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Understanding Legitimacy: A Scoping Review and Future Re- search Agenda

Abstract

Purpose: This study examines recent research on legitimacy within the fields of management and entrepreneurship. It offers a detailed analysis of the current state of research, providing an up-to-date overview of international literature on the topic. Primarily, the study presents an approach to comprehensively grasp research by selecting, evaluating, and summarizing studies in the interconnected domains of management and entrepreneurship.

Study design/methodology/approach: A scoping review methodology has been employed.

Sample and data: To achieve these objectives, the scoping review covers 41 articles published between 2001 and 2023, selected from databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, using rigorous inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Results: The analysis's results offer a comprehensive understanding of the legitimacy concept, highlighting the main research gaps and promising future avenues of research.

Originality/value: This research was specifically designed to identify limitations in the evidence base where little or no prior research exists.

Research limitations/implications: This study highlights several key implications and limitations. It identifies gaps in legitimacy research, offering a theoretical contribution by pinpointing underexplored areas. The scoping review summarizes the current research landscape, helping guide future studies. Practically, it synthesizes findings and offers insights for policymakers and practitioners. A key limitation is the potential omission of relevant studies due to database selection, time constraints, and language barriers. Another limitation concerns balancing broad topic coverage with in-depth analysis.

Keywords: Scoping Review, Legitimacy, Databases, SCOPUS, Web of Science, Google Scholar.

JEL classification: M10, M13, M19

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الملخص

فهم الشرعية: مراجعة النطاق ومستقبل احتياجات البحث

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هدف الدراسة: تستكشف هذه الدراسة أحدث الأبحاث حول الشرعية في مجالات الإدارة وريادة الأعمال. وهي تقدم تحليلاً معمقاً للحالة الحالية للبحث في هذا المجال. وصورة حديثة للأدبيات الإدارية الدولية المتعلقة بموضوع البحث. في المقام الأول، تقدم الدراسة نهجاً لفهم البحث بشكل شامل من خلال اختيار وتقييم وتلخيص الدراسات في المجالات المترابطة للإدارة وريادة الأعمال. تصميم/ منهجية/ طريقة الدراسة: منهجية مراجعة النطاق.

عينة الدراسة وبياناتها: لتحقيق هذه الأهداف، تغطي مراجعة النطاق الحالية 41 مقالاً نُشرت بين عامي 2001 و2023، تم اختيارها من قواعد بيانات مثل SCOPUS و Web of Science و Google Scholar. تم اختيار المقالات وفقاً لمعايير الإدراج والاستبعاد الصارمة. نتائج الدراسة: تقدم نتائج التحليل فهماً شاملاً لمفهوم الشرعية، وتسلط الضوء على الفجوات البحثية الرئيسية والمجالات البحثية الواعدة في المستقبل.

أصالة الدراسة: صُممت أبحاثنا الحالية لتحديد القيود في قاعدة الأدلة حيث لم يتم إجراء أي بحث. حدود الدراسة وتطبيقاتها: تسلط دراستنا الحالية الضوء على عدة نتائج ومحددات رئيسية. فهي تحدد الفجوات في الأبحاث الحالية حول المشروعية، مقدمةً إسهاماً نظرياً من خلال تحديد المجالات التي تفتقر إلى التحقيق. يوفر استعراض النطاق ملخصاً لحالة الأبحاث الحالية، مما يمكن أن يوجه الدراسات المستقبلية. من الناحية العملية، يساعد في دمج نتائج الأبحاث، ويقدم رؤى قيمة لصانعي السياسات، والممارسين، والمستهلكين. إن أحد القيود الأساسية يستند إلى حقيقة مفادها أن المراجعة ربما أغفلت بعض الدراسات ذات الصلة. وكثيراً ما يُعزى هذا القيد إلى اختيار قاعدة البيانات واستبعاد الأدبيات الرمادية من البحث، أو القيود الزمنية، أو الدراسات المنشورة بلغة غير الإنجليزية. ويرتبط القيد الثاني بالتوازن بين اتساع وعمق المراجعة النطاقية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مراجعة النطاق، الشرعية، قواعد البيانات، SCOPUS، Web of Science Google Scholar.

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Introduction

Legitimacy is a concept that is increasingly studied in the areas of management in general and entrepreneurship in particular. In fact, legitimacy is considered an essential resource for business survival and growth. Suchman (1995) views legitimacy as “*a generalized perception or presumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within a socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions*” (p. 574).

Legitimacy is a complex and multifaceted concept that spans various dimensions, including normative, regulatory, cognitive, moral, and pragmatic aspects. These dimensions are explored across different organizational contexts, such as institutional, organizational, and entrepreneurial settings. Researchers have examined legitimacy from diverse perspectives, including the individual entrepreneur, emerging organizations, and the broader institutional environment. As Pailot et al. (2017) note, legitimacy is mobilized to understand various social processes, which makes the literature vast and varied.

Moreover, while legitimacy is widely recognized as an essential resource for business survival and growth, there is a significant lack of consensus regarding its definition, dimensions, and operationalization. Different scholars have proposed varying frameworks (e.g., Scott, 1995; Suchman, 1995), and no universally agreed-upon methodology exists to assess whether a firm is operating in a state of pre- or post-legitimacy (Nagy et al., 2012).

In addition, legitimacy research, particularly in the context of entrepreneurship, remains an emerging field. Although much has been written about the importance of legitimacy for new ventures, there is a lack of research on the social emergence and evolution of legitimacy (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2019).

The legitimacy literature also employs a wide variety of methodological approaches, including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods approaches, applied across diverse contexts such as institutional, organizational, and entrepreneurial settings. Moreover, there are significant unexplored aspects of legitimacy research, such as the processes and activities that occur before and after a firm attains legitimacy, as well as the contextual and interactive nature of legitimacy. No empirical research has been conducted to elucidate the critical activities around the legitimacy threshold, representing a significant gap in understanding the practical implications of legitimacy attainment (Nagy et al., 2012).

The research gaps mentioned above are likely to justify a scoping review of legitimacy. In fact, as noted by Pham et al. (2014, pp. 371–372) “*a scoping review of a body of literature can be particularly useful when the topic has not yet been extensively examined or is complex or heterogeneous in nature (Mays et al., 2001). It makes it possible to map the entire literature on a thematic area (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005)*”. A scoping review is an ideal methodology for mapping the literature on complex and heterogeneous topics like legitimacy. Scoping reviews provide an overview of the breadth and depth of existing research, which is especially valuable when a topic is not yet extensively examined or lacks clear boundaries (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005; Mays et al., 2001). Given the diverse and sometimes conflicting perspectives on legitimacy, a scoping review would help clarify the scope of research and identify areas where further investigation is needed, as emphasized by Hanneke et al. (2017) and Munn et al. (2018).

The legitimacy literature is particularly well-suited for a scoping review for several reasons. First, the complexity and heterogeneity of legitimacy across multiple levels and contexts justify the need for a scoping review to map the breadth of these conceptualizations (Drori & Honing, 2013; Zelditch, 2001; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002). Second, this ambiguity in conceptualization and measurement, along with the unclear origins of legitimacy, highlights the need for a scoping review to systematically identify and categorize these differing views and uncover theoretical and methodological gaps in the literature. Third, the scarcity of studies that operationalize legitimacy through practical metrics (Vergne, 2011) emphasizes the need for a scoping review to examine the breadth of literature and map the scope of this emerging field, as recommended by Munn et al. (2018) and Pham et al. (2014). Finally, the methodological diversity further supports the need for a scoping review to provide a comprehensive overview of how legitimacy has been studied and offer a broad understanding of the theoretical and methodological diversity in the literature (Nagy et al., 2012; Parhankangas & Ehrlich, 2014).

In conclusion, the legitimacy literature is well-suited for a scoping review due to its conceptual complexity, diverse applications, methodological variety, and the significant gaps in understanding and measurement. A scoping review would provide a comprehensive mapping of the current state of the literature, offering valuable insights into both the conceptual development of legitimacy and the practical challenges it presents.

Thus, our research question is: *What is the contemporary research on legitimacy in management and entrepreneurship literature?*

To answer this question, we set the following research objectives:

1. Clarifying the definitions of legitimacy through its various dimensions of legitimacy; and
2. Identifying and analyzing knowledge gaps in legitimacy

To achieve these objectives, our paper is divided into four sections. The first section focuses on our research methodology. The second section discusses theoretical frameworks and categorizes legitimacy. The third one reveals the research findings. The last section is devoted to the discussion.

Research Methodology and Material Collection

As part of our scoping review on legitimacy, we conducted a content analysis of a representative sample of 41 relevant articles (see Figure 1) published between 2001 and 2023. The objective was to comprehend how legitimacy is discussed in the literature, exploring the various perspectives, theories, and contexts studied over time. To achieve this, we adhered to a rigorous methodology for identifying and selecting this sample.

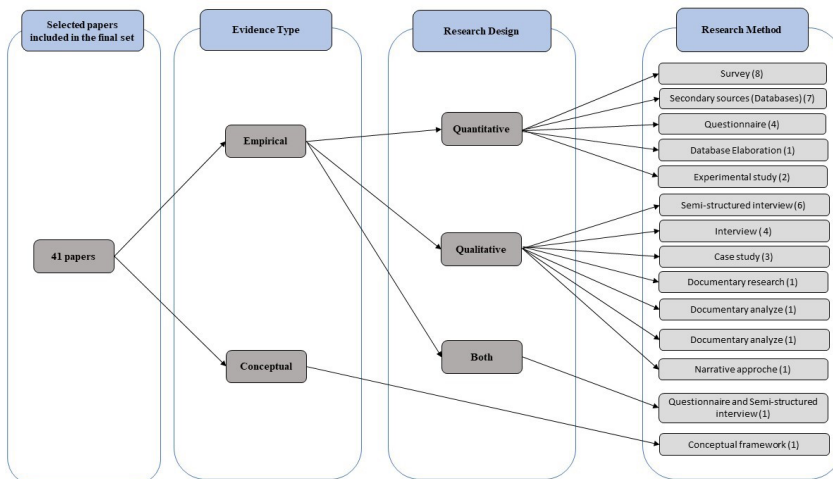


Figure 1: A Classification of the Articles According to the Methodological Approach Adopted by Author

Source: Authors

Database

To constitute our corpus of articles, we first used a sampling criterion (Patton, 1990), and subsequently, we carried out keyword searches in several reference databases (see Table 1), primarily SCOPUS. These databases provided access to articles discussing legitimacy from various perspectives and contexts, enabling us to conduct our literature review.

Table 1
Databases

Database	Number of Articles
Scopus	32
Web of Science	2
Google Scholar	7
Total	41

Source: Authors

Journals & Reviews

We conducted a keyword search in management science journals (see Table 2) that publish research related to legitimacy, entrepreneurship, organizational performance, growth, and organizational survival, as well as entrepreneurial orientation. Some of these journals include, for example: Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal, Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development, Journal of Technology Management & Innovation, Strategic Management Journal, International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research, Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship, Technological Forecasting & Social Change.

