

Moral Identity as an Educational Outcome and Psychological Pathway to Social Entrepreneurship Intention

Huynh Ai Van¹, Huynh Minh Hien²

¹ FPT University, Greenwich Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh Campus, Vietnam

² Ho Chi Minh City Open University, Vietnam

*Corresponding author: vanha4@fe.edu.vn

Abstract: Understanding the psychological mechanisms that shape social entrepreneurship intention has been of interest, especially among undergraduates in higher education. Drawing on Social Cognitive Career Theory, this study investigates how Entrepreneurship Education influences Social Entrepreneurship Intention through the mediating role of Moral Identity. Data were collected from 327 Vietnamese university students in different majors throughout the country and analyzed by SmartPLS 3 software. It found that Entrepreneurship Education significantly influences both Moral Identity and Social Entrepreneurship Intention, and that Moral Identity partially mediates the relationship between EE and Social Entrepreneurship Intention. Notably, the findings reveal no significant difference in Social Entrepreneurship Intention by gender or major to demonstrate the inclusive impact of practical education on student career intention. The research result contributes theoretically by integrating Moral Identity into the Social Cognitive Career Theory model and emphasizes the need for educational programs to nurture not only knowledge and skills but also moral identity. Practical implications include curriculum design that embeds ethical reasoning and social engagement, aiming to foster a new generation of moral social entrepreneurs. Limitations and directions for future research are discussed, particularly regarding the role of culture and family background in shaping moral development and entrepreneurial intention.

Keywords: Social Entrepreneurship Intention, Moral Identity, Social Cognitive Career Theory

1 Introduction

There has been growing interest in how educational interventions can foster not only entrepreneurial skills but also socially responsible behavior among students recently. As the world faces complex challenges such as poverty, inequality, and climate change, social entrepreneurship has emerged as a powerful mechanism for simultaneously addressing societal issues and contributing to economic growth. Social enterprises operate at the intersection of business and social impact, creating innovative, sustainable solutions that serve marginalized communities while also generating income and employment.

Entrepreneurship Education (EE) plays a critical role in shaping students' capabilities and mindsets toward entrepreneurship. However, less is known about

how EE influences deeper psychological factors such as Moral Identity (MI)—an individual's self-concept organized around moral traits like honesty, compassion, and justice. Moral Identity has been recognized as a motivational force behind prosocial and ethical behavior, and it may provide the psychological foundation for students to pursue entrepreneurship that creates social impact. In addition, recent literature reviews further emphasize MI as a critical but underexplored psychological antecedent to SEI (Ambad, 2022).

In developing countries like Vietnam, the growth of social ventures are particularly important. This country continues to face persistent development challenges including income disparity, limited access to healthcare and education, and environmental degradation—all of which hinder inclusive growth. In

this context, fostering a new generation of socially-driven entrepreneurs becomes a strategic imperative. The intention to engage in social entrepreneurship—commonly referred to as Social Entrepreneurship Intention (SEI)—is influenced by a variety of cognitive, emotional, and contextual factors, making it essential to explore how educational environments shape these intentions.

Building on the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which posits that career-related intentions are shaped by a combination of learning experiences, self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals, this study proposes that Moral Identity serves as a key mediating mechanism through which Entrepreneurship Education can foster Social Entrepreneurship Intention.

This paper try to answer the research question “Does Entrepreneurship Education influence Moral Identity to increase Social Entrepreneurship Intention among students?”

By exploring this question, the study contributes to both the theory and practice of entrepreneurship education by emphasizing the importance of moral development in preparing the next generation of socially conscious entrepreneurs.

2 Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses Development

This study is grounded in Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent et al., 1994), which extends Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory by focusing on the development of career intentions and behavior. SCCT emphasizes how learning experiences—such as those provided by entrepreneurship education (EE)—influence personal agency through self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals. Within this framework, moral identity (MI) can be conceptualized as a personal factor that interacts with educational inputs to shape an individual’s intention to pursue socially-oriented career paths, such as social entrepreneurship.

