Revista de Educação e Pesquisa em Contabilidade
Journal of Education and Research in Accounting

REPeC, Brasília, v. 12, n. 4, art. 4, p. 468-485, Oct./Dec. 2018
Available online at *www.repec.org.br*
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17524/repec.v12i4.1873

Periódico Trimestral, digital e gratuito publicado pela Academia Brasileira de Ciências Contábeis

ISSN 1981-8610

Institutional Theory: a bibliometric analysis in Accounting research

Abstract

Objective: Analyze how research based on the Institutional Theory has been developed in accounting research.
Method: For the search, the Knowledge Development Process-Constructivist was used, considering articles published between 1993 and 2018. Seven databases were used and a bibliographic portfolio was selected with 148 articles on the theme.
Results: The study found: (i) 27 theoretical and 121 empirical studies; (ii) most studies adopt a qualitative design; (iii) the most used techniques were semistructured interviews and documentary analysis; (iv) the majority used the New Institutional Sociology; (v) the authors who stood out were Burns and Scapens (2000) (OIE), Williamson (2000) (NIE) and DiMaggio and Powell (1983) (NIS); (vi) the Agency Theory and the Structuration Theory were the most frequent besides the Institutional Theory; and (vii) the suggestions for future studies indicate other data collection and analysis techniques, changes in the context analyzed, exploration of heterogeneous environments, use of longitudinal designs and quantitative methods.
Contributions: The study contributes by analyzing how the Institutional theory is being applied in studies from different Accounting research areas, identifying the main studies in each theoretical current, the methods use, suggestions for research and possible routes, thus serving as the theoretical base for future empirical research in this area.
Key words: Institutional Theory; Accounting Research; Financial Accounting; Management Accounting; Literature Review.

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Published in Portuguese and English. Original Version in Portuguese.

Received in 6/5/2018. Ask to Revise on 10/26/2018. Resubmitted on 11/8/2018. Accepted on 11/8/2018 by Dr. Orleans Silva Martins (Editor). Published on 12/2/2018. Organization responsible for the journal: Abracicon

1. Introduction

The turbulence in the environment (Vamosi, 2003), economic, social, organizational trends (Scapens, 2006), harmonization of standards (Irvine, 2008) and the bureaucracy the governments impose (Tagesson, 2007) are some of the factors that lead organizations not to remain static and undergo adaptations in their routines and processes (Zoni, Dossi & Morelli, 2012). This scenario has affected the institutional logics of organizations (Kantola & Järvinen, 2012) and how they develop and implement their strategies (Ma & Tayles, 2009), causing the institutionalization and deinstitutionalization of practices and artifacts in organizations (Russo, Parisi & 2016), leading to change processes in search of survival in a highly competitive environment (Zoni *et al.*, 2012).

The processes of change have attracted considerable attention from organizational research, exploring the aspects of resistance and the consequences of these changes (Angonese & Lavarda, 2014; Lukka, 2007). Several factors cause these alterations and also affect the organizations' accounting practices, both in the process of generating management information for decision making in search of more efficiency (Halbouni & Hassan, 2012) and in the accomplishment of the financial statements presented to investors and governments, who are influenced by external standards and pressures (Irvine, 2008; Phang & Mahzan, 2017).

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) point out that these changes are increasingly driven by bureaucratization, rather than by the search for organizational efficiency or effectiveness. This process has institutionalized the organizations' practices, making them more similar, such as the harmonization of accounting standards and the adoption of the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) (Guerreiro, Rodrigues & Craig, 2012; Irvine, 2008; Judge, Li & Pinsker, 2010; Phang & Mahzan, 2017).

An institution can be characterized as a way of thinking that incorporates habits and becomes part of the routine of a group, in this case, the organizations and their accounting practices (Scapens, 2006). In this perspective of change and its institutions, a theoretical current that has gained strength and is being widely used in research is the Institutional theory. Institutional theory is based on the premise that organizations influence and are influenced by the context they are operating in. An institutional perspective can bring knowledge about the effects that dominant institutions and structural conditions exert on organizations' actions (Mantzari, Sigalas & Hines, 2017).

Institutional theory has been widely used in management literature, especially on new accounting technologies for management and its implementation (Lukka, 2007). In addition to management literature, the theory is increasingly used in financial accounting research to understand influences on the internal structures of organizations (Hassan, Rankin & Lu, 2014).

By consolidating several currents of the Institutional theory in accounting practice studies, the current and future challenge is to use this theoretically explored understanding to improve accounting practices and provide relevant and useful information to investors and managers as key users of accounting information (Guerreiro, Frezatti & Casado, 2006).

Given this context, the following research question emerges: **How has the current literature dealt with the Institutional theory in Accounting research?** Thus, the objective of this article is to analyze how the studies based on the Institutional theory have been carried out, in Accounting researches, aiming to produce knowledge in this area. In order to search for the most recent studies, the research was limited to the last twenty-five years.

To seek a better understanding of the use of this theory in accounting practices, it is important to find out how the theory is being applied in studies. Considering the need to build bridges between theories to expand analysis levels (Yazdifar, Zaman, Tsamenyi & Askarany, 2008), it is also important to identify which other theories are being applied together with the Institutional theory for the sake of a better understanding and analysis of the accounting practices in the organizational reality.

Thus, this study aims to contribute to the literature, analyzing how research has been carried out based on the Institutional theory, presenting data collection methods, theoretical currents used, other theories and suggestions for future research, contributing to the discussion of the accounting research literature and serving as a theoretical basis for future research.

