

## SRI LANKAN SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS IN THE CREATIVE INDUSTRY: THE UNDERLYING REASONS

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### Abstract

Social entrepreneurship is an emerging domain that generates both economic and social value by addressing societal problems. Although the literature on social entrepreneurship has expanded in recent years in Western contexts, studies in developing countries remain relatively scarce. Concurrently, the creative industry has gained notable momentum in the twenty-first century; however, the intersection of social entrepreneurship and the creative sector in Sri Lanka on a contextual basis is under-researched. Therefore, this qualitative study investigates the reasons why social entrepreneurs engage in Sri Lanka's creative industry. We conducted in-depth interviews with nine social entrepreneurs located in the Western and Central Provinces, drawing on a narrative research approach grounded in a social constructionist philosophical framework, to explore motives derived from their personal experiences. Thematic analysis was employed to identify core driving forces. Consequently, the findings reveal several key themes: preservation of cultural legacy and innovation in traditional practices, intrinsic passion for creativity, orientation towards consumer well-being and happiness, commitment to addressing social issues and dissatisfaction with conventional employment. Based on these themes, the study proposes a model linking the inner experiences of social entrepreneurs with socio-cultural and industry contexts. Finally, the study offers implications for policymakers and stakeholders, suggesting strategies to align institutional support with these principal motivational dimensions. This research fills a gap in Sri Lankan social entrepreneurship literature within the creative industry and suggests avenues for future research in other industries by contributing new empirical insight into the motives of social entrepreneurs in the creative industry.

**Keywords:** Creative industry, motives, narrative inquiry, social constructionism, social entrepreneurship

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## **Introduction**

Social entrepreneurship is an innovative and emerging field that integrates economic activities with social advancements and utilises both economic and social resources sustainably (Elliott, 2019; Hossain & Shamsuddoha, 2021). Global statistics indicate that social entrepreneurship appears to be more entrenched in the developed economies than in the developing economies (Premadasa et al., 2023). For instance, the United Kingdom estimated that there were about 131,000 social enterprises, contributing 78 billion pounds to the economy and employing 9.5% of the workforce in SMEs (Doshi et al., 2023). In Australia, 518 registered social enterprises are employing about 31,000 individuals, 45% of whom are from marginalised communities (Social Traders, 2023). Similarly, more than 1,000 social enterprises are present in Canada, and they are contributing more than 4.1 billion dollars in revenue and employing over 9,000 individuals (Buy Social Canada 2023). For Africa, social entrepreneurship is more advanced in Nigeria, with an estimated 443,000 social enterprises (British Council & Qualiquant, 2022). In contrast, Sri Lanka has a comparatively less social entrepreneurship landscape, experiencing rapid expansion, with 38% of social enterprises established in recent years. Currently, there are between 6,000- 15,000 social enterprises, actively widespread between 25 districts in 9 provinces across many industries in Sri Lanka (British Council, 2018; Jayasinghe & Greitane, 2022). The Thomson Reuters Foundation ranked 44 countries for social entrepreneurs, but even Sri Lanka was not included (Mudalige, 2023). Therefore, it is evident that the social entrepreneurship contribution in Sri Lanka is comparatively low. The study of the factors that have led to a lack of social enterprise in Sri Lanka and the driving forces behind growth is crucial.

Despite its relevance having been increasing in wider circles, definitions of social entrepreneurship remain inconsistent across disciplines, making it difficult to define theoretical limits (Chaudhary et al., 2021; Saadaoui & Belgaroui, 2013; Shavyrina, 2021). For some authors, it includes everything that comes within nonprofit organisations or charitable philanthropic endeavours (Mair & Martí, 2006). A debate exists whether it is considerably different from traditional entrepreneurship or social work, particularly when considering its broad range of nonprofit to hybrid for-profit entities, with respect to its various forms (Choi & Majumdar, 2014; Weerawardena & Sullivan Mort, 2006). Other authors, like Jayasinghe and Greitane (2022), define it much more broadly as the use of entrepreneurial approaches to reach social outcomes. This ambiguous definition makes it difficult to develop both theoretical knowledge and create effective policies.

Meanwhile, creative industries are seen as agents of economic growth and innovation. The creative industry is essential to the inception of social entrepreneurship by promoting innovation, cultural expression, and inclusive economic development (Stosic-Mihajlovic & Nikolic, 2017; UNCTAD, 2022). Social entrepreneurs involved in creative industries fuse artistic intent with social purpose through creative and community engagement to address societal issues, as well as achieve some level of economic sustainability (Agung et al., 2018; Mathory et al., 2023). The creative industries, alongside their associated trades around the world, are expanding more quickly than many traditional sectors. This trend applies not just to developed nations but also to developing countries (British Council, 2018). The Export Development Board of Sri Lanka has revealed, 'oil served as the main fuel of the economy in the 20th century, meanwhile creativity serves as the fuel of the economy in the 21st century' (Sri Lanka Export Development Board, 2021). In addition, this sector is largely made up of small businesses and sole entrepreneurs, supporting aspects such as cultural preservation and local development. Sri Lanka's creative sector is gradually evolving, and increasingly, as social entrepreneurs are entering the field. According to the Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka, the creative sector in Sri Lanka consists of eight sub- sectors, including crafts, fashion design, literature and publishing, advertising, photography, performing and visual arts, IT, architecture, and interior design (Hirimuthugodage et al., 2020). However, research into social entrepreneurship in the creative sector is limited (British Council, 2018; Jayasinghe & Greitane, 2022).

Furthermore, the Department of Census and Statistics collaborated with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to estimate the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) in Sri Lanka, which demonstrates three main areas that show poverty: education, health, and overall living standards. It found that about one in six people in Sri Lanka face multidimensional poverty, and this number is roughly half in urban areas. This suggests that prior efforts by the government, non-profit organisations, and traditional development programs specifically funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and World Bank were competent but not adequate in remedying social problems. Herein, social enterprises are becoming more popular with public officials and government policymakers as an alternative to address social problems and improve lives, as well as reduce inequality (Department of Census and Statistics et al., 2021).