Table 2
Journals/Reviews List

Journals/Reviews	Number of Article(s) per Journal/Review	Ranking
Qualitative Articles		
Technovation	1	Q1
Social Enterprise Journal	1	Q1

Cont. Table 2
Journals/Reviews List

Journals/Reviews	Number of Article(s) per Journal/Review	Ranking
International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research	3	Q1
Journal of Enterprising Communities	2	Q2
Journal of Business Venturing	1	Q1
Entrepreneurship & Regional Development	2	Q1
Journal of Management History	1	Q1
Int. J. Business and Globalisation	1	Q3
Industry & Higher Education	1	Q2
Management Review Quarterly	1	Q1
Nonprofit Management & Leadership	1	Q1
Journal of Business Venturing Design	1	Q1
Journal of business research	1	Q1
Total	17	
Quantitative Articles		
Management Decision	2	Q1
Sustainability	2	
Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice	2	Q1
Journal of Business Venturing	1	Q1
Regional Studies	1	Q1
Technological Forecasting & Social Change	1	Q1
International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal	2	Q1
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	1	Q1
Journal of Business Research	1	Q1
Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development	1	Q1
International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship	1	Q1

Cont. Table 2
Journals/Reviews List

Journals/Reviews	Number of Article(s) per Journal/Review	Ranking
Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal	1	Q1
Journal of Management & Organization	1	Q2
Small Business Institute	1	Q3
International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business	2	Q3
Journal of Technology Management & Innovation	1	Q3
Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship	1	Q3
Total	22	
Mixed Articles		
Journal of Enterprising Culture	1	Q2
Total	1	
Conceptual Articles		
Strategic Management Journal	1	Q1
Total	1	

Source: Authors

Countries and Analysis Units

While breaking down the items reviewed in the paper is useful (Tables 1 and 2), it would be beneficial to provide more context regarding the geographic coverage of these items (e.g., USA, UK, China, South Africa, etc.). This is especially important as the concept of legitimacy can be highly context-dependent, influenced by a country's laws, norms, and values. The same can be said about the type of analysis units included in each of these studies (see Table 3).

Table 3
Countries/Analysis Units

Authors	Country	Analysis Units
Qualitative Articles		
Dart (2004)	Germany	NA
Hervieux et al. (2010)	Canada	NA
Williams Middleton (2013)	Sweden	Nascent entrepreneurs
Heriot et al. (2014)	USA & Canada	College instructors
Karlsson et al. (2015)	UK	Start-up
Swail et al. (2017)	UK	Women nascent entrepreneurs
Nayır et al. (2019)	Turkey	Social entrepreneurs
Bolzani et al. (2020)	Ghana & Italy	Transnational social enterprise
Sapir (2019)	UK	NA
Glas and Lounsbury (2021)	Canada	Entrepreneurs
Kašperová (2021)	UK	Entrepreneurs
Göcke et al. (2021)	USA	NA
Ghods et al. (2021)	France	Entrepreneurs
Ojediran et al. (2022)	South Africa	Black women entrepreneurs three stakeholders
Imiren et al. (2023)	Nigeria	Digital entrepreneurs
De Lima (2023)	Kenya	Social entrepreneurs
Qualitative Articles		
Tornikoski et al. (2007)	USA	Nascent entrepreneurs
Batchelor et al. (2011)	USA	Firm
Iakovleva and Kickul (2011)	Russia	Russian women-led SMEs
Brown (2012)	USA	Firm
Nagy et al. (2012)	USA	Entrepreneurs
Kibler et al. (2014)	Austria & Finland	The regions

Cont. Table 3
Countries/Analysis Units

Authors	Country	Analysis Units
Messeghem et al. (2014)	France	Incubators
Ogbolu et al. (2015)	USA	Entrepreneurs
Díez-Martín et al. (2016)	Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, Czech, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Qatar, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Trinidad, UAE, UK and USA	Countries
Soria et al. (2016)	Chile & Colombia	Students of business administration (potential entrepreneurs)
Ge et al. (2016)	China	Firm
Wang et al. (2017)	Canada	New ventures
Kawai et al. (2020)	Japan	New ventures
Wang and Zhou (2021)	China	Social enterprises
Newlands and Lutz (2020)	UK	Home-sharing platforms
Chen et al. (2020)	China	Client of social enterprises
Kawai et al. (2020)	Japan	Female entrepreneurs
Lortie et al. (2022)	USA	Social venture
Donbesuur et al. (2022)	Ghana	New ventures
Tian et al. (2022)	China	Social enterprises
Li et al. (2022)	USA	Crowdfunding platform
Mixed Articles		
Radu-Lefebvre et al. (2019)	France	Entrepreneurs & Students
Conceptual Articles		
Lounsbury and Glynn (2001)	USA	New venture

Source: Authors

Keywords

To compile an initial inventory of articles on legitimacy, we searched for articles with titles, abstracts, or keywords containing our list of relevant keywords such as “Legitimacy”, “Entrepreneurship”, and “Entrepreneurial Legitimacy”. We examined the identified initial articles and their associated keywords to refine our search further and ensure comprehensive coverage of legitimacy perspectives. Based on this analysis, we adjusted our research approach and defined an expanded list of keywords specifically related to legitimacy and its various dimensions, including “New venture performance”, “Entrepreneurial orientation”, “Legitimacy”, “Entrepreneurship”, “Social entrepreneurship”, “Entrepreneurial legitimacy”, “Institutional theory”, “Legitimacy strategies”, “Cognitive Legitimacy”, “Identity work”. This systematic and iterative research process led to the identification of approximately one hundred articles on legitimacy in organizations. These articles explore different facets of entrepreneurial legitimacy, ranging from strategic considerations to cognitive and identity-related implications. They offer a comprehensive insight into the conceptualization, examination, and practical application of legitimacy within the entrepreneurial and organizational contexts.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To refine our selection, as suggested by Ferrari (2015) and Gott et al. (2011), we needed to define inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the quality and relevance of the articles included in our literature review. Inclusion criteria included: *being written in English, being published in indexed journals, the relevance of the study objective to legitimacy, the presence of the word "Legitimacy" in the abstract or title, the nature of the article (research, conceptual, theoretical), the scope of the research questions, and a length exceeding 10 pages.*

The exclusion criteria applied to the articles aimed to filter out articles that do not align with our specific research framework and to ensure that only the most relevant and rigorous work is considered. The exclusion criteria included: *articles written in a language other than English, articles published in non-indexed journals (to ensure the reliability and credibility of the sources), articles presenting conference proceedings, chapters of books, or working papers, and articles that do not place sufficient emphasis on legitimacy or its various forms and dimensions in a specific context.*

By applying these exclusion criteria, our literature review on legitimacy is better delineated and focused on the most relevant and high-quality articles in the field. This allows us to ensure a thorough and rigorous analysis of legitimacy by eliminating articles that do not fit our specific research objective. Thanks to our research method and rigorous selection process, the articles included in our corpus cover a wide range of topics and perspectives, providing a solid foundation for our in-depth study of legitimacy. These articles form the basis of our literature review on legitimacy, offering an extensive overview of academic work in this area.

Scoping Review

Literature reviews are crucial in academic research and critically synthesize existing work on a given topic. They avoid redundancy and establish a solid foundation by situating current research in its appropriate historical and conceptual context (Booth et al., 2008). Literature reviews help identify gaps in existing research, guide the formulation of relevant research questions (Tranfield et al., 2003), enhance the credibility of the study by showing how it fits into the broader intellectual landscape (Hart, 1998; Ridley, 2012), and foster a deeper understanding of the topic by exploring different theoretical and methodological perspectives (Fink, 2014; Webster & Watson, 2002). We distinguish several types of literature reviews, including the narrative review, the systematic review, and the scoping review (see Table 4).

**Table 4
Literature Review Types**

	Narrative Review	Systematic Review	Scope Review
Concept	It is a non-systematic summary and analysis of the available literature on a specific subject.	It entails method used to gather evidence from multiple studies, identifying all relevant studies, assessing quality and synthesizing results.	It involves a rapid survey of the literature in a given field, designed to give an idea of overview search type, scope and quantity available. Search exploratory is generally performed prior to a review in order to obtain a comprehensive overview of the literature on a given subject.
Purpose/use	It provides a summary of more or less on a subject or object.	It provides a comprehensive review of the evidence in response to a specific question.	It is used to systematically identify and map the extent of evidence available on a particular topic, domain, concept or issue, in different contexts.

Cont. Table 4
Literature Review Types

	Narrative Review	Systematic Review	Scope Review
Question	It is broad, can evolve and be reformulated as the process progresses.	It is specific and well-defined, formulated prior to documentary research.	It is often a broad research question.
Global method	It describes and evaluates published articles, but the method of article selection may not be described.	It follows well-established standards in editorial guides and a protocol specific to each journal. Is explicit and structured.	It is a protocol or plan that is ideally included.
Search strategy documentary	It is a general one, not specified or not clearly specified; in these cases, the completeness of the review cannot be verified.	It is an exhaustive, rigorous approach to documentary research, detailed protocol.	It includes comprehensive sources and thus it is an explicit and reproducible search strategy.
Study selection	It is potentially biased.	It is based on clearly defined and consistently applied criteria.	It is criteria-based selection applied uniformly, clearly and explicitly.
Type of studies included	This includes qualitative, quantitative, theoretical, mixed.	It is quantitative in nature and may include qualitative studies.	This includes qualitative, quantitative, theoretical, or mixed.
Summary	It is rather qualitative.	It can be either qualitative or quantitative (meta-analysis).	It depends on objective, generally descriptive summary.
Inferences	They are subjective, and perhaps evidence-based.	They are evidence-based.	They are evidence-based.

Source: Authors

To address our research question and achieve the objectives outlined above, we conducted a scoping review. Framarin and Déry (2021) define “a *scoping review* as a preliminary assessment of the size and extent of available literature on a specific topic. The primary goal of a scoping review is to assess whether a systematic or non-systematic but comprehensive review on the topic is warranted (Conn & Coon Sells, 2014; Grant & Booth, 2009; Heyn et al., 2019; Horsley, 2019)” (p. 16). Scoping reviews aim to provide an initial overview of the potential size and characteristics of the existing literature on an emerging topic (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Daudt et al., 2013; Levac et al., 2010). According to Paré et al. (2015), a scoping review can be conducted to assess the extent, scope, and nature of research activity in a specific area, evaluate the need for a full systematic review, or identify gaps in the existing literature. Consistent with its primary objective, scoping reviews typically end with a detailed research agenda for future research and potential implications for both research and practice.

Results

The results analysis was segmented into two sections. In the first one, the theoretical frameworks, definitions, typologies, and dimensions of legitimacy were examined. In the second section, research gaps in legitimacy were identified and analyzed.

Clarifying the Definitions of Legitimacy

This section presents various theoretical frameworks used to explore the concept of legitimacy. We discuss its diverse definitions, various typologies, and dimensions as outlined in the literature.

Theoretical Frameworks

The concept of “legitimacy” has attracted considerable interest among scholars from a variety of theoretical frameworks, including institutional theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), and organizational ecology (Singh et al., 1986). This increased attention reflects the complexity and importance of this concept in understanding contemporary organizational dynamics.

