GESPYE

GESTIÓN PÚBLICA Y EMPRESARIAL

UNIVERSIDAD DE GUADALAJARA
Centro Universitario de Ciencias Económico Administrativas
División de Gestión Empresarial
Departamento de Administración

Edificio G-202, Núcleo Universitario Los Belenes Periférico Norte No. 799,
Los Belenes, C.P. 45100, Zapopan, Jal.

Pioneering strategical social innovation

Oscar Alejandro Espinoza Mercado[6]

RESUMEN: La innovación social ha surgido como un tema importante tanto en el discurso académico como en la agenda política global. Fue durante las secuelas de la crisis económica y financiera de 2008 que la innovación social ganó fuerza como respuesta práctica a diversos desafíos sociales como la pobreza, el envejecimiento y la migración. En este contexto, hubo un reconocimiento creciente de la innovación social como un concepto prometedor digno de investigación, comprensión, definición y conceptualización. La clasificación de la innovación social es amplia e intrincada y abarca varias perspectivas a través de las cuales se puede abordar el concepto. Esta diversidad de entendimiento se refleja en la multitud de iniciativas y proyectos que se describen más adelante en este documento. A pesar de la diversidad conceptual, todas las definiciones de innovación social comparten un reconocimiento común que deben abordar: •Hacer hincapié en el intercambio abierto de conocimientos y evitar la propiedad exclusiva del conocimiento; •Adoptar enfoques multidisciplinarios e integrar la resolución de problemas en diversos campos; •Fomentar la participación y el empoderamiento de los ciudadanos y usuarios; •Priorizar las soluciones personalizadas frente a las producidas en masa. *Palabras clave: Estrategia, Innovación Social.*

ABSTRACT: Social innovation has emerged as a significant topic in both scholarly discourse and the global political agenda. It was during the aftermath of the 2008 economic and financial crisis that social innovation gained traction as a practical response to various societal challenges such as poverty, aging, and migration. Within this context, there was a growing recognition of social innovation as a promising concept worthy of research, understanding, definition, and conceptualization. The classification of social innovation is broad and intricate, encompassing various perspectives through which the concept can be approached. This diversity in understanding is reflected in the multitude of initiatives and projects outlined later in this document. Despite the conceptual diversity, all definitions of

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6   Profesor del Departamento de Mercadotecnia y Negocios Internacionales, Centro Universitario de Ciencias Económico Administrativas, Universidad de Guadalajara, Correo Electrónico: oscar.espinoza@academicos.udg.mx

social innovation share a common acknowledgment that they should address: •Emphasizing open knowledge-sharing and eschewing exclusive ownership of knowledge; •Embracing multidisciplinary approaches and integrating problem-solving across various fields; •Fostering participation and empowerment among citizens and users; •Prioritizing customized solutions over mass-produced ones. Keywords: Strategy, Social Innovation.

Introduction

In contemporary times, innovation has become essential for every company, reshaping the landscape of global economic growth. This transformation is driven by the rapid and continuous evolution of technology, shorter product lifecycles, programmed obsolescence, and accelerated new product development. To survive in this dynamic environment, companies, institutions, and organizations must ensure that their business strategies are both unique and innovative to establish and maintain a competitive edge, as failure to do so could result in their demise.

There is widespread consensus among authors, researchers, consultants, and management experts regarding the pivotal role of innovation for organizations. They assert that innovation is the core capability essential for organizational success, emphasizing the importance of adopting innovative approaches. Fundamentally, innovation involves leveraging existing elements in novel ways to achieve different outcomes. In the realm of social innovation, this principle applies similarly.

The present study seeks to explore its impact on science, technology, and society. After identifying and analyzing the key drivers, a theoretical methodology will be employed and scrutinized through a comprehensive examination. It will be crucial to ascertain the significance of these drivers to ensure that the data is accurately comprehended.

Lastly, it's important to note that the findings are intended to be disseminated to improve practical applications in addressing current challenges related to social innovation.

Theoretical framework

Knowledge management and social innovation are two important concepts that have emerged in recent years. While they may seem unrelated at first glance, they are actually closely linked and can have a significant impact on organizations, communities, and society.

