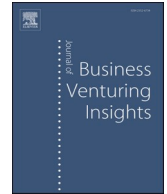




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Upward, downward or steady: How social class experience shapes transnational social venturing

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ABSTRACT

Transnational social entrepreneurs leverage their cross-border knowledge and experiences to create and exploit opportunities in multiple markets. However, this knowledge and experience is not homogeneous or equally distributed among them. In this paper, we examine how the social class experiences of 18 transnational social entrepreneurs from the African diaspora living in the West influence their transnational social venturing. We identify four types of Transnational Social Class Experience (TSCE)—Grounded, Elite, Fallen and Elevated—each associated with a different approach to transnational social venturing. Our key contribution is introducing and unpacking the concept of Transnational Social Venturing Advantage (TSVA): the unique benefits that transnational social entrepreneurs can gain when their economic experiences across multiple countries intersect with the varied sociocultural environments they encounter. We also develop a framework that elucidates the connections between TSCE and social venturing approaches through TSVA. Taken together, our study advances the literature on transnational social venturing by unpacking the social class experience dynamics that enable transnational social entrepreneurs to access resources and understand their beneficiaries. It also advocates for a shift beyond a low versus high social class dichotomy in the broader (transnational) entrepreneurship discourse to a spectrum-based approach that accounts for social class experiences gained across borders.

1. Introduction

Transnational social entrepreneurs (TSEs) are cross-nationally embedded entrepreneurs who draw on their lived experiences across their home and host countries to undertake social ventures between these varied settings (Abd Hamid et al., 2023; Drori et al., 2009; Bolzani et al., 2020; Koehne et al., 2022). Transnational social venturing is particularly complex as entrepreneurs must balance activities across borders while pursuing dual social and commercial objectives (Bolzani, et al., 2020; Drori et al., 2009; Zahra et al., 2014). Studies in the broader transnational entrepreneurship field often portray entrepreneurs as either elites or underdogs, given that their dynamic cross-border experiences can lead to both commercial opportunities and challenges in multiple countries (Chen and Tan, 2009; Abd Hamid et al., 2023; Lin and Tao, 2012; Portes et al., 2002). Similarly, recent research in the transnational social venturing context highlights variations in accessible benefits, pointing out that some entrepreneurs exhibit greater social distance from their

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beneficiaries than others, which influences their venturing approaches (Koehne et al., 2022). These findings point to the role of social class as an important structural condition in the TSE context, yet it remains insufficiently explored.

Social class significantly influences entrepreneurial success (Audretsch et al., 2013; Ge et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2013). It refers to an individual's position within a social hierarchy, determined by factors such as parental education, occupational prestige, and household income during childhood, as well as by perceptions of disadvantage relative to others (Côté, S., 2011; Côté, 2022; Kraus et al., 2012; Loignon and Woehr, 2018). Extant literature suggests higher-class entrepreneurs have more financial access, while lower-class entrepreneurs build better customer relations (Davidsson and Honig, 2003; Ge et al., 2022; Honig, 1998; Pidduck and Clark, 2021). Although this dichotomy is intuitive for static social class settings, the possibility and impact of social class mobility, i.e., the structural shifts in an individual's social class (Martin and Côté, 2019; Phillips et al., 2020; Loignon and Woehr, 2018), remains critically underexamined and undertheorized in the transnational social venturing literature. Unlike traditional entrepreneurs who may experience social mobility within a single country (Brändle and Kuckertz, 2023; Waldron et al., 2015; Quadriani, 2000), TSEs have to navigate between high and low social class settings across countries, gaining insights and facing challenges distinct to each stratum (Bolzani et al., 2020).

This paper addresses this opportunity by investigating: *How does social class experience influence the venturing approaches of transnational social entrepreneurs?* We draw on the life stories of 18 TSEs from the African diaspora living in the West, delving into how their social class experiences influence their transnational social venturing. Our study contributes to the literature on transnational social venturing by unpacking the cross-border dynamics of social class experience and significantly advances the understanding of how transnational social entrepreneurs can gain advantages (Bolzani et al., 2020; Koehne et al., 2022). We categorize Transnational Social Class Experience (TSCE) into four types: Grounded, Elite, Fallen, and Elevated, each marked by distinct social class mobility patterns and associated with unique venturing approaches. At the heart of our findings and foundational to our theoretical contribution is the concept of Transnational Social Venturing Advantage (TSVA). TSVA emphasizes the role of social class structural constraints and individual agency in transnational social entrepreneurship. In our study, it highlights how this interplay can create dynamics that influence the ways TSEs acquire social and commercial advantages. Through TSVA, we elucidate a range of benefits that present a complex, sometimes contradictory, picture: while some aspects are advantageous, others may pose challenges for social venturing.

Our theoretical framework, complemented by empirical data, challenges and refines the notion that higher social class entrepreneurs inherently possess better resource access, while lower social class entrepreneurs have greater empathy through reduced social distance (Davidsson and Honig, 2003; Ge et al., 2022; Honig, 1998; Pidduck and Clark, 2021). By examining social class experiences that include mobility between countries, our research offers a nuanced understanding of these dynamics in transnational social venturing contexts and highlights a need to shift beyond a low versus high social class dichotomy in the broader entrepreneurship discourse. Our study also adds depth to the discourse surrounding underdog dynamics in entrepreneurship (Miller and Le Breton-Miller, 2017; Yu et al., 2022). Answering the recent call for transnational entrepreneurship research on the role of social class in this area (Abd Hamid et al., 2023), our work offers insights into how perceived social class disadvantages can be reinterpreted and utilized as benefits in the entrepreneurial journey.

2. Methods

2.1. Research context

We asked, “*How does social class experience influence the venturing approaches of transnational social entrepreneurs?*” and theoretically and conveniently chose 18 TSEs (6 female, 12 male) who could answer it. They grew up in Africa or spent most of their youth there, moved to the West by choice, and lived there for over three years. Countries of origin included Ghana, Nigeria, Morocco, Cameroon, Zimbabwe, Congo, Uganda, Kenya, and Sierra Leone, while countries of residence included the United States, United Kingdom, Netherlands, and Belgium. As TSEs, they were founders/co-founders of social enterprises that had been operating for at least one year and had business linkages in their home and host countries.

