ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 10| October 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

DIGITALIZATION, GOVERNANCE, AND NETWORKS IN GREEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW OF EMERGING PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABILITY

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ABSTRACT

The urgent need to address climate change and achieve sustainable development goals has elevated the importance of green entrepreneurship as a driver of innovation, competitiveness, and environmental value creation. This study presents a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of 25 peer-reviewed articles published in ABDC A and A journals between 2020 and 2025, identified through the Scopus database. Following the PRISMA protocol, the review applied clear inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure rigor and transparency, resulting in a final dataset of high-quality studies across diverse contexts and methodologies.*

A thematic analysis revealed three dominant clusters shaping the role of green entrepreneurship in sustainability: (i) digitalization and technological enablers, which enhance eco-innovation through digital leadership, big data, and environmental management tools; (ii) governance, leadership, and institutional frameworks, which provide legitimacy, direction, and human capital necessary for sustainability transitions; and (iii) networks, markets, and ecosystems, which amplify entrepreneurial outcomes by facilitating resource access, financial rewards, and collaborative innovation.

The discussion emphasizes the interplay of these components, illustrating that sustainable entrepreneurship transcends individual firms and is a systematic phenomenon intertwined with institutional, relational, and technological contexts. The review enhances theory by integrating institutional theory, ecosystem perspectives, and dynamic capacities. Furthermore, the practical and policy ramifications are delineated, emphasizing inclusive financial structures, enhanced governance, and the advancement of digital capabilities. The discussion concludes with limitations and a proposed research agenda, advocating for methodological diversity, cross-regional comparisons, and additional exploration of financial mechanisms for sustainable initiatives.

KEYWORDS: *Green entrepreneurship; Sustainability; Digitalization; Governance; Networks; Systematic Literature Review*

INTRODUCTION

People are speaking out more about the need for more environmentally friendly ways to expand the economy because of the challenges that climate change, loss of biodiversity, and lack of resources are causing. Entrepreneurship, historically associated with invention and competitiveness, is now regarded as a crucial element in facilitating transitions to more sustainable practices (Cohen & Winn, 2007; Dean & McMullen, 2007). Green entrepreneurship, which is the starting and growing of firms that have both economic and environmental goals, is a means for societies to safeguard the environment while still growing the economy (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011). By making sustainability a part of the business process, green entrepreneurs produce both financial and environmental value. This makes them important for the change to economies that are low in carbon and circular. Green entrepreneurship is different from ordinary entrepreneurship since it focuses on both making money and being good for the environment. Cohen and Winn (2007) viewed sustainable entrepreneurship as a mechanism to address market failures resulting in environmental deterioration, while Schaltegger and Wagner (2011) described it as "entrepreneurship through an environmental lens." These kinds of businesses are particularly crucial for making eco-innovations bigger, utilizing fewer resources, and changing the whole system. Since 2020, the sector has grown significantly because more policies are focused on net-zero goals, ESG measurements are becoming more relevant in financial markets, and Industry 4.0 technologies are spreading. Recent research demonstrates that digital leadership and big data analytics foster sustainable innovation (Aftab et al., 2025), that environmental governance frameworks stimulate corporate climate innovation (Hamim & Mollah, 2025), and that open innovation networks enable the co-creation of shared value (Camilleri et al., 2023). These changes suggest that green entrepreneurship is getting more intricate and is becoming more a part of bigger social, technological, and institutional systems.

The literature remains fragmented despite these advancements. Prior research has predominantly focused on certain subjects, such as ambidextrous organizational practices (Cancela et al., 2022), customer-oriented green innovation (Huang et al., 2022), or the role of social capital in small and medium-sized enterprises (Simmou et al., 2025). Although these research

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yield significant insights, there has been insufficient effort to integrate findings across various contexts, methodologies, and analytical dimensions. There is a scarcity of longitudinal or comparative research that could elucidate the dynamic evolution of sustainable entrepreneurial practices, with the majority of empirical studies being cross-sectional in nature. Additionally, SMEs in emerging economies are inadequately represented in research, despite their disproportionate importance for innovation, employment, and environmental impact (Corazza et al., 2021).