In the literature, several theoretical frameworks are used to explore the nature of “legitimacy”, examine the relationships between its different dimensions, and demonstrate its essential role in the sustainability and evolution of organizations.

These theories offer a rich and nuanced analytical perspective, allowing us to explore the multiple facets of “legitimacy” its implications for organizations in various contexts, and the mechanisms underlying the construction, maintenance, and loss of “legitimacy”. The literature review reveals a variety of theories used by researchers in their studies on “legitimacy” that we present in this paper (see Table 5). This theoretical diversity reflects the breadth of conceptual and methodological approaches adopted by researchers to address this subject. Our literature review identifies the most widely used theories, especially the institutional theory and the theory of planned behavior.

Table 5
Theoretical Frameworks

Theoretical Frameworks	References
Institutional theory	Díez-Martín et al. (2016); Batchelor et al. (2011); Li et al. (2022); Díez-Martín et al. (2021); Brown (2012); Nagy et al. (2012); Newlands and Lutz (2020); Soria et al. (2016); Kibler et al. (2014); Kawai et al. (2020); Heriot et al. (2014); Lounsbury and Glynn (2001); Karlsson et al. (2015); Dart (2004); Hervieux et al. (2010)
Legitimacy theory	Lortie et al. (2022); Bolzani et al. (2020); Ge et al. (2016), Kawai et al. (2020); Dart (2004)
Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)	Soria et al. (2016); Lortie et al. (2022); Kibler et al. (2014); Iakovleva and Kickul (2011)
Social entrepreneurship theory	De Lima (2023); Bolzani et al. (2020); Nayır et al. (2019); Hervieux et al. (2010)
Resource Based View theory	Kawai et al. (2020); Lounsbury and Glynn (2001)
New venture legitimacy theory The opportunity-based approach Neo-institutional theory	Messeghem et al. (2014)
Evolutionary Theories	Brown (2012)
Impression Management theory	Nagy et al. (2012)
Signaling theory	Iakovleva and Kickul (2011)
Entrepreneurial & legitimacy theories	Wang et al. (2017)

Cont. Table 5
Theoretical Frameworks

Theoretical Frameworks	References
The trait theory	
Three-dimensional theory	
Theory of big five personality traits	Tian et al. (2022)
New trait theory	
Relational capital theory	
Social cognitive theory	Kawai et al. (2020)
Green entrepreneurship theory	
The theory of economic transition	Ge et al. (2016)
Theory of entrepreneurship	
Entrepreneurial & legitimacy theories	Wang et al. (2017)
Theories of competition	
Social Innovation theory	De Lima (2023)
Rhetorical perspective	Nayır et al. (2019)
Theory of designing	Glaser and Lounsbury (2021)
Social representation of entrepreneur's theory	Radu-Lefebvre et al. (2019)
Organizational theory	Lounsbury and Glynn (2001)
Transnational Entrepreneurship theory	Bolzani et al. (2020)
Capital theory	
Social and entrepreneurial identities approach	Ojediran et al. (2022)
Identity work approach	
Institutional logics approach in new institutional theory	Sapir (2019)
New institutional theory	
Visual legitimacy theory	
Entrepreneurial identity approach	Smith and Warren (2022)
Corporate Entrepreneurship approach	Göcke (2021)
Convention theory	
Social Entrepreneurship approach	Hervieux et al. (2010)
Social representations theory	Ghods et al. (2021)

Source: Authors

Legitimacy: Definitions

The “Legitimacy” concept is approached by researchers from various perspectives taking into account specific contexts, and highlighting its importance for new ventures, its link with conformity to social norms and values, as well as its role in stakeholder recognition and access to resources, among others.

In Appendix 1, various definitions of legitimacy from our literature review provide a comprehensive understanding of how organizations navigate their social and institutional environment to maintain their legitimacy and access the resources necessary for their survival and success. These definitions are each based on various perspectives.

Below, we present some definitions of legitimacy, each rooted in a distinct perspective. For instance, Suchman’s (1995) definition, “*generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions*”, appears as one of the most accepted and widely used definitions in the literature. Hence, many researchers (e.g. Deephouse & Suchman, 2008; Ge et al., 2016; Kawai et al., 2020; Nagy et al., 2012; Newlands & Lutz, 2020; Messeghem et al., 2014; Tian et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2017; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002) based on the Suchman’s work (1995) adopted a broader perspective by viewing legitimacy as a general perception of conformity to social and institutional norms and values. They suggest that legitimacy is demonstrated through the support and social approval of actions that align with established norms. This alignment is deemed essential by Meyer and Rowan (1977), who underscore its significance in obtaining the resources essential for organizational survival. De Lima (2023) adds depth by highlighting entrepreneurs’ ability to navigate paradoxes by introducing new ideas while respecting social norms. Iakovleva and Kickul (2011) specifically focus on the level of adherence to social norms and values, asserting that legitimacy is contingent on the extent of conformity to these norms and values.

The research of Dart (2004) and Lounsbury and Glynn (2001) reveals that legitimacy is a dynamic process of construction and maintenance, involving communication and storytelling to justify organizational existence and identity. Similarly, in the work of Bolzani et al. (2020) and Johnson et al. (2006) emphasize that legitimacy is a collective process framed within a system of norms, values, and acquired beliefs.

Messeghem et al. (2014) and Sapir (2019) emphasize the importance of legitimacy as a valuable resource that facilitates access to markets and resources. This idea of resource access is supported by the research of Díez-Martín et al. (2021) and Nagy et al. (2012), as well as by Díez-de-Castro et al. (2018) and Zimmerman and Zeitz (2002), who define legitimacy as favorable judgments of acceptance, adequacy, and deservingness. These judgments allow access to resources necessary for survival and growth. Batchelor et al. (2011) also stress the significance for new entrepreneurs to provide benefits that align with their employees' expectations to enhance their legitimacy. Improved legitimacy will enable them to more easily attract and retain competent employees. This legitimacy is seen as an asset for accessing high-quality human resources, which, according to Selznick (1957), is associated with better resource acquisition and superior performance compared to similar companies that lack this legitimacy.

Another perspective emerges regarding the strategic management of legitimacy and its importance for new ventures (Dart, 2004; Fisher, 2020; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Suchman, 1995). This strategic approach is also highlighted in the work of Imiren et al. (2023), who emphasize the importance of alignment with social norms to access resources. Batchelor et al. (2011) stress the importance for new entrepreneurs to offer benefits to employees to enhance their legitimacy. Iakovleva and Kickul (2011) indicated that legitimacy increases the chances of survival of emerging firms led by Russian women leaders of SMEs.

Finally, legitimacy can be viewed from an uncertainty reduction perspective, as demonstrated in the work of Díez-Martín et al. (2021), where Desai (2008) asserts that legitimacy plays a crucial role in reducing uncertainty and risk perception, especially when considering a specific cultural context. This type of legitimacy is primarily grounded in individual reputation within these communities. When viewed in an institutional context, DiMaggio and Powell (1983), as well as Tolbert and Zucker (1983), illustrate how organizations often adopt compliant structures and practices to uphold their legitimacy, as discussed in the works of Dart (2004) and Imiren et al. (2023).

Drawing on the analysis and interpretation of the literature, we synthesize these definitions of legitimacy into a unified one, Legitimacy is defined as the perception that the behavior, persona, or presence of an entity is desirable, suitable, or is a part of the socially relevant norms, values, and belief systems. Legitimacy is created by the entity's efforts to conform to these norms and values and

is important for gaining the acceptance of certain stakeholders such as society, markets, and those offering resources. Legitimacy is maintained and communicated actively in social settings and as such, it is a dynamic and ongoing process. The strategic management of these social norms is very important because it helps gain essential resources, increases organizational survival, and reduces overall uncertainty and risks. In new ventures, legitimacy provides many assets including easier access to human resources, credibility, growth expectations, and performance level of the organization. Legitimacy allows the adoption of highly innovative ideas by employing them efficiently within societal boundaries. Legitimacy indicates the level of recognition an organization has from the stakeholders as well as its ultimate success and sustainable development.

Typologies and Dimensions of Legitimacy

The examination of all these articles highlighted the dimensions and types of legitimacy that have been studied in various fields to enhance the understanding of this concept (see Table 6). The typology of legitimacy we have identified underscores the complexity and multidimensional nature of this concept, as well as the researchers' interest in it, as evidenced by the number of related publications.

Table 6
Dimensions and Types of Legitimacy

Dimensions and Types of Legitimacy	Number of Publications	Quantitative Articles	Qualitative Articles
Cognitive legitimacy	11	7	4
Moral legitimacy	6	3	3
Regulatory legitimacy	5	5	0
Normative legitimacy	4	4	0
Pragmatic legitimacy	4	2	2
Social legitimacy	3	3	0
Organizational legitimacy	3	2	1
Competitive legitimacy	1	1	0
Employee legitimacy	1	1	0
Customer legitimacy	1	1	0
Conforming legitimacy	1	1	0

Cont. Table 6
Dimensions and Types of Legitimacy

Dimensions and Types of Legitimacy	Number of Publications	Quantitative Articles	Qualitative Articles
Strategic legitimacy	1	1	0
Category legitimacy	1	1	0
State legitimacy	1	1	0
Market legitimacy	1	1	0

Source: Authors

The analysis of publications based on the dimensions and types of legitimacy reveals several significant trends. Firstly, cognitive legitimacy is extensively explored with a total of 11 publications, consisting of 7 quantitative and 4 qualitative articles. In contrast, regulatory and normative legitimacy are predominantly approached quantitatively, with all publications (5 and 4, respectively) being quantitative. This indicates a focus on data collection and analysis to comprehend the regulations and norms associated with these dimensions. Moral legitimacy shows an equal distribution between quantitative and qualitative approaches. Pragmatic and organizational dimensions also exhibit some diversity, with both quantitative and qualitative publications aimed at understanding these aspects of legitimacy. On the other hand, dimensions such as competitive, employee, customer, compliant, strategic, category, state, and market legitimacy are less explored, with only one quantitative publication each, underscoring aspects of legitimacy that are less developed in the literature.

Legitimacy is a multifaceted concept that is difficult to understand as it presents itself in different guises. We propose a typology of legitimacy (see Table 7) based on our scoping review.

