

A Four-decade Bibliometric Analysis of Social Entrepreneurship

Khairun Najihah Sabri^a, Siti Fatimah Mohamad^{b*}, Ungku Fatimah Ungku Zainal Abidin^c, Hazrina Ghazali^d, Mass Hareeza Ali@Hamid^e

^{a,b,c,d}Department of Food Service Management, Faculty of Food Science and Management, Universiti Putra Malaysia, ^eDepartment of Management and Marketing, School of Business and Economics, Universiti Putra Malaysia

Corresponding Author Email: s_fatimah@upm.edu.my

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Abstract

This paper presents a bibliometric analysis of the previous studies on social entrepreneurship and maps the studies according to publication year and growth, source, language, subject area, countries and institution's productivity, and also citation metrics. Suggestions for future research based on the four decades of bibliometric analysis are presented towards the end of this paper. The bibliometric analysis was conducted on 1,835 social entrepreneurship articles retrieved from the Scopus database. The articles were published from 1978 until 2021. The software used in the analysis comprised Microsoft Excel for frequency analysis, VOSviewer for data visualization, and Harzing's Publish or Perish for citation metrics and analysis. The findings show that there has been a tremendous growth of publications on social entrepreneurship over the years, indicating that social entrepreneurship is an emerging research discipline with many potential academic fields to be explored. The subject areas of business, management and accounting are the prominent areas for the social entrepreneurship publication within the context of the Scopus database. This study presents a bird's-eye view of the current trend of social entrepreneurship research globally. The bibliometric analysis indicators from this study serve as a guide to researchers in identifying the most suitable journals for publication, potential collaborators and areas for future research.

Keywords: Social Entrepreneurship, Bibliometric Analysis, Scopus Database, VOSviewer, Harzing's Publish or Perish

Introduction

The concept of social entrepreneurship emerged in recent decades with many avenues to be explored. Social entrepreneurship mainly relates to business improvement and societal

wellbeing (Apadula & Predmore, 2019; Celebi et al., 2020; Gupta et al., 2020; Hidalgo et al., 2020; Majumdar & Ganesh, 2020; Tan et al., 2020). Social entrepreneurs differ from commercial entrepreneurs by creating needs, whereas the latter fulfils needs (Booth et al., 2020). It is challenging for different stakeholders to agree on social entrepreneurship definitions and progress from conceptual work to broaden the discussion into different areas (Canestrino et al., 2020; Mottiar, 2016). Nevertheless, the crucial mission of a social enterprise is to address the most urgent environmental or social issues (Cheah et al., 2019). Creating positive societal changes is the central reason social enterprises exist (Austin et al., 2006; Kimmitt & Munoz, 2018). In this paper, published social entrepreneurship studies were presented and mapped according to bibliometric analysis indicators.

Literature Review

Bibliometric Analysis Overview

Bibliometric analysis is a widespread and thorough approach to explore and analyse extensive scientific data Donthu et al (2021) where the accumulated scientific knowledge and evolutionary distinctions of entrenched fields are deciphered and mapped by rigorously analysing a large volume of unstructured data. Specific software, such as VOSviewer, efficiently conducts bibliometric analyses, which refer to co-authorship analysis, citation-based analysis, and co-word analysis (Van Eck & Waltman, 2017). Bibliometric indicators are classified as quantity, quality, and structural (Durieux & Gevenois, 2010). The quantity indicator refers to a researcher's productivity or output. The quality indicator reveals the connection between the publication and author and research areas (publication growth, trend, and productivity) by analysing the publications of specific research domains. The publication performance and impact are evaluated based on the total h- or g-index, the number of citations per year, cite score, the impact factor, or impact per publication (Ahmi & Nasir, 2019). The structural indicator involves co-citation, co-authorship, and bibliographic coupling measures. The most common bibliometric analysis indicators are publication classification, citation, publication impact, authorship, and country (Ahmi & Mohammad, 2019).

Social Entrepreneurship Literature

Bibliometric analysis has recently become prevalent and involves a significant quantity of social entrepreneurship studies. The most recent articles used a bibliometric analysis within the social entrepreneurship context (Table 1). For example, Hota et al. (2021) mapped social entrepreneurship articles on ISI Web of Science published within the previous 30 years. The authors presented the most highly-cited documents based on the citation number and social entrepreneurship development by (i) identifying research contributions to the field and the links, (ii) tracking social entrepreneurship development and progress, (iii) analysing social entrepreneurship, and (iv) examining the function of ethics in social entrepreneurship.

