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REVIEW ARTICLE

Social Entrepreneurship

THE ENTREPRENEURIAL PERDURABILITY OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISES: SYSTEMATIC REVIEW AND RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

LA PERDURABILIDAD EMPRESARIAL DE LOS EMPRENDIMIENTOS SOCIALES: REVISIÓN SISTEMÁTICA Y PERSPECTIVAS DE INVESTIGACIÓN

A PERDURABILIDADE EMPRESARIAL DAS EMPREENDEDORISMO SOCIAL: REVISÃO SISTEMÁTICA E PERSPECTIVAS DE INVESTIGAÇÃO

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Abstract

The systematic literature review presented in this article aims to demonstrate the evolution, relevance, importance and research perspectives of the business durability of social enterprises. This bibliographic study, which followed what was established in the PRISMA declaration, used the Publish or Perish software to search the literature in WoS, Scopus and Google Scholar, as well as inclusion and exclusion criteria that allowed the elimination of duplicates and the selection of documents by relevance and subareas; while, the use of tools such as Rstudio, ToS, Gephi and Bibliometrix, it made possible the analysis of the evolution and importance of bibliographic material, as well as the identification of collaboration networks and research perspectives. The results show a growth in academic productivity and the existence of three major perspectives that revolve around the problems and opportunities of the business durability of these ventures. Likewise, it was possible to identify research gaps that open up future work.

Keywords: economic and social development; economic equilibrium; financing; problem solving.
JEL: F63; L26; L31; Q01; Q56.

Resumen

La revisión sistemática de literatura que se presenta en este artículo, tiene como propósito, evidenciar la evolución, relevancia, importancia y perspectivas de investigación de la perdurabilidad empresarial de los emprendimientos sociales. Este estudio bibliográfico, que siguió lo establecido en la declaración PRISMA, utilizó el software Publish or Perish para el rastreo de la literatura en WoS, Scopus y Google Scholar, al igual que criterios de inclusión y exclusión que permitieron la eliminación de duplicados y la selección de los documentos por relevancia y subáreas; mientras que, la utilización de herramientas como Rstudio, ToS, Gephi y Bibliometrix, posibilitó el análisis de la evolución e importancia del material bibliográfico, como también, la identificación de las redes de colaboración y las perspectivas de investigación. Los resultados evidencian un crecimiento de la productividad académica y la existencia de tres grandes perspectivas que giran en torno a los problemas y oportunidades de la perdurabilidad empresarial de estos emprendimientos. Asimismo, se logró identificar vacíos investigativos que dan apertura a futuros trabajos.

Palabras clave: desarrollo económico y social; equilibrio económico; financiación; resolución de problemas.
JEL: F63; L26; L31; Q01; Q56.

Resumo

A revisão sistemática da literatura apresentada neste artigo tem como objetivo destacar a evolução, relevância, importância e perspectivas de investigação da durabilidade empresarial das empresas sociais. Este estudo bibliográfico, que seguiu o estabelecido na declaração PRISMA, utilizou o software Publish or Perish para busca da literatura no WoS, Scopus e Google Scholar, bem como critérios de inclusão e exclusão que permitiram a eliminação de duplicidades e a seleção dos documentos por relevância e subáreas; enquanto, o uso de ferramentas como Rstudio, ToS, Gephi e Bibliometrix, Possibilitou a análise da evolução e importância do material bibliográfico, bem como a identificação de redes de colaboração e perspectivas de pesquisa. Os resultados mostram um crescimento da produtividade acadêmica e a existência de três grandes perspectivas que giram em torno dos problemas e oportunidades da durabilidade dos negócios desses empreendimentos. Da mesma forma, foi possível identificar lacunas de pesquisa que abrem trabalhos futuros.

Palavras-chave: desenvolvimento económico e social; equilíbrio económico; financiamento; resolução de problemas.
JEL: F63; L26; L31; Q01; Q56.

Introduction

Publications related to social entrepreneurship have been increasing in recent years, as detailed by Austin et al. (2006), Campos et al. (2019), Granados et al. (2011), and Sassmannshausen & Volkmann (2018). This area has sparked academic and research interest within the scientific community because of its role in addressing social and environmental challenges (Corner & Ho, 2010; Hall et al., 2010; Pache & Santos, 2013).

This interest has materialized in various research approaches; however, a significant portion revolves around the business sustainability of social enterprises. Research has focused on (i) the financial balance necessary for value creation (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Doherty et al., 2014; Ebrahim et al., 2014; Hestad et al., 2020; Stubbs & Cocklin, 2008); (ii) the strategic, legal, credibility, and acceptance factors that affect the development of their activities (Haigh & Hoffman, 2014; Moyano, 2021; Siegner et al., 2018); and (iii) contributions to the fields of circular economy and sustainable development (Chaarani & Raimi, 2022; Manea et al., 2021; Smitskikh et al., 2020; Suchek et al., 2022).

