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Entrepreneurial Intention, Growth and Sustainability Among Professional Service Firms: A General Overview



Abstract: - In recent years, the fast-paced shifts in business environments, classified by technological refinements, evolving market demands, and internationalization, have highlighted the growing importance of entrepreneurship as an essential principle for economic competitiveness, evolution, and sustainability. At its core, entrepreneurship has become a basis for sparking innovation and developing new career opportunities while addressing the evolving challenges in today's dynamic markets. In this context, entrepreneurial intention serves as a core aspect in establishing, developing, and sustaining businesses, especially in professional service firms, which are paramount in the contemporary era, as they contribute to the development of global service economies. This paper delves into the intricate associations between entrepreneurial intention, business growth, and long-term sustainability, with a primary focus on professional service entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, the expedition from entrepreneurial intention to sustainable development is intricate and full of challenges; subsequently, this paper highlights the pressing need to incorporate sustainability into entrepreneurial strategies by embracing techniques that balance short-term profitability with long-term stability by considering environmental, social, and economic facets. Therefore, this paper proposes invaluable insights in an effort to cultivate an entrepreneurial system that mainly advocates sustainable economic advancement while addressing the intricacies of a rapidly evolving global landscape.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Growth, Sustainability, Professional Service Firms, Entrepreneurial Intention, Theory of Innovation, Theory of Planned Behavior

I. INTRODUCTION

In the global context, entrepreneurship continuously adapts in response to uncertainties within social environments [1] in order to drive positive change and enhance resilience within the economy [2]. Indeed, significant shifts in the global economic landscape, such as technological advancements and evolving job markets, have reshaped entrepreneurial opportunities and challenges, mandating creative and flexible responses from entrepreneurs [3]. At its core, entrepreneurship is widely identified as a core driver of economic development [4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10], which primarily highlights creativity and innovation [11]. Subsequently, entrepreneurial activities highly contribute to job creation and increased productivity [12, 13] while alleviating poverty [14, 15, 16].

In the realm of entrepreneurship, professionals, also known as professional service entrepreneurs (PSEs), who manage their enterprises are considered entrepreneurs despite having limited freedom for creativity and innovation. This limitation emanates from the nature of professionalism, which is established upon a "stable and protected knowledge base" [17,18]. In contrast, entrepreneurship promotes creativity and innovation and is rooted in "cultural individualism and change" [19, 20]. Traditionally, PSFs have been predominantly dominated by small firms and sole practitioners [21], representing a considerable area of research due to their substantial contributions to the economy [22].

Accordingly, PSFs are categorized into two types, namely classic or regulated PSFs and neo-PSFs [23, 24]. On the one hand, classic or regulated PSFs are professionals who operate under statutory governing bodies or institutions, such as architects, lawyers, and medical doctors, where they should adhere to rigid regulatory standards and ethical codes [25]. Typically, classic PSFs' lifespans predominantly rely on the presence of registered professionals within the firm, and the death or departure of a firm owner can jeopardize its continuity, making succession planning an imperative challenge for long-term sustainability. On the other hand, neo-PSFs lack formal governing bodies or institutions and often operate within a limited and standardized knowledge base, exemplified by consulting firms and advertising agencies. These firms are generally less constrained by regulatory

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requirements, enabling more flexibility in operations; nevertheless, their emphasis on standardized expertise frequently confines the depth of their knowledge base.

Entrepreneurship is increasingly concerned with promoting sustainable entrepreneurial initiatives and growth by having an entrepreneurial intention, which refers to the motivations, aspirations, and plans that guide individuals toward starting and growing businesses with a sustainable focus. While much of the existing literature has examined these aspects in a general context, little attention has been given to Professional Service Firms. Given the increasing significance of these firms in today's business landscape, it is highly crucial to thoroughly grasp how entrepreneurial intention re-shapes the establishment, growth, and sustainability of professional service firms. Therefore, this paper seeks to fill the gap in the existing literature by providing a comprehensive overview of how entrepreneurial intention affects the development and sustainability of professional service firms by highlighting the unique facets that influence entrepreneurs to accomplish sustainable growth while also fostering an environment where innovation, adaptability, and long-term sustainability are prioritized.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. *The Context of the Professional Services Firms (PSFs)*

In today's global landscape, professional services hold an immense position [26]; according to PwC's Global Crisis and Resilience Survey (2023), 9 out of 10 organizations have confronted disruptions other than the COVID-19 pandemic in recent years. Nevertheless, the ever-evolving work environment propels businesses to innovate by forming new opportunities that can be primarily advantageous for the professional services sector. The era of IR 4.0 and technological advancements have potentially influenced professional services [27, 28, 29], transforming how these services are delivered to society [30], often leading to considerable cost reductions and increased accessibility [31].