Cardella et al (2021) explored the intellectual structure of social entrepreneurship and presented a conceptual model of social entrepreneurship evolution based on 1,425 articles from the Scopus and Web of Science databases. Phan Tan (2021) performed a bibliometric analysis of 1,361 papers on ISI Web of Science, where the main clusters and overall publication rankings were analysed according to the authors, most influential publications, journals, and keywords. Iskandar et al (2021) analysed 453 articles from two leading journals and mapped the findings based on the social entrepreneurship classification process, the

current social entrepreneurship research trend and focus, and the direction of social entrepreneurship research.

Yesmin et al (2021) conducted a keyword co-occurrence analysis of 1,763 articles from the Scopus database, but retained only 227 for further analysis. Celebi et al (2020); Hota et al (2019); Dionisio (2019); Campos et al (2019); Naatu and Alon (2019); Persaud et al (2018); Rey-Marti et al (2016); Ferreira et al (2016) also performed bibliometric analyses in the social entrepreneurship context. While some of the aforementioned researchers used the Scopus database for bibliometric analysis, they used limited domain strategies. Thus, it is possible to extend the article publication span. Thus, this study is anticipated to contribute value by presenting a current map that visualises and clusters the Scopus articles related to social entrepreneurship research published in the last 43 years (1978 to 2021).

Table 1

Previous social entrepreneurship articles and bibliometric analyses

Author	Domain/Search strategy indicated in the article	Data Source	TDE	Bibliometric Attributes
Hota et al. (2021)	“social ent*”, “social ven*”, “social purpose vent*”, “social purpose organization” and “social business*”	Web of Science (1990-2020)	2,517	Citation analysis, co-citation analysis and structured review
Cardella et al. (2021)	“social entrepren*”	Web of Science and Scopus (1978-2020)	1,425	Productive countries, journal analysis, author productivity and high impact articles
Phan Tan (2021)	“social entrepreneur*”	Web of Science (1999-2020)	1,361	Co-citation and co-word analysis
Iskandar et al. (2021)	Social entrepreneurship	Journal of Social Entrepreneurship (2010-2020) and Social Enterprise Journal (2005-2020)	453	Keyword distribution, core author and citation analysis
Yesmin et al. (2021)	“SOCIAL* ENTREPRENEURSHIP*”	Scopus (1996-2019)	227	Co-authorship, author keywords, articles per year, productive journal and leading authors
Celebi et al. (2020)	Social entrepreneur and food, social entrepreneurship and food/gastronomy, social enterprise and	Web of Science, Emerald, EBSCO, Elsevier and Scopus	20	Keywords and authors

	food/restaurants and social business and food				
Hota et al. (2019)	Not mentioned	Not mentioned (1996-2017)	1,296	Citation analysis, co-citation analysis and network analysis	
Dionisio (2019)	“social entrepreneurship”	Social Enterprise Journal (2005-2017)	154	Key authors, institutions and geographic origins	
Campos et al. (2019)	“Social Entrepreneurship” AND “Economy of the Common Good”	EBSCO Business Source Premier, Emerald, JSTOR, Science Direct, Springer and Wiley Online	124	Publication by year, journal analysis and author analysis	
Naatu and Alon (2019)	“social franchis*” AND “microfranchis*”	ISI Web of Science and Scopus (2002-2018)	94	Co-citation analysis and publication per year	
Persaud et al. (2018)	“social entrepreneur*”	Web of Science, Scopus and ABI/Inform Global (1990-2015)	92	Highly cited journal, citation counts articles, country of authors and publication per year	
Rey-Martí et al. (2016)	Not mentioned	Web of Science	2,922	Countries analysis, languages, productive journals and authors’ productivity	
Ferreira et al. (2016)	“social entrepreneurship”	Web of Science (1994-2014)	204	Number of articles published, highly cited articles, co-citation network, core authors and highly cited journals	

TDE = Total Documents Examined

Methodology

Scopus was selected as the database platform as it is one of the largest and most frequently updated academic databases globally (Rew, 2010; Wahid et al., 2020). Scopus articles as of November 2021 were used. The title is the first opportunity for an article to attract readers’ attention (Chen, 2010; Hallock & Bennett, 2020). Thus, the data collection keyword was ‘social entrepreneur’ as it is the primary keyword related to the topic. The query identified 1,835 documents, which included articles, book chapters, and conference and review papers. The information in the articles was extracted where the (i) frequency of published materials was calculated and design relevant charts and graphs were designed using Microsoft Excel, (ii) bibliometric networks were constructed and visualised with VOSviewer, and (iii) citation

metrics and other frequencies were calculated with Harzing's Publish & Perish. Figure 1 depicts the search strategy flow diagram.

