

TECH-ENABLED SOCIAL INNOVATION: THE ROLE OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS IN SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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Abstract

This paper, titled "Tech-Enabled Social Innovation: The Role of Digital Platforms in Social Entrepreneurship," explores the transformative impact of digital platforms on social entrepreneurship. The paper investigates how digital technologies facilitate social innovation by enabling social entrepreneurs to address complex societal challenges more effectively. By examining various case studies and existing literature, the review identifies key ways in which digital platforms support social ventures. These include expanding access to resources, fostering community engagement, and enhancing operational efficiency. The study highlights the unique capabilities of digital platforms in democratizing access to information, connecting diverse stakeholders, and scaling social impact. Furthermore, it discusses the implications of technological advancements such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and data analytics in driving social entrepreneurship. The paper also addresses the challenges and ethical considerations associated with leveraging digital platforms for social purposes, including issues of digital divide, data privacy, and platform dependency. Through a comprehensive analysis, this review underscores the critical role of digital platforms as enablers of social innovation, providing a nuanced

understanding of their potential and limitations. The findings suggest that while digital platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for social entrepreneurs, strategic and ethical approaches are essential to maximize their benefits and mitigate risks. This paper contributes to the field by offering a holistic view of the intersection between technology and social entrepreneurship, providing insights for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers interested in harnessing digital tools for social good. Ultimately, it calls for a balanced approach that leverages technology while addressing the inherent challenges to foster sustainable and inclusive social innovation.

Keywords: Social Innovation, Digital Platforms, Social Entrepreneurship, Technological Advancements, Social Ventures, Community Engagement, Resource Access, Operational Efficiency, Artificial Intelligence, Blockchain, Data Analytics, Ethical Considerations, Digital Divide, Data Privacy, Platform Dependency, Sustainable Innovation, Inclusive Innovation, Social Impact, Stakeholder Engagement, Technology and Social Good.

Introduction

In the contemporary landscape, social entrepreneurship has emerged as a dynamic field dedicated to addressing societal challenges through innovative solutions. Traditional approaches to social entrepreneurship, while impactful, often grapple with limitations in scale and reach. However, the advent of digital platforms has revolutionized this domain, enabling a new era of tech-enabled social innovation. Digital platforms, encompassing a range of technologies from social media to blockchain, offer unprecedented opportunities for social entrepreneurs to amplify their impact, streamline operations, and foster community engagement.

This paper explores the transformative role of digital platforms in social entrepreneurship, examining how these technologies facilitate the development and dissemination of innovative solutions to social problems. By leveraging digital tools, social entrepreneurs can overcome geographical barriers, enhance their outreach efforts, and engage with a broader audience. Moreover, digital platforms provide robust infrastructures for collaboration, resource mobilization, and data-driven decision-making, which are crucial for sustaining and scaling social initiatives.

The integration of digital platforms into social entrepreneurship not only augments the capacity for innovation but also reshapes the methodologies and frameworks traditionally employed in this sector. This review synthesizes current research on the intersection of technology and social innovation, highlighting case studies and empirical evidence that illustrate the diverse applications and impacts of digital platforms. Through this analysis, the paper aims to elucidate the critical factors that underpin successful tech-enabled social entrepreneurship and offer insights into future directions for research and practice.

Understanding the interplay between digital platforms and social entrepreneurship is essential for harnessing the full potential of technology to drive social change. This review contributes to the growing body of knowledge in this field by providing a comprehensive overview of how digital platforms are redefining the boundaries and possibilities of social innovation.

Background of the study

In recent years, the intersection of technology and social entrepreneurship has garnered significant attention from scholars, practitioners, and policymakers alike. The rapid advancement of digital technologies and the proliferation of online platforms have revolutionized the ways in which social enterprises operate, scale, and achieve their missions. This transformative impact is particularly evident in the concept of tech-enabled social innovation, where digital tools and platforms are leveraged to address social issues more efficiently and effectively.

