

Trends In Social Entrepreneurship: A Systematic Review

Sunayana
Assistant Professor
Centre for Management Studies
Jamia Millia Islamia
New Delhi-110025

&

Shadab Mohd Khan
Research Scholar
Centre for Management Studies
Jamia Millia Islamia
New Delhi – 110025
Mail: shadabmohdkhan@gmail.com

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to gain understanding of the evolution and current state of work done in the field of social entrepreneurship. Bibliographic analyses of 117 papers were used to track the evolving research in the field of social entrepreneurship over past three decades from 1987 to 2018. By content analysis of the established research in the field this paper provides an insight of the subjects emphasised upon by researchers, key areas where the research in the field of social entrepreneurship needs to be addressed and suggests direction for future research in the field of Social Entrepreneurship. Although there is a significant rise in research work in the field of social entrepreneurship, this study shows that research in the field of social entrepreneurship is in the nascent stage. Most of the research is dominant by researchers belonging to US and UK. Domains like Political Science, Economics, Sociology, Education, and Finance increasing their impact in the development of the field. Analysis of statistical status of available researches shows that conceptual articles dominant the empirical articles. There is a lack of theory building and testing in the field of social entrepreneurship. To summarise, future research should draw attention to three big issues: converging empirical results on the social entrepreneurship process, enlarging the field of social entrepreneurship towards new phenomena and broadening the topic.

Keywords: Social entrepreneurship, Social Enterprise, Social Entrepreneurship, Social Entrepreneur, Research, Interdisciplinary approach,

INTRODUCTION

The term Social entrepreneur and social entrepreneurship are not new and were first used in literature on social change in the 1960s. The terms came into widespread use in the 1980s and 1990s, when the founder of Ashoka Bill Drayton, and author Charles Leadbeater promoted it. Different authors defined the terms in different context according to their observations of the phenomena of Social Entrepreneurship. Basically social entrepreneur can be defined as someone who aims for social value in the process of transformational change that will be beneficial for society at large (Schwab found. 2018). They use innovative and systematic approach to tackle the social problems and to create impact in the life of marginalised and the disadvantaged who lacks financial means or the political clouts to address their problems (Chell et al, 2010). The process of Social Entrepreneurship starts with recognition of social problem and business feasible solution of the problem thus use of social entrepreneurial principles to create, organise and manage a venture to create a social change (Weerawardena, 2006). Social Enterprises are mission driven organizations that strive to achieve a social purpose. Some use profits from the social enterprise or other organizations to do well, while others use the social enterprise itself for good (Tapsell, 2010).

Social Entrepreneurship is a global phenomena and attention to social entrepreneur and social entrepreneurship is increasing. World class universities, global organisation such as World Bank, world economic forum, public agencies, entrepreneurial firms and private corporations are paying attention to the phenomena of social entrepreneurship and are dedicating their resources to it. In some countries India, Bangladesh they have filled the gap left by the state and in some like UK, US they closely aided the public organisations at different levels. Various European countries, some of the South American countries have setup dedicated organisation to encourage social entrepreneurial initiative (BBC, 2018).

Different forms of social entrepreneurship have emerged in different countries in some cases even within the same countries which is why different approaches have been followed to understand and the promotion of the social entrepreneurship. This is also a reason that different school of thoughts have emerged and there is a geographical divide in a way social entrepreneurship is conceptualised (Weber, 2015).

For a country like India which is a third largest economy of the world and second most populated country, Social entrepreneurship is very important as issues like illiteracy, unemployment and poor health care system, malnutrition etc prevailed in Indian society and social entrepreneurship can provide a solution to country's problems (Partap, 2012).

Although, Ashoka introduced the term ‘social entrepreneur’ in 1981, cooperative and community-owned business models such as amul and fab India have existed in India since the 1950s. This is the reason that social impact and entrepreneurship are deeply rooted in the Indian ethos (Brijesh et al, 2013).

India has seen significant growth in its social enterprise operation over the past decade. Due to growing awareness, funding, quality training and workshops available to social entrepreneurs and social enterprise leaders, the number and quality of innovative ideas and business plans have increased. Through aid organizations providing direct, indirect, financial and advisory assistance to social enterprises, the social enterprise ecosystem has grown. This is why the Indian social enterprise ecosystem is among the most established with a wide range of domestic and international stakeholders and support organizations (ADB, 2013).

