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# A Decade and Beyond of Social Entrepreneurship Research: Bibliometric Analysis (2014–2025)

Nur Raihan Che Nawi

Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia

E-mail: nurraihan@upm.edu.my

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**Abstract**

This study delivers a comprehensive, updated bibliometric examination of Social Entrepreneurship Research (SER) spanning from 2014 to 2025. It evaluates critical structural components within the literature, including annual scientific outputs, preeminent publishing sources, seminal core articles, highly prolific authors, and collaborative networks. Furthermore, this analysis explores the field's intellectual architecture by investigating evolutionary trends in author keywords and emerging thematic priorities up to 2025. The bibliometric results indicate that *Sustainability* stands as the most prominent publishing outlet with 68 published articles, closely followed by the *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship* (59 articles) and the *Proceedings of the European Conference on Innovation and Entrepreneurship* (33 articles). Among top-tier articles, Saebi et al. (2019) remains the most structurally impactful work with 598 citations. Within the global authorship network, Chandra from the City University of Hong Kong continues to lead the field, followed closely by Vázquez-Parra and Ramírez-Montoya from Tecnológico de Monterrey. Keyword co-occurrence analysis reveals a highly concentrated emphasis on "social entrepreneurship" (912 occurrences), "entrepreneurship" (264 occurrences), "social enterprise" (124 occurrences), and "social innovation" (115 occurrences). The findings move beyond descriptive summaries to contextualize these trends against institutional mandates, digital transformation, and structural transitions within the post-pandemic, SDG-driven academic landscape.

**Keywords:** social entrepreneurship, social innovation, social enterprise, bibliometric analysis, citation analysis

## 1. Introduction

The core objective of this bibliometric analysis is to critically map out the structural and

intellectual landscape of social entrepreneurship research (SER) literature over a 12-year horizon (2014–2025). By assessing publication velocities, source distribution, prominent papers, and global authorship networks, this paper traces how a niche field has effectively consolidated into an established, interdisciplinary, and digitally agile academic discipline.

## 2. Background of Social Entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship has advanced as an agile, dynamic domain that balances innovative approaches to complex societal vulnerabilities with structurally viable economic mechanisms. Over the last decade and into 2025, this paradigm has received institutional buy-in within higher education, reflecting a paradigm shift in how universities view venture creation and social responsibility.

The evolution of SER is intrinsically linked to multidisciplinary adaptations within corporate management curricula. Spais and Beheshti (2016) noted that business and management institutions have increasingly integrated social impact metrics alongside traditional market-driven returns. However, pedagogical success remains contingent upon individual backgrounds; Pache and Chowdhury (2012) argued that variable baselines of student pre-socialization profoundly alter educational outcomes, necessitating highly localized and adaptive training methods.

Simultaneously, scholarship has focused on structural predictors of social entrepreneurial intent. Viswanath et al. (2024) observed that opportunity recognition varies significantly based on individual and institutional resources, advising policymakers to adjust structural support models accordingly. This supports the views of Kickul et al. (2018), who noted that contemporary curricula must synthesize scalability with systemic sustainability rather than treating social impact as an afterthought.

Recent milestones between 2024 and 2025 demonstrate a strong focus on competency development and institutional resilience. Mao and Yao (2025) empirically demonstrated that educational programs significantly accelerate students' real-world entrepreneurial intent by serving as a structural pipeline for building core competencies. This pipeline is further reinforced when programs integrate participatory designs, as highlighted by Verbytska et al. (2024), where community-partnered learning bridges theoretical frameworks with localized, systemic solutions. In summary, the background of social entrepreneurship heading into 2025 is defined by an evolving ecosystem prioritizing digital scale, community integration, and multi-sector models to generate shared economic and social prosperity.