Digital platforms, encompassing social media, crowdfunding sites, and dedicated apps, serve as powerful enablers for social entrepreneurs. These platforms provide unprecedented opportunities for reaching broader audiences, mobilizing resources, and fostering collaboration across geographical boundaries. The advent of social media, for instance, has democratized information dissemination, enabling social entrepreneurs to raise awareness and engage with communities in real-time. Crowdfunding platforms have similarly disrupted traditional fundraising models, allowing social ventures to access capital from diverse sources and validate their ideas through public support.

Moreover, digital platforms facilitate the creation of innovative business models that prioritize social impact alongside financial sustainability. They enable the integration of data analytics, which aids in measuring social outcomes, improving accountability, and refining strategies. This data-driven approach ensures that social enterprises can adapt to changing conditions and maximize their impact.

Despite the promising potential of tech-enabled social innovation, there remains a gap in understanding how these digital platforms specifically contribute to the success and scalability of social entrepreneurship initiatives. Existing literature often focuses on either the technological aspects or the social impact, but rarely does it comprehensively explore the synergies between them. Furthermore, the dynamic and rapidly evolving nature of digital technologies necessitates continuous examination to capture emerging trends and best practices.

This study aims to fill this gap by providing a thorough review of the role of digital platforms in social entrepreneurship. It seeks to analyze how these platforms enhance the capabilities of social entrepreneurs, the challenges they encounter, and the strategies they employ to overcome these obstacles. By synthesizing current research and offering new insights, this paper intends to contribute to a deeper understanding of tech-enabled social innovation and guide future research and practice in this domain.

Justification

In recent years, the intersection of technology and social innovation has garnered significant attention from scholars, practitioners, and policymakers. The proliferation of digital platforms has fundamentally transformed various sectors, including social entrepreneurship, which seeks to address societal challenges through innovative solutions. This review paper is both timely and critical for several reasons.

1. Emerging Field of Study: Tech-enabled social innovation represents a relatively nascent field that is rapidly evolving. As digital platforms continue to advance and integrate into everyday life, understanding their impact on social entrepreneurship becomes essential. This paper aims to consolidate existing knowledge, identify gaps, and provide a comprehensive overview of how digital platforms are being leveraged for social innovation.

2. Practical Relevance: Social entrepreneurs are increasingly utilizing digital platforms to enhance their outreach, operational efficiency, and impact. Platforms such as crowdfunding sites, social media, and digital marketplaces have become vital tools for raising awareness, mobilizing resources, and scaling social ventures. By reviewing current literature, this paper will offer valuable insights for practitioners seeking to optimize their use of technology in their social initiatives.

3. Policy Implications: Governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are keen on fostering environments conducive to social innovation. Understanding the role of digital platforms can inform policy decisions and support mechanisms that encourage the growth and sustainability of social enterprises. This paper will highlight best practices and policy recommendations that can facilitate tech-enabled social entrepreneurship.

4. Theoretical Contributions: The review will contribute to the theoretical framework of social entrepreneurship by integrating perspectives from technology adoption, innovation diffusion, and social capital theories. This multidisciplinary approach will enrich the academic discourse and provide a robust foundation for future research in this domain.

5. Addressing Societal Challenges: The world is facing numerous social challenges, including poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. Social entrepreneurs are at the forefront of addressing these issues, and digital platforms can significantly enhance their efforts. By synthesizing research on this topic, the paper will underscore the potential of technology to drive meaningful social change and inspire more innovative solutions.

6. Bridging the Knowledge Gap: While there is considerable research on digital platforms and social entrepreneurship separately, there is a paucity of literature that specifically examines their intersection. This review aims to bridge this gap by systematically analyzing how digital platforms support and amplify social entrepreneurial activities.

7. Future Research Directions: Finally, this paper will identify key areas for future research, encouraging scholars to explore unexplored dimensions of tech-enabled social innovation. By highlighting emerging trends and unanswered questions, the paper will set an agenda for ongoing and future investigations.

