# A Review and Analysis of the Thematic Structure of Social Entrepreneurship Research: 1990-2018

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**Abstract.** This article explores the dominant themes in social entrepreneurship (SE) research and whether the themes changed over a 28-year period (1990-2018). A text mining analysis, using Leximancer 4.5 software, of the most influential SE research studies was conducted to identify themes and trace changes over time. Our literature search process produced 101 articles, which were used in the analysis. The analysis was conducted over three time periods corresponding to three different phases of SE research. The nascent phase covers 1990-2002; the growth phase covers 2003-2010, and the maturity phase covers 2011-2018. This temporal analysis reveals that different themes emerged at the different phases. The dominant theme in the first phase focused on the social entrepreneur (individual level). The second phase focused heavily on the organisational level of SE and the third phase focused on institutional and contextual dimensions of social entrepreneurship. Overall, our analysis revealed four dominant themes in SE, namely (1) social entrepreneurs, individuals and communities (2) organisation of SE (3) innovation and value creation in SE, and (4) context of social entrepreneurship. Our study also reveals research gaps and avenues for future research.

**Keywords:** social entrepreneurship, social innovation, SE organisation, institutions, community, text mining, Leximancer.

## 1. Introduction

Academic interest in social entrepreneurship (SE) has grown considerably over the last two decades (Sassmannshausen & Volkmann, 2018). SE has been explored by researchers from a variety of distinct disciplines and fields (e.g., ethics, sociology, entrepreneurship, innovation, economics, management) each drawing from their own domain-based perspectives and approaches (Sassmannshausen & Volkmann, 2018; Saebi, Foss & Linder, 2019). While the diversity of perspectives and theoretical lenses have enriched our understanding

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of SE (Kimmitt & Muñoz, 2018; Saebi, Foss, & Linder, 2019), it has also resulted in a fragmented literature with little consensus around its ideological, epistemological and ontological dimensions (Short, Moss & Lumpkin, 2009; Lehner & Kansikas, 2013). In this regard, Nicholls (2010b) argues that the multidisciplinary contest over the epistemology of the field has failed to set normative boundaries around SE. Similarly, Choi & Majumdar (2014) contend that SE is a contested concept that makes it challenging to articulate it as a coherent field of scholarly investigation (Saebi, Foss, & Linder, 2019).

According to Mair & Marti (2006), the 'variegated nature and multiple expressions of social entrepreneurship' (p. 39) presents an opportunity for researchers to employ different theoretical lenses and analytical methods to further the understanding of SE. In an attempt to clarify the nature and scope of SE, several recent review studies have identified various dimensions of SE (e.g., Short, Moss & Lumpkin, 2009; Desa, 2010; Hoogendoorn, Pennings & Thurik, 2010; Bacq & Janssen, 2011; Granados, Hlupic, Coakes, & Mohamed, 2011; Lehner & Kansikas, 2013; Kraus, Filser, O'Dwyer & Shaw, 2014; Dato-on & Kalakay, 2016; Rey-Martí, Ribeiro-Soriano & Palacios-Marqués, 2016; Macke, Sarate, Domeneghini, & Da Silva, 2018; Sassmannshausen & Volkmann, 2018; Saebi, Foss & Linder, 2019). While these studies, which differ in their focus, methodological approaches, unit of analysis and timeframes covered, have improved our understanding of SE, many scholars continue to argue for more research aimed at clarifying the 'key' dimensions of SE around which scholars and practitioners may coalesce (Short, Moss & Lumpkin, 2009; Lehner & Kansikas, 2013; Saebi, Foss & Linder, 2019). Developing a unifying core of themes is considered pivotal to establishing the distinctive nature of SE (Weerawardena & Sullivan Mort, 2006; Choi & Majumdar, 2014; Saebi, Foss & Linder, 2019).

Against this backdrop, the research question we explore in this study is: what are the dominant themes in SE research from its early inception (1990) to the present (2018) and have the themes changed over this 28-year time frame? Our goal is to identify the emergence of themes between 1990 and 2018 and to trace how research on these themes has evolved (expanded, narrowed or changed focus). To achieve this objective, we conduct a text mining study using a commercial off-the-shelf software, Leximancer 4.5. Text mining is a form of computer-aided text analysis (CATA) where a computer algorithm generates underlying concepts or themes in a text corpus (Cretchley, Rooney, Gallois, 2010). In contrast to traditional methods of content analysis, CATA provides researchers the capability to examine "very large samples of text" and has improved "internal, external, construct and statistical conclusion validity" (McKenny, Aguinis, Short, & Anglin, 2018, p. 2910). This way our study deviates from prior studies by focusing on a longer timeframe, and by utilizing text mining, which avoids researchers' bias in generating key themes.

In order to examine the evolution of themes, we divide the timeframe of our study (1990-2018) into three distinct periods based on analysis presented by prior bibliometric, scientometric and review studies. For instance, many scholars consider 1990-2002 as representing the nascent phase of SE, 2003-2010 as the growth phase, and 2011-2018 as the establishment or maturity phase (Granados, Hlupic, Coakes & Mohamed, 2011; Sassmannshausen & Volkmann, 2018). Based on these timeframes, our study identified several key themes underlying SE research. The main contribution of our study is threefold: First, our study contributes to a deeper understanding of evolution of SE by showing how key themes emerged and changed over time. We consider this an important complement to the literature since it was not possible to determine from prior studies whether themes evolved and changed over time as well as the temporal importance of themes. This nuance is important for further SE research because it suggests that not all themes are equally important all the time. It also indicates where research interests in the themes expanded, changed directions, waned, or become more nuanced. It also identifies areas where research has flourished and areas that remain under-researched. The research gaps we identify can inspire new directions for further research. Second, our study contributes to the SE literature by explicating the shared meaning and accumulation of knowledge of the themes as articulated by the most influential studies in the field. This is very important for paradigm development since they can serve as building blocks of theory in the field (Kuhn, 1962; Suddaby, 2010). Third, our analytical method, text mining, which offers many methodological advantages over manual coding approaches, is considered a unique and important methodological contribution to SE research given the increased usage of text mining in other fields of management and business research.

The remainder of this article is structured into five sections. Section 2 provides an overview of the previous review studies in order to situate our analysis. Section 3 describes the methodology employed to identify relevant SE research and the text mining approach used to identify themes. Section 4 presents the results followed by a discussion in Section 5, Section 6 suggests topics for further research, and Section 7 offers some concluding remarks and limitations.

## 2. Previous Literature Reviews

The several literature reviews on SE in recent times have focused on the different aspects of the intellectual structure of the field. Early reviews tended to focus on the state of the field. For instance, Short, Moss, & Lumpkin (2009) and Granados, Hlupic, Coakes, & Mohamed (2011) focused on the epistemological nature of studies in the field. Along with the lack of agreement in definitions, both studies noted the preponderance of conceptual or descriptive studies compared to theory-driven empirical ones. Hoogendoorn, Pennings, & Thurik (2010) identified and

reviewed 31 empirical studies on SE indexed in the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI). They observed that the majority utilized case study methodologies. These authors noted that research in the early years focused primarily on establishing a conceptual foundation of the field through a considerable stream of conceptual papers. The findings of Hoogendoorn, Pennings, & Thurik (2010) were corroborated by Lehner & Kansikas (2013) who found that 82% of SE literature relied partially on qualitative methods, and 48% of the articles were primarily conceptual and focused on defining SE and its attendant processes. Later reviews also reported that the bulk of SE research in the early years has been informed by case studies, narratives, interviews, and anthropological qualitative methods (Granados, Hlupic, Coakes & Mohamed, 2011; Rey-Martí, Ribeiro-Soriano & Palacios-Marqués, 2016; Sassmannshausen & Volkmann, 2018). Scholars contend that these methodological approaches indicate the nascent nature of the field, thereby supporting Short, Moss, & Lumpkin's (2009) contention about the relative lack of scientific rigour in the early years of development of the field.

In their analysis Hoogendoorn, Pennings, & Thurik (2010) also noted that although SE is a global phenomenon, two distinct perspectives could be found, which they termed as the American Tradition and the European Tradition. However, Bacq and Janssen's (2011) narrative analysis did not find any transatlantic divide but instead revealed a diversity in the conceptualization of SE, social entrepreneurs and SE organizations even within the same school of thought. In fact, all previous reviews reported the proliferation of definitions of SE and the consequent lack of consensus around a precise definition.

