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TOWARD THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MODELS FOR SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

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ABSTRACT

With social depravation and inequities on the rise, social enterprise has been the response offered to combat this trend. These social enterprises are required to be autonomous, sustainable and meet the social needs that are not being fulfilled by government or the private sector. Research has been focussed on the definition of social enterprise but has not sufficiently examined the concepts of sustainability and business models within the social enterprise context. A conceptual framework is proposed that synthesizes sustainability, business model and social enterprise components.

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1. INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Social deprivation and inequality is on the rise in South Africa [1]. Traditionally, government is held responsible to represent the interests of its citizens and alleviate social problems that would not be resolved otherwise [1]. It has however been evident that even governments in developed countries are not capable of resolving their social problems, much less governments in developing countries.

Teasdale [2] expands on four failures that explain the context within which Social Enterprises (SE's) originated. The failures are; (1) failure of state and market, which occurs when government is not able to counteract inequalities fostered by the market or when there is a lack of market presence by the private sector, (2) resource failure, the dependence of an organisation on its external environment for its resources, there is often a lack of control over the flow of these resources by the organisation (3) institutional theory failure, which occurs when the dominant practices of an industry are incorrectly accepted as best practice and finally (4) voluntary failure, which occurs as a result of the power imbalance between the donor and the organisation receiving the funding. Traditionally Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) serve the sector that SEs target. NGOs however do not always operate with a business model as they often do not capture value. Thus, NGOs are more dependent on donations than traditional enterprises. To overcome this dependence, other sources of income are desired [2]. The failures and dependencies identified illustrate that neither the government, NGOs or the private sector can comprehensively meet the social needs of society, or the subsequent gaps in the market. As can clearly be seen in South Africa, 60% of the national budget is spent on social services [3]. The budget deficit is already 24%, clearly the social need is greater than even government can cater for, which supports the case of state and market failure. From these statistics it is clear that in developing countries, SE's developed not because of institutional theory failure, but out of a need to provide for social needs.

With increased competition for resources, resource failure has highlighted the frailty of NGOs. NGOs limited control over their revenue streams cause NGOs to have variable certainty about their long-term liquidity and sustainability.

Something in between the public and private-sector was needed to fill the gap in the market. More specifically, an enterprise that could be sustainable, autonomous and address the social and market needs that are not being met by government, NGOs or the private sector. The resulting concept was that of the social enterprise [2]. For the purpose of this paper, SEs will be defined as: "Organisations seeking to achieve social goals through the application of commercial and business like activities" [4].

The definition and evolution of SEs has been well researched in literature [5] [6] [4]. Although sustainability is a vital component of SE policy, there has been little critical debate on how to achieve sustainability, and it is recognised as a subject that needs to be researched more rigorously [4].

Business models, in general, are a topic of study that have been neglected and rarely analysed [7]. Research has not uncovered many scalable and sustainable business models [8]. This is due to the lack of business models that are able to serve the SE market sustainably [6]. Recent research in business model innovation has also placed emphasis on sustainability issues [9]. Thus, it is required to research the nature of business models that are sustainable within the markets that SE's serve.

The preliminary investigation suggests that there are numerous examples of well-meaning SEs that aim to make a positive difference in society but are not able to make sustainable profits [10]. Business models that have been applied in the past required very high penetration rates and were not sustainable [10]. Scalable and sustainable business models have also not been sufficiently explored in literature [8]. SEs tend to struggle with hybridity tension that arises because of its dual mission. It is also evident that business models research is in its infancy in the SE field. Thus, there is a need to develop a conceptual framework, that will provide an understanding of the elements required of a business model, to ensure that SEs can be sustainable.

The research will be guided by the following research questions:

1. How can sustainability be defined for social enterprise?
2. What are the concepts that need to be accounted for in a business model that aims to serve the social enterprise sector?
3. What are the main tensions and issues that arise from the social and financial missions in SE's?

4. How can organisational sustainability theory and business models manage the tension between the social mission and financial sustainability within a social enterprise?
5. What are the factors that drive sustainability in social enterprises?
6. How can business models enable scaling of social enterprises?

