

Full Length Research Paper

Altruism towards others and sustainability intention of small business owners

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Though, small businesses are vital globally, they contribute to environmental and social challenges such as deforestation, pollution, use of polythene bags, poor working conditions, child labour and health hazards. Thus, it is vital to understand the concept of sustainability intention of small business owners. The purpose of this study therefore was to assess how altruism towards others influences sustainability intention of small business owners in Uganda. The study adopted a cross sectional design. A sample of 384 small businesses in Kampala was selected and self-administered questionnaire used to collect data. Statistical package for social science (SPSS) was used to process and analyze data from the respondents through correlation and regression analysis to determine the predicting power of altruism towards others on sustainability intention. The study findings revealed that altruism towards others significantly predicts the sustainability intention of small business owners. It is therefore recommended that small business owners should always be empathetic and sympathetic to the people and be mindful of conserving the environment for better long term profit gains.

Key words: Altruism towards others, sustainability intention, small businesses, business owners.

INTRODUCTION

Globally small businesses are important contributors to world economies through employment creation, resource utilization, and government revenue and poverty eradication. However they pose both environmental challenges such as deforestation, pollution, use of polythene bags and social challenges like poor working conditions, under employment, income inequality and child labour (Criado-Gomis et al., 2017; Gast et al., 2017; Shepherd and Patzelt, 2011; Choongo et al., 2016). This will likely affect the realization of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals such as end poverty in

all its forms everywhere (Goal 1), end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture (Goal 2), ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages (Goal 3) and promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all (Goal 8). Thus, small business owners need to develop sustainability intention in order to conserve the environment and the values of the society.

Small businesses in developing countries, such as Uganda, transact in charcoal, firewood and polythene

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bags that pose both environmental and social challenges. For example, over 80% of plastics are imported, with approximately 30 businesses producing plastic bags (UMA unit report, 2008). Restaurants use polythene bags for steaming food and storage, which may lead to health hazards; consequently, affecting the achievement of sustainable development goals 1, 2, 3 and 8. In addition, the way they are disposed is a threat, since there is a tendency to throw used polythene bags that may end up blocking water drainage system. Polythene bags hardly decompose, thus soil infertility besides the littering destroys the beautiful scenery of the environment making it difficult to realize the sustainable development goals 6, 7, 13 and 15. While Uganda has a regulatory body (NEMA, UNBS), the objectives and outcomes are far from being realized (Montiel and Husted, 2009).

Previous studies indicate several determinants of sustainability intention for example, Koe and Majid (2014) revealed that socio-cultural factors such as time orientation, sustainability orientation and social norm significantly influence sustainability intention. In addition, Majid et al. (2017) reported that positive sustainable value, favourable sustainable attitude, supporting social norms, and sufficient government legislation positively affect sustainability intention of entrepreneurs. Bădulescu et al. (2014) further revealed that business students have a positive attitude towards sustainability intention.

Although there are several studies on sustainability intention, none of the studies has examined the contribution of altruism towards others in predicting sustainability intention of small business sector in a single study in the context of an African developing country such as Uganda. The desire to establish the contribution of altruism towards others on sustainability intention of small business owners in Uganda formed the motivation for this study. This was realized through a questionnaire survey of 384 small businesses in Kampala. Results suggest that altruism towards others contribute 28.6% of the variance in sustainability intention of small business owners.

This study is important in the following ways. First, the study contributes to the existing literature by examining the contribution of altruism towards others on sustainability intention. Second, small business owners need to practice empathy and sympathy if they are to develop sustainability intention.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical foundation

In this study, the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) and social exchange theory (SET) were adopted to explain the relationship between altruism towards others and sustainability intention of small businesses. The theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) arose as an extension of

the theory of reasoned action (TRA) by (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), on the ground that the latter fails to explain behaviours that are not under volitional control. The main underpinning of the TPB is that complete volitional control is rare, certain behaviours require special knowledge, skills and resources. Thus, TPB views an individual's behaviour as mainly directed by behavioural intention, which in turn is explained by a person's attitude towards the behaviour, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). The behaviour intention is the immediate antecedent of performing any behaviour of interest. An individual's interest to perform any behaviour is largely inclined by whether people view it in a positive way (Ajzen, 1991). The general principle of the TPB is that the intention to perform is strongest when individuals hold positive attitudes towards the behaviour, there is a strong subjective norm to perform the behaviour and there is a high level of perceived behaviour control (Ajzen and Fishbein, 2004).