This study is also justified by its originality as, after a survey in international databases, no articles were found, published in scientific journals, which analyzed how the Institutional theory is applied in Accounting research. The study also responds to Cunha, Santos, and Beuren (2015), broadening the bibliometric research of Institutional theory and Accounting to a larger number of databases and a wider scope within the topics of accounting research.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this section, the theoretical framework is presented which supports this study on the Institutional theory and its theoretical currents.

2.1 Institutional Theory

The Institutional theory arose from various authors' critique of the Neoclassical Economic Theory of the Firm, which considers the rational and maximizing behavior of individual decision makers (Guerreiro *et al*., 2006). Its assumptions are based on the economic rationality of the individual and on the market equilibrium (Burns & Scapens, 2000).

The Neoclassical Economic Theory of the Firm reports on the changes caused in Accounting as a product of the rational behavior to optimize organizational profits through the generation of new information. It is based on mathematical models that take into account the total rationality of people in their choices (Guerreiro *et al*., 2006).

The Neoclassical theory was one of the first theoretical bases in Management Accounting research. Subsequently, researchers began to use the contingency theory, especially in behavioral research in Accounting. As from the 1980s, however, researchers moved to the field of sociology and institutional economics for the study of management accounting (Zarifah & Siti-Nabiha, 2012).

From the divergence of these ideas and the change to a sociological focus, the Institutional theory began to develop, which considers Accounting as an institution that undergoes transformations deriving from both internal and external pressures and its function is to give meaning to a given social group.

Studies that attempt to explore the aspects of change, institutionalization, and deinstitutionalization of organizational practices have explored the Institutional theory in the following theoretical currents: Old Institutional Economics (OIE), New Institutional Economics (NIE) and New Institutional Sociology (NIS) (Scapens, 2006).

Old Institutional Economics (OIE) starts from questions related to the Neoclassical Economic theory. Instead of assuming a perfect equilibrium and total rationality, the current considers people's limited rationality and opportunism and attempts to explore the reason for this opportunism, and how it determines the types of economic behavior (Scapens, 2006).

OIE allows a closer view of the organizations and focuses on their internal pressures, seeking to understand what shapes the organizational practices (Scapens, 2006). The current recognizes that people operate in a social environment with institutionalized rules and values and tries to explore the institutions that shape behaviors within that environment. The focus is on the organizational environment and on this institutionalization at the micro level (Burns & Scapens, 2000; Scapens, 2006). Therefore, these practices are approached within the organizations through the institutionalization and deinstitutionalization of habits, routines, and rules (Burns & Scapens, 2000).

Burns and Scapens (2000) argue that habits are previously acquired individual characteristics of disposition or tendency to take action. Routines are patterns that are usually adopted by a group of people. Rules are the formalized procedures, while routines are the procedures that are actually already used. The aforementioned authors have elaborated a framework to study the changes in Management Accounting.

The framework begins with the coding of institutional principles in rules and routines. Then, the actors adhere to the rules and routines outlined in the initial stage. The third stage occurs when the behaviors are repeated, which leads to a reproduction of the routines. The last stage is the institutionalization of rules and routines, which were reproduced through the behavior of the individual actors and, thus, the rules and routines simply become the way things are. This being a cyclical process, the institutions will then be coded again in the rules and routines in course, which will shape new rules, and so on (Burns & Scapens, 2000).

The other theoretical approaches of the Institutional theory focus on the organizations' external environment. Both NIE and NIS address the external pressures, respectively economic and institutional, on the organizations and their practices. The currents try to understand the nature of these pressures, analyzing the organizations at the macro and micro levels. Despite the same focus, however, these two currents have very distinct approaches (Scapens, 2006).

New Institutional Economics (NIE) does not break the economic reasoning, but it assumes some elements that make the neoclassical model of the firm more restricted. Limited rationality and opportunism in people's interests are taken into account (Williamson, 2000). The focus is on the institutional environment and on this institutionalization, both at the micro and macro levels, in the attempt to explain the economic agents' behavior (Scapens, 2006).

Liszbinski, Kronbauer, Macagnan and Zardin Patias (2014) explain that the NIE focuses more on the economic relationships in the organizations' context and looks for explanations for the market equilibrium problem, as this is flawed, and the organizations try to provide these explanations by using tools that safeguard them against uncertainties.

The current uses economic reasoning to investigate the range of institutional arrangements and their properties. This reasoning is further explored to try and explain people's actions, the institutionalization of organizational practices in different environments; and is concerned with the structures used to rule economic transactions (Scapens, 2006).

The Institutional theory arose from the authors' critique of the Firm's Neoclassical Economic Theory that considers the rational and maximizing behavior of individual decision makers (Guerreiro *et al*., 2006) and its assumptions are based on the economic rationality of the individual and the market equilibrium (Burns & Scapens, 2000).

The firm's Neoclassical Economic Theory reports the changes caused in Accounting as a product of rational behavior to optimize the organizations' profits through the generation of new information. It is based on mathematical models that take into account people's total rationality in their choices (Guerreiro *et al*., 2006).

This institutionalization is directly linked to one of the basic concepts of the current, the Transaction Cost (Williamson, 2000). This was developed by Coase (1937) and means that every economic transaction has its costs, which may occur before or after this transaction. At this point, the institutions' importance comes in. The institutions are created to minimize uncertainties and reduce this limitation of people's rationality and opportunism (North & Hart, 2006; Williamson, 2000). In addition, they limit human interactions, structuring economic and social relationships and determining the price of these transaction costs (North & Hart, 2006).

