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The effect of social mission on service quality and brand image

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, social enterprise issues have developed rapidly both in Taiwan and around the world. Consequently, social enterprises utilize several different business models and are hybrid organizations that need to pursue both profit and a social mission and to adopt good practices in their operations. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the relationships among social mission, service quality and brand image in a social enterprise.

Data were collected from 316 customers by Come True Coffee in February 2018. A structural equation model (SEM) was used to examine the relationships among the research variables and identify the final model. The results show that the social mission improves the service quality and brand image. Moreover, the social mission of a social enterprise is an important issue in terms of encouraging consumers to feel concern. Finally, service quality is a moderating factor for a social mission in regard to brand image. The outcomes of this study could help a social enterprise's managers better understand the relationships among the social mission, service quality and brand image.

1. Introduction

A social enterprise is a hybrid organization that simultaneously pursues financial and social goals and is frequently defined as “an organization that addresses a basic unmet need or solves a social or environmental problem through a market-driven approach” (Leung, Mo, Ling, Chandra, & Ho, 2019; Kim & Moon, 2017; Social Enterprise Alliance, 2018; Alon, Mersland, Musteen, & Randøy, 2020). Besides, Szi-jarto, Milley, Svensson, and Cousins (2018) have claimed that social enterprises are more nimble, flexible, efficient, transparent and accountable than conventional social sector organizations or non-profit organizations. Apparently, social enterprises utilize several different business models in parallel (Gebauer, Saul, Halidmann, & Kramer, 2017; Davies & Doherty, 2018; Defourny & Nyssens, 2010; Tykkyläinen & Ritala, 2020). However, to pursue and accomplish a social mission constitutes a major goal regardless of the categories or models (Bhattarai, Kwong, & Tasavori, 2019; Defourny & Nyssens, 2017; Doherty, Haugh, & Lyon, 2014). The social mission of a social enterprise is critical for legitimacy and accountability purposes (Mersland, Nyarko, & Szafarz, 2019). Subsequently, Coombes, Morris, Allen, and Webb (2011) have pointed out that an organization's social performance refers to the

creation of social value for the customers or to achieving social missions, goals, and objectives. So far, by adopting a market orientation, social enterprises have been better able to learn about and address the specific needs and demands of their customers (Bhattarai et al., 2019). It is important for social enterprises to be competitive, sustainable, and profitable (Leung et al., 2019), and to increase interest in organizations that focus on a social mission or on social value creation (Tykkyläinen & Ritala, 2020).

According to Roy, Donaldson, Baker, and Kerr (2014), the ability of the social enterprise to meet its social mission is likely to depend on a range of internal and extraneous factors. By selling goods or services, rather than constantly depending on soliciting donations, nonprofits are able to secure the financial resources needed to fulfill their social missions (Hai & Daft, 2016). Leung et al. (2019) have also claimed that social enterprises need to adopt good practices in their operations, such as good business planning and reviews, accounting and financial management, and operations management. Therefore, social enterprises can create more products and services and provide greater access to meet their customers' demands (Bhattarai et al., 2019; Liu, Eng, & Takeda, 2015). Furthermore, a social mission, product competitiveness, and customers' perceptions and attitudes will improve the intention to

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purchase social enterprise products (Craig, Ngondoa, & Flynn, 2016; Lin, Lin, Wang, & Tsai, 2020; Tsai, Hung, & Yang, 2020). On the other hand, many profit organizations, non-profit organizations and social enterprises are working hard to enhance brand image and value through offering a social mission, staff behavior, service quality and brand identification (Lin et al., 2020; Lin & Ryan, 2016; Nam, Ekinci, & Whyatt, 2011; Wang, 2014). It is thus reasonable to assume that any organization or social enterprise can use its mission statement (social mission) and high service quality to enhance its customers' perceptions of its brand image.

It seems to be the case, however, that past research has paid more attention to the effects of social missions in non-profit organizations (Raja-Yusof, Norman, Siti-Soraya, & Nazri, & Mohd-Yusoff, 2016; Jäger & Beyes, 2010). More recently, scholars have raised concerns that social enterprises can in fact deliver their social mission while at the same time pursuing financial sustainability or profit (Ebrahim, Battilana, & Mair, 2014; Cetindamar & Ozkazanc-Pan, 2017; Ramus & Vaccaro, 2017; Bhattarai et al., 2019; Mersland et al., 2019) and business-model innovation (Dobson, Boone, Andries, & Daou, 2018; Reficco, Layrisse, & Barrios, 2020; Sunio, Laperal, & Mateo-Babiano, 2020). Meanwhile, Dobson et al. (2018) conducted an in-depth study on the ViaVia Travellers Cafés to investigate how social enterprises can develop and scale their business models under uncertainty. Furthermore, most research has also concentrated on the impact of the social mission statement from the perspective of internal stakeholders like employees and managers. However, consumer-related issues remain poorly understood (Gras & Mendoza-Abarca, 2014; Lin et al., 2020; Thompson, Purdy, & Ventresca, 2018; Tsai et al., 2020). Specifically, the public by and large does not understand what social enterprises are and often oversimplifies them (Tsai et al., 2020). As a consequence, despite the importance of the social mission statement to *all* stakeholders, it appears that little research has been conducted on the possible roles played by such statements in the minds of external stakeholders, most notably customers (Lin et al., 2020; Tsai et al., 2020). The question therefore arises as to whether social missions can be applied to strengthen and improve service quality and brand image in accordance with customers' perceptions. Therefore, from the consumers' perspective, the issue regarding consumers supporting social enterprises because they agree with their concepts because the goods and services they provide meet market needs warrants further investigation (Rahaman & Khan, 2017; Lin et al., 2020).

