

A FUTURE BLUEPRINT: COMPREHENSIVE EXPLORATION OF THEORIES AND SCALES FOR SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION AMONG STUDENTS IN EMERGING ECONOMIES

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ABSTRACT

Background: Social entrepreneurship is a crucial, innovative solution for addressing major societal challenges, such as poverty, unemployment, and other priorities within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially in developing countries. Assessing social entrepreneurial intentions among students is a vital indicator of future sustainable development in these regions.

Purpose: This scoping review aims to systematically synthesize and identify the most dominant theoretical frameworks and measurement scales utilized in research assessing students' social entrepreneurial intentions in emerging economies.

Design/methodology/approach: The review was conducted according to the PRISMA-ScR protocol. Articles were systematically collected from major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest, and ScienceDirect. After the screening process, an empirical article was selected and analyzed to chart the theoretical models and instruments applied.

Findings/Results: This review provides a comprehensive synthesis identifying two widely adopted theoretical frameworks: the theory of planned behavior (TPB) and the social entrepreneurial intention formation theory (SEIFT). The dominance of the TPB underscores its role in explaining intentions by utilizing psychological theory. In terms of measurement instruments, the most frequently employed scales were those originally developed by Hockerts and Linan and Chen. The sustained use of these two instruments highlights the reliance on validated tools designed specifically for the context of social entrepreneurship.

Conclusion: This study offers a necessary methodological and theoretical roadmap for future research. The clear identification of TPB, SEIFT, and the validated scales provides a credible foundation for advancing rigorous research on student social entrepreneurial intention in emerging economies.

Originality/value (State of the art): To the best of the authors knowledge, this is the first scoping review to exclusively map and synthesize the theories and scales used to measure student social entrepreneurial intention, specifically within the context of emerging economies.

Keywords: social entrepreneurial intention, students, sustainable development goals, developing countries, scoping review

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INTRODUCTION

Social entrepreneurship has become one of the most interesting and researched topics in recent years. This interest is due to the significant impact that social enterprises have on addressing various social issues worldwide. According to data from the Schwab The The Foundation shows that by 2023, social enterprises had positively impacted 891 million lives, created 28,000 jobs, and distributed 902 billion dollars (Schwab, 2024). The development of research on social entrepreneurship is expected to expand its impact of social entrepreneurship by increasing the number of social entrepreneurs worldwide (Ogbo et al. 2019).

To produce more social entrepreneurs, it is necessary to develop social entrepreneurial intentions among many people. Previous research suggests that social entrepreneurial intentions are important predictors of social entrepreneurial behavior (Lyu et al. 2024; Maheshwari, 2022; Tan et al. 2020). As indicated by Bazan, Gaultois, et al. (2020) and H. Hassan (2020); Prastyaningtyas et al. (2023), the process of developing creative ideas into productive businesses can be facilitated through entrepreneurial training, guidance, mentor support, and entrepreneurial communities.

Social entrepreneurial intention plays a key role in building social entrepreneurial behavior; therefore, so the development of research on social entrepreneurial intentions has grown rapidly in recent years (C. D. Duong, 2023b; Hossain & Asheq, 2020; Luc, 2024; Tiwari et al. 2017a). Research on social entrepreneurial intentions is expected to contribute to policymaking at both the university and government levels (Sabri et al. 2023; Shahverdi et al. 2018).

Despite the rapid proliferation of research on social entrepreneurial intentions, a critical question remains regarding the theoretical and methodological coherence of this burgeoning field, particularly in the context of university students. The extant literature appears to be fragmented, with researchers applying a diverse array of theoretical frameworks, ranging from the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Aure et al. 2019; Wahid et al. 2019), often without providing a systematic justification for the appropriateness of these frameworks for a specific demographic. This creates a significant theoretical gap; the underlying assumptions of these dominant models, frequently adopted from commercial entrepreneurship,

may not adequately capture the unique motivational drivers, such as empathy, social responsibility, or moral obligation, that shape SEI in different socio-cultural environments (Viera et al. 2023). Consequently, this theoretical ambiguity directly impacts methodology, raising crucial questions about the construct and contextual validity of the measurement instruments being used (Epstein et al. 2015). Therefore, the novelty of this research should be recognized, as it provides the first literature review in this domain. We hope that this will offer a foundational critique to guide future research toward greater theoretical alignment and methodological consistency.

