THE SPECIFIC CHARACTER OF ONLINE INVESTIGATIONS IN THE RESEARCH OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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Received 15 02 2016; accepted 15 03 2016

Social entrepreneurship is an important socio-economic institute. At present the research the specific character implementation investigations social entrepreneurship according to online methods of collection sociologic information is vital. The essence of the problematic situation lies in the expansion of employment of online-interrogations in sociologic investigations. The problem of research has been how according to online methods the specific character of research of social entrepreneurship from the position of economic, legal and sociologic aspects can be revealed. The aim of the research has been to represent the specific character of organization and conducting of online investigations in the research of social entrepreneurship. The task of the research has been to reveal the opportunities of sociologic research of social entrepreneurship according to the methods of online research. The methodology of the research is based on monographic and descriptive analysis, content and meta-analysis of scientific sources and is oriented towards the revelation of the opportunities of research of social entrepreneurship according to the methods of online research taking into consideration the advantages and limitations of the research of the given type. The results of the conducted research indicate that the methods of on-line research enable to conduct the research efficiently, by automating the field stage and stage of entry of sociologic information.

Keywords: social entrepreneurship, online research, internet-panel.

JEL Codes: C40, C82, H49, H55.

1. Introduction

The speeding up of the rates of development of the society and solving of social problems necessitates the participation in their abatement with the help of business structures. The solving of social problems with the help of business and namely with the help of social enterprises enables to grant the social benefits which cannot be or are insufficiently granted by the state and commercial sectors. The activity of social entrepreneurs in solving social problems contributes to their abatement in the sphere of ecology and also the support of the vulnerable groups of citizens by means of their involving into labour activity, organization of additional educational services and so on.

The term “social entrepreneurship” spread in 1990 thanks to the founder of Ashoka Trust B. Driton.
Social entrepreneurship was introduced first as a sphere of scientific investigation by the Director of the Centre of Development of Social Entrepreneurship Duke University G. Dees (1998). He notes that social entrepreneurship promotes the combination of innovations and business. Social entrepreneurship as a form of innovation activity is becoming a subject of interdisciplinary investigation of economists, legal theorists, sociologists. We shall analyze the specific character of research of social entrepreneurship from the standpoint of economic, legal and sociologic aspects.

The economic aspect of the analysis of social entrepreneurship is focused on the revelation of types of business-models more successful from the economic and social effectiveness viewpoint. From the viewpoint of the legal aspect the implementation of social entrepreneurship in the research of legal forms is important. The methods which enable to determine the interaction of business, state and non-commercial organizations with the purpose of effective ensuring of social-material demands are also encompassed in the research field. The sociologic aspect of research supposes the analysis of the essence and the causes of appearing and also the peculiarities of development of social entrepreneurship in the context of social-economic, national and political systems characteristic of the specific society.

At present the accumulation and expansion of the sociologic data on the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship is related, first of all, with obtaining of the empiric data by means of offline and online investigations. A direction having potential, to our mind, is the research of social entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurs according to the methods of online investigations.

In this paper online research methods are seen as a key component that provides the ability to conduct online research. So for online research is meant research process of cognition of social reality by means of online use as sociological methods of collecting information. Moreover, online methods are the tools that provide access to the respondent, as the bearer of views on issues of interest to the researcher.

The research problem in this article is – how employing the methods of online investigations the specific character of research of social entrepreneurship can be revealed from the standpoint of economic, legal and sociologic aspects. The research object is online investigations and their application in the research of social entrepreneurship. The research tasks of this article are the research of social entrepreneurship and representation of expediency and the specific character of organization and conducting of online investigations.

The methodology of this research is focused on the following theoretic basis: 1) the elucidation of the opportunities of research of social entrepreneurship according to the methods of online research; 2) the description of the advantages and limitations of the methods of online investigations in the research of the social entrepreneurship; and 3) the organization and conducting of online investigations in the research of social entrepreneurship. The methodological basis of the investigation is monographic and descriptive analysis, content and meta-analysis of the scientific sources. As a method of research comparative analysis has been employed. The present method of research enables on the basis of comparison of the specific character of the organization and conducting online and offline research to determine the pecu-
liarities, opportunities and prospects of sociological research of social entrepreneurship with the help of internet investigations.

