

Social Enterprise Performance in South Africa: The Role of Strategic Planning and Networking Capability

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the factors of social enterprise performance, accounting for the role of strategic planning and networking capability. The data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire of 147 respondents serving as owners/managers of social enterprises. Structural equation model (SEM) was used for statistical analysis. The partial least square (SmartPLS) technique was utilised to ascertain the effect of (a) *strategic planning on social enterprise performance*; (b) *networking capability and social enterprise performance*; and (c) *the mediating effect of networking capability on the relationship between strategic planning and social enterprise performance*. The findings reveal the existence of relationships between (a) strategic planning and social enterprise performance; (b) networking capability with social enterprise performance; and c) strategic planning with social enterprise performance. Finally, and concerning mediation, networking capability had a fairly weak positive and significant mediating effect on the relationship between strategic planning and social enterprise performance. This research provides new insights into the management for performance of social enterprises, especially in a developing country context. Emphasis is placed on paying attention to the development of strategic planning and networking capabilities. Managers within social enterprises can potentially benefit from such findings assisting their managerial practice.

KEYWORDS

Strategic planning; social enterprise performance; network capability; social enterprises; mediation effect

Introduction

Social enterprises are acknowledged for their important social and economic development role (Shir, Nikolaev, and Wincent 2019). In communities where social challenges prevail, social enterprises are praised for occupying a positive social utility role (Sharir and Lerner 2006). In emerging markets like South Africa, the work of social enterprises is also praised as crucial in nation-building (Torres and Augusto 2020). Such work by social enterprises is believed to lead to social change (Dacin, Dacin, and Matear 2010). In countries like South

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Africa there is need to give attention to the work of social actors that assist the government in solving prevailing socio-economic challenges (Vickers and Lyon 2014; Wang, Alon, and Kimble 2015). Given such a focus, calls exist for continued inquiry into enhancing how social enterprises not only perform but also operate (Tucker and Croom 2021). The growth and popularity of social enterprises have also necessitated focus into how they are run in achieving their goals (Powell, Gillett, and Doherty 2019; Mahto, Belousova, and Ahluwalia 2020). Stemming from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, a need also exists to understand and proffer solutions to the post-pandemic operation and performance of social enterprises (Bacq and Lumpkin 2021; Huda and Maliha 2021).

From the literature, continued calls are being made into understanding the management processes of social enterprises. For instance, a need exists to make a link between the role of social enterprises and the theme of sustainable development (Johnson and Schaltegger 2020). Linked to this, others call for scholars to ascertain the role dynamic capabilities can play in enhancing the management and performance of social enterprises (Hackett 2010; Zahra et al. 2009). In essence, attention needs to be centred in understanding how social enterprises create networks for value in achieving their social and economic utility goals (Leung et al. 2019). The necessity to link dynamic capabilities en route to such social and economic utility goals becomes key (Elia, Margherita, and Passiante 2020). Such an inquiry could be welcomed as mostly technological capabilities have been positioned as crucial for their value-creating ability in organisations (Saura, Palacios-Marqués, and Ribeiro-Soriano 2023). A need exists to be expansive, accounting for the role of other firm-specific capabilities.

Capabilities are defined as activities related to the organisation, management, coordination or governance of an organisation (Dosi and Teece 1998). Two general types of capabilities are believed to exist (Vesalainen and Hakala 2014). First, those capabilities related to resources and those related to activities within an organisation. With resource capabilities, focus is on the human capital component and concerns the knowledge and skills component (Leonard-Barton 1992).

Concerning capabilities related to resource utilisation, focus is given to aspects related to the role of managerial systems, organisational processes, and organisational capital (Leonard-Barton 1992; Kogut and Zander 1992; Hamel and Prahalad 1994; Tyler 2001). The argument here is that through the emphasis of dynamic capabilities in social enterprises this can potentially improve their performance (Hoogendoorn 2016). Further, calls exist to be expansive in understanding the role of socio-cultural and economic factors in enhancing social enterprise operation and management (Mendez-Picazo, Galindo-Martin, and Castano-Martinez 2021). In essence, the interaction between the social enterprise and contextual factors is crucial to its management and performance (Defourny and Nyssens 2010; Kerlin 2013). This study gives focus to the internal factors influencing social enterprise performance. These include the strategic planning and networking capabilities.

