Developing an Exhaustive and Objective Definition of Social Enterprise through Computer Aided Text Analysis

Authors : Deepika Verma, Runa Sarkar

Abstract : One of the prominent debates in the social entrepreneurship literature has been to establish whether entrepreneurial work for social well-being by for-profit organizations can be classified as social entrepreneurship or not. Of late, the scholarship has reached a consensus. It concludes that there seems little sense in confining social entrepreneurship to just non-profit organizations. Boosted by this research, increasingly a lot of businesses engaged in filling the social infrastructure gaps in developing countries are calling themselves social enterprise. These organizations are diverse in their ownership, size, objectives, operations and business models. The lack of a comprehensive definition of social enterprise leads to three issues. Firstly, researchers may face difficulty in creating a database for social enterprises because the choice of an entity as a social enterprise becomes subjective or based on some pre-defined parameters by the researcher which is not replicable. Secondly, practitioners who use 'social enterprise' in their vision/mission statement(s) may find it difficult to adjust their business models accordingly especially during the times when they face the dilemma of choosing social well-being over business viability. Thirdly, social enterprise and social entrepreneurship attract a lot of donor funding and venture capital. In the paucity of a comprehensive definitional guide, the donors or investors may find assigning grants and investments difficult. It becomes necessary to develop an exhaustive and objective definition of social enterprise and examine whether the understanding of the academicians and practitioners about social enterprise match. This paper develops a dictionary of words often associated with social enterprise or (and) social entrepreneurship. It further compares two lexicographic definitions of social enterprise imputed from the abstracts of academic journal papers and trade publications extracted from the EBSCO database using the 'tm' package in R software.