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# The development of social entrepreneurship: a bibliometric analysis

## *El desarrollo del emprendimiento social: un análisis bibliométrico*

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**Abstract**

The aim of this study was to conduct a bibliometric analysis of the development of social entrepreneurship between 2003 and 2024. The methodology used was a bibliometric analysis to quantify scientific output through data analysis. A total of 1,475 documents from Scopus were considered for inclusion in the research based on their relevance and English keywords (economic impact, social entrepreneurship). In 2023, there was a notable increase in scientific output (n=238; 16.1%), with the United States leading the way with 11.7%. Sustainability Switzerland was the most important source, with 93 publications. The author Welter, F. obtained the highest number of citations (1918) and four articles. Of these publications, 82% were academic articles and 28% were classified under the topics of business, management, and accounting. It is concluded that there are more sources, a greater variety of authors and topics covered, and more resources in general regarding the development of social entrepreneurship. This offers a more complete picture of the visibility, influence, and importance of global scientific production within entrepreneurship. By conducting a comprehensive evaluation of the current literature, this bibliometric study provides evidence-based support, thus laying the foundation for future research on the growth of social entrepreneurship at the international level.

**Keywords:** Development, behaviour, social entrepreneurship, bibliometric.

**Resumen**

El presente estudio tuvo como objetivo realizar un análisis bibliométrico sobre el desarrollo del emprendimiento social entre 2003 y 2024. La metodología utilizada fue un análisis bibliométrico para cuantificar la producción científica mediante el análisis de datos. Se consideraron 1475 documentos de Scopus para su inclusión en la investigación en función de su relevancia y de las palabras clave en inglés (*economic impact, social entrepreneurship*). En 2023 se produjo un notable crecimiento de la producción científica (n=238; 16,1%), con Estados Unidos a la cabeza con un 11,7%. Sustainability Switzerland fue la fuente más importante, con 93 publicaciones. El autor Welter, F. obtuvo el mayor número de citas (1918) y cuatro artículos. De estas publicaciones, el 82% eran artículos académicos y el 28% se clasificaban en los temas de empresa, gestión y contabilidad. Se concluye que hay más fuentes, una mayor variedad de autores y temas tratados, y más recursos en general respecto al desarrollo del emprendimiento social. Esto ofrece una imagen más completa de la visibilidad, influencia e importancia de la producción científica mundial dentro del emprendimiento. Al llevar a cabo una evaluación exhaustiva de la literatura actual, este estudio bibliométrico proporciona un apoyo basado en pruebas, sentando así las bases para futuras investigaciones del crecimiento del emprendimiento social a nivel internacional.

**Palabras clave:** Desarrollo, conducta, emprendimiento social, bibliométrico.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, social entrepreneurship has gained momentum as a means of combating the growing scale of economic challenges (Méndez et al., 2022). This is largely due to the fact that the concept emerged as a reaction to problems such as high unemployment, severe economic recessions, and overly competitive and constantly changing markets (Álvarez-Sousa, 2019).

In this vein, social enterprises emerge as a reaction to economic uncertainty, with the aim of targeting a specific market group suffering from an unresolved socio-economic problem. They can be used to establish a set of programs managed by the government, companies, or individuals who seek to advance society and the economy through new information and ideas (Méndez, 2022).

On the other hand, when it comes to boosting local economies and creating new jobs, social entrepreneurship is vital (Villa et al., 2021). Businesses and projects launched by social entrepreneurs help their communities prosper economically while providing jobs for the local population (Espínola & Torres, 2020). In this way, social entrepreneurship and its effects on the economic development of inclusive businesses represent opportunities for economically and socially disadvantaged people with the aim of reducing poverty rates by promoting social inclusion, economic growth, and social entrepreneurship (Mazacón et al., 2020).

In this regard, studies on the economic impact of social entrepreneurship have increased in the last decade (Vargas, 2021). Therefore, social entrepreneurs play a crucial role in the economic development and job creation of their communities by starting businesses and launching projects (Minga et al., 2022). In any case, bibliometric research helps academics gauge the relative importance of various publications and monitor the expansion of human knowledge by analyzing written works and other academic papers (Caló, 2022; Leyva et al., 2022).

