

Emerging trends in social entrepreneurship and sustainability: a Southeast Asia analysis

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Abstract

Purpose – This study conducted a comprehensive systematic review and bibliometric analysis of 442 scholarly articles published between 2001 and 2023, focusing on the intersection of social entrepreneurship and sustainability. By mapping the intellectual structure of the field, the study uncovered key research trajectories, influential contributions and emerging themes that shape the discourse.

Design/methodology/approach – The study used a systematic approach to reviewing the literature, used bibliometric techniques such as performance analysis, science mapping and content analysis to analyze the selected papers. Data from Scopus and Web of Science were analyzed using bibliometric tools such as VOSviewer and Biblioshiny to visualize citation networks, thematic clusters and research collaborations.

Findings – The results suggested a significant increase in publications post-2016, indicating heightened scholarly interest and increasing contributions to the field. The study identified leading authors, core journals and dominant publishing countries, highlighting key insights from Southeast Asia. In addition, the findings highlighted the limited international collaboration, particularly in Southeast Asia, underscoring the need for stronger research networks and cross-border partnerships to advance knowledge in this critical area.

Originality/value – This study offers a novel and systematic evaluation of the research landscape in social entrepreneurship and sustainability, providing actionable insights for academics, policymakers and practitioners. By identifying current research trends and existing gaps, it contributes to shaping future research directions, with a particular emphasis on the evolving role of Southeast Asia in this domain. The findings serve as a foundation for supporting greater collaboration and advancing the theoretical and practical understanding of sustainable social entrepreneurship.

Keywords Sustainability, Southeast Asia, Bibliometric analysis, Social innovation, Social entrepreneurship, Sustainable business models

Paper type Literature review

1. Introduction

1.1 Social entrepreneurship and sustainability

Social entrepreneurship and sustainability are increasingly recognized as essential components of addressing societal and environmental challenges while promoting economic growth. Social entrepreneurship integrates entrepreneurial principles to create and sustain social value, whereas sustainability ensures that economic and social progress is achieved with minimal environmental



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harm (Gerlach, 2003). Together, these concepts contribute significantly to sustainable development, particularly in emerging economies where socio-economic disparities are prominent.

Despite growing interest in these fields, there remains a lack of structured synthesis on how social entrepreneurship and sustainability intersect in specific regional contexts. Southeast Asia (SEA), characterized by institutional voids and socio-economic disparities, presents a unique environment where social enterprises play a critical role in bridging gaps left by governments and markets (Kaushik *et al.*, 2023; Setiawan *et al.*, 2023). However, existing research on this intersection is fragmented, limiting the ability of scholars, policymakers and practitioners to build a coherent understanding of regional trends, drivers and challenges. This study addressed this gap through a systematic bibliometric analysis of research on social entrepreneurship and sustainability in SEA.

This study makes three key contributions. First, it provides a structured synthesis of research conducted in SEA, identifying the most influential works and thematic clusters in the field. Second, by applying bibliometric analysis, it offers an objective evaluation of research trends and knowledge gaps, ensuring a data-driven perspective on scholarly developments. Third, it refines an understanding of how social enterprises in SEA respond to institutional voids and sustainability challenges, offering insights that can inform both academic discourse and policy frameworks. By addressing these aspects, this study enhances the visibility of research from this region and facilitates the development of future research agendas.

1.2 Research context: Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia (SEA) is home to rapidly growing economies but is also characterized by institutional voids, including gaps in regulatory, financial and legal structures that hinder economic and social development (Kaushik *et al.*, 2023). Social entrepreneurship in the region often emerges as a response to these voids, providing innovative solutions and essential services to underserved populations. Entrepreneurs in SEA navigate challenges such as limited access to funding, weak institutional support and socio-political uncertainties, making the study of social entrepreneurship in this region particularly significant (Setiawan *et al.*, 2023).

In addition, SEA's increasing geopolitical importance and integration into global trade networks present both opportunities and responsibilities for sustainable development. While the region's economic growth has been robust, it has also exacerbated environmental degradation and social inequalities. Social enterprises play a crucial role in addressing these issues by driving innovation, fostering inclusive growth and promoting sustainable business models (Yu, 2024). However, scholarly attention to these dynamics remains limited, necessitating a structured analysis to map research trends and contributions in the field. Hence, our study contributes to this special regional context in contrast to other studies focusing on the global context.

1.3 Research aim and justification for bibliometric analysis

To systematically assess the current state of research on social entrepreneurship and sustainability in SEA, this study employs bibliometric analysis as a methodological approach. Bibliometric techniques allow for a quantitative mapping of scholarly contributions, revealing influential authors, research clusters and thematic trends over time (Donthu *et al.*, 2021). This approach provides an objective and data-driven evaluation of the field, enabling the identification of key research trajectories, intellectual structures and underrepresented areas requiring further scholarly attention. Unlike traditional literature reviews, which often rely on

selective reading and qualitative synthesis, bibliometric analysis facilitates a comprehensive and reproducible understanding of research developments. By examining citation networks, keyword co-occurrence and research collaborations, this study uncovers critical insights that inform future research directions and policy interventions.

1.4 Research questions

To guide this investigation, the study addresses the following research questions:

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- RQ1. What are the current publication trend, geographic distribution and popular sources in social entrepreneurship and sustainability in SEA?
- RQ2. Which authors and affiliations are the most productive, and which articles influence social entrepreneurship and sustainability in SEA?
- RQ3. What social entrepreneurship and sustainability themes in SEA are most popular among scholars?
- RQ4. What is the intellectual structure of current research, and which topics have scholars focused on across different time periods in social entrepreneurship and sustainability in SEA?
- RQ5. What future areas can be studied in social entrepreneurship and sustainability?

The paper is structured as follows: after the introduction, Section 2 provides a literature review on social entrepreneurship and sustainability, whereas Section 3 outlines the research methodology used. The subsequent -section (Section 4) presents the findings from the review, including bibliometric analysis and content analysis conducted on relevant papers indexed in the Scopus and Web of Science databases. Discussion is provided in Section 5. Finally, the paper concludes with implications and limitations.

2. Literature review

Sustainable entrepreneurship integrates economic, social and environmental dimensions to create long-term value. It aligns with the [World Commission on Environment and Development \(1987\)](#) definition of sustainability, emphasizing the need to meet current needs without compromising future generations. Entrepreneurs adopting sustainable practices integrate these principles into their business models, striving for profitability while ensuring minimal environmental harm ([Gerlach, 2003](#)). This approach operationalizes sustainability by balancing economic viability with environmental stewardship and social responsibility ([Terán-Yépez et al., 2020](#)).

