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Leveraging Digital Technologies in Social Entrepreneurship: A Multiple Case Study

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Abstract

Frame of the research: *Digital transformation is reshaping social entrepreneurship by introducing innovative value-creation models. This study examines how digital platforms integrate technology to foster social impact while addressing societal challenges.*

Purpose of the paper: *This research explores how digital tools enhance entrepreneurial models. In particular, it focuses on Sharing Economy Platforms (SEPs) and Gig Economy Platforms (GEPs), analyzing their role in promoting inclusivity, sustainability, and new opportunities for social value creation.*

Methodology: *A multiple case study approach has been applied, gathering data from company reports, academic research, and industry analyses. This approach provided a holistic understanding of how digital platforms generate and distribute entrepreneurial value.*

Results: *The research reveals several differences between SEPs and GEPs in economic, environmental, and social terms. Indeed, SEPs focus on resource optimization, sustainability, and equitable access to resources. Differently, GEPs emphasize operational efficiency and labor flexibility, considering the environmental aspect less. Such differences highlight the different value contributions and the potential impact these platforms generate.*

Research Limitations: *reliance on secondary data sources and a restricted number of cases, which may impact the broader applicability of the findings. In addition, it does not consider long-term effects or potential regulatory changes.*

Managerial Implications: *Platform operators and policymakers can implement well-designed strategies to foster inclusivity, ensure equitable opportunities, promote fair value creation and distribution, and support long-term sustainability. This, in turn, can create a more balanced digital ecosystem that benefits workers, entrepreneurs, and society.*

Originality of the paper: *This paper aims to advance the discourse on the socioeconomic impact of digital platforms by proposing a theoretical framework explaining digital value creation, highlighting the challenges and opportunities of digital social entrepreneurship while offering insights into the role of technology in fostering social impact.*

Key words: *Digital Transformation; Platform Innovation; Social Entrepreneurship; Sharing Economy; Gig Economy*

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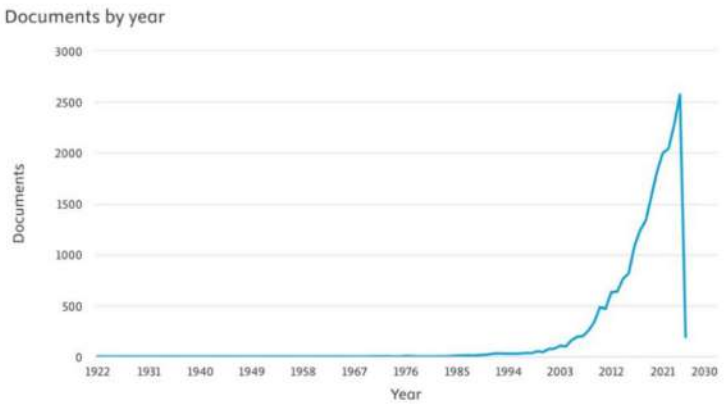
1. Introduction

The rapid growth of organizations with a social purpose and their potential to generate social value has driven increasing interest in social entrepreneurship (SE) among academics, practitioners, and policymakers (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018). As illustrated in Figure 1, which represents the annual count of scientific papers on social entrepreneurship indexed in Scopus, the growing volume of publications in recent years highlights the rise of a rapidly expanding field.

Fig. 1: Annual number of scientific papers on social entrepreneurship indexed in Scopus, Source: Scopus



This trend reflects an increasing effort to address emerging societal challenges. SE, by its interdisciplinary nature, draws from diverse fields such as anthropology, economics, political science, psychology, and sociology (Dacin *et al.*, 2011), offering a multifaceted lens for addressing pressing societal challenges. Recently, the emergence of digital technologies has reshaped the landscape of SE, giving rise to the concept of Digital Social Entrepreneurship (DSE). DSE integrates digital tools into entrepreneurial ventures, fostering innovation, collaboration, and impactful solutions to societal needs (Ghatak *et al.*, 2023; Skivko, 2021). Sharing Economy Platforms (SEPs) and Gig Economy Platforms (GEPs) exemplify how digital platforms have become critical enablers of social entrepreneurship. These platforms lower barriers to entry by fostering access to entrepreneurship, allowing individuals to monetize underutilized resources and participate in the economy with minimal initial investment. SEPs, for instance, promote collaborative consumption and sustainability by encouraging the sharing and reuse of assets, while GEPs offer flexible employment models that serve diverse worker needs. Moreover, the technological innovation driven by these platforms including AI, machine learning, and predictive logistics enhances operational efficiency, improves user experiences, and fosters trust between participants. By leveraging these capabilities, SEPs and GEPs not only create economic value but also build communities and networks that align with the goals of SE (Popov *et al.*, 2022; Frenken *et al.*, 2020).

