

## Article

# Role and Potential of Comedians/Entertainers as Social Entrepreneurs Who Activate Local Communities

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**Abstract:** Japan continues to confront population decline and aging and ranks low in terms of individual social entrepreneurship. Yoshimoto Kogyo, a leading Japanese entertainment company, launched a project dispatching comedians/entertainers and staff to 47 Japanese prefectures to activate local community collaboration and support various social entrepreneurial activities. This project aims to improve residents' quality of life and alleviate social and economic challenges. This study frames the project as a case study and investigates the role and potential of comedians/entertainers as social entrepreneurs who can activate local communities. This study surveys the people involved with the project and examines characteristics and roles of comedians/entertainers as social entrepreneurs. Furthermore, this study discusses comedians'/entertainers' potential as social entrepreneurs and their future prospects by analyzing the effect of the tools used to promote social entrepreneurship. The results indicate that comedians/entertainers residing in their local areas have significant potential to be social entrepreneurs, despite the project being relatively unknown. Finally, this study found that when this project is introduced through a promotional video and song, peoples' interests, support, and involvement in the projects increase.

**Keywords:** comedians' potential; social business; social entrepreneur; local community



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## 1. Introduction

Local rural areas in Japan continue to confront population decline and aging; hence, knowledge on how to implement revitalization projects for local communities is valuable. Administrative efforts have been made to improve community development by residents, relationships, and cooperation with people inside and outside the localities. In 2009, Japan's Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications established the "Local Vitalization Cooperators" system. The system has been working to activate collaboration between people inside and outside of local community (residents) and support various activities including agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and livelihood support for residents [1].

Private companies have also made various efforts for the regional revitalization of local communities. For instance, in April 2011, a leading Japanese entertainment company, Yoshimoto Kogyo (formally Yoshimoto Kogyo Holdings Co., Ltd., Osaka, Japan) launched the "Living in Your Local Community" project, dispatching comedians/entertainers and staff to 47 Japanese prefectures. This project aims to group local comedians/entertainers and staff with local stakeholders to alleviate social and economic challenges and to improve residents' lives. Comedians/entertainers were appointed as tourism ambassadors to boost local tourism and sell local products, and started their own TV programs at local TV stations [2].

Through this project, the group has driven businesses designed for vitalizing local economies and contributed to the revitalization of local communities with the power of comedy. Since these comedians/entertainers have been engaged in many local revitalization and problem-solving initiatives for many years, the group established a joint venture company, "Yunus-Yoshimoto Social Action", with Dr. Muhammad Yunus, a Nobel Prize

recipient and advocate of microcredit and social business, to develop further activities that fused local revitalization and social business by the comedians/entertainers and staff [2]. However, the role and potential of comedians/entertainers as social entrepreneurs who activate local communities have not been examined.

Therefore, this study focuses on the project and examines the process of their daily activities and how they recognize local problems through their activities and establish projects to solve them as social business. By conducting surveys with people and comedians/entertainers involved in the “Living in Your Local Community” project by a leading Japanese entertainment company, this study examines the process of daily lives and how they recognize local problems through their activities and establishes projects to solve them as social businesses. Furthermore, this study also discusses their potential as social entrepreneurs and their future prospects by analyzing the effect of entertainment via social networking sites (SNS) to promote social entrepreneurial ecosystems.

## 2. Literature Review and Research Questions

The concept of social business is not always synonymous with social entrepreneurship. It originates from a type of financial service, called microcredit services, offered by Grameen Bank, which aimed to help the poor by supporting their transition to becoming financially independent. The concept is said to have been first proposed by Dr. Muhammad Yunus who helped combat poverty in Bangladesh by spreading microcredit services around the country. Dr. Yunus presented following seven principles, which serve as defining elements and the model for social businesses used until today at the World Economic Forum in 2009 [3]:

1. Business objective will be to overcome poverty, or one or more problems (such as education, health, technology access, and environment) which threaten people and society, not profit maximization.
2. Financial and economic sustainability.
3. Investors get back their investment amount only. No dividend is given beyond investment money.
4. When investment amount is paid back, company profit stays with the company for expansion and improvement.
5. Gender sensitive and environmentally conscious
6. Workforce gets market wage with better working conditions.
7. ... do it with joy

Yunus [4] and Yunus Center et al. [3] claim that the following three components are especially crucial for social business. First, social business is a business model that does not strive to maximize profits, but rather to serve humanity’s most pressing needs. It aims at solving social problems with products and services at affordable prices or giving the poor and marginalized people ownership in a business. Second, social business does not pay its investors dividends, but only pays back the original investment amount and reinvests all additional profits into the development of activities to solve various social problems or further growth. Third, social business should operate within the current capitalist system and the most important criterion for social business is the creation of social and economic value while reinvesting.

Notably, Ahmed et al. [5] distinguish two types of social business: Type 1 concentrates on businesses specifically addressing social objectives, while Type 2 focuses simultaneously on solving the social problem of one’s own poverty/unemployment by supporting oneself through business and making the venture profitable while repaying a small loan [4]. Ahmed et al. [5] additionally emphasize that social entrepreneurs from both developed and developing markets have launched Type 2 social businesses, which typically consist of a sole proprietor or a small number of individuals.

Regardless of the types of social business, social entrepreneurs usually face challenging situations trying to expand and grow businesses with little investment and limited financial and other resources [5–7]. While such social business has to be financially sustainable and

generate enough revenue to cover their own costs, the investor makes no financial gain, and all profits have to be reinvested in the social business itself. Therefore, investors hesitate to invest, and scaling-up is a bottleneck for social businesses. Indeed, Bocken et al. [8] reveal that many social businesses fail to make a significant social impact due to the lack of scalability of their business. Although investments in social business cannot expect a financial return, social entrepreneurs participating in social business can find it easier to start their businesses or projects under the existence of the social business network as a system [7]. Such network system helps the growth and expansion of social businesses in local communities. Therefore, it is indispensable to analyze the role and potential of comedians/entertainers as social entrepreneurs who activate local communities in Japan as a case study of a new challenge to create such network in local communities.

