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Active Ageing for 50+ Entrepreneurs and Sustainable Development for Rural Areas

1 Römer-Paakkanen, T.*; 2 Suonpää, M.
*Corresponding author - presenter
[1] tarja.romer-paakkanen@haaga-helia.fi; Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, Finland
[2] Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, Finland

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Background of the study

As older Europeans are in good health and can contribute to economic growth through their skills and experience, it is crucial to better exploit the potential of older people in the labor market (European Commission, 2014, p.8).

According to the European Commission (2023), predominantly rural areas make up half of Europe and represent around 20% of the population. However, most of the rural areas are also among the least favored regions in the EU, with a GDP per head significantly below the European average. Rural areas are facing challenges in terms of sustainable development. The countryside is an attractive place to live and work and a reservoir of natural resources and unique landscapes. (Sobczyk, 2014.)

As older people have accumulated more developed networks, stronger financial positions and a greater ability to leverage resources and create more credible businesses, they are better placed to start new and more successful businesses than the younger generation. This paper presents the research (Römer-Paakkanen & Suonpää 2023) that has been conducted for the ENTRUST project, which aims at designing an entrepreneurship training programme for people aged 50+ who are interested in creating new businesses to foster the sustainable development of rural areas and to provide services to tourists or other businesses that support tourism in rural areas. The ENTRUST project will create interactive tools and a learning platform with training and support material for planning a new business. The ENTRUST project involves Finland, the Netherlands, Ireland and Portugal.

The aim of the study is to outline what kind of competencies and training do potential 50+ entrepreneurs need if they intend to become an entrepreneur in rural areas. The research question (RQ) is: What kind of entrepreneurial training do potential 50+ entrepreneurs need if they want to create new businesses, which promote sustainable development and tourism in rural areas?

Literature review

Despite of the growing importance of seniors for economic performance, policy frameworks and business, their impact is under-researched (Isele and Rogoff, 2014). Both the 18-29 age group and the 60+ age group have the same number of new start-ups, in fact the 55-64 age group has the highest start-up activity (Isele and Rogoff, 2014). Entrepreneurship among older people is a very important economic asset (Schøtt et al., 2017).

People aged 50-64 are generally better able to start and run businesses than younger people (Kibler et al. 2012; Singh and DeNoble, 2003; Kautonen, 2013, 14) and their businesses are also more successful (Khan 2013, 53). Their success is based on social capital and more developed networks that they have accumulated during their careers. They also have stronger financial positions, a greater ability to leverage resources and create more credible businesses over their careers. (Schøtt et al., 2017.)

Escuder-Mollon et al. (2014) found that lifelong learning in later life is becoming more common, but instead of meeting work-related needs and qualification requirements, older people have more personal needs: curiosity, a desire to understand the environment.

Older people have accumulated a lifetime of experience, that they bring to learning situations. Their readiness for entrepreneurship varies according to their previous life experience: some may have had work experience as employees, while some have experience as entrepreneurs. Kern (2014, 210) reminds adult education providers to define the target group precisely, to reflect on their interests but also to consider that learning arrangements are not only obliged to the requests of participants but also to assist them in developing new learning interests and to address their conscious learning needs increases well-being and understanding of oneself and society. Finding and achieving personal goals helps older learners to feel that they are contributing to and being part of society (Escuder-Mollon et al., 2014).

Methodology

The research is driven by an interest in producing practical knowledge for creating training for 50+ potential entrepreneurs. The data for research question were collected through a survey in four ENTRUST partner countries (the Netherlands, Ireland, Portugal and Finland). The questionnaires were targeted at two different audiences: experts in the tourism industry and regional development, and potential 50+ entrepreneurs. The literature review highlighted the main phenomena and concepts based on which the survey questions were structured.

Table 1

Operationalization of the questionnaire

Concept	Themes of Survey Questions
Entrepreneurial opportunity in rural area	Potential and challenges in tourism-related businesses in rural areas.

Entrepreneurial aspirations of older people	Motivation for entrepreneurship of potential 50+ entrepreneurs.
Entrepreneurship education for older people	Key topics and methods suitable for 50+ entrepreneurship training.

The questionnaire consisted of multiple-choice questions, open questions and statements, which respondents rated on a Likert scale of 1 to 4 (1= strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree). Respondents for both surveys were selected by snowball sampling in all countries. Both surveys were carried out by e-mail between April and July 2022. A total of 100 expert respondents and a total of 72 potential 50+ entrepreneur respondents were reached.

Likert scale analysis was used to calculate the mean scores for the statements. The results show the range of means for the four countries. The results of the multiple-choice questions are presented as percentages, i.e., the percentage of respondents who selected a statement.

Results

Experts (n = 100) felt that rural areas have a lot of opportunities for entrepreneurs (average 3.4–3.8) and that it is important to make local cultural heritage visible (average 3.6–3.8), which is why they felt that providing entrepreneurship training is important for the development of tourism in the rural areas (average 2.8–3.7).

According to experts (n=100) the main challenges faced by entrepreneurs in rural areas are access to labor (71%), infrastructure (56%) and access to finance (54%) as the main challenges for entrepreneurship in rural areas in all partner countries.

Potential 50+ entrepreneurs felt that their long careers in a wide range of jobs and extensive life experience put them in a good position to succeed as entrepreneurs in the future.

Entrepreneurs also mentioned that sales skills, extensive networks, the ability to work hard, learning from mistakes, problem-solving skills and an eagerness to learn new things contribute to success as an entrepreneur. Overall, respondents felt that they had a good chance of success (average 2.7–3.1) if they started a business.

Respondents rated their ability to reflect, get along with different people, assess the consequences of ideas and actions and project management skills very highly (average 3.3–3.6). In addition, some respondents mentioned that they had important skills in creative thinking, interpersonal skills, networking skills, openness and a willingness to help people find solutions to their problems. On the other hand, respondents considered their ability to tolerate uncertainty, take risks and design and develop new products and services to be only slightly above average (average 2.5–3.2).

The most important reasons given by potential 50+ entrepreneurs (n=72) for becoming or remaining self-employed were the desire to develop and use their skills (65%) and the desire to participate actively in society (46%), while belonging to the community (22%) or the need to earn extra money (27%) were somewhat important reasons for becoming or remaining an entrepreneur. Respondents cited lack of finance, bureaucracy, lack of confidence in their ideas, lack of courage, old age, working alone, lack of time and better income from paid work as factors preventing them from becoming entrepreneurs.

When asked about pedagogical solutions for entrepreneurship training, half of the respondents (50%) felt that personalised guidance supported their professional learning. Peer learning with other entrepreneurs was also perceived as useful (48%). Combining contact and online learning was seen as a good solution by 40% of respondents, while classroom learning was favoured by only 4%.

When asked about the topics of entrepreneurship training, both experts and potential 50+ entrepreneurs felt that creating new ideas, anticipating the future and identifying opportunities, developing sustainable tourism experiences and service design were important. Both groups of respondents considered both knowledge of national and European funding sources and leadership skills as unnecessary elements of training.

Conclusion, managerial and theoretical implications and limitations

The conclusion from the surveys is that there are perceived business opportunities in rural areas for experienced 50+ professionals. In each of the target countries, almost all of the potential 50+ entrepreneurs already had a lot of the skills that entrepreneurs need, but they also needed to learn from other entrepreneurs in rural areas. In addition, there was a desire for multidisciplinary learning, consisting of contact learning and online learning, and possibly also some virtual components. There was also a need for one-to-one mentoring, but traditional classroom teaching was not appreciated.

For the managerial implications entrepreneurship training aimed at 50+ entrepreneurs should familiarize them with what kind of business already exist in rural areas and what kind of business is needed there. In addition, potential entrepreneurs want to learn about what should be considered in sustainable tourism and how to create a sustainable tourism business from rural cultural heritage. It was also important that the training could give them an opportunity to concretely try out in practice how to turn an idea into a commercial product or service. Theoretically this research contributed to the next targets and phenomenon:

- Information for constructing the training programme (Entrepreneurship Education)
- Well-being of older people (social sustainability)
- Well-being on rual communities (economic sustainability)
- Wellbeing of rural areas (environmental sustainability)

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One limitation of the survey is the small number of respondents. As the aim was to find ideas for designing entrepreneurship training in rural areas and not to describe or compare populations, the small number of respondents does not compromise the usefulness of the results or the reliability of the study.

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Assessing the quality level of Entrepreneurship Trainings in Higher Education in Bhutan

Deki.[1 *]; V. Somsamone.[2]; B. Burboeck.[2]

*[1] deki.gcbs@rub.edu.bt; Royal University of Bhutan, Gedu College of Business Studies, Bhutan

[2] birgit.burboeck@fh-joanneum.at; FH JOANNEUM University of Applied Sciences, Austria

[2] v.somsamone@su.edu.la; Souphanouvong University, Laos PDR

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1. Background of the study/Literature Review

Entrepreneurship has come to be known as one driver for economic development. Entrepreneurship can help to move out of poverty, generate employment opportunities, allow innovation as well as creativity to revitalize an economy. The concept of entrepreneur was borrowed from the French word entrepreneur which means to undertake (Kowo, Sabitu, & Bola, 2019). Amongst the various definitions Mason and Brown, 2014 put forth one key element that is predominantly captured in the varying definitions of an entrepreneur which is the risk element (Mason and Brown, 2014). Thus, Harrell & Alijani, 2017; Kowo, Sabitu, & Bola, 2019 describe an entrepreneur as an individual who takes the risk to explore business opportunities. Similarly, the concept of entrepreneurship is mostly associated with identification of business opportunities.

In Bhutan, the concept of entrepreneurship promotion and support is still at an infancy stage and the players of the ecosystem are just learning to share information and implement plans and programs through collaboration (ITC 2019). As of June 2020, Bhutan has around 21,813 active licensed CSIs and this has created employment for more than 100,000 individuals. As entrepreneurship in Bhutan is at the evolution stage right now and with a huge number of people being engaged in entrepreneurship related activities, any support provided towards entrepreneurship is timely and much needed.

Vocational trainings on various topics related to entrepreneurship have been implemented as one part of ENCORE[1] [1]project with the goal to strengthen the

[1] *Entrepreneurship Knowledge Centers to Foster Innovative Entrepreneurship Practices in Education and Research (ENCORE) which is a co-funded project by Erasmus+ Program of the European Union aims at promoting entrepreneurship education and student-business learning activities at HEIs in Bhutan, Nepal and Laos.*

university-business cooperation which is currently not very distinctive and will help the universities to be seen as pioneers in the field. The main aim is to increase the capacities for innovation in entrepreneurship education and research to contribute positively to the current economic situation and the sustainable development of business structures with a future perspective in Bhutan.

To become a pioneer in the field of entrepreneurship it is important to offer marketable services as additional trainings can build on pillar of their strategy (Abdullah, 2006; Gallifa and Batalle, 2010; Mahmoud and Khalifa, 2015; Marzo-Navarro et al., 2005; O'Neil and Palmer, 2004). With other words, the service quality of a higher institution can become a key success factor for attracting students, serving their needs and retaining them (Kwek et al., 2010; Nadiri et al., 2009; Senthilkumar and Arulraj, 2011).

To measure the quality of the service performance of the vocational trainings the SERVPERF (Cronin and Taylor, 1992) instrument was introduced and adopted to the needs of the trainings. Several researchers argue that service quality in higher education holds the same main characteristics as other service. With other words generic service quality instruments can be applied to measure service quality in higher education (Abdullah, 2005; Brochado, 2009; Law, 2013; Sultan and Wong, 2012).

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2. Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to identify the level of service quality of the vocational entrepreneurship trainings from the Gedu College of Business Studies and Royal Thimphu College in Bhutan. Even though all partner universities in Nepal (TU[2] and GCI[3]), Bhutan (RTC[4] and GCBS[5]), and Laos (NUOL[6] and SU[7]) are involved in this activity, sufficient feedback has been received so far only from GCBS and RTC.