Therefore, for databases to serve as tools for determining scientific background, it is essential to have a reliable capacity for collecting research data (Sanz, 2022). This leads to the use of bibliometric indicators, which are metrics for quantifying the body of literature on a given topic or group of related topics (García-Villar & García-Santos, 2021; Llerena & Arévalo, 2021).).

Likewise, a bibliometric framework is needed for gathering information on the economic effects of social entrepreneurship. Throughout the review process, the following indicators will be taken into account: the year of publication of the material, country of origin, subject matter, file type, association with an institution, its source, and its authors. Thus, the objective of the research is to conduct a bibliometric analysis of the economic impact of social entrepreneurship between 2003 and 2024.

## METHOD

Bibliometric techniques were used to evaluate current research on the economic impact and social behavior of entrepreneurship. Bibliometrics played a key role in providing researchers with the data they needed to carry out the study (Caló, 2022). This method is essential for evaluating various fields of knowledge, as it details the properties of publications; for example, the most prominent authors, the year of publication, and the language of publication are fundamental for developing standards to evaluate researchers and decide on future research directions (Salinas and García, 2022; Leyva et al., 2023). In addition, the search was carried out in the Scopus database, which catalogs academic works from around the world. The study period was from 2003 to 2024.

The following Boolean operators were applied to abstracts, titles, and keywords to collect the information: Economic AND social AND entrepreneurial impact. As a result of this process, a database of documents was compiled, which had to undergo a filtering, standardization, and elimination process before the final sample could be considered. A total of 1,475 academic papers were selected for the study. As part of this data cleansing process, the following exclusion criteria were also established: 1) research conducted outside the study period (2003-2024), 2) duplicate publications, and 3) studies not related to the topic.

On the other hand, the impact of the selected works on the academic debate was evaluated using a set of bibliometric markers. These metrics included production broken down by year of

publication, author, place of publication, type of document, topic, and institutional affiliation (Florez-Fernández & Aguilera-Eguía, 2020). A final step consisted of compiling descriptive data on the documentary volume of the sample and analyzing it in Excel. Similarly, the mapping of term co-occurrences was carried out using VOSviewer V 1.6.19.

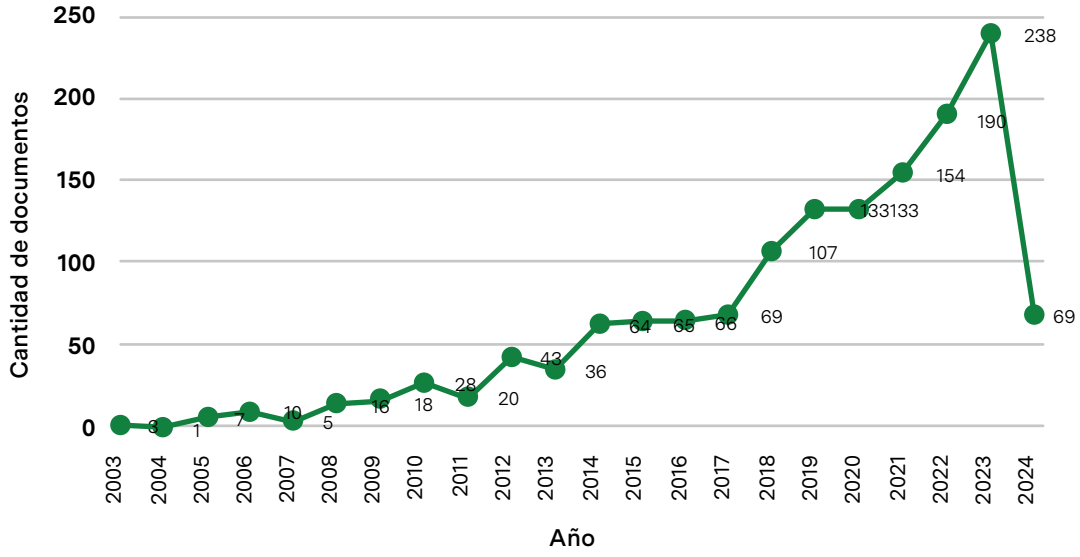
## RESULTS

This bibliometric analysis focused mainly on research papers published in sources or journals between 2003 and 2024. A total of 1,475 academic documents referring to the monetary economic effects of social entrepreneurship were selected for this review. Furthermore, the impact of the selected works on the academic debate was evaluated using a set of bibliometric markers. These metrics included production broken down by year of publication, author, place of publication, type of document, topic, and institutional affiliation (Florez-Fernández & Aguilera-Eguía, 2020). A final step consisted of compiling descriptive data on the documentary volume of the sample and analyzing it in Excel. Similarly, the mapping of term co-occurrences was carried out using VOSviewer V 1.6.19.