This fragmentation necessitates integrative reviews that consolidate existing data, delineate thematic trends, and identify pathways for future research.

This paper addresses this gap through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of recent scholarship on green entrepreneurship and sustainability. Using the Scopus database and restricting the search to ABDC A and A* journals between 2020 and 2025, 25 peer-reviewed articles were identified. The base paper by Mac Clay et al. (2025), which analyzes industrial dynamics and business strategies in the agricultural biologicals sector, anchors the review by illustrating how entrepreneurial strategies drive sustainability transitions in traditional industries.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1. What dominant themes and patterns emerge in recent high-quality scholarship on green entrepreneurship?

RQ2.What enablers, barriers, and outcomes are most frequently reported?

RQ3, How do digitalization, governance, leadership, and networks interact to shape sustainable entrepreneurial practices?

CONTRIBUTIONS

The review contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it offers a comprehensive thematic mapping of 25 high-impact studies, identifying clusters such as digitalization and technology, governance and policy, leadership and human capital, networks and ecosystems, and finance and market outcomes. Second, it highlights research gaps and methodological limitations, particularly the scarcity of longitudinal and cross-country analyses and the limited exploration of SMEs in resource-constrained contexts. Third, it develops a future research agenda that emphasizes the integration of policy, managerial capabilities, and technological infrastructures to accelerate sustainable entrepreneurship.

In sum, this SLR provides an integrative synthesis of recent scholarship on green entrepreneurship, linking fragmented insights into a coherent framework. . The review contributes to academic discourse by framing green entrepreneurship as a driver of societal sustainability and a promoter of corporate competitiveness, offering valuable guidance for managers, entrepreneurs, and policymakers navigating the transition to sustainable economies.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a systematic literature review (SLR) method that follows the standards set by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). The PRISMA framework provides a systematic and transparent methodology for identifying, assessing, and integrating prior research, aiming to reduce bias and ensure replicability (Moher et al., 2009).

Scopus was chosen as the only source of literature because it has a lot of peer-reviewed articles in management, business, and environmental studies, and it closely follows the ABDC Journal Quality List. The assessment only looked at articles published between 2020 and 2025 so that it could include the most recent information on the topic. Only English-language journal articles indexed by ABDC A or A* graded publications were considered. This made sure that the studies that were included not only showed the most up-to-date research but also met the highest standards of academic quality and impact. The search process initially identified 278 articles. After the removal of duplicates, 243 articles remained for further consideration. Titles and abstracts were then screened for relevance to the topic of green or sustainable entrepreneurship, which led to the exclusion of 168 studies that focused either on general entrepreneurship without environmental dimensions or on sustainability without an entrepreneurial component. The remaining 75 articles underwent full-text assessment. Of these, 50 were excluded for reasons such as methodological weakness, lack of direct relevance, or publication in journals not classified as ABDC A or A*. The final dataset comprised 25 peer-reviewed articles, each of which explicitly addressed the relationship between entrepreneurship and sustainability.

A quality appraisal was conducted to ensure the robustness of the included studies. Each article was evaluated using an adapted version of the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist, focusing on clarity of research aims, appropriateness of design, transparency in data collection and analysis, acknowledgement of limitations, and theoretical and practical contributions. All 25 selected studies met the minimum quality threshold and were retained for synthesis.

Data extraction was carried out systematically using a structured template. Information was collected on author(s), year of publication, journal, research context, methodological approach, theoretical underpinnings, key findings, and limitations. This process enabled comparability across the studies and laid the foundation for the thematic analysis.

Given the heterogeneity of research designs, which included survey-based studies, econometric analyses, case studies, and conceptual papers, the review employed a thematic synthesis approach**.** Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, the analysis proceeded in three stages: familiarisation and open coding to capture recurring concepts, grouping of codes into categories through axial coding, and integration of categories into overarching themes. This process resulted in three dominant thematic clusters: digitalization and technology, governance and policy frameworks, networks and open

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innovation ecosystems, and sustainability outcomes. These themes form the basis of the findings presented in the next section. The PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1) provides an overview of the selection process, showing the number of records identified, screened, assessed for eligibility, and finally included. While the methodology was rigorous, certain limitations must be acknowledged. Restricting the review to ABDC A and A* journals may have excluded valuable contributions from lower-ranked outlets. In a similar vein, publications indexed in other databases, such Web of Science, might have been missed if Scopus had been the only focus. Last but not least, restricting the evaluation to the years 2020–2025 guaranteed that it would concentrate on recent advancements, although it did not include older foundational studies, which were cited for background in the introduction. Notwithstanding these drawbacks, the methodology used guarantees a methodical, open, and reliable synthesis of recent research on sustainability and green entrepreneurship.

