



A bibliometric analysis of social entrepreneurship[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Social entrepreneurship is a relatively new topic which is gathering researchers' attention because of the social input and the boom of this kind of business. The main aim of this article is to orient researchers in creating a theoretical framework and to guide researchers who are new in social entrepreneurship research so that they know which journals and authors to consult when studying this phenomenon. To do so, this study uses the *Web of Science* database to determine the research areas with the greatest research output, the countries and languages responsible for most social entrepreneurship research, the year in which research on social entrepreneurship began, the journals that publish most research, and the most relevant authors with publications on social entrepreneurship.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, interest in social entrepreneurship has increased noticeably. The importance of social entrepreneurship lies in its impact on economic and social development (Peredo & McLean, 2006). Social entrepreneurship adds value to society, offers solutions to social problems, and seeks to increase personal wealth (Peredo & McLean, 2006). Social entrepreneurship not only generates social value, but also creates jobs and wealth. The process of social entrepreneurship originates from a personal mission: the desire to trigger a change or social transformation (Yunus). By pursuing material goals and aims, social entrepreneurs' mission is to make a profound contribution to society. To achieve their aims, social entrepreneurs mobilize resources to resolve social problems and satisfy basic human needs (Yunus, 2007).

Despite this growing interest in social entrepreneurship, however, analysis on the status of social entrepreneurship is scarce. Scholars have yet to determine the amount or quality of research conducted in this area (Peredo & McLean, 2006). This limits research into social entrepreneurship and justifies the need for the present study.

This article presents a bibliometric analysis using the *Web of Science* database to determine the research areas with the greatest research output, the countries and languages responsible for most social entrepreneurship research, the year in which research on social entrepreneurship began, the journals that publish most research, and the most relevant authors with publications on social entrepreneurship. This

study thus aims to orient researchers who are new in social entrepreneurship research so that they know which journals and authors to consult when studying this phenomenon.

2. The concept of social entrepreneurship

The newness of the term 'social entrepreneurship' means that some controversy remains surrounding its definition. In recent years, scholars define social entrepreneurship as a sub-discipline within entrepreneurship (Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern, 2006). The literature contains numerous definitions of entrepreneurship (Ribeiro-Soriano & Roig-Dobón, 2009; Ribeiro-Soriano & Urbano, 2010; Ribeiro-Soriano & Castrogiovanni, 2012; Roig-Dobón & Ribeiro-Soriano, 2009). Thake and Zadek (1997) define social entrepreneurship as the desire of entrepreneurs to obtain justice in society and ensure that all people have a decent quality of life. In this case, social entrepreneurship aims to provide financially sustainable solutions that help fulfil this purpose. Carraher and Welsh (2015) define social entrepreneurship as the process involving the innovative use and combination of resources to pursue opportunities which trigger social change and address social needs. Peredo and McLean (2006) define social entrepreneurship as the identification of a situation that marginalizes or excludes a group of individuals who lack the resources or capabilities required for a decent quality of life and the identification of an opportunity to resolve this problem by creating a company. Weerawardena and Sullivan Mort (2001) conclude that social entrepreneurship is a source of sustainable competitive advantage over time, which enables the fulfilment of a social mission.

This study uses the definition by Alford, Brown, and Letts (2004), who define social entrepreneurship as "a process that creates innovative solutions to immediate social problems and mobilizes the ideas,

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capacities, resources, and social agreements required for this sustainable social transformation.” Although social entrepreneurs have a social mission, they may also seek profit. Social entrepreneurs may pursue goals or missions that are social, commercial, or both (Davis, 1997). The most striking element of social entrepreneurship is its capacity to combine elements from private business and volunteer organizations, although this combination may also represent the biggest obstacle to defining social entrepreneurship because these terms are difficult to delimit (Certo & Miller, 2008).

3. Method

A bibliometric analysis consists of applying statistical methods to determine qualitative and quantitative changes in a given scientific research topic, establish the profile of publications on the topic, and detect tendencies within a discipline (De Bakker, Groenewegen, & Den Hond, 2005). In addition, this type of analysis provides useful information for experts seeking to evaluate scientific activity (Duque Oliva, Cervera Taulet, & Rodríguez Romero, 2006) because a bibliometric analysis acts as a guide to the status of research into social entrepreneurship.