Although the role and potential of comedians/entertainers as social entrepreneurs who activate local communities have not been examined, the value of laughter, a sense of humor, and comedians/entertainers have been reported to help facilitate communication and business (e.g., Miller [9], Greengross and Miller [10], Vitug and Kleiner [11], Fugate [12], Fatt [13]).

Comedy and comedians/entertainers are widespread in various forms in the entertainment industry around the world and range from jokes, to exaggerations, to funny nonverbal actions. Entertainers in television or movies engage in improvisational comedy in a theater environment by exhibiting exaggerated, nonverbal expressions [11]. Appropriate and effective use of comedy and humor creates a humanizing effect and connects the speaker and their audience in various situations, including doing business [9,11–13]. According to Fatt [13], the following are the benefits of humor in business: 1. Helps people solve problems; 2. Lowers tension, anger, pain, and the stress of modern-day living and working, resulting in better mental health; 3. Encourages creative solutions; 4. Promotes self-expression through clothing, style, and things tacked onto their office walls, humanizing the workplace; 5. Lifts spirits and inspires motivation and productivity with less absenteeism; 6. Makes working in a team enriching with a constant free exchange of fun; and 7. Helps establish better business relationships with people who are fun to do business with.

Regarding the role of entertainment in attracting public attention and solving social problems, humor and comedy have been increasingly utilized as culturally resonant tools for effective climate change [14]. Additionally, in many countries, songs have been used to support public health advice in the COVID-19 pandemic [15]. A World Health Organization (WHO) scoping review of arts and health suggested that public health messages can be effectively delivered through arts [16]. For instance, Shef and Irons [17] evaluated the effectiveness of using traditional folk songs for health education in how messages are communicated and how they affect the attitudes and behaviors of their audiences by analyzing participants' reactions.

Moreover, social networking sites (SNSs) including YouTube [18,19] have rapidly emerged as indispensable communication tools for people to connect, and provide a platform where users can share information, ideas, songs, movies, and other content [14]. Several studies including Kujur and Singh [20] and Bellman et al. [21] analyzed how YouTube and its advertising affected consumer engagement.

To analyze the effects of some intervention projects, we conducted a randomized control trial (RCT) wherein subjects were randomly assigned into one of two groups: an experimental group received the intervention being tested, and a comparison or control group received alternative treatment [22]. For instance, some studies, including Banerjee et al. [23] and Fernaldo et al. [24], report results from the randomized evaluation of a group-lending microcredit program in case studies to analyze the effect and role of microfinance.

While several studies have assessed the effect and role of microfinance in developing countries, project evaluation for increasing recognition of social business is rare, despite social entrepreneurial activity being essential for sustainable growth in societies [7]. Social entrepreneurs face challenging situations in attempting to expand and grow businesses

with little investment and limited resources [7]. In Japan, although national and local initiatives in industry, government, and academia have been created to promote social entrepreneurship, compared to the rest of the world, Japan ranks low in terms of social entrepreneurial activity [25]. This is because Japanese social investors willing to invest in start-up companies are fewer, and no social entrepreneurs are available to serve as role models [25].

Nakamura [25] categorized the respondents of questionnaire survey by social entrepreneur types in Japan: “actual social entrepreneurs (SOENT)”, “past social entrepreneurial experience (EXSOE)”, “potential social entrepreneurs (POTSE)”, “general social entrepreneurial interests (SEINT)”, and “no social entrepreneurial interests (NOINT)”. Nakamura [25] found that 76.2% of the respondents in Japan had “no social entrepreneurial interests”.

Interactions and networks between social entrepreneurs, investors, and other stakeholders including local comedians/entertainers who activate local communities as social entrepreneurs, so-called social entrepreneurial ecosystems, are indispensable in promoting social entrepreneurship.

Based on the review of existing literature and the situation of the project in Japan, five research questions are listed as follows: 1. How can the local comedians/entertainers who activate local communities be categorized as social entrepreneurs in comparison with the situation in Japan?; 2. What kind of characteristics do such comedians/entertainers have in relation to social entrepreneurship and to local communities?; 3. Does the general public, including those who are not interested in social entrepreneurship, know about the existence of the project and what is their perception of it?; 4. Are there any changes in the recognition and perception of the project or social entrepreneurship through entertainment activities due to the creation of a promotional video or songs introducing the project’s activities?; 5. What factors are related to changes in awareness and perception of the project and social entrepreneurship?

### 3. Research Outline

To clarify the above research questions and objectives, a questionnaire survey, an on-line interview, and an online workshop (detailed below) were conducted in order (Table 1). Contents of the interviews and questionnaire surveys were specifically about life satisfaction, community attachment, experience of social entrepreneurship, interest in social entrepreneurship, intention for social entrepreneurship, “how they became entertainers living in local community”, “anecdotes about hardships during community activities”, “how to create connections with the locals”, “how to identify local problems”, and “prospects for future activities”.