Therefore, Figure 1 shows the most recent global publications included in the Scopus index. The data shows that 238 academic papers were published in 2023, representing a record high of 16.1% in the annual publication rate.

**Figure 1**

*Documents published by year*




Note: Data from Scopus (2024)

A total of 107 countries were considered for the study, as shown in Table 2. The United States ranks first in scientific productivity (11.7%), followed by the United Kingdom with 8.6%, Spain and China with 5.7% each. Furthermore, of the three most common languages in academic writing, 96.8% of the papers were published in English, 2.6% in Spanish, and 0.5% in Portuguese.

**Table 1**
*Publication of documents by country*

| N° | Country | Number of documents | % | N° | Country | Number of documents | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | United States | 239 | 11.7% | 17 | Indonesia | 33 | 1.6% |
| 2 | United Kingdom | 176 | 8.6% | 18 | Russian Federation | 30 | 1.5% |
| 3 | Spain | 117 | 5.7% | 19 | Poland | 28 | 1.4% |
| 4 | China | 116 | 5.7% | 20 | Mexico | 27 | 1.3% |
| 5 | India | 101 | 5.0% | 21 | Saudi Arabia | 25 | 1.2% |
| 6 | Italy | 66 | 3.2% | 22 | Romania | 24 | 1.2% |
| 7 | Australia | 60 | 2.9% | 23 | Colombia | 22 | 1.1% |
| 8 | Germany | 55 | 2.7% | 24 | Sweden | 22 | 1.1% |
| 9 | Portugal | 54 | 2.6% | 25 | United Arab Emirates | 21 | 1.0% |
| 10 | Canada | 51 | 2.5% | 26 | Iran | 20 | 1.0% |
| 11 | Malaysia | 45 | 2.2% | 27 | Denmark | 19 | 0.9% |
| 12 | Netherlands | 41 | 2.0% | 28 | Greece | 19 | 0.9% |
| 13 | Pakistan | 41 | 2.0% | 29 | Chile | 18 | 0.9% |
| 14 | France | 36 | 1.8% | 30 | Ukraine | 18 | 0.9% |
| 15 | South Africa | 36 | 1.8% | 31 | Undefined | 444 | 21.8% |
| 16 | Brazil | 34 | 1.7% | | **Total** | **107** | |

Note: Data from Scopus (2024)

A total of ninety-seven academic sources were consulted for this review. The data acquired for this research is summarized in Table 2. It also shows the total number of articles published in various journals and sources, such as Sustainability Switzerland, with 93 publications. In contrast, 27 papers were published in the journal Technological Forecasting and Social Change. Furthermore, each of these sources has contributed substantially to the development of its associated academic discipline.

