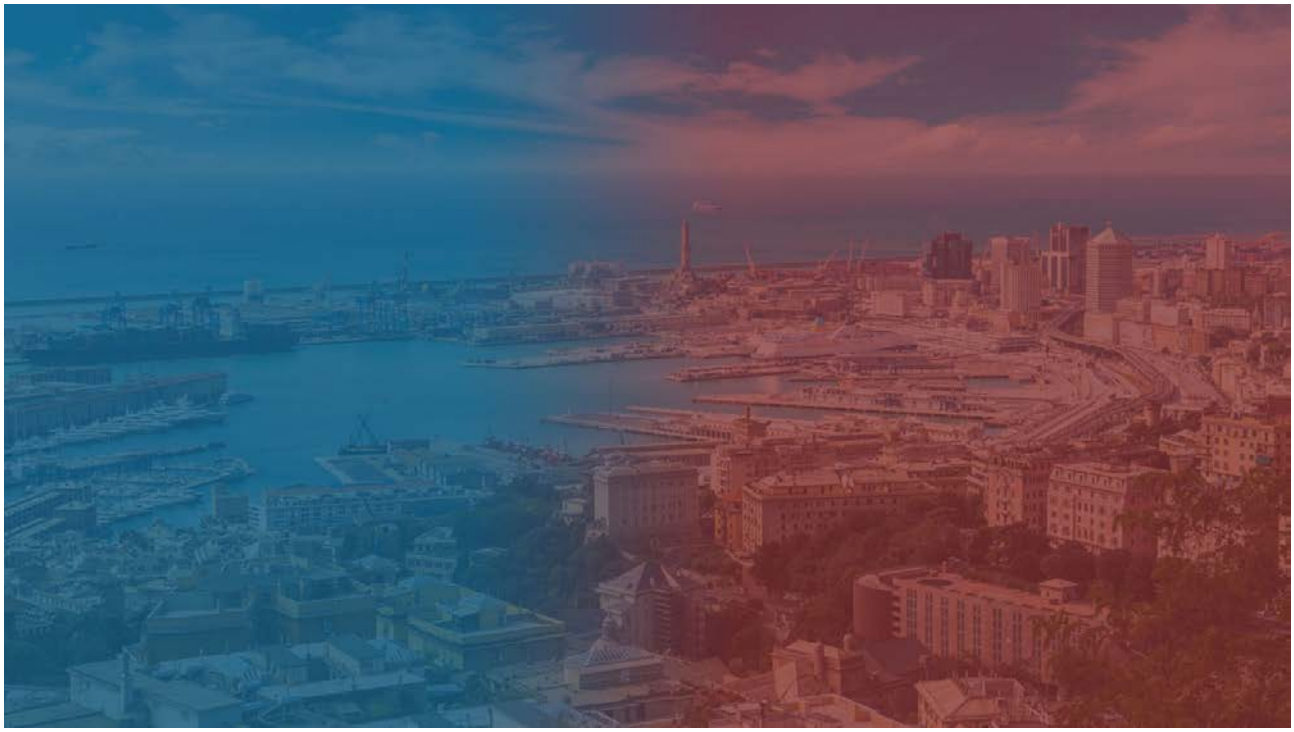
Sinergie SIMA
Management Conference



Tertiarization & sustainability new challenges for management in the digital era

Conference Proceedings

Short Papers

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12-13 June 2025

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Tertiarization & sustainability. New challenges for management in the digital era

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edited by

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To the reader,

this volume contains the short papers of the Sinergie-SIMA 2025 Management Conference, hosted by the University of Genova on June 12th and 13th 2025.

Tertiarization is one of the most salient profiles of the structural change and economic development that have characterized the recent decades (Jorgenson & Timmer, 2011). The growth of the service industry affects multiple sectors, e.g. wholesaling/retailing, tourism/hospitality, transport and logistics, health services, public administration, education, communication, banking and financial services, and B2B services (Baines *et al.*, 2017; Barrett *et al.*, 2015).
This growing relevance of services in the economy and the society has stimulated a broader interdisciplinary debate, e.g., the impact of tertiarization on the performance of the entire economic system, the innovation and digitalization of services, and the applicability of service management issues for the transformation of product-based business models.
Based on these premises, the 2025 Sinergie-SIMA Conference aims to explore the role of services as part of the evolution of society in terms of relevance, growth, competitiveness, innovation, but also sustainability and well-being. The lens of analysis used to explore this phenomenon will be digitalization, as it is shaping service innovation in more traditional sectors (e.g., social and sanitary services, tourism, retailing, etc.) and it is boosting knowledge-intensive business services (KIBS). Thus, digitalization is a key driver of the business model transformation, facilitating the transition of manufacturing firms towards digital servitization, enabling a new automation frontier (Frank *et al.*, 2019; Kastalli & Van Looy, 2013; Liu *et al.*, 2024), and paving the way for new opportunities for value creation within the global economy (Ostrom *et al.*, 2015).
The application of digital technologies to services (e.g., Artificial Intelligence, Big Data Analytics, Internet of Things, Machine Learning, Additive Manufacturing, Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality, Metaverse) also facilitates the pursuit of relevant environmental and social issues, for example contributing significantly to the achievement of greater systemic efficiency that help attain the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and circular economy (Xing & Liu, 2023). Leveraging advanced technologies enables the extraction of valuable insights from vast amounts of information, facilitating informed decision-making, personalized service offerings, optimizing service delivery processes, and enhanced customer experiences (Chauhan *et al.*, 2022). Big data plays a strategic role in developing novel solutions that address evolving societal challenges, while driving sustainable growth and innovativeness in the digital era (Cappa *et al.*, 2022; Ciampi *et al.*, 2021; Mikalef *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, the real challenge today is to harness the application of digitalization to enhance the service-oriented approach and empower companies' economic, social, and environmental performances, generating and consolidating greater trust and loyalty among their employees, customers, and suppliers for a more sustainable, inclusive, and better society (Shaukat *et al.*, 2016).
AIDEA devoted a Conference to the tertiarization and new challenges for management and governance 25 years ago in Genoa, and many scholars focused on these topics from multiple perspectives and with original approaches.
The 2025 Sinergie-SIMA Genoa Conference, in continuity with the past, is an excellent opportunity to discuss our community's research efforts in the service economy and management, in order to identify new effective solutions suitable to face the current digital era. Different theories, methodological approaches, and units of analysis are required to generate scientific research impacting theories but also outlining wide-ranging strategies that can offer valuable insights to business leaders, companies, and institutions. More precisely, the Conference was a great occasion to discuss the research efforts of our research community within tracks related to the:

- Conference theme (Tertiarization & sustainability. New challenges for management in the digital era),
- SIMA thematic groups (Artificial intelligence in management, Entrepreneurship, Innovation & Technology Management, International Business, Marketing, Purpose-driven Businesses,

Retailing & Service Management, Small & Family Business, Strategic Communication, Strategy & Governance, Supply Chain Management, Logistics & Operations, Sustainability, and Tourism & Culture Management),
- Management Case Studies.