Social entrepreneurship gained traction in the 1970s in response to rising unemployment and declining economic growth ([Borzaga and Defourny, 2004](#)). Bill Drayton, founder of Ashoka, institutionalized social entrepreneurship in the 1980s by providing support and recognition to social entrepreneurs ([Sen, 2007](#)). Over time, social entrepreneurship has been increasingly linked to broader societal goals, such as poverty alleviation, economic inclusion and access to essential services ([Dees, 1998](#)). This evolution underscores the shifting role of businesses in addressing social and economic challenges beyond traditional profit-driven motives.

Social innovation refers to developing and implementing novel solutions to address social problems, enhancing well-being and creating systemic change. Unlike traditional innovation, which focuses on technological advancements, social innovation meets societal needs through creative and impactful interventions ([Phillips et al., 2015](#)). The rise of social enterprises has contributed to economic development by fostering job creation, improving

access to basic services and strengthening community resilience. Research highlights the importance of collaborative ecosystems in promoting social innovation, where governments, businesses and civil society organizations play complementary roles in scaling impact (Seelos and Mair, 2004).

There has been a notable shift toward emphasizing social entrepreneurship and sustainability due to their potential to generate economic value while addressing pressing social and environmental challenges. Social entrepreneurs integrate innovative strategies to drive significant social impact (Phillips *et al.*, 2015), merging social and environmental objectives with economic growth (Di Zhang and Swanson, 2013). This integration is particularly pertinent in achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs), as social innovation and entrepreneurship play a crucial role in addressing basic needs and fostering long-term sustainability (Seelos and Mair, 2004).

Sustainable entrepreneurship is increasingly recognized as essential for advancing toward a sustainable future, aligning economic value creation with environmental stewardship and social responsibility (Rosário *et al.*, 2022). This field has gained momentum as researchers explore how social and sustainable entrepreneurship intersect and influence global sustainability efforts. The relationship between these domains highlights the potential for entrepreneurial ventures to address systemic issues and drive transformative change.

A significant contribution to this field is the study by Miao and Phelps (2019), which underscores the pivotal role of social entrepreneurship in China's transition toward sustainability. This study illustrates how social enterprises contribute to China's sustainability agenda by addressing environmental and social issues through innovative business models. Similarly, Bansal *et al.* (2019) emphasized that social entrepreneurship serves as a vital mechanism for achieving sustainable development, aligning with global efforts to address poverty and inequality. Miah *et al.* (2024) identified social entrepreneurship as a transformative force in reducing poverty, enhancing employment opportunities, fostering economic growth and promoting environmental sustainability.

The need for regionally focused studies accounting for local socio-political and economic contexts is gaining attention. Zahra *et al.* (2014) argued that while global studies offer valuable insights, regional analyses reveal how social entrepreneurship adapts to local challenges, including regulations, cultural norms and economic barriers. This is particularly relevant in developing regions, where community engagement and policy frameworks shape the success of social entrepreneurship (Doherty *et al.*, 2014). By focusing on SEA, this study addresses a critical gap in understanding how local elements impact the strategies and outcomes of social entrepreneurs.

Much existing research focuses on regions like Europe, North America or East Asia (Defourny and Nyssens, 2010; Defourny and Kim, 2011), whereas social entrepreneurship in SEA remains underexplored. Factors such as regional disparities, uneven access to resources and varying government policies necessitate localized approaches (Yusuf *et al.*, 2014). Understanding how social enterprises operate within SEA is crucial, as the interplay between local values and global sustainability objectives shapes the social entrepreneurship landscape in distinctive ways (Klarin and Suseno, 2023; Mair and Marti, 2006). Expanding the focus to these underexplored regions will provide a more comprehensive understanding of social entrepreneurship's role in sustainable development.

Despite advancements in research, the intersection of sustainability, entrepreneurship and management remains an evolving area with room for further investigation. While research has expanded over the past three decades, gaps persist, particularly in understanding how social entrepreneurship contributes to sustainable development in various regional contexts.

Prior bibliometric studies have analyzed social entrepreneurship on a global scale (Granados *et al.*, 2011; Rey-Martí *et al.*, 2016; Anand *et al.*, 2021), but few have examined research

patterns within SEA. This gap is critical because the socio-economic and institutional context of this region differs significantly from Western economies, where most existing research is concentrated (Doherty *et al.*, 2014; Klarin and Suseno, 2023). In addition, studies have primarily focused on case-based or conceptual analyses, lacking a comprehensive mapping of research trends in the region. Addressing this limitation, this study employs bibliometric analysis to systematically examine the evolution of social entrepreneurship research in SEA, ensuring a region-specific understanding of its development and impact.

In the ASEAN region, social enterprises play a crucial role in supporting vulnerable and impoverished communities, aiming to enhance their socio-economic conditions sustainably. The growth of social entrepreneurship in ASEAN countries is driven by various initiatives from governments, educators and the corporate sector to promote awareness and engagement within the sector. This has inspired a rise in social enterprises, reflecting a growing commitment to addressing social issues through entrepreneurial approaches (United States Agency for International Development, 2018).

However, there remains a notable gap in research concerning the relationship between social entrepreneurship and sustainable development in SEA. While literature reviews often focus on specific countries or regions, such as Europe, comprehensive reviews synthesizing the evolution and impact of social entrepreneurship in SEA are scarce. To date, no systematic review has examined the development of this field within the region. This lack of analysis underscores the need for a well-structured literature review that provides valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners, bridging knowledge gaps, informing strategic decisions and enhancing the effectiveness of social entrepreneurship initiatives.

3. Methodology

3.1 Bibliometric analysis

Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative method for systematically evaluating scholarly literature, identifying publication trends, key authors and thematic areas (Donthu *et al.*, 2021). Bibliometric analysis, widely used since the 1950s (Kent Baker *et al.*, 2020), is conducted using tools such as Gephi, VOSViewer, Biblioshiny by R and CiteSpace (Moral-Muñoz *et al.*, 2020). It has been applied across disciplines, including entrepreneurship, marketing, finance and accounting (Kent Baker *et al.*, 2020; Maheshwari *et al.*, 2023).