Internal factors such as strategic planning and network capabilities are emphasised here and argued as crucial especially in contemporary organisations (Cennamo et al. 2020; Kretschmer et al. 2022). Enhancing such internal factors can assist potentially social enterprises management and operation with emerging nations where such capabilities are argued as crucial (Kedmenec and Strašek 2017; Urban and Gaffurini 2017; Urban 2019). Strategic planning and networking capabilities form an important

set of micro foundations that can lead to superior performance (Wilden et al. 2018; Felin, Foss, and Ployhart 2015; Sinthupundaja, Kohda, and Chiadamrong 2020). The researchers tested a model that narrows focus into the role of strategic planning and networking capability as factors happening within the social enterprise. Further, the researchers sought to ascertain how factors such as strategic planning and networking capability can lead to driving social enterprise performance. The model that was tested becomes a first, specifically within an emerging markets context. Such a context and its significance receive attention next.

The South African Context

South Africa currently faces several social challenges. Chief of these are the growing inequality and poverty levels (Manyaka-Boshielo 2017). These challenges subsequently are attributed to the structural composition of the South African society. Further, the lack of opportunity and growing unemployment also becomes a feature of such an unequal society (Harry and Chinyamurindi 2022). The presence of the social challenges noted in South Africa highlights the important role that social enterprises can play (Littlewood and Holt 2018). Such a need for social enterprises is also acknowledged in other African countries (Oduro, Hashem, and Alsharif 2022). The focus of the social enterprises should be aimed at improving the management and planning capabilities (Ngatse-Ipangui and Dassah 2019). A situation not aided by South Africa's lack of legal recognition and policy framework, especially concerning social purpose-driven businesses (Sheik, van Rooyen, and Mazzei 2023). Further, in South Africa, social enterprises are noted to be mostly donor reliant for their funding (Maboya and McKay 2019). This affects their overall sustainability and rising need to develop unique funding models and operational models (Mathibe, Chinyamurindi, and Hove-Sibanda 2023). This study seeks to answer such calls and in turn advancing understanding around the social entrepreneurship research stream albeit the noted challenges of a social and economic nature.

In South Africa, scholars have also argued for the need to pay attention to the prioritisation of social enterprise research (Mamabolo and Myres 2020). Such research in South Africa should not just be in diagnosing the problems faced by social entrepreneurs but also seeking for ways in making such ventures run better (Mathibe, Chinyamurindi, and Hove-Sibanda 2023). An issue warranting attention within the South African context is the role that dynamic capabilities play for social enterprise performance (Urban and Gaffurini 2017). The study magnifies the role of such capabilities being network and planning capabilities argued as crucial to the performance of social enterprises (Halberstadt and Spiegler 2018). This potentially can answer calls in South Africa for research that advances understanding the work of social enterprises (Mamabolo and Myres 2020; Mathibe, Chinyamurindi, and Hove-Sibanda 2023).

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Strategic Planning and Social Enterprise Performance

Through strategic planning, social enterprises potentially can leverage their performance in fulfilling their social utility goal (Islam 2020). In essence, by using the resource-based

view of the firm (Wernerfelt 1984; Dosi and Teece 1998), through strategic planning firms potentially can direct resources for superior performance (Doyle 2019). This potentially can lead to the attainment of a competitive advantage (Gomera, Chinyamurindi, and Mishi 2018; Mathibe, Chinyamurindi, and Hove-Sibanda 2023). This places importance on using strategic planning as a tool to potentially deal with the uncertainty that accompanies complex environments en route to the attainment of goals (Rindova and Courtney 2020). Others note the alignment of activities such as strategic planning within a social enterprise to lead to social value creation in a social enterprise (Dwivedi and Weerawardena 2018). The improvement of such dynamic capabilities as strategic planning may potentially also result in superior performance and sustainability (Gali et al. 2020).