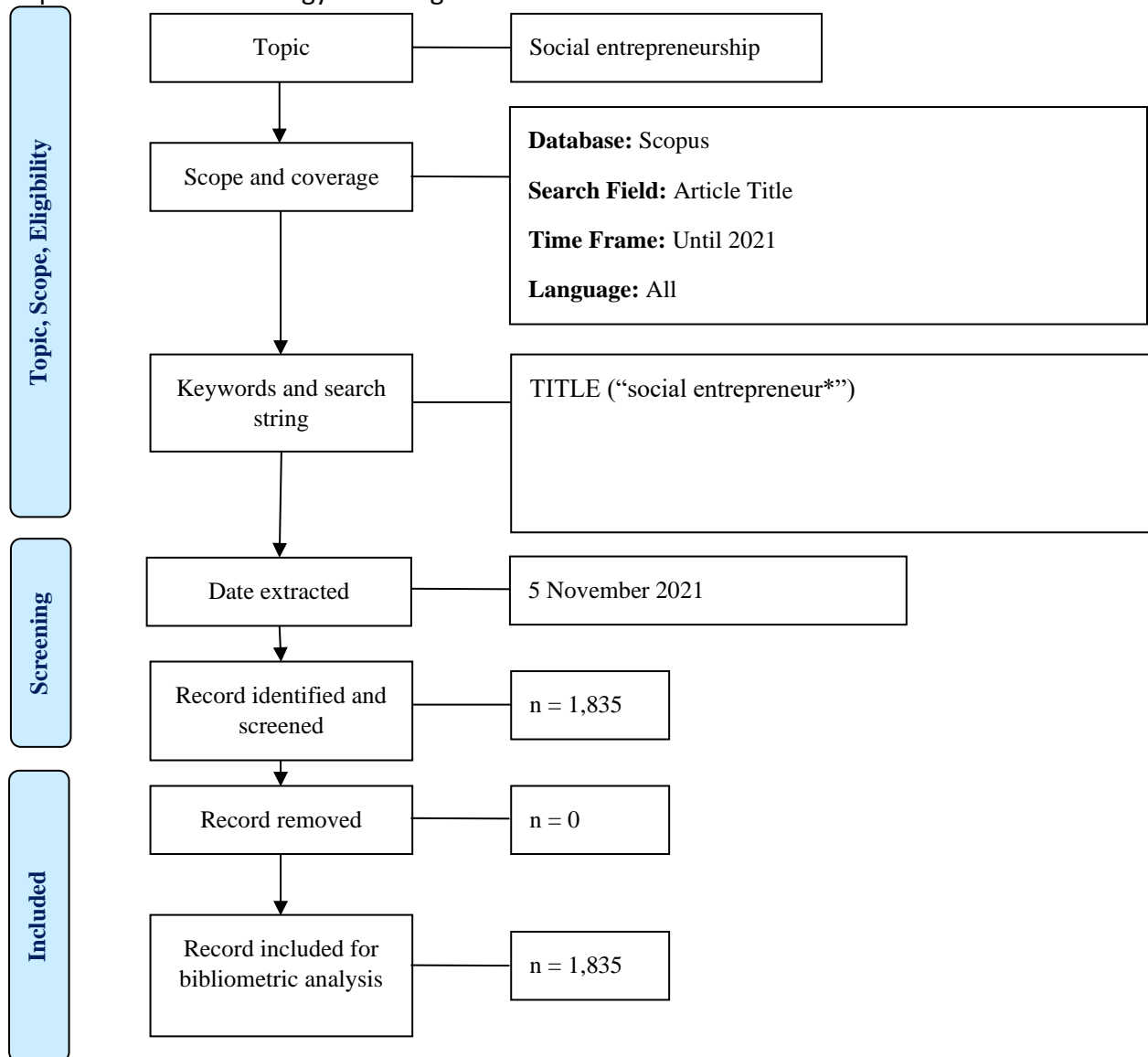


Figure 1. The search strategy flow diagram

Results

The bibliometric attributes of the Scopus database articles were reviewed and analysed based on the (i) annual growth and publication by year, (ii) document source and type, (iii) source title, (iv) document language, (v) subject area, (vi) analysis of keywords, (vii) national productivity, (viii) active institution, and (ix) analysis of citations. The results were mainly presented as frequencies and percentages. VOSviewer was used to map keyword co-occurrence, citation analysis was reported as citation metrics, and the 10 most cited social entrepreneurship articles were identified.

Annual Growth and Publication by Year

The first social entrepreneurship article was published by Lessem (1978), who examined the reconciliation of arts, business, social concerns, and financial techniques. Subsequently, social entrepreneurship-related publications generally remained static until the term 'social

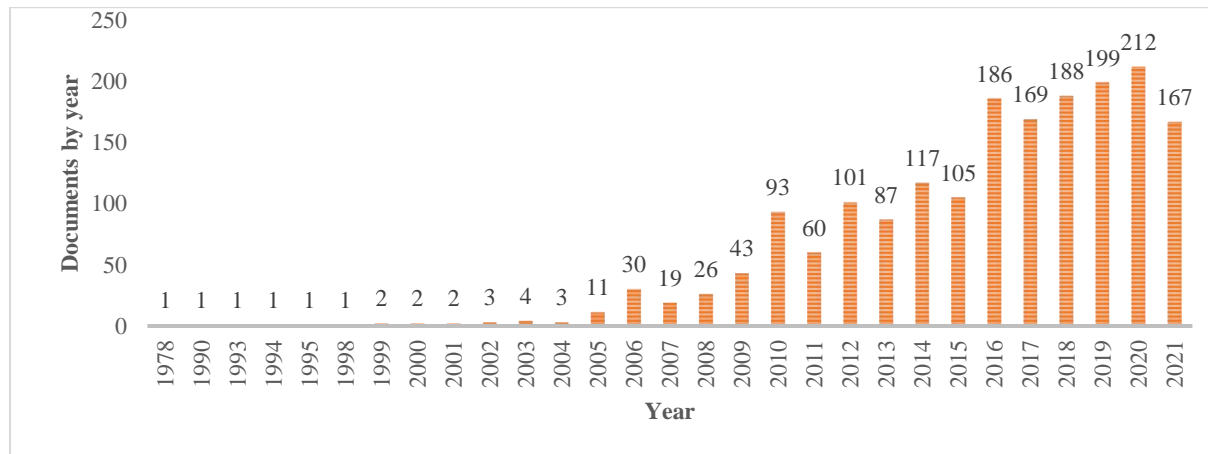