In addition to the above, scientific knowledge, characterized by its rigor and replicability, has been growing exponentially in recent years (Carbonell et al., 2021). While this is positive, even for this field of knowledge, its rapid advancement complicates the systematization and analysis of information. This is where systematic literature reviews become highly relevant, as they allow for the identification of the significance and state of the art of a field of study, as well as the recognition of knowledge gaps and future research directions (Velásquez, 2014).

Based on the above, this research aims to present a systematic literature review on the business sustainability of social enterprises. To this end, bibliographic material published in Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar between 2006 and 2023 will be analyzed, as these are the years when studies were disseminated in these databases, according to the search equation used. To achieve this objective, this document will determine the evolution and significance of research revolving around the business sustainability of these enterprises, identify the main collaboration networks, and establish research perspectives in this area of study.

Finally, this document is structured as follows: the methodology, which details the research protocol, search criteria, inclusion and exclusion criteria, as well as the various tools and software used; the results, where the main findings, the tree of business sustainability of social enterprises, and the research perspectives of this area of knowledge are presented; and the conclusions.

Methodology

This qualitative bibliographic study was conducted in two phases. First, a systematic literature review was carried out, following the rigor and verification criteria established in the PRISMA 2020 statement (Haddaway et al., 2022; Zuluaga et al., 2023). This review was preceded by the construction of the search equation and its implementation in WoS and Scopus through Publish or Perish (POP), a software that facilitates not only the integration of the results obtained but also the generation of metrics, identification of the importance of publications, and elimination of duplicate records (Jacsó, 2009; Mahapatra & Sharma, 2020). Table 1 summarizes the criteria and results obtained.

Table 1

Search Criteria and Results

Items	Scopus	Web of Science
Equation	(“Social entrepreneurship” OR “social entrepreneur” OR “social entrepreneurial” OR “social enterprises” OR SE) AND (“Entrepreneurial sustainability” OR “business sustainability” OR “corporate sustainability” OR “business durability” OR “business perdurability” OR “sustainable social enterprises” OR “sustainable business models”)	
Search Date	March 10, 2023	
Time Period	2006:2023	2010:2023
Journals	90	57
Documents	132	108
Authors	320	368
Annual Growth Rate	5,54%	17,35%

Source: Prepared by the authors with data from Scopus and WoS.

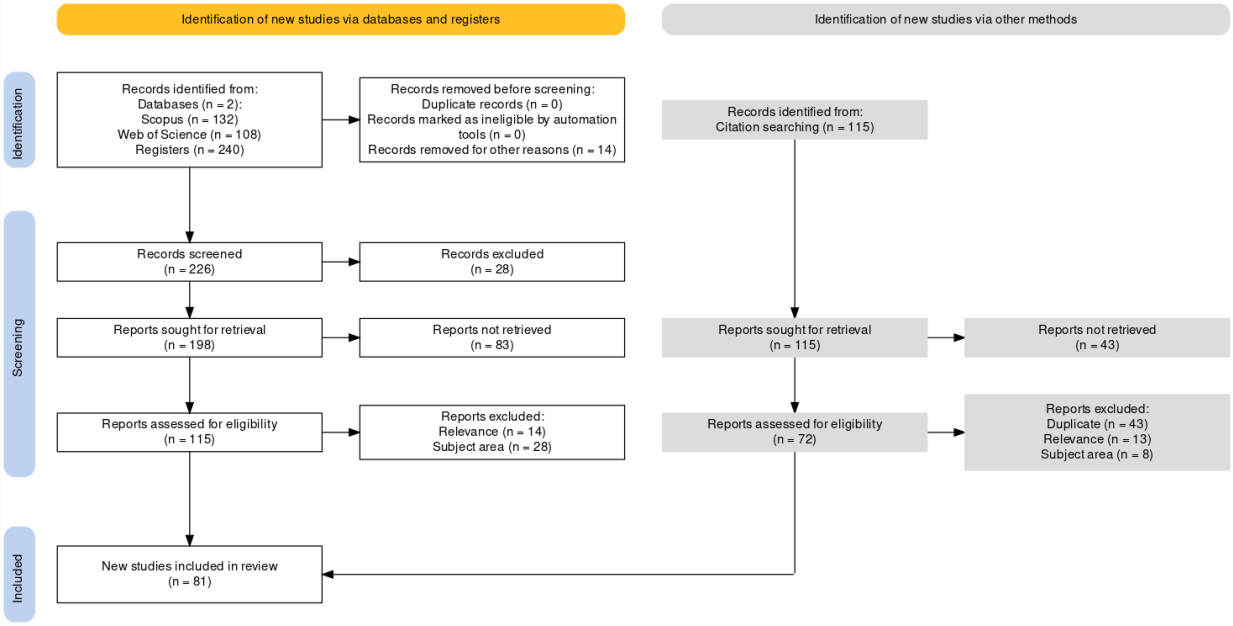
In parallel with obtaining the results from WoS and Scopus, the search equation was executed in Google Scholar, where 115 documents were retrieved. These, along with those recovered from WoS and Scopus, were subjected to inclusion and exclusion criteria. All the bibliographic records were organized into a matrix, as described by Carbonell et al. (2021), detailing information such as title, author(s), publication date, database from which it was retrieved, publisher, DOI, URL, ISSN/eISSN, number of pages, document type, issue and volume of publication, keywords, abstract, affiliations, country of publication, research area, document accessibility, reference count, and document citations.

