



## Bibliometric analysis of social entrepreneurship: trends, themes, and future directions

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### Abstract

This study presents a bibliometric analysis of social entrepreneurship research indexed in Scopus from 2020 to 2025. Using R Studio and VOSviewer, the study examines publication trends, leading journals, influential countries, co-authorship networks, and keyword co-occurrence patterns. The findings indicate that research is concentrated in journals such as the Journal of Social Entrepreneurship and Social Enterprise Journal, with the USA, United Kingdom, and India showing the highest citation impact. Five thematic clusters were identified, covering social impact, sustainability, business models, social capital, and entrepreneurial intention. Emerging topics include gender, social capital, theory of planned behavior, and social value creation. This study contributes by mapping the intellectual structure of the field and identifying directions for future research.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Social entrepreneurship has gained increasing recognition as a transformative force in addressing complex social issues, while fostering innovative business models that achieve both societal and economic impact (Dasgupta, 2025). This approach blends the objectives of traditional entrepreneurship with the goal of creating positive social change, aiming to resolve issues such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation (Zhang et al., 2022). As the significance of social entrepreneurship continues to grow, so does the volume of academic research exploring various aspects of this field. However, despite a burgeoning literature, a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the trends, themes, and future directions in social entrepreneurship remains largely absent. Existing studies have predominantly focused on specific components of social entrepreneurship, such as the role of innovation, funding challenges, or social impact measurement (Schätzlein et al., 2023). While these individual studies have contributed valuable insights, they have often overlooked the broader picture of how social entrepreneurship has evolved as a research field and the key themes that have driven this development. Furthermore, with research spread across diverse academic disciplines, there is a lack of cohesive analysis that ties together the various threads of social entrepreneurship and highlights gaps in current knowledge. Unlike prior reviews that focus on conceptual discussions or limited



timeframes, this study provides an updated bibliometric mapping of social entrepreneurship research covering the 2020–2025 period. It integrates publication trends, citation structures, collaboration networks, and keyword clustering to reveal the evolving intellectual and thematic landscape of the field

This research aims to bridge this gap by providing a bibliometric analysis of the social entrepreneurship literature. By analyzing a vast array of academic sources, this study seeks to identify emerging trends, key themes, and influential research clusters that have shaped the evolution of the field. This analysis will not only synthesize existing research but also reveal opportunities for future exploration, positioning this study as an essential resource for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners seeking a deeper understanding of the field's trajectory. While social entrepreneurship has become an increasingly important area of study, the literature remains fragmented, and there is no systematic review that captures the evolution of key themes, research trends, and future research directions in the field. This fragmentation hinders both theoretical development and practical application, leaving a significant gap in the understanding of the field's progression. Therefore, this research seeks to answer the following question: What are the emerging trends, central themes, and future research directions in social entrepreneurship, and how can a bibliometric approach provide a clearer understanding of the field's evolution?

This question will guide the identification of existing research gaps and provide insights that inform future studies, enabling scholars and practitioners to navigate the complexities of social entrepreneurship more effectively. The primary objective of this research is to perform a bibliometric analysis of social entrepreneurship, aiming to uncover the key themes, trends, and influential factors that have shaped its development. Specifically, the study will:

1. Analyze the evolution of research trends and thematic areas in social entrepreneurship over time.
2. Identify key authors, research institutions, and journals that have contributed significantly to the field.
3. Highlight critical research gaps and propose future directions for the study of social entrepreneurship.

By achieving these objectives, this study will contribute to the academic field of social entrepreneurship by offering a systematic, data-driven analysis that informs both scholarly discourse and practical initiatives. The findings will provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the growth and development of the field, enabling scholars and practitioners to address current gaps and engage more effectively with the challenges and opportunities inherent in social entrepreneurship.

