

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP THEORY AND RESEARCH: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Manishkumar S Patel

ABSTRACT

There has been a significant increase in scholarly interest in the field of “Social Entrepreneurship” since the advent of 21st century. The field is still in development stage, and conceptual and theoretical research largely dominated this field. A more rigorous and formal research for theory development, followed by validation is required to develop consensus on the boundaries of this research field. The present study proposes to analyze the research journey so far to identify if conceptual consensus can be constructed from the literature and what could be the future research areas. A sample of 549 research papers was drawn from sampling frame of four sources comprising of two publication groups namely, Sage Publications and Emerald Insight, and two online scholarly databases namely JSTOR and Google Scholar. It attempts to examine if a broader consensus can be derived on the definitions of the key terms of this research field. The inclusion of social and environmental benefits and their impact may be needed in the conceptual frameworks to make them relevant for social entrepreneurship. The researchers’ focus should be beyond the concepts and theories in this field to take it further with development of meaningful theories and models related to social entrepreneurship and ways to validate them.

Keywords: Social Entrepreneurship, Conceptual framework, Models, Research

I. INTRODUCTION and LITERATURE REVIEW

The Social entrepreneurship is a business model, which serves as social problem solving endeavour. (Robinson et al., 2009; Mair and Marti, 2006; Peredo and McLean, 2006; Dees et. el., 2002). Social entrepreneurship continues to be a field of interest spanning across academic disciplines and differs from traditional theories of economic and business development (Dart, 2004; Leadbeater, 1997). Many academic scholars suggest that the phenomenon encompasses the different domains of entrepreneurial studies, social problems and solutions, and non-profit sector management (Mair & Marti, 2006; Perrini, 2006).^[1] However, the Social entrepreneurship philosophy is still considered to be in its development phase (Short et. al, 2009; Patel, 2018). There is lack of consensus regarding the conceptual framework and theory of Social Entrepreneurship (Hill et al., 2010, Short et al., 2009, Mair and Marti, 2006; Patel, 2018).

The definitions of social entrepreneurship seem to have different versions due to diverse context of geographic locations, academic backgrounds and the economic development of the countries (Kerlin, 2009; Defourny and Nyssens, 2006; Patel, 2018). Thus, the debate is still on among the academicians and practitioners over the exact definitions of social entrepreneurship (Mair and Marti, 2009; Robinson et al., 2009; Thompson, 2002; Peattie and Morley, 2008; Spear, 2006; Jones, 2007; Hockerts, 2006; Haugh, 2005; Defourny and Nyssens, 2006; Alter, 2003; Dart, 2004).

The lack of agreement on the exact forms, boundaries, domain and interpretations of social entrepreneurship (Peredo & McLean, 2006; Perrini, 2006) results in a field of study characterized by no universally accepted definition (Short et al., 2009), no precision, and largely peripheral research approaches. Thus, it is imperative to identify what has been achieved in the research journey so far and future research opportunity to create conceptual consensus for meaningful results. However, there seems to be broad consensus on the boundary of field about “social entrepreneurship being an activity, which creates social value along with entrepreneurial value capture”. Though, the scholarly debate exists about the balance between these two essential ingredients of social entrepreneurship.

The present study proposes to analyse the research journey and trend with respect to research area, specifically since 1986, to identify if conceptual consensus can be constructed. The paper attempts to identify the avenues for future research in the field.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The relevant research papers on social entrepreneurship were retrieved using sample frame consisting of four sources; namely Sage Publishing (384 journals), Emerald Insight (50 journals), the online scholarly research database www.jstor.org and www.scholar.google.com. The publications (Sage Publishing and Emerald Insight) were selected from SSCI index, which was last updated in May 2017 (http://mjl.clarivate.com/publist_ssci.pdf).