2.2. Data collection

In stage one, we used LinkedIn to identify transnational social entrepreneurs using specific keywords such as “social entrepreneur”, “Africa” and “migrant”. The recruitment strategy also involved personalized outreach to gauge interest and provide study details. We focused on African social entrepreneurs as one of the co-authors has lived experience with the African diaspora and social entrepreneurship. We chose TSEs based on their migration and transnational social venturing history, verified by an online survey and public records.

In stage two we conducted life-story interviews which position individuals as knowledgeable agents (e.g., (Steyaert and Bouwen, 2019; Dyer, 1995; Singh et al., 2015) who can provide a subjective account of the life they have lived (Atkinson, 1998). We interviewed 18 transnational social entrepreneurs in total, with each interview lasting an average of 120 min. Through these conversations, we gained insights into their backgrounds, upbringings, migration experiences, social lives, as well as their personal and career aspirations.

To gain insights into participants' transnational social venturing, we drew on insights from Battilana and Lee's (2014) typology to unpack their activities. We also explored the geographical locations of their operational activities which included for example, their beneficiary arrangements, business models and partnerships.

2.3. Data analysis

Using qualitative research guidelines (Eisenhardt et al., 2016; Gioia, Corley; Langley, 1999) and our complementary expertise, we

studied each social entrepreneur's life story. In stage one, we engaged in open coding to unpack each TSEs social class experience across the home and host country. We next compared codes within and across our cases and found distinct themes, concerning their parent's occupations and their reflections of social mobility. Through an iterative process of reviewing our coding and the extant literature, we defined Transnational Social Class Experience as the social, cultural and economic conditions of living in, interacting with, or being exposed to multiple countries. This stage culminated in, classifying TSEs into three categories of TSCE: Elite, Grounded and Fallen (Table 1).

Table 1
Transnational social class experience categories.

Category	Participant ID	Home Country	Host country	Gender	Venture Mission
Fallen (High class in home country and then low class in host country) Experience: Downward mobility	CamBelf	Cameroon	Belgium	Female	Aiding young African people on the Diaspora and in Africa to undertake and participate to projects which will enable them to obtain skills, knowledge and understanding needed for their livelihoods.
	KenUkF	Kenya	UK	Female	A community based youth activism project that works in resource deficient communities in Africa targeting school-aged children as the agents of change in the community.
	NigUkM1	Nigeria	UK	Male	An initiative that provides bicycles to young children in sub-Saharan Africa to enable them access school, be educated and get the best possible start in life.
	ZimUkF	Zimbabwe	UK	Female	A reusable sanitary wear line that helps African women and girls make their own pads, using scraps of material that they might have lying around at home.
Grounded (Low class in both home and host country)Experience: Low Class Maintenance	GhaNethM	Ghana	Netherlands	Male	A footwear apparel company that seeks to help provide job opportunities for talented shoe makers in Ghana and across West Africa.
	SieUkM	Sierra Leone	UK	Male	An initiative creates a bridge between Westerners (especially Africans from diaspora) and the business opportunities within sub-Saharan Africa for social and economic development.
	GhaUsM1	Ghana	US	Male	Empowering African students to become changemakers by mobilizing their interests with real community problem-solving experiences and active-learning workshops.
	GhaBelf	Ghana	Belgium	Female	Empowering African youth in Belgium through cultural awareness programs, academic and professional skills development, entrepreneurship and mentorship.
Elite (High class in both home and host country) Experience: High Class Maintenance	MorUsM	Morocco	US	Male	An organization that creates sport development initiatives that build skills and empower African youth for future professions.
	GhaUsM2	Ghana	US	Male	An African Diaspora youth lead venture that is developing an gamified online social learning tool that offers an alternative to traditional exam preparation in Ghanaian Junior High Schools.
	NigUsM1	Nigeria	US	Male	A nonprofit that empowers mostly disconnected and at-risk youth - the formerly incarcerated, homeless, domestic violence, single parents, foster-care, etc., through tech, education and entrepreneurship.
	NigUsM2	Nigeria	US	Male	An initiative that centers around revitalizing the Niger Delta, an area devastated by five decades of oil pollution.
	UgaUkF	Uganda	UK	Female	A UK-based social enterprise working to connect and empower innovators, businesses and investors harnessing technology to drive sustainable development in Africa.
	ZimUkM	Zimbabwe	UK	Male	An organization that seeks to empower the global development community by creating IT based solutions for data analytics purposes.
	ConUsM	Congo	US	Male	Brining African agricultural products closer to end-consumers in the US market and supplying African farmers with quality but affordable farming equipment they need to increase their productivity.
	NigUkM2	Nigeria	UK	Male	A technology platform that leverages the talents of students and professionals in the US & UK by strategically connecting them to high potential agri-business ventures in Nigeria.
	NigUkF	Nigeria	UK	Female	We create opportunities for African tech startups to gain the support and investment they need from international markets.
	GhaUsM3	Ghana	US	Male	An organization working to improve the early detection and treatment of diseases in Africa using machine learning.

In stage two, we examined the association between our TSCE categories (Elite, Grounded and Fallen) and their approaches to transnational social venturing. To achieve this, we engaged in comparative analysis, both within and across the TSCE categories. Our analysis was guided by the practices outlined by Polkinghorne, (1995), who emphasizes the importance of understanding the entire configuration of patterns in qualitative research. By adopting this holistic perspective, we were able to identify transnational social venturing approaches within each TSCE that are distinct across the categories.

In stage three, we iterated between empirical observations from our data and existing theories in the literature on social class and transnational entrepreneurship to conceptualize Transnational Social Venturing Advantage (TSVA): the unique benefits that transnational social entrepreneurs can gain when their economic experiences across multiple countries intersect with the varied socio-cultural environments they encounter. Drawing on the configurations of patterns within each of our TSCE categories from stage two, we also conceptualized different constellations of TSVA (Enablement, Sensitivity, Leverage, Pressure, Authenticity, Alignment), that vary in commercial benefits (resource access) and social benefits (beneficiary insights). Although absent in our findings, in a further step, we conceptualized a fourth theoretical category, Elevated TSCE, drawing on our understanding of our empirical data and the broader transnational entrepreneurship literature (Brändle and Kuckertz, 2023; Portes et al., 2002; Zhou and Liu 2014).