This study is contributing to the existing literature in three ways. First, the study measures the service quality of vocational training with a core focus on entrepreneurship topics. Second, SERVPERF has not been applied in the Bhutanese context yet and can contribute to a better understanding of the cultural setting. Third, identify possible improvements in future trainings and is building the basis for further comparative analysis with all partner universities.

3. Methodology

According to the objectives of this study, the data was collected via online (i.e., Google Form) from the training participants at RTC[4] and GCBS[5.] The vocational trainings took place between March 2023 and May 2023. Table 1 shows the five adopted SERVPERF dimensions used, which are i.) Tangible, ii.) Reliability, iii.) Responsiveness, iv.) Assurance and v.) Empathy. The items for each of the dimensions were adapted from

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[2] *Tribhuvan University*
[3] *Global College International*
[4] *Royal Thimphu College*
[5] *Gedu College of Business Studies*
[6] *National University of Laos*
[7] *Souphanouvong University*

Cronin and Taylor (1992) to context of the study and has led to 20 items in total. After each training the participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire. The sample size for each training was not larger than n=15. Therefore, gender or any other demographic data were not asked in order to avoid any derivation of the feedback. The items were measured by using Likert scales with 1= strongly disagree and 5= strongly disagree. Data analysis used in examining the impact of a case challenge was conducted in IBM SPSS to perform the tests such as Frequency, Percentage, Mean (M), and Standard deviation (SD).

Table 1. SERVPERF Dimensions and items

Dimensions	Item Statements
Tangible	1. *Training space is suitable for training*
	2. *Training space is well equipped*
	3. *Training materials are useful*
	4. *Trainers are well dressed and appear neat*
Reliability	5. *Training follows given schedule*
	6. *Activities promised in program are carried out*
	7. *Other services promised are available*
	8. *Trainers are dependable*
Responsiveness	9. *Trainers are always available for helping trainees*
	10. *Trainers react quickly to any occurring problems*
	11. *Trainers deliver prompt service*
	12. *Trainers communicate trainees when activities and services will be performed*
Assurance	13. *Trainers are professional and know their field*
	14. *Trainees can trust trainers*
	15. *Trainers are polite and have good manners*
	16. *Trainees feel safe in their transactions and activities with trainers*
Empathy	*14. Trainers show interest in trainees*
	15. Trainers give individual attention to trainees
	16. Trainers know needs of trainees
	17. Training hours are convenient for trainees

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4. Result

The results are based on a total of n = 67, where GCBS is responsible for n = 44 and RTC for n = 23. According to the statistical power analysis (Cohen, 1992) with the assumption of a one-sample t-test, significance level $\alpha = 0.05$, the power of the test, p = 0.8, and the sample size of n = 67 an effect size of 0.347 is reached. This effect size is considered as a small to medium effect size. To interpret the mean scores, this study is following the approach by AI-Mutawah and Fateel (2018) to interpret mean scores. Table 2 shows the results of the dimension "Tangible". The highest mean has achieved the item "4. Training materials are useful" with a m=4.746 and the lowest item "1. Training space is suitable for training" with a m=4.642. Despite the differences of the four items, the overall perception on the items of the dimension "Tangible" is very high.

Table 2. Perception of Service Performance on the dimension "Tangible"

Item Description	Mean	Variance	SD	Std error	Conf-Interval
1. Training space is suitable for training	**4.642**	0.264	0.513	0.063	[4.519 -4.765]
2. Training space is well equipped	4.522	0.374	**0.612**	0.075	[4.376 -4.669]
3. Training materials are useful	4.687	0.340	0.583	0.071	[4.547 - 4.826
4. Trainers are well dressed and appear neat	**4.746**	0.192	0.438	0.054	[4.641 -4.851]

Note: Range of interpretation: (1) 1.00–1.80: very low; (2) 1.81–2.60: low; (3) 2.61–3.40: moderate; (4) 3.41–4.20: high; (5) 4.21–5.00: very high

Table 3 reveals the results of the dimension "Reliability". The results show that the participants are likely to have a favorable opinion that the activities promised in the program were carried out, with a m= 4.687 and a bit lower opinion on the dependency of the trainers with m=4.403, but with the highest standard deviation of SD = 0.799.

Table 3. Perception of Service Performance on the dimension "Reliability"

Item Description	Mean	Variance	SD	Std error	Conf-Interval
5. Training follows given schedule	4.426	0.577	0.759	0.092	[4.246 - 4.607]
6. Activities promised in program are carried out	**4.687**	0.400	0.633	0.077	[4.535 - 4.838]
7. Other services promised are available	4.478	0.405	0.636	0.078	[4.325 - 4.630]
8. Trainers are dependable	**4.403**	0.638	**0.799**	0.098	[4.212 - 4.594]

Note: Range of interpretation: (1) 1.00–1.80: very low; (2) 1.81–2.60: low; (3) 2.61–3.40: moderate; (4) 3.41–4.20: high; (5) 4.21–5.00: very high

In Table 4, the results of the dimension "Responsiveness" are shown. Here, the highest mean with m = 4.776 has been achieved for the item #12 in regards to the communication between the trainers and the trainees when activities and services are carried out. A lower mean, but still at a very high level has been achieved for the item #10 with a mean of m =4.612. This means that the reaction of the trainer when a problem occurred was perceived lower.

Table 4. Perception of Service Performance on the dimension "Responsiveness"

Item Description	Mean	Variance	SD	Std error	Conf-Interval
9. Trainers are always available for helping trainees	4.746	0.253	0.503	0.061	[4.626 -4.867]
10. Trainers react quickly to any occurring problems	**4.612**	0.393	**0.627**	0.077	[4.462 -4.762]
11. Trainers deliver prompt service	4.687	0.218	0.467	0.057	[4.575 -4.798]
12. Trainers communicate trainees when activities and services will be performed	**4.776**	0.207	0.455	0.056	[4.667 -4.885]

Note: Range of interpretation: (1) 1.00–1.80: very low; (2) 1.81–2.60: low; (3) 2.61–3.40: moderate; (4) 3.41–4.20: high; (5) 4.21–5.00: very high

The perception of the service performance on the dimension "Assurance" is shown in table 5. The trainers are polite and have good manners with a m= 4.836. The lowest score has received the item on "trainees can trust trainers" with m=4.687. But in terms of interpretation despite this value can be considered as very high. The highest standard deviation hat achieved the item "Trainers are professional and know their field" with SD = 0.566.

Table 5. Perception of Service Performance on the dimension "Assurance"

Item Description	Mean	Variance	SD	Std error	Conf-Interval
13. Trainers are professional and know their field	4,731	0,321	**0,566**	0,069	[4.596 - 4.867]
14. Trainees can trust trainers	**4,687**	0,279	0,528	0,065	[4.560 - 4.813]
15. Trainers are polite and have good manners	**4,836**	0,139	0,373	0,046	[4.746 - 4.925]
16. Trainees feel safe in their transactions and activities with trainers	4,791	0,168	0,410	0,050	[4.693 - 4.889]

Note: Range of interpretation: (1) 1.00–1.80: very low; (2) 1.81–2.60: low; (3) 2.61–3.40: moderate; (4) 3.41–4.20: high; (5) 4.21–5.00: very high

Table 6 presents the outcomes of perceived service performance on the dimension "Empathy". The findings show that the trainers show interest in trainees in their needs with m = 4.731. While, it seems that the training hours were not convenient for all participants in the trainings with m = 4.478 and a standard deviation with SD = 0.746.

Table 6. Perception of Service Performance on the dimension "Empathy"

Item Description	Mean	Variance	SD	Std error	Conf-Interval
17. Trainers show interest in trainees	**4,731**	0,199	0,447	0,055	[4.624 -4.838]
18. Trainers give individual attention to trainees	4,687	0,279	0,528	0,065	[4.560 -4.813]
19. Trainers know needs of trainees	4,567	0,340	0,583	0,071	[4.428 -4.707]
20. Training hours are convenient for trainees	**4,478**	0,556	**0,746**	0,091	[4.299 -4.656]

Note: Range of interpretation: (1) 1.00–1.80: very low; (2) 1.81–2.60: low; (3) 2.61–3.40: moderate; (4) 3.41–4.20: high; (5) 4.21–5.00: very high

5. Conclusion, managerial implications and limitations

The study shows that the participants perceive the service quality on various entrepreneurship topics at a very high level. To sum up, the highest mean value (4.836) was achieved with the politeness and the good manners of the trainers under the Assurance Dimension. This could be one positive influence of the cultural and humble nature of the Bhutanese. While the lowest mean value was achieved with the dependency of the trainers under Reliability with 4.403 and with the highest standard deviation of SD = 0.799. To improve the quality of the trainings, the dependency of the trainers can be further improved.

The rather overall high value can indicate on the one hand the high service quality delivered and maybe also need for the trainings in Bhutan. This might be an indication that the participants need the trainings provided in Bhutan and complement the policies and initiatives implemented by the Bhutanese government to foster entrepreneurship.

However, the results of this study have of course some limitations and should guide for further research. First, the findings are based only on six trainings from the partner universities in Bhutan. In total a minimum of 10 trainings are expected. This may lead to

larger sample size, higher accuracy in terms of power of statistical test, and maybe to a different result. Therefore, the data presented should be interpreted with caution. Second, as the other partner universities are currently implementing these trainings, it would be also interesting to compare the findings on an international level. Third, since the partner universities with ENCORE are public as well as private universities, it would be interesting to see if there is a difference between these two university types as well.

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Challenges and opportunity in entrepreneurship growth in Nepal

Thapaliya, R.[1]*; Bogati, P.[2]; Karki, I. [2]

*Corresponding author - presenter

[1] ramthapaliya@tuicms.edu.np; Tribhuvan University, Nepal

[2]Tribhuvan University, Nepal

Keywords: Entrepreneurship growth, Challenges, Opportunities, Nepal, Socioeconomic structure

Background of study

Globally, the socioeconomic structure of countries has been greatly impacted by the creation and development of entrepreneurship. Nepal is at a critical crossroads in this global phenomena, juggling a complex interplay of obstacles and possibilities that mold its business landscape. This study explores the nuances of entrepreneurship growth in Nepal with the goal of explaining the complex processes that affect the development of this crucial industry. This study aims to provide a thorough overview of Nepal's entrepreneurial environment by analysing the challenges faced by entrepreneurs and illuminating viable paths for progress. In doing so, it aims to offer fresh perspectives that can inform the development of public policies, business procedures, and educational programs in order to support the growth of an entrepreneurial environment. This study illuminates how Nepal's distinctive setting interacts with entrepreneurial initiatives, providing a basis for strategic decision-making and promoting sustainable development as the country navigates the dynamic currents of economic, social, and technical change.

Nepal has had several socioeconomic challenges throughout its history, which have hindered its progress toward sustainable development. Entrepreneurship is a practical way to deal with these problems and open doors for progress. Successful businesspeople identify opportunities for new ventures or changes based on particular issues and interpersonal interactions. The need to investigate the variables and interactions that affect successful entrepreneurs' opportunity recognition and challenges in Nepal's dynamic and unpredictable business climate exists despite the paucity of research on individual, specific opportunity recognition.

The growth of entrepreneurship in Nepal is a topic of immense significance, characterized by a dynamic interplay of challenges and opportunities. This extended abstract delves into the multifaceted landscape of entrepreneurship growth in Nepal, shedding light on the obstacles faced by entrepreneurs and the potential pathways to cultivate a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem. In contemporary global contexts, entrepreneurship has emerged as a driving force behind economic advancement, reshaping industries, fostering novel markets, and fostering community resilience.

