

# The role of institutional support structure in shaping social entrepreneurial intention

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The present study aims to investigate the role of institutional support structure in shaping intention to form a social business using the model of Mair and Noboa (2006).

**Research Design & Methods:** This study utilized Structural Equation Modelling with a sample of 516 students in Vietnam to examine the hypotheses.

**Findings:** The finding shows that institutional support structure is positively associated with empathy, social entrepreneurial self-efficacy and perceived social support. In addition, institutional support structure also increases social entrepreneurial intention through enhancing empathy, social entrepreneurial self-efficacy and perceived social support.

**Implications & Recommendations:** Policymakers need to develop a complete legal framework, and policies to support potential social entrepreneurs to start a business such as tax support, competitiveness, and loans... to help increase self-efficacy, empathy and perceived social support for those who wish to become social entrepreneurs.

**Contribution & Value Added:** This study highlight the interesting role of institutional support structure in increasing intention to form a social business. The results of this study contribute to the social entrepreneurship literature in understanding factors that lead to social entrepreneurial intention.

**Article type:** research article

**Keywords:** institutional support structure; social entrepreneurial intention; empathy; social entrepreneurial self-efficacy; perceived social support; moral obligation

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## INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, rapid social development leads to many negative impacts such as environmental pollution, climate change, natural disasters, epidemics, unequal access to public health and education, and income inequality. Therefore, social enterprises are established as a way to help society deal with these hazards. Social enterprises are a mixed model using business activities to achieve social goals. Its mission is to solve social problems and drive social change (Bui Ngoc Tuan & Pham, 2020; Zaremohzzabieh et al., 2019). It creates new products and new markets, meets the needs of marginalized groups in society, or solves socio-environmental issues. For these reasons, social entrepreneurship is a topic which attracts more and more attention from academics and politicians, as the entrepreneurial ecosystem, the widely understood business and political environment, should be in favour of stimulating entrepreneurship (Nowiński et al., 2020; Wach & Bilan, 2021).

Studying entrepreneurial intention is a key issue to understand entrepreneurship (Doanh & Bernat, 2019; Fayolle & Liñán, 2014; Wach & Bilan, 2022). Thus, the entrepreneurial intention is the most discussed topic in entrepreneurship in the past decades. However, Gawell (2012) argues that there is a difference between the factors that form the intention to establish commercial enterprises and social

enterprises. Furthermore, there are also significant differences in motivation to establish social enterprises between countries, especially between developed and developing countries. One of the reasons is that developed countries have more active institutional and cultural support compared to developing countries (GEM, 2019). Therefore, it is necessary to produce social entrepreneurial intention research in various contexts to have a holistically understanding of social entrepreneurship (Lacap et al., 2018). In addition, current studies have not yet fully explored the determinants of social entrepreneurship, so factors (both individual and contextual) that affect social entrepreneurial intentions still need to be explored further (Canestrino et al., 2020; Kedmenec & Strašek, 2017).

The current study contributes to social entrepreneurship literature by examining social entrepreneurial intention of students in emerging economies, taking Vietnam as a case. Vietnam is a developing country with the 4th largest economy in Southeast Asia in terms of GDP. Besides, currently, Vietnam has more than 22.1 million people between the age of 16-30, accounting for about 22.5% of the country's population. This young generation is strongly inclined towards entrepreneurship because they are risk-free, deeply interested in innovation, and need achievement (Altinay et al., 2012).