A bibliometric approach is particularly well-suited for this study, as it enables an objective, large-scale analysis of published research, identifying key patterns, thematic clusters and influential contributions in the field (Donthu *et al.*, 2021). Unlike traditional literature reviews, it offers a large-scale, data-driven assessment of research contributions (Maheshwari and Kha, 2023). This study employs bibliometric techniques using Scopus and Web of Science to analyze citation networks, keyword co-occurrence and authorship patterns, mapping the research landscape of social entrepreneurship and sustainability (Mukherjee *et al.*, 2022). This analytical approach ensures that the findings are comprehensive, reproducible and reflective of broader scholarly trends (Maheshwari *et al.*, 2024), thereby addressing the need for a structured understanding of the research field.

This study applied performance analysis, science mapping and network analysis (Donthu *et al.*, 2021) using Biblioshiny and VOSViewer. Performance analysis measures publication and citation metrics, while science mapping includes citation, co-citation, bibliographic coupling, co-word and co-authorship analyses (Cobo *et al.*, 2021). Network analysis further enriches these insights through clustering and visualization (Tunger and Eulerich, 2018).

The study addressed five research questions (RQs). Annual production and social network analysis explore research trends (RQ1). Performance analysis identifies influential authors, countries, institutions and sources (RQ2). Science mapping reveals thematic clusters (RQ3),

which also inform the analysis of research gaps (RQ4). Finally, the study examines these themes to suggest future research directions (RQ5)

3.2 Search procedure

This study followed a structured approach to data collection and processing, ensuring robustness and replicability. Relevant literature was extracted from Scopus and Web of Science using predefined search queries related to social entrepreneurship and sustainability in SEA. Bibliometric software such as VOSviewer and Biblioshiny was used to visualize citation trends, thematic clusters and co-authorship networks. To enhance reproducibility, the PRISMA 2020 diagram (Figure 1) was adopted for the search procedure (Korkmaz *et al.*, 2022).

The database search focused on academic articles published between 2001 and 2023, using specific keywords related to sustainability, social entrepreneurship and Southeast Asian countries. The keywords included “sustainability” OR “sustainable” AND “social entrepreneur*” AND “Southeast Asia*” OR the names of specific countries in SEA (Brunei, Myanmar, Cambodia, Timor-Leste, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam). This keyword strategy ensured coverage of diverse interpretations across disciplines while narrowing the focus to SEA.

Initially, the Scopus search resulted in 660 articles. After excluding non-English studies, conference proceedings, book chapters and non-research articles, 438 relevant studies remained. Further filtering to business, management, economics, social science and interdisciplinary fields reduced this to 382 articles. A similar WoS search yielded 156 articles, bringing the total to 538. After removing 96 duplicates, the final sample comprised 442 articles.

The five-step search procedure (identification, screening, inclusion) is illustrated in Figure 1 using the PRISMA-2020 framework.

4. Results and analysis

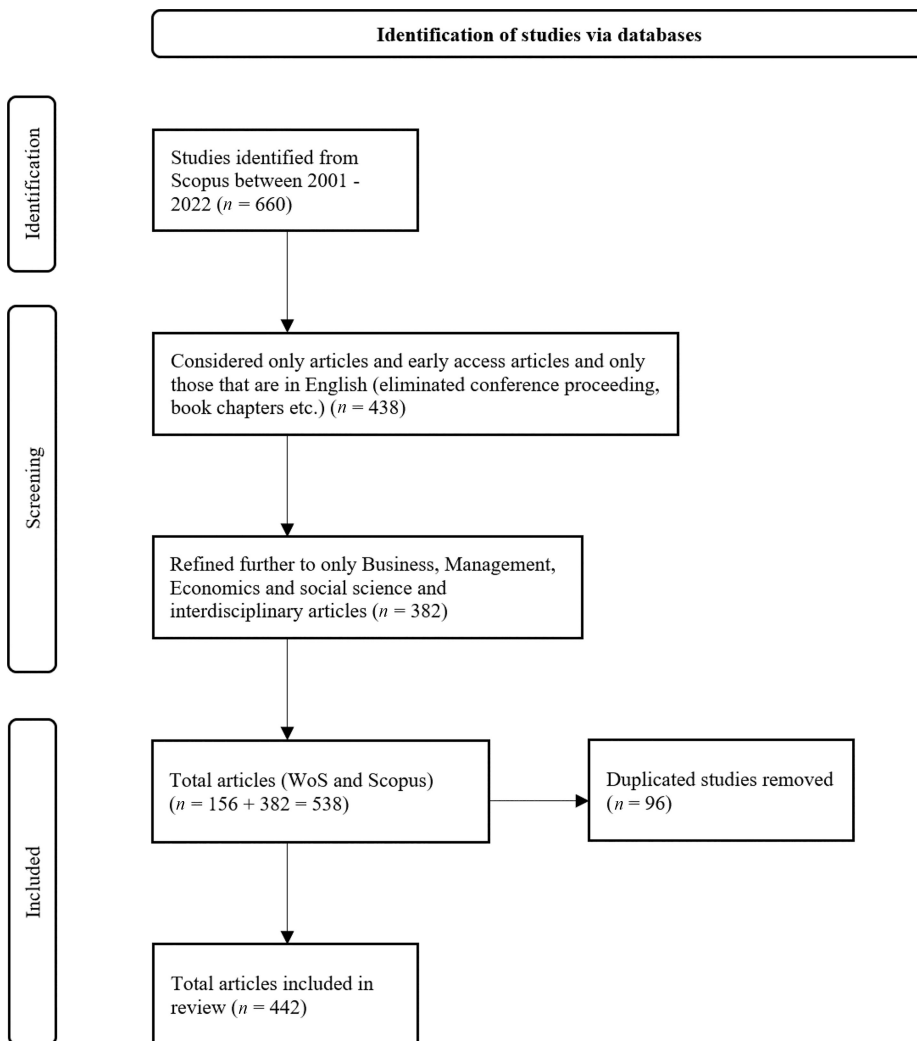
To address the research questions of this study, a comprehensive analysis was conducted on the 442 selected papers.

4.1 Performance analysis (RQ1)

4.1.1 Trend of the research field. To address RQ1, a descriptive statistical analysis of 442 journal articles (2001–2023) was conducted. As shown in Table 1, these articles were published in 268 sources, with an average of 9.24 citations per document and an annual citation rate of 1.76. Single-authored papers accounted for 84 articles, whereas the average co-authorship per document was three, with international collaborations at 4.07%.