This paper explores the intricate link between economic openness and the growth of entrepreneurship in developing nations, with Nepal serving as a pertinent example. As a developing economy with distinct characteristics, Nepal's journey differs from that of developed counterparts. The globalization of industries and commerce has ushered both benefits and challenges, necessitating a proficient pool of entrepreneurs adept at recognizing new opportunities and navigating associated risks. Entrepreneurship assumes a pivotal role in breaking the cycle of low income and poverty prevalent in Nepal, contributing to improved employment generation, capital formation, economic balance, and enhanced living standards.

This is where entrepreneurship can help. For developing nations like Nepal, entrepreneurship has a number of advantages, including the creation of jobs, the promotion of capital formation, the dynamism of small business plans, the development of a balanced economy, higher living standards, and self-sufficiency.

However, the path to entrepreneurial success in Nepal is beset with a plethora of challenges, stemming from socio-cultural, economic, political, and infrastructural dimensions. Issues related to human resource management, political instability, inadequate security, and effectiveness of government institutions pose formidable barriers. Moreover, natural and human-made disasters, corruption, and lack of financial and institutional support further complicate entrepreneurial endeavours.

Amidst these challenges, Nepal also presents a tapestry of opportunities. These include improved legal support, social and economic well-being, enhanced tourism, technology and hydropower sectors, youth population engagement, geopolitical advantages, joint venture policies, and abundant resources. To harness these opportunities, collaboration between government bodies, educational institutions, private sectors, and skilled manpower is crucial.

Aim of the study

The goal of this study is to perform a thorough examination of the various obstacles preventing Nepal's entrepreneurship from growing. By methodically examining barriers spanning economic, cultural, governmental, and infrastructural sectors, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the unique entrepreneurial constraints particular to Nepal. This study tries to combine and give a thorough evaluation of these difficulties, highlighting their interconnection and providing a holistic understanding, even though past research has focused on specific entrepreneurial issues.

Finding latent development drivers inside Nepal's entrepreneurial environment is the study's main goal. The study examines emerging markets, technical developments, and sociocultural trends in an effort to identify untapped opportunities that businesspeople might seize for long-term growth. This study aims to move beyond the conventional narrative of struggles and instead focuses on identifying creative opportunities that are frequently disregarded. It offers fresh viewpoints by suggesting possible industries and tactics that can encourage entrepreneurship in Nepal.

Furthermore, the study evaluates how well the lessons learned from successful entrepreneurial ecosystems around the world can be applied to the context of Nepal. By analysing international best practices in law, education, and industry collaboration, the research aims to offer practical recommendations that improve Nepal's entrepreneurial environment. While studies typically focus on local factors, this research combines best practices from around the world, providing a novel perspective that highlights how lessons from many contexts can be applied to Nepal's particular situation. Addition to this the study presents evidence-based policy recommendations that solve problems and take advantage of chances for entrepreneurship expansion. By combining research findings with stakeholder viewpoints, the study aims to provide policymakers with a practical guide for creating an environment that is conducive to entrepreneurs. The study's focus on developing workable policy suggestions from a thorough investigation of options and difficulties introduces fresh perspectives that aid in bridging the gap between theoretical research and successful policy implementation.

Through the pursuit of these aims, this study endeavours to furnish an intricate and forward-looking outlook on Nepal's entrepreneurial growth challenges and possibilities. The endeavour aspires to offer valuable insights to academia, governmental bodies, industry professionals, and aspiring entrepreneurs through its innovative approach and thorough scrutiny.

Research methodology

Our study involves a thorough analysis of the body of academic writing, government regulations, and trade organizations. Focused focus groups with stakeholders were employed to obtain primary data, which enriched the study. The government of Nepal's policies, laws, and other legal frameworks are the subject of this study. Along with business strategy, theoretical and practical approaches in the nation, and ongoing academic work, it also emphasizes the importance of private sector actors like the FNCCI, Chamber of Commerce, and Confederation of Nepalese Industries and other stakeholders.

Results and findings

The main goal of the research was to examine the opportunities and challenges for entrepreneurship growth in the Nepalese context. The study emphasizes the crucial role that educational institutions and governmental organizations play in promoting entrepreneurship through curriculum adaptation, hands-on learning, incubation facilities, enhanced legislation, and open business settings. Critical elements were collaborating between the public and commercial sectors and bridging the barriers between academia and industry. Educational institutions can support entrepreneurship by modifying their curricula, offering learning that is applied, setting up incubation centres, etc. Government organizations can promote entrepreneurship by strengthening and implementing existing rules and regulations, fostering open, business-friendly settings, enhancing start-up accessibility, inspiring and motivating young people to pursue self-employment, etc. sectoral fragmentation and globalization continue to exist

While globalization and sectoral fragmentation continue to be obstacles for our nation's developing domestic industry, there is still hope that by preserving a robust industrial ecosystem and bolstering the foundation of state-society relations, we may encourage entrepreneurship.

Similar to this, caste and gender were considered when looking for jobs in the past according to sociocultural views in Nepal. Nevertheless, attitudes and mind sets have shifted as of late. Although entrepreneurs and the entrepreneurial philosophy were responsible for these advances, investors, customers, and the government still need to support them. To encourage younger generations and create an entrepreneurial culture, the sector itself needs to become more aware of its own behaviours and challenge how society currently views entrepreneurship. The public and private sectors both contribute significantly to taking the firm to the next level. The interaction between the public and private sectors contributes to the creation of clear, accessible avenues for investors and entrepreneurs.

The development of entrepreneurship in Nepal, however, is also greatly aided by trained labour. It's important to solve Nepal's human resource problem. While helping to sustain and enhance the relationship between academia and industry, educational institutions and vocational training can also play a significant role in the production of skilled labour. We need to recognize research gaps and perform it accordingly if we want to keep excellent ties between academia and industry.

Conclusion, managerial implications and limitations

To sum up, we can state that despite a number of issues, including low productivity, socio-cultural variables, restrictions on support systems, corruption, and others, that affect entrepreneurship in Nepal, both youths and adults are expressing enthusiasm in the development of entrepreneurship. In general, this research aids in our ability to recognize and comprehend the potential and problems that exist in Nepal's entrepreneurial sector. It gives readers a thorough understanding of Nepal's market, financial, policy, support system, human capital, and cultural dynamics as well as its entrepreneurship ecosystem, which aids in educating new and seasoned business owners as well as decision-makers in the fields of policy, training, academia, funding, and other related fields.

This research underscores the complexity and potential of entrepreneurship in Nepal, offering insights for practitioners, policymakers, educators, and support agencies. Recommendations encompass policy implementation, improved business environments, enhanced investment avenues, and educational reform.

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COACHING AS A TOOL TO ENHANCE ENTREPRENEURSHIP AMONG UNVERSITY STUDENTS

Holmberg, E. [1]*; Anckar, R.[2] ; Konttinen, A. [1]

**Corresponding author – presenter*

[1] *eva.holmberg@haaga-helia.fi. Finland*

[2] *Novia UAS, Finland*

Key words: Coaching, student entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial mindset

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is often seen as a key to economic development and growth, both in the industrialized world and in countries still struggling with finding strategies for economic development. The Erasmus+ ENCORE project aims to foster innovative entrepreneurship practices in education and research in the three target countries of Bhutan, Nepal, and Lao PDR (ENCORE, 2022). The aim of this study is to find out how student entrepreneurship can be enhanced through coaching, which is a participatory and experiential learning approach. In recent years, coaching has become an increasingly popular learning approach at universities, especially in entrepreneurship and business idea creation (e.g., Holmberg & Habiyakare, 2018), accelerator and incubator programmes (Mansoori et al., 2019) and in design thinking (Konttinen & Moilanen, 2021).

In this study coaching for entrepreneurship in a university setting is studied through a literature review and by conducting interviews with experienced coaches. The results aim to help the academic staff working at the Entrepreneurship Knowledge Centers (EKCs) established through the ENCORE project in the target countries. From a student perspective, these entrepreneurship centres or hubs should offer opportunities to test, and even fail with, their business ideas and to develop the abilities to reach their dreams (Allahar & Sookram, 2019).

Literature review

As an increasing number of growth focused entrepreneurs is regarded as important for a dynamic economy, many universities around the world have introduced entrepreneurship programs. Some universities have taken one more step by establishing entrepreneurship incubators or hubs. In these incubators students can get support with their business ideas and even start their own company. (Allahar and Sookram, 2019) A key activity of the entrepreneurship hubs is coaching the students towards an entrepreneurial mindset. As Carolis & Litzky (2019, 63) points out:" The twenty-first century university entrepreneurship curricula must focus on developing the whole person, to get the student to think and act as an entrepreneur.

As future entrepreneurs need an entrepreneurial mindset, universities need to rethink teaching and learning to enhance students' competences related problem-solving and innovation. This can be supported by experiential learning as students are activated and learn also practical skills. Experiential learning will enhance students' creativity, empathy, resilience, self-sufficiency, and ability to learn from failure. Even if students as graduates end up working for a company or organisation, they benefit from behaving in an enterprising way as intrapreneurs (Daniel, et al., 2017). When student students are in the centre of the learning process and take responsibility for their learning, they will gain competences and an attitude needed for entrepreneurship (Akmaliah & Ariayaygan, 2019; Carolis & Litzky 2019; Daniel et al., 2017). Students fulfilling their dreams of becoming entrepreneurs should develop an entrepreneurial mindset. Entrepreneurial mindset can simply be defined as the ability to think out of the box (Pihie & Arivayagan, 2016, 1). An entrepreneurial mindset is dependent on competences such as self-management, resilience, and the ability to learn from failure (Carolis & Litzky, 2019; Pihie & Arivayagan, 2016).

Research shows that a typical business school curriculum can seldom enhance skills related to entrepreneurship (Pihie & Sani, 2009; Carolis & Litzky, 2019). Experiential learning can be used for offering students a possibility to develop their own business ideas (Holmberg & Habiyakare, 2018). Some students might be willing to develop their business ideas further and for them the university could offer individual or group coaching. Generally coaching is in a university setting seen as a form of "mentoring" (Bettinger & Baker, 2014) or facilitation of learning (Mansoori et al., 2019). Coaching has been used to engage students in their studies and improve academic success and student retention (Bettinger & Baker, 2014; Robinson & Gahagan, 2010), career planning (Lee et al., 2022) and nowadays also often to enhance students' entrepreneurial mindset and giving them tools to start their own businesses (Carolis & Litzky, 2019).

Coaching is an important tool to help students to understand their own strengths as future entrepreneurs. Thus, coaching should be provided especially for those students who have a dream of becoming entrepreneurs in the coming years. Coaching and mentoring are often used as synonymous, but mentors are usually giving more clear advice than coaches mainly focusing on asking questions. (Ellinger & Kim, 2014)

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In short, coaching is always a development process of the coachees. It is a participatory and systematic process that increases the growth and self-awareness of the coachees (Grant, 2006). According to Bachkirova et al. (2010) coaching involves an intervention, a structured interaction with various strategies, tools, and techniques that include open questions, among others. Coaching promotes sustainable, positive changes for the coachees who are responsible for their own development and activities. Moreover, coaching enhances the performance, effectiveness, improvement, and diverse skills of the coaches. (Ellinger & Kim, 2014)

Research methodology

Interviewing was chosen as the data collection strategy for this qualitative study. In total six semi-structured interviews with experienced entrepreneurship coaches from Haaga-Helia StartUp School were conducted in January-February 2023. The interviews were conducted in Ms Teams and recorded. Thereafter the interviews were transcribed. The data analysis strategy was a narrative approach (Sandelin, 2014) and the results are presented in the form of a re-constructed narrative, a narrative analysis.