## 2. THEORETICAL REVIEW

Social entrepreneurship (SE) has gained significant attention in recent years due to its potential to address social and environmental challenges through innovative business practices. While the field has seen various theoretical contributions, a unified conceptual framework for SE is still lacking (Kamaludin et al., 2024). Theories commonly applied to SE include the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which explores the intentions behind starting a social enterprise, and Social Capital Theory which emphasizes the role of networks and relationships in facilitating the growth and success of social enterprises

(Ruiz-Rosa et al., 2020; Hadi et al., 2022). Additionally, Institutional Theory examines how external factors like laws and regulations influence the operation of social enterprises. These theories provide foundational insights but fail to fully capture the complexity of social entrepreneurship, especially in terms of balancing social and economic objectives (Stephan et al., 2015).

Despite the growing interest in SE, much of the existing literature remains fragmented and lacks empirical validation. Previous studies have predominantly been conceptual, focusing on the motivations and behaviors of social entrepreneurs, with limited use of formal hypotheses or rigorous empirical methods (Cardella et al., 2021). A critical gap in the literature is the lack of research on the long-term impacts and performance measurement of social enterprises. Furthermore, the influence of sociological factors, such as governance structures and community participation, has not been adequately explored. These gaps highlight the need for a more comprehensive theoretical approach that integrates both economic and social outcomes, as well as the institutional and cultural contexts that shape SE practices (Wang & Yee, 2023).

This study aims to fill these gaps by providing a multidimensional framework that connects entrepreneurial intentions, social impact, and institutional support. It posits that the success of social enterprises is not solely determined by the entrepreneur's intention or the economic viability of the venture, but also by the external support systems and social networks that enable the enterprise to thrive. By synthesizing theories from various disciplines, such as sociology, economics, and institutional theory, this research contributes to a more holistic understanding of SE. Moreover, it offers empirical insights into the role of institutional networks, which are crucial in providing resources and legitimacy to social enterprises.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a bibliometric methodology to explore the scientific landscape surrounding the topics of social entrepreneurship. Data were sourced from the Scopus database, chosen for its comprehensive coverage and structured metadata, which facilitate bibliometric analysis. The initial search yielded 468 articles using the keywords "social entrepreneurship" OR "Sociopreneur" in the title, abstract, or keywords. After applying inclusion criteria namely articles published between 2020 and 2025, written in English, categorized under Business, Management, and Accounting, and classified as journal articles. Bibliometric analysis was conducted using R Studio, enabling visual mapping and statistical evaluation of key bibliographic indicators. The analysis focused on yearly publication trends, the most productive journals, author collaborations (co-authorship), keyword co-occurrences, and citation performance. The co-occurrence network of keywords revealed thematic clusters, while co-authorship mapping illustrated collaboration patterns among researchers and institutions, providing insights into both the structural and conceptual dynamics of the research field over the selected timeframe.

### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This study aims to map and provide a blueprint for future research on social entrepreneurship using a bibliometric approach, The first analysis carried out is to look at

the top 10 journals that have publications in the field of social entrepreneurship which can be seen in table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Top Ten Journal Research on Social Entrepreneurship

Journal Name	Number of Article
Journal of Social Entrepreneurship	70
Social Enterprise Journal	35
Emerald Emerging Markets Case Studies	12
International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research	11
Journal of Business Ethics	10
Administrative Sciences	9
Small Business Economics	9
Event Management	8
Journal of Business Research	7
Journal of Business Venturing Insights	7

Tabel 1 shows the top 10 journals that frequently publish articles related to social entrepreneurship, with the Journal of Social Entrepreneurship being the most prominent, publishing 70 articles. Journals like the Social Enterprise Journal and Emerald Emerging Markets Case Studies are consistently cited as key references because they focus on the development and study of social entrepreneurship, involving business innovations aimed at social goals. The diversity of articles published by these journals reflects the wide range of relevant topics within the field, from entrepreneurial behavior to business ethics and management. With their high quality and quantity of publications, these journals have become trusted sources of information for researchers and practitioners in the field of social entrepreneurship.

Tabel 2 presents data on the countries with the highest citation counts (TC) for research on social entrepreneurship. The USA leads with 537 citations, followed by the United Kingdom with 356 citations. India ranks third with 285 citations, while Italy, Australia, and Germany follow with 155, 141, and 136 citations, respectively. Malaysia, Brazil, and China also contribute significantly to the field, with citation counts of 120, 105, and 101. The average article citations in these countries vary, with Malaysia having the highest average at 24.00, indicating a significant impact in terms of how often articles from these nations are cited in social entrepreneurship research.