Through strategic planning, social enterprises can potentially also achieve the combination of social and economic goals (Davies and Doherty 2019; Tykkyläinen and Ritala 2021). The attainment of such goals will potentially result in solving societal problems (Porter and Kramer 2011). This becomes important in countries like South Africa noted for their social challenges (Mathibe, Chinyamurindi, and Hove-Sibanda 2023). The need here could be to place emphasis in the improvement of the strategic planning capability within the enterprise (Mkhonza and Sifolo 2022). An activity here could be to improve the planning capabilities in the firm. Further, this can include strengthening the capacity of managers and strategists concerning planning regimes. An awareness and monitoring of the environment can possibly position for entrepreneurial success (Tykkyläinen and Ritala 2021). Based on the presented literature, it can be expected that:

H1: Strategic planning is positively related to social enterprise performance.

Networking Capability and Social Enterprise Performance

Networking capability within organisations refers to a firm's ability to not only build but also exploit relationships within its environment (Vesalainen and Hakala 2014). Relationships can also extend to partnerships that exist with other organisations (Lambe, Spekman, and Hunt 2002). Within social enterprises, such networks have been shown to be critical in achieving intended outcomes (Murthy, Roll, and Colin-Jones 2021). In essence, networking capabilities exist as activities through which the social enterprise exploits and explores its activities in view of the internal and external environment (Faroque et al. 2021). Consideration of the environment is an important issue for social enterprises (Griffin-EL 2021) as a means of using its networks to have a resource pool for its use (Mathibe, Chinyamurindi, and Hove-Sibanda 2023).

Networking capabilities can potentially work well, given location specific advantages. The argument here is centred on leveraging the location specific advantages through existing networks and the activities here (Langley et al. 2020). The management of relationships through networking capabilities also assists in how activities are conducted within the firm (Mathibe, Chinyamurindi, and Hove-Sibanda 2023). This becomes crucial as social networks and their management have been shown to positively influence the work of female social entrepreneurs in South Africa (Halberstadt and Spiegler 2018).

Potentially, the networking capabilities can lead to quests for innovation (Pervez, Maritz, and de Waal 2013). Quests for such network capabilities have been attributed to superior performance in social enterprises operating in Korea (Kim and Shin 2022). In advancing networking capabilities, the firm has the potential to also have and occupy a social value (Nason, Bacq, and Gras 2018). Others have found the improvement of the networking capabilities to lead to better customer value and satisfaction (Vesalainen and Hakala 2014). The role of leaders in driving networking capabilities has the potential to enhance this activity (Dees 2009) and subsequently influence capabilities for superior performance even in social enterprises (Oduro, Hashem, and Alsharif 2022). Based on the presented literature, it can be expected that:

H2: Network capability is positively related to social enterprise performance.

Networking Capability as a Mediator between Strategic Planning and Social Enterprise Performance

This study proposes the networking capability of the social enterprise to potentially act as a mediator between strategic planning and social enterprise performance. The thinking here is that the use of networks and tools such as strategic planning can assist to deal with complexity often faced within the environment (Dongqin, Can, and Guanglei 2022; Zhu, Zhang, and Feng 2022). This potentially can generate some currency for the social enterprise to build on its strengths en route to attaining a competitive advantage (Kraus et al. 2022; Dwivedi et al. 2020).

Further, given that networking capabilities consist of explorative and exploitative activities (Faroque et al. 2021), these can potentially be aligned with other internal activities such as strategic planning where decisions are made (Teasdale, Lyon, and Owen 2018). In essence, the presence of a management team and internal alignment can aid such activity (Vesalainen and Hakala 2014). This potentially can lead to the attainment of a competitive advantage (Mathibe, Chinyamurindi, and Hove-Sibanda 2023) and performance (Kim and Lim 2017).

Through their work, social enterprises may put in place organisational structures aimed at involving stakeholders as important networks (Feiler and Teece 2014). Such structures not only serve a social utility role (Zahra and Wright 2016) but can have economic ramifications (Harris and Helfat 2016). This emphasises the importance of networking capabilities in the formation and functioning of social enterprises (Akaegbu and Usoro 2018). It becomes key in such a context to then address capabilities as enablers for the realisation of such goals (Galera and Borzaga 2009). The thinking here is that strategic planning also becomes crucial in supporting networking capabilities (Day and Jean-Denis 2016). Such a view appears to also support the recognition that social entrepreneurship scholars attribute around the challenge of maintaining balance albeit a complex and often corrupt environment (Arend 2021).