In a final stage, we developed a framework that connects Transnational Social Class Experience (TSCE), Transnational Social Venturing (TSV) and Transnational Social Venturing Advantage (TSVA). Working between our data and theoretical concepts, we developed propositions for each TSCE category and created definitions that describe the implications of each TSVA constellation (Table 2).

3. Findings

3.1. Fallen transnational social class experience

The Fallen TSCE category represents downward mobility, from a high social class in the home country to a lower social class in the host country:

Table 2
The role of social class experience in transnational social venturing.

		Social class experience in host country	
		Low social class	High social class
<i>Social class experience in home country</i>	High social class	<p>Fallen Transnational Social Class Experience (4 participants): Entrepreneurs experience Downward Mobility characterized by a transition from high social class in their home country to low social class in their host country.</p> <p>P1: Downward Mobility is associated with Transnational Social Venturing Advantage characterized by Enablement and Sensitivity, leading to potentially limited resource access but expanded beneficiary insights in social venturing.</p> <p>Enablement: The circumstance where downward mobility increases a social entrepreneur's motivation to initiate efforts to alleviate impoverished conditions for individuals for home country nationals, potentially limiting resource access.</p> <p>Sensitivity: The state in which downward mobility heightens a social entrepreneur's awareness of sociocultural differences between nations, potentially expanding their insights into the lived experiences of beneficiaries.</p>	<p>Elite Transnational Social Class Experience (10 participants): Entrepreneurs experience High Class Maintenance characterized by the maintenance of high social class from their home country in their host country.</p> <p>P2: High Class Maintenance is associated with a Transnational Social Venturing Advantage characterized by Leverage and Pressure, leading to potentially expanded resource access but limited beneficiary insights in social venturing.</p> <p>Leverage: The circumstance where maintaining a high social class increases a social entrepreneur's motivation to utilize their status for the benefit of their home country or diaspora, potentially expanding resource access.</p> <p>Pressure: The state in which maintaining a high social class heightens a social entrepreneur's awareness of sociocultural expectations, potentially limiting their insights into the lived experiences of beneficiaries.</p>
	Low social class	<p>Grounded Transnational Social Class Experience (4 participants): Entrepreneurs experience Low Class Maintenance characterized by the maintenance of low social class from their home country in their host country.</p> <p>P3: Low Class Maintenance is associated with a Transnational Social Venturing Advantage characterized by Authenticity and Alignment, leading to potentially expanded resource access but limited beneficiary insights in social venturing.</p> <p>Authenticity: The circumstance where maintaining a low social class increases a social entrepreneur's motivation to utilize their humble beginnings for the benefit of their home country or diaspora, potentially expanding resource access.</p> <p>Alignment: The state in which maintaining a low social class heightens a social entrepreneur's conformity to sociocultural norms in the host country, potentially limiting their insights into the lived experiences of beneficiaries.</p>	<p>Elevated Transnational Social Class Experience (0 participants): Entrepreneurs are expected to experience Upward Mobility characterized by a transition from low social class in their home country to high social class in their host country.</p> <p>P4: Upward Mobility is expected to be associated with a Transnational Social Venturing Advantage that leads to potentially expanded resource access and expanded beneficiary insights in social venturing.</p>

‘Well, my dad was an engineer in Nigeria, and when he came to the UK, it was tough, he had to settle for the minimum, which was as a security guard. Likewise, when my mum came she was working in a bank in middle management in Nigeria. She had to settle for care kind of jobs like cleaning, to just make ends meet ... ’ (NigUkM1).

This transition not only impacts their material circumstances but also brings a painful awareness of the barriers to social mobility, as NigUkM1 further observes:

Table 3
Fallen transnational social class experience.