Despite these opportunities, significant challenges remain. SEPs and GEPs often exacerbate economic inequality by disproportionately benefiting asset owners or platform operators, leaving workers vulnerable to precarious conditions and limited protections. Moreover, the growing reliance on algorithmic control has raised concerns about worker autonomy and welfare in gig platforms (Eyert *et al.*, 2022). Questions about long-term sustainability and regulation persist, particularly for SEPs, where rebound effects such as increased consumption may undermine their environmental goals. These tensions highlight the need for a deeper exploration of how digital platforms can balance innovation with inclusivity, equity, and sustainability. In particular, SEPs have been exploited to foster collaborative consumption, optimize resource use, and drive sustainable practices. Airbnb, for example, has been studied as a model of peer-to-peer exchange that promotes community engagement and creates economic opportunities for asset owners (Álvarez-Herranz & Macedo-Ruíz, 2021).

Similarly, platforms like Vinted have been associated with advancing circular economy principles, particularly in the fashion industry, by encouraging the reuse of goods and reducing waste (Palomo-Domínguez *et al.*, 2023). In contrast, GEPs such as Uber and Deliveroo have drawn attention for their ability to leverage digital technologies to improve logistics, offer flexible work schedules, and enhance customer experiences (Cram *et al.*, 2022; Popan, 2024). However, these platforms have also faced challenges regarding worker precarity, algorithmic control, and income inequality, which challenge their alignment with the principles of social entrepreneurship (Casagrande *et al.*, 2021; Hickson, 2024).

While these studies provide insights into the operational dynamics of SEPs and GEPs, there is limited understanding of how these models collectively contribute to social entrepreneurship across different sectors. Examining these platforms together offers an opportunity to bridge theoretical gaps and inform holistic strategies for balancing innovation with inclusivity and sustainability. Addressing these gaps is crucial to uncovering the mechanisms through which digital transformation shapes social entrepreneurship and determining the methods required to mitigate the challenges inherent to these models. In this regard, this study aims to fill a gap in the literature by investigating the interaction between digital transformation and SE through multiple case studies of Airbnb, Vinted, Uber, and Deliveroo. By examining how these platforms foster social value while considering actual challenges, this research provides a comprehensive understanding of their contributions to SE and offers a roadmap for future research. Moreover, it aims to guide stakeholders, policymakers, entrepreneurs, and platform operators toward building more sustainable digital ecosystems.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Social entrepreneurship

SE is an interdisciplinary concept initially introduced by William Drayton, a MacArthur fellow (Rahim & Mohtar, 2015). It aims to promote community empowerment, protect the environment, and create innovative solutions (Harsono, 2024). Over time, diverse definitions have emerged, reflecting varying academic perspectives. For example, Abu-Saifan (2012) views SE as entrepreneurial actions centered on creating social value, while Cardella *et al.* (2021) emphasize the use of innovative concepts to achieve social value. Pless (2012) highlights SE as leveraging creativity and resource integration to address societal challenges. Despite these variations, Dacin *et al.* (2011) identify four central aspects of SE: individual characteristics of social entrepreneurs, their domains of operation, the resources and processes they employ, and their mission to create social value. In this regard, existing studies analyzed the connection of SE with sustainable development (Al-Qudah *et al.*, 2022; Anh *et al.*, 2022; Ramadani *et al.*, 2022; Baquero & Monsalve, 2024), as environmental responsibility presents a valuable opportunity to access new markets, enhance their reputation with stakeholders, and distinguish their products (Méndez-Picazo *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, it has been recognized as an effective tool for addressing poverty, driving social transformation, enabling inclusive growth in subsistence marketplaces and facilitating institutional change. In essence, the process of SE involves the creative utilization of resource combinations to seize opportunities with the goal of establishing organizations or practices that generate and maintain social value (Saebi *et al.*, 2019). To this end, the adoption of digital tools can facilitate the achievement of social entrepreneurs by fostering interaction and information sharing, advertising, and communication strategies for social entrepreneurs (Sviko, 2021).

2.2 Digital social entrepreneurship

Recently, digitally driven business models have become increasingly prevalent among social enterprises (Masiero & Ravishankar, 2019), transforming SE practices and creating an innovative

