

A Literature Review of Social Entrepreneurship

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Abstract

Social entrepreneurship has increasingly emerged as an important strength for solving social problems and promoting social innovation, and has quietly become an emerging issue in management. This paper is based on antecedents-processes-performance of social entrepreneurship. The perspectives and theories mainly involve theory of planned behavior, entrepreneurial intention model; Hockers modified model, social capital theory, social network theory, institutional theory, event system theory, performance measurement model, etc. The results show that the research mainly focuses on the antecedents, establishment and management of social entrepreneurship, but less attention of sociological perspectives such as social governance and population theory, and also lacks attention to entrepreneurial performance. The theoretical framework of social entrepreneurship needs to be further improved. Finally, it was pointed out that future research topics should focus more on the internal problems of social enterprises, the interplay of factors affecting social entrepreneurship, the disciplinary study of social entrepreneurship, and the institutional and cultural context of different countries.

Keywords

Social Entrepreneurship, Literature Review, Theory of Planned Behavior, Entrepreneurial Intention

1. Introduction

Social entrepreneurship as an emerging research area, not only promotes economic development but is also an important way to solve social problems and create social values (Stoffers, Gunawan, & Kleefstra, 2018; Huda et al., 2019). With the emergence of social entrepreneurship practitioners and policies, more and more scholars are interested in social entrepreneurship, which have dual benefits. Social entrepreneurship can help disadvantaged groups in society, while

also considering economic benefits (Tracey & Phillips, 2007). However, after two decades, social entrepreneurship has not yet to develop a fully fledged academic system. There are at least three reasons for this. Firstly, the academic community mainly understands the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship from the perspective of social entrepreneurship or social entrepreneurs (Bacq & Alt, 2018; Teasdale et al., 2023) and the innovative behavior of social entrepreneurs, the business models and strategies of social entrepreneurship, the value creation and dissemination of social entrepreneurship (Bacq & Janssen, 2011; Cherrier et al., 2018; Dickel & Eckardt, 2020). Secondly, the economic and social value created cannot be completely stripped away by social entrepreneurship which combines the pursuit of solving social problems with the market-oriented tools but for non-profit organizations. The combination of entrepreneurship, opportunity and philanthropy creates a sustainable and circular path of development for society, economy and institutions (Xu et al., 2022; Koehne et al., 2022). Thirdly, social entrepreneurship involves a wide range of research directions, but the related results show the characteristics of diversification and decentralization. Motivated by this, this paper is based on antecedents-processes-performance of social entrepreneurship, and gives the suggestion about the formation of a systematic theoretical system for social entrepreneurship research. Taking into account the limitations proposed above, this paper draws on goal framework theory (Lindenberg & Steg, 2007) to adopt a more comprehensive approach to fully understand different types of behavior. As a comprehensive framework that can explain environmental behaviors (Steg & Velk, 2009), goal framework theory reveals the importance of studying multiple goals to explain related intentions and behaviors, which provides a strong explanatory power for this paper. Based on this, on the basis of integrating and learning from academic achievements of other types of entrepreneurship, this paper systematically combs relevant research literature in the field of social entrepreneurship, summarizes and analyzes the process elements of social entrepreneurship including antecedents-processes-performance based on the goal framework theory, and further clarifies the key research topics to be studied urgently. It also points out directions for future improvement and development of research methods, thus promoting the formation of a systematic research theory of social entrepreneurship.