This paper on tech-enabled social innovation is justified by its potential to provide a holistic understanding of the role of digital platforms in social entrepreneurship. It aims to offer practical insights, inform policy, contribute to theory, and address pressing societal challenges, making it a valuable addition to the academic and practical discourse on social innovation.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore how digital platforms facilitate and enhance the activities of social entrepreneurs, focusing on their role in scaling social impact and improving operational efficiencies.
2. To identify and analyze the specific digital technologies and tools that are most commonly used by social entrepreneurs to drive innovation and solve social challenges.
3. To conduct detailed case studies of successful social enterprises that have effectively leveraged digital platforms, identifying best practices and lessons learned.
4. To investigate the challenges and barriers social entrepreneurs face when adopting and integrating digital platforms into their operations, and propose potential solutions.
5. To understand how digital platforms facilitate engagement and collaboration among various stakeholders, including beneficiaries, donors, volunteers, and other partners in the social entrepreneurship ecosystem.

Literature Review

Social innovation refers to novel solutions to social problems that are more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than existing solutions. Social entrepreneurship combines the passion of a social mission with an image of business-like discipline, innovation, and determination. The convergence of these two fields is increasingly facilitated by digital platforms, which offer new avenues for collaboration, resource mobilization, and impact measurement. This literature review explores the role of digital platforms in enabling social innovation within the realm of social entrepreneurship, highlighting key themes and insights from recent scholarly work.

Digital Platforms and Social Entrepreneurship

Digital platforms have transformed various aspects of social entrepreneurship, from how social enterprises are launched and operated to how they engage with stakeholders and scale their impact. These platforms serve as intermediaries that facilitate the exchange of goods, services, and information, thus enabling social entrepreneurs to reach broader audiences and mobilize resources more efficiently.

1. **Resource Mobilization and Crowdfunding:** Crowdfunding platforms like Kickstarter, Indiegogo, and GoFundMe have become critical tools for social entrepreneurs. Research indicates that these platforms not only provide financial resources but also help validate the social value of entrepreneurial ideas through the support of a community of backers (Belleflamme, Lambert, & Schwiendbacher, 2014). Studies also show that the success of crowdfunding campaigns is influenced by the narrative presented, the social network of the entrepreneur, and the platform's design (Mollick, 2014).

2. **Collaboration and Networking:** Digital platforms facilitate collaboration and networking among social entrepreneurs, allowing them to share knowledge, resources, and best practices. Platforms like Ashoka and Changemakers offer forums for social entrepreneurs to connect and collaborate on projects. Research by Smith and Stevens (2010) highlights how these networks enhance the capacity for social innovation by providing access to diverse resources and expertise.
3. **Scaling Social Impact:** Digital platforms also play a crucial role in scaling social impact. According to a study by Bohnsack and Pinkse (2017), platforms like Khan Academy and Coursera use digital technology to deliver educational content to millions, thereby significantly expanding their reach and impact. The scalability of digital platforms allows social enterprises to operate across geographical boundaries, reaching underserved populations in remote areas.
4. **Data-Driven Decision Making:** The integration of data analytics into digital platforms enables social entrepreneurs to make informed decisions based on real-time data. Platforms like Google Analytics and Salesforce provide tools for tracking and analyzing the impact of social initiatives. A study by Hassan, Lee, and Yoo (2016) emphasizes the importance of data-driven strategies in enhancing the effectiveness of social ventures.

Challenges and Considerations

While digital platforms offer numerous benefits, they also present challenges that need to be addressed. Issues such as digital divide, data privacy, and platform dependency can hinder the effectiveness of tech-enabled social innovation.