Figure 2 illustrates a sharp increase in publications from 2016, with 371 articles (84% of the total), aligning with the adoption of the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals in 2015. The peak citation years, 2007 and 2020 (Appendix A1), with 596 and 528 citations, respectively, highlight key periods of academic engagement.

4.1.2 Contributors impacting the field of research. A citation network analysis identified key contributors and affiliations (Appendix 2 and Appendix 3). Al MA was the most prolific author with seven publications, followed by Fazal S. (six) and Ahmad N. (five), while University Sains Malaysia emerged as the top-affiliated institution publishing in this domain. Impact assessment using the m-index highlighted Hong T. (0.75) as a highly influential scholar within a shorter period. Country analysis publishing in this domain (Appendix A4) showed Malaysia (82 studies), Indonesia (81) and Thailand (54) as leading contributors, with Malaysia playing a pivotal role through initiatives like the Social Entrepreneurship Action



Source(s): Authors' own work

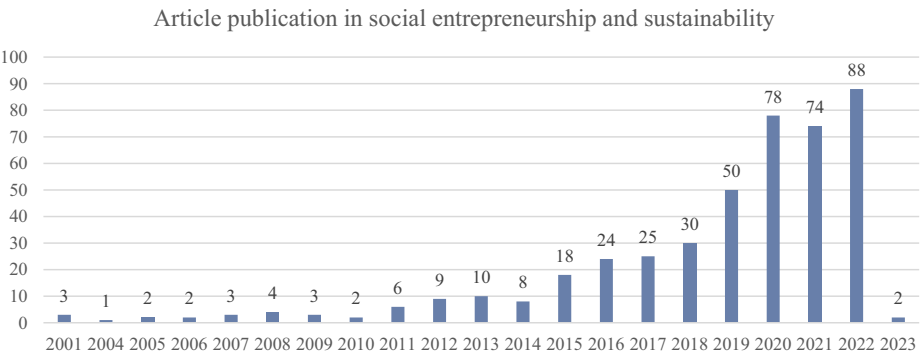
Figure 1. Search procedure PRISMA-2020

Framework 2030. Contributions from Europe and Oceania indicate limited but notable global interest. [Appendix A4](#) further details the distribution of corresponding authors by country, distinguishing between single-country (SCP) and multi-country (MCP) publications. The dominance of SCP suggests a need for greater international collaboration in future research.

4.1.3 Publication sources (RQ2). After this, we analyzed RQ2 by examining publication and citation trends. Using Bradford's law, *Sustainability* (Switzerland) emerged as the leading journal with 39 articles ([Appendix A5](#)), highlighting its central role in the field.

Table 1. Main information of data using descriptive statistics

Description	Results
<i>Main information about data</i>	
Timespan	2001:2023
Sources	268
Documents	442
Annual growth rate (%)	1.83
Document average age	4.35
Average citations per doc	9.242
Average citations per year	1.763
References	3617
<i>Authors collaboration</i>	
Single-authored docs	84
Documents per author	0.376
Co-authors per doc	3.06
International co-authorship (%)	4.072
Source(s): Authors' own work	



Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure 2. Total number of publications in social entrepreneurship and sustainability (2001–2023)

Among the top three locally cited articles, *Sustainability* (Switzerland) also led in local citations ([Appendix A6](#)). A comparison of local and global citations ([Appendix A7](#) and [A8](#)) showed [Roxas et al. \(2017\)](#) as a top locally cited author with strong global recognition, whereas [Murray Li \(2007\)](#) had the highest global citations, reflecting significant international impact.

4.2 Science mapping

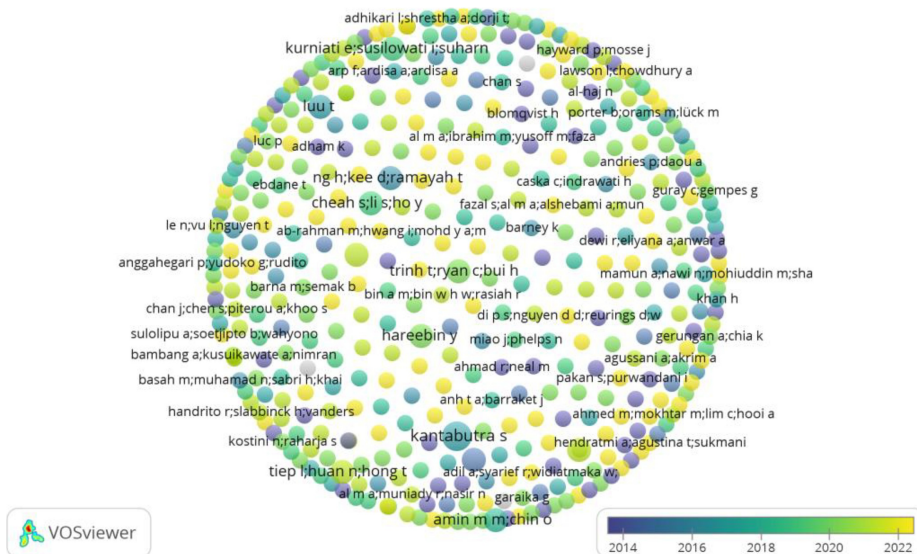
In this section, science mapping techniques were used to address the study's research questions. The analysis included citation network analysis, co-occurrence analysis and co-citation analysis.

4.2.1 *Citation network analysis by authors.* Citation network analysis helps uncover the scientific structure and connections within a research domain by examining citation patterns

(McLaren and Bruner, 2022). It assesses a paper's impact based on citation frequency and is widely used in bibliometric studies (Appio *et al.*, 2014; Guleria and Kaur, 2021; Mihalic *et al.*, 2021). This study used VOSviewer for citation network analysis, with Figure 3 supporting the findings from Appendix 7 and Appendix 8, highlighting limited author collaboration within the network.