2. Concept Definition and Theory

2.1. Concept Definition

Grameen Bank, founded in 1976 by renowned Bangladeshi economist Professor Yunus, has made fighting poverty and promoting equitable development goals. Professor Yunus's efforts are seen to be the beginning of social entrepreneurship. Leadbeater (1997) proposed social entrepreneurship is a market activity for the purpose of realizing social goals rather than non-profit purposes. Johnson (2000) believes that social entrepreneurship, as an innovative means to solve complex

social problems, breaks the traditional boundary between public, private and non-profit sectors. Fowler (2000) puts forward a practical concept that social entrepreneurship is a creative activity that produces and maintains social benefits through practical socioeconomic structures, relationships, institutions, organizations and experiences. Pomerantz (2003) defines social entrepreneurship from the perspective of enterprise operation, arguing that social entrepreneurship is to improve and innovate social services by using commercial principles and methods to create social value. Some scholars have defined the connotation of social entrepreneurship in terms of its characteristics and key elements. Mort et al. (2003) believe that the structure of social entrepreneurship can enable social enterprises better to be established, developed and managed. Peredo & McLean (2006) put forward the duality of social entrepreneurship-entrepreneurship formed by some people or organizations that can identify and explore opportunities to create social value and take risks with the power of innovation. Martin & Osberg (2007) believes that opportunity identification is the core of social entrepreneurship, which aims to create a new, better and balanced society. Liu et al. (2020) & Fu et al. (2017) concluded that social entrepreneurship has multifaceted characteristics. It can not only remedy the shortcomings of government functions and bring the new social changes, but also create new market opportunities. Saebi et al. (2019) argue that social entrepreneurship that combines social and economic missions can distinguish between activities dominated by the economic mission or the social mission. Because of their emphasis on both social and economic missions, social entrepreneurship is, to more extended, sustainable, charitable and innovative (Saebi et al., 2019). (Kruse, 2020) argue that social enterprises have entrepreneurship models that combine a social mission with a desire to generate financial profit, as well as being innovative and involving risk. In essence, therefore, social entrepreneurship can be defined as a new hybrid form of entrepreneurship that combines the mission and desire of society to achieve, to generate monetary profit and self-funding social action.

2.2. Theory

The concept of social entrepreneurship is still in the stage of widespread debate in academia. The definition of social entrepreneurship focuses on the entrepreneurial process and behavior. In this paper, Based on the goal framework theory (Lindenberg & Steg, 2007), we develop an analytical framework based on the antecedent-process-performance of social entrepreneurship.

2.2.1. Antecedents of Social Entrepreneurship

The antecedents of social entrepreneurship are based on the emphasis on satisfying psychological cognition and self-efficacy, and the need to gain social identity in order to further explore and motivate social entrepreneurial behavior. Therefore, theories such as planned behavior theory, entrepreneur intention model, Hockerts extended model, and social identity theory are often be used.

Antecedents of social entrepreneurship promote individuals' intention to become social entrepreneurs, is considered to be the most important predictor of building a society (Hockerts, 2017; Kruse, 2020).

2.2.2. Process of Social Entrepreneurial

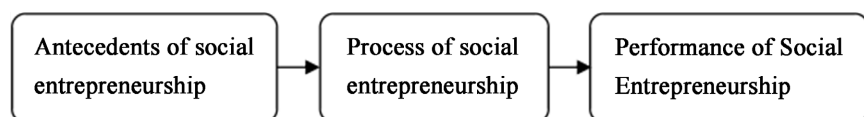
The entrepreneurial process of social entrepreneurship, such as opportunity identification and resource acquisition, entrepreneurs are most sensitive to their own resources to ensure the sustainability for their business. Thus, social capital theory, social network theory, institutional theory and institutional logic theory play an important role in the process of social entrepreneurship. These theories also have an impact on the development of social entrepreneurship, which coincides with the target situation of norms.

2.2.3. Performance of Social Entrepreneurship

Through entrepreneurial activities, social value is created and sustainable competitive advantage is gained for businesses. Social entrepreneurship produces a range of effects at the individual and organizational levels, and how to measure the effects of promoting personal growth and social change. Thus, evaluation index such as social rate of return, social return on investment, etc would be used to evaluate the performance of social entrepreneurship.