The Professional Service Firms (PSFs) represent a rapidly growing economic sector, with the most prominent firms operating globally and contributing integrally to the functioning of the global economy [32]. In general, PSFs are classified as knowledge-intensive business service firms, represented by a high reliance on expertise, low capital necessities, and a highly professionalized workforce. Essentially, PSFs substantially impact the global economy as agents of economic globalization [33]. Nevertheless, numerous PSFs encounter challenges in acquiring profitability as they grapple with economic challenges associated with their origins in emerging markets [34]. In order to overcome these challenges, successful PSFs have cultivated the ability to deliver highly innovative services, proposing unique and high-quality resolutions that set them apart from the conventional services provided by their competitors [35]. Henceforth, PSFs are paramount economic expansion, innovation, and cross-border cooperation drivers to acclimate evolving regulatory, technological, and market necessities. Accordingly, they play a vital role in supporting sustainable development and boosting the stability of economies on a global scale.

B. *The Concept of Entrepreneurship*

In the dynamic business landscape, entrepreneurial activities are key drivers of innovation, growth, and competitiveness [36]; subsequently, entrepreneurship is one of the key drivers in a country's economic growth, as it provides jobs, services, and products [37], which has also experienced substantial changes driven by technological advancement, globalization, and evolving market dynamics [38].

Over the years, entrepreneurship's importance has remained intact, as its concept primarily emphasizes value creation by highlighting positive impacts on society [39]. The term "entrepreneurship" refers to a dynamic process focused on developing valuable assets [40] which are mainly generated by individuals who predict notable threats such as equity, time, and career obligation in an effort to bring meaningful products or services to life [41]. In accordance with the prominent scholars' viewpoints, entrepreneurship is the practice of starting new businesses or revitalizing mature organizations in response to identified opportunities through technical and organizational innovation [42, 43].

In 1776, Adam Smith defined entrepreneur as "an individual who forms an organization for commercial purpose by being a capitalist". Accordingly, Hisrich [44] pinpointed entrepreneurs as individuals who use initiative and creative thoughts to organize social and economic mechanisms by turning resources and situations into practical accounts while accepting risk and failure as well. Occasionally, entrepreneurs are individuals who must bend the rules to accomplish their goals, straying from standard practice and embracing innovation [45]. This concept is referred to as "creative destruction", where the term "destruction" indicates that, in order to facilitate

innovation and creativity, entrepreneurs must be inclined to dismantle outdated practices in manufacturing, production, or business models.

C. *Elements of Entrepreneurship*

Entrepreneurship involves a blend of creativity, strategic planning, financial acumen, and leadership, vital in building and maintaining a thriving business [46]. In other words, entrepreneurship contains recognizing and capitalizing on business opportunities by launching new products or services in the market [47, 48, 49]. Indeed, the journey begins with ideation, where the entrepreneurs formulate a unique idea or solution that addresses a gap or opportunity in the market [50]. Subsequently, after ideation, business planning is the essential step, which converts conceptual ideas into structured plans with precise objectives, timelines, and resources [51]. A well-formed business plan serves as a roadmap and acts as a mechanism for securing investors or other support while also providing effective management strategies [52] in order to assure coherence and consistency.

Accordingly, financial management is another element of entrepreneurship that ensures that resources are allotted wisely and that the venture upholds financial health; evidently, sound financial management aids in securing funding, managing cash flow, and forecasting development, all of which significantly contribute to the longevity and success of the enterprise [53]. Similarly, marketing and sales are vital components, as they drive brand recognition, customer acquisition, and revenue generation [54].

Furthermore, operations and management form the backbone of daily activities by ensuring smooth and efficient processes [55] in order to facilitate production, logistics, and service delivery, enhancing customer satisfaction and operational profitability. Ultimately, leadership is an indispensable element that binds all these factors together; undoubtedly, robust entrepreneurial leadership involves encouraging and guiding individuals or teams, making strategic decisions, communicating a persuasive vision, and establishing short and long-term goals [56, 57]. As a result, entrepreneurship elements are demanding yet fulfilling, calling for a unique blend of skills and attributes to embrace risks and learn from setbacks [58].