Table 7
Legitimacy Typologies

Typologies	References
Cognitive legitimacy	Suchman (1995); Ge et al. (2016); Cohen and Dean (2005); Rao et al. (2008); Scott (1995); Tian et al. (2022); Nagy et al. (2012); Díez-Martín et al. (2016); Wang et al. (2017); Chen et al. (2020)

Cont. Table 7
Legitimacy Typologies

Typologies	References
Moral legitimacy	Dart (2004); Karlsson et al. (2015); Bitektine (2011); Scott (1995); Suchman (1995); Tost (2011); Nayir et al. (2019); Newlands and Lutz (2020); Chen et al. (2020); Lortie et al. (2022)
Regulatory legitimacy	Suchman (1995); Rao (1994); Scott (1995) Dacin et al. (2007); Díez-Martín et al. (2016); Wang et al. (2017); Wang et al. (2017); Chen et al. (2020); Donbesuur et al. (2022)
Normative legitimacy	Díez-Martín et al. (2016); Scott (1995); Díez-Martín et al. (2016); Wang et al. (2017); Wang et al. (2017); Chen et al. (2020)
Pragmatic legitimacy	Dart (2004); Karlsson et al. (2015); Lortie et al. (2022); Handelman and Arnold (1999); Tost (2011); Chen et al. (2020); Suchman (1995)
Social legitimacy	Suchman (1995), Etzioni (1987); Fritsch et al. (2014); Chen et al. (2020); Kibler et al. (2014); Soria et al. (2016)
Organizational legitimacy	Sapir (2019); Chen et al. (2020); Heriot et al. (2014); Dacin et al. (1997); Suchman (1995); Dowling and Pfeffer (1975); Golant and Sillince (2007)
Competitive legitimacy	Marchesnay (1998); Messeghem et al. (2014)
Employee legitimacy	Batchelor et al. (2011)
Customer's legitimacy	Suchman (1995); Batchelor et al. (2011)
Conforming legitimacy	Tornikoski and Newbert (2007)
Strategic legitimacy	Ashforth and Gibbs (1990); Dowling and Pfeffer (1975); Suchman (1995); Tornikoski and Newbert (2007)
Category legitimacy	Li et al. (2022)
State legitimacy	Beetham (2013); Scott (1995); Díez-Martín et al. (2021)
Market legitimacy	Chen et al. (2020)

Source: Authors

In this research, we present the definitions of the most cited and identified dimensions of legitimacy (see Table 8).

Table 8
Definitions of Regulatory, Normative, and Cognitive Legitimacy

Author(s)	Definitions
Regulatory Legitimacy	
Wang et al. (2017)	Regulative legitimation occurs through obtaining governmental approvals and industrial and professional certifications to indicate that the venture will comply with established regulations and standards (Rao, 1994). (Page 375)
Chen et al. (2020)	Regulatory legitimacy comes from laws and rules from governments, industry associations and professional organizations. (Scott, 1995). (Page 4)
Donbesuur et al. (2022)	Regulatory legitimacy refers to the extent to which firms' adherence to societal rules, regulations, and socially responsible behaviors are accepted by external stakeholder constituencies, including regulatory bodies (Suchman, 1995; Dacin et al., 2007). (Page 2)
	Regulatory legitimacy is a significant path toward new venture growth, especially in environments characterized by strict adherence to societal rules and where the survival of firms largely depends on socially responsible behaviors (Dacin et al., 2007). (Page 4)
Normative Legitimacy	
Wang et al. (2017)	Normative legitimation is obtained mainly by pursuing socially responsible and environmentally friendly activities so as to enhance stakeholders' perceptions that the venture will address social interests, welfare, and values (Wang & Bansal, 2012). (Page 375)
Wang and Zhou (2021)	Normative legitimacy reflects the degree of consistency between the organization's behavior and its ethics, social values and customs (Scott, 1995). (Page 4)
Chen et al. (2020)	Normative legitimacy, similarly to moral legitimacy by Suchman (1995), comes from being consistent with socially accepted norms and values (Scott, 1995). (Page 4)
Cognitive Legitimacy	
Dart (2004)	Cognitive legitimacy refers to legitimacy at the level of taken-for-grantedness rather than the level of evaluation. (Page 417)

Cont. Table 8
Definitions of Regulatory, Normative, and Cognitive Legitimacy

Author(s)	Definitions
Nagy et al. (2012)	Studies have defined cognitive legitimacy as assessments of comprehensibility or taken-for-grantedness made by key stakeholders concerning an organization (Shepherd & Zacharakis, 2003; Suchman, 1995). (Page 943)
Heriot et al. (2014)	“Cognitive legitimacy refers to the level of acceptance or taken-for-grantedness of the new product, process, or service” (Katz, 2006, p. 5 of 55). (Page 9)
Karlsson et al. (2015)	Cognitive Legitimacy gained from tacit mimicry of the environment by acting as expected and in taken-for-granted ways. (Page 470)
Ge et al. (2016)	Cognitive legitimacy refers to the degree of social recognition and acceptance of startups, which is primarily determined by the extent of knowledge of new enterprises and their products and services by society. (Page 5)
Nayir et al. (2019)	Cognitive legitimacy is based on the demonstration that the firm is similar – fits in within an industry – yet distinct in doing things differently from the norm. (Page 9) Attainment of cognitive legitimacy signifies that the new venture has indeed gone from a “non-worthy” status to a venture that is worthy of support from key stakeholders (Choi & Shepherd, 2005). (Page 9)
Wang and Zhou (2021)	Cognitive legitimacy covers public acceptance and recognition of the organization (Scott, 1995). (Page 4)
Chen et al. (2020)	Cognitive legitimacy refers to the acceptance of the organization as inevitable and necessary (Suchman, 1995). (Page4) Cognitive legitimacy refers to the acceptance and support of an organization’s activities by stakeholders (Scott, 1995). (Page 4)
Tian et al. (2022)	Cognitive legitimacy demonstrates the consistency of beliefs between social groups and legitimate groups, which depends on whether the beliefs are recognized by these groups. (Page 6) Cognitive legitimacy of social enterprises comes from the perception from stakeholders of these enterprises’ capability and future development potential, as well as recognition of their mode of operation and business philosophy. (Page 6)

Cont. Table 8
Definitions of Regulatory, Normative, and Cognitive Legitimacy

Author(s)	Definitions
Customer's Legitimacy	
Batchelor et al. (2011)	<p>Customer's legitimacy: Customers are key stakeholders for any organization; their perceptions have a substantial influence on the overall legitimacy and success of any organization. Shepherd and Zacharakis (2003) shows that customer knowledge of an organization, management, and product leads to higher probability of purchase, which is interpreted herein as a sign of customer legitimacy.</p> <p>Suchman (1995) describes this, assumed legitimacy, as the subtlest and powerful type of legitimacy an organization can obtain. (Page 31)</p>
Employee Legitimacy	
Batchelor et al. (2011)	<p>Employee legitimacy: for employees to perceive an organization as legitimate, the organization must comply with the norms set by other organizations and meet employee perceptions of what is appropriate treatment. (Page 33)</p>
Conforming Legitimacy	
Tornikoski et al. (2007)	<p>Conforming legitimacy: Organizations may attain legitimacy through the reliance on passive characteristics deemed by the environment as typical of a legitimate organization (conforming legitimacy). (Page 315)</p>
Strategic Legitimacy	
Tornikoski et al. (2007)	<p>Strategic legitimacy: legitimacy is also argued to be an operational resource that can be extracted proactively from the environment through more calculated strategic behavior in an attempt to manipulate the perceptions of external audiences (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990; Dowling & Pfeffer 1975; Suchman, 1995), such as by shaping (Dowling & Pfeffer 1975; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) and/or manipulating the environment (Suchman, 1995). Thus, this type of legitimacy (strategic legitimacy) is acquired not by the reliance on passive characteristics, but rather through active behavior. (Page 315)</p> <p>Strategic legitimacy is "creating the impression of a credible organization, transforming resources into finished goods, and manipulating external audiences' perception of the nascent organization." (Page 312)</p>

Cont. Table 8
Definitions of Regulatory, Normative, and Cognitive Legitimacy

Author(s)	Definitions
Category Legitimacy	
Li et al. (2022)	Category legitimacy: We define category legitimacy as a collective perception of the congruence between the actions of the firms within the same category with the general behavioral norms, beliefs, and expectations of external stakeholders. (The authors, p. 2266)
State Legitimacy	
Diez-Martín et al. (2021)	State legitimacy: The concept of state legitimacy refers to how the different practices of the institutional and public power are consciously accepted by citizens (Beetham, 2013). (Page 936)
	State legitimacy: The state legitimacy reflects cultural alignment, normative support and consonance with the relevant rules and laws (Scott, 1995). (Page 938)
Moral Legitimacy	
Dart (2004)	Moral legitimacy refers to legitimacy that is normative and based on an evaluation of whether an activity of a focal organization is the proper one (relative to external norms) rather than whether it specifically benefits those who are making the evaluation. (Page 417)
Karlsson et al. (2015)	Moral legitimacy: It is this type of legitimacy gained from the self-interest of an organization’s immediate audience. (Page 470)
Nayır et al. (2019)	Moral legitimacy is based on the idea that the firm’s activity is the morally right thing to do, such as reaching out to the less fortunate, offering employment, teaching socially desirable behaviors, etc. (Page9)
Newlands and Lutz (2020)	Moral legitimacy: Moral legitimacy describes the evaluation of an entity’s morality and its normative approval (Bitektine, 2011; Scott, 1995; Suchman, 1995). (Page 3)
Chen et al. (2020)	Moral legitimacy: Moral legitimacy is related to how organizational actions promote societal values and beliefs (Suchman, 1995). (Page4)

Cont. Table 8
Definitions of Regulatory, Normative, and Cognitive Legitimacy

Author(s)	Definitions
Lortie et al. (2022)	Moral legitimacy perception: Moral legitimacy perceptions are comprised of consumers' judgments that the venture's social goals positively contribute to society, are appropriate, and are not motivated purely by self-interest (Dart, 2004; Tost, 2011). (Page 313)
Social Legitimacy	
Kibler et al. (2014)	Regional social legitimacy : Regional social legitimacy of entrepreneurship – understood as a convergence of perceptions in a region that entrepreneurial activity is ‘desirable, proper or appropriate’ (Suchmann, 1995: 574) – reflects a core element of a region’s entrepreneurship culture (Etzioni, 1987; Fritsch et al. (2014) in this issue) and shapes the way an individual’s entrepreneurial beliefs influence the intention to start a business and the likelihood of the individual turning that intention into action. (Page 2)
Soria et al. (2016)	Social legitimacy of entrepreneurship: a “generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper and suitable” (Suchmann, 1995). (Page 69)
Kibler et al. (2014)	Social legitimacy: The present article’s specific definition of social legitimacy reflects SCOTT’s normative and cognitive institutional pillars, and particularly relies on Suchmann’s (1995) conceptualisation, which involves three dimensions of social legitimacy: pragmatic, moral and cognitive legitimacy. Applied to the entrepreneurial context, pragmatic legitimacy reflects self-interested calculations concerning entrepreneurship; moral legitimacy relies on normative evaluations of entrepreneurship; and cognitive legitimacy rests on taken-for-granted assumptions of entrepreneurship, irrespective of a negative, a positive or no valuation. Suchmann (1995). (Page 4) Social legitimacy: ‘a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate’ (Suchmann, 1995: 574). (Page 4)
Chen et al. (2020)	Social legitimacy: social legitimacy refers to the extent to which a customer perceives that the behavioral models of a social enterprise are consistent with the society’s rules and expectations. (Page 3)

