



Incentive Factors for Social Entrepreneurship Adoption Based on Diffusion of Innovation Theory

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Abstract: The paper analyzes the manner in which the Diffusion of Innovation Theory can be used in the adoption of social entrepreneurship as an innovative form of entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurship is an innovative concept, which relies on the development of an innovative idea meant to answer a social problem identified by the social entrepreneur. Based on the theoretical framework developed in order to determine the factors influencing the acceptance and diffusion of innovation, there have been drafted assumptions for making a model based on the Diffusion of Innovation Theory so as to determine the factors with a decisive role in an individual's decision to become a social entrepreneur. The personality traits of a social entrepreneur positively impact innovation, and communication and collaboration between social enterprises lead to the development of associations and collective social economy structures. The social entrepreneur as an individual, but also the collective efforts of the members of the developed social businesses, contribute to innovation in social enterprises. With the purpose of innovating the entrepreneurial process, but also of continuously improving its competitive advantage, it is important to encourage the social entrepreneurial culture and to further participative management.

Keywords: social entrepreneurship; innovation; entrepreneurship adoption; factors; intention; Diffusion of Innovation Theory

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1. Introduction

The literature review discloses the existence of a sustained concern of researchers to anticipate the manner in which consumers will react to a recent idea or technology and the factors that induce them to use it. From all the theories that analyze the acceptance of the new, the Diffusion of Innovation Theory (DIT) stands out. Given the complexity of human behavior, it cannot be put aside the importance of psychological factors. The most advanced theory in the prediction of the entrepreneur's behavior, based on psychological elements, but which, in the meantime, was complemented with elements of a technological nature, is the Decomposed Theory of Planned Behavior. In order to shape a complex system of attributes, it should not be neglected the role of cultural factors and empirical factors, which highlight certain aspects that classical theories are missing, inclined towards formalization.

Researchers such as McClelland and Winter (1969), Hull et al. (1980), Cuervo (2005), Turkina and Thai (2015) and Yan and Yan, (2016) analyzed the profiling of a prosperous entrepreneur with the purpose of identifying distinctive personality traits. They reached the conclusion that, in entrepreneurial behavior, there appear characteristics such as extroversion, innovation, creativity, desire for achievement and independence, need for power and achievement, risk taking and proactivity (Hussain, 2018). Moreover, most researches have concluded that centralized entrepreneur decision-making can benefit from innovation, particularly exploitative innovation that builds on the entrepreneur's existing knowledge (Cardinal, 2001; Jansen et al., 2006). Yan and Yan (2016), in a study, postulate that, with limited resources owned by SMEs, decisions made centrally by the entrepreneur tends to bring about radical innovations. Moreover, the psychological characteristics of successful entrepreneurs are explored so as to detect distinguishing aspects in their personality that differentiate entrepreneurs from the other of people in a society (Yan & Yan, 2016). The three important characteristics in entrepreneurial behavior, such as risk-taking, proactivity and innovation, cause entrepreneurs to change the way they take the initiative, do different things and assume the risks associated with change (McClelland, 1961; Kihlstrom & Laffont, 1979; Cuervo, 2005). Although, numerous studies have analyzed the various aspects of the characteristic personality traits of entrepreneurs and the characteristics of innovation, the results obtained by researchers are still inconclusive and require further investigation (Zali and Chaychian, 2017). A relatively small number of researchers have analyzed the link between the entrepreneur's characteristic personality traits and innovation performance (Bello, 2017).