2.1 Entrepreneurship Education and Social Entrepreneurship Intention

Entrepreneurship education provides students with knowledge through theoretical application, case studies, and hands-on exercises, which equips them with entrepreneurial skills to apply in the real workplace. EE has been shown to significantly shape students’ entrepreneurial intentions, particularly when it involves

experiential and socially embedded learning (Hockerts, 2018). Through exposure to social and environmental problems as well as social venture models, EE helps students develop the skills and awareness necessary for addressing societal challenges. Educational programs play a vital role in intention formation by influencing students’ attitudes and perceived behavioral control (Liñán & Fayolle, 2015; Adekiya & Ibrahim, 2016).

Current studies in the Vietnamese context indicate that the crucial role of entrepreneurship education is in developing the initiatives in pursuing social ventures. Nguyen et al. (2024) demonstrated that EE positively influences social entrepreneurship intention (SEI) through individual capital, highlighting the role of internal resources gained via education. Similarly, Pham & Huynh (2025), using a configurational fsQCA approach, confirmed that EE is a necessary condition in multiple pathways leading to SEI, especially when coupled with psychological or relational assets. Therefore, it can be said that:

H1: *Entrepreneurship education positively influences social entrepreneurship intention.*

2.2 The Role of Moral Identity in Social Entrepreneurship Intention

Moral identity (MI) is defined as a self-concept centered around moral traits such as honesty, compassion, and responsibility (Aquino & Reed, 2002). It is a key driver of prosocial behavior, including ethical consumption, volunteering, and social venture creation. Hardy & Carlo (2011) argue that individuals with a strong moral identity are more likely to experience moral motivation, which translates into action aligned with ethical values.

In the context of social entrepreneurship, MI is considered a personal characteristic formed by the development individuals impacting on their career intention. It provides the internal ethical driver that aligns with the social mission which motivate the entrepreneurs pursuing social ventures. Mair & Noboa (2006) proposed that empathy and moral obligation are precursors to social entrepreneurial intentions. In addition, Ambad (2022) indicated that the psychological factor impacts the intention towards social entrepreneurship.

H2: *Moral identity positively influences social entrepreneurship intention.*

2.3 The Mediating Role of Moral Identity

Entrepreneurship Education may influence the SEI indirectly through the development of students' moral identity. Educational experiences—particularly those embedded in real-world social contexts—can shape their moral obligations and develop their characteristics towards ethical awareness. Hockerts (2018) found that students exposed to experiential EE were more likely to internalize social values through ethical lessons and social issues mentioned in the classroom. The entrepreneurship education perception is a pathway from EE to MI which transforms to behavior and intention towards social ventures.

Previous studies in Vietnam confirm the Nguyen et al. (2024) found that individual capital mediates the relationship between EE and SEI, reinforcing the idea that internal psychological assets are crucial mediators. Similarly, Anwar et al. (2023) argued that the effect of EE is best understood through its influence on internal motivation and moral values. When students perceive their education as morally relevant, they are more likely to integrate moral traits into their identity, which in turn promotes SEI (Duong, 2023). Therefore, it can be said that:

H3: *Moral identity mediates the relationship between entrepreneurship education and social entrepreneurship intention.*

The conceptual framework is in the Figure 1:

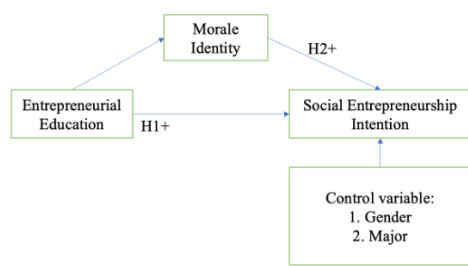


Figure 1. Source: Authors' own work (2025)

3 Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the relationships among Entrepreneurship Education (EE), Moral Identity (MI), and Social Entrepreneurship Intention (SEI), using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) as the primary analysis technique. This method is suitable for theory development, mediation analysis, and studies with relatively complex models and moderate sample sizes.

3.1 Sample and Data Collection

The data were collected from 327 university students across four major cities in Vietnam using a purposive sampling approach. Participants were required to have completed at least one formal course or workshop in entrepreneurship education. An online self-administered questionnaire was distributed via university mailing lists and classroom forums. Participation was voluntary and anonymous.