**Table 1.** Overview of the research schedule.

Date	Concerned Person	Contents
13 November 2020	Chairman of a leading entertainment company, which implements the “Living in Your Local Community” project	Research/survey cooperation request and outline explanation
12 December 2020	General manager of the entertainment company	Explanation and requests for interviews and questionnaire surveys
12 December 2020–15 January 2021	Project manager, staff in charge of the project, and all entertainers and comedians/entertainers of the project	Distribution and collection of interview content drafts and questionnaires
15 January–3 February 2021	General manager and person in charge of the project	Interview survey request/date and time adjustment
3–27 February 2021	Interviewees (27 entertainers and comedians/entertainers in total)	Interview survey (about 1 to 1.5 h per session) (online)
2 March 2021	Person and staff in charge of the project, survey participants, and collaborators	Online workshop (survey report/study group “Entertainment × Region × Social Business”) held
11 March 2022	Person and staff in charge of the project, survey participants, and collaborators	Production and completion of promotional video and song
27 July–1 August 2022	3000 samples of online survey in Japan	Online survey in Japan

Both questionnaire-survey and interview-recording data were stored, organized, and analyzed using NVivo and STATA software as qualitative and quantitative data. Regarding interview data, advanced permission was obtained, and videos were then recorded after the interview. Only the necessary parts were edited and saved as research data. Anonymity and nondisclosure considerations were given to the interviewees to avoid disturbing their work.

Furthermore, based on the results of interviews and questionnaire surveys, a promotional video and song introducing the content obtained by the interviews and surveys were edited and produced with the comedians/entertainers. The content of the promotional video and the lyrics of the song also reflected their thoughts. We then analyzed how the general public's understanding and interest in their activities changed as a result of viewing and listening to the promotional video and song.

#### 4. Characteristics and Potential of Comedians/Entertainers as Social Entrepreneurs

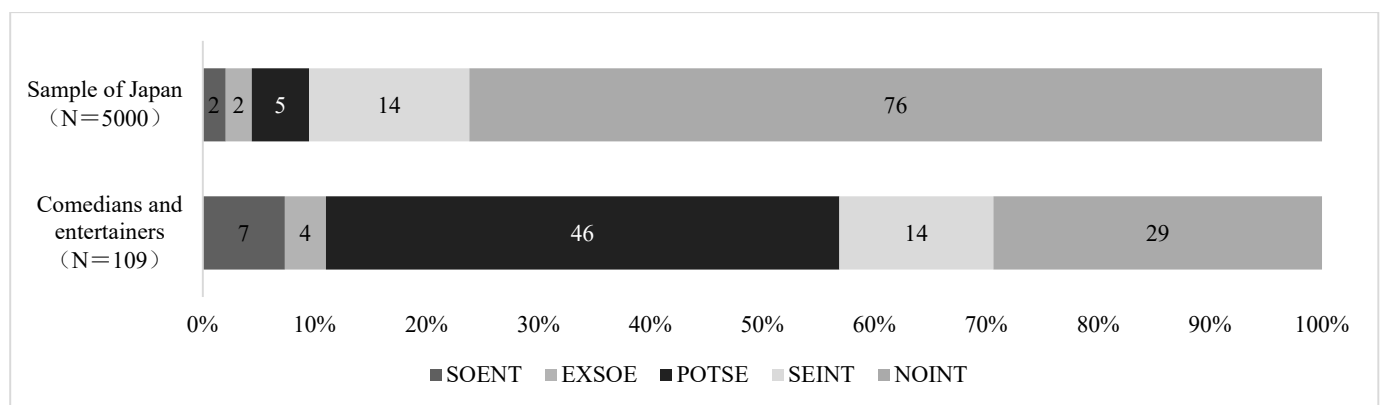
Regarding Research Question One, "How can the local comedians/entertainers who activate local communities be categorized as social entrepreneurs in comparison with the situation in Japan?", based on data collected in the questionnaire survey distributed to all comedians/entertainers who participated in the project ( $N = 109$ : male = 104; female = 5), they were classified as "actual social entrepreneurs (SOENT)", "past social entrepreneurial experience (EXSOE)", "potential social entrepreneurs (POTSE)", "general social entrepreneurial interests (SEINT)", and "no social entrepreneurial interests (NOINT)". This classification is identical to that of Nakamura [25]. Concretely, individuals were first distinguished according to those with social entrepreneurial experience and those without it. Here, "social entrepreneurial experience" was defined as "experience of founding, owning, and running a corporation that paid salaries and wages to employees and owners, as well as all other expenses, for three or more months".

Respondents with social entrepreneurial experience were further categorized as "actual social entrepreneurs" (SOENT) if they were currently involved in a start-up business or as having "past social entrepreneurial experience" (EXSOE) if they had retired from or shut down a start-up business. Next, respondents with no social entrepreneurial experience who had no interest in social entrepreneurship were categorized as having "no social entrepreneurial interests" (NOINT). If they did have an interest, regardless of their interest in starting a business themselves, they were categorized as having "some social entrepreneurial interests". Respondents in this latter group were further categorized as having "general social entrepreneurial interests" (SEINT) if they did not intend to start a business themselves. Conversely, if they did, they were categorized as "potential social entrepreneurs" (POTSE).

Figure 1 reports the results of categorizing. A comparison with Nakamura [25] targeting the nationwide sample reveals that "actual social entrepreneurs" (SOENT), (7%) are higher than the sample of Japan as a whole. Moreover, the "no social entrepreneurial interests" (NOINT) group (29%) is small. Particularly, "potential social entrepreneurs" (POTSE) (46%) are higher in number compared to Japan as a whole (5%). Comedians/entertainers living in local area have large potential as social entrepreneurs.

In response to Research Question Two, "What kind of characteristics do such comedians/entertainers have in relation to social entrepreneurship and to local communities?", Table 2 indicates the degree of local attachment, life and job satisfaction, and interest in social entrepreneurship support such as investment for others to start businesses that provide products and services to solve both social and local issues. Respondents were then asked to rate their responses using a 5-point scale (1 = no, 2 = not very, 3 = neutral, 4 = somewhat, or 5 = yes), and Table 2 indicates the scores by social entrepreneurial type. Degree of attachment to the area wherein comedians/entertainers live indicates that average value is generally high (the value is 4.74). Compared to the degree of attachment to the area of SOENT (the value is 4.33), those of the others, especially EXSOE (the value is 4.83) and NOINT (the value is 4.82), are higher.