Cont. Table 8
Definitions of Regulatory, Normative, and Cognitive Legitimacy

Author(s)	Definitions
Pragmatic Legitimacy	
Dart (2004)	Pragmatic legitimacy is the most basic form of legitimacy, based on a kind of exchange calculation of the expected value of a focal organization’s activity to immediate stakeholder groups. (Page 416)
Karlsson et al. (2015)	Pragmatic legitimacy: It is this type of legitimacy gained from the self-interest of an organization’s immediate audience. (Page 470)
Lortie et al. (2022)	Pragmatic legitimacy perception: Pragmatic legitimacy perceptions are comprised of consumers’ judgments that the venture’s financial goals lead to a product or service which provides an immediate personal benefit (Handelman & Arnold, 1999; Tost, 2011). (Page 313)
Chen et al. (2020)	Pragmatic legitimacy: Pragmatic legitimacy comes from the perceived impact of the organization’s actions on the well-being of its stakeholders (Suchman, 1995). (Page 4)
Organizational Legitimacy	
Dowling and Pfeffer (1975)	Organizational legitimacy is the outcome of, on the one hand, the process of legitimation enacted by the focal organization, and on the other, the actions affecting relevant norms and values taken by other groups and organization.
Heriot et al. (2014)	Organization legitimacy is essential for acceptability and resources need for survival (Dacin et al. 1997; Deephouse, 1996; Suchman, 1995). (Page 9)
Sapir (2019) and Chen et al. (2020)	Organizational legitimacy is defined by Suchman (1995, p. 574) as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions.” (Page 3)
Market Legitimacy	
Chen et al. (2020)	Market legitimacy: Market legitimacy refers to a customer’s perception of a SE’s power and capability in operating in certain markets. (Page 3)

Cont. Table 8
Definitions of Regulatory, Normative, and Cognitive Legitimacy

Author(s)	Definitions
Competitive Legitimacy	
Messeghem et al. (2014)	Competitive legitimacy reflects a company’s ability to deal with its competitive environment. In the field of entrepreneurship, Marchesnay (1998) referred to competitive legitimacy as the ability of a business to adapt to competitive pressures, according to a vision of ‘the ecology of populations’ (p.102). (Page 532)

Source: Authors

Identifying and Analyzing Research Gaps in Legitimacy

The gaps in the research that arises from our scoping review could be divided into two main sets. The first one is related to the gaps from quantitative articles (see Appendix 2). The second is regarding the gaps in research from the qualitative articles (see Appendix 3).

In Appendix 4, we have summarized these research gaps identified by prior scholars under a few broad themes (e.g., Legitimacy and Business Performance, Legitimacy and Cultural/Regional Factors, Impact of Personal and Social Characteristics on Legitimacy, Entrepreneurial Typology and Legitimization Processes, Legitimacy and the Role of Social Identities and Narrative). Organizing these gaps in a table would provide a clear synthesis and understanding of our topic, aligning with the paper’s primary objective.

Discussion and Directions for Future Research

In order to address the research question outlined above, we conducted a scoping review by analyzing a corpus of 41 articles that explore the concept of "legitimacy" from various perspectives and employing different research methodologies, such as quantitative, qualitative, conceptual studies, and mixed approaches. This methodological variety facilitated a comprehensive and detailed examination of the concept, leading to a holistic comprehension of its various aspects. Consequently, we have successfully met the objectives of this research, which include:

Clarifying the Definitions of Legitimacy

Our literature review enabled us to provide a detailed synthesis of various definitions of legitimacy, revealing how this concept is conceptualized in different

ways and the nuances associated with these definitions. These definitions come from numerous researchers and help us understand the multidimensional nature of legitimacy, demonstrating its relevance in different contexts (e.g., Baum & Oliver, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Suchman, 1995; Überbacher, 2014). Furthermore, this review highlights key themes such as the role of legitimacy in conforming to social norms, its strategic importance for resource acquisition, and its dynamic process of construction and maintenance (e.g., Deephouse & Suchman, 2008; Suchman, 1995; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002). It also sheds light on these dynamic and strategic processes, involving communication and storytelling to justify organizational existence and identity, which enables organizations to proactively manage their legitimacy better.

Identifying and Analyzing Knowledge Gaps in Legitimacy

Our scoping review, through the analysis of various articles, enabled us to identify several knowledge gaps in the field of legitimacy. Firstly, the findings of these studies are frequently confined to particular contexts, such as innovation-driven countries, thereby constraining their generalization to other entrepreneurial settings (e.g., Díez-Martín et al., 2016; Messeghem et al., 2014). Second, utilizing various methods to measure legitimacy can introduce bias and complicate the comparison of results across studies (e.g., Díez-Martín et al., 2016; Nayır et al., 2019). Moreover, some studies rely on restricted or specific samples, which may impact the strength of the conclusions drawn (e.g., Heriot et al., 2014; Nayır et al., 2019; Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2019). Furthermore, in the field of social entrepreneurship, current studies largely neglect the competitive aspect, thus limiting the understanding of the challenges faced by social entrepreneurs in obtaining stakeholder support and the necessary resources (e.g., De Lima, 2023; Nayır et al., 2019). Furthermore, there is a lack of theorizing and empirical experimentation regarding the relationship between entrepreneurship and legitimacy, necessitating in-depth studies on how entrepreneurs perceive and construct legitimacy in various contexts (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2019). Finally, additional research is needed to understand how legitimacy and resources influence new venture performance (Tornikoski & Newbert, 2007).

Future Research Avenues

For future research, we propose specific research questions (Table 9) based on the analysis and synthesis of the results of our scoping review into some insights extracted from this scoping review on legitimacy.

Table 9
Future Research Avenues

Insights	Authors	Research Questions /Avenues
The Need for Longitudinal and Empirical Studies	Diez-Martín et al. (2021) Imiren et al. (2023) Lounsbury and Glynn (2001) Nagy et al. (2012) Ogbolu et al. (2015) Swail et al. (2017) Tian et al. (2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what ways does the legitimacy of a firm grow over the years, and how does it correlate with the firm’s growth and sustainability? • Over an extended period, how does legitimacy impact the identity and strategies employed by female entrepreneurs? • What is the interplay between the business strategies, actions to build legitimacy, and the success of the new business after a period of time? • Over what period, and how do characteristics and relational capital have an effect on the performance of social enterprises and how can this be tested longitudinally? • What are the shifts that have occurred because of “digital shielding” to entrepreneurship and moving around institutional environments after a long duration of time? • In what ways can longitudinal data assist in exploring the correlation between state legitimacy and entrepreneurial performance in various institutional settings?
Role of Legitimacy in Entrepreneurship	Batchelor et al. (2011) Brown (2012) Chen et al. (2020) Dart (2004) Ge et al. (2016) Heriot et al. (2014) Karlsson et al. (2015) Kawai et al. (2020) Li et al. (2022) Wang and Zhou (2021) Wang et al. (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does legitimacy, in the perspective of institutional theory, drive the ability of new ventures to acquire resources over a period of time? • What influence does customer legitimacy have on the new ventures’ financial performance and how does this change over time? • How do social enterprises or green entrepreneurship get affected by different types of legitimacy (moral, pragmatic, political)? • How does legitimacy change in academic entrepreneurship and new ventures, and what are the drivers of this change over time? • What are the different tactics that new ventures and social enterprises use to acquire and sustain legitimacy and how are those tactics context specific? • How can different perspectives on legitimacy create a model that allows to see how it affects the existence and development of business, especially in the entrepreneurial setting?

Cont. Table 9
Future Research Avenues

Insights	Authors	Research Questions /Avenues
Cross-Cultural and Cross-National Perspectives	Ghods et al. (2021) Göcke et al. (2021) Kawai et al. (2020) Newlands and Lutz (2020) Ojediran et al. (2022) Tian et al. (2022) Bolzani et al. (2020) De Clercq and Voronov (2009) Sapir (2019) Tornikoski et al. (2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is legitimacy related to resource acquisition and capability development, and how do all of these things influence the success of entrepreneurial activity? • How do different events affect the processes of judging legitimacy especially in the issues of entrepreneurial fundraising and the development of new ventures? • What is the difference in legitimacy within different cultures in the hospitality industry and what is its effect on entrepreneurial achievement? • In which terms do black women entrepreneurs differ in urban compared to rural locations, and how do such differences change their approaches to legitimacy? • How is the legitimacy of social enterprises established considering the various institutional and cultural contexts of different nations? • How are practices of academic entrepreneurship affected by culture and institutional differences and how is their legitimacy constructed in these contexts? • In what ways do social and transnational entrepreneurship practices change in such they are embedded practices and what is the importance of legitimacy? • In what ways can legitimacy and entrepreneurship be understood better using models of cross-national research, and what can be learned from applying these models in new countries? • What contributions do qualitative techniques make in engendered understanding legitimacy dynamics in the lifecycle of the venture? • How do qualitative techniques contribute to measuring the impact of efforts to gain legitimacy within the circular economy, and what is their impact to the sustainability of the business? • In what ways do international entrepreneurs construct legitimacy within diverse field, and what qualitative techniques can be used to study these processes in greater detail?

Source: Authors

Contributions

Theoretical Contributions

In addition to achieving the previously outlined objectives, which we fundamentally regard as theoretical contributions, our current research is specifically designed to identify gaps in the evidence base where no research has been conducted. This represents a significant theoretical contribution.

This scoping review focuses on the concept of legitimacy and aims to yield several significant theoretical contributions, including the identification of research gaps in the current literature on legitimacy. This will facilitate further advancement in the dissemination process by summarizing the existing literature on the overall state of research activity (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Additionally, such a review can consolidate the diverse conceptualizations of legitimacy present in the existing literature (Mapping the Conceptual Landscape). This involves identifying key definitions, dimensions, and distinctions among various forms and typologies of legitimacy. By delineating these concepts, the review can enhance the understanding of legitimacy across the fields and contexts of management and entrepreneurship. Moreover, our current research has illuminated the theoretical frameworks employed in the study of legitimacy, revealing the most frequently utilized frameworks and their variations across disciplines or contexts (Management and Entrepreneurship). This facilitates a clearer comprehension of the foundational theories that underpin legitimacy research, such as Institutional theory, Legitimacy theory, the Theory of Planned Behavior, Social Entrepreneurship theory, the Resource-Based View theory, and Stakeholder theory.

Finally, by synthesizing the existing literature, our scoping review has generated new research questions that could clarify areas of ambiguity, contradiction, or insufficiently explored topics within the field of legitimacy research. This process can lead to new theoretical inquiries and directions for future research, such as the need for longitudinal and empirical studies, as well as the investigation of the role of legitimacy in entrepreneurship.

Table 10 organizes the key theoretical contributions across studies and provides a clear overview of the main insights and how they relate to legitimacy.