Similarly, existing literature identifies several motivational factors driving social entrepreneurs. As stated by Omorede (2014), Nigerian social entrepreneurs are driven by local conditions, an international mindset, passion, and a social network that supports them to enter social enterprises. Entrepreneurs in the creative industry are influenced by socio-cultural factors and social contexts, and leveraging creative abilities can help facilitate life choices and ideal career choices (Patten, 2016). In addition, innovativeness, proactiveness, risk management,

passion, and collaborativeness also drive social entrepreneurship in the creative industry (Agung et al., 2018).

While existing Sri Lankan implications have identified broad motives of social entrepreneurs such as self-efficacy, perceived feasibility, socio-cultural influences and passion, few have indicated how motives are shaped specifically within the creative industry and creative social entrepreneurs balance the desire for social value with creative expression in a context where creative careers are often undervalued (Mudalige, 2023). In contrast, entrepreneurs' motives in the creative sector are even more complex as audiences shift according to the artistic sub-sector, the impact of cultural heritage, and the identity of the artist. Similarly, the creative industry in Sri Lanka has an economic value that is undeniable. Existing literature on the small art and craft enterprises in the creative industry has highlighted the contextual significance, but specific studies focusing on the creative industry in Sri Lanka are rare (Hafsa et al., 2023). Moreover, while the study by Mafasiya and Gunasinghe, (2023) explores motivational factors behind start-ups of social ventures generally in Sri Lanka, it does not differentiate between sub-industries or consider how motives may differ for those operating in novel creative sectors such as crafts, performance arts, or fashion design. Hence, the present study seeks to fill that gap by examining social entrepreneurs within the Sri Lankan creative industry, exploring how artistic passion, cultural legacy, and creative innovation specifically influence their decision to engage in social entrepreneurship. More precisely, academically, this contribution to a more nuanced understanding of motive variation by industry is practical, implying that creative social enterprises benefit from cultural policy, funding, and support specifically tailored to their needs. Furthermore, this provides social contribution to the creative sectors through which inclusion and cultural preservation might be enabled or supported by the public. Hence, the lack of literature raises the fundamental research question: What are the motives to engage in social entrepreneurship among the social entrepreneurs in the creative industry in Sri Lanka?

## **Literature Review**

Entrepreneurship, widely determined as the creation of economic value by means of risk-taking and innovation, is identified as the most significant factor in the economy. The sphere of entrepreneurship is substantial that encompassing not only corporate but also female and social types of entrepreneurships. Among these, Social Entrepreneurship has gained the greatest interest for its promise of solving social problems in the marketplace with novel business models (Dees, 1998; Pless, 2012).

Scholarly interest in social entrepreneurship has increased significantly over the last two decades (Chaudhary et al., 2021; Choi & Majumdar, 2014; Teasdale et al., 2023). The concept of "social entrepreneurship" was revealed for the first time in the 1960s and 1970s, but it was only about twenty years later that it became widely acknowledged in the literature of international management (Shavyrina, 2021; Saadaoui & Belgaroui, 2013). When G. Dees addressed the issue of social entrepreneurship for the first time, he identified that it had always existed, but in the past, researchers lacked the tools to address it effectively (Dees, 2007). It evolved through various phases of civic innovation, inclusive models of diversity, collaboration, and supporting institutions (Teasdale et al., 2023). Zahra et al. (2009) defines it as pursuing opportunities to enhance social wealth through innovative ventures, while Monge (2016) notes differences in models, scalability, and revenue. Global examples include Professor Muhammad Yunus' Grameen Bank establishment in Bangladesh in 1976, which introduced microfinance to eradicate poverty and empower women (Martin & Osberg, 2007). Similarly, public-private social services in Sweden (Gawell, 2014). While youth employment initiatives in the Balkans (Stosic-Mihajlovic & Nikolic, 2017).

Within the Sri Lankan context, the social entrepreneurship ecosystem in Sri Lanka is relatively novel, growing quickly with 51% established or led by young people aged between 25-44. This illustrates an elevated level of youth involvement and leadership with possibilities for gender parity and market diversification (British Council, 2018). Similarly, social entrepreneurs are more likely to be well-educated and middle-aged women compared to commercial business (Elliott, 2019; Hoogendoorn et al., 2011). This leads to a critical need for social entrepreneurship research in Sri Lanka.

## **Creative industry and social entrepreneurship in the creative industry**

Creative industries contribute to both economic development and social improvement through the creation of jobs, supporting cultural diversity, and attracting investments (UNCTAD, 2022). Adversely, the creative industries function with challenges receiving digital disruption, copyright infringement, and gaps in skills. Notwithstanding these challenges, opportunities abound in the creative industries for strong growth owing to increased demand, innovations in technology, entrepreneurship, and the impact of globalisation (Božić, 2024). Creative industries entrepreneurs also contribute strongly to economies, but their unique dynamics, grounded in innovation and unconventional partnerships, require a better understanding of the inside to be fully realised in terms of potential impact on economies (Patten, 2016).

This literature explores entrepreneurship in creative industries, highlighting its unique characteristics and research potential as passion drives entrepreneurial behaviour, which can be transformed into a symbolic value system (Schulte-Holthaus, 2018). The UK's creative sector makes up 7.3% of the economy, and it generates ideas, pictures, symbols, design, and cultural expression on a large scale. It employs one million people and supports 800,000 creative workers. The growth of the sector is crucial for the livelihoods of British residents. Creativity and innovation are overlapping concepts, with creativity focusing on the origination of innovative ideas and innovation on successful exploitation (The Work Foundation, 2007). In the context of the Sri Lankan creative industry, there were almost 240,000 job opportunities in the creative industries in 2017 across eight sectors, as discussed above in the introduction. Creative industries employ about 62% of their workers in the arts and crafts sector. The publishing and IT sectors have taken up the second and third, in that order. For example, the export earnings for Sri Lanka's IT industry in 2018 grew to USD 1 billion (Sri Lanka Export Development Board, 2021).