2. RESEARCH METHODS AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ANALYSIS

The topic of this study is multi-disciplinary in nature, with grounding in business management, economics, social sciences and engineering. This study will thus be qualitative in nature, reviewing material from various sources. Grounded theory, which is a commonly utilised qualitative research method [11], is capable of reviewing large amounts of multi-disciplinary data. Grounded theory does however not sufficiently provide a process to be followed when formulating a conceptual framework. Jabareen [12] formulated the conceptual framework analysis which provides a detailed process, based in grounded theory, that can be used to build a conceptual framework during qualitative studies. The conceptual frameworks that are subsequently developed are intended to provide an interpretive approach to society and provide understanding of the real world, rather than theoretical definitions [12].

The conceptual framework analysis defines the phases of formulating a conceptual framework very well, but it does lack 'tools' that are capable of achieving the objectives of the different phases. To solve this, systematic literature review tools are incorporated into the conceptual framework analysis.

Table 1 illustrates the synthesis of the conceptual framework analysis and the systematic literature review tools.

Table 1: Adapted conceptual framework analysis [12], [1], [11]

Conceptual Framework Analysis Phases	SLR Phase	Systematic Literature Review Tools [1], [11]	Conceptual Framework Analysis Tools [12]
Phase 1: Mapping the selected data sources	Searching for articles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keywords • Search strings • Databases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensive review • Initial specialists interview • Comprehensive data collection
Phase 2: Extensive reading and categorizing of the selected data	Relevance appraisal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screening, inclusion and exclusion criteria • Quality appraisal (Four Criteria) aims and objectives stated, clear context, concept description, sufficient data for evidence • Open-coding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Categorise data by discipline • Categorise by importance within the discipline • Atlas.ti line-by-line coding • Atlas.ti mapping of publishing dates and geographical location
Phase 3: Identifying and naming concepts	Extracting data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open coding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discover concepts • Read and re-read the coded data
Phase 4: Deconstructing and categorizing the concepts		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Axial coding - analysing context of the concepts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deconstruct each concept identify its main attributes, characteristics assumptions and role • Organise and categorise concepts by: features and

		ontological, epistemological and methodological role
Phase 5: Integrating concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Axial coding - analyse which characteristics of the identified concepts overlap. Link those concepts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate and group together concepts to form new categories
Future Research - Not Included in this paper		
Phase 6: <i>Synthesis, resynthesis and making it all make sense</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Selective Coding - select core category, forms foundation of the framework</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Synthesize theoretical framework</i> • <i>Semi-structured interviews</i> • <i>Iterations</i>
Phase 7: <i>Validating the conceptual Framework</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Present at peer reviewed conferences</i> • <i>Framework ranking interviews, case study and case study interviews</i>
Phase 8: <i>Rethinking the conceptual framework</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Revise conceptual framework based on feedback, new insights and literature.</i>

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ANALYSIS

Jabareen [12] defines a conceptual framework as “a network or ‘plane’ of interlinked concepts that together provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon or phenomena”. Conceptual frameworks are built on concepts alone, not variables. Concepts are groupings of similar data that together are given conceptual labels. These concepts are then related to each other by statements of relationships which result in new categories being defined. Categories are groupings of concepts that have been elaborated upon to describe the real world [11]. The framework is synthesized using the identified categories. This paper will document the first six phases of the conceptual framework analysis, up until the integration of the concepts into categories and an initial synthesis of a theoretical framework.

3.1 Phase 1: Mapping the selected Data sources

The goal of this phase was to comprehensively survey the topic of study and to collect relevant data. This was achieved by analysing the existing literature. Upon completion of Phase 1 it was desired to understand the data sources. This was achieved by first selecting the relevant key words for the study, shown in Figure 1.

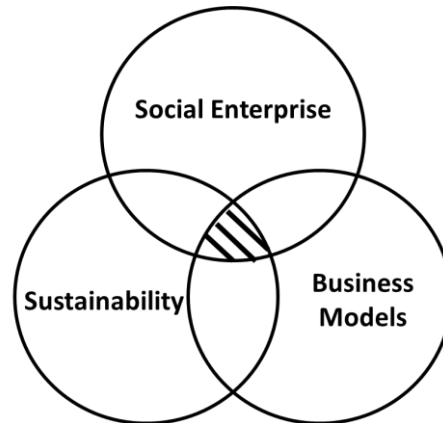


Figure 1: Key Word Venn Diagram

The keywords were combined to form the search terms. These terms were used to identify the literature that is relevant to the shaded area in Figure 1, where the three domains of the study overlap. The search terms were used to weed out papers that did not relate to the niche that the study is researching. The search terms are listed in Table 2. The online database utilised was Scopus, as Scopus is “the largest abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature” [13]. The initial search returned 376 articles. In addition to the articles found using the Scopus search, 14 grey literature articles were included, thus a total of 390 articles were identified.

