

Social entrepreneur management of personal network linkages: Does the use of social media increase resources?

A xestión de redes persoais por emprendedores sociais: A utilización de redes sociais aumenta o acceso ós recursos?

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Abstract

Research on social entrepreneurship highlights how important resources are since a lack of them may undermine a social organization's activity and mission. To maintain or increase the amount of resources available, the social entrepreneur needs to manage his/her personal network linkages via social media to connect with current stakeholders and seek new ones. This research uses primary data collected from a survey of social organizations to see whether the social entrepreneur's network reliance on social media increases the amount of resources available for the social organization. The primary data was collected between January and March 2020. The results obtained from 313 social organizations in Portugal show that the social entrepreneur's network linkages have a direct and an indirect effect. Directly, managing the social entrepreneur's linkages with stakeholders seems to attract resources for the social organization. The indirect effects occur via social media usage, firstly, by seeking and establishing relationships with new stakeholders, and secondly, by managing the personal linkages with the current network of stakeholders.

Keywords: social organizations; social entrepreneur; network; social media; resources.

JEL Codes: L31; M10; O35.

Resumo

A investigación sobre o emprendemento social destaca a importancia dos recursos, xa que a falta deles pode socavar a actividade e a misión dunha organización social. Para manter ou aumentar a cantidade de recursos dispoñibles, o emprendedor social necesita administrar os vínculos da súa rede persoal a través das redes sociais para conectarse coas partes interesadas actuais e buscar outras novas. Esta investigación utiliza datos primarios recompilados dunha enquisa de organizacións sociais para ver se a dependencia da rede do emprendedor social nas redes sociais aumenta a cantidade de recursos dispoñibles para a organización social. Os datos primarios recompiláronse entre xaneiro e marzo de 2020. Os resultados obtidos de 313 organizacións sociais en Portugal mostran que os vínculos da rede de emprendedores sociais teñen un efecto directo e indirecto. Directamente, a xestión dos vínculos do emprendedor social cos stakeholders parece atraer recursos para a organización social. Os efectos indirectos prodúcense a través do uso das redes sociais, en primeiro lugar, ao buscar e establecer relacións con novos stakeholders e, en segundo lugar, ao xestionar os vínculos persoais coa rede actual de stakeholders.

Palabras chave: organizacións sociais; emprendedor social; rede; redes sociais; recursos.

1. INTRODUCTION

The use of social media by social organizations is increasing as more social media platforms are becoming available (Smith & Smith, 2021). The term “social media” is defined in the present paper as any online service through which users can create and share a variety of content. They encompass user-generated services (such as blogs), social networking sites, video sharing sites and online communities, whereby social organizations produce, design, publish, or edit content (Krishnamurthy & Dou, 2008).

These different kinds of social media sites allow social organizations to find new stakeholders and maintain the current base of the stakeholding network via these online channels. Furthermore, social media enables social entrepreneurs to interact with stakeholders to make the whole community aware of the social organization when it comes to its social mission, so as to capture resources from different sources, and to leverage the amount and quality of them. Therefore, social media differs from the normal approach toward stakeholders by changing how social organizations interact with their network and the community (Bourdieu, 1986).

The concept of social entrepreneurship emerged as a response to social problems in society and, due to its social nature, is closely associated with restricted access to resources (Austin et al., 2006; Cukier et al., 2011; Obschonka, et al., 2010; Paulsen et al., 2010; Seelos et al., 2011; Constanzo et al., 2014; Gordon, 2014; Lan, H et al., 2014; Zahra et al., 2009). The challenge of finding resources for the social organization has been so time-consuming for the social entrepreneur that it has become one of the primary focuses of the organization’s activities, shaping its capacity for social value creation (Urban, 2010). Additionally, resource scarcity drives the social entrepreneur to innovate ways of obtaining resources for the social organization (Zahra et al., 2009). Most social entrepreneurs have experience in markets characterized by a paucity of resources, so they have a different outlook on resource constraints (Di Domenico et al., 2010). As Austin et al. (2006, p. 371) underline, “The non-distributive restriction on surpluses generated by nonprofit organizations and the embedded social purpose of for-profit or hybrid forms of social enterprise limits social entrepreneurs from tapping into the same capital markets as commercial entrepreneurs”.

Some definitions of “social entrepreneur” emphasize the role of acquiring resources as one of the main entrepreneurial tasks. For instance, the definitions of Dees (2001) and Cho (2006) motivate social entrepreneurs to act boldly without being limited by the resources which they have available. Leadbeater (1997) stresses the efficiency of managing resources (people, buildings, equipment). Thompson, Alvy and Lees (2000) claim that social entrepreneurs are people who gather together the necessary resources (generally people, often volunteers, money and premises) and use these to make a difference. Mair and Noboa (2006) state that one of the key features of social entrepreneurship lies in the search for resource acquisition to pursue opportunities to fulfill the organization’s mission and/or practices that yield and sustain social value. By doing so, social entrepreneurship could also be understood as a process that “involves individual(s) who are driven to act on opportunities and/or environmental catalysts by employing innovative processes in the face of limited resources” (Nga & Shamuganathan, 2010, p. 261). Zahra et al. (2009) reinforce how important it is for social organizations to employ resources effectively and innovatively to create greater social value and exploit opportunities to enhance social wealth. In a content analysis of the literature on social entrepreneurship, Cukier et al. (2011) point out that some of the scientific articles on social entrepreneurship focus on a meso level of analysis, exploring

the entrepreneurial organizational processes inside the social organization, among which the impact of resource management is examined.

The few studies available on the entrepreneur’s networks and resource acquisition have been carried out basically through inductive research in the entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship literature (Martens et al., 2007; Miglietta et al., 2015; Roundy, 2014; Burg et al., 2021; Littlewood & Khan 2018). Furthermore, a few studies in recent years have attempted to investigate the extent to which the social entrepreneur interacts with the stakeholders via social media during the process of capturing different types of resources for the social organization.