This study uses the *Web of Science* (WOS) online database, which houses scientific documents across all disciplines. The fact that the WOS provides data on scientific research output enables the bibliometric analysis because the WOS offers data on output, dissemination, collaboration, and impact (De Bakker et al., 2005). This type of analysis constitutes a methodological innovation with respect to traditional literature reviews (De Bakker et al., 2005).

4. Unit of analysis

The analysis of the WOS database focuses on social entrepreneurship research (bibliometric analysis took place in February, 2015). To do so, this study analyzes all documents on this subject found in the WOS. The resulting sample comprises 2922 documents, including articles, proceedings, reviews, book review, editorial material, book chapters, meeting abstracts, notes, and letters. This article uses the term document as opposed to article to refer to any of these forms of research output.

The bibliometric indicators used in this research are as follows:

- Language of publication of research on social entrepreneurship
- Areas of knowledge within which authors have published research on social entrepreneurship
- Change in the number of social entrepreneurship research documents published between 2003 and 2015
- Countries where authors have published research on social entrepreneurship
- Journals in which authors have published research on social entrepreneurship
- Authors who have published research on social entrepreneurship

4.1. Language

The JCR contains indexed journals published in languages other than English. For instance, the journals *Historia y comunicación social*, *Innovar revista de ciencias administrativas y sociales*, and *Revista de economía mundial*, publish in Spanish, although the majority of the journals publish in English.

Table 1 shows the number of social entrepreneurship publications by language, according to data gathered from the WOS. As expected, the most common language is English (2728 documents). The second most common language is Spanish (37 documents). This pattern meets the expectations, because the major journals are English-language journals, which is the language that all researchers must know in the modern global academic community. A surprising finding is the higher number

Table 1

Languages used in research on social entrepreneurship.

Ranking	Language	N. publications
1	English	2728
2	Spanish	37
3	Slovak	30
4	Czech	17
5	Chinese	17
6	German	14
7	Croatian	12
8	Portuguese	10
9	Russian	6
10	French	6
11	Lithuanian	3
12	Italian	3
13	Dutch	3
14	Swedish	2
15	Polish	2
16	Latvian	2
17	Ukrainian	1
18	Turkish	1

of documents written in minority languages such as Slovak or Czech than in major languages such as German or French. This result may owe to the preference of scholars in Slovakia and the Czech Republic for publishing in their own language (Table 1).

4.2. Research area

According to Vasquez and Davila (2008, p. 107), “entrepreneurship has been studied from the perspective of economics, psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Initially, only economics scholars studied entrepreneurship, seeking relationships with economic growth and addressing entrepreneurship from a purely economic point of view. Subsequently, psychology, sociology, and anthropology developed contributions in the study of entrepreneurship from a social point of view.”

Table 2 shows the number of documents published in different knowledge areas. The WOS contains 1851 documents in business

Table 2

Areas of knowledge within which authors have published research on social entrepreneurship.

Ranking	Research area	N. publications
1	BUSINESS ECONOMICS	1851
2	PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION	347
3	SOCIAL SCIENCES OTHER TOPICS	231
4	EDUCATION EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH	189
5	SOCIOLOGY	171
6	ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES ECOLOGY	145
7	ENGINEERING	129
8	PSYCHOLOGY	104
9	GEOGRAPHY	90
10	COMPUTER SCIENCE	87
11	OPERATIONS RESEARCH MANAGEMENT SCIENCE	86



economics, 347 in public administration, and 231 in social sciences and other topics. These figures reveal a large difference between the number of documents in business economics and the number in other knowledge areas (Lee, Ribeiro, Olson, & Roig, 2007). This finding implies that social entrepreneurship is a highly relevant topic in the field of business economics.

89 research areas that address social entrepreneurship do not appear in the ranking. The number of documents in these areas is irrelevant because each category contains fewer than 50 social entrepreneurship documents.

