

Editorial: Social entrepreneurship and digitalization

Editorial: Emprendimiento social y digitalización

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Abstract: This editorial introduces the special issue of TEC Empresarial dedicated to exploring the nexus between social entrepreneurship and digitalization. Social entrepreneurship, characterized by its dual mission of social impact and economic sustainability, is increasingly shaped by digital transformation. Digital technologies—ranging from crowdfunding platforms to mobile applications—enable social ventures to mobilize resources, expand their reach, and enhance inclusivity. The editorial synthesizes contributions that address critical aspects related to alternative financing through crowdfunding, digital inclusion of marginalized populations, and the role of education and local ecosystems in fostering social entrepreneurial. The contributions included in the special issue emphasize how digital tools can catalyze empowerment, particularly among women and older adults, while also identifying persistent barriers related to gender and institutional support. The collection advocates for interdisciplinary research that integrates perspectives from ethics, gender studies, and organizational behavior, and calls for participatory approaches to co-develop digital solutions with different stakeholders. By employing diverse methodological to analyze different regional contexts, this issue contributes to a deeper understanding of how digital innovation can contribute to inclusive and sustainable social change.

Keywords: Social entrepreneurship; digital transformation; crowdfunding; digital inclusion; empowerment.

Resumen: Este editorial presenta el volumen especial de TEC Empresarial dedicado al estudio del vínculo entre emprendimiento social y digitalización. El emprendimiento social, definido por su doble misión de impacto social y sostenibilidad económica, se ve cada vez más influido por la transformación digital. Las tecnologías digitales—p.e., plataformas de financiamiento colectivo (crowdfunding) y aplicaciones móviles—permiten a los emprendimientos sociales movilizar recursos, ampliar su alcance, y fomentar la inclusión social. Este editorial sintetiza las contribuciones que abordan temas clave como el financiamiento alternativo a través del crowdfunding, la inclusión digital de poblaciones marginadas, y el papel de la educación y los ecosistemas locales en la promoción del emprendimiento social. Las contribuciones incluidas en este volumen especial destacan cómo las herramientas digitales impulsan el empoderamiento, especialmente entre mujeres y adultos mayores, al tiempo que identifica barreras persistentes vinculadas al género y al apoyo institucional. La colección de trabajos publicados en este volumen especial aboga por una investigación interdisciplinaria que integre perspectivas éticas, de estudios de género y comportamiento organizacional, y promueve enfoques participativos para co-crear soluciones digitales junto a diversos grupos de interesados. Al reunir diversas perspectivas metodológicas y regionales, este número especial contribuye a una comprensión más profunda de cómo la innovación digital puede contribuir a un cambio social inclusivo y sostenible.

Palabras clave: Emprendimiento social; transformación digital; crowdfunding; inclusión digital; empoderamiento.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, social entrepreneurship has gained increasing recognition as a transformative force for sustainable development, social cohesion, and inclusive innovation. Defined by its dual commitment to social impact and financial viability, social entrepreneurship represents a paradigm shift in how individuals and organizations respond to pressing societal challenges (Weerawardena & Mort, 2006; Saebi et al., 2019). It departs from traditional nonprofit and for-profit models by integrating market-based strategies with a deep-rooted mission to serve communities, address inequalities, and protect the environment (Rey-Martí et al., 2016; Vedula et al., 2022).

Simultaneously, the rise of digital technologies has reconfigured the landscape in which social enterprises operate. From cloud computing and big data to social media, artificial intelligence, and mobile applications, digitalization offers unprecedented opportunities to scale impact, engage stakeholders, and measure outcomes (Brynjolfsson & Collis, 2019; Goldfarb & Tucker, 2019; Berente et al., 2021). The integration of digital tools into social entrepreneurial activity not only enhances operational efficiency and reach but also facilitates the creation of innovative business models capable of addressing complex and dynamic social issues (Ibáñez et al., 2022; Mas-Tur, 2022; Yáñez-Valdés et al., 2023).

Recent literature emphasizes that this convergence—what some have termed “digital social entrepreneurship”—goes beyond the simple adoption of new technologies. It embodies a new logic of value creation, one in which social goals are embedded in digital ecosystems of collaboration, transparency, and decentralized decision-making (Chandna, 2022). Crowdfunding platforms, for example, democratize access to finance and empower grassroots initiatives to attract resources from a global audience, bypassing traditional intermediaries (Paniagua et al., 2017; Coakley et al., 2022). Similarly, mobile apps designed to support women’s empowerment or promote active aging illustrate how digital solutions can be tailored to meet the specific and often neglected needs of vulnerable populations (Rey-Martí et al., 2015; Li, 2023).

Furthermore, scholars have increasingly called for research that integrates gender, ethics, and inclusion into studies of entrepreneurship and technology (Orero-Blat et al., 2022). This lens is essential for understanding how power dynamics, digital literacy, and access barriers shape the outcomes of social entrepreneurial initiatives. As societies confront the dual imperatives of digital transformation and social equity, there is a clear need for interdisciplinary research that explores not only the opportunities but also the tensions, trade-offs, and ethical implications of digitalized social entrepreneurship.