Knowledge management is typically thought as the process of identifying, capturing, sharing, and effectively using knowledge and information within an organization. It involves creating and maintaining an environment in which knowledge can be easily accessed, shared, and utilized to improve business processes, products, and services. The goal of knowledge management is to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of an organization by leveraging the collective knowledge and expertise of its employees. Still, it is not only restricted to organizations.

To grasp this concept, it's imperative to delve into various perspectives. López and Meroño (2011) highlighted that despite significant progress in certain areas, there had been diverse and sometimes contradictory findings regarding the factors influencing knowledge management initiatives. Duhon (1998) defined knowledge management as an integrated strategy aimed at identifying, capturing, assessing, retrieving, and disseminating all types of information, which may encompass databases, documents, policies, procedures, or previously undocumented expertise and experience among individual employees. Knowledge management was also viewed as a process involving the creation, acquisition, and transfer of knowledge manifested in the organization's behavior, which proves to be valuable. Essentially, it revolves around the collection and systematic organization of a company's assets.

Social innovation definition

It is important to recognize that businesses operate within a broader societal context. Their future success hinges not only on technological advancements but also on their impact on the social environment. It's increasingly evident that business model innovation isn't solely driven by technology; companies must also leverage their human resources and engage with their social surroundings to thrive (Howaldt & Schwarz, 2010).

Moreover, businesses are realizing that their sustainability is contingent upon persuading customers that their products or services benefit people, the planet, and profitability. Many companies are embracing the concept of social entrepreneurship, which emphasizes creating social value alongside generating profits. By restructuring to support social innovation, companies can foster broader social and economic inclusion, as well as achieve objectives like reducing consumption and fostering community engagement. Consequently, social innovation not only aids in business innovation but also contributes to broader societal goals (Davies, 2014; Zahra, Gedajlovic, Neubaum, & Shulman, 2009).

As per OECD (2023), "Social innovation entails the creation and execution of novel solutions involving conceptual, procedural, product, or organizational modifications, all with the overarching goal of enhancing the welfare and quality of life for individuals and communities" (p. 7).

Numerous initiatives led by civil society and the social economy have showcased innovative approaches to tackling environmental and socio-economic issues while fostering economic development. To facilitate collaboration among public, non-profit, and private entities to co-create and implement socially innovative solutions, thereby addressing socio-economic challenges, enhancing territorial resilience, and preparing for future disruptions, it is imperative to fully leverage the potential of social innovation. This necessitates the establishment of an enabling policy framework.

Social innovation encompasses the conception and execution of novel ideas, products, services, and practices aimed at addressing social and environmental challenges. It entails identifying and responding to social needs by devising fresh solutions that drive positive social change. Social innovation can manifest at individual, organizational, or community levels, often involving cooperation and partnerships among diverse stakeholders.

Once the concept of social innovation is comprehended, it becomes crucial to delve deeper into innovation strategies, which are intricately intertwined with these dynamics. The outcome of an innovation strategy is seen as a critical element in producing superior products, processes, and services, thereby catalyzing economic and social progress.

Additionally, a frequently cited definition of social innovation reads: "Social innovation is a fresh approach to addressing a social issue that proves to be more effective, efficient, sustainable, or equitable than existing solutions, with

the resulting benefits primarily accruing to society at large rather than to private individuals" (Phills, Deiglmeier, & Miller, 2008). This definition underscores the imperative of putting innovations into practice to support the integration of marginalized social segments. From our viewpoint, a truly successful innovation should not only be conceptualized but also executed, thereby fostering the social inclusion of disadvantaged demographics. Hence, we propose the following operational definition of social innovation: the conception, refinement, and implementation of novel concepts aimed at tackling social hurdles faced by individuals, groups, or communities. This definition underscores the importance of 'implementation' as a key measure of success in addressing social issues.

Having said that, identifying the participating agents of social innovation is crucial, as one of the key aspects of social innovation involves transforming social and power dynamics. According to the examination research (Table 1), it is pertinent to highlight the main actors or agents who promote social innovation, as they hold the potential to enhance the transformative impact of these innovations (Avelino et al., 2019).