Nowadays, there is a rising trend towards social entrepreneurship within the creative industry with good potential for positive social change (Sri Lanka Export Development Board, 2021). For example, an initiative on ethical manufacture and increased exports within the world of art, crafts, design, fashion, and the performing arts looks at the 'Creative Sri Lanka 2030' project now underway. Creative entrepreneurs often harness traditional crafts and cultural narratives to develop novel approaches to social issues, combining creative practice and social entrepreneurship (Sri Lanka Export Development Board, 2024). It consists of many small businesses and self-employed individuals; hence, measuring their contribution to economic activities is crucial for policymakers and industry professionals (Hirimuthugodage et al., 2020). In Sri Lanka, as the creative industry integrates into the economy, creative enterprises confront new difficulties and possibilities. Existing literature revealed that unavailability of supplies, poor consumer purchase intention, short-term vision limitations, and social network building, while opportunities included digital presence exposure, closed innovation practices, and specialisation (Hafsa et al., 2023).

Moreover, scholars contend that the social entrepreneurship movement in the creative industries is one of the supporting factors for the development of socially responsible innovations in these industries. This collection of creativity and social obligation, therefore, determines the difference between social entrepreneurship in the creative industry and regular commercial ventures, revealing the motivation as well as the approaches that the social entrepreneurs have employed in this domain (Mathory et al., 2023). As Agung et al. (2018) provides a detailed model for social entrepreneurship that recognises five dimensions of behaviour: innovativeness, proactiveness, risk-taking, passion, and collaboration. It points out the barriers regarding the environment, sustainability, and social mission that the creative industries deal with, and it indicates that the creative industries incorporate social entrepreneurship for sustainable and inclusive development.

Despite this growth in the creative industry, most studies focus on a Western context, and there is scarce empirical research on developing countries on why individuals engage in social entrepreneurship, especially in Sri Lanka. The creative industry, including arts, crafts, and design, is a unique place where economic, cultural and social purposes collectively drive (UNCTAD, 2022). Accordingly, less evidence indicated how the specific socio-economic, cultural, and institutional conditions in Sri Lanka influence the motivations of social entrepreneurs. The observation of motives in the Sri Lankan creative context will thus result in examining the gap in the literature.

### **Motives for social entrepreneurship**

Social entrepreneurship consists of a variety of internal and external sources of motivation, as the empirical evidence indicates globally, such as personal value systems, socio-cultural environments, and the contextual environment (Agung et al., 2018; Gawell, 2014; Mudalige, 2023). Motivation derives from internal motivation, meaning readiness, and rejection is influenced by internalised attitudes, predispositions, and methods of proactivity internally rather than externally (Shavyrina, 2021). As an internal motive, passion helps to build up the social entrepreneur (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Moreover, scholars have highlighted that entrepreneurial passion and frustration also stem from an instinctive motive (Ruskin et al., 2016). It was further stated that occupational dissatisfaction acts as a catalyst for entry into social entrepreneurship (Yitshaki & Kropp, 2011). Furthermore, enhancing consumer well-being and happiness flourishing to a person becomes a social entrepreneur (Bacq & Janssen, 2011; Akar & Doğan, 2018; Sharma, 2016). Meanwhile, four major themes emerged as motivators for young social entrepreneurs: early life experiences, inspiration from customers and coworkers, work-related experiences, and personal significance (Ahrari et al., 2019). Gender also significantly influences social entrepreneurship intentions, with men motivated by 'pull factors' and women by 'push factors' like gender prejudice, frustration, and poverty. Younger individuals may be more influenced, necessitating entrepreneurship education for women to explore social entrepreneurship as a viable career choice (Hoogendoorn et al., 2011). It is evident in Sri Lanka, as a study reveals a gender bias in social entrepreneurship, with 81% being male (Mudalige, 2023).

Additionally, people in the creative industry frequently adopt distinctive motives for social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurs in this field may aim to address serious social or environmental concerns by developing novel solutions that draw on their creative ability. The combination of creativity and social impact may be a strong motivator for anyone looking to effect positive change in their communities (Stosic-Mihajlovic & Nikolic, 2017). Meanwhile, creative industry entrepreneurs are influenced by socio-cultural factors and social contexts, with personal or family circumstances. For example, the death of close family members affects their dreams and actions. However, even when career choices are not ideal, leveraging creative abilities can facilitate life choices (Patten, 2016). Protecting cultural heritage in an era of rapid globalisation is also motivated by authors (Hawkes, 2001). Additionally, Peredo and McLean (2006) reviewed cultural conservation as a major driver. Further, it is proved by Hesmondhalgh (2013) that social entrepreneurs enhance the perceived value of cultural heritage through this.

Similarly, in the Sri Lankan context, it is proven that social entrepreneurial motivations are derived from personality factors and social factors. Personality factors, such as personality traits, academic background, and career experience, influence an individual's decision to become a social entrepreneur (Mafasiya & Gunasinghe, 2023). In addition, social factors derived as social family background, personal experiences, connections with others, and religion (Mafasiya & Gunasinghe, 2023; Sellaheewa & Samarasinghe, 2022). Furthermore, these authors argued that while social entrepreneurship has been studied globally, the motives in the creative industry context in Sri Lanka remain underexplored. Therefore, this clearly stated the purpose of this research.