After consolidating the matrix, the following inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied: (i) duplicate records were removed; (ii) documents whose abstracts were directly related to the topic

and research sub-area were selected; and (iii) documents that were not open access and not related to the business sustainability of social enterprises were discarded. As a result of applying these criteria, 81 documents were selected and retrieved from the various sources for analysis. It is worth noting that 8 of these texts were retrieved from the Google Scholar search engine, which had initially been excluded from the WoS results due to lack of access; however, once retrieved, they were included in the analysis of articles from the Clarivate Analytics database. The PRISMA flowchart for material selection is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Flow diagram of the PRISMA statement.



Source: Prepared by the authors based on Haddaway et al. (2022)

In turn, the second phase focused on the study of publications from the perspective of scientometrics and bibliometrics, starting with the generation of a plain text file containing all the document information using the POP software. This file was uploaded to the "Tree of Science" (ToS) algorithm on the RStudio cloud, which, through the analogy of a tree, enables an exhaustive analysis of the scientific literature (Zuluaga et al., 2022; Zuluaga et al., 2016).

The processing of information in the ToS algorithm allows for the classification of seminal documents in the root, structural documents in the trunk, and research field documents in the leaves (Moyano, 2022). This facilitates the visualization of scientific production as well as the

understanding and construction of the theoretical framework (Buitrago et al., 2019; Landínez & Montoya, 2019).

Additionally, an output file in .graphml format was generated in RStudio, containing the necessary information for co-citation analysis. This file, known as a graph, was exported to Gephi, an open-source software that allows for the processing of co-citation networks and the identification of research perspectives or clusters (Bastian et al., 2009). This made it possible to visualize three perspectives, which concentrate a large percentage of the network (68.7%), as well as to identify the number of connections between documents in the network, reflected in 2,221 edges.

Finally, from the WoS and Scopus portals, a BibTeX file was generated, which enables the storage and management of the bibliographic information of the initially selected documents. This file was exported to Bibliometrix, a statistical tool for scientometric analysis of information (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017), which has been used by various studies across different fields of knowledge (Agnusdei & Coluccia, 2022; Linnenluecke et al., 2019; Moral et al., 2020; Trejos et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2020). This process facilitated the identification of relevance, importance, and evolution, as well as the construction of the global collaboration network around the business sustainability of social enterprises.

Results

Evolution, relevance, and importance

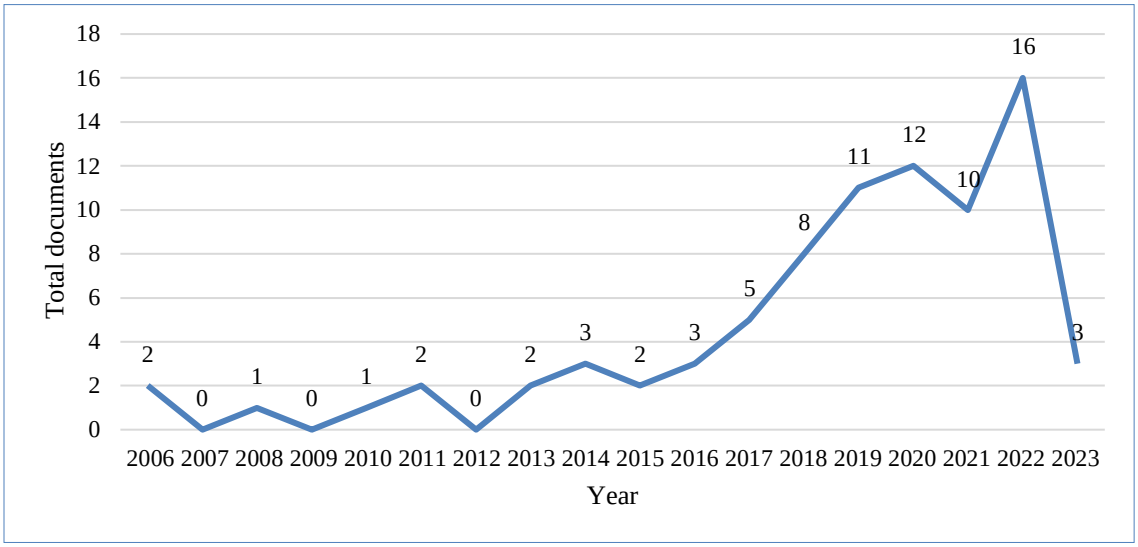
Following the guidelines established in the PRISMA 2020 statement (Haddaway et al., 2022), the first methodological phase selected a total of 81 documents that met all the inclusion and exclusion criteria. These documents allowed for the determination of the evolution and importance of studies related to the business sustainability of social enterprises, as well as the identification of the main global collaboration networks in this area of knowledge.