The following search terms were used to search for research papers available using 4 sources: “Social Entrepreneurship”, “Social Entrepreneur”, “Social Enterprise” and also included India as additional search term to for India centric research papers in this field. Though the terms “Social Entrepreneurship”, “Social Entrepreneur” and “Social Enterprise” have been used extensively in this research field, a similar evolutionary pattern was identified among the three datasets having these three keywords from the sample, evidencing that the concepts did not have different evolutions and could be found as synonymous in

the literature (Patel, 2018; Granados et al., 2011). Other words suggested by the literature, such as, “Community enterprise”, “Social venture”, “Third sector” in combination with “Entrepreneurship” were included too, due to the initial purpose of this study and the pertinence to the central discussion of this study.

A total of 1,330 bibliographic records (research papers) were retrieved using above search terms on sample frame. The records were then organized and selected using filters: language (English only), duplicate records, journal articles and books, search words on the abstract, title, and keywords and relevance to the study subject. Using these procedure, the dataset was trimmed down to 549 research papers, which then were finally selected and studied. (The selected research papers were from those, which were published till March 2018.

The findings from these articles were then recorded in excel datasheet using various parameters as columns. If any record was found to have multiple keywords from above table, it was split in to as many records with one keyword. This resulted in swelling of total global dataset size from 549 to 672, while Indian data-subset swelled to 177 from 152. Similar data handling was done with records having multiple research discipline per paper, which resulted in swelling of total global dataset size from 549 to 916, while Indian data-subset swelled to 237 from 152.

The analysis was carried out using pivot tables applying various data filters and sorting methods, and charts created from this datasheet for graphical and tabular representation for easier understanding.

III. DATA AND EMPIRICAL RESULTS

The keyword wise global dataset consisting of 672 records after data treatment due to multiple key words or research area in each paper is presented in table 2, while Table 3 presents similar data from Indian data-subset.

The tables show that three search terms “Social Entrepreneurship”, “Social Enterprise” and “Social Entrepreneur” show evolutionary patterns which are quite similar to each other, which supports scholarly view that these terms are considered synonymously and area used interchangeably in literature under study. The evolutionary pattern does not show any significant difference between global and Indian data-subset.

The global and Indian datasets were analysed for research areas explored by scholars so far as shown in figure 1 and 2.

Table 4 presents fourteen research areas merged together into three broader research area categories based on broader basic parameter they belong to, for both global and Indian datasets. It shows that research in the area of “Social and environmental issues and challenges” is significantly higher in global dataset

compared to India dataset while for research in the area of “Economic and traditional entrepreneurship issues and challenges”, India dataset has significantly higher percentage. This shows that in Indian social entrepreneurs, focus is more on economic and traditional entrepreneurship issues than social issues compared to their global counter-parts. However, there still seems to be more interest in economic and traditional entrepreneurship issues (42.9% and 58.2%) than social and environmental issues (32.6% and 27%) both globally and in India respectively.

The global analysis shows that 634 (69%) research articles published were on five (35%) broad research areas out of 916 articles, where research was conducted on 14 broad research areas, while for India data-subset, 174 (73%) research articles published were on five (35%) broad research area, out of total Indian data-subset of 237 articles on 14 research areas.

Above figures show that global and India datasets have quite similar patterns especially for top five research areas. Although, It shows that globally research area of “Concepts and Theory” is second with frequency of 139, while Indian dataset has it, listed at fifth position with frequency of 27 (19%) numbers. This shows that in conceptual research, 99 papers out of 139 (71%) has happened in developed countries.

For India dataset, the top five research areas derived from figure 2 are; “Impact and Social Innovation” with 40 frequencies, “Management Issues” with 38 frequencies, “Other issues and challenges” with 36 frequencies, “Entrepreneurship” with 33 frequencies and “Concepts and theories” with frequency of 27. While for the global dataset, top five research areas are, “Impact and Social Innovation” with 155 frequencies, “Concepts and Theories” with 139 frequencies, “Management issues” with 128, “Entrepreneurship” with 108 and “Other Issues and Challenges” was fifth with 104 frequencies.

The frequency of research papers published in top five research areas have been graphically presented in figure 4 (global dataset) and figure 5 (Indian data subset). This frequencies have been divided in to 5 year time periods, starting from 1986.

It can be seen from figure 4 and 5 that more than 92% research (585 out of total 634) in global dataset and more than 90% research (157 out of 174) in India data subset in these five research categories has been carried out after 2005.