The purpose of this study is to assess whether the proposed linkages between the social mission, brand image and service quality actually exist, because if such linkages can be found then it might be worthwhile for companies to utilize their social missions as part of an exercise to improve service quality and focus on brand building. As a result, a direction of causality is envisaged whereby a social mission could positively influence a firm's service quality and brand image, while the perception of service quality may in turn also determine how customers view the firm's brand image. This paper also reports on research undertaken using a sample of Taiwanese respondents in regard to their understanding of how a social enterprise's social mission might influence its customers' perceptions of its service quality and brand image. It is suggested at the outset that the findings will identify a number of useful consumer considerations that focus on the enterprise's social mission, service quality and brand image and that these will enable managers of social enterprises to differentiate their social missions, service quality and brand image from those of their competitors in other social enterprises and commercial firms.

The rest of this article is organized as follows. We start by reviewing the relevant literature on social missions, service quality and brand image, which is followed by a description of our research hypotheses. We then describe the methods we adopt and the rationale for selecting Come True Coffee as our case study. We then present our findings, the resulting model, and discuss them in the light of theory and practice. We also present critical findings regarding the theoretical and managerial implications of our results, propose future research directions, and offer

our conclusions.

2. Conceptual background and hypothesis development

2.1. Literature review

2.1.1. Social mission

Social enterprises have been defined as businesses with social objectives, whose surplus revenues are reinvested in order to accomplish these goals and tasks and achieve satisfactory tradeoffs between financial and social logics and values (Alon, Mersland, Musteen, & Randøy, 2020; Defourny, Hulgård, & Pestoff, 2014; Lin et al., 2020; Tykkyläinen & Ritala, 2020; Wry & Zhao, 2018). Szijarto et al. (2018) point out that a social enterprise refers primarily to the characteristics of an organization rather than a process or intervention (Antadze & Westley, 2010; Cunha, Bennenworth, & Oliveira, 2015). Dacin, Dacin, and Tracey (2011) claim that the primary mission of the social entrepreneur is one of creating social value by providing solutions to social problems. In particular, Scuotto, Del Giudice, Tarba, Petruzzelli, and Chang (2020) propose that international social entrepreneurs respond to prevalent social problems when local governments support them and the social service is urgently needed. Besides, a B Corporation is similar to a social enterprise, and is defined as a firm that is publicly committed to positively impacting a broad range of stakeholders and awarding for-profit firms with a social impact status from B Lab (Alon et al., 2020; Czinkota, Kaufmann, Basile, & Ferri, 2019). Scuotto, Del Giudice, Shlomo, Petruzzelli, and Chang (2020) and Xing, Liu, and Lattemann (2020) contribute to previous research (Wang, Alon, & Kimble, 2015) by indicating that in China social enterprises often leverage a twin organizational set-up with both a for-profit and non-for-profit arm. With this arrangement, the social enterprises can simultaneously, while under the same umbrella, distinguish between the different activities of the firm and are able to effectively channel funds through donations and government support. Despite the fact that self-sufficiency and non-reliance on public funds are frequently noted among the goals of social enterprise actors (Luke, Barraket, & Eversole, 2013), to achieve such goals, social enterprises are considered to be more likely than conventional social service organizations to apply methods adopted from the private sector, for instance through the use of marketing strategies to raise the demand for their goods or services (Lin et al., 2020; Szijarto et al., 2018).

Social missions range from addressing local concerns to alleviating global problems. Hence, the intensity of financial and social missions as well as their relative weights vary from firm to firm, creating heterogeneity between social enterprises (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010; Shepherd, Williams, & Zhao, 2019; Tykkyläinen & Ritala, 2020). Sengupta, Sahay, and Hisrich (2020) point out that a social enterprise is aligned to the social mission through the different beneficiaries and the revenues from customers. In other words, the original intention on the part of social enterprises to solve social issues is likely to be based on the characteristics of people's goodwill (Defourny & Nyssens, 2017). Although social enterprises are typically active in markets and aim to generate economic profits, some or all of these profits are reinvested in the pursuit of their social missions (Szijarto et al., 2018). Jäger and Beyes (2010) refer to nonprofit strategizing that seeks to strengthen the organization's economic rationale while simultaneously nurturing its social mission focus. Undoubtedly, social enterprises vary widely in terms of their organizational characteristics, missions, and intended outcomes (Alon et al., 2020).