In general, the field of social innovation is relatively new, interdisciplinary, and rapidly expanding. However, Grimm et al. (2013) express concern over its evolution, noting that it is progressing in divergent directions and leading to conceptual ambiguity, potentially reaching a breaking point. Similarly, Hernández-Ascanio et al. (2021) find that various definitions of social innovation coexist without proper articulation, given its consolidation across multiple disciplines and application areas. Consequently, there is no universally accepted concept of social innovation (Herrero De Egaña, 2021). Proof of it, Table 1 includes some definitions of pioneering authors and references in this field to identify some of the key characteristics that consolidate the social innovation.

Table 1. Social innovation conceptions and highlights

(Bouchard, 2012)	An initiative initiated by individuals or groups within society in response to the need to address certain needs, provide solutions, or seize opportunities to alter social dynamics, change existing frameworks of action, or propose new goals.	• Action by social actors • New social relations and action framework
(Herrera Baltazar, 2015)	Social innovation entails a quantifiable and re-producible endeavor that employs either a novel idea or an innovative application of an existing concept to generate value both for society and for shareholders.	• New concept or imple-mentation. • Measurable and rep-licable • Social value
(Alonso-Martínez et al., 2015)	Social innovation refers to innovations intro-duced by governments, businesses, or individ-uals, which uniquely enhance the quality of life for society while also yielding economic or sustainable advantages.	• Involve the govern-ment • Improve quality of life • Generates economic and sustainable benefits
(Ayob et al., 2016)	Initially stemming from socio-ecological dis-course, and likewise discernible within discus-sions on technology's impact on social dynam-ics, political theory, and design methodologies, social innovation denotes novel collaborative approaches. These can manifest at individual or organizational levels, often entailing fresh, more egalitarian partnerships among government entities, civil society, and citizens.	• New forms of collab-oration • New relationships. •New ideas or innova-tions
(Bock, 2016)	Social innovation is promising, since it consid-ers the opportunities offered by change in social organization, new partnerships, and the use of modern technology.	• New relationships or social organizations • Modern technologies
(Edwards Scha-chter & Wallace, 2017)	Social innovation is characterized by a shared set of fundamental components that form the foundation across three interconnected domains of discourse: processes driving social change, sustainable development, and the ser-vice sector.	• Social change • Sustainable develop-ment • Services

Source. Own elaboration

In the conducted review, the most observed characteristics of social innovation include the emergence of new ideas and structures of social organization. This is followed by addressing social problems and needs, resulting in the creation of value and social impact. Additionally, social innovation often entails the esta-blishment of enduring relationships between various groups, as well as shifts in attitudes, behaviors, and power dynamics among different agents. Other signifi-cant aspects include social learning, the utilization of technology, and conside-rations of sustainability.

Methodology

To proceed with the planned analysis, the methodological parameters are outlined. These parameters served as the framework for the current research, aimed at achieving and addressing the established objectives. According to Gil (2008), research can be categorized based on its nature, objectives, and data search methods. The present study adopts a qualitative nature, as it seeks to deepen the understanding of the phenomena through the examination of literature contents (Oliveira, 1999). The objective is exploratory, focusing on gathering information and describing how the phenomenon unfolds. Regarding data collection and analysis, an integrative literature review approach was employed, aiming to synthesize findings from studies on a specific theme or question in a systematic, orderly, and comprehensive manner (Ercole et al., 2014). Six steps were followed in preparing the integrative review: 1) formulating the guiding question; 2) establishing inclusion and exclusion criteria; 3) identifying pre-selected and selected studies; 4) categorizing the selected studies; 5) analyzing and interpreting the results; and finally, 6) presenting the review of knowledge (Botelho et al., 2011). Figure 1 illustrates these steps along with their descriptions.

Table 2. Stages of the Systematic Review

Steps	Description
1) Elaboration of the guiding question	The guiding question of the research is: "How does strategical thinking impact on social innovation?"
2) Inclusion and exclusion criteria	For literature search, a comprehensive survey was conducted across several databases including Web of Science, Ebsco, Scopus, Emerald, and Scielo. The search was performed using specific fields such as "Titles, Abstracts, and Keywords," employing descriptors and their combinations related to "Social innovation." A total of fifty-eight articles were retrieved from these databases. To refine the content selection, only empirical articles presenting results derived from field research were included, while purely theoretical articles were excluded. Following this criterion, twelve articles remained for detailed content analysis.
3) Identification of the pre-selected and selected studies	Based on the research question, it was sought to identify in the articles the similarities between the objectives and the main results.