entrepreneurship' became more prevalent in 2005. Table 2 presents the total publication number and the percentage and cumulative percentage of the published social entrepreneurship documents. The number of social entrepreneurship publications was highest in 2020 (n = 212) (Table 2 and Figure 2). The number of such publications was expected to increase in 2022 as the social entrepreneurship-related areas are widely debated and significantly influence business performance and growth.

Table 2

Social enterprise journal articles publication years and annual growth

Year	Number of Published Articles	Percentage (N=1835)	Cumulative Percentage
1978	1	0.05	0.05
1990	1	0.05	0.11
1993	1	0.05	0.16
1994	1	0.05	0.22
1995	1	0.05	0.27
1998	1	0.05	0.33
1999	2	0.11	0.38
2000	2	0.11	0.49
2001	2	0.11	0.60
2002	3	0.16	0.71
2003	4	0.22	0.87
2004	3	0.16	1.09
2005	11	0.60	1.25
2006	30	1.63	1.85
2007	19	1.04	3.49
2008	26	1.42	4.52
2009	43	2.34	5.94
2010	93	5.07	8.28
2011	60	3.27	13.35
2012	101	5.50	16.62
2013	87	4.74	22.13
2014	117	6.38	26.87
2015	105	5.72	33.24
2016	186	10.14	38.96
2017	169	7.63	49.10
2018	188	10.25	56.73
2019	199	10.84	66.98
2020	212	13.35	91.12
2021	167	8.88	100
Total	1,835	100.00	