Table 2: Search Strings and Scopus Results

Keywords	Search Strings	Scopus Results
Social Enterprise, Sustainability	("Social Enterprise") AND ("Sustainability")	214
Business Model, Sustainability	("Business Model") AND ("Organisational Sustainability")	18
Social enterprise, business model	("Social Enterprise") AND ("Business Model")	115
Social enterprise, business model, sustainability	("Social Enterprise") AND ("Business Model" OR "Business Model Innovation") AND ("Sustainability")	29

3.2 Phase 2: Extensive reading and categorizing of the selected data

The aim of this phase was to identify the articles that were relevant to this study and to subsequently read and categorise the data by coding.

3.2.1 Screening papers: inclusion and exclusion criteria

The titles, abstracts, and in some cases the full texts of the 390 articles identified were scrutinised to determine whether they were to be included in the study. If the paper met any of the exclusion criteria, the paper was rejected. The exclusion criteria were: (1) article did not focus on any of the keywords, (2) full text not available, (3) article not in English and (4) the paper did not meet the inclusion criteria.

For inclusion the paper needed to meet only one of the inclusion criteria; (1) definitions of relevant concepts provided (2) paper focuses on the relevant search terms (3) the paper synthesizes some of the search concepts and (4) the paper embarked on a case study in the relevant field.

3.2.2 Relevance appraisal

After the screening of the initial 376 articles using the exclusion and inclusion criteria, 30 relevant articles were identified. To further refine the search, a relevance appraisal was conducted on the remaining 30 articles. The

articles were appraised using three metrics scored from 0-2. The metrics used were: (1) the article expressly deals with one of the three key search terms (2) the article discusses the relation between at least two of the three key search terms and (3) the article contains a validated definition or framework that relates directly to the key search terms. Only papers with a combined score of 5 or higher were included in the review. After the appraisal, 20 papers were identified to have a score of 5 or higher and were subsequently coded.

3.2.3 Categorisation of data

The data was categorised through open-coding, using the program 'Atlas.ti'. During coding four main themes, which are listed in Table 3, emerged from the data. Each of the themes were made up of several codes that were identified during the process of open-coding. Open-coding was used to identify concepts, which arose in the form of keywords, phrases and sentences.

Table 3: Themes and Codes that emerged during open coding

1. Research Aids	2. Social Enterprise	3. Business Model	4. Sustainability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gap in literature • Industry 4.0 • Research Lens • Research Methodology • Scaling ability • Tools and Frameworks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition • Innovation • Challenges • Characteristics • Entrepreneur and staff • Sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition • Innovation • Business Model • Social Enterprise Business Models • Sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition • Challenges • Drivers • Financial

The code names were kept broad so that concepts were not pre-empted. This step can be viewed as 'housekeeping'.

3.2.4 Mapping of selected data

Research into SEs, business models and sustainability has been gaining popularity, this is supported by Figure 2, as the number of articles published is increasing per year. From the twenty articles selected, nine were published within the last two years. SE literature has been on the rise since 2006, but there has been a marked increase in the interest in its sustainability and business models [14].