**Figure 1.** Classification and ratio of social entrepreneurs, etc. (comparison with nationwide). Notes: Data for sample of Japan (N = 5000) are from Nakamura [25].

**Table 2.** Respondents' degree of local attachment, etc., by social entrepreneurial type.

	Overall		SOENT		EXSOE		POTSE		SEINT		NOINT	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Local attachment	4.74	0.57	4.33	1.00	4.83	0.41	4.78	0.50	4.65	0.71	4.82	0.39
Life satisfaction	3.21	1.43	4.00	1.32	3.83	1.17	3.07	1.27	3.35	1.23	3.03	1.06
Job satisfaction	2.93	1.30	3.44	1.33	2.83	1.60	2.83	1.24	3.26	1.32	2.72	1.31
Interests in social investment	3.12	1.43	4.00	1.50	3.83	1.33	3.67	1.22	2.91	1.24	2.00	1.21

Regarding life satisfaction, the overall average was 3.21, with SOENT having the highest average (4.00), followed by EXSOE with 3.83. This indicates that those with social entrepreneurship experience have a higher degree of local attachment compared to those without experience. Especially those rated NOINT, representing those with no social entrepreneurial interests, have the lowest attachment to their local area (the average value is 3.03). Although job-specific satisfaction is low on average (the average value is 2.93), the job satisfaction of SOENT is higher (the value is 3.44) than that of others. The job satisfaction of NOINT is lowest (the value is 2.72).

Regarding interest in social entrepreneurship support such as investment for others to start businesses providing products and services to solve social and local issues, the values of the degree of interests increase in the order of NOINT (2.00), SEINT (2.91), POTSE (3.67), EXSOE (3.83), and SOENT (4.00).

## 5. Interview Survey: Frequently Mentioned Words and Summary

After conducting a questionnaire survey of all entertainers and comedians/entertainers who live in each local area (Table 2), we categorized them according to the content of their responses, location, field of activity, and type of social entrepreneurship. A total of 27 interview candidates were selected at random. Table 3 presents an overview of the interviewees. For instance, one of the activities involves comedians living in local areas delivering local crops and sharing agricultural experiences to consumers to provide solutions to the ongoing shortage of farmers in the local region. The farmers' voices are conveyed to the customers, and the comedians/entertainers share their reactions back to the farmers through various entertaining activities. Additionally, the comedian can take part in creating a cycle that sells crops and compartment sales via the internet by developing a local community and promotion video.

**Table 3.** Interviewees (a total of 27 people).

Type	Number of Interviewees	Examples of Activity Fields
SOENT	3	Agricultural business, nursing care business, community revitalization activity, dementia prevention events
EXSOE	2	Local product development, local food development
POTSE	13	Local food development, tourist information, support for traditional crafts, agricultural business, creation of regional art works
SEINT	3	Comedy workshop, local food development, local music production
NOINT	6	Support for traditional crafts, agricultural activity

Figure 2 (a “word cloud”) illustrates the words most frequently mentioned in the interviews. The word cloud selects multiple words with a high frequency of occurrence and uses colors to indicate their size and relevance according to frequency. Figure 2 indicates that the most frequent words in the interviews were “comedian (entertainer)”, followed by “do it” and “local area”. Additionally, words such as “activity”, “timing”, “event”, “give”, and “content” were often mentioned. Using these results, actual responses are gathered according to the context of the most frequent words, and with reference to them, we extracted topics and issues for the interview survey.



**Figure 2.** Frequently mentioned words (word cloud) when answering interviews (**left:** Japanese original, **right:** English translation).

First, we present specific examples of references to “comedians/entertainers” as follows. Some comedians/entertainers living in local areas have a passion for fostering local entertainment as a comedian or entertainer in local area. A POTSE comedian/entertainer indicated, “I really wanted to be a comedian, so I became a comedian. But, when I became a comedian, I also had a strong feeling of wanting to do something for my hometown as a comedian”.

In the course of their activities, comedians/entertainers also felt the unique value of comedians/entertainers involved in the “Living in Your Local Community” project. They emphasized the difference from the conventional image of comedians/entertainers as follows: “What everyone thinks that a comedian should be like is too restrictive. A comedian involved in “Living in Your Local Community” project is different from a conventional comedian—comedy on stage and comedy as a communication skill are two different things. What brings me satisfaction is comedy as a communication skill. When it comes to comedy on stage, I feel that I’m not very good at it. I think it’s best to do my best and shine where I can” (SOENT comedians/entertainers mentioned in the interview).

“Comedians/entertainers involved in “Living in Your Local Community” project are really close to the local community. Of course, I also do work as a stand-up comedian on stage, but other than that, there are quite a few other recreational works, such as playing the role of a MC and a moderator in local festivals, holding workshops for education of

local children, and so on. I never get tired of it. I can do a lot of things rather than comedy in general, so I thought it was really good and rewarding” (POTSE comedians/entertainers mentioned in the interview).

Regarding the important factors of working in the local community such as how to learn more about the local community and communicate with local residents, “It’s not like I’m doing it consciously, but I think it might be a good to follow things. I used to do things all the time, such as walking around town and talking to everyone. It wasn’t about trying to be able to talk at tourism places as a tourist promotion guide but talking to an old lady somewhere in a store. If I do something like that, people will first become interested in me as local comedian. When I went to talk, I felt like I was connected with the locals in natural way” (POTSE comedians/entertainer).