In this regard, Bacq and Janssen (2011) found that early definitions of SE focused on the social causes and activities undertaken by individuals and organizations in areas such as economic, education, research, welfare, social and spiritual well-being while definitions focusing on the context, environment or institutional-level received far less attention. This assessment was corroborated by Dato-on & Kalakay (2016) and Saebi, Foss, & Linder (2019). In tracing the evolution of the SE research, Sassmannshausen and Volkmann (2018), using scientometric analysis, noted the explosive growth in SE research from just over 200 publications in the year 2000 to almost 4,000 by 2010 – a more than doubling on an annual basis! The authors contend that such explosive growth indicates the increasing maturity of the field. Similarly, Granados, Hlupic, Coakes & Mohamed (2011) contend that the three criteria of the maturity process suggested by Serenko, Bontis, Booker, Sadeddin, & Hardie (2010), namely, increasing trend in co-authorship, diversity of inquiry methods, and reduced role of practitioners and increasing role of academics, apply to the SE field.

Overall, according to Sassmannshausen & Volkmann (2018), since the 1990s, SE research has evolved from a nascent field of research to a more established, institutionalized domain of research. However, several scholars contend that research focusing on theory-building, theory validation, and large-scale empirical studies using sophisticated quantitative methods, which are

hallmarks of established research domains, are still lacking in the context of SE (Short, Moss, & Lumpkin, 2009; Lehner & Kansikas, 2013; Sassmannshausen & Volkmann, 2018; Saebi, Foss, & Linder, 2019).

Table 1 summarizes previous systematic literature review studies on SE. As shown in Table 1, the primary focus of most reviews was on the general state of research in SE. Among the four studies that specifically focus on theme identification, the study by Kraus, Filser, O'Dwyer, & Shaw (2014) used a small sample of 20 articles. The study by Lehner and Kansikas (2013) focused on themes within the opportunity recognition construct while, Dato-on and Kalakay (2016) limited their theme identification to definitions of SE. Similarly, while the study by Macke, Sarate, Domeneghini, and Da Silva (2018) uses keyword and semantic analysis to identify the research themes, their study did not consider the temporal aspects. Hence, although there are several literature reviews on SE, by focusing and identifying the main themes over time, our study provides a more nuanced understanding of the evolution of research on SE during the three periods of infancy, growth and maturity. In other words, our focus on understanding the evolution of research themes in SE complements and extends the previous thematic analysis but with greater coverage over a longer timeframe.

*Table 1*: Previous Literature Reviews - A snapshot

| Authors (Year) | Data Source | Unit of Analysis | Inclusion Criteria | Time Span | Primary Research Focus | Number of studies in Analysis |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Short et al. (2009) | EBSCO, Web of Knowledge, ABI/ INFORM, & Science Direct | Only peer-reviewed scholarly articles. | All | 18 years (1991-2008) | General - state of the field | 152 |
| Hoogendorn et al. (2010) | Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) | Only peer-reviewed scholarly articles in English | All | Until October, 2009 | Specific – focus on empirical studies only | 31 |
| Granados et al. (2011) | SSCI, Business Source Complete, Science Direct, Social Enterprise J. & J. of Social Entrepreneurship | Only peer-reviewed scholarly articles | Not clearly mentioned | 20 years (1991-2010) | General - state of the field | 284 |
| Lehner and Kansikas (2013) | Social Science Citation Index | Only peer-reviewed scholarly articles | All | 2005-2010 | Theme identification | 77 |
| Kraus et al. (2014) | Emerald, EBSCO, ProQuest, Science Direct and Google Scholar | Only peer-reviewed scholarly articles | Specific - Top 20 cited articles | Till date | Theme identification | 20 |
| Dato-on and Kalakay (2016) | PsycINFO®; ABI/ INFORM Global | Not mentioned | Articles with definition of SE | 2005-2010 | Specific - definition of SE | 13 |
| Rey-Marti et al. (2016) | Web of Science | Scholarly and general articles | All | Until February, 2015 | General - state of the field | 2922 |

| Sassmanns-hausen and Volkmann (2018) | EBSCO Host's Business Source Premier; Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts, Philosopher' Index; Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection; PsycINFO; Emerald; ProQuest; Science Direct; Springer Link, Wiley, & Google Scholar. | Scholarly and general articles | All | 1954-2013 | General - state of the field | Not available |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Macke et al. (2018) | Web of Science | Not mentioned | All | Not specified | Specific – titles & abstracts | 297 |
| Saebi et al. (2019) | Scopus, Web of Science | Only peer reviewed scholarly articles in English | Articles Rated 3 to 4* by the Chartered Association of Business Schools (2015) | Until May, 2018 | General - state of the field | 395 |

## 3. Methodology

We begin our systematic literature review by first identifying peer-reviewed journal articles written in English and indexed in at least one of three widely used academic databases in business, management and social sciences research, namely, the *Web of Science (WOS), SCOPUS and ABI Inform/Pro-Quest Global*. According to Saebi, Foss, & Linder (2019), the Scopus database contains over 20,500 journals from over 5,000 publishers and the Web of Science database contains over 10,000 journals and seven citation databases. Thus, we are confident that together these three academic databases cover virtually all of the top-ranked academic business, management, entrepreneurship, and other social sciences journals. We excluded literature sources that are less likely to be peer-reviewed such as books, conference papers, reviews, and reports (Sassmannshausen & Volkmann, 2018) and only included research studies that can be considered certified and validated (Ramos-Rodríguez & Ruíz-Navarro, 2004).

Next, we identified search criteria that were used in prior studies and employed them in our study. Some of the most widely-used search terms employed in the SE literature are social entrepreneur*, social enterprise, social venture, and social business in the titles, abstracts or keywords (Short, Moss, & Lumpkin, 2009; Granados, Hlupic, Coakes & Mohamed, 2011; Saebi, Foss & Linder, 2019). We also utilized these words except for social enterprise, which is often characterised as a substantially distinct field from SE (see Granados, Hlupic, Coakes & Mohamed, 2011). Our initial search returned 1,246 articles, of which 259 were from the *Web of Science*, 435 from *ABI/Inform Global*, and 552 from *Scopus*.

We next considered the citation count of an article to identify influential studies in SE. Generally, the higher the citation count of an article, the higher is

the acknowledgement by other scholars about the importance of the article. Therefore, citation counts serve as useful indicators of the research impact, and intellectual influence, relevance, and contributions to a field of enquiry (Ramos-Rodríguez & Ruíz-Navarro, 2004; Lockett & McWilliams, 2005; Bornmann & Daniel, 2008; Waltman, 2016). To identify the most influential articles in SE, we consider a minimum of $25^2$ citations to an article (Trieu, 2017) as of June 1, 2018. Following the approach of Sassmannshausen & Volkmann (2018), our choice was also informed by the h-Index of the journal where the article was published. Similar to h-index for scholars, the h-Index for journals is regarded as a reliable indicator of publication quality. It is used to assess the overall impact of journals dedicated to the same field (Harzing and Van der Wal, 2009) and has been used in recent reviews of the SE literature (e.g., Short, Moss, & Lumpkin, 2009; Rey-Martí, Ribeiro-Soriano & Palacios-Marqués, 2016; Sassmannshausen & Volkmann, 2018). Generally, the higher the h-Index of the journal, the higher the quality of scholarly contribution. For instance, an h-Index of $25^3$ for a journal means that at least 25 articles in that particular journal were each cited at least 25 times. Therefore, we cross-referenced the h-index of the journal in which selected articles with the 25 citation count cut-off appeared. Our search for the h-Index of the top entrepreneurship, business, management, and social sciences journals that published SE research showed that those with an h-Index of 25 or greater are on the lists of the most highly ranked journals.

Next, we zeroed in on the final list of articles through a careful reading of the titles, abstracts, keywords and introduction sections of the articles in order to ensure that they present relevant SE research or have SE as their focus, removing duplicates from the databases, and applying the 25 citations cut-off. This process resulted in the identification of 101 articles that were published between 1990 and June 1, 2018. These 101 articles constitute the sample for our study and collectively constituted the text corpus for CATA. We then applied the CATA software, Leximancer 4.5, to extract the themes. Below we provide a brief description of a Leximancer Text Mining Analysis.