Despite the importance and valued potential of the Social Sector around the globe, most of the literature in the field is limited to defining the field of Social Entrepreneurship. Different horizons related to Social Entrepreneurship which can provide valuable new insights into the field are missing (short, 2009). The purpose of this paper is to identify the key areas where the research in the field of social entrepreneurship needs to be addressed and suggests direction for future research in the field of Social Entrepreneurship.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A large number of authors paid attention to definitional aspect of social entrepreneurship despite this consensus on the definition has not been achieved. For evidence, Fowler (2000) defined “Social entrepreneurship as the creation of viable socio-economic structures, relations, institutions, organisations and practices that yield and sustain social benefits”. Fowler emphasises on social benefits as the output of social entrepreneurship whereas Alword et al. (2004) defined “Social entrepreneurship as a creation of innovative solutions for immediate social problems and gathering ideas, capacities and mobilizing resources and social arrangements require for sustainable social transformation”. Thus focusses on social transformation as an end of social entrepreneurship. According to peredo and McClean (2006) social entrepreneurship is exercise when some person or group (i) seeks to create social value in an exclusive or influential way (ii) shows the ability to identify and exploit opportunities to build that value (iii) Uses innovation from a simple idea to adapt the novelty of someone else to new invention, to generate or deliver that value (iv) is willing to take some level of risk in the building of this value (v) is exceptionally resourceful in the organization of

scarce resources to build that value. Similarly, weerawardena and mort (2006) defined social entrepreneurship as “a behavioral phenomena that is expressed in a NFP organisation context aimed at delivering social value through exploitation of opportunities”. These authors considered creation of ‘Social value’ as an implicit and important outcome of social entrepreneurship and this social value can be achieved through different social processes. “Social entrepreneurship encompasses the activities and processes undertaken to discover , define and exploit opportunities in order to enhance social wealth by creating new or managing existing organisations in an innovative manner” zahara et al. (2009). Thus, describes social wealth as an important outcome.

A bulk of Social Entrepreneurship research have been published in management journals to date and this percentage becomes high while viewing entrepreneurship journals as a subpart of management research. Still there are valuable research streams within management which are unaddressed by social entrepreneurship scholars which can enhance the contribution of management field into the field of social entrepreneurship.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To address how social entrepreneurship research can move forward theoretically and empirically this paper highlights the current state of the work done in the field. Therefore this paper helps in understanding the evolution of the concept of Social Entrepreneurship and analyse yearly geographic progress in the field of social entrepreneurship. By content analysis of the established research in the field this paper also provides an inside of the subjects emphasised upon by researchers working in this emerging field of social entrepreneurship while understanding the interdisciplinary nature of social entrepreneurship and methods they used in inquiring that subjects. At last the paper throws light on the future scope of new development in the field.

METHODOLOGY

To get a better understanding of the available literature on social entrepreneurship, we find and analyzed the series of articles that were published in leading management and entrepreneurship journals that focused primarily on social entrepreneurship or its phenomena. Therefore, we explore the articles that were explicitly related to social entrepreneur, social entrepreneurship, social enterprise or social venture, without placing any limits on time period. As the social entrepreneurship is a emerging topic, we tried to find any article that is available, hence reviewed every possible year. We start our research with the journals

mentioned by (Tahai and Meyer, 2009) in their examination of management and entrepreneurship. These journals included Administrative Science Quarterly, Strategic Management Journal, Academy of Management Journal, Journal of Management, Academy of Management Review and Organization Science as management journals. Specific entrepreneurship journals included Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal, Journal of Business Venturing, and Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice.

Only 17 articles were revealed in this analysis out of which two were published in Academy of Management Journal, eight in Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, three were published in Academy of Management Review and four in Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal.

Thus, we felt the need to expand our search to include other research-oriented journals in the field of management and other fields too. In this search we found 117 relevant research articles from different fields including entrepreneurship and management but not limited to, and on arranging the articles in term of their publishing year the first article appeared to be published on 1987.

