

Institutional Levels Entrepreneurial Orientations and Social Entrepreneurial Intentions: Understanding the Mediating Role of Empathy

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Abstract : Research suggests that the main trait differentiating social entrepreneurs from traditional entrepreneurs is empathy. And although prior research has established the relevance of empathy in predicting social entrepreneurial intentions in different contexts, its usefulness at predicting social entrepreneurial intentions in emerging economy like Nigeria is yet to be well established. Whereas, it is well known that students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria (e.g. Universities, Polytechnics, and Colleges of Education) are given entrepreneurial orientations by being made to offer compulsory courses in entrepreneurship, research focusing on the effect of such students' entrepreneurial orientation on entrepreneurial intentions is scant. To address this gap in the entrepreneurship literature, this study attempts to enhance our understanding by focusing on students selected from one University of Technology, one Polytechnic, and one College of Education in Niger State of Nigeria. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine the mechanism through which students' institutional level entrepreneurial orientations affect their social entrepreneurial intentions and the role empathy plays in this relationship. Building on complexity theory (Satis & Streufert, 2003, 2001), this study proposes empathy as a proximal antecedent of social entrepreneurial intentions and that it is the mechanism through which the students' entrepreneurial orientations affect their social entrepreneurial intentions. Data collected from 598 respondents were analyzed using multilevel structural equation modelling with Mplus version 7.3. The findings reveal that (i) although students' entrepreneurial orientation directly relates to their social entrepreneurial intentions, this relationship differs according to the kind of institution; and (ii) students' entrepreneurial orientations positively relates to social entrepreneurial intentions indirectly through empathy. Finally, the paper discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the findings, highlights the study's strengths and limitations, and then maps out some directions for future research.

Keywords : institutional level, entrepreneurial orientation, empathy, social entrepreneurial intentions

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