The Conference call for papers gave the opportunity to submit either short and long papers. Overall, the editorial staff received 311 submissions of which 263 short papers and 49 long papers.

For the *short and long papers*, the evaluation followed the peer review process, with a double-blind review performed by, respectively, one and two referees - university lecturers and experts about the topic - selected among SIMA and the community of Sinergie members.

In detail, the referees applied the following criteria to evaluate the submissions:
- clarity of the research aims,
- accuracy of the methodological approach,
- contribution in terms of originality/innovativeness,
- theoretical and practical contribution,
- clarity of communication,
- significance of the bibliographical basis.

The *peer review* process resulted in full acceptance or rejection of the submissions. In the case of disagreement among reviewers' evaluations, the decision was taken by the Chairs of the SIMA thematic groups or conference track. Each work was then sent back to the Authors together with the referees' reports. The suggestions received by the referees were used by the Authors during the presentation of their research works at the Conference.

The evaluation process ended with the acceptance of 293 papers (249 short papers and 44 long papers). This volume proposes the short papers whose Authors have authorized their publication.

All the short papers published in this volume were presented and discussed during the Conference and published online on the web portal of Sinergie-SIMA Management Conference (**https://www.sijmsima.it/**).

While thanking all the Authors, Chairs, and participants, we hope that this volume will contribute to advancing knowledge about tertiarization and sustainability in management.

The Conference Chairs

Lara Penco, Arabella Mocciaro Li Destri, and Marta Ugolini

SUMMARY

Track 1 - Artificial Intelligence in Management

AI adoption in the workplace: Cognitive and Emotional Appraisals
GIULIA GOGIALI, FABIOLA SFODERA, ANDREA LAUDADIO, LUCA DEZI PAG. 3

How self-verification experiences and self-concept clarity jointly shape job applicants' responses to AI
VALERIO DERIU, MARTINA DI CIOCCIO, ANDREA MONTEFUSCO " 9

Data Discrimination and Algorithmic Challenges in AI copilots. A systematic literature review
CARMELA ELITA SCHILLACI, FEDERICO MERTOLI, LUIGI PIPER, LUCREZIA MARIA DE COSMO, GIANLUIGI GUIDO " 15

Lights and Shadows in the Governance of Generative AI Firms: a preliminary approach
FRANCESCO LAVIOLA, ROBERTO ARGIOLAS, CARMELA DI GUIDA " 21

Il Web3 incontra l'AI. Verso nuovi modelli di business decentralizzati e generativi
FRANCESCO FASANO, CHIARA BARTOLI, FRANCESCO CAPPA, ENZO PERUFFO, PAOLO BOCCARDELLI " 29

The Future of Education: reframing skills and learning in the age of artificial intelligence
CHIARA BARTOLI, FEDERICO CESCHEL, LORENZA GERARDI, LUCIA MARCHEGIANI, ENZO PERUFFO " 37

Leveraging AI for Internationalization: The Role of Artificial Intelligence in the Global Expansion of Italian Startups
NOHAILA KARTTI, CHIARA CANNAVALE " 43

The Role of International Knowledge in China's Artificial Intelligence Ecosystems
JACOPO CRICCHIO, SAVERIO BARABUFFI, ALBERTO DI MININ " 49

Generative Artificial Intelligence in the healthcare ecosystem: a game-changer for performance measurement
ANNA BASTONE, FRANCESCO SCHIAVONE, DANIELE LEONE, ANDREA GARGIULO " 55

Human-Based vs. AI-Based Diagnosis for Anamnesis Tertiarization: The Roles of Patients' Psychological Adaptation and e-healthcare Ethical Concern
ANDREA SESTINO, SIMONE GUERCINI " 61

L'impresa del post-umano: il lato oscuro della transizione digitale nelle dinamiche aziendali
PAOLO BARILE, GERARDO BOSCO, RAFFAELE D'AMORE " 67

The Intelligence Gap: Merging Explainable AI with Managerial Perception for Proactive Crisis Strategy
DAVIDE LIBERATO LO CONTE, GIUSEPPE SANCETTA, RAFFAELE D'AMORE " 75

Stakeholder Engagement and Social Sustainability Practices in Innovative Italian SMEs: The Mediating Role of Artificial Intelligence
LORENZO TURRIZIANI, VINCENZO DELL'ANNO, CRISTINA CERVINO, VALERIO MUTO " 83

Using Artificial Intelligence for Improving Sustainability in Smart City
ANGELO RIVA " 91

The Circular Revolution Is Served: AI Strategies for Sustainable Competitive Advantage
MAURO SCIARELLI, ANNA PRISCO, MARTINA PERCUOCO, VINCENZO DELL'ANNO " 95

Donor preferences between search engines and Large Language Models (LLMs): Transforming donor decision-process in non- profit fundraising
ALESSANDRO SIGNORINI, ALESSANDRO FERI " 101

AI tra impatti di (post) management e decisioni verso trans-disciplinarietà e algoretica
LUCIANO PILOTTI " 107

The Trade-off Between Data Privacy and Personalization in the Financial Sector: Can Generative AI be a moderator in Gen Z's Investment Decisions?
MARCO VALERIO ROSSI, IRENE FULCO, FRANCESCA FAGGIONI, BARBARA AQUILANI PAG. 115

Unveiling the Dark Side of Technological Innovation: Navigating the Sustainability Challenges of Generative Artificial Intelligence– A Preliminary Exploration
IRENE FULCO, MARCO VALERIO ROSSI, FRANCESCA FAGGIONI, BARBARA AQUILANI " 121

Strategic Innovation in the Digital Age: Integrating Growth Hacking, Dynamic Capabilities, and Artificial Intelligence
DOMITILLA MAGNI, BENEDETTO LORENZO CANNATELLI, ALESSANDRO GIUDICI " 127

Using Artificial Intelligence in Business-to-Business Sales Processes
LENA NIEDERER, ULRIKE MAYRHOFER " 135

The Impact of AI Tool Usage on Student Well-Being in Higher Education: The Moderating Role of Self Efficacy
FRANCESCA CELIO, EMANUELA STAGNO, FRANCESCO RICOTTA " 141

Track 2 - Entrepreneurship

Female Entrepreneurship: overcoming barriers and expanding theoretical perspectives for inclusive growth
GIORGIA MARIA D'ALLURA, FEDERICA ROMANO " 151

The role of humane entrepreneurship for sustainability: Evidence from tourism digital start-ups
ANTONELLA MONDA, SILVIA BAIOCCO, PAOLA MARIA ANNA PANICCIA " 159

Rethinking Entrepreneurial Mindsets: Concepts and Measuring of Individual Humane Entrepreneurial Orientation
CHIARA CRUDELE, ROSANGELA FEOLA, ROBERTO PARENTE, RICKY CELENTA, ELEONORA RUSSO " 167

