



Social Enterprise and Economic Growth: A Systematic Literature Search and Bibliometric Analysis

Mohammed M. Sulaiman Ebrahim

Department of Business Administration
Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh

Amgad S. D. Khaled

Faculty of Administrative Sciences and humanities
Al Janad University for Science and Technology - Taiz
amgad.khaled@just.edu.ye

Ali Thabet Yahya

Faculty of Administrative Sciences and humanities
Al Janad University for Science and Technology - Taiz

Asif Akhtar

Department of Business Administration
Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh

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Abstract

Social enterprises (SEs) have gained recognition as innovative hybrid organizations that address complex societal challenges while fostering economic growth through job creation, social inclusion, and local development. Despite their growing influence, the empirical relationship between SEs and macroeconomic progress remains underexplored in a systematic manner. This study bridges this gap by conducting a comprehensive systematic literature review (SLR) and bibliometric analysis of 906 peer-reviewed articles published between 1999 and 2023, sourced from the Scopus database. Utilizing VOSviewer software, we employ co-occurrence and citation network analyses to map the intellectual structure of this interdisciplinary field, identifying key contributors, influential publications, thematic clusters, and emerging trends.

Our findings reveal a 23.17% surge in publications in 2021, reflecting heightened academic and policy interest in SEs' role in sustainable economic development. Geographically, China, the United Kingdom, and the United States dominate research output, underscoring the global relevance of SEs in addressing socioeconomic and environmental disparities. The analysis highlights recurring themes, including mission governance, scaling challenges, and impact measurement, while pinpointing underexplored areas such as SE ecosystems in developing economies. By synthesizing these insights, this study not only clarifies the SE-economic growth nexus but also provides a foundational framework for future research, policy design, and cross-regional comparative studies.

Keywords: Social Enterprise, Economic Growth, Systematic Literature Review, Bibliometric Analysis, and VOS Viewer.

Introduction

Social enterprises (SEs) have emerged as dynamic hybrid organizations that integrate social and environmental missions with market-driven strategies, positioning themselves as catalysts for inclusive economic growth. By addressing societal challenges—such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality—through innovative business models, SEs exemplify the potential to reconcile profit motives with social value creation (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010; Mair & Martí, 2006). Their dual objectives enable them to fill institutional voids, particularly in developing economies, while contributing to job creation, skills development, and financial inclusion (Estrin et al., 2013; Doherty et al., 2014). Despite their growing prominence, the mechanisms through which SEs foster sustained economic growth remain underexplored, with extant literature often fragmented across disciplines, regions, and methodologies (Bacq & Janssen, 2011; Nicholls, 2006).

The relationship between social enterprises and economic growth has gained scholarly traction over the past two decades, yet critical gaps persist. First, while case studies and qualitative analyses dominate the field (e.g., Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Littlewood & Holt, 2018), large-scale empirical evidence on SEs' macroeconomic impact remains scarce. Second, the tension between financial sustainability and social mission—often leading to "mission drift"—warrants deeper investigation to understand how SEs balance these priorities long-term (Hota et al., 2020). Third, despite the proliferation of SE research, no systematic synthesis exists to map the evolution of this interdisciplinary field or identify emerging trends.

This study addresses these gaps by conducting a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of 906 peer-reviewed articles (1999–2023) sourced from Scopus, a database renowned for its high-quality, interdisciplinary coverage. By leveraging co-occurrence and co-citation analyses (Zyoud & Zyoud, 2021), we map the intellectual structure of SE-economic growth research, identifying key contributors, thematic clusters, and temporal shifts. Visualisation tools (e.g., VOSviewer) elucidate networks among authors, keywords, and journals, revealing underexplored linkages (Lee & Chen, 2012). Methodologically, this study advances prior reviews by combining quantitative bibliometrics with systematic qualitative insights, offering a dual lens to assess the field's maturation.

The implications are threefold: (1) clarifying SEs' role in economic growth through empirical synthesis, (2) identifying research frontiers (e.g., scaling SEs in Global South contexts), and (3) informing policymakers on SEs' capacity to address Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By bridging theoretical fragmentation and methodological disparities, this study lays a foundation for future longitudinal and comparative research on SEs' socioeconomic impact.

Research Questions

The present investigation's focus and direction will be guided by the following main research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What is the publication scenario for social enterprise and economic growth between 1999 and 2023?

RQ2: What are the most significant and influential components of the literature on social enterprise and economic growth, such as sources, writers, nations, and networks?

RQ3: What are the current co-occurrence analyses utilized in the research on social enterprise and economic growth?

Literature Review

Bibliometric analyses have become an increasingly vital tool for mapping the evolving landscape of social enterprise (SE) and economic growth research. Existing studies reveal a dynamic and multidisciplinary field, characterized by diverse methodological approaches, geographic concentrations, and thematic developments. This section synthesizes key contributions to identify prevailing trends, methodological variations, and critical gaps in the literature.

Methodological and Thematic Evolution

Prior bibliometric studies demonstrate significant heterogeneity in their analytical frameworks. Granados et al. (2011) conducted a foundational analysis of SE and social entrepreneurship (SEship) literature from 1991 to 2010, drawing on Scopus, Web of Science, and JSTOR. Their findings revealed exponential growth in publications during the final decade of their study period, alongside increasing international collaboration. While the U.S. and U.K. dominated research output, contributions from other regions signaled the globalization of SE scholarship. Similarly, Hota (2021)

employed Web of Science data to trace three decades of SESHIP research, emphasizing the growing centrality of ethical considerations and identifying seminal works that have shaped the field. Cardella et al. (2021) expanded this trajectory by analyzing 1,425 Scopus and Web of Science publications, proposing a conceptual model of SESHIP's intellectual structure. Their work highlighted influential journals, citation networks, and keyword clusters, underscoring the field's theoretical maturation. Complementary studies by Phan Tan (2021) and Iskandar et al. (2021) further delineated research clusters and journal-specific trends, reinforcing the field's interdisciplinary nature.

Geographic and Thematic Trends

Geospatial analyses reveal uneven research distribution. Yesmin et al. (2021) identified Anglo-American dominance through keyword co-occurrence analysis of 1,763 Scopus articles, while also noting emerging contributions from Asia and Africa. This aligns with findings by Rey-Martí et al. (2016) and Ferreira et al. (2017), who observed that SE research in developing economies often focuses on poverty alleviation and informal sector dynamics, whereas developed economies emphasize institutional governance and scaling challenges.

