

## UNDERSTANDING EXPERIMENT-BASED SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP LITERATURE

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose-** This study aims to analyze experimental methodology-based publications in social entrepreneurship, offering insights for researchers planning to undertake investigations in this area.

**Methodology-** A thorough content analysis was conducted on 39 articles related to social entrepreneurship research. These articles, which employed experimental design, were identified through comprehensive searches of the ISI and Scopus databases.

**Findings-** The findings reveal a growing interest in experimental design within social entrepreneurship research, focusing on topics such as donation and funding, consumer attitudes and behavior, intention and motivation and education and training.

**Conclusion-** This study contributes to a better understanding of the experimental design research landscape in social entrepreneurship, emphasizing the need for continued investigation and methodological advancements. Future research should address identified gaps and opportunities, such as the exploration of novel experimental techniques and the application of interdisciplinary perspectives to further enrich our understanding of social entrepreneurship.

**Keywords:** Social entrepreneurship, experimental design, content analysis

**JEL Codes:** L26, C90, A13

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The field of social entrepreneurship has expanded significantly in recent years, driven by the global quest for sustainable and innovative solutions to pressing societal issues (Zahra et al. 2014; Gupta et al., 2020). However, understanding the complexities of social entrepreneurship requires adopting rigorous research methodologies. Although experimental design is a powerful tool for establishing causal evidence, its use within social entrepreneurship research has been limited.

This paper analyzes 39 articles that have employed experimental design in social entrepreneurship research, aiming to demonstrate the potential of experimental design in this field and encourage its broader application. A thorough examination of the ISI and Scopus databases has facilitated the identification of these articles, which serve as critical benchmarks for future inquiries in this intriguing field.

The purpose of this study is to illuminate the potential of experimental design to act as a driving force for generating novel insights and furthering the understanding of social entrepreneurship research. By providing a comprehensive analysis of the selected articles, we aspire to emphasize the value of experimental design in social entrepreneurship studies and encourage its broader application within the research community. The findings of this study will contribute significantly to the existing body of knowledge, fostering future research that harnesses the power of experimental design to explore the multifaceted nature of social entrepreneurship.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social entrepreneurship is characterized as the process through which opportunities are discerned, assessed, and harnessed to produce social value by innovatively integrating resources to tackle societal needs and challenges (Mair & Marti, 2006; Zahra et al., 2009). While a universally accepted definition of social entrepreneurship remains elusive, scholars widely concur that social ventures endeavor to achieve a dual mission, harmonizing social and economic objectives (Dacin et al., 2010).

Diverse research methodologies characterize the landscape of social entrepreneurship research. However, a burgeoning demand for rigorous methodologies to bolster the theoretical understanding of social entrepreneurship has emerged. In this context, experimental research designs have surfaced as a promising avenue, given their capacity to establish causal relationships.

Experimental research designs entail the manipulation of variables to examine cause-and-effect relationships, thereby enabling researchers to establish causal connections and assess the efficacy of various interventions. The value of experimental research designs lies in their ability to scrutinize and develop theories by determining causal relationships, rendering them the most reliable method for this purpose (Trochim & Donnelly, 2001). Utilizing these approaches, researchers can produce robust evidence that reveals the causal mechanisms

underpinning social entrepreneurship phenomena. Consequently, these findings can inform more precise and effective strategies, empowering practitioners and policymakers to make well-informed decisions.

In the realm of entrepreneurship research, experimental methods have gained attention, offering considerable potential for contributing to theoretical advancements. The body of research employing experimental methods to investigate entrepreneurial phenomena has consistently grown, paving the way for novel and innovative research directions. Despite continued advocacy for incorporating experiments in entrepreneurship studies, these techniques remain underutilized compared to other research methods (Stevenson et al., 2020). A similar pattern is observable in social entrepreneurship literature. Gupta et al. (2020) highlighted that qualitative research methods, including single and multiple case studies, observations, and interviews, predominantly feature as the preferred approaches among social entrepreneurship scholars.