Urban Innovation, Housing Costs, and Youth Entrepreneurship: Rethinking the Smart City Model
FILIPPO MARCHESANI " 175

Università e sviluppo regionale: costruire ecosistemi imprenditoriali in aree periferiche
SILVIA IOSSA, ANDREA PICCALUGA " 181

How do strategic decision-makers make sense of Artificial Intelligence?
ALESSIA MUNNIA, JAMES A. CUNNINGHAM, REBECCA CASEY, MARCO ROMANO " 189

Artificial Intelligence and The Paradigms of Authenticity in Entrepreneurship: Charting a Research Agenda
SILVIA RANFAGNI, MASSIMO ROSATI, KRISTIAN GIANASSI " 199

How to Improve the Quality of Entrepreneurship Education Programs? Managerial Insights from Service Marketing
SERENA GALVANI, FRANCESCA MARIA CESARONI " 209

Learning and experimentation throughout the pre-entry phase of the entrepreneurial processes
MARCO CORSINO, FILIPPO RIZZATO, SALVATORE TORRISI " 215

Entrepreneurial Mindset and Cultures: The African context through the lens of an insider perspective
BICE DELLA PIANA, FORSTER AMPADU " 221

Building the Foundation: How Dual Team Formation Shapes Early Venture Trajectories
PAOLA GIURI, MOHAMMAD HAWILY, MARCO CORSINO " 229

Development and Retention of Entrepreneurial Competencies: a case study from a management course
ALESSANDRA SCROCCARO, ALESSANDRO ROSSI " 235

La Teoria della Attribuzione come quadro per la comprensione delle determinanti che guidano l'individuo verso la scelta di lavorare nella sostenibilità
NORA ANNESI, VALENTINA CUCINO PAG. 245

Decentralized Finance as an alternative financing channel for SMEs: Challenges and Opportunities
CRISTINA DE SILVA, ANNA GERVASONI, FRANCESCO FERRARA " 249

Dalla resilienza dell'imprenditore alla resilienza dell'impresa: intuizioni da un caso studio qualitativo
SONIA CATERINA GIACCONE, PASQUALE MASSIMO PICONE " 261

Track 3 - Innovation & Technology Management

Ricombinazione di conoscenza e esternalità spaziali nel contesto dell'Industria 4.0 europea
SAVERIO BARABUFFI, GIULIO FERRIGNO, GUIDO PIALLI, ANDREA PICCALUGA " 269

La diffusione della Marketing Automation tra gli e-tailer italiani: risultati da una cluster analysis
GIADA SALVIETTI, DANIO BERTI, SILVIA RANFAGNI " 275

From IP Awareness to Strategic Valorization: bolstering IP capabilities of Italian SMEs through policy interventions
PAOLA BELINGHERI, ALESSIA POLI, MARIA ISABELLA LEONE " 281

The Dynamic Role of Digital Orientation in Shaping SME Performance
LUDOVICA ANTENOZIO, PILAR MARQUES, ANDREA BIKFALVI " 289

Digital Tools as Olympionic: Exploring the Real Golden Medal in SMEs Performance
LUDOVICA ANTENOZIO, FRANCESCO APPIO " 295

Driving social impact through innovation: The strategic role of SMEs in B2B markets
ANGELA CARIDÀ, MARIA COLURCIO, JAQUELINE PELS, VANIA VIGOLO " 301

Green and digital-driven Innovation Ecosystems: an exploratory text analysis of Smart Specialization Strategies
VALENTINA MALLAMACI, MELITA NICOTRA " 309

Paradoxes of Public Service Ecosystems: The Case of Digital Pharmaceuticals
STEFANIA MANETTI, ORLANDO TROISI " 319

The power of diversity: How female leadership drives innovation and performance in SMEs and Deep Tech
NICOLETTA BURATTI, ELVIRA TIZIANA LA ROCCA, VALERIA SCHIFILLITI, FRANCESCO VITELLARO " 325

No Women No Innovation? The Effect of Women on Boards on Patent Activity in SMEs
FRANCESCA PASCALE, GIULIO FERRIGNO, SAVERIO BARABUFFI, ANDREA PICCALUGA " 333

E-Sports and social innovation: promoting resilience, inclusion, and social capital in the digital age
BEATRICE FRATANGELI, FRANCESCA VICENTINI, GIORGIO PORTALURI, RITA MURA " 339

The ACT Model: A Literature Review on the Role of Influencer Marketing in Digital Environments with a Focus on Food and Beverage
PIERLUIGI PASSARO, ALESSANDRO GIANNATTASIO, LORENZO SAPONARO, CESARE AMATULLI, MARCO PICHIERRI " 345

Managing Complexity in New Product Development: A Framework for Assessing and Mitigating Over Featuring
SILVIA TEDESCHI, GIACOMO MARZI " 351

Technological Characteristics and Technological Competition. A Patent Portfolio Perspective on Inventions' Non-use
GABRIEL FRANCESCHINI, PAOLA GIURI " 357

Employees' autonomy in data-driven decision-making: an empirical analysis of Italian firms
LORENA M. D'AGOSTINO, MARCO CORSINO, MIRIAM TOMASUOLO, SALVATORE TORRISI PAG. 363

Medical Doctors' Entrepreneurial Intention Through Organizational Support to Innovation and Collaboration Propensity
ANDREA SESTINO, ALFREDO D'ANGELO " 369

Retrovation for Sustainability: a Categorization with Cases from the Agrofood Industry
AMIR MAGHSSUDIPOUR, SILVIA RITA SEDITA, LORENZO GUERRINI " 373

Track 4 - International Business

The Link Between Humane Entrepreneurship and International Competitiveness: An Explorative Analysis of Key Dimensions
MARTINA TOMASETIG, MARIA ROSITA CAGNINA, MARIA CHIARVESIO, FATIMA DAHBI, ANDREA MORETTI " 379

Cultural perspectives on leadership effectiveness. A comparative study between Italy and South Korea
CINZIA DESSI, JESSICA LAMPIS, ANNALISA SUCCA " 387

How Incubators and Accelerators Foster Startup Internationalization
MIRKO OLIVIERI, CHIARA CANTÙ, LALA HU " 395

Between innovation and skepticism: AI's role in international strategic decisions for the food and beverage sector
BARBARA FRANCIONI, ALICE AIUDI, IZABELA KOWALIK " 399

Corruption as a Tool in International Business: Conflicting Strategies at Company and Country Level
SERGIO VALENTINI " 405

Exploring the Role of Cultural Intelligence in Career Sustainability: A Multi-Industry Comparative Study
BICE DELLA PIANA, MAY OWEN " 413

The impact of country image evaluations on consumer perceptions of brand sustainability and willingness-to-pay: Empirical evidence
CHIARA SCRIMIERI, ADAMANTIOS DIAMANTOPOULOS, MICHELA MATARAZZO, ALBERTO PASTORE " 421