Concept	Evidence
Downward mobility	<p>Low class occupation & challenging upbringing:</p> <p>‘ ... [mum] was a teacher in Zimbabwe but when you come over here things are a lot different ... Mum literally was reduced to cleaning in hospitals [in the UK] ... it was quite painful to actually see my Mum have to start all the way at the bottom when she'd already established a sound career for herself ... ’ (ZimUkF).</p> <p>‘ ... it really didn't go well [for my Dad] in Cameroon ... he took over the business of his family and it didn't go well ...so he had to come study here ... [my parents] were married and they broke up ... [Dad's now] in London and he's working in a hotel as a chef’ (CamBelF).</p> <p>Heightened interest in home country:</p> <p>‘I'm still very much entrenched in my friends that are of African/Caribbean heritage, my friends that I've had from university and also know the wider family ... And of course, also going to Nigeria to work as well, it's building that network of Nigerians in the diaspora, but also kind of back home. I'm still a part of that’ (NigUkM1).</p>
Transnational Social Venturing Advantage	<p>‘ ... my closest friends that I made at high school were Zimbabwean or of African descent and I felt I could relate to them more ... ’ (ZimUkF).</p> <p>Enablement:</p> <p>‘ ... listening to community and letting them basically direct what kinds of solutions that you go back and come up with or enhance. The ability to reach their own goals. So, you're taking away the barriers so that they can reach their goals for their community, not so much you coming from the outside and deciding how development will happen in their own community ... that's how my project started’ (KenUkF).</p>
Limited resource access	<p>‘ ... when we were going home for my older sister's wedding December 2015 ... I just thought that it's a very big thing because for a girl especially an African girl not to go to school, for me it was drummed in all of my life that education's a big thing, so for me I realised how empowering learning and education can be especially for young girls and women in Zimbabwe ... I felt like, okay, maybe I should do something ... I want to be able to help’ (ZimUkF).</p> <p>Vague business model:</p> <p>‘I [don't] know how to really approach that, generating revenue ... my background isn't so much in business ... I have lived in healthcare all my life ... ’ (KenUkF).</p> <p>‘Going forward I mean apart from obviously seeking out individual donors I am looking to put on some fundraising events if possible. But also to seek out grants and funding that's available from the government as well for social enterprises’ (ZimUkF).</p> <p>Low social class partnerships:</p> <p>‘ ... I am looking for somebody else because the girl that I partnered up with in Zimbabwe is based in Harare and I would like obviously somebody based in Bulawayo as well to be able to run with programs on the ground so we have people both in the north and south’ (ZimUkF).</p> <p>‘Besides the schools, the partners - well, communities. We engage with the community and we have their buy-in, so that's a big partner for us otherwise we wouldn't be able to do much’ (NigUkM1).</p>
Concept	Evidence
Transnational Social Venturing Advantage	<p>Sensitivity:</p> <p>‘ ... the conceptions that I had about living abroad were just so wrongwhen they look at me they think, okay, there's loads of money, there's loads of opportunities, grass is greener on the other side ... everyone's just kind of looking at when's the next donation going to come, when's the next person going to send money from the diaspora ... ’ (ZimUkF).</p> <p>‘ ... when I go to Kenya I'm usually very much in - like, December holidays. Kind of like vacation mode in a sense ... I try and speak slowly as much as possible just to avoid just standing out’ (KenUkF).</p> <p>‘When it comes to paying school fees, when it comes to - and even for my aunt, she's always the one sending money to everybody at the family ... [my mum also] ... will just make a lot of compromise ... buy expensive stuff, expensive clothes and all that stuff [for family back home]’ (CamBelF).</p>
Expanded beneficiary insights	<p>Direct engagement style:</p> <p>‘So one of the ways in which I hope to be able to reach them is obviously with how the pad looks.I think will appeal to the African women [if it's] made out of African material so Kente designs and Koshier designs, Ndebele designs ... ’ (ZimUkF).</p> <p>‘We actually just show up. Just show up and make appointments with them. And it's just me and a couple of the youth leaders that work with us’ (KenUkF).</p> <p>Beneficiary focused workplace culture:</p> <p>‘Well first of all, Africa. Well you have to love Africa the way I love Africa ... [It's] really important, so wanting to empower other leaders and bringing leaders together ... ’ (CamBelF).</p> <p>‘We always connect to our desire to really give youth a platform to be heard. And I think because of that, we tend to have a lot of conversations with each other about those types of topics. Like, what are you doing, what are we doing?’ (KenUkF).</p> <p>‘We're sold out to the interest of the community, the interest of the country, and the interest of the continent. That's the first that we place the needs of those people and those students who we're working with - that's centred around what we think irrespective of our differences or our ideas - what's the goal at the end? We want to improve lives ... Forget about our own ideas and personal things’ (NigUkM1).</p>

Table 4
Elite transnational social class experience.

Concept	Evidence
High Class Maintenance	<p>High class parental occupations: 'My mother is an environmental engineering professor and she's a Dean of Diversity at the UniversityAnd then my dad ... now he runs the geotechnical engineering department ... ' (NigUsM2).</p> <p>' ... [my dad] ... used to work as the chief land valuer for the Registration Board. And my mum is an entrepreneur. She owns her own salon ... ' (GhaUsM2).</p> <p>'My father's an engineer - actually, all the men in my family are engineersMy mum was Director for Education' (NigUsM1).</p> <p>'My dad used to be an accountant and then retired. He used to work as an accountant for Shell and then he was an accountant for another company ... He was like a chairman of the board for that for a while. But he's now fully retired and he just grows his tea' (UgaUkF).</p> <p>Heightened interest in host country: '[In London] I've gotten to meet some incredible people. I've gotten to have wonderful conversationsthere's so many things that you can learn and experience that shape you as an individual ... ' (NigUkF).</p> <p>'But being in the States, I've learnt a lot. I've actually taken the time to appreciate my time here and make connections ... with people who I think I can help, who I think can help me down the line' (GhaUsM2).' ' ... the US is a country that was built by entrepreneurs, so seeing everything that's possible, even with limited capital here in the US, has kind of shaped my entrepreneur spirit. I mean, in part, I'm very entrepreneur minded because of the fact that I live in the US ... ' (ConUsM).</p>
Transnational Social Venturing Advantage	<p>Leverage: 'It was, really, just having strategy discussions on the rooftop with the friend who I said works at Google, and then starting to circulate emailsHaving strategy meetings, to narrow it down to what we thought our approach should be ... ' (MorUsM). 'So, when I was doing my master's at Sussex ... I started reaching out to my contacts in South Africa and maybe a company in the UK saying, "I'm going my master's. I've got some free time on my hands, let me do some research and data analysis for you" ... we were making pretty decent money, definitely more than enough for students and then we figured, Why don't we scale this thing?' (ZimUkM).</p> <p>' ... we always heard our parents complaining about Nigeria. They were like, "Well, there's so many smart Nigerians, why is the country in such disarray?" ... so one way we saw was using skillswe felt there was a skills gap but there was also capital gap ... Why don't we leverage that to ... enable sustainable growth of the middle market in Africa' (NigUkM2).' ' ... it was actually in one of my [university] lessons. We were talking about donor aid and why it was a problem and why it wasn't working. So I thought let's support the development of home-grown initiatives, and support diaspora engagement with issues on the continent ... ' (NigUkF).</p>
Concept	Evidence
Expanded resource access	<p>High social class funding sources: 'So in my final year in college, I came up with an idea to pretty much create a tele-medicine App to connect mothers in rural areas to doctors in the cities ... I got \$20,000 from MIT to panel that idea' (GhaUsM3). 'So, funding comes from ... Proposals to companies, both local and international companies, with Africa presence. Organizations like USAID. The State Department does a lot of sports exchange programmes ... ' (MorUsM). 'So far, we've only raised one grant and that as from Comic Relief. Then we ended up in the process of raising another ... that's from Innovate UK, which is a government agency; they support innovation and small businesses and stuff' (UgaUkF). 'We participated in a lot of competitions. At least two a month. And we won like \$5000 at Princeton, one like \$5000 at Duke, a little bit. Another bit at Duke. I think we won about four or five competitions' (NigUkM2).</p> <p>High social class partnerships: 'So what we've done is we go down the philanthropy to investment scale. We establish a partnership with Shell's foundation arm ... not only does Shell Nigeria know about it but Shell Corporate knows about it' (NigUsM2).</p> <p>'We are partnered with with Tech London Advocates to - Tech London Advocates is a community of like thought leaders of tech in London. There's over 4000 peoplewe [also] have different partners like two law firms in London. So like Fieldfisher ... we've [also] worked with, like Oxfam ... ' (UgaUkF). ' ... medium to large size NGOs and charities, usually based in the UK. So, you're looking at about 10 million pounds and up of annual funding. That's probably our core segment' (ZimUkM).</p> <p>'I'm in this thing called Interact ... once a year they get all these VCs, like Lightspeed, Highland, Sequoia and then different technologists who care about social impact together and you can build relationships with them. It's a very strong network' (NigUkM2).</p>
Concept	Evidence
Transnational Social Venturing Advantage	<p>Pressure: 'I keep thinking would I be able to be this broke for two years and push this dream ... if I was back home in Uganda, just from a social pressure and - just that inability to just deal with some of the failures and not let your parents be like you've wasted your entire engineering degree and masters ... ' (UgaUkF).</p> <p>' ... So there's always this pressure to go above and beyond and do something that will create the wow factorbecause I'm a foreigner to the country, I don't want to fail' (GhaUsM3).</p> <p>'I learned at a young age that if [to] defy people's expectations ... Because my parents taught me to go and be the best at what I'm doing. And so what you end up doing was you end up being like super black. You're black but you're really smart and</p>