The demographic breakdown included:

- Gender: 59.3% female, 40.7% male
- Academic majors: 12.5% business majors; 87.5% non-business majors (including IT, graphic design, and social work)

3.2 Measures

All constructs were measured using validated multi-item Likert-type scales (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree):

- Entrepreneurship Education (EE): 8 items from Adekiya & Ibrahim (2016)
- Moral Identity (MI): 5 items adapted from Paramita et al. (2022)
- Social Entrepreneurship Intention (SEI): 5 items based on Duong (2023)

3.3 Data Analysis

The measurement and structural models were assessed using SmartPLS 3.0 software. The analysis included:

- Reliability and validity tests: Outer loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
- Discriminant validity: Assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratio
- Collinearity: Evaluated using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)
- Structural model testing: Path coefficients, R^2 , Q^2 , and effect size (f^2) were calculated to test direct and mediating relationships

This approach enabled rigorous testing of the proposed hypotheses, including the mediating effect of Moral Identity on the relationship between Entrepreneurship Education and Social Entrepreneurship Intention.

4 Results

To evaluate indicator reliability, the outer loadings (OL) of each measurement item on its respective construct were examined. As presented in Table 1, all

loadings ranged from 0.77 to 0.90, exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating that each item is strongly associated with its underlying construct (Hair et al., 2019). This supports the recommendation to retain items with loadings above 0.70 due to their substantial contribution.

Internal consistency was assessed through both Cronbach's alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR). The CA values ranged from 0.89 to 0.95, and CR values spanned from 0.91 to 0.95—all of which surpass the minimum recommended benchmark of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). These results demonstrate a high degree of internal consistency, indicating that the items reliably measure their corresponding constructs.

Convergent validity, which reflects the degree to which items of a construct converge or share common variance, was assessed using Average Variance Extracted (AVE). As shown in Table 1, AVE values were between 0.695 and 0.767, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.50 by Fornell & Larcker (1981). This implies that over 69% of the variance in the indicators is accounted for by their respective constructs, indicating strong convergent validity.

Discriminant validity was tested using both the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations, the latter being a more stringent approach. HTMT values presented in Table 1 all fall below the conservative threshold of 0.85, confirming adequate discriminant validity between all construct pairs.

Construct	OL	CA	CR	AVE	HTMT criteria		
					EE	MI	SEI
EE	0.829-0.888	0.95	0.958	0.739		0.377	0.467
MI	0.824-0.903	0.924	0.943	0.767			0.522
SEI	0.77-0.872	0.89	0.919	0.695			

Table 1. Reliability, Convergent and Discriminant Validity Assessment

Before analyzing the structural model, collinearity among predictors was assessed using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). All VIF values ranged from 1.000 to 1.148—well below the critical threshold of 5—indicating no multicollinearity issues. This confirms that each predictor contributes uniquely to explaining the variance in the endogenous variables. The model's explanatory power was demonstrated by R² values: 31.7% for Moral Identity (MI) and 54.6% for Sustainable Purchase Intention (SPI). Predictive relevance was verified via Stone-Geisser's Q² values (MI = 0.119, SEI = 0.186), both above zero. Effect sizes (f²) were 0.148 for EE → MI and 0.119 for MI → SEI, indicating small to moderate effects. The results of hy-

pothesis testing based on path coefficients confirmed the statistical significance of these relationships.

Relationship	b	t-value	VIF	f ²	R ²	Q ²
EE → MI	0.359	6.378	1.000	0.148		0.119
MI → SEI	0.377	7.146	1.148	0.119	0.317	0.186
EE → SEI	0.305	5.541	1.148	0.181	0.317	0.186

Table 2. PLS-SEM result

A multigroup analysis (PLS-MGA) was conducted to test for potential differences in SEI across gender and academic major. The results indicated no significant differences in the structural relationships based on either gender (male vs. female) or major (business vs. non-business). This suggests that the impact of Entrepreneurship Education and the mediating role of Moral Identity on SEI are universally effective, regardless of demographic characteristics.

5 Discussion

This study investigate how Entrepreneurship Education influences Social Entrepreneurship Intention with a particular focus on the mediating role of Moral Identity. The findings reflect the understanding of the psychological mechanisms transforming education to social entrepreneurial behavior.