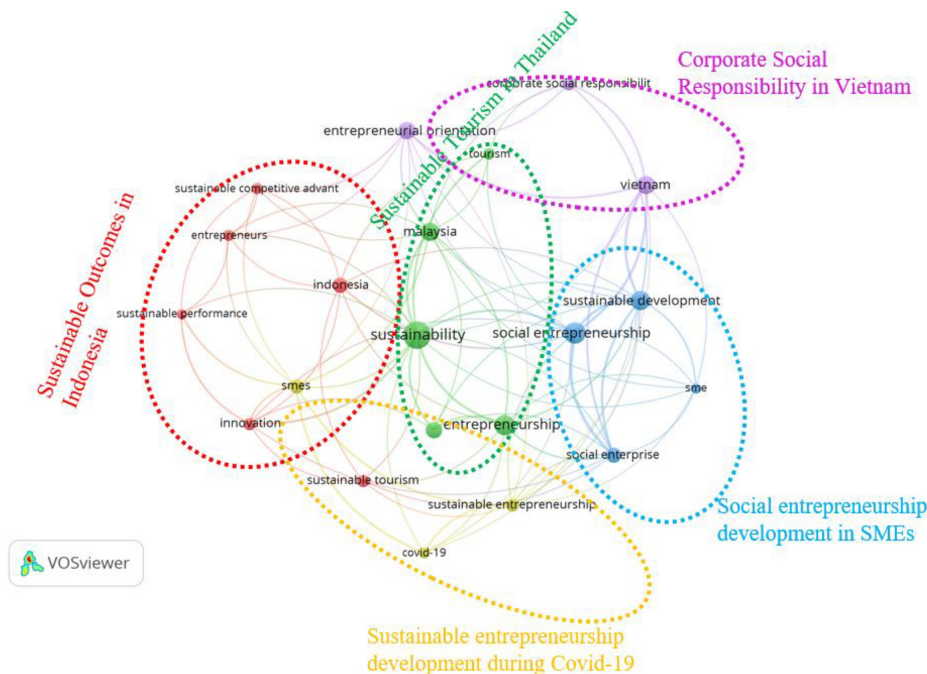
4.2.2 Co-occurrence analysis (RQ3). RQ3 identifies key themes in articles on social entrepreneurship and sustainability in SEA. Co-occurrence and co-citation analyses, conducted using VOSviewer, was used for exploring RQ3. Co-occurrence analysis examines the frequency of two keywords appearing together in the same article, indicating a connection between the concepts (Sedighi, 2016). This method helps identify emerging themes and research gaps for further exploration. Widely used across various fields, it provides insights into concept networks (Kent Baker *et al.*, 2020; Kraus *et al.*, 2020). Figure 4 presents an overview of the key content themes in the research.

Figure 4 shows several thematic clusters. Cluster 1 (red) includes six terms: entrepreneurship, Indonesia, innovation, sustainable entrepreneurship, sustainable performance and sustainable tourism, focusing on sustainability outcomes in Indonesia. Cluster 2 (green) consists of five terms: entrepreneurship, Malaysia, sustainability, Thailand and tourism, reflecting the link between sustainable tourism and entrepreneurship in Malaysia and Thailand. Cluster 3 (blue) includes four terms: SME, social enterprise, social entrepreneurship and sustainable development, highlighting social enterprise development within SMEs. Cluster 4 (yellow) features three terms: COVID-19, SMEs and sustainable entrepreneurship, suggesting a focus on sustainable entrepreneurship during the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, Cluster 5 (purple) comprises three terms: corporate social responsibility, entrepreneurial orientation and Vietnam, indicating research in Vietnam centers on corporate social responsibility and its relationship to entrepreneurial orientation.



Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure 3. Co-citation network analysis by VOSviewer



Source(s): Authors’ own work

Figure 4. Co-occurrence analysis by VOSviewer

4.2.2.1 Research themes. Based on the co-occurrence analysis, the following research themes have emerged within the domain of social entrepreneurship and sustainability:

Research theme #1: Sustainability outcomes in Indonesia

The first research theme explores sustainability outcomes in Indonesia, emphasizing the lasting positive impacts of sustainable practices on the environment and society. Empirical studies in Indonesia have shown tangible benefits from adopting environmentally friendly practices. These studies suggests that such practices improve organizational social performance (Agussani and Akrim, 2020), enhance leadership dimensions (Mamun et al., 2021) and increase perseverance and resilience (Kantabutra, 2014):

Research theme #2: Sustainable tourism in Malaysia and Thailand

The next research theme focuses on sustainable tourism, which has gained significant attention for its contributions to environmental conservation, cultural preservation and economic development. Studies in Malaysia and Thailand highlight the importance of community participation and green entrepreneurship in promoting eco-tourism. For instance, Rahmawati et al. (2021) emphasized the role of green entrepreneurship in eco-tourism development in Indonesia, despite challenges like limited environmental awareness and government support. These studies provide valuable insights into the opportunities and obstacles faced by businesses and communities, informing future research and policy initiatives in the tourism sector:

Research theme #3: Social enterprise development in SMEs

The development of social enterprises within small and medium enterprises (SMEs) emerges as the third research theme. Scholars have explored the motivations, challenges and outcomes of this transition. [Khieng and Dahles \(2015\)](#) examined the challenges faced by commercial organizations transitioning into NGOs, focusing on social mission alignment and market orientation. Similarly, [Desiana et al. \(2022\)](#) investigated the factors influencing social enterprise development in micro and small enterprises (MSEs) in Indonesia, highlighting the roles of ecosystems, dynamic capabilities and innovation. These studies provide valuable insights into the complexities of social enterprise development, offering practical guidance for businesses and policymakers promoting social entrepreneurship at the grassroots level:

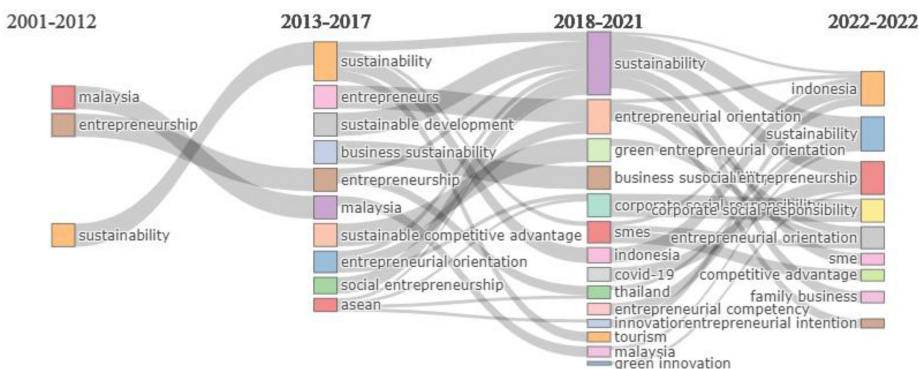
Research theme #4: Development of sustainable entrepreneurship during COVID-19