Table 10
Theoretical Contribution

Theoretical Contribution	Authors	Key Insights
1. Legitimacy and New Ventures/Entrepreneurship	Bolzani et al. (2020) Donbesuur et al. (2022) Ge et al. (2016) Kawai et al. (2020) Swail et al. (2017)	Legitimacy plays a key role in new venture performance, with regulatory and strategic legitimacy enhancing opportunity recognition. Political and commercial legitimacy influence green entrepreneurship in transitional economies. Entrepreneurs shape legitimacy across micro, organizational, and institutional levels. Gendered perspectives show the complexity of legitimacy for women.
2. Capital and Legitimacy	De Lima (2023) Bolzani et al. (2020) Cho et al. (2011) Ojediran et al. (2022)	Capital (social, cultural, symbolic) helps entrepreneurs construct their identities and gain legitimacy. Social entrepreneurs compete for legitimacy using various capital forms. Black women entrepreneurs leverage cultural, human, and symbolic capital to navigate legitimacy in marginalized contexts. Transnational entrepreneurs use capital to gain legitimacy across institutional levels.
3. Social Entrepreneurship and Legitimacy	De Lima (2023) Nayır et al. (2019)	Social enterprises must balance social welfare and economic logics to maintain legitimacy. Legitimacy competition may sometimes surpass the focus on social missions in social entrepreneurship.
4. Digital and Contextual Legitimacy	Diez-Martín et al. (2021) Imiren et al. (2023)	Digital entrepreneurship is shaped by digital legitimacy mechanisms, helping entrepreneurs overcome contextual barriers. Institutional context impacts entrepreneurship, either fostering or hindering venture creation.
5. Identity and Legitimacy	Ojediran et al. (2022) Swail et al. (2017)	Identity work is crucial in achieving legitimacy, particularly in gendered contexts where entrepreneurs navigate the interplay between personal identity and entrepreneurial expectations. Marginalized groups, like black women, engage in identity work to construct and negotiate legitimacy.

Cont. Table 10
Theoretical Contribution

Theoretical Contribution	Authors	Key Insights
6. Legitimacy in Transitional and Uncertain Environments	Ge et al. (2016) Imiren et al. (2023)	Legitimacy plays a dynamic role in transitional economies and uncertain environments. Political and commercial legitimacy can enhance or inhibit entrepreneurship depending on institutional conditions. Digital entrepreneurs use digital platforms to overcome institutional uncertainties and contextual challenges.
7. Multilevel and Microlevel Legitimacy Dynamics	Li et al. (2022) Soria et al. (2016)	Legitimacy operates at multiple levels, from microlevel dynamics to institutional influences. Social legitimacy and gender are important in shaping entrepreneurial intentions. Category legitimacy is a multilevel phenomenon, with micro-level interactions complementing institutional dynamics.
8. Fairness and Legitimacy	Newlands and Lutz (2020)	Perceived fairness (procedural, interactional, informational) plays a key role in shaping organizational legitimacy and regulatory desirability, particularly for new platforms or industries like home-sharing.

Source: Authors

Practical Contributions

Tricco et al. (2016) state that scoping reviews are used to inform research programs and identify implications for policy or practice. Therefore, our scoping review is no exception and also emphasizes practical contributions.

Discussing the importance of legitimacy for business, especially for new ventures that must navigate uncertain and often hostile environments to access resources and markets (e.g., Messeghem et al., 2014; Sapir, 2019; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002) could be considered as one of the most practical implications we could focus on. These practical applications help practitioners understand how strategic thinking about legitimacy can enhance their businesses' chances of survival and success.

Furthermore, as noted by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), our scoping review could provide a detailed description of the findings and the breadth of research related to legitimacy. This could serve as a means to synthesize and disseminate re-

search findings to policymakers, practitioners, and consumers who may not have the time or resources to conduct such work themselves (Antman et al., 1992).

Table 11 below consolidates both sets of practical contributions, offering a comprehensive overview of strategies for building and enhancing legitimacy in various entrepreneurial contexts, from new ventures to social enterprises, and highlighting the importance of policy, narrative, and digital presence.

Table 11
Practical Contribution

Practical Contribution	Authors & Key Insights
External Knowledge Transfer & Legitimacy Strategies	Donbesuur et al. (2022): Entrepreneurs should focus on transferring external knowledge resources to build entrepreneurial capabilities, particularly in opportunity recognition. Additionally, it is crucial to develop strategies that strengthen the legitimacy of new ventures with key stakeholders to improve venture performance, especially in dynamic environmental contexts.
Social Entrepreneurial Traits & Legitimacy	Tian et al. (2022): Social entrepreneurs should focus on developing entrepreneurial traits that influence both economic and social performance. The findings suggest that enhancing relational capital and cognitive legitimacy is critical for improving social enterprise performance, emphasizing the need for entrepreneurs to cultivate high-quality relational networks and focus on building cognitive legitimacy to boost economic outcomes.
Policy Design for New Venture Growth	Kawai et al. (2020): Policymakers should focus on increasing the visibility and credibility of entrepreneurship as a positive career choice. Ensuring public acceptance of entrepreneurship is key for new venture growth, especially for entrepreneurs without prior experience and those in highly competitive markets. Emphasis should be placed on improving societal legitimacy to overcome resource barriers and enhance survival probabilities for new ventures.
Social Impact & Geographic Considerations in Social Entrepreneurship	De Lima (2023): Social entrepreneurs must be mindful of the geographic and symbolic competition for recognition and resources. Policymakers and support actors should avoid fostering competition in areas already saturated with NGOs and humanitarian organizations. Decisions about where social innovations are delivered should focus on actual needs rather than logistical or symbolic preferences, to ensure that social impact is genuine and not undermined by competing interests.

Cont. Table 11
Practical Contribution

Practical Contribution	Authors & Key Insights
Narrative Construction for Legitimacy	Nayır et al. (2019): Social entrepreneurs should strategically craft and deploy narratives that communicate the distinctiveness of their ventures to stakeholders. This approach goes beyond storytelling, as carefully constructed narratives can play a pivotal role in resource acquisition and legitimacy. Entrepreneurs must understand their audience and adapt their messages accordingly to enhance the effectiveness of their communication and legitimize their ventures.
Cultural Sensitivity & Policy Development for Women Entrepreneurs	Ojediran et al. (2022): Women entrepreneurs, particularly black women, should acknowledge social structures that influence their entrepreneurship. Policies and programs must be culture-sensitive, taking into account the unique challenges faced by marginalized groups. Policymakers should aim to create inclusive, supportive environments for black women entrepreneurs, ensuring that they have access to the resources and opportunities needed to thrive, while also fostering a deeper understanding of the entrepreneurs' social needs and values.
Digital Legitimacy Building Practices	Imiren et al. (2023): Digital entrepreneurs, particularly in complex contexts, should leverage mechanisms such as digital shielding, curating their digital footprints, and networking to build legitimacy. Practical strategies like online mentoring, managing digital identities (e.g., personal websites or brand creation), and networking are crucial for building a resilient entrepreneurial presence. These practices can be integrated into acceleration programs to better equip entrepreneurs with the tools they need to gain legitimacy and navigate challenges in the digital space.
Entrepreneurial Legitimacy and Market Regulations	Diez-Martín et al. (2016): Countries aiming to increase entrepreneurial activity should focus on improving cognitive legitimacy through education and experience, as well as regulative legitimacy by easing regulations and reducing startup costs. A stable regulatory environment and a strong entrepreneurial culture are essential.
State Legitimacy and Economic Growth	Diez-Martín et al. (2021): Improving state legitimacy is crucial for fostering trust in government, promoting entrepreneurial opportunities, and reducing informal enterprises. Policymakers should prioritize citizen satisfaction and communication, focusing on areas such as education, health, and economic stability to generate a more legitimate and conducive environment for entrepreneurship.

Cont. Table 11
Practical Contribution

Practical Contribution	Authors & Key Insights
Moral Legitimacy in Platforms	Newlands and Lutz (2020): Managers of home-sharing platforms should focus on boosting moral legitimacy by emphasizing fairness, which can help reduce regulatory challenges. Policymakers and consumer protection advocates can use these insights to develop strategies that address public concerns and improve legitimacy in platform-based businesses.
Legitimacy as Competitive Tool	Wang and Zhou (2021): Social enterprises should strategically manage their legitimacy at different stages of development. Newly established enterprises need to innovate and resonate with key stakeholders' expectations to obtain legitimacy and enhance their competitiveness in a rapidly changing market. Legitimacy strategies are essential for bridging the gap between formal and informal institutions, especially when dealing with social pressures.
Legitimation for Resource Acquisition and Flexibility	Wang et al. (2017): Entrepreneurs can enhance their competitive position by actively undertaking legitimation efforts. Legitimation can improve access to resources and enhance entrepreneurial orientation, increasing the flexibility of resource acquisition and enabling ventures to adapt to changing market conditions.
Legitimacy Buffers for Crowdfunding Campaigns	Li et al. (2022): Entrepreneurs looking to launch crowdfunding campaigns should consider the timing and category of their campaigns to enhance legitimacy. Those with limited prior performance should focus on establishing credibility through narrative storytelling, demonstrating trustworthiness, and showcasing project quality to reduce information asymmetry in the crowdfunding process.

Source: Author

Limitations

Apart from the potential value of this contribution, there are some limitations to our scoping review that are worth noting. It should be noted that these limitations are inherent and intrinsically linked to any scoping review.

A primary limitation is based on the findings of research conducted by Pham et al. (2014) on scoping reviews. 32.0% of these searches, or 110 out of 344, suggest that the review may have overlooked certain relevant studies. This limitation is

often attributed to database selection (i.e., searching other databases could have identified additional relevant studies), excluding grey literature from the search, time constraints (Bostock et al., 2009; Brodie et al., 2009; Cahill et al., 2008; Freeman et al., 2002; Templeton et al., 2006; in Pham et al., 2014), or excluding studies published in a language other than English. Our current research is not exempt from this limitation.

A second limitation of our research is a continuation of the first as it pertains to the language of selection of the articles included in our scoping review. All selected articles are in English, reflecting the extensive number of studies included. Consequently, our findings are generalizable to scoping reviews written in English (Tricco et al., 2016).

A third and final limitation is associated with the balance between the breadth and depth of the scoping review. According to Pham et al. (2014), this can lead to challenging decisions regarding whether breadth (covering all available articles in the literature) is more crucial than depth (providing detailed analysis and evaluation of a smaller number of studies). Additionally, it is not feasible to conduct a comprehensive synthesis of the literature due to the vast number of articles available (Brien et al., 2010; Cronin de Chavez et al., 2005; Pham et al., 2014).