field, Digital Social Entrepreneurship (DSE). These are integral to achieving social impact (Ghatak *et al.*, 2023). Existing literature emphasizes the potential of DSE to provide income opportunities for marginalized communities. The challenges associated with the DSE model have also been explored, including the critical role of securing institutional support from government entities, the necessity of tailoring venture presentations to suit diverse audiences, and the sociocultural adjustments employees must make as they transition from their home communities to the workplace. These studies view DSE as social-commercial hybrids, striving to balance the dual logic of charity and business that they integrate (Masiero & Ravishankar, 2019). Technologies such as Web 2.0 and social media have improved shared resource exchange by offering frameworks for online platforms that support swapping, sharing, and lending models (Richter *et al.*, 2017). Thus, the rapid digitization of modern society introduces a transformative element to this domain. As a result, the digitally powered sharing economy, facilitated by platforms, fosters both entrepreneurial growth and innovative forms of entrepreneurship (Vinogradov *et al.*, 2022). A practical example is represented by sharing economy platforms (SEPs), which introduce innovative business models and opportunities (Garud *et al.*, 2022). SEPs operate as intermediaries linking supply and demand for services, enabling interactions between people and businesses (Aloisi, 2016). For instance, individuals who own cars, homes, tools, or other assets can generate income from these possessions, tapping into their unused potential and decreasing their reliance on earnings from work (Vallas & Schor, 2020). On the other hand, gig economy platforms (GEPs) offer opportunities for individuals to provide personal services like transportation, cleaning, and delivery tasks (Frenken *et al.*, 2020). While these platforms leverage advanced digital technologies such as real-time tracking and algorithmic management to optimize logistics and enhance user experiences, they also pose significant challenges. Studies have highlighted the precarious nature of work on GEPs, as workers face limited protections, algorithmic control, and inconsistent incomes (Cram *et al.*, 2022; Popan, 2024).

3. Methods

3.1 Research Design

A qualitative field study was conducted, which is suitable for exploring emerging phenomena and addressing the preliminary stage of theory development (Giudici *et al.*, 2020). A multiple case study approach was utilized to investigate the research question. This method supports replication logic, treating each case as an experiment to validate or contest conclusions drawn from others (Santos & Eisenhardt, 2009). Compared to single-case studies, this approach facilitates the creation of more robust and generalizable theories (Santos & Eisenhardt, 2009).

3.2 Research Setting

The study focused on four digital companies operating in different sectors that leverage digital platforms to develop innovative business models. The selection criteria included: (1) the design and scope of their business models, (2) their use of digital platforms, (3) their social influence, and (4) their contribution to social entrepreneurship. To ensure contextual diversity, companies from various sectors were chosen. The final selection comprised two representatives from the Sharing Economy and two from the Gig Economy, represented in Table 1:

Tab. 1: Operating Sectors of Selected Companies

Company	Sector	Reference
Airbnb	Hospitality	Oskam, J., & Boswijk, A. (2016); Airbnb (2025).
Deliveroo	Food Delivery	Drahokoupil, J., & Piasna, A. (2019); Deliveroo (2025).
Uber	Mobility & Transportation	Khosrowshahi (2019); Uber Technologies Inc. (2025)
Vinted	Second-Hand Fashion	Tournois, (2025); Vinted (2025)

3.3 Data Collection

Data was collected from multiple sources, including official company websites, surveys, annual reports, and academic literature, to ensure comprehensiveness and triangulation. These data sources encompassed key dimensions of the companies, such as their core business activities, historical development, ethical practices, and innovation strategies. This approach ensured a holistic understanding of each company's structure and strategies. Furthermore, business models were analyzed to identify commonalities and sector-specific distinctions in the application of digital platforms. While these data sources provided valuable insights, potential biases in corporate self-representation were mitigated by cross-referencing with independent academic and industry reports (Ganapati & Reddick, 2018).

3.4 Data Analysis

To ensure empirical observations aligned with existing theoretical concepts, a three-step data analysis process was followed (Giudici *et al.*, 2020):

Database Development: A structured database was created to organize and facilitate interpretation of the material, focusing on information related to the companies' business models, digital strategies, and social entrepreneurship outcomes.

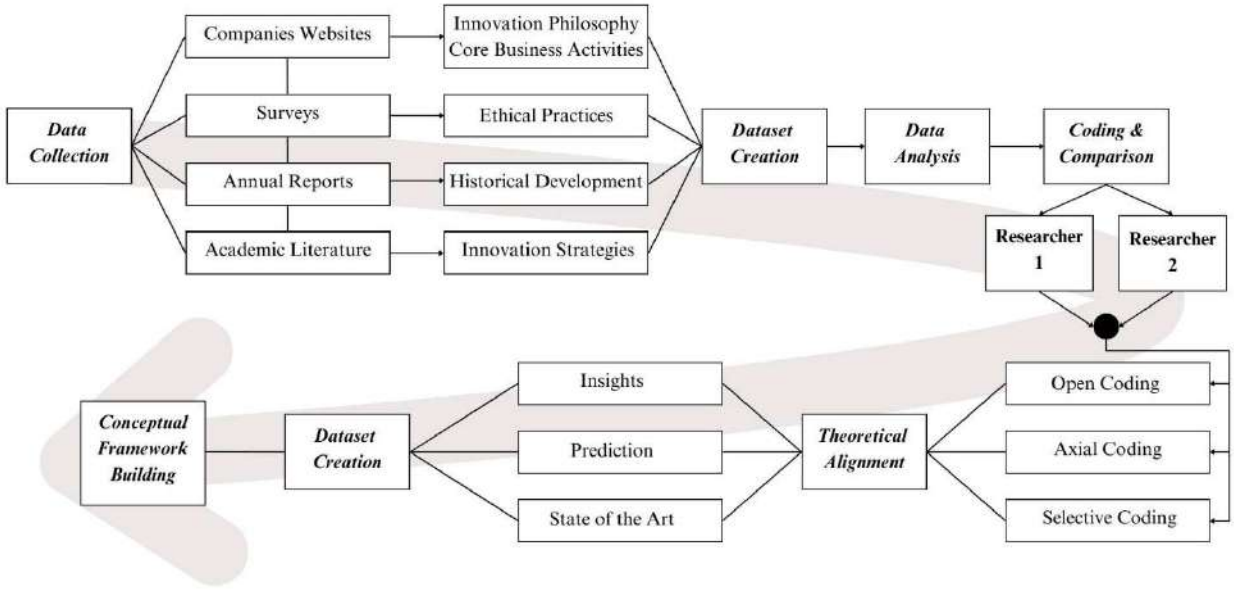
Coding and Comparison: Data were analyzed through multiple cycles of comparison with theoretical frameworks. Open, axial, and selective coding techniques were employed to identify key themes and patterns. Two researchers independently reviewed and coded the data to ensure reliability, engaging in detailed discussions to refine coding frameworks.