The strategic planning process can assist in meeting the necessary goals for the social enterprise (Elbanna and Elsharnouby 2018). During periods of change, paying attention to strategic planning can also become crucial as part of internal responses needed by a social enterprise (Loukopoulos and Papadimitriou 2022). In essence, social enterprise decision-making capabilities coupled with networking activities have the

potential to create value (Tejada-Malaspina and Jan 2019). Despite this being acknowledged, it remains an issue needing further interrogation and critique in multiple contexts (Akaegbu and Usoro 2018). Further, the presence of dynamic capabilities in the social enterprise has the potential to assist decision-making capabilities and the performance of the social enterprise (Oduro, Hashem, and Alsharif 2022). Thus, networking capability exists as factor of concern not just for firm operation but also its performance (Cennamo et al. 2020; Martin, Chetty, and Bai 2022). Based on the presented literature, it can be expected that:

H3: Networking capability mediates the relationship between strategic planning and social enterprise performance.

The hypothesised relationships expressed by the presented hypotheses are illustrated in Figure 1.

Methodology

Sample and Procedure

Data collection was carried out through an online networking event organised by a local provincial economic development entity. The entity is based in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. During this three-day event, social enterprises operating in the province were invited to participate. The event aimed to build capacity among stakeholders in the face of socio-economic challenges in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. Table 1 contains the demographics of the social enterprises participating in the study.

A total of 250 social enterprise owners and managers from five districts of the province, (a) Buffalo City Metropolitan; (b) Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan; (c) Amathole District; (d) Chris Hani; and (e) Oliver Reginald Tambo, were invited to participate in online sessions spread over three days. The workshop sessions were divided into 60 participants per day, 180 in total by the end of the third day. The authors negotiated with the host local government agency to also distribute questionnaires related to the aims of the workshop. A total of 147 questionnaires were successfully completed by the 180 participants, which corresponds to a response rate of 92%. The remaining 8%

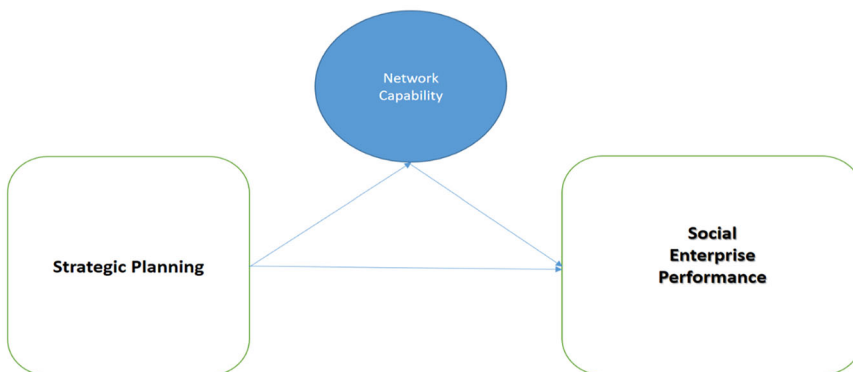


Figure 1. Conceptual model.

were rejected for analysis as these had data that was missing and therefore deemed unusable (See Table 1).

As indicated in Table 2, 62% (majority) of the sample comprised social enterprises that were owned or led by women. In addition, most owners/managers were aged between 41 and 50 (52%). Concerning educational qualifications, most of the owners/managers (48%) had a diploma/degree as the highest educational qualification. The majority (87%) of the social enterprises that took part in the study had been in existence for more than 12 years. Finally, in terms of their role, 14% of the respondents were owners and 86% were managers of the social enterprises.