**Table 2**

*Publication of documents by source or journal*

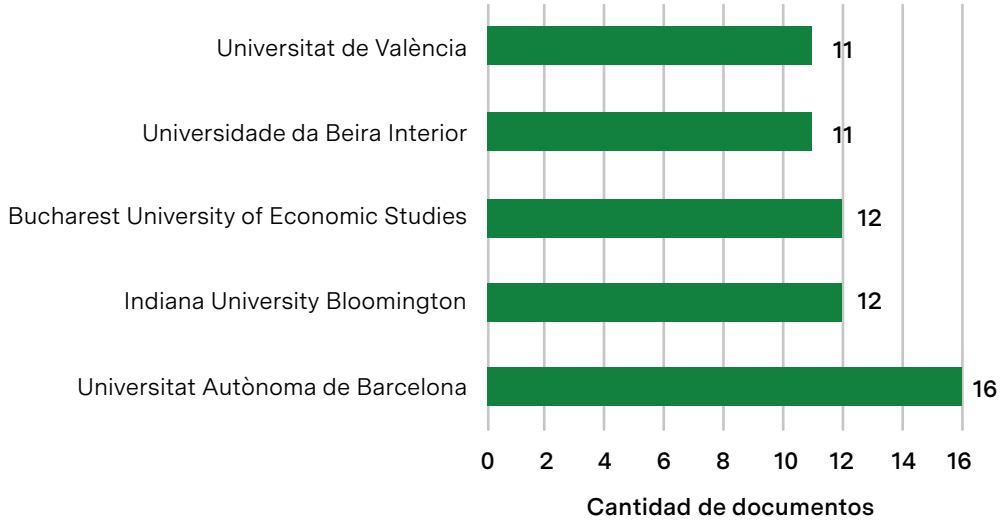
| Source or Journal | Number of documents | Source or Journal | Number of documents | Source or Journal | Number of documents |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sustainability Switzerland | 93 | Journal of Business Ethics | 10 | International Journal of Entrepreneurship | 6 |
| Technological Forecasting and Social Change | 27 | Revesco Revista de Estudios Cooperativos | 10 | International Studies in Entrepreneurship | 6 |
| International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research | 18 | Entrepreneurship and Regional Development | 9 | Journal of the Knowledge Economy | 6 |
| Frontiers in Psychology | 17 | International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal | 8 | Local Economy | 6 |
| Journal of Cleaner Production | 15 | Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development | 8 | Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal | 6 |
| Journal of Enterprising Communities | 15 | Journal of Social Entrepreneurship | 8 | Cogent Business and Management | 5 |
| Small Business Economics | 15 | Academy of Entrepreneurship Journal | 7 | Contemporary Issues in Entrepreneurship Research | 5 |
| Emerald Emerging Markets Case Studies | 14 | Ciriec España Revista de Economía Pública Social Y Cooperativa | 7 | Entrepreneurship Research Journal | 5 |
| Journal of Business Research | 14 | International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business | 7 | IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management | 5 |
| Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies | 14 | Journal of Entrepreneurship and Public Policy | 7 | Industry and Higher Education | 5 |
| Journal of Technology Transfer | 12 | Education and Training | 6 | International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health | 5 |
| Contributions to Management Science | 10 | Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice | 6 | Indefinido | 210 |
| International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship | 10 | International Journal of Business and Globalization | 6 | Total revistas | 97 |

Note: Data from Scopus (2024)

Furthermore, authors from more than 123 different universities worked together to produce the 1,475 academic papers. Figure 2 shows the universities with the highest production in terms of volume of academic papers during the research period. The universities that make up this group are: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (16), Indiana University Bloomington (12), Bucharest University of Economic Studies (12), and University of Beira Interior (11).

**Figure 2**

*Documents published by institution*




Note: Data from Scopus (2024)

The selected academic publications featured 95 authors. The highest number of citations (1918 in total) was obtained by Welter, F., as shown in Table 3. He was followed by three authors: Urbano, D. (1220 citations), Guerrero, M. (1170 citations), and Fayolle, A. (511).

**Table 3**

*Documents published by author*

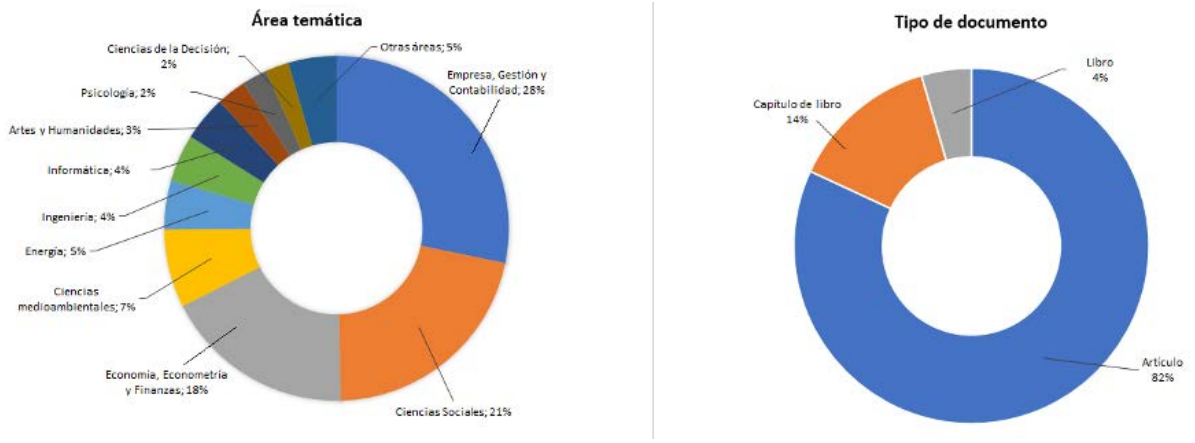
| By author | Amount | Total, citations | By author | Amount | Total, citations |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Urbano, D. | 12 | 1220 | Welter, F. | 4 | 1918 |
| Guerrero, M. | 10 | 1170 | Yáñez-Valdés, C. | 4 | 59 |
| Dana, L.P. | 7 | 138 | Amran, A. | 3 | 96 |
| Fayolle, A. | 5 | 511 | Anderson, A.R. | 3 | 420 |
| Audretsch, D.B. | 4 | 79 | Aparicio, S. | 3 | 29 |
| Daniel, A.D. | 4 | 32 | Audretsch, D.B. | 3 | 211 |
| Ratten, V. | 4 | 95 | Braga, V. | 3 | 16 |
| Sergi, B.S. | 4 | 133 | Brem, A. | 3 | 62 |