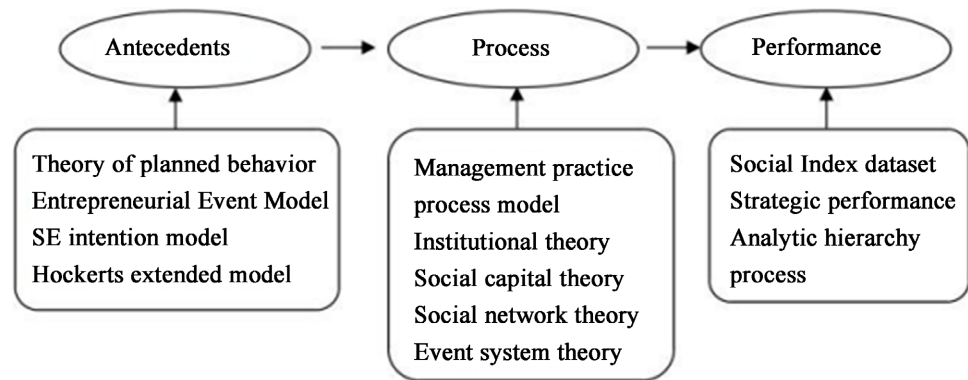
3. Analysis

The study is based on literature from CNKI (Chinese National Knowledge Network), Web of Science, science direct, Springer and other databases. The topic is "social entrepreneurship*" (* is the wildcard character, The same below) or "social entrepreneur(s) *" or "social enterprise(s) *" or "social venture(s) *" or "social innovation", The search journals are the top international Management journals Academy of Management Journal (AMJ), Academy of Management Review (AMR), Journal of Management Studies (JMS), Journal of Management (JM), Journal of Business Venturing (JBV), Journal of Business Research (JBR), Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice (ETP), Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal (SEJ), Journal of Small Business Management (JSBM), etc. The retrieval time is up to February 1, 2023. There is about 16000 papers from the database. At the end, the litterateurs such as conference papers, book reviews and solicitation notices were removed. Finally, more than 700 significant research documents were obtained. In this paper, the important theories of social entrepreneurship and future research directions would be discussed. **Figure 1** showed the analytical framework.



Source: Lindenberg & Steg (2007).

Figure 1. Analytical framework.



Source: Lindenberg & Steg (2007).

Figure 2. The framework of social entrepreneurship process elements.

3.1. Antecedents of Social Entrepreneurship

3.1.1. Theory of Planned Behavior

Ajzen's theoretical model of planned behavior (TPB) (Engle et al., 2010) is one of the most important models of entrepreneurial intention. According to TPB, the generation of an individual's intention was to perform a particular action by his attitude and ability. Particularly, there are three important points: attitude (ATB), behavior control (PBC), and subjective norms (SN) (Ajzen, 1991). This model can modify existing factors according to the scope and nature of the study, complementary factors and causal relationships (Kolvereid, 1996; Iakovleva & Kolvereid, 2009). TPB is widely to be used, also in many research fields (Krueger et al., 2000), see **Figure 2**.

3.1.2. Entrepreneurial Event Model

Entrepreneurial Event Model is the first model in entrepreneurial intention research (Shapero & Sokol, 1982). The model illustrates two phases: the intention to start a new business and the decision to start a new business. At the first stage, the model suggests that entrepreneurial intent stems from recognition of the desire and feasibility of becoming an entrepreneur. Specifically, the perceived feasibility is described as people's ability to start a business, while the perceived demand is related to the overall attractiveness of starting a business (Shapero & Sokol, 1982; Krueger et al., 2000).