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Table 4 (continued)

Concept	Evidence
Limited beneficiary insights	you're in all these circles that you shouldn't be in' (NigUsM2).
	'Both of my parents are quite traditional. So they would prefer that I had a job, a magic circle law firm, and was kind of doing very institutional things, you know; very clear path, promotions and all of that stuff ...' (NigUkF).
	Indirect beneficiary engagement style: 'A lot of the marketing is not as much tailored to the young people. Again, we're not raising money from them. Most of them are just happy to get in the programme. So, it's more for the donors' (MorUsM).
	'... with Comic Relief, [we] pitch[ed] this program around a startup boot camp for female entrepreneurs - the goal was they wanted to have - they wanted support technology based innovations that improved the lives of women and girls. We went to them saying we can create a program ...' (UgaUkF).
	Indirect beneficiary emphasis of workplace culture: '... what I really strive for, this cultural communication and openness. And then once you have that, things like innovation and things like will flow because once there's communication, that's when you can begin to get innovative' (GhaUsM3). 'It's creative. It's result-focused. It's aspiration-driven. We're about reaching for the stars. It believes in the power of the private sector. So, it's about innovative partnerships, and it's about being really nimble' (MorUsM).
	'Culture wise as well, it's - because we're a data first company, we need to obviously take that very seriously and stress test our ideas so the way we do that is we - it's basically a process of hypothesis testing ...' (ZimUkM).

'... the UK is a very class society ... the social economic power you have makes a big difference[for] your children ... social mobility [is] a problem for you based on what kind of job you do, the kind of people you meet ...'.

As a result of downward mobility, these social entrepreneurs have heightened interest in their home country (Table 3), with some frequently traveling to their home country where they originally held a high social class. CamBelF explains that '*... by going back every year, every summer to Africa ... Africa is really my only motivation actually that helped me to go through every day here in Belgium ... not give up*'. KenUkF agrees:

'... my core identity is Kenyan and African and I go back quite a bit ... just interacting with my friends back home ... Going back has had a big impact on my ability to remain connected to my culture and my roots'.

Consequently, social entrepreneurs with Fallen TSCE are motivated to pursue *enablement* to address the low-class conditions in their home countries (Table 3). CamBelF effectively articulates this:

'When I was in Ghana for 4 months ... I had a long conversation with a local from there ... she couldn't find a job for three years ... she was really emotive and I felt I really want to do something ... I truly want to give a voice to the people who don't have one'.

Despite a strong motivation to enable, these social entrepreneurs face challenges in resource access, which is evident in their venturing approaches (Table 3). Specifically, they often establish community-based ventures that provide tools, resources, and opportunities to improve circumstances (Table 1). KenUkF's initiative exemplifies this: '*A community based youth activism project that works in resource deficient communities in Africa targeting school-aged children as the agents of change in the community*'.

Resource challenges attached to the enablement motivation are particularly apparent in organizational partnerships. These social entrepreneurs often collaborate with lower social class groups who help them support their beneficiaries but do not provide financing (Table 3):

'Money, money, money, money. Yeah, can't deny that. I need money, man ... We'll probably end up selling to other people at the markets if they can afford it' (NigUkM1).

Social entrepreneurs who undergo downward mobility also become *sensitive* to socioeconomic disparities between their home and host countries (Table 3). Although they occupy a lower social class in their host country, these social entrepreneurs are often perceived as higher class in their home countries due to the prevailing belief in the prosperity of life abroad (Table 3). NigUkM1 expresses the accompanying insights:

'... the way I grew up [in Nigeria]. If you go to a party people come and eat and drink at your own expense ... It's well appreciated, and for that you make it possible for them to eat and drink and be merry, and gifts back home on the way' (NigUkM1).

This attunement with socioeconomic differences informs their engagement approaches with beneficiaries (Table 3). They, for example, work directly '*... with the schools to identify kids that walk kilometers, long distances [in Nigeria] ...*' (NigUkM1). Moreover, their workplace culture is intentionally designed to be sensitive to the needs of beneficiaries.

'We always connect to our desire to really give youth a platform to be heard ... we tend to have a lot of conversations with each other about those types of topics' (KenUkF).