2. The Research of Social Entrepreneurship according to the Methods of Online Investigation

Russian sociologist E. Zhuravleva (2013) defines the methods of online investigation as “usual traditional methods of collection of data adapted for employing in the internet with the help of such instruments as e-mail, website and different software packages” (Zhuravleva, 2013, p. 87). N. Korytnikova adheres to the position naming the online investigation “an innovative means permitting to perceive new social reality in its virtual interpretation” (Korytnikova, 2012). In this way the method of online investigations is to be understood as a method of collection of qualitative and quantitative sociologic information mediated with the help of computer technologies and internet medium. Till present both qualitative and quantitative methods of collection of empiric data have been adapted for online medium.

Qualitative methods of online research when investigating social entrepreneurship are aimed for obtaining of information on the reasons of behavior, philosophy and values of social entrepreneurs. Online focus-groups (chat and forum), internet-interview can be attributed to examples of qualitative methods of online investigations.

Quantitative methods of online investigations enable to quantify the characteristics examined by an investigator, presenting statistically important information based on the research of public opinion on the vital problems of reality. Online interrogations are an example of quantitative method of online investigations. During the research of social entrepreneurship the employment of quantitative methods of online investigation enables to reveal the level of awareness about the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship and also to establish the population relation to reality of social entrepreneurs, to evaluate the dynamics of development of social entrepreneurship and so on.

The employment of the opportunities of both qualitative and quantitative methods of online investigations is a direction having potential in the research of social entrepreneurship, it is related both with the specific character of the organization and conducting online investigations and with the specific character of the object of the research. We shall note that the specific character of online investigations enables to automate the stage of collection and also the stage of entry of sociologic information, by the same favouring the operative reception of sociologic data and reduction of expenses (economic and human resources) for the conducting of the research. Taking into consideration the fact that the social entrepreneurs and target groups to which the activity of the social enterprises is directed are often difficult of access groups for offline investigations. To our mind, their examination by means of online investigations is effective. This is preconditioned by the peculiarity of conducting of research in the regime of real time enabling the respondents to participate in the research at any time convenient for them, anywhere and with the help of any means granting the access to the Internet. Effective is the study of them through online research. This is due to the possibilities of obtaining valid and reliable sociological information.
Sociological research data allow us to analyze the specificity of the conditions, positive and negative trends in the development of social entrepreneurship, as well as develop recommendations necessary for managerial decision-making, both in the economic and social policy spheres. However, the features of sociological knowledge allow to predict the development of social entrepreneurship, especially relevant to the given possibility of acquiring the political, economic and socio-cultural realities in the dynamic changes.

3. The Advantages and Limitations of Online Investigations in the Research of Social Entrepreneurship

While on the subject of the peculiarity of research of social entrepreneurship certain advantages and limitations imposed during the investigations of the present phenomenon according to online methods are worth mentioning.

Russian sociologist T. Filippova (2000) distinguishes the following advantages of online investigations:

- reduction of time, material and human resources;
- allocation of individual reverse relation;
- reduction of the degree of the influence of the interviewer;
- frankness of the respondents in the research of sensitive problems.

In general, these advantages of online investigations are characteristic of the research of social entrepreneurship as well.

It is true that online research enables to economize the investigation resources. However, it is not true to say that all the online investigations are of lower price than offline investigations in full measure. The general degree of expenditure decreases in online investigations, as the necessity to print questionnaires and mail expenses breaks away on the ground that it is performed by means of web internet. Accordingly the expenditure for the provision of interviewer network decreases (decreases and is not absent, as in certain types of investigations recruitment of respondents can be performed in the traditional way). There is no expenditure for logical examination and entry of questionnaires, as the present actions are performed in the quantitative internet investigations automatically.