This study examines the factors shaping intention to establish a social enterprise and investigates the linkage between institution support structure, empathy, moral obligation, social entrepreneurial self-efficacy, perceived social support and social entrepreneurial intention. The results of this study would be helpful for both academicians and politicians to promote social entrepreneurship.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Mair and Noboa (2006) are known as pioneers in providing a theoretical perspective on factors affecting intention to form a social business. Their argument was developed on the Entrepreneurship Event Model of Shapero and Sokol (1982) and especially the theory of planned behaviour of Ajzen (1991). Ajzen (1991) argued that an individual's intention is influenced by three determinants: attitude toward behaviour (ATB), subjective norm (SN) and perceived behavioural control (PBC). *Attitude toward behaviour* refers to the degree to which a person has a good or bad assessment of performing a specific behaviour. *Subjective norm* reflects the perceived social pressure in terms of executing or not executing a particular behaviour. *Perceived behaviour control* refers to a person's perception of easiness or difficulty in carrying a behaviour. In addition, Ajzen (2002) stated that perceived behavioural control includes two types of internal and external behavioural control, the first of which is generally known as a person's self-efficacy while the last refers to the belief of a person about the support or objection they will face in the environment (Hockerts, 2015). Due to some specific and distinctive features of social entrepreneurship, Mair and Noboa have adjusted the traditional measures used in the TPB by using the variables empathy, moral obligation, social entrepreneurial self-efficacy and perceived social support as proxies for attitude toward behaviour, subjective norm, internal behavioural control and external behavioural control, respectively.

Empathy is a factor that substitutes the first component of Ajzen's (1991) TPB. While attitude towards behaviour relates to actual behaviour, empathy is considered as an attitude towards another person. Particularly, empathy can be seen as an instinct to understand others' feelings and emotions through witnessing his/her situation or simply visualising it (Decety & Jackson, 2004). Mair and Noboa (2006) also defined empathy as the capacity to acknowledge and share the emotions or feelings of others.

Moral obligation is proposed as a proxy for subjective norms. Moral obligation refers to the degree to which a person feels morally obligated to address the problems of socially marginalized groups (Hockert, 2018). Haines et al. (2008) stated that after making a moral judgment, moral obligation occurs as a secondary decision-making process before forming a moral intention.

Social entrepreneurial self-efficacy refers to his/her perception of the ability to solve societal problems (Hockert, 2017). Mair and Noboa (2006) argue that a person with high self-efficacy will find it feasible to create a social venture, thus positively influencing behavioural intention formation. In addition, Hockert (2015) stated that people often see social issues as something so massive that they cannot solve at all, so self-efficacy plays a very important role in promoting them to establish a social enterprise.

Perceived social support refers to a person's beliefs about the support he or she will receive from the surrounding environment when performing a particular behaviour. The support from society is another essential factor of intention formation (Birley, 1985; Honig & Davidsson, 2000). Mair and Noboa (2006) also emphasize that "social support is needed [...] to trigger the formation of an intention to start a social enterprise".

### **Factors influencing social entrepreneurial intention (SEI) – the antecedents from Mair and Noboa's (2006) model**

Up to now, there have been many empirical studies demonstrating the relationship between the four antecedents in Mair and Noboa's model (2006) on the intention to start a social venture (e.g. Hockerts, 2017; Lacap et al., 2018; Sousa-Filho et al., 2020). Mair and Noboa (2006) argued that empathy and moral obligation are known as necessary conditions for a person to form an intention to start a social enterprise. It has also been suggested that high moral obligation (Lacap et al., 2018) and rich empathy are qualities of social entrepreneurs. In addition, self-efficacy and social support are sufficient conditions to establish intention to become a social entrepreneur. A person who has high self-efficacy and finds positive support from around will have a high intention to form a social business (Mair & Noboa, 2016). However, the impact magnitudes of four antecedents from the model of Mair and Noboa were inconsistent. The results of these relationships depend on the particular research context. Therefore, this article applies Mair and Noboa's model in the context of a developing country – Vietnam. We expect to see the positive linkage between these antecedents and intention to establish social enterprise as suggested by Mair and Noboa. Thus, the following hypotheses were proposed:

- H1:** Empathy has a positive impact on social entrepreneurial intention.
- H2:** Moral obligation has a positive impact on social entrepreneurial intention.
- H3:** Social entrepreneurial self-efficacy has a positive impact on social entrepreneurial intention.
- H4:** Perceived social support has a positive impact on social entrepreneurial intention.