This Special Issue of *TEC Empresarial* addresses that need by bringing together a collection of original studies that examine the intersection of social entrepreneurship and digitalization from diverse theoretical, empirical, and geographical perspectives. The issue responds to a research gap highlighted by previous bibliometric analyses (Rey-Martí et al., 2016; Vedula et al., 2022), while also offering valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and educators seeking to leverage technology in the pursuit of social value creation.

2. Contributions

The articles included in this Special Issue reflect the diversity and richness of the field. Several contributions focus on the role of crowdfunding as an enabler of social entrepreneurship. The systematic literature review “*The Impact of Crowdfunding on Social Entrepreneurship: A Bibliometric Analysis*” by Mora-Cruz et al., (2025) and the bibliometric study by Grueso-Gasa (2025) entitled “*Purpose and pixels: A bibliometric analysis on social entrepreneurship and digitalization*” jointly map the evolution of scholarly attention to this topic, identify research gaps, and underline crowdfunding’s potential to support community-driven initiatives. These articles reinforce the importance of digital finance in expanding access to capital, particularly in contexts where traditional banking fails to reach early-stage or impact-focused entrepreneurs.

This theme is extended through two empirical papers. “*The use of crowdfunding among music students: Analysis of key drivers and barriers*” by Montero et al., (2025) provides a model of how entrepreneurial intention and perceptions

of digital platforms shape adoption among young creatives. The findings suggest that integrating financial literacy and entrepreneurship education into cultural training can enhance autonomy and innovation. Complementing this, Manso-Laso et al., (2025) present “*Factors influencing alternative financing of entrepreneurship through crowdfunding*” which uses European data to show how innovative firms—especially younger ones—benefit from digital finance, calling for policies that encourage fintech adoption and diversify funding sources.

A second major axis of the issue is the exploration of digital inclusion and empowerment, especially among marginalized groups. The article *Cultivating continuing learning and active aging through digital literacy: A digital and social approach*, by Flor et al., (2025) demonstrates how digital training can reduce isolation, enhance well-being, and strengthen social networks among older adults, a population often excluded from the digital revolution. Similarly, Yáñez-Valdés et al., (2025) in their paper titled “*Apptivism: Women’s activism through digital applications to solve invisibilized needs*” offers an in-depth analysis of women-led mobile apps that promote empowerment, community building, and visibility of gender-specific needs. This work illustrates the role of “apptivism” as both a technological and social movement that aligns with key Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

Lastly, the article “*Determinants of social entrepreneurship in Central American university students*” by Rojas-Segura et al., (2025) focuses on education and ecosystem development. Through a mixed-methods approach, the study identifies mentorship, practical experience, and social ties as drivers of social entrepreneurial intention among university students in Central America. Its regional focus addresses a major gap in empirical research and underscores the importance of tailoring entrepreneurial education to local contexts and social realities.

3. Conclusions

This Special Issue provides a timely and multifaceted contribution to our understanding of how digitalization is reshaping the landscape of social entrepreneurship. The collection of articles demonstrates how digital tools not only enhance operational capabilities and outreach but also foster inclusion, social innovation, and alternative forms of resource mobilization. The empirical evidence presented highlights diverse dynamics—ranging from the role of digital literacy in promoting active aging and empowerment, to the relevance of digital financing mechanisms and the influence of education, mentorship, and ecosystem support in enabling socially oriented ventures.

At the same time, the research highlights the continued need to address structural barriers related to gender, digital literacy, financing, and institutional support. These challenges remind us that digitalization is not inherently inclusive, and its benefits can only be realized if systems are designed with equity, accessibility, and sustainability at their core.

Future research should explore how emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and the metaverse may affect the dynamics of social entrepreneurship. These tools introduce both opportunities and risks: they can enhance transparency, participation, and personalization, but may also exacerbate inequalities if not governed responsibly. There is also a clear call for more comparative, cross-national studies that assess the effectiveness and adaptability of digital solutions across different cultural, economic, and regulatory environments.

Moreover, deeper theoretical integration is needed. Scholars are encouraged to draw from fields such as ethics, gender studies, digital sociology, and organizational behavior to enrich conceptualizations of digital social entrepreneurship. Integrating these perspectives will help clarify how power, identity, and institutional structures shape the adoption, impact, and sustainability of digital innovations in the social sphere.

Finally, there is a strong case for promoting practice-oriented and participatory research, co-developed with entrepreneurs, platform designers, public actors, and affected communities. This collaborative approach is essential

to ensure that digital transformation in the social entrepreneurship domain remains grounded in the values of justice, inclusion, and meaningful change.

By bringing together empirical insights, methodological diversity, and theoretical reflection, this Special Issue not only documents the present moment but also lays the groundwork for future academic inquiry and transformative practice. We hope it will inspire scholars and practitioners alike to keep exploring the powerful intersection between technology and purpose.

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