To establish the possibility of a causal relationship between the variables examined, the study followed a descriptive survey design. Multiple regression with partial least squares (PLS) was used to calculate the proposed model. This was also done using a structural equation modelling (SEM) approach. Such an approach, including the techniques used, allows for the construction of research models through the determination of latent variables. These are variables that are not observed directly but are derived from other observed variables. It is generally accepted in the literature that such an approach and technique is useful when working with small samples, estimating complex models, and also making predictions and explanations (Hair et al. 2019).

Measure and Instruments

The researchers made use of a structured questionnaire. This required the respondents to select answers from a set of choices offered explicitly by the researchers as this simplifies data analysis (Taris et al. 2021). Questionnaires were distributed online, at the end of each day, through a three-day online workshop hosted by the Eastern Cape local government agency.

The questionnaire had four sections. The first section was the biographical section, which measures individual and organisational characteristics related to the social

Table 1. Scale details.

Scale	Example item	Source
Strategic Planning (19 items)	The organisation monitors and evaluates the execution of the planned strategies.	(Sandada 2015).
Network Capability (12 items)	In our organisation we can deal flexibly with our partners.	(Parida et al. 2017; Walter, Auer, and Ritter 2006).
Social Enterprise Performance (15 items)	In the past few years we have met our objectives in terms of beneficiaries served.	(Miles, Verreyne, and Luke 2014).

($n = 147$). Source: Survey results.

Table 2. Descriptive results of respondents.

Gender	n	Race	n	Educational level	n	Years of operation	n	Role	n
Male	56	Black	42	Matric	12	Less than 1 year	0	Owner	21
Female	91	Coloured	7	Certificate	36	1–5 years	6	Manager	126
		White	27	Diploma/Degree	70	6–11 years	13		
		Indian	71	Postgraduate	29	12–16 years	68		
						More than 16 years	60		

($n = 147$). Source: Survey results.

enterprise. The next three sections all measured the independent variable (strategic planning), the mediator (networking capability), and finally the dependent variable of social enterprise performance. A 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used. Strategic planning with a composite mean score of 3.92 was measured using 7 items adopted and adapted from Sandada (2015). The adapted strategic planning measures were centred on issues of strategic planning strategy implementation (SPSI), strategic planning evaluation and control (SPEC and SPTH). The mediator (networking ability) had a composite mean score of 4.00 and was measured using 12 items from the networking capability scale (Walter, Auer, and Ritter 2006). Finally, the dependent variable of social enterprise performance with a composite mean score of 4.02 was measured using 4 items adopted and adapted from Miles, Verreyne, and Luke (2014).

Results

The measurement and structural models were tested by performing PLS and bootstrapping in Smart PLS version 2. The step entailed measuring reliability using indicator reliability, the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient and composite reliability. Table 3 indicates the factor loadings based on the scales utilised in the study.

As opined by Hair et al. (2019), an outer loading of 0.633 is acceptable while a loading of 0.700 and above is preferred. Table 3 shows the factors loadings of the scales for Network Capability (NetworkCa), Strategic Planning (StrategicPla) and Social Enterprise Performance (SocialPerf). All items with low factors loadings were deleted from the measurement model as they failed to load and explain at least 50% of the latent variables. This was done as per the recommended criteria as these items were below the minimum threshold of 0.40 (Hair et al. 2019).

Table 3. Outer loadings (Factor loadings).

	Network Capability	Performance	Strategic Planning	Squared outer loading
NetworkCap1	0.6717			0.451
NetworkCap10	0.7558			0.571
NetworkCap11	0.8065			0.650
NetworkCap12	0.7505			0.563
NetworkCap3	0.7648			0.585
NetworkCap7	0.7678			0.590
NetworkCap8	0.7703			0.593
NetworkCap9	0.8123			0.660
EcoPerf6		0.8619		0.743
SocialPerf2		0.6708		0.450
SocialPerf3		0.8099		0.656
SocialPerf4		0.8369		0.700
SocialPerf5		0.8956		0.802
StrategicPlaF1			0.7865	0.619
StrategicPlaF2			0.8127	0.660
StrategicPlaF3			0.7937	0.630
StrategicPlaSI1			0.7414	0.550
StrategicPlaSI2			0.8070	0.651
StrategicPlanSI3			0.7946	0.631
StrategicPlanTH1			0.6327	0.400
StrategicPlanTH2			0.6701	0.449

SocialPerf: Social Performance; EcoPerf: Economic Performance; NetworkCa: Network Capability; StrategicPla: Strategic Planning.