Table 5 presents five-year research frequencies since 2006 in these five research areas. It can be observed that there is significant increase in research in other research areas compared to “Concepts and theory”. If these five research areas can be categorized broadly into two research area categories, namely “Concepts

and theory” and “Other issues (social and economic)”, the rise in “Concepts and theory” is 170% globally vis-à-vis 412% in “Social issues” and 132% in “Economic Issues” in 2011-2015 over 2006-2010. In India subset, research in area of “Concepts and theory” rose by 71% vis-à-vis 600% in “Social issues” and 132% in “Economic Issues” over similar period. This shows that there is definitive shift from conceptual and theoretical, and economic research to research in social issues, thus causing the field to mature.

IV. CONCLUSION

Though there is lack of agreement on the exact forms, boundaries, domain and interpretations of social entrepreneurship, there seems to be broad consensus on the boundary of field about social entrepreneurship being an activity, which creates social value along with entrepreneurial value capture. Though, the scholarly debate exists about the balance between these two essential ingredients of social entrepreneurship. The three search terms “Social Entrepreneurship”, “Social Enterprise” and “Social Entrepreneur” show quite similar evolutionary patterns, which supports scholarly view that these terms are considered synonymously and area used interchangeably in literature under study (Granados et al., 2018; Patel, 2018).

The study confirms scholarly view that most of the conceptual research in the field is happening in in developing countries. This study also shows that there is definitive shift from conceptual and theoretical, and economic research to research in social issues, thus causing the field to mature. The evolutionary pattern does not show any significant difference between global and Indian data-subset. The research share in the area of “Social and environmental issues and challenges” to total research in respective area, is significantly higher in global dataset compared to India dataset while for research in the area of “Economic and traditional entrepreneurship issues and challenges”, India dataset has higher respective share compared to global dataset. This shows that in Indian social entrepreneurs, focus is more on economic and traditional entrepreneurship issues than social issues compared to their global counterparts. However, there still seems to be more interest in economic and traditional entrepreneurship issues. It is observed that more than two third of the research in the field is concentrated in five research areas, “Concepts and theory”, “Impact and Social Innovation”, Entrepreneurship”, “Management Issues” and “Other Issues and challenges”. However, there is trend shows that significant research shift is happening towards “Social Issues and Challenges” in this research field.

The study shows that the in recent years, the research shift is happening towards “Social Issues and challenges” as field head towards maturity. The academic

interest has increased significantly in recent years, sowing the seeds for more rigorous research involving formulation of various relevant models, and their validation, hypothesis formulation and testing is not far away, like other mature research disciplines. With the field approaching maturity, there will be significant increase in interest from academicians and practitioners alike, which will result in increase in amount of research in this field in both globally and in India.

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Figure 1: Global Dataset - Research area wise