Figure 2. Number of social entrepreneurship publications per year



Document and Source Type

The social entrepreneurship documents were analysed according to the source title, document type, and source type, which included books, conference papers, journal articles and reviews, book chapters, and editorials. Most of the social entrepreneurship documents were journal articles compared to books and conference proceedings (Table 3). Figure 3 presents a pie chart of the document types where 64% were journal articles (n = 1,175), followed by book chapters (n = 327, 18%), conference papers (n = 156, 9%), and review papers (n = 78, 4%)

Table 3

Source type

Source Type	Number of Published Articles	Percentage (N = 1,835)
Journal	1,311	71.44%
Book	346	18.86%
Conference proceeding	124	6.76%
Book series	53	2.89%
Trade journal	1	0.05%
Total	1,835	100.00

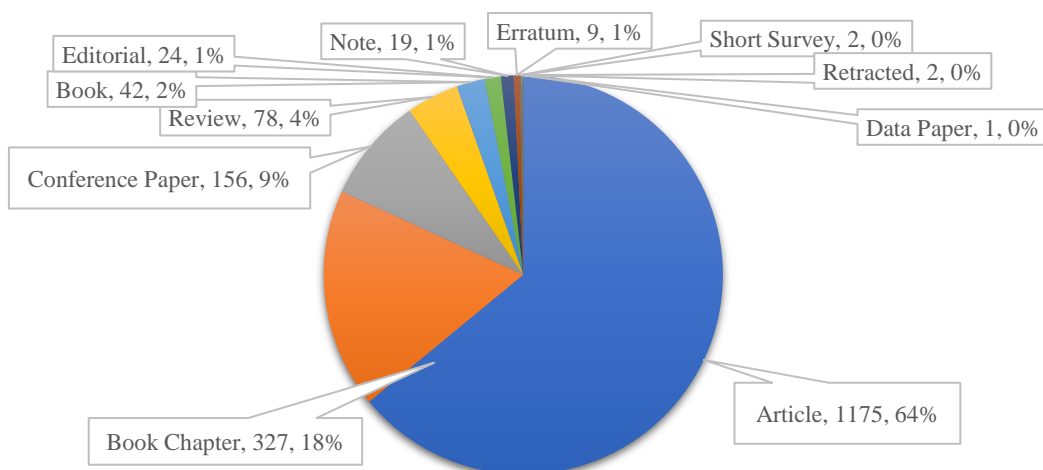


Figure 3. Document type of the published articles

Source Title

The social entrepreneurship studies were published in various proceedings, journals, and books. Table 4 summarises the leading source title, in which the social entrepreneurship articles were published based on the minimum five publications by each source title. The *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship* published the most social entrepreneurship papers.

Table 4

Leading source title

Source Title	TP	Percentage (N = 1,835)
	10	
Journal of Social Entrepreneurship	6	5.78
Journal of Business Ethics	33	1.80
Sustainability Switzerland	30	1.63
International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business	23	1.25
Social Enterprise Journal	22	1.20
Voluntas	21	1.14
Entrepreneurship and Regional Development	20	1.09
Academy of Entrepreneurship Journal	18	0.98
Academy of Management Learning and Education	18	0.98
Journal of Business Research	16	0.87

Document Language

Most of the social entrepreneurship publications were written in English (n = 1,768, 95.57%) (see Table 5). The other publication languages were Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Croatian, French, and Slovenian.

Table 5

Languages used for publication

Language	Number of Published Articles	Percentage (N = 1835)
English	1,768	95.57
Spanish	30	1.62
Portuguese	12	0.65
Russian	11	0.59
Croatian	5	0.27
French	5	0.27
Slovenian	4	0.22
Total	1,835	100.00

Subject Area

The social entrepreneurship documents were classified based on the subject area (Table 6). Social entrepreneurship research was performed mainly in management, business, and accounting (n = 1,247, 68%), social sciences (n = 770, 42%), and economics, econometrics, and finance (n = 738, 40%). The social entrepreneurship articles were also published in the areas of environmental science, computer science, arts and humanities, engineering, and decision science.