### **Theoretical framework**

Examining the motives of Sri Lankan social entrepreneurs in the creative industry is both contextually pertinent and theoretically significant. In Sri Lanka's creative sector, social entrepreneurs engage in social entrepreneurship for several reasons. Researchers have adopted a wide range of theories, such as Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), to accommodate this. First, Self-Determination Theory, developed by Ryan and Deci (2000), offers a solid framework for researching social entrepreneurs' intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. According to SDT, people are motivated by the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which form the basis for intrinsic, self-driven, purpose-directed behaviour. Autonomy refers to the social entrepreneurs who usually need to have autonomy and freedom to pursue personally meaningful goals. This may stem from dissatisfaction with working in a traditional workplace or bureaucratic constraints (Tandon et al., 2023). Competence refers to the number of people who are inspired to use their skills to effectively engage and address social problems, which gives them a sense of agency and success when creating impact (Mafasiya & Gunasinghe, 2023). Next component, relatedness, means social entrepreneurs also often feel a strong affiliation with community engagement or the community in which they are engaged. They are inspired by their empathy and engagement in a social cause (Hemingway, 2005).

Based on the key points of self-determination theory is that the factors that lead people to join and remain engaged in social enterprises are due, at least in part, to non-financial or tangible extrinsic rewards. Typically, social entrepreneurs in Sri Lanka's creative industries present intrinsic motivations, contributing towards social impact, creative expression, and cultural preservation, all of which are not triggered by an economic incentive. This also supports earlier studies that report on social entrepreneurs' motivations of self-fulfilment and social value rather than profit maximisation (Tandon et al., 2023). For creative entrepreneurship, Cnossen et al. (2017) applied SDT to Dutch creative industry entrepreneurs and found 'autonomous intrinsic' motivation was high; however, their study did not attempt to research SDT and social entrepreneurship specifically.

Within the Sri Lankan context, entrepreneurs often demonstrate a combination of motivations, highlighting a strong emphasis on the well-being of the community and the preservation of culture (Hafsa et al., 2023). Hence, there has not been an empirical study found that directly studies social entrepreneurship specifically within the creative industries through an SDT lens.

Furthermore, the TPB adds to SDT to explain how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control affect entrepreneurial intentions (Ajzen, 1991). In Sri Lanka, where societal expectations are emphasised in the community, TPB clarifies how social norms and perceived feasibility influence entrepreneurial intention to start social ventures in creative sectors. They not only define individual intentions but also incorporate an understanding of how cultural and social structures influence entrepreneurial motivation. In contrast, Sri Lankan researchers identified entrepreneurial self-efficacy and perceptions of feasibility as significant proximal predictors of social entrepreneurial intentions (Mudalige, 2023). Within the framework of social entrepreneurship, TPB sheds light on how moral obligation, empathy, and perceived social support interrelate with these three components to predict their social entrepreneurial intention. Mair and Noboa (2006) broadened the TPB framework by integrating empathy and moral judgment into the model because they recognised that social entrepreneurs may be motivated by altruistic and prosocial values rather than traditional profit motivation.

Despite the increasing interest in social entrepreneurship, research on the creative industries in Sri Lanka is scarce. Empirical research rarely focuses on the motivations behind the social entrepreneurs in the creative industry. This leaves an unexplained gap in the existing literature. Theorising, there is a framework-building opportunity to build a more comprehensive framework that combines the TPB and SDT with social capital to design a framework that can explain the complex interactions among individual, social, and contextual influences of motivation. Methodologically, as most empirical studies in the Sri Lankan context are quantitative and absence in creative industry specific, this means the broader implications of qualitative approaches to social entrepreneur motivation will be overlooked. Addressing these research gaps may provide a more theoretical understanding and address the research question of why Sri Lankan social entrepreneurs engage in the creative industry.

## **Methodology**

Qualitative research studies human behaviour, focusing on body language, attitudes, opinions, and experiences, while inductive research generates new theories and generalisations (Patel & Patel, 2019). Hence, this qualitative study employed an inductive approach and a social constructivist research philosophy, which is best suited for the study. Social constructivism refers to the fact that there is no objective reality; it exists through individuals' experiences, culture, and social relations (Berger & Luckman, 1991; Crotty, 1998). The aim of qualitative research, particularly grounded theory, is to generate ample data to explain concepts, categories, properties, and dimensions of phenomena. The ontological perspective of grounded study design, influenced by early sociological theory, pragmatism, and symbolic interactionism, focuses on controlling empirical phenomena and abstract notions through an iterative data collection and analysis process (Frost & Nollaig, 2011). Thus, it is inappropriate for this study. Concurrently, phenomenology is a qualitative method that delves into individuals' actual experiences to understand how they navigate their personal and social lives regarding a specific phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Since the study does not look at a specific phenomenon, experiments and survey approaches are thus inappropriate.

Meanwhile, Narrative research allows individuals' experiences to be explored through storytelling and enables the researcher to understand their motives (Creswell, 2007; Reis, 2023). With the emphasis on individual experiences and contextual constraints, the narrative research method was determined to be the best approach. In this study, narrative design was employed as a philosophical stance and as a methodological framework. It directed how stories were elicited, interpreted and represented narrative design and appropriately structured the interviewing process in this area if the participants were asked to narrate their professional journey as social entrepreneurs, including their experiences at that time. The interviewing techniques were designed specifically to evoke narrative reflection rather than brief responses, affording each practitioner to develop a succinct presentation or tell their story of lived experience.

## **Sample, sampling technique and data collection**

Koerber and McMichael (2008) identified three relevant sample approaches for qualitative research: convenience, purpose, and theoretical. It is utilised to choose the sample since the planned study involves people with various viewpoints. Purposive sampling encompasses a wide range of techniques, including heterogeneous sampling, extreme deviant examples, and snowballing (Patel & Patel, 2019). This study employed a purposive sampling approach as it ensured that participants possessed direct experience as creative social entrepreneurs.