This theoretical and methodological gap becomes even more critical when applied to the context of emerging countries. To address these problems, the present study employs a comprehensive approach based on two fundamental actions. First, the most influential theories explaining social entrepreneurial intention, particularly those applicable to developing countries, will be identified. Second, valid measurements capable of capturing distinct motivational factors, such as moral obligation and empathy for marginalized people, should be identified and evaluated (Viera et al. 2023).

This study aimed to provide a comprehensive blueprint through a scoping review. By comprehensively mapping the theories and instruments that have been used, this study explicitly identifies where mismatches occur between theoretical constructs and measurement items within the context of developing countries. The primary contribution of this research is to provide a critical synthesis that not only highlights existing shortcomings but also offers a solid foundation for future researchers. The results of this review will serve as a guide for adapting, validating, or even developing new measurement instruments that are theoretically stronger and contextually more relevant, thereby enhancing the validity and credibility of SEI research where it is needed most.

METHODS

This study employed a scoping review approach guided by the principles of the PRISMA and JBI guidelines. This study explores how past researchers have examined social entrepreneurial intentions among university students. Peters et al (2020) noted that scoping reviews are well-suited for exploring and describing specific conditions or situations.

The article search used the keywords “social entrepreneur* intention” AND “student*” from four databases: Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest, and Science Direct. The inclusion and exclusion criteria for this study were determined by Peters et al. (2020) and their comprehensive framework encompassing participant, concept, context, and type of evidence sources. The participants of this study are students, cover a wide period, excluding a particular year, and are in English. The analysis was limited to empirical articles from journals, excluding literature review articles and articles from non-peer-reviewed journals. Table 1 shows the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The process began by executing the defined search query “social entrepreneur* intention” AND “student*” across four databases: All records retrieved from these searches were then compiled into a Rayyan application to automatically identify and remove duplicate articles. Subsequently, a two-stage screening process was performed by two independent reviewers. In the first stage, the titles and abstracts of the remaining articles were screened for relevance against the inclusion criteria. In the second stage, the full texts of the articles that passed the initial screening were thoroughly assessed to determine their final eligibility.

A systematic article search was conducted across four predetermined databases to ensure comprehensive

literature coverage. This process was guided by a set of carefully designed inclusion and exclusion criteria intended to maintain the study’s relevance and focus. The initial search strategy, which utilized a specific combination of keywords, yielded 1,815 articles. This figure represents the raw data pool, which serves as the starting point for subsequent screening phases. This initial collection reflects the broad scope of the available literature before the application of title and abstract filtering. A detailed breakdown of the articles retrieved from each database is presented in Table 2.

A comprehensive search of four major databases, Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest, and ScienceDirect, yielded 1,815 articles that addressed social entrepreneurial intentions among students. A total of 89 articles were identified as relevant to the context (students’ social entrepreneurial intentions in developing countries). After the final selection process, 53 articles were deemed significant and are summarized in Figure 1. The articles from the study, grouped by the research questions. Pollock et al (2023) states that a scoping review is organized based on research questions. In this context, identification can also be based on the participant, concept, and context (PCC). The charting data contained five categories: (1) article identity, (2) country, (3) participants, (4) theoretical perspective, and (5) measurement tools.

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria for the literature review

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Participant	College student	Non college student: high school student, entrepreneur, employee etc
Concept	Entrepreneurial intention	Non entrepreneurial intention
Context	Social entrepreneursip	No social entrepreneurship context: comersial entrepreneurship, green entrepreneurship etc
Type of evidence source		
Language	English	Non-English
Type of article	Peer-reviewed empirical analysis article on journal	Research outside peer-reviewed including literature review, meta-analysis, proceeding

Table 2. Results of the article search of social entrepreneurial research at students

Database	Result
Scopus	788
Web of Science	831
Pro-Quest	171
Science Direct	25
Total	1815