First, the selected documents span the period from 2006 to 2023, with March 10, 2023, serving as the cut-off date for this research. It is worth noting that this time frame, which was not part of the inclusion and exclusion criteria previously described, corresponds to the years in which the studies were published in the consulted databases, using the defined search equation.

In this regard, Figure 2 shows the evolution of academic productivity around the business sustainability of these enterprises, which exhibits a growing trend in recent years. This behavior can be understood as the positioning of an emerging subfield in the area of social entrepreneurship, as described by Sassmannshausen & Volkmann (2018).

Figure 2

Evolution of Bibliographic Production, 2006-2023

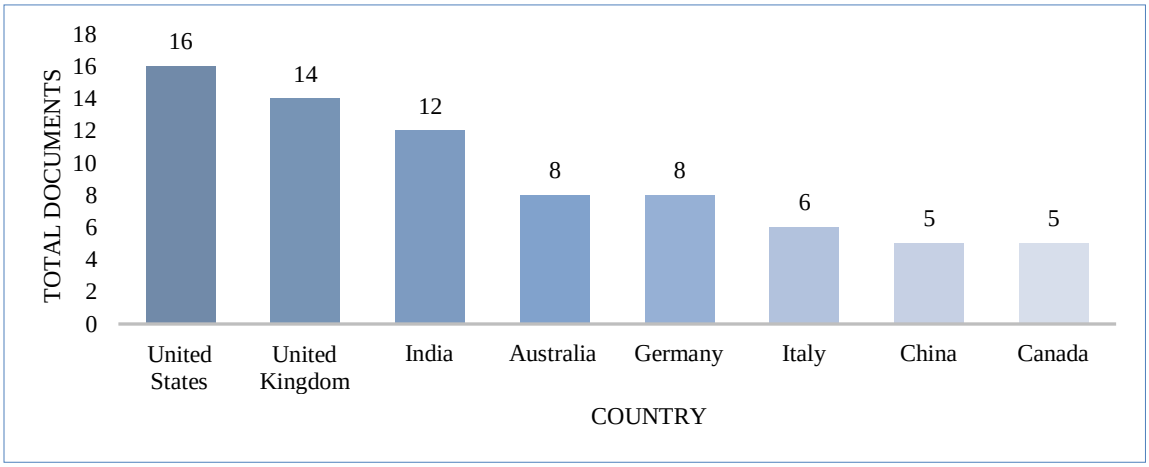


Source: Prepared by the authors.

The United States and the United Kingdom are the countries with the highest productivity, registering 16 and 14 documents, respectively. According to Bacq & Janssen (2011), Granados et al. (2011), and Monteiro et al. (2022), these two countries lead the research in this field. The following countries with the most productivity, in decreasing order, are India, Australia, Germany, Italy, China, and Canada. This information is presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Countries with the Highest Bibliographic Production, 2006-2023