Table 6

Subject area

Subject Area	*Number of Published Articles	Percentage (N = 1,835)
Business, Management and Accounting	1247	67.96
Social Sciences	770	41.96
Economics, Econometrics and Finance	738	40.22
Environmental Science	120	6.54
Arts and Humanities	113	6.16
Engineering	104	5.67
Computer Science	87	4.74
Decision Sciences	83	4.52
Energy	64	3.49
Medicine	49	2.67
Psychology	47	2.56
Earth and Planetary Sciences	15	0.82
Agricultural and Biological Sciences	12	0.65
Multidisciplinary	12	0.65
Nursing	12	0.65
Mathematics	11	0.60
Biochemistry, Genetics and Molecular Biology	9	0.49
Health Professions	8	0.44
Materials Science	7	0.38
Pharmacology, Toxicology and Pharmaceutics	5	0.27
Physics and Astronomy	5	0.27
Chemistry	4	0.22
Chemical Engineering	2	0.11
Veterinary	2	0.11
Immunology and Microbiology	1	0.05
Neuroscience	1	0.05

*Some documents are categorized in more than one subject area

Keyword Analysis

Figure 4 presents the VOSviewer network visualisation of the keywords used in the analysed social entrepreneurship articles. The relationship strength among the keywords was indicated by the font size, circle size, colour, and thickness of the connecting lines (Van Eck & Waltman, 2017). Identical colours indicated that the linked keywords were commonly listed together. The VOSviewer diagram suggested that the keywords social innovation, social impact, social value, empathy, sustainability, and social capital were closely linked and typically co-occurred.

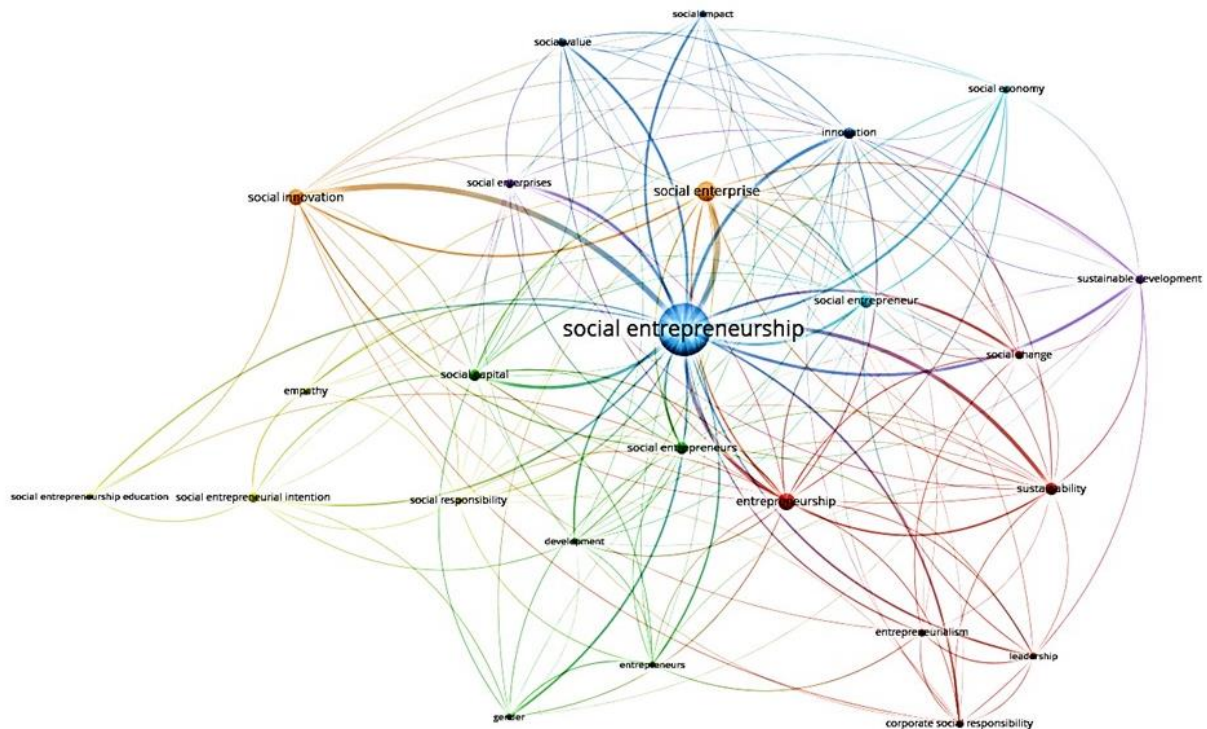


Figure 4. Keyword co-occurrence analysis

Country Productivity

The social entrepreneurship articles were from 41 countries. Figure 5 depicts the 10 leading publishing countries coloured according to the author affiliations. For example, an article co-authored by two authors each from the United States and Malaysia was counted as having one author each from the United States and Malaysia. The publication number was highest from the United States, followed by the United Kingdom, Spain, Germany, and Canada.