Results

The interviewed coaches had a lot of experience of coaching student entrepreneurs. They highlighted that the role of the coach is to give support, not direct advice, to the coachees on their journey towards entrepreneurship. Coaches must give space to the coachee, discuss different points of view, connect with the person, and support their individual process emphasising their strengths and positive progress. The coaches shared their concrete techniques, which often involve asking several types of questions and setting goals and milestones with the coachee. However, it is vital that the coachees commit to the coaching process by a formal agreement, have thought about what they want to achieve and understand that all the decisions, actions and progress are their responsibility, with the coach just supporting the process. Coaches believe that coaching is an effective process which delivers concrete results and has a vital role to play in entrepreneurship education and in transforming students into entrepreneurs. If not immediately after graduation then maybe in some years when the students have some more work-related experiences.

Conclusion

At Haaga-Helia StartUp school coaching students towards entrepreneurship is a key activity. The coaches though all agreed upon that the entrepreneurial process must be owned by the students themselves. The coach is there to support the students but if a student fund a company, the company is the responsibility of the student. The coach is mainly there to ask the right questions and not to give solutions. Thus, as a coach you need to reflect upon your own role all the time otherwise there is a risk that you get too involved in the process that should be owned by the student.

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Creative Networks Learning

Kitta, Richard[1]*; Raisova, Manuela[2]

*Corresponding author - presenter
[1]richard.kitta@tuke.sk; Technical University of Kosice, Faculty of Arts, Slovakia
[2]Raisova, Manuela, Technical University of Kosice, Faculty of Economics, Slovakia

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Connectivism, Networking, Creative Transfer, Sustainability, Creative & Culture Industries

Background Parallel Studies

Creative networks usually offer many interesting approaches, solutions and "algorithms". So-called "network learning" for the creative and cultural industries implies mapping specific environments, interconnections, input and output data, as well as the individuals and communities involved. Ongoing innovative and original regional networking projects such as Greenpoints, Micelio or CRACK (Creative Research & Action Key) foresee the creation of specific localised info-structures around cities and centres in the Slovak region, which are interconnected, especially in terms of sharing and collaboration of ideas, programmes and further communication. The role of individual points of the network is to provide space for basic and extended activities based on creative, interdisciplinary and co-educational projects. The result is pilot and gradually established regional creative industry hubs that can be detected in a wider (e.g. European) context.

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A number of scholarly and empirical sources, both bibliographic and multimedia, form the basis for this study. At the same time, it should be noted that the specific research is currently being conducted under the MAO / Media Art Office umbrella in cooperation with the academic university environment of TUKE, as the research activity in question is a parallel and part of the above-mentioned projects, which are gradually and continuously being implemented. Many of the processes, such as data collection and analysis, analysis of selected environments, as well as typological forms, are in the process of being evaluated or in the phase of observation, sorting and structuring. In addition to gathering knowledge and drawing conclusions, an essential method of this research is its forthcoming ongoing application and field testing. As it is both a creative and living process, it involves multiple actors, whether in the form of professional and other participating communities, or in experimental tasks within open interdisciplinary teams that plan or directly implement so-called field projects.

Purpose: Permanent Networking

The concept of networking in the case of the above-mentioned development or experimental projects is based on the synergistic combination of ecology, smart-technologies and selected digital platforms, including their concrete applications, which are continuously implemented. Networking points are gradually emerging based on new and more innovative interdisciplinary concepts. Each of the physical and virtual points of the common regional network, has its own unique character and design with respect to local conditions and needs, the topic or issue addressed. Projects of this type are particularly stimulating in their cultural-ecological and socio-cultural dimension and are implemented with the intention of developing local creative industries. They offer a combination of local uniqueness and globalisation themes, but above all a functional link between ecology, architecture, design and other creative fields (e.g. the IT sector), together with other social fields such as sport, tourism, education and science, or working with disadvantaged groups – in the case of social inclusion projects.

Of course, there are also other continuous activities based on communication with the professional and wider public, with an emphasis on the participation of the local population in the implementation of projects and the strengthening of networks. A distinctive and important element of lively networking is formal and informal continuous learning and evaluation of results - using several hybrid methods and tools (analogue and digital), not excluding forms of experiential learning (e.g. learning by doing).

The specificities of education in artistic fields, as well as in various related cultural sectors, are applicable in practice in a broader sense, excelling especially in functional confrontation with other technical and social sciences. Digital interactive and immersive learning and experiences in contemporary telematics-oriented education (online), according to the opinions of several experts, should be combined with presentational forms and methodologies in which several, sometimes diametrically opposed to each other, educational practices, tools or educational aids and applications are applied. The characteristic of permanent networking is the constant exchange of information, experiences and ideas in a given localised environment, but within a broader educational network, the importance of which lies precisely in the local activities and concrete actions that follow and at the same time respond to the currently observed space-time or local cultural and social climate. At first glance, the perhaps utopian vision of permament networking is nothing more than the next stage of exploring and building tolerant community education and raising awareness and human perception and sensitivity.

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The result is innovation, experimentation and revision of existing strategies and their expansion. The connectivity of digital, virtual and physical realities is proving to be very substantial and stimulating, not only in terms of developing urban settlements and raising the standard of living of their inhabitants, but also in terms of knowledge and creative transfer in the form of applied research. Today, the zone of creative thinking and thinking offers many interesting ideas that need to be implemented or integrated in further concepts and prototypes. The network itself, not only its actors, is capable of adopting self-learning strategies and of being instrumental in tackling new thematic challenges together with the "point actors".

Methodology and Interim Results

The working terminus technicus used – "network learning" (also as part of the main title of this text) evokes a kind of peculiar analogy with the well-known term "machine learning", and rightly so. This fact emerges from our previous experiments, observations and analyses, as well as from other research and surveys we have conducted, and we have reached various intermediate conclusions. One of the remarkable results of the research, besides tracing and redefining the potential development of networks (including their physical and virtual infastructure), is the identification of possible complex forms of "multitasking" synergistic cooperation and communication between the different points of the network. It should be noted that the sharing of information and data between often typologically different process actors requires constant evaluation and continuous assessment. This is an important way of thinking and looking at the issue in the context of arts education, creativity support or general development within creative practice. In this case, the approach itself is also original, as is the way in which advanced digital tools and online platforms are being used to achieve different outcomes. The uniqueness and content of this applied research lies in its very nature: it is theoretically inexhaustible, because at every point in the research, progress is just another starting point.

The very title of this study suggests that it is a reference to 'machine learning', which means that a machine improves what it is supposed to do by repeating a task. The most commonly used machine learning algorithms are supervised machine learning algorithms, which take what the machine has learned in the past and use that to predict the correct outcome. In contrast to these algorithms, there are so-called unsupervised algorithms, which use unlabeled and unclassified input data. The machine does not know the correct outcome, but can suggest a possible correct outcome. These basic facts represent an important hypothetical starting point for us, where we try to sort of set up the idea of creative local development of our living place (point) and its surroundings, in synergy with other points of the network.

Our thinking on the issue has been partly influenced by the principles of connectivism. The knowledge and learning inherent in digital living algorithms today lies in the diversity of input data. Diversity is thus an important prerequisite for learning, for connecting actors, points, information sources, and de facto for the existence of a network. However, associativity, as the ability to see connections between different domains, and topicality and exactness, which form the basis of educational networking (connectivism), are key. The so-called information climate is something that applied creative research projects work with. What all influences our decision making? In the context of creative projects involving applied research, the establishment of an information climate is deliberately limiting, but from the perspective of an integrated territorial strategy and educational development or the stimulation of the creative potential of cities and regions, extremely positive.

Open Conclusion

Machine learning, which is a subset of artificial intelligence (AI) systems, is mainly based on mathematics and statistics. Nearly two centuries have passed from the definition of Bayes' theorem in 1812 by Pierre-Simon Laplace, which deals with conditional probabilities of phenomena, to Marvin Minsky, the creator of the first computer simulation of the functioning of the human brain in the form of SNARC (Stochastic Neural Analog Reinforcement Calculator). Today, more than ever, we have the opportunity to create powerful digital socio-cultural tools whose application in education and practice will become more and more prominent, but most importantly, more useful and effective. The emerging repositories of humanity's digital consciousness and civilization's digital memory, combined with experiential forms of education, will also be a great opportunity for the application and testing of various new segments of the creative industries. Rather, these innovative practices are based on ongoing original individual research as well as interdisciplinary creative research, the anticipated outcomes of which we cannot yet categorize with complete precision today. In concluding this paper, we would still like to draw your attention to a telling statement by George Siemens (a founder of www.elearnspace.org) in the context of connectivism and networking – "The ability to know more is more crucial than what is currently known."

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Exploring Sustainability Competence Needs in the Finnish Tourism and Hospitality Industry

Puhakainen, E.[1]*; Vehkaperä, M.[2]
*Corresponding author - presenter
[1]eeva.puhakainen@haaga-helia.fi; Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, Finland
[2] Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, Finland

Key Words

Competence needs, sustainability, Finnish tourism and hospitality industry, education

Introduction

The tourism and hospitality industry has faced tremendous challenges during the last few years. Changing strategic environment, sustainability, technological development, tough competition, transforming customer behaviour, COVID-19 pandemic and most recently, global inflation, have created needs for agile competence development. At the same time, companies have faced huge issues in attracting and retaining employees and responding to their stakeholders' expectations for more sustainable business.

Generally, sustainability or sustainable development refer to idea of meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability to meet the future generation to meet their own needs. When sustainability as a concept has been developed at macro level, corporate responsibility and corporate social responsibility can be seen as corporate level contributions including the same three dimensions: environmental, social and economic (see e.g. Garriga & Melé, 2004). Sustainable and responsible businesses attain to maximize the positive contribution and minimize the negative impacts to people, society and environment.

The lack of a skilled workforce forces companies to investing in attracting labour and to retaining existing professionals. Wages are low, and working hours are challenging, therefore other ways to attract and engage employees must be generated. In this light, companies should start investing on educating their existing and upcoming employees and developing more sustainable business models. Consequently, it is important to identify the current and future sustainability competence needs, which enable for companies to be competitive in the future.

Guerrero and De los Ríos (2012) state, that there is no shared agreement in academia to define the term competence. Also, Fernandez et al. (2012) have specified that a straightforward examination of what is meant by the term competence is missing from the literature. Nevertheless, the term is extremely popular across these differing domains results in its being used in diverse ways, with different and sometimes conflicting meanings and intentions (Glaesser, 2019). However, Fernandez et al. (2012) conclude that there is an agreement that competence is composed of knowledge, skills, and other components. Furthermore, even though agreement about the nature of these other components is lacking, attitudes and values are suggested to be essential ingredients of competence.

Competence can be seen as a resource that practitioners need, entailing abilities and skills related to practical work (Moore, Cheng, & Dainty, 2002). Mulder (2014) postulates that professionals are competent when they act responsibly and effectively according to given standards of performance.

Research methods

The aim of this study was to explore and identify sustainability competence needs in the Finnish hospitality and tourism industry. In this paper, only competences related to sustainability and responsible business will be analysed and discussed.

Data collection was part of a larger research and development project, MODULE, which was funded by the European Social Fund (ESF). Altogether 40 tourism and hospitality professionals were interviewed to get insight in their conceptions about the most important current and future competence and training needs in their establishments as well as in the whole industry. There have been some previous studies done to define competences needed but, this was the first study done in Finland after the COVID-19 pandemic. The following research question was formulated: Which competences the tourism and hospitality professionals consider the most important now and in the future?

Data gathering started by contacting hundreds of hospitality companies to find out whether they were willing to contribute to the research project. Professionals, working mostly in management and leadership positions, HR or as entrepreneur, participated to semi-structured interviews. Interviews took place in Helsinki capital area or via Teams in autumn 2021.