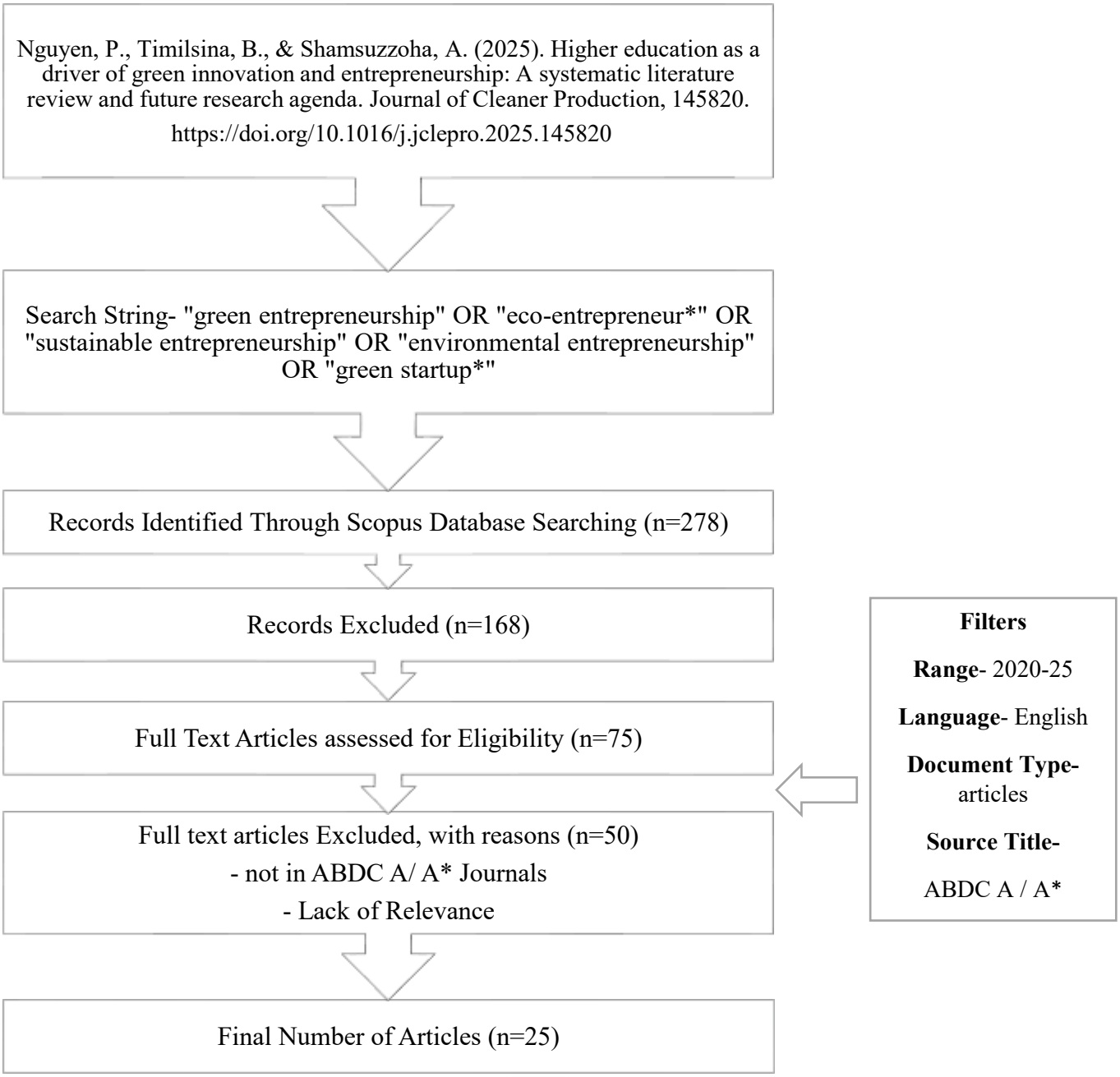


Fig.1 : PRISMA Flow Diagram (fig.)