Conclusion

In conclusion, by employing a scoping review methodology, this study explores contemporary research on legitimacy in management and entrepreneurship fields. It provides an in-depth analysis of this field's current state of research. It provides an in-depth analysis of this field's current state of research, and gives an up-to-date picture of the international managerial literature related to the research topic. Primarily, the study presents an approach to comprehensively grasp research by selecting, evaluating, and summarizing studies in the interconnected domains of management and entrepreneurship. The results of the analysis offer a comprehensive understanding of the legitimacy concept, highlighting the main research gaps and promising future avenues of research.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Definitions of Legitimacy

Author (s)	Definitions
Dowling and Pfeffer (1975)	<p>Parsons viewed legitimacy as the "appraisal of action in terms of shared or common values in the context of the involvement of the action in the social system" (1960, p. 175). "Legitimation is the process whereby an organization justifies to a peer or superordinate system its right to exist, that is to continue to import, transform, and export energy, material, or information" (Maurer, 1971, p. 361). (Page 123)</p>
Lounsbury and Glynn (2001)	<p>Legitimacy as a process where organizations continually make and remake stories to maintain their identity and status. (Page 560)</p>
Dart (2004)	<p>From an institutional perspective, legitimacy is even the means by which organizations obtain and maintain resources (Oliver, 1991) and is the goal behind an organization's widely observed conformance or isomorphism with the expectations of key stakeholders in the environment (Di Maggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983). (Page 415)</p> <p>"Legitimacy is the property of a situation or behavior that is defined by a set of social norms as correct and appropriate" (Scott, 1992, p. 305). (Page 416)</p> <p>Suchman locates strategic approaches to legitimacy in Pfeffer's work (for example, Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) and notes that their framing of legitimacy is the most relevant to a managerial perspective because it "emphasizes the ways in which organizations instrumentally manipulate and deploy evocative symbols in order to garner societal support" (Suchman, 1995, p. 572). (Page 416)</p>
Batchelor et al. (2011)	<p>New entrepreneurs that are able to more successfully provide benefits that meet the expectation of their employees, thus enhancing legitimacy, should more easily attract and retain competent employees; here legitimacy is seen as increasing access to employees as a resource (see Selznick, 1957 for discussing the link between legitimacy and resource acquisition), leading to a higher performance relative to similar firms lacking these benefits. (Page 33)</p>
Iakovleva and Kickul (2011)	<p>It is suggested that legitimacy, as a resource, enhances the odds of survival of emerging women-run firms (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Rao, 1994; Singh et al., 1991; Suchman, 1995) and attracts resource transactions over sustained periods of time. (Page 6)</p> <p>Legitimacy is contingent on the degree of conformity to social norms, values, and expectations. (Page 6)</p>

Cont. Appendix 1

Definitions of Legitimacy

Author (s)	Definitions
Brown (2012)	Legitimacy is the acknowledgment of an actor's existence by those external stakeholders which have the ability and power to formally or informally recognize the participant. (Page 413) Maurer (1971) writes: 'Legitimation is the process whereby an organization justifies to a peer or subordinate system its right to exist ... (Page 415) "Legitimacy is an environmental event by which actors in an organizational field (i.e., industry, geography) certify that the '... actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions (Suchman, 1995)". (Page 416)
Nagy et al. (2012)	Legitimacy: Scholars define legitimacy as favorable judgments of acceptance, appropriateness, and worthiness made about individuals and their efforts (Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002). (Page 943)
Heriot et al. (2014)	Legitimacy, based on a logic of confidence and good faith, provides stability and access to further resource needed for institutional success and survival (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). (Page 5)
Messeghem et al. (2014)	Legitimacy: legitimacy is a resource for new ventures – a resource at least as important as capital, technology, personnel, customers and networks (Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002, p. 214). (In this article p. 530)
Díez-Martín et al. (2016)	Entrepreneurial legitimacy: We define a country's entrepreneurial legitimacy as a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of a country to promote entrepreneurial activity are desirable, proper, or appropriate.
Ge et al. (2016)	Legitimacy: Suchman (1995) [10] proposes that legitimacy refers to external stakeholders' overall evaluation of the appropriateness of corporate behavior with respect to both social responsibility and other standards, such as competitive advantage and enterprise scale. (Page 2)
Wang et al. (2017)	Legitimation: Legitimation, which refers to "the intentional engagement of social actors in specific practices that may lead to achieving [legitimacy]" (Drori & Honig, 2013, p. 349), is a potential antidote to the liability of newness (Stinchcombe, 1965). (Page 374)
Radu-Lefebvre et al. (2019)	As Suchman (1995) observed, legitimacy is an interactive construct of communication in the public sphere that reflects its context and contributes to shaping individual and collective action. (Page 3) Entrepreneurial legitimacy is a dynamic process constantly negotiated and consolidated in the public space, through individual and group communication and interaction. (Page 3)

Cont. Appendix 1 Definitions of Legitimacy

Author (s)	Definitions
Bolzani et al. (2020)	Legitimacy is a problem in the construction of social reality, and is thus a collective process framed within a taken for granted system of norms, values, and beliefs (Johnson et al., 2006); it involves mediating individuals' perceptions and behaviors to explain and support the existence of a certain social entity (Berger et al., 1998; Johnson et al., 2006). (Page 3)
Sapir (2019)	Legitimacy is a valuable organizational resource that provides access to resources and markets, thereby enhancing the survival prospects of the organization. (Page 3)
Nayır et al. (2019)	Legitimacy – the generalized perception that the actions of an entity are proper and acceptable within some socially constructed systems – enhances the stability and comprehensibility of an organization (Suchman, 1995). (Page 4)
Kawai et al. (2020)	<p>Legitimacy is often defined as “a generalized perception or assumption that organizational activities are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman, 1995, p. 577). (Page 429)</p> <p>Legitimacy is “a social judgment of acceptance, appropriateness, and desirability, enables organizations to access other resources needed to survive and grow” (Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002, p. 414). (Page 429)</p>
Glaser and Lounsbury (2021)	<p>Legitimacy is a master concept in organizational sociology that draws attention to how perceptions of more proximate, ground-level activities are fundamentally shaped by general sociocultural beliefs and processes (Suchman, 1995). (Page 1)</p> <p>Deephouse et al. (2017, p. 32) define legitimacy as “the perceived appropriateness of an organization to a social system in terms of rules, values, norms, and definitions.” (Page 1)</p>
Díez-Martín et al. (2021)	<p>Legitimacy is a multidimensional concept that includes regulatory, moral, pragmatic and cognitive aspects (Díez-de-Castro et al., 2018). (Page 939)</p> <p>Legitimacy is a key factor to reduce uncertainty and risk perception (Desai, 2008). (Page 936)</p>

Cont. Appendix 1
Definitions of Legitimacy

Author (s)	Definitions
De Lima (2023)	<p>Legitimacy is perhaps most observable in the high levels of support and social acceptance subjects receive for acting in accordance with socially established norms and formal laws (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). (Page 3)</p> <p>Legitimacy is a consequence of the entrepreneurs' ability to enact an 'entrepreneurial habitus': a disposition that enables entrepreneurs to deal with the paradoxes of 'standing out,' coming up with new ideas, products, and services, while at the same time 'fitting in' by complying with social norms and institutions. (Page 3)</p>
Imiren et al. (2023)	<p>Legitimacy is a concept developed in sociology that accounts for the compliance of individuals and groups to expected social norms and defines what is "desirable" within societies and groups (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Schuman, 1995). (Page 6)</p> <p>Legitimacy is socially embedded (Wry et al., 2011) and reflects a process of alignment with socially-accepted norms, which enable entrepreneurs to access resources (Pollack et al., 2017). (Page 6)</p>

Source: Authors

Appendix 2

Gaps in Research from Quantitative Research

Author (s)	Research Gap
Messeghem et al. (2014)	Despite the many studies on the types of legitimacy (Bitektine, 2011), none to our knowledge has investigated the relationship between a taxonomy of entrepreneurs based on the type and degree of legitimacy they possess and the nature of the entrepreneurial processes they engage in. (Page 529)
Batchelor et al. (2011)	Compared to publicly traded corporations, there is little information available to individuals when making judgments about private entrepreneurial organizations. (Page 30) This study indicates that greater access to information, enjoyed by employees and financial institutions, may allow them to form better judgments about the legitimacy of new entrepreneurial firms than customers with limited contact and access to firm information. (Page 44)
Tornikoski and Newbert (2007)	Gap 1: To date, much of the empirical research that has been conducted in the area of entrepreneurship has focused on existing organizations. While such research has greatly increased our understanding of new and/or small firms, it has done little to inform us of how would-be entrepreneurs, or nascent entrepreneurs, can successfully create a new organization. This omission is likely due to the difficulty in obtaining data; for, either data must be collected prior to organization when the firms do not yet exist, thereby complicating the identification of a reliable sample, or retrospectively after the organization is formed, thereby increasing the potential for respondent bias. (Pages 311 – 312) Gap 2: Although our knowledge of the process by which firms become operational (a process called “organizational emergence”) has improved since that time, it still remains underdeveloped largely due to the conceptual and methodological complexity of the phenomenon. Indeed, Delacroix and Carroll (1983) observe that, because there is technically no organization per se prior to founding, those attributes typically used to study and explain organizations often do not exist. For such reasons, Bamford et al. (2000) argue that accurately measuring founding conditions is one of the main challenges for conducting empirical research on new ventures. (Page 313)

Cont. Appendix 2
Gaps in Research from Quantitative Research

Author (s)	Research Gap
Kawai et al. (2020)	The present study contributes a new perspective to the female entrepreneurship literature to fill this research gap and is expected to enable the development of public policy initiatives designed to foster women's entrepreneurial cognitive resources. It reveals empirical evidence on female entrepreneurs' self-efficacy and tenacity as key enablers of venture growth. (Page 18)
Li et al. (2022)	The high uncertainty and ambiguity of the crowdfunding platform, wherein vast information asymmetry exists between entrepreneurs and investors, places investors in constant vulnerability (Josefy et al., 2017). (Page 2263) Given the difficulty of searching for further diagnostic clues or more reliable information on the crowdfunding platform (Negro et al., 2015; Plummer et al., 2016), it is crucial for entrepreneurs to understand how potential investors assess the legitimacy of crowdfunding projects because legitimacy, by its nature, is bestowed by key stakeholders (Deephouse et al., 2017). (Page 2264)
Díez-Martín et al. (2021)	This paper contributes to the academic research, fulfilling an identified gap in the research agenda about the need of analyzing the entrepreneurship activities through new and updated variables (Abdesselam et al., 2018; Fuentelsaz et al., 2019), especially taking into consideration the differences between various countries (Assenova & Sorenson, 2017; Martínez-Fierro et al., 2016). So far, the relationship between the state legitimacy and the entrepreneurship rate has not been empirically validated. (Page 937)
Brown (2012)	While many scholars have offered theoretical works on legitimacy, there is a lack of empirical testing in this area. This paper attempted to fill this gap by empirically testing the ability of firms to survive longer with respect to variables that are hypothesized to either aid or stifle legitimating efforts. (Page 424)
Nagy et al. (2012)	Although research into what cues stakeholders use to make decisions is well developed (e.g., Shepherd & Zacharakis, 2003; Tyebjee & Bruno, 1984), we know much less about specific behaviors that entrepreneurs can employ to positively influence stakeholders' perceptions and subsequent resource-related decisions. (Page 942)