The sessions started with a set of open-ended questions about current and future competence needs to get spontaneous responses. The next step was to discuss a list of the most important trends and changes in strategic environment in the future to get more insight and deeper understanding about future competence demands. Two interviewers participated each interview. One of them was very active and asked for more ideas and thoughts about competences and competence needs while the other wrote down the given answers and explanations as precisely as possible.

Qualitative content analysis and data-driven approach was applied to get a good understanding of the written data. The process of analysis reduces the volume of text collected as well as identifies and groups categories together and seeks some understanding of it (Bengtsson, 2016).

Data analysing started with de-contextualising process in which, transcribed text was read several times to obtain the sense of the whole and to understand what it is all about (see Bengtsson, 2016). The data was then coded inductively to sub-themes, which included e.g., various skills, knowledge, and attitudes as well as other competence-related concepts. Finally, six main competence themes, one being sustainability competences, of Finnish tourism and hospitality industry were identified.

The second phase was to recontextualize, that is, to make sure that all aspects of the content have been covered in relation to the aim and are relevant for the study and its purpose (Bengtsson, 2016). The next phase was to identify the main themes and categories of competence needs of Finnish tourism and hospitality industry. To improve reliability of interpretations, all interviews were re-examined by both two authors until they agreed upon the main themes or categories.

Results suggest that the main competence needs in the Finnish hospitality industry are related to the following themes: leadership and management, personal professional skills, technological competences, communications and social media, sustainability and corporate responsibility, and customer experience and sales. As mentioned, only sustainability and corporate responsibility related competence needs will be discussed in this paper.

Main findings

Despite of the fact, that sustainability and corporate social responsibility have become major trends in tourism and hospitality sectors, competence needs related to sustainability were not brought up spontaneously often by informants. However, when the trend of sustainability was mentioned by the interviewer, almost all said that sustainable and responsible business will be very important in the future. It was also suggested that taking actions towards more responsible business and communicating the results could help companies to achieve competitive advantage. But, companies seemed to need better understanding of what sustainability and corporate social responsibility mean in company's every day service operations as well as tools for communicating it to both, employees and customers. Also, many kinds of competence and training needs were identified topical and important.

Even though all three dimensions of corporate responsibility, economic, social, and environmental, were discussed by informants, significant emphasis was on environmental issues and competences. Especially, more profound comprehension of climate change and its multifaceted implications is needed. In addition, the acquisition of technical competences associated with calculating carbon footprint, reducing energy consumption, and attaining environmental certifications and labels were emphasized. Reducing food waste as well as origins of ingredients were seen important particularly for restaurant companies. The concept of circular economy and its potential opportunities in the future was raised by a few industry experts.

Competence needs regarding social responsibility were mainly related to leadership, human resources management, diversity and inclusion, accessibility, health, safety and quality. Hospitality workplaces are more diverse and heterogenous than ever so good leadership was considered critically important. Rising level of employee heterogeneity does not refer only the growing cultural diversity, but also other diversity, such as age, disability, gender, sexual orientation, or religion (Scherle, Rosenbaum, & Obermeyer, 2021). Good leadership and responsible HR practices were seen as important for attracting and retaining employees. Coaching-based leadership was often mentioned as one of the solutions.

The interpretation of health and safety seemed to broaden amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Safety and quality have always been important for tourism and hospitality companies but because of the restrictions, health security had become more critical. Accessibility, designing services and environments to be inclusive and accessible to everyone, was seen as one of the rising topics.

Generally, economic responsibility was interpreted in a very narrow way or the concept was not very well known. Almost all considered profitability particularly important but, some professionals didn't see it as part of sustainable business. It seemed obvious that COVID-19 pandemic had caused a lot of challenges for a profitable business. In addition to profitability, some positive economic impacts for the society were mentioned, such as providing jobs and payment of taxes.

One of the most emphasized competence needs was corporate social responsibility communication. Corporate social responsibility communication means communicating responsible operations and their impacts to stakeholders and society (Ihlen, Bartlett & May 2011). It was widely pointed out that each employee should possess the capacity to effectively communicate the matters pertaining to their company's responsibility and sustainability.

Implications for the hospitality and tourism education and companies

In summary, Finnish hospitality and tourism companies identify the need for sustainability and corporate responsibility competences development but, many of them do not yet comprehend what and how to develop them.

Based on the findings, some suggestions for competence development can be made for both, the Finnish tourism and hospitality industry as well as educational institutions. First of all, top management needs deeper understanding about strategic advantages of responsible business and new business opportunities sustainability and furthermore, circular economy can create. Also, systematic knowledge about negative and positive impacts during the entire life cycle of products and services is required. Both top and middle managers need to know how to manage responsibility and reduce the negative impact of their businesses as well as how to report and communicate these actions.

Responsible leadership and enhancing well-being, diversity and inclusion in the workplace will become more important in the hospitality and tourism industry. Leadership, specifically, coaching-based leadership could be a key solution to attract and maintain employees and motivate them. According to Zuberbuhler, Salanova, and Martíne (2020) research increasingly shows that coaching skills have become an essential part of leadership competence and positive workplace cultures.

In the future, every employee should be able to communicate the company's responsibility efforts to the customers and help them make more responsible choices. Companies need to focus on continuous learning and create opportunities for their employees to learn and develop their competences. From this perspective, it is interesting that Zizka (2017) found that while the students are overwhelmingly convinced by the importance of sustainability and corporate responsibility, they are not particularly interested in learning about it.

Both companies and educational institutions must find new and more agile ways to cultivate and train current and potential employees. Degree programmes cannot respond to the changing needs of rapidly changing sustainability demands and regulation. Continuous learning and development are necessary for most of the companies if they want to survive and be successful. Time-efficient micro-credentials offer one opportunity particularly for tourism and hospitality sector which employs a lot of low-skilled and low-paid employees.

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Inclusive and sustainable leadership in family firms: a cross-cultural approach among Japan and Austria

Wieser, D.[1]*; Zehrer, A.[2]; Shinohara, Y.[3]; Kim, R.C.[4], Ackaradejruangsri, P.[5]
Corresponding author - presenter
[1] desiree.wieser@mci.edu, *MCI | The Entrepreneurial School®, Innsbruck, Austria*
[2] *MCI | The Entrepreneurial School®, Innsbruck, Austria*
[3,4,5] *College of International Management Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Beppu, Japan*

Track 4: Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Impact

Abstract

Family firms (FFs) are the most widespread types of business worldwide. Driven by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), family firms all around the world try to shape, extend and improve their sustainability practices. Considering the three-folded nature of sustainability (social, environmental, and economic dimensions), FFs, seem to put a special focus on the social dimension of sustainability (Kuttner & Feldbauer-Durstmueller, 2018). However, much of the scholarly discussion on FFs' engagement on sustainability, especially in relation to social sustainability remains ambiguous (e.g., Curado & Mota, 2021), and is arguably under-theorized. In this light, adequate understanding that can improve the crucial responsibility of FF to contribute to the global agenda of the SDGs has been lacking. Furthermore, leadership as a means to foster sustainable practices and the role of the leader as catalysts for enabling sustainable development in FF has not been part of prior debates in this field (e.g., Fries et al., 2021; Piwowar-Sulej & Iqbal, 2022). This paper connects both issues and addresses the social dimension of sustainability, taking a closer look at inclusive leadership from a cross-cultural perspective in FF between Austria and Japan.

Keywords: sustainable development, inclusive leadership, social sustainability, family firms

1. Background of the study/literature review

A recent study by Miroshnychenko and De Massis (2022) shows that family businesses are less committed to environmental sustainability over time than non-family businesses. Kuttner and Feldbauer-Durstmüller (2018) further found evidence that family firms may prefer social CSR practices that focus on and impact employees and the closer environment over environmental ones. Although Curado and Mota (2021) summarize potential determinants of the social dimension of sustainability (characteristics of family members, religiosity, reputation and image, the choice of CEO and their succession, knowledge retention within the family, balance between internal and external stakeholder interests, and industry familiarity with CSR practices) and note that CSR practices are determined by the control of the family itself, but also industry affiliation, and that family values affect the disclosure of CSR practices, deeper and further explanation in the context of social sustainability are lacking, especially with regard to the role of leadership. It can be assumed that the way a family business is managed has a significant influence on the sustainability orientation and practices in an organization. Although, as Fries et al. (2021) suggest, leadership plays a central role in family businesses, leadership styles and behaviors in family businesses are largely neglected as it is assumed and argued that they are very family business specific (see e.g. Mussolino & Calabrò, 2014) and thus not or only to a certain extent comparable to conventional ones (Fries et al., 2021). Thus, we do not know, which role leadership in FF plays (style and behaviour) in pursuing and for promoting sustainability in general and social sustainability in particular.

Piwowar-Sulej and Iqbal (2022) conducted a literature review and identified transformational leadership and sustainable leadership as the leadership styles most often linked to sustainable organizational development and performance in general. Transformational leadership referred thereby most of the times to the environmental dimension of sustainability and sustainable leadership referred to the sustainability performance in general. While the social dimension takes the backseat. A concept that has not (or barely) received attention in this debate is inclusive leadership. According to Korkmaz et al. (2022), inclusive leadership was introduced in 2006 and is thus a new field of research, which on the one hand is still overshadowed by (partly already implicitly integrated in) related fields such as ethical leadership, servant leadership, authentic leadership, empowering leadership, shared or distributed leadership, humble leadership, and transformational leadership. On the other hand, the term inclusive leadership is also used as an umbrella term for relationship-oriented leadership styles, such as the latter (Korkmaz et al., 2022). In general, inclusive leadership emphasizes employee's uniqueness, appreciation, support/identification with the organization, and belonging to the team (Korkmaz et al., 2022). Inclusion, as part of the SDG agendas (SDG 3,4,8,10,11,16), is considered an important subgoal for achieving social sustainability and, in the entrepreneurial context, refers to the extent to which individuals feel part of the organization (access to information and resources, opportunity to participate in decision-making processes, etc. (Mor-Barak & Cherin, 1998). Inclusion, though being an integral part of the SDGs and the social dimension of sustainability, has not been focused in prior literature.

Moreover, although, well mentioned and often references in the limitations and further research parts of numerous articles, the culture aspect remains still unaddressed in similar debates. While Japan constitutes the home for one of the oldest FFs in the world and looks back at a long and rich history of FF tradition, in Austria, 90% of all business are FFs, which are active in the production, tourism, trading and other industries. In terms of social sustainability, Asian companies including Japan tend to regard the local community as the most important stakeholder compared to American and European companies (Kim & Moon, 2015). While in Austria, the region is of crucial importance as well – in particular for FF – it is rarely highlighted as the key stakeholder and merely addressed in terms of regional embedding (Bichler, et al., 2022; Glowka & Zehrer, 2019).

Thus, another relevant gap to fill is the narrow focus of most studies, which concentrate on a single country only (Miroshnychenko & De Massis, 2022; Delmas &Gergaud, 2014; Berrone et al., 2010;), neglecting that definition about sustainability, as well as family firm values may vary across countries and cultures. Ignoring culture, could result in a discrepancy between countries not moving in the same directions, while pursuing the very same global goal(s). It could also result in missed opportunities to join forces and complement efforts to multiply outcomes. To outbalance here, especially cross-cultural studies between countries with common, different or even contradicting histories, societal values and languages should be envisaged.

2. Aim of the study including originality & novelty

The aim of this paper, which constitutes a work in progress, is the gathering of more and deeper cross-sectional insights into sustainability practices related to inclusive leadership of family firms in Japan and Austria and to compare both approaches to gather deeper insights and learn from each other with the ultimate goal to support the global sustainability agenda.

This paper is the first to explore inclusive and sustainable leadership in the context of FF as part of a cross-cultural study among Japan and Austria. This, will not only counterbalance the shortcomings mentioned, but even more so create important implications for businesses (especially FFs) seeking strategies for their competitive advantage, not only in Japan and Austria, but also in the global capitalist market calling for sustainability. By identifying cross-cultural differences and commonalities and bundling forces, new insights can be gathered that will support the fulfilment of the SDGs and improve our understanding how to fight the most pressing issues of our times.