Muñoz and Kimmitt (2019), Siegner, Pinkse, and Panwar (2018) and Tykkyläinen and Ritala (2020) claim that recent research has challenged the dichotomy between financial and social missions, as social enterprises may have several social goals but are forced to pursue only one or two. Szijarto et al. (2018) advocate improving relationships between social enterprises and funders so that they can move beyond financial targets to a richer discussion of what it means to achieve a social mission. Similar to Braun, Wesche, Frey, Weisweiler, and Peus (2012)'s

contention for developing mission statements, a brief and comprehensive presentation of major contents should be emphasized. On the contrary, the combination of a market-driven logic with a social mission is not without its risks, and mission drift is paramount among them (Cornforth, 2014). In fact, it seems that the boundary conditions set by financial and social missions may provide a stronger explanation for the tensions endured by social enterprises than the business model innovations themselves (Tykkyläinen & Ritala, 2020). Findings from Bhattarai et al. (2019) suggest that radical innovations within social enterprises often do not address their social missions if they are not developed with a focus on beneficiaries. In order to create added social value for the market's disruptive innovation in their new products and services, the social enterprise must ensure that it continues to learn about and address the needs and demands of existing markets and target clientele to remain true to its social missions and objectives (Bhattarai et al., 2019; Christensen, Baumann, Ruggles, & Sadtler, 2006).

2.1.2. Service quality

Service quality is considered to be a critical dimension of competitiveness. Hung, Huang, and Chen (2003) point out that providing excellent service quality and high customer satisfaction is the important issue and challenge facing the contemporary service industry. Service quality has become a major competitive ability because of its strong impact on business performance, return on investment, satisfaction, customer loyalty and profit (Seth & Deshmukh, 2005; Baker, 2013). The definitions of service quality are all formulated from the customers' perspective, i.e., what customers perceive are important dimensions of quality (Lewis, 1989). In fact, the customer's perception of quality is an antecedent of his/her satisfaction level with the service (Falk, Hammerschmidt, & Schepers, 2010; Bezerra & Gomes, 2015). As the result of a cognitive process, the perceived service quality is not only subjective, but also context dependent and will likely vary according to several factors (Wilson, Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2012).

Now that social enterprises have become increasingly aware of their targeted customers' needs and wants, they can devise better approaches in serving them (Bhattarai et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2015). Tsai et al. (2020) find that subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and attitude have a significantly positive impact on the willingness to purchase social enterprise products. Craig et al. (2016) examine the effectiveness of mission statements for the top 100 and bottom 100 companies in the Fortune 500 list for the year 2014. They find that while products/services and customers were the most prevalent mission statement components, excellence was the most common transparency variable. With the aim of developing a continuous process of service quality improvement, the skills of all employees should be enhanced through appropriate training courses, as the friendliness of staff is one of the crucial factors (Chiappa, Martin, & Roman, 2016). In referring of the results obtained by Bayrak (2020), these authors also point out that the content of mission statements of various higher educational institutions may provide an opportunity for their stakeholders to engage in self-examination in terms of their services to their students and discipline. Besides, there is also evidence to suggest that emphasizing a strong ideological mission may provide relatively high-quality services under certain conditions (Law & Breznik, 2018). This is similar to Lin et al. (2020)'s contention that one of the major functions of a social mission is to convey the messages or promises of a social enterprise to its stakeholders and thereby improve the social enterprise's product competitiveness.

Choi and Winterich (2013) introduce the concept of moral identity and determine that people possessing a moral identity were easily converted into brand supporters and consumers. Based on this discussion, a perceived contribution occurs when an individual's moral identity is triggered, at which point he or she feels compelled to help others out of concern and thus becomes more likely to purchase social enterprise products to contribute to social welfare (Tsai et al., 2020). In studies on social welfare-related product purchase behavior, Ellen,

Webb, and Mohr (2006) find that when ethical self-identity is sufficiently high to engender stronger ethical intentions, consumers have higher consumption intentions to engage in social welfare. Accordingly, Berbegal-Mirabent, Alegre, and Guerrero (2019) suggest using short and concise mission statements that clearly articulate who the customers are, what products/services are offered, and what the geographical domain is. A mission statement has also been found to be an essential and crucial management tool for a firm to determine its goals, direction and rationale for existence through the implementation of strategic plans (Lin et al., 2020; Wang & Lin, 2011). Leuthesser and Kohli (1997) argue that a mission statement provides a significant channel for communicating essential values and norms to target groups such as consumers and employees. It also refers to both internal and external actions (Braun et al., 2012; Goldsby et al., 2018). This is because it helps create a sense of belonging, and inspires congruity between the contributions of employees and the values of the firm (Lin, 2012). It is thus reasonable to assume that a firm's high level of service quality has the support of employees and that the enterprise keeps its social mission and services and products together.

2.1.3. Brand image

Branding is a "process of representation: particular practices of production, consumption, and distribution of the brand between organizational agents and ultimately consumers" (Vásquez, Sergi, & Corde-lier, 2013). In a frequently cited definition by Keller (1993) brand image is described as "perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in memory". According to Hewer, Brownlie, and Kerrigan (2013), a strong brand is crucial as it could express the consumers' habits, thereby implying that an organization has a good understanding about its consumers. In turn the brand becomes a tool to attract recognition and status through the strategic management of identity. A firm's corporate image is developed by the company's logo, name, mission statement, vision statement, organizational culture, range of products/services, advertisements, and the appearance of the corporate headquarters building. A strong brand identity also means that consumers distinguish it from the similar service providers or product manufacturers. This view is supported by Lin, Lin, and Ryan (2014), who find that purchase intentions in the franchise markets are significantly influenced by brand awareness. For this reason, it can be seen that many businesses are trying their best to develop and maintain their own brand, such as offering consistent service quality, an established corporate identity system, an improved organizational image, and the maintenance of relationships with customers; all to enhance brand value (Wang, 2014).