As such, people go through a conscious and deliberate decision-making process based on careful consideration of available information before engaging in a given behaviour. It assumes that people are rational decision makers whose behavioural intention is influenced jointly by attitude towards the behaviour, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. In addition, when people have preconceived notions of their personal ability in terms of resources and capacity to achieve specific objective, this perception will play a major role in their behaviour directly and/or indirectly through attitude. In this study, behavioural intention and perceived behaviour control are relevant in explaining sustainability intention among small businesses in Uganda. However, this theory does not address the empathy and sympathy that small business owners need to have in developing sustainability intention.

Social exchange theory (SET) is generally used in sociology and social psychology research, it is considered to be one of the oldest theories of social behaviour (Homans, 1958). SET involves two persons, each of whom provides some benefits to the other in return for rewards from the other. SET is a social behaviour theory that emphasizes social behaviour in the exchange process (Homans, 1958). The theory assumes that individual behaviour is an exchange of activities, specifically uncalculated benefits and costs, no specified future obligation, no reciprocation; and individuals interact voluntarily while considering alternatives (Homans, 1958). According to this theory, there are interdependent interactions between the stakeholders and the entrepreneurs (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). In other words, Entrepreneurs and the stakeholders are interdependent on each other for mutual satisfaction in terms of benefits and costs. Altruism calls for the interdependence between stakeholders. As the entrepreneur increases his profit margin, he should decrease what negatively affects the society and

environment. Therefore, entrepreneurs will engage in an exchange with stakeholders if they maximize the benefits of the relationship and minimize the costs involved. The decision to get involved in the exchange process mainly depends on the entrepreneur; hence altruism towards others comes to play.

Actors in an exchange process are dependent on one another for outcomes they value. In other words, small business owner-managers are in the exchange process with other stakeholders like suppliers, employees, customers and the government for mutual benefit; thus, they act in a manner that yields shared values. SET urges that a person's decision to involve in an exchange process is based on the cost benefit analysis. Therefore, people participate in an interaction process after realizing that the benefits of the relationship outweigh the costs of participating in that relationship. This relationship may continue only if both parties feel that they are gaining from it.

Consequently, the social exchange theory is relevant to our study since the entrepreneurs have to sympathize and empathize with the society and the environment in their pursuit of profits and thus sustainable entrepreneurship.

Altruism towards others and sustainability intention

Altruism towards others involves some self-sacrifice, with the intention of benefiting others. Altruism towards others is a person's drive to develop other people regardless of the returns (Choongo et al., 2016). In other words, it is a deed of charity (Khalil, 2004). Another scholar defined altruism as "Behaviour that benefits another organism, not closely related, while being apparently detrimental to the organism performing the behavior; benefit and detriment being defined in terms of contribution to inclusive fitness" (Trivers, 1970: 1). Altruistic persons are concerned, generous, helpful, caring, sympathetic, thoughtful, compassionate and benevolent. Therefore, their thoughtfulness drives their altruistic intention that develops the well-being of the society and the environment. Literature indicates that entrepreneurs usually engage in altruistic activities due to their family background, marriage to altruistic individuals, business associates, religion, membership in non-profit organization as well as their personal tragedy (Tietmeyer, 2015). In addition, it results from group selection, gains of social reputation and recognition by others, genetic disposition, personality factors, and improved psychological and emotional wellbeing for those who help (Patzelt and Shepherd, 2011). However, the personality, physical and mental makeup of entrepreneurs is the major focus of this study in understanding sustainable entrepreneurship.

In addition, entrepreneurs who are altruistic towards others usually understand the societal grief and the environmental condition that stimulates their intention to

find sustainable opportunities. In other words, altruistic entrepreneurs sympathize and empathize with poor people and strive to improve the environmental condition in which these people live (Tietmeyer, 2015). For instance, entrepreneurs who run restaurants may be concerned about the use of inappropriate materials like polythene bags to steam food. Thus the hypothesis:

H₁: Altruism towards others and sustainability intention are positively related.