Theoretical Alignment: The findings were compared with theoretical predictions and insights from existing literature (e.g., social entrepreneurship and digital transformation theories) to contextualize the results and generate new conceptual insights (Tracey & Jarvis, 2007).

This iterative process ensured rigor and theoretical coherence in the analysis.

Figure 2 illustrates the methodological structure, including the interconnections between research design, data collection, and analysis.

Fig. 2: Methodological Overview, Source: Author's Own Elaboration



4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Key differences between the sharing economy and gig economy models

The preliminary results provide a perspective on how companies have shaped the digital platform across different sectors. In particular, Airbnb allows home-sharing, enabling residents to generate income by renting out underutilized living spaces (Álvarez-Herranz & Macedo-Ruíz, 2021). Unlike traditional businesses operating in the hospitality sector, which face physical limitations, the digital model adopted by Airbnb enables flexibility, faster growth, and "shared" value creation. In doing so, the digital business model proposed by Airbnb combines different elements. For instance, the adoption of algorithms offers the possibility to calculate rental prices for properties on specific dates. Such calculations consider around 150 variables, including factors such as location (country, market, neighborhood), average prices for the date in question (including stay costs and additional cleaning fees), property availability, and quality metrics (such as the number of reviews and user ratings), among many others (Moreno-Izquierdo *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, AI is utilized across Airbnb to minimize the inherent friction within the platform, addressing areas such as enhancing search functionality, preventing fraud, and assisting hosts in optimizing pricing (Airbnb, 2018). This, in turn, improves the value creation process, shifting from a profit-oriented concept to a multidimensional one. In this regard, a recent interview with Brian Chesky, CEO and one of the founders of Airbnb (Cimpanelli, 2022) assessed:

"*Airbnb wants to bring social and economic value to communities, to cities. As already said, we focus mainly on places that are still untouched by mass tourism, so in reality we diversify it*"

Similarly, Vinted uses a platform to sell and swap second-hand clothing (De Bruyne & Verleye, 2023). In this way, it enables users to balance their preference for renewing their wardrobe with a more responsible and sustainable consumption model, reducing the need for excessive purchases of new items and minimizing the waste of products that remain in good, usable condition (Palomo-Domínguez *et al.*, 2023). This, in turn, helps reduce waste in the fashion industry, which is known for its environmental footprint (Palomo-Domínguez *et al.*, 2023). Thomas Plantenga, Vinted CEO's, identified the driving factors of the company's success (Van Elven, 2019):

"There are two main drivers: purchasing power and the rapidly growing trend around the circular economy. When it comes to fashion, that's exactly what we do, offering our members a convenient and easy-to-use tool to earn some extra money and afford a wide variety of fashion at lower prices. But we also believe that we exist to make fashion more circular and enable people to consume more responsibly, giving their clothes a second or even third life".

On the other hand, GEPs exploit an algorithm-driven movement of gig workers to signal a new era of automation, adaptability, and employment opportunities (Popan, 2024). In particular, Uber leverages technology to evaluate driver eligibility for the platform, direct drivers to passenger pick-up locations, conduct regular background checks, offer feedback to help drivers enhance their performance, and take corrective actions against drivers who fail to meet the required standards (Cram *et al.*, 2022). This, in turn, has led to rapid growth built on technology applications, where tasks such as booking rides, planning routes, calculating fares, and processing payments are managed through a smartphone app (Dudley *et al.*, 2017). Benedetta Arese Lucini, Manager of Uber Italy, highlighted the crucial role of digital technology as follows (Montegiove, 2014):

"We believe that technology and the spread of the sharing economy can improve people's lives. These values are at the core of the Uber platform"