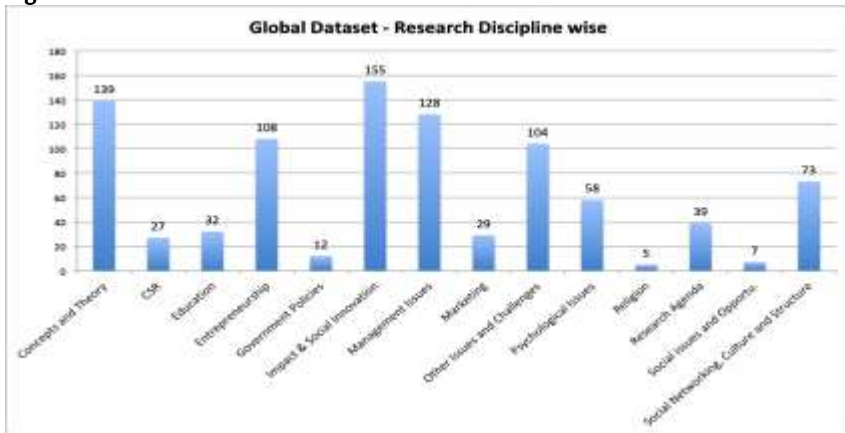


Figure 2: Indian Data subset – Research area wise

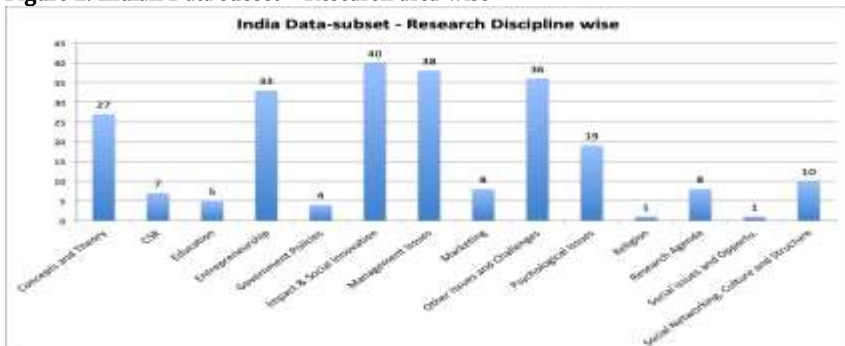


Figure 3: Concepts and Theory research Distribution (Geographical area wise)

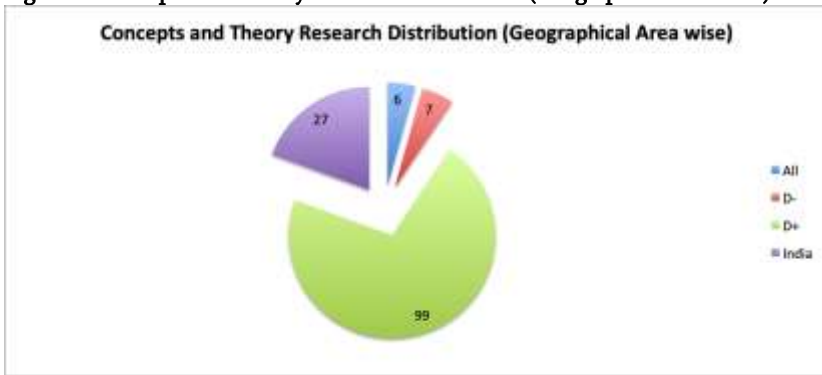


Figure 4: Global Dataset – Top Five Research area wise

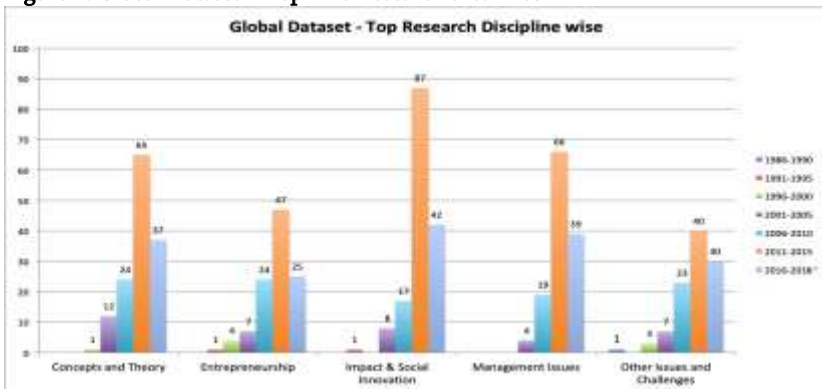
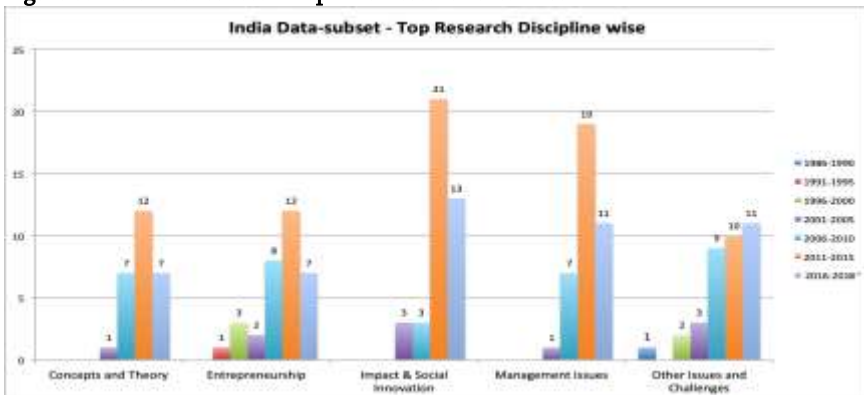