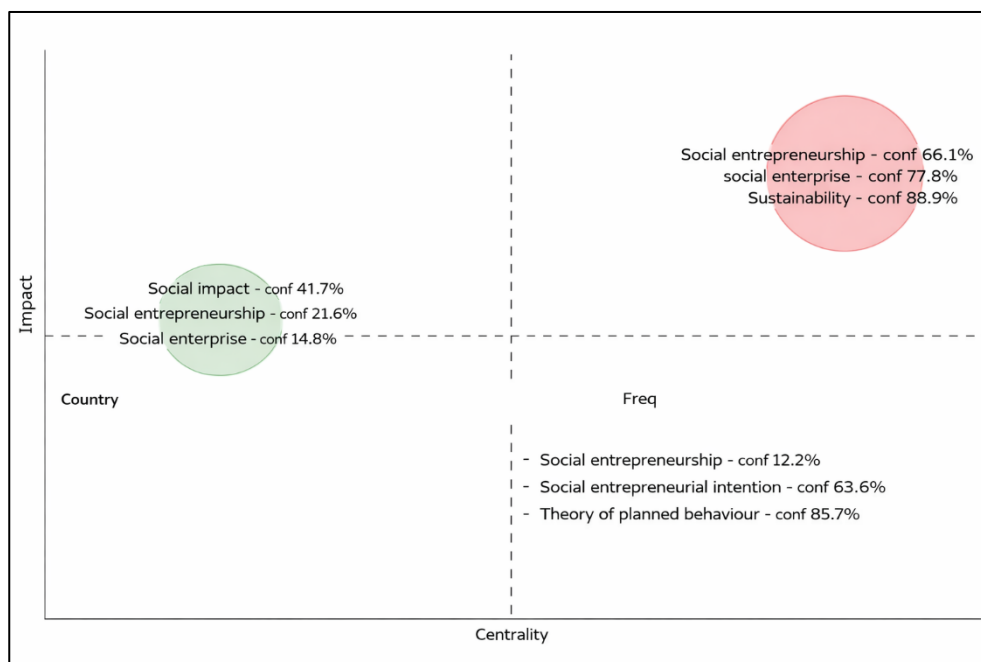
**Table 2.** Research productive country Organizational Commitment and Job Performance

Country	Total Citation	Average Article Citations
USA	537	8.80
United Kingdom	356	10.50
India	285	7.00
Italy	155	14.10
Australia	141	11.80
Germany	136	6.80
Malaysia	120	24.00
Brazil	105	8.80
China	101	7.80

Figure 1 shows that a two-dimensional scatter plot, divided into four quadrants by dashed lines representing the axes of "Impact" and "Centrality." In the upper-left quadrant, smaller green and red circles represent different research themes related to social entrepreneurship. The green circle is positioned closer to the "Impact" axis and includes terms such as "Social impact," "Social entrepreneurship," and "Social enterprise," with confidence levels of 41.7%, 21.6%, and 14.8%, respectively. This quadrant emphasizes the importance of social impact and enterprise within the field of social entrepreneurship, suggesting a significant association with the impact dimension but less frequent appearance in the literature compared to other terms.

On the right side of the plot, the larger red circle is placed in the upper-right quadrant, highlighting more frequently discussed topics such as "Social entrepreneurship" (66.1%), "Social enterprise" (77.8%), and "Sustainability" (88.9%). These terms exhibit a higher centrality and frequency in research, reflecting their dominant role in the field and the higher frequency of related articles. Below, the plot shows topics like "Social entrepreneurship" (12.2%), "Social entrepreneurial intention" (63.6%), and "Theory of planned behavior" (85.7%), with increasing confidence levels as they move toward higher centrality and frequency. The plot visually represents the interrelationships between these topics, offering insights into the research trends in social entrepreneurship, where topics like sustainability and social enterprise are central and have a broad impact, while other aspects like social impact are gaining more traction but remain less central in frequency.