In the same way, Deliveroo's platform provides various digital tools to support restaurants in offering delivery services. These include features for menu setup, order and payment processing, and access to a network of riders (Rodriguez & Piccoli, 2020). By leveraging digital technology, this platform integrates all three components of its target marketplace (restaurants, grocers, and retailers), benefits from increased sales, and helps riders improve their potential earnings. (Deliveroo, 2025a). This is achieved through the application of machine learning systems that enhance the marketplace experience. Therefore, Deliveroo improves service quality and operational efficiency and drives continuous improvements in rider productivity and earnings, operational efficiency for partners, customer satisfaction, and overall economic performance (Deliveroo, 2025b). Hence, the exploitation of micro logistics through such platforms allows the access of a new entrepreneurial paradigm for workers and restaurants. In this context, Matteo Sarzana, General Manager of Deliveroo Italy, assesses:

"It is much "easier" for the restaurateur-entrepreneur to optimize their offering, testing new services or meeting customer needs, with a level of security that was difficult to obtain previously"

At this stage, the commitment and the benefits regarding the implementation of digital platforms have been highlighted. Table 1 graphically summarizes the use and the enabler technologies from each platform.

Proposition 1: *Sharing economy platforms (SEPs) foster economic and social value creation by leveraging digital technologies to promote resource optimization and sustainable consumption, aligning with circular economy principles.*

Proposition 2: *Gig economy platforms (GEPs) prioritize operational efficiency and labor flexibility through algorithmic management to increase overall performance.*

Proposition 3: *While SEPs typically drive value through sustainable consumption and resource optimization, and GEPs emphasize labor flexibility and algorithmic efficiency, many digital platforms may operate along a spectrum that incorporates both characteristics. This hybridization enhances their ability to meet diverse social, economic, and environmental objectives.*

4.2 How do digital platforms contribute to social value creation and entrepreneurship?

The analysis of these platforms highlights the strategic use of digital technologies to create economic, social, and environmental value. Moreover, they foster innovative modes of interaction, collaboration, and novel pathways for pursuing opportunities that have significantly transformed the competitive environment, introducing new challenges for entrepreneurial ventures across various domains (Chandna, 2022). In this context, platforms like Airbnb offer low-risk micro-entrepreneurship opportunities, allowing individuals to gain early career experience in similar ventures, earn additional income, expand their skills, and build a wider professional network (Mahmuda *et al.*, 2022). Vinted, instead, exemplifies the "Impact Entrepreneurship" concept by providing users with a platform that encourages active entrepreneurial practices (Buying, Selling, Promoting, Shipping, etc.). By enabling these exchanges, Vinted not only enhances economic participation but also cultivates a sense of connection and community among its users (Emmie, 2024). In addition, considering the direct relation of Vinted with the SE principle, it is reasonable to assess the connection between their business model and the development of "Social Commerce" (Puschmann & Alt, 2016). Uber has also contributed to creating an entrepreneurial hub that provides flexible work options. Such flexibility enables drivers to manage their work schedules alongside other responsibilities, potentially enhancing their overall quality of life and satisfaction (Ferreira *et al.*, 2024). In the same vein, Deliveroo has played a role in reshaping employment dynamics within the

gig economy by offering riders flexible work arrangements (Deliveroo, 2025c). However, as observed in the case of Uber, Deliveroo riders do not fully align with traditional definitions of entrepreneurs. Instead, they operate as precarious workers within an automated management system and algorithmic oversight, reflecting "traditional" work structures. The commitment and the benefits of the implementation of digital platforms have been highlighted. Table 1 graphically summarizes the use and the enabler technologies from each platform.

Tab. 1: Digital Platform's Overview, Source: Author's Own Elaboration

Company	Platform Type	Use of Digital Platform	Main Technologies	Value Creation Process
Airbnb	SE	Temporary Accommodation	AI, Machine Learning, (Recommendation Systems)	Matches hosts with guests, optimizing pricing and availability
Deliveroo	GE	Delivery services	Real time tracking, Machine Learning	Connects restaurants with customers and riders, optimizing delivery times
Uber	GE	Cars for transportation	Location services, Machine Learning	Links drivers with riders, optimizing routes and pricing
Vinted	SE	Reuse of clothes	Machine Learning, AI (Recommendation Systems)	Enables second-hand selling while promoting sustainable trade

Proposition 4: *Digital platforms contribute to social entrepreneurship by enabling innovative business models that balance economic, social, and environmental value creation; however, their alignment with social entrepreneurship principles varies based on their operational focus.*