Made in Italy effect: Exploring relationship between Re-shoring and Country of origin
KANWAL GUL, VALENTINA DELLA CORTE, SIMONE LUONGO, ENRICO DI TARANTO " 427

Institutional perspectives on internationalization choices of state-owned enterprises
GABRIELE GALLI, ROBERTO URBANI, ANTONIO MAJOCCHI " 435

"Made in Japan" vs "Made in Germany": An Application of the Implicit Association Test to the Study of the Country-of-Origin Effect
DANIELE PORCHEDDU, RAFFAELE CAMPO, ANTONIO USAI, MICHELA IESU, GAVINO VACCA " 441

The Human Rights Cost of Service Value Chains: Outsourced Content Moderation in the Digital Economy
GALO SERJE MORALES, MARC OBERHAUSER " 449

Sustainability and Global Value Chain Dynamics: Evidence from the Plastic Industry
NUO WANG, FRANCESCO MUTIGNANI, ANTONELLA ZUCCHELLA " 457

Delving Into the International Dimension of Activist Entrepreneurship in Fashion
GIULIA MONTEVERDE, ANDREA RUNFOLA, SIMONE GUERCINI " 463

Outsidership/Insidership in international business: looking back and moving forward
MATILDE MILANESI, ANDREA RUNFOLA, SIMONE GUERCINI " 469

Track 5 - Management Case Studies

Digital healthcare platforms for engaging chronic patients: The case of ASL Caserta's Chronic Plus Platform
RAFFAELLA MONTERA, ADELAIDE IPPOLITO, CARMELA DI GUIDA, FRANCESCA LANDOLFI, LEONARDO PAONE — PAG. 475

Integrating corporate industrial heritage, digital transformation and social sustainability: the Dublo Fashion Heritage project
SABRINA RESTANTE, DANIELA CAVALLO, ROSSELLA BARATTA, FRANCESCO MERCURI — " 481

L'approccio strategico alla catena di fornitura: il caso ERG S.p.A.
CHIARA DE BERNARDI, MARCO FREY — " 489

Punti di svolta e passaggi critici nell'evoluzione di Enel: una analisi multidimensionale
MARIO BRUNETTI, GIANLUCA VAGNANI — " 499

Track 6 - Marketing

From Table to Closet: Exploring Italian Consumers' Willingness to Embrace Food Waste Fashion
DOMENICO MORRONE, ANNUNZIATA TARULLI, ALESSIA ANNA DITRANI, RAFFAELE SILVESTRI — " 509

Vintage Vibes or Trendy Thrift? Unveiling Generational Shifts in Second-Hand Fashion Consumption Among Early and Late Gen Z
ANNUNZIATA TARULLI, DOMENICO MORRONE, CHIARA COLAMARTINO, GAIA FIORE — " 515

Towards an Integrated Winescape Framework: a theoretical synthesis in Wine Tourism research
VALENTINA CASCIO — " 521

Exploring the Role of Sustainability in Achieving Customer Loyalty via PLS-SEM
PIERFELICE ROSATO, SAVINO SANTOVITO, MAGDA D'AGOSTINO MASSARELLI, RAFFAELE CAMPO, CRESCENZA CALCULLI — " 531

Nutri-Score and Food Perception: Insights from an Italian Study
LEOPOLDO TRIESTE, ALICE CORTI, ORNELLA BONAFEDE, ANDREA BAZZANI, GIUSEPPE TURCHETTI — " 541

Consumer (Mis)Perception of Sustainable Behaviors: Insights for Energy Usage and Food Consumption
LUDOVICA SERAFINI, ALESSANDRO MARIA PELUSO, AURORA MARTIGNANO, LUIGI PIPER, MARIA IRENE PRETE — " 547

Does seniors' co-creation enhance acceptance of digital public services? A conceptual model
ANGELA CARIDÀ, NICOLA VARRONE, BEATRICE BELLASSI — " 553

How Artificial Intelligence in Advertising Impacts Consumer Perceptions of Brand Authenticity
ALBACHIARA MATTEUCCI, ANGELO BACCELLONI — " 561

The SITE Model: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding AI and Emerging Technologies in Tourism and Hospitality
NICOLAIA IAFFALDANO, ALESSANDRO GIANNATTASIO, LORENZO SAPONARO, CESARE AMATULLI, MARCO PICHIERRI — " 569

T*he Power of Transparency: Can Disclosing AI-Generated Advertising Enhance Consumer Perceptions, Attitude, and Dispositions?*
VERONICA MAROZZO, FABRIZIO CESARONI, TINDARA ABBATE, AUGUSTO D'AMICO — " 575

Enhancing the Identity of Made in Italy: The Role of Augmented Reality in the Food Sector. Analysis of U.S. Consumers' Purchase Behavior
VALERIA VIGNOLI — " 581

Investigating Effective Health Communication Strategies to Enhance Customer Engagement in Preventive Health Behaviors.
VALENTINA SBROLLI, LAURA GRAZZINI, GAETANO AIELLO PAG. 589

AI and sustainability: Preliminary insights from a bibliometric analysis
MIHAELA GIANNELLI, ALESSANDRO MARIA PELUSO " 595

All That Glitters Is Not Gold, but Words: Transparency and Uniqueness in Luxury Brand Building Through Storytelling
VIRGINIA GRETTER, MARCO FRANCESCO MAZZÙ, ANGELO BACCELLONI " 603

Consumers' Expectations Elicited by Frozen Food Packaging Colors in Digital Environments
RAFFAELE CAMPO, DANIELE PORCHEDDU, PIERFELICE ROSATO, SAVINO SANTOVITO " 613

Persuasion knowledge activation versus health knowledge intervention: enhancing the effectiveness of Front-of-pack nutritional labels against misleading information
JUN HE, MARCO FRANCESCO MAZZÙ, CINZIA CALLUSO, PIERPAOLO IODICE, REGIS THOUVARECQ " 621

Research advances in Front-of-Pack Nutritional Labeling and stages of policy life cycles: A Systematic Review
VALERIA GAMMELLA QUINTERO, MARCO FRANCESCO MAZZÙ, ANGELO BACCELLONI " 627

Understanding the Motivation of Co-Creation in Urban Living Labs: A Preliminary Study on Citizen Engagement
GIUSEPPE CECI, MAURO GATTI, MICHELA IANNOTTA " 635

Bridging the Trust Gap and Digital Divide: A Dual-Path Model of Public Service Satisfaction
GIOELE ZAMPARO, MICHELA CESARINA MASON, SANDRO BRUNO, ANDREA MORETTI " 641

Empowering Consumers in Participatory Pricing: a Comparative Analysis of Pay-What-You-Want and "Choose a Price" Models and Their Impact on Consumers' Willingness to Co-Create Value
FRANCESCA SAMMARTINO, ALFONSO SIANO, AGOSTINO VOLLERO, ALESSANDRA FERRARA " 647

The use of PLS-SEM by the Italian management scholars' community: An updated review and some guidelines
FABIO CASSIA, FRANCESCA MAGNO " 655