Meanwhile, Snowball sampling is useful in research that investigates underground cultures, social movements, or secret societies. Each person is asked to select a different person in the population, where there is a predefined integer. For example, each person in the sample may be asked to name his 'best friends,' or the 'people he most regularly associates with,' or the 'those whose opinions he most frequently seeks,' etc (Frost & Nollaig, 2011). Therefore, snowball sampling was utilised to expand the participant base through professional referrals to this study, which enhanced diversity in perspectives (Koerber & McMichael, 2008). Initially, the sampling process began with purposive sampling using the personal and professional network. Accordingly, snowball sampling was adopted, where after interviewing one creative social entrepreneur, the researcher asked that entrepreneur to suggest other creative social entrepreneurs in their network. This method was specifically used early in the data collection process but was not successful in identifying sufficiently diverse participants. To address this problem, the researcher also used personal and professional contacts to help invite participants to the data collection.

Accordingly, as per the Institute of Policy Studies' Sri Lanka's classification, the participants represented a wide range of creative industries, including fashion design, crafts, performing arts, and others (Hirimuthugodage et al., 2020). In this manner, this study collected data from nine social entrepreneurs considering diversification in the creative industry as saturation was reached. The rationale behind the smaller number of samples was that researchers recognised the recurring patterns and similar narratives emerged among participants in subsequent interviews, after no new code emerged across successive interviews. To be eligible for the selection, they had to

have at least three years of experience running a creative business, be actively involved in activities that have a positive impact on society and be recognised as social entrepreneurs in their local communities or networks. Table 1, shown below, gives a detailed look at the participants’ background and business details, showing how varied and representative the sample is. Similarly, research sites were selected as the Western and Central provinces due to their rich cultural value.

Data collection was done from semi-structured in-depth interviews, observations and photos, which allowed participants to describe individual stories and experiences relevant to the research focus. The researcher contacted participants via several networks, then contacted participants over the phone and via email. Interviews were in a face-to-face setting at a mutually convenient location, were approximately fifty minutes in length, and were tape-recorded with participants’ consent for accuracy. For the follow-up clarification, an average of twenty minutes of phone calls was conducted with each respective participant. The researcher experienced challenges with finding participants, scheduling interviews, and travel delays, but managed the issues effectively to get all the interviews completed.

**Table 1**  
*Demographic factors of the sample*

Respondent	Age (years)	Gender	Education level	Experience in business	Creative Sector	Living Province
A	50	Male	A/L	18	Crafts	Central
B	46	Male	A/L	8	Crafts	Central
C	26	Female	Graduate	4	Crafts	Western
D	27	Male	Graduate	5	Architecture and interior design	Western
E	47	Male	A/L	6	Crafts	Western
F	49	Female	Masters	15	Literature and Publishing	Western
G	32	Female	Masters	9	Fashion design	Central
H	40	Female	Masters	8	Fashion design	Western
I	26	Female	Masters	14	Fashion design	Central

*(Source: Developed by authors based on literature (2025))*

## Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis refers to the methodical process of analysing non-numerical data, such as observations, interviews, and documents, to identify themes, patterns, and significance and glean important insights. There are many ways to analyse qualitative data, including thematic analysis, narrative analysis, and grounded Theory analysis (Weckesser & Denny, 2022). Narrative Analysis focuses on tales and how individuals utilise them to create meaning. Stories are analysed for their language, structure, and context to comprehend viewpoints and experiences (Riessman, 2005). Grounded Theory analysis is an inductive methodology: theories based on facts that may be developed and that create hypotheses based on the data itself by identifying ideas, categories, and their relationships as you evaluate the data (Razavi et al., 2014).

Compared to the other analysis methods, this study used the thematic analysis to interpret participants' stories by identifying recurring patterns, as it offers flexibility and depth (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Weckesser & Denny, 2022). This framework consists of compiling stories and examining them to identify important plot points. In this study, thematic analysis followed four main stages: getting familiar with the data, coding, creating themes, and reviewing the work. At first, researchers created transcripts that included every single word as well as sporadic annotations by listening to the audio recording to understand deeply what the participants experienced and the context they were in. During the coding stage, important parts of the data were given labels that described the main ideas and repeating patterns. These labels were then grouped into bigger themes that showed common meanings and connections related to the research goals. Also, to make sure the themes were accurate and reliable, inter-coder reliability was ensured through peer debriefing, which made the whole analysis more trustworthy. Furthermore, we categorised these motives in relation to existing motivational theories, including self-determination theory and prosocial motivation theories, to establish a theoretical orientation and show how our findings contributed to understanding theory. Concurrently, the researchers performed the analysis manually, and no analysis software was used.

Similarly, when conducting qualitative research, ethical considerations are crucial to understanding participants' experiences. Denscombe (2010) identifies three primary ethical considerations: participant safety, no dishonesty, and informed consent. As a result, all interviews were held in locations convenient for the participants. Participants are informed that the data obtained will be utilised just for the study, and their names will not be revealed. Before data collection began, all participants were informed about the study's aim and role. Finally, the researcher acquired informed consent from each of them. Participants were guaranteed their confidentiality. The research employed code numbers to represent individuals. Participants were advised that they might withdraw from the research at any moment, as participation was voluntary. They might refuse to answer unpleasant inquiries. Additionally, data triangulation, thick description, and member checking strategies were applied for the research to be trustworthy.

## Findings and Discussions

This section presents interview data from participants to address the research question of the study. Accordingly, five major themes emerged using thematic analysis. Such as preservation of cultural legacy and innovation in traditional practices, intrinsic passion for creativity, orientation toward consumer well-being and happiness, commitment to addressing social issues and dissatisfaction with conventional employment. Then each theme is explained using instances from their own words. Additionally, the researcher's interpretations provide insight into each theme. The researchers contextualised their findings by reviewing relevant literature for each theme. Finally, researchers have developed a model using the research findings.