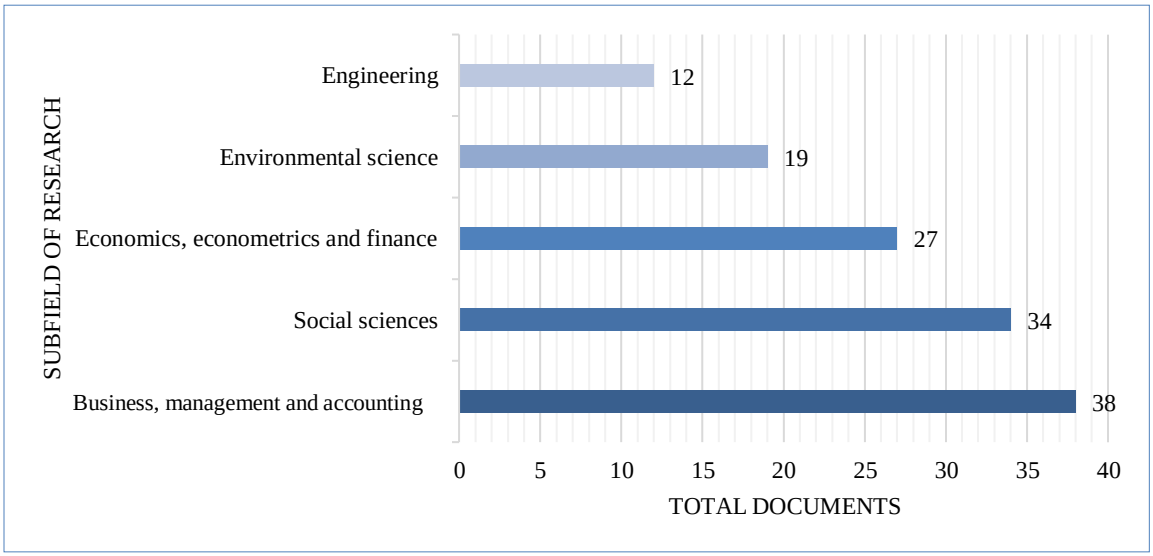


Source: Prepared by the authors.

On the other hand, using the matrix constructed during the methodological process, it was possible to identify and classify the research subfield of the 81 documents, which correspond, in descending order, to (i) business, management, and accounting; (ii) social sciences; (iii) economics, econometrics, and finance; (iv) environmental sciences; and (v) engineering. Figure 4 graphically represents these research subfields.

Figure 4

Main Research Subfields of Bibliographic Production, 2006-2023



Source: Prepared by the authors.

In this same vein, the journals in which the different documents were published were analyzed. Using the "SCImago Journal & Country Rank" as a reference, characteristics such as the publisher, quartile, and H-index of each journal were consulted. It was identified that 75.3% of the documents were published in Q1 scientific journals, meaning they belong to the top 25% of the highest-ranked journals.

It was also identified that the "Journal of Cleaner Production" from the United Kingdom and "Sustainability" from Switzerland are the journals with the highest number of publications, with 21 and 19, respectively. Following these journals in the number of publications are: "Business Strategy and the Environment" with 8, "Social Enterprise Journal" with 7, and "Business and Society" with 6, all from the United Kingdom. The results described here are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Scientific Journals with the Highest Number of Publications, 2006-2023

No.	Journals	Publications	Publisher	Quartile	H-Index
1	Journal of Cleaner Production	21	Elsevier Ltd.	Q1	232
2	Sustainability	19	MDPI AG	Q1	109
3	Business Strategy and the Environment	8	John Wiley and Sons Ltd	Q1	115
4	Social Enterprise Journal	7	Emerald Group Publishing Ltd.	Q1	11
5	Business and Society	6	SAGE Publications Ltd	Q1	81

Source: Prepared by the authors using data from the SCImago Journal & Country Rank.

On the other hand, it was determined that the total number of publications was authored by 293 authors; however, only a small percentage (9.3%) of the authors contributed to the writing of more than one document. Additionally, the affiliation of each of the 279 authors was identified, with the "Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur" and "Chalmers University of Technology" being the institutions with the highest number of affiliations, respectively. The details of this information are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Affiliations with the Highest Number of Publications, 2006-2023

Scopus			**Web of Science**		
Affiliation	**Country**	**Articles**	**Affiliation**	**Country**	**Articles**
Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur	India	6	Chalmers University of Technology	Sweden	8
Mahidol University International College	Thailand	5	Blekinge Institute of Technology	Sweden	7
Ewha Womans University	South Korea	4	Southeast University	Bangladesh	6
Egade Business School	Mexico	3	University of Cambridge	United Kingdom	6
Esade Business School	Spain	3	Luleå University of Technology	Sweden	5

Source: Prepared by the authors using data from Scopus and Web of Science.

The number of citations and the average citations of the articles were also of interest to this research. For the documents published in Scopus, the country with the highest number of citations is the United Kingdom; however, the countries with the highest average citations are Bangladesh, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Regarding WoS, the highest number of citations belongs to the United States, while the highest averages are held by Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany. The record of this information is found in Table 4.