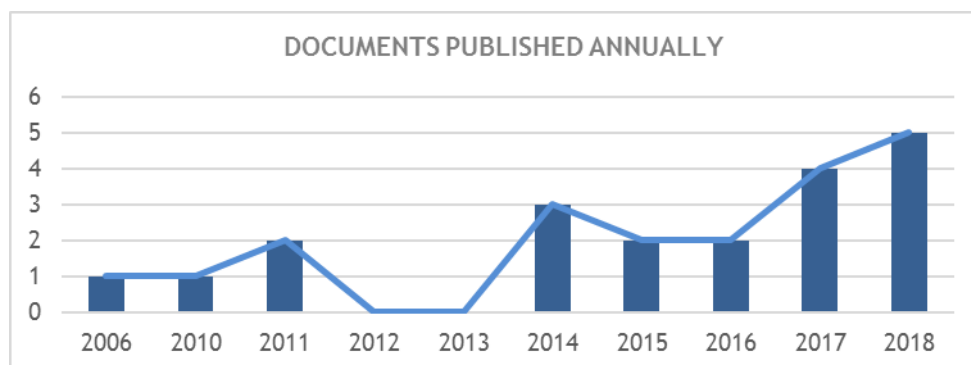


Figure 2: Articles published per year

It is interesting to note, from Figure 3, that the published papers are originating from developed and developing countries alike. Although 65% of articles originate from developed countries, the developing countries are contributing significantly to the literature, as in these countries SE's are filling the voids left by institutional failure [2].

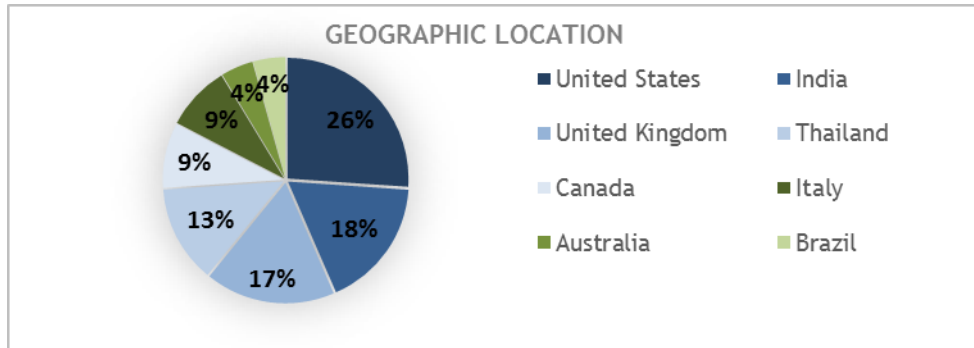


Figure 3: Geographic locations of papers published

Figure 4 supports the notion that social enterprise, business models and sustainability are multi-disciplinary topics of research. This confirms that the research methodology chosen, the conceptual framework analysis and systematic literature review, are appropriate for this study. The conceptual framework analysis in conjunction with the systematic literature review, are capable of handling large quantities of data, whilst also facilitating the formulation of conceptual framework based on the multi-disciplinary literature.

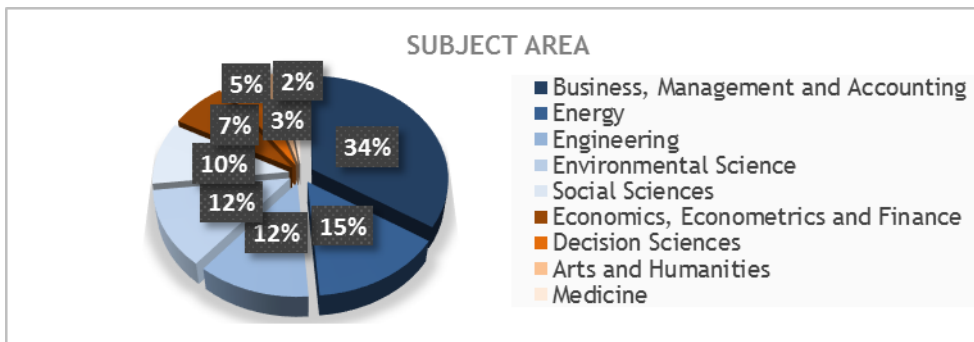


Figure 4: Subject areas of selected articles

3.3 Phase 3: Identifying and naming concepts

The goal of this phase was to allow concepts to emerge from the selected data. It was imperative for this phase that the data was not read with pre-conceived ideas about what the data would reveal, but rather for the prevalent concepts to be brought forward after reading and re-reading the selected data. This phase involved substantial data processing and 'ground work'.

The strategy for this phase was to identify concepts through the lens of the 3 main themes of the research; social enterprise, business models and sustainability. The results are indicated in Figure 5, Figure 6 and Figure 7. This phase is useful to identify concepts that previous authors have seen as important. It must be noted that the number of mentions that a concept has is not indicative of how important that concepts is. A concept with one mention could be just as important to the bigger picture as a concept with 10 mentions. The number of mentions gives an indication of how well grounded a concept is in literature.