The Diffusion of Innovation Theory analyzes the steps that a person or an organization travels through, before making the decision to adopt an idea recently appeared on the market. Diffusion of innovation is a theory based on the requisite that any economy has various investors, entrepreneurs, who differ according to their enthusiasm for a business idea and readiness to try the development of that business. Pursuant to this

theory, in the first instance it is gathered and synthesized the information on the new idea, based on which they form their own opinion and will accept or reject it. For social enterprises that want to launch new products, understanding and using the Diffusion of Innovation Theory can make the difference between the success or failure of a product launch. The Diffusion of Innovation Theory (DIT), presented for the first time by Rogers, has become one of the most well-known theories. Diffusion can be seen as the social process that takes place among the population as a result of the acceptance of an innovation, for example, a new approach based on evidence to addressing or developing social entrepreneurship. An idea, a certain practice or even an object can be considered innovation only if it is perceived as new by possible adopters and must be considered feasible for adoption. Rogers elaborated this model in order to show the diffusion of the innovation procedure (Rogers, 1995). As a consequence, is a sequence of stages through which the innovation is disseminated from the creative source or discovery to the one who will use or adapt this innovation, a process that takes place in society as a group (Rogers, 2003).

2. Methodology

At global level, entrepreneurship has become a real phenomenon due to its positive contribution to global economic development. In developed countries, entrepreneurship has been seen for a long time as a manner to promote innovation, to enhance competitive capacity, technological development but also to create new jobs (Guerrero, Rialp & Urbano, 2006).

In less developed countries, entrepreneurship was deemed a means of fostering economic development and solving stringent economic and social problems (Ozaralli & Rivenburgh, 2016). In order to understand why some choose to start a business, we need to understand the intentions to develop a social business and the factors that impact these intentions.

This paper attempts to identify the factors that influence individuals' intention to adopt the social entrepreneurship as a solution for putting in practice their business ideas. Constructs that are investigated in this study were derived from diffusion of innovation theory (Rogers, 1983) and related findings from previous studies conducted on entrepreneurships and social entrepreneurship adoption. Theories and relevant studies on this field were analyzed in order to be used as the basis to develop the research model. Reviewing the theories and previous studies indicate that factors that may influence the adoption of entrepreneurship are countless. The diffusion of innovation theory suggests that relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability and observability as five factors that influence individuals' intention to adopt a technology. This construct was particularized for social entrepreneurship.

3. Characteristics of Entrepreneurship that Recommend the Use of the Diffusion of Innovation Theory in the Analysis of the Choices Made by Entrepreneurs

The application of the Diffusion of Innovation Theory for adopting the social entrepreneur status is based on the fact that entrepreneurs respond differently to trends in innovation and, according to this criterion, are divided into different categories. The response to the innovation can be evaluated among entrepreneurs, organizations such as associations, foundations, or larger collectivities such as cities. Diffusion of innovation can be used as a tool that can be used so as to persuade entrepreneurs to choose social entrepreneurship to implement their ideas, given that social entrepreneurship is a relatively new concept, derived from traditional entrepreneurship. Although it is a field that has proven to need its own theoretical development, some researchers hold that the social entrepreneurship development can rely on previous research in traditional entrepreneurship (Short et al., 2009; Haugh, 2012;). Nevertheless, even if there are similarities between corporate and social entrepreneurship, these areas of interest can have divergent notions (Shaw & Carter, 2007), because, in some cases, the social mission characteristic of social entrepreneurship can conflict with the strictly economic mission of traditional entrepreneurship. Consequently, it is necessary to be taken into account the specific elements of each type of entrepreneurship (Dacin et al., 2010). Thus, there are many studies that focus on understanding the entrepreneurial motives that lead to the emergence of classical enterprises in traditional (classical) entrepreneurship, but there is relatively little research in the field of social entrepreneurship. (Liñán & Fayolle, 2015). Continuing/deepening the research in as concerns social enterprises, it is noticed that they distance themselves from the traditional enterprises' performance, because the main goal of social organizations is a social one, while traditional organizations pursue an exclusively economic goal (Shaw & Carter, 2007; Zahra et al., 2009).