However, new classes of expenditure for the following specialists appear: responsible for the programming of a questionnaire, maintaining the effectiveness of internet panel and also the specialists creating and maintaining the functioning of banner advertisements, pop-up windows inviting to participate in the investigation.

Maintaining of reverse connection with the respondents enables to familiarize the participants with the results of investigations forming at the same time the positive image of quantitative and qualitative online investigations.

The lack of the effect of the interviewer and peculiarity of internet-medium for ensuring the anonymity of the respondent favours for his relaxing and expression of more sincere and open answers. All these advantages are reflected on the specific character of the investigated topics, as Internet can be one of the best stages for the investigation of the problems of social entrepreneurs, barriers on the way to the development of social entrepreneurship and so on.
The opportunity of “control of the quality of entry of answers and process of coding and processing of questionnaire data” (Devjatko, 2010, p.18) can also be attributed to the advantages of online investigations among them in the research of social entrepreneurship, and also the employment of multimedia opportunities of tools enabling to include graphic forms, audio and video into the questionnaire (Tinchurin, 2010). Online questionnaires encompass a significant width of scale enabling to investigate the opinion of different social groups both within the limits of one country and within the limits of several countries within the framework of organization of international sociologic investigations (Strebkov, 2010).

T. Filippova (2000) attributes the following characteristics to the limitations of online investigations:

- insufficient level of the scope of Internet among the broad masses of population;
- conscious distortion of the information presented by the respondent;
- repeated participation in the investigations (professional respondents).

Among the limitations the necessity of material or immaterial motivation of the respondents for participation in the investigation should also be noted (Tereshchenko, 2011).

The above mentioned limitations are characteristic of the research of social entrepreneurship as well. On the one hand, in the research of the opinion of social entrepreneurs the statement “insufficient level of the scale of Internet among the broad masses” is true not in the full measure due to the fact that the social entrepreneurs are an active part of the population employing Internet for the distribution of information on the activity of their enterprise. On the other hand, during the investigation of relation between the population and the social entrepreneurship the present barrier can be an essential limitation especially in the countries where the scope of computer literacy of the population and the range of the scale of Internet is insufficiently large.

The last of the described limitations are typical of the online investigations in the research of the social entrepreneurship as well. To increase the material/immaterial remuneration the respondents are registered for participation in online investigations many times. Such registration is performed through the means of employment of different e-mail addresses under the pretence of the representatives of different strata of society. In this way the potential respondent can indicate in his registration data the social-demographic characteristics not typical of him.

At present for the minimization of professional respondents the investigators employ identification of IP and e-mail addresses, bases of the participants of investigations are drawn up – all these means enable to eliminate professional respondents.

Earlier only traditional focus groups used to come across such problems as distortion of the presented information, participation of professional respondents. However, as the online investigations appeared, these problems spread in large scales in both qualitative and quantitative online investigations.
4. The Specific Character of Organization and Conducting Online Investigations during the Research of Social Entrepreneurship

When considering the analysis of opportunities of the online investigations of the research of social entrepreneurship we shall pay attention to the specific character of their organization and conducting.

The specific character of the organization and conducting of online investigations oriented towards the research of social entrepreneurship in general does not differ from the traditional investigations of the present subject-matter. So it embodies the preparatory stage in the course of which the object and subject of research is established, the description of the aims, tasks and principal hypotheses of the research is provided, the study population (for quantitative investigations) and also the design interview and focus-group (for qualitative investigations) is substantiated, the sociologic tools (questionnaire, guide) are constructed. We shall note that in general the composition of a questionnaire for online investigations is similar to the printed analogues. So the requirements to the structure of the questionnaire for online investigations are comparable with the requirements set for offline interrogations. The questionnaire placed in Internet begins with an introductory part including in it an address to the respondents on the part of the scientific institution holding a poll, informs the respondent on the aims and tasks of the research, importance of his opinion and confidentiality of information on his participation. As for the principal part of the questionnaire which encompasses in it a block of questions corresponding to the aims and tasks of the research, the investigator can employ the opportunities of computer technologies. This enables to employ both textual and audio and video questionnaires. Besides the possibility of technologic failures related with the problems of work of Internet, type of internet-browsers, technical characteristics of the means employed for participation in the research exists. All these can distort the textual, multimedia and graphic information of the questionnaire. The necessity of including the instruction for the respondent for the work with questionnaire explaining in what way the questions different in the form of the presumed answer (open, closed, semi-closed), different in the form of presenting of the question (table, textual, graphic questions) and also the questions different according to the quantity of possible variants of the answer (single and multiple selection of answers) is worth noting. The structure of online questionnaire ends with the questions of social-demographic block and gratitude for the participation in the research.