Text mining analysis facilitates examination of large volumes of text in order to measure constructs, identify semantic structures and discover hidden patterns (Nunez-Mir, Iannone, Pijanowski, Kong, & Fei, 2016). According to Fan, Wallace, Rich, and Zhang (2006), "text mining is the process of extracting

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2. We used Google Scholar's h-index. Google Scholar calculates 5-year h-index of journals and an h-index of 25 would mean 25 articles published in that journal have each been cited at least 25 times by other articles published by all types of documents indexed by Google Scholar in the last 5 years.

3. Note that the citation counts differ across the academic databases depending upon the number of journals included in the databases. The citation count in Google scholar tends to be the highest as Google Scholar includes citations to a given study from all sources i.e. books, conference papers, etc. The three academic databases that we considered generally include citations from studies published within their respective databases. This often accounts for differences in citation counts across databases. In this study, if an article appears in multiple databases, we take the highest citation count across the databases.

interesting and non-trivial patterns or knowledge from text documents" (pp. 77-78). Text mining analysis typically follows a three-step approach of (a) parsing text, (b) identification of concepts, and (c) clustering (Indulska, Hovorka & Recker, 2012). The text mining software, Leximancer, uses complex statistical algorithms (Marjanovic & Dinter, 2017) to produce useful visualization of coded themes (and concepts) together with an interface that allows the researcher to drill down to the underlying data (articles in our study) to understand the context of the themes/concepts, and identify the sources and common discussion(s) of them (Indulska, Hovorka & Recker, 2012). Unlike other content analysis software that strictly calculates word frequencies or suggests significance based on predetermined dictionaries or manual coding (e.g., NVivo), Leximancer identifies these themes/concepts using a Bayesian co-occurrence metric to measure co-occurrence relevance (Indulska, Hovorka & Recker, 2012). Moreover, it avoids the potential bias of researchers in categorising content and informs potential hypothesis for further research (Cretchley, Rooney & Gallois, 2010). The software has been extensively evaluated for stability, reproducibility and correlative validity of the underlying statistical algorithms (Smith & Humphreys, 2006). Additionally, it has been widely used in academic research in disciplines such as strategy, international business, marketing, entrepreneurship, advertising, information systems and social media (e.g., Cummings & Daellenbach, 2009; Crofts & Bisman, 2010; Dann, 2010; Campbell, Pitt, Parent, & Berthon, 2011; Liesch, Håkanson, McGaughey, Middleton, & Cretchley, 2011; Sotiriadou, Brouwers, & Le, 2014; Young, Wilkinson, & Smith, 2015; Volery and Mazzarol, 2015; Marjanovic & Dinter, 2017; Wilden, Akaka, Karpen, & Hohberger, 2017) .

Leximancer uses four core elements to convey meaning identified in a text corpus: keywords, concepts, themes, and a concept map. A concept map is shown in Figure 1. *Keywords* are the building blocks used to derive concepts. Keywords are words that have been determined to have statistically significant relationships with other words throughout the corpus. The algorithm provides a weight to all words based on their co-occurrences within sentence blocks, with statistically significant relationships leading to the designation of keywords. A *concept* consists of a collection of keywords that are related to each other in statistically meaningful ways (Leximancer User Guide 4.5). Concepts that are often found together will generally be placed near each other on a concept map. Themes are represented by heat-coloured circles on a concept map. The *concept map* displays the relevant concepts and themes. Hot colours (red, orange) correspond to themes that are frequently discussed within the text while cold colours (blue, green) symbolise themes that are mentioned relatively less (Marjanovic & Dinter, 2017). A *theme* is a statistically significant cluster of concepts within a concept map. For example, the *theme* of red circle in Figure 1 is labelled *social* (red lettering/colour of the bubble) by Leximancer and the *concepts* (black lettering) are *entrepreneur, entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial, social, initiatives,* and

*public*. By default, each *theme* takes its name from the most connected concept within that circle i.e. the red circle is named *social* because *social* is the most connected concept to the other concepts in the red circle. Also, the relative distance of concepts on the map indicates the degree to which the concepts co-occur i.e. concepts that are often found together are placed near each other on a concept map (Indulska, Hovorka & Recker, 2012).

Leximancer also produces a dashboard graphic that compares themes over time in terms of relative frequency and strength (Indulska, Hovorka & Recker, 2012). However, the main high-level output of Leximancer is the concept map. The concept map facilitates easy exploration of the data through drill-downs and hyperlinks such that the source of the concepts can be explored.

*Figure 1*: Leximancer Concept Map Illustration
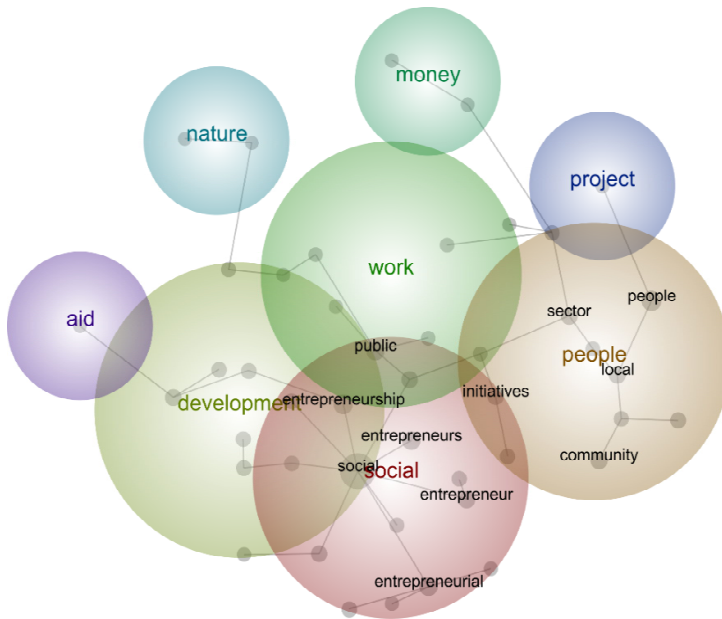


It is important to note that even though the concepts and themes are generated by the program, "meaning" is not automatically provided by the software (Marjanovic & Dinter, 2017). Rather, researchers are expected to make sense of the visualized maps in order to derive insights and tell the story based on their knowledge of the subject (Marjanovic & Dinter, 2017). As noted by Indulska, Hovorka & Recker (2012), this sense-making is achieved by drilling down, from the high level theme to 1) first identify concepts that underlie the themes, 2) exploring their relative distance (between concepts) to understand connectivity and context of use, 3) drilling down to identify evidence words for

each concept to understand the exact context of the concept, 4) drilling down to explore relevant quotes that exemplify the concepts and provide further context.

## 4. Results

We conducted four separate analysis covering the periods 1990-2002, 2003-2010, 2011-2018 and all the three periods combined. The concept maps displaying the most frequently occurring themes and tables listing their associated concepts are shown below for each period of analysis.

Figure 2 displays the concept map showing the core themes (Panel A) and associated concepts (Panel B) for the period 1990-2002. The themes and associated concepts in Figure 2 indicate a primary focus (red circles) on social entrepreneurs and the SE initiatives they undertake in response to social needs, social problems, social change, social development and social policy. Another stream of research (green circles) focuses on the support for and the role local people and communities play in the success of social entrepreneurship. Another theme that researchers examined during the early phase of SE pertains to the nature of problems and issues social entrepreneurs pursued due to failure of public policy and development aid to alleviate social failures.