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THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The synthesis of the 25 evaluated publications identifies three predominant themes that encapsulate the current dynamics of green entrepreneurship and sustainability. The three main ideas are: (i) digitalization and technology enablers, (ii) governance, leadership, and institutional frameworks, and (iii) networks, markets, and ecosystems for creating long-term value. When taken together, they give a whole picture of how entrepreneurship helps with transitions to sustainability.

Digitalization and Technological Enablers

Recent literature continuously emphasizes the transformative impact of digitalization and sophisticated technologies on facilitating green entrepreneurship. Digital instruments, such as big data analytics, artificial intelligence, blockchain, and environmental management accounting systems, have been demonstrated to augment organizations' capacity for sustainable innovation. Aftab et al. (2025) show that combining digital leadership with big data analytics greatly improves the performance of sustainable innovation. This makes digital skills a strategic asset for green businesses. Zheng et al. (2025) show in a similar way that digital transparency lets businesses deal with environmental issues from different levels of stakeholders, which makes entrepreneurial sustainability initiatives more legitimate and scalable.

Sun et al. (2024) add to this by showing that digital transformation is linked to green innovation, especially when people are more concerned about the environment. Xu et al. (2024) say that environmental management accounting improves innovation results by encouraging collaboration between different departments and suppliers to create new products. All of these findings support the idea that technology innovation is not just a helpful tool, but a key part of sustainable entrepreneurship. It helps entrepreneurs balance operational efficiency, transparency, and environmental impact.

Governance, Leadership, and Institutional Frameworks

The second main idea is that institutional factors, leadership, and governance have a big impact on the success of green businesses. Researchers like Hamim and Mollah (2025) have found that companies are much better at coming up with environmentally friendly solutions when they have good climate risk governance in place. Alkaraan et al. (2024) also show that companies can better follow sustainable strategies when governance structures are combined with Industry 4.0 technology. Mac Clay et al. (2025) illustrate the interplay between regulatory frameworks and entrepreneurial initiatives by emphasizing the influence of sustainability transition-aligned corporate strategies on sectoral dynamics within agricultural biologicals.

Both leadership and human capital are very important. Fazal-e-Hasan et al. (2022) say that green innovation makes employees more engaged and hopeful, which helps keep them on the job. On the other hand, Adomako (2023) shows a direct link between the results of product innovation and green creativity and responsible innovation. Simmou et al. (2025) show that entrepreneurial leadership acts as a link between social capital and green innovation using data from small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) in Morocco. Overall, these studies show that leadership and governance are two examples of institutional and organizational levers that affect green entrepreneurship.