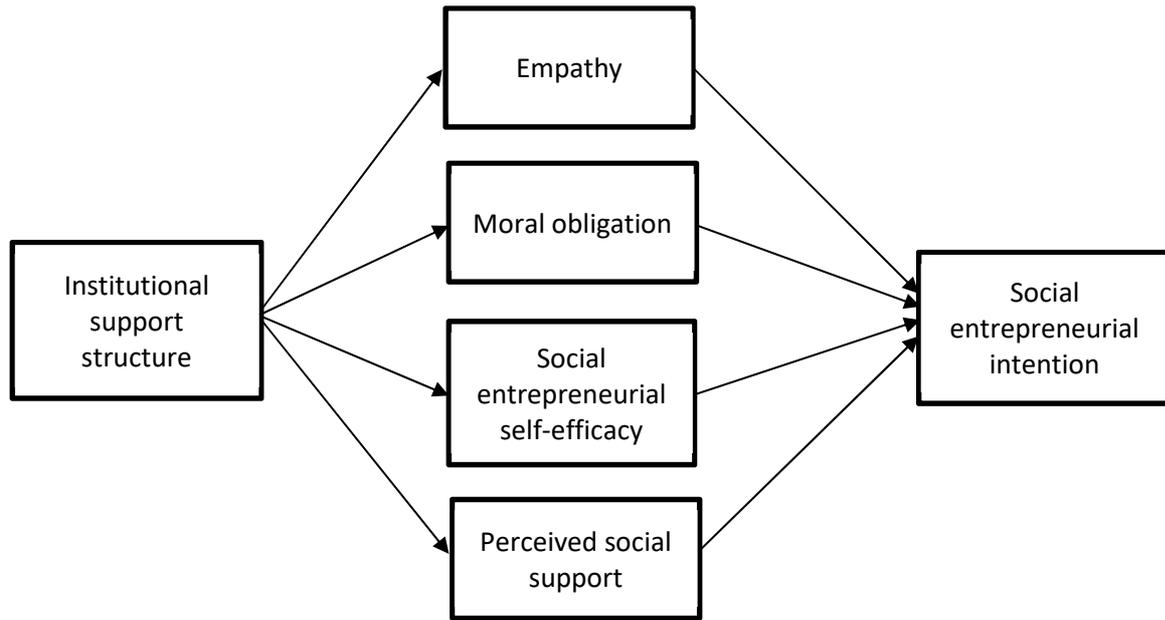
### **Institutional support structure**

It is argued that the institutional theory is of great relevance to social entrepreneurship because social entrepreneurship is seen as an economic behaviour associated with the institutional environment of society, communities or nation (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994). And behaviour of social entrepreneurs can be affected by many social, economic, cultural and political factors. The institutional theory assumes that the public and private institutional structures of a country create the rule of the game for an organization and shape individual behavioural processes and beliefs (North, 1990).

Institutional support structure refers to various policy support systems, including support from national and financial institutions, and rapid access to needed information and resources (Nicholls, 2010). The institutional support structure effects to individual's willingness, self-efficacy and vision. Therefore, it plays an important role in fostering social entrepreneurship. Many studies have found that a supportive institutional environment can make a person have a positive attitude toward entrepreneurship and social norms, enhance their knowledge about entrepreneurship and self-efficacy, and therefore improve their intention to form a business venturing (Mustafa et al., 2016). In terms of social entrepreneurship, we expect a similar effect of institutional support structure on four antecedents: empathy, moral obligation, social entrepreneurial self-efficacy and perceived social support. Therefore, the following four hypotheses were proposed:

- H5a:** The institutional support structure has a positive impact on empathy.
- H5b:** The institutional support structure has a positive impact on moral obligation.
- H5c:** The institutional support structure has a positive impact on social entrepreneurial self-efficacy.
- H5d:** The institutional support structure has a positive impact on perceived social support.