Brand image is understood in the consumers' minds through favorability, strength, and the uniqueness of brand associations (Mitra & Jenamani, 2020). In short, if the brand is about achieving recognition, then brand equity is about the market value that the brand adds to a product (Chen & Chang, 2008) through its brand name, image and awareness generation (Jara & Cliquet, 2012). Because service quality and ideal self-congruence are antecedents of consumer satisfaction, Ekinci, Dawes, and Massey (2008) suggest that they are a key determinant of the intention to return. Consequently Nam et al. (2011) use physical quality, staff behavior, ideal self-congruence, brand identification and lifestyle-congruence to refine a concept of symbolic consumption within the services industry and as measures of customer-based brand equity. However, a brand perceived price can improve the effect of store service quality on the attitude toward store brands, while the overall service quality can function as a catalyst to improve attitudes toward store brands (Diallo & Seck, 2018). On the other hand, Pearce and David (1987) establish that mission statements can be classified into eight groups based on their content and an "explanation of the firm's desired public image" as the last type of content. In a nutshell, the company's philosophy, self-concept, and public image are more often exhibited by high-performing firms (Bart, Bontis, & Taggar, 2001). In a study on corporate social responsibility and brand consumption, Singh

(2016) finds that ethical self-identity factors influence consumer attitudes and intentions. Besides, Lin and Ryan (2016) find evidence of a positive relationship between an airline's mission statement and passenger perceptions of brand trust and brand equity. Likewise, practitioners should ensure the satisfaction of relevant stakeholders with the mission's development and implementation process, while seeking to improve their memory of and increase their understanding of and commitment to the mission statement. Therefore, it can be assumed that the more that customers are in agreement with the mission statement, the more positive are their perceptions of the brand (Lin et al., 2020). Specifically, we expect that the higher the level of consumer perceived social mission and brand image, the greater the consumer's consumption intention towards social enterprise products and services (Tsai et al., 2020).

2.2. Research hypotheses

This study is based on previous studies that assume that a customer's awareness of a social enterprise's social mission will subsequently in part determine the customer's trust in the enterprise, and thus the social mission has the potential to enhance the service quality and brand image of a social enterprise on the part of the customers' perception. The research design therefore considers a situation where customers are made aware of the social enterprise's social mission by providing respondents with the social mission of the case study.

While Craig et al. (2016) find that product/service and customers are the most prevalent components of the mission statement, Bayrak (2020) also argues that the content of mission statements may enable stakeholders to engage in self-examination in terms of the services provided to their clients. Subsequent research has found that mission statements can clearly illustrate the kinds of products and services that are offered (Berbegal-Mirabent et al., 2019). Tsai et al. (2020) suggest that entrepreneurs communicate the social mission with their consumers to enable them to better understand how goodwill can be generated through social enterprise product and service purchases and the benefits that such purchases accrue for disadvantaged groups. Therefore, our first hypothesis is proposed as follows:

- H1: The social mission has a positive influence on service quality.

Berbegal-Mirabent et al. (2019) conclude that short and concise mission statements clearly articulate who the customers are, what products/services are offered, and what the geographical domain is. Meanwhile, consumers agree that purchasing social enterprise products can achieve social objectives that yield benefits, similar to the feeling of satisfaction generated by helping disadvantaged people (Tsai et al., 2020). In recent times, Lin et al. (2020) have concluded that the social enterprise can build a brand with strong product competitiveness under a social mission that matches the requirements of the customers. Therefore, our second hypothesis is as follows:

- H2: The social mission has a positive influence on brand image.

According to Bao, Bao, and Sheng (2011), higher perceived quality leaves consumers more prone to purchasing store brands. Besides, Beneke and Carter (2015) find evidence of a positive impact of perceived quality on perceived product value for a store brand. Given that store brands are positioned on the price/quality ratio in general (Diallo, Burt, & Sparks, 2015), Diallo and Seck (2018) also state that overall service quality can function as a catalyst to improve attitudes toward store brands. Similarly, Tsai et al. (2020) suggest that social enterprises can communicate their service concepts and philosophies to their customers to positively influence consumer intentions. Therefore, our third hypothesis is as follows:

- H3: The service quality has a positive influence on brand image.

3. Methods

3.1. Survey setup and questionnaire design

This study refers to the work of Porter and Kramer (2011) to create five questions focusing on the responsibility of public service, the implementation of a social mission, the provision of services for socially vulnerable groups and the promotion of important social topics, including the creation of socially positive benefits and products with a good contribution to society, in order to measure the customers' understanding of the social mission of a social enterprise. In addition, a further 7 questions related to the functional image, affective image and reputation as referred to in Martínez, Montaner, and Pina (2009) and Pina, Riley, and Lomax (2013) are included. Finally, 11 questions adapted from Giacomo, Juan, and Concepcion (2016) are used to measure the service quality. The questions were modified by Come True Coffee based on the characteristics of the social enterprise being considered. The questionnaires regarding the social mission, service quality, and brand image used a five-point scale, with 1 equaling 'strongly disagree' and 5 'strongly agree'. The factor structure of the measurement model was verified using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). A structural equation model (SEM) was employed as the main method in the data analysis.