### Preservation of cultural legacy and innovation in traditional practices

As Hawkes (2001) argues, this motive is significant as it addresses the broader societal need to protect cultural heritage in an era of rapid globalisation, where unique local crafts, skills, and cultural identities are at risk of erosion. Similarly, the current study found that social entrepreneurs in Sri Lanka are inspired by the country's cultural heritage and traditional practices. Respondent commentaries are as follows.

Respondent I: *I use natural dyes like turmeric and indigo for my sustainable batik, ensuring eco-friendliness and cultural authenticity. My work was featured on 'Nuga Sewana' to highlight the value of preserving Sri Lankan traditions.'*

Respondent B: *'I introduced brush and broom packaging in Sri Lanka while preserving cultural heritage. After 10 years abroad, I saw the value of our traditions to the world and opened a local brand showroom in One Galle Face Mall.'*

Respondent E: *'I noticed that the traditional ekel brooms were slowly being replaced by plastic ones, which harm the environment and lack the charm of our cultural heritage. I decided to innovate sustainably, ensuring that the production process was completely eco-friendly.'*

These commentaries postulate the concept of subjective norms within the Theory of Planned Behaviour, where the influence of social pressure from community members plays a role in shaping entrepreneurial choices (Ajzen, 1991). An important aspect of the creative sector is the engagement of traditions and cultural heritage, since it provides a space for creators to innovate. Social entrepreneurs use these traditions as the basis for creating products that consumers recognise and understand as authentic and culturally tangible, as stated by Respondent B. When these entrepreneurs combine traditional practices into modern-day products and services, both cultural memory and market ubiquity increase the value of cultural heritage. Hesmondhalgh (2013) claims that products with cultural meaning can yield experiential value, a global value of authenticity, and cultural diversity. Similarly, Peredo and McLean (2006) illustrate that conserving culture is a crucial element for social entrepreneurs, especially in creative industries.

Meanwhile, in Sri Lanka, the handicrafts entrepreneurs held similar insights to these findings but remain lacking in the intersection with social entrepreneurship (Hafsa et al., 2023). Hence, this showed a clear gap between motives for social entrepreneurship in the Sri Lankan creative industry and added a new contribution to existing literature. These major findings are extended from previous research (Hafsa et al., 2023; Tandon et al., 2023). By showing that in growing cultural economies, creativity is not just about making art, it becomes a moral and social action. It connects how artists see themselves with how they help change society. This offers a better understanding of why social entrepreneurs are motivated and lays the groundwork for developing new theories about creative industries.

### Intrinsic passion for creativity

Creativity is the ability to create novel and useful ideas by thinking differently and getting out of routine patterns. The importance of this passion for creativity serves as a driver of innovation and resilience among social entrepreneurs, suggesting that individuals passionate about creative expression are more likely to address social

challenges through artistic or cultural endeavours (Schulte-Holthaus, 2018). To derive this theme, the researcher analysed the respondent commentaries as follows.

Respondent A: *'I've always been passionate about creativity since childhood. Even in school, I spent most of my time doing creative things and thinking outside the box. Today I solved social problems by using my creativity. That is why I started this business.'*

Respondent F: *'I'm passionate about creating unique things that showcase my skills and potential. I think from the future and work in the present. This is called reverse engineering.'*

Respondent E: *'Creativity is in my genes. I've always done art and crafts. As an entrepreneur, I believe creativity and innovation are essential. Starting a business based on my creative skills was a dream because I knew I had the potential to do something unique in this industry.'*

Three respondents, A, F, and E, identified passion for creativity as the primary motivation for social entrepreneurship. Respondent A stated that she had spent her whole life 'doing creative things,' and how this passion naturally extended into their business, whereas Respondent F explained that creating unique things using his creative skills. Like this, Ruskin et al. (2016) have identified that passion drives social entrepreneurial activities. Zahra et al. (2009) stated that entrepreneurs are commonly driven by the process of intensive involvement in the creative, enchanting process of innovative and creative innovation. Stosic-Mihajlovic and Nikolic (2017) highlighted the contribution of creative passion to social entrepreneurship, which is mainly in creative industries, where social entrepreneurs use their creative potential to solve social issues.

Moreover, Self-Determination Theory argues that people are most productive and satisfied when they engage in activities that align with their intrinsic motivations and passions. According to Deci and Ryan (2000), sustaining creativity requires an organisation of work conditions that promotes autonomy and intrinsic motivation. This has also been supported in the multidimensional model of social entrepreneurship in the sense that passion leads to social entrepreneurship in the creative sector (Agung et al., 2018).

Furthermore, it was stated that people who have passion are more likely to make progress. But not specifically mentioning the creativity in the Sri Lankan context (Mafasiya & Gunasinghe, 2023). Ultimately, this creative drive is the main source of motivation for people who wish to have a positive impact on society, emphasising the creative power that specific creative industries can have to create economic and social value, which has been overlooked in the existing literature on social entrepreneurship in the creative industry in Sri Lanka.

### **Orientation towards consumer well-being and happiness**

Consumer well-being refers to the degree to which a product, service, or business model impacts mental, physical, emotional, and social consumer health. Social entrepreneurship in creative industries brings much-needed well-being to consumers by elevating the quality of life with innovative, socially responsible goods and premium value that is more than just money (Elkington & Hartigan, 2008). Respondent commentaries are as follows.