Cont. Appendix 2
Gaps in Research from Quantitative Research

Author (s)	Research Gap
Newlands and Lutz (2020)	Indeed, while growing research has studied the regulatory climate of the sharing economy (Cetin & Deakin, 2019; Uzunca & Borlenghi, 2019), no research to date has examined the desirability of regulation from a user perspective. (Page 2) Not only have the topics of moral legitimacy and regulatory desirability been under-studied in the hospitality and tourism literature, they have also been neglected as a subject of interest across other sectors, particularly when considered as an outcome of fairness (Hegtvedt, 2015; Tost, 2011). (Page 12)
Soria et al. (2016)	However, the literature on regional comparative analysis regarding EI and related variables is scarce and there is even less in emerging economies such as Colombia and Chile. (Page 67)
Iakovleva and Kickul (2011)	However, little work has examined the impact of structural components in the context of entrepreneurial ventures. (Page 2) However, while a number of studies identifying women SME success factors have been carried out in advanced countries (Anna et al., 2000; Chaganti & Parasuraman, 1997; Lerner & Almor, 2002), economic research on entrepreneurship in transition economies is less developed and only a few studies have used a rigorous scientific approach (Tkachev & Kolvereid, 1999). The lack of information on female entrepreneurs is especially apparent. (Page 2) There has been little scientific research on entrepreneurship in Russia. (Page 3) While the profile and motivation of Russian entrepreneurs was explored in some studies during the last decade, there is an absence of studies analyzing the combination of different factors and attempting to explain performance of Russian SME, especially with regard to the role of women. This study addresses the mentioned research gap by testing a model explaining the performance of female-owned SMEs in Russia. (Page 4)
Wang et al. (2017)	As mentioned above, the strategic (BMI) and institutional (legitimacy) approaches to organizations are synergetic and complementary with a point of view that looks “out” instead of “in” (Elsbach, 1994), especially in the case of social enterprises. In China, more social enterprises are pursuing BMI as well as legitimacy. These two considerations have strong connections with each other, framing the construction of social enterprises, but there remains a gap in the knowledge of how internal mechanisms combine with specific situations to promote SEP. This paper aims to fill this gap by empirically testing a conceptual model that includes BMI, legitimacy and SEP. (Page 2)

Cont. Appendix 2
Gaps in Research from Quantitative Research

Author (s)	Research Gap
Lortie et al. (2022)	We feel this lack of research on how social ventures leverage their social impact models is an important gap in the literature that deserves more attention as the success of many social ventures relies heavily on various consumer responses. (Page 313)
Chen et al. (2020)	Current literature on customer socialization strategies is lacking and focuses mostly on service organizations in for-profit organizations. Little research has examined the mechanisms through which deliberate customer socialization strategies may affect customer-perceived organizational legitimacy, which in turn affect customer in-role RPB and extra-role citizenship behavior among SEs. Our study addresses this research gap. (Page 4)
Wang et al. (2017)	In the absence of a clear connection between legitimacy and economic returns, entrepreneurs and managers may not give strategic priority to legitimation. (Page 373) However, because “legitimacy, arguably, has no specific, tangible value and cannot be accounted for directly as a firm asset” (Nagy et al., 2012, p. 943), whether and how legitimation affects other performance aspects beyond organizational survival is less known. (Page 374)
Kibler et al. (2014)	This study addresses the lack of congruent concepts and measurement tools for the investigation of the regional cultural embeddedness of entrepreneurship (Bosma et al., 2008; Trettin & Welter, 2011). (Page 3)
Tian et al. (2022)	However, there are few studies designed to reveal the mechanisms of action on social enterprise performance from the perspective of personal traits of entrepreneurs. (Page 2) However, multidimensional entrepreneurial traits have not been established. The theory of relational capital holds that the relationship can bring a certain value to enterprises. (Page 2)
Kawai et al. (2020)	One critical omission is that the past research implicitly assumes that access to resources mediates the relationship between legitimacy and new venture performance. Put differently, it has only chiefly stressed the crucial role of resource accessibility in theory, though it remains empirically vague. (Page 428)

Cont. Appendix 2
Gaps in Research from Quantitative Research

Author (s)	Research Gap
Ge et al. (2016)	As green entrepreneurship needs to consider both venture performance and social responsibility, it will be subject to legitimacy constraints at the system level. Whether these legitimacy constraints are favorable to green enterprise is not yet clear from current research. (Page 1) The causal model of “GEO–legitimacy–resources–business growth” does not reflect the essence of legitimacy in green entrepreneurship; a comparative exploration of the impact of varying degrees of legitimacy on the effects between GEO and green performance appears to be more worthwhile, and such studies are rare. (Page 2)

Source: Authors

Appendix 3

Gaps in Research from Qualitative Research

Author (s)	Research Gaps
De Lima (2023)	Competition in the social entrepreneurship field is largely overlooked by scholars and only vaguely mentioned as a consequence of fundraising processes (e.g., Austin et al., 2006; Zahra et al., 2009). (Page 1)
Nayir et al. (2019)	Although the literature continues to have an idealized notion of social entrepreneurship and research often assumes limitless support from stakeholders, recent work on social ventures shows that social entrepreneurs frequently face resistance in their ability to get support from stakeholders and obtain the resources they need. Actually, little is known about how social entrepreneurs overcome the barriers they encounter (Ruebottom, 2013). (Page 2)
Radu-Lefebvre et al. (2019)	We aim to address an important theoretical gap concerning entrepreneurial legitimacy, which the vast majority of articles portray as a predictor of entrepreneurial success, enabling entrepreneurs to attract resources.
Lounsbury and Glynn (2001)	Lack of a theory about entrepreneurship. (Page 559)
Heriot et al. (2014)	Our findings demonstrate that entrepreneurship is likely not considered legitimate, in part, due to both a lack of academic preparation and a lack of research productivity of instructors within the field of entrepreneurship. (Page 14)
Swail et al. (2017)	Whilst acknowledging that the relationship between nascency and legitimacy has been explored at some length, we suggest there still remains an important gap regarding how social ascriptions such as gender, influence this relationship. (Page 2)
Ojediran et al. (2022)	This study argues that prior studies have ignored how black women challenge the norms and prejudices that frame their entrepreneurial identities in achieving legitimacy (Chasserio et al., 2014; Tedmanson & Essers, 2016), as their social identities may not fit well with a socially constructed, entrepreneurial, white, middle-class, male archetype that configures normative assumptions and expectations (Hamilton, 2013). Such lacunae may signal a lack of recognition for the social, cultural, and symbolic aspects (Anderson, 2015) linked to their access to, or lack of, resources and legitimacy (Dy, 2017). (Page 3)
Sapir (2019)	Historical studies about the rise of entrepreneurship in universities have largely focused on the involvement of individual academic entrepreneurs in commercial activities, and little is known about early entrepreneurial activities at the organizational level (Musselin, 2018). (Page 1)

Cont. Appendix 3

Gaps in Research from Qualitative Research

Author (s)	Research Gaps
Smith and Warren (2022)	From an organisational perspective, we know little about how successful entrepreneurs organise themselves to leverage collective legitimacy, nor the societal mechanisms used to achieve this. (Page 478)
Karlsson et al. (2015)	Given the importance of creating legitimacy during emergence of the venture, including overcoming liabilities of newness, scholarship has generally overlooked how legitimacy develops in new ventures (Drori & Honig, 2013), with few empirical investigations offered. (Page 470)
Göcke (2021)	Research on CE is missing an integrated concept and research agenda for understanding the legitimacy of CE and the subsequent dynamics of intraorganizational resource deployment and withdrawal. (Page 403)
Hervieux et al. (2010)	The question of legitimacy is rarely addressed in SE research. To date, the literature on SE has been largely limited to descriptive case studies that have mainly focused on definitional aspects and have had a clear lack of theory building (Harding, 2004). (Page 38) Published academic literature is limited. (Page 45)
Imiren et al. (2023)	There are still gaps in our understanding of digital entrepreneurship in terms of context-related challenges which digital entrepreneurs face, with scant studies focusing on non-western contexts that may have unique conditions and therefore research insights (Ngoasong, 2018; Welter & Smallbone 2011; Xheneti, 2017; Zahra et al., 2014). (Page 1) Admittedly, there are established gaps in terms of the research literature on digital entrepreneurship. Such gaps focus on enablers, outcomes, business models and market offerings within contexts and entrepreneurial ecosystems (Berger et al, 2019; Bouncken & Kraus, 2022; Essen et al., 2022). (Page 1) This paper addresses the theoretical gap in understanding how entrepreneurial actors gain legitimacy in a digital context by closely examining the mechanisms through which digital entrepreneurs build legitimacy in terms of operating, networking, and enacting opportunities. (Page 25)
Ghods et al. (2021)	Literature overlooks international entrepreneurs' institutional context which does not enable to fully understand certain behaviors that are rational in context (Hoefler & Green, 2016). (Page 2) Following Locke and Golden-Biddle (1997), we believe that existing literature is inadequate to understand the generalized perception of legitimacy. (Page 2)

Source: Authors

Appendix 4

Gaps / Themes

Research Gaps/Themes	Authors
Quantitative Articles	
Legitimacy and Business Performance: There remains a lack of empirical validation of the impact of legitimacy on organizational performance and business survival, particularly in specific contexts.	Brown (2012) Ge et al. (2016) Kawai et al. (2020) Li et al. (2022) Newlands and Lutz (2020) Wang et al. (2017)
Legitimacy and Cultural/Regional Factors: Legitimacy is influenced by cultural and regional contexts, but there is little research analyzing how these variables affect perceptions of legitimacy in different geographical and cultural environments.	Díez-Martín et al. (2021) Kibler et al. (2014) Soria et al. (2016)
Impact of Personal and Social Characteristics on Legitimacy: Personal traits and consumer perceptions influence the legitimacy of entrepreneurs, but empirical research is still limited, particularly with regard to perceptions linked to race, gender and the multidimensional traits of entrepreneurs.	Iakovleva and Kickul (2011) Kawai et al. (2020) Ogbolu et al. (2015) Tian et al. (2022)
Access to information Personal and behavioral factors: Information asymmetry affects the perceived legitimacy of companies. Entrepreneurs' psychological resources, influencing behaviors, and their impact on entrepreneurial success, with a particular focus on female entrepreneurs.	Batchelor et al. (2011) Chen et al. (2020) Li et al. (2022) Nagy et al. (2012)
Entrepreneurial typology and legitimization processes: Lack of research on the relationship between entrepreneurial legitimacy typology and entrepreneurial processes.	Messeghem et al. (2014)
Methodological and conceptual challenges of organizational emergence: Difficulties related to the lack of research on nascent entrepreneurs, data collection on nascent entrepreneurs and measuring founding conditions, particularly for new businesses.	Tornikoski et al. (2007)
Qualitative Articles	
Legitimacy in social entrepreneurship and Start-Up creation: There is little solid theorizing to explain how social entrepreneurs overcome challenges to acquire resources and gain legitimate recognition.	De Lima (2023) Nayır et al. (2019)

Cont. Appendix 4
Gaps / Themes

Research Gaps/Themes	Authors
<p>Legitimacy and the role of social identities and narrative: There is a dire need to analyze how marginalized groups use narrative or visual strategies to overcome prejudice and gain legitimacy. Understand how social identities influence legitimacy.</p>	<p>Kašperová (2021) Ojediran et al. (2022) Swail et al. (2017) Glase and Lounsbury (2021)</p>
<p>Contextual and institutional challenges for legitimacy in diverse environments: Importance of examining how cultural and institutional contexts influence the construction of legitimacy, and how entrepreneurs adapt in diverse environments.</p>	<p>Ghods et al. (2021) Imiren et al. (2023) Sapir (2019)</p>
<p>Insufficient theorizing on the legitimacy and mechanisms for obtaining resources: The theoretical and empirical basis needs to be strengthened to better understand how entrepreneurs manage to obtain resources and overcome obstacles when setting up new businesses.</p>	<p>Heriot et al. (2014) Karlsson et al. (2015) Göcke et al. (2021) Lounsbury and Glynn (2001)</p>

Source: Authors

Appendix 5

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