Considering the maturation of social entrepreneurship as a research field, the abundance of published articles provides a wealth of studies available for review, offering opportunities for retrospective analysis and consideration of the field's future trajectory (Gupta et al., 2020). Although numerous articles employ various research methods, experimental designs have been applied to a lesser extent. Consequently, this study aims to deliver a comprehensive overview of existing experimental studies within the field, emphasizing the potential value of such approaches for social entrepreneurship researchers.

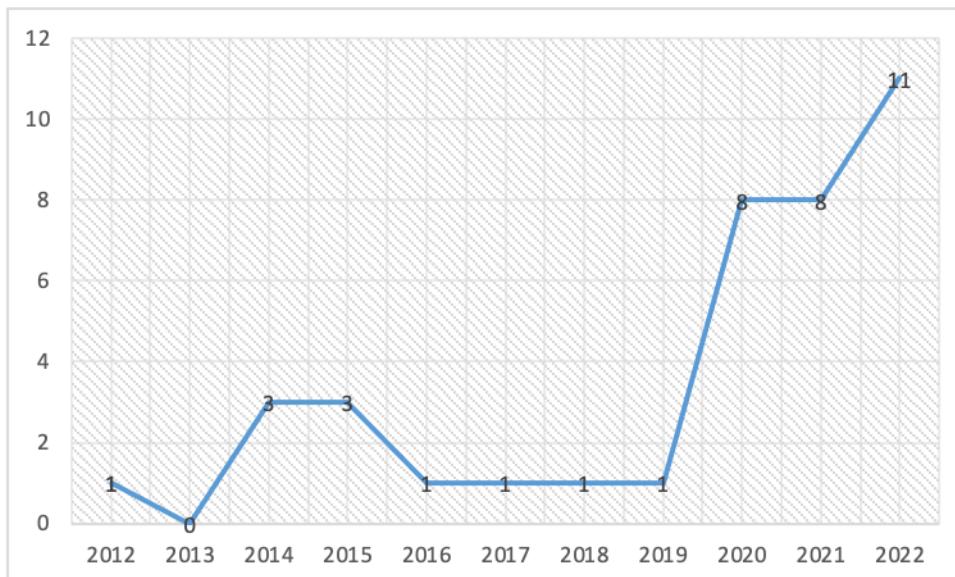
### 3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This study employed a systematic search strategy to identify pertinent articles in the domain of experimental social entrepreneurship research. The ISI and Scopus databases were utilized to ensure a comprehensive and representative sample of articles for analysis. The search terms, including experiment\*, conjoint\*, social ent\*, social venture\*, and social business\*, were carefully selected to encompass the broad spectrum of social entrepreneurship and experimental research designs. Initially, a total of 127 articles were retrieved. These articles were then assessed based on their abstracts to eliminate those that were irrelevant. Articles that did not concentrate on social entrepreneurship or employ experimental design as a research methodology were removed from consideration. Following this filtering process, 39 relevant articles were identified. A comprehensive list of these articles can be found in Appendix 1. After identifying 39 articles that satisfied the inclusion criteria, a content analysis approach was adopted to thoroughly examine the number of articles per year, key focus areas, journals, theoretical frameworks in experimental social entrepreneurship research.

### 4. FINDINGS

The analysis of publications reveals a sustained interest in the application of experimental research designs for investigating social entrepreneurship. The publication timeline, ranging from 2012 to 2023, highlights the ongoing significance of this research area. Figure 1 depicts the yearly trends in social entrepreneurship experiments, showcasing a remarkable upward trajectory. A majority of the articles were published recently (2019-2023), indicating a growing enthusiasm for employing experimental methodology in the field, as well as a heightened appreciation for the importance of social entrepreneurship research.