4.3 Social and environmental challenges for digital platforms

Although there are different benefits, both models operating in both the GE and SE face several social challenges. Indeed, companies within this context are capitalizing on the widening income inequality by presenting gig work as a form of "micro-entrepreneurship" (Ahsan, 2020). In their study, Ganapati & Reddick (2018) identified four major challenges. First, renting may lead to significant limitations, fostering social class divisions and increasing inequalities. For instance, space-sharing platforms such as Airbnb do not own the properties listed, but the rental income goes to the landlords. Hence, individuals without property or other assets do not take any benefit from the SE systems. Moreover, property owners earn higher returns than wage workers, resulting in economic inequality (Ganapati & Reddick, 2018). Second, internet platforms do not inherently promote equality and may undermine the benefits available to gig workers. Indeed, Gig work offers individuals the freedom to decide their working hours, locations, and the tasks to take on. Nevertheless, the other side of the coin is represented by unfixed income and limited access to traditional employment benefits like health insurance and retirement plans (Joshi *et al.*, 2024). Third, the long-term sustainability advantages of the SE remain uncertain. Indeed, the environmental impact of the SE, its rebound effects, and how these impacts measure up against those of similar business models still need to be clarified. Such impacts will largely depend on the future development of business models and user practices and the establishment of complementary institutions, which are still being designed (Frenken, 2017). Lastly, issues related to security and trust present ongoing concerns within this economic model. From a security perspective, governments are responsible for maintaining society's proper functioning (D'Hauwers *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, regulation constraints do exist. With a particular focus on GE models, there is an absence of a structured framework and governmental backing to establish an environment that promotes quality work and projects, ensures worker protection, and grants access to benefits typically associated with traditional employment (Roy & Shrivastava, 2020). In this regard, Deliveroo faced legal action from a rider over allegations of underpayment (Gladkaja). Similarly, trust in such models is built by reviews and feedback. Platforms gather reputational data and convert it into ratings, simplifying the information for user comprehension. Such ratings, often accompanied by written reviews, act as indicators of a participant's reliability and trustworthiness (Stemler, 2017). In this context, the major threats are

represented by fake reviews and the "cold start challenge". This refers to the newcomers because of the lack of feedback history, while established players planning to leave the market might exploit their reputations to the fullest without concern for long-term consequences (Ganapati & Reddick, 2018).

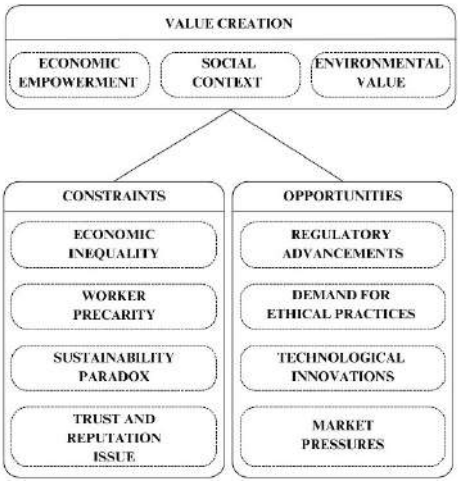
Nevertheless, despite these challenges, the implementation of advanced digital technologies such as geolocation, logistics optimization, and predictive algorithms has enabled these platforms to improve operational efficiency.

Proposition 5: *The sustainability and inclusivity of digital platforms depend on the establishment of complementary policies and frameworks that address economic inequality, worker precarity, and environmental impact.*

4.4 Theoretical Framework

Digital platforms face various challenges, opportunities for growth, and external threats. Their ability to drive economic empowerment and provide income-generating opportunities. Examples like Airbnb and Vinted highlight their potential to empower users by enabling them to earn from unused spaces (Caccese, 2019) or by encouraging sustainable consumption through purchasing and selling second-hand clothing (Balińska *et al.*, 2024). Differently, Uber Drivers and Deliveroo riders represent the benchmark category in terms of flexibility and technological efficiency. If, on one side, the on-demand employment model is fostering the elimination of restrictions on the ability to decide when, where, and how to provide labor, offering individuals greater autonomy in shaping their professional lives (Hickson, 2024), on the other side, it lacks traditional "benefits" such as job security, health insurance, and retirement plans. This, in turn, creates a paradox where workers enjoy the freedom to set their schedules but remain vulnerable to income instability, making it challenging to determine an individual's creditworthiness (Roy & Shrivastava, 2020). Indeed, relying on algorithm-driven management systems fuels these challenges, as workers are subjected to automated controls, limiting their autonomy and influence over work-related decisions. Nevertheless, while SEPs and GEPs are often conceptualized as distinct economic models, recent developments suggest that this binary classification might be overly simplistic. Indeed, many platforms have started to merge their characteristics. For example, platforms like Airbnb may involve gig-like service elements (e.g., cleaning, management, personalized hosting), while GEP like Uber can incorporate asset-sharing when drivers lease or rent vehicles to access the platform. This suggests a continuum rather than a dichotomy, where digital platforms may combine sharing and gig economy features to meet evolving user and market needs. Following our aim to provide a holistic understanding of the impact of digital platforms on SE, a conceptual framework has been created (Figure 3).