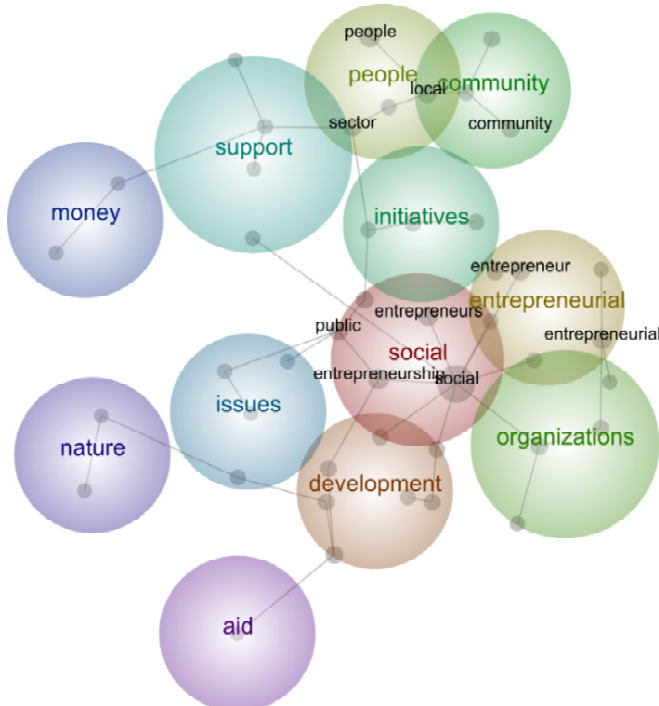*Figure 2:* Panel A: Concept Map for Period 1990-2002

Figure 2 Panel B: Themes and Associated Concepts for Period 1990-2002

| Stream | Themes | Co-occurred Concepts |
|---|---|---|
| Social entrepreneur & social entrepreneurship | social, entrepreneurial, entrepreneurship, development, organizations | social, entrepreneurs, resources, different, public, common, role, entrepreneurial |
| People & Community | people, community, initiatives, support, money | local, need, project, sector, money, groups, people, others, community, private, initiatives, economic, value, organization |
| Social entrepreneurship issues | nature, issues, development, aid | problems, actions, public, policies, nature, change, development, issues, aid, civic, society |

Note: Grey dots represent co-occurred concepts, which are shown in the last column in Panel B. They are not shown on the concept map to avoid a cluttered map and enhance clarity. The *Streams* identified in Panel B are the authors' interpretation of the themes and concepts.

Further analysis of the results shows strong co-occurrence rates between concepts such as *social entrepreneurs, local, needs, problems, resources, groups, and community*. For instance, Thompson (2002) noted that social entrepreneurs listen to the "voice of the community" and respond in meaningful ways. Many initiatives are successful because they clearly relate to local needs. Also, SE initiatives involve members of the community and relies on the community for help in various ways. Overall, the results for the first period of SE research suggests an extremely strong focus on the individual level of analysis (social entrepreneurs and other individuals) and particularly on the local context (e.g., Waddock & Post, 1991; Prabhu, 1999; Thompson, 2002).

Figure 3 displays the concept map showing the core themes (Panel A) and associated concepts (Panel B) for the period 2003-2010. This period is characterised by three important streams of research. The results indicate that research on the individual theme (*entrepreneurs, people, and entrepreneurship*) continued albeit with an expanded focus on the personality traits of social entrepreneurs along with the opportunities they exploit and the economic, political and developmental change they influence (e.g., Alvord, Brown & Letts, 2004; Sharir & Lerner, 2006; Seelos & Mair, 2005; Zahra, Gedajlovic, Neubaum & Shulman, 2009). The expanded focus also included research on the entrepreneurial process, value creation, differences and parallels between social and economic entrepreneurship, and the role of individuals in creating or managing SE ventures (e.g., Weerawardena & Sullivan Mort, 2006).
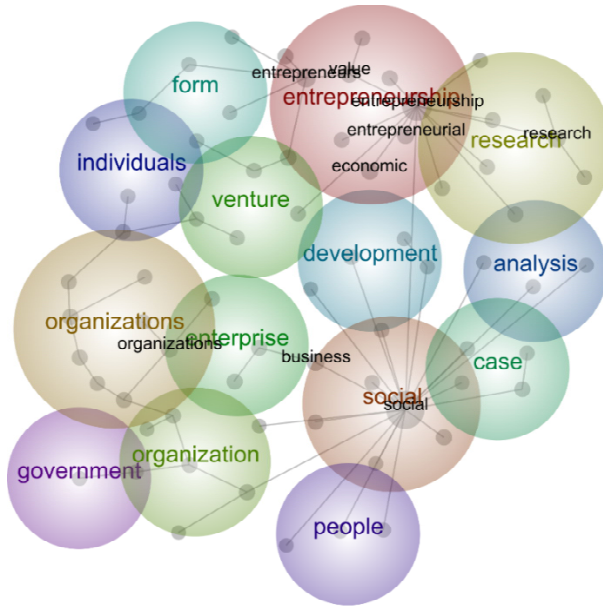
*Figure 3*: Panel A: Concept Map for Period 2003-2010



Figure 3 Panel B: Themes and Associated Concepts for Period 2003-2010

| Stream | Themes | Co-occurred Concepts |
|---|---|---|
| Social entrepreneurs & people | social, development, entrepreneurship, people | entrepreneurs, value, opportunities, focus, economic, change, political, knowledge, development, need, world, work, people |
| Social entrepreneurship organization | organization, enterprise, government, venture, business, individuals, form | organization, community, public, private, non-profit, government, school, services, support, activity, business, enterprise, foundation, market, financial, capital, individuals, successful, ventures, personal, forms, needs, human |
| Research approaches & methods | research, analysis, case | institutional, theory, context, field, approach, success, case, model |

Note: Grey dots represent co-occurred concepts, which are shown in the last column in Panel B. They are not shown on the concept map to avoid a cluttered map and enhance clarity. The *Streams* identified in Panel B are the authors' interpretation of the themes and concepts.

We also observed a strong shift in research focus towards the enterprise level as opposed to the individual level. This enterprise stream of research examined issues pertaining to non-government organizations, non-profit enterprises, community organizations and support for SE enterprises from government and businesses. This focus seems to be in line with the social enterprise school of thought that emphasize the organization over the individual (social innovation school) (Bacq & Janssen, 2011). Overall, we conclude that in the second period of SE research, 2003-2010, scholars began to examine SE in more formal ways emphasising the organization over the individual. Further, our results also

indicate that research focusing on defining the scope, methodology, approaches, context, and theories underlying SE began to emerge (e.g., Neck, Brush & Allen, 2009; Dacin, Dacin & Matear, 2010; Nicholls, 2010b). This research stream represented early efforts at establishing the epistemological basis of SE (e.g., Goldstein, Hazy & Silberstang, 2008; Thompson, 2008; Urbano, Toledano & Soriano, 2010).

Figure 4 displays the concept map showing the core themes (Panel A) and associated concepts (Panel B) for the period 2011-2018. This period is characterised by three relatively new research streams: (1) a focus on institutions and institutional contexts, (2) innovation and value creation, and (3) educational and SE programs offered to students.

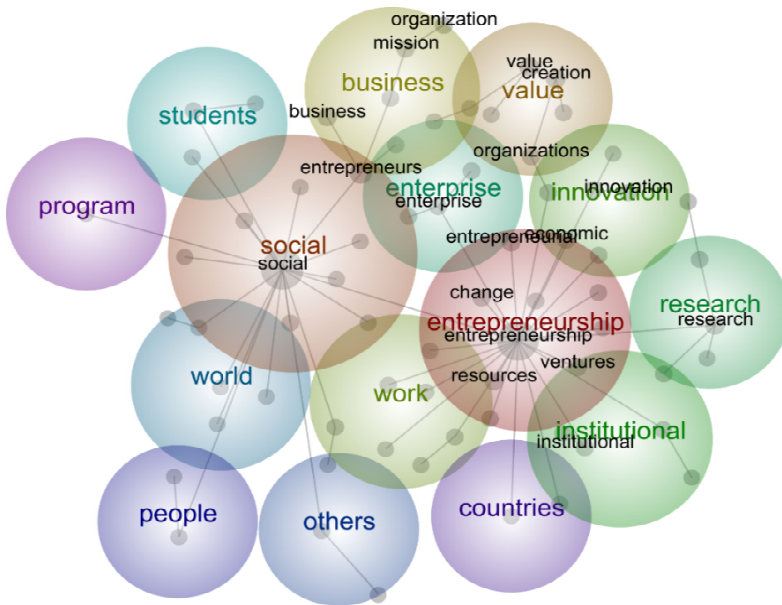*Figure 4*: Panel A: Concept Map for Period 2011-2018



Figure 4 Panel B: Themes and Associated Concepts for Period 2011-2018

| Stream | Themes | Co-occurred Concepts |
|---|---|---|
| Institutional context | people, world, others, work, countries, institutional | poor, problem, local communities, world, behaviour, government, support, institutions, individuals, actors, approach, environment, work, study, institutional, theory, data, study |
| Innovation and value creation | social, enterprise, innovation, value, entrepreneurship, business | social, group, community, practice, society, positive, business, commercial, create, opportunities, finance, mission, organization, management, enterprise, value creation, innovation, process, venture, change, development, role, resources, public |
| Educational programs | programs, students | education, learning, experience |

Note: Grey dots represent co-occurred concepts, which are shown in the last column in Panel B. They are not shown on the concept map to avoid a cluttered map and enhance clarity. The *Streams* identified in Panel B are the authors' interpretation of the themes and concepts.