The proposed conceptual framework is described in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Conceptual framework**

Source: own elaboration.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Data collection and sample

It has been suggested that undergraduate students tend to prefer entrepreneurship and are the ones with the highest intention to start a new business (Guerrero et al., 2016; Reynolds et al., 2002), so the data set used in this study was collected from university students in Viet Nam. The method of convenience sampling was utilized to collect data through online-based survey. After distributing 550 questionnaires to the students, we obtained 516 qualified questionnaires to be used for further analysis. In our sample, there are more males (54.3%) than females (45.7%). The main range of respondents' age was between 21 and 24 years old, accounting for 76.7%. More than 50% of respondents study economics, and 74.8% of respondents have not taken part in any entrepreneurial course.

**Table 1. Demographic statistics**

Variables		Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	280	54.3
	Female	236	45.7
Age	18-20	53	10.3
	21-24	396	76.7
	>24	67	13
Fields of study	Economics	253	49
	Non-economics	263	51
Did you used to take part in an entrepreneurship course	No	386	74.8
	Yes	130	25.2

Note: N=516, F: Frequency, %: Percent

Source: own study.

### Analyses

To test the hypotheses, we use structural equation modelling (SEM). A three-step process was utilized to analyze the data supported by IMP SPSS AMOS 22.0 software. Firstly, the scales are preliminarily evaluated through two main tools (1) Cronbach's alpha and (2) exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Cronbach's alpha was utilized first to remove inappropriate variables. Variables with item-correlation

less than 0.3 or Cronbach's alpha value less than 0.6 will be eliminated. Next, EFA was employed to examine the total variance explained (>50%) and remove variables with factor loading less than 0.5 (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988). Secondly, we implemented confirming factor analysis (CFA) to assess the construct validity. Finally, the correlation coefficients for hypotheses were estimated by SEM. Furthermore, we employed the PROCESS macro approach to estimate the indirect effect of the institutional support structure on social entrepreneurial intention. Bootstrapping method with a 5,000 sample and 95% confidence interval was implemented. Bootstrapping is understood as an iterative-replaced sampling method, where the initial sample acts as the crowd. In terms of practice, the study of mediating effects is the study of the influence of an independent variable on a dependent variable through one or more mediators. When the study sample is large, the Sobel test method can be applied to test such intermediate effects (Sobel, 1986). However, if the original data is available, bootstrapping is a much better alternative (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

### Measures

This study examines six variables: empathy, moral obligation, social entrepreneurial self-efficacy, perceived social support, institutional support structure, and social entrepreneurial intention. All scales used in this study were adapted from previous research. To measure the responses, we used a five-point Likert scale for all the measures, starting from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Specific, the measure of empathy, including three items, was adopted from Hockert (2017). The scales of moral obligation (three items), social entrepreneurial self-efficacy (three items) and perceived social support (three items) were also inherited from Hockert (2017). These scales have been used and tested experimentally in many previous studies (eg. Sousa-Filho et al., 2020, Lacap et al., 2018). In addition, the four-item scale measuring institutional support structure was borrowed from Farashah (2015). And the measure of social entrepreneurial intention was adopted from Mair and Noboa (2006) (the first three items) and Liñán and Chen (2009) (the last item).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Cronbach's alpha and exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

Firstly, the reliability of the scales was assessed through Cronbach's Alpha. The results show that all scales were higher than 0.687, so all scales were within accepted values. Thus, the internal consistency reliabilities of all constructs were confirmed (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). After that, we conducted EFA to test the convergence and discriminant validity of variables. The result of EFA exhibits that  $KMO = 0.819$ , Sig. (Bartlett's Test) =  $0.000 < 0.005$ , Eigenvalues = 1.104. The rotation matrix results show that 20 observed variables are grouped into 6 factors, all observed variables have Factor Loading greater than the cut-off value of 0.5. The results of Cronbach's alpha, EFA and descriptive analysis are illustrated in the following table.

### Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

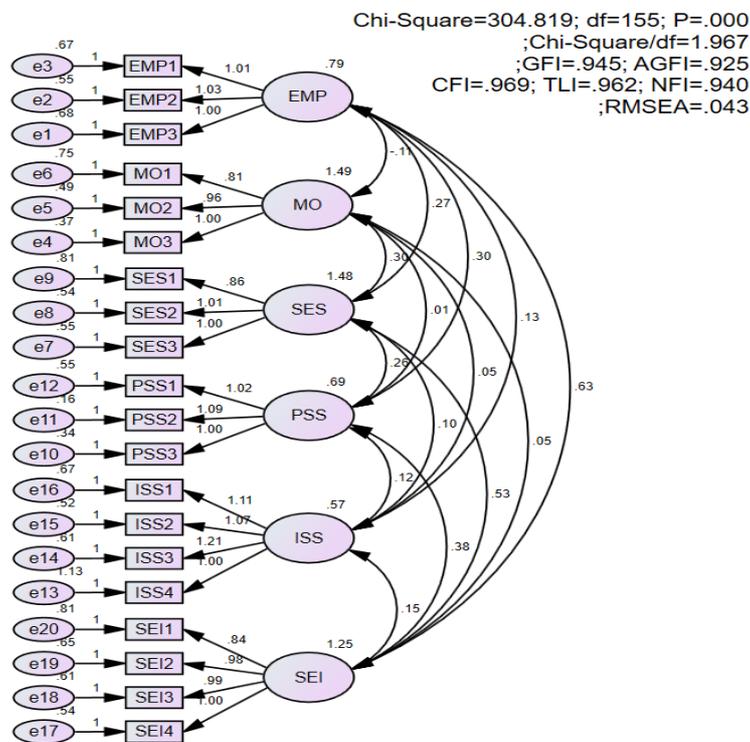
After assessing the reliability and validity of scales, the measurement model was analyzed by performing the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The full measurement model included six latent variables and all 20 indicator variables. The analysis result generally shows a good level of fit:  $\chi^2 (155) = 304.819$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 1.967$ ,  $p = 0.000 < 0.001$ . Other fit statistics were CFI = 0.969, GFI = 0.945, TLI =  $0.962 > 0.9$ , RMSEA = 0.043.

In addition, Gerbing and Anderson (1988) suggested that construct reliability should be reassessed after confirmatory factor analysis. Whereby the estimated loadings for each indicator, composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted measure (AVE) were assessed. The results show that all the CRs values were higher than 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010), and almost the AVE values of variables were higher than 0.5 which is within the accepted level (Hair et al., 2010). Although the AVE of ISS only achieved 0.494, Ertz et al. (2016) suggested that this value could be accepted.

**Table 2. The results of Cronbach’s alpha, EFA and descriptive analysis (n = 516)**

Constructs and the scale items	Mean	SD	Cronbach’s alpha	Factor loadings
<b>Empathy (EMP)</b>			<b>0.793</b>	–
EMP1	3.69	1.216	0.754	0.701
EMP2	4.07	1.181	0.687	0.814
EMP3	3.80	1.211	0.713	0.826
<b>Moral obligation (MO)</b>			<b>0.872</b>	–
MO1	2.37	1.313	0.868	0.866
MO2	2.54	1.365	0.802	0.891
MO3	2.50	1.366	0.785	0.899
<b>Social entrepreneurial self-efficacy (SES)</b>			<b>0.862</b>	–
SES1	2.56	1.385	0.848	0.826
SES2	2.76	1.431	0.789	0.865
SES3	2.78	1.423	0.779	0.889
<b>Perceived social support (PSS)</b>			<b>0.863</b>	–
PSS1	3.98	1.127	0.855	0.837
PSS2	4.09	0.994	0.761	0.877
PSS3	4.05	1.016	0.810	0.863
<b>Institutional support structure (ISS)</b>			<b>0.786</b>	–
ISS1	4.01	1.169	0.733	0.793
ISS2	4.17	1.083	0.732	0.812
ISS3	3.69	1.197	0.697	0.820
ISS4	3.60	1.306	0.784	0.687
<b>Social entrepreneurial intention (SEI)</b>			<b>0.872</b>	–
SEI1	3.52	1.303	0.863	0.701
SEI2	3.21	1.363	0.826	0.840
SEI3	3.41	1.355	0.834	0.803
SEI4	3.39	1.338	0.820	0.852

Source: own study.