Networks, Markets, and Ecosystems for Sustainable Value Creation

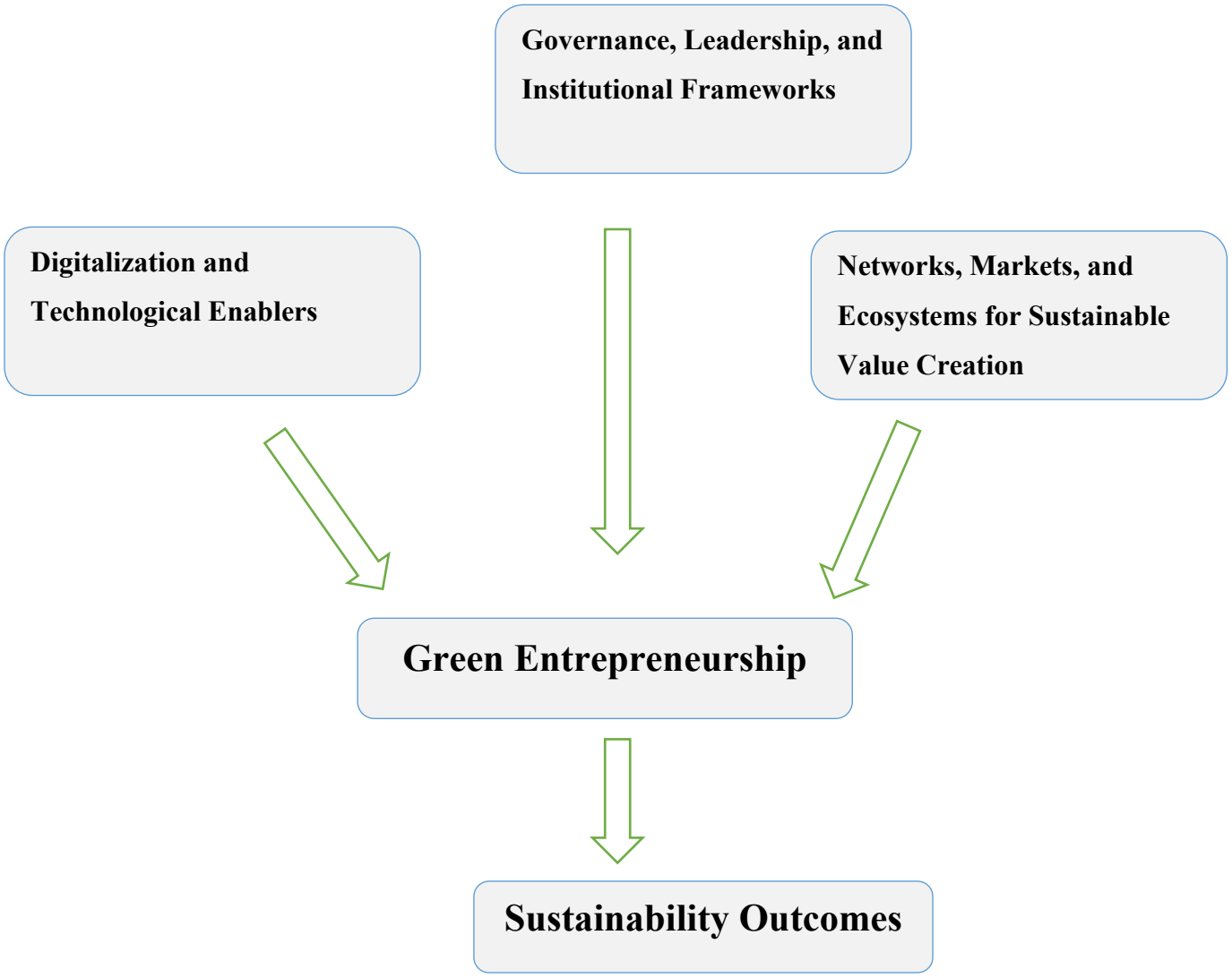
A third of the recurring themes are about the market and social aspects of sustainable entrepreneurship. Research shows that environmentally friendly innovation doesn't happen in a vacuum; it needs ecosystems, collaborations, and networks to work. Corazza et al. (2021) show that formalized corporate networks can help small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) get around resource limits when they want to make the switch to sustainability.

While Kim et al. (2024) highlight the usefulness of ambidextrous strategic orientations in producing eco-innovation outcomes, Camilleri et al. (2023) claim that open innovation approaches make it easier to create shared value as a result of environmental innovation. Green innovation ecosystems are shown to improve environmental performance in the food service industry, as Rosa et al. (2023) demonstrate further.

A reinforcing influence is also played by the outcomes of the market and the financial system. Both Tian et al. (2023) and Bataineh et al. (2023) provide evidence that investment in research and development reinforces the connection between eco-innovation and competitive advantage. Tian et al. demonstrate that green innovation increases firm value in capital markets. At the same time that Mehmood et al. (2024) demonstrate how digital and lean techniques speed the route to net-zero competitiveness, Olekanma et al. (2024) highlight the social impact of small and medium-sized enterprises' (SMEs) activities to reduce their carbon footprint, which create green jobs. It is clear from these findings that the relational and financial infrastructure that green entrepreneurship relies on to build sustainable value is provided by networks, ecosystems, and market mechanisms.