The New Institutional Sociology, on the other hand, focuses on the organizational environment that shapes organizational structures and systems and on the pressures of this environment in organizations (Scapens, 2006). The current seeks to explore why organizations in similar situations become similar through socially institutionalized contexts and procedures (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Another point addressed by the current is the aspect of legitimation towards the environment, which would be linked to the acceptance of these socially institutionalized procedures. Organizations seek this legitimation because of the facilities it could bring in obtaining resources and survival in their environments (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) explain that organizations tend to adopt the same practices and structures as other organizations in similar contexts, in response to the institutional pressures exerted on the organization. This process of homogenization of organizations is called isomorphism and has been used in several studies (Hassan, Rankin & Lu, 2014; Nurunnabi, 2015) to investigate the aspects of organizational change. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) classify isomorphism into three types: coercive isomorphism, mimetic isomorphism, and normative isomorphism.

Coercive isomorphism results from the formal and informal pressures exerted on an organization by stakeholders, which the organization depends on. Sources for coercion include governmental regulations and the social, cultural, and political pressures exerted on an organization (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

The second process of isomorphism is mimetic. Due to the uncertainties of the organizational environment, organizations tend to copy the practices of other organizations. When the technologies used are out of phase, when the objectives are ambiguous, or when the environment creates uncertainty, organizations can model themselves after other organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

The last isomorphism is normative, which derives from the professionalization of the organizational agents. Professionalization is defined as the members' collective search to define the conditions and methods of their work; control "the production of producers"; and establish a cognitive basis and legitimation for their occupational autonomy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

In the literature, some studies were found that develop a bibliometric analysis of the scientific articles and use the Institutional theory in Accounting research. Cunha, Santos, and Beuren (2015) analyzed articles that relate Institutional Theory to Management Accounting and found that the publications do not exceed two articles per year. The journals Management Accounting Research and Accounting Organizations and Society had the largest number of publications and most articles use the New Institutional Sociology.

Vailatti, Rosa, and Vicente (2017) analyzed the approaches and methods used in research that adopted the Institutional Theory to evaluate aspects of Management Accounting practices, from 2006 to 2015, with the New Institutional Sociology approach as the most frequent in the studies. These works were limited to Management Accounting studies though and we did not find in our research any review of all the research in Accounting linked to the Institutional theory.

3. Methodological Procedures

This section presents the methodological framework of the research, the selected intervention tool and the collection and data analysis procedures.

3.1 Methodological Framework

This study is characterized as descriptive (Richardson, 1999). Concerning the technical procedures, it is a bibliometric research (Chueke & Amatucci, 2015) with a quantitative approach to the problem (Richardson, 1999). The selected data collection tool was the structured bibliographic review process Knowledge Development Process-Constructivist (ProKnow-C), detailed under item 3.2.

3.2 Knowledge Development Process-Constructivist (ProKnow-C)

In order to meet the research objective, the tool ProKnow-C was selected, whose objective is to build knowledge on a given theme according to a constructivist view. Other objectives of the tool are to identify a relevant Bibliographic Portfolio (BP) on a given topic, perform a critical analysis and identify gaps in the literature on the subject (Ensslin, Ensslin & Pinto, 2013).

Proknow-C consists of four steps: selection of the Bibliographic Portfolio, bibliometric analysis, systemic analysis, and pointing out challenges for future research. In this research, the first two steps will be implemented. The first stage of Proknow-C, the selection of the portfolio, aims to define the BP, with articles considered relevant in the research area and which are aligned with the researcher's perception, according to predefined delimitations (Ensslin, Ensslin & Pacheco, 2012).

The other step that will be operationalized in this study, the Bibliometric analysis, is the quantification of the information and presentation of the characteristics of the publications (Ensslin, Ensslin & Pinto, 2013). In this step, the following variables were considered: (i) the type of research: whether it is theoretical or empirical; (ii) the research approach (qualitative or quantitative); (iii) the techniques used in the research; (iv) the theoretical current of the Institutional theory used to support the study: Old Institutional Economics (OIE), New Institutional Economics (NIE) or New Institutional Sociology (NIS); (v) the main authors cited, according to the theoretical currents; (vi) the other theories used to support the articles; and (vii) the suggestions for future research pointed out in the studies.

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

For the data collection procedure, a Bibliographic Portfolio (BP) was selected, putting the first stage of ProKnow-C in practice. The topic was divided into two research axes and the keywords that represented them were selected. The search command was chosen in the English language due to its larger number of results in relation to the other languages. English is also the language of the best global journals and was used in seven databases.

In order to search the literature for the most recent articles on the proposed theme, the search was delimited to the publications of the last twenty-five years, from 1993 to 2018. The articles that appeared were filtered according to their alignment, as follows: title alignment, abstract alignment, article availability, and full article alignment. Figure 1 shows the search and filter process of the BP.