The institutional stream focuses on the unique environments or institutional contexts in which SE occurs within local communities, countries, between countries and around the world in terms of government policies, actions, and support in addressing social problems and the needs of the poor. The behaviours of individuals and other actors in SE is also central. The results indicate a growing interest in understanding how the incorporation of unique institutional contexts can lead to a deeper theoretical understanding of SE (e.g., Abu-Saifan, 2012; Griffiths, Gundry & Kickul, 2013; Stephan, Uhlaner & Stride, 2015).

In terms of the innovation and value creation stream of research, we observe that the themes and co-occurred concepts pertain to a range of issues including mission of SE, business and commercial opportunities, innovation process and practices, organization and management of social ventures and enterprises, resource mobilisation and orchestration, and change and development. Similarly, the creation of positive social and economic value has been the subject of considerable discourse in this latest period. Our results of the 2011-2018 period also revealed the emergence of a new stream of research on SE educational and training programs (e.g., Smith, Besharov, Wessels & Chertok, 2012; Howorth, Smith, & Parkinson, 2012; Smith & Woodworth, 2012). This stream of research focused on evaluating the extent to which curriculum design and pedagogy of SE programs provide students with the requisite knowledge, skills, and qualities to create and exploit SE opportunities and effectively lead and manage SE ventures.

Finally, we examined all three periods and all 101 articles as a single corpus. Leximancer allows us to conduct this analysis through the use of folder tags – where the files for each period are tagged as a folder. Figure 5 shows output from this procedure. The concept map shows that the tags are quite far apart, thereby confirming that there is less co-occurrence among themes, which indicates a good level of separation among themes over time.

*Figure 5*: Concept Map for Full Text Corpus 1990-2018 with Tags for each Period
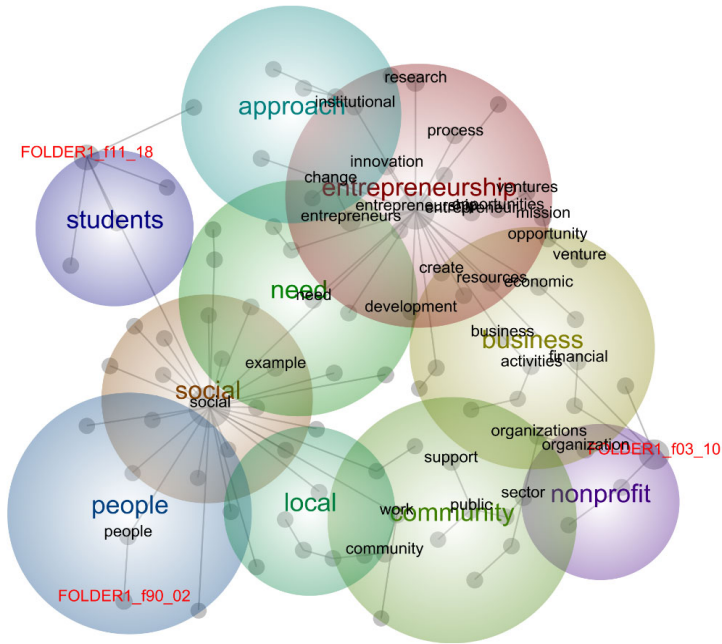


Figure 6 below shows the relative strengths and frequency of themes over the three time periods based on Leximancer's dashboard output using Bayesian methods. This graphic enables us to compare themes over time in terms of relative frequency and strength (Leximancer Manual 4.5). As can be observed from Figure 6, each period is characterized by distinct discourses and themes over the past 28 years (1990-2018). The first period can be characterised as a focus on the individual level (entrepreneurs) and can be characterised as influenced by the social innovation school of thought. The second period focuses on formal organizations and enterprises and is more aligned with the social enterprise school of thought where the organization is central. The third period is characterised by themes focusing on institutions, innovation, value creation, and theory development and validation.

*Figure 6*: Insight Dashboard Quadrant Report
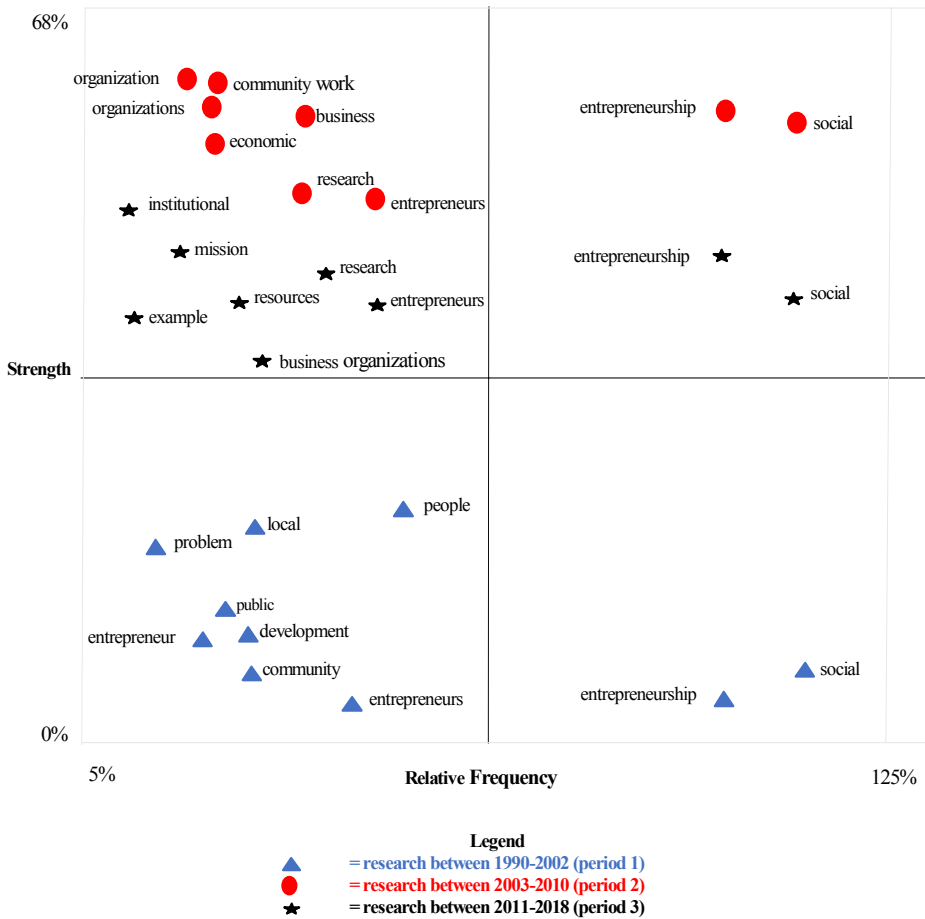


Note: The dashboard is designed for comparison or difference analysis. The dashboard quadrant shows the concepts most relevant to the discussion in each period. The *frequency axis* represents a conditional probability i.e. given that a text extract comes from a specific period, it gives the chance that the concept is coded in this text extract. This measures frequency of mention in the data and is affected by the distribution of comments across the periods. The frequency score is a log scale so that it can be mapped on the quadrant. The *strength* score is the reciprocal conditional probability. Given that the concept is present in a section of text, it gives the probability that this text comes from that period. Strong concepts distinguish the period from others, regardless if the concept is mentioned frequently. The *percentages* reflect the strength and frequency of conditional probabilities.

## 5. Discussion

Overall, the results of our study provide new insights into the evolution of SE research, from a micro-level focus in which the roles of the different actors/ individuals were the focus of attention during the earliest phase, to a more meso-

level focus that also examined the different forms of social entrepreneurial organizations (non-government organizations, non-profit enterprises, community organizations) along with the supporting ecosystem that facilitated/hindered the growth of SE. Finally, the recent trend seems to indicate a macro-level focus in which examining the role of institutions and contextual factors seems to be central. Here, it must be noted some of the research themes identified in our study (as discussed below) overlap with Macke, Sarate, Domeneghini, and Da Silva (2018). However, unlike Macke et al. (2018) our analysis provides additional insights into the focus and emergence of new themes during the different periods between the years 1990-2018. This way our study also finds support for Sassmannshausen & Volkmann's (2018) contention about the widening of the thematic clusters studied by SE researchers over time. To further our understanding of the different themes, in the next section we provide a more detail exposition of the emerging themes from the 101 articles published during the years 1990-2018. The discussion is organized around 4 major themes. The first theme focuses on the individual-level of analysis, which was a dominant stream of research in the first period. The theme focuses on social entrepreneurs and other individuals and actors in the community in establishing SE initiatives. The second theme focuses on the organization-level of analysis, which was a dominant theme in the second period of research. The third theme focuses on innovation and value creation, and the fourth theme focuses on the institutional context of SE.