3.1.3. Social Entrepreneurship Intention Model

Mair & Noboa (2006) developed the social entrepreneurship intention Model (SEI) in 2006. In their model, they looked at the intention of entrepreneurship to set up new social enterprises in terms of two factors: cognitive emotion and motivation specifically focused on four variables: empathy, moral judgment, self-efficacy, and social support. Mair & Noboa (2006) show that the intention of establishing a social entrepreneurship is a process from emotional perception to feasibility judgment, which is influenced by two dimensions: perceived desirability and perceived feasibility. Specifically, perceived desirability is believed to be

influenced by cognitive feelings (including empathy and moral judgment). Perceived feasibility is influenced by factors including self-efficacy and social support. Particularly, Mair & Noboa's SEI model, believed to be the first to measure SEI. Notably, four-factor models with direct effects of empathy, moral judgment, self-efficacy, and social support were found to have significantly greater empirical cases (Urban & Kujinga, 2017).

3.1.4. Hockerts' Extended Model

Studies have found that entrepreneurs with compassion are more likely to form emotional connections with victims, thus stimulating entrepreneurs to find market opportunities and seek effective ways to solve social problems (Miller et al., 2012). However, some scholars hold different views on this, arguing that compassion cannot be regarded as a unique trait of social entrepreneurs, and emphasizing that emotional changes of entrepreneurs should be paid attention to (Renko et al., 2015). Emotional factors such as hot cognition and prosociality have attracted the attention of scholars. Hockerts (2017) found that the impact of social entrepreneurship experience on social entrepreneurship intentions is somewhat influenced by empathy, moral judgment, self-efficacy, and social support, and extended the model of social entrepreneurship intentions. The results show that pro-social positive emotions play a key moderating role in the whole process from trauma to entrepreneurship of social entrepreneurs (Qiu & Li, 2019).

3.2. Social Entrepreneurial Process Model

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3.2.1. Management Practice Process Model

According to Dees (2004), social entrepreneurship includes three stages: transition period, change period and stable period. Dees described social entrepreneurship as a complex evolutionary process. At different stages, social entrepreneurs assume different roles and major tasks. Crisan-Mitra et al. (2011) propose a model of how social entrepreneurship works in different types of organizations (social enterprises/commercial enterprises). This model reflects the process of engagement of organizations in solving social problems and the transformation of social entrepreneurship. Commercial enterprises cooperate or participate with social organizations, or involve in the whole process of social entrepreneurship. Agarwal et al. (2020) pointed out that the key elements of the resource integration process of social enterprises include asset multiplication, utilizing human capital, building social embeddedness, frugality and inclusion.

3.2.2. Institutional Theory

Scholars have mainly discussed the factors influence the institutions of social entrepreneurship in two ways: formal and informal. Formal institutions refers to written laws, regulations, policies while informal system is a kind of implicit system through cultural communication, value beliefs, social culture, ethical norms, etc. (North, 1990). Formal institutions such as government activism, government support, quality of property rights have an important impact on the development of social entrepreneurship activities (Liu & Zhuang, 2018). The influence of informal institutions on social entrepreneurship is also supported by empirical evidence. Social entrepreneurs are influenced by the moral sense of commitment and moral responsibility to help others (Renko et al., 2015), solved social problems such as unemployment, poverty, gender disparity, etc. (Yang et al., 2021).

3.2.3. Social Capital Theory

For the entrepreneurs, social capital can promote the identification of opportunities, acquisition and utilization of scarce resources on the basis of providing network relations and connections (Birley, 1985; Uzzi, 1999). At the same time, entrepreneur's network also exerts an important influence on entrepreneurial intention by influencing their entrepreneurial efficacy (Wennekers et al., 2005). When entrepreneurs have a good expectation of funds and human resources, they can raise their entrepreneurial intention in the future. It is important to note that social capital has proven to be important for the survival of the poor, becoming a important strengthen in addressing the difficult issue of poverty at the bottom of the pyramid (Simanis et al., 2008). Financing, which is one kind of social capital, can help entrepreneurs obtain sufficient funds (Zhou & Delios, 2012). Ip et al. (2017) divided Social Capital into Bonding Social Capital and bridging social capital. Meanwhile, social entrepreneurs integrate resources through social capital and enhance their ability to identify opportunities under the intermediary role of entrepreneurial alertness (Wang et al., 2017). Social capital theory refers to the synthesis of resources embedded, available and derived from the relationship network owned by individuals or organizations (Wan et al., 2019), which is often described as the actual and potential assets embedded in individuals, communities and social relationships.