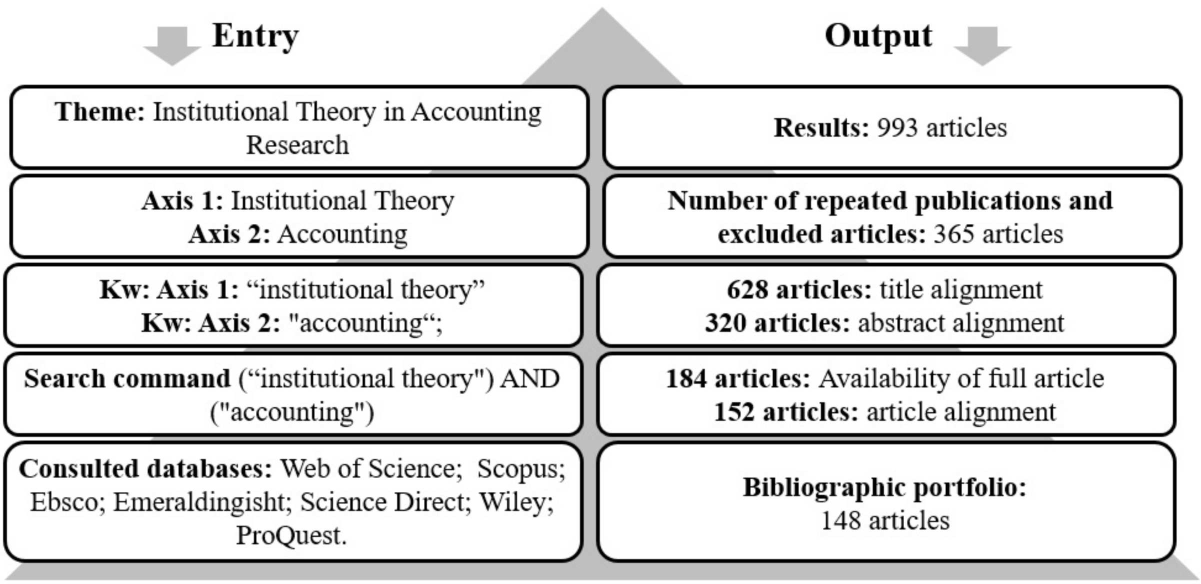

Figure 1. Data collection process

The data were collected on April 25th 2018. The BP on the literature fragment related to the selected theme Institutional theory in accounting research consisted of 148 articles.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

After defining the Bibliographic Portfolio (BP) on the topic "Institutional Theory" in Accounting research, composed of 148 articles, identified in the first stage of ProKnow-C, the second stage will be carried out, which is the bibliometric analysis of the articles.

The objective of the bibliometric analysis is to generate knowledge about relevant points of the theme under study and, for this purpose, some characteristics are selected for further investigation, through the identification of their occurrence and, then, through the search for additional information to support the researcher's arguments.

For the analysis, the BP was separated into research areas and subareas, to facilitate the analysis according to common themes. The first area identified was Financial Accounting, in which articles on the following themes were classified: Accounting reform, Governance, Implementation of IFRS, Reporting, Public Accounting, Sustainability, and Auditing. The second research area is Management Accounting, which consists of articles dealing with Performance Evaluation Systems, Budgetary Practices, Management Control Systems, Costing Systems, Management Accounting Practices, and Environmental Accounting. The other articles, addressing general topics such as the accounting profession, accounting education, and accounting research practices, were classified as accounting research.

After separating the articles based on their research themes, the studies were analyzed according to their areas. The first analysis was intended to separate the articles into theoretical, where the theory is discussed, proven or revised, and empirical, seeking some practical proof or negation within the study. In relation to the theoretical articles, two research methods were identified, the theoretical essay and the literature review, in which scientific articles on the subject were analyzed. Regarding the literature review articles, the variables analyzed in these studies were searched for the knowledge of what was previously researched, serving as the basis for the analyses of this research.

In the analysis of the empirical articles, the same method used by Helden, Johnsen, and Vakkuri (2008) was used. For the identification of the research methods used, the studies that sought to explain some variable in a population by means of the study of a sample were classified as quantitative, while the studies that go deeper into a given case were classified as qualitative.

Subsequently, as one of the requirements for the article to be considered aligned was that the underlying theory was the Institutional theory, the articles were investigated to identify which theoretical current of this theory was used, being divided into Old Institutional Economics (OIE), New Institutional Economics (NIE) and New Institutional Sociology (NIS). After the identification of the theoretical current, we searched in the articles which model and which authors were presented as references in the studies, seeking the main authors of the theory.

Then, the articles were searched for the other basic theories presented in the articles in order to identify those theories that are being approached to the Institutional theory to develop and analyze the studies.

Finally, the research suggestions presented after the studies were analyzed in the articles, aiming to identify what has been appointed as possible gaps in the studies and in the theory, in order to point out possible routes for future studies.

4. Results

This section presents the research results of the bibliometric analysis for the variables, divided by the Financial Accounting, Management Accounting and Accounting Research studies, followed by the discussion of the results.

4.1 Bibliometric Analysis: financial accounting articles

First, the articles on Financial Accounting and Institutional theory were analyzed. The results are displayed in Figure 2.

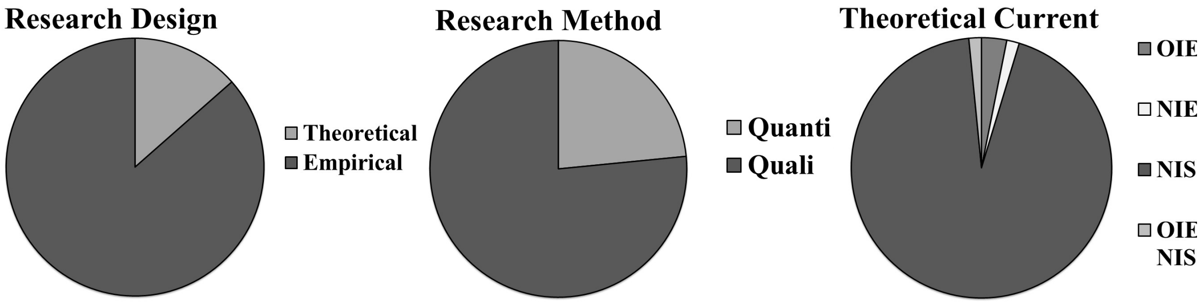

Figure 2. Analysis results – Financial Accounting articles

The portfolio of articles that discuss Financial Accounting consists of 74 articles, which were divided into theoretical and empirical articles, being 64 empirical studies and 10 theoretical articles.