Figure 2: Annual Trends in Social Entrepreneurship Experiments



Building on this analysis, the categorization of the 39 articles offers insights into the primary focus areas in the field of social entrepreneurship:

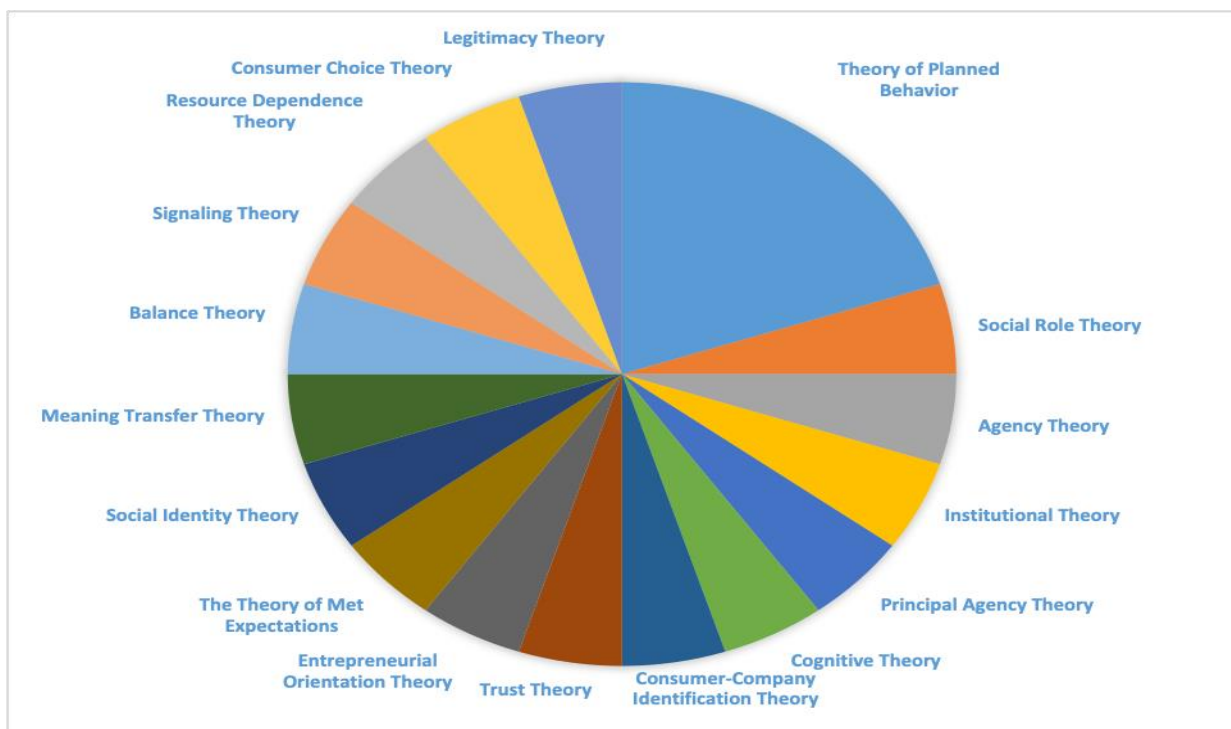
- **Donation and Funding:** As the most extensively researched theme, 12 articles underscore the importance of funding and donations within the social entrepreneurship ecosystem. These papers explore various funding sources such as donations,

impact investments, and crowdfunding. For example, Achleitner et al. (2012) delved into the methods used by social venture capitalists to evaluate the integrity of social entrepreneurs.