We further divided our research into conceptual and empirical articles to evaluate the distinctive merits of each type of contribution. Out of total 117 articles, 82 were found to be conceptual and 35 were empirical in nature. Then, we investigated the purpose of the article for conceptual articles and the use of formal proposals. We coded research method used, formal propositions or hypotheses made, research setting developed for empirical articles

DISCUSSION

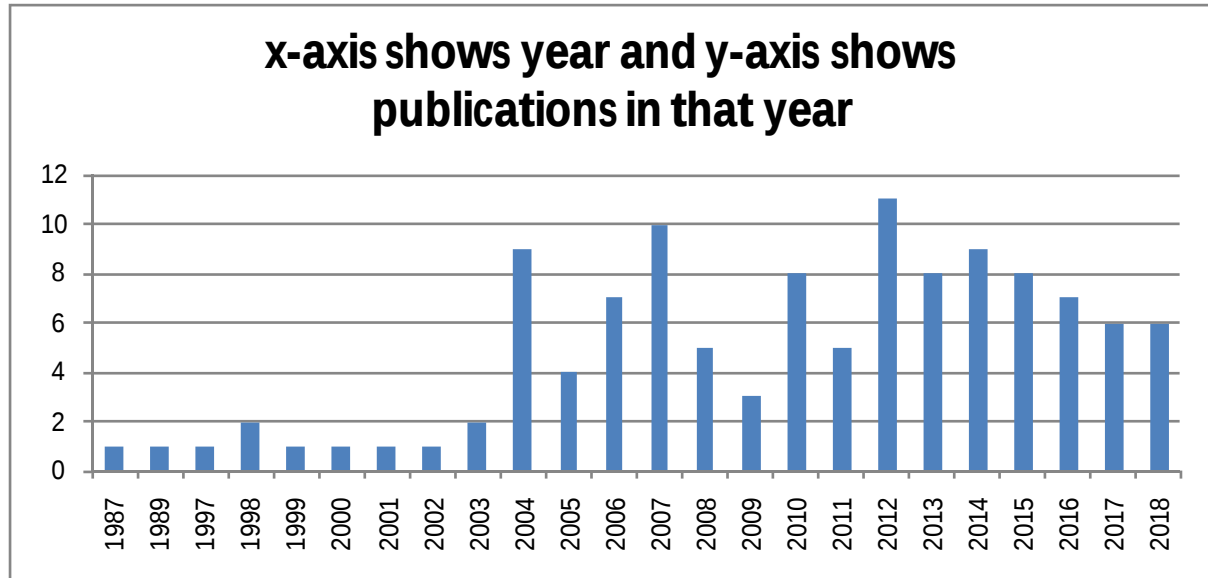


Figure 1: Published papers per year

Source: Author(s)

Figure 1 shows the number of papers per year related to the social entrepreneurship topic from 1987 to date. Till the year 2000 there is not much significant work on the topic Social entrepreneurship. The beginning of 21st century marked a substantial rise of interest among the scholars as the number of paper increased seven to eight times in these years. A wave of research on social entrepreneurship took place from 2010 which is a result of global economic crisis of 2008.