**Figure 2. The results of confirmatory factor analysis (standardized estimates)**

Source: own elaboration.

**Table 3. Construct validity**

FACTOR	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	ISS	EMP	MO	SES	PSS	SEI
ISS	0.795	0.494	0.039	0.806	<b>0.703</b>					
EMP	0.794	0.562	0.403	0.795	0.197	<b>0.750</b>				
MO	0.874	0.699	0.041	0.890	0.059	-0.105	<b>0.836</b>			
SES	0.864	0.680	0.151	0.872	0.105	0.250	0.202	<b>0.825</b>		
PSS	0.869	0.690	0.168	0.893	0.197	0.408	0.007	0.260	<b>0.831</b>	
SEI	0.874	0.634	0.403	0.879	0.181	0.635	0.039	0.389	0.410	<b>0.796</b>

Source: own study.

### Structural model analysis

The estimated results of the theoretical model are reported in table 4. Although the research model has  $\chi^2 = 418.5162$  with 162 degrees of freedom ( $p = 0.000 < 0.001$ ), and  $CMIN/df = 2.583$ , the other indicators show that the model achieve a good level of fit:  $GFI = 0.925$ ,  $CFI = 0.948$ ,  $TLI = 0.938$  and  $RMSEA = 0.055$ . These indicators have proved that the research model provided a profound understanding of factors that lead to social entrepreneurial intention. Thus, the initial model was used to examine the hypothesized linkages.

**Table 4. The results of hypotheses test**

Hypotheses				Estimate	Standard Error	Critical Ratios	P	Label
H1	EMP	->	SEI	0.640	0.062	10.276	***	Supported
H2	MO	->	SEI	0.036	0.037	0.979	0.328	Not supported
H3	SES	->	SEI	0.215	0.038	5.672	***	Supported
H4	PSS	->	SEI	0.250	0.055	4.562	***	Supported
H5a	ISS	->	EMP	0.264	0.068	3.902	***	Supported
H5b	ISS	->	MO	0.095	0.084	1.138	0.255	Not supported
H5c	ISS	->	SES	0.209	0.086	2.433	0.015	Supported
H5d	ISS	->	PSS	0.242	0.059	4.119	***	Supported

Note:  $N = 516$ ; \*\*\*  $< 0.001$ 

Source: own study.

The estimated results support six hypotheses and do not support other two hypotheses. First, the results confirmed that all antecedents from Mair and Noboa's model were positive predictors of intention to form a social venture, except for moral obligation. Especially, social entrepreneurial intention was most strongly affected by empathy ( $\beta = 0.640$ ;  $p = 0.000 < 0.001$ ), thus, H1 is supported from the data. Perceived social support also positively impacts on social entrepreneurial intention ( $\beta = 0.250$ ;  $p = 0.000 < 0.001$ ); lending support to H4. The results also provided support for H3 confirming that social entrepreneurial self-efficacy was positively associated with intention to start a social business ( $\beta = 0.215$ ;  $p = 0.000 < 0.001$ ). The path from moral obligation to social entrepreneurial intention is 0.036, as our expectation for H2, however, this path is not significant ( $p = 0.328 > 0.05$ ). Therefore, H2 is not supported.