METHODOLOGY

Research design, population and sample

The study employed a cross sectional and correlational research design to examine the relationship between altruism towards others and sustainability intention of small businesses in a developing economy. Cross sectional research design is a type of observational study that analyzes data collected from a population, or a representative subset, at a specific point in time; while correlational research design is a quantitative method of research wherein there are two or more quantitative variables from the same group of subjects from which a relationship can be determined if it exists or not. The population of this study was 108,534 small businesses in Kampala (Uganda Bureau of Statistics - UBOS, 2013), from which a sample of 384 small business was determined using Krejcie and Morgan (1973) table of sample selection approach and employed the rotary method of selecting the subjects. Of the 384 small businesses, completed questionnaires were received from 358 small business owners, indicating a response rate of 93%. The higher percentage response rate was possible because of the face to face interaction between the researcher and the respondents, and maintaining a contact with respondents. This study's unit of analysis was the small businesses and the unit of inquiry was the small business owners or managers.

Measures and the questionnaire

A six-point Likert scale questionnaire ranging from Very often to Never designed to measure the opinion of a respondent was utilized. This study utilized a face to face questionnaire to enable a face to face interaction between the researcher and the respondents, and to improve the quality and response rate. The questionnaire design was based on reviewing the existing literature on altruism towards others, sustainability intention, and small businesses. Sustainability intention was operationalized as the likelihood of the individual to take up sustainability actions (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Gruzdet al., 2012) and altruism towards others was conceptualized to describe the feelings that show selflessness while doing business (Rushton et al., 1981). Both variables were considered as a uni dimensional variables, with a bias on sustainability. Specifically, the altruistic actions of small businesses in the study setting were examined.

Validity and reliability

Face and content validity were performed. Face validity involved conducting interviews on 10 small business owners/managers, with the intention of getting their views on how they define sustainability intention; whether they have been involved in sustainable practices in their businesses as well as the benefits and challenges they

Table 1. Descriptive statistics.

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gender	332	1	2	1.52	0.500
Age of the respondent	332	1	4	2.14	0.925
Education level	332	1	8	4.32	1.373
Business age	332	1	4	2.38	0.742
Sustainability training	332	1	2	1.47	0.500
Altruism towards others	332	1.14	6.00	4.4445	1.06369
Sustainability Intention	332	2.33	6.00	4.7395	0.89108
Valid N (listwise)	332				

Table 2. Correlation results.

Correlation	Altruism towards others	Sustainable Intention
Altruism	1	0.535**
Sustainable Intention	0.535**	1

** : Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

derived from practicing sustainability. This helped the researcher to change the wording in the questionnaire. Content validity test was conducted to determine how accurately the instrument taps into the various aspects of the specific construct in question. The content validity index (CVI) was computed and the recommended cut off point was satisfactory. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was measured to test reliability of how closely related a set of items are as a group. Study results revealed that all the variables have coefficient above .7 which is acceptable (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1978).

FINDINGS

The study revealed that majority of the respondents were females (52%), majorly those between 29 - 39 years age t (38%), followed by those between 18 - 28 years (28%); clearly indicating that on average, those in business are below 40 years. In addition, majority of the respondents had either a diploma or bachelors (27%), followed by masters' holders (20%); indicating that the respondents were knowledgeable as far as the issues under study are concerned. On another hand, majority of the small business owners and managers had obtained training on sustainability concerns (53%); and 47% had never obtained any form of training on sustainability concerns. The results further show that majority of the businesses were between 2-5 years (55%). This is followed by those that have been around for the period of 6 - 10 years (30%). Thus, indicating that most of the businesses are young.

Descriptive statistics

Mean and standard deviations were computed to

summarize the observed data. Mean indicates a summary of data while standard deviation shows how well the means represent the data (Field, 2013). Study results indicate that the mean and standard deviation for altruism towards others and sustainability intention is 4.4445 and 4.7395 and 1.06369 and 0.89108 respectively. The standard deviations are closer to each other and this shows that there are minimal variations in the understanding of sustainability intention among small business owners and managers. The mean values are higher for both the dependent and independent variables indicating that they were all relevant as indicated in Table 1.

Correlation results

Pearson's Correlation analysis was conducted to measure the strength of linear associations between the study variables and is denoted by r . The Pearson correlation coefficient, r , can take a range of values from +1 to -1. A value of 0 indicates that there is no association between the two variables. A value greater than 0 indicates a positive association; that is, as the value of one variable increases, so does the value of the other variable. A value less than 0 indicates a negative association; that is, as the value of one variable increases, the value of the other variable decreases. The study variables were measured on a continuous scale, and thus Pearson correlation was found to be the most appropriate to test the relationships between the variables. The results are presented in Table 2.