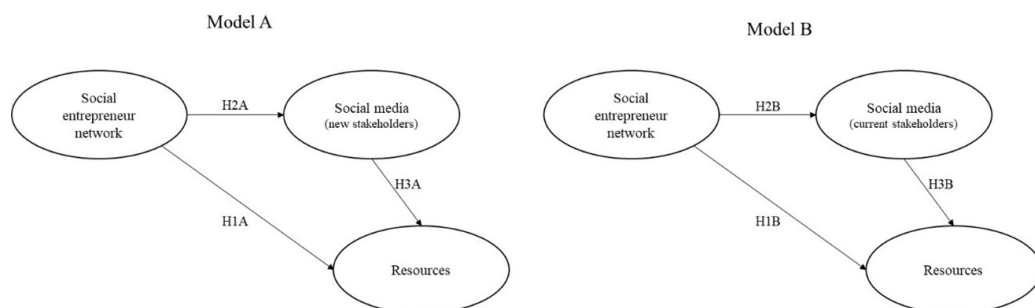
In this study, we analyze the connection between the personal network of the social entrepreneur and social media usage with the objective of acquiring resources. As this topic has received little attention in the social entrepreneurship literature, examining the role of social entrepreneur networks and social media on the acquisition of resources will allow us to learn more about how social entrepreneurs manage their personal network links via social media to capture the different types of resources for the social organization.

In the following section the conceptual framework and the hypotheses are developed. Next, the study methodology is presented, followed by the results. The discussion and conclusions sections are in the last section of the paper.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOTHESES

The proposed framework (Figure 1) aims to determine whether a social entrepreneur’s personal network and the reliance on social media to manage stakeholders have an impact on the amount of resources the social organization acquires. Drawing from the social network theory, resource-based theory and the social entrepreneurship literature, this study investigates how the management of a social entrepreneur’s relationship with stakeholders through social media attracts resources for the social organization. The direct and indirect effects of social media usage are measured with two different models. In model A, social media is used by a social entrepreneur to create bonds with new stakeholders. In model B, social media is used by a social entrepreneur to manage the linkages with his/her current stakeholders. The reliance on social media is thought to directly affect the capacity of the social organization to mobilize resources, as well as indirectly shape the degree to which the social entrepreneur’s personal network contacts are able to capture more resources for the social organization.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework



Source: Own elaboration

2.1. The role of a social entrepreneur's personal network

The concept of networks is derived from social psychology, sociology and inter-organizational theory (Tichy et al., 1979; Granovetter, 1983; 1985) to analyze the nature of exchange that occurs among individuals and the influence of networks on how organizations are managed (Dodd et al., 2006).

In the context of entrepreneurship, there is a long tradition of studying entrepreneurial networks and their effect on the success of startups (Birley, 1985; Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986; Johannisson, 1988; Birley & MacMillan, 1997; Hoang & Antoncic, 2003; Greve & Salaff, 2003; Witt, 2004; Huang et al., 2012). The concept of networks has been progressively applied to entrepreneurship (e.g., Slotte-Kock & Coviello, 2010; Dodd et al., 2006; Stephens, 2021) and more recently a significant number of articles have explored the role of networks within the scope of social entrepreneurship (e.g. Leadbeater, 1997; Bauer et al., 2012; Dufays & Huybrechts, 2014; Bernardino & Freitas Santos, 2019; Atsan, 2019).

According to current positions in the literature, economic behavior is embedded in a network of relationships that connects individuals and firms in a continuous and cumulative process that is developed over time (Slotte-Kock & Coviello, 2010; Granovetter, 1985; Jiang et al., 2018). Thus, to have a complete picture of entrepreneurship, it is necessary to take the role played by networks into consideration.

A network consists of single nodes (such as persons or organizations) linked by a set of relationships (e.g. friendship, transfer of funds, overlapping membership), which as a whole forms its structure (Hoang & Antoncic, 2003). Hence, individuals belonging to a given network are involved in social interactions and social relationships with the actors that are also part of the same network.

The literature recognizes that there are different types of networks. The structural characteristics of the network is related to the way its members are interconnected (Aprilia & Wibowo, 2017). This can vary depending on network size (the number of direct links held), diversity, centrality (the capacity of the individual to "reach" others in his/her network through intermediaries), formality, and proximity to the different members (strong vs weak ties) (Dodd et al., 2006; Hoang & Antoncic, 2003; Stephens, 2021; Burg et al., 2021). Further, networks could be categorized in accordance with the actors' interconnections in the relationships between the nodes. Personal networks include the set of social relationships that are established by entrepreneurs with family members, friends, business colleagues and other entrepreneurs (social or economic) (Santos, 1998; Witt, 2004; Webster & Ruskin, 2012, Shu et al., 2018). These informal connections are grounded on shared interests, personal friendship, family ties or other kinds of demographic, social or cultural preferences. These sorts of relationships are considered particularly important for entrepreneurship (Dodd et al., 2006; Hernández-Carrión et al., 2019).

The systematic literature review performed by Littlewood and Khan (2018) indicates that several advantages have been studied and linked to networking. As argued by Hoang and Antoncic (2003), a social network where an entrepreneur is embedded can exert power over the entrepreneurial process. A study on entrepreneurial networks has been developed to understand their impact on the identification and seizing of opportunities (Bauer et al., 2012; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000), the ability to be entrepreneurial (Galunic & Eisenhardt, 1994; Song et al., 2021), and the amount of resources acquired (Ge et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2010; Jiang et al., 2018). As mentioned by Smith and Smith (2021, p. 466), "networking to attain needed resources is a critical entrepreneurial behavior and social network theory proports

that entrepreneurs actively build networks to extract resources to strategically further their venture interests”.