D. *Entrepreneurial Intention and its Importance for the Professional Services Firms (PSFs)*

The intention to become an entrepreneur is not a spontaneous decision; indeed, entrepreneurial knowledge is highly required to start a business, accomplish efficiency, and uphold existence and development in the early phases [59]. In addition, prior research has indicated that entrepreneurial intention (EI) is one of the most important, reliable, enduring, and widely used predictors of entrepreneurial activity and economic performance [60, 61, 62]. As a result, EI has emerged as a widely studied subject, focusing on the elements and motivators affecting individuals' aspirations in order to pursue a career in entrepreneurship [63]. In this context, intention refers to the degree of effort individuals are equipped to invest and their determination to carry out a behavior [64] while also representing a mental state that consistently precedes action [65].

The prior studies on the predictors and factors affecting individuals' starting a business have given rise to two main approaches. Firstly, the content-oriented approach, which is explained through the "pull" and "push" theories proposed by Gilad and Levine [66], indicates that individuals are driven by internal and external factors such as demographic, situational, social, and environmental influences that either "pull" or "push" them toward entrepreneurship. On the one hand, "Pull" factors are positive motivators, such as financial independence, creativity, and the desire for autonomy, which attract individuals to entrepreneurial ventures [67]. On the other hand, "Push" factors are adverse pressures, such as low income, job dissatisfaction, and time constraints, that compel individuals to pursue entrepreneurship in order to escape undesirable circumstances [68, 69, 70]. As a result, the content-oriented approach focuses on the elements that trigger, guide, uphold, and terminate entrepreneurial behavior [71].

The second approach, known as the process-oriented approach, focuses on individuals' cognition, inspirations, perceptions, and intentions that precede any entrepreneurial actions. From another perspective, research on EI can also be classified into two main streams. The first stream focuses on personal traits or characteristics, such as self-efficacy [72, 73, 74], the need for achievement [75, 76, 77, 78], and the tolerance for ambiguity [79, 80], which drive individuals toward entrepreneurial ventures. The second stream examines the impact of demographic and contextual factors, including gender, age, work experience, and job dissatisfaction, on the intention to become entrepreneurs [81, 82, 83, 84].

Another significant determinant of EI is pinpointed as risk-taking [85], which is referred to as a component of the decision-making process in uncertain circumstances [86], enabling individuals to undertake risks [87, 88],

which strongly affects their entrepreneurial intention. The willingness to take risks stems from an individual's intimate nature, which is notable in entrepreneurship start-ups with challenges and uncertainties. Therefore, individuals with a higher risk tolerance are more inclined toward entrepreneurship than those with less patience [89, 90], as risk-takers typically have more entrepreneurial intentions and are willing to be employers by having a positive attitude towards entrepreneurial behaviors [91, 92].

Moreover, age, gender, and education are also significant aspects influencing entrepreneurial behavior. Accordingly, research indicates that females are generally less likely to start a business than males due to limited funding and a lack of confidence [93]; hence, males exhibit significantly greater entrepreneurial intentions, leading to a higher likelihood of becoming business founders [94, 95]. In terms of educational factors, individuals who enrolled in entrepreneurship courses demonstrate higher entrepreneurial intention compared to others [96, 97]. Evidently, exposure to entrepreneurship knowledge and activity may raise entrepreneurial intention in an individual [98]. For instance, individuals with entrepreneurial parents are more likely to develop entrepreneurial behaviors due to early exposure to entrepreneurship [99, 100, 101].

It would seem inadvisable for anyone to embark on entrepreneurial actions with very low self-efficacy in their people, marketing skills, or financial management skills unless they are confident in their ability to access the necessary expertise through personal networks, team members, or PSFs [102]. Consequently, EI is integral for establishing and expanding PSFs, which highly rely on expertise and consumer relationships, as it fosters opportunity recognition, effective risk management, and innovation, eventually driving long-term success in today's ever-evolving markets.

