



A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF THE ROLE OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS IN SCALING SUSTAINABLE ENTREPRENEURSHIP



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Abstract

While the world rallies toward sustainable development, access to digital platforms now enables so many entrepreneurs in terms of the environment and social issues. This paper systematically reviews the literature on what the platforms do for scaling sustainable entrepreneurship. It pulls from peer-reviewed studies published from 2010 to 2024 and uses their findings to synthesise various academic schools on entrepreneurship, sustainability studies, digital innovation, and platform economics. It is found that one of the three roles that digital platforms play toward sustainable entrepreneurship is accessibility to such resources as funding, knowledge, and markets; collaboration and co-creation among different stakeholders; and transparency, accountability, and trust regarding sustainable value propositions. Platforms such as crowdfunding sites, e-commerce ecosystems, blockchain-based traceability systems, and sustainability-oriented social networks have therefore reduced the entry barriers and operational expenses and accelerated access to markets for green and social ventures. Nonetheless, the review also brings to light some of the most significant gaps and challenges. Among these are issues of digital inequality, platform governance, and algorithmic biases, alongside the other troubling possibility of mission drift when entrepreneurs aim for sustainability but scale via a commercially driven platform. The authors argued for more empirical research from the Global South, interdisciplinary approaches to platform analysis, and frameworks that integrate socio-technical and ecological perspectives. This review enhances the budding field of digital sustainability by sketching out the ways in which platforms shape sustainable entrepreneurship and proposing a research agenda going forward. With the double-edged role of digital platforms as enablers and gatekeepers elaborated in the paper, scholars, policymakers, and practitioners are consequently rendered paths illuminating the way to nurturing inclusive and impactful entrepreneurial ecosystems in the digital age.

Keywords: *Digital Entrepreneurship; Entrepreneurial Ecosystems; Impact-driven Innovation; Platform-based Ventures; Sustainable Business Models; Sustainability-oriented Startups*

Introduction

Entrepreneurship, in the midst of global sustainable challenges such as climate change, inequality, and scarcity of resources, has become one of the exciting leverage points for interfacing sustainable solutions against social and environmental challenges. In this respect, sustainable entrepreneurship means to conceive and nurture business ventures oriented toward generating economic value while balancing social and environmental concerns. The issue of digital sustainability has now found a place on the entrepreneurial agenda. This study begins explaining the different facets of

digital platforms—online marketplaces, social networks, data infrastructures, innovative collaborative environments, etc.—which have, during these times, also expedited growth and sustainability for these ventures. Digital platforms provided sustainable entrepreneurs with better access to markets, improved resource mobilisation, and enhanced stakeholder engagement, including data-driven decision-making. Online platforms are distinctly considered contemporary entrepreneurial ecosystems that provide worldwide scalability, operational efficiency, and network reach to assist startups in overcoming traditional barriers in terms of capital, infrastructure, and distance [1]. The pandemic-induced disruptions worldwide consequently expedited the adoption of digital modes, with increased engagement from sustainable entrepreneurs, who requested solutions through platforms for operational resilience and outreach.

Digital platforms and sustainable entrepreneurship have become an increasing focus of both practical and academic interest; however, the existing literature remains scattered across several disciplines, from information systems to innovation studies to sustainability science to strategic entrepreneurship [2]. A common understanding of how digital platforms enable or constrain the scaling of sustainable ventures is at present non-existent. Additionally, while many studies discuss the technological affordances of platforms, they have given inadequate attention to the business models, governance structures, and ecosystem dynamics that enable or constrain the scaling and eventual success or failure of platform-enabled sustainability ventures.

The Rise of Digital Platforms and Sustainable Entrepreneurship

Digital platforms are technological infrastructures that enable multiple actors to engage in interactions for value exchange and the co-creation of new solutions. The various industries have been transformed by them from retail to logistics, as they offer scalable solutions with the most advanced digital technologies in lowering entry impediments and allowing connectivity [3]. The diffusion of knowledge can, therefore, be very fast, forming and developing business ecosystems and integrating digital tools to support the scaling of entrepreneurial ventures. As such, digital platforms have become a viable method of scaling sustainable entrepreneurship by offering access to global markets, facilitating resource-efficient allocation, and providing avenues for collaboration among very diverse stakeholders.

Sustainable entrepreneurship is, by definition, where entrepreneurs act towards promoting environmental, social, and economic sustainability by addressing societal challenges with new and innovative business practices [4]. The rapid pace of technology integration into the practices of this entrepreneurship sector is a central force in how these avenues enhance scaling and impact of sustainable business modelling. Digital platforms provide fertile grounds for the scaling of ventures targeting SDGs and addressing climate change, poverty, and social inequality by quickly disseminating information among consumers, producers, and other collaborators.

Digital Platforms as Key Enablers of Sustainable Business Models

Available literature highlights how digital platforms can make it possible for scaling sustainable business models by acting as a sort of infrastructure for resource-sharing, collaboration, and transparency. Therefore, by providing access to a global market, digital platforms reduce costs and facilitate smooth communication among entrepreneurs, investors, and consumers, which greatly aids in scaling sustainable ventures. The same platforms allow entrepreneurs to look at new customers using data analytics to make informed decisions and share feedback received from them to further iterate on and develop their business models [5].