There were also many comedians/entertainers involved in the project who said that they were in a state of mind of “just do it”. For instance, “When I decided to participate in the project and go to a local area in Tokyo, I thought ‘let’s just go, try and do it’” (SOENT comedians/entertainer). Additionally, “In local areas, the comedians/entertainers can have a closer relationship with the locals than in urban areas like Tokyo. It is very easy to talk each other. People in the local area tell me all sorts of things. For example, ‘Isn’t it possible to promote local product with you as professional comedian?’. So, instead of doing things like making jokes on TV, I’m often asked by the locals that ‘Would you like to do something interesting with us?’ It feels like we’re doing something together” (POTSE comedians/entertainer). Many interviewees mentioned the significance and ease of doing activities in the local community.

However, comedians/entertainers encounter a few problems in local activities: “When it comes to a job or work as comedian alone, in this local area, there are no theaters, and if we want to do our job as a comedian, we have to do everything by ourselves including arranging the stage and location. So, if you ask me whether I’m doing what I want to do 100% right now, I’m not sure. Although I’m very satisfied with living in my local town. I’m not satisfied with my job. The reason is that there are many more things I want to do, or I can do not only for myself but also for my local area. So I’m not satisfied with that” (POTSE comedians/entertainer).

Although some are satisfied with their current activities, a POTSE comedian expressed concern about how to continue social entrepreneurial activities while earning money for their continuing activities: “I wanted to help children fulfill their hopes and dreams when I decided to become a comedian. Our activities in the “Living in Your Local Community” project are fun and rewarding. Job satisfaction is high, but the only and biggest challenge is that it’s not a job that pays”. According to the survey results, about 80% of the comedians/entertainers have an annual income of 3 million yen or less, and most of their cash savings are less than 1 million yen.

The concept of social entrepreneurship and social business is an important perspective for the sustainable activities of the comedians/entertainers living in local communities under the projects. This is because no matter how much comedians/entertainers love their communities, they need to earn money to continue their activities and run some form of business to generate funds needed to allocate resources to various local activities.

One comedian/entertainer felt the potential of social business “When I thought about wanting to give something back to the area where I’m living as an entertainer, I noticed that what is absent here is people who create entertainment from scratch. Here is a small and rural town. We don’t have such company. Hence, I thought we wanted to run a new entertainment company by myself in this area. I want to create a company that can convey the appeal of the region and solve local problems” (SOENT entertainers).

Based on the results of the interviews and questionnaire surveys, we produced a promotional video that introduces the project and content obtained by the interviews and surveys, featuring songs produced by comedians/entertainers. The content of the promotional video and lyrics of the song also reflected comedians/entertainers’ thoughts, which are then uploaded to their official YouTube channels for public viewing [26]. We then



analyzed how the general public's understanding and interest in their activities changed as a result of viewing promotional video.

## 6. Questionnaire Survey: Public Perception and Effectiveness of the Project

### 6.1. Survey Data Collection

In order to examine regarding Research Question Three, "Does the general public, including those who are not interested in social entrepreneurship, know about the existence of the project and what is their perception of it?", the following survey and analyses were conducted. First, to determine and analyze people's perception of the "Living in Your Local Community" project, which involved comedians/entertainers, necessary data were gathered via online and smartphone surveys in Japan. We contacted Neo Marketing Inc. to conduct the survey, and responses were collected between 27 July and 1 August 2022. The questionnaire included gender, age, and income, and subjective questions to assess respondents' daily life and society. Respondents were then randomly selected by Neo Marketing Inc. To construct a sample without bias, Neo Marketing Inc. then distributed and gathered the questionnaires relative to the population of each prefecture in Japan by gender and age distribution. They contacted 62,173 individuals and obtained 10,599 responses (response rate: 17.04%).

After excluding responses with incomplete answers, we obtained a final sample size of 3000 individuals (males: 1492, females: 1508). The survey includes questions on sociodemographic data (e.g., gender, age, and educational status). Regarding respondents' age distribution, the numbers of respondents in their 20s or younger, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, and 70s or older were 554 (18.5%), 448 (14.9%), 562 (18.7%), 474 (15.8%), 530 (17.7%), and 432 (14.4%), respectively. We also collected data from individuals regarding social networking situations, experience and interest in social entrepreneurship, and various things regarding perception of "Living in Your Local Community" project.

### 6.2. Public Perception and Effectiveness of the Project

Regarding Research Question Four "Are there any changes in the recognition and perception of the project or social entrepreneurship through entertainment activities due to the creation of a promotional video or songs introducing the project's activities?", after briefly explaining the "Living in Your Local Community" project in questionnaire surveys, we measured individuals' perceptions of the project and involved comedians/entertainers through various question items. For each question, respondents could choose yes (1) or no (0), and these values are then used as binary data of the explained variables for analyses. The question items are as follows:

- Awareness (AWARE): Did you know about "Living in Your Local Community" project (before participating in this survey)?
- Interest (INTRE): Are you interested in the "Living in Your Local Community" project?
- Contribution (CONTR): Do you think that "Living in Your Local Community" project contributes to local revitalization?
- Support (SUPPT): Would you like to support the "Living in Your Local Community" project?
- Involvement (INVOL): Do you want a comedian or entertainer to come to your local area to implement the project?"

To analyze the effects of viewing and listening to the promotional video and song presenting the survey results and the content of the projects through a randomized control trial (RCT), respondents are then randomly assigned to two groups: 1. the treatment group, with viewing and listening to the promotional video/song ( $N = 1500$ ); 2. the control group without them ( $N = 1500$ ).

Table 4 reports the details of individual's perception of "Living in Your Local Community" project and included comedians/entertainers in the treatment and control groups. The results show that the percentage of control groups for each item are 18.40, 19.53, 27.07, 24.20, and 20.00, respectively. This indicates that while less than 20% of people did not

know and had no interest in the projects, 27% of them think that this project contributes to local revitalization.