2.1.1. The direct effect of social entrepreneur networks on resources

Resource-based theory (RBT) states that a firm is seen as a portfolio of tangible and intangible assets that can be used to gain a competitive advantage and optimal organizational performance in the short term (Barney, 1991; Austin & Seitanidi, 2011; McKelvie & Davidsson, 2009; Rumelt et al., 1991). Based on this theory, an organization owns or has access to different resources working together create capabilities to attain the organization's success which have the ability to achieve (Hart & Dowell, 2011; Molloy, Chadwick et al., 2011). Hence, variations in the amount of resources and capabilities available are the justifications for persistent differences in performance (Finney et al., 2008; Foss et al., 1995). Indeed, RBT focuses on the heterogeneity of firms in terms of these two factors to explain such differences (Killen, Jugdev, Drouin & Petit, 2012). Meyskens et al. (2010) add that RBT is also applied to and observed in social entrepreneurship, finding an operational process similar to that of economic ventures. Indeed, social entrepreneurs need to attract and manage a wide range of resources to accomplish their mission, as do all entrepreneurs (Bauer et al., 2012; Austin et al., 2006; Mair & Noboa, 2006; Sakurai, 2008; Bojica et al., 2018).

On a similar note, in accordance with social network theory, social entrepreneur networks are important for resource acquisition and the management of social organizations in order that they can accomplish their social missions. The analysis of some definitions of social entrepreneurship reveals the role of networks in the management of social organizations (Austin et al., 2006; Bauer et al., 2012; Leadbeater, 1997; Mair & Martí, 2006; Sakurai, 2008; Sharir & Lerner, 2006; Chell, 2007).

Throughout the entrepreneurial process, social entrepreneur networks act as support for initial entrepreneurial activity (raising resources), improving the operational efficiency of a business (i.e., management of human, physical and financial resources) (Stuart & Sorenson, 2005). Further, to create a venture, new formal and informal networks are developed, which include family, friends, acquaintances, private organizations and public institutions (Birley, 1985; Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986).

The role that an entrepreneur's network plays in the resource acquisition process has been acknowledged by Witt (2004). As stated by the author, “founders can gain access to resources more cheaply by using their network contacts than by using market transactions, and that they can acquire resources from the network that would not be available via market transactions at all”. Additionally, the “opportunity to procure resources (...) arises due to friendship or kinship ties to network partners” that “offer the entrepreneur specific resources at no charge or below the market price simply to do them a favor or to return a favor that they received earlier (Witt, 2004, p. 394).” To Aldrich and Zimmer (1986), entrepreneurship is facilitated by links between aspiring entrepreneurs, resources and opportunities that can be used to source advice and business information, which in turn can help to alleviate problems in society. A study by Krebs and Holley (2006) advocates that individual social entrepreneurs' networks enable social organizations to design and implement effective strategies to link other entities of this type to them and deliver more business support to each other.

A review of the literature referring to the role of social networks in social entrepreneurship concludes that social networks are useful vehicles enabling social entrepreneurs to have access to important resources (Dangmei, 2016). Additionally, an

empirical investigation carried out on Norwegian entrepreneurs confirms that social networks are substantial tools for capturing resources (Jenssen, 2001). Based on the same data, Jenssen and Koenig (2002) reinforce the idea that social networks allow easier access to financial resources. Stuart and Sorensen (2005) share the same position on the importance of social networks in facilitating the mobilization of financial capital flows. Other authors add that social networks play a critical role in locating valuable resources and improving acquisition capability (Ge et al., 2009).

In a synthesis of the literature, Zhang et al. (2010) show that social networks are widely recognized for being successful tools for funding entrepreneurial ventures. Specifically, strong ties (e.g., friends and family, acquaintances, donors, or sponsors) are more important for securing initial funding than market methods (e.g., banks and investors).

The positive impact of social networks on fundraising has been found in different financial situations ranging from crowdfunding (Kuppuswamy & Bayus, 2014; Lehner, 2014; Skirnevskiy et al., 2017; Kang et al., 2017) and donations (Galaskiewicz et al., 2006; Herzog & Yang, 2017), to funding operations involving larger amounts of resources (Matcht, 2016).

Human resources are also an important input for social organizations to accomplish their mission. In a dynamic and competitive labor market, the quest for human resources is challenging for social ventures. Therefore, an entrepreneur's network becomes critical in the process of identifying and recruiting workers for the social venture (Stuart & Sorensen, 2005).

A literature review about the contribution of networks to the organizational growth of the non-profit sector shows that social networks are useful for recruiting new members, even though they may have a negative impact on employees' turnover, since individuals could use their ties to find new jobs and abandon the social organization with a corresponding loss of knowledge (Galaskiewicz et al., 2006). In the social entrepreneurship domain, a qualitative investigation reveals that social networks are critical for social organizations to mobilize resources (Bernardino et al., 2017). It also claims that some of the human resources companies use to pursue their social missions are provided under the cooperation established between a social entrepreneur and his/her network. The use of networks for human resource acquisition occurs mainly to hire specialized employees and volunteers (Bernardino et al., 2017).

Following these arguments, we hypothesize that:

H1A) Social entrepreneurs' reliance on their personal networks to build relationships with their new stakeholders is positively related to an increase in resources for their social organizations

H1B) Social entrepreneurs' reliance on their personal networks to maintain relationships with their current stakeholders is positively related to an increase in resources for their social organizations

2.1.2. The indirect effect of a social entrepreneur's network on social media

Relationships are established as a result of a gamut of daily interactions, such as those with friends, family, co-workers, volunteers, donors and other stakeholders (Bourdieu, 1986). Therefore, networking is seen as an activity for connecting with others and adding new nodes (e.g., persons or organizations) to a given network joined together by the relationships formed (Hoang & Antoncic, 2003; Littlewood & Khan, 2018). In modern societies, online interaction through social media has replaced face-to-face contacts as a way of sharing and exchanging

ideas, opinions and knowledge (Finkbeiner, 2013). Indeed, social media is now considered an online public space where existing social ties can be maintained and new acquaintances or friends can be found (Hampton et al., 2011).

Studies on relationships between physical and online communities show that computer-mediated interactions have positive effects on communication with others (Hampton & Wellman, 2003; Kavanaugh et al., 2005). Additionally, social media helps form new relationships, in the sense that it provides an alternative way for peers to connect with each other who share interests or relational goals (Ellison et al., 2006; Parks & Floyd, 1996).