Thematic shifts are equally salient. Early studies (e.g., Persaud et al., 2018) prioritized SE definitions and legal frameworks, while recent work (e.g., Sabri et al., 2022) explores impact measurement, digital transformation, and ecosystem governance. Notably, Campos et al. (2020) and Naatu & Alon (2019) identified a persistent gap in longitudinal studies linking SE activities to macroeconomic indicators—a critical omission given SEs' purported role in sustainable development.

Gaps and Future Directions

Despite these advancements, limitations persist. First, database selection biases are evident: 65% of studies rely solely on Web of Science or Scopus, potentially overlooking regional journals (Celebi et al., 2020). Second, most analyses end by 2021, omitting post-pandemic SE adaptations. Third, few studies integrate bibliometrics with systematic content analysis, leaving qualitative insights underdeveloped (Hota et al., 2019).

This review underscores the need for:

Temporal Extensions: Updating analyses to include post-2020 literature, particularly on crisis resilience.

Methodological Pluralism: Combining bibliometrics with SLRs or meta-analyses to deepen theoretical insights.

Geographic Inclusivity: Intentional incorporation of Global South research to decolonise SE narratives.

Table 1 synthesizes key bibliometric studies examining social enterprise (SE) research, revealing several critical patterns:

- 1- Methodological Diversity: Studies employ varied approaches, from traditional SLRs (Bandyopadhyay & Ray, 2020) to advanced tools like VOSviewer (Chaudhuri et al., 2020) and RStudio (Shahab et al., 2024), reflecting the field's interdisciplinary nature.
- 2- Temporal Expansion: Analysis periods range from 1968–2022 (Hisyama & Lin, 2023), showing growing scholarly interest over decades, with recent studies (e.g., Shahab et al., 2024) incorporating longer timeframes for trend analysis.
- 3- Database Discrepancies: While Scopus dominates (7/10 studies), some combine multiple sources (e.g., Ali et al., 2022), suggesting potential selection biases in single-database studies.
- 4- Thematic Shifts: Earlier works (Granados et al., 2011) focused on foundational theory, while newer research examines applied topics like social media (Ali et al., 2022) and TBL alignment (Hisyama & Lin, 2023), indicating an evolution toward practical and sustainability-oriented inquiries.
- 5- Scale Variability: Retrieved articles range from 47 (Bandyopadhyay & Ray, 2020) to 2,359 (Hisyama & Lin, 2023), highlighting disparities in research scope and inclusion criteria. Key Implication: The table underscores the need for methodological transparency, broader database integration, and standardized timeframes to enhance comparability across SE research syntheses.

Table 1.

shows previous SLR studies in the social enterprise and economic growth study sectors

| Author | Research Scope | Data Source | Time Frame | Retrieved Articles | Methodology |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Romani-dias et al., (2018) | Mapping international scientific production of SE research domain. | web sites and Scopus database | 1991–2013 | 204 | Lotka's bibliometric law |
| (Bozhikin et al., 2019) | The interplay of government and key nonstate actors in SEs. | Scopus database | 2001–2018 | 478 | SLR |
| (Bandyopadhyay & Ray, 2020) | Marketing practices across the SE research domain. | Scopus database | 1995–2018 | 47 | SLR |
| (Chaudhuri et al., 2020) | Social business enterprises as a research domain. | Scopus database | 2006–2020 | 128 | Bibliometric analysis via VOSviewer |
| (Islam, 2021) | social-impact scaling strategy employed by SEs | (Scopus & Web of Science) | Not specified | 111 | SLR |
| (Ali, et al., 2022) | Role of Social Media Platforms in the Performance of SEs | Scopus, Google Scholar & Web of Science | 2002–2021 | 130 | Bibliometric analysis via VOSviewer and SLR |
| (Hisyama & Shi-Woei Lin, 2023) | Alignment of SE studies and TBL framework | Scopus database | 1968–2021 | 2359 | Bibliometric analysis via VOSviewer & content analysis |
| (Shahab et al., 2024) | The role of the development of finance in the growth of the economy | Scopus database | 1986 - 2022 | 662 | Bibliophagy - RStudio, Microsoft Excel and VOSviewer |

| Author | Research Scope | Data Source | Time Frame | Retrieved Articles | Methodology |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| (Granados et al., 2011) | Social enterprise and social entrepreneurship study and theory. | web sites and Scopus database | 1991-2010, | 286 | Bibliometric scient metric, and informetric. |
| (Ahmad & Bajwa., 2021) | The Role of Social Entrepreneurship in Socio-economic Development | Web of Science | 2005 -2020 | 83 | Meta-analysis (bibliometric and content) analyses. |

Research methodology

This research study employed the bibliometric technique to evaluate and analyze the literature. "The use of statistical methods to analyze articles and reviews" is what bibliometrics is about. This approach produces correct research findings by combining the use of quantitative and qualitative methodologies (Hassan et al.). To determine research topics and possible areas for additional study, it uses text analysis and the methodical extraction of pertinent research.

Method of Data Extraction

- The following steps determine the number of research studies chosen for analysis (Figure 1).
- Database selection: Scopus is the largest and most comprehensive multidisciplinary academic source; articles in Scopus intersect with articles in Web of Science (Hassan et al.). 2021).
- Keyword selection:
- Initial Keyword Generation
 - A preliminary list of keywords was derived from core terms found in seminal studies on social enterprise and economic growth, as well as related conceptual frameworks (e.g., Salido-Andres et al., 2022; Santos, F. M. (2012); Ahmad S & Bajwa A. I. (2021).
 - Keywords were extracted from key journals (e.g., Journal of Socio-Economics, Journal of Cleaner Production, Sustainability (Switzerland)) to align with established academic discourse.
- Expert Consultation and Refinement

- a. A brainstorming session was conducted with two academic experts specializing in social entrepreneurship and economic development. Their input ensured terminological precision and conceptual relevance.
 - b. Through iterative discussions, synonyms, related terms, and Boolean combinations (e.g., "social enterprise" AND "economic development") were evaluated to enhance search sensitivity and specificity.
- Final Keyword Compilation
- a. After rigorous deliberation, 22 keywords were selected, balancing breadth (to capture diverse literature) and focus (to maintain thematic relevance). The keywords were (LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD, "Economic And Social Effects") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD, "Sustainable Development") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD, "Economic Growth") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD, "Economic Development") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD, "Sustainability") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD, "Small And Medium-sized Enterprise") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD, "Corporate Social Responsibility") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD, "Social Enterprise") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD, "Economic Growths") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD, "Developing Countries") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD, " Entrepreneurship") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD, "Social Capital") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD, "Investment") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD, "Social Development") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD, "Growth") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD, "Chaina") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD, "Poverty Alleviation") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD, "Sustainable Growth") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD, "Innovation") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD, "Gross Domestic Product") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD, "Social Responsibility") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD, "Social Enterprises")
- Search field: On 2nd October 2024, the chosen keywords were entered into Scopus' search box. Article title, Abstract, and Keywords were in the search field. 3,551 search results were shown. The study offers 3031 outcomes from 1999 to 2023.