Track 7 - Purpose-driven Businesses

Sostenibilità e Creazione di Valore Condiviso: il Contributo degli Incubatori nella Generazione dell'Impatto
GABRIELE LECIS, LEONARDO CORBO " 669

Stili di leadership e tratti della personalità: strategie per eccellere nelle organizzazioni non-profit
ILENIA CEGLIA, NORA ANNESI, MASSIMO BATTAGLIA " 675

Redefining business for a sustainable future: firm transformation through a purpose-driven logic
MARIA CRISTINA DARDANO, MONIA MELIA " 683

The relevance of biodiversity practices for business: A purpose-driven perspective
MAURO CAPESTRO, STEFANO DENICOLAI " 691

When the Lights Go Out: Orchestrating Social Innovation with Hybrid Funding
JORDANA RECH GRACIANO DOS SANTOS, IAN MCCARTHY, DOUGLAS WEGNER " 699

The New Longevity Economy: its Definition and its Ecosystem
GIULIA NEVI, LUCA DEZI " 703

From Purpose to Impact: A Multi-Level Framework for Embedding Human-Centered Values in Service Ecosystems
MUHAMMAD JUNAID SHAHID HASNI, ERICA SANTINI, MARIA DELLA LUCIA, STEFAN LAZIC " 711

Changing for Good: Conceptualizing life-affirming organizations
STEFAN LAZIC, MARIA DELLA LUCIA PAG. 716

Generativity, responsible innovation and biodiversity: the contribution of business to the common good
MARTINA TAFURO, VALENTINA CUCINO, GIANLUCA GIONFRIDDO, ANDREA PICCALUGA " 723

Open innovation 2.0 for sustainability: the different way to implement business model innovation
ROSARIA FERLITO, ROSARIO FARACI " 729

Humane Entrepreneurial Orientation: Strategic Posture and Performance Implications Across Italian Firms
ROSANGELA FEOLA, CHIARA CRUDELE, GIOVANNI BALDI, MASSIMILIANO VESCI, ANTONIO BOTTI " 737

Ruolo dei facilitatori nell'Open Social Innovation: processi di co-creazione a supporto della fragilità
CHIARA PALAGONIA, VALENTINA CUCINO, ANDREA MARIO CUORE PICCALUGA " 743

Track 8 - Retailing & Service Management

Disclosing the AI Identity: How Virtual Assistant Transparency Shapes Consumer Perceptions and Purchase Behavior
SIMONE AIOLFI, CHIARA BACCHILEGA, SILVIA BELLINI, DAVIDE PELLEGRINI " 751

Socio-Demographic Clustering and Localized Competition: A Spatial Analysis of Grocery Retail Markets in France
MICHELE BADOLATO " 761

Sustainable value propositions and the purchasing gap: a consumer-centric analysis
GIULIA GOGIALI, GIULIA NEVI, DILETTA BARTOLESCHI, LUCA DEZI " 769

Health and Healthy Eating. Retailers' Communication and Consumers' Perception in Online conversations
BEATRICE CECCOLI, ANNA BONCOMPAGNI, GUIDO CRISTINI, DONATA TANIA VERGURA, CRISTINA ZERBINI " 777

Promoting Healthy Choices at the Point of Sale: The combined effect of Space Management and In-store Communication
SUSANNA GRAZIANO, BENEDETTA GRANDI, MARIA GRAZIA CARDINALI, GUIDO CRISTINI " 785

The role of recovery strategies in online service failures: a cross-national study
GIOVANNA BAGNATO, VANIA VIGOLO, ATTIA ABDELKADER ALI, FELIPE RUIZ-MORENO " 791

The role of special events and AI in amusement parks to improve the customer experience and performance
ANTONELLA ANGELINI, MAURIZIO CRISANTI, MARCO TRASSINELLI " 795

An empirical study on the perception of AI-generated online reviews among university students
GRAZIANO ABRATE, VALERIA FARALLA, " 803

The dimensions of the hospitality experience quality in the long-term care organizations: preliminary empirical results
ANGELO BONFANTI, PAOLA CASTELLANI, NICOLA COBELLI, CHIARA ROSSATO, FRANCESCA SIMEONI " 809

Track 9 - Small & Family Business

Preliminary Findings on Knowledge Transfer in Family Firms: Insights from Family Communication Patterns Theory
FEDERICA ROMANO, GIORGIA MARIA D'ALLURA " 819

Track 10 - Strategic Communication

Municipalities Facebook Pages and sustainability challenges
MAFALDA EIRÓ-GOMES, IARA GRAÇA, SARA SANTOS PAG. 829

Corporate Social Responsibility: How can businesses implement their initiatives?
ANNA PIERGALLINO, ANTONELLA CAMMAROTA " 837

Sustainability Communication in Corporate Strategy: The Case of Valmex S.p.A.
ALESSIO TRAVASI, EMANUELA CONTI, FABIO MUSSO, GIORGIA CUCCHIARINI " 843

From Loss to Gain: Rethinking Value Co-Destruction in Strategic Communication. Insights From the Banking Sector
FRANCESCA SAMMARTINO, DOMENICO SARDANELLI, FRANCESCA CONTE, MADDALENA DELLA VOLPE, ALFONSO SIANO " 849

Strategic Brand Management in Luxury Tourism: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Mangia's Online Communication
WALTER SPEZZANO, GIUSEPPINA LO MASCOLO, CAMILLA VÁSQUEZ " 857

Track 11 - Strategy & Governance

Strategic management in the public sector: new leadership models to navigate the turbulent post-Covid era.
DARIO NATALE PALMUCCI, CHRISTIAN DI PRIMA, DEVID SPARAPANI, ALBERTO FERRARIS " 867

Do Financial Indicators Affect Employee Resilience? Examining the Mediating Role of Employee Motivation
MEYSAM SALIMI, FRANCESCO MASSARA, FRANCESCO DE MATTEO " 875

Market demand shocks, bottom-up approach to firm's risk analysis, and risk-return arbitrages
ANTONIO RENZI, PIETRO TARAGONI, GIANLUCA VAGNANI, PAOLO SAONA HOFFMANN " 881

Managerial Capabilities Revisited: A Bibliometric Journey Through Theory and Practice
MARIA GRAZIA STRANO " 889

Circular Economy Disclosure and ESG Performance: Measuring Impact Beyond Greenwashing
CHIARA LEGGERINI, MARTINA PERCUOCO, IRENE RICCIARDI, ANNA PRISCO " 897

Board gender diversity, spillover effects on managerial training and firm performance
ANNA MENOZZI, ROBERTO GABRIELE, OKSANA TOKARCHUK " 905

Track 12 - Supply Chain Management, Logistics & Operations

Fostering humanitarian supply chain towards positive environmental sustainability impact. Insights from experiences in logistics operations.
ALESSANDRA COZZOLINO " 913

