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SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SOCIAL INNOVATION: A BIBLIOMETRIC REVIEW AND RESEARCH AGENDA

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ABSTRACT

Scholars' interest in social entrepreneurship (SE) and social innovation (SI) has been growing in recent decades. However, it is still unclear whether social innovation occurs within social entrepreneurship. We address this theoretical limitation via a bibliometric analysis of the intersection of SE and SI theoretical domains. We combine co-citation analysis, historiography, and bibliographic coupling. Demonstrating the recent theoretical evolution of social innovation research under the social entrepreneurship umbrella, we document the beginning of a new trend that can open new research pathways.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, scholars' efforts in advancing the research on social entrepreneurship (SE) that promotes equality and inclusivity by advancing social innovation (SI) have increased noticeably (e.g., Olivetti, Yunus, etc.). In this view, SE and SI have been central in tackling grand challenges (Ruskin, Seymour, & Webster, 2016; McGahan et al., 2021), rebalancing social and economic power (Lumpkin, Bacq, & Pidduck, 2018), pursuing institutional changes (Rosca et al., 2020) and, finally, contributing to poverty alleviation (Pidduck, & Clark, 2021).

Previous research has involved investigations to explore the link between SE and SI. However, while the fundamentals of SE and SI seem inseparable, many scholars argue that "*social innovation is not social entrepreneurship*" (Morris, Santos, & Kuratko, 2020: 1093). In this respect scholars have questioned whether SI occurs necessarily within SE and, conversely, whether social entrepreneurs necessarily need to create SI (Portales 2019).

From a theoretical standpoint, SI is conceptualized as a process that needs to transcend sectors, levels of analysis, and methods to give a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the impacts on social problems (Phills, Deiglmeier, & Miller, 2008). In contrast, SE is more concerned with balancing the financial and social goals necessary for the implementation, sustainability, and scaling of innovation (Phillips et al., 2015). Accordingly, the logics, challenges, and natures of the processes of SE and SI are different and yet, for example, SI has been measured as an outcome of SE

(Dwivedi and Weerawardena, 2018; see also Oeij et al., 2019), proving that these two concepts conceptually and empirically overlap. Moreover, on the one hand, SI may face resistance when being adopted by some parties and stakeholders who do not believe it is viable or are threatened by the changes that it represents (de Souza João-Roland & Granados, 2020); on the other hand, SE needs to focus on actions and strategies to overcome such obstacles, establish influential relationships, harvest resources, and develop alternative platforms to promote innovation (Morris et al., 2020).

Such lack of theoretical clarity may stimulate more empirical works but ultimately hinders our understanding of these phenomena (Bacq, Drover, & Kim, 2021). It is thus important to better understand the nexus between SE and SI so to foster reciprocal reinforcements and to encourage the generation of genuinely new insights. This would require a systematic analysis of the literature that goes beyond the methodological limits of previous work (see Rey-Martí, Ribeiro-Soriano, & Palacios-Marqués, 2016; Cancino et al., 2020). In this paper, we start addressing this gap with an in-depth bibliometric analysis of 950 research articles by combining three techniques—co-citation analysis, algorithmic historiography, and bibliographic coupling (Zupic & Cater, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

We use three bibliometric methods (Zupic & Cater, 2015): co-citation analysis (Small, 1977) to examine the theoretical foundations of our area of interest, algorithmic historiography (Garfield et al., 2003) to trace the historical evolution of our area of interest, and bibliographic coupling (Kessler, 1963) to map its current development. We searched Web of Science for the following search terms: "social entrep*" or "social inno*" or "impact entrep*" or "impact inno*" in the Business, Management and Economics categories. We excluded conference papers and book chapters to retain only papers published in scientific journals indexed by Social Science Citation Index. This resulted in 1,236 documents. Two authors read the abstracts of all these articles in parallel and assigned them as either pertaining the scope of SE or SI. Any difference was resolved by the third author. This step led to a final dataset of 950 papers.

FINDINGS

Study 1: Co-citation analysis

Co-citation analysis (CCA-R) revealed six distinct groups of articles (figure n.1).

 Insert Figure 1 about here

Theoretical framing and conceptualization of social entrepreneurship. The papers in the red group defined the conceptual boundaries of research on SE, by providing definitions and meanings of social entrepreneurship and intersection with institutionalism (Tan et al., 2015).