- **Customer Attitudes and Behavior:** The 10 articles in this area emphasize the importance of understanding customer attitudes and behavior for social enterprises. These articles specifically examine how target audiences perceive social enterprise brands and investigate the factors that influence consumer purchase intentions and behavior. For example Lortie et al (2020) examined consumers' purchase intentions and willingness to recommend the social ventures to other.
- **Intention and Motivation:** The 7 articles in this category indicate that exploring the intentions and motivations of social entrepreneurs is essential to understanding what drives them to start and manage social enterprises. Baierl et al. (2014) investigated the direct and moderating impact of an individual's overall social appraisal on their intention to pursue social entrepreneurship.
- **Education and Training:** The presence of 5 articles in this category suggests that the role of education and training in social entrepreneurship is important. By providing relevant education and training programs, aspiring social entrepreneurs can develop the necessary skills and knowledge to create and manage successful social enterprises. Chandra and Jin (2022) developed two social entrepreneurship focused comics and assessed their effectiveness.
- **Miscellaneous:** The 5 articles in this category cover a diverse range of topics, reflecting the multifaceted nature of social entrepreneurship. It is important to consider various aspects such as legislation, human resources practices, innovation, and failure when examining social entrepreneurship to get a comprehensive understanding of the field. Muñoz et al. (2020) delved into the decision-making journey of social entrepreneurs when dealing with a failing enterprise, drawing comparisons with the methods employed by their commercial counterparts.

In addition to categorizing the articles based on their thematic focus, an analysis of the theoretical underpinnings was also conducted. The investigation of the theoretical frameworks employed in these articles uncovers a broad spectrum of perspectives and varying levels of theoretical grounding. While certain articles do not make an explicit reference to any particular theory, others encompass a wide range of theoretical frameworks. As illustrated in Figure 2, Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior stands out as the most commonly employed theoretical framework, with three articles adopting this perspective. Moreover, two articles simultaneously integrate Agency Theory and Institutional Theory, indicating a potential for blending various theoretical approaches within the field. Additional theories referenced within the analyzed articles include Social Role Theory, Cognitive Theory, Consumer-Company Identification Theory, Trust Theory and Entrepreneurial Orientation Theory, Theory of Met Expectations, Social Identity Theory, Meaning Transfer Theory, Balance Theory, Signaling Theory, Resource Dependence Theory, and Consumer Choice Theory. The diversity of theoretical perspectives utilized within the analyzed articles reflects the varied approaches to social entrepreneurship research and underscores the potential for a multifaceted understanding of the phenomenon. In light of these observations, it can be inferred that a robust theoretical foundation may contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced comprehension of social entrepreneurship. The incorporation of various theoretical perspectives may allow for a more holistic understanding of social entrepreneurship, and serve to inform the development of future research in the field.

**Figure 2: Theoretical Perspectives in Social Entrepreneurship Experimentation**



The analyzed social entrepreneurship articles were published in a diverse array of scholarly journals, reflecting the multidisciplinary nature of the field. The list of source titles includes a mix of established and emerging journals, each of which offers a unique perspective on the subject matter. Among the more frequently represented journals are the Journal of Business Research and the Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly. Other journals represented in the list include the *Voluntas*, Journal of Social Entrepreneurship, The Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal, Sustainability, and the Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics. In addition to established journals within the field of social entrepreneurship, there are a number of journals represented in the analyzed list that may be considered interdisciplinary in nature. For instance, *Education and Urban Society*, *Climate Services* explore social entrepreneurship from a unique perspective outside of traditional business research. Overall, the diverse range of journals represented in the analyzed list underscores the multidisciplinary nature of social entrepreneurship research, and highlights the potential for interdisciplinary collaboration and cross-pollination of ideas within the field.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The increasing interest in experimental research designs is evident across various disciplines, but its application in the realm of social entrepreneurship remains comparatively limited. This is primarily because social entrepreneurship has traditionally relied on qualitative and case study methods to understand complex social and environmental challenges. However, experimental methods offer unique advantages in advancing the theoretical understanding of social entrepreneurship.

Adopting experimental research approaches in social entrepreneurship can lead to the development of innovative and impactful solutions for addressing pressing social and environmental issues. By discovering evidence-based best practices, stakeholders can maximize the positive outcomes of their initiatives, ensuring that resources are optimally allocated.

Given the relatively limited use of experimental research in social entrepreneurship, there is significant potential for expansion in this area. Future research could explore a wider variety of topics, by investigating diverse contexts and populations, researchers can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the field.

Moreover, it is essential for researchers to focus on replicating and building upon existing experimental findings. This will not only strengthen the validity and reliability of the current body of knowledge but also enhance its generalizability. As a result, the insights generated from experimental research in social entrepreneurship can help inform more effective and sustainable solutions to the world's most pressing challenges.