The results confirm that Entrepreneurship Education significantly predicts both MI and SEI, consistent with prior research emphasizing the broader impacts of EE beyond skill development (Hockerts, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2024). In addition, this study reveals that Moral Identity partially mediates the relationship between EE and SEI. This indicates that education programs not only develop students' entrepreneurial competencies but also shape their internal moral compass—a critical determinant for those inclined toward social ventures.

These findings align with Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which posits that learning experiences influence career intentions through self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals. In this context, MI serves as a personal moral filter, shaped by educational content, experiences, and reflections, through which students make career-related judgments. The strong reliability scores of the EE and MI constructs further support the integrity of this mediating relationship.

In particular, when students are exposed to entrepreneurship education that incorporates ethics, social problem-solving, and real-world social innovation cases, they are more likely to internalize moral traits

such as empathy, fairness, and responsibility. This moral self-concept—MI—not only enhances their self-understanding but also motivates prosocial goals, such as creating social impact through entrepreneurship (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Hardy & Carlo, 2011).

Interestingly, the lack of significant differences in SEI by gender or major suggests that moral identity development through EE may be universally effective, regardless of demographic characteristics. This broad applicability underlines the potential of well-designed entrepreneurship education to activate moral development across diverse student groups, making it a valuable tool for higher education institutions aiming to produce socially responsible leaders.

6 Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the literature on social entrepreneurship and educational psychology by offering several theoretical insights.

First, it extends the application of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) by integrating Moral Identity (MI) as a mediating psychological construct within the formation of Social Entrepreneurship Intention (SEI). While SCCT has traditionally emphasized constructs such as self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and career goals, this research shows that moral self-concept also plays a crucial role in shaping prosocial entrepreneurial intentions.

Second, the findings provide support for the emerging perspective that Entrepreneurship Education (EE) influences not only cognitive and behavioral outcomes but also deep psychological traits (Nguyen et al., 2024; Anwar et al., 2023). Specifically, the results show that EE fosters moral identity development, which subsequently increases SEI. This implies that educational interventions can have long-term internalized effects, thus bridging the gap between pedagogical design and identity formation.

Third, this study contributes to the growing body of research that treats Moral Identity as a key antecedent to social entrepreneurship (Mair & Noboa, 2006; Aquino & Reed, 2002). Prior studies have discussed MI's role in ethical decision-making and prosocial behavior, but its mediating position in the context of entrepreneurship education has been underexplored. The current findings fill this gap and highlight MI as a missing psychological link in many existing intention-based models of social entrepreneurship.

Lastly, the study's findings provide empirical reinforcement for the holistic role of education in influenc-

ing both instrumental (skills, knowledge) and intrinsic (values, identity) factors. This challenges the prevailing assumption in entrepreneurship research that intentions are primarily shaped by utility-driven motivations and suggests a more values-based conceptualization of entrepreneurial intention formation.

7 Practical Implications

The findings of this study offer several meaningful implications for educators, curriculum designers, and higher education policymakers aiming to cultivate social entrepreneurial mindsets among students.

First and foremost, the results emphasize the transformative role of Entrepreneurship Education (EE) in shaping not only entrepreneurial intention but also moral identity. This underscores the importance of designing EE curricula that go beyond technical skills to include value-based learning components such as ethical reasoning, community engagement, and social impact reflection. When students are given opportunities to engage with real-world social problems, they are more likely to develop a moral self-concept aligned with prosocial entrepreneurial goals.

Second, the study reveals no statistically significant difference in SEI between genders or academic majors. This finding is practically significant because it suggests that the impact of entrepreneurship education on moral identity and SEI is inclusive and broadly effective. Whether a student comes from a business background or a non-business discipline, or whether they are male or female, the pathways to developing social entrepreneurship intention remain accessible—as long as educational content is value-rich and identity-invoking.

As such, educators should adopt universal strategies in embedding social values and moral identity development within entrepreneurship education, without the need for tailoring based on demographic segmentation. This also reinforces the scalability of social entrepreneurship education programs across faculties and genders.

Finally, institutions should consider integrating experiential components such as social innovation projects, service-learning, or internships with social enterprises into their entrepreneurship programs. These not only strengthen the link between EE and SEI but also provide a real-world context in which students can internalize and act upon moral values.