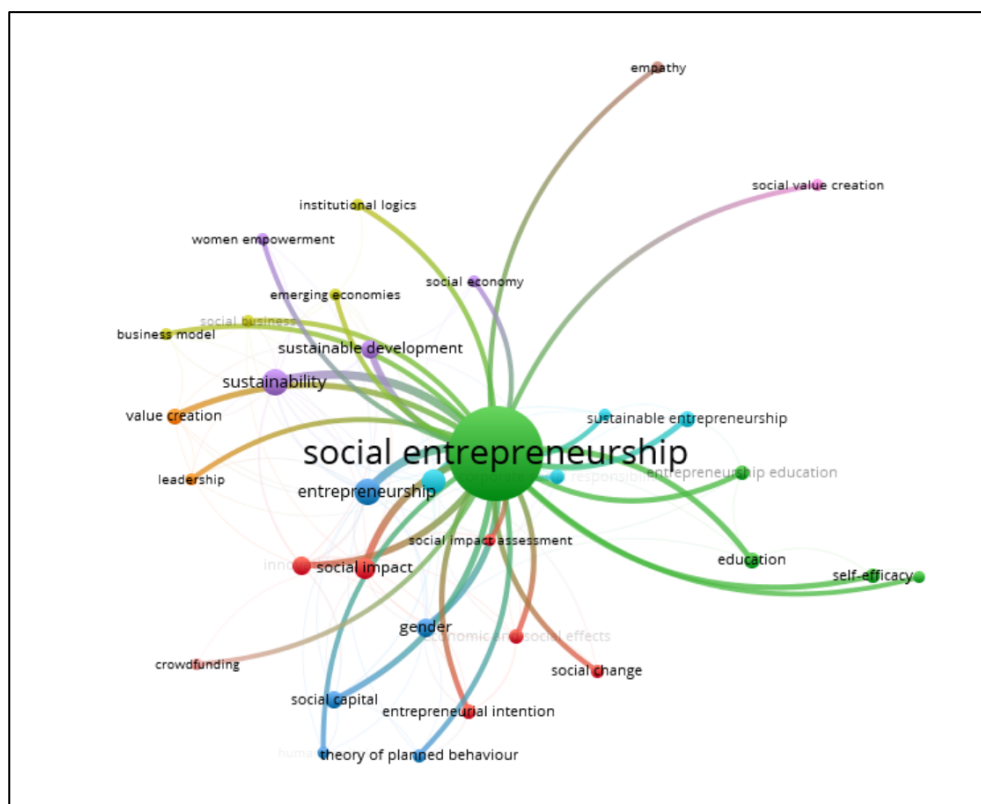
The plot effectively captures the evolving landscape of social entrepreneurship research, showing how different themes are positioned based on their impact and frequency in academic discourse. Topics like "Sustainability" and "Social enterprise" dominate in terms of frequency and centrality, reflecting their growing significance in current research. In contrast, "Social impact" remains relevant but is less central, indicating that while it has a substantial impact, it is less frequently addressed in comparison. This visualization helps identify the areas of focus within the field, highlighting key trends and the shifting priorities of social entrepreneurship research.



**Figure 1.** Clustering by Coupling Analysis

The third analysis is a co-occurrence analysis to see the mapping of research that has been conducted related to the topics of social entrepreneurship. This analysis was conducted using VosViewer. The results of the co-occurrence analysis can be seen in figure 2 bellow. The co-occurrence network analysis of social entrepreneurship reveals five distinct clusters, each representing a different aspect of the field. The five clusters illustrate the multidimensional configuration of social entrepreneurship research. The dominance of sustainability and business model themes reflects a shift toward hybrid value creation and organizational resilience. The presence of entrepreneurial intention and self-efficacy themes indicates growing attention to behavioral antecedents. Meanwhile, social capital and empathy clusters emphasize relational, cognitive, and normative mechanisms that underpin social venture development.

Cluster 1 (red) focuses on the practical and financial dimensions of social entrepreneurship, featuring terms like social impact, business model, value creation, and social business. This cluster emphasizes how social enterprises can drive societal change while maintaining economic sustainability. It underlines the importance of business strategies that generate both social and financial value (Neessen et al., 2021). Meanwhile, Cluster 2 (green) represents the core of social entrepreneurship, highlighting terms such as social entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship, sustainable entrepreneurship, education, and social capital. This cluster underscores the foundational elements of the field, focusing on how entrepreneurs build sustainable solutions, foster networks, and contribute to educational initiatives that shape the future of social entrepreneurship.