The global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on businesses and economies emerges as the fourth research theme. The pandemic has been a catalyst for businesses to adapt, innovate and embrace sustainable practices. Strategies like digital transformation and forging collaborations and partnerships have been used to foster sustainable entrepreneurship ([Kamaludin et al., 2022](#)). These strategies have yielded positive social and environmental impacts, showcasing businesses' resilience and adaptability. [Anggadwita et al. \(2022\)](#) specifically focused on the role of women in driving sustainable entrepreneurship during the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia. In addition, leadership has been identified as a critical factor in sustainable entrepreneurship development, as noted by [Suriyankietkaew et al. \(2022\)](#):

Research theme #5: Corporate social responsibility in Vietnam

The fifth research theme focuses on the intersection of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and sustainable entrepreneurship, emphasizing the importance of responsible business practices that consider social impact and environmental sustainability. CSR provides a guiding framework for social entrepreneurs, offering principles and best practices. Recently, scholars have begun exploring the relationship between CSR and sustainability, with researchers in Vietnam at the forefront of this exploration ([Nayak et al., 2022](#); [Anh et al., 2022](#)). This emerging topic highlights the critical role of CSR in shaping sustainable entrepreneurship practices, as demonstrated by the studies of [Nayak et al. \(2022\)](#) and [Anh et al. \(2022\)](#).

4.2.2.2 Thematic evolution. Furthermore, a thematic evolution analysis was conducted to examine the progression of research themes from 2001 to 2022, as shown in [Figure 5](#). From 2001



Source(s): Authors' own work

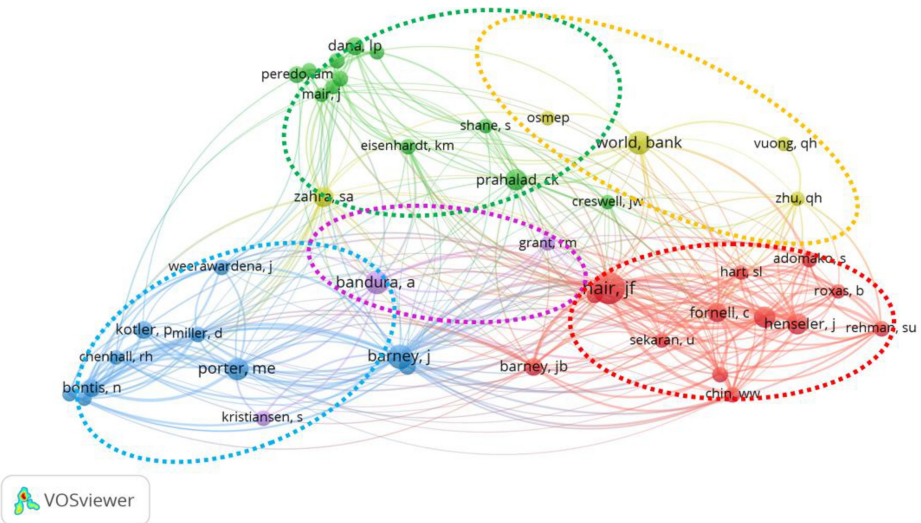
Figure 5. Thematic map of publications from 2001 to 2022

to 2012, sustainable entrepreneurship emerged as a key focus, primarily studied in Malaysia. Research centered on understanding its foundations and implications in the country. Between 2013 and 2017, the thematic landscape expanded to include sustainable development, business sustainability, social entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial orientation, with Malaysia continuing as the main research hub. From 2018 to 2021, the focus shifted to topics like green entrepreneurial intentions, corporate social responsibility and tourism, with increasing contributions from Indonesian scholars. In 2022, sustainable entrepreneurship broadened its focus to include SMEs and small businesses in Indonesia.

4.2.3 *Co-citation analysis (RQ4).* RQ4 focused on the intellectual structure of social entrepreneurship and sustainability research in SEA using co-citation and content analysis (Donthu *et al.*, 2021). Co-citation analysis maps the relationships between cited works, revealing significant themes, trends and influential publications (Small, 1973; Hjørland, 2013; Bang *et al.*, 2023). VOSviewer identified five research clusters with 43 co-cited researchers across 442 articles, as shown in Figure 6. Cluster 1, focusing on structural equation modeling (SEM), included authors like Fornell and Bookstein (1982) and Hair *et al.* (2011, 2019). Cluster 2, led by C.K. Prahalad, addressed strategic management and co-creation (Prahalad and Hamel, 2009). Cluster 3 featured sustainability and competitive advantage theories (Barney, 1991; Porter, 1985). Clusters 4 and 5 explored knowledge-based theory (Eisenhardt and Santos, 2006) and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977).

4.3 *Suggestions on future areas of research (RQ5)*

This section addresses the final research question of our study by highlighting key areas for future research. Our exploration of social entrepreneurship and sustainability highlights significant research gaps that need urgent attention. One major issue is the lack of collaboration among researchers, particularly in SEA, where diverse cultural contexts require more partnerships to enhance the depth and breadth of insights. In addition, the



Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure 6. Co-citation authors analysis by VOSviewer

narrow focus on specific countries and industries limits the scope of our understanding. There is a need to expand research beyond small businesses to include sectors such as healthcare and education. The potential of technologies like blockchain and artificial intelligence remains largely unexplored but offers promising avenues for reshaping social entrepreneurship practices.

Moreover, the influence of gender diversity on decision-making within social enterprises is under-researched, calling for more inclusive research approaches. Future studies can address these gaps by fostering collaboration across countries, industries and technological domains. Key areas for future research include examining barriers to eco-tourism development in SEA, investigating the role of ecosystems in SME transitions to social enterprises and exploring the intersection of CSR and sustainable entrepreneurship, particularly in Vietnam, to inform business strategy frameworks.

5. Discussion

This literature review used bibliometric and content analysis techniques to examine 442 articles from the Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) databases, focusing on social entrepreneurship and sustainability in SEA. The bibliometric analysis assessed publication trends, author contributions, journal impact and citation patterns, identifying leading researchers, institutions and high-impact journals. The paper provided insights into the evolution of the field, highlighting both extensively explored areas and underdeveloped themes. Complementing this, content analysis qualitatively assessed research themes, methodologies and findings, provided key topics, emerging trends and significant contributions in the Southeast Asian context.