The intellectual capital at the level of an enterprise includes two dimensions, namely: human capital and client-related capital, dimensions that are closely related to the innovation capacity of the enterprise. Under these conditions, the company's performance, intellectual capital and innovation will be moderated by the entrepreneurial orientation (Alzuod & Isa, 2017). In order to be sustainable, a company must rely, in addition to innovation, on intelligent knowledge management, and to ensure its survival in the economic environment, competitive advantages must be sustainable. The competitive advantage of a company can be obtained with the help of internal resources, which are a key element. One of the most important internal resources of a company is intellectual capital, the essential intangible resource for company management. Most of the time, SMEs do not have enough tangible resources to ensure their survival on the market, but if they possess adequate and quality intellectual capital, they can gain competitive advantages that help them face a hostile

environment (Ngah, Abd Wahab & Salleh, 2015; Todericiu & Stanit, 2015). Among the three types of capital: relational capital, structural and innovative capital, in the context of intellectual capital, innovative capital is more important, because due to the changes that may occur in the economic environment, it is possible for the intellectual capital available within the organization to lose its value, the one that ensures sustainability is innovation (Suddaby, Bruton & Si, 2015). Social organizations must adopt an appropriate knowledge management if they want to adopt important changes, because such a program will produce important changes within the organization. In the context of the adoption of major changes within the organization, they must adopt measures to stimulate the human resources involved in the change, organizational culture being a particularly important element, with different approaches viewed through the prism of knowledge management (Montequín, et al., 2006).

Innovation existing at the level of organizations plays the role of mediator between the three types of capital: human, structural and relational, in this context innovation is the factor that keeps the intellectual capital updated.

Studying the literature, it is found that there is a particular concern for the use of the Diffusion of Innovation Theory for entrepreneurship and, especially, for social entrepreneurship, the latter being a sector that has gained popularity in the last period. Social entrepreneurship is accomplished through the performance of a social enterprise, which, in turn, was founded by a social entrepreneur (Ruskin, Seymour & Webster, 2016). As concerns the conceptualization of social entrepreneurship, this is still a recent subject and it stands out for a number of divergences in its conceptualization (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018). In general, social entrepreneurship refers to an innovative activity with a social purpose (Austin et al., 2006), since the concept of social entrepreneurship includes the creation of social value that usually takes place through the entry of innovations in services or products that have consequences on changing certain social realities (Rosolen, Tiscoski & Comini, 2014, Ashraf et al., 2019;). With regard to the scope of activities, social entrepreneurship “[...] covers a wide range of sectors, such as environmental protection, health care, education and reintegration of the long-term unemployed” (Hoogendoorn, 2016). Social entrepreneurs are distinguished by innovative approaches that are unusual for standard solutions intended for improving complex social problems such as poverty diminishing, energy conservation, environmental protection, education, health, housing (Kostetska, 2014). Therefore, social entrepreneurship is social as it solves or at least proposes itself to solve social problems.

Rogers (2003) identified four elements playing a major part in the dissemination of new ideas related to the approach of entrepreneurship by individuals and the materialization through social entrepreneurship, as follows:

- it should be classified as an innovation;

- it should be communicated through certain channels;
- it should be adopted among the members of a social system;
- it should take into account the duration or time factor.

Furthermore, social entrepreneurs play the role of agents of change. They achieve this through the following actions:

- adopting a mission for creating and supporting social value, not just financial value;
- recognising and continuously pursuing new opportunities for performing the assumed mission;
- engaging in a process of continuous innovation, adaptation and learning;
- the ability to undertake increased responsibility towards the community served and for the results acquired (Dees, 2001).

4. Using the Diffusion of Innovation Theory in Social Entrepreneurship

Rogers (2003) considered that the innovation-decision process is a process that unfolds in five stages. He reached this conclusion after analyzing data from hundreds of studies that had as their subject the theory of diffusion of innovation, following which he developed the methodological framework of a business decision-making process in five stages/steps, known as knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation and confirmation.

Further, it will be analyzed the content of each stage, respectively the general framework, after which it will be particularized, in turn, for making the decision to practice social entrepreneurship, as Table 1 shows in a synthetic manner.

Stage 1: Knowledge is exposure to the new idea; the more a social entrepreneur sees or hears about an idea, the more likely it is to engage in its development. At this stage, entrepreneurs should find out, be informed about the new concept.

Step 2: Persuasion makes the shift toward the interest in an idea and the search for information related to its implementation. In the case of social entrepreneurship, it can be said that the more information is disseminated, the more entrepreneurs will be tempted to develop such an initiative.