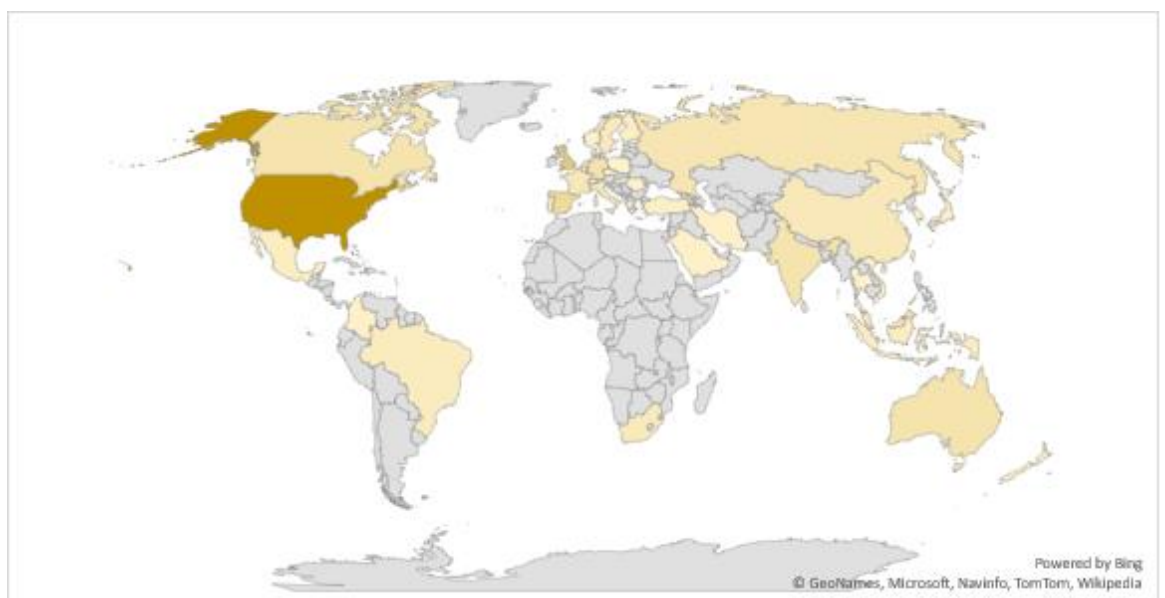


Figure 5. Countries that contributed social entrepreneurship articles

United States	458	China	52	Taiwan	30	Czech Republic	15
United Kingdom	187	France	51	New Zealand	29	Romania	15
Spain	116	Italy	51	Hong Kong	24	South Korea	15
Germany	80	Sweden	47	Switzerland	24	Japan	14
Canada	77	South Africa	45	Belgium	23	Poland	14
India	77	Brazil	37	Finland	23	Viet Nam	14
Australia	76	Indonesia	34	Turkey	23	Norway	13
Russian Federation	66	Mexico	34	Colombia	19	Slovenia	13
Malaysia	63	Portugal	34	Saudi Arabia	17	Croatia	12
Netherlands	54	Denmark	30	Iran	16	Greece	12
						Thailand	12

Active Institution

The analysis of the authors’ affiliations determined that much social entrepreneurship research originated from the University of Valencia (Spain), followed by the Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education (Mexico), Indiana University Bloomington (the United States), the University of Oxford (the United Kingdom), the University of St. Gallen (Switzerland), and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (Malaysia) (see Table 7).

Table 7
Most active institutions

Institution	Frequency	% (N = 1,835)
University of Valencia	17	0.93
Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education	17	0.93
Indiana University Bloomington	16	0.87
University of Oxford	16	0.87
University of St. Gallen	15	0.82
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia	14	0.76
Copenhagen Business School	13	0.71
IESE Business School	13	0.71
National Taiwan University	12	0.65
Harvard University	12	0.65

Citation Analysis

Table 8 summarises the citation metrics for the social entrepreneurship documents and lists the total citation numbers and the average citations per year of the documents. A total of 32,790 citations were reported during the 43-year inclusion period (1978–2021). The average citations per year of the 1,835 retrieved articles were 762.56.