As pointed out by Smith and Smith (2021), networking could benefit from digital tools and take advantage of digital capabilities such as searchability and shareability to facilitate networking. Indeed, social media can change entrepreneurs' network compositions, making individuals and organizations more closely connected, reinforcing their entrepreneurial capabilities (Zhao et al., 2022).

Boase et al. (2006) conclude that individuals who use social media are more likely to have a larger network of close friends than those who do not, and that these account holders are more likely to receive assistance for any queries they may make. Specifically, social media allows users to expand their networks in different ways and provides the opportunity for new forms of interpersonal relationships to take shape (Donath & Boyd, 2004; Boase et al., 2006). According to Wellman et al. (2001), social media increases online interaction, which could substitute face-to-face communication, and even reduce the amount of time spent online.

Past research indicates that Internet-based linkages support the formation of weak ties, Ellison et al., (2007) suggesting that new forms of relationship-building can occur on online platforms. There are many social media sites where the formation of weak ties is required as this allows users to create and maintain larger, and more widely spread networks of relationships (Ellison et al. 2007). Indeed, social media eases online interactions by providing weak ties with a wider range of information exchange between individuals. This enhances face-to-face communication as members of a network become more aware of each other's needs and strengthen relationships through more frequent contact (Wellman et al. 2001). Finkbeiner (2013) suggests that social interaction on social media allows existing ties to be maintained online and new ones to be formed, where similar interests can be shared. Recently, Zhao et al. (2022) defend that the use of social media created and sustained online by digital technologies is important for the development of social networks.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is postulated:

H2A) Social entrepreneurs' reliance on their personal networks is positively related to social media usage to seek relationships with new stakeholders

H2B) Social entrepreneurs' reliance on their personal networks is positively related to social media usage to maintain relationships with current stakeholders

2.1.3. The role of social media in the resource acquisition process

Social media allows individuals to build their own profiles, add friends or contacts to lists and exchange information with others over the Internet (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Smith & Smith, 2021). Such platforms usually include communication tools that allow members to capture, store, and exchange information and interact with others by way of interactive tools. Using said platforms, social groups can share information with others in an online setting, forming

social networks based on transactions, interests, or relationships (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Cao et al., 2013).

There are many social media platforms, so it is important for social organizations to define a strategy to decide which one is the most appropriate for them if they want to attract the right crowd. Some (e.g. LinkedIn) are focused on professional profiles to make business connections while others (e.g. Facebook) are more oriented to the general public allowing photos, videos and posts to be shared.

It must also be mentioned that the handling of social media platforms is a full time job as social organizations must stay active and update posts on all platforms to communicate their social mission, inform the community about their activities and answer questions from specific stakeholders and the general public. According to Picazo-Vela et al.(2012), the lack of up-to-date entries could undermine the credibility and accuracy of the information posted on these sites.

Social media features and functionality affect how users interact, coordinate and form relationships with contacts such as friends, family members, and business partners (Gnyawali et al. 2010). According to Zeng et al. (2010), social media sites are unique information sources that allow users to discover very valuable opportunities for social and economic exchange.

Social media has become an important tool for social organizations to connect with their stakeholders and it has changed the way which we create, collaborate, spend, and communicate helping establish conversations with donors or potential volunteers and enabling direct contacts with other potential stakeholder.

Social media platforms enable social organizations to exchange, share, disseminate and search for information quickly, efficiently, and inexpensively (Xu & Saxton, 2019; Bhati & McDonnell, 2020). They are increasingly being used to support fundraising campaigns (Bhati & McDonnell, 2020), recruit volunteers (Ihm, 2017), and obtain other types of resources in the online context (Zhou & Pan, 2016).

Social organizations use social media for crafting, supporting, and executing fundraising campaigns. Bhati and McDonnell (2020) have examined social media data on Facebook's nonprofit website and find that fundraising success is positively associated with the number of likes, posts, and shares. In a systematic review of the literature on the use of social media for fundraising by nonprofit organizations, Di Lauro et al.(2019) refer to the benefits of increased transparency and accountability, operational involvement and engagement, and improved organizational image (although in respect of the latter two, the outcomes may vary). Investigating the advantages of donating by social media, Sura et al.(2017) point out efficiency and cost-effective factors or, simply put, the easy, quick and direct transfer of money. Tian et al. (2021) note a positive and significant relationship between several media activities of nonprofit organizations (whereby communication is initiated on their social media pages) and donations.

A study developed by Ihm (2017) shows that social media allows individuals to participate in online volunteering activities, which may include sharing posts, promoting awareness of social issues, eliciting donations, encouraging others to volunteer, examining data online, or managing websites for good causes. In some social organizations, volunteers may also provide professional services, such as preparing tax returns, writing legal documents, and offering management consulting (Ihm, 2017).

Social organizations can use social media to publish their individual stories about social causes to a wide audience as a means of mobilizing collective action, often referred to as connective action (Ihm, 2017). In China, Zhou and Pan (2016) find that despite Internet censorship and the unique government-NGO relationship, Chinese NGOs use social media to

attract followers, share information, improve organizational legitimacy, build up a community, and obtain resources. Based on qualitative research, [Smith and Smith \(2021\)](#) observe that entrepreneurs use digital networks more restrictively, mainly to access information to gather material resources. For the authors, this result is constrained by entrepreneurs' awareness of the availability of resources in their digital networks, mainly when it comes to their willingness to exploit them and the perceived social judgment risk, which could lead to acceptance or rejection of the acquisition of resources through online networks. Even so, [Smith and Smith \(2021, p.479\)](#) argue that digital platforms could act as "capacitor networks that store potential resources to be extracted mainly by private means".

Based on the above empirical evidence, the following hypotheses are offered:

H3A) The use of social media by social entrepreneurs to create relationships with new stakeholders is positively related to an increase in resources for their social organizations

H3B) The use of social media by social entrepreneurs to maintain relationships with current stakeholders is positively related to an increase in resources for their social organizations

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. The research setting and data collection

The database used in the research integrates the organizations that the Portuguese Tax Administration considers of public interest, such as social solidarity institutions and social, cultural, and humanitarian entities. The database, which only contains the fiscal number and the names of the organizations, has been compiled by consulting each of their websites, social media pages, and the list of social organizations made available by the Ministry of Solidarity and Social Security. At the end of this procedure, a list of 3,252 email contacts of social organizations has been obtained.