## 3. Literature Review

The lineage of quantifying scientific outputs dates back to Pritchard (1969), who codified "bibliometrics" to systematically measure written records and distribution trajectories. Contemporary science mapping has refined these tools, visualizing conceptual clusters, research structures, and international co-authorship architectures. Prior bibliometric exercises within SER can be arranged into six thematic operational buckets:

1. **Broad Thematic Mappings:** General landscape studies tracing the foundational boundaries of the domain (e.g., Campigotto-Sandri et al., 2020; Coronel-Pangol et al., 2023; Iskandar et al., 2021; López et al., 2022).
2. **Network and Co-Author Analysis:** Structural reviews exploring collaboration and citation networks (e.g., Celebi et al., 2020; Kurata et al., 2023; Phan Tan, 2021; Tan Luc et al., 2022).
3. **Intellectual Structure and Tracking:** Studies tracing chronological changes in core theories (e.g., Cardella et al., 2021; Hota, 2023; Hota et al., 2020; Trabskaia et al., 2023).
4. **Intersectional Analysis:** Studies focusing on the strategic boundary line between social innovation, sustainability, and entrepreneurial ventures (e.g., Sottini et al., 2023; Vázquez-Parra et al., 2022).
5. **Advanced Methodological Inquiries:** Reviews utilizing automated data processes or machine learning to refine classification models (e.g., Kaushik et al., 2023).
6. **Comparative/Knowledge Divergence Analysis:** Papers distinguishing academic theories from non-academic practitioner knowledge (e.g., De Bernardi et al., 2022; Kurata et al., 2023).

Table 1. Previous Bibliometric Studies within Social Entrepreneurship Research

| Category | Authors | Scope / Title |
|---|---|---|
| **Broad Analysis of Themes & Fields** | Coronel-Pangol et al. (2023) | Social Entrepreneurship: A Bibliometric Analysis of Its Fields of Study |
| | López et al. (2022) | Social entrepreneurship: a bibliometric analysis and literature review |
| | Iskandar et al. (2021) | Bibliometric analysis on social entrepreneurship specialized journals |
| | Campigotto-Sandri et al. (2020) | Social entrepreneurship and social innovation: A bibliometric analysis |
| **Network Analysis: Co-Citation & Co-Word** | Tan Luc et al. (2022) | A Co-Citation and Co-Word Analysis of Social Entrepreneurship Research |
| | Kurata et al. (2023) | A Comparative Analysis of Social Entrepreneurship and Entrepreneurship |
| | Phan Tan (2021) | Mapping the social entrepreneurship research: Bibliographic coupling |
| | Celebi et al. (2020) | |

| Category | Authors | Scope / Title |
|---|---|---|
| | | Bibliometric analysis of social entrepreneurship in gastronomy tourism |
| **Intellectual Structure & Evolution** | Hota (2023) | Tracing the Intellectual Evolution of Social Entrepreneurship Research |
| | Hota et al. (2020) | Mapping the Intellectual Structure of Social Entrepreneurship Research |
| | Cardella et al. (2021) | Social entrepreneurship research: Intellectual structures |
| | Trabskaia et al. (2023) | A Bibliometric Analysis of Social Entrepreneurship and Ecosystems |
| **SE and Social Innovation Intersections** | Sottini et al. (2023) | Social Entrepreneurship And Social Innovation: A Review |
| | Vázquez-Parra et al. (2022) | Social Entrepreneurship and Complex Thinking: A Bibliometric Study |
| **Advanced Analytical Approaches** | Kaushik et al. (2023) | An integrated bibliometric–machine learning based review |
| **Comparative & Knowledge Systems** | De Bernardi et al. (2022) | Beyond the “ivory tower”: Comparing academic and practical knowledge |
| | Kurata et al. (2023) | A Comparative Analysis of Social Entrepreneurship and Entrepreneurship |

## 4. Methodology

Figure 1 illustrates the sequential steps employed in the search strategy. This study follow the PRISMA Statement as reporting guidance for systematic reviews (Page et al., 2021), the review adhered to a rigorous and well-defined methodology, encompassing the precise collection, selection, and analysis of relevant articles. Data gathering was conducted using the Scopus database on 31 December 2025. Scopus database is largest citation databases with a wide global coverage of scientific journals, conference proceedings, and books and highest quality data indexed through rigorous content selection and re-evaluation by an independent Content Selection and Advisory Board (Baas et al., 2020).

The analysis of the Scopus database focuses on social entrepreneurship. The search utilized the “Article Title” field with the keywords "social" and "entrepreneurship," initially yielding a total of 3,671 documents. Subsequently, the search was refined to include only publications

from the years 2014 to 2025, specifically targeting documents categorized as "Articles and Conference Papers" to focus on research literature. Moreover, only documents in the "Final Publication" stage were considered to ensure that only completed works were included in this analysis. The source type was further restricted to "Journals and Conference Proceedings" to enhance the relevance and quality of the results. After applying these specific filters, the search results were ultimately narrowed down to 1,942 documents for data analysis.