Table 3 shows the results of the remaining indicators in the measurement model. As indicated in Table 3, Network Capability has outer loadings ranging between 0.671 and 0.812. Social Enterprise Performance has outer loadings ranging from 0.671 and 0.896; while Strategic Planning having loadings ranging from 0.633 and 0.813. The outer loadings for all three latent variables are above the minimum threshold value of 0.633. More so, all the indicators presented in Table 3 have squared outer loadings ranging from 0.400 and 0.802, which falls within the acceptable and preferred (0.4 and above) threshold. The results in Table 3 confirm the reliability of the remaining indicators for all the variables.

Reliability and Validity of The Results

Table 4 presents example items from the three sections of the questionnaire used for this research study and the reliability scores through the Cronbach alpha coefficient tests. As observed from Table 4, all the scales used in the study reported Cronbach alpha coefficient scores of 0.7 above the recommended threshold (Nunnally 1978).

Correlation Tests

In assessing discriminant validity, this study adopted a method by Fornell and Lacker (1981) which compares the correlation coefficients of the latent variables against the square root of the computed AVE values. These tests are shown in Tables 4 and 5.

Tables 4 and 5 indicate that the square root AVE values of 0.764; 0.819 and 0.758 for all three latent variables (Strategic Planning, Network Capability and Social Enterprise Performance respectively) are greater than the correlation coefficients of the latent variables in this study. This proves that all three latent variables as indicators are weakly correlated and different, therefore confirming the presence of discriminant validity among strategic planning, network capability and social enterprise performance.

Model Testing

To test the conceptual model proposed in Figure 1, PLS SEM testing was conducted, and the results are shown in Table 6.

The findings in Table 6 are also supported by the model shown in Figure 2.

The PLS SEM results in Table 6 and Figure 2 show that all three hypotheses in this study are positive and highly significant. All the *T*-statistic values were above the minimum threshold value of 2.000, and the *p*-values were less than 0.05, which confirms high significance. A moderately positive and a highly statistically significant (path

Table 4. Reliability and validity results.

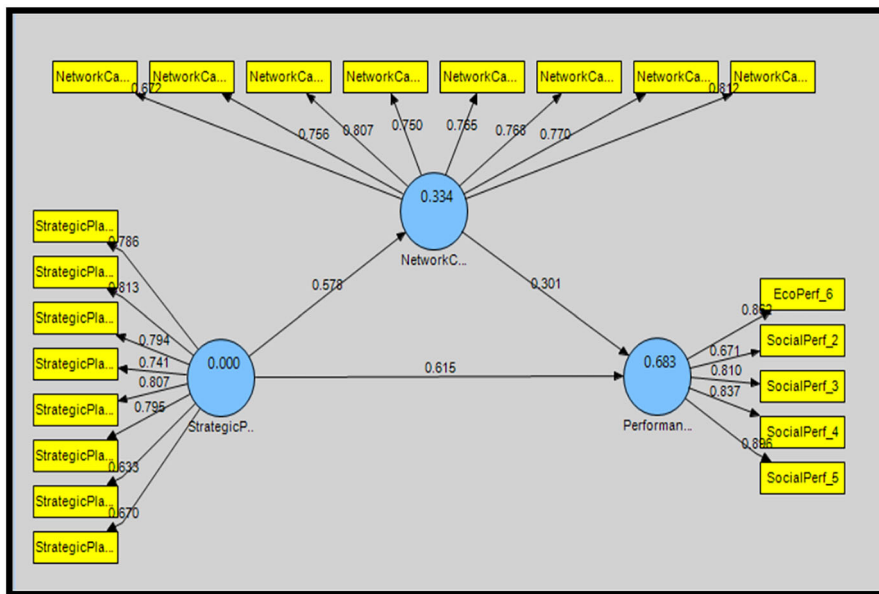
	AVE	Composite reliability	R Square	Cronbach alpha coefficient	Communality	Square roots of the average variance extracted (AVE)
Network Capability	0.5830	0.9177	0.3340	0.8980	0.5830	0.7635
Social Enterprise Performance	0.6703	0.9097	0.6834	0.8737	0.6703	0.8187
Strategic Planning	0.5738	0.9145	0.0000	0.8924	0.5738	0.7575

Table 5. Correlation matrix.