3.2.4. Social Network Theory

Social network theory, which focuses on the interaction between individuals and organizations are closely related to the concepts of social capital and embeddedness. Social entrepreneurs are embeddings into local communities, which are easier to identify social entrepreneurship opportunities and meet the needs of local communities (Shaw & Carter, 2007). Meanwhile, social networks can also provide rich human resources for entrepreneurial disciplines. Networks in which social enterprises participate form symbiotic networks in which organizations exchange resources to promote individual and community development through collaboration (Meyskens et al., 2010). Different types of social networks, such as

capital network, market network, technology network, professional service network, media network and institutional network, have differentiated impacts on entrepreneurial models (Feng & Qu, 2019). Some scholars have also focused on the impact of structural and relational characteristics of corporate social networks on corporate performance, but less attention has been paid to the role of different social networks on corporate growth. The structure and content of social networks can enable enterprises to obtain heterogeneous resources at lower cost and risk, enhance the possibility of successful entrepreneurial activities, and significantly improve entrepreneurial performance (Wang & Cao, 2020). Pérez-Fernández et al. (2022) found that entrepreneurial intention can be enhanced by enhancing the entrepreneurial interaction information in the social network environment. Also, many researchers have focused on social networks impact on different types of business performance, entrepreneurial decision making, entrepreneurial motivation, and entrepreneurial opportunity identification.

3.2.5. Event System Theory

According to event system theory, individual behaviors and decisions are closely related to events, and event occurrence time, space and intensity determine the degree of impact of events on individuals or organizations (Morgeson et al., 2015). In the process of entrepreneurship, entrepreneurs make appropriate conversion between analytical and intuitive entrepreneurial cognitive models according to the actual situation, so as to improve the ability to utilize resources (Zhang & Ren, 2018). Scholars show that event intensity attribute plays an important role in the process of events promoting the development of social enterprises, and promote individuals' sense of social responsibility greatly (Li & Sun, 2020). For serial entrepreneurs, entrepreneurs can gain relevant experience from failure events for future entrepreneurial decisions and create proactive events to compensate for failure events (Koehne et al., 2022).

3.3. Performance Evaluation

Social entrepreneurship is playing an increasingly important role in the fields of community service, elderly care, disability employment and environmental protection, but the performance evaluation system for social entrepreneurship is not yet perfect. Academics mostly use secondary data from organizations such as the Social Index dataset, the Ethical Investment Research Service (EIRIS), the UN Global Compact and the Global Reporting Initiative. There are some quantitative researches on social entrepreneurship performance, for example, Schreck (2011) discussed the influence of corporate social performance on the financial performance of 294 listed companies from 24 countries. Tobias et al. (2013) measured social entrepreneurship performance from the perspective of poverty reduction and conflict reduction. At the same time, academics understand the impact of social entrepreneurship as an overall increase in social welfare. Markatou (2015) tried to use fuzzy analytic hierarchy process (AHP) to build a per-

formance evaluation system for entrepreneurship. Kroeger and Weber (2014) compared the social value creation of various industries based on the subjective well-being of beneficiaries from different industries. Mendoza-Abarca et al. (2015) argued from the perspective of population ecology that social enterprises and commercial enterprises do not promote each other, but compete for resources, so they will inhibit each other. Huq et al. (2020) studied how female entrepreneurs relate corporate growth performance to individuals and socialization. Teasdale et al. (2023) found how the strategic performance of social entrepreneurs changed over time from a dynamic typology perspective, and improved business management performance through interaction with the environment and collective action framework.