A preliminary version of the questionnaire was developed and administered to ten academics in the field of management and economics, with the purpose of evaluating the content validity of the selected measures. The research instrument was then modified based on the feedback received. Subsequently, the revised questionnaire was pretested and refined for relevance and clarity, with no significant problems being found.

The 3,252 social organizations were contacted between January and March 2020. After data cleansing, 864 email addresses were removed due to missing email addresses and error messages. The sampling frame was made up of 2,388 email contacts.

A formal email describing the objectives and importance of the study was sent out to all the organizations. All the respondents were guaranteed anonymity, and a summary of the research findings was promised in exchange for their participation. After sending emails on two occasions asking respondents to fill out the questionnaires, some organizations did not acknowledge the email or stated that they were not willing to answer them. A total of 337 questionnaires were answered although 24 were invalid due to there being excessive amounts of data missing. Thus, we obtained 313 relevant responses, yielding an acceptable response rate of 13.1% (313/2,388).

3.2. Measurement

Multi-item and five-point Likert scale response formats have been used to operationalize all variables (1 for "strongly disagree" and 5 for "strongly agree"). The measurement approach for each theoretical construct is described briefly below. The constructs of both models and

the survey scale items are listed in [Table A1 \(Appendix 1\)](#). The studies from which these scale items have been adapted are also listed in this table.

The first scale has been adapted for social organizations and refined in the pretesting of the questionnaire based on [Huang et al. \(2012\)](#), the second and third based on [Ellison et al. \(2007\)](#), and the fourth based on [Ge et al. \(2009\)](#).

Entrepreneur's Network (EN) – this construct uses four statements for measuring founders' perceptions of the potential partners that are beneficial for their businesses, the common values that they share, the level of mutual trust and respect they hold, and the honest interchange of information.

Social Media & New Stakeholders (SMNS)- this construct uses four statements for measuring managers' perceptions about the importance of social media in acquiring new contacts to enhance the network of social organizations.

Social Media & Current Stakeholders (SMCS)- this construct uses four statements for measuring managers' perceptions about the importance of social media in maintaining long-term contacts to sustain the network of social organizations.

Resources (R)- this construct uses four statements for measuring managers' perceptions about their capacity to obtain material resources (e.g., machines and vehicles), human resources (such as volunteers and collaborators), financial resources, and tax exemptions and financial support from the network of social organizations.

3.3 Sample

[Table 1](#) presents the sample. Most of the 313 respondents who participated in the survey were from social organizations located in the middle of the country (N = 143). The sample contains 91.1% of the organizations that had already been in existence for more than 10 years. The geographical area of intervention of the majority of organizations was local (N = 141). The size of the social organizations, measured in terms of the number of employees, was more than 30 (N = 129), mostly volunteers and beneficiaries.

Table 1. Sample

Categories		n	%
Location (Portugal)	North	112	35.8
	Center	143	45.7
	South	50	16.0
	Islands	8	2.6
	Total	313	100.0
Scope	Local	141	45.0
	Regional	92	29.4
	National	62	19.8
	International	18	5.8
	Total	313	100.0
Number of employees	< 5	45	14.4
	Between 5 and 10	41	13.1

Categories		n	%
Number of employees	Between 11 and 30	98	31.3
	> 30	129	41.2
	Total	313	100.0
Number of volunteers	< 10	186	59.4
	Between 10 and 20	63	20.1
	Between 21 and 50	25	8.0
	> 50	39	12.5
	Total	313	100.0
Number of beneficiaries	< 100	76	24.3
	Between 101 and 200	78	24.9
	Between 201 and 500	58	18.5
	> 500	101	32.3
	Total	313	100.0
Annual amount in euros	< 50,000	30	9.6
	Between 50,000 and 100,000	61	19.5
	Between 100,001 ad 500,000	89	28.4
	> 500,000	133	42.5
	Total	313	100.0

Source: Own elaboration

4. RESULTS

The study develops two conceptual models, Model A relating the constructs social entrepreneur networks to social media (seeking new stakeholders), and Resources, Model B relating the constructs social entrepreneur networks to social media (retaining current stakeholders) and Resources.

The data has been statistically analyzed via the SPSS (Version 26) and AMOS (Version 22) software. AMOS is suitable for solving SEM which encompasses the combination of factor analysis and multiple regression. Basic SEM statistics include covariance, variance, correlations and regression coefficients (Thakkar, 2020).

4.1. Reliability and validity

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) have been used to assess the dimensionality, reliability and validity of the scales.

When analyzing raw data, the items factor loadings do measure the intended constructs, as shown in Table A1 (Byrne, 2016). Moreover, the skewness and most kurtosis values fell between -/+2 (see Table 2), showing that the distributions for the research items are normal (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2016). Subsequently, the values indicate that the correlation matrix is

factorable, since Bartlett's test of Sphericity is $p < 0.001$ and overall KMO is > 0.60 (Watkins, 2018).

Table 2 also reveals the mean and standard deviations of the responses to each item, and with the percentage of total explained variance ($> 60\%$) for the items of each construct, it can be verified that the data is highly useful (Hair et al., 2014).