**Table 4.** Details of individual's perception for the project.

	Symbol	Treatment Group (Viewers) (N = 1500)		Control Group (N = 1500)		$\chi^2$	p Value
		Number	%	Number	%		
Awareness	AWARE	279	18.60	276	18.40	0.0199	0.888
Interest	INTRE	343	22.87	293	19.53	4.988	0.026
Contribution	CONTR	503	33.53	4.6	27.07	14.851	0.000
Support	SUPPT	437	29.13	363	24.20	9.334	0.002
Involvement	INVOL	350	23.33	300	20.00	4.910	0.027

Regarding the treatment group, 18.60% of them know about the projects; compared to the control group, no significant difference can be found between them. Generally, the project is relatively unknown. However, when such a project and comedians' or entertainers' situation and thoughts are introduced by the promotional video and song based on the interviews and survey results, the percentage of each item except for "1. Awareness" is higher by more than 3% with statistical significance. This means that knowing about the project and comedians/entertainers' situations and their thoughts through the promotional video increased peoples' interests, support, and involvement in the projects.

### 6.3. Determinants of Perception

In accordance with Research Question Five "What factors are related to changes in awareness and perception of the project and social entrepreneurship?" we conducted a more detailed analysis to examine the determinants of what factors increase peoples' interests, support, and involvement with the projects after viewing and listening to the promotional video and song. For the treatment group, the following additional questions were asked after viewing and listening to the promotional video and song:

- Favorability (FAVOR): After watching the video, did you like the comedians/entertainers involved in the project?
- Antipathy (ANTIP): After watching the video, did you dislike the comedians/entertainers involved in the project?
- Watch (WATCH): After watching the video, do you think you will watch future YouTube videos or TV programs about the project?
- Social entrepreneurship (SOCEN): Did the video make you interested in social entrepreneurship?
- Skip: Did you skip and fast forward the video?
- Positive: Did you have a positive feeling about the promotional video and song?
- Negative: Did you have a negative feeling about the promotional video and song?

The first four comprise questions about changes in awareness of the project after watching the video, and the latter three are questions about the video itself. Table 5 presents the summary statistics of the variables used for analysis including the abovementioned question items.

**Table 5.** Descriptive statistics of the variables.

Variable		Symbol	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Favorability	If the individual has favorability about comedians/entertainers involved in the project after watching the video, 1; if otherwise, 0	FAVOR	0.559	0.497	0	1

Table 5. Cont.

Variable		Symbol	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Antipathy	If the individual has antipathy about comedians/entertainers involved in the project after watching the video, 1; if otherwise, 0	ANTIP	0.167	0.373	0	1
Watch	If the individual thinks they will watch the other videos or TV program about the project on YouTube or TV in the future after watching the video, 1; if otherwise, 0	WATCH	0.285	0.451	0	1
Social entrepreneurship	If the individual becomes interested in social entrepreneurship after watching the video, 1; if otherwise, 0	SOCEN	0.324	0.468	0	1
Skip the video	If the individual skips and fast forwards the video, 1; if otherwise, 0	SKIP	0.331	0.471	0	1
Positive feeling for video	If the individual has a positive feeling about the video and the song in the video, 1; if otherwise, 0	POSI	0.647	0.478	0	1
Negative feeling for video	If the individual has a negative feeling about the video and the song in the video, 1; if otherwise, 0	NEGA	0.221	0.415	0	1
Gender (female)	If the individual is female, 1; if otherwise, 0	FMALE	0.503	0.500	0	1
Age (ref: 20s and younger)	If the individual is 30s, 1; if otherwise, 0	A30S	0.149	0.356	0	1
	If the individual is 40s, 1; if otherwise, 0	A40S	0.187	0.390	0	1
	If the individual is 50s, 1; if otherwise, 0	A50S	0.158	0.365	0	1
	If the individual is 60s, 1; if otherwise, 0	A60S	0.177	0.381	0	1
	If the individual is 70s, 1; if otherwise, 0	A70S	0.144	0.351	0	1
The presence of child	If the individual has a child or children, 1; if otherwise, 0	CHILD	0.501	0.500	0	1
Educational status (ref: high school vocational school, technical, or junior college graduate)	If the individual is a university student or has a bachelor's degree, 1; if otherwise, 0	EDUC <sub>1</sub>	0.403	0.491	0	1
	If the individual has a master's or doctorate degree, 1; if otherwise, 0	EDUC <sub>2</sub>	0.0423	0.201	0	1
Social entrepreneur type (ref: no social entrepreneurial interests (NOINT))	If the individual is a current social entrepreneur, 1; if otherwise, 0	SOENT	0.018	0.135	0	1
	If the individual has a past social entrepreneurial experience, 1; if otherwise, 0	EXSOE	0.036	0.187	0	1
	If the individual is a potential social entrepreneur, 1; if otherwise, 0	POTSE	0.073	0.260	0	1

Table 5. Cont.

Variable	Symbol	Mean	SD	Min	Max
If the individual has general social entrepreneurial interests, 1; if otherwise, 0	SEINT	0.044	0.204	0	1

Note: Number of observations is 3000. “SD” denotes standard deviation.

Eight models for analyzing the determinants of what factors increase peoples’ interests, support, and involvement with the projects after viewing the promotional video and song, using eight binary data as explained variables, are presented as follows: 1. Interest (INTRE); 2. Contribution (CONTR); 3. Support (SUPPT); 4. Involvement (INVOL); 5. Favorability (FAVOR); 6. Antipathy (ANTIP); 7. Watch (WATCH); and 8. Social entrepreneurship (SOCEN).