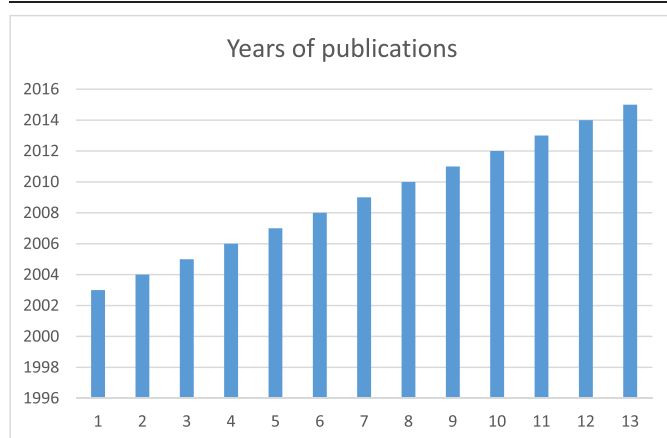
4.3. Year of publication

A search for the concept of social entrepreneurship in the WOS revealed the existence of a social entrepreneurship article written in 1936. A thorough analysis of this document, however, shows that this article does not address social entrepreneurship, but offers a criticism of economic development and entrepreneurship in general from scientific and social perspectives.

According to the WOS, the current meaning of the term social entrepreneurship first appears in a journal in 1964. Nonetheless, the number of documents published per year before 2003 is very low (less than 40 per year). Table 3 shows the number of publications between 2003 and 2015. The data show how interest in this area of knowledge has increased year on year. The number of publications has increased annually, except for the first two years, which seems a period of relative stability. From 2003 to 2008, the number of publications increases gradually. From the year 2008, however, in academic interest this topic has increased. In 2009, the number of social entrepreneurship articles is nearly 100 greater than the same number in 2008. A similar trend occurs between 2009 and 2010. In 2014, publications amount to 381 documents, and so far in 2015, published documents amount to 110. This ongoing interest shows that social

Table 3
Number of social entrepreneurship documents published between 2003 and 2015.

Ranking	Year	N. publications
1	2003	54
2	2004	35
3	2005	74
4	2006	98
5	2007	126
6	2008	129
7	2009	214
8	2010	313
9	2011	343
10	2012	389
11	2013	358
12	2014	381
13	2015	110



entrepreneurship is still relevant for society and that researchers can still address many gaps. Examples of such gaps include the following: Mair and Marti's (2006) attempt to find the organizational forms that are most suitable for social enterprises, the differences between organizing a social enterprise in developed and emerging countries, and the way that social entrepreneurship can affect the sustainable development of a country, city, or region. Other authors who propose future research on social entrepreneurship are Dacin, Dacin, and Tracey (2011), who raise research challenges such as exploring links between institutional ideas and social goals of the population and the construction of a viable organizational and marketing plan for such initiatives.

4.4. Countries

Table 4 shows that, in the USA, publications since 2003 on social entrepreneurship amount to 892. The UK ranks second with 494 publications. Besides England, the figure for the UK comprises Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, thus boosting the number of documents published. The study does not cover all remaining countries in the analysis because they have fewer than 50 publications and are therefore irrelevant to the study. The difference in the number of documents occurs because most JCR journals are from the USA or the UK.

4.5. Journals

Knowing about the journals that publish social entrepreneurship research is especially important for deciding which journals to read when performing a literature review, but also for being familiar with each journal's focus on social entrepreneurship. Table 5 presents the journals that have published most documents on social entrepreneurship, along with their impact factors.

The journal's impact factor refers to the information contained in the Journal Citation Reports (JCR) by the Science Citation Index (SCI). The JCR compiles and releases information about scientific research in

Table 4
Countries where social entrepreneurship research has been published.

Ranking	Country	N. publications
1	USA	892
2	UK	494
3	PEOPLES R CHINA	191
4	CANADA	166
5	SPAIN	164
6	NETHERLANDS	122
7	GERMANY	113
8	AUSTRALIA	102
9	ROMANIA	97
10	SWEDEN	74
11	FRANCE	67
12	ITALY	66
13	FINLAND	62

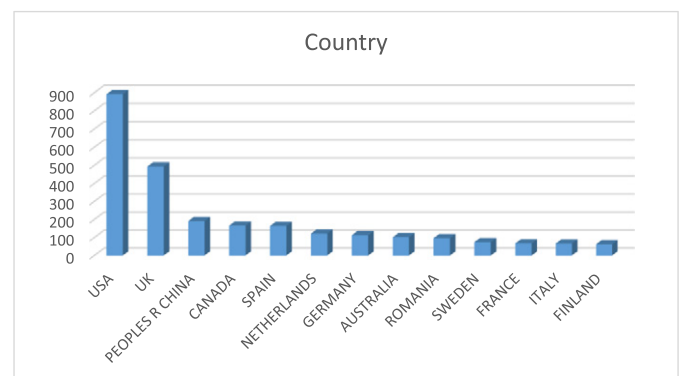


Table 5
Journals that have published research on social entrepreneurship.