A self-administered questionnaire was used as an instrument to collect data from customers of Come True coffee in Taichung city in February 2018. All respondents were experiencing their orders within the coffee shops and were asked to read the content of Come True Coffee's social mission, and then to answer the questions in the questionnaires that were categorized into the following sections: Part I: Social Mission; Part II: Service Quality; Part III: Brand Image and Part IV: the respondent's demographic profile. A total of 316 questionnaires were distributed which, after removing those with incomplete answers, yielded a response rate of 95.75%.

3.2. Case of come true coffee

Come True Coffee was established in May 2015 in the city of Taichung in Central Taiwan and has operated through a social enterprise model that applies commercial strategies to maximize improvements in human and environmental well-being and create a new form of charity. Although the UK rules that donating 30% of its profits can enable a firm to be regarded as a social enterprise, Come True Coffee chose to give back 50% of its profit to support World Vision Taiwan's Clean Water Projects in Africa. Come True Coffee hopes that the local residents in Africa can gain access to clean water and be motivated to live better lives. As far as we know, Ethiopia is famous for the quality of its coffee beans, and is the home of the coffee industry. Come True Coffee will keep purchasing coffee beans directly from Africa's farmers to offer them better trading conditions: a win-win-win situation for farmers, entrepreneurs and consumers. Furthermore, Come True Coffee was certified as a B Corporation in July 2017 and as the 20th B Corp in Taiwan (as well as the 1st coffee company in Taiwan). It donated funds through World Vision Taiwan for the first well in the Republic of Zambia's Yunge Village in 2017. By the end of 2019, a sixth well had been built in the Republic of Mozambique's Madiga C village. Besides, Come True Coffee adheres to three goals: it is financially independent, it can feed back to the community; and it can become a role model for social enterprises in Taiwan. As of September 2020, Come True Coffee had twelve physical stores in Taiwan.

3.3. Sample characteristics

As shown in Table 1, the majority of respondents were female (68.4%), there being relatively fewer males (31.6%). Among the different age groups, those respondents who were 21–30 years old formed the largest group with 48.1%. By contrast, those who were over

Table 1
Demographic profiles of respondents.

Variables	Category	Number	Percent
Gender	Male	100	31.6%
	Female	216	68.4%
Age	≤ 20	64	20.3%
	21–30	152	48.1%
	31–40	63	19.9%
	41–50	28	8.9%
	≥ 51	9	2.8%
Occupation	Private sector staff	140	44.3%
	Public sector staff	45	14.2%
	Other (e.g., retiree, housewife)	27	8.5%
	Students	104	32.9%
Monthly Income (USD)	≤ 700	107	33.9%
	701–1,300	100	31.6%
	1,301–2,000	69	21.8%
	2,001–2,700	18	5.7%
	≥ 2,701	22	7.0%
Education	High school or lower	39	12.3%
	Bachelor's	221	69.9%
	Master's degree or above	56	17.7%
	Frequency of purchases in this social enterprise	First time	256
	2–4 times	52	16.5%
	≥ 5 times	8	2.5%

51 years old made up the smallest group with only 2.8%. As regards occupation, 44.3% of the respondents were employed in the private sector and 32.9% were students. Around 33.9% of the respondents reported monthly incomes of under US\$700, followed by 31.6% and 21.8% who reported incomes of between US\$701 and US\$1,300, and between US\$1,301 and US\$2,000, respectively. An obvious similarity can be seen in terms of the respondents' education, with 69.9% of the respondents having a bachelor's degree, followed by 17.7% with a master's degree or above. Lastly, 81% of the respondents had consumed food and drink in this social enterprise for the first time, and 16.5% of respondents had the experience of having made between two and four purchases.

4. Data analysis and results

All of the Cronbach's α values exceeded 0.7, which represents a conventional measure of reliability. The highest Cronbach's α values referred to the scales measuring the social mission (0.90) and brand image (0.90), and were followed by that related to service quality (0.88).

The descriptive data are shown in Table 2. All items for the social mission successfully obtained a high mean value of over 3.97. The item ranked number 1 in terms of the social mission, which was "I think this social enterprise can create a socially positive benefit (SM4)", had a mean of 4.11. As for the construct for the brand image, two items for the functional factor, three items for the affective factor and two items for the reputation factor were over 3.66. Next, all items for the service quality gained a high mean value of over 3.68. Most respondents agreed with the statement "Friendliness of staff (SQ9)," which had the highest mean value of 4.29 for the service quality construct. Besides, respondents were less likely to agree with "Value/price (SQ5)", where the mean value was 3.68. Finally, the item "The brand is nice (BI3)" achieved the highest mean value with 4.10, followed by "The products have a high quality (BI1)" and "It is a brand that does not disappoint its customers (BI5)" with mean values of 4.04 and 4.01, respectively. On the other hand, respondents were less likely to agree with the statement "The brand is very consolidated in the market (BI7)", where the mean value was 3.66.