- Document type and publishing stage filter: 1,332 results were found after adding the filter for document type and restricting the search results to article, conference paper, review, and publication stage filter, which contained only final published publications.
- Filter by language: Out of 1,332 findings, about 94.4% were published in English. About 1,258 studies were conducted in English, 22 in Chinese, 20 in Russian, 16 in Spanish, 4 in Croatian, 3 in Ukrainian, 2 in French, 2 in Italian, 2 in Polish, 2 in Portuguese, and 2 in Slovak. There is one in Slovenian, one in Persian, one in Japanese, one in Czech, and one in Afrikaans. Documents published in English were selected for additional examination. As a result, Scopus yielded 1258 results in total.

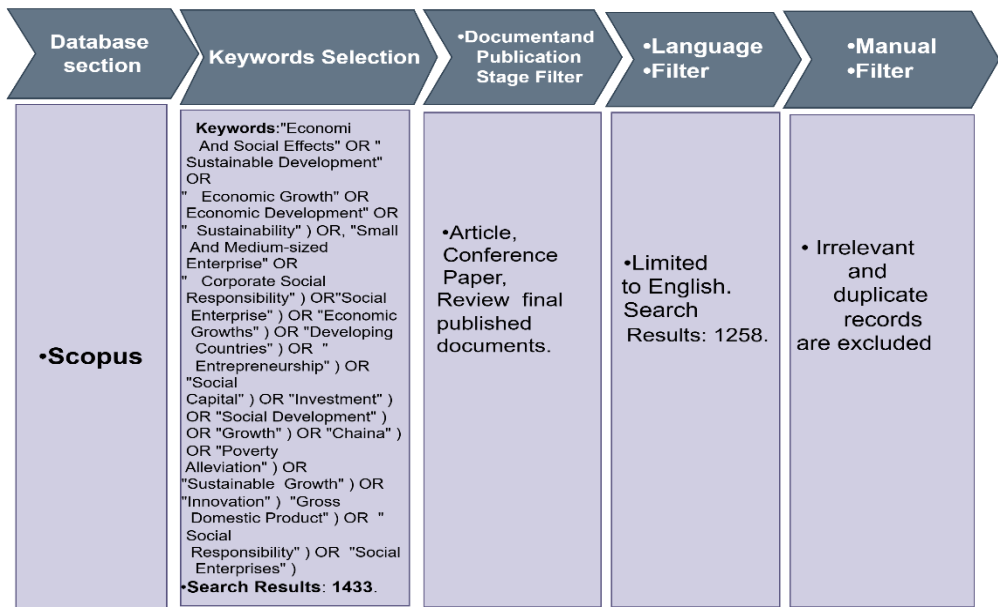


Figure1. The systematic search for literature selection

- Manual filter: The next phase involved manual filtration, which screened the title and abstract of each paper. Studies in energy, engineering, computer science, decision science, agricultural and biological sciences, medicine, earth and planetary sciences, arts and humanities, and psychology were eliminated. Papers related to chemical engineering and mathematics from the region were deemed irrelevant and rejected. Duplicate records were removed. Ultimately, 906 research studies were selected for the bibliometric analysis.

Bibliometric tools used

Bibliometric analysis, which includes descriptive and network analyses, is a well-known statistical approach for extracting a list of relevant scientific articles from retrieved metadata (Gallego-Valero et al.). 2021; Kraus et al. 2022; Romani-Dias et al.2018); (Yu et al. 2020). As a standalone technique, bibliometric analysis is prone to inaccuracy, as the results may be influenced by isolated ideas (Gao et al.). 2020)(Koseoglu, 2016). Consequently, this study used a systematic literature review and content analysis to further investigate the findings and ensure their credibility (Kraus et al.). 2022). VOSviewer was used to map scientific data. Microsoft Excel was used to organize the data and change the graphs received from the Scopus database.

Discussion and Results

This section highlights the pertinent conclusions and discoveries from examining the 906 papers acquired from the Scopus database. 5.1 Descriptive Analysis This section answers RQ1 and partially covers RQ2. Table 2 describes the data. Around 906 papers were cited 41,996 times, with an average citation of 22. 056 per document 2,433 different authors contributed to the data.

Table 2.

Description of the data

| Description | Results |
|--------------------------------|-------------|
| Timespan | 1999 – 2023 |
| Sources | 477 |
| Documents | 906 |
| Average citations per document | 22.056 |
| References | 41.996 |
| Author keywords | 2793 |
| Authors | 2433 |
| Average Author per document | 2.69 |
| Citation | 19983 |
| Collaboration Index | 1.69 |
| Article | 691 |
| Conference paper | 172 |
| Review | 43 |

Trend (RQ1)

The findings demonstrated that, generally, the publishing trends had a progressive increase throughout the year, signifying a notable expansion in the corpus of literature. Research outputs were considered stable until 2016, but starting in 2017, social enterprise and economic growth captured the interest of researchers, leading to a major improvement in their work. In 2017, the yearly growth rate of publications gained pace and stayed steady. In 2021, the scientific production growth was calculated at 23.17% indicating a steady growth rate. The publishing trend resulting from the study's findings is depicted in Figure 2.

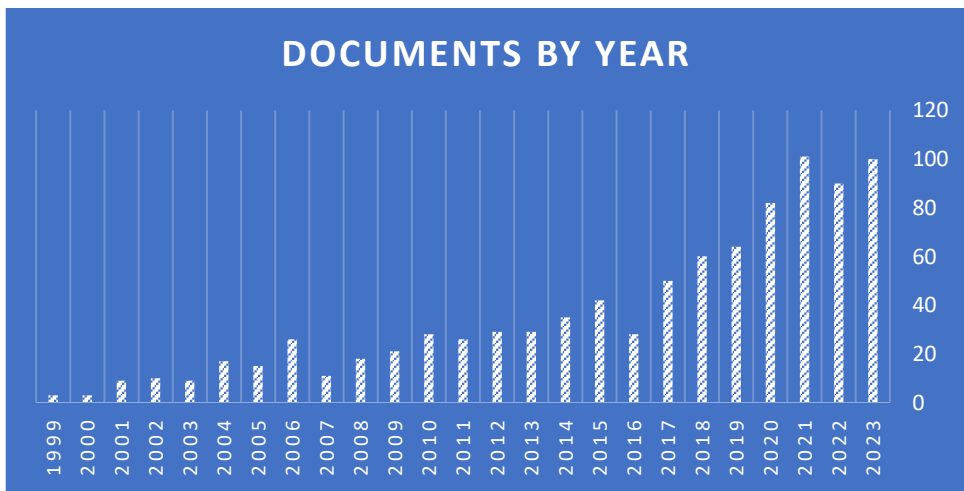


Figure2. Annual publishing of Articles

Sources Analysis (RQ2)