Green Logistics Practices Driving Buyer Decision-Making: A Study on Logistics Service Provider Selection
CHIARA SGUIZZARDI, BENEDETTA BALDI " 919

Natural resource scarcity and green supply chain management of the firm
FRANCESCO GHEZZI, ELEONORA ANNUNZIATA, FRANCESCO RIZZI " 925

The Role of Consumers in Circular Supply Chains: A Multi-Sector Case Study
LAURA BRAVI, FABIO MUSSO, ALESSIO TRAVASI, GIADA PIERLI " 933

Traceability in Circular Supply Chains: the role of digital technologies
SARA SAVY, NADIA DI PAOLA, SILVIA COSIMATO, ROBERTO VONA, NUNZIA CAPOBIANCO " 939

Transizione circolare nella gestione dei rifiuti tessili nell'Unione Europea. Barriere sistemiche ed opportunità strategiche
ALICE GUZZETTI, VALERIA BELVEDERE PAG. 947

Developing a Capabilities Matrix for Agri-Food Companies in Piemonte
DARIO PEIRONE, JUDY YUEH LING SONG " 953

Optimizing transportation management through product feature forecasting: a Design Science approach
ALESSANDRO RIZZOTTI, IVAN RUSSO, JAN HOLMSTRÖM " 959

Unveiling Omnichannel Strategy Dynamics through Topic Modeling Methodology and Fuzzy-TISM Analysis
FRANCESCO RUSSO, MARCO ROMANO, VIJAY PEREIRA " 969

"Online or offline? That is the question". The wine distribution channels dilemma
FABRIZIO BALDASSARRE, SAVINO SANTOVITO " 975

Assuring Supply Chain Resilience in the aeronautic industry: a Total Cost of Ownership perspective
BARBARA GAUDENZI, ALESSANDRA COZZOLINO " 981

Track 13 - Sustainability

Implementing ESG Criteria in Italian SMEs: Regulatory Challenges and the Role of Innovative Digital Tools in the Context of the CSRD Directive
GIOVANNI SPATOLA, MARIO D'AVINO " 989

Unpacking ESG performance and the relation with green innovation: the moderating role of board cultural diversity
ELISA FIORE, JORDANA RECH GRACIANO DOS SANTOS, ROBERTO URBANI " 993

Understanding the Interplay Between ESG Performance and ESG Controversies: A Quadrant-Based Framework
EMILIA FILIPPI, ALICE ALOSI " 999

Corporate purpose and sustainability: Do SDGs references in Purpose statements influence ESG performance?
LUCIA BARRA, ADELE PARMENTOLA, MICHELE COSTAGLIOLA DI FIORE " 1007

The Impact of Green Training on Workforce Behavior, Environmental Performance, and Reputation: A European Study
GIULIA ALESSANDRI, FABIO IANNONE, ANNAMARIA PESCI, TIBERIO DADDI, FABIO IRALDO " 1013

Control Points Perspective in Environmental Business Strategies: Corporate Roles in Shaping Sustainable Markets
VITTORIO MARIA GARIBBO, RENÉ BOHNSACK, FRANCESCO RIZZI, ELEONORA ANNUNZIATA, MARCO FREY " 1019

Trusting Green Energy: How Social and Emotional Value Drive Peer-to-Peer Energy Adoption
DOMENICO DE FANO, ROSAMARTINA SCHENA, ANGELOANTONIO RUSSO " 1031

On a mission to get funds: the demand for venture capital of impact oriented ventures
VALENTINA LO MELE, ANITA QUAS, STEFANO ROMITO, CLODIA VURRO " 1037

Understanding Paradoxical Thinking in Corporate Sustainability Antecedents, Processes, and Outcomes
GIOVANNI GESIOT, ALICE ALOSI, FRANCESCO RIZZI, ELEONORA ANNUNZIATA, MARCO FREY " 1045

Assessing costs and benefits of a Nature-based Solution through a triple bottom line and participatory approach.
GIORGIA CONDOMITTI, MARIA ROSA DE GIACOMO, SARA TESSITORE, MARCO FREY " 1051

Exploring Customer-Centric Sustainability and Brand Relationships in Fast Fashion: Evidence from Indian Consumers
MANJITHA MATHEW, POORNIMA VIJAYKUMAR, LUCA PERSICO, RICCARDO SPINELLI PAG. 1057

Towards a sustainable present: strategies and innovation for food sustainability
ANTONIO CAPASSO, MAXIMILIAN BROGLIO " 1065

Analysis of three sustainability labels in the Food&Beverage sector
MAXIMILIAN BROGLIO " 1071

Shaping Circular Economy Ecosystems: Foundations for a Framework
MONIA MELIA, MARIA CRISTINA DARDANO, MARIA COLURCIO " 1077

An exploratory study on consumer sustainable responses to nature-inspired VR brand experiences
SARA BOCCALINI, MICHELA PATRIZI, MARIA VERNUCCIO, ALBERTO PASTORE " 1083

Beyond Good Intentions: Unpacking the Paradox of Sustainable and Responsible Consumption Across Sectors
CECILIA GRIECO, ALESSIO DI LEO, ALBERTO MATTIACCI " 1091

Corporate Green Commitment: Exploring international exposure and value chain decarbonization
ALBA MARINO, GIOVANNA TERRIZZI, DANIELA BAGLIERI, MARIA CRISTINA CINICI " 1097

Sustainability in Retail: A framework, review and future research agenda
GENNI PERLANGELI " 1105

Towards a Conceptual Framework of Enabling Factors for Industrial Symbiosis Within Industrial Parks
MARIA COSCIA, ALESSANDRA DE CHIARA " 1115

Exploring the complexity of choosing a smartphone: How do perceived sustainability tensions and paradoxical mindset influence greener consumer choices?
ROBERTA IOVINO, VINICIO DI IORIO, MICOL BATELLI, FRANCESCO TESTA " 1123

The Impact of Sustainability in Work Psychology and Corporate Training
MARIO D'AVINO, GIOVANNI SPATOLA, ANTONIO CAPASSO " 1131

New Sustainability Models in Businesses of the Italian Inland Areas
ANTONIO CAPASSO, GIOVANNI SPATOLA, MARIO D'AVINO " 1135

Addressing Biodiversity Loss: How can management studies contribute to public policy development?
JACOPO CRICCHIO, ANDREA PICCALUGA, ALBERTO DI MININ " 1139

Leading data-driven transformation towards sustainability: the role of transformational leadership and digital-enabled capabilities
MARICA GREGO, COSTANZA BALDRIGHI, STEFANO DENICOLAI " 1145

Social Innovation and Well-Being: Exploring the Relationship Through a Bibliometric Analysis
GIORGIA MASILI, DANIELE BINCI " 1153

A systematic literature review on drivers and barriers for supply chain decarbonization.
GIORGIA CONDOMITTI, MARIA ROSA DE GIACOMO, MARCO FREY " 1163