1. **Digital Divide:** The unequal access to digital technologies can exacerbate existing social inequalities. Research by Van Deursen and Van Dijk (2014) underscores the importance of addressing digital literacy and access issues to ensure that marginalized communities can benefit from digital platforms.
2. **Data Privacy and Security:** The collection and use of data through digital platforms raise concerns about privacy and security. Studies suggest that social entrepreneurs must navigate these challenges by implementing robust data protection measures and being transparent with stakeholders about data usage (Kitchin, 2014).
3. **Platform Dependency:** Reliance on third-party platforms can create dependencies that may be detrimental in the long run. A study by Srnicek (2017) highlights how platform capitalism can influence the operations and sustainability of social enterprises, suggesting the need for strategies that mitigate such dependencies.

The literature on tech-enabled social innovation underscores the transformative potential of digital platforms in social entrepreneurship. By facilitating resource mobilization, collaboration, and data-driven decision making, these platforms empower social entrepreneurs to innovate and scale their impact. However, challenges such as the digital divide, data privacy, and platform dependency must be addressed to fully realize the benefits of digital platforms in this context. Future research

should explore strategies to overcome these challenges and examine the long-term impacts of digital platforms on social innovation.

Material and Methodology

Research Design:

The research design for this review paper on "Tech-Enabled Social Innovation: The Role of Digital Platforms in Social Entrepreneurship" follows a systematic review approach. This design ensures a comprehensive and structured synthesis of existing literature to provide a clear understanding of the role digital platforms play in fostering social entrepreneurship. The study includes a detailed examination of peer-reviewed articles, conference papers, and relevant grey literature published within the last decade. This approach allows for a holistic analysis of technological advancements and their impact on social entrepreneurial activities.

Data Collection Methods:

Data collection for this review involved a thorough search of multiple academic databases, including but not limited to Google Scholar, JSTOR, PubMed, and Scopus. Keywords such as "social innovation," "digital platforms," "social entrepreneurship," "technology-enabled social ventures," and "tech-driven social change" were used to identify relevant studies. The initial search yielded a substantial number of articles, which were then filtered based on relevance and quality. Reference lists of key articles were also scanned to identify additional pertinent studies. The selected literature was then analyzed to extract data on how digital platforms contribute to the development and scaling of social entrepreneurship initiatives.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:

The inclusion criteria for this review were as follows:

1. Articles published in peer-reviewed journals or conference proceedings.
2. Studies focusing on the intersection of technology and social entrepreneurship.
3. Research that examines the role of digital platforms in social innovation.
4. Publications from the last ten years to ensure current relevance.

Exclusion criteria included:

1. Articles not available in English.
2. Studies that did not directly address the role of digital platforms in social entrepreneurship.
3. Publications that were not peer-reviewed or lacked empirical data.
4. Duplicate studies or those that did not provide substantial evidence or theoretical insights.

Ethical Consideration:

This review study adhered to ethical research practices throughout the process. Since the study is based on a review of existing literature, no primary data collection involving human subjects was conducted, thus minimizing ethical concerns related to participant consent and confidentiality. However, ethical considerations were applied in ensuring the proper citation and acknowledgment of all sources used in the review to avoid plagiarism. The integrity of the research was maintained by presenting findings objectively and transparently, without any bias or misrepresentation of the original studies. Additionally, the review respected intellectual property rights by strictly adhering to fair use guidelines and obtaining necessary permissions where required.

Results and Discussion

The study "Tech-Enabled Social Innovation: The Role of Digital Platforms in Social Entrepreneurship" explores how digital platforms facilitate social innovation and entrepreneurship. Through comprehensive literature review and analysis of case studies, the research highlights several key findings that underscore the transformative impact of technology on social ventures.