Digital platforms also create new business ecosystems to advance sustainable entrepreneurship. These platforms act as innovation hubs by engaging a diverse range of actors, including startups, corporate players, policymakers, and consumers. Quite evidently, this networked method enables collective ideation and implementation of business models that are sustainability conscious. With crowdsourcing, open innovation, and sharing economy models, digital platforms have afforded entrepreneurs access to resources, knowledge, and technologies that would have otherwise been difficult to identify or access. Such an approach has been crucial for supporting emerging economies, where traditional infrastructures may be lacking [6].

The Challenges and Opportunities of Scaling Sustainable Entrepreneurship in Digital Platforms

Such a platform has many advantages, yet scaling sustainable entrepreneurship through digital platforms remains challenging. Paramount is, thus, the digital divide, whereby access to technology is never equal across regions and

populations. Entrepreneurs in resource-poor settings may find barriers in either opting for the use of digital tools or even establishing linkages with the global digital ecosystem, thus hampering their scaling efforts in their sustainable ventures. On the other hand, integrating digital technologies into business models while maintaining social and environmental goals is challenging; therefore, governance, stakeholder alignment, and impact measurement often present significant obstacles [7]. Nevertheless, avenues for overcoming these challenges do seem very clear. Meanwhile, mobile technology, cloud computing, and AI are generating a wealth of opportunities to promote inclusive entrepreneurship. Harnessing these technologies would afford the entrepreneurs an opportunity to set up business models that are ever resilient, resource-efficient, and scalable to the sustainability goals [8]. Further, trends in digital transformation, like the application of blockchain to ensure transparency, together with the use of the IoT for the real-time monitoring of sustainability metrics, are presenting new pathways for the establishment of impactful digital business models [9, 10].

Purpose of the paper

The focus of the research is on how digital platforms and sustainable entrepreneurship meet and interact with each other in view of building insights into how digital technologies may be harnessed to construct more sustainable, scalable, and impactful business models [11]. This study is a timely response to the continuing grappling between policymakers, entrepreneurs, and scholars with the transition of the global economy toward more sustainable ways requiring innovative and scalable solutions that can be driven by digital platforms [12].

Research Purpose and Scope

- **Research Objectives**
 - To analyse the digital platform scaling sustainable entrepreneurial ventures.
 - To categorise the roles digital platforms play in the growth of the sustainable business.
 - To examine constraints and enabling factors that influence the effectiveness of platforms in sustainability contexts.
 - To develop a research agenda into the future based on gaps identified in the literature.
- **Scope of the Paper**
 - Focus on peer-reviewed journal articles from 2014 to 2025.
 - Highlighting digital platforms explicitly in sustainable entrepreneurship contexts, green or social.
 - Excluding purely theoretical research that has not examined any empirical instances of platform-based models.

Research Methodology

Kind of Research: Systematic Review of Literature

The study utilised systematic literature review (SLR) methodology, which is a rigorous method for finding, evaluating, and synthesising existing scholarly literature on a predetermined topic while minimising bias through a clearly defined and replicable process.

Data Sources

The literature was retrieved by the researchers from the major academic sources and databases:

Scopus

Web of Science

ScienceDirect

These are the trusted resources guaranteeing that the high-quality articles were peer-reviewed.

Selection Criteria

Initially, more than 80 studies were screened, and a selection was made based on:

- Relevance to digital platforms and sustainable entrepreneurship
- Papers that were based solely on theoretical dissertations were excluded from the selection.

- Period of publication: Articles published between 2014 and 2025

Thus, the review can capture recent developments – in part accelerated by trends in digital transformation post-COVID-19.

Method of Analysis: Thematic Content Analysis

The main technique employed was thematic content analysis, a qualitative method that helps recognise common themes, patterns, and concepts from the selected articles. Categorise findings into main roles and challenges offered by digital platforms toward sustainable entrepreneurship.

Literature Review

This literature review paper synthesises existing studies that examine the role of digital platforms in scaling sustainable entrepreneurship, highlighting key findings, challenges, and research gaps.

Conceptualizing Digital Platforms and Sustainable Entrepreneurship

Digital platforms, more commonly defined as web-based spaces for the transfer of goods, services, or information in a network of users [13, 14], include everything from marketplace platforms (Amazon, eBay) to collaborative platforms (Airbnb, Uber) to even platforms that started or provide a nurturing environment for innovation ecosystems (GitHub, Kickstarter). Sustainable entrepreneurship encompasses business practices that are economically value-generating yet address issues of society and the environment [15, 16]. Sustainable entrepreneurs aim to create long-term value using economic, social, and ecological sustainable development opportunities as the fulcrum of their strategies, in alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals [17, 18].