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Fig. 2: Conceptual Framework Linking to Green Entrepreneurship and Sustainability Outcomes



DISCUSSION

The analysis of twenty-five ABDC A and A* journal articles that were published between the years 2020 and 2025 sheds light on three primary aspects that have a significant impact on the connection between green entrepreneurship and sustainability. Together, these three dimensions—technological enablers, governance and leadership frameworks, and networks and markets—provide a comprehensive understanding of how entrepreneurship contributes to the advancement of sustainable transitions.

There is a persistent emergence of digitalization as a fundamental driver of environmentally conscious businesses. Digital leadership and big data analytics have been shown to help businesses come up with new ideas in a way that is good for the environment. Digital transparency also makes things more legitimate by helping entrepreneurs deal with problems that come up with stakeholders (Aftab et al., 2025; Zheng et al., 2025). Also, other studies show that digital transformation is closely linked to green innovation, especially when environmental issues are important (Sun, 2024). Environmental management accounting also encourages cooperation between different departments, which leads to eco-innovation (Xu, 2024). The findings of both of these studies are backed up by the results of other studies. These findings bolster resource-based and dynamic capabilities perspectives, positioning digital competencies as strategic assets rather than ancillary tools. At the same time, research from small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in emerging economies shows that there are still digital divides. This makes it harder for smaller businesses to take advantage of new technologies (Rosa et al., 2023). In order to fix this problem, the government needs to put programs into place that make it easier for more people to use digital infrastructure and get training.

The success of green entrepreneurship depends not only on having the right technology, but also on having good leadership and management in the organization. Research on climate risk governance indicates that companies with stronger governance frameworks are better positioned to foster environmental innovation (Hamim & Mollah, 2025). Research indicates that the integration of governance structures with Industry 4.0

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technologies enhances the effectiveness of businesses in achieving sustainable strategies (Alkaraan et al., 2024). Research connecting entrepreneurial creativity and managerial skills to product innovation results (Adomako, 2023; Simmou et al., 2025) illustrates the influence of human capital and leadership within organizations. These studies show how important leadership and human capital are. It has also been shown that green innovation can make employees more engaged and less likely to leave, which shows a link between sustainability policies and employee outcomes (Fazal-e-Hasan et al., 2022). These results align with institutional theory, emphasizing that entrepreneurship is embedded within larger governance frameworks and that leaders act as agents who translate institutional expectations into practice. But developing countries still don't have enough institutional structures to support the growth of sustainable initiatives (Mac Clay et al., 2025).

The literature also talks about the relational and market-based factors that come into play in green entrepreneurship. Networks, partnerships, and ecosystems are often seen as ways for entrepreneurs to get around resource limits and create shared value. Established networks enable small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to access the resources necessary for transitioning to a more sustainable model (Corazza et al., 2021). Open innovation models, on the other hand, promote working together to find solutions to environmental problems (Camilleri et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2024). The market's reaction to these efforts makes them even stronger: companies that invest in green innovation see their stock prices rise (Tian et al., 2023), their R&D spending gives them a better competitive edge (Bataineh et al., 2023), and creating green jobs leads to better job outcomes (Olekanma et al., 2024). These findings align with ecosystem approaches that regard entrepreneurship as part of interconnected systems comprising players, markets, and institutions. Mehmood et al. (2024) found that it is harder for entrepreneurs in emerging economies to get long-term financing. But access to long-term financing is still not always available.

When taken as a whole, these findings indicate that green entrepreneurship is best understood as the result of an integrated system in which technology, governance, and networks interact with one another.

Digitalization equips entrepreneurs with tools to innovate and measure impact, governance and leadership establish legitimacy and mobilize resources, and networks and markets ensure scalability and financial viability. This systemic view contributes to theoretical advancement by bridging dynamic capabilities, institutional, and ecosystem perspectives in the context of sustainability.

From a practical standpoint, the review provides several implications. Managers should prioritize investment in digital capabilities and foster cultures of green creativity to sustain competitive advantage. Policymakers should strengthen governance frameworks, particularly in emerging economies, to create enabling environments for sustainability-oriented ventures. Financial institutions and investors should develop inclusive mechanisms, such as green bonds or sustainability-linked loans, that broaden access to capital for entrepreneurs.

