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CHAPTER XXII. RESEARCH METHODS

# STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN OR HIGHWAY TO HELL? THE USE OF GLOBAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP MONITOR DATA IN ACADEMIC RESEARCH (INTERACTIVE PAPER)

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**Abstract**

In 1998 Babson College and London Business School initiated the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) program to increase our understanding of the role of entrepreneurship in national economic growth. GEM is now the largest single study of entrepreneurial activity in the world. In view of the 10th anniversary of the GEM project we seek to understand how the "heavenly" possibilities for entrepreneurship research are currently used in the academic world. With a thorough analysis of empirical academic papers using GEM data the paper aims to provide insights and recommendations about the future usage of the data.

**KEYWORDS:** Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, entrepreneurship research

**INTERACTIVE PAPER**

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## Principal Topic

In 1998 Babson College and London Business School initiated the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) program to increase our understanding of the role of entrepreneurship in national economic growth. GEM is now the largest single study of entrepreneurial activity in the world. In view of the 10th anniversary of the GEM project we seek to understand how the "heavenly" possibilities for entrepreneurship research are currently used in the academic world. With a thorough analysis of empirical academic papers using GEM data the paper aims to provide insights and recommendations about the future usage of the data.

## Method

Based on information provided by the GEM consortium and an EBSCO search we identified 66 English-language papers published in academic journals using GEM data. To ensure a reliable evaluation of the papers we set up an analyzing framework including relevant aspects of data usage in empirical studies. Each paper was analyzed by at least two of the three authors.

## Results and Implications

Academic papers use GEM data in a number of different ways and concerning different topics. In almost half of the papers the unit of analysis is the individual level while slightly more than half of the papers deals with aggregated data, mostly on the national level and only in a few cases on the regional level. Both groups of papers have specific strength and report specific limitations. Financing, gender and framework conditions are topics frequently covered. Most papers take the established constructs of Early-Stage Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA), nascent entrepreneurship and young business ownership. The breadth of information gathered within the GEM project is not fully utilized, e.g. established business owners are only seldom the focus of analysis. Often, GEM variables are used without discussing their appropriateness regarding the research question.

Our results have implications for researchers within and outside the GEM project. So far some papers based on GEM data have managed to climb the "stairway to heaven", increase our knowledge about entrepreneurship and get published in top entrepreneurship journals. We believe that it is important to fully understand the GEM methodology in order to understand whether GEM data fit to a specific research question. We encourage researchers to make use of the individual data, be innovative, include new constructs and challenge established ways of using GEM data.

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