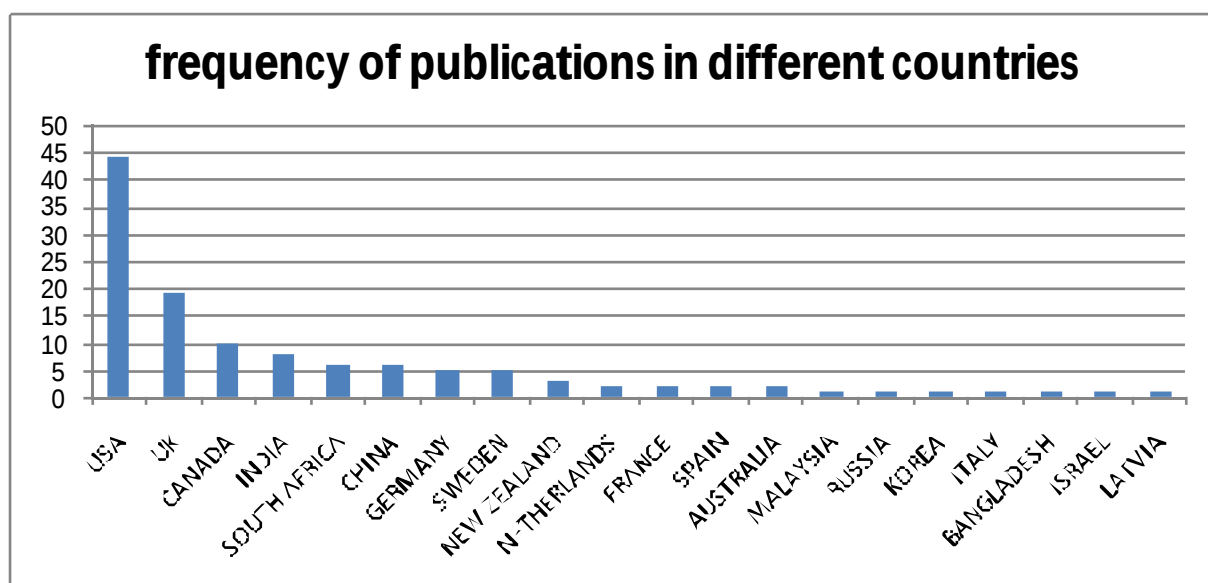


Figure 2: Country wise publications

Source: Author(s)

The breakdown by first author's country is depicted in Figure 2. As shown, a relevant percentage (more than 62%) is provided by English-speaking countries, such as USA, UK and Canada. The analysis of author's country reveals that the present knowledge of social entrepreneurship is basically governed by US perspectives. At the same time it can also be concluded that diverse geographic nature represented in our sample is an indication of the international nature of social entrepreneurship research and its potential to benefit human kind globally but a broader geographical perspective seems to be required in empirical research in order to test the arguable universal validity of theories of social entrepreneurship

The analysis of keywords used in the analyzed papers which depicts the essence of the paper provided by the authors. As expected social entrepreneurship is the predominant keyword, appearing in 52 papers that are analyzed. After that the most used keywords are Social enterprise, entrepreneurship, Social Entrepreneur. This analysis shows that scholars that are interested in studying social entrepreneurship emphasises on the understanding of Social enterprise, Entrepreneurship and Social entrepreneur. Innovation, Social Capital, Social impact, Social Venture, and Scaling are some other keywords that have been emphasised upon by scholars in the field of social entrepreneurship.

The outlets publishing social entrepreneurship research hint at the acceptance of social entrepreneurship as a field of academic inquiry by members of academic societies and may provide evidence of this research stream's legitimacy. To better highlight sources of social entrepreneurship research we examined the diverse nature of disciplines contributing to entrepreneurship research and reported the linkages of a variety of disciplines, such as accounting, economics, finance, management, marketing, operations management, political science, psychology, and sociology.

The most common discipline contributing to the social entrepreneurship research was management (40%), followed by entrepreneurship (19%), political science (12%), economics (10%), sociology (9%), and education (5%). Finance (1%) as a discipline is minimally publishing work in social entrepreneurship, and we found no social entrepreneurship articles in the domains of accounting, operations management, or psychology. Overall, our review suggests that social entrepreneurship research is beginning to reach a broad audience, and that there may be sufficient interest within multiple domains to warrant cross-disciplinary scholarly collaboration.

DOMAIN	PERCENTAGE OF PUBLICATIONS
Economics	10%
Education	5%
Entrepreneurship	19%
Finance	1%
Management	40%
Polit.Science	12%
Sociology	9%
Other Businesses	4%

Table 1: Publications in journals.

Source: Author(s)

To further examine the boundary and exchange conditions of social entrepreneurship research, we coded a number of critical issues in a similar vein as Busenitz and colleagues' (2003) review of entrepreneurship research. We divided research into conceptual and empirical efforts to assess the distinctive merits of each contribution type (e.g., Busenitz *et al.*, 2003). Of the 117 social entrepreneurship articles in our review, 82 were conceptual and 35 were empirical in nature. For conceptual articles, we examined the purpose of the article and coded for use of formal propositions. For empirical articles, we coded for use of formal propositions or hypotheses, research method, research setting. The results of our content analysis are displayed in Table 2.

CONCEPTUAL ARTICLES (N=82)	
PURPOSE	COUNT(out of 82)
Descriptive	33 of 82
Explanatory	44 of 82
Predictive	5 of 82
USE OF FORMAL PROPOSITIONS	6 out of 82
EMPIRICAL ARTICLES (N=35)	
USE OF FORMAL PROPOSITION OR	6 out of 35

HYPOTHESIS	
	COUNT(out of 35)
QUALITATIVE METHOD TOTAL	27 out of 35
Case study	22
Grounded Theory	5
QUANTITATIVE METHODS TOTAL	9 out of 35
Descriptive statistics	8
Correlation	5
Regression	1
DATA COLLECTION	
Interviews	21 out of 35
Secondary Data	14 out of 35
Surveys	7 out of 35
Observation	4 out of 35