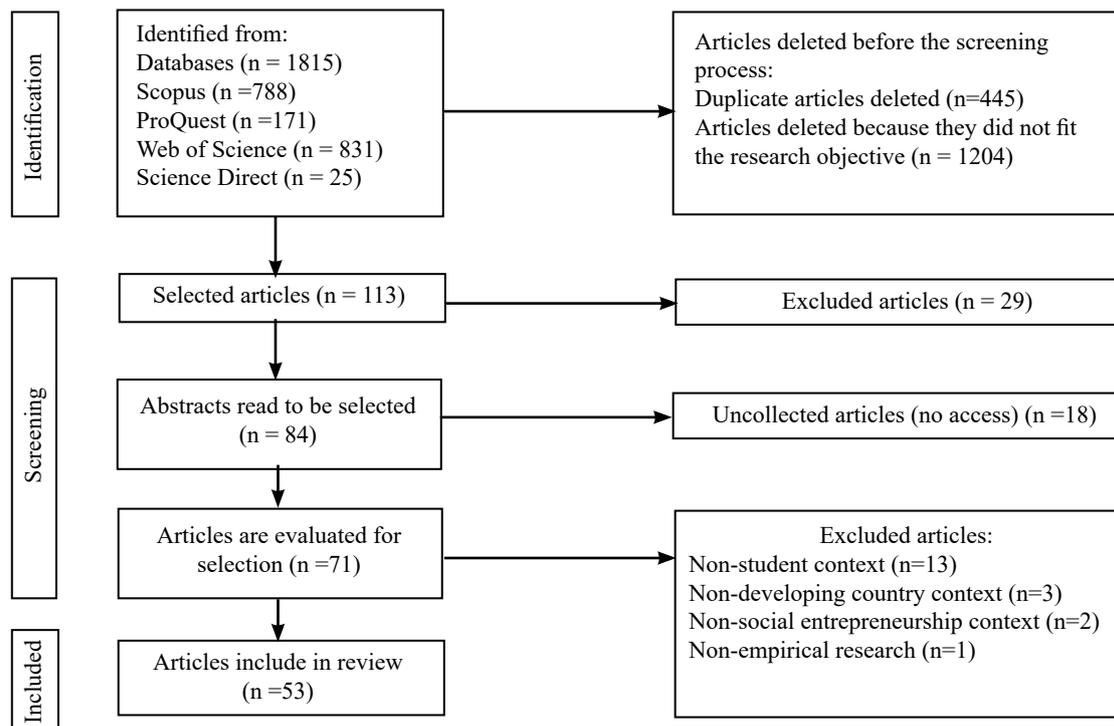


Figure 1. PRISMA diagram in literature review of social entrepreneurial intention research

The analysis and reporting of the findings in this study followed Pollock’s guidelines to ensure methodological transparency and rigor. The selection of basic qualitative content analysis with a descriptive model was deemed most appropriate, as our primary objective was to summarize and describe the existing state of the literature rather than generate a new theory. In practice, this analysis involved systematically mapping the evidence, where data were extracted and grouped according to predefined characteristics aligned with the research questions. This method allowed for the clear identification of patterns, trends, and gaps in the literature.

The research process comprised several stages. The research process involved four fundamental steps: 1) formulation of the research question; 2) establishment of the inclusion and exclusion criteria; 3) collection of data in accordance with these criteria; and 4) creation of a chart to organize the data. Ultimately, this process culminates in the compilation, summarization, and reporting of results. The execution of these processes was guided by the guidelines established by Pollock et al. (2023).

RESULTS

Study characteristics

Research on social entrepreneurial intentions in developing countries has grown significantly in recent years, peaking in 2021. However, this trend reversed, with a decline in 2022 and 2023. Despite this, research on social entrepreneurial intentions among students is still needed. Most studies on social entrepreneurial intentions have been conducted in Vietnam, with eight such studies. Malaysia, India, Bangladesh, and South Africa each had six studies. Only a few others have one or three studies. This suggests a growing research interest among Vietnamese students. Figure 2 shows research development by year, and Figure 3 shows research development by country.

Theoretical Perspective on Students’ Social Entrepreneurial Intention in Emerging Economies

Most Common Theory

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

Research on social entrepreneurial intentions among students commonly uses TPB and Mair and Noboa’s theory. Each study has a strong rationale for using

this theory. The TPB is used because it is easy to implement in different situations (Tiwari et al. 2017b). It explains the entrepreneurial intention model, which was previously unclear and specific (Naveed et al. 2021). The TPB was used as a conceptual framework because it specifically discusses intention. It provides a theoretical framework for measuring broader intentions and understanding entrepreneurial intentions without distinguishing between personal and social factors (Luc, 2020b). The TPB is considered suitable because it can explain the relationship between variables (Wahid et al. 2019).