Figure 5: India Data subset – Top Five Research area wise



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Table 1: Characteristics of the sample selected

Search terms	(1) "Social Entrepreneurship" or "Social Entrepreneur" or "Social Enterprise" (2) "Community Enterprise" or "Third Sector" or "Social Venture" and "Entrepreneurship" (3) Above "terms" and "India"
Cut-off time line	March 2018
Sample Frame	(1) Sage Publishing (www.journals.sagepub.com) (2) Emerald Insight (www.emeraldinsight.com) (3) JSTOR - Online scholarly database (www.jstor.org) (4) Google Scholar - Online scholarly database (www.scholar.google.com)
Search Limitations	Only scholarly journal papers and books were selected

Table 2: Global dataset (Keyword wise)

Publishing year	Social Entrepreneurship	Entrepreneurship	Other	Social Enterprise	Social Entrepreneur	Grand Total
1986-1990					2	2
1991-1995		1			2	3
1996-2000	3	3		1	2	9
2001-2005	9	6	1	4	16	36
2006-2010	39	21	3	23	34	120
2011-2015	112	39	7	78	91	327
2016-2018*	59	22	4	51	39	175
Grand Total	222	92	15	157	186	672

* Till March 2018

Table 3: Indian data-subset (Keyword wise)

Publishing year	Social Entrepreneurship	Entrepreneurship	Other	Social Enterprise	Social Entrepreneur	Grand Total
1986-1990					2	2
1991-1995		1				1
1996-2000	2	2			2	6
2001-2005	4	2			3	9
2006-2010	15	6	1	1	13	36
2011-2015	30	8	2	5	27	72
2016-2018*	20	6	1	14	10	51
Grand Total	71	25	4	20	57	177

* Till March 2018

Table 4: Research article distribution – Broad research area category wise

Broad Research Area Category	Research Area	Global Dataset		India Dataset			
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%		
Concepts and Theory	Concepts and Theory	139	178	19.5 %	27	35	14.8 %
	Research Agenda	39		8			
Social and Environments Issues and Challenges	CSR	27	299	32.6 %	7	64	27.0 %
	Education	32			5		
	Impact and Social Innovation	155			40		
	Religion	5			1		
	Social Issues and Opportunities	7			1		
	Social Networking, culture and Structure	73			10		
Economic and Traditional Entrepreneurship Issues & Challenges	Government Policies	12	439	42.9 %	4	13	58.2 %
	Marketing	29			8		
	Entrepreneurship	108			33		
	Psychological Issues	58			19		
	Other Issues and Challenges	104			36		
	Management Issues	128			38		

Table 5: Five-year research frequencies (comparison between 2006-2010 and 2011-2016)

Research Area	Broad Research Area Category	Time Period	Global Dataset		Indian Dataset	
			Fre q.	% Change	Fre q.	% Change
Concepts and Theory	Concepts and Theory	2006-2010	24	170 %	7	71 %
		2011-2015	65		12	
Impact and Social issues	Social Issues	2006-2010	17	412 %	3	600 %
		2011-2015	87		21	
Entrepreneurship	Economic Issues	2006-2010	66	132 %	24	71 %
Management Issues		2011-2015	153		41	
Other Issues and Challenges						

ABOUT AUTHOR

Manish Patel (Managing Director, Suman Trades Pvt. Ltd., Surat) is pursuing Ph.D at Dept of Business and Industrial Management, VNSGU, Surat. He founded Suman Trades in 1993 and one of the leading ELV and IT infrastructure companies in South Gujarat. The Expertise includes Technological integration solutions like Audio-Video, Access-Control, IT Infrastructure, Security and Surveillance, Fire-Alarm, Tele-communication, Lighting and Infra-Red Automation for clients from various verticals.