Decoding the Twin Transition: Integrating Theory and Practice in Digital and Sustainable Transformation
GIUSEPPE BONGIORNO, MARIA COLURCIO " 1171

Choose Sustainable! How Digital Nudging positively impacts consumer behavior and corporate reputation
SIMONE AIOLFI, CHIARA BACCHILEGA, SILVIA BELLINI, DAVIDE PELLEGRINI " 1179

Diversità di genere nella leadership: un fattore chiave per la resilienza d'impresa?
FURIO URSO, CRISTINA LEONE, PASQUALE MASSIMO PICONE, MARIA FRANCESCA CRACOLICI " 1187

Leveraging DEI to Foster a Sustainable Work Context: A Study on Italian Employees
SILVIA RAVAZZANI, MARGHERITA ZITO, CHIARA FISICHELLA, ALESSANDRA MAZZEI, ALFONSA BUTERA PAG. 1193

Mapping the Stakeholder Network and Value Creation in Grassroots Football: Evidence from Italy
ANDREA FRANZONI, MARCO TRAVERSI, RONGTITYA RITH, RICCARDO SPINELLI " 1199

Track 14 - Tourism & Culture Management

Smart Cities e Mega-Eventi tra Opportunità ed Elefanti Bianchi: L'Impatto della Finale UEFA Champions League sulla Digitalizzazione Urbana
FILIPPO MARCHESANI, GIUSEPPE CECI " 1207

Festivals' long-term benefits to a host destination: the challenge to adopt a legacy perspective
ELENA BELLIO, FRANCESCO CASARIN " 1213

Collaborative practices of local operators: Connecting DART model to sense of community in DMO constitution
FABIO CORONA, GIUSEPPE MELIS " 1221

The impact of mountain huts as hybrid organizations in the Italian alpine region towards a sustainable tourism development
GIULIA CAMBRUZZI, FEDERICA BUFFA, UMBERTO MARTINI, MASSIMO MORELLATO " 1227

Il nomadismo digitale come fenomeno turistico. Analisi sull'attrattività dei borghi italiani e sulle opportunità di valorizzazione dei territori
ANTONIO FERRARO, FEDERICA BUFFA, PIER LUIGI NOVI INVERARDI, UMBERTO MARTINI " 1235

La digitalizzazione delle collezioni d'arte moderna e contemporanea in Italia
ENRICO CRISAFULLI " 1243

Museums as knowledge-based organisations and Metaverse: preliminary evidence from a multiple case study
CRISTINA CATERINA AMITRANO, CIRO TROISE, MARK ANTHONY CAMILLERI " 1253

Does virtual help real? Investigating how virtual tours affect learning, satisfaction, museum liking, and willingness to visit
CONCETTA FERRARA, DOMENICO SARDANELLI, MARA CERQUETTI " 1259

Twin transition and museum ecosystem: a governance model to enable the digital and sustainable transformation
LEA IAIA, VERONICA SCUOTTO, LUCA MATTEO ZAGNI, MONICA FAIT, MARCO PIRONTI " 1267

Social Media and Smart Cities: Cultural Proximity as a Key to Digital Engagement
FILIPPO MARCHESANI, GINEVRA TESTA, KAMEL BEN YOUSSEF " 1273

Film-induced tourism: the influence of "My brilliant friend" TV series on tourist perceptions
SIMONE LUONGO, FABIANA SEPE, ELEONORA NAPOLANO, GIOVANNA DEL GAUDIO, ELENA LUPOLO " 1279

Virtual Reality and Tourism: A Literature Review
LORENZO SAPONARO, MARCO PICHIERRI " 1285

Lean Six Sigma for a Sustainable Customer Driven Model in Tourism: A Case Study Analysis
RAFFAELE TARDIO, ANTON STRAETEMANS " 1291

Leveraging Visitor Satisfaction to Enhance cultural Sites Management: Fresh Insights from Bourbon Heritage.
FABIO GRECO, AMELIA NAPOLITANO, LAURA CLEMENTE, GESUALDA IODICE, FRANCESCO BIFULCO " 1299

Tackling grand challenges: the role of Collective Action in preserving the Mediterranean coastal ecosystem
SARA TESSITORE, EDOARDO BIGOLIN, DUCCIO TOSI, NATALIA GUSMEROTTI, FRANCESCO TESTA " 1305

Knowledge-Driven Innovation in Tourism SMEs: A Systematic Literature Review
ANDREA VINCIS, CINZIA DESSÌ PAG. 1313

Does the eco-entrepreneur exist in Italian hospitality? Some evidence from the tourism sector
GINEVRA TESTA, SIMONE SPLENDIANI, LUCA GIRALDI, CHIARA MENCARELLI " 1319

Sharing economy e ospitalità: sfida o opportunità? Analisi del rapporto di sostituibilità tra imprese alberghiere e affitti brevi
ROBERTA MINAZZI, DANIELE GRECHI, MICHELA SEGATO, MARTINA DENTI " 1325

Exploring change in tourism systems: a qualitative study on hospitality operators and the new Salerno airport's impact on destination management
STEFANIA ESCOBAR, MARA NORMANDO, CHRISTOPHER GAFFNEY " 1331

Action research on hotel guests' sustainable behaviour
ANNA IRIMIAS, ARIEL MITEV, LÍVIA PINTÉR-SZABÓ " 1339

A-RIES: un modello adattivo per la rigenerazione del patrimonio
MICHELA TOUSSAN, LUCA QUAGLIERI, DILETTA PILOCA, BERNARDINO QUATTROCIOCCHI " 1345

Track 15 - Tertiarization & sustainability. New challenges for management in the digital era

Can digitalization foster Social Inclusion? Evidences from Italy and Switzerland
FEDERICO MERTOLI, CARMELA ELITA SCHILLACI, JOSÉ M. ALONSO " 1355

A Systematic Literature Review on The Impact of AI, Innovation, and Digitalisation on Airport Passenger Experience
CARLO RICCARDO RAGGI " 1361

Link between digital technologies and Sustainable Development Goals in service businesses: a systematic literature review
CORRADO DE CRISTOFARO, ORLANDO TROISI, GENNARO MAIONE, MARA GRIMALDI " 1367

Governance and Digital Innovation: Redefining the Business Model Canvas
MAURO SCIARELLI, IRENE RICCIARDI, CRISTINA CERVINO, LORENZO TURRIZIANI " 1375

Generativity, responsible innovation and biodiversity: the contribution of business to the common good

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Abstract

The multiple and severe crises of our time are deeply rooted in an economic model driven by relentless growth and profit maximization. This model has not only accelerated environmental degradation and resource depletion but has also exacerbated social inequalities and weakened collective well-being. These consequences have been intensified by cultural shifts that prioritize individualism, consumerism, and immediate gratification, often at the expense of long-term prosperity. In response to these challenges, we propose generativity as a powerful alternative, a cultural and practical approach capable of fostering creativity, innovation, collaboration, and the development of new social and economic frameworks that emphasize long-term well-being over short-term gains. Generativity encourages regenerative practices, i.e., practices that systematically sustain ecological balance and social equity, positioning businesses as key agents of change.