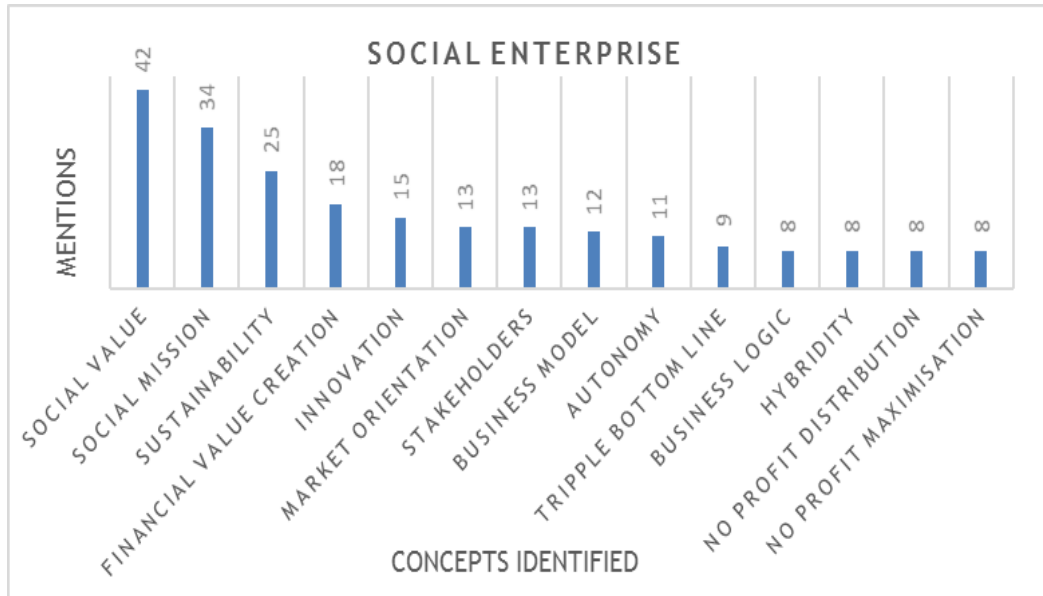


Figure 5: Social Enterprise Concepts Identified

For the SE theme, illustrated in Figure 5, it is interesting to note that sustainability and business models are frequently mentioned in the SE literature. Further, the author also identified that the SE is composed of 4 areas; community, financial logic, business logic and social logic. From this initial concept generation, it is evident that SEs are multi-faceted and multi-disciplinary enterprises, with aspects of: economics, business strategy, business management and the social sciences.

