

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE: CATALYST FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

While social entrepreneurship has been acknowledged as critical to entrepreneurship development, there is perhaps a neglect of the communication imperative in social entrepreneurship and its basis for entrepreneurship development. It becomes possible to dissect and build on a nuanced understanding of the tripod of social entrepreneurship, public sphere and entrepreneurship development. The main objective of this paper is to situate the value of the public sphere and how it contributes to entrepreneurship development. Anchored on the social capital and presence theories, the paper used literary analysis as method of data gathering and analysis.. The obvious finding of the paper is that the public sphere have the capacity to generate political, social and economic information to all segments of the society which can stimulate entrepreneurship. It recommends government and non-governmental development agencies should develop partnership with social bloggers to promote social entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship development. There is a need to organize workshops or training for small scale business owners to sensitize them about the place of the public sphere in their business development.

Keywords. Public sphere, Social entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurship development, Social interaction

INTRODUCTION

The pervasive nature of poverty and the high population growth with its attendant impact on public infrastructure, widening unemployment, and inequalities call for a reawakening of the need to promote social entrepreneurs capable of stimulating entrepreneurship growth in Nigeria. This is achievable when the potential of the new media is deployed in the process.

Inegbenebor and Igbinomwanhia (2011) observed that “Nigeria is endowed with abundant human and natural resources. The country is blessed with a variety of mineral deposits including petroleum, natural gas, uranium, tin, columbite, coal, precious metals and gemstones. Over the last three decades, the country has earned over US\$300 billion from oil sales. However, this has not reflected in the standard of living of its citizenry. Nigeria remains among the poorest countries of the world and still carries the tag of a ‘developing’, or worse ‘underdeveloped,’ nation.”

Addressing these challenges require the input of social entrepreneurs and communication experts working hand in hand to create an atmosphere for entrepreneurship to thrive.

Roger and Sally (2001) define social entrepreneurship as having the following three components: (1) identifying a stable but inherently unjust equilibrium that causes the exclusion, marginalization, or suffering of a segment of humanity that lacks the financial means or political clout to achieve any transformative benefit on its own; (2) identifying an opportunity in this unjust equilibrium, developing a social value proposition, and bringing to

bear inspiration, creativity, direct action, courage, and fortitude, thereby challenging the stable state's hegemony; and (3) forging a new, stable equilibrium that releases trapped potential or alleviates the suffering of the targeted group, and through imitation and the creation of a stable ecosystem around the new equilibrium ensuring a better future for the targeted group and even society at large.

Although, the government has recognized the place of entrepreneurship in its quest for economic development when it introduced entrepreneurship education, Bank of Industry and the Small and Medium Scale Enterprises Development Association of Nigeria (SMEDAN) to grow, fund and stimulate entrepreneurship. However, the number of entrepreneurs remain abysmally low considering the population of Nigeria. The poor publicity given to entrepreneurial works and the absence of social entrepreneurs to galvanize the process of entrepreneurship remain the bane to its growth.

Nevertheless, Social entrepreneurs tackle major social issues that bother on boy or girl child education fighting poverty, community development amongst others. The influence of social entrepreneurship is either misconstrued as philanthropy, social activism, social service or is largely unaccounted for by the communication media. However, the activities of these groups find support in social entrepreneurship.

In spite of the functional relevance of the communication media, especially the internet as a public sphere, It seems there is a lack of knowledge of the nexus between social entrepreneurship, the public sphere and entrepreneurship development. This is what this paper seeks to unravel.

In doing this, the paper adopts the literature modelling to interrogate relevant literatures on the concept and relate how the concepts are applicable to the subject of discourse in order to provide a better understanding of how the public sphere help in entrepreneurship development.

Statement of the Problem

Although, the advent of the internet and the social media have greatly enhanced and transformed the marketing and advertising of small scale businesses especially the wide acceptance in their usage and popularity among individuals and groups who are likely target markets for small scale business ventures. It seems there is a knowledge gap on the power of the internet as public sphere and catalyst for entrepreneurship development. It can be hypothesized that where the knowledge level is high the volume of social entrepreneurship activities on the public sphere in driving entrepreneurial will be high, this may not be the case in Nigeria.

Where the level of social entrepreneurship discourse on the public sphere appear low despite this window of opportunity brought about by the growth and expansion in the use of the internet, the likelihood is that aspiring entrepreneurs from marginalized groups will lack the needed motivation and support necessary for their entrepreneurial activities to thrive. It is in this light that the paper seeks to discuss the place of the public sphere and social entrepreneurship as imperatives for entrepreneurship development in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework.

This paper is anchored within the framework of social capital theory and social presence theory.

Oana and Shahrazad (2014) conceived social capital as the power of networks of people

working together and sharing information. Similarly, Dekker and Uslaner, (2001) see it as the value of social networks, bonding similar people and bridging between diverse people, with norms of reciprocity.

In relation to this study, since social entrepreneurs work with the social groups to foster entrepreneurial change, The civil society creates networks through collaboration with various groups to create the right value that transform marginalized groups. Oana and Shahrazad (2014) opined that the fact that social entrepreneurs use networks in social ventures, in order to add more value to the sustainability of the innovative solution is critical to the realization of the social enterprise.