Stage 3: Decision is the stage during which the individual weighs the value of the idea and decides whether to adopt or reject it. In this stage of diffusion of innovation theory, it is time for the consumer to make a decision. Similarly, the adoption of a social entrepreneurial idea remains in the end the entrepreneur's decision, even though all he knows are merely positive aspects.

Stage 4: Implementation is the stage where the individual takes over the idea to a higher level and is able to search for additional information. In the case of consumers, when the purchase decision is made, they need to be convinced that the product is useful and might need to know detailed information, so as to maximize the experience of knowing the product in order to avoid returning the product. In the case of social entrepreneurship, things are a little different. If the decision to buy a product that can subsequently be returned at no cost or with minimal costs can be changed, in the case of implementing a social entrepreneurship idea, the decision cannot be changed as easily, since it appears the involvement of important financial, material and human resources, and giving up would mean significant losses on all levels.

Stage 5: Confirmation is the stage during which the individual maintains his/her decision to continue the activity that is based on an innovative action. The consumer wants to confirm, usually with friends, family and through product review sites on the Internet, that the product does what it is designed to do. Confirmation, in the case of the implementation of a social entrepreneurial idea, will be performed by disseminating and continuing the development of new entrepreneurial ideas.

Table 1. The Decision-Making Process for the Involvement of Social Entrepreneurship According to TDI (Processing after Rogers, 1985)

Stage	Actions: general framework	Actions: social entrepreneurship
Stage 1: knowledge:	Exposure to the new idea	entrepreneurs should find out, be informed about the new concept
Stage 2: persuasion:	the shift towards the interest in an idea and the search for information related to its implementation	the more information is disseminated, the more entrepreneurs will be tempted to develop such an initiative
Stage 3: decision	The individual weighs the value of the idea and decides whether to adopt or reject it; it is time to take a decision	the adoption of a social entrepreneurial idea remains in the end the entrepreneur's decision, even though all he knows are merely positive aspects
Stage 4: implementation	the individual takes over the idea to a higher level, is able to search for additional information	in the case of implementing a social entrepreneurship idea, the decision cannot be changed easily, since it appears the involvement of important financial, material and human resources, and giving up would cause significant losses
Stage 5: confirmation	the individual maintains his/her decision to continue the activity that is based on an innovative action	confirmation, in the case of the implementation of a social entrepreneurial idea, will be performed by disseminating and continuing the development of new entrepreneurial ideas.

Starting from the classical theory, there have been the identified intrinsic characteristics of innovations that significantly influence the decisions to adopt or reject the innovation for the adoption of social entrepreneurship as a form of manifestation of the entrepreneurial initiative, in the form of the factors that underlie the decision adoption. The factors identified by Rogers (1995) are presented in the following:

relative advantage is the extent to which the change is seen as an improvement in the individual's situation;

compatibility, represents the manner in which it is evaluated the easiness of incorporating the innovation in the individual's life;

complexity is the complexity perceived by the individual for the process of adopting or using the innovation;

experimentation is the existence of the opportunity to test or experience the innovation;

visibility is the extent to which the innovation is visible to others and the way in which it is communicated to the people with whom the individuals come into contact and which results in either positive or negative reactions.

Below are presented the definitions of the five factors considered to be the key elements in the behavior of consumers towards innovative solutions, starting from the manner in which they were formulated by Rogers (Rogers, 1995), and are found in a graphic form in Figure 1.

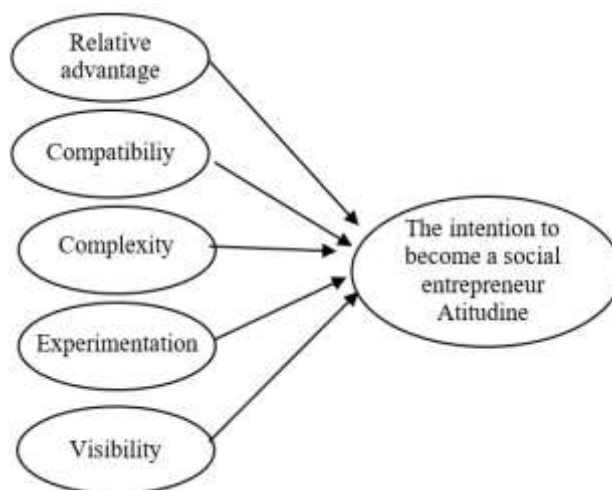


Figure 1. The factors forecasted by the Diffusion of Innovation Theory (processing after Rogers, 1995)