Although the discussion is organised around the distinct themes, it is recognised that there are some intersections among the various themes (overlapping bubbles), which suggests that while the themes can, to a large extent, be construed as distinct, the intersection with other themes is consistent with much of the literature. For example, strong links are observed between innovation and organisation (e.g., Tapsell & Woods, 2010; De Bruin, Shaw, & Lewis, 2017), collaboration among communities, organisations and people in pursuit of specific social objectives (e.g., Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern, 2012; McKeever, Anderson, & Jack, 2014; De Bruin, Shaw, & Lewis, 2017; Pret & Carter, 2017; Bojica, Ruiz Jiménez, Ruiz Nava, & Fuentes-Fuentes, 2018; Janssen, Fayolle, & Wuilaume, 2018; Lumpkin, Bacq, & Pidduck, 2018) and how individual practices and choices are situated in particular communities (Putnam, 2000; Tapsell & Woods, 2010; McKeever, Anderson, & Jack, 2014; Bizri, 2017; Bojica, Ruiz Jiménez, Ruiz Nava, & Fuentes-Fuentes, 2018; Janssen, Fayolle, & Wuilaume, 2018).

### *Theme 1: Social Entrepreneurs, Individuals & Communities*
As mentioned in the results section, research during the emerging phase of SE focused primarily on the people engaged in SE, that is, social entrepreneurs and other individuals and social actors as well as the level of support and engagement they had within local communities. The people involved in SE include volunteers,

workers, stakeholders, community supporters, donors, and the people that social ventures serve (Sullivan Mort, Weerawardena, & Carnegie, 2003; Bloom & Smith, 2010; Dees, 2012). This characterisation is consistent with the view that SE is more of a collective action (Bacq & Janssen, 2011) where the social entrepreneur is embedded in a social network that contributes a wide range of resources and assist in its governance (Johannisson & Nilsson, 1989; Spear, 2006; Dana, 2008; Bacq & Janssen, 2011).

However, the disproportionate focus of early SE research on social entrepreneurs is consistent with later observations that SE research at the individual level has focused more on the founding entrepreneur, while downplaying entrepreneurial teams or others supporting the founder and who are necessary for the success of the venture (Light, 2006). We surmise that the strong focus on social entrepreneurs in the literature has been largely driven by views that SE is inextricably linked to the characteristics of social entrepreneurs i.e. vision, ambitions, traits, attitudes, behaviours, and actions (Venkataraman, 1997; Dees, 1998; Bacq & Janssen, 2011). This may also be due to the fact that much of the early research focuses on establishing parallels and differences between social and commercial entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship (Roberts & Woods, 2005; Mair & Marti, 2006; Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern, 2012). In this regard, an important research question is whether individual attributes of social entrepreneurs are sufficient to distinguish SE from other forms of entrepreneurship (Dacin, Dacin, & Matear, 2010; Bacq & Janssen, 2011) and whether the emphasis should be on the process (Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern, 2012) rather than on the individual (Desa, 2010; Dees, 2012).

Another strand of this research theme focuses on the importance of community in facilitating SE growth and success. Indeed, many social ventures are local, participative, grass-roots and community initiatives run by local people for the benefit of local people (Shaw & Carter, 2007; Marshall, 2011). In this context, Putnam (2000) shows how individual practices and choices are situated in particular groups and communities. For example, social entrepreneurs establish enterprises in locations with which they are familiar and operate within interest groups or sectors in which they have experience (Shaw & Carter, 2007). More recently, Tapsell & Woods (2010) illustrate how SE and innovative activity can emerge as the result of self-organisation of an indigenous tribal community where culture and tradition are key drivers. Similarly, Defourny & Nyssens (2010) and Pret & Carter (2017) demonstrate how community embeddedness can be an important influence on social entrepreneurs as well as the credibility and operation of the SE  (Maclean, Harvey, & Gordon, 2013). The authors provide insights on how social and moral obligations within community contexts can induce collaboration and social value creation (Pret & Carter, 2017).

Moreover, recent research at the individual level found that collaborative arrangements among social entrepreneurs, community partners, groups, governments and individuals can improve access to resources and funding,

strengthen legitimacy, build identity capital and provide a mechanism for the exchange of tacit knowledge (Huybrechts & Nicholls, 2013; Shaw & De Bruin, 2013; Lewis, 2016). Additionally, collaboration with complementary organisations can enhance the impact of SE (Vansandt, Sud & Marme, 2009; Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern, 2012; Montgomery, Dacin, & Dacin 2012; Shaw & De Bruin, 2013). Further, research on bricolage demonstrates that when it is combined with other resource mobilisation practices, like bootstrapping or strategic alliances, it leads to new or increased collaborations and/or personal networks sharing between social enterprises (Desa & Basu, 2013; Bacq, Ofstein, Kickul & Gundry, 2015; Kannampuzha & Suoranta, 2016; Janssen, Fayolle & Wuilaume, 2018).

### Theme 2: The Organisation of Social Entrepreneurship

The organisation theme connects with a broad range of issues pertaining to the organisational forms of SE and the activities, programs, roles and relationships of SE with other organizations such as government, non-governmental organizations, and private corporations. Several articles in our text corpus (e.g., Murphy & Coombes, 2009; Neck, Brush, & Allen, 2009; Zahra, Gedajlovic, Neubaum, & Shulman, 2009; Dacin, Dacin, & Matear, 2010; Desa & Basu, 2013) examined the characteristics, organisational forms, activities, services, and practices of social ventures. Various organisational forms (such as for-profit, government, NGOs or hybrid) and sectors (public, private and non-profit) are discussed (Townsend & Hart, 2008; Pache & Santos, 2013; Doherty, Haugh, & Lyon, 2014). Our analysis indicates the existence of a relatively large conceptual literature dedicated to clarifying the parallels and distinctions between SE and other forms of organizations such as non-profit, charitable or public organisation and other social movements. For instance, there is much debate around the notion of whether a charitable or public organisation that expands its role by undertaking more social activities can be properly considered as SE (Lasprogata and Cotten, 2003; Baron, 2007).

According to Mair & Martí (2006) the organisational context in which SE occurs is extremely important because it is a key distinguishing feature relative to other less structured social initiatives such as activist movements (Choi & Majumdar, 2014). Similarly, Short, Moss, & Lumpkin (2009) noted that "the distinctiveness of SE lies in using practices and processes that are unique to entrepreneurship to achieve aims that are distinctly social, regardless of the presence or absence of a profit motive" (p. 172). Bacq & Janssen (2011) provide a detailed elaboration of the nature and differences of various organisational forms used by ventures that focus on social issues.

Another strand of this theme examines the relationships among the various organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors in addressing social issues, mobilising resources, managing SE organisations, marketing SE programs, and a range of legal issues (Zietlow, 2001; Lasprogata & Cotten, 2003;

Hemingway, 2005; Korosec & Berman, 2006; Sharir & Lerner, 2006; Bloom & Smith, 2010; Germak & Singh, 2009; Mair, Battilana, & Cardenas, 2012). According to Dacin, Dacin, & Matear (2010), many SE ventures appearing in the literature are nearly indistinguishable from their conventional counterparts, in that they also earn profits and social entrepreneurs tend to utilise resources in much the same way as conventional entrepreneurs. These authors argue that this could pose significant challenges for SE when it comes to raising revenues and other resources, especially in harsh economic or resource constrained conditions, since SE ventures have to compete with these organizations (Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern, 2012). Despite these strong conceptual arguments, it remains unclear what factors drive social entrepreneurs to adopt a particular organisational form for their ventures. In this context, Townsend & Hart (2008) contend that a social entrepreneur's understanding of ambiguities of the institutional environment could lead to variance in choice of organisational form. It seems that additional empirical research may shed light on this topic.