The working out of a guide which includes the list of subjects (questions) which must be revealed in the process of discussion is essential in the qualitative online investigations in the preparatory stage. The list of questions is formed on the basis of set aims and tasks of the research in the same way as in offline investigations.

The recruiting of participants for conducting of the field stage of qualitative and quantitative online investigations is the most labour-intensive task in the preparatory stage. Under the recruiting of participants we understand the process of selection of respondents in accordance with the earlier established criteria (social-demographic characteristics and other peculiarities of target auditorium) which have been established according to the aims and tasks of the research.
Recruiting for online investigations can be performed with the help of: pop-up (appearing windows) and also internet-panel of the respondents. We shall analyze the present ways of recruiting for online investigations more in detail.

Pop-up (appearing windows) supposes “the appearance of the interrogation in a new window at the moment when the user enters the site” (Komli, 2003, p. 51).

The opportunity of accidental selection of the visitors of the site and also provision of information about the research aiming to invite to participate in it should be noted as the advantages of the present method (Plotnikova, 2004).

Besides we wish to note the difficulty which the investigators encounter during the selection of the respondents in the way of pop-up means, it is related with the opportunity of blocking pop-up windows on the part of internet-browsers. The presence of such blocking makes the appearance of invitation to the participation in the research impossible.

In the event of recruiting via pop-up windows the placement of pop-up windows in the sites which are related with the necessary target auditorium according to their subject matter is effective. In studies of social entrepreneurship the placement of pop-up windows in the internet sites and platforms devoted for the realization of socially significant projects and also in the portals the task of which is the popularization of the ideas of social entrepreneurship and increase of importance of social initiative is effective.

One more method of recruiting of respondents for participation in the online investigations is carried out via internet-panels. As Byelorussian sociologist O. Tereshhenko notes the term panel in the internet interrogations means “not so much a group of respondents participating in a number of repeated (longitudinal) investigations, as a big group of potential respondents who have signed for regular participation in the investigations of a specific company” (Tereshhenko, 2011, p. 60).

Currently online-panels are the most spread way of organization of interrogation. As M. D’jakova (2012) believes online panels have several obvious advantages:

- community of respondents who have agreed to participate in the investigations;
- concise profiling of the participants of the panel;
- providing of access to narrow target groups.

However, in spite of the present advantages there is a number of problems related with the reduction of response and refusal to participate in the investigations on the part of the members of the panel. Therefore the working out of methods favouring to maintain the effectiveness of internet-panel by way of screening of inactive respondents becomes a necessity.

Russian sociologist B. Doktorov (2000) distinguishes ordinary and specialized internet-panels. An ordinary internet-panel is a basis of potential respondents wishing to participate in the investigations. Employment of such internet-panel in the research of social entrepreneurship enables to establish the attitude of the population towards social entrepreneurship. A special internet-panel is devoted to the research of difficult of access group of population. Such panel can encompass a base of social entrepreneurs and also experts of branch of social business. Access to a specialized internet-panel will enable the investigators to examine the portrait of a social entrepreneur, causes of activity, specific character of work of social enterprises, difficulties which the social entrepreneurs encounter and others.
The performance of recruiting with the help of internet-panel means screening of respondents employing filtration of a base of registered potential participants in accordance with the characteristics emphasized by sociologists. Then sending of invitations to the respondents attributed to the target group takes place, it certifies the beginning of the field stage of the research.