The data set samples were analysed using Biblioshiny, an R package specifically designed for bibliometric analysis, which has been validated by previous studies (Ali et al., 2022; Büyükkidik, 2022; Kumar et al., 2023). The use of Biblioshiny allows for comprehensive and sophisticated analysis, ensuring detailed insights into various aspects of the data (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017).

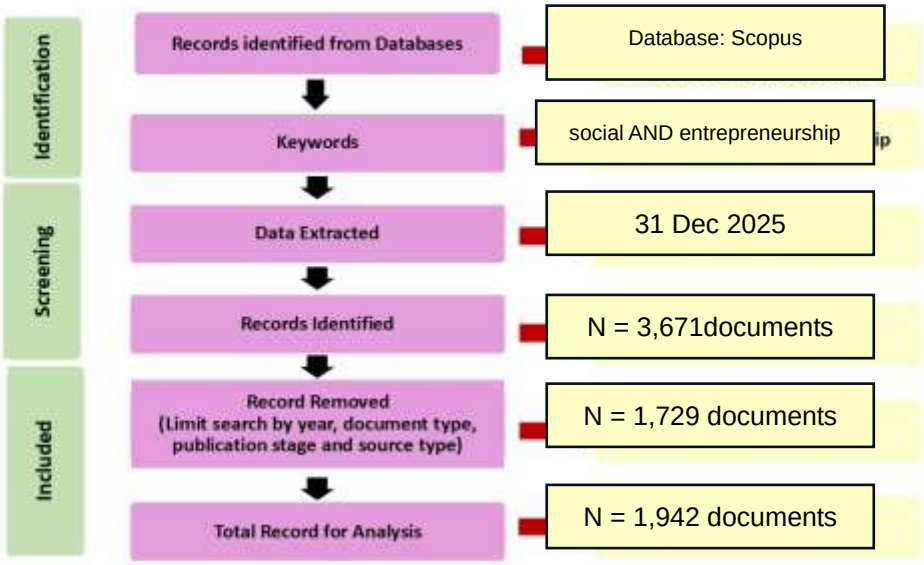



Figure 1. Sequential Steps Employed in the Search Strategy

## 5. Findings and Deeper Interpretive Discussion

### *5.1 Aggregate Sample Characteristics*

The fundamental descriptive features of the updated bibliographic dataset are detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Main Metric Profiles of Sample Data (2014–2025)

| Profile Metric | Value |
|---|---|
| Chronological Duration | 2014–2025 |
| Consolidated Dataset Size (N) | 1,942 documents |

| Profile Metric | Value |
|---|---|
| Mean Document Age (Years) | 5.12 |
| Mean Citation Density per Paper | 22.14 |
| Aggregate Authors (N) | 4,681 |
| International Co-Authorship Ratio (%) | 26.15% |

*5.2. Progression of Annual Scientific Production*

The annual publication output reveals a steady expansion over the first part of the decade, followed by an aggressive consolidation period during the mid-2020s.