Fig. 3: Theoretical Framework of Digital Social Entrepreneurship, Source: Author's Own Elaboration



4.4.1 Value Creation

Digital platforms are becoming intermediaries in many industries, changing how they operate, how work is done, and how value is created and gained (Kenney *et al.*, 2019). For instance, SEPs, such as the Airbnb platform, serve as a catalyst for innovation by fostering micro-entrepreneurship, enabling individuals and small businesses to monetize underutilized assets and spaces, creating economic value (Mahmuda *et al.*, 2022). By facilitating access to alternative income streams, these platforms contribute to broader economic participation, particularly in contexts where traditional employment structures may be restrictive or exclusionary. Similarly, GEPs allow workers to engage in the digital economy with autonomy over their schedules. In this regard, Van Doorn & Badger (2021), introduced the concept of "dual value production", which explains how platforms extract two distinct forms of value from gig work: the direct monetary value derived from service transactions and the more uncertain, speculative value generated through data produced during service delivery. Moreover, digital platforms foster new forms of social engagement beyond economic contributions by strengthening community networks and enabling collaborative consumption. Engaging in peer-to-peer interactions through digital platforms, even in anonymous or semi-anonymous settings, introduces a novel approach to building and utilizing interpersonal relationships while also reshaping participation in social communities (Sutherland & Jarrahi.,2018). At the environmental level, earlier research has ignored the significant impact of sustainable development factors, particularly the quality of firms' environmental innovation, on the internal evolution of their digital platform capabilities and competitive edge. Indeed, while scholars recognize that merely implementing digital platforms does not automatically lead to success, gaining a competitive advantage depends on a firm's ability to adaptively leverage these platforms to enhance and execute its existing strategies (Liao *et al.*, 2024). However, while these platforms generate economic and social value, their benefits are not always distributed equally, and their long-term impact remains subject to ongoing debate.

4.4.2 Constraints

Despite the benefits of digital social entrepreneurship, platform-based models present significant structural constraints. Digital inequality represents a significant challenge confronting social entrepreneurship in the digital age. While digital technologies present numerous opportunities, not all individuals or communities can take advantage of them equally. This gap is evident in various aspects, including the availability of advanced technological devices, reliable and high-speed internet connectivity, and the necessary digital skills to leverage technological advancements (Setiawan, 2025). Moreover, it remains uncertain whether the advantages can be fully realized in a society with income inequality (defined as the unequal distribution of wealth among individuals) since economic disparities may weaken the potential benefits associated with collaborative consumption (Hussain *et al.*, 2023). In practice, platforms such as Vinted, high-volume sellers with extensive inventories, have a competitive advantage over casual users, demonstrating how digital marketplaces can perpetuate disparities based on resource accessibility. In addition, labor is characterized by precarious working conditions, as gig workers lack access to employment protections, including healthcare benefits, paid leave, and social security. According to Wood *et al.* (2019), the algorithmic management of platform-based labor affects workers' autonomy, flexibility, and authority, ultimately shaping their experiences of job insecurity within the gig economy (Anwar & Graham, 2021). What is more, while sharing products as a service via digital sharing platforms is increasingly recognized as a key facilitator of the circular economy (Schwanholz & Leipold, 2020), they may also generate unintended negative externalities. For instance, Airbnb has been linked to over-tourism and rising real estate prices, displacing long-term residents and increasing socio-economic inequalities in urban areas. Similarly, while gig economy platforms optimize delivery and transport logistics, they also contribute to increased environmental emissions. Studies have highlighted how such initiatives assist drivers in delivering faster and more flexible logistics services to customers, contribute to cost optimization,

and help lower the transportation sector's carbon footprint. However, the potential downsides of crowd logistics have received limited attention, with only a few studies addressing concerns such as its ambiguous environmental impact and critical social issues, particularly regarding precarious working conditions and road safety (Moncef & Monnet Dupuy, 2021). Lastly, due to asymmetric information and economic risks in peer-to-peer marketplaces, businesses have implemented reputation systems to foster trust among traders. One of the most prevalent reputation mechanisms is the display of online reviews from experienced users regarding the seller's reliability. In the context of sharing economy platforms, establishing trust between participants is even more important than in earlier peer-to-peer marketplaces. A key distinction between these two types of platforms is that traditional peer-to-peer marketplaces primarily involve the sale of goods, whereas sharing economy platforms focus on services. As a result, conventional peer-to-peer marketplaces are mainly associated with financial risks, whereas sharing economy platforms introduce additional risks, including those unrelated to monetary transactions (Ert *et al.*, 2016).