This section investigates the significance and effect of sources, namely the journals in which research papers were published. Figure 3 illustrates the ten most prominent sources of publications in social enterprise and economic growth. Sustainability Switzerland leads the way with 72 publications, followed by the Journal of Cleaner Production (35) and E3S Web of Conferences (29). Additional relevant sources include the IOP Conference Series on Earth and Environmental Science; Resources Policy; Nature, Environment, and Pollution Technology; Technological Forecasting and Social Change; the International Journal of Global Environmental Issues; the International Journal of Small Business and Entrepreneurship; and, finally, the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health.

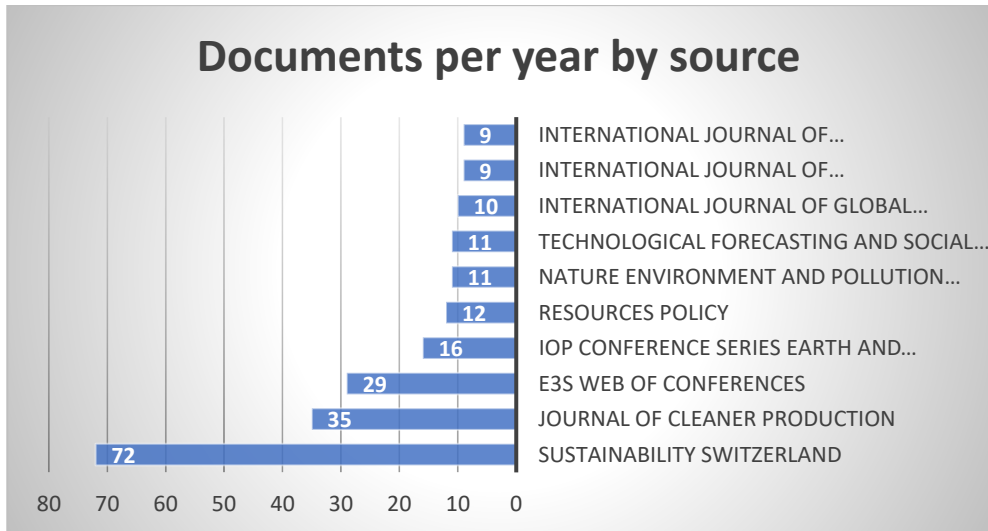


Figure3. Most relevant sources

Authors' Analysis (RQ2)

This section examines the writers' significance and effect. Figure 4 represents the top 10 Social Enterprise and Economic Growth writers. Surya, B. Jones, and Taylor, M. The most relevant writers, with three publications apiece, followed by Adams, D. Smith, J., and Adams, K. Who all have two? Other notable writers include A. Akbar, A. R. Anderson, R. Attah-Boakye, Y. Choi, M. Del Baldo and P. K. Dey.

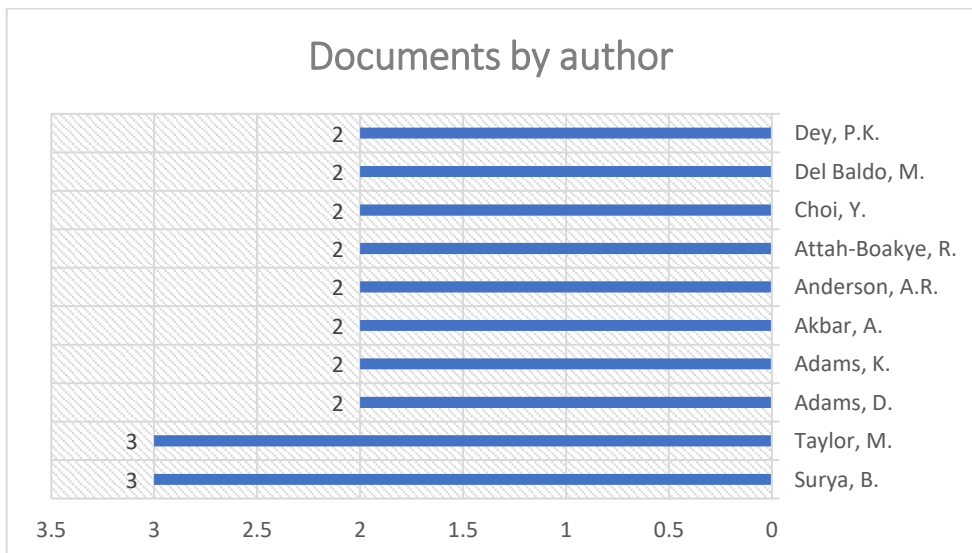


Figure 4. Most relevant authors

Affiliations Analysis (RQ2)

Affiliation analysis assesses the contributions of different institutions to a body of research or publications. The study is based on the number of documents produced by various organizations. The data shows a clear hierarchy among the organizations, with the Chinese Academy of Sciences leading the way by releasing ten publications. This remarkable production distinguishes it as a prominent contributor compared to other universities. Zhejiang Gongshang University and the Russian Academy of Sciences follow closely after, each releasing seven documents. Several other universities, including Peking University, the University of the Witwatersrand, and others, have each submitted six documents, showing a competitive environment in this study area.