Antecedents and outcomes of social entrepreneurship. The green group of articles documented antecedents of SE and outcomes on society. Scholars provided an understanding on antecedents that predicted intentions of social entrepreneurship, motivation origins, and forms of capitals (Hockerts, 2017).

Social innovation. Research included in the blue group has focused on SI and its connection with business and entrepreneurship. We can find two systematic literature reviews that respectively documented the links between SI and SE, as well as methods and tools for pursuing innovations, overlapping domains of SI and SE (Murray et al., 2010).

Hybrid organizations, institutional logics, and social-commercial trade-off. The yellow group of articles presents the concept of hybrid organizations and tensions coming with social-commercial trade-off. Scholars explored hybrid dimension of social business, typologies of social business hybrids, activates, structures, and process through which social enterprises combine multiple organizations forms (Battilana & Lee 2014).

Institutional voids and resource bricolage. Articles in the purple group include research on institutional theory and resource mobilization. In specific, studies in this stream examined SE in contexts characterized by institutional voids, understanding actions aimed to cope with surrounding constraints (Di Domenico et al., 2010)

Innovation, sustainability, and social entrepreneurship. As last, the light blue group includes research on how market and institutions stimulate SI. In this group of papers, authors contributed to further define SE and documented radical technologies and innovation business models as response to market imperfections (Cohen & Winn, 2007)

Study 2: Historiography

The historiography analysis was focused on 100 nodes that represented the development of the SE and SI fields overtime (figure n.2).

 Insert Figure 2 about here

We can observe that the rise of social entrepreneurship literature is due to two main scholars Leadbeater, (1997) and Dees (1998). From a theoretical standpoint, social entrepreneurship was informed by institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell 1983) and resource-based view theory (Barney, 1991). Such research provided the theoretical basis for further developments between 2006 and 2011. Within this cloud of contributions, we find several articles focused on innovation and SI processes, which have contributed to defining the relevant concepts, definitions, and impacts (Mulgan 2006). Among them, we find articles that have documented the links between SI and SE (Phillips et al., 2015; Van der Have and Rubalcaba, 2016, Cajaiba-Santana, 2014). In conclusion, we can observe that knowledge in the SE and SI fields has been developed through explorative and conceptualizing works that have shifted this stream toward substantial theory development.

Study 3: Bibliographic coupling

Bibliographic coupling: results

The coupling analysis returned seven clusters (figure n.3).

 Insert Figure 3 about here

Coupling cluster 1 (red): social innovation process. The 66 articles in cluster one are primarily focused on SI, focusing on a range of catalyzers that promote it (Rey-García et al., 2018), external factors that influence SI and outcomes and impact measurement (Mollinger-Sahba et al., 2021).

Coupling cluster 2 (green): organizational hybridity and dual mission management. The 61 articles of the cluster 2 are primarily empirical and contribute to the literature of hybrid organizations (Wagenschwanz & Grimes, 2021). We can identify four main trends: dual missions management, process of creation of hybrid and innovative model, scaling of social innovations pursued by hybrid organizations, and relationship between founder identity and organizational hybridity.

Coupling cluster 3 (blue): conceptualization of social entrepreneurship. The cluster three represents 51 articles that conceptualize the boundaries of SE. We can identify four main research streams: theoretical lens used to investigate SE, systematic reviews that organized extant research, theoretical conceptualizations of SE, and measurement scales (Kuratko et al., 2017).

Coupling cluster 4 (yellow): antecedents of social entrepreneurship. The cluster four includes 43 articles which mainly contribute to understand the antecedents of SE. We can recognize three levels of analysis developed by authors: psychological antecedents of social entrepreneurship, behavioural and demographic characteristics of social entrepreneurs, and contextual factors that promote it (Hechavarría et al., 2017).

Coupling cluster 5 (light blue): bricolage and entrepreneurial approach. The 37 articles included in the cluster five mainly investigate approaches to acquire resources. The articles in this cluster focus on bricolage strategies, including resource-constrain contexts (Reypens et al., 2021).