**Figure 2.** Co-occurrence analysis

Cluster 3 (blue) delves into societal development and impact assessment, with terms like sustainability, social value creation, sustainable development, and social economy.

These concepts highlight how social entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in addressing global challenges by fostering long-term sustainable development. Cluster 4 (yellow) shifts the focus to personal empowerment and leadership, with key terms such as women empowerment, leadership, self-efficacy, and entrepreneurial intention. This cluster emphasizes the importance of individual growth and leadership qualities in driving social entrepreneurship forward. Finally, Cluster 5 (purple) centers on empathy and social impact assessment, including terms like empathy, social impact assessment, and social change. These terms reflect the emotional and evaluative aspects of social entrepreneurship, highlighting the need for entrepreneurs to deeply understand social needs and assess the outcomes of their initiatives to ensure positive change. Together, these clusters provide a comprehensive view of social entrepreneurship, from its foundational concepts to its broader societal implications.

The next analysis is an overlay to find out the phenomenal topics researched about social entrepreneurship. Figure 2 shows that there are four topics that can be studied in the future, namely gender, social capital, theory of planned behavior, and social value creation. Gender, as a research topic in social entrepreneurship, has gained significant attention due to the growing emphasis on inclusivity and equality within entrepreneurship ecosystems. As social enterprises increasingly focus on addressing societal challenges, gender dynamics play a crucial role in shaping entrepreneurial opportunities and outcomes (Do, 2023). Women entrepreneurs, for example, often face unique challenges, including access to capital, networks, and societal biases, which can hinder their ability to scale and sustain their ventures (Mashapure et al., 2022). Research on gender within social entrepreneurship aims to understand how these challenges can be mitigated and how gender equality can be promoted to foster inclusive economic development. Investigating gender in this context is essential for identifying barriers to entry, promoting policy changes, and creating an equitable environment for all entrepreneurs (Fernández-Guadaño & Martín-López, 2023).

Social capital, another compelling topic in social entrepreneurship research, refers to the networks, relationships, and trust that individuals and communities develop over time, which can significantly enhance the success of entrepreneurial ventures. In the context of social entrepreneurship, social capital is vital for fostering collaboration, securing resources, and scaling impact (Daskalopoulou et al., 2023). Strong networks and relationships with stakeholders, such as investors, customers, and local communities, provide social enterprises with the support they need to address pressing social issues (Pusz et al., 2024). As social entrepreneurship continues to expand, understanding the role of social capital in both the formation and success of these ventures will be crucial for designing strategies that strengthen social networks and increase the impact of socially-driven initiatives (Sahasranamam & Nandakumar, 2020).

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) is another critical framework in understanding the motivations behind social entrepreneurship. TPB posits that individuals' behaviors are influenced by their intentions, which are shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In the realm of social entrepreneurship, this theory can help explain why individuals choose to engage in ventures that prioritize social impact over financial gain (Chang et al., 2022). By examining how attitudes toward social change, societal expectations, and an individual's perceived ability to create change influence their entrepreneurial intentions, researchers can gain insights into the psychological and social drivers of social entrepreneurship (Yang et al., 2023). This understanding is crucial for

developing policies and programs that encourage more individuals to pursue ventures that contribute to sustainable development and social good.

Lastly, social value creation is at the heart of social entrepreneurship and is increasingly becoming a focal point of research as society grapples with global challenges such as inequality, climate change, and poverty (Daskalopoulou et al., 2023). Social enterprises aim to create value not just for their founders or investors, but for society at large, addressing systemic issues and improving the well-being of marginalized communities. As the impact-driven business model gains popularity, scholars are examining how social value creation is measured, how it can be maximized, and what frameworks can be implemented to ensure its sustainability. Research into social value creation is essential for understanding how enterprises can not only be financially sustainable but also achieve lasting, positive change in the communities they serve. It opens doors to innovative solutions and provides the foundation for building a more inclusive and just society.