Steps	Description
4) Categorization of Selected Studies	After identifying the pre-selected studies, the aim was to classify them according to the alignment of knowledge management with social innovation.
5) Analysis and interpretation of results	With the categories grouped together, it began the identification of which knowledge management initiatives were focused on each one of them.
6) Presentation of the knowledge review	The review presentation encompasses interpretations and findings derived from the integrative analysis of the articles' data.

Source. Adapted from Botelho et al., 2011.

Interpretation

The field of social innovation is relatively recent, multidisciplinary, and rapidly expanding. Grimm et al. (2013) express concern that its evolution is diverging in various directions, leading to conceptual ambiguity that could potentially reach a breaking point. Similarly, Hernández-Ascanio et al. (2021) find that different definitions of social innovation coexist without sufficient integration, given its consolidation across multiple disciplines and application areas. Consequently, there is no universally accepted concept of social innovation (Herrero De Egaña, 2021).

According to Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995), in an economy characterized by uncertainty, the most reliable source of sustained innovation and competitive advantage is essentially knowledge. Building upon this premise. From the literature reviewed, strategic management can be understood as the capacity to identify, generate, harness, transfer, integrate, and apply superior knowledge resources inherent in individuals, teams, or organizations.

This involves a wide range of activities and interactions aimed at enhancing existing practices and fostering new innovations. A pertinent example of this would be the creation of high-quality products, processes, and services, which are pivotal for gaining a competitive edge and addressing societal needs (Meier, 2011).

The empirical findings by Surikova et al. (2015) indicate that in the context of a deficient public education system, social innovation provides new solutions, characterized as superior knowledge resources, that contribute to the development of a more capable future workforce. Similarly, Scheuerle et al. (2015)

demonstrate that deploying superior knowledge resources through social innovation initiatives aimed at addressing widespread unemployment can lead to increased employment opportunities and economic benefits through enhanced consumption. Moreover, Cajaiba-Santana (2014) and Spiess et al. (2015) underscore the positive outcomes of social innovation when coupled with superior knowledge resources, such as the introduction of advanced products, processes, and services, which in turn can drive economic value in terms of profit maximization, market dominance, and improved private performance. El Arifeen et al. (2013) further emphasize the beneficial effects of social innovation and knowledge resources on issues related to social health.

Contrary to these perspectives, Cajaiba-Santana (2014) offers an alternative viewpoint on social innovation, suggesting two main approaches: agentic-centered, focusing on individual change agents akin to social entrepreneurship, and structuralist, emphasizing the influence of social structures on these agents. This suggests a connection between social innovation and institutional change, highlighting the interplay between structure and agency in driving innovation.

Furthermore, Van der Have & Rubalcaba (2016) conducted a systematic analysis of the scholarly literature on social innovation, suggesting that it represents a paradigm shift in innovation studies, encompassing a revitalization of the social aspects inherent in all forms of innovation, not just technological advancements.

Early reviews of social innovation emphasize its interdisciplinary nature and the consequent fragmentation of its scope and meaning (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014; Edwards-Schachter & Wallace, 2017; Phillips et al., 2015; Silveira & Zilber, 2017; Van der Have & Rubalcaba, 2016). Various definitions have attempted to encapsulate this diversity, often incorporating sociological perspectives and addressing both structural and agentic aspects. Pol & Ville (2009) highlight the emergence of social innovation in academic and practitioner literature, contrasting it with business innovation by its focus on social impact rather than profitability.

Once these approaches have been considered, it is important to stand out the role of strategic management, since it can be such a powerful tool for driving social innovation. It is well known that by effectively capturing, sharing, and leveraging knowledge, organizations can develop innovative solutions to social and environmental challenges. This is the reason why the theoretical study ex-

plores how strategic knowledge management can serve as a key driver for social innovation.

