Expanded abstract

Factors That Influence Social Innovation Among University Students

Objective

Social innovation, unlike other forms of innovation, is directed towards creating solutions to problems and issues directly affecting society, such as poverty, climate change, unemployment, health, education and ongoing conflicts. Developments in this sphere are achieved through the collaborative efforts of a range of social actors including community groups and organisations, cooperatives, social enterprises, the public and private sectors, and above all citizens. In other words, social innovation depends on the commitment to the project of one or more people. Nevertheless, not everybody has the initial drive to participate in or promote initiatives of this kind, as it depends to a large degree on personal qualities. The aim of the current paper, then, is to identify and analyse, in the context of university undergraduates, the personal traits which influence willingness to engage in social innovation.

Methodology

In order to achieve the above goal, a quantitative methodology was adopted within a descriptive-exploratory framework using structural equation modelling (SEM), as this technique enables more complex theoretical models to be analysed. In this case, the theoretical model was shown to have a good fit, as the following measures indicate: chi-squared test (χ^2) = 115.216, p < 0.001; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.974; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.040; and Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual (SRMR) = 0.023. These values suggest the model is a good fit to the data, corroborating its statistical validity.

The study population consisted of students enrolled at the University of Huelva (UHU) in the academic year 2021-2022. Given the unmanageable size of the total population, a stratified sample was selected, numbering 1,900 students. These participants completed, on a voluntary and anonymous basis, a specially designed questionnaire based on an exhaustive literature review.

The hypotheses to be tested in relation to each trait (variable) were the following:

- Teamwork (TW) has a significant influence on intention towards social innovation (H1).
- Internal locus of control (ILC) has a significant influence on intention towards social innovation (H2).
- Innovation (INV), or innovative capacity, has an influence on predisposition towards social innovation (H3).

- Creativity (CRE) has a significant influence on intention towards social innovation (H4).
- Tolerance of uncertainty (TU) has a significant influence on intention towards social innovation (H5).
- Risk tolerance (RT) is positively correlated with, or has an influence on, predisposition towards social innovation (H6).
- Self-confidence (SC) has a positive influence on predisposition towards social innovation (H7).
- Ethical and social leadership (LS) have a positive influence on predisposition towards social innovation (H8).
- Saving habits (SH) have a positive influence on predisposition towards social innovation (H9).
- Social, ethical and environmental values (VS) have a positive influence on predisposition towards social innovation (H10).
- The capacity to work under pressure (WUP) is an essential competence driving predisposition towards social innovation (H11).
- Social awareness (SA) has a positive influence on predisposition towards social innovation (H12).
- Need for success (NS) has a positive influence on predisposition towards social innovation (H13).
- The female gender has a significant influence on intention towards social innovation (H14).
- Having family members who are entrepreneurs (FE) has a significant influence on intention towards social innovation (H15).
- Experience of volunteering (VL) has a positive influence on predisposition towards social innovation (H16).

Results

The results indicate that personal traits such as teamwork, internal locus of control, capacity for innovation, risk tolerance, self-confidence, social leadership, the capacity to work under pressure, social conscience, saving habits, the female gender, experience of volunteering and having family members who are entrepreneurs are important factors which promote the development and consolidation of social innovation. In view of this, it is essential that the university reinforces those attributes in students, not only through education programmes, research, management, extension and social projection, but also by promoting a culture of innovation and collaboration with various social actors. This interaction would enable students to experience first hand the problem areas and issues in their immediate area, and to make the most of the opportunities arising to create solutions that benefit the community.

At the same time, the findings also show that personal traits such as creativity, tolerance of uncertainty, social values and the need for success do not significantly influence the process of social innovation. This might be because social innovation does not solely depend on creativity, but also on action, resources, technology and cooperation between various social actors. In

addition, although those with a high degree of tolerance for uncertainty tend to manage complex situations well, potentially favouring social innovation, recent research indicates that not everybody has the capacity or initial impulse to participate in processes of this kind. Similarly, although those with a high need for success are capable of contributing to social innovation as a product of their desire to achieve goals and solve problems, it has been observed that they tend to prioritise personal achievements above the collective wellbeing, which is a key goal of social innovation. Likewise, embracing social values (such as solidarity, respect, responsibility and empathy) does not guarantee the creation of new and effective initiatives and actions to address needs or resolve social problems. While such values are essential to promote structural change, foster appropriate behaviour and maintain social order, they need to be complemented by the factors identified above to drive the process of social innovation effectively.

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