### Theme 3: Innovation & Value Creation in Social Entrepreneurship

Innovation is portrayed in SE research in various ways such as *creating* new social ventures (Short, Moss & Lumpkin, 2009), a *goal* to develop innovative solutions to solve problems of social integration, socially dysfunctional behaviour, and socio-economic development (Chell, Nicolopoulou, & Karata-Özkan, 2010), a *process* (Dees, 2007; Dato-on & Kalakay, 2016) of developing innovative solutions to tackle social issues (Alvord, Brown, & Letts, 2004; De Bruin, Shaw, & Lewis, 2017), a set of innovative *activities* that focus on resolving social market failures (Nicholls, 2008), the innovative *use* of resources to exploit opportunities aimed at catalysing social change (Mair & Martí, 2006), and utilising innovative *approaches* to mobilise the ideas, capacities, resources and social arrangements required for social transformations (Zahra, Gedajlovic, Neubaum, & Shulman 2009). Essentially, SE is viewed as a set of innovative activities designed to create social value by combining resources to exploit opportunities to solve social failures and contribute to human well-being (Nicholls, 2008, 2010a; Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern, 2012).

Indeed, from the very inception of SE, scholars have characterised SE efforts as innovative actions and hence it is not surprising that innovation is seen as a core and enduring characteristic of SE that distinguishes it from other types of social phenomena such as charity, philanthropy (Ostrander, 2007; Acs, Boardman & McNeely, 2013), activist movements (Choi & Majumdar, 2014), and non-profits (Certo & Miller, 2008). Many scholars argue that SE must embed essential entrepreneurial functions such as opportunity identification, innovation, risk taking, and resource mobilization (Drucker, 1985; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Short, Moss & Lumpkin, 2009; Corner & Ho, 2010) to create new SE ventures or manage existing ventures in new ways to achieve their social missions (Zahra, Gedajlovic, Neubaum, & Shulman 2009; Saebi, Foss & Linder, 2019).

Further, SE is also linked to innovative ends or outcomes. For instance, many of the studies argue that the underlying mission of SE must involve social transformation (Roberts & Woods, 2005), social value creation (Dees, 1998; Roberts & Woods, 2005; Peredo & McLean, 2006; Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern 2012), stimulate social change (Mair & Martí, 2006; Mair & Schoen, 2007), maximise social impact, bring about catalytic changes (Waddock & Post, 1991; Nicholls, 2008), create social wealth (Zahra, Gedajlovic, Neubaum, & Shulman 2009), and enable new collaborations to improve the capacity to act (De Bruin, Shaw & Lewis, 2017). Others have also argued that SE should undertake the dual mission of pursuing economic goals such as job creation, wealth generation, and community development (Tracey & Phillips, 2007; Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern 2012; Pache & Santos, 2013; Doherty, Haugh, & Lyon, 2014; Dato-on & Kalakay, 2016).

In addition to being innovative, the extant literature strongly indicates that the primary goal of SE is to create social value and social wealth, and to address social failures (Roberts & Woods, 2005; Mair & Schoen, 2007; Nicholls, 2008; Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern, 2012). Hence, many scholars consider social value creation at the heart of SE (Bacq & Janssen, 2011; Santos, 2012). Choi & Majumdar (2014) view social value creation as a core and uncontested dimension while Dees (1998) sees it as integral to the mission of social entrepreneurship.

However, some scholars advance the view that SE should extend beyond the originally conceived core social mission and embrace economic motives such as revenue generation by employing commercial means in order to guarantee their sustainability (Defourny & Nyssens, 2006, 2008; Nicholls, 2008; Miller, Grimes, McMullen, & Vogus, 2012). It is argued that social ventures should embrace business practices that would enable them to enhance their revenue generation, resource utilisation, and service delivery capabilities and reduce their dependence on donors (Alter, 2007). This would give self-sustaining SE ventures greater flexibility to decide on the social needs, communities or groups they want to serve as well as the activities and processes they want (Alter, 2007; Dees, 2007; Bacq, Janssen, & Kickul, 2016b). Overall, the value theme captures not only the social value creation aspect but also the economic benefits that SE produces (e.g., job creation, community development and economic growth) and the institutional and social changes they influence (Wolk, 2007; Dato-on & Kalakay, 2016). Also, the theoretical foundations and practical challenges of assessing social value creation, impacts and outcomes of SE are core concerns underlying this theme (Parkinson & Howorth, 2008; Nicholls, 2010b; Dacin, Dacin, & Tracey, 2011; Ruebottom, 2013; Zahra, Newey, & Li, 2014).

### Theme 4: The Context of Social Entrepreneurship

Our findings indicate that context is one of the key pillars of SE (Short, Moss & Lumpkin, 2009; Sassmannshausen & Volkmann, 2018) that needs to be observed and studied (Mair & Schoen, 2007; Bacq & Janssen, 2011). Contextual factors not only serve as catalysts for SE activities (Defourny & Nyssens, 2006; Short,

Moss & Lumpkin, 2009; Kerlin, 2013) but also influence the nature and impact of SE (Spear & Bidet, 2005; Weerawardena & Sullivan Mort, 2006; Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern, 2012; Doherty, 2018; Saebi, Foss & Linder, 2019). Even the ability of social entrepreneurs to recognize SE opportunities as attractive enough to exploit, is shaped by the context of their environment and their relationship to the disadvantaged community they want to serve (Saebi, Foss & Linder, 2019).

In the literature, context is characterised in a variety of ways such as the local environment (Spear & Bidet, 2005; Mair & Martí, 2006), population growth, immigration and welfare systems (Chell, Nicolopoulou, & Karata-Özkan, 2010), social, political, regulatory, institutional forces and public policies (Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern, 2012; Saebi, Foss & Linder, 2019), cultural, economic, or market factors (Short, Moss & Lumpkin, 2009). Indeed, several empirical studies show how context shapes SE in different geographies based on the prevalence of these factors. For instance, Defourny & Nyssens (2008) show how differences in contextual factors between Europe and US and among different regions within Europe help explain observed differences in approaches to SE. Additionally, several studies noted a strong positive association between resource scarcity, social problems and the demand for SE, that is, in contexts where public resources are lacking, there tend to be more social problems and greater social needs, which in turn lead to greater demand for SE (Zahra, Gedajlovic, Neubaum, & Shulman, 2009; Dacin, Dacin, & Matear, 2010). Similarly, the demand for SE is substantially higher in countries with harsh economic context (Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern, 2012) and lack of government support for social programs (Stephan, Uhlaner, & Stride, 2015). In this regard, several studies addressed the impact of social and economic policies on SE formation and performance (Vansandt, Sud & Marme, 2009; Zahra, Gedajlovic, Neubaum, & Shulman, 2009; Nicholls, 2010a; Rivera-Santos, Holt, Littlewood & Kolk, 2015).

In addition to serving as a catalyst for SE and explaining differences in SE approaches, the literature also points to the influence of context on the performance of SE. For instance, Weerawardena & Sullivan Mort (2006) observed that turbulent and dynamic contexts limit the value creation potential of SE, which ultimately impacts their performance and resource mobilisation capacities. Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern (2012) went further arguing that context directly influences the ability of SE to fulfil the dual mission of creating social value (social mission) and being financially stable and/or self-sustaining (economic mission).

Further, this theme also deals with existing global social issues and those within specific societies. The roles and strategies of social entrepreneurs and other actors – governments, co-operatives, NGOs, businesses, etc. – in working to find solutions to social needs is a key focus. Nicholls (2010a) noted that rather than leaving societal needs to the government or business sectors, social entrepreneurs

solve the problem by changing the system, spreading the solution and persuading entire societies to take new leaps. Marshall (2011) notes that social entrepreneurs and social ventures are generally close to the people they serve, which help social entrepreneurial ventures to develop innovative, locally responsive strategies and systems to resolve deep rooted social issues and contradictions (Prabhu, 1999).

## 6. Further Research

As discussed above, our text mining analysis uncovered four dominant themes, which were the focus of the most influential SE literature during the 1990-2018 period investigated. Additionally, through our drill-down analysis, we observed the emergence of several research dimensions around the various themes. In text mining analyses, this suggests that while there may not be enough statistical evidence for these topics to emerge as a theme, it points to subtle and gradual changes in the discourse, which may signal new or under-researched topics (Indulska, Hovorka & Recker, 2012). For instance, we observed in the preceding discussion that bricolage, collaboration, and institutional contexts have strong links to social entrepreneurs (individual-level theme), social enterprises (organisation-level theme) and represents *innovative* mechanisms to *value creation* (Desa & Basu, 2013; Bacq, Ofstein, Kickul, & Gundry, 2015; Bojica, Ruiz Jiménez, Ruiz Nava & Fuentes-Fuentes, 2018; Janssen, Fayolle, & Wuilaume, 2018). Bricolage and collaboration are considered innovative approaches for environments characterised by institutional voids, resource-constrained environments, or weak public support (Di Domenico, Haugh, & Tracey, 2010; De Bruin, Shaw, & Lewis, 2017; Janssen, Fayolle, & Wuilaume, 2018).