Key Findings

1. **Enhanced Reach and Accessibility:** Digital platforms significantly expand the reach of social enterprises by enabling access to broader audiences. Social entrepreneurs can connect with a global community, enhancing the dissemination of their mission and mobilizing support from diverse geographical regions. This increased accessibility is critical for scaling social impact and fostering inclusive growth.
2. **Improved Efficiency and Resource Allocation:** The integration of digital tools enhances operational efficiency within social enterprises. Platforms facilitate streamlined communication, project management, and resource allocation, allowing organizations to maximize their impact with limited resources. The automation of routine tasks and the use of data analytics contribute to more informed decision-making and strategic planning.
3. **Enhanced Collaboration and Network Building:** Digital platforms serve as crucial hubs for collaboration among social entrepreneurs, stakeholders, and communities. They provide spaces for knowledge exchange, partnership formation, and collective problem-solving. These networks not only strengthen individual ventures but also contribute to a more cohesive social innovation ecosystem.
4. **Increased Visibility and Awareness:** Social media and other digital marketing tools play a pivotal role in raising awareness about social issues and initiatives. Through targeted campaigns and storytelling, social entrepreneurs can engage potential donors, volunteers, and beneficiaries more effectively. The viral nature of digital content helps amplify their message and garner support from a wide audience.
5. **Access to Funding and Resources:** Crowdfunding platforms and digital funding mechanisms have democratized access to capital for social enterprises. Entrepreneurs can leverage these platforms to secure financial support from a diverse pool of backers,

reducing dependency on traditional funding sources. Additionally, online resources and training modules provide essential skills and knowledge to aspiring social entrepreneurs.

6. **Empowerment and Inclusivity:** Digital platforms empower marginalized communities by providing them with tools and opportunities to participate in social innovation. These platforms can bridge the digital divide, offering access to information, education, and economic opportunities that were previously inaccessible. This inclusivity fosters a more equitable landscape for social entrepreneurship.
7. **Data-Driven Impact Measurement:** The availability of digital analytics and monitoring tools enables social enterprises to track and measure their impact with greater precision. Data-driven insights facilitate continuous improvement, allowing organizations to adapt their strategies based on real-time feedback and outcomes. This evidence-based approach enhances the accountability and effectiveness of social initiatives.

The findings of this study illustrate the profound role that digital platforms play in shaping the landscape of social entrepreneurship. By enhancing reach, efficiency, collaboration, visibility, funding access, empowerment, and impact measurement, technology serves as a catalyst for social innovation. The integration of digital tools not only augments the capabilities of social enterprises but also contributes to the creation of a more inclusive and sustainable future.

Limitations of the study

Despite the comprehensive analysis presented in this review, several limitations should be acknowledged. Firstly, the scope of the study is inherently constrained by the selection of literature sources, which may not encompass the full spectrum of research on tech-enabled social innovation and digital platforms in social entrepreneurship. Consequently, there may be relevant studies or emerging trends that were not included due to publication bias or accessibility issues.

Secondly, the rapidly evolving nature of digital technologies means that the findings and conclusions drawn from existing literature may quickly become outdated. Innovations in digital platforms and their applications in social entrepreneurship are progressing at a fast pace, and new developments could significantly alter the landscape described in this paper.

Thirdly, the review is limited by its reliance on secondary data. While secondary sources provide valuable insights, they may also introduce biases or inconsistencies based on the original authors' perspectives or methodologies. This reliance on existing studies means that primary data collection was not conducted, which could have provided more nuanced and firsthand insights into the role of digital platforms in social entrepreneurship.

Additionally, the study primarily focuses on digital platforms and their impact within specific geographical contexts. There is a potential limitation in the generalizability of the findings across different regions, particularly in areas with varying levels of technological infrastructure and digital literacy. The socio-economic and cultural factors influencing the adoption and effectiveness of digital platforms in social entrepreneurship may differ significantly across different settings.

Lastly, the conceptual nature of this review, which synthesizes and interprets existing research, may inherently limit the depth of empirical analysis. While this approach allows for a broad understanding of the topic, it may not capture the detailed, on-the-ground realities faced by social entrepreneurs utilizing digital platforms.

In light of these limitations, future research should aim to include a broader range of sources, incorporate primary data collection, and consider longitudinal studies to better understand the evolving impact of digital technologies on social entrepreneurship. Additionally, exploring diverse geographical contexts and integrating empirical evidence can provide a more comprehensive and up-to-date understanding of tech-enabled social innovation.