No multicollinearity problems were found among the explanatory variables in Tables 6 and 7, which present the results of the analyses. In Table 7, the estimated odds ratios of each variable in all eight models are shown in dark grey, grey, and light grey colors, which indicate statistical significances at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively. Results of the models “1. Interest (INTRE)”, “2. Contribution (CONTR)”, “3. Support (SUPPT)”, and “4. Involvement (INVOL)” in Table 7 indicate that there is similar tendency with statistical significance. For instance, people with positive feeling about the promotional video and the song have more interest in the project, want to support and be involved in it, and highly favor it. Additionally, while people with experience or interest in social entrepreneurship have similar tendencies, people with negative feelings about the promotional video have opposite tendencies.

Table 6. Results of the analyses of the eight models.

	SKIP	POSIT	NEGAT	FMALE	A30S	A40S	A50S	A60S	A70S	CHILD	EDUC1	EDUC2	SOENT	EXSOE	POTSE	SEINT
SKIP	1.000															
POSTI	−0.013	1.000														
NEGAT	0.174	0.041	1.000													
FMALE	−0.065	0.077	−0.057	1.000												
A30S	0.027	−0.007	0.020	−0.010	1.000											
A40S	−0.019	−0.003	−0.013	−0.008	−0.201	1.000										
A50S	0.010	−0.028	−0.033	−0.008	−0.182	−0.208	1.000									
A60S	−0.033	0.035	−0.079	0.010	−0.194	−0.222	−0.201	1.000								
A70S	−0.027	0.053	0.019	0.032	−0.172	−0.197	−0.178	−0.190	1.000							
CHILD	−0.049	0.117	−0.003	0.075	−0.102	−0.044	0.019	0.200	0.288	1.000						
EDUC <sub>1</sub>	0.002	0.056	0.045	−0.188	0.026	0.019	−0.065	0.061	−0.093	0.017	1.000					
EDUC <sub>2</sub>	0.017	0.014	0.021	−0.109	0.003	0.041	0.016	−0.039	−0.031	−0.006	−0.176	1.000				
SOENT	−0.019	0.006	0.019	−0.087	0.001	0.045	−0.040	−0.010	0.016	0.012	0.033	0.035	1.000			
EXSOE	0.042	0.011	0.118	−0.092	−0.029	0.005	−0.034	−0.051	−0.046	−0.033	0.049	0.056	−0.031	1.000		
POTSE	−0.033	0.082	0.136	−0.094	0.055	0.009	−0.022	−0.061	−0.097	−0.016	0.062	0.013	−0.043	−0.059	1.000	
SEINT	−0.013	0.069	−0.025	−0.017	−0.003	−0.032	0.001	0.023	0.019	0.026	0.019	0.063	−0.033	−0.045	−0.063	1.000

Regarding model “5. Favorability (FAVOR)”, people in their 40s and older, especially in their 60s, tend to have more favorability towards the comedians/entertainers involved in the project than people in their 20s and younger. These results also indicate that the more the individuals have positive feeling about the promotional video and song, the more they favor comedians/entertainers being involved in the project. Interestingly, no significant association with social entrepreneurship and interest is found except that the variable regarding past social entrepreneurial experience has a negative association. Additionally, people who are university student or have bachelor’s, master’s, or doctorate degrees have greater favorability about the comedians/entertainers than people of other educational status. Regarding model “6. Antipathy (ANTIP)”, this result indicates that the more individuals have a negative feeling about the video, the more they have antipathy about comedians.