Second, as expected, empathy was positively influenced by institutional support structure ( $\beta = 0.264$ ;  $p = 0.000 < 0.001$ ). Thus, H5a is supported by the data. Besides, the results also show that institutional support structure had a significantly positive impact on social entrepreneurial self-efficacy, lending support for H5c. In addition, the results also confirmed that institutional support structure was positively associated to perceived social support ( $\beta = 0.242$ ;  $p = 0.000 < 0.001$ ). Therefore, H5d is strongly supported. Meanwhile, unlike our expectation, institutional support structure was not significantly positive related to moral obligation ( $\beta = 0.095$ ;  $p = 0.255 > 0.05$ ). Thus, H5b is not supported by the data.

The bootstrapping method with a 95% confidence interval was utilized to estimate the indirect coefficients. The results are shown in table 5 which indicated that institutional support structure has an indirect impact on social entrepreneurial intention via empathy (*indirect effect* = 0.0822,  $p < 0.05$ ).

In addition, institutional support structure also increases intention to start a social business by improving social entrepreneurial self-efficacy (*β*indirect effect = 0.0263,  $p < 0.05$ ) and perceived social support (*β*indirect effect = 0.0314,  $p < 0.05$ ). However, there is no statistical evidence that moral obligation mediates the effect of institutional support structure on social entrepreneurial intention ( $p > 0.05$ ).

**Table 5. Indirect effects**

Indirect paths	Indirect effects	Standard errors	95% confidence interval	
			Lower level of confidence interval	Upper level of confidence interval
ISS -> EMP -> SEI	0.0822*	0.0247	0.0749	0.2139
ISS -> MO -> SEI	0.0030	0.0039	-0.0033	0.0125
ISS -> SES -> SEI	0.0263*	0.0124	0.0046	0.0532
ISS -> PSS -> SEI	0.0314*	0.0127	0.0103	0.0595

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ .

Source: own study.

## CONCLUSIONS

The present study extends the Mair and Noboa's model (2006) by including institutional support structure as an additional variable affecting antecedents. Through this study, the author expects to contribute new knowledge to social entrepreneurship literature and practices. Firstly, students' intention to form a social enterprise in Vietnam is influenced by empathy, social entrepreneurial self-efficacy and perceived social support. However, there is no evidence that moral obligation has an impact on social entrepreneurial intention. This finding contrasts with the original statement of Mair and Noboa (2006) but is in line with the results of Hockert's study (2017). Secondly, the results of our study also show that institutional support structure has a direct positive impact on empathy, social entrepreneurial self-efficacy and perceived social support. Third, this study found that institutional support structure affects indirectly social entrepreneurial intention through empathy, social entrepreneurial self-efficacy and perceived social support. In other words, when institutional structure supports social entrepreneurship, it will increase empathy, self-efficacy and perceived social support of a person, thereby increasing the intention to form a social business.

Along with the efforts to develop the country's economy, many socio-environmental problems have arisen. The countries face many social challenges such as poverty, income inequality, pollution, and so on. Therefore, social enterprises are established as a way to help governments deal with these burdens. Several researchers have suggested that it is necessary to create studies about intention to form a social business in Asia context to have a holistic knowledge of social entrepreneurship (Lacap et al., 2018; Liang et al., 2017). Thus, this article was produced in an emerging economy context which is quite different when compared to previous studies. This study provided a new point about the role of institutional support structure in shaping students' intention to establish a social venture. This finding could be useful for politicians. It implies that policymakers need to develop a complete legal framework, and policies to support potential social entrepreneurs to start a business such as tax support, competitiveness, and loans... so that social enterprises can operate more effectively as well as increase self-efficacy, empathy and perceived social support for those who wish to become social entrepreneurs.

Despite providing new knowledge to social entrepreneurship literature, this study remains some limitations that may take several directions for further studies. First, this study did not include demographic factors like age, education background, ... which have been demonstrated to have effects on students' entrepreneurial intention. Further studies could incorporate these variables into the research model to test the linkage between institutional support structure and intention to start a social enterprise. Second, the convenience sampling method could not determine sample error, thus further research could utilize a random sample approach to increase the significance level of data. Finally, further research should extend the research model by examining new factors to enrich the knowledge about social entrepreneurship.

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The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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