Table 2. Items and constructs analysis

Items	Factor loadings (Model A)	Factor loadings (Model B)	Mean	Standard deviation	Skew	Std. skew error	Kurtosis	Std. kurtosis error	KMO	TEV
SEN1	0.773	0.773	3.60	1.173	-0.554	0.138	-0.412	0.275	0.833	78.61%
SEN2	0.849	0.852	3.81	1.082	-0.848	0.138	0.303	0.275		
SEN3	0.899	0.900	4.12	1.033	-1.223	0.138	1.118	0.275		
SEN4	0.883	0.877	3.76	1.123	-0.794	0.138	0.037	0.275		
SMNS1	0.920	-	3.17	1.268	-0.236	0.138	-0.897	0.275	0.854	85.51%
SMNS2	0.921	-	3.05	1.248	-0.131	0.138	-0.942	0.275		
SMNS3	0.918	-	3.18	1.257	-0.270	0.138	-0.862	0.275		
SMNS4	0.878	-	3.14	1.202	-0.224	0.138	-0.732	0.275		
SMCS1	-	0.843	3.34	1.238	-0.418	0.138	-0.767	0.275	0.801	81.76%
SMCS2	-	0.898	3.07	1.180	-0.231	0.138	-0.764	0.275		
SMCS3	-	0.920	3.04	1.217	-0.058	0.138	-0.805	0.275		
SMCS4	-	0.889	3.38	1.235	-0.498	0.138	-0.663	0.275		
R1	0.780	0.785	3.01	1.117	-0.130	0.138	-0.744	0.275	0.874	61.77%
R2	0.719	0.723	3.18	1.109	-0.217	0.138	-0.747	0.275		
R3	0.849	0.855	2.96	1.024	-0.108	0.138	-0.555	0.275		
R4	0.764	0.761	2.89	1.076	0.007	0.138	-0.563	0.275		
R5	0.788	0.781	3.01	1.083	-0.074	0.138	-0.620	0.275		
R6	0.636	0.627	3.42	1.003	-0.350	0.138	-0.358	0.275		

Source: Own elaboration

Note: Kaiser Normalization Varimax rotation method; Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) = 0.878 (Model A), 0.870 (Model B); Bartlett's test sig. < 0.000 ; Total Explained Variance (TEV): 73.68% (Model A), 72.73% (Model B); Cronbach's alpha: 0.89 (Model A), 0.889 (Model B); All factor loadings are significant at $p < 0.001$

The composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha values (α) of all constructs clearly exceed 0.7, which indicates that the scale items are internally consistent or reliable (Collier, 2020), as shown in Table 3. Furthermore, the average variance extracted (AVE) of all constructs exceeds 0.5, thus satisfying convergent validity (Collier, 2020; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 3 also reveals that $AVE > \text{Maximum Shared Variance (MSV)}$, $AVE > \text{Average Squared Shared Variance (ASV)}$, and the AVE of a latent variable is higher than the squared correlations between the latent variable and all other variables. Thus, all constructs satisfy discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 3. The reliability and discriminant validity of the constructs

Constructs - Model A	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV	1	2	3
1 - Social entrepreneur network	0.907	0.911	0.719	0.232	0.159	0.848		
2 - Social media - new stakeholders	0.943	0.944	0.807	0.092	0.089	0.292	0.899	
3 - Resources	0.875	0.877	0.545	0.232	0.162	0.304	0.482	0.739
Constructs - Model B		CR	AVE	MSV	ASV	4	5	6
4 - Social entrepreneur network	0.907	0.911	0.719	0.232	0.155	0.848		
5 - Social media - current stakeholders	0.925	0.925	0.805	0.077	0.077	0.278	0.897	
6 - Resource	0.875	0.877	0.546	0.232	0.154	0.276	0.482	0.739

Source: Own elaboration

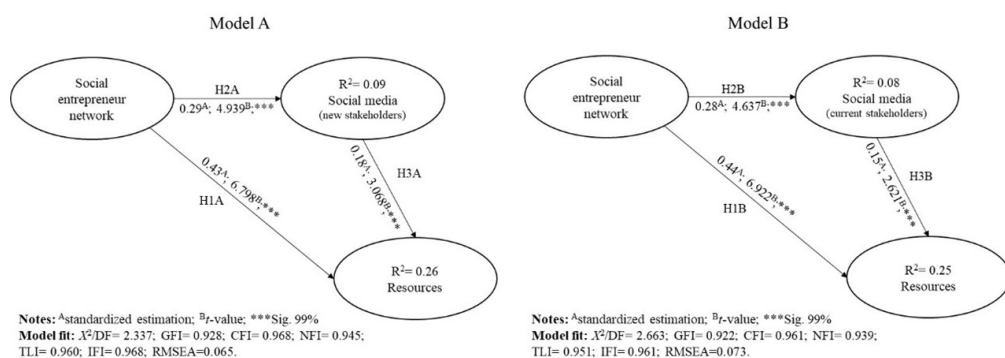
Note: CR - Composite Reliability; AVE - Average Variance Extracted; MSV - Maximum Shared Variance; ASV - Average Shared Variance; diagonal elements (*italic and bold*) illustrate the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE).

4.2. Model validation

To validate the hypothesized model, a structural equation modeling (SEM) technique has been used. This statistical procedure examines the structural relationships between the observed variables (items) and their constructs, as well as the relationships between constructs, allowing the statistical validation of a structural model (Collier, 2020).

The results of the SEM analysis are shown in Figure 2 and more statistical specifications can be seen in Appendix 2. The notes to Figure 2 also report the levels of fit for both models that, according to Collier (2020) and Thakkar (2020), are statistically validated. Model A, has achieved a good level of fit: $\chi^2/df= 2.337$; the goodness-of-fit (GFI) = 0.928; the normed fit index (NFI) = 0.945; the incremental fit index (IFI = 0.968); the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = 0.960; the confirmatory fit index (CFI) = 0.968, and the root means square approximation (RMSA) = 0.065. The same level of fit applies to Model B, with the results indicating: $\chi^2/df= 2.663$; GFI= 0.922; NFI = 0.939; IFI = 0.961; TLI = 0.951; CFI = 0.961; and RMSA = 0.073.

Figure 2. Hypothesized model with composite measures



Source: Own elaboration

4.3. Hypothesis testing

The hypotheses formulated in the models represent causal paths and can be empirically tested through the significance of the trajectories/paths represented in the structural model (Collier, 2020; Thakkar, 2020).

As hypothesized, according to Model A, the result supports that social entrepreneur networks have a positive and significant impact on social media (new stakeholders) ($\beta= 0.29$; $p < 0.001$) and resources ($\beta= 0.43$; $p < 0.001$). Thus, the investigation carried out supports hypothesis H1A and H2A. This result confirms that the social entrepreneur relies on his/her personal network to build relationships with new stakeholders. To be more precise, these personal contacts are established via social media and are used to acquire different types of resources for their social organizations. Therefore, the larger the size of a social entrepreneur's personal network, the more he/she uses social media digital platforms to develop connections with new stakeholders. Moreover, the aim of these connections via social media created by the social entrepreneur network is to enhance its ability to mobilize resources for the venture.