3.2. Elite transnational social class experience

Social entrepreneurs with Elite TSCE enjoy the privilege of maintaining a high social class in both their home and host countries. Their backgrounds are markedly different, often characterized by familial achievements and prestigious careers, as MorUsM and ConUsM describe: *'I was born into a diplomat family ... My dad worked for the Nigerian Foreign Service for about 35 years'* (MorUsM) and *'Well, my dad was a doctorLater on, he worked for the United Nations, and when we migrated here [US]'* (ConUsM). By maintaining a high social class, social entrepreneurs with Elite TSCE gravitate towards their host countries (Table 4), as illustrated by NigUsM2: *' ... for someone like me, I have the choice of going down the well-worn path and becoming a banker at JP Morgan or Goldman Sachs ... just living in New York, LA, San Francisco ... becoming a globalist all the way'*.

NigUsM1 further elucidates this trend:

'The challenge I have with moving back now is I feel like I may stagnate in my ability to learn ... What New York does is it keeps me on my toes to constantly develop, to constantly improve ... I feel like moving back to Nigeria would take that away from me' (NigUsM1).

High class maintenance facilitates the pursuit of self-actualization for these entrepreneurs. GhaUsM3's childhood curiosity exemplifies this: *' ... When I was really young I asked my mum "Why are we here?" ... Can we find a higher calling beyond earth?'* NigUkF later echoes this introspective theme:

'I think trying to figure out what your real passion is and recognizing that mine was ... trying to validate my feelings of belonging on a continent that I hadn't been really connected to since I was 10. And wanting to somehow contribute to that because of the experiences and the opportunities that I'd been given because I didn't live there' (NigUkF).

Consequently, these social entrepreneurs are motivated to leverage their high social class to for the home country/diaspora benefit (Table 4). This is best exemplified by UgaUkF:

'When I moved to the UK, I [learnt] ... a way of building a successful business that I didn't know about, and I know a lot of African entrepreneurs, don't know about ... I started thinking about how can I provide them access to some of this information and expertise.. How could I use my presence in the UK to benefit the legal system back home?' (UgaUkF).

The motivation to leverage encourages social entrepreneurs with Elite TSCE to develop technology-based ventures that enhance economic opportunities for trade, investment and sustainable practices (Table 1), such as *'An organization that seeks to empower the global development community by creating IT-based solutions for data analytics purposes'* (ZimUkM).

Elite TSCE is characterized by expanded resource access through high social class partnerships and funding sources (Table 4), as NigUkF illustrates: *'So we're usually partnered with Boots, which is a large pharmaceutical and Planet Organic and ASOS ... We [also] partnered with Facebook and Google ...'* Social entrepreneurs in this category also tend establish concrete business models such as NigUsM1 who states, *'We take equity, right now. We take 5 percent equity from the startups we work with. Then corporate sponsorships ...'* (NigUsM1).

Although high-class maintenance facilitates the motivation to leverage, it also makes social entrepreneurs with Elite TSCE susceptible to pressure based on the sociocultural expectations others have of them to succeed (Table 4). NigUkM2 succinctly puts it, *' ... the expectation is just to be bright ... to do well'*. NigUsM1 adds depth to this notion, reflecting on the broader implications of these expectations: *'The mindset of the average Nigerian is not mediocre ... I feel very responsible playing my role, my part, in ensuring that Nigeria walks into the future, ready'*. These pressures can limit beneficiary insights as social entrepreneurs with Elite TSCE engage with a range of stakeholders, often extending beyond direct beneficiaries (Table 4). Although pressure might make them prioritize big projects, but these initiatives might not create much value for the beneficiaries, as NigUkF's experience highlights:

' ... I hated it when events were 250 people because people [beneficiaries] didn't actually talk to each other. They just kind of came, sat down, and left. And it was really sad to me when it got that big ... because it meant that people were not actually speaking to each other. They weren't learning from each other. They weren't growing together ...' (NigUkF).

Moreover, their workplace cultures often prioritize entrepreneurship and innovation, but these aspects indirectly help beneficiaries through improved operations and results. UgaUkF's description of her workplace culture underscores this point: *'Entrepreneurial. Everyone involved is an entrepreneur in some way or the other ... It's understood that this is an entrepreneurial venture and if you don't sell tickets, it's not working'* (UgaUkF).

3.3. Grounded transnational social class experience

Social entrepreneurs with Grounded TSCE maintain a consistently low social class in both their home and host countries, as illustrated by GhaUsM1 and GhaNethM: *'My mum, she's a nurse. My dad, he drives a tour bus'* (GhaUsM1) and *'My mum works at the hotel and my step-dad works in the restaurant'* (GhaNethM). Such humble beginnings are often accompanied by challenges during childhood. For instance, SieUkM's experience highlights the educational struggles inherent in such a background: *'I went to a pretty bad secondary school ... I'd call it surviving'*. Similarly, GhaBelF shares their experience of feeling alienated and misunderstood in Belgium:

' ... I was treated [differently] at school because I lived, let's say, very far from town in a very small city here in Belgium and people were not really open minded ... So when they see you, they feel strange, like who are you and why are you here ...' (GhaBelF).

In coping with continued low social class challenges in their host countries, many of these social entrepreneurs gravitate towards their home country, specifically the diaspora community (Table 5). GhaBelF's experience illustrates this trend:

‘I have few Belgium friends ... I tried to be part of the community, I do everything you’re supposed to do but ... here we have our own community, the Ghanaian community ... it still feels like you’re home, in your own home country’.

Challenging conditions in the host country, motivates these social entrepreneurs to *authentically* use their low social class circumstances for the home country/diaspora benefit (Table 5). Ghana F1’s journey is a powerful example:

‘The organization I created ... [is] based on my story of coming to Belgium and not knowing anybody or finding any role model. I was once told by my bookkeeping teacher that because I always have this cool hairstyle ... it’s better for me to do hairdressing than business and computer studies’ (GhaBelF).

Table 5
Grounded transnational social class experience.