The studies with a theoretical approach address aspects such as Corporate Governance, convergence with IFRS, sustainability, and reporting. The theoretical articles used two research methods: the theoretical essay, as used in Ball and Craig's work (2010), and content analysis (article analysis and document analysis), such as the study by Cohen, Krishnamoorthy and Wright (2008), which presents theories that may be useful in Corporate Governance research. In this work, in addition to the Institutional theory, the Agency Theory, the Resource Dependence Theory and the Managerial Hegemony Theory are approached.

The empirical articles were separated according to the approach and analysis of their variables. Most of the studies are qualitative and mainly use semi-structured interviews and document analysis for data collection, aiming to explore audit topics, convergence to international accounting standards (IFRS), changes in accounting practices in countries, public accounting, and sustainability. Among these articles, we highlight the studies by Touron (2005) which, based on the Institutional theory, focus on the reason why companies in France adhere to US GAAP; and the work of Albu, Albu, Bunea, Calu, and Girbina (2011), which, in the light of the Institutional theory, addresses the implementation of IFRS in Romania.

The quantitative empirical studies used statistical methods, based on data obtained from questionnaires, databases, and official documents. Judge, Li, and Pinsker (2010), which aimed to understand the reason why some countries adopt IFRS standards quickly, while others take more time or have not yet adopted those standards, use statistical regression techniques to evaluate the effect of the three isomorphic pressures in the adoption of IFRS, based on several databases.

It was also verified which theoretical current of the Institutional theory was used as a theoretical framework for the studies. Old Institutional Economics (OIE) was applied in only two studies (Alsharari & Abougamos, 2017; Jones, Baskerville, Sriram & Ramesh, 2017). It is noteworthy that the two articles are recent and used the concepts studied by Burns and Scapens (2000).

Irvine (2011), in addition to the OIE concepts of Burns and Scapens (2000), uses NIS to examine the process of change in an Australian nonprofit organization for accrual accounting. The decision to change was taken by institutional pressures, but the new system was not institutionalized.

With regard to the New Institutional Economics (NIE), this was used only in the article by Liszbinski *et al.* (2014), which adopted the theories proposed by North (1995) and Williamson (2000) as the theoretical basis. This article sought to relate how the regulations the companies adopted are impacted by changes in accounting practices, which in this study was the recognition of intangible assets. As explained by the authors of the article, the use of the Institutional theory is especially relevant due to the possibility of comparing the changes that occurred in the institution to a new formal regulatory structure that supports the new accounting procedures.

Most of the Financial Accounting articles used the New Institutional Sociology (NIS), using the institutional isomorphism approach and coercive, normative and mimetic pressures, related to Accounting issues. The studies by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), Covaleski, Dirsmith, and Michelman (1993) and Scott (2001) were the most referenced authors in these works. An example is the work by Irvine (2008), which applied NIS in the United Arab Emirates to verify which pressures (coercive, mimetic or normative) contributed to the adherence to international accounting standards in the country.

Other theories applied together with the Institutional theory were searched in the articles. The Agency theory was the most used in the BP studies, being applied in six studies. In addition, Pfeffer and Salancik's (1978) resource dependence theory was addressed in three papers; Giddens's Structuration theory (1984) and Watts & Zimmerman's Positive Accounting Theory (1978, 1979, 1986) were employed in two articles.

Finally, suggestions were sought for future studies, which were presented in Financial Accounting research. Great heterogeneity was observed, the most common suggestions being the change of the technique used in the research, the change in the context analyzed and the use of longitudinal studies. As most of the studies are based on the New Institutional Sociology, mainly in coercive isomorphism, research could focus on how the isomorphic factors influence the adoption of the IFRS, corporate governance and audit reports. Guerreiro *et al.* (2012), who developed the study in Portugal, also focusing on these factors, suggest the following research questions for the future: to what extent can the coercive and mimetic forces overcome the normative resistance in the adoption of the IFRS in other countries? To what extent does the coercive and mimetic behavior turn into normative behavior? Pilcher (2011), then, who studied the impact of the IFRS on the local government in the context of New Public Management, suggests that future research develop a longitudinal study to determine the problem the government experiences in the isomorphic convergence process. The studies can also look into how the governments respond to the isomorphic pressures of generally accepted accounting standards, using Oliver's conceptual model elaborated based on the Resource Dependence theory, as Carpenter and Feroz (2011) suggest. So as to make it possible, thus, to understand the evolution of the convergence process and how the change in the coercive, mimetic and normative values takes place in other contexts.

