

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP: ADVANCING TOWARDS SDGs AGENDA

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ABSTRACT

PURPOSE: The purpose of this article is to examine the link between entrepreneurship, digital transformation, and the UN Agenda 2030's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), highlighting the potential of digital technologies in achieving these goals.

DESIGN/METHODOLOGY/APPROACH: The design and methodology of this research involve a comprehensive review of existing literature and empirical data to establish the connections between entrepreneurship, digital transformation, and the UN Agenda 2030's SDGs.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY: The study's findings show how digital transformation can empower entrepreneurs to address the UN Agenda 2030's SDGs, such as by creating sustainable solutions for economic growth, inclusivity, and environmental stewardship. They also offer recommendations and strategies for entrepreneurs to harness digital technologies effectively for achieving these goals, and emphasise the importance of alignment with sustainable development objectives. Additionally, the findings touch on policy implications to support digital entrepreneurship in the context of the global sustainable development agenda.

ORIGINALITY/VALUE OF THE PAPER: The originality and value of this paper lie in its unique exploration of the intersection between entrepreneurship, digital transformation, and the UN Agenda 2030's SDGs.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS: The study may not be universally applicable, as the effectiveness of digital entrepreneurship in achieving SDGs can vary depending on local contexts and resource availability.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS: This research delves into the practical implementation of digital transformation for entrepreneurs to address the United Nations Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, emphasising the use of digital tools to create sustainable solutions and the alignment of entrepreneurial efforts with sustainable development objectives.

KEYWORDS: *Entrepreneurship; Digital Transformation; United Nations Agenda 2030; Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); Sustainable Development; Digital Technologies; Innovation*

INTRODUCTION

The realm of entrepreneurship has been considerably influenced by the rapid technological change in our present era. Emerging technologies and digitisation have changed how businesses

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operate, making digital transformation and entrepreneurship a fascinating field for exploration (Dedrick *et al.*, 2010). It argues the criticality of digital transformation to entrepreneurship for achieving SDGs and cites various academic studies to bolster the presented information (Diab and Nasr, 2023).

Entrepreneurship in the digital era contributes to multiple SDGs, including eradicating poverty, ensuring quality education, fostering gender equality, promoting sustainable cities and communities, and driving responsible consumption and production. Digital technologies enable entrepreneurs to access new markets, gather data-driven insights, and tailor products and services to meet specific societal needs, thereby advancing sustainable development objectives (Lesinskis *et al.*, 2023).

The age of digital transformation has completely reshaped the landscape for entrepreneurs, ushering in a new era filled with both challenges and opportunities. This study delves into the intricate interplay between entrepreneurship, digital transformation, and the United Nations Agenda 2030, encompassing its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It sheds light on the potential of digital technologies to contribute significantly to the attainment of these global objectives.

The advent of digital transformation, powered by technological advancements such as cloud computing, artificial intelligence, big data analytics, and the Internet of Things (IoT), unveils vast prospects for entrepreneurs in addressing the SDGs outlined in the United Nations Agenda 2030. Through the adept utilisation of digital tools and innovative business models, entrepreneurs can craft sustainable solutions that foster economic growth, social inclusivity, and environmental preservation.

Nonetheless, while digital transformation brings forth promising opportunities, it simultaneously presents hurdles that entrepreneurs must overcome to align with the UN Agenda 2030. Challenges such as cybersecurity threats, concerns surrounding data privacy, and the digital divide must be tackled to ensure that digital entrepreneurship opportunities are accessible to all in an inclusive and equitable manner.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study is to show how entrepreneurship can contribute to the SDGs and how their implementation to transform enterprises is limited. This is due to several factors including the SDGs and the rapidly growing and changing global economic, social and environmental challenges. We also explore how entrepreneurship aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Multiple authors have recognised the relationship between digital transformation and entrepreneurship. Nambisan (2017) points out that digital innovation is creating new opportunities for entrepreneurs. Similarly, Matt *et al.* (2015) argue that digital transformation reshapes businesses and market dynamics, redefining entrepreneurship.

Authors such as Ghobakhloo (2018) stress on the role of digital innovation in achieving SDGs. Digital innovations, if tactical, can not only spur socio-economic development but also contribute to environmental sustainability (Brettel *et al.*, 2014). Incorporating digital technologies can facilitate the creation of green jobs, cleaner production technologies and sustainable business practices (Autio *et al.*, 2018).

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Digital transformation, as the term suggests, involves the incorporation of digital technology into various aspects of a business, fundamentally changing operations (Bharadwaj *et al.*, 2013). From streamlining processes to driving innovation, digital transformation is shaping the global business landscape in unprecedented ways (Matt *et al.*, 2015).

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

With the advent of digital technologies, entrepreneurship has witnessed the rise of new opportunities, challenges, and disruptions (Nambisan, 2017). Adopting digital transformation has allowed entrepreneurs to refine their business models, optimise data, enhance decision-making, and globalise their businesses (Brettel *et al.*, 2014). The efficiency and effectiveness brought about by digital transformation consequently drive profitability, resulting in economic growth (Autio *et al.*, 2018).

ADVANCING THE SDGs AGENDA

Digital transformation stands as a fundamental aspect of achieving the SDGs Agenda. Each goal contributes to sustainable development, and digital technologies play a significant role in realising them (Ghobakhloo, 2020). A potent example is Goal 9—‘Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation, and foster innovation’. Digital transformation enables entrepreneurs to design, create, and implement digital innovations that foster sustainable industrialisation (Nambisan *et al.*, 2019).