Future Scope

As we look ahead, several promising avenues emerge for further exploration and advancement in the field of tech-enabled social innovation and its impact on social entrepreneurship. This future scope outlines key areas for research and development:

1. **Advanced Digital Platform Integration:** Investigate how emerging technologies such as blockchain, artificial intelligence (AI), and Internet of Things (IoT) can further enhance digital platforms for social entrepreneurship. Explore their potential in improving transparency, efficiency, and scalability of social initiatives.
2. **Impact Measurement and Evaluation:** Develop robust methodologies and tools for measuring the social impact of digital platform-driven initiatives. Focus on creating standardized metrics that can assess both quantitative and qualitative aspects of social outcomes.
3. **Cross-Sector Collaborations:** Examine the dynamics of partnerships between digital platforms, governments, NGOs, and corporate sectors in fostering social innovation. Analyze best practices and challenges in collaborative models that aim to address complex social issues.
4. **Policy and Regulatory Frameworks:** Study the role of regulatory environments in shaping the landscape of tech-enabled social innovation. Explore how policy frameworks can support innovation while ensuring ethical use of technology and protection of stakeholders.
5. **User-Centric Design and Accessibility:** Investigate how digital platforms can be designed to be more inclusive and accessible to marginalized communities. Explore the role of user-centered design principles in creating solutions that cater to diverse societal needs.
6. **Longitudinal Studies and Long-Term Sustainability:** Conduct longitudinal studies to track the long-term sustainability of social enterprises leveraging digital platforms. Explore factors influencing resilience, adaptation to technological advancements, and evolving market conditions.

7. **Ethical Considerations and Social Responsibility:** Address ethical challenges associated with tech-enabled social innovation, such as data privacy, digital divide, and algorithmic biases. Propose frameworks for responsible innovation that prioritize societal welfare and equity.
8. **Global Perspectives and Comparative Studies:** Compare the adoption and impact of digital platforms in social entrepreneurship across different regions and economies. Identify contextual factors influencing success and scalability.
9. **Educational Initiatives and Capacity Building:** Explore the role of education and capacity building programs in empowering social entrepreneurs to effectively utilize digital platforms. Develop training modules and resources tailored to the needs of social innovators.
10. **Emerging Trends and Innovations:** Monitor and analyze emerging trends in technology and their potential application in social entrepreneurship. Highlight innovative approaches and disruptive technologies that could redefine the future of social innovation.

By focusing on these future research directions, scholars and practitioners can contribute to advancing knowledge, informing policy, and fostering inclusive and sustainable development through tech-enabled social innovation.

This future scope provides a roadmap for continued exploration and innovation in leveraging digital platforms for social entrepreneurship, ensuring meaningful impact on global societal challenges.

Conclusion

This research paper has explored the dynamic intersection of technology and social innovation within the realm of social entrepreneurship. Through an in-depth analysis of various digital platforms, it becomes evident that these technologies play a crucial role in fostering and scaling social impact initiatives worldwide.

The findings underscore the transformative potential of digital platforms in enhancing efficiency, expanding reach, and promoting sustainability in social entrepreneurship endeavors. By leveraging digital tools, social entrepreneurs can effectively address complex societal challenges, empower marginalized communities, and catalyze positive change on a global scale.

Moreover, the study highlights the evolving landscape where innovation in technology continuously reshapes the strategies and outcomes of social enterprises. It emphasizes the importance of adaptable business models and agile approaches in harnessing the full potential of digital platforms for social good.

Looking forward, while digital platforms present unprecedented opportunities, they also pose challenges such as digital divide and ethical considerations. Addressing these issues will be

essential in maximizing the inclusive and equitable impact of technology-enabled social innovation.

In essence, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how digital platforms can serve as powerful enablers of social entrepreneurship, paving the way for a more sustainable and inclusive future. By embracing technology responsibly and innovatively, stakeholders can collectively strive towards creating meaningful and lasting social change.

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