By applying quantitative, as well as qualitative methods, we will investigate different cases of FF and their inclusive and sustainable business leadership practices, answering the following research questions:

1. How do FFs in Japan and Austria define (social) sustainability and which vision, mission, values and strategies/business models are associated with sustainability in the respective countries?
2. How and to what extent sustainability activities of FFs embrace inclusion in Japan and Austria?
3. What differences and commonalities (cultural and institutional) can be observed across Austria and Japan?
4. How can cross-cultural learning of Japan and Austria be fostered to advance knowledge and global competitiveness of FF and serve global goals of sustainable development?

3. Methodology

A mixed-method approach will be adopted, including case studies of Japan and Austria. Starting with a systematic literature review of FF's sustainability practices, we will then apply an exploratory approach to investigate commonalities and differences between sustainable practices of FFs in Japan and Austria (by employing Hofstede Theory, Globe Index, Country Value Score). Based on it, we will create a protocol for semi-structured interviews to explore the vision and purposes FFs' practices toward sustainability and what style of leadership their CEOs follow. In addition to the interviews, we will visit FFs in both Japan and Austria to observe their sustainable practices. Observations are considered of particular relevance in determining whether a company's sustainability practices are "washing" or not. Finally, we construct a hypothetical model of the sustainability practices of FFs from the data obtained.

4. Expected Results & Contributions

This work constitutes work in progress. Expected results will draw out commonalities and differences between sustainable practices and inclusive leadership styles between FF in Japan and Austria. Based on these, the goal is to develop a novel conceptual/theoretical model for *Sustainable and Inclusive Business Leadership in Family Firms*. This also serves as a practical framework, which can be adopted by FFs in different contexts, in different countries and with different backgrounds to become more sustainable and inclusive.

5. Conclusion, managerial implications and limitations

We aim to stimulate further research to acknowledge that ignoring culture could result in a discrepancy between countries not moving in the same direction, while pursuing the very same global goal(s). It could also result in missed opportunities to join forces and complement efforts to multiply outcomes. Secondly, we contribute by refining the definition (understanding) of social sustainability (practices) in the field of FF and further exploring the role of inclusive business leadership and culture in this context. From a practical point of view, we provide FF with guidance on how sustainability practices can be fostered through inclusive leadership across different countries and cultures. Future research avenues might open as well and include comparative studies across additional cultures.

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Is Case Challenge an Entrepreneurial Motivational Tool?

Thavisay, T.[1]*; Mahajan, L.[2]
*Corresponding author - presenter
[1] thavisay.toulany@gmail.com; Faculty of Economics and Business Management, National University of Laos, Lao PDR
[2] lisa.mahajan@fh-joanneum.at; FH JOANNEUM University of Applied Sciences, Austria

Keywords: Entrepreneurial case challenge, Entrepreneurial motivational tool, Entrepreneurial intention

1. Background of the study

Entrepreneurship education is considered as an important tool in nurturing students with the necessary skills and strengthening the capacity of creating their own new ventures (Iwu et al., 2021; Silva et al., 2021). As such, the educational factors have been widely used to predict the university students' entrepreneurial intention. However, it is not always easy for the students to obtain the real-world skills and competencies required for the entrepreneurship (Bliemel, 2014), and it might not enhance the entrepreneurial intention (Chen et al., 2015). It is so because entrepreneurship is a dynamic transformational process that requires inspiration for the development and application of fresh and innovative ideas (Motta & Galina, 2023) and the ability to navigate an uncertain environment through real-life case to help foster and develop the skills of the students (Neck & Greene, 2011). For instance, estimating risks, forming an effective team, gathering the important resources, formulating a strategic business plan, and seeing possibilities are the ample skills and competencies required for becoming an entrepreneur (Kolb, 2014). In this regard, as argued by Othman et al. (2012), more practical activities which allow the students to engage in the real-world problems should be introduced. Therefore, a case challenge could considerably be introduced as an approach to entrepreneurship education to provide the students with a strong support so that their entrepreneurial intention spirit could be fostered.

A case challenge has been introduced by the ENCORE[1] project with the ultimate objective to have students from the project partners' countries (i.e., Nepal, Bhutan, and Laos) undergo a realistic business entrepreneurship process. The students worked individually or as a team to solve a case challenge of identified entrepreneurs in their home countries. The students were provided with clear instructions to carry out the work and had support from mentors and business partners to guide them with every stage of problem solving, while having a dedicated physical space at university premises at their disposal. It was strongly believed in the benefits of a case challenge that could serve as an influential tool to motivate the students as they were able to carry out their own case study reports while excellent productivity and output quality were consistently maintained.

[1] *Entrepreneurship Knowledge Centers to Foster Innovative Entrepreneurship Practices in Education and Research (ENCORE) which is a co-funded project by Erasmus+ Program of the European Union aims at promoting entrepreneurship education and student-business learning activities at HEIs in Bhutan, Nepal and Laos.*

2. Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to examine the impact of a case challenge which is carried out by the students from colleges and universities in three different countries (Nepal, Bhutan, and Laos) under the ENCORE project. This study is considered as novelty of the existing literature on entrepreneurship education in two possible ways. First, the study measures a case challenge as a motivational tool in boosting the entrepreneurial intention and extends the factors that predict the entrepreneurial desires among students in three countries. Second, a case challenge could be considered as an intervention to develop entrepreneurship skills of college and university students.

3. Methodology

According to the objectives of this study, the data was collected via online (i.e., Google Form) from the students from colleges and universities in Nepal (TU[2] and GCI[3]), Bhutan (RTC[4] and GCBS[5]), and Laos (NUOL[6] and SU[7]). They were the ones who were involved in the case challenge as a team or an individual for the past seven months starting from November 2022 to May 2023. Table 1 shows the number of the students and their demographic characteristics.

This research estimated the impact of a case challenge by measuring the perception of entrepreneurial case challenge, perceived adequacy of entrepreneurial content of a case challenge, perceived mentoring of entrepreneurial case challenge, and perceived actual entrepreneurial experience. These factors were identified from recent existing studies (e.g., Iwu et al., 2021; Silva et al., 2021; Puni et al., 2018) in the field of entrepreneurship education and then the items measuring these factors were revised to meet the characteristics of a case challenge. Finally, they were measured by using Likert scales with 1= strongly disagree and 5= strongly agree.

Data analysis used in examining the impact of a case challenge was conducted in IBM SPSS to perform the test such as Frequency, Percentage, Mean (M), and Standard deviation (SD). The study also used the approach withdrawn from AI-Mutawah and Fateel (2018) to interpret the individual statement mean score on the respondents' agreement level to indicate the likelihood impact of a case challenge.

[2] *Tribhuvan University*
[3] *Global College International*
[4] *Royal Thimphu College*
[5] *Gedu College of Business Studies*
[6] *National University of Laos*
[7] *Souphanouvong University*

Table 1. Students' demographic profiles

	Group	Frequency	Percent
Age	19 – 24	60	100.0
	Total	60	100.0
Gender	Male	28	46.7
	Female	32	53.3
	Total	60	100.0
Level of study	Bachelor's degree	60	100.0
	Total	60	100.0
Year of study	1st Yr.	4	6.7
	2nd Yr.	51	85.0
	3rd Yr.	4	6.7
	4th Yr.	1	1.7
	Total	60	100.0
College/University	GCBS	12	20.0
	GCI	2	3.3
	RTC	5	8.3
	TU	9	15.0
	NUOL	29	48.3
	SU	3	5.0
	Total	60	100.0
Country	Laos	31	51.7
	Nepal	14	23.7
	Bhutan	15	25.0
	Total	60	100.0

4. Result

In Table 2, the results show that the students are likely to have favourable opinions on a case challenge as the mean score falls between 3.98 and 4.32 which indicates that the students either agree or strongly agree with the statements. For instance, the majority of the sampled students reported that a case challenge enhanced creative and innovative ideas and equipped them with business creation skills. This consequence indicates that the students were open to a case challenge to not only acquire entrepreneurial competencies but also to gain entrepreneurial motivation to develop ideas for businesses.

Table 2. Perception of entrepreneurial case challenge

No.	Item Description	Opinion Level	
		M (SD)	Interpretation
1.	Case challenge enhances my motivation to develop entrepreneurial competencies.	4.16 (0.60)	High
2.	Case challenge enhances creative and innovative ideas.	4.32 (0.61)	Very high
3.	Case challenge helps in learning how to reduce numbers of failed businesses	3.98 (0.75)	High
4.	Case challenge equips me with business creation skills.	4.23 (0.71)	Very high
5.	Case challenge can facilitate the development of my entrepreneurial problem-solving skills	4.16 (0.68)	High

Note: Range of interpretation: (1) 1.00–1.80: very low; (2) 1.81–2.60: low; (3) 2.61–3.40: moderate; (4) 3.41–4.20: high; (5) 4.21–5.00: very high.

In Table 3, the entrepreneurial adequacy of a case challenge generated positive outcomes. Particularly, the students reported that a case challenge contained sufficient contents that promoted the skills required for entrepreneurship and encouraged them to share business ideas. Moreover, the content introduced the students to sources of funds, hands-on experience, and new idea inspiration. According to the mean score falling between 3.75 and 4.16, the results signalize a direction to entrepreneurial content creation in order to meet the needs of the students so that they could fully exercise their thoughts and learn the skills required as entrepreneurship.

Table 3. Perceived entrepreneurial adequacy of case challenge

No.	Item Description	Opinion Level	
		M (SD)	Interpretation
1.	The content of a case challenge promotes the skills required for entrepreneurship.	4.16 (0.65)	High
2.	The content of a case challenge encourages me to share business ideas.	4.14 (0.64)	High
3.	The content of a case challenge exposes students to relevant sources of funds for entrepreneurship activities.	3.75 (0.84)	High
4.	The content of a case challenge encourages me to have practical experience in entrepreneurship through field work and interaction with practicing entrepreneurs.	4.00 (0.66)	High
5.	The content of a case challenge provides a favorable inspiration to develop ideas for new businesses.	4.09 (0.72)	High

Note: Range of interpretation: (1) 1.00–1.80: very low; (2) 1.81–2.60: low; (3) 2.61–3.40: moderate; (4) 3.41–4.20: high; (5) 4.21–5.00: very high

Table 4 presents about the outcomes of perceived mentoring of entrepreneurial case challenge. The mean score for the statements falls between 4.13 and 4.21 show that the sampled students were highly encouraged to think out of the box by the mentoring session. Also, mentoring session inspired and motivated them to learn about entrepreneurial activities and thoughts. The results imply that mentors play an important role in guiding the students along the entrepreneurial path through expertise and knowledge. Thus, mentoring session is likely to increase motivation and strengthen the relationship between mentors and students.

Table 4. Perceived mentoring of entrepreneurial case challenge

No.	Item Description	Opinion Level	
		M (SD)	Interpretation
1.	Mentoring of a case challenge inspires me to keep learning about entrepreneurship.	4.13 (0.69)	High
2.	The mentoring of a case challenge motivates me to participate in entrepreneurship related activities.	4.14 (0.77)	High
3.	The mentoring of a case challenge allows me to think out of the box.	4.21 (0.76)	Very high
4.	The mentoring of a case challenge stimulates my critical thinking.	4.11 (0.73)	High
5.	The mentoring of a challenge helps provide in-depth knowledge of entrepreneurship.	4.11 (0.68)	High

Note: Range of interpretation: (1) 1.00–1.80: very low; (2) 1.81–2.60: low; (3) 2.61–3.40: moderate; (4) 3.41–4.20: high; (5) 4.21–5.00: very high

Table 5 reveals that the result of the mean score falling from 3.95 to 4.23 explains the participants' likelihood to gain favourable entrepreneurial experience as the majority of them highly reported that a case challenge increased their ability to identify an opportunity. implies that the students might have done a lot of market research so that they found possible ways to identify new business opportunities, which is an important skill for an entrepreneur to use for seeking and developing market opportunities.