The TPB has contributed to the study of entrepreneurial intention, but recent studies have criticized its limitations. One limitation is that it is a psychological theory that purely discusses intention, but it does not adjust to the entrepreneurial context, so it must be adjusted when applied. Another criticism is the assumption that individuals use utility principles when making decisions or view everything in terms of benefits gained. The TPB is not appropriate for social entrepreneurship because it is a basic theory that cannot explain social entrepreneurial behavior (C. D. Duong, 2023a).

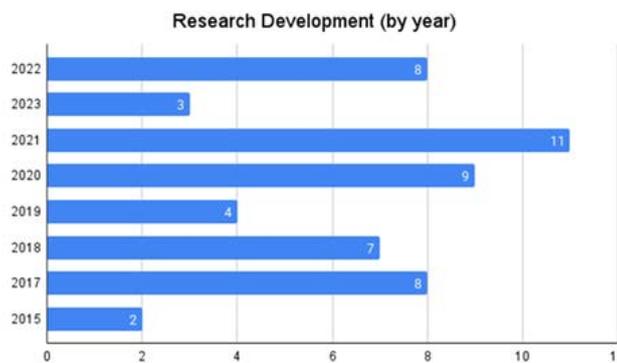


Figure 3. Development of social entrepreneurial intention research

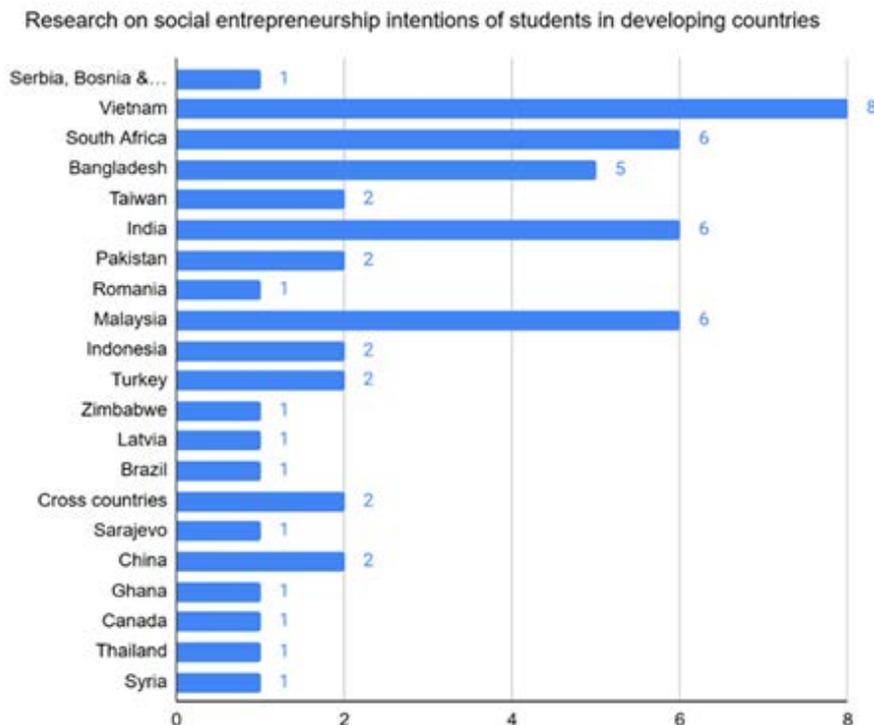


Figure 4. Students' social entrepreneurship intentions research in developing countries

Model of social entrepreneurial intention formation (MSEI-F)

Another widely used perspective is Mair and Noboa's MSEI-F, the first framework developed specifically for the social entrepreneurship context. This model considers the characteristics of social entrepreneurship, which focuses on social impact. While fundamentally an evolution of the TPB, its key contribution is adapting the core antecedents of desirability and feasibility to the social context (Urban & Teise, 2015). This model of social entrepreneurship intention is influenced by empathy, moral obligation, self-efficacy, and social support (C. D. Duong, 2023a). This theory is key to Hockerts' model of social entrepreneurial intention, which adds the element of experience (Hockerts, 2017). The critique of Mair and Noboa's theory of social entrepreneurial intention refers to other factors related to social entrepreneurial intention in the student context, where students have their own characteristics compared to nascent entrepreneurs or the general public.