Koufteros (1999) pointed out that CFA is used to estimate one or more hypothesized models of factor structure, each of which proposes a set of latent variables to account for covariance among a set of observed variables. The model adequacy was assessed by the fit indices suggested

Table 2
Means and standard deviations of the variables.

Dimensions	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	
Social Mission	This social enterprise draws attention to the responsibility to engage in public service (SM1)	4.08	0.69	
	This social enterprise practices its social mission (SM2)	3.97	0.69	
	This social enterprise always provides services for socially vulnerable groups and promotes important social topics (SM3)	4.00	0.72	
	This social enterprise can create socially positive benefit (SM4)	4.11	0.67	
	The products of this social enterprise have a good contribution to society (SM5)	4.03	0.69	
Service Quality	Price acceptability (SQ1)	3.77	0.70	
	High quality of products offered (SQ2)	4.05	0.65	
	Originality of the food (SQ3)	4.04	0.76	
	Variety of food (SQ4)	3.94	0.76	
	Value/price (SQ5)	3.68	0.77	
	Location and proximity (SQ6)	4.19	0.61	
	Appearance (SQ7)	4.22	0.66	
	Internal atmosphere (SQ8)	4.17	0.69	
	Friendliness of staff (SQ9)	4.29	0.69	
	Speed of service (SQ10)	4.12	0.73	
	Cleanliness and comfort of the premises (SQ11)	4.21	0.65	
Brand Image	Functional (BFI)	The products have a high quality (BI1)	4.04	0.62
		The products have better characteristics than competitors (BI2)	3.94	0.66
	Affective (AFI)	The brand is nice (BI3)	4.10	0.63
		The brand has a personality that distinguishes it from competitors (BI4)	3.91	0.74
		It is a brand that does not disappoint its customers (BI5)	4.01	0.66
	Reputation (RBI)	It is one of the best brands in the sector (BI6)	3.67	0.80
		The brand is very consolidated in the market (BI7)	3.66	0.78

by Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, and Tatham (2009). The convergent validity of the CFA results should be supported by item reliability, construct reliability, and average variance extracted. Items should exceed the critical ratio at the 0.05 level of significance. Thus, all items are significantly related to their specified latent variables if these conditions are met. In addition, construct reliability estimates ranging from 0.87 to 0.90 are required to exceed the critical value of 0.6 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). These were present and suggest that a high internal reliability for the data exists. The average variance extracted indicates what percentage of the variance of the construct is explained by an individual item. The average extracted variances of all constructs ranged between 0.38 and 0.72, with the majority above the suggested value of 0.5 (Koufteros, 1999). The data are shown in Table 3.

A structural equation model (SEM) was then used to validate the causal relationships among variables in the research model. In terms of the model, it was necessary to correct and examine the suitability of the model first by adding the correlation path, and the next step was to assess the overall model by means of goodness-of-fit measures. In terms of the goodness-of-fit measures, the indexes were divided into χ^2/df , GFI, AGFI, CFI, RMR, NFI, and RMSEA. The results showed that all goodness-of-fit measures were within acceptable levels, and even though the AGFI and RMSEA values were not normal values, they could be accepted (Hair et al., 2009). After the overall model was accepted, the final correct model optimal solution value and the modulus estimates were listed as shown in Table 4.

Since the goodness-of-fit measures are within the range of recommended levels, the model should be acceptable. Structural equation analysis was also performed after satisfying the requirements of the

Table 3
Parameter estimates, standard errors, critical ratios, R², and convergent validity.

Latent variable	Item	Standardized factor loading	Standard error	Critical ratio	R ²	Construct reliability	Average variance extracted
Social Mission	SM1	0.83	–		0.68	0.90	0.64
	SM2	0.82	0.06	16.95	0.67		
	SM3	0.78	0.06	15.77	0.62		
	SM4	0.79	0.06	15.56	0.62		
	SM5	0.78	0.06	15.21	0.61		
Service Quality	SQ01	0.58	0.12	8.46	0.33	0.87	0.38
	SQ02	0.78	0.12	10.59	0.61		
	SQ03	0.73	0.14	10.12	0.53		
	SQ04	0.65	0.14	9.41	0.42		
	SQ05	0.73	0.15	10.07	0.53		
	SQ06	0.54	0.10	8.25	0.29		
	SQ07	0.50	0.09	8.67	0.25		
	SQ08	0.53	0.09	10.06	0.28		
	SQ09	0.54	0.09	10.08	0.29		
	SQ10	0.50	0.10	9.29	0.25		
	SQ11	0.61	–	–	0.38		
Brand Image	FBI	0.84	–		0.70	0.88	0.72
	ABI	0.90	0.05	18.87	0.81		
	RBI	0.80	0.07	16.24	0.63		

Table 4
Final model modulus estimates.