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## Appendix 1

Authors	Article Title	Year	Source
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Achleitner, Ak; Lutz, E; Mayer, J; Spiess-Knafl, W	Disentangling Gut Feeling: Assessing the Integrity of Social Entrepreneurs	2012	Voluntas
Andersson, F.O; Self, W	The Social-Entrepreneurship Advantage: An Experimental Study of Social Entrepreneurship and Perceptions of Nonprofit Effectiveness	2014	Voluntas
Baierl, R; Grichnik, D; Sporrle, M; Welpe, I.M	Antecedents of Social Entrepreneurial Intentions: The Role of an Individual's General Social Appraisal	2014	Journal of Social Entrepreneurship
Ziegler, R; Schulz, S; Richter, L; Schreck, M	Following Gandhi: Social Entrepreneurship as a Non-Violent Way of Communicating Sustainability Challenges	2014	Sustainability
Walk, M; Greenspan, I; Crossley, H; Handy, F	Mind The Gap: Expectations and Experiences of Clients Utilizing Job-Training Services in a Social Enterprise	2015	Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics
Fischer, S; Goerg, S.J; Hamann, H	Cui Bono, Benefit Corporation? An Experiment Inspired by Social Enterprise Legislation in Germany and the Us	2015	Review of Law & Economics
Venugopal, S; Viswanathan, M; Jung, K.J	Consumption Constraints and Entrepreneurial Intentions in Subsistence Marketplaces	2015	Journal of Public Policy & Marketing
Choi, G.H; Kim, J	Effects of Displaying Social Enterprise Certification Information on Consumers' Product Evaluations and Purchase Intentions	2016	Journal of Global Scholars of Marketing Science
Willems, J; Waldner, C.J; Dere, Yi; Matsuo, Y; Hogy, K	The Role of Formal Third-Party Endorsements and Informal Self-Proclaiming Signals in Nonprofit Reputation Building	2017	Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly
Mayer, J; Scheck, B	Social Investing: What Matters From the Perspective of Social Enterprises?	2018	Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly
Douglas, E; Prentice, C	Innovation And Profit Motivations for Social Entrepreneurship: A Fuzzy-Set Analysis	2019	Journal of Business Research
Kruse, P	Spreading Entrepreneurial News-Investigating Media Influence on Social Entrepreneurial Antecedents	2020	Green Finance
De Amicis, L; Binenti, S; Cardoso, Fm; Gracia-Lazaro, C; Sanchez, A; Moreno, Y	Understanding Drivers When Investing For Impact: An Experimental Study	2020	Palgrave Communications
Faulk, L; Pandey, S; Pandey, S.K; Kennedy, K.S	Donors' Responses to Profit Incentives in the Social Sector: The Entrepreneurial Orientation Reward and the Profit Penalty	2020	Journal of Policy Analysis and Management
Waldner, C.J	In The Centre of Attention: How Social Entrepreneurs Influence Organisational Reputation	2020	Journal of Social Entrepreneurship
Moses, A; Sharma, A	What Drives Human Resource Acquisition and Retention in Social Enterprises? An Empirical Investigation in The Healthcare Industry in an Emerging Market	2020	Journal of Business Research
Lee, M; Adbi, A; Singh, J	Categorical Cognition and Outcome Efficiency in Impact Investing Decisions	2020	Strategic Management Journal
Matrapazi, V.K; Zabaniotou, A	Experimental and Feasibility Study of Spent Coffee Grounds Upscaling via Pyrolysis Towards Proposing an Eco-Social Innovation Circular Economy Solution	2020	Science of The Total Environment
Munoz, P; Cacciotti, G; Ucbasaran, D	Failing And Exiting In Social And Commercial Entrepreneurship: The Role of Situated Cognition	2020	Journal of Business Venturing Insights
Capella-Peris, C; Gil-Gomez, J; Chiva-Bartoll, O; Salvador-Gracia, C	Contrast of Two Service-Learning Modalities in Physical Education Teacher Education	2021	Profesorado-Revista de Curriculum y Formacion de Profesorado
Aastebro, T; Hoos, F	Impact Measurement Based on Repeated Randomized Control Trials: The Case of a Training Program to Encourage Social Entrepreneurship	2021	Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal
Paparrizos, S; Kumar, U;	Are Farmers Willing to Pay for Participatory	2021	Climate Services