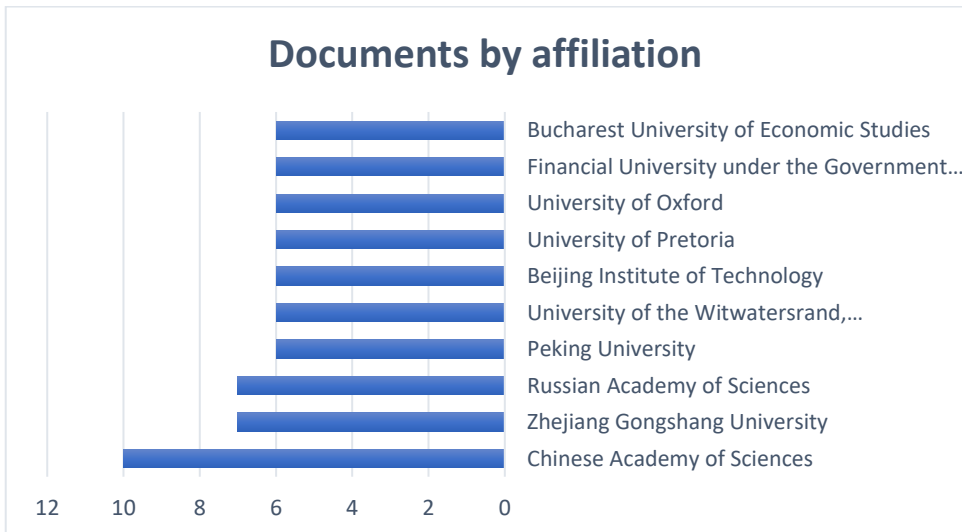


Figure 5. Documents by Affiliations

Countries of Publications (RQ2)

The geographical region was essential for highlighting the leading articles about social enterprise and economic growth, hence facilitating the identification of the nation's most contributing to the notion. Moreover, contextual inspections may augment researchers' comprehension of social enterprise and economic growth at the national level, facilitating improved inferences and comparisons that yield projections of contextual disparities for future endeavors. This study elucidates the prevailing research trends in social enterprise and economic growth across nations like China, the United

Kingdom, the United States, the Russian Federation, India, Australia, South Africa, Italy, Spain, and Canada. Furthermore, China gained the greatest amount of research papers ($n = 235$), followed by the United Kingdom ($n = 101$), the United States ($n = 98$), the Russian Federation ($n = 61$), India ($n = 47$), Australia ($n = 39$), South Africa ($n = 35$), Italy ($n = 32$), Spain ($n = 29$), and Canada ($n = 20$). Figure 3 highlights the nations that contributed to research products in social enterprise and economic development.

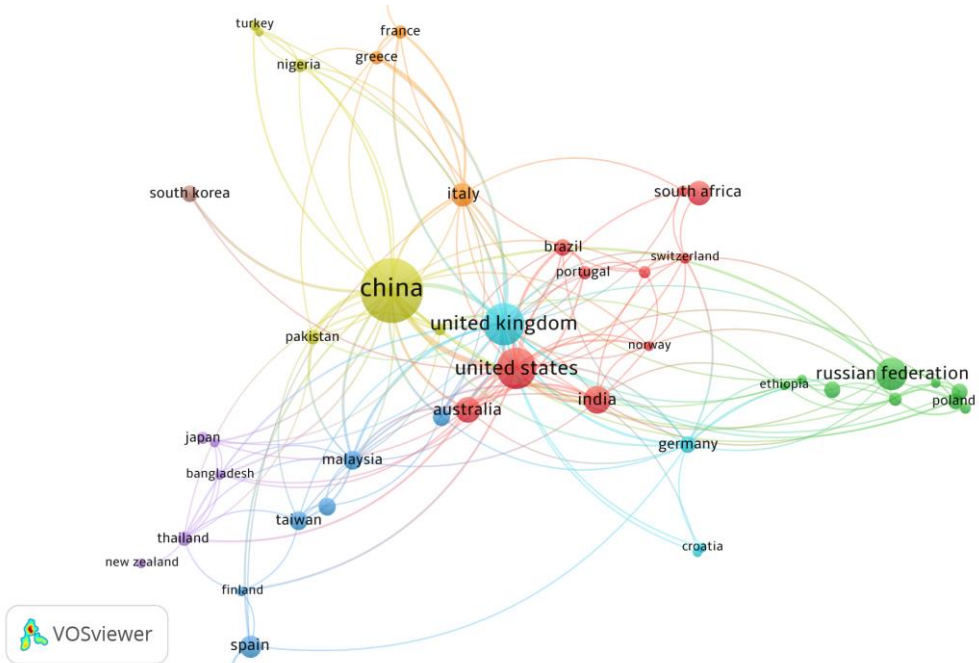


Figure 6. Publication distribution by country

Document Analysis (RQ2)

The most influential publications are included in this section according to their citation counts. The list of the ten most frequently referenced papers worldwide is shown in Table 3. It demonstrates that the Journal of Landscape and Urban Planning has the most citations from a single research article (706) published by (Wu, 2014). This is followed by a research paper (390) written by (Litman & Burwell, 2006). There are several citations (Hoffmann & Schlosser, 2001), (Kirubi et al., 2009), (Lin & Ma, 2022), (Anderson & Miller, 2003), (Ezeah et al., 2013), (Wang, 2013), (Lordkipanidze et al., 2005), (Cohen et al., 2019).

Table 3.

Most globally cited documents

| Author(s) | Title | Journal | Citations |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| Wu, J. (2014) | Urban ecology and sustainability: The state-of-the-science and future directions. | Landscape and Urban Planning | 706 |
| Litman, T., & Burwell, D. (2006) | Issues in sustainable transportation Todd. | Int. J. Global Environmental Issues. | 390 |
| Hoffmann, W. H., & Schlosser, R. (2001) | Success Factors of Strategic Alliances in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises—An Empirical Survey. | Long Range Planning. | 317 |
| Kirubi, C., Jacobson, A., Kammen, D. M., & Mills, A. (2009) | Community-Based Electric Micro-Grids Can Contribute to Rural Development: Evidence from Kenya. | World Development. | 295 |
| Lin, Boqiang, and Ruiyang Ma. (2022) | How does digital finance influence green technology innovation in China? Evidence from the financing constraints perspective. | Journal of Environmental Management. | 267 |
| Anderson, A. R., & Miller, C. J. (2003) | Class matters”: human and social capital in the entrepreneurial process. | Journal of Socio-Economics. | 246 |
| Ezeah, C., Fazakerley, J. A., & Roberts, C. L. (2013) | Emerging trends in informal sector recycling in developing and transition countries. | Waste Management. | 239 |
| Wang, A. L. (2013) | THE SEARCH FOR SUSTAINABLE LEGITIMACY: ENVIRONMENTAL LAW AND BUREAUCRACY IN CHINA. | Harvard Environmental Law Review. | 225 |
| Lordkipanidze, M., Brezet, H., & Backman, M. (2005) | The entrepreneurship factor in sustainable tourism development. | Journal of Cleaner Production. | 225 |
| Cohen, P. J., Allison, E. H., et al. (2019) | Securing a Just Space for Small-Scale Fisheries in the Blue Economy. | Frontiers in Marine Science. | 224 |

Network Analysis

This part demonstrates the application of network analysis techniques by showing relationships between various components in the realm of social enterprise and economic growth and provides more information for answering RQ2. Co-citation and co-authorship have both been performed for this purpose.