Table 4

Number and Average Citation of Publications, Period 2006-2023

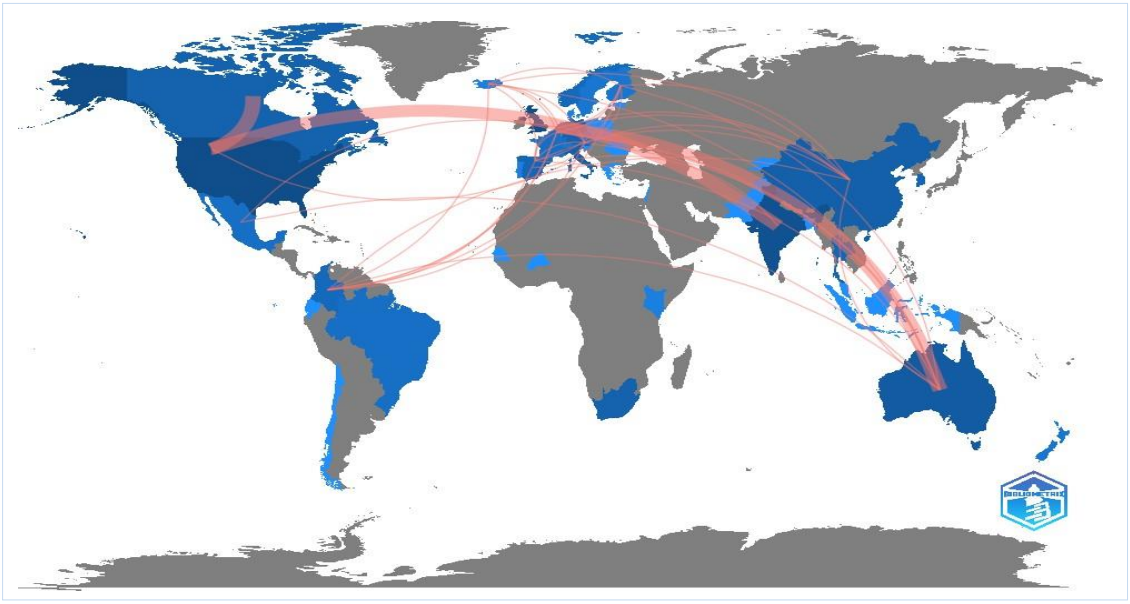
Scopus			**Web Of Science**		
Country	**Number of Citations**	**Average Citations per Article**	**Country**	**Number of Citations**	**Average Citations per Article**
United Kingdom	416	46.22	United States	466	38.83
Belgium	180	60.00	Sweden	427	19.41
Australia	133	44.33	Germany	316	63.20
Netherlands	108	54.00	Netherlands	268	67.00
United States	93	15.50	United Kingdom	255	42.50
Bangladesh	92	92.00	Belgium	139	69.50
India	87	10.88	China	119	11.90
Spain	81	16.20	Australia	114	28.50
Thailand	74	14.80	Saudi Arabia	72	36.00
Italy	71	23.67	Denmark	60	30.00

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from Scopus and Web of Science.

Finally, using Bibliometrix, it was possible to identify the collaboration networks. The strongest network regarding the business sustainability of social enterprises is between the United Kingdom and the United States, followed by collaborations between France and Australia, China and Finland, and Austria and the Netherlands. In terms of academic productivity in this area of knowledge, Colombia's most significant collaboration is with France and Finland. Figure 5 illustrates the global collaboration networks.

Figure 5

Collaboration network of publications by country, period 2006-2023



Source: Prepared by the authors based on Bibliometrix data.

Tree of Science

The tree of science on this topic was constructed using the algorithm designed by Robledo et al. (2014), which employs the metaphor of a tree to classify seminal documents at the roots, structural ones at the trunk, and those belonging to research fields at the leaves (Moyano, 2022). The documents corresponding to the roots (10) were published between 2006 and 2014, focusing on business models, entrepreneurial strategies, innovation, and the conceptualization of social entrepreneurship (Austin et al., 2006; Bocken et al., 2014; Boons & Lüdeke, 2013; Dean & McMullen, 2007; Mair & Martí, 2006; Teece, 2010; Zahra et al., 2009; Zott et al., 2011). The

criterion used for locating the documents was a high entry degree and zero exit (Robledo et al.,

2014).

In the trunk of the tree, 10 documents were positioned due to their high degree of mediation, written between 2014 and 2018. These texts concentrated on the sustainability of business models, the balance between commercial purpose and the social mission of such ventures, and the performance and strategies for innovation (Belz & Binder, 2015; Brehmer et al., 2018; Davies & Chambers, 2018; Dentchev et al., 2018; Palomares et al., 2018; Provasnek et al., 2016; Siegner et al., 2018).

In this order, the documents positioned at the leaves of the tree (61 texts) are characterized by a high exit degree and zero entry (Moyano, 2022). In this case, a significant number of documents focused on case studies and systematic reviews, analyzing the behavior and role of such ventures in society, as well as the contributions of social entrepreneurship to sustainable development, under the premise of their contributions to solving problems (Arru, 2020; Bertoni, 2017; Campos et al., 2019; Dalborg & Friedrichs, 2021; Di et al., 2022; Doherty & Kittipanya, 2021; Gray et al., 2018; Kulshrestha et al., 2022; Schaltegger et al., 2014; Schoneveld, 2020)..