Table 2: Classifications of research papers**Source: Author(s)****Conceptual articles**

To assess the purpose of each article, we coded if articles provided descriptions by defining key constructs like social entrepreneurship; provided explanations concerning why and to what degree key constructs (such as social entrepreneurship and performance) are related; or made predictions of organizational outcomes, such as the antecedents or consequences of social entrepreneurship. Thirty three descriptive articles in our sample of conceptual articles chiefly sought to describe what social entrepreneurship is, without providing additional theoretical perspectives upon which research in social entrepreneurship might be informed, or concrete predictions to aid future research efforts. We coded articles as predictive when propositions were explicitly stated; only five articles fit this criterion. The general dearth of theoretical propositions could be interpreted in two different ways. First, scholars may still be trying to identify and develop the construct of social entrepreneurship, and the construct's tenuous nature at present may prohibit the formation of propositions that future scholars may operationalize. An alternative explanation is that the majority of journals where social entrepreneurship research is currently being published do not require such structured

presentation of construct relationships. In other words, more rigorous theoretical development will not occur unless it is required by editorial review boards of scholarly journals. The lack of predictive articles is a result of disparate construct definitions, unclear boundary conditions, and anecdotal antecedents to performance. The results of our coding of conceptual papers confirm that research in social entrepreneurship is in its infancy. To date, only 12 papers in the social entrepreneurship literature used formal propositions, including six conceptual and six empirical articles. Scholars are focusing primarily on describing and explaining social entrepreneurship, rather than predicting this phenomenon. Even with this emphasis, however, the descriptions extend over a wide range of phenomena and numerous types of explanations. While description and explanation should eventually lead to a unified view to strengthen the construct, this unity does not currently exist.

Empirical articles

Empirical efforts were coded to highlight use of formal hypotheses, research method, data sources.

- Use of formal hypotheses

Hypotheses are important because they can be tested apart from a researcher's values and opinions. Thus, in rigorous empirical research, one would expect to find theoretically driven, specific hypotheses to describe relationships between variables. From this vantage point, it is disappointing that of the 35 empirical articles studied, only two set forth operational hypotheses that may be rigorously tested. Additionally, only six empirical papers set forth general propositions based on their case studies and grounded theory methods.

- Research method Used

We coded the method of research social entrepreneurship scholars employ to allow comparisons to reviews of the management, strategy, and entrepreneurship literatures. Twenty two of the 35 empirical articles in our review relied primarily on case study methods, while five developed a grounded theory of social entrepreneurship. Eight of the 35 articles reported descriptive statistics, and five reported correlation while one of the articles used regression analysis.

- Data Collection method used

Interview method dominates the data collection method with 21 of the 35 articles using this method followed by secondary data collection method used in 14 of the 35 articles while survey method is also employed in 7 articles.

FINDINGS

The Analysis of keywords shows that Social Enterprise, Entrepreneurship and Social Entrepreneur are important emerging avenues. Most contributing discipline to the field of social entrepreneurship is Management. Analysis of statistical status of available researches shows that conceptual articles dominant the empirical articles. There is a lack of theory building and testing in the field of social entrepreneurship. Regarding lack of theory on social entrepreneurship, so many new questions can be opened at sight of the review done. On the one hand, an approach to the process of building a theory requires an empirical work may be tested in several different scenarios to test the hypotheses. On the other hand, it may open a discussion about several social entrepreneurship indicators (proactiveness, innovativeness, readiness).

CONCLUSION

Although, there is a significant rise in research work in the field of social entrepreneurship, this study shows that research in the field of social entrepreneurship is in nascent stage. Most of the research is dominant by researchers belonging to US and UK. Therefore, perspective of these countries governs the field of social entrepreneurship. Future trend is observed in factors i.e. Innovation, social capital, social impact, Social venture, and Scaling as these topics are gaining importance in the field of social entrepreneurship. Domains like Political Science, Economics, Sociology, Education, and Finance increasing their impact in the development of the field. But still there is a need for theory building and rigorous testing if a field is to grow. To summarise, future research should draw attention to three big issues: converging empirical results on the social entrepreneurship process, enlarging the field of social entrepreneurship towards new phenomena and broadening the topic.

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