E. Growth Factors in Businesses

The attitude and capacity of entrepreneurs or managers to guide their businesses are crucial for growth, as these qualities are reflected in the strategies and operations they execute [103, 104]. In this context, personal abilities significantly impact the quality of strategies selected for business growth [105], with individual competency, motivation, and personal traits serving as crucial components. In addition to human or individual factors, organizational factors such as firm resources, including labor, capital, and knowledge, also significantly influence business growth [106, 107, 108] in order to enhance the firms' effectiveness and performance by supporting better resource allocation and decision-making. Similarly, prior studies have demonstrated that business growth can emerge regardless of a firm's size or age [109, 110]. Undeniably, businesses are continuously influenced by external factors that impact their performance and growth [111, 112, 113, 114]. For instance, rapidly growing firms are often located in dynamic industries and regions [115]; however, new firms in highly innovative industries encounter higher failure rates than those in less innovative sectors [116].

F. The Concept of Sustainability

The concept of "sustainability" encompasses three interconnected dimensions, namely environmental conservation, social well-being, and economic viability [117, 118]. In general, sustainability is viewed as a strategic approach for sustaining competitiveness, attracting and retaining consumers by offering environmentally friendly products and services with the highest quality in an effort to enhance operational performance, efficiency, and effectiveness by reducing resource consumption and costs while contributing positively to society [119].

Evidently, sustainability has become a prominent and dynamic area of interest for researchers, managers, consultants, competitors, and consumers of modern organizations today [120]. The growing focus on sustainability is further strengthened by modernization and structural integration [121]. Remarkably, sustainability plays a crucial role by supporting businesses in attaining their corporate social responsibility (CSR) objectives while facilitating employee development and career progression, thereby assuring the organization's long-term success [122]. Therefore, sustainability refers to the capability to sustain outcomes, processes, or systems over time, highlighting human activities that mainly fulfil needs and aspirations while maintaining productive resources and avoiding environmental damage [123]. Accordingly, sustainability enhances an organization's reputation by attracting consumers and employees who align with its values [124], eventually fostering a strong sense of emotional connection between stakeholders and the organization by cultivating brand loyalty and a competitive advantage, leading to enhanced customer retention and employee commitment.

While the journey toward sustainability may seem daunting, it is essential for long-term success, as it is deemed an ongoing process of learning, adapting, and improving by taking proactive steps to contribute to a better world and build a resilient and future-proof firm [125]. Particularly, governments create the foundation for long-term

economic sustainability and development by investing in human capital and allocating resources towards education, training, and workforce development to enhance the capabilities of the labor force and foster innovation, productivity, and competitiveness [126].

G. Growth and Sustainability in the Professional Services Firms (PSFs)

Professional Service Firms (PSFs) have been identified as one of the fastest-growing industries over the past few decades, often described as innovative by their nature [127, 128]. These firms commonly encourage entrepreneurial opportunities by leveraging the knowledge and expertise of individuals, frequently incorporating insights from diverse disciplines and organizational boundaries [129] to innovate continuously, adapt to emerging market demands, and create new business avenues, consequently driving growth and enhancing their competitive edge in an ever-evolving landscape. Notably, PSFs prioritize advancing sustainability as a core strategy to enhance revenue growth by focusing on traditional approaches such as boosting brand recognition and reputation, increasing sales from existing customers, and launching new products and services [130].

Indeed, growth and sustainability are interconnected [131] as firms recognize that long-term success hinges on balancing profitability with social and environmental responsibility. As the demand for sustainable practices expands, PSFs adjust their business models to reduce their environmental footprint, enhance operational efficiencies, and align with evolving consumer expectations; however, employees need more than socially ethical work experiences, practices, and processes to support the firm's sustainability goals [132]. In this context, growth in terms of entrepreneurship is driven by innovation, strategic decision-making, and the ability to integrate sustainability into core service offerings. Hence, sustainability has become a vital driver of entrepreneurial growth and performance in the PSFs, significantly influencing their capability for innovation by encouraging forward-thinking practices and nurturing a culture of ongoing improvement to generate growth and superior performance [133].

III. CONCLUSIONS

Entrepreneurship remains an engine of immersive economic expansion, innovation, and resilience, and PSFs are subsequently acknowledged for their critical contributions in this context. Although there are various challenges presented by regulatory frameworks and the standardization of knowledge for PSFs, EI and innovative approaches have been playing an instrumental role in their growth and long-term sustainability. As PSFs persist in adjusting and succeeding, they demonstrate the transformative power of entrepreneurial activities by balancing economic goals with environmental and social responsibilities for the road to long-run viability. Accordingly, this paper seeks to highlight the essence of EI and sustainability in establishing the future of PSFs, compelling their growth and adaptability, as well as the capability for innovation in an ever-evolving global landscape.

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