Results in Table 2 show that Altruism towards others is positively related to Sustainability Intention ($r = 0.535^{**}$,

Table 3. Regression results.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.747	0.178	15.430	0.000
	Altruism	0.448	0.039	0.535	11.511

R = 0.535a, R² = 0.286, Adjusted R² = 0.284, df1 = 1, df2 = 330, F Change = 132.500. a: Dependent Variable: Sustainability Intention.

P<0.05). This implies that a positive change in altruism towards others helps to improve sustainability intention of owners of small businesses.

Regression results

Linear regression analysis was conducted to establish the predicting power of control variables as well as altruism towards others on the sustainable intentions of small business owners as shown in Table 3.

Results in Table 3 show that altruism towards others significantly predict sustainability intention ($\beta=0.535^{**}$, $P<0.01$). Altruism towards others explained 28.6% of sustainability intention ($R^2 = 0.286$). This implies that altruism towards other explain 28.6% of sustainability intention. Meaning there are other variables at play that were not addressed in this study.

DISCUSSION

The study revealed that there is a significant correlation between altruism towards others and sustainability intention. This implies that positive changes in altruism towards others are associated with positive changes in sustainability intention. Altruism in this study was conceptualized to mean acting in the best interest of others rather than in one's own self-interest, even at a risk or cost to oneself. The result mean that when small business owner/managers have the interest of others above self, they are likely to develop plans of creating awareness in the communities about social and environmental concerns, training their workers on health and safety, promoting environment sustainability among their customers and instituting monitoring and controlling measures for social and environmental sustainability.

In addition, study findings imply that small business owners with the inclination to help others without pay, give to charity, donate blood, etc. are likely to develop plans that promote social and environmental sustainability. The study results are in line with Patzelt and Shepherd (2011) who found that owner managers' with the tendency of putting others above self, end up planning for activities related to social and environmental sustainability. Gender role also may provide a probable explanation for the result. A study by Mestre et al. (2009)

revealed that girls scored higher than boys in their ability to stand in "the other person's shoes" and also in the feelings towards a person in trouble or in need. Similar results were reported by Eisenberg and Lennon (1983), Knafo et al. (2008), and Van der Graaff et al. (2014). The majority of respondents in this study were females. By their nature, women business owners/managers are more concerned about the social and environmental factors surrounding their businesses.

Furthermore, the age of the respondents may also explain the study findings. This is because older people tend to be more empathetic towards others around them, than the younger age group. For instance, the study findings of Richter and Kunzmann (2011) indicated that in comparison to their younger counterparts, older adults generally reported and expressed greater sympathy while observing the target persons; and they were better at sharing the emotions of the target persons who talked about a topic that was relevant to older adults. This suggests that the older business owners have been around long enough to appreciate the need to reach out to one another and ensure that the communities around are transformed socially and environmentally. This in turn, results to them developing action plans to see this happen. This also suggests that older owner managers are more likely to work with community members through such activities as donating blood, giving goods or clothes to charity, giving money to strangers who asked for it, etc. Such altruistic actions enhance their plans for community development. The study findings thus provide empirical evidence to support the theory of altruism from the business perspective.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Owner-managers of small businesses can improve their sustainability practices by enhancing their empathy and sympathy. This study provides empirical evidence indicating that altruistic behaviour is essential, as it emphasizes having feelings toward others. This suggests the need for small business owners to establish a good relationship with the stakeholders that include employees, community members, the government, suppliers as well as customers. Enhancing altruism towards others through supporting stakeholders equips

small business owners with the understanding of not only what occurs but how and why.

However, the study was limited by the fact that small businesses were investigated in general including businesses in trading, hotel and restaurant as well as manufacturing sector. This is likely to affect the study finding because the business model of the enterprises is different and thus affect the environment and the society differently. Therefore future studies should focus on small businesses in particular sectors independently, such as manufacturing.

This study focused on only small businesses in the urban region rather than the rural setting. Due to different business environments, the findings may not entirely apply to small businesses in rural areas, the higher concentration of businesses makes it possible for people who do not have access to sustainable practices to learn by observing others. Therefore, the model should be tested in a rural setting for reliability and validity.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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