Co-citation analysis (RQ2).

Among the approaches that facilitate the examination of intellectual structure in particular research is looking at the unit of analysis from the perspective of cited publications. Respectively, VOS viewer software provides a co-citation analysis option to study the cited publications in the field of interest. According to (Misraa & Khurana, 2017), co-citation occurs when an author refers to two papers concurrently. Co-citation emerged as an effective instrument for measuring similarities between two documents from a contextual point of view (Surwase et al., 2011). The co-citation analysis establishes the visualization of the network between different journals based on research papers cited in the same source. The unit of analysis was the cited sources. 189 journals were classified into 6 clusters a minimum of 20 citations. Cluster 1 has (64 items), Cluster 2 has (44 items), Cluster 3 (36 items), Cluster 4 has (23 items), Cluster 5 has (18 items), Cluster 6 has (4 items). Figure 6 visualizes the co-citation analysis between journals. sustainability journal has the strongest link strength of 10561 with 558 citations following J. Clean Prod with 397 citations with 9170 link strength following Journal of Business Venturing with a link strength 8022 of 244 citations, following Journal of cleaner production with a link strength of 7159 with 306 citations.

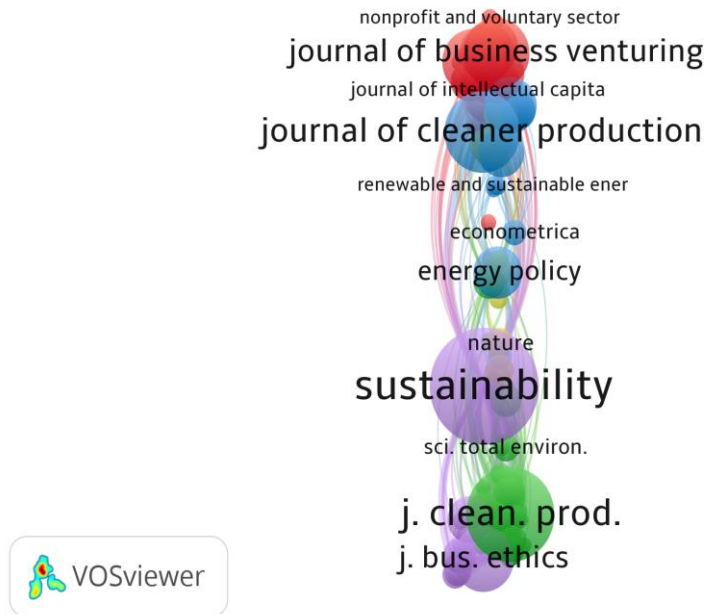


Figure 7. Co-citation-analysis of Journals

Co-Authorship Network Analysis (RQ2)

Bibliometric co-authorship analysis provides valuable insights into collaborative patterns within academic research, offering empirical evidence of knowledge-sharing networks that drive scientific progress. This study employs VOSviewer's co-authorship analysis function to examine collaboration patterns among authors and nations in social enterprise research from 1999 to 2023. The analysis was conducted with stringent inclusion criteria, requiring authors to have a minimum of two publications and twenty citations to ensure meaningful collaboration patterns were identified. The analysis revealed significant collaborative networks, with 33 authors meeting the established threshold. These researchers formed 20 distinct clusters, visualized through network mapping that demonstrates both the density and diversity of collaborative relationships. The most substantial collaboration cluster emerged around Surya and Batara, whose three co-authored publications accumulated 99 citations, indicating both productivity and academic impact. Another notable collaboration involved Adams, Dawda, Adams, Kweku, Ullah, and Subhan, whose joint work on two documents received 49 citations. These findings align with existing

literature demonstrating that strategic research collaborations typically yield higher citation impact and more innovative outcomes (Wuchty et al., 2007). The visualization of these networks (Figure 5) not only maps current collaboration patterns but also identifies potential gaps in international and interdisciplinary cooperation within the field. The concentration of productive collaborations among relatively small groups of authors suggests opportunities for broader network expansion, particularly in connecting established researchers with emerging scholars. This analysis contributes to understanding the social enterprise research ecosystem by:

- 1- Quantifying existing collaboration networks
- 2- Identifying key contributors and their impact
- 3- Revealing patterns that may influence research dissemination and innovation
- 4- Providing a foundation for future research partnership development

The results underscore the importance of international and interdisciplinary collaboration in advancing social enterprise research, while also highlighting areas where collaborative networks could be strengthened to enhance knowledge production and dissemination.

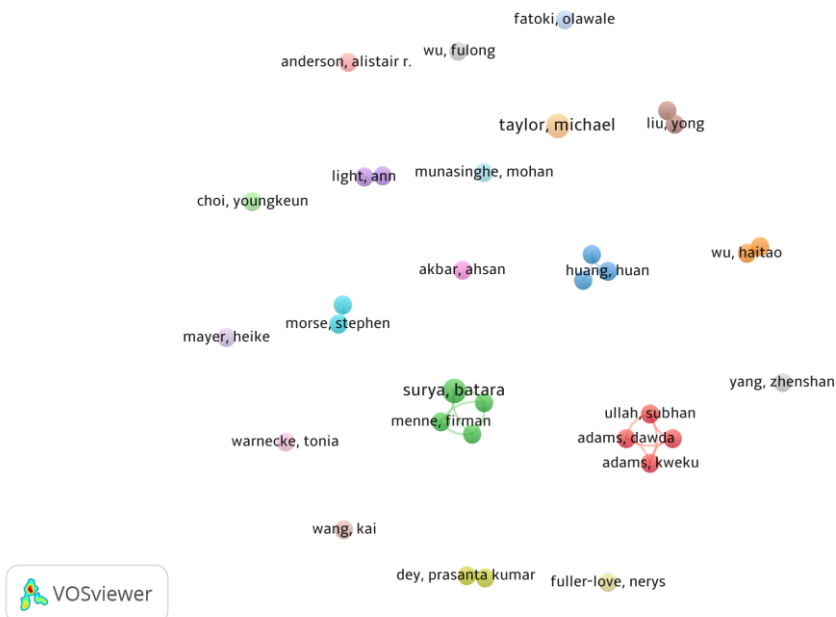


Figure 8. Co-authorship by authors

Co-occurrence analysis (RQ3).

This section highlights the use of co-occurrence analysis methodologies by illustrating correlations between numerous components in social enterprise and economic growth and providing more information for answering RQ3. Co-occurrence by keywords, co-occurrence of author keywords, and co-occurrence of index keywords were all used for this purpose.

Co-occurrence by keywords

Table 4.