Intrinsic grade of fit	Modulus estimates	Standardized coefficient	Standard	C. R.	P value
Social Mission → Service Quality	0.37	0.54	0.05	7.74	0.00***
Social Mission → Brand Image	0.29	0.32	0.06	5.35	0.00***
Service Quality → Brand Image	0.75	0.55	0.10	7.36	0.00***
Overall grade of fit	Value	Range	Result		
P value	0.00	<0.05	Suitable		
χ ² /df	2.18	<3	Suitable		
GFI	0.90	>0.9	Suitable		
AGFI	0.87	>0.9	Can accept		
CFI	0.95	>0.9	Suitable		
RMR	0.02	<0.05	Suitable		
RMSEA	0.06	<0.05 to 0.08	Can accept		
NFI	0.91	>0.9	Suitable		

p < 0.01***; p < 0.01**, p < 0.05*.

measurement model. The latent exogenous variable in this study is social mission (ξ1) and the latent endogenous variables are brand image (η1) and service quality (η2). Fig. 1 shows the standardized path coefficients and the overall fit indexes. Most of the hypotheses were validated.

This study attempted to determine whether a direct relationship exists between social mission, service quality and brand image in social enterprises. The results show that the path coefficient of “This social enterprise draws attention to the responsibility to engage in public service (SM1)” item is strongly correlated with social mission, which is followed by “This social enterprise practices its social mission (SM2)”. Besides, five path coefficients of social mission are over 0.78. Then the top three strongest correlation items of service quality are “High quality of products offered (SQ2)”, “Originality of the food (SQ3)” and “Value/price (SQ5)”. Moreover, all path coefficients of the three brand image factors are over 0.80. The affective brand image factor is strongly correlated with brand image. In addition, the social mission path coefficient of service quality is 0.54 (p < 0.001). To sum up, the social mission has a remarkable influence on service quality, and so Hypothesis 1 is supported. Besides, the social mission path coefficient for brand

image is 0.32 (p < 0.001). The social mission also impacts brand image. Thus, Hypothesis 2 is supported. Finally, the service quality path coefficient of brand image is 0.55 (p < 0.001). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is supported.

In this study it was found that customers ate and drank in this social enterprise because of its social mission and this was also reflected in their perception of the service quality and brand image portrayed by the enterprise. Therefore, the social mission of a social enterprise has an important effect on the enterprise’s service quality and brand image. A social mission not only lets customers understand the organization’s goals, duties and responsibilities, but it also can build and improve its service and image on the part of the internal and external stakeholders. Besides, one important piece of information is displayed in Table 5. The same result is obtained as before where service quality is a key intervening variable. Thus there is an effective rise in the total effect between social mission and the brand image through the indirect effect of service quality.

5. Conclusion and discussion

This study has attempted to shed light on a social enterprise in Taiwan and the relationships around social mission, service quality and brand image. The study contributes to filling the research gap in the literature on social enterprises regarding the perceptions held by external stakeholders (customers). The findings were based on 316 valid questionnaires that were collected from Come True Coffee in Taichung city, Taiwan. Social enterprise issues have contributed to a growing body of literature in recent years and, although the relationship between mission statements and the performance or business models has been examined in numerous studies (e.g., Coombes et al., 2011; Lin & Ryan, 2016; Mersland et al., 2019; Tykkyläinen & Ritala, 2020), this study represents a first attempt to integrate the contents of social mission to study the effects of perceptions of service quality and brand image on the part of customers. The results presented in the previous sections provide us with at least three important insights. First, this study has shown that service quality as it has been measured in previous research is correlated with a number of both practically and theoretically interesting variables. It was found to be an important intervening variable that may be a useful predictor for many practically relevant variables between the mission statement and final output. Second, the results of the structural equation model have indicated that social mission has had a significant effect on service quality and brand image especially in a social enterprise. Consistent with Lin et al. (2020) and Tsai et al. (2020), the mission statement (social mission) was found to consist of a purpose, strategy, behavior and values. The social mission was also found to be a good tool