	Network capability	Social enterprise performance	Strategic planning
Network Capability	1.0000		
Social Enterprise Performance	0.6569	1.0000	
Strategic Planning	0.5779	0.7892	1.0000

Table 6. Partial least squares structural equation model analysis results.

Hypothesised relationship	Hypotheses	Path Coefficients	T-statistic	p-Value	Result
Strategic Planning → Network capability	H ₁	0.5779	6.699	0.000	Supported
Network Capability → Enterprise performance	H ₂	0.3014	20.101	0.000	Supported
Strategic Planning → Enterprise Performance	H ₃	0.6150	15.955	0.001	Supported

**Figure 2.** Measurement and structural model results.

SocialPerf: Social Performance; EcoPerf: Economic Performance; NetworkCa: Network Capability; StrategicPla: Strategic Planning.

coefficient = 0.578; *T*-statistic value = 6.699, and *p*-value = 0.000) effect of strategic planning on network capability was also found. Strategic planning also has a moderate effect on social enterprise performance (path coefficient = 0.615; *T*-statistic value = 20.101, and *p*-value = 0.000). Network capability has a weak positive effect on strategic planning, yet a highly significant effect on social enterprise performance. Overall, network capability has a fairly weak positive and significant mediating effect on the relationship between strategic planning and social enterprise performance.

Discussion

The study was aimed at examining the factors of social enterprise performance accounting for the role of strategic planning and networking capability. The findings

of the study show support for the relationships between a) *strategic planning and social enterprise performance*; b) *networking capability to with social enterprise performance* and c) *strategic planning with social enterprise performance*. Finally, as per the presented mediation tests, *networking capability had a fairly weak positive and significant mediating effect on the relationship between strategic planning and social enterprise performance*. This section discusses the results in view of the literature presented and makes implications based on these findings.

From the literature, continued calls into the management of social enterprises emerge. For instance, a need exists to make a link between the role of social enterprises and themes of sustainable development (Johnson and Schaltegger 2020). Linked to this, others call for the need to understand the role dynamic capabilities can play in enhancing the management and performance of social enterprises (Hackett 2010; Zahra et al. 2009). In essence, attention needs to be given to understanding how social enterprises create networks for value in reaching their social and economic utility goals (Leung et al. 2019). The necessity to link dynamic capabilities en route to such social and economic utility goals becomes key (Elia, Margherita, and Passiante 2020). Such an inquiry could be welcomed as technological capabilities have mostly been positioned as crucial for their value creating ability in organisations (Saura, Palacios-Marqués, and Ribeiro-Soriano 2023).

In realising social enterprise performance, a need exists to pay attention to the development and utilisation of dynamic capabilities (Dosi and Teece 1998). The study and its findings illustrate the role of those capabilities that concern resource utilisation (Leonard-Barton 1992; Kogut and Zander 1992; Hamel and Prahalad 1994; Tyler 2001). Saliiently, the findings show how network capability and strategic planning exist as important for firm performance. This finding illustrates the role of important organisational factors and processes in enhancing social enterprise performance (Mendez-Picazo, Galindo-Martin, and Castano-Martinez 2021).

In the hands of managers and strategists within social enterprises an opportunity exists to realise organisational outcomes. This study paid attention to strategic planning and network capabilities as potentially important precursors in how social enterprises not only perform but are managed (Cennamo et al. 2020; Kretschmer et al. 2022). A focus on strategic planning and network capabilities essentially exists as crucial micro foundations of social enterprise performance (Wilden et al. 2018). The findings to the research attest to how through developing capabilities that enhance the networks of a social enterprise, superior performance can be attained (Elia, Margherita, and Passiante 2020; Tucker and Croom 2021).