4.2 Bibliometric Analysis: management accounting articles

Next, the articles were analyzed that discussed themes related to Management Accounting, with the following results:

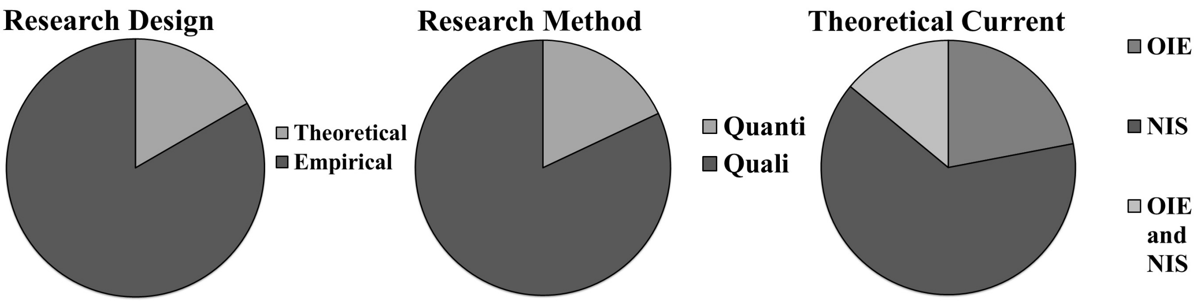

Figure 3. Bibliometric analysis results – Management Accounting articles

As in the Financial Accounting articles, the Management Accounting articles were divided between theoretical and empirical articles. We found 60 articles that use the Institutional theory and are related to Management Accounting, among which 10 were theoretical articles and 50 empirical articles.

Two research methods were found in the theoretical studies. The first method used was the theoretical test, which appeared only in the article by Guerreiro *et al*. (2006) which, in addition to the Institutional theory, adopted the Personality theory and organizational culture approach to investigate why organizations do not use the models developed in theory in practice.

The second research method was the literature review, analyzing the profile of scientific articles published in journals that discuss topics such as Performance Evaluation Systems, Budget and studies on general Management Accounting themes, analyzing variables such as authors, journals (Cunha *et al*., 2015), research methods used (Helden *et al*., 2008), theory underlying the studies (Helden *et al*., 2008; Cunha *et al*., 2015), and identifying theories, including the Institutional theory (Baxter & Chua, 2003).

Finally, among the theoretical studies, Alsharari, Dixon, and Youssef (2015) use Old Institutional Economics and the New Institutional Sociology, as well as Hardy's Mobilization of Power and Policy Framework (1996), to create a framework to explain management accounting change processes across multiple organizations. And the study by Scapens (2006), which analyzes the changes that have occurred in management accounting research in the last 35 years, with the support of the Institutional theory, besides developing a detailed review of the entire theory.

Regarding the empirical studies, articles were presented that discussed the change in performance evaluation systems, management control systems, budget practices, cost systems, management accounting practices, and environmental practices.

The first characteristic investigated was the method used in the research. Most of the studies were approached through a qualitative analysis, with 41 articles, including case studies, multiple case studies, longitudinal case studies, and ethnographic research, such as Van der Steen's article (2011), which investigates and aims to provide an understanding of the dynamics in the emergence and change of management accounting routines, with a study over a four-year period.

Another empirical method that appeared in two studies was the historical case study, which uses document analysis to explore certain practices over a given period of time, as in the study by Noguchi and Boyns (2012), which examines the role of the Japanese state in the development of budgets within "special companies" in the Transport sector between 1928 and 1945.

These studies vary among the following data collection techniques: open interviews, direct observation, participant observation, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews, the latter two of which are the most used. The other nine articles approach their variables quantitatively, eight of which are questionnaires. The exception is the article by Blaskovich and Mintchik (2011), which conducts an experiment to investigate internal and external influences on the recommendations of accounting executives to outsource the IT infrastructure.

Next, in this section of articles, it was verified which theoretical current of the Institutional theory was used as the basis within the studies. Eleven articles used Old Institutional Economics (OIE) and, among these studies, the most used work was Burns and Scapens (2000). None of the articles in Management Accounting used New Institutional Economics (NIE). Most of the papers used the concepts of the New Institutional Sociology (NIS), most of them based on the studies of DiMaggio and Powell (1983), Covaleski, Dirsmith, and Michelman (1993) and Scott (2001).

In addition, seven of the studies used the NIS and OIE at the same time, all of them qualitative, such as the article by Ma and Tayles (2009), which investigates the change factors in the management control systems to make them more strategic. The study by Yazdifar *et al*. (2008), as well as the study by Alsharari *et al*. (2015), uses in addition to the two currents the Mobilization of Power and Policy framework (Hardy, 1996), in this case to investigate the Management Accounting change at a subsidiary imposed by its headquarters.

In the next analysis, we looked into the other theories that appeared in the construction and analysis of the studies, besides the Institutional theory. In addition to Hardy's aforementioned Mobilization of Power and Policy Framework (1996), the theories that most appeared in the studies were Giddens' Structuration theory (1984), in three publications; and the Contingency theory with two. Other theories that appeared in management accounting studies are the Legitimacy theory by Dowling and Pfeffer (1975), and the Resource Dependence theory by Pfeffer and Salancik (1978). Finally, we looked for the suggestions for future research in the articles in the context of the Institutional theory linked to Management Accounting. With a considerable amount of studies on the changes in Management Accounting practices, some aspects need to be further explored, such as studies that relate the different routine concepts (Van der Steen, 2011), and assess the resistance in the implementation or change process of the artifacts (Angonese & Lavarda, 2014).

The studies have investigated and also suggested for further studies the exploration of heterogeneous environments, aiming to search for new discoveries such as outsourced sectors (Nicholson & Aman, 2012), subsidiaries (Yazdifar *et al*., 2008), and emerging economic environments (Cohen *et al*. al., 2008). Unlike the studies in Financial Accounting, the studies in Management Accounting are more focused on mimetic isomorphism. From these studies, some research problems arise: how does the isomorphism affect the management control systems in organizations? How does mimetic isomorphism affect the organizational settings? What are the reasons that lead organizations to adopt management control systems? An example is the study by Chen, Duh, Chan, and Xiao (2011).