The result for hypothesis H3A confirms that social media (new stakeholders) has a positive and significant impact on resource acquisition ($\beta= 0.18$; $p < 0.01$). Accordingly, the presence of social entrepreneurs on social media could be advantageous to the venture as a new medium that facilitates the interaction with present and future stakeholders. By doing this, the opportunities to obtain resources for social projects could increase.

Regarding Model B, the result supports the fact that social entrepreneur networks have a positive and significant impact on social media (current stakeholders) ($\beta= 0.28$; $p < 0.001$) and resources ($\beta= 0.44$; $p < 0.001$). Finally, social media (current stakeholders) has a positive and significant impact on resources ($\beta= 0.15$; $p < 0.01$), so H1B, H2B, and H3B are supported, respectively. Thus, the results obtained show that social entrepreneurs' reliance on their personal networks has a positive and statistically significant impact on the amount of resources that are available to invest in social projects. In addition, social entrepreneurs embedded in larger personal networks are also more engaged in social media operations in order to maintain relationships with existing stakeholders. It seems that using social media to a higher degree enhances the capacity of social entrepreneurs to nurture their personal relationships, and that could lead to an increase in resources for social projects.

5. DISCUSSION

The investigation indicates that social entrepreneur networks have a positive and significant effect on the resource acquisition process of social organizations. This positive effect is found in both models, and is consistent with the arguments found in the literature that defend the relevance of social entrepreneur networks in the social entrepreneurship field (Bernardino & Freitas Santos, 2019; Atsan, 2019; Bauer et al., 2012; Dufays & Huybrechts, 2014). As argued in the literature, the personal interactions that take place within an individual's network are able to influence the management of social organizations (Dodd et al., 2006; Hoang & Antoncic, 2003). Thus, by being embedded in a network, which involves a range of relationships with other actors, social organizations have a greater capacity to access the resources they need (Ge et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2010; Dangmei, 2016). As previously stressed by other authors, networks could be seen as important vehicles for social organizations to leverage resources (Jenssen, 2001; Jenssen & Koenig, 2002; Bernardino et al., 2017).

The research also reveals that the reliance on social media by social entrepreneurs allows them to reinforce their personal network. This pattern is found both when considering the use of social media for acquiring new contacts and for maintaining existing contacts. The coefficients of the structural equation model are very similar in the two models, suggesting a similar effect on strengthening the personal network in both situations of social media usage (new stakeholders and current stakeholders). The findings obtained emphasize the critical role that digital tools can play in the complex and highly demanding task of building relationships (Hampton et al., 2011; Slotte-Kock & Coviello, 2010; Jiang et al., 2018). As such, and according to the researchers' initial expectation, we observe that the use of social media allows social entrepreneurs either to retain their current circle of contacts or to enlarge the number of contacts that their network is able to hold (Boase et al., 2006; Zhao et al., 2022; Donath & Boyd, 2004).

In addition, the presence on social media is considered to have a positive and direct effect on the amount of resources that social organizations are able to access, as previously argued by other authors (Xu & Saxton, 2019; Bhati & McDonnell, 2020; Ihm, 2017; Zhou & Pan, 2016). The investigation suggests that the interaction developed through social platforms with different stakeholders, allows social organizations to improve their capabilities to obtain different types of resources. The positive effect of social media is seen in the use of social media for acquiring new contacts and in the retention of existing contacts, with a very similar intensity, although slightly higher in the first case.

It should be noted that although social media has a direct positive effect on access to resources, this is relatively limited, as observed in the intensity of the structural equation model's coefficient and also as shown by Smith and Smith (2021). Indeed, the most noticeable benefits in terms of the improvement in the amount of resources available are observed in the cases where a stronger personal network exists, which in turn benefits from the reliance on social media. Thus, despite the direct impact it has, social media is mainly seen as an empowerment tool for social entrepreneurs, leveraging all the potential that the connection with others can offer in terms of access to resources.

6. CONCLUSION

Grounded in social network theory, resource-based theory and the social entrepreneurship literature, the investigation reveals that entrepreneur networks have a direct and positive effect on the capability of social organizations to access resources. In addition to this direct effect, access to resources is also improved by entrepreneurs' reliance on social media, which positively contributes to increasing resources and, most importantly, to building and boosting social entrepreneurs' personal networks.

Thus, the empirical research carried out indicates that the process of acquiring resources in social organizations is very complex and is influenced by the interaction of different dimensions that are able to reinforce themselves and improve the capability of organizations to attract resources.

The results of this study provide a theoretical framework for understanding the role of entrepreneur networks and social media on the acquisition of resources for social organizations. They contribute to acknowledging the critical role of entrepreneurial networks and social media that preceded and determine resource acquisition. Further, this research offers new theoretical contributions, allowing us to explore the application of social network theory and resource-based theory to social entrepreneurship.

From a practical standpoint, the results provide significant implications for social entrepreneurs and organizations. Firstly, the investigation highlights the need for social entrepreneurs to invest in personal relationships with the actors of the ecosystems in which social organizations find themselves. Creating a dense and diverse network of relationships is beneficial to the management of social organizations, increasing the amount of resources acquired and the capability to create social value.

Secondly, the research draws attention to the need for social organizations to be present in social media as it provides a space where they can interact online with a myriad of new and existing stakeholders and thus expand their networks in terms of diversity and density. For this reason, social organizations should strengthen their presence and interaction in the social sphere, and have human resource teams that are qualified enough to handle this challenging function. Furthermore, social organizations should have a clearer understanding of the platforms and discourses that the most relevant stakeholders are predisposed to use to maximize the potential use of digital tools. In addition, the presence on social media platforms is recognized as important for social organizations that can only do so by building on their personal networks and relationships.