Firstly, strategic knowledge management can help organizations identify social and environmental needs. By collecting and analyzing data, organizations gain valuable insights into social trends, needs, and challenges that have already occurred in our daily lives. This information can be used to identify areas where social innovation is needed, as well as to develop new solutions to address these challenges. For example, a social enterprise working on renewable energy may use knowledge management to identify trends in the market and develop "new products" that meet the needs of customers and future generations (Flores-López et al., 2023).

Secondly, strategic knowledge management can help organizations collaborate and share knowledge. Collaboration is key to social innovation, and knowledge management can facilitate this collaboration. By creating knowledge-sharing platforms, organizations can connect with other stakeholders, including communities, NGOs, and government agencies.

Thirdly, strategic knowledge management can help organizations build capacity for social innovation. By developing a culture of learning and innovation, organizations can create an environment that supports social innovation. This culture can be supported by knowledge management practices, such as training and development programs, which can help employees develop the skills and knowledge needed to develop innovative solutions. For example, a social enterprise may offer training and development programs to employees, helping them to develop the skills needed to develop new products and services.

Indeed, strategic knowledge management plays a pivotal role in enabling organizations to assess the impact of social innovation. By systematically collecting data on the outcomes and effects of social innovation initiatives, organizations can gain insights into what strategies are effective, what aspects need improvement, and how to refine their approaches for better results. This continuous learning process contributes to the enhancement of social innovation initiatives, leading to more positive outcomes for communities and the environment.

Supporting this assertion, various sources provide compelling data:

- The Global Innovation Index (GII, 2022) highlights the increasing importance of social innovation as a driver of economic growth and social well-being. It emphasizes the role of social innovation in addressing pressing social issues like poverty, inequality, and climate change.
- The European Commission (2023) acknowledges social innovation as a critical catalyst for social and economic advancement. It recognizes the potential of social innovation to generate novel solutions to complex social challenges, promote social entrepreneurship, and foster inclusive growth.
- The Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship Report (2019) underscores the rapid global growth of social innovation. It reveals the emergence of social entrepreneurs across various regions, particularly focusing on sectors such as healthcare, education, and sustainable development.
- The Ashoka Globalizer Program (2023), dedicated to scaling the impact of social entrepreneurs, reports significant achievements. Its alumni organizations have collectively impacted over 100 million individuals across more than 90 countries, demonstrating the tangible effects of social innovation initiatives.

Conclusions

At the end of this study, the goal was achieved, since it was possible to present, by means of reviews, dissertation, and discussions regarding the set of strategic social innovation actions. As to the goals and main results of the articles analyzed, it can be observed that, in general, management turns out to be a key driver for a suitable social innovation development. It is important to stand out the fact that there are many contexts where this interconnection takes place: social, economic, technological. In addition, it should be emphasized that social innovation actions bring a strong bias of cooperative work and attendance to social needs.

Regarding innovation, it's notable to underscore the collaborative efforts among stakeholders employing social innovation tools. In terms of technology utilization, particular attention is given to open technologies accessible to societies at no cost. The motivational aspect and adaptability to enhance productivity and reduce costs within public organizations are pivotal. For forthcoming research, a more comprehensive examination of strategic approaches concern-

ing learning patterns and motivation associated with social innovation across diverse communities is suggested. This study could be warranted to advance social innovation and gain deeper insights into the collaborative networks formed within these dynamics.

At the conclusion of this study, the primary objective was achieved through the presentation of reviews, dissertations, and discussions concerning strategic social innovation actions. Across the analyzed articles, it is evident that management emerges as a crucial driver for effective social innovation development. It is noteworthy that this interconnectedness occurs within various contexts: social, economic, and technological. Moreover, social innovation initiatives inherently prioritize collaborative work and address social needs.

Regarding innovation, the emphasis is placed on cooperative and collaborative efforts among stakeholders utilizing social innovation tools. The use of technology is highlighted, particularly open technologies accessible to societies at large. Motivation and flexibility play essential roles in enhancing productivity and reducing costs for public organizations.

For future research, there is a proposed focus on exploring strategic approaches concerning learning processes and motivation related to social innovation within diverse communities. Such a study would contribute to the advancement of social innovation practices and deepen our understanding of the collaborative networks fostered within these dynamics.

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