Relative advantage defines the perception of innovation by the entrepreneur as better than the idea that precedes it. In the case of social entrepreneurship, we can define relative advantage as the extent to which entrepreneurs perceive social entrepreneurship as a much better way to develop their business ideas, compared to the alternative, namely to put into practice their entrepreneurial idea, in a classic business environment. Here we find the social component that distinguishes the development of a classical-style business from the one in the social economy.

Compatibility defines the entrepreneur's perception of innovation as being in accordance with old values and acquired experience. Translating to social entrepreneurship, it can be stated that the social component proves its compatibility with the traditional way of developing a business if the social component does not put the entrepreneur in novel situations for him/her and does not contravene his/her opinion about the manner in which it is carried out the implementation of his own idea. Factors such as personal experience and inherited values are an important component that proves compatibility.

Complexity defines the entrepreneur's perception of innovation as something difficult to understand and use. As concerns social entrepreneurship, complexity is given by the degree of difficulty perceived by the entrepreneur when deciding to put into practice a business idea that includes a social side and how quickly he/she realizes what to do when being put in a position to implement it. External factors identified, such as the legislative framework, the political environment, access to financing determine the degree of perceived complexity.

Diffusion of innovations is a stochastic process that involves random probabilities, but can also be influenced by strategies that change the odds. In order to contribute to the diffusion of an innovation, an entrepreneur must help innovation outrun most of these barriers to diffusion (for example, low costs, switching costs, learning costs and material costs for buying new technologies).

Experimentation refers to the extent to which the possibility of testing an innovation will determine the user to use it, when he/she will have the opportunity. As concerns social entrepreneurship, this depends on the existence of pilot models for testing, made available to potential social entrepreneurs, which gives them the opportunity to analyze the innovation applicability.

Visibility refers to the impact had on the entrepreneur by the contact with the positive results brought by the innovation. With regard to social entrepreneurship, we can talk about the influence of highlighting the positive effects generated by its use, especially through popularization in the online environment, TV, leaflets and other ways, examples of good practices.

5. Assumptions Concerning the Diffusion of Innovation Theory for the Determination of Influencing Factors in Social Entrepreneurship Adoption by Individuals

The purpose of any business, including the businesses developed in the social economy, is to attract the consumer, the customer, in order to make him/her accept and prefer a new product or service, even to adopt a new behavior that he/she has never had before.

As the theory puts forth, as the market enters and promotes - diffuses - an innovative product, service or an idea (specific to social entrepreneurship), the consumer or customer is very likely to adapt to them. In addition, the theory assumes that any new products, services, arising from the existence of an innovative idea flow (or "diffuse") on the market not linearly, but gradually according to their acceptance by consumers, starting with the innovative entrepreneurs, then passing to the early adopters, the early majority, late majority and late at the end of the line.

In order to test the application of the diffusion of innovation theory in social entrepreneurship, there have been formulated five assumptions, which will be tested in the next stage of the research:

Relative advantage H1: The greater the advantages the social enterprises for implementing the business idea than traditional companies, the more likely the social entrepreneurship will be adopted.

Compatibility H2: The greater the perceived compatibility of the social entrepreneurship with entrepreneur own values, the more likely the social entrepreneurship will be adopted.

Complexity H3: The lower the complexity of implementing a social component of a business idea, the more likely the social entrepreneurship will be adopted.

Trialability H4: The higher the possibility of testing the pilot project for business developed as social enterprises, the more likely the social entrepreneurship will be adopted.

Observability H5: The higher the perceived observability of social entrepreneurship benefits by the potential entrepreneurs, the more likely the social entrepreneurship will be adopted.