Social presence theory was developed by John Short, Ederyn Williams and Bruce Christie in 1976. They theory measures communication media based on the extent of awareness of the other person in the communication interaction. They argued that communication media differ in their level of social presence and that these differences play an important role in how people interact. They see social presence basically as the quality of communication medium that can determine the way people interact and communicate. They noted that some media have higher degree of social presence over others. They assert that a medium with high degree of social presence is seen as being sociable, warm and personal, whereas, a medium with a low degree of social presence is seen as less personal.

Tu and McIsaac (2002) define Social presence as the degree of feeling, perception and reaction of being connected to another intellectual entity on computer mediated communication. In a modern context, Asemah, Nwammuo and Nkwam-Uwaoma (2017) see social presence as the way individuals represent themselves in their online environment. They assert that social presence defines how participants relate to one another which in turn, affects their ability to communicate effectively.

Asemah et al (2017) observe that social presence theory classifies different communication media along a one-dimensional continuum of social presence, where the degree of social presence is equated to the degree of awareness of the other person in a communication interaction. The theory, they noted, conceive communication to be effective if the communication medium has the appropriate social presence required for the level of interpersonal involvement required for a task. They highlighted some of the factors that contribute to social presence as: social context, online communication and interactivity.

In relation to this study, the way entrepreneurship is represented by social entrepreneurs will go a long in stimulating discourses around it and promote an entrepreneurial zeal among the interactants. In other words, the features of the public sphere which make it possible for bloggers, surfers and social networks to raise and discuss a matter of importance unhindered also provide the same avenue for social entrepreneurs to raise and discuss entrepreneurial issues.

The social media represents a viable network for entrepreneurs to coalesce into a group to discuss entrepreneurship issues. This is because, the public sphere is a forum for both social entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs to chart courses that would advance entrepreneurship.

The Internet as Public Sphere

Development in media technologies particularly the internet has provided another avenue for the deepening social entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship. Besides the internet, other technological possibilities for business owners to share with themselves and their customers. The internet has made it possible for the creation of a virtual community.

The internet and its associated communication technologies such as video technology, direct mailing and telephone banks etc. have altered business communication from its traditional approach thereby creating opportunities for closer interactions between and among people.

The internet has become a potent force in social entrepreneurship because it provides a margin of information regarding marginalised groups and business activities. Social activists can express their views on matters arising within the body polity and business environment using the platform which the new technology offers without hindrance. The information super highway thus makes it possible for them to be active participants in the business discourse without been hindered by geographical distance or the gate keeping encumbrances peculiar to traditional mass media. New technologies now make it possible to send back Short Message Services (SMS) to business men and women in the distribution chain. This strategy helps to reinforce the dominant views about entrepreneurship in the media and to persuade subtly. Norris (2002) contends that the internet helps in 'bridging' and 'bonding' the role assign to online technologies in building communities. Putnam (2000) explains these terms to mean 'bridging groups' functioning to write disparate members of a community and 'bonding groups' reinforcing close-knit networks among people sharing similar backgrounds and beliefs. Of all the relevance of the internet in communication interactions media scholars have identified its usefulness as a public sphere, in that it enable individuals to meet and discuss ideas unhindered.

Oso (2007, p.119) citing Habermas (1979) defines the public sphere as: "A realm of our social life in which something approaching public can be formed, access is guaranteed to all citizens.

He goes further to state that the use of social media in promoting small scale businesses offers these business outlets various innovative communication platforms for engaging in robust marketing and advertising (communication) activities so as to increase awareness of their wares among social media users in order to gain increase patronage. This has aided two-way communication between the small scale business owners and the consumers.

Social entrepreneurs cannot utilized traditional media without paying for the cost of airing or publishing their programmes. These drawback is overcome by the public sphere since the free access create avenue for ideas to be shared unhindered. It is free from the bureaucracy associated with the public media and its reach cut across international boundaries. Thus, social entrepreneurs can take lessons from other parts of the world and contribute to their own home grown efforts at stimulating entrepreneurship.

Empirical Review of Related Studies

A number of studies have been done on the relationship between social entrepreneurship and development. For instance, Tiwari, Shat and Tikeria (2017) did an empirical analysis of the factors affecting social entrepreneurship intentions. The study identified the social intention among undergraduate students in Indian context by using the theory of planned behaviour as theoretical basis. The study sought to find out the role of the theory of planned behaviour in predicting social entrepreneurial intentions. It also sought to develop a conceptual model and empirically test the effect of emotional intelligence, creativity and moral obligation on social entrepreneurial intentions. The study was based on the survey research design with the systematic random sampling technique and questionnaire used as instrument for data collection. The result of the study shows that planned behaviour does not relate to entrepreneurial intentions. The result further shows that there is a positive correlation between creativity, emotional intelligence and social entrepreneurship.