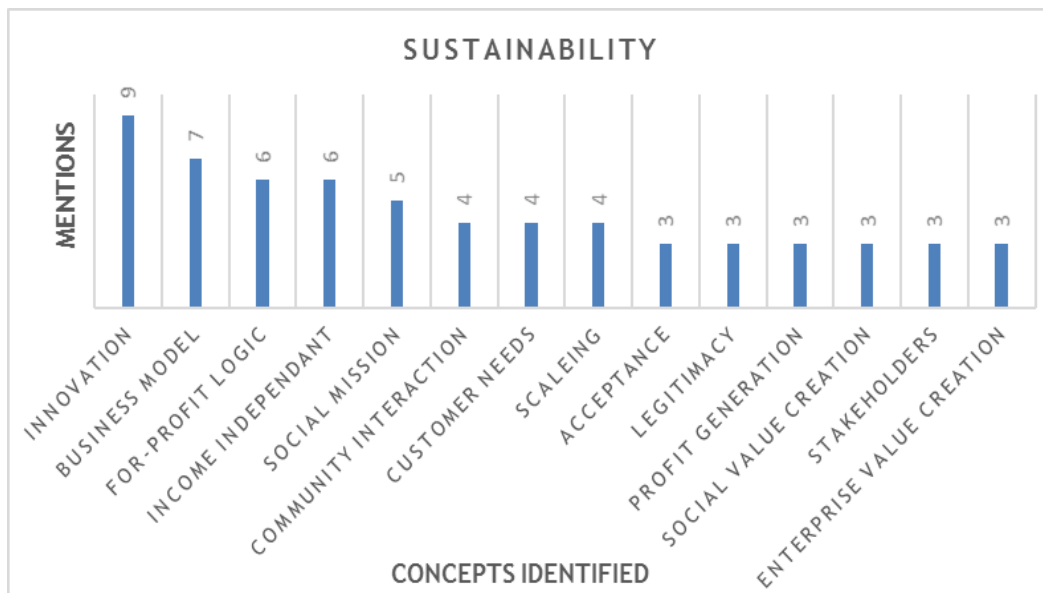


Figure 6: Sustainability Concepts Identified

Sustainability is interesting in that the concepts, as shown in Figure 6, that get the highest number of mentions in literature are financial in nature. Social mission only has the fifth most mentions in the articles reviewed. This is interesting and highlights the hybridity issue that SEs face: whether to pursue a financial mission, or social mission? It was also found that these concepts comprised the four areas of; community, financial logic, business logic and social logic. It is interesting to note how the SE and sustainability concepts correlate. Both focus on for-profit business logic, social mission, community engagement and social value creation.

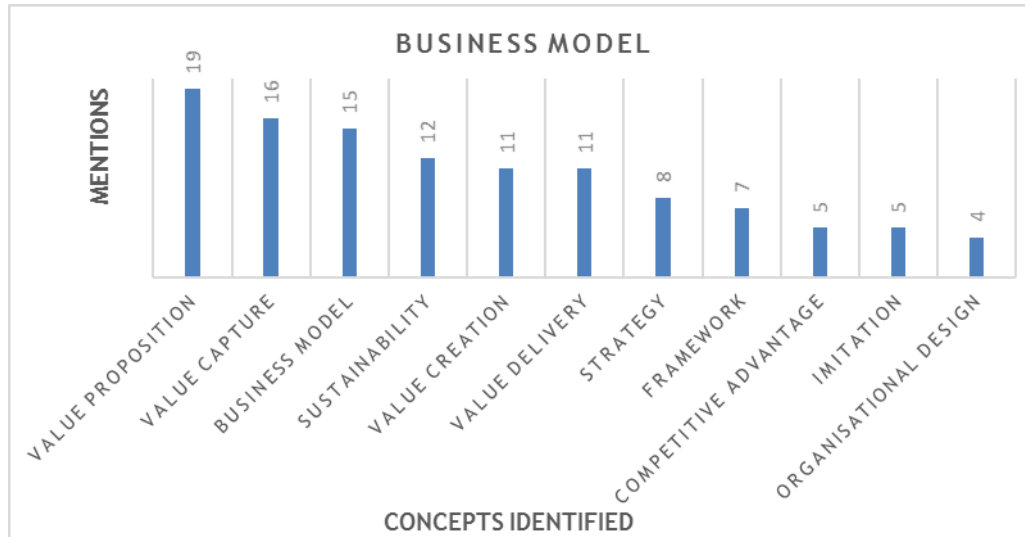


Figure 7: Business Model Concepts Identified

The initial identification of business model concepts, in Figure 7, gives an impression that business models are intrinsic to both SEs and organisational sustainability. An initial hypothesis is that business models are drivers of financial sustainability within SEs. The business model by itself will however not ensure sustainability of the SE, as the social mission also needs to be considered. The business model concepts identified in Figure 7 can be categorised in three groups: value, market and organisational design. These groups will be synthesized in Phase 5.

3.4 Phase 4: Deconstructing the concepts

In this phase, the goal was to dive deeper into the meaning of the concepts identified. It was desired to know the role, characteristics and assumptions of the selected concepts. Many concepts were identified in Phase 3 of the CFA. Before the concepts were researched in more depth, the identified concepts were reviewed to refine and synthesize the initial concepts identified. The concepts included in Phase 4 were selected based on: its importance to social enterprise, sustainability or business models, strength of relationship with surrounding concepts and how well grounded the concept was in literature. The concepts included are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Deconstruction of concepts