Despite the importance of bricolage, it did not emerge as a key theme and was addressed much later in SE research. We noted the paucity of both theoretical and empirical research on various facets of social bricolage, community collaboration and engagement, particularly in terms of resource mobilisation and scaling of social innovations. Desa (2012) calls for future research to examine the extent to which bricolage can affect the diffusion of social innovations, a theme echoed by Janssen, Fayolle, & Wuilaume (2018) and Bacq, Ofstein, Kickul, & Gundry (2015).

Our analysis also revealed that there is agreement among scholars that SE focuses primarily on creating and sustaining social innovations. However, we observe a paucity of research on the scalability of social innovations or in the words of De Bruin, Shaw, & Lewis (2017), "how a spark that is ignited locally can spread flames beyond the local level" (p. 578) or scaling of the social impact (Desa & Koch, 2014) from the local to the system level. The challenge is how to ensure that the social innovation helps more people in more places and reduces the social problem's negative effects more dramatically (Bloom & Chatterji,

2009; Bloom & Smith, 2010). This is a formidable challenge for SE (Bloom & Smith, 2010) and for which there is limited scholarly research. De Bruin, Shaw, & Lewis (2017) observe that deeper insights are needed to better understand the mechanisms through which institutions, social structures, and collaboration among various social actors facilitate the diffusion of social innovations from the local level to the system level. There is a need for more research on how SE can work in concert with social institutions and norms to bring about social change and transformation (Saebi, Foss, & Linder, 2019).

Our analysis suggests that scaling-up social innovations from the local to the system level may require a much more profound understanding of how the broad range of financing mechanisms, institutions, public policy and support networks can be configured to facilitate the scalability of high-impact social innovations. Research along these lines could provide deeper insights of how public policy, public-private partnerships and social networks can lead to innovative business models that could enable the spread of successful social innovations (Seelos & Mair, 2005; Mair & Schoen, 2007; Desa & Koch, 2014). For instance, the role social media platforms play in promoting venture philanthropy among citizens, businesses, and governments to alleviate social causes has so far attracted little research efforts except for the evolving research on crowdfunding of social ventures (Lehner, 2013). The impact of crowdfunding on SE growth and success represents a valuable area of enquiry.

We also note that there is a paucity of theoretical and empirical research on how institutional factors and social capital, which differ across geographies influence SE (Smith & Stevens, 2010). Further, since SE tends to be grassroots, community-based, local initiatives, it is crucial to develop a deep understanding of how specific institutional and social capital differences in various geographies shape SE at the local level (Marshall, 2011). This is particularly relevant since SE creation is viewed as an outcome of a complex social process, shaped by the characteristics of the individual starting a new venture and the context surrounding the new venture (Perrini, Vurro & Costanzo, 2010). Therefore, understanding how cultures, traditions, and institutions influence entrepreneurial practice and performance is a fruitful area of enquiry (Chell, Nicolopoulou, & Karata-Özkan, 2010; Tapsell & Woods, 2010; Zahra, Newey, & Li 2014; Kimmitt & Muñoz, 2018). Indeed, more research is needed on the optimal combination of individual-level factors (e.g., personality traits, social capital, and formal training) and institutional-level factors that influence the intention of people to pursue social ventures, the choice of organisational form of the ventures, and the performance of social ventures.

Further, the argument that SE should pursue the dual mission of creating social value while also pursuing economic goals aimed at making them financially stable and self-sustaining seems to be gaining in popularity (Mitra, Kickul, Gundry & Orr, 2019), particularly in harsh economic or resource constrained contexts (Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern, 2012). However,

despite the conceptual reasonableness of this argument, there is a lack of research that examines the implications of the dual mission on both social entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurship. Dees (2012) notes that the social mission is explicit and central to SE and this mission affects how social entrepreneurs perceive and assess opportunities. Thus, the question of how does the dual mission affect social entrepreneurs' perception and assessment of opportunities needs further investigation. Similarly, the practical implications of a dual mission on SE organization, structure, governance, processes, and performance require empirical evidence. Moreover, pursuing the dual mission would require new theoretical measurement models to assess the performance of SE since the premise and indicators of the social mission are quite different from economic indicators. In a nutshell, the social mission is driven by social market failures (Nicholls, 2008, 2010b; Bacq, Hartog, & Hoogendoorn 2016a; Bacq, Janssen, & Kickul, 2016b) whereas the economic mission is aligned with market opportunities (Seelos & Mair, 2005; Weerawardena & Sullivan Mort, 2006). Additionally, there is a dearth of evidence on the practical impact of the pursuit of the dual mission on the targeted community and groups as well as supporters of the social venture. Hence, more empirical studies are needed on the dual mission to clarify these and other related issues.

Another theme that has received some attention in the literature reviewed but did not emerge as a dominant theme pertains to models and frameworks to evaluate the value, impact, and outcome of SE to address multifaceted social problems (Shaw & De Bruin, 2013). For instance, frameworks to assess issues such as the accountability of social entrepreneurs and social ventures to their supporters and the public are lacking. Lasprogata & Cotten (2003) conclude that despite the challenges, such frameworks and models will not only guide empirical analysis but could also identify areas of strengths and weaknesses and where policy interventions may lead to performance improvements (Kimmitt & Muñoz, 2018).

Moreover, accountability frameworks can also shed light on where SE policies and practices may be flawed (Parkinson & Howorth, 2008), ineffective or even encourage undesirable behaviours (Dato-on & Kalakay, 2016; Kimmitt & Muñoz, 2018). Further, Dees (2012) argues that even if social entrepreneurs do not intentionally perpetuate the problems they are addressing, they may inadvertently exacerbate problems or create other problems by their very acts of kindness. Dees (2012) notes that charitable ventures can be counterproductive, hurting or demeaning those it was intended to serve, robbing them of dignity or making them dependent in unhealthy ways. Further, Dacin, Dacin, & Matear (2010) contend that SE researchers and practitioners could benefit from a deeper understanding of entrepreneurial failures.

## 7. Concluding Remarks and Limitations

In this study, we employed a novel computer-based text mining analysis technique to identify key themes emerging from the most influential academic research on SE over the last twenty-eight years (1990-2018). Our text mining method allows us to uncover the evolution of key themes across three time-periods of study. Our text mining analysis also enabled us to identify potential research gaps around the themes we identified. The results reveal a strong focus on the social entrepreneur and the local context during the earliest period (1990-2002) of SE research. We found a change in the focus of SE research from an individual level of analysis (social entrepreneurs in their local context) towards an organization level during the period 2003-2010. The key themes studied during this period include forms of SE ventures, resources, value creation, differences and parallels between social and economic entrepreneurship, and the role of individuals in creating or managing SE ventures. Our results also reveal an increasing focus on institutional-level and contextual factors during the period 2011-2018. We also observe a heightened focus on innovation, value creation, and educational programs targeted to students.

Although we try to minimize researchers' bias by using computer-aided text analysis to generate the themes, there are some limitations of our study. First, our analysis is based on the most influential studies or what is considered the core of the field using citation counts of both individual articles and the h-index of the journals. Despite the merits of this approach, it disadvantages more recent studies. However, we tried to control for this non-inclusion by drawing on recent studies when discussing the themes in detail. Second, the threshold of 25 citations needed for inclusion of an article could be considered arbitrary and subjective. Although we tried to control for such subjectivity by using Google Scholar's h5 index for journal quality, future studies can identify and incorporate more objective cut-offs or relax this threshold completely. Third, our study focused exclusively on peer-reviewed journal articles and excluded books, theses, conference papers, and editorials, all of which could arguably provide additional insights on the topic. This may be considered a limitation, which can be addressed in future studies by including these types of publications.

In spite of these limitations, we believe our study has made an important contribution to SE research by identifying the main themes that have emerged over the course of the last three decades. Overall, our study provides several unique insights that complement prior SE research. The themes generated in our study can inform future SE research and even enable more fine-tuned analysis by focusing on specific themes or variants of these themes. This way the fragmented nature of the field will give way to a deeper and more focused analysis of important sub-themes of research leading to improved legitimacy of SE as an academic field of study.

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