We followed [Donthu et al.'s \(2021\)](#) structure for conducting systematic literature reviews, with [Appendix 1](#) and [Figure 2](#) presenting citation counts and publication trends, offering context for the growing scholarly attention on social entrepreneurship and sustainability in the region. [Appendix A2](#), [A3](#) and [A4](#) identify key contributors and institutions, guiding potential collaborations and future research. In addition, [Appendix A5](#), [A6](#), [A7](#) and [A8](#) highlight influential journals, helping researchers identify relevant publication venues.

This combined analysis by performance analysis and science mapping suggested the intellectual structure of the field, shedding light on the predominant research themes and areas of focus. The study highlighted key themes such as the role of social enterprises in addressing socio-economic challenges, sustainable business practices and the impact of social innovation in the region. It also identified significant gaps in the literature, such as the need for more research on social entrepreneurship in less-studied Southeast Asian countries and the exploration of emerging issues like the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on sustainable entrepreneurship. This literature review not only contributes to the academic discourse but also provides actionable insights that can drive future research and practice in the evolving domain of social entrepreneurship and sustainability.

6. Conclusion, implications and limitations

Sustainable development aims to address current needs while ensuring that future generations can also meet their needs. The United Nations 2030 Agenda emphasizes the importance of balancing economic growth with environmental sustainability and social stability ([United Nations General Assembly, 2015](#)). Social entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in this framework, providing innovative solutions that align social, environmental and economic goals ([Diaz-Sarachaga and Ariza-Montes, 2022](#)).

The objective of this study was to conduct a systematic review and bibliometric analysis to explore the intersection of social entrepreneurship and sustainability within the Southeast Asian context. Our analysis revealed several key findings. First, a detailed descriptive statistical

analysis of 442 selected papers from 2001 to 2023 identified a significant rise in research output from 2016 onwards with 371 articles published during this period. This surge correlates with the adoption of the United Nations' SDGs in 2015. Second, the citation network analysis indicated that individual scholars, particularly in Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand, have made substantial contributions to the field. Furthermore, we identified prominent themes such as the impact of sustainability practices in Indonesia, the role of sustainable tourism in Malaysia and Thailand and the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on sustainable entrepreneurship.

In addition, we highlighted the need for future research to address gaps, including promoting collaboration among researchers, expanding the focus to underrepresented regions and sectors and exploring the potential of technological innovations in social entrepreneurship. Our findings underscore the importance of regional studies in understanding how social entrepreneurship can effectively contribute to sustainable development goals in SEA. Hence, this review not only maps current research trends but also provides valuable theoretical and practical insights that can inform future exploration in the field. By restating the objectives and key findings, we hope to emphasize the relevance of our work and the pressing need for continued research in this area.

6.1 Theoretical implications

The study makes a significant theoretical contribution by addressing a current gap in research on social entrepreneurship and sustainability within SEA. Despite growing global interest in these topics, there is a notable scarcity of studies focusing on this region. Through detailed bibliometric and content analysis, the study identifies prevailing research themes, such as the development of social enterprises within SMEs, the impact of sustainable entrepreneurship during the COVID-19 pandemic and CSR initiatives in Vietnam. These themes provide critical insights into the current state of research and highlight underexplored areas that warrant further investigation.

The dominance of research from Malaysia and Indonesia emphasizes the need for broader exploration across other Southeast Asian nations. By identifying these thematic trends and gaps, the study serves as a valuable resource for future researchers, offering a strategic roadmap for investigating new areas. This contribution advances scholarly discourse and guides future research efforts, enriching our understanding of the field and laying a foundation for developing future research agendas in underrepresented regions.

In addition, this study contributes to the existing literature by offering a dual-perspective analysis that integrates both thematic and methodological trends within social entrepreneurship research in SEA. While traditional bibliometric studies often focus exclusively on thematic clusters, our approach incorporates methodological trends, such as the use of structure equation modeling (SEM), to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how social entrepreneurship research is evolving in this region.

By including methodological clusters, this study highlights the analytical tools that are gaining prominence and shaping the field, particularly in SEA's emerging and dynamic context. This dual approach not only broadens the scope of bibliometric analysis but also offers new insights into how regional research practices may influence the development of social entrepreneurship theories. As SEA continues to grow in importance on the global stage, understanding these methodological trends becomes crucial for refining and applying social entrepreneurship theories across diverse socio-economic contexts.

6.2 Practical implications

There are several practical implications based on the analysis from this review for various stakeholders. This systematic review can be invaluable for scholars aiming to conduct future research in social entrepreneurship and sustainability. The insights provided in this review

will inspire and motivate researchers to develop novel frameworks that address the unique challenges faced in SEA and contribute to the broader community.

Policy practitioners can leverage these findings to implement relevant policies and provide the necessary support to enhance sustainable entrepreneurship practices. By doing so, they can create an environment that fosters an entrepreneurial culture within their countries, addressing pressing social issues through innovative solutions.

Educational institutions and educators have a vital role to play in inspiring students to engage with social entrepreneurship. By enhancing course curricula and developing applicable skills and knowledge, educators can encourage creativity and boost self-confidence in students. This approach not only cultivates entrepreneurial intentions but also equips students with the tools needed to take action in their communities.

While our findings mostly contribute to the academic understanding of social entrepreneurship, they also have practical implications that can shape the trajectory of sustainable practices and social impact in SEA. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, this study empowers stakeholders to implement informed, evidence-based approaches that promote long-term sustainability and societal well-being in the region.

6.3 Limitations and directions for future research

Despite our study's contributions, this review presents several limitations which we would like to acknowledge. First, our study focuses exclusively on articles from the Scopus and WoS databases collected from 2001 to 2023. This timeframe was purposely selected to reflect recent developments in social entrepreneurship and sustainability, particularly following the establishment of the SDGs in 2015. While this choice may limit the inclusion of earlier foundational works, it allows for a concentrated examination of contemporary trends and challenges within the field.

In addition, we acknowledge that focusing exclusively on prominent databases such as WoS and Scopus may introduce selection bias, potentially impacting the accuracy of our findings. We chose these databases because they are among the largest and are known for their rigorous indexing criteria, which typically ensure high-quality research. However, we recognize that incorporating a broader range of sources, including those outside these databases, could enhance our analysis and provide a more comprehensive view of the literature.