Ranking	Journals	N. publications
1	JOURNAL OF BUSINESS VENTURING	83
2	ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT	80
3	ENTREPRENEURSHIP THEORY AND PRACTICE	57
4	JOURNAL OF BUSINESS ETHICS	56
5	INTERNATIONAL SMALL BUSINESS JOURNAL	53
6	SMALL BUSINESS ECONOMICS	53
7	RESEARCH POLICY	33
8	INTERNATIONAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND MANAGEMENT JOURNAL	31
9	ORGANIZATION STUDIES	28
10	ORGANIZATION SCIENCE	21

different disciplines and specialties in terms of both citations made and citations received. The impact factor provides scholars with an objective measure of the importance of different journals within a given category. In addition, according to the WOS official website, the JCR, “helps to measure research influence and impact at the journal and category levels, and shows the relationship between citing and cited journals.” Likewise, the Institute of Scientific Information (ISI) provides a classification of journals based on intuitive criteria (Leydesdorff, 2006; Pudovkin & Garfield, 2002).

Table 5 shows that the *Journal of Business Venturing*, which has published 83 documents on social entrepreneurship, has published more social entrepreneurship research than any other journal. *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development* ranks second with 80 publications. According to the WOS, 1951 journals have published research on social entrepreneurship. In the interest of brevity, however, this study considers only the 10 most relevant journals in terms of number of publications.

Another way to measure journals' importance is by comparing the journal to others according to the quartile the journal belongs to. Journals within the first quartile are the most relevant, whereas journals within the fourth quartile are the least relevant. Calculating to what quartile a journal belongs involves, first, dividing the total number of journals by four such that each group would belong to a quartile. For example, considering 100 journals, journals 1 to 25 would belong to the first quartile. These journals would have a higher impact factor than journals 26 to 50, which would belong to the second quartile. Journals 51 to 75 would belong to the third quartile, and journals 76 to 100 would belong to the fourth quartile. The journals in this last quartile would be those with the lowest impact factor.

4.6. Authors

When performing a bibliometric analysis of research in a specific area, measuring the research performance at the micro level (i.e., at the level of individual scientists) is somewhat problematic (Bornmann & Daniel, 2007). These difficulties owe to two main reasons. First, to obtain statistically reliable indicators, researchers need to yield a high research output in a manageable time period. Second, the correlation between research productivity (i.e., number of publications) and impact in terms of citations is not necessary (Glänzel, 2006). Because of the scarcity of resources, however, quantifying scientific performance is necessary for assessment and systematic comparison purposes such as providing information for decision-making on funding or research authorship (Ball, 2005; Hirsch, 2005a).

The number of citations an article receives and the studies cited in an article are two of the most popular bibliometric indicators used to determine an article's quality (Duque Oliva et al., 2006). Nevertheless, the number of citations received by an article may owe to the popularity of the article's author or research field rather than the relevance of the article itself. Table 6 lists the most important authors in terms of social entrepreneurship research. According to the WOS, the most prolific

Table 6
Authors who have published on social entrepreneurship.

Ranking	Nombre del autor	N. publicaciones	Total citas	H-index	C/P
1	ANDERSON AR	12	539	10	44,92
2	MAIR J	10	421	6	42,1
3	SHEPHERD DA	9	206	6	22,89
4	NIJKAMP P	9	44	3	4,89
5	IRELAND RD	9	572	8	63,56
6	HONIG B	9	811	8	90,11
7	ZAHRA SA	8	411	5	51,38
8	WRIGHT M	8	235	6	29,38
9	URBANO D	8	79	3	9,88
10	TRACEY P	8	213	5	26,62
11	JACK S	8	177	5	22,12
12	DODD SD	8	210	5	26,25
13	DE CLERCQ D	8	137	7	17,12
14	WELTER F	7	275	7	39,29
15	WEBB JW	7	264	6	37,71
16	HAUGH H	7	84	4	12

social entrepreneurship author is Anderson AR, who has published 12 articles in JCR journals and has received 539 citations. The author with most citations, however, is Honig B, with 811 citations for 9 articles.