Coupling cluster 6 (pink): ethics and value creation within social entrepreneurship. The cluster six has 29 articles contributing to the literature with three main research streams: ethical reflection of social entrepreneurship, meaningfulness in pursuing social entrepreneurial actions and identity work as well as emotional side of social entrepreneurs (Chandra et al., 2017)

Coupling cluster 7 (orange): sustainable entrepreneurship. The cluster seven presents only 13 articles on sustainable entrepreneurship. These studies focus on defining dimensions of sustainability and relationship with entrepreneurial orientation, sustainable development, and capacity to address grand challenge.

DISCUSSION

Based on our co-citation analysis, we recognize three main phenomena. First, the theories of resource bricolage, institutionalism, and hybrid organizations have supported the development of the SE literature (Battilana et al., 2014). Second, we detect a theoretical effort of setting conceptual boundaries between SI and SE to enhance theoretical clarity and highlight their similarities and differences (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014). Third, the three most relevant articles are conceptual and were published in leading entrepreneurial and management journals (Austin et al., 2006; Zahra et al., 2009; Edwards-Schachter & Wallace, 2017).

From a longitudinal perspective, our historiography highlights a continual growth of the popularity of SE and SI. Two observations emerge from this analysis. First, the foundational articles are dominated by empirical works—mainly qualitative—and characterized by an explorative approach. This is counterintuitive; new theoretical streams have typically begun by engaging with conceptual works (see Kouropalatis et al., 2019: 15). Such an atypical theoretical evolution might be perhaps partially explained by the large expansion—both in terms of the number of articles and subtheoretical conversations—of relevant contributions between 2005 and 2011. This raised the need for researchers to organize the extant literature and define future research, leading to the conceptual articles and systematic literature reviews that followed (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014). Second, we observe that SI emerged quickly from and almost parallel with the SE literature. Within SE development, SI likely played the role of a quasi-outsider. Only recently have scholars investigated the theoretical intersections between SI and entrepreneurship (Phillips et al., 2015). This may represent an historical convergence and the beginning of a new trend in the research at the intersection of SI and SE. Specifically, we observe that SI scholars are moving into the field of SE rather than the contrary.

Our coupling analysis has uncovered a multidisciplinary nature and, not surprisingly, heterogeneity of the salient subfields with independent and parallel research trajectories and theoretical focuses. One possible explanation for this is that the journal outlets divide these groups.

While articles in the first cluster were not predominantly published in entrepreneurship outlets, such as *technological forecasting and social change*, the clusters that include articles on SE—the second, third, and fourth—were published in leading entrepreneurship journals, e.g., the *journal of business venturing* and *entrepreneurship theory and practice*.

RESEARCH AGENDA

Building on our discussion, we have identified four main research areas for the further development of the field at the crossroads of SE and SI.

Combining social entrepreneurship and social innovation

We encourage to further advance research at the theoretical intersection between SE and SI. To meet this goal, we propose the following research routes:

First, research should identify theoretical anchors that expand the intersection and convergence between SE and SI. Our co-citation and coupling analysis may lead to identifying resource bricolage as a theoretical anchor, given its implications for both SE and SI (Kickul et al., 2018; Edwards-Schachter & Wallace, 2017). Another theoretical anchor is hybrid organizations and dual-mission management (Mitzinneck & Besharov, 2019). Within this debate, scholars may investigate how the scaling of social innovation impacts tensions when balancing dual mission management.

A second path of future inquiry may be the theoretical relationships between SE and SI. In this vein, how, when and what circumstances lead SI to SE and/or vice versa are still unclear. Therefore, scholars may map and compare the antecedents of SI and SE within the same environment to identify such similarities and differences.

Third, our historiography revealed a recent convergence between SI and SE. On the one hand, this creates a set of theoretical anchors that facilitate the convergence between them. On the other hand, it may lead to a ‘third’ independent research route via the merging of these research streams into a new theoretical construct.

Orchestration of social innovation by social entrepreneurs

The literature clearly explains what social innovation is and how it unfolds and evolves over time. However, we have to define SI orchestration as a process that requires building and managing the relationships of an extended network of actors and is aimed at unlocking and leading the exchange of resources and knowledge to promote innovation (Giudici, Reinmoeller, & Ravasi, 2018). Within this debate, scholars may also investigate how social enterprises catalyze and promote SI (Rey-García et al., 2018). In particular, the coordination mechanisms that orchestrate the creation of entrepreneurial ecosystems may provide an understanding of the relationships, interactions, and engagements between different actors across SI processes.