The primary sociologic information received within the course of the field stage of quantitative research is automatically included in the databases which enable to output the obtained results in the regime of the real time in the form of a file of entered data. In the future the obtained file is to be statistically processed by offline software (for example, by SPSS).

As for qualitative online investigations, the obtained information is presented in written form in the form of a transcript. Its recording is performed automatically in the course of the field stage of the investigation. The analysis of the obtained information for both qualitative and quantitative online investigations is performed by sociologists in accordance with the requirements which are set to the analysis of information in offline investigations.

We shall draw attention to the fact that the selection of a sociologist in favour of online or offline investigations is determined by: the specific character of the examined subject, resources which the investigator has access to and also the advantages and limitations of every method of empiric data retrieval.

5. Conclusions

1. The sociological approach to the study of social enterprise allows to describe and identify the specifics, as well as to identify and justify the most successful economic and legal forms of realization of social entrepreneurship for a particular geographic region. Sociological analysis provides improvement possibilities of the socio-economic institute by forecast and recommendations strengthening the activity and practice of economists and lawyers.

2. The employment of qualitative methods of online investigations enables to extract the underlying information on the reasons of behavior, philosophy and values of social entrepreneurs, quantitative methods of online investigations offer an opportunity to obtain statistically significant information on the development of social entrepreneurship.

3. The organization of the online investigations in the research of social entrepreneurship is in general analogous to conducting similar investigations in the offline regime. The peculiarities of employment of online investigations during research of social entrepreneurship are preconditioned by the specific character of Internet and computer technologies.
Acknowledgement

This article is submitted by the financial support of Lithuanian Academy of Science in the frame of Scientific Research Project „Social entrepreneurship as the type of innovative activity in Lithuania and Belorus“ in redeem of Cooperation Program of state partners – Republic of Lithuania and Republic of Belorus, in the area of science and technology in the period of 2015-2016 by the Contract No. TAP LB-07/2015.

References


ONLINE METODO TAIKYMAS SOCIALINIO VERSLO TYRIMUOSE

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Įteikta 2016 02 15, priimta 2016 03 15

Santrauka

Socialinis verslas tampa svarbi socialiniu-ekonominiu institutu. Socialinio verslo plėtros ir išsivystymo lygio analizė ir vertinimas gali būti atliekamas naudojant offline ir online sociologinio tyrimo metodus. Šio straipsnio aktualumą sudaro tai, kad socialinio verslo tyrimuose sociologinės informacijos rinkimas online (internetiniu) metodu turi tam tikrą specifiką. Šio tyrimo tikslas yra išryškinti online metodo taikymo specifiką socialinio verslo tyrimuose. Tyrimo metodika yra orientuota į keletą teorinių prielaidų: 1) atskleisti online metodo taikymo galimybes socialinio verslo tyrimuose; 2) aprašyti online metodo taikymo privalumus ir trūkumus tiriant skirtus socialinio verslo modelius; ir 3) išryškinti online metodo organizavimo ir vykdymo specifiką socialinio verslo tyrimuose. Siekiant atrinkti konkrečius mokslinius rezultatus, panaudota mokslinių šaltinių monografinė ir deskriptyvinė analizė, turinio ir meta- bei lyginamoji analizė. Tyrimo rezultatai rodo, kad online metodas leidžia efektyviai vykdyti mokslinius tyrimus, automatizuojant duomenų rinkimo ir įvedimo stadiją, atsakymus tiesiogiai persiunčiant į elektroninę duomenų bazę, išvengiama apklau- sėjų darbo bei duomenų kodavimo netikslumų.

Raktiniai žodžiai: socialinis verslas, online tyrimo metodai, interneto-paneliniai tyrimai
JEL kodai: C40, C82, H49, H55.