Specific & Various Theories

Research on students' social entrepreneurial intentions utilizes more specific theories to capture contextual uniqueness. Human Capital Theories (HCT) provide a robust rationale for the emphasis on education, as demonstrated in the following argument: the theory posits that an individual's knowledge, skills, and experiences directly contribute to their "human capital," which in turn enhances their capacity and propensity for productive entrepreneurial activities (Rakicevic et al. 2023). To explain the underlying psychological process, researchers have employed the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) Theory. The model posits that entrepreneurship education and the university environment act as external stimuli (S) that shape a student's internal cognitive and emotional states (O), such as empathy, moral obligation, and self-efficacy. These, in turn, produce their SEI (R) (C. D. Duong, 2023a).

Several alternative perspectives have been proposed regarding the complexity of intention formation. Multi-level Theory (MLT) posits that a single model is inadequate for studying intention, which must be examined across multiple levels, including personality, cognition, and exposure (Bergner et al. 2022). The present study demonstrated that for students, internal

factors such as personality and cognitive processes exert a more significant influence than external exposure. In conclusion, the TRA provides a comprehensive explanation of how decisions are shaped by attitudes towards a behavior and normative beliefs about how others perceive that behavior. Although foundational, TRA is now less commonly used in this field because its general approach has been refined by more specific antecedents in subsequent models (Wahid et al. 2019). Collectively, these theories provide a more detailed lens through which to understand the student context, allowing for the consideration of variables that broader models often overlook (Nugroho et al. 2019).

Students' Social Entrepreneurial Intention Scales in Emerging Economies

Commonly used scale of social entrepreneurial intention

Credible research requires a measure of social entrepreneurial intentions. Most of the scales currently used are commercial entrepreneurial intention scales adapted to the social entrepreneurial context, such as those developed by Hockerts (2017) and Ip et al. (2017). Even the scale used by Liñán and Chen (2009) is a measure of commercial entrepreneurial intention that has not been adapted to the social entrepreneurial context. This is also due to the development of the theory of social entrepreneurial intention, which is based on the theory of commercial entrepreneurial intention. Most researchers did not explain why they chose these scales, but they had a small number of items. In this regard, there are still contradictory differences in perspective, with some references stating that measurement instruments with few items and only a single variable tend to be less valid and reliable (Mwange, 2018).

The most widely used scale is the entrepreneurial intention scale Liñán and Chen (2009), which measures general entrepreneurial intention. The scale has six items, and there were several changes in implementation, such as different numbers of items (Q. H. Duong et al. 2021; Loan, 2022; Luc, 2020a; Younis et al. 2020). Adaptations are also made for cultural and language reasons, as in the research of Darmanto and Pujiarti (2020), and to provide clarity in the context of social entrepreneurship. The results of the measurement tool trials conducted by researchers using this scale show good values, such as loading factors and AVE

values above 0.5, and α and CR values above 0.7 (Hair et al. 2019). This indicates that the scale has good validity and reliability. However, some researchers do not mention the validity and reliability results in detail, such as Darmanto and Pujiarti (2020), Luc (2018), and Wahid et al. (2019).

The social entrepreneurial intention scale Hockerts (2017) is different from Liñán and Chen's (2009) scale because it was created for the social entrepreneurship context. It was based on Douglas and Shepherd's (2002) and Thompson's (2009) entrepreneurial intention scales. Referring to the original scale, this measure included three items. The highest score from the three studies was 0.831, while the loading factor varied between 0.774-0.813. The Hockerts scale was used without adaptation; therefore, the number or arrangement of items did not change.

In addition to using these two measures, other studies have combined multiple scales in their research (Chao & Yu, 2022; C. D. Duong, 2023a; H. M. K. Hassan et al. 2022; Iancu et al. 2021; Wannamakok & Chang, 2020). These studies do not detail the process of adapting the scales and do not specifically mention the basis for developing these scales. However, these studies do not clearly and specifically explain the results of the tests of the measuring instruments.