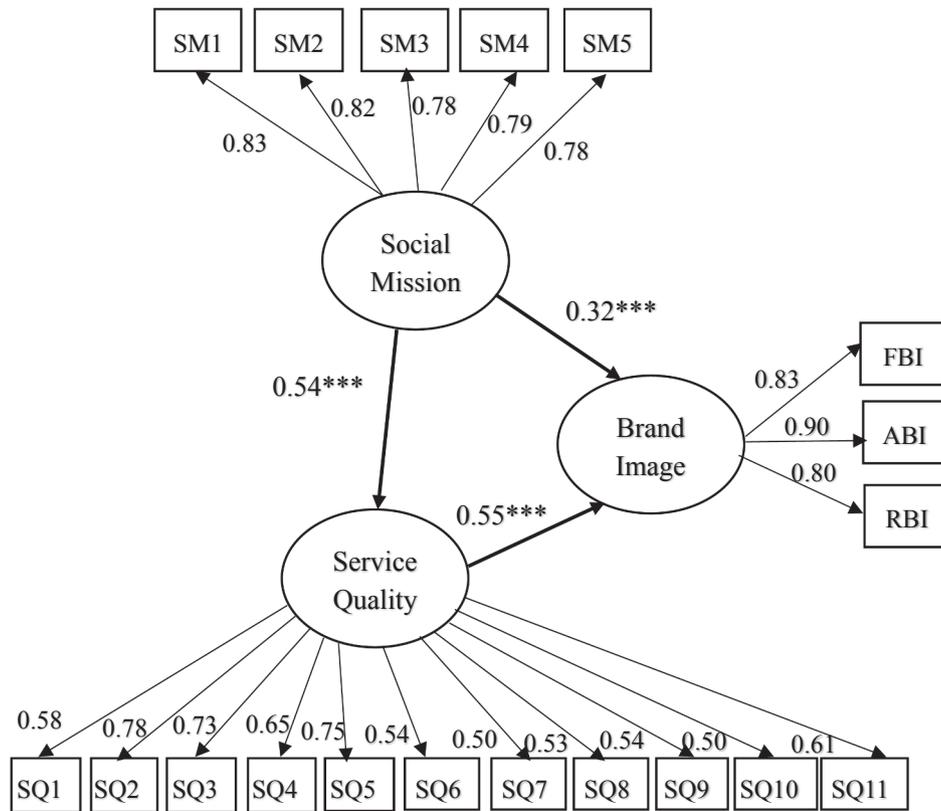


Fig. 1. SEM model paths.

Table 5
Results of the path analysis for three dimensions.

Dependent Variable		Independent Variable: Endogenous Variable	
		Service quality	Brand image
Exogenous Variable			
Social mission	Direct effect	0.54	0.32
	Indirect effect	-	0.30
	Total effect	0.54	0.62
Service quality	Direct effect	-	0.55
	Indirect effect	-	-
	Total effect	-	0.55

for generating commitment to customers and staff when improving service quality and building brand image to reflect higher-level values. In addition, as mentioned earlier, service quality has served as an important intervening variable between the social mission and brand image.

Our findings corroborate some of the existing understanding in commercial firms, and also reveal that there are specific differences between social enterprises and commercial firms that should be taken into account. While the findings replicate previous research, this study has also provided reasons for the belief that a positive relationship exists between an enterprise’s mission and the organization’s image and performance (Lin, 2012; Lin & Ryan, 2016; Lin et al., 2020; Tsai et al., 2020). Therefore, the results of this study indicate that the communication of a social enterprise’s social mission to its customers can directly enhance positive assessments of perceptions of service quality and brand image. Meanwhile, a feeling and experience of service quality will enhance the perceptions of brand image on the part of customers toward the social enterprise. As mentioned earlier, by definition a social mission includes information of interest to stakeholders, and the dissemination of that information can be utilized in the formation of a business strategy

that seeks to create positive perceptions of an organization. The social mission not only places restraint on the objective of profit maximization and safeguards the good or service of the social enterprises, but it also pushes the social enterprises to develop an explicit brand image and improve their service quality.

This study has proposed and empirically tested a new theoretical model of a social mission and brand image mediated by service quality, which can serve as a platform for future research. In terms of its practical implications, this study claims that the information and value philosophy conveyed by the social mission can be of value to customers. In addition, just as in the case of businesses in industry, social enterprises should carefully employ customers with positive connections to the products and their service philosophies in the service space to positively influence consumer experience and repurchase intentions.

The findings of this study are consistent with studies by Klein, Schneider, and Spieth (2020) and Tsai et al. (2020), which found that customers buy products or services because of the social values that the enterprise believes in and because they voluntarily unfold the implementation of those values. In turn this points to a need for the content of the social mission to be frequently reviewed by the social enterprise’s management to ensure that the information conveyed matches the requirements of the customers. Besides, by identifying key service attributes which require improvement, marketing managers can conduct a simple importance-performance analysis (Balmer, Lin, Chen, & He, 2020). Furthermore, training staff to deliver “service” with a social mission and brand image can enhance customers’ perceptions and experiences and also lead them to perceive the service process as being more hedonic and identifiable. For instance, managers and staff can focus their efforts on space, situational and service process design (e.g., passively providing supporting photos, figures, music and videos and actively explaining the relationship between products and services and the enterprise’s social mission) in order to enhance customers’ feelings and understand and encourage the customers’ future purchasing behavior. Based on our discussion above, one of the major functions of a

social mission is to convey important messages or promises of a social enterprise about its products and services to stakeholders.

A key limitation of this study is that while much of the conceptualization is based on customer perceptions as derived from the literature review, the survey was not based on actual experience but on customer perceptions and images. Future research could thus focus on developing tests to draw comparisons between commercial firms and social enterprises, or examine the consumers' social mission identification at the beginning and end of their visit or consumption for a specific social enterprise. Another limitation is that this research explores customers' brand image based on a social mission and the service quality of a social enterprise. It is suggested that in future researchers could explore other aspects of the social mission and brand, such as brand loyalty, brand experience, and brand relationship, as the resulting conclusions might better reflect consumer attitudes and behavior. Nonetheless, it is suggested that the results are of interest to social enterprises, and for the wider research community the study provides a new direction of research that more clearly confirms the existence of a social mission based on customers' perceptions and experiences with regard to service quality and brand image as against the previous emphasis on performance and business models. Without a doubt, social enterprise managers should understand and address the needs and demands of their existing market if they wish to achieve and improve their economic and social performance at the same time.

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