In summary, Table 5 presents the main publications for each part of the tree (roots, trunk, and leaves).

Table 5

Main Publications of the Tree of Science

Root	Trunk	Leaves
Business Models, Business Strategy and Innovation (Teece, 2010)	Managing tensions in a social enterprise: The complex balancing act to deliver a multi-faceted but coherent social mission (Siegner et al., 2018)	Sustainable entrepreneurship impact and entrepreneurial venture life cycle: A systematic literature review (Di et al., 2022)

A typology of social entrepreneurs: Motives, search processes and ethical challenges (Zahra et al., 2009)	Sustainable Entrepreneurship: A Convergent Process Model (Belz & Binder, 2015)	Introducing Sustainability in Value Models to Support Design Decision Making: A Systematic Review (Bertoni, 2017)
Social and Commercial Entrepreneurship: Same, Different, or Both? (Austin et al., 2006)	Integrating hybridity and business model theory in sustainable entrepreneurship (Davies & Chambers, 2018)	The Role of Social Enterprise Hybrid Business Models in Inclusive Value Chain Development (Doherty & Kittipanya, 2021)
Social entrepreneurship research: A source of explanation, prediction, and delight (Mair, & Martí, 2006)	Sustainable business models as boundary-spanning systems of value transfers (Brehmer et al., 2018)	Constituents and drivers of mission engagement for social enterprise sustainability: A systematic review (Kulshrestha et al., 2022)
Toward a theory of sustainable entrepreneurship: Reducing environmental degradation through entrepreneurial action (Dean & McMullen, 2007)	Sustainable Corporate Entrepreneurship: Performance and Strategies Toward Innovation (Provasnek et al., 2016)	Sustainable business models for inclusive growth: Towards a conceptual foundation of inclusive business (Schoneveld, 2020)

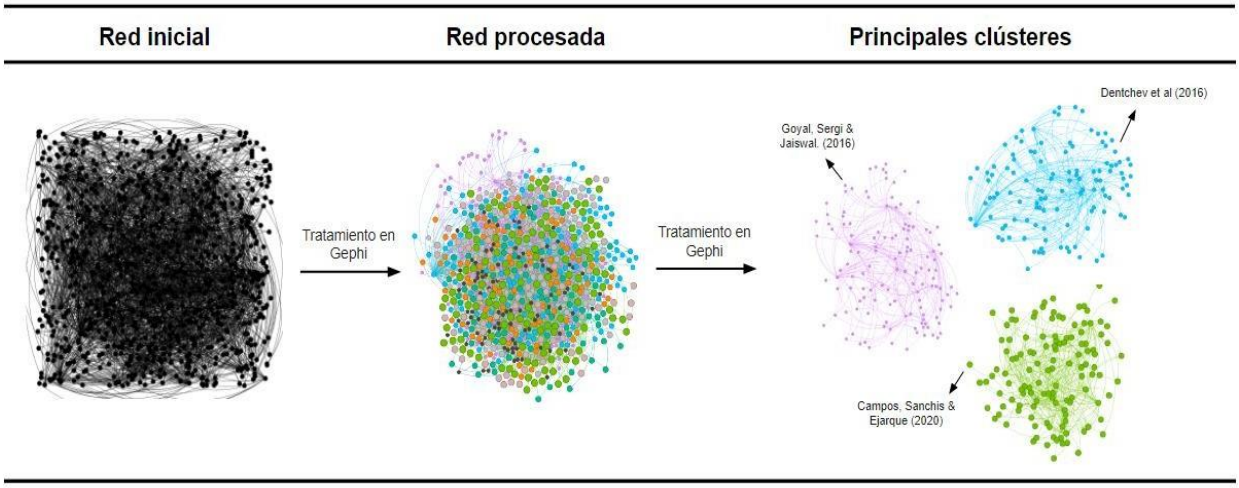
Source: Prepared by the authors based on ToS.

Research Perspectives

With the processing of the graph in Gephi, it was possible to identify the different research perspectives in this area of knowledge. Specifically, nine perspectives were identified; however, three of them accounted for 68.7% of the total co-citation network. This argument supported the selection of these three clusters for further processing and analysis. The processing of the co-citation network is illustrated in Figure 6, while the three main perspectives are described below.

Figure 6

Processing of the co-citation network



Source: Prepared by the authors based on RStudio Cloud, ToS, and Gephi.