In conclusion, gender, social capital, theory of planned behavior, and social value creation are all integral topics in the field of social entrepreneurship that require deep exploration as the field continues to evolve. Each of these areas offers significant insights into the mechanisms that drive social enterprises and the challenges they face. Researching these topics will help build a more comprehensive understanding of how social entrepreneurship can be leveraged as a powerful tool for sustainable development, social equity, and positive societal transformation. By focusing on these key issues, researchers can help shape the future of social entrepreneurship and guide policymakers, practitioners, and investors toward more effective strategies for social impact.

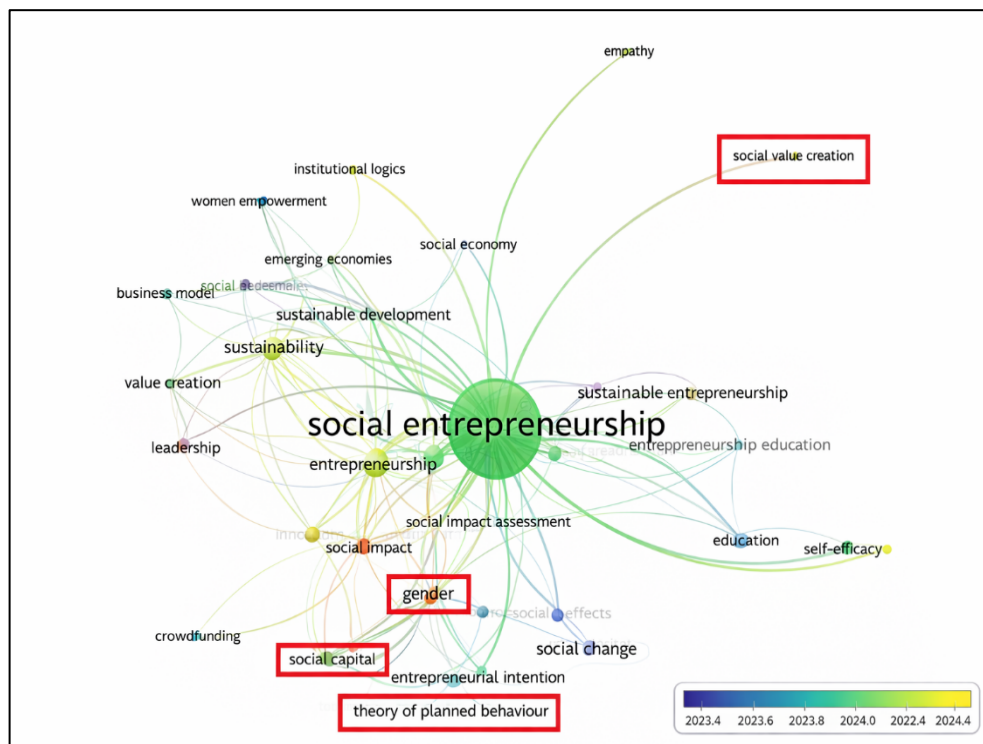


Figure 3. Overlay analysis

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provides a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of the social entrepreneurship (SE) literature, shedding light on the evolving trends, key themes, and influential factors that have shaped the field. Through a detailed examination of academic sources published between 2020 and 2025, the study identifies the top journals, productive countries, and significant research clusters in SE. It reveals that while concepts like social impact, sustainability, and social enterprise are central to current research, other themes such as gender, social capital, and social value creation are emerging as critical areas for further exploration. The study highlights the fragmentation in the literature and emphasizes the need for a more integrated theoretical approach to SE that considers both social and economic outcomes in varying institutional contexts.

Future research in social entrepreneurship should explore the emerging themes of gender, social capital, and social value creation, as these areas hold significant potential for advancing the field. Developing a unified theoretical framework that connects entrepreneurial intentions, social impact, and institutional support is crucial for capturing the complexity of social enterprises. Policymakers should focus on creating an environment that fosters institutional support and enhances network participation to strengthen social enterprises. Additionally, practitioners should prioritize integrating social and financial objectives, while emphasizing sustainability and long-term social value creation, ensuring that their initiatives have a lasting and meaningful impact.

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