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From Invention to Industry: The
emergence of the 3D Printing Industry

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Abstract

In organizational and management literature, the phenomenon of how industries emerge has either been investigated theoretically from an institutional perspective and empirically on already established industries. Few studies in entrepreneurship literature have also explored the emergence of industries but most of those credit the creation of an industry to the ‘hero entrepreneurs’, without regards to the existence of other actors. While useful, these studies give us a partial understanding to industry emergence. What remains undiscovered is the actual process that happens before the industry is even created. Social movements offer a broader perspective and some scholars have implemented the concept of social movements to understand industry emergence, but these studies are again restricted to established industries, specifically the wind industry. Given these limitations, this study, using an actor centric approach, tries to answer two questions: (1) how industries emerge? and (2) how social movement like processes can drive the creation of an industry? Drawing on the concept of social movements, this study contributes towards understanding the phenomenon of industry emergence from the pre-emergence phase where diverse actors, not necessarily entrepreneurs, are identified that form a collective action and help in the emergence of an industry. 3D printing industry was chosen as a single case study where the actors are the embedded unit of analysis. This study explores the narratives of a diverse set of 15 actors belonging to 3D printing industry from the beginning. A qualitative approach was adopted using the Gioia methodology for rich analysis. The findings show how a social movement composition of diverse actors, coupled with temporal engagement, form the foundation of a new industry thereby gradually leading to industry emergence.

Key words: Industry Emergence, Social Movements, Collective Action, Actor, Community, Qualitative, Entrepreneurship