Number of occurrences and total link strength of keywords

| Keywords | No. of occurrences | Total link strength |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| economic and social effects | 267 | 1008 |
| sustainable development | 242 | 847 |
| economic growth | 230 | 720 |
| China | 134 | 597 |
| economics | 124 | 552 |
| economic development | 138 | 545 |
| sustainability | 116 | 372 |
| innovation | 74 | 316 |
| investments | 54 | 281 |
| small and medium-sized enterprise | 80 | 269 |

Table 4 gives information on numerous keywords associated with social enterprise and economic growth in this study, including the number of occurrences and overall link strength. The term "economic and social effects" has the maximum occurrences (267) and a total link strength of 1008. This shows that conversations about the effects of economic activity on society are common and well-connected in the dataset. Following closely behind is "sustainable development," which appears 242 times and has an 847-link strength. This demonstrates a strong interest in balancing economic expansion with environmental concerns, emphasizing its relevance in modern debate. The keyword "economic growth" is also very relevant, appearing 230 times with total link strength of 720, indicating its importance in policy talks and research. The keyword "China" appears often with 134 occurrences and a link strength of 597. This emphasizes the

Co-occurrence of Author Keywords

Table 5.

Number of occurrences and total link strength of keywords by authors

| Author Keywords | No. of occurrences | Total link strength |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| sustainable development | 81 | 100 |
| entrepreneurship | 57 | 94 |
| sustainability | 66 | 84 |
| economic growth | 72 | 77 |
| social enterprise | 52 | 55 |
| innovation | 33 | 51 |
| corporate social responsibility | 46 | 48 |
| economic development | 34 | 37 |
| growth | 27 | 35 |
| social capital | 30 | 34 |

Table 5 provides useful insights into the major issues in the research on social enterprise and economic growth. Here's an analysis of ten relevant keywords, their occurrences, and overall link strength: Sustainable Development (81 occurrences, 100 link strength): This is the most commonly used term, showing that sustainable development is a major topic in the literature. The high link strength indicates significant links to diverse ideas in the area, highlighting its significance in talks regarding social businesses and their role in supporting long-term economic success. Entrepreneurship (57 occurrences, 94 link strength): Entrepreneurship is a popular subject, emphasizing the importance of entrepreneurial activity in social enterprise. The high link strength suggests that this phrase is closely related to other crucial topics, stressing the creativity and risk-taking inherent in social initiatives. Sustainability (66 occurrences, 84 link strength): Sustainability is closely tied to sustainable development and appears frequently in the literature, emphasizing the importance of combining social goals with economic viability. The link's strength indicates its importance to numerous concerns concerning the durability and effect of social enterprise. Economic Growth (72 occurrences, 77 link strength): This term is directly related to the study's focus. Its considerable presence implies that many scholars are looking at how social enterprise contributes to overall economic growth, while the slightly lower connection strength

suggests it is less interconnected with other issues than sustainability. Social Enterprise (52 occurrences, 55 link strength): This word is slightly less common than others, which might imply that it is frequently inferred rather than expressly stated. Innovation (33 occurrences, 51 link strength): Innovation is an important feature of social enterprise since they frequently seek novel solutions to social problems. The statistics reveal a reasonable degree of occurrences and connection strength, showing its relevance but also suggesting that it may be underemphasized in comparison to other topics. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (46 occurrences, 48 link strength): CSR appears frequently, indicating that debates about social enterprises frequently overlap with business actions aiming at social benefit. The link strength reveals modest links to other topics, implying a linkage with established business procedures. Economic Development (34 occurrences, 37 link strength): This term emphasizes a larger framework of economic progress, focused on development. Its low frequency and connection strength imply that it is not regularly discussed as a distinct idea in the literature. Growth (27 occurrences, 35 link strength): This term is more generic and appears less frequently, indicating that the literature may be more focused on certain types of growth (e. g., economic or sustainable) rather than growth in general. Social Capital (30 occurrences, 34 connection strength): Social capital is associated with community participation and networks that promote social entrepreneurs. The low frequencies and connection strength indicate that it is an important but not dominating subject in the evaluated literature. Overall, the data indicates that themes like sustainable development, entrepreneurship, and sustainability dominate the discourse surrounding social enterprise and economic growth. The interconnections among these keywords suggest a complex, multi-faceted relationship where social enterprises are viewed as vital contributors to sustainable economic development through innovative approaches and community engagement. The varying link strengths also point to areas where further exploration could deepen understanding, particularly regarding the integration of social enterprises with traditional economic growth metrics. Figure 10 depicts the network visualization of co-occurrence analysis using authors' keywords as the unit of analysis. The minimum number of occurrences was set at 5. was discovered that there were 70 keywords divided into three groups. Cluster 1 has 16 items, Cluster

Table 6 presents a comprehensive overview of index keywords related to the study of "Social Enterprise and Economic Growth. Here's an analysis of the data based on the number of occurrences and total link strength: Economic and Social Effects (267 occurrences, 920 link strength): This term has the most occurrences and link strength, suggesting that it is a prominent topic in the literature. It implies that scholars are genuinely interested in studying both the economic and social implications of social enterprise, indicating a complete approach to evaluating their contributions. Sustainable Development (186 occurrences, 706 link strength): This keyword is also often used, emphasizing its relevance in debates about social enterprise. The substantial connection strength suggests that sustainable development is inextricably linked to a variety of other subjects, validating the notion that social enterprises strive for long-term sustainability in addition to social aims. Economic Growth (180 occurrences, 561 link strength): This term is directly aligned with the study's focus, illustrating the connection between social enterprises and broader economic growth. Its strong presence suggests that many scholars are investigating how social enterprises contribute to economic progress. China (124 occurrences, 537 link strength): The concentration on China implies that a significant quantity of study is being conducted to investigate social enterprises in this specific setting. The strong connection strength indicates that talks about social businesses in China are intertwined with a variety of economic and social issues. Economics (123 occurrences, 510 link strength): This term refers to the larger economic theories and ideas that inform conversations about social enterprise. Its frequent occurrences demonstrate that economic frameworks are critical for understanding the function of social enterprise in economic growth. Economic Development (115 occurrences, 466 link strength): This keyword, like "economic growth," refers to the larger framework in which social entrepreneurs operate. The moderate link strength indicates that, while it is an important subject, it may not be as commonly mentioned as some of the more famous keywords. Sustainability (68 occurrences, 267 link strength): While this keyword is important, its lower occurrences and link strength compared to others suggest that discussions around sustainability may be more specific or less emphasized in the context of social enterprises and economic growth. Investments (53 occurrences, 259 link strength): This keyword indicates that financial