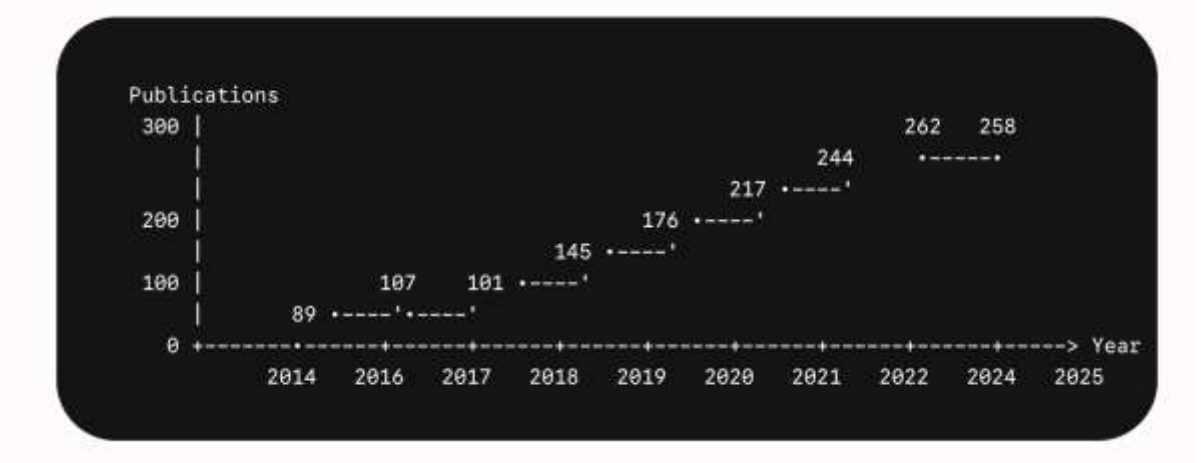



Figure 1. Chronological Growth in SER Publications (2014–2025)

**Deeper Interpretive Interpretation of Production Dynamics**

The publication curve demonstrates that SER has solidified its position as a core mainstream pillar within management science. The trajectory over this 12-year window can be explained by three structural phases:

- **The Institutionalization Phase (2015–2019):** Triggered by the rollout of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), funding agencies and university boards heavily prioritized research with clear social utility, driving steady publication increases.
- **The Crisis Shock Phase (2020–2022):** The COVID-19 pandemic acted as an external shock. It exposed deep institutional failures in global safety nets, prompting an explosion of research exploring social enterprises as resilient, localized survival mechanisms.
- **The Consolidation & Digital Phase (2023–2025):** Rather than dropping off after the pandemic, publication volume remained high (peaking at 262 articles in 2024). This reflects a maturing field where research shifted away from basic conceptual definitions

toward examining how social ventures scale through artificial intelligence, crowdfunding, and platform business models.

*5.3 Source Distribution Analysis*

Table 3 ranks the core publication outlets driving the dissemination of SER.

Table 3. Top 20 Publishing Sources for Social Entrepreneurship Research

| Source / Journal Title | Count | Source / Journal Title | Count |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. *Sustainability* | 68 | 11. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development* | 18 |
| 2. *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship* | 59 | 12. *Int. J. of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Res.* | 17 |
| 3. *Proceedings of ECIE* | 33 | 13. *Journal of Business Venturing Insights* | 16 |
| 4. *Journal of Business Research* | 28 | 14. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship* | 14 |
| 5. *Frontiers in Psychology* | 25 | 15. *Voluntas* | 14 |
| 6. *Int. J. of Entrepreneurship & Small Business* | 24 | 16. *Academy of Entrepreneurship Journal* | 13 |
| 7. *Journal of Business Ethics* | 23 | 17. *Journal of Cleaner Production* | 13 |
| 8. *Social Enterprise Journal* | 23 | 18. *Journal of Enterprising Communities* | 12 |
| 9. *E3S Web of Conferences* | 19 | 19. *Revesco Revista de Estudios Cooperativos* | 11 |
| 10. *Technological Forecasting & Social Change* | 18 | 20. *International Entrepreneurship & Mgmt. J.* | 11 |

**Interpretive Interpretation: The Dominance of Sustainability-Focused Outlets**

The data reveals that *Sustainability* (68 articles) and the *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship* (59 articles) continue to dominate the publishing landscape. This distribution highlights distinct publishing structural dynamics:

1. **The Interdisciplinary Advantage of Sustainability Outlets:** Social entrepreneurship naturally bridges sociology, business ethics, and public policy. Traditional corporate management journals often treat hybrid, multi-objective organizations as exceptions to standard financial theories. Broad-scope sustainability journals, however, readily accommodate research on hybrid models that balance financial viability with environmental and social goals.
2. **Speed-to-Market vs. Traditional Gaps:** The data shows a persistent absence of journals in the middle tier (35–50 articles). This reveals a highly polarized publication ecosystem. Authors tend to choose either fast-tracked, open-access sustainability outlets to publish time-sensitive policy research, or specialized niche journals like the *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship* and *Social Enterprise Journal*. General elite management journals capture only a small fraction of the total volume.

### *5.4 Analysis of Seminal Core Literature*

Table 4 lists the ten most cited articles within the dataset, forming the structural and conceptual bedrock of contemporary SER.