Amjath-Babu, T.S; Ludwig, F	Climate Information Services? Insights from a Case Study in Peri-Urban Khulna, Bangladesh		
Kim, C.H; Kim, J	The Role of Cause Involvement and Assortment Size on Decision Difficulty via Communal Relationships	2021	Sustainability
Ganguli, I; Huysentruyt, M; Coq, Cl	How Do Nascent Social Entrepreneurs Respond to Rewards? A Field Experiment on Motivations in a Grant Competition	2021	Management Science
Reichert, P; Bird, Md; Farber, V	Gender and Entrepreneurial Propensity: Risk-Taking and Prosocial Preferences in Labour Market Entry Decisions	2021	Social Enterprise Journal
Block, J, H; Hirschmann, M; Fisch, C	Which Criteria Matter When Impact Investors Screen Social Enterprises?	2021	Journal of Corporate Finance
Donaldson, D; Winter, N; Bigley, J	Organizational Attributes and Their Effect on Donor Intentions: Examining How the Descriptors Used in Marketing Communications can Affect Donor Support	2021	Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing
Lortie, J; Cox, Kc; Roundy, P.T	Social Impact Models, Legitimacy Perceptions, and Consumer Responses to Social Ventures	2022	Journal of Business Research
Capella-Peris, C; Cosgrove, M.M; Salvador-Garcia, C; Marave-Vivas, M	How to Promote Social Entrepreneurship on Urban Education? An Active Learning Implementation	2022	Education and Urban Society
Gupta, V.K; Wieland, A.M; Turban, D.B	Gender Characterizations in Entrepreneurship: A Multi-Level Investigation of Sex-Role Stereotypes about High-Growth, Commercial, and Social Entrepreneurs	2022	Journal of Small Business Management
Zulkefly, N.A; Ghani, N.A; Chin, C.P.P; Hamid, S; Abdullah, N.A	The Future of Social Entrepreneurship: Modelling and Predicting Social Impact	2022	Internet Research
Shahid, S; Becker, A; Kundi, Y.M	Do Reputational Signals Matter for Nonprofit Organizations? An Experimental Study	2022	Management Decision
Chandra, Y; Jin, Q	Winning the Heart and Shaping the Mind With Serious Play: The Efficacy of Social Entrepreneurship Comics as Ethical Business Pedagogy	2022	Journal of Business Ethics
Becker, A; Waldner, C.J; Nitsch, L.J; Trautwein, S	Communicating Social Value: An Experimental Study on Credible Communication and Social Enterprises	2022	Nonprofit Management & Leadership
Chang, Dr; Kim, Q	A Study on The Effects of Background Film Music Valence on Para-Social Interaction and Consumer Attitudes Toward Social Enterprises	2022	Journal of Business Research
Barber, P; Farwell, M.M; Galle, B	Does Mandatory Disclosure Matter? The Case of Nonprofit Fundraising	2022	Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly
Hoos, F	Showing Off or Showing Impact? The Joint Signalling Effect of Reputation and Accountability on Social Entrepreneurs' Crowdfunding Success	2022	Management Accounting Research
Rathee, P; Aggarwal, S	Investors' Preference for Creating Impact: (A Study to Understand Impact Investors' Preference While Making Investment in India)	2022	Vision
Blocker, C.P; Manning, K.C; Trujillo, C.A	Beyond Radical Affordability in the Base of the Pyramid: The Role of Consumer Self-Confidence in Product Acceptance	2023	Journal of Consumer Affairs