The large majority of the studies also appoint the need to perform the same study in different contexts and locations to grant robustness to the results found, or to apply quantitative methods to permit the generalization of these results.

4.3 Bibliometric Analysis: research articles in Accounting

The research articles in Accounting were considered to be the other articles that discuss the themes research routes in Accounting and Accounting Education. In this area, only 14 articles were found, which were also separated into theoretical and empirical, with seven articles in each class.

As far as the theoretical studies are concerned, all of them focus on Accounting research problems and bring the Institutional theory to analyze the changes and as a solution for future cases, such as the study by da Silva, Martins and Lemes (2016), which seeks to create a framework for a possible theory of accounting choices, using, in addition to the Institutional theory, the Contractual Theory of the Firm and the Positive Accounting Theory. Other theories used in the theoretical studies are Giddens's Structuration Theory (1984) and Critical Theory.

The empirical articles are also very homogeneous. All of them have qualitative designs and conduct case studies. The data collection techniques were semi-structured interviews and document analysis, and they all discuss Accounting teaching. As an example, we mention the work by Dumitru, Stanciu, Dumitru, and Feleaga (2014), which analyzes the changes in the curriculum of a Faculty of Accounting and Management Information Systems in Romania. All articles are based on the New Institutional Sociology. In these articles, again, the work of DiMaggio and Powell (1983) stands out - and none of these articles refer to other theories.

In the suggestions for future research in the field of Accounting research, in the empirical studies, the request was found to strengthen the results presented in the theoretical articles (Silva *et al*., 2016), as well as the call for future research using the Institutional theory in the analysis of curriculum change in Accounting courses (Dumitru *et al*., 2014).

4.4 Discussion of Results

Based on the respective results classified in Financial Accounting, Management Accounting, and Accounting Research, the study presents the discussions of these results, pointing out possible paths for new studies.

The main topics related to Financial Accounting are audit, accounting reform, and adoption of IFRS, deriving from external pressures the media exerts on organizations. In this context, the New Institutional Sociology is used to justify most of the studies, trying to understand what are the institutional pressures that influence these areas and how they affect the organization.

The most prominent topic is the adoption of IFRS. The studies have explored the isomorphism deriving from their adoption, presenting results in multiple contexts, as in Latin countries (Carneiro, Rodrigues & Craig, 2017), Portugal (Guerreiro *et al*., 2012), Romania (Albu *et al*., 2011), Malaysia (Phang & Mahzan, 2017), Iraq (Hassan, *et al*., 2014), and Australia (Pilcher *et al*., 2011).

The studies found that the initial incentive towards adoption is coercive isomorphism, but the process is better institutionalized when accompanied by the mimetic isomorphism of trading partners; and the normative isomorphism of professionals prepared for the adoption (Albu *et al*., 2011; Carneiro *et al*., 2017; Hassan *et al*., 2014).

In addition to the isomorphic aspects, one route to investigate is to deepen the resistance factors, testing in different cultural contexts (Nurunnabi, 2015) and aiming to help the adoption process. The idea can also be used in other accounting reforms, standardization of auditing and public sector accounting.

In Management Accounting, although the main themes are related to the internal aspects of organizations, such as control, budgeting and performance evaluation systems, most of the studies focus on external factors that lead to changes in the organizational practices, also investigating the isomorphism and its causal relationships. These results confirm the earlier studies (Cunha *et al*., 2015; Vailatti *et al*., 2017), the NIS being used in most Management Accounting studies. The studies have explored the changes in the multiple management control systems (Granlund, 2001), focusing on the isomorphism that affects the system (Chen, Duh, Chan & Xiao, 2011), how to turn them more strategic (Ma & Tayles, 2009) and why the models developed in theory are not used in practice (Guerreiro *et al*., 2006).

In this context, studies of how isomorphism affects the institutionalization (Chen *et al*., 2011) and which institutional logics can help in the process (Kantola & Järvinen, 2012) need to be deepened, again verifying different contexts for the sake of more robust results. Another possibility is to continue the studies that discuss the internal and external factors that affect changes in the systems (Zoni *et al*., 2011), joining assumptions of OIE and NIS, as well as the work by Yazdifar *et al*. (2008).

In Accounting education, the focus has also been on external pressures. It should be noted, however, that this is a poorly explored area. For all these themes, the propositions of DiMaggio and Powell (1983) have proved to be an important tool to explore and understand the external pressure and the isomorphic mechanisms that lead to changes and new institutions. It is noticed, however, that despite the development of the Institutional theory literature in Accounting research, there is still much to be explored.

First, there is a lack of quantitative studies in the area to reinforce the findings resulting from a deeper exploration of the research contexts. One step would be the exploration of concepts by means of statistical analyses, investigating the relation of the variables studied in a population and seeking a better understanding of the institutional phenomena. Another possibility is to carry out more studies in heterogeneous contexts, focusing on the same assumptions, developing a research area that can reinforce the conclusions.

The approximation of the Institutional theory with other theories is also a good route. The combination of Agency theory and Institutional theory can support auditing and governance research, aiming for a better understanding of the quality of the reports presented (Cohen *et al*., 2008). Structuration theory can be used to understand the interconnection between human and institutional factors in the change processes of accounting systems (Granlund, 2001). Resource Dependence theory can contribute to the understanding of the strategic responses of the stakeholders in institutional pressures (Abernethy & Chua, 1996).