considerations are important in the study of social enterprises. The lower occurrences suggest that while investments matter, they may not be the primary focus of the literature. Innovation (57 occurrences, 251 link strength): Innovation is an essential component of how social companies run and compete. Its existence implies that academics are looking at new techniques, but the link strength suggests it may not be as interwoven as other themes. Economic Growths (47 occurrences, 241 link strength): This version of "economic growth" appears less frequently and has a lower link strength, suggesting that it is a less prevalent approach to address the issue, possibly reflecting differences in how growth is seen or quantified. Overall, Table 5 identifies major themes and areas of concentration in the research on social enterprise and economic growth. The use of terms such as "economic and social effects," "sustainable development," and "economic growth" demonstrates a comprehensive approach to analyzing the various effects of social businesses. The emphasis on the Chinese setting indicates a specific area of focus, while the presence of economic frameworks and investment concerns highlights the relevance of financial sustainability in the operation of social enterprises. This research indicates a strong relationship between social goals and economic contributions, making social enterprises important participants in the quest for sustainable development. Using index keywords as the unit of analysis, Figure 11 shows the network visualization of co-occurrence analysis. The minimum number of occurrences was set at 20. Forty-five keywords were found to be placed into three groups: Cluster 1 had 20 items, Cluster 2 had 18 items, and Cluster 3 had 7 items. The colors of the clusters were "red," "green," and "blue."

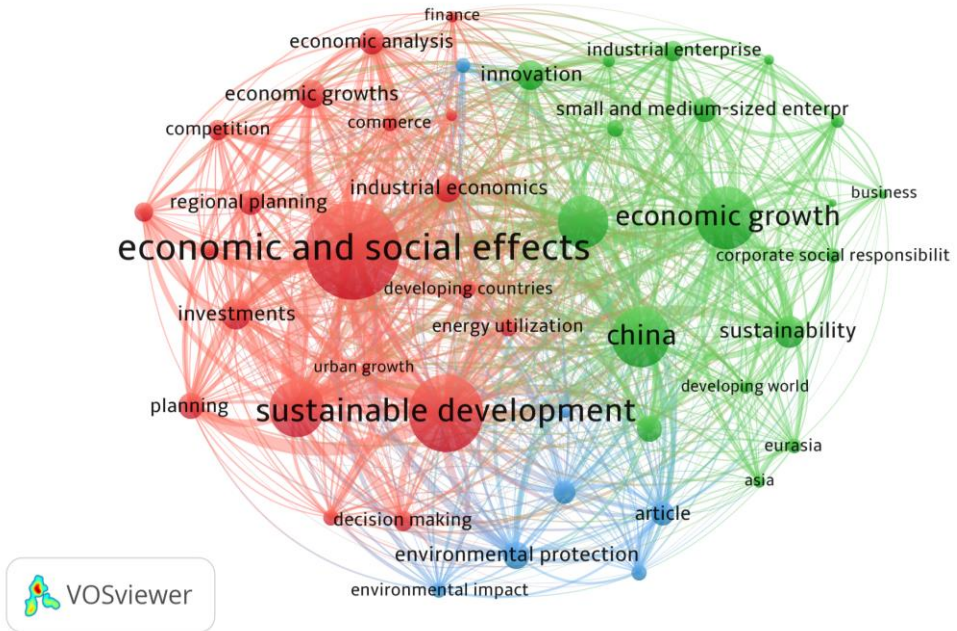


Figure 11.co-occurrence of index' keywords

Future Research Directions

While this study provides comprehensive insights through its analysis of Scopus-indexed literature, several promising avenues for future research emerge. First, methodological expansions could incorporate comparative analyses across multiple databases (e.g., Web of Science, Dimensions) to mitigate potential selection biases and enhance the generalizability of findings. Second, the conceptual framework could be enriched by integrating additional search parameters, particularly through Boolean operator refinements that capture emerging subdomains such as digital social entrepreneurship and impact investing.

Substantively, three critical gaps warrant attention: (1) the underexplored intersection between Islamic social entrepreneurship principles and social capital formation, particularly regarding the institutional role of Islamic financial systems in SE ecosystems; (2) longitudinal, mixed-methods investigations tracking SE scalability and mission drift across economic cycles, which would address current limitations in temporal analysis; and (3) macroeconomic impact studies employing quasi-experimental designs to isolate SEs' causal effects on regional development indicators.

These directions align with broader scholarly calls for more robust empirical frameworks in social entrepreneurship research (Saebi et al., 2019). As SEs continue evolving as agents of inclusive growth, systematic inquiry into their institutionalization pathways and ecosystem enablers will be crucial for both theory-building and policy formulation. Future work should particularly prioritize comparative cross-national studies that account for varying regulatory environments and cultural contexts in SE development.

Conclusion

This systematic literature review and bibliometric analysis of social enterprises (SEs) and economic growth research (1999–2023) underscores the expanding scholarly recognition of SEs as dual-purpose entities that simultaneously advance social welfare and economic development. By synthesizing 906 publications, this study delineates key trends, contributions, and emerging themes in the field, offering three principal insights.

First, the analysis reveals a marked increase in research output, with publication volume growing by 23.17% in 2021 alone, reflecting heightened academic and policy engagement with SEs' role in sustainable development. Leading journals such as *Sustainability* (Switzerland), *Journal of Cleaner Production*, and *E3S Web of Conferences* dominate the discourse, emphasizing the centrality of environmental and sustainability frameworks in SE research.

Second, the geographic and institutional distribution of research highlights China, the UK, and the US as dominant contributors, with the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Zhejiang Gongshang University, and the Russian Academy of Sciences emerging as key institutional players. This pattern suggests a global, albeit uneven, diffusion of SE research, with China's prominence signaling its strategic focus on SE-driven economic models.

Third, keyword and co-authorship analyses reveal a robust interdisciplinary focus on "economic and social effects," "sustainable development," and "innovation," with influential collaborative networks clustered around scholars such as Surya and Batara. The *Journal of Landscape and Urban Planning*'s high citation impact further underscores the growing intersection of SE studies with urban planning and environmental economics.

Social enterprises (SEs) are essential for rectifying market flaws and fostering inclusive growth. This study validates their significance while underscoring the necessity for comprehensive examination of SE scalability and governmental support. Future research should concentrate on comparative analyses across various institutional contexts and longitudinal evaluations of the macroeconomic impact of social enterprises to guide successful policy formulation. This work enhances a systematic comprehension of SEs' expanding function in the global economy and offers guidance for further research, underscoring their growing significance in mitigating market failures and aiding marginalized populations.

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