Digital Platforms as Enablers of Scaling Sustainable Business Models

Factors through which the digital platforms benefited sustainable entrepreneurship include the scaling of business models. The scaling power significantly influences the firm's social and environmental impact, enhancing its focus on sustainability [19, 20]. Profits from digital platforms will become viable as businesses reduce geographical barriers, enabling their products or services to reach consumers who are far removed from the entrepreneur and do not have any physical infrastructure [21, 22]. For instance, platforms like Etsy and eBay are among the best options for small-scale sustainable businesses that want to go international by selling their eco-friendly products to customers around the globe. Several digital platforms also reduce costs of entering the market by eradicating the need for traditional retail infrastructure, which would have created barriers against sustainable businesses in accessing new markets [23, 24].

Digital Platforms and Sustainable Business Model Innovation

Digital platforms are vital to innovating sustainability-oriented business models. As per the literature, when digital technologies are adopted, entrepreneurs can establish new models based on sustainability as their value proposition [25, 26].

Barriers to Scaling Sustainable Entrepreneurship on Digital Platforms

The digital divide is one disadvantage that highly affects sustainable entrepreneurs, especially in emerging economies [27]. Although digital platforms offer access to international markets, they require entrepreneurs to have reliable internet connectivity, as well as the necessary digital devices and skills [28]. However, it is possible that, despite severe restrictions, this could be the one thing that does not prevent scaling up businesses by such entrepreneurs [29, 30]. In order for digital platforms to support inclusive growth, it is necessary to reduce the digital divide by providing affordable technologies in conjunction with digital literacy schemes and bolstering infrastructure [31]. Governance of an increasingly scalable digital platform faces formidable challenges. Data privacy, monopoly on platforms, and ethical usage of digital technologies have become increasingly problematic [32]. These regulatory hindrances may keep sustainable entrepreneurs from reconciling these business models with the ethical standards and, consequently, the sustainability ideals. Besides, in some areas, the absence of a clearly laid-down legal framework for digital platforms can inhibit the very possibilities for entrepreneurs to scale their businesses there [33].

Discussion

Digital platforms have already played a crucial role in scaling sustainable entrepreneurship by providing entrepreneurs with opportunities to access global markets, collaborate across boundaries, and develop innovative business models that emphasise sustainability [34]. However, notwithstanding the increase in literature on this intersection, several issues remain unaddressed that fully explain how digital platforms can facilitate the scaling of a sustainable venture.

Understanding the Connection Between Digital Platforms and Sustainability

As has been discussed in the literature, digital platforms serve as a useful ecosystem that enables innovative and scalable sustainable business models (which help build up toward the extreme). Digital tools allow businesses to build circular economy models, optimise supply chains, and reduce operational costs [35, 36]. Collecting very specific data on consumer behaviour, making efficient use of resources, and measuring environmental impact will further improve the business's sustainability. There is no full-fledged measurement and reporting framework on the environmental and social impacts of businesses scaled through digital platforms.

Challenges in Scaling Sustainable Entrepreneurship via Digital Platforms

While digital platforms indeed empower businesses to grow into infinity, particularly the sustainable ones, the digital divide remains a massive barrier. Studies indicate that in developing countries or rural areas, new entrepreneurs were unable to access digital infrastructure that would help them to compete in the global markets [37, 38]. Such platforms often created a monopoly when they started scaling, concentrating power within a few large players. That concentration of power makes it difficult for competition and limits the chances available to small sustainable businesses; besides that, their customers might have concerns about data privacy and security [39, 40]. Meanwhile, regulations related to digital platforms have not been properly defined, especially in emerging markets.

Possibilities of Further Innovation and Evolution of Business Models

Moreover, these digital platforms open more avenues to entrepreneurs for diversifying their business models and consequently moving from profit-focused models to sustainability-oriented business models [41, 42]. One way would be to expose entrepreneurs to subscription-based models, sharing economies, and pay-per-use schemes through digital platforms, which could reduce waste and promote more sustainable consumption patterns.

Research Gap

Digital platforms that promote sustainable entrepreneurship have identified several issues, primarily opportunities and challenges. However, few gaps remain unexplored. First, a comprehensive framework is lacking to measure sustainable businesses that are enabled by digital platforms in terms of environmental, social, and governance aspects. Evidence is lacking regarding how such platforms can be enhanced to bridge this divide and support the underserved. Additionally, there is a lack of governance and regulatory frameworks concerning these platforms.

Conclusion

Digital platforms play an integral role in scaling sustainable entrepreneurship by providing innovations and solutions that enable businesses to reach wider markets, optimise operations for more effective systems, and practice sustainable business methods. They help shape a new business model to emerge for creating capital through economic growth alongside environmental as well as social sustainability. However, as digital entrepreneurship evolves, there are several gaps in research. First, comprehensive impact measurement frameworks are required, alongside solutions for bridging the digital divide. Secondly, the new areas of inquiry should include deeper investigations into governance structures and those emerging technologies driving sustainability, such as AI, blockchain, and IoT.

Future Research

Future research would provide insights on how to best utilise digital platforms to overcome challenges in sustainable entrepreneurship. This would boost the making of a more inclusive and equitable digital economy while accelerating

progress towards the achievement of global sustainability goals, successfully turning towards the ultimate importance of studies on digital platforms in the context of "sustainable entrepreneurship".

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Conflict of Interest

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