In this context, the development of theoretical essays that approach the Institutional theory to these other theories can contribute to a better understanding of the contexts studied, but it is important to develop a series of studies that can prove these assumptions and reinforce the theory, such as the series of studies based on Old Institutional Economics, New Institutional Sociology, and the Power and Policy Mobilization Framework by Alsharari *et al*. (2015), Alsharari and Abougamos (2017), and Alsharari and Youssef (2017).

These are some alternatives that may aid in the development of the Institutional theory in accounting research, reinforcing the theoretically explored understanding and aiming to improve the Accounting practices, in line with Scapens (2006) and Guerreiro *et al*. (2006).

5. Conclusions

The objective of this study was to analyze how the studies based on the Institutional theory have been developed in Accounting research, aiming to produce knowledge in this area. The objective was achieved, using the ProKnow-C tool for the selection of a Bibliographic Portfolio of scientific publications on the proposed theme. The bibliometric analysis was applied to generate the research results.

First, the bibliometric analysis of the Financial Accounting articles was performed, which found 74 articles aligned with the research problem proposed in the study. Ten of these articles are theoretical and mainly developed theoretical essays. Among the empirical articles, those that adopted a qualitative approach used semistructured interviews and document analysis as the main data collection tools. The quantitative articles, in turn, used questionnaires, databases, and official documents.

With regard to the theoretical current of the Institutional theory, it was verified that most of the works use the New Institutional Sociology (NIS), mainly based on the studies of DiMaggio and Powell (1983), Covaleski, Dirsmith, and Michelman (1993) and Scott (2001). Old Institutional Economics (OIE) was used in three articles, based on the study by Burns and Scapens (2000). New Institutional Economics (NIE) was used in only one article, adopting the studies by North and Hart (2006) and Williamson (2000) as a theoretical basis. Finally, in the verification of which other theories were discussed together with the Institutional theory, it was verified that Agency theory was the most used in the articles of the BP, being applied in six studies. Suggestions for future work are focused on changing the data collection and analysis technique, changing the context analyzed and using longitudinal studies.

The bibliometric analysis of the Management Accounting articles identified 60 articles, including 10 theoretical articles, which used theoretical essay and literature review methods; the other 50 were empirical studies. Most of these were qualitative, developing case studies, multiple case studies, longitudinal case studies, ethnographic research, and a historical case study. In those studies, the following data collection tools were found: open interviews, direct observation, participant observation, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews. The quantitative articles present questionnaires or experiments.

Most studies use the New Institutional Sociology (NIS), with emphasis on the studies by Di Maggio and Powell (1983), Covaleski, Dirsmith, and Michelman (1993) and Scott (2001). Others used Old Institutional Economics (OIE), with emphasis on references to Burns and Scapens (2000); and six studies used both theories. In the analysis of the other theories that were discussed in the studies, the most frequent theories were Giddens's Structuration theory (1984) and the Contingency theory. In the suggestions for future research, studies have suggested the exploration of heterogeneous environments to seek new discoveries and the need to carry out the same study in different contexts or to apply quantitative methods.

Among the articles considered in Accounting research, seven were classified as theoretical. The other seven studies were considered as empirical, all qualitative, using semi-structured interviews and document analysis as data collection tools. All articles are based on the New Institutional Sociology. In these articles, again, the work of DiMaggio and Powell (1983) stands out and no other theory appeared in these works. In the future suggestions, we found indications of empirical studies to reinforce the results presented in the theoretical articles and the call for research on the analysis of curriculum changes in Accounting courses.

Thus, based on the Bibliographic Portfolio of the study, it is concluded that the Institutional theory has been widely used in Accounting research, aiming to understand the organizational changes, to explore the process and the consequences of these changes and why they occur. The papers explore the theoretical understanding of accounting practices and seek to understand the different contexts the accounting practices are inserted in to provide useful information to their stakeholders.

In an attempt to better understand the organizational context of the studies, some research has also sought to expand its scope, seeking the approximation of other theories with the sociological concepts of Institutional theory in its different currents. The challenge has been to use the already explored understanding to improve the practices in the actual environments, and to understand the diverse emerging contexts of today's organizations. The search for depth in the contexts studied has taken an important step towards a better understanding of how organizations work, as well as the search to improve the accounting practices in favor of these organizations.

The study presents some limitations though: (i) the bibliographic search was restricted to articles published in scientific journals; (ii) the search procedure for BP formation considered only seven databases, including only the articles available in full; and (iii) the analysis of the articles with respect to the research variables was informed by the judgment and interpretation of the authors of the research, and may not correspond to the conclusions of the original authors of the studies.

In the light of the studies analyzed, for the development of future research, in the light of the Institutional theory in Financial Accounting, in the Brazilian context, we suggest (i) analyzing how the audit firms institutionalize their methods, procedures, and routines, with a view to the issuing the new independent auditor's model report (ISA 700 and 701); (ii) examine the isomorphism factors; and/or (iii) the change in the rules and routines in the implementation of the Brazilian Accounting Standards Applied to the Public Sector.

For Management Accounting research, in a general context, we suggest: (i) assessing the possible factors of motivation and resistance that can influence the institutionalization of a performance assessment model in public companies and entities; (ii) exploring the motivation; and/or (iii) the isomorphism to implement the management accounting practices in the context of micro and small companies.

Finally, in Accounting research, we suggest (i) developing more theoretical essays to approach the institutional theory to other sociological, behavioral or economic theories; (ii) identifying the change in the classroom routines of Accounting students resulting from the implementation of new teaching and assessment methods in undergraduate and graduate Accounting programs; and (iii) exploring the factors of isomorphism that lead to changes in the curricula of these courses.

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