4. Conclusion and Future Research

4.1. Conclusion

After mostly two decade, in the research field of social entrepreneurship, there are still many areas for us to explore. First of all, it would strengthen on the connotations of social entrepreneurship, integrate and construct conceptual dimensions and guide the development of social entrepreneurship theory and practice. Secondly, empirical data testing and feedback are necessary to construct a complete theoretical framework. Finally, social entrepreneurship is one of the important ways to build a harmonious society. It should thoroughly study the peculiarities of social entrepreneurship and provide theoretical references for social entrepreneurs in entrepreneurial practices, provide knowledge and technology for entrepreneurs use strategic communication tools to achieve more effective communication, so that they can more effectively communicate the ideas and contributions of social entrepreneurship in practice, thus winning over investors and achieving social goals. Moreover, current research topics mostly focus on the antecedents of social entrepreneurship and its formation and management. However, there is lack of sociological perspectives such as social governance and population theory. So, in the further exploration, the theoretical framework of social entrepreneurship needs to be implemented. Finally, there is still lack of entrepreneurial performance study. The meaning of multi-objective performance in social entrepreneurship needs to be further clarified, and the construction of a performance evaluation metric system for social entrepreneurship needs to be further deepened.

4.2. Future Research

The contribution of this paper is mainly reflected in three aspects: First, it combs the relevant theories in the field of social entrepreneurship, draws on the goal framework theory of Lindenberg and Steg (2007), adopts a more comprehensive theoretical analysis framework, and proposes the development direction and research field of future theoretical research, which provides a

strong explanatory ability for this paper. The second is to review the relevant research methods of social entrepreneurship research and indicate future directions for improvement and development of research methods. The third is to explore the limitations of existing research on social entrepreneurship and to call for future research and exploration of social entrepreneurship based on a combination of interdisciplinary knowledge from different research contexts. Although scholars have some research on social entrepreneurship, in general, it is still in the early stage of research, especially the research on “social entrepreneurship” and its theoretical framework, and there are many problems to be solved. This paper believes that further research can be carried out in the following three aspects.

4.2.1. Research Theme

Research topic social entrepreneurship is an entrepreneurial approach to solving a national and social problem. Problem orientation is evident in the characteristics of social entrepreneurship research, which involves both tracked problem and original problem research. Future research should pay more attention to answering such as “how to do”, the process of opportunity identification of social entrepreneurship, the strategy of obtaining social entrepreneurship legitimacy, the interaction between the influencing factors of social entrepreneurship and the strategic orientation of social entrepreneurship, and the importance of entrepreneurs’ mentality (values, beliefs, personality and cognitive mode) in their companies’ social entrepreneurship activities, etc.

4.2.2. Research Perspective

Social entrepreneurship has shifted its focus on developed countries to developing countries, where complex social problems can be addressed through social entrepreneurship. Future research topics should be a more in-depth study of internal social entrepreneurship, focusing more on the interplay of the factors and specific mechanisms that influence social entrepreneurship, and taking into account the differences in institutional and cultural contexts across countries. For example, developing and developed countries have their own particularities in the process of economic development. Each country has different stages of economic development and social environment, so it is necessary for social entrepreneurship theory researchers and policy makers to conduct relevant research on social entrepreneurship according to local conditions and time conditions to serve social entrepreneurship practitioners better. Based on the national situation, it is suggested that future research and exploration of social entrepreneurship can be carried out by focusing on the combination of social and institutional entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship education for university students, and management philosophy in various countries.

4.2.3. Research Context

Future research perspectives should focus more on cross-disciplinary studies of

social entrepreneurship, attempting to integrate the growth of social enterprises with strategic management, social entrepreneur analysis with psychology, sociology, and organizational behavior, and in addition, society Entrepreneurship research should also try to benefit the research results of this subject to other disciplines, such as social performance evaluation in social entrepreneurship. Moreover, future research topics should be a more in-depth study of internal social entrepreneurship, focusing more on the interplay of the factors and specific mechanisms that influence social entrepreneurship.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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