6.1. Limitations and future lines of research

Despite the new insights our research provides, it does have some limitations, such as the fact that it is restricted to the Portuguese context. The use of the structural equation model introduces a more comprehensive approach to the interaction between social entrepreneur networks, social media and resource acquisition. In the future, it would be interesting to go further and study these dimensions in detail via a focus group alongside those responsible for social organizations, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the benefits that could be obtained by using social media platforms for seeking and retaining stakeholders and the main barriers that its use still entails for social organizations.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization JFS, SB; Data Curation JFS, PS, SB; Formal Analysis JFS, SB, PS; Methodology JFS, SB; Project Administration JFS, SB; Software: PS; Validation: JFS, SB, PS; Writing-Original Draft JFS, SB; Writing- Reviewing and Editing JFS, SB.

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Appendix

Appendix 1

Tabel A1. Survey items

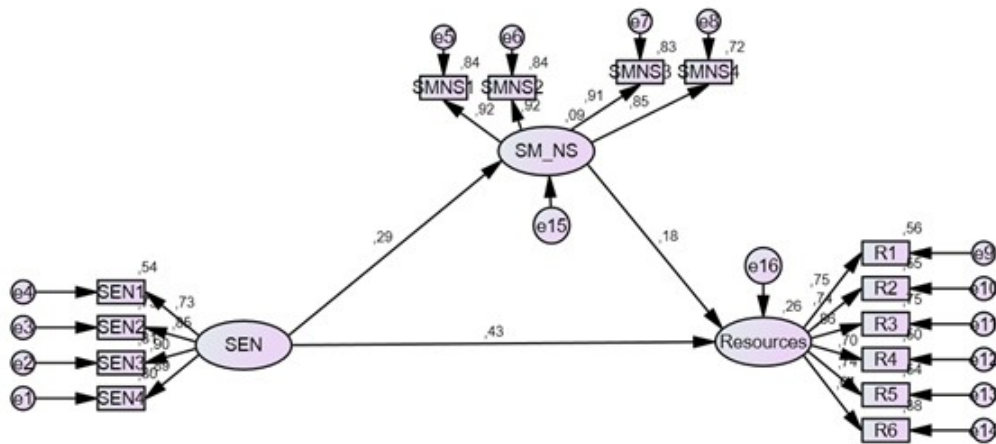
Constructs	Items	Code Item	Factor loadings (Model A)	Factor loadings (Model B)	Source
Social Entrepreneur's Network	The entrepreneur(s) of this organization has many potential partners that are beneficial to the organization's mission.	SEN1	0.773	0.773	Huang et al. (2012)
	The entrepreneur(s) of this organization shares common values with organization's partners.	SEN2	0.849	0.852	
	The entrepreneur(s) of this organization and partners maintain relationships of trust and respect.	SEN3	0.899	0.900	
	The entrepreneur(s) of this organization and partners exchange information honestly.	SEN4	0.883	0.877	
Social media - new stakeholders	The organization uses social networks to find new contacts	SMNS1	0.920	-	Ellison et al. (2007)
	The organization uses social networks to find new partners	SMNS2	0.921	-	
	The organization uses social networks to find other organizations	SMNS3	0.918	-	
	The organization uses social networks to find other social organizations	SMNS4	0.878	-	

Constructs	Items	Code Item	Factor loadings (Model A)	Factor loadings (Model B)	Source
Social media - current stakeholders	The organization uses social networks to maintain contact with its partners.	SMCS1	-	0.843	Ellison et al. (2007)
	The organization uses social networks to find out more about people known to other organizations.	SMCS2	-	0.898	
	The organization uses social networks to find out more about people close to the organization.	SMCS3	-	0.920	
	The organization uses social networks to maintain contact with people useful to the organization.	SMCS4	-	0.889	
Resources	Which extent do you agree that you can, through the organization's networking, obtain material resources (machines, vehicles, etc.)?	R1	0.780	0.785	Ge et al. (2009)
	Which extent do you agree that you can, through the organization's networking, attract human resources (volunteers, employees)?	R2	0.719	0.723	
	Which extent do you agree that you can, through the organization's networking, attract financial resources?	R3	0.849	0.855	
	Which extent do you agree that you can, through the organization's networking, obtain financial, fiscal or other support from the Government?	R4	0.764	0.761	
	Which extent do you agree that you can, through the organization's networking, obtain occasional support and help from other social organizations for the provision of the service?	R5	0.788	0.781	
	Which extent do you agree that you can, through the organization's networking, find better suppliers?	R6	0.636	0.627	

Source: Own elaboration

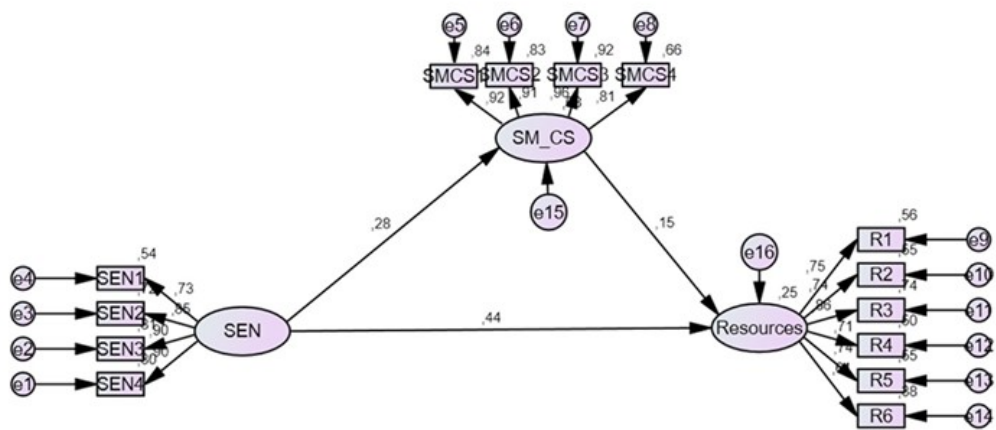
Appendix 2

Figure A2.1. Items and path coefficients of Model A



Source: Own elaboration

Figure A2.2. Items and path coefficients of Model A



Source: Own elaboration