Respondent D: *'My goal is not profit but people's happiness. Even if I face a loss, I offer my products to bring joy. If someone isn't satisfied, I redesign it to meet their needs.'*

Respondent G: *'I want to give my product as 'what they want', not as 'what I want.' If they get any mental health from my product, that is my real happiness.'*

Respondent I: *'Through Sustainable textiles, I would be able to enhance people's quality of life. My fashion items make people feel good.'*

The perspectives of respondents D, G, and I emphasised the focus of their business away from profit and leveraging emotional and personal value to drive value creation, highlighting a people-based perspective. Specifically, respondent D prioritises happiness over profit, treating themselves as a commercial endeavour with not so much benefit to themselves but with benefits to the consumer as much as possible. These statements align with the literature that social entrepreneurs within this sector are acutely mindful of the opportunity to improve quality of life and contentment, indicating a movement away from the conventional business emphasis solely on financial gain towards one that prioritises beneficial social influences (Bacq & Janssen, 2011). The focus is on customer satisfaction and happiness as important driving forces in social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurs enhance their relationship with their audience and have a lasting impact on consumer loyalty and social value by creating products that prioritise the mental and emotional well-being of consumers (Akar & Doğan, 2018). Social entrepreneurship allowed for a pathway that was more self-directed, purposeful, and impactful (Zahra et al., 2009).

This approach aligns with theories of happiness and well-being in that if entrepreneurs emphasise human impact, their ventures can help build a more meaningful and emotionally enriching consumer experience with the product or service (Sharma, 2016). This theme is consistent with the related aspect of SDT, the need for meaningful connection with others and the attitudinal dimension of the TPB, where the perceived overall value of social good

determines entrepreneurial intentions. As Bacq and Janssen (2011) noted, participants highlighted human well-being and satisfaction as intrinsic rewards, implying that emotional connection to end-users is central to sustaining the social purpose of creative enterprises.

Ultimately, this theme emphasises that a social entrepreneur's motive is to redefine business success to include its impact on human happiness—that customer well-being is a business asset and a socially responsible outcome. Although evidence suggests that social entrepreneurial motivations exist in Sri Lanka, specific to this motive in creative industries in social entrepreneurship is scarce. Thus, this contributes novel insights into existing literature.

### **Commitment to address social issues**

The desire to solve significant social problems often drives social entrepreneurship (Gandhi & Raina, 2018). In fact, in the creative industry, social entrepreneurs often seek to create change by addressing issues such as inequality, education, mental health, community development, and environmental issues (Hossain & Shamsuddoha, 2021). The current study presents how social entrepreneurs are motivated by this theme as follows.

Respondent F: *'I saw many social issues in Sri Lanka: suicides, divorces, harassment, and discrimination. Though people are educated, they struggle to face life's challenges. I started this business to create a positive change in response to these problems.'*

As per respondent F, she started the business to advocate for the burning social problems for positive social change as literature.

Stated (Gandhi & Raina, 2018). While Sri Lankan literature hosted a similar argument that social entrepreneurial orientation promotes the triple bottom line via dynamic capability and social innovation utilized and social entrepreneurs discover new creative methods to solve the most urgent social problems (Premadasa et al., 2023).

Further, respondent F stated that,

Even though we are schooled and get an education, we do not have the quality education to become real gentlemen. People do not have that mindset.

This motivation is essential as it highlights the unique role that the creative industry plays in fostering social dialogue and raising awareness. This highlights that, unlike traditional industries, the creative sector has a distinct power to influence public perception and evoke emotional responses through art, design, media, and storytelling (Hawkes, 2001). Similarly, this motivation holds great significance, aligning perfectly with the upward trend of businesses embracing the role of change-makers, a shift underscored by the research of (Doherty et al., 2006).

Besides, respondents address various burning social problems as below.

Respondent C: *'Environmental pollution makes an impact from the high spread of invasive plants like Japan Jabara, Ali mana. It is a threat to the environment. I need to address a social problem which was burning in society. I want to make a significant impact on society as a social entrepreneur.'*

Respondent G: *'I started the business to address key social issues like poverty, women's empowerment, and climate change. I'm passionate about Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and have completed nine related certifications.'*

The above statements proved that they became social entrepreneurs, neither seeking financial gain nor harming society, while considering sustainability. Existing literature stated that this approach emphasises that social entrepreneurship goes beyond economic gains to create shared value for both entrepreneurs and communities (Hockerts, 2010). In evidence to the Sri Lankan context, addressing social problems drives the social entrepreneurs, but it lacks the specification into the creative industry (Mafasiya & Gunasinghe, 2023).

### **Dissatisfaction with conventional employment**

Dissatisfaction with traditional employment, restrictive creativity, lack of fulfilment, and hierarchical structures leads many people in the creative sector to pursue social entrepreneurship. The insights from respondents as below.

Respondent A: *'When I was doing a job, I was stuck at eight to five. I was frustrated after doing a job for more than 10 years. Now I am pretty much satisfied with what I am doing right now.'*

Respondent E: *'I worked at Sirasa TV for over 15 years with a good package, but I realised it wasn't my true path. I wanted more freedom and to reach my full potential.'*

Respondent F: *'I've worked in software, computer engineering, consulting, and lectured at the Open University while also engaging with a Non-Government Organization (NGO). With experience in both public and private*

sectors, *I felt I had more to offer and grew frustrated with the limitations of permanent employment.*'

In the respondents' comments, there are clear sentiments of frustration with existing employment conditions that led to thinking about social entrepreneurship (Ruskin et al., 2016). Respondents E and F perceived that having a conventional job was stifling and did not fit in line with their own goals.

According to the available literature, this has been reported using the life stories approach in which the author conducted interviews with a sample of 18 social bricoleurs or micro-level social entrepreneurs comprising 8 countries to understand reasons for initiating social entrepreneurship. Some such motivations included pull factors: an awareness of social injustice or push factors: job dissatisfaction (Yitshaki & Kropp, 2011). Social entrepreneurs often seek to break free from profit-driven models, aiming to balance personal satisfaction with societal impact, driven by dissatisfaction with traditional work environments (Zahra et al., 2009).