At a practical level, some strategies can be incorporated within the social enterprise as inferred from the findings of the research. This includes assisting managers and owners of social enterprises to develop the necessary acumen related to management, planning and networking capabilities. This could be in the form of participating in managerial training and development related to such capabilities. Such interventions have been positioned as crucial in assisting the work of social enterprise owners and managers (Ngatse-Ipangui and Dassah 2019). There is also a need to develop the networking capabilities of social enterprises in particular. The study and its findings show a link between the promotion of networking capability activities and the performance

of the social enterprise. By promoting the social enterprise network capability focus, owners and managers of social enterprises can respond to the noted challenges on such enterprises being mostly donor reliant for their funding (Maboya and McKay 2019). The development of networking capabilities as shown in this study can potentially change this state of donor reliance. This potentially allows the social enterprise through its networks to seek for ways of enhancing performance.

Contributions and Limitations of The Study

The study makes some important contributions. First, the study gives focus to generating social enterprise understanding especially within an emerging nation context of South Africa. Such an endeavour and focus are important in assisting the work done through social enterprises. This work comprises occupying the utility of a social and economic development nature (Shir, Nikolaev, and Wincent 2019). The study makes a contribution in answering calls for research around the work of social enterprises in countries like South Africa (Kedmenec and Strašek 2017; Urban and Gaffurini 2017; Urban 2019).

The study proffers a model that narrows focus on the role of strategic planning and networking capability as activities that happen within the enterprises in driving social enterprise performance. This model becomes a first to be tested specifically within an emerging markets context of South Africa. Given the noted challenges South Africa is facing (Manyaka-Boshielo 2017; Harry and Chinyamurindi 2022), the study and its findings emphasise the role dynamic capabilities can play in enhancing social enterprise performance in tackling these challenges (Mathibe, Chinyamurindi, and Hove-Sibanda 2023; Oduro, Hashem, and Alsharif 2022).

Second, the study contributes to the social enterprise literature in showing how the role of capabilities such as networking capability and strategic planning aids social enterprise performance. Potentially, this answer calls for more nuanced studies around the aspect of how to enhance social enterprise performance (Powell, Gillett, and Doherty 2019; Mahto, Belousova, and Ahluwalia 2020). Through the findings, the study contributes towards an enhanced understanding of those factors that need attention, especially given the post-pandemic operation and performance of social enterprises (Bacq and Lumpkin 2021; Huda and Maliha 2021).

The study was not without limitations. The data collection process happened at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, and this affected the number of social enterprises that could participate in the study. This in turn affected the sample size. Another limitation was that the study was based only on social enterprises within the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. There may be a need to be expansive not only in terms of social enterprise activity but also location.

Future studies can continually prioritise more research into social enterprise performance against other factors. The focus in this study was on management practices and dynamic capabilities but the breadth of extension can be widened. This may include exploring the role of individual characteristics exhibited by the social entrepreneur into how this influences social enterprise performance. There may also be an opportunity to explore the interaction that potentially exists between these individual

characteristics as well as dynamic capabilities in informing social enterprise performance. This interaction appears important, considering the role of the environment in informing social enterprise performance (Tucker and Croom 2021). Future research may also look at how ownership influences the role of strategic planning and the intended outcomes of social enterprise performance.

Future research can also consider incorporating a qualitative approach to understanding how management practices and dynamic capabilities are important within social enterprises. Future research can also test management practices and dynamic capabilities against other indicators of performance. This study acknowledges the efforts by Urban and Gaffurini (2017) in advancing this cause and the study encourages other researchers in the African context to follow suit. This research narrowed focus on social enterprise performance; other indicators that can be used can include sustainability outcomes. These outcomes have been prioritised as important for the future social enterprises (Mendez-Picazo, Galindo-Martin, and Castano-Martinez 2021).

Conclusion

The study and its findings become important in the management of social enterprises. In so doing, focus should be on capability development. Two such capabilities are argued as key. First, those capabilities related to how social enterprises can interact with stakeholders, argued in this study as network capabilities. Second, those capabilities related to how social enterprises can plan and strategise in view of their social utility mission, argued in this study as strategic planning. The important work here is a work of balance between the two capabilities in seeking for social enterprise performance.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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