CONCLUSIONS

Digital transformation and entrepreneurship interact in a complex arena of opportunities and challenges. Notwithstanding, it is evident that digital transformation is a key instrument for entrepreneurs to propel sustainable development, thus contributing significantly to the SDGs agenda.

Digital Transformation Encompasses Several Critical Components

1. **Data and Analytics:** Data-driven decision-making has become indispensable. Entrepreneurs leverage big data and advanced analytics to glean insights into customer behaviour, market trends, and operational efficiencies (McAfee *et al.*, 2012).
2. **Cloud Computing:** Cloud platforms serve as the cornerstone of digital transformation, facilitating rapid scalability and cost reduction for businesses (Armbrust *et al.*, 2010).

3. **IoT and Connectivity:** The Internet of Things (IoT) empowers entrepreneurs to create smart, interconnected products and services, thereby elevating customer experiences and fostering new business prospects (Zillner *et al.*, 2018).
4. **AI and Machine Learning:** Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning technologies hold the potential to automate tasks, customise customer interactions, and enhance productivity, thus conferring a competitive advantage upon entrepreneurs (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2014).
5. **E-commerce and Digital Marketing:** The proliferation of online marketplaces and digital advertising has revolutionised how entrepreneurs engage with customers (Smith, 2018).

Opportunities for Entrepreneurs

1. **Innovative Startups:** The digital transformation era presents a fertile ground for startups to pioneer innovative solutions to persistent challenges (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000). Entrepreneurs can identify market gaps and harness technology to address them.
2. **Global Reach:** The erasure of geographical barriers by the internet allows entrepreneurs to access a global customer base, enabling rapid expansion (Oviatt and McDougall, 1994).
3. **Agile Business Models:** Digital tools and cloud computing enable startups to maintain flexibility and adaptability in their business models, swiftly responding to shifting market conditions (Teece, 2018).
4. **Personalised Customer Experiences:** Data and AI-driven solutions empower entrepreneurs to tailor their offerings to individual customer preferences, elevating loyalty and satisfaction (Verhoef *et al.*, 2015).
5. **Diverse Revenue Streams:** Digital transformation affords entrepreneurs the opportunity to explore a range of revenue models, including subscription-based schemes and data monetisation (Le Roux and Pretorius, 2019).

Challenges and Considerations

1. **Cybersecurity:** The increased digital presence exposes entrepreneurs to cyber threats. Protecting sensitive data and maintaining customer trust necessitates prioritising cybersecurity (Möhlmann, 2015).
2. **Data Privacy Regulations:** Adherence to data privacy regulations, such as GDPR and CCPA, is critical for businesses handling personal information (Ezrachi and Stucke, 2016).
3. **Digital Divide:** Disparities in digital technology access among different regions and demographics necessitate strategies to bridge the digital divide (Norris, 2001).
4. **Talent and Skills Gap:** The demand for tech-savvy talent frequently surpasses supply. Entrepreneurs must invest in workforce upskilling and consider external collaborations (Bessen, 2019).

5. **Constant Adaptation:** The digital landscape is in constant flux. Entrepreneurs must remain agile, ready to adapt to emerging technologies and market dynamics (Christensen, 1997).

Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

1. **SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure):** Entrepreneurship within the digital transformation context contributes to this goal by fostering innovation and supporting the development of infrastructure, critical for sustainable economic growth.
2. **SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth):** Entrepreneurial endeavours in the digital era help drive economic growth and employment opportunities, aligning with the spirit of this goal.
3. **SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production):** Digital transformation offers avenues for entrepreneurs to promote responsible consumption by offering efficient, data-driven products and services.

Regarding United Nations problems, entrepreneurship can play a role in addressing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations. Entrepreneurs can contribute to issues such as poverty alleviation, quality education, clean energy, gender equality, and affordable healthcare through innovative solutions. Additionally, they can support the UN's broader agenda for sustainable development and climate action.

In brief, entrepreneurship in the age of digital transformation holds the potential to stimulate economic growth, foster innovation, and drive positive societal change. Nevertheless, it also poses challenges associated with accessibility, regulation, and sustainability, which must be addressed within the context of global concerns acknowledged by the United Nations. Additionally, it is imperative to synchronise entrepreneurial initiatives with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, ensuring the enduring sustainability and worldwide benefit of their endeavours. Going forward, those who can harness the capabilities of digital tools while harmonising their actions with sustainable development objectives will achieve success in their entrepreneurial pursuits. The future of business belongs to those who seamlessly blend the dynamism of digital transformation with an unwavering commitment to sustainable development.

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BIOGRAPHY



Dr Arshad Mahmood has a PhD from Universiti Sains Malaysia and he has been an academic for eight years. He currently serves as a founding director at the European Sustainable Research Outreach in Germany. His research interests encompass a diverse spectrum, including organisational development, entrepreneurship, sustainability, community engagement, and human development. Dr Mahmood has garnered recognition for his contributions to community development, notably receiving the Sumitomo Foundation Grant in Japan and the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS) from the Ministry of Education in Malaysia. In addition to his administrative roles, Dr Mahmood is editor of several academic journals, including the *International Journal of Strategic Management and Innovation*, *Sustainability Journal*, and *Frontiers in Public Health Journal*. He has published over 30 papers featured in Web of Science Impact Factor and Scopus-indexed journals, and has presented his research at conferences addressing themes such as human resource development, entrepreneurship, sustainability, and community engagement.

