below 0.7 and considered as not extremely high (Pallant, 2011).

Table 4: Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlation Coefficient

	M	SD	SO	SN	TO	IN
SO	7.609	1.273	1			
SN	7.311	1.343	0.662**	1		
TO	7.262	1.568	0.576**	0.688**	1	
IN	7.045	1.337	0.448**	0.475**	0.467**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 summarizes the regression analysis. As mentioned earlier, correlation analysis (Table 4) indicated that multicollinearity did not exist. It was again evidenced because tolerance values were > 0.1 and VIF values were < 10 (Pallant, 2011). The data fit the model well because F -statistics = 52.463 and it was significant at 0.000. The R -squared was 0.282, indicated that 28.2% of the variance in intention towards sustainable entrepreneurship was explained by TO, SO and SN. The adjusted R -squared was 27.7%. In regards to influences of socio-cultural factors on intention towards sustainable entrepreneurship, TO ($\beta = 0.222$) was found to be the important factor, followed by SN ($\beta = 0.197$) and SO ($\beta = 0.190$). All the three independent variables recorded a P -value < 0.01, indicated that TO, SN and SO significantly and positively influenced intention towards sustainable entrepreneurship. Thus, H1, H2 and H3 were supported.

Table 5: Regression Analysis

Model	Beta (β)	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
				Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)		3.269	0.001		
TO	0.222	3.713	0.000	0.501	1.995
SN	0.197	3.013	0.003	0.421	2.373
SO	0.190	3.277	0.001	0.534	1.874
R^2	0.282				
Adjusted R^2	0.277				
F -statistics	52.463		0.000		

Dependent Variable: IN

4.5. Discussions

The statistical analyses revealed that socio-cultural factors, specifically time orientation, sustainability orientation and social norms significantly influenced intention towards sustainable entrepreneurship among SMEs. The findings were consistent with previous study whereby non-economic factors could motivate

individuals to engage in sustainable practices (Shivani *et al.*, 2006). From the cultural perspective, the time orientation that people possess has found to significantly influence their intention towards sustainable entrepreneurship. The result supported Trompenaars (1993). It is because sustainable management requires a long-term effort and can have a long-term effect. Another cultural aspect, sustainability orientation was also found to have significant effect on intention towards sustainable entrepreneurship. It was consistent with Spence *et al.* (2008) and Trompenaars (1993). Human-nature relationship orientation indeed plays an important role in encouraging sustainable practices among individuals. The social factor, social norm was significant in affecting intention towards sustainable entrepreneurship. The findings confirmed Vermeir and Verbeke (2008), Meek *et al.* (2010), Yaacob (2010) and De Clercq and Voronov (2011). Therefore, social pressures do influence a person's behavior because individuals are concern about others' opinions and ideas.

5. Conclusion

This research was conducted to examine the intention towards sustainable entrepreneurship and the influence of socio-cultural factors on it among SMEs in Malaysia. The study found that all the three socio-cultural factors, namely time orientation, sustainability orientation and social norm significantly influenced intention towards sustainable entrepreneurship. All the three hypotheses were supported. As SMEs constitute a large portion of business activities in the country, understanding the effects of socio-cultural factors on intention towards sustainability entrepreneurship among SMEs can serve as an initial step in developing true sustainable entrepreneurs. Therefore, socio-cultural factors should be given sufficient attention in order to promote sustainable entrepreneurship in the country. Several limitations were identified in this study. For instance, it only considered socio-cultural factors; future researchers are urged to include also internal factors. In addition, future studies can also extend the research framework to examine the actual sustainable behavior among SMEs.

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