Rarely Used Scale of Social Entrepreneurial Intention

One of the social entrepreneurial intention scales was from Ip et al. (2017). This instrument is not widely used in the social entrepreneurship literature. Therefore, Thompson's commercial entrepreneurial intention instrument was developed to meet the research needs of social entrepreneurial intention in the context of students. According to the source, this instrument has similarities with Hockerts', but quantitatively, it has more items. The number of items in this measuring instrument is eight, developed from two dimensions: conviction and preparation. Although it consists of two dimensions, Ip conducted a trial of this instrument using a single-factor model. Based on previous searches, the researcher found only two studies that used this measuring instrument (H. Hassan, 2020; H. M. K. Hassan et al. 2022). In addition to Ip, some researchers have adapted scales developed by other researchers. Some researchers who use other researchers' entrepreneurial intention scales not used in other research are Bergner et al (2022); Chinaire et al

(2021); M. U. Hossain & Asheq (2020); Mohammadi et al (2020); Rakicevic et al (2023); Shahverdi et al (2018).

Theoretical Contribution

The primary theoretical contribution of this study is that it addresses how dominant frameworks, such as the TPB, are theoretically underspecified for predicting students' social entrepreneurial intentions. These models often overlook the crucial role of the educational environment and career development processes, creating a theoretical gap. This study aims to bridge this gap by integrating HCT and SOR theory. HCT provides a basis for understanding how entrepreneurship education builds the necessary human capital that precedes perceived behavioral control, whereas SOR theory explains how educational stimuli are processed by students to shape their attitudes and intentions.

This integration establishes a more complete causal pathway linking educational inputs to intention formation through a solid theoretical lens. The framework is strengthened, and a new measurement instrument is required. Existing tools cannot capture the key constructs of HCT and SOR. Therefore, our contribution underscores the necessity of developing an instrument that is not merely culturally adapted but is fundamentally and theoretically aligned with this model of students' social entrepreneurial intentions.

Practical Contribution

Practically, this research also contributes to researchers who will conduct research on social entrepreneurial intention, making it easier to choose a theoretical perspective that is equipped with reasons for use and considers the criticisms of each theory. In addition, this research also facilitates the selection of the most appropriate scale of social entrepreneurial intention, accompanied by a presentation of the items and a complete explanation of the results of the validity and reliability tests of the scale.

Another contribution of this study is that it provides information on the development of research on students' social entrepreneurial intentions in developing countries, both by year and by country, so that researchers can map the development of research in their respective countries. Based on this information,

the current need for research on social entrepreneurial intentions can also be determined.

Managerial Contribution

The findings of this study are also relevant to the development of policies by government entities and academic institutions. The findings of this study indicate the presence of several significant theories concerning the development of social entrepreneurial intentions, including the role of influential factors. This can serve as a foundational reference for governmental entities and academic institutions in developing policies that align with these theoretical frameworks. This research also contributes to the social entrepreneurial intention instrument, where the appropriate instrument can be used to map the social entrepreneurial intentions of students in higher education.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

This study reviewed articles on students' social entrepreneurial intention. Many theories have been used to explain these intentions, including the TPB and SCCT. However, some studies criticize the TPB, arguing that it does not fully capture all the factors influencing behavior. An alternative is the SEIF theory. Researchers also considered SCCT, HCT, SOR, and MLT. Another theory, the TRA, is similar to the TPB, although it has been criticized. While theories explain why certain measurement tools are used, they often do not explain why these tools are used. The most common tools were those of Linan and Chen and Hockerts. These scales were based on the entrepreneurial intention scale, a popular tool in general and business research. The reason for choosing these tools is not specified, but they have good test results.

Recommendations

This study contributes to the research on students' social entrepreneurship intentions by presenting different theoretical perspectives that can be used in subsequent research, including providing different perspectives or critiques of some existing theories. In terms of information on the measurement instruments used, this study explains in detail the origins of the measurement instruments used in several studies, along

with their validity and reliability values. In practical terms, it is easier for researchers to find the theoretical perspectives and scales to be used in studies. Although this study provides information about the instrument used to measure social entrepreneurial intention in the context of student research, it cannot provide a detailed picture, as further research is needed. Subsequent research can also conduct meta-analyses and systematic reviews that explain the best scale in more detail and can be implemented in future empirical research.

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