Concept Name	Description	Reference
1. Social Value	Social value creation is the main goal of the SE. Social value is aimed at the community that the social mission is targeting, it includes: solutions to societal problems, social change, satisfaction of social needs, development of social goods and services, eliminating poverty, creation of jobs and ultimately, improving the quality of life of the community.	[15] [6]
2. Social Mission	It is the articulation of social value to be added in the community and is also expressed as social goals. The SE must have a clear, established and documented social mission. Social mission is prioritised in SE above economic drivers. The social mission is the driving force behind the SE's strategic direction. The social mission also affects the configuration of the enterprise.	[16] [6] [17] [8]
3. Innovation	Innovation leads to the integration of social mission, sustainability and solution design in SE's. It is a core element of delivering value and involves experimentation with new procedures, products and	[8] [18] [15]

	markets. It is also implemented in SE's to reduce the hybridity tension experienced from dual mission.	
4. Market orientation	It is the orientation of the SE to meet its economic bottom-line. SE's incorporate business-like practices to ensure the financial continuity of the enterprise. This relieves the dependence on donations and ensures that the social mission can be met sustainably. It is also an articulation of how the organisation will meet the needs of its stakeholders. Market orientation is a driver for scaling an SE.	[6] [19] [20] [8] [4]
5. Stakeholders	Stakeholders are the various parties impacted by the SE's activities. The market (and the public) is considered as stakeholders not customers. The views of stakeholders are incorporated into the objectives and values of the SE. The social and economic value generated by the SE, is aimed at its stakeholders. Thus, for an SE to be successful, it must satisfy its stakeholders.	[21] [6] [19] [20] [9]
6. Autonomy	SE's are characterised by being autonomous before the state, financially and in its decision making. Financial sustainability is imperative for autonomy and business models are used to bolster financial autonomy.	[16] [6] [18]
7. Triple bottom line	The social, economic and environmental goals that guide the SE. The needs of the people, profit and planet. SE's often employ the double bottom-line: the economic and social goals. Environmental goals are not a defining trait of SE's.	[6] [19]
8. Hybridity tension	The trade-off between social and economic missions cause internal tensions. Governed by double bottom line. SE's have a hybrid organisational setup, to ensure social mission is met, whilst generating sustainable economic returns. The SE organisational form also spans the public and private sector.	[8] [6] [19] [17]
9. Scaling	The ability of an SE to increase the reach of programs while maintaining financial sustainability. Seen as a central issue for sustainable business models, which has been identified as a key driver to achieving scale. Characteristics required for scaling: staffing, communication, alliance building, lobbying, earning generation, replication and stimulating market forces. Scaling can also be supported by increasing the range of value propositions.	[22] [23] [23] [8]
10. Value Proposition	Basic element of business model. The products and services that create value for customers and generate a profit for the enterprise. Value propositions are only valid for a specific customer segment. It represents the product-service system developed by a business. Its essential pillars are: the product/service, customer segments and customer relationships.	[23] [24] [14] [9]
11. Value capture	One of the minimum requirement for a business model. The two focusses of value capture are: how to generate revenue and how to keep costs low. Value capture is the mechanism used to secure a return from the value proposition.	[24] [14]
12. Value Creation	It refers to how processes are executed. It also details how resources are transformed into a value proposition. It relates to the organisational activities that form the	[24] [14] [9]

	value proposition. Value creation is also seen as venturing into new business areas and markets.	
13. Value Delivery	Often linked with value creation. Value delivery is who the value proposition is targeted at and how it will be delivered to them. Customer segments are identified as well as distribution channels. It also deals with: resource acquisition, channel management, partner management and technology use.	[24] [14]

3.5 Phase 5 & 6: Integrating and synthesizing concepts

During this phase, concepts were integrated and synthesized to reduce the number of concepts and to indicate the relationship between concepts. The result is displayed in Figure 8. There are multiple ways for the concepts to be integrated and synthesized, Figure 8 merely represents the author's interpretation and insight.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With social deprivation and inequities on the rise, social enterprise has been the response offered to combat state and market failure. These SEs are required to be autonomous, sustainable and meet the social needs that are not being fulfilled by government or the private sector. Research has been focussed on definition of social enterprise but has not sufficiently examined the concepts of sustainability and business models within the SE context.

As research pertaining to sustainability and business models in the SE context is in its infancy, it was desired to derive a conceptual framework that could synthesize the key aspects of sustainability, business models and social enterprises. To achieve this, the conceptual framework analysis, proposed by Jabareen [12], was synthesized with systematic literature review tools. Phases 1-6 of the conceptual framework analysis, shown in Table 1, was completed and resulted in the framework presented in Figure 8.