4.4.3 Opportunities

Despite these constraints, various emerging opportunities can reshape digital social entrepreneurship toward a more inclusive and sustainable future. Regulatory advancements present one of the most significant mechanisms for addressing labor precarity and economic inequality. The efforts of governments and social entrepreneurs complement each other, as the public sector has successfully mobilized large-scale initiatives at various times but has struggled to adopt models that ensure sustained efficiency and effectiveness (Arasti et al, 2015). Moreover, policymakers are increasingly recognizing the need for legal protections that ensure fair wages, algorithmic transparency, and access to social security benefits for gig workers. Legislative frameworks aimed at regulating short-term rental markets, data privacy, and environmental sustainability could further mitigate the unintended consequences of platform economies. Beyond regulatory interventions, shifting consumer expectations drive demand for ethical and sustainable business practices. Fortunately, the importance of sustainable business practices in both the marketplace and society has been recognized for quite some time (Svensson *et al.*, 2010). It has been determined that the advancement of sustainable business approaches should fulfill current needs and demands while ensuring that future generations can meet their requirements without compromise (Brundtland, 1985). Moreover, the rise of responsible consumerism has incentivized platforms to adopt sustainability-focused initiatives, such as eco-friendly logistics, ethical supply chains, and fair labor policies. Vinted, for example, has capitalized on the increasing consumer preference for circular economy models, demonstrating how shifting market behaviors can align platform incentives with environmental and social goals. Technological advancements further offer promising pathways for enhancing equity and transparency, simplifying data interpretation, and supporting the strategic planning of corrective actions. Consequently, these technologies act as a dynamic link between the physical and digital realms, expanding human capabilities and enabling systems to operate independently (Di Vaio *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, the competitive pressures within the platform economy are compelling companies to differentiate themselves by integrating socially responsible business models. As investor interest in Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) continues to grow (Dmuchowski *et al.*, 2023), businesses that align with ethical labor standards and sustainability objectives are likely to gain a competitive advantage. The rise of worker-owned cooperative platforms further signals a shift toward more inclusive digital entrepreneurship models, challenging traditional hierarchical structures of platform governance. The extent to which these opportunities translate into lasting change will depend on the collaborative efforts of policymakers, businesses, and digital platform communities in shaping regulatory frameworks, business strategies, and governance innovations that balance economic efficiency with social impact.

5. Conclusion

This study explores the intersection between digital transformation and social entrepreneurship, analyzing how the sharing economy and gig economy platforms utilize digital technologies to foster the creation of value in the SE panorama. The findings reveal that digital platforms reshape entrepreneurial landscapes by providing novel business models promoting accessibility, efficiency, and innovation. In particular, SEPs enable individuals to optimize underutilized resources, fostering sustainability through collaborative consumption and circular economic principles, allowing users to engage in low-barrier entrepreneurial activities, facilitating income generation while reducing environmental impact. Differently, GEPs have revolutionized labor markets by offering flexible employment opportunities, enabling workers to participate in the digital economy with fewer traditional constraints. Both platforms leverage digital technologies such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and algorithmic management to enhance service efficiency and optimize user experiences. However, while digital entrepreneurship opens new economic and social empowerment pathways, it also introduces critical challenges. SEPs exacerbate socio-economic disparities, favoring asset owners rather than those without access to capital or property. Similarly, GEPs lack workers in terms of worker protection, leading to precarious labor conditions, algorithmic control, and inconsistent incomes. The increasing reliance on digital intermediaries has further raised concerns regarding data privacy, transparency, and ethical governance in platform-based ecosystems. Consequently, the study underscores the relationship between digital innovation and social responsibility, emphasizing the need for balanced models that ensure sustainable and inclusive growth. However, despite its contributions, this study presents some limitations. First, the reliance on secondary data sources such as company reports, academic literature, and industry analyses may introduce potential biases or selective reporting. Future research could incorporate primary data collection, such as interviews with entrepreneurs, platform workers, and policymakers, to provide a more comprehensive perspective. Second, the study focuses on a limited number of cases, which may not fully capture the diversity of digital social entrepreneurship across different industries and geographic regions. Expanding the scope to include emerging platforms and regional variations would enhance the generalizability of the findings. Third, the research does not account for long-term impacts and regulatory developments as digital business models continue to evolve rapidly. Future studies should adopt longitudinal approaches to assess the shifting dynamics between platform innovation, labor conditions, and policy interventions over time. From a managerial perspective, this study provides valuable insights for platform operators, policymakers, and social entrepreneurs seeking to harness digital transformation for positive impact. To build a more equitable and sustainable digital economy, platforms must implement inclusive governance structures that protect workers' rights, ensure fair compensation, and foster ethical AI and algorithmic decision-making. Regulators must establish policies that address income disparities, worker protections, and the environmental consequences of digital platforms, ensuring that technological advancements do not exacerbate socioeconomic divides. In the same vein, entrepreneurs and businesses leveraging digital models should prioritize social innovation strategies that balance profitability with community well-being, reinforcing the role of digital social entrepreneurship as a force for good rather than an enabler of inequality. In conclusion, fostering collaborative approaches between stakeholders will be crucial in shaping responsible innovation as digital transformation continues to evolve. Future research should explore the potential of policy frameworks, technological advancements, and new business models that promote sustainability and equity in platform-based entrepreneurship. In addition, understanding how platforms increasingly blend SEP and GEP features, potentially leading to hybrid models that transcend traditional categorizations and offer novel pathways for DSE. By addressing the complex relationship between digital technologies and social impact, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how the digital economy can be leveraged to drive inclusive, ethical, and sustainable entrepreneurship in the modern era.

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