Note: Data from Scopus (2024)

Figure 3 shows a compilation of research on the financial effects of social entrepreneurship from 2003 to 2024. The most recent information on this topic comes mainly from the fields of business, management, and accounting (28%), social sciences (21%), and economics, econometrics, and finance (18%). It is also clear that scientific articles account for 82% of the output, book chapters for 14%, and books for 5% when broken down by document type.

**Figure 3**

*Publication of documents by subject area and type*




Note: Data from Scopus (2024)

Figure 4 shows the words included in the titles, abstracts, and keyword lists of the publications analyzed. By using colors to indicate the degree of correlation among keywords, Visual Object Sense (VOSviewer) facilitates the observation of groups of connected words.

- Blue cluster. “Social entrepreneurship” (n=104 occurrences) groups together the following words: social innovation, social impact, social capital, social network, regional development, economic impact.

- Red cluster. “Economic and social effects” (n=88 occurrences), groups together the following words: finance, business activity, developing countries, social enterprise, economic development, social enterprise, economy, business orientation.

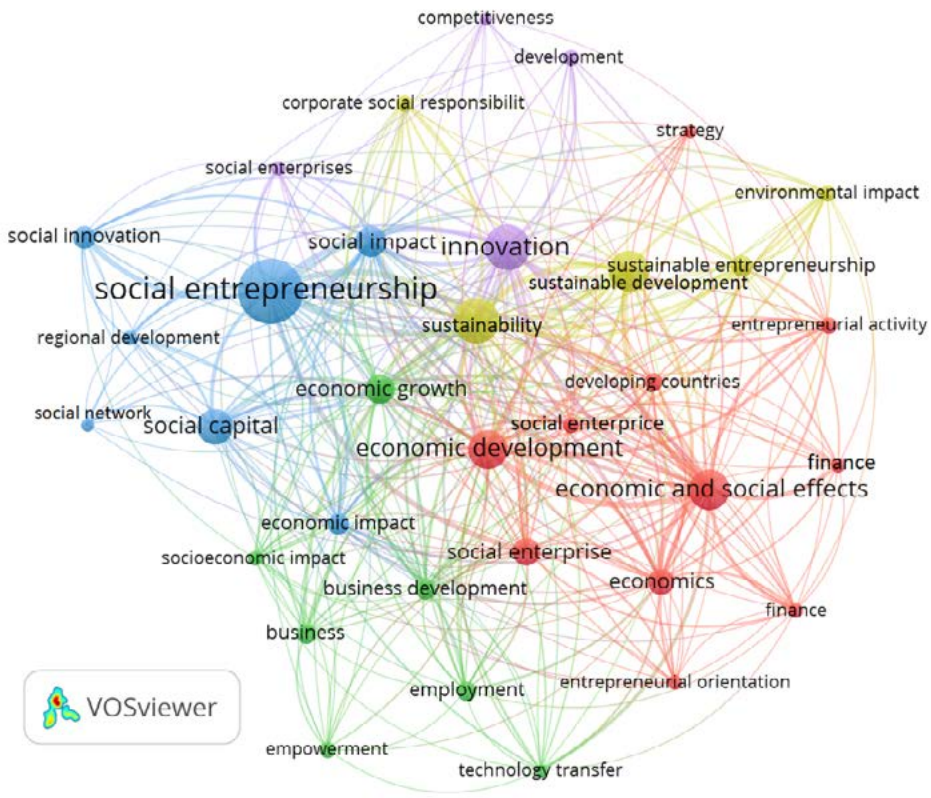
- Yellow cluster. “Sustainability” (n=71 occurrences), groups together the following words: sustainable development, sustainable entrepreneurship, environmental impact.