Perspective 1: Durability

The first perspective, represented in purple, accounts for 29.3% of the co-citation network. In this perspective, research by Dean & McMullen (2007) and Cohen & Winn (2007) suggests that social enterprises often identify and leverage market failures and societal issues as opportunities for business durability.

Additionally, this perspective includes studies by Shepherd & Patzelt (2011), which detail the uncertainty surrounding the development and sustainability of social enterprises. Moreover, analyses by Pacheco et al. (2010) and Belz & Binder (2015) indicate that limitations and scarcity of funding sources impact the durability of these enterprises, which have become, according to Hall et al. (2010), a panacea for many social and environmental problems.

Perspective 2: Hybrid Models

The second perspective represents 21.9% of the network and is illustrated in green. The documents in this perspective address the business durability issue faced by social enterprises, proposing the development of hybrid business models through which necessary funding sources can be achieved via commercial activities to create social value and resolve the social and environmental issues promoted by these enterprises (Austin et al., 2006; Battilana & Dorado,

2010; Corner & Ho, 2010; Doherty et al., 2014; Ebrahim et al., 2014; Hestad et al., 2020; Pache & Santos, 2013; Stubbs & Cocklin, 2008).

This has also been expressed by Davies & Chambers (2018), who additionally state that when organizations fail to achieve a financial balance that ensures their social activities, the latter often take a back seat. However, the financial dilemmas and tensions are not the only problems faced in terms of business durability; these enterprises also encounter strategic, legal, credibility, and acceptance issues (Haigh & Hoffman, 2014; Siegner et al., 2018).

Perspective 3: Contributions to the Circular Economy

The third perspective, represented in blue, accounts for 17.5% of the co-citation network. In this case, research on the conceptualization of the circular economy and its contribution to sustainable development, primarily carried out by companies or enterprises focused on environmental quality and social impact, was identified (Gil & Latorre, 2022; Kirchherr et al., 2017; Roleders et al., 2022). However, publications by Geissdoerfer et al. (2017) and Henry et al. (2020) highlight that, despite advances in this area, the relationship between the circular economy and sustainable development is not made explicit, which limits, due to conceptual ambiguity, the focus of studies in which, according to Chaarani & Raimi (2022), Manea et al. (2021), Smitskikh et al. (2020), and Suchek et al. (2022), social enterprises could fit.

Conclusions

The systematic literature review conducted, following the PRISMA statement, highlighted the academic and research interest in the business durability of social enterprises, as evidenced by the growth in the number of studies published on this topic since 2006. The countries with the highest number of publications are the United States and the United Kingdom, primarily concentrated in the subfields of business, management, accounting, and social sciences. It was also possible to identify that the majority of the research was published in top journals worldwide, with 75.3% belonging to the Q1 quartile of the "SCImago Journal & Country Rank."

By utilizing the various tools described in the methodological section, we were able to determine the collaboration networks surrounding this field. The main network is that of the United Kingdom and the United States, followed by collaborations between France and Australia, China

and Finland, and Austria and the Netherlands. In the case of Colombia, the primary collaborations occur with European countries, with France and Finland leading the way.

Furthermore, the classification of documents using the ToS methodology allowed for a documentary review from the perspective of co-citation analysis, complemented by the clustering process conducted with RStudio Cloud and Gephi to identify the different perspectives. These procedures enabled the analysis of seminal, structural, and novel documents, as well as a review of the three main academic communities investigating this field, which primarily revolve around the problems and opportunities social enterprises face regarding their business durability.

However, this study was limited by the use of WoS and Scopus, which, while being among the largest and most important databases, do not account for publications not indexed in these sources. Additionally, the use of these databases was constrained by subscription access, which did not allow for the retrieval of all documents. This limitation is compounded by the fact that the use of ToS is also dependent on these databases.

Nonetheless, the objectives set forth were achieved through this systematic review. Despite the various analyses performed, no model of business durability that identifies, examines, and addresses the factors and peculiarities of social enterprises was identified, representing a research gap that can be addressed in future studies.

Finally, the importance of this systematic literature review lies in the synthesis and analysis of information, which enabled the identification of collaboration networks, key documents, and the three most important research communities or perspectives. This, in turn, establishes a starting point for subsequent studies, providing clarity on the generalities and trends surrounding the business durability of social enterprises.

Ethical Considerations

This research did not require ethical approval, as it was based on a documentary review.

Conflict of Interest

All authors made significant contributions to the document and declare that there are no conflicts

of interest related to the article.

Author Contribution Statement

Gabriel Antonio Moyano Londoño: Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Validation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Writing - Original Draft, Writing: Review and Editing. Pablo Felipe Marín Cardona: Resources, Data Curation, Visualization, Supervision, Project Administration, Funding Acquisition.

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