Any theory, either scientific or economic, presents certain advantages or limitations, which must be known by those who adopt a certain behavior. Pursuant to the diffusion of innovation theory applied to social entrepreneurship, most consumers do not take the risks of testing and adopting products, services, resulting from a social entrepreneurship idea, thence it can be very difficult for social entrepreneurs to direct consumers towards new ideas and products. As in any business, there is a high risk of

failure in the creation and promotion of new ideas on the market, the diffusion of the theory indicates a course for social enterprises without existing any guarantee of success. Cultural limitations are also an important element that can make the difference between the success or failure of a social business. Social enterprises that develop new innovative ideas often do not regard culture or the cultural environment. It is admirable when a company creates and offers the virtues of an innovative idea, but it is necessary that the expression of this idea be achieved in an adequate environment, since cultural norms can reject it. The time factor can act in favor or to the detriment of recently created businesses. As the data shows, marketing specialists within social enterprise face plenty of early and late majorities and a hard dose of delay. Nevertheless, the advantage is that there are precious innovators and early adopters who help forward a product until its large-scale adoption. The reality is that there are more customers who do not want to take the risk than there are risk takers. Competing or complementary innovative ideas of social entrepreneurship are important as those who decide to adopt an idea usually have an alternative in what to adopt, and so do failures because most innovations are not disseminated. There is also the possibility of deceleration, which is important because the decision to adopt a novel innovation is connected to the renunciation of a previous one, and those who do not decide to adopt, may decide to reject a socially confirmed innovation. The diffusion rate acceleration, in the case of voluntary adoption decisions, is usually due to members who have a certain influence in the social system and who make the decision to adopt a social entrepreneurial idea, their decision being made public, it is also followed by others who then follow their example.

6. Conclusions

Innovation is recognized at the level of the entire social entity as a unique creation: whether it is the introduction of new products, new processes or innovative services, whether we refer to the application of distinct administrative systems, taken individually or any combination of these factors that contribute to the general performance of the organization (Bulut & Yilmaz, 2008). Innovative performance characterizes social entrepreneurship and can be defined as the intention of a social entity to bring new elements to the production and service process, to back up new ideas and to identify a creative solution to complex social problems (Raghuvanshi & Garg, 2018).

Social entrepreneurship and the social economy represent an important source of providing social benefits in the context of a society with more and more diverse needs of support. These forms of manifestation are permanently growing within a pluralistic economy and are considered to be the third economic sector, located between the public and private sectors. Due to the various forms of organization, types of activities they approach, the functionalities, as well as the relationships with entities from the

public or private economy, social entrepreneurship and the social economy are deemed to be a complex field.

It is necessary to be started actual actions to promote the social economy and social entrepreneurship through which the advantages of starting such initiatives are made visible, with close cooperation among public policies and the representatives of various types of organizations. These can become profitable business opportunities that can generate social responsibility, the more and more active presence of social entrepreneurship in the business environment, as well as its expansion as an accomplishable business model, has resulted in an expansion in its popularity and impact in a society which needs conscious and socially responsible organizations.

By approaching social entrepreneurship as using an innovation and continuing this study we can help introduce social entrepreneurship in the business and social environment and enhance its related benefits.

Depending on the importance, the identified determining factors, relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, experimentation and visibility, will be ordered according to their importance and according to the support they provide to the political, economic and social decision-making bodies, these being used as important tools in making decisions.

It has been identified a positive connection among the advantages seen in the adoption of a social entrepreneurial idea, the possibility of testing through passive involvement and the visibility of these advantages as a result of diffusion and communication among individuals or organizations. At the opposite pole, a low complexity perceived on the involvement in an innovative idea with a social purpose is linked to the observed compatibility with the characteristics of the personality traits and with the resources required to be allocated in the adoption of the innovation.

In this manner, it can be reached the conclusion that the entry of new innovative products and services, the search and identification of unique methods and work techniques, finding new ideas to answer complex problems, supporting innovative ideas and transforming them into useful applications, all of these create innovation performance in social entrepreneurship.

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