8 Limitations and Future Research

One key limitation lies in the omission of cultural and familial influences, which are known to significantly shape both identity development and career intentions. In many collectivist societies such as Vietnam, family expectations, traditions, and cultural norms play a vital role in shaping students' values, motivations, and decisions—including their willingness to engage in socially oriented ventures. By not accounting for these contextual variables, the study may overlook important background factors that interact with education to influence moral development and intention formation.

Additionally, while the study measured whether students had entrepreneurial family backgrounds, it did not examine the depth, quality, or nature of family involvement, nor did it explore broader cultural values such as power distance, collectivism, or long-term orientation. These may moderate or mediate the relationship between education, identity, and intention in more nuanced ways.

Future research should therefore explore how cultural dimensions and family upbringing influence the formation of moral identity and social entrepreneurial intention. Comparative or cross-cultural studies may also help determine whether the observed relationships hold in different sociocultural contexts, or whether they are culture-specific. Moreover, qualitative studies could complement these findings by providing deeper insights into the moral narratives that students draw from family and culture in the context of social entrepreneurship.

References

- Adekiya, A.A. & Ibrahim, F. (2016), "Entrepreneurship intention among students. The antecedent role of culture and entrepreneurship training and development", *The International Journal of Management Education*, Vol. 14 No. 2, pp. 116-132, doi: 10.1016/j.ijme.2016.03.001.
- Ambad, S. N. A. (2022). Moral identity and social entrepreneurship: A systematic review. *Asian Journal of Business Research*, 12(1), 101–118.
- Anwar, M. N., Saeed, S., & Hussain, T. (2023). Entrepreneurship education and moral values: A mediation model of internal motivation. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 29(4), 721–740.
- Aquino, K., & Reed, A. (2002). The self-importance of moral identity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83(6), 1423–1440.
- Duong, C.D. (2023), "Applying the stimulus-organism-response theory to investigate determinants of students' social entrepreneurship: moderation role of perceived university support", *Social Enterprise Journal*, Vol. 19 No. 2, pp. 167-192, doi: 10.1108/sej-10-2022-0091.
- Fornell, C. & Larcker, D.F. (1981). Evaluating Structural Equation Models with Unobservable Variables and Measurement Error. *Journal of Marketing Research* 18, 39-50. doi: 10.1177/002224378101800104
- Hair, J.F., Black, W.C., Babin, B.J., & Anderson, R.E (2019): *Multivariate data analysis*. Cengage Learning, Hampshire, United Kingdom
- Hardy, S. A., & Carlo, G. (2011). Moral identity: What is it, how does it develop, and is it linked to moral action?. *Child Development Perspectives*, 5(3), 212–218.
- Hockerts, K. (2018). The effect of experiential social entrepreneurship education on intention formation in students. *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship*, 9(3), 234–256.
- Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D., & Hackett, G. (1994). Toward a unifying social cognitive theory of career and academic interest, choice, and performance. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 45(1), 79–122.
- Liñán, F., & Fayolle, A. (2015). A systematic literature review on entrepreneurial intentions: Citation, thematic analyses, and research agenda. *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, 11, 907–933.
- Mair, J., & Noboa, E. (2006). *Social entrepreneurship: How intentions to create a social enterprise get formed*. In J. Mair, J. Robinson, & K. Hockerts (Eds.), *Social Entrepreneurship* (pp. 121–135). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Nguyen, H. T., Tran, Q. T., & Pham, V. K. (2024). Exploring internal capital and social entrepreneurship intention among university students. *Journal of Social Innovation*, 10(1), 45–62.
- Nguyen, T.T.D., Nguyen, D.T., & Huynh, V.A. (2024). The mediating effect of individual capital in the relationship between entrepreneurship

- education and social entrepreneurship intentions. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 38(7), 2075–2093. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-09-2023-0454>.
- Nunnally, J.C. & Bernstein, I. (1994): The assessment of reliability. *Psychometric theory* 3, 248-292.
- Paramita, W., Indarti, N., Virgosita, R., Herani, R. & Sutikno, B. (2022), Let ethics lead your way: The role of moral identity and moral intensity in promoting social entrepreneurial intention., *Journal of Business Venturing Insights*, vol. 17, p. e00299.
- Pham, V. K., & Huynh, A. V. (2025). Configurational pathways to social entrepreneurship intention: A fuzzy-set QCA approach. *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship*, 12(2), 75–98.