Furthermore, our focus on SEA arises from its unique socio-economic dynamics and pressing challenges that differ from those in other regions, such as West Asia and South Asia. While we recognize that including a broader geographic scope could enhance our analysis, our aim was to provide an in-depth study of SEA, where social entrepreneurship is relatively underexplored. Future research could benefit from expanding this scope to include comparative studies across different Asian contexts, thereby providing valuable insights into how social entrepreneurship and sustainability evolve in diverse settings.

Furthermore, the review did not incorporate methods to analyze correlations among quantitative results from independent studies. Future research could enhance robustness and depth by employing meta-analysis techniques, which systematically combine findings from multiple studies to produce more nuanced and generalizable conclusions.

Finally, while social entrepreneurship often intersects with sustainability, it is important to acknowledge that not all social enterprises directly address sustainability goals, and conversely, not all sustainability efforts fall under the umbrella of social entrepreneurship. For instance, healthcare-focused social enterprises may prioritize different objectives that do not emphasize sustainability as a core mission. Therefore, addressing these intersections explicitly in future studies will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the scope of both fields.

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Table A1. Total citations and number of publications

Year	MeanTCperArt	No. of articles	Total citations	Citable years
2001	13.33	3	40	23
2004	5	1	5	20
2005	28	2	56	19
2006	3	1	3	18
2007	298	2	596	17
2008	4.75	4	19	16
2009	11.5	2	23	15
2010	0	2	0	14
2011	14.17	6	85	13
2012	8.11	9	73	12
2013	11.7	10	117	11
2014	16	8	128	10
2015	15.89	18	286	9
2016	11.83	24	284	8
2017	14.28	25	357	7
2018	12.37	30	371	6
2019	8	50	400	5
2020	6.77	78	528	4
2021	5.47	74	405	3
2022	3.18	88	280	2
2023	14	2	28	1
<i>Total</i>			<i>4084</i>	

Note(s): TC: Total citations**Source(s):** Authors' own work**Table A2.** Top 10 most impactful authors according to h-index and number of publications in Southeast Asia

Authors	h_index	g_index	m_index	TC	NP	Year of first publication
Abdullah MA	4	7	0.667	96	7	2018
Fazal S	4	6	0.571	87	6	2017
Mamun A	4	5	0.571	51	5	2017
Ahmad N	3	6	0.375	97	6	2016
Hong T	3	3	0.75	28	3	2020
Kantabutra S	3	4	0.273	61	4	2013
Kee D	3	3	0.375	88	3	2016
Le T	3	5	0.429	61	5	2017
Muniady R	3	3	0.5	26	3	2018
Nawi N	3	4	0.429	46	4	2017

Note(s): TC = Total publications; NP = Number of publications**Source(s):** Authors' own work

Table A3. Top 10 affiliations publishing in the domain

Country	Articles	Affiliation	Articles
Indonesia	81	University Sains Malaysia	20
Malaysia	79	University Kebangsaan Malaysia	15
Thailand	54	University Malaysia Kelantan	15
Australia	16	University Technology Mara	13
United Kingdom	11	Mahidol University	12
Philippines	10	National University of Singapore	10
Singapore	9	University Technology Malaysia	9
China	8	IPB University	8
Vietnam	8	University Putra Malaysia	8
USA	6	Taylor's University	7

Source(s): Authors' own work

Table A4. Top 10 countries in the research domain

Country	Articles	SCP	MCP	Frequency	MCP_Ratio
Malaysia	82	77	5	0.186	0.061
Indonesia	81	80	1	0.183	0.012
Thailand	54	53	1	0.122	0.019
Australia	16	15	1	0.036	0.063
United Kingdom	11	8	3	0.025	0.273
Philippines	10	9	1	0.023	0.1
Singapore	9	9	0	0.02	0
Vietnam	9	7	2	0.02	0.222
China	8	8	0	0.018	0
USA	6	6	0	0.014	0

Note(s): SCP = Single country publication; MCP = Multiple country publication

Source(s): Authors' own work

Table A5. Most influential journals publishing in the domain considering Bradford's law

Journal name	Frequency
Sustainability (Switzerland)	39
Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies	5
Cogent Business and Management	4

Source(s): Authors' own work

Table A6. Top 3 sources in the social entrepreneurship and sustainability domain

Journal	h_index	g_index	m_index	TC	NP	Publication year
Sustainability (Switzerland)	10	16	1	293	39	2014
Benchmarking-An International Journal	3	3	0.6	44	3	2019
Journal of Cleaner Production	3	3	0.6	52	3	2019

Source(s): Authors' own work

Table A7. Top 10 locally cited articles

The Bottom Line

Author and journal	Year	Local citations	Global citations	LC/GC ratio (%)
Roxas <i>et al.</i> (2017), J Small Bus Manage	2017	2	100	2.00
Pratono <i>et al.</i> (2019), Bottom Line	2019	1	59	1.69
Lim <i>et al.</i> (2001), J Bus Venturing	2001	0	9	0.00
Milgram (2021), Hum Organ	2001	0	31	0.00
Edralin (2001), Reg Dev Dialogue	2001	0	0	
Martawijaya and Montgomery (2004), Bull Indones Econ Stud	2004	0	5	0.00
Low (2005), J Asia Pac Econ	2005	0	15	0.00
Koh and Wong (2005), Technol Forecast Soc Change	2005	0	41	0.00
Ahmad and Neil (2006), Asian J Manage Cases	2006	0	3	0.00
Murray Li TM, 2007, Econ Soc	2007	0	593	0.00

Source(s): Authors' own work**Table A8.** Top globally cited articles

Paper	Total citations (TC)	TC per year
Murray Li (2007), Econ Soc	593	34.88
Roxas <i>et al.</i> (2017), J Small Bus Manage	100	14.29
Schouten and Bitzer (2015), Ecol Econ	98	10.89
Luu (2017), Int J Contemp Hosp Manage	87	12.43
Sadiq <i>et al.</i> (2022), China Finance Rev Int	65	32.5
Sodhi and Tang (2011), Socio-Econ Plann Sci	65	5
Schoneveld <i>et al.</i> (2019), Global Environ Change	61	12.2
Pratono <i>et al.</i> (2019), Bottom Line	59	11.8
Muangmee <i>et al.</i> (2021), Soc Sci	55	18.33
Grandhi and Singh (2016), J Food Prod Mark	55	6.88

Source(s): Authors' own work**Corresponding author**Greeni Maheshwari can be contacted at: greeni.maheshwari@rmit.edu.vn

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