Table 4. Top Cited Articles in Social Entrepreneurship Research

| Rank | Primary Author(s) & Year | Core Theoretical Perspective | Citations |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Saebi et al. (2019) | Comprehensive review of field framing and research directions | 598 |
| 2. | Phillips et al. (2015) | Meta-analysis connecting social innovation with enterprise structures | 517 |
| 3. | Stephan et al. (2015) | Analysis of institutional voids and multi-level configurations | 506 |
| 4. | Choi & Majumdar (2014) | Conceptualization of SE as an essentially contested multi-cluster concept | 436 |
| 5. | Calic & Mosakowski (2016) | Empirical study on how sustainability orientation affects crowdfunding | 408 |
| 6. | Rey-Mart íet al. (2016) | Bibliometric validation of structural trends across business sectors | 405 |
| 7. | Gupta et al. (2020) | Future agenda mapping using systematic review methods | 367 |
| 8. | Rawhouser et al. | Methodological review tracking how social impact is | 337 |

| Rank | Primary Author(s) & Year | Core Theoretical Perspective | Citations |
|---|---|---|---|
| | (2019) | measured | |
| 9. | Popkova & Sergi (2020) | Study of human capital convergence with automation and Industry 4.0 | 277 |
| 10. | Estrin et al. (2016) | Comparative study of human capital returns across hybrid ventures | 270 |

*5.5 Prolific Authorship Patterns*

Table 5 profiles the foundational contributors based on total document counts up to 2025.

Table 5. Highly Prolific Authors in Social Entrepreneurship Research

| Rank | Author Name | Primary Institutional Affiliation | Country Base | Articles |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Chandra, Y. | City University of Hong Kong | Hong Kong | 13 |
| 2. | Vázquez-Parra, J. C. | Tecnológico de Monterrey | Mexico | 12 |
| 3. | Ramírez-Montoya, M. S. | Tecnológico de Monterrey | Mexico | 11 |
| 4. | Bacq, S. | IMD Business School | Switzerland | 9 |
| 5. | Cruz-Sandoval, M. | Tecnológico de Monterrey | Mexico | 8 |
| 6. | Muñoz, P. | Durham University | United Kingdom | 8 |
| 7. | Pathak, S. | Raymond A. Mason School of Business | United States | 7 |
| 8. | Sergi, B. S. | Harvard University | United States | 7 |
| 9. | Dana, L. P. | Montpellier Business School | France | 7 |
| 10. | Carlos-Arroyo, M. | Universidad del Valle de Atemajac | Mexico | 6 |

**Interpretive Interpretation: Explaining Geographies of Research Proliferation**

The geographic distribution of prolific authors highlights clear clusters, centered at institutions like Tecnológico de Monterrey in Mexico (Vázquez-Parra, Ramírez-Montoya) and City University of Hong Kong (Chandra). These concentrations are driven by distinct structural factors:

- **Targeted Institutional Mandates:** Tecnológico de Monterrey has explicitly built "complex thinking" and social innovation into its strategic identity. Dedicated research labs, institutional funding, and adjusted teaching loads have allowed faculty to publish a steady stream of highly productive work on educational and social entrepreneurship models.
- **Proximity to Emerging Market Realities:** Mature economies often possess comprehensive public welfare infrastructures. In contrast, emerging markets in Latin America and East Asia frequently face structural institutional gaps. This gives local universities a unique research advantage. Scholars in these regions can directly study, experiment with, and validate new hybrid business models designed to solve pressing community needs on the ground.

*5.6 Analysis of Author Keywords*

Table 6 summarizes keyword frequencies, identifying the primary conceptual building blocks of the discipline.

Table 6. Frequency Rankings of Primary Author Keywords (Combined 2014–2025)

| Rank | Keyword Term | Count | Rank | Keyword Term | Count |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | social entrepreneurship | 912 | 12. | digital transformation | 38 |
| 2. | entrepreneurship | 264 | 13. | social media | 35 |
| 3. | social enterprise | 124 | 14. | gender | 32 |
| 4. | social innovation | 115 | 15. | social entrepreneur | 29 |
| 5. | social capital | 89 | 16. | social entrepreneurship education | 28 |
| 6. | sustainable development | 72 | 17. | social economy | 26 |
| 7. | innovation | 54 | 18. | social enterprises | 25 |
| 8. | sustainability | 49 | 19. | resilience | 24 |
| 9. | entrepreneurship education | 44 | 20. | development | 22 |

| Rank | Keyword Term | Count | Rank | Keyword Term | Count |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10. | higher education | 41 | 21. | education | 22 |
| 11. | corporate social responsibility | 37 | 22. | social value | 21 |