Table 5. Perceived actual entrepreneurial experience

No.	Item Description	Opinion Level	
		M (SD)	Interpretation
1.	Case challenge I attended enabled me to identify the characteristics of successful entrepreneurs.	3.96 (0.66)	High
2.	Case challenge I attended increased my understanding of the actions a person has to take to start a business.	4.11 (0.62)	High
3.	Case challenge I attended increased my practical administrative/management skills to start a business.	3.95 (0.67)	High
4.	Case challenge I attended increased my ability to develop networks.	4.11 (0.73)	High
5.	Case challenge I attended increased my ability to identify an opportunity.	4.23 (0.66)	Very high

Note: Range of interpretation: (1) 1.00–1.80: very low; (2) 1.81–2.60: low; (3) 2.61–3.40: moderate; (4) 3.41–4.20: high; (5) 4.21–5.00: very high

5. Conclusion, managerial implications and limitations

The study finds that when the students were exposed to a real-world case challenge with the goals of giving them to solve a problem required entrepreneurial knowledge could increase the opportunity to recognize skills, grow more entrepreneurship ability, develop diverse viewpoints, and identify new business possibilities. The findings point to the importance of a case challenge as a motivational tool to increase self-confidence and entrepreneurial capability among students in relation to new business ventures. It could also be a possible tool to increase entrepreneurial intention.

The results of this study add to the body of scientific literature by elucidating how a case challenge develops entrepreneurial motivations and intentions of the students in Bhutan, Nepal, and Laos. The findings further demonstrate the importance of providing entrepreneurial education for students by allowing them to expose to a real-life case. It is also crucial to emphasize the significant role of mentoring in organizing a case challenge as to make sure that entrepreneurial education is co-creation innovative ideas.

This study contributes to managerial implications. The results show that a case challenge was perceived as a positive impact among the students, which confirms that it is a significant method by which entrepreneurial understanding can be enhanced. The findings also suggest that a case challenge could be used as an intervention to motivate entrepreneurial practices and intentions among students. Therefore, colleges and universities should promote the benefits of a case challenge in the entrepreneurship course in the corresponding to the needs of the students from different fields of study to promote entrepreneurial career development.

Nevertheless, this study has limitations which, however, would guide future research. The accuracy of the results needs to be cautiously interpreted as it needs to be examined further. Thus, the future study might consider conducting experimental research that compares the results before and after introducing a case challenge to the students. In this regard, the result could yield greater accuracy.

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Promoting sustainability, Corporate Social Responsibility, and online presence of companies: B2B Reputation model for food exporters

Puma Flores, Manuel Jesus, Doctoral student[1]*; Rosa Diaz, Isabel Maria. PhD[2]

** Corresponding author – presenter: Manuel Jesus Puma Flores manuelpumaflores@gmail.com*

[1] Doctoral Student Strategic Management and International Business. Universidad de Sevilla.

[2] PhD. Doctoral Thesis Director. Universidad de Sevilla

Keywords: Sustainability, Food, Reputation, Business, Corporate Social Responsibility

1. Background of the study/literature review

This study (work in progress) is being developed as a doctoral thesis in the Strategic Management and International Business program at the University of Seville. The student had the opportunity to receive training in Applied Design Research at the Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, which has served to contribute to the development of practical knowledge applicable to the field of sustainable development and the business world in the thesis.

Undoubtedly, the food sector is one of the main sectors of the world economy. Due to its contribution to Europe and the world, it is important to analyse the relevance of the promotion strategies of the food producers, specially promoting aspects of sustainability that affect their reputation.

Considering food sector contributes to satisfy a basic need of the human being and it involves security reasons for the health of the consumers, its paramount importance to evaluate the suppliers specially the exporters from developing countries that export products to Europe, because these products will be consumed in the European Market. Europe have multiple safety policies in place, and there are certifications in the market that contribute to assure the perception of quality, but there are not studies related about how the reputation of the suppliers is measured in a business to business (B2B) context for the food sector where an exporter promotes its products to introduce its products to a specific market.

Agricultural products have a more serious asymmetric information problem as they have the characteristics of both experience goods and belief-based goods. “Buyers have difficulty observing quality beforehand and may not be able to ascertain that quality even after consumption. Under these circumstances, the belief in the average quality of the exporter, which is affected by the reputation of the country, would affect the purchasing behaviour of buyers. There is substantial evidence that the reputation of the country has a positive and significant impact on the quality of the export” (Huai, et al., 2020).

Due to this, it is needed to have a methodology to measure the reputation of exporters of food products, clarifying previously the construct of reputation for this sector. Also, sustainability promotion must be addressed to evaluate its impact on the reputation of the companies. On this, the construct of sustainability marketing plays an important role in this study.

The definition of sustainability marketing has been previously evaluated but it is still a novel construction. One of the most important approaches is that the concept could be considered in different dimensions. “The first is auxiliary sustainability marketing focused on the production of sustainable products, the second is reformative sustainability marketing, extending the auxiliary approach through the promotion of sustainable lifestyles and behaviour change and the third is transformative sustainability marketing, which further extends auxiliary and reforming approaches through the need for transformation of current institutions and norms and critical reflection" (Kempera & Ballantine, 2019). Taking in consideration that "Foods are sensitive products, that involve aspects for health and safety to the consumers" (Woerkum & Lieshout, 2007), it is important to assess how the sustainability marketing strategies of the companies affect their reputation and the exports of their products.

Moreover, the e-reputation (online reputation), that can be defined as "a reputation built from the set of perceptions that the interested parties will create from any element that circulates in the network" (Paquerot, et al., 2011), could play an important role in the B2B context where exporters need to present an online image in front of the buyers to sell their products internationally. Also, online reputation "could be considered an element of reputation itself, it can specifically arise from digital channels" (Chun & Davies, 2001), what requires a discussion of how the online presence of the company affect their exports in this B2B context. Therefore, "if a company wants to develop its online reputation, it should focus its communication on products, services and the quality of its actions, because these items are the ones that customers consider the most" (Dutot, et al., 2016).

2. Aim of the study including originality & novelty

The study aims to:

- Objective 1. Estimate the impact of promoting sustainability on the reputation of food exporting companies.
- Objective 2. Estimate the impact of digital presence on the reputation of food exporting companies.

- Objective 3. Estimate the impact of image promotion on the reputation of food exporting companies at B2B Trade Shows.

The originality and novelty of the study is based on:

- Analysis of reputation in the context of agricultural exports to Europe. The identified studies of corporate reputation consider a general analysis of reputation. There are no specific studies identified focused on exports. Considering the globalization of the economy, the study becomes relevant by proposing a measurement model in the context of international trade (exports to Europe).
- Consider reputation in the context of international shows: The importance of international fairs in the context of food exports stands out as being the main meeting mechanism between buyers and exporters, as well as market trend experts. No studies published in the academic context have been identified, where aspects of corporate reputation are analysed.
- Consider the marketing of sustainability: The importance of sustainable development has grown in recent decades internationally, especially due to climate change and its effects on society. Despite this, although sustainability has been widely studied in various fields, the specific marketing component and its implications when applied to sustainability and its impact on the corporate reputation of food exports have not been studied in the field. academic field in the same dimension of the developed studies of sustainability in general.
- Consider Online presence as component of reputation: The digitization of society, going from a world where reputation was basically offline to an online reputation, leads to the need for an analysis of how reputation is affected by image in the digital world. Exporting companies are not isolated from this situation and their reputation can be affected by their presence, especially in a Business to Business B2B context.

3. Methodology (the methods used in your research including data collection and data analysis)

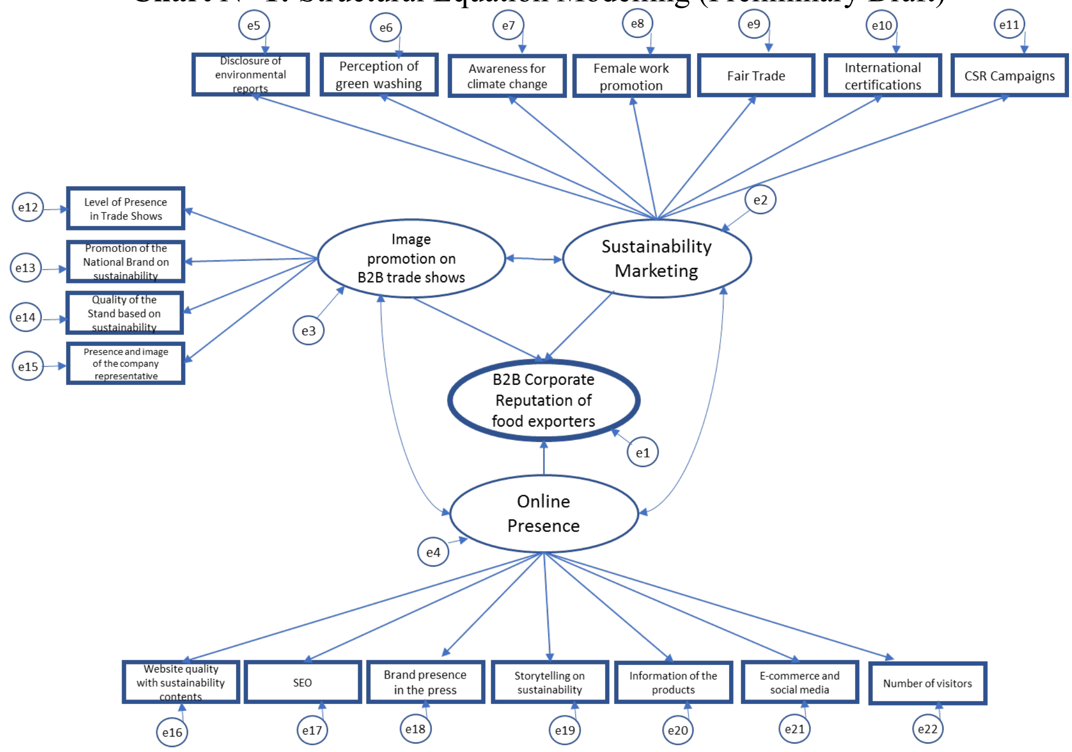
B2B Trade Shows are the main channel to connect with international exporters of food sector. The most important exporters in the world participate in the most well-known trade shows in Europe, such as Anuga and Biofach in Germany or Sial in Paris. On the other hand, working with data available of Peruvian companies that participate in these events and data sets of exports from the customs, the study follows the next steps in the methodology. All these companies supply food sector products to the European market.

- **Construct definition:** A constructive research approach has been adopted, which takes into consideration the study of a real-world problem to provide a contribution to business practice in connection with previous theory (Lukka 2003). After a detailed revision of literature about the marketing of sustainability and interviews to experts, a list of variables was defined to survey Peruvian companies exporting food products to European companies. Also, a revision of the construct and measurement methods of the construct was considered as the core part of the study.
- **Survey to exporters:** The survey to companies was implemented to validate the importance of the variables that affect the reputation of the exporters on sustainability marketing and digital presence. This list of variables was collected from Peruvian promoting the products in B2B trade shows. **The results of this survey could be presented in the conference.**
- **Measurement of online reputation:** This section of the methodology is in progress and is estimated to be ready for the time of the conference. Currently, the study plans

to estimate the Total Online reputation (TOR) score considering the variables of online presence and the corporate social responsibility disclosure and sustainability in public websites. Multiple studies on online reputation are being considered to implement the methodology. As part of this analysis a sentiment analysis is being considered in the methodology.