Table 6 lists the main authors of social entrepreneurship. In this section, the term used is articles, not documents, because the study filters all documents that are not articles from the database to ensure consistency with the h-index and number of author citations. After filtering out authors with fewer than 7 published articles, Table 6 contains only 16 authors of the 101. Most authors had published 6 articles or fewer, so we set this threshold to keep the table manageable. These 16 authors have published 142 articles and have received 4678 citations between them; thus, this sample comprises a large body of research on social entrepreneurship, which allows extracting observations.

Hirsch (2005a, 2005b) proposes a research performance indicator that is applicable at a micro level. The *Hirsch Index*, or *h-index*, quantifies scientific output from a single researcher as a single figure. This index is a novel, simple measure capturing both the quantity and the visibility of authors' published work (Bornmann & Daniel, 2007; Egghe, 2006; Egghe & Rousseau, 2006; Van Raan, 2006). An h-index of 40 means that a scientist has published 40 articles that have each received at least 40 citations. Therefore the h-index of a scientist can never decrease. On the contrary, this index will generally increase as new research is published and attracts citations (Cronin & Meho, 2006; Hirsch, 2005a). An h-index of 0 characterizes inactive authors (Glänzel, 2006) who, even if they have published at least one article, have had no visible impact. “A scientist has index h if h of his/her N_p papers have at least h citations each and the other ($N_p - h$) papers have no more than h citations each” (Hirsch, 2005a, p. 16,569).

The h-index is a robust estimator of the total impact of a scientist's contribution in a given research field (Hirsch, 2005a). Thus, the h-index is insensitive to a set of uncited articles or one or more highly cited articles (Bornmann & Daniel, 2007). Hirsch (2005a, p. 16571) devised h-index threshold values as the basis of physicists' scientific success level:

“An h index of 20 after 20 years of scientific activity characterizes a successful scientist An h index of 40 after 20 years of scientific activity characterizes outstanding scientists, likely to be found only at the top universities or major research laboratories An h index of 60 after 20 years, or 90 after 30 years characterizes truly unique individuals.”

Table 6 also shows the h-index, allowing to assess a researcher's output. The author with the highest h-index is Anderson AR ($h = 10$) followed by Honig B and Nijkamp P ($h = 8$), which means that these authors have published 8 papers and that each paper has at least 8 citations.

5. Conclusions

This article presents a bibliometric analysis of social entrepreneurship research to determine the areas within which researchers are studying social entrepreneurship, the language of publication of such research, the trend in the number of publications from year to year, the most relevant journals for literature review, and the most prolific and most cited social entrepreneurship authors. This analysis offers a guide to those who are entering the field of social entrepreneurship, providing information on which journals to consult and which authors are most eminent.

The bibliometric analysis of 2984 social entrepreneurship research documents gathered from the Web of Science (WOS) database shows that 1951 are scientific articles. The most popular language for publication is English (2728 documents), the area with most published documents is business economics (1851 documents—more than the number of documents published in all other areas that appear in the ranking). The term social entrepreneurship first appears in 1964, but only after 2003 the concept really begins to attract researchers' attention, and the number of publications begins to increase year on year, reaching 381 documents published in 2014. The country responsible for most social entrepreneurship research is the United States (982 publications). The journal that has published the most on social entrepreneurship research is the *Journal of business Venturing* (83 documents), which has an impact factor of 3.265. The most prolific social entrepreneurship author is Anderson AR (12 documents and 539 citations).

This study reveals some findings that can help guide researchers in the field of social entrepreneurship, although future studies should include articles that do not belong to the WOS and therefore have no impact factor. Because they have no impact factor, the scientific community does not consider these articles as relevant, but they would nonetheless supplement the data used in the present study with more information about social entrepreneurship. Furthermore, subsequent bibliometric studies could restrict the bibliometric analysis by studying only social entrepreneurship articles within the WOS and excluding any document that is not an article, like reviews, proceedings, book reviews, and so forth.

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