This review has limitations. Restricting the scope to ABDC A and A* journals ensured quality but may have excluded valuable insights from other outlets. Reliance on Scopus as the sole database may have overlooked contributions indexed elsewhere, and the 2020–2025 timeframe excluded earlier foundational studies. Future research should expand across databases and rankings, employ longitudinal designs to capture the evolution of sustainable entrepreneurship, and compare governance and financing models across developed and emerging contexts.

In sum, the review demonstrates that green entrepreneurship is enabled by the interplay of technology, governance, and networks. Entrepreneurs create sustainable value not in isolation, but within systems of resources, institutions, and relationships that jointly determine their capacity to contribute to global sustainability transitions.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Although this review followed PRISMA guidelines to ensure rigor, several limitations should be noted. First, the scope was restricted to ABDC A and A* journals indexed in Scopus. While this ensured quality, it excluded potentially relevant insights from B-ranked journals, book chapters, or other databases such as Web of Science. Future studies could broaden the scope to capture a wider evidence base.

Second, the review period was limited to 2020–2025. This focus highlighted recent developments in digitalization, ESG integration, and net-zero strategies but excluded earlier foundational studies. Future research could adopt a longitudinal lens to track how green entrepreneurship has evolved over time.

Third, the reviewed literature was dominated by quantitative designs, particularly surveys and panel data analyses. This emphasis provides generalizable findings but overlooks the nuanced, process-oriented perspectives that qualitative or mixed-method approaches can offer. Greater methodological diversity would enrich understanding of entrepreneurial practices and motivations.

Fourth, the geographic coverage of the studies was uneven, with heavy concentration in China, South Korea, and Europe. Research from Africa, South Asia, and Latin America remains limited, despite these regions' critical role in sustainability transitions. Comparative, cross-country studies are therefore needed to explore how institutional contexts shape green entrepreneurship.

In conclusion, the financial mechanisms that include carbon markets, green bonds, and sustainability-linked loans have received a relatively little amount of attention recently. In subsequent research, it might be possible to study how such instruments make it possible for entrepreneurs, particularly

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small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), to scale sustainable projects.

As a conclusion, resolving these limitations will contribute to the advancement of theory and practice by providing insights into green entrepreneurship that are more inclusive, diverse, and sensitive to conditions.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review analyzed 25 publications from ABDC A and A* journals published between 2020 and 2025 to investigate the role of green entrepreneurship in promoting sustainability. Based on Mac Clay et al. (2025), the analysis delineated three principal dimensions: digitalization and technical enablers, governance and leadership frameworks, and networks, markets, and ecosystems. Collectively, these emphasize that green entrepreneurship is not a solitary firm-level endeavor but a systemic process integrated within wider technological, institutional, and relational frameworks.

The results improve our understanding of theory by bringing together different points of view on dynamic capacities, institutions, and ecosystems. Digital skills, like big data and transparency, are strategic assets; governance and leadership make sustainability a part of how a company works; and networks and markets improve results through collaboration and financial tools. This integration shows that the factors that drive green entrepreneurship need a broad understanding instead of relying on just one theoretical framework.

There are also practical and policy effects. Entrepreneurs and managers need to invest in digital skills, tools for managing the environment, and new ideas that are good for the environment. Small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) should use networks to get around their lack of resources. Investors can speed up sustainability by encouraging green innovation through inclusive finance arrangements. Policymakers, especially in developing countries, need to improve governance frameworks, digital infrastructure, and collaborative ecosystems that support and promote sustainable businesses.

This review, although thorough, is limited by its focus on ABDC A/A* publications, its exclusive use of Scopus, and its coverage from 2020 to 2025, thereby excluding earlier foundational research. Subsequent research ought to broaden databases, adopt longitudinal methodologies, and investigate underexplored domains and financial instruments.

Ultimately, green entrepreneurship is a crucial pathway for sustainability, enabled by the interplay of technology, governance, and ecosystems. This review improves both theoretical and practical understanding, giving scholars, policymakers, and practitioners ideas for how to align entrepreneurial efforts with global sustainability transitions.

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