In a related study by Cukier, Trenholm, Carl and Gekas (2011), They did a content analysis of the literature on social entrepreneurship, with particular emphasis on case studies. Using standardized search terms in several bibliographic databases (EBSCO, ProQuest, and Google Scholar), they trace the trends in the literatures on: "entrepreneur" or "entrepreneurship"; "social entrepreneur" or "social entrepreneurship"; "social movement"; and "social

marketing.” they plotted the results by year for the period from 1987 to 2007. Their citation analysis demonstrates that despite growth in the literature on “social entrepreneurship” in recent years, it remains dwarfed by the research on “entrepreneurship” and “entrepreneurs,” as well as on “social movements”. their content analysis of 567 unique articles concerning “social entrepreneur” or “social entrepreneurship” revealed interesting patterns. The result confirmed that there are no consistency in definitions and objects of focus and that there is little rigorous comparative analysis. Some research encompasses social innovation and advocacy efforts. Other articles use a more narrow definition insisting on inclusion of income generation goals. The result further shows that different levels of analysis, including studies of individuals (micro), studies of organizations and processes (meso), and broader studies of the economic, political and societal context (macro). Finally, the majority of the journal articles did not conduct empirical research and instead simply focused on theory. A mere 22% (123) made reference to specific examples of social entrepreneurship, primarily drawing on secondary accounts to illustrate arguments. While 274 unique case studies were cited in 123 articles, most appear only once and often with limited detail. they suggested that strengthening the precision of definitions, exploring measures of success, increasing the rigor of empirical research, and drawing on related disciplines would strengthen the field of social entrepreneurship overall. They recommend that further study should focus on clarifying definitions and boundaries in order to clearly explain why only some are identified as examples of successful social entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. As well, improving the rigour of analysis and empirical data on impacts and on processes would strengthen assertions concerning “best practices.

Wullemann and Hudon (2015) studied models of entrepreneurship from empirical evidence from Mexico. Their paper sought to improve the understanding of social entrepreneurship models based on empirical evidence from Mexico, where social entrepreneurship is currently at its peak. Their aims was to supplement existing typologies of social entrepreneurship models. To that end, building on Zahra, Gedajlovich, Neubaum, & Shulman (2009) typology it begins by providing a new framework classifying the three types of social entrepreneurship-social bricoleur, social constructionist and social engineer.

A comparative case study of ten Mexican social enterprises was elaborated using these framework. Findings suggest that the distinct typologies in Canada are evolving in a dynamic manner determined by the resources and ambitions of social entrepreneurs. Starting either as social bricoleurs or as social constructionists, social entrepreneurs aspire to become social engineers. Moreover, social constructionists usually present hybrid business models.

These studies have relationship with this paper, first, it is possible to measure the degree of creative ability of upcoming social entrepreneur in the public in the type of creative solutions they bring into business. It is also possible to benchmark the category of social entrepreneurship by looking at the key business interest. Although these studies used survey and case studies, the paper adopted literary analysis. Nevertheless, the obvious conclusion from these studies find relevance in the topic under study.

Social Entrepreneurship and its Place in Entrepreneurship Development

What is the relationship between entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship? What is the point of convergence or divergence between the two concepts? It is safe to say that social benefit is the basic line of difference between social entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship.

Roger and Sally (2011) believe that the critical distinction between entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship lies in the value proposition itself. For the entrepreneur, the value

proposition anticipates and is organized to serve markets that can comfortably afford the new product or service, and is thus designed to create financial profit. From the outset, the expectation is that the entrepreneur and his or her investors will derive some personal financial gain. Profit is *sine qua non*, essential to any venture's and the means to its ultimate end in the form of large-scale market adoption and ultimately a new equilibrium.

They contend that the social entrepreneur neither anticipates nor organizes to create substantial financial profit for his or her investors – philanthropic and for the most part – or for himself or herself. Instead, the social entrepreneur aims for value in the form of large-scale, transformational benefit that accrues either to a significant segment of society or to the society at large. Dees (1998) sees it as social entrepreneurship initiative as a hybrid organization, partly for-profit and partly not-for-profit.

Unlike the entrepreneurial value proposition that assumes a market that can pay for the innovation, and may even provide substantial upside for investors, the social entrepreneur's value proposition targets an underserved, neglected, or highly disadvantaged population that lacks the financial means or political clout to achieve the transformative benefit on its own (Roger and Sally 2001).

Conclusion/ Recommendations

The public sphere has become a space for public discussion on issues that affect humanity. The value of communication as a common feature of various fields of human endeavours has become critical in the discourse of social entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship development. The interactive nature of the internet and other social media platforms make the exchange of ideas and information among individuals and groups imperative. The growing number of small scale business owners who own and use social media applications suggest that social entrepreneurs can take advantage of its potentials to create value for entrepreneurship development. The goal of social entrepreneurship to transform society can get the desired bite when the promoter understands the place of the public sphere as platform to gain massive support especially from the young people who belong to the Net Generation. The paper therefore suggests the following;

- Government and non-governmental development agencies should develop partnership with social bloggers to promote social entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship development.
- There is a need to organize a workshop or training for small scale business owners to sensitize them about the place of the public sphere in their business development.
- Social entrepreneurs should unite and create a blog where issues that require societal attention can be discussed.
- Entrepreneurs who have benefited from social entrepreneurs should organize seminars to support their efforts.

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