Table 8

Citation metrics

Metrics	Data
Publication years	1978-2021
Citation years	43
Papers	1,835
Citations	32,790
Cites/year	762.56
Cites/paper	17.87
Authors/paper	2.41
h-index	81
g-index	151

Table 9 lists the 10 most cited articles based on the number of occasions the article was cited from Scopus. The highest number of citations to date was recorded for 'Social entrepreneurship research: A source of explanation, prediction and delight' by Mair and Marti (2006) (1,512 citations or 100.80 citations per year on average). The articles by Zahra et al. (2009) and Peredo and McLean (2006) were cited 1,062 and 750 times, respectively.

Table 9

The 10 most cited articles

N	Authors	Title	Source	T	CY
o				C	
1	Mair and Marti (2006)	Social entrepreneurship research: A source of explanation, prediction, and delight	Journal of World Business	151	1080
2	Zahra et al. (2009)	A typology of social entrepreneurs: Motives, search processes, and ethical challenges	Journal of Business Venturing	1062	880
3	Peredo and McLean (2006)	Social entrepreneurship: A critical review of the concept	Journal of World Business	750	500
4	Dacin et al. (2010)	Social entrepreneurship: Why we don't need a new theory and how we move forward from here	Academy of Management Perspectives	697	636
5	Alvord et al. (2004)	Social Entrepreneurship and Societal Transformation: An Exploratory Study	The Journal of Applied Behavioural Science	614	362
6	Dacin et al. (2011)	Social entrepreneurship: A critique and future directions	Organization Science	584	400
7	Weerawardena and Sullivan Mort (2006)	Investigating social entrepreneurship: A multidimensional model	Journal of World Business	551	363
8	Defourny and Nyssens (2010)	Conceptions of social enterprise and social entrepreneurship in Europe and the United States: Convergences and divergences	Journal of Social Entrepreneurship	525	473

9	Santos (2012)	A Positive Theory of Social Entrepreneurship	Journal of Business Ethics	5	57
				2	.7
				0	8
1	Seelos and Mair (2005)	Social entrepreneurship: Creating new business models to serve the poor	Business Horizons	5	31
0				0	.5
				5	6

TC= Total citations; CY= Citation per year

Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, the academic social entrepreneurship articles published from 1978 to 2021 were reviewed by reporting the trend of such studies using specific bibliometric analysis indicators. A total of 1,835 documents were extracted from the Scopus database. Joseph Banks introduced the term 'social entrepreneur' in 1972 in his book entitled *The Sociology of Social Movements* (Banks, 1972). Based on the Scopus database findings, the social entrepreneurship concept began to flourish in 2005, where publications expanded from 11 to 167. Most articles were published in journals and the preferred language was English. The *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship* was the leading social entrepreneurship research journal. The highest number of contributing authors was from the United States, followed by those from the United Kingdom, Spain, German, Canada, and India. Other Asian countries also contributed substantial numbers of social entrepreneurship research publications. Social entrepreneurship research was mainly performed in the areas of management, business, and accounting, social sciences, and econometrics, economics, and finance. Nevertheless, social entrepreneurship research was also explored in engineering, computer sciences, physiology, arts, and the humanities. On average, there were more authors per document throughout the year in addition to an increase in publication frequency each year. This pattern indicated greater collaboration between authors in this social entrepreneurship. Lastly, the University of Valencia was suggested as a suitable candidate for collaborative social entrepreneurship research.

While valuable findings were presented in this article, several limitations should be considered. First, the initial list of scholarly works published as indexed by Scopus were identified using specific queries or keywords, which was a common practice in earlier bibliometric-related studies. Although Scopus is among the most extensive indexing databases for scholarly works online, it does not encompass all available sources. Thus, some relevant articles might have been overlooked in this study. Furthermore, no search query is 100% optimal for capturing all academic studies in subject area. Therefore, false negative and false positive results are expected. Regardless of these limitations, an overall view of the current social entrepreneurship research trend globally was presented in this article. Hopefully, this bibliometric analysis can aid researchers in identifying the evolution of publications within the social entrepreneurship scope and objectively mapping documents based on the selected bibliometric analysis indicators.

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