**Interpretive Interpretation: Structural Keyword Mapping**

The keyword distribution reflects a field transitioning from early definitions to modern applications. While core terms ("social entrepreneurship", "social enterprise") naturally lead the frequencies, the emergence of "digital transformation" (38) and "resilience" (24) indicates a strong contemporary focus. Researchers are increasingly moving beyond basic operational studies to examine how social ventures use technology to scale up, survive economic disruptions, and adapt to changing environments.

*5.7 Evolutionary Trends in Keywords (2014–2025)*

Table 7 tracks the chronological trajectories of author keywords, highlighting shifting thematic interests over time.

Table 7. Chronological Trajectories of Author Key Terms

| Rank | Thematic Term | Cumulative Freq. | Year (Q1) | Median Year | Year (Q3) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | social entrepreneurship | 912 | 2017 | 2020 | 2023 |
| 2. | entrepreneurship | 264 | 2017 | 2021 | 2023 |
| 3. | social enterprise | 124 | 2018 | 2020 | 2022 |
| 4. | sustainable development | 72 | 2020 | 2022 | 2024 |
| 5. | entrepreneurship education | 44 | 2018 | 2021 | 2023 |
| 6. | higher education | 41 | 2021 | 2023 | 2025 |
| 7. | digital transformation | 38 | 2022 | 2024 | 2025 |
| 8. | social media | 35 | 2019 | 2021 | 2023 |
| 9. | gender | 32 | 2020 | 2022 | 2024 |
| 10. | social entrepreneur | 29 | 2019 | 2022 | 2023 |
| 11. | resilience | 24 | 2021 | 2023 | 2025 |

| Rank | Thematic Term | Cumulative Freq. | Year (Q1) | Median Year | Year (Q3) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12. | complex thinking | 11 | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 |
| 13. | artificial intelligence | 9 | 2024 | 2025 | 2025 |

### Interpretive Interpretation: Conceptual Transitions Over Time

An evaluation of keyword median positions reveals a distinct evolution across three major historical horizons:

1. **The Foundation Phase (2014–2018):** Research focused primarily on definitions and basic structural setups ("social enterprise", "social value"). Studies focused on explaining how hybrid models could balance profit with purpose.
2. **The Contextual Expansion Phase (2019–2022):** The focus expanded to include social infrastructure and broader global goals ("social networks", "gender", "sustainable development"). This work explored how external networks and public policy support venture survival.
3. **The Technological & Mental Phase (2023–2025):** Current research priorities have shifted toward technical and cognitive evolution ("digital transformation", "resilience", "complex thinking", "artificial intelligence"). Modern studies focus on how social ventures leverage digital networks to achieve scale, and how universities can systematically train students in the adaptive mindsets needed for modern social challenges.

## 6. Discussion and Synthesis

Table 8 consolidates the key insights from this comprehensive 12-year bibliometric review.

Table 8. Summary Matrix of Updated Core Metrics (2014–2025)

| Analytical Dimension | Core Bibliometric Insight |
|---|---|
| **Annual Production Peak** | 2024 (262 published works); consistent baseline maintained into 2025. |
| **Top Publishing Outlets** | *Sustainability* (68); *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship* (59). |
| **Core Seminal Paper** | Saebi, Foss, and Linder (2019) with 598 citations. |
| **Leading Authors** | Chandra, Y. (13); Vázquez-Parra, J. C. (12). |
| **Primary Structural Keywords** | Social entrepreneurship; Digital transformation; Social innovation. |

## 7. Conclusions

This analysis shows that social entrepreneurship research has successfully transitioned from an emerging, loosely defined topic into a structured, academically rigorous, and digitally integrated discipline. The field's growth has been shaped by clear institutional factors, including global sustainability mandates and targeted funding in specific regional hubs. As SER continues to evolve through 2025 and beyond, its primary challenge will be to effectively connect digital-scale models with real-world applications, ensuring that modern technological tools translate into sustainable social impact.

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