Concept	Evidence
Low class maintenance	<p>Low class occupations ‘My dad is a mechanic and my mum she’s a trader’ (GhaBelF).</p> <p>‘So my mum is a housing officer and my dad looks after, you know, he’s like a care worker’ (SieUkM).</p> <p>Challenging upbringing: ‘You get in the space where people are looking at you and it’s like who is this dark skinned, African kid walking around? The loudest bias - there’s a lot of discrimination ... So it was tough for me’ (GhaUsM1).</p> <p>Heightened interest in home country diaspora: ‘ ... Ghanaian culture is in my home. It’s in my church ... you can’t really escape that. It’s not that watered down to the point where it’s almost American. There’s a lot of Ghanaian sentiments that are still present in our diasporic relations. So while I’m not local, I not present in Ghana, the culture is still very present here’ (GhaUsM1).</p> <p>‘I’m always a Ghanaian and I can’t do away with it ... It doesn’t matter how far you go you still come back to your Ghanaian culture. So for that one once I was born there and raised there, and I have Ghanaian parents and I can always relate to my Ghanaian culture’ (GhaNethM).</p>
Transnational Social Venturing Advantage	<p>Authenticity: ‘ ... when all the turmoil about racial injustice ... with the police and African-Americans and black people [happened] ... It made me think about Africa. It made me think about home that’s when we decided to start [the organization]’ (GhaUsM1).</p> <p>‘My personal objectives was to answer the question “Do I want to move to anywhere in Africa? Do I want to focus my life on solving problems specifically connected to Africa? And do I see myself as somebody who is equipped, can survive, somebody who can thrive within the environments of these countries?”’ (SieUkM).</p>
Expanded resource access	<p>High and low social class sources: ‘So some of it has come from corporate sponsorship, a lot of funding has come from our pocket’ (SieUkM).</p> <p>‘Mostly university grants and major ... that’s probably where pretty much all our funding has come from’ (GhaUsM1).</p> <p>High social class partnerships: ‘ ... so African Diaspora Network in Europe. It’s funded by a lady who works at the parliament, the European parliament and because she believed in the dream that we had ... ’ (GhaBelF).</p> <p>‘The University of Virginia is a great partner for us because we sort of started there. So they assist us with a lot of things that we need ... ’ (GhaUsM1).</p>
Concept	Evidence
Transnational Social Venturing Advantage	<p>Alignment: ‘ ... it’s very important that you know the language because if you don’t know the language it will be hard for you to speak ... they have to know that you’ve really adapted into the system of being not a Belgium but adopted into the community’ (GhaBelF).</p> <p>‘My culture in secondary school, as I said it was a bit of a rough school so you always had to be a bit street wise; know what to say, how to say it, how to come across - a lot of the things is you needed to show a lot of heart’ (SieUkM).</p> <p>‘So when you think about the work environment as well, and especially if you’re used to that particular environment and then you go to a very very corporate/middle class environment, that will completely kind of throw you. And the sub personality which is set to allow you to survive in that environment, will normally come up. Which might make you come across as more quiet, which might make you come across as more conservative’ (SieUkM).</p>
Limited beneficiary insights	<p>Indirect beneficiary engagement style: ‘We go through universities a lot and we go through our previous participants’ (GhaUsM1).</p> <p>‘So it’s through word of mouth and through online marketing. So something that would cost us as well would be marketing ... that could be TV, radio, newspaper, social media ... ’ (SieUkM).</p> <p>Indirect beneficiary emphasis of workplace culture: ‘We’re just a very - we’re just relaxed. We don’t - we’re not a very - we’re very casual. We’re very fun people. We all know each other already’ (GhaUsM1). ‘I would say there’s a lot of kind of integrity and just sticking to your values and commitment and just making sure that we say what we’re going to do and if we’re not able to do stuff, we kind of voice it out’ (SieUkM).</p>

Table 6
Future research and practical implications.

Level	Future Research Ideas	Practical Implications
Individual	<p>What types of benefits accrue to transnational social entrepreneurs who experience upward mobility (Elevated TSCE)?</p> <p>How does experiencing multiple forms of social mobility (upward and downward) influence the development of TSVA?</p> <p>What other types of TSCE could lead to the development of TSVA?</p> <p>How can transnational social entrepreneurs mitigate the challenging aspects of TSVA while amplifying the positive aspects?</p> <p>How does TSVA influence long-term entrepreneurial effectiveness in terms of social impact and financial performance?</p> <p>How does TSCE affect other types of social venturing motivations, skillsets and priorities?</p> <p>How does TSCE affect other (social) entrepreneurs such as foreigners, returnees, immigrants, and refugees?</p>	<p>Social Venturing Training and Education: Programs can be developed to incorporate lessons from diverse social class experiences, helping transnational social entrepreneurs understand how these experiences can be leveraged for entrepreneurial success.</p> <p>Networking and Mentorship: Creating platforms where transnational social entrepreneurs from varied social backgrounds can engage to learn from each other could enhance their ability to leverage TSVA.</p>
Team/ Organizational	<p>How do diverse social class experiences within a founding team influence the development and expression of TSVA?</p> <p>How can organizations leverage the diverse social class experiences of their founding teams to maximize the benefits generated from TSVA?</p>	<p>Team Composition and Recruitment: Ventures should consider social class diversity as a potentially valuable factor in team composition. When recruiting or forming teams, including members from various social class backgrounds can enhance the team's ability to develop diverse perspectives and approaches, contributing to a richer TSVA.</p>
Ecosystem	<p>How can investors be encouraged to recognize and support the complementary skill sets of transnational entrepreneurs from diverse social class backgrounds?</p> <p>How can the investment ecosystem be structured to harness the benefits of distinct constellations of TSCE and/or TSVA?</p>	<p>Investor Education and Awareness Programs: Implementing training programs for investors that highlight the value and potential of diverse social class backgrounds in transnational social entrepreneurship.</p> <p>Incentivization Schemes: Creating financial incentives or funding programs specifically designed to support ventures led by transnational social entrepreneurs from underrepresented social classes.</p>

They develop community-based ventures focused on building skills, networks, and capabilities (Table 1). These ventures interestingly, enjoy high social class partnerships with high class organizations and individuals sometime receive funding from high class sources (Table 5), as SieUkM reveals:

‘We’ve got a good relationship with LBS [London Business School], I can get the students involved, I can get the Uni involved, I can get PWC involved ... I’ve got good relationships with them and all of them have the Africa summits ... So there’s several kind of large institutions ... ’.