- Green cluster. “Economic growth” (n=54 occurrences) groups together the following words: socioeconomic impact, business development, employment, training, technology transfer.

- Purple cluster. “Innovation” (n=48 occurrences) groups the following words: competitiveness, development, social enterprises.

With this classification system, most of the study’s keywords are directly related to the research topic.

**Figure 4**
*Keyword co-occurrence map*




Note: Results in VOSviewer (2024)

## DISCUSSION

The bibliometric analysis carried out between 2003 and 2024 confirms that social entrepreneurship has gone from being an emerging field to establishing itself as a cross-cutting area of research that connects the social, economic, and management sciences with issues of sustainable development and social justice. The peak in publications in 2023 reflects not only academic interest, but also a social urgency in the face of global challenges arising from the pandemic, persistent poverty, economic inequality, and climate change.

According to Cabeza-Ramírez et al. (2020), the interdisciplinary breadth of social entrepreneurship has generated a pluralistic theoretical framework that combines perspectives from the solidarity economy, social innovation, and corporate responsibility. This plurality is also reflected in bibliometrics, where research networks linked to sustainability, public policies, and community management models coexist.

In line with Aliya et al. (2021), the current debate challenges the traditional premises of management and classic entrepreneurship, placing social impact as a key variable for success. Thus, social entrepreneurs do not limit themselves to creating companies, but rather shape ecosystems of shared value, involving multiple actors: local communities, NGOs, universities, governments, and the private sector.

On the other hand, Álvarez-Castañón et al. (2023) highlight the bottom-up nature of social entrepreneurship, in contrast to the vertical development approaches promoted by international institutions. This approach has led to an increase in local case studies, which bibliometrics shows in the geographical diversification of publications: although European and North American countries predominate, there is sustained growth in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, where social entrepreneurs face more complex but also more urgent realities. This principle is reflected in the most recent bibliometric trends, which associate the topic with SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals), particularly in relation to poverty reduction,

gender equality, decent work, and action on climate change.

In the same way, Smitskikh et al. (2020) and Guilarte-Barinaga et al. (2023) highlight that social entrepreneurship not only generates innovative solutions to social and environmental problems, but also drives processes of socioeconomic inclusion. Bibliometric evidence points to growth in studies on social entrepreneurship in rural, educational, and circular economy settings, demonstrating the field's ability to adapt to diverse contexts.

Finally, as García et al. (2019) argue, the full realization of the potential of social entrepreneurship requires clear institutional frameworks and public policies that facilitate its expansion. This is confirmed in recent literature, which identifies the need for favorable regulatory environments, access to inclusive financing, and incubation and acceleration programs specialized in social entrepreneurship.

## CONCLUSIONS

In recent years, there has been an increase in studies examining the economic effects of social entrepreneurship. Taking into account all documents indexed by Scopus in 2023, the bibliometric study showed an increase of 16.1% (n=238). Among the nations examined, the United States stands out with a production rate of 11.7%. In addition, 96.8% of the publications were written in English. Likewise, the author Welter, F. was cited 1,918 times, and the most significant source was Sustainability Switzerland, which published 93 scientific papers.

Likewise, 82% of the publications were scientific articles, of which 28% belonged to the field of business, management, and accounting, and 21% to the social sciences. The VOSviewer keyword analysis found 104 occurrences of the term "social entrepreneurship." In addition, the chosen study is relevant to the concepts of "economic and social effects," "sustainability," "economic growth," and "innovation," so these words should be taken into account.

The 1,475 scientific papers also highlight the importance of the economic impact of social entrepreneurship, as it has the potential to create new jobs, foster innovation, and boost market competitiveness, all of which lead to economic growth. Finally, it is concluded that there are more sources, a greater variety of authors and topics covered, and more resources in general regarding the economic impact of social entrepreneurship. This offers a more complete picture of the visibility, influence, and importance of global scientific production. By conducting a comprehensive assessment of the current literature, this bibliometric study provides evidence-based support, thus laying the foundation for future research.

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