Measurement of social innovation and social entrepreneurship

We have observed that social impact measurement remains an important and still unresolved issue in the literature, although it can support the transition to an inclusive and sustainable society, as declared in the SDGs of the UN (2015). Thus, it is urgent to better understand how SI and SE impact each other. This dual-side relationship can be investigated at both the geographical and firm levels. First, scholars may measure how social entrepreneurship impacts the emergence of social innovation at local and regional levels and vice versa (Mollinger-Sahba et al., 2021). Second, understanding whether SI enhances the likelihood of pursuing social entrepreneurial opportunities

and vice versa may provide a more comprehensive perspective on the relationships between these two theoretical elements.

Geographic comparison and common journal outlets

Our co-citation and coupling analyses showed a high number of explorations in the developing economy context; Southeast Asian and Central American studies prevail in our sample. This revealed a strong bias toward African countries. However, scholars' efforts in investigating such phenomena in Africa have recently emerged. Moreover, research on SI is mainly present in specific academic outlets, which are generally overlooked by entrepreneurship scholars, and vice versa. This increases the risk of knowledge duplication rather than fostering exchange and accumulation.

FIGURES

Figure 1. Co-citation analysis

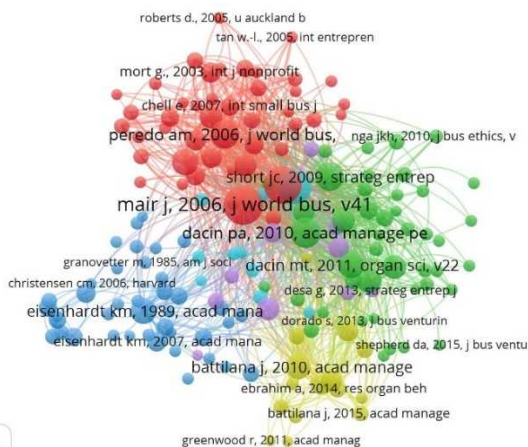


Figure 2: historiography analysis

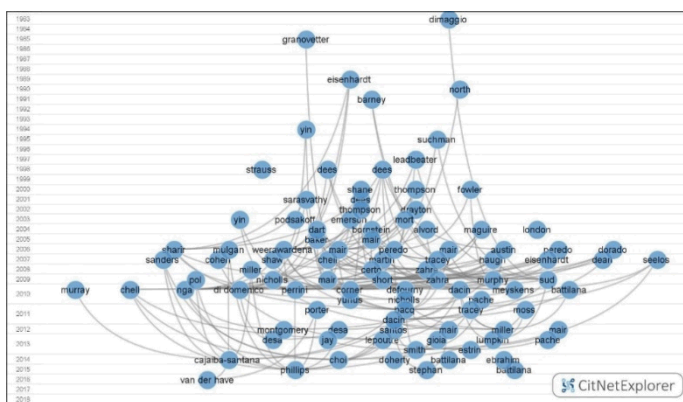
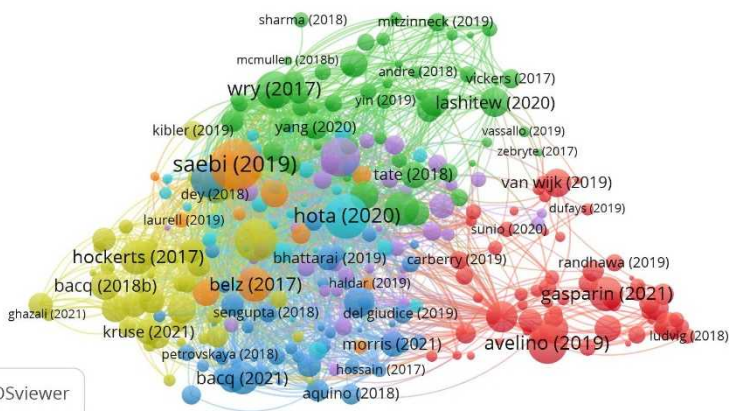


Figure 3. Coupling analysis



REFERENCES AVAILABLE FROM THE AUTHORS