- **Regression model to measure the impact of online reputation on exports.** This section of the methodology is in progress and it is estimated to be ready for the time of the conference. A regression model with a dependent variable (export amount by company) and independent variables that comprise the total online reputation score are considered to measure the impact of online reputation on exports.
- **Structural Equation Model:** A preliminary draft of the structural equation scheme is presented below (work in progress) to be implemented in this study.

Chart N° 1: Structural Equation Modelling (Preliminary Draft)



Source: Draft developed by the Doctoral student (still a work on progress)

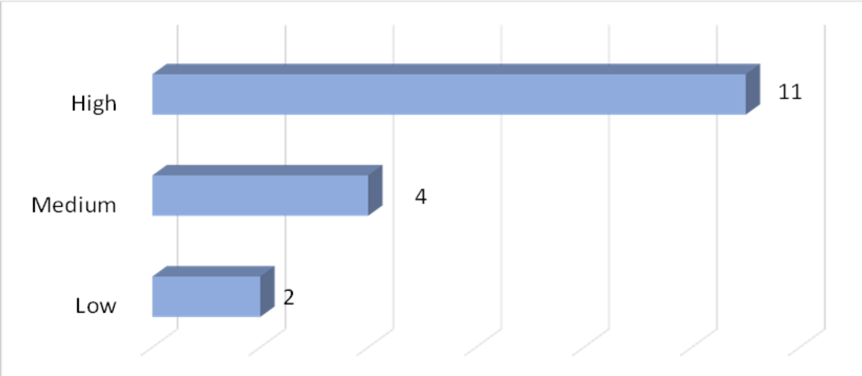
4. Result/findings and argumentation

This work-in-progress has results of the variables identified based on a survey to Peruvian companies exporting food sector products and participating in trade shows in Europe. As part of the sustainability marketing construct variables such as International Product Certifications (Good manufacturing practices, product quality, international standards), International certifications related to social and environmental aspects, Awareness for climate change, Implementation of Fair-Trade principles (Fairtrade), Product with health protection and food quality components (immunological, quality of life, fresh, natural without sugar, little processing, organic, etc.), Policies for the promotion of female work, among others have been identified.

Using a survey with a scale from 1 to 7 points, companies that exported these products to Europe evaluated the sustainability marketing variables. In the survey, the preliminary results show that 11 of the variables are considered as high importance (64.7%), 4 medium importance (23.5%) and 2 low importance (11.8%).

In general, the group of variables reached an average of 5.37 points showing an important relevance of the sustainability marketing construct.

Chart N° 2: Number of sustainability marketing variables evaluated in the survey by the level of importance



Groups of variables in alphabetic order	Sub-groups by importance	Number of Variables
Awareness for climate change, international product certifications, implementation of fair-trade principles, logistic capacity to prompt delivery of the product.	High upper level Average: 6.5 points	11 (64.7%)
Background of the current export of the company, components of the food quality for the health, financial solvency of the company, lifetime of the product, perception of green washing, policies for the promotion of female work.	High Average: 5.5 points	
Compliance and disclosure of environmental reports, CSR Campaigns, fair wages to communities, supplier policy regarding environmental protection	Medium Average: 4.5 points	4 (23.5%)
Code of ethics, Employee satisfaction	Low Average: 3.9 points	2 (11.8%)

Source: Survey to exporters participating in trade shows. Ranking and points for each variable to be included in final research.

5. Conclusion, managerial implications, and limitations

This study has preliminary conclusions and managerial implications:

- The results obtained in the first phase of the study have made it possible to identify a set of strategic elements of the sustainability marketing and digital presence of exporters.
- Furthermore, the sets of sustainability marketing components comprise the vision of sustainability marketing as an association between environmental, economic, ethical, and relational aspects contributing to the study of the construct.
- Finally, the results of this work in progress about sustainability marketing, online presence and its impact on reputation and exports will contribute remark the importance of sustainability on the food sector suppliers that export products that are consumed by European countries.

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Toxicity evaluation of propil-propane thiosulfonate, a new additive for animal feed

Cascajosa-Lira, A.[1*]; Guzmán-Guillén, R.[1]; Pichardo, S.[1]; Prieto, A.I. [1]; Ayala, N.[2]; Moyano, R.[2]; Baños, A.[3]; de la Torre, J.M.[3]; Jos, A.[1]; Cameán, A.[1]
*Corresponding author - presenter
[1] aclira@us.es; Área de Toxicología, Facultad de Farmacia, Universidad de Sevilla, España.
[2] Departamento de Farmacología, Toxicología y Medicina Legal y Forense, Facultad de Veterinaria, Universidad de Córdoba, Campus de Rabanales, Edificio Darwin, 14071 Córdoba, España.
[3] DMC Research Center, Granada, España.

Keywords: Allium, organosulfur compounds, *in vitro*, *in vivo*, toxicity.

Background of the study

The use of antibiotics as growth promoters is no longer permitted in the European Union. Moreover, the European Parliament has recently agreed to develop a new regulation that limits the use of antibiotics in animals in order to curb human resistance to them (October 25, 2018; www.europarl.europa.eu/news/es). Therefore, the livestock sector needs to search for alternative products that ensure similar productive effects and food safety without generating unwanted effects associated with their consumption. For this reason, the new market trends in animal nutrition are oriented towards the manufacture of feed without the use of antibiotics or chemical substances that generate environmental impact. Feed additives used in animal nutrition play an important role in maintaining the physicochemical properties of feed, animal development, final product quality, immune response, or disease resistance. The organoleptic feed category includes flavouring substances, which increases aroma and palatability, and additionally could become an alternative to medicated feed and growth promoters.

Among the most widely natural products used in this sector, plant extracts have the advantage of low bacterial resistance without generating unwanted residues. The usefulness of oregano, rosemary and grape extracts has been recognized as natural additives in various meat products. Plant extracts of the genus Allium, especially garlic and onion, are rich in organosulfur compounds, highlighting propyl-propanethiosulfonate (PTSO) and propyl-propanethiosulfinate (PTS). In this sense, some studies have demonstrated the efficacy of these compounds as an immunomodulator and enhancer of the immune response.

Aim of the study

Given the potential use of organosulfur compounds in animal feed as sensory additives and, in order to respond to the needs of the international market, it is necessary to evaluate the safety of these compounds for their approval as sensory additives in animal production.
This global objective has been achieved through the following specific objectives: 1) To assess *in vivo* genotoxicity of PTS by using the comet assay (OECD 489, 2016) and micronucleus (OECD 474, 2014). 2) To investigate the potential *in vitro* hepatic biotransformation processes of PTSO, by using subcellular rat and human models. 3) To assess the *in vivo* subchronic general toxicity of PTSO and PTS, by perfoming a 90-day repeat-dose study in rats (OECD 408, 2018). And 4) To investigate the potential *in vivo* reproductive toxicity on two generations of PTSO using a multigenerational study (OECD 416, 2001).

Methodology

In the genotoxicity assessment, the OECD 489 (comet assay) and 474 (micronucleus, MN) protocols have been used in combination in order to minimize the number of experimental animals following the 3R principle (Reduction, Refinement, Replacement). Exposure to PTS have been carried out in rats by gastric tube. A previous acute toxicity test in rats have been carried out to obtain the maximum tolerable dose (MTD), the maximum dose to be tested.

Liver microsomes have been incubated with PTSO in saline medium in the presence of NADPH or UDP-glucuronosyltransferase. In the incubation with NADPH we have been able to obtain oxidized metabolites. In the incubation with UDP-glucuronosyltransferase, glucuronides are formed. And when incubating with GSH we have investigated the possible conjugation with this compound. The parent compound and potential metabolites have been determined by UHPLC-MS/MS.

For subchronic toxicity studies, animals have been exposed to the organosulfur compounds through the diet using three dose levels and a control batch (20 rats/dose, 10 females and 10 males). The doses were selected based on the MTD, as the highest dose, using a descending factor of 4 according to OECD 408 (2018). Possible signs of morbidity and mortality have been monitored daily. Periodically, weight gain, water and food consumption have been checked and any signs indicative of toxicity (skin changes, eye discharge, tremors, etc.) have been observed. A clinical and haematological biochemistry have been performed at the end of the study. The rats have been sacrificed, blood samples have been taken (cardiac puncture) and their organs (liver, kidney, heart, pancreas, brain, adrenals, uterus, ovaries, thymus, marrow) have been extracted and processed for histopathological study (optical microscopy).

For two generation reproductive toxicity test, 3 dose levels were daily administered by the oral route to male and female mice. In the parental generation, they were administered during their growth, mating, resulting gestation, and weaning of the first generation. It continued in the first generation (F1) during its growth until adult stage is reach, mating and production of a second generation (F2). Three dose levels were used (according to the results previously obtained in the subchronic toxicity study) and a control batch. In this complex study, reproductive, endocrine, and genetic parameters were addressed. Clinical signs, sperm motility and morphology, estrous cycle analysis, sex hormone levels and gene expression of genes related to reproduction were checked (OECD 416).

Result

No evidence of genotoxicity was found in the study, when performing the standard and enzyme-modified comet assay in the livers and stomachs of rats exposed to PTS. The % of DNA in the tail of the comets were similar to the negative controls.

Once the liver microsomes and the PTSO were incubated for several times, UHPLC-MS/MS analysis successfully detected. A total of 12 metabolites from phase I reactions with NADPH and 53 phase II metabolites were determined. The predominant metabolites were conjugated with glutathione: s-propylmercaptoglutathione (GSSP) and s-propyl mercaptocysteine (CSSP). We have been able to rule out conjugation with glucuronic acid as a metabolic pathway since no glucuronic-derived metabolites have been found. In addition, 118 new metabolites have been detected whose metabolic pathway is still unknown.

During the subchronic assay for both PTSO and PTS, the results were similar. No clinical changes have been observed during the experiment (90 days) for both substances. The weight and weight gain of the treated animals reported normal values compared to control animals. No alterations have been observed in the clinical biochemistry, in the hormonal values nor in the haematological parameters of the treated rats with respect to the control batch. After the necropsy of the animals, no differences were observed in the weights of the different organs, nor in the relative weights of the organs/total weight or with respect to the brain, of the treated animals. None histopathological alterations were detected in the treated animals. For all these reasons, the NOAEL, for both compounds, has been estimated to be higher than 55.0 mg/kg/day.

Similarly, in the two generation reproductive assay, no clinical signs were found in any of the generations studied or histopathological alterations. The hormone levels of estradiol, testosterone, LH and FSH remained at normal levels. Only progesterone showed higher levels in some batches of males. Sperm analysis showed some differences, but not related to exposure to PTSO. The estrous cycle of the females did not show any alteration.

The results obtained so far represent an advance in knowledge. The economic and social impacts are very important, since the evaluation of the safety of PTSO and PTS will allow their approval as an additive at a European level. This will play an relevant role in the economy for the Andalusian community, for the applications of said additive in animal feed, considering that livestock farming is a key sector in the economy of the region.

This work will contribute to the development of the sector by promoting the creation of products with avoiding the use of antibiotics or polluting chemicals. Once the safety of these additives is confirmed, they could be used in the Andalusian livestock industry, which will help to ensure its profitability, to improve its productivity and to reduce current costs.

Conclusion

The results obtained so far on PTSO and PTS show an appropriate safety profile for their use in the market as additives in animal nutrition. In the *in vitro* metabolic studies, PTSO and PTS have transformed into safe metabolites. In addition, the *in vivo* toxicity of these compounds has been evaluated through subchronic studies showing no toxic effects related to the administration of PTSO. In all *in vivo* trials, doses 100 times higher than those used in the industry have been used (administered doses of 55 mg/kg per day versus 0.3 mg/kg effective and used in the livestock industry), highlighting the safety of these compounds.

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