The Sri Lankan study showed that both work and life experiences drive social entrepreneurs to create social enterprises. yet the participants have not explicitly highlighted the frustration with conventional employment (Mafasiya & Gunasinghe, 2023).

Although work-related experiences were seen as the driving force behind social entrepreneurship, they didn't clearly express the dissatisfaction directly (Ahrari et al., 2019). According to the Self-determination theory, clear that the dissatisfaction with working in a traditional workplace or bureaucratic constraints led social entrepreneurs to seek their goals (Tandon et al., 2023). But it was generally indicated that creative industries are not specifically mentioned. The reviewed literature mostly indicated that many scholars found their previous career to be positively impacting their social entrepreneurial journey, though there are a few contributing researchers driven by job dissatisfaction to take up a social entrepreneurial journey.

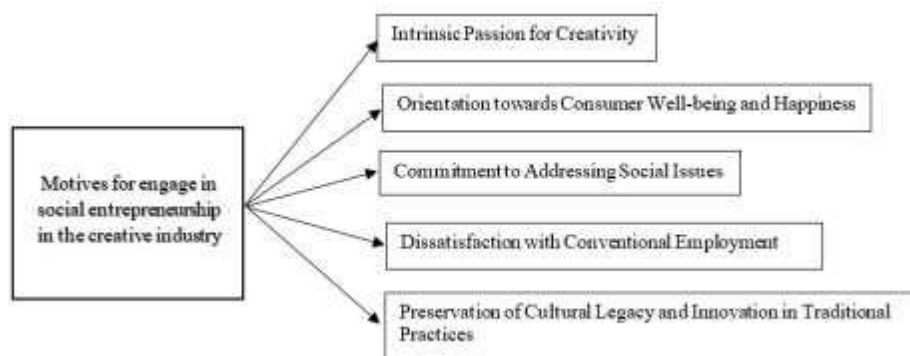
Based on these research findings, this study proposes a model as follows.

### Proposed model of the study

Figure 1- By examining the motives of social entrepreneurs in the creative industry in Sri Lanka, this model was proposed for this study, which emphasises the need to understand a developing country with a multitude of social problems. This describes that there are five major motives that affect the motives for engagement in social entrepreneurship in the creative industry as follows. These various motivations are connected and work together to influence entrepreneurial activity. External factors like support from institutions, market conditions, and societal demands can affect how these motivations operate. Although the model is based on qualitative insights and isn't statistically generalizable, it offers a strong conceptual basis for future research, especially for testing these relationships with quantitative methods. This study provides a novel theoretical framework to an under-researched area that adds to the existing body of literature on social entrepreneurship in creative industries in Sri Lanka.

**Figure 1:**

*Proposed model for the study*



*(Source: Developed by authors based on literature (2025))*

### Conclusion and Future Research Agenda

Social entrepreneurship delivers social impact and economic value across the globe. Meanwhile creative industry is becoming more popular through its contribution to the economy and unique business models. Studies on the interrelationship of social entrepreneurship and the creative industry are yet to be explored in developing countries, specifically concerning Sri Lanka. Consequently, the current study addresses the above theoretical gap,

focusing on the social entrepreneurs' motivations around the triangle of creative industry, which gives a great contribution to the economies, offering a crucial, context-specific field primarily focused on developed economies. This study investigated the passion towards creativity, enhancing well-being and happiness, efforts towards resolving socially oriented problems, dissatisfaction with traditional employment, promoting the revival of culture, empowering communities, and contributing to economic development and growth. The overlap of Sri Lanka's creative sector provides an exciting opportunity for social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurs in this space are not only driven by international factors but are rather locally based, as they harness their enterprises as opportunities to safeguard and utilise their culture while also engaging with pressing social issues today. This continually shapes the value of the economy and enables greater solidarity in the creative industry.

In this study, several theoretical contributions have been made. This study provides a contribution to existing research and a basis for future empirical research surrounding this nascent area of study. Accordingly, the model outlined here provides an initial step for future research in this area. It explains the approaches applied by social entrepreneurs in a developing nation to manage them via motives to engage in social entrepreneurship in the creative industry. Empirical studies on social entrepreneurship can be used as a testable hypothesis. Those dearth areas are covered by the current study. Thus, this study addresses the key gaps above-mentioned in the literature. Therefore, these implications show that the current study has shown the significance of theoretical implications to literature.

When considering the practical contribution of the study, this offers actionable insights for multiple parties. First, an understanding of the concept of social entrepreneurship is crucial for the government and policymakers to tackle burning social problems in the country. Second, the study's proposed model would have an impact on policy development by implementing various programs to support social entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the study recommends several recommendations for the respective authorities. Social entrepreneurs within the creative industry have the capacity to lead to innovative solutions for societal problems, cultural revival, community empowerment and economic growth, not only helping solve societal concerns, but also for the sake of the country's growth. As findings revealed, creative social entrepreneurs in the industry especially gain attention for their environmental responsibility as well. Hence, institutional support is strategically aligned with these motivational dimensions. Through the encouragement of collaboration and the development of strong supporting structures, stakeholders can realise the transformative power of creative social entrepreneurship for sustainable economic and societal change.

While providing rich, novel data, this study is subject to limitations inherent in its design. The qualitative study primarily focuses on social entrepreneurs in Sri Lanka's creative industry, highlighting limitations in generalisation. The study used a selection of participants, which could have caused selection bias. This study is cross-sectional and contains interviews. However, longitudinal studies could provide more valuable data using ethnography to accustom themselves to the development of these enterprises over a long period. While studying is subject to the creative industry and subjective, future research could attempt to replicate the study in other industries or use triangulation methods and quantitative validation of the proposed model. In addition, the study is limited to Sri Lanka, and future research could be conducted in other countries to look at differences between demographic factors, such as gender, in the creative industry, thus prolonging the comprehension of social entrepreneurial behaviour in this nascent sector.

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