Continued low class in the host country also results in these social entrepreneurs *aligning* with the norms in the host country (Table 5). This is a skill born out of necessity as GhaNethM articulates:

‘Society is built on values and norms ... [to avoid being] deviant I have to comply with the [Dutch] norms and values ... the norms and values in a Dutch culture ... [if] you want to be accepted then you have to ... ’.

These social entrepreneurs often express gratitude for the opportunities provided by their host countries, reflecting a complex interplay of challenges and opportunity. GhaUsM1 vividly captures this sentiment:

‘I think it’s been an incredible journey and, frankly, I wouldn’t trade my experience for anything. I have to go through everything I went through to be where I am now. I know what it feels like to feel like you’re not enough and you’re not a part of the community and you’re not respected ... [it] has definitely prepared me for [the] future ... ’.

Gaining alignment appears to limit these social entrepreneurs’ access to beneficiary insights (Table 5). Their engagement style with beneficiaries is indirect and does not include face to face interactions: ‘It’s through Facebook ... When you put it on social media that this person is coming to talk it drags more interest from the youth to say I want to be there ... ’ (GhaBelf). Their workplace cultures also emphasize values and leadership styles which enhance workplace harmony but do not directly benefit their beneficiaries:

‘I would say there’s a lot of integrity and just sticking to your values and commitment and just making sure that we say what we’re going to do and if we’re not able to do stuff, we kind of voice it out’ (SieUkM).

4. Discussion

Our research contributes to the growing discourse on the benefits accessible to transnational social entrepreneurs (Bolzani et al., 2020; Koehne et al., 2022), by presenting a theoretical framework that considers the role of social class experiences of TSEs. Our framework lays the groundwork for future research in transnational social venturing, suggesting a more nuanced perspective on who may be uniquely positioned to acquire social and/or commercial advantages through introducing and linking two novel concepts, transnational social class experience (TSCE) and transnational social venturing advantage (TSVA). In doing so, it highlights the importance of the interplay between structural social class conditions and individual agency in the advantages transnational social entrepreneurs can gain. In Table 6, we present further avenues for future research.

First, our framework identifies four types of TSCE, Elite, Fallen, Grounded and Elevated. It offers a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of entrepreneurial social class experiences by exploring social class experiences in both home and host countries and the social class mobility occurring during transitions between countries. These insights are transferable to the broader entrepreneurship literature concerned with foreigners, returnees, immigrants and refugees (Abd Hamid et al., 2023; Abebe, 2023; Ahmed et al., 2022; Elo and Täube 2022; Sinkovics & Reuber, 2021; Tucker and Croom, 2021). Thus, we advocate for a move beyond the dichotomy of low versus high social class (Audretsch et al., 2013; Ge et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2013), towards a spectrum-based approach that accounts for nuances of social class experiences gained across borders.

A spectrum-based approach stands to enrich entrepreneurship literature which has recognized that entrepreneurs from higher social classes typically have better access to resources, while those from lower social classes exhibit deeper empathy and understanding towards disadvantaged groups, through reduced social distance (Davidsson and Honig, 2003; Ge et al., 2022; Honig, 1998; Pidduck and Clark, 2021). For example, our findings highlight that foreign entrepreneurs (Fallen TSCE) who were formerly high social class and still perceived as high class in their home countries, can expand their beneficiary insights by developing a sensitivity for sociocultural differences across borders. Another example is foreign entrepreneurs (Grounded TSCE) who despite being low social class in both their home and host country, can experience reduced beneficiary insights by conforming to sociocultural norms in their host country. These findings and our framework more generally, hint at the significance of social mobility across countries for entrepreneurial motivations, skillsets and priorities, but future research is needed to further understand and unpack the implications.

Second, we introduce and conceptualize the novel concept of TSVA, which links TSCE to transnational social venturing, specifically whether and how TSEs acquire social and/or commercial advantages. Through TSVA, our framework offers novel insights into which social class experiences enable social and/or commercial value creation within social ventures. Our examination of the Fallen and Grounded categories directly speaks to entrepreneurs’ challenges when they are foreigners, refugees or immigrants (Abebe, 2023; Ahmed et al., 2022; Pidduck and Clark, 2021). Specifically, we unveil counterintuitive insights, by highlighting how a consistently low social class in the home and host country (Grounded TSCE) can paradoxically confer potential resource advantages to entrepreneurs such as partnerships with high social class organizations. This advantage emerges when these entrepreneurs authentically draw on their low social class backgrounds when venturing. Thus, our study highlights how perceived social class disadvantages can be reinterpreted and utilized as benefits in the entrepreneurial journey.

In addition to the literature on transnational social entrepreneurship, our counterintuitive insights on Grounded TSCE broaden the

understanding of social class's impact on entrepreneurship, particularly contributing to the discourse on underdog dynamics. Defined by Miller & Le Breton-Miller (2017) and expanded upon by Yu et al. (2022), underdog dynamics refer to the influence of challenging personal conditions—be they economic, sociocultural, cognitive, or physical/emotional—on the development of entrepreneurial capabilities. In response to the recent call by Abd Hamid et al. (2023), we contribute to this literature by comprehensively elaborating on how such entrepreneurs navigate home and host country environments, interpret and gain distinctive advantages associated with their underdog status.

5. Conclusion

Our study provides a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of the social class experiences of TSEs. This research establishes the groundwork for understanding how a TSEs social class background influences their access to resources and ability to connect with marginalized groups. In conceptualizing Transnational Social Venturing Advantage (TSVA), we emphasize the pivotal role of the intersection between economic and sociocultural factors in shaping transnational social venturing and offer compelling avenues to examine TSVA and TSCE beyond our research context. These insights serve as a compelling invitation for scholars in the field of entrepreneurship to delve deeper into the relationship between entrepreneurship and social class experiences gained across borders. Such exploration is crucial for cultivating more equitable and inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Nkosana Mafico: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Project administration, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Anna Krzeminska:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology, Conceptualization. **Charmine Härtel:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Methodology, Conceptualization. **Josh Keller:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Supervision, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known conflicts of interest.

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