**Table 7.** Results (odds ratio) of the analyses of eight models.

Variables	1. INTRE		2. CONTR		3. SUPPT		4. INVOL		5. FAVOR		6. ANTIP		7. WATCH		8. SOCEN	
SKIP	0.654 ***	(0.101)	0.752 **	(0.106)	0.859	(0.121)	0.641 ***	(0.099)	0.882	(0.145)	1.124	(0.225)	0.747 **	(0.109)	0.648 ***	(0.0920)
POSIT	9.277 ***	(2.020)	16.38 ***	(3.329)	12.84 ***	(2.673)	11.65 ***	(2.714)	65.50 ***	(12.76)	1.020	(0.215)	16.72 ***	(3.897)	11.08 ***	(2.069)
NEGAT	0.600 ***	(0.108)	0.371 ***	(0.0631)	0.499 ***	(0.0843)	0.517 ***	(0.094)	0.580 ***	(0.106)	53.19 ***	(11.27)	1.969 ***	(0.313)	1.818 ***	(0.283)
FMALE	1.049	(0.149)	1.424 ***	(0.191)	1.545 ***	(0.208)	1.138	(0.161)	1.017	(0.163)	0.671 *	(0.137)	0.781 *	(0.107)	0.869	(0.115)
A30S	0.906	(0.223)	1.177	(0.277)	1.014	(0.238)	0.869	(0.221)	1.354	(0.354)	1.420	(0.455)	0.941	(0.224)	0.643 *	(0.148)
A40S	1.006	(0.233)	1.447 *	(0.323)	1.409	(0.311)	1.147	(0.270)	1.712 **	(0.435)	1.059	(0.330)	1.178	(0.265)	0.850	(0.184)
A50S	1.325	(0.323)	2.250 ***	(0.533)	1.662 **	(0.390)	1.308	(0.327)	1.671 *	(0.451)	0.548 *	(0.191)	0.781	(0.193)	0.666 *	(0.155)
A60S	0.884	(0.221)	1.920 ***	(0.454)	1.222	(0.289)	1.176	(0.294)	2.561 ***	(0.731)	1.422	(0.500)	0.892	(0.216)	0.655 *	(0.150)
A70S	1.155	(0.308)	2.905 ***	(0.745)	1.594 *	(0.405)	1.527	(0.406)	1.830 **	(0.542)	2.002 *	(0.721)	1.323	(0.338)	0.719	(0.179)
CHILD	0.980	(0.150)	0.787 *	(0.114)	0.873	(0.126)	1.135	(0.173)	0.834	(0.145)	0.674 *	(0.150)	1.335 *	(0.199)	1.258	(0.181)
EDUC1	1.090	(0.157)	1.319 **	(0.180)	1.172	(0.160)	0.917	(0.133)	1.438 **	(0.236)	0.949	(0.193)	0.989	(0.138)	1.204	(0.162)
EDUC2	0.910	(0.309)	0.838	(0.278)	1.079	(0.349)	0.803	(0.277)	2.406 **	(1.251)	0.955	(0.456)	0.810	(0.269)	0.700	(0.228)
SOENT	2.098 *	(0.887)	1.370	(0.591)	2.108 *	(0.878)	3.447 ***	(1.438)	2.231	(1.251)	1.464	(0.906)	2.441 **	(1.049)	2.433 **	(1.025)
EXSOE	3.082 ***	(0.974)	2.084 **	(0.686)	2.229 **	(0.716)	3.418 ***	(1.107)	0.529 *	(0.187)	1.796	(0.743)	3.174 ***	(1.039)	1.992 **	(0.618)
POTSE	4.158 ***	(0.961)	2.576 ***	(0.615)	2.481 ***	(0.576)	3.516 ***	(0.827)	0.930	(0.256)	1.548	(0.487)	3.290 ***	(0.774)	4.822 ***	(1.186)
SEINT	3.345 ***	(0.916)	2.362 ***	(0.691)	2.960 ***	(0.837)	2.216 ***	(0.619)	1.219	(0.472)	0.613	(0.314)	1.767 **	(0.494)	3.016 ***	(0.838)
Constant	0.050 ***	(0.013)	0.034 ***	(0.0093)	0.035 ***	(0.0096)	0.035 ***	(0.010)	0.050 ***	(0.014)	0.038 ***	(0.013)	0.031 ***	(0.0092)	0.072 **	(0.018)
R2	0.161		0.229		0.185		0.173		0.444		0.452		0.216		0.207	
LLV	−676.33		−737.92		−737.88		−674.28		−572.87		−371.49		−702.73		−749.25	

Note: Figures in parentheses are standard errors. \*\*\*, \*\*, and \* indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively. The number of observations is 3000. LLV is log likelihood value.



The results of models “7. Watch (WATCH)” and “8. Social entrepreneurship (SOCEN)” have a similar tendency. Both models show that individuals with social entrepreneurial activities and experiences are more likely to watch the other videos or TV programs about the project on YouTube or TV in the future and be interested in social entrepreneurship after watching the video. Moreover, the results indicate that not only do people have positive feelings about the promotional video but those who initially had negative feelings about it are more likely to watch the other videos and become interested in social entrepreneurship after watching the promotional video.

## 7. Discussion and Conclusions

While Japan’s level of individual social entrepreneurship is low, national and local governments and private organizations have collaborated to produce regional revitalization and social entrepreneurial activities for local communities. This study focused on a project dispatching comedians/entertainers implemented by a leading Japanese entertainment company. This project aims to group local comedians/entertainers with local stakeholders to solve various social and local problems and improve residents’ lives through social entrepreneurship.

Based on the findings of existing literature and the situation of the project, five research questions were listed. In response to the five research questions, the following main findings can be discussed and can contribute to research on social entrepreneurship and regional revitalization.

Firstly, by conducting surveys with people and comedians/entertainers involved in the project, this study found that the comedians/entertainers living in local areas have considerable potential to be social entrepreneurs. Furthermore, although the survey results of Japanese samples show that the project is relatively unknown, this study found that when the project is introduced through a promotional video and song based on the interviews and survey results to entertainers or comedians, peoples’ interests, support, and involvement in the projects increase. This indicates that the engagement of comedians/entertainers as social entrepreneurs through the production of media works via SNSs will lead to greater public awareness of and support for regional revitalization projects and social entrepreneurship in local regions.

Our analysis also demonstrates that people in their 40s and older, and especially those in their 60s, tend to have more favorability about the comedians/entertainers involved in the project than people in their 20s and younger. Moreover, the more individuals have a positive feeling about the promotional video and the song, the greater is their favorability about the comedians/entertainers involved in the project. People with positive feelings about the promotional video and the song have greater interest in the project, want to support and become involved in it, and evaluate it highly. Additionally, not only do people having positive feelings about the video, but those with initially negative feelings were more likely to watch the other videos and become interested in social entrepreneurship after watching the video. Considering that younger people often check online videos and SNSs, they may become interested in and encourage young people to pursue social entrepreneurship in local regions by undertaking such a project.

The leading entertainment company that implemented the project launched its own broadcasting satellite (BS), BS Yoshimoto, in March 2022. The company aims to create various TV programs based on the theme of regional revitalization and social business, wherein comedians/entertainers living in the local area will convey the charm of each local region to the whole country and create businesses from the program. This study finds that people who already have social entrepreneurial experience are more likely to watch the other videos or TV program about the project on YouTube or TV in the future. Moreover, these people are more likely to become interested in social entrepreneurship after watching the promotional video used in this study. In this way, this study examined the future and development potential of comedians/entertainers as social entrepreneurs.

However, this study was limited in terms of focusing on one unique case. Even though the role and potential of comedians/entertainers as social entrepreneurs who activate local communities have been examined in this study, those of other comedians/entertainers who are not participating in the project are weak. Thus, further research and case studies similar to this are required.

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**Institutional Review Board Statement:** The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Ethics Committee of Institute of Social Science, University of Tokyo (approval code: 99; and date of approval: 23 June 2022).

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

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