The proposed framework identified the main components to be considered with regards to sustainable business models for social enterprises. For future research it is recommended that the underlying themes of; value capture, value creation, value delivery, social value and market orientation be researched in depth. Although the broad conceptualisation offers an understanding of the topic, there needs to be an in depth, 'nuts and bolts' analysis on each of these themes to discover what drives their success respectively.

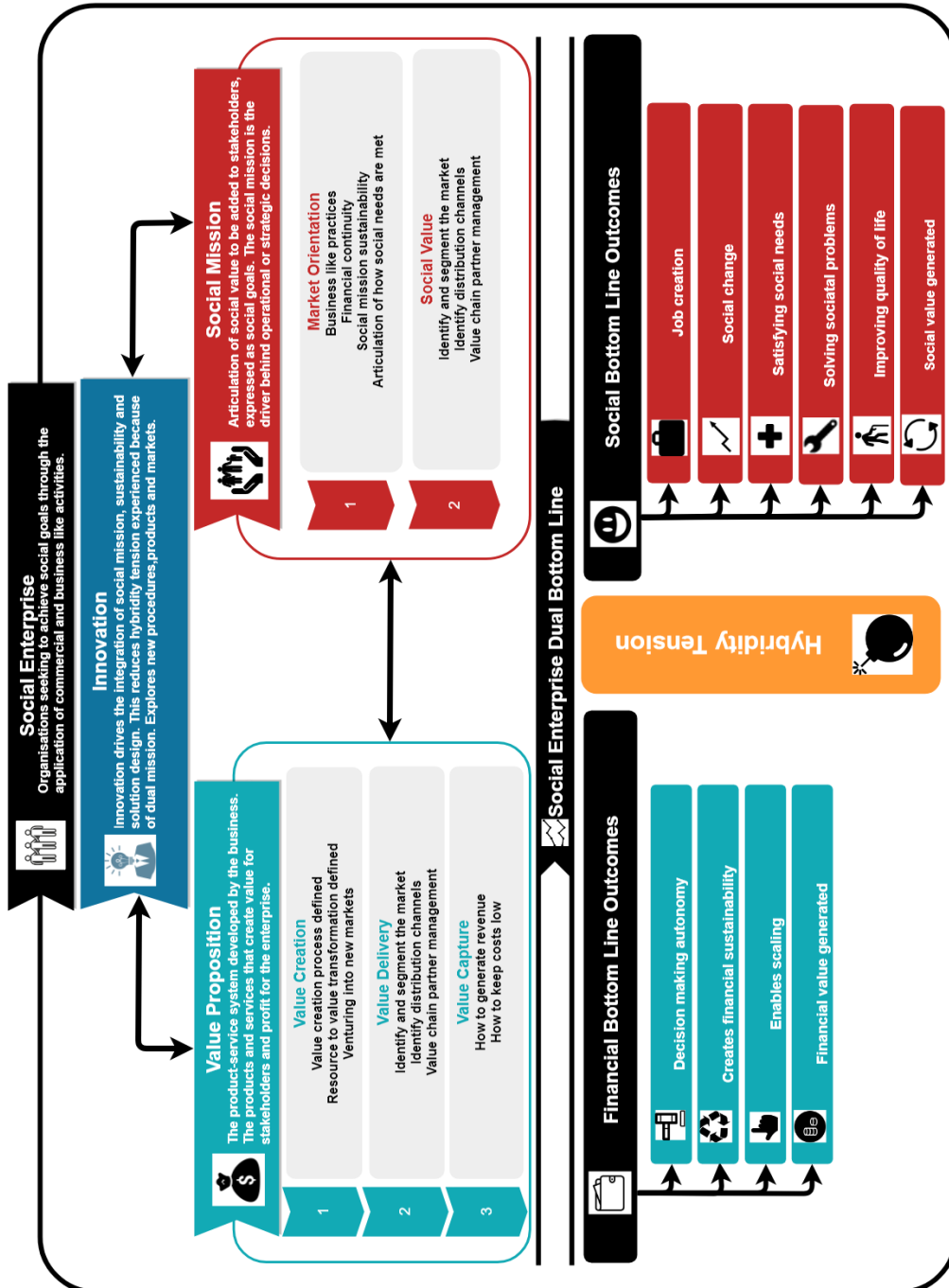


Figure 8: Synthesized framework of sustainability, business model and social enterprise concepts

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