Central to this transformation is the concept of corporate purpose, which serves as a guiding principle for businesses to define their role in society beyond profit generation. More specifically, a pro-social corporate purpose reflects an organization's commitment to align its strategic economic goals with broader social and environmental concerns. By integrating purpose into their core identity, businesses can contribute to the common good, foster stakeholder engagement and strengthen their capacity to address complex global challenges. By creating shared value, purpose-driven organizations are better equipped to balance financial performance with social impact, offering meaningful contributions to their communities while enhancing employee motivation and trust.

Closely tied to this vision is the concept of responsible innovation, which emphasizes the ethical and societal dimensions of technological and organizational advancements. Responsible innovation ensures that businesses adopt forward-looking strategies that prioritize long-term social value, inclusiveness and accountability. This approach requires organizations to anticipate potential risks, engage stakeholders in decision-making processes, and actively design innovations that contribute to societal well-being. By integrating responsible innovation into their practices, businesses can transition away from purely performance-driven models and adopt more sustainable strategies that foster resilience and adaptability.

Generativity, purpose, and responsible innovation are all deeply connected to the concept of biodiversity, which plays a vital role in counteracting the growing dominance of uniformity and de-differentiation in economic and social systems. Biodiversity, in this context, extends beyond environmental conservation to encompass diverse business models, organizational structures and innovative approaches. By promoting variety in entrepreneurial practices and encouraging flexible solutions, biodiversity reinforces resilience and strengthens the capacity of businesses to thrive.

Our research aims to provide empirical evidence of the connections between generativity, corporate purpose, responsible innovation and biodiversity. To achieve this, we have designed a quantitative study that involves distributing structured questionnaires to 200 micro-enterprises and 200 SMEs across Italy. The questionnaire explores multiple dimensions of these themes using Likert scales (5-point and 7-point) and multiple-choice questions informed by recent literature and validated by two research groups.

We anticipate that our findings will offer valuable insights into how generativity shapes corporate purpose, how responsible innovation can strengthen biodiversity, and how these interconnected themes collectively foster purpose-driven business practices. By examining micro-enterprises and SMEs, often overlooked in research on responsible business, our study highlights the potential of these smaller organizations to act as catalysts for meaningful change. Ultimately, our goal is to build a conceptual framework that supports businesses in transitioning from a growth-focused economic model to one that prioritizes generativity and biodiversity. By integrating purpose into their strategies, businesses can unlock new pathways to responsible innovation, biodiversity preservation and shared value creation.

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Framing of the research. *This research is situated within the broader context of the pressing crises that define the contemporary world, which have been significantly influenced by the societal shift from a culture of necessity to one of desire, particularly in the wealthier nations (Bauman and Magatti, 2007). More specifically, Magatti argues that the paradox of desire lies in the fact that, despite living in an age obsessed with it, desire is actually diminishing. Modernity attempts to define, possess, and satisfy desire, reducing it to concepts like happiness, interest, and utility, which ultimately strip it of its depth. In this transformation, desire is desecrated rather than safeguarded, leading to an endless yet futile attempt to fill what can never truly be satisfied. This transformation, while accompanying an unprecedented era of economic growth, has also triggered a series of severe social, environmental, and economic problems that characterize the "anthropocene", an epoch defined by human-induced changes to the planet (Magatti and Giaccardi, 2024). These interconnected challenges, ranging from environmental degradation to rising social inequalities, demand an urgent and multifaceted response. Central to this response is the need for a profound shift in our cultural, social, and economic paradigms, particularly in how we approach business and its role in society (Giaccardi and Magatti, 2022). In addressing these crises, the project will focus on two core elements: generativity and corporate purpose, exploring how these concepts can drive the necessary change.*

Generativity, in this context, refers to both a cultural and practical response to crises, emphasizing long-term and system thinking, and the cultivation of systems that generate positive, lasting outcomes for society and the environment (Magatti and Giaccardi, 2014; Magatti and Giaccardi, 2024). The study will explore how generative practices - those that focus on nurturing wellbeing, life, culture, and the environment can provide a viable alternative to current patterns of exploitation and consumption. The concept of corporate purpose, which has gained prominence in recent years (e.g., George et al., 2023), will be examined as a critical tool for guiding organizations toward the need to contribute to the common good.

Purpose of the paper. *The purpose of this paper is to develop a deep understanding of how generativity and corporate purpose can contribute to a shift toward biodiversity. This study seeks to explore how these two concepts can serve as critical drivers in transforming business models, especially in the context of SMEs, towards more responsible, sustainable, and biodiverse approaches. By combining these two emerging fields, we aim to provide a fresh perspective on how businesses can align their operations with broader societal and environmental goals, moving beyond traditional profit-maximization strategies to focus on long-term value creation and positive social impact (Asselle and Piccaluga, 2019).*

Generativity is a central concept in this paper, representing the drive to create new, life-affirming systems that promote ecological sustainability, social well-being, and economic equity. Generative practices are those that focus on long-term solutions rather than short-term gains, emphasizing responsible innovation that not only seeks profitability but also aims to restore and regenerate the environment, create social value, and contribute to the common good (Magatti and Giaccardi, 2014; Magatti and Giaccardi, 2024). We will investigate how generativity can be embedded within the corporate purpose of SMEs, fostering a culture that prioritizes responsibility, long-term sustainability, and the creation of shared value. Generative businesses are not merely reactive to crises but proactive in designing solutions that address the root causes of these issues, contributing to the regeneration of both their communities and the environment.

Corporate purpose, as explored in this paper, extends beyond the traditional view of a company's role in society. It is no longer sufficient for a business to operate solely to maximize profit. A company's purpose must now include creating value for all its stakeholders: employees, customers, local communities, and the broader society. George et al. (2023) define purpose in for-profit companies as "the essence of an organization's existence by explaining what value it seeks to create for its stakeholders. In doing so, purpose provides a clear definition of the firm's intent, creates the ability for stakeholders to identify with, and be inspired by, the firm's mission, vision, and values, and establishes actionable pathways and an aspirational outcome for the firm's actions" (p. 1847). We will examine how SMEs can embrace a purpose-driven approach, integrating it into their strategic vision and daily operations. The integration of corporate purpose with generativity presents an opportunity to transition from a purely financial-driven mindset to one that actively contributes to the common good (Cucino et al., 2023). Consequently, we formulated our first research hypothesis:

***Hypothesis 1 (H1):** Corporate purpose positively contributes to generativity.*

This paper will investigate how the combination of generativity and corporate purpose can also drive responsible innovation within companies. Von Schomberg (2013) defines responsible innovation as "a transparent, interactive process by which societal actors and innovators become mutually responsive to each other with a view to the (ethical) acceptability, sustainability and societal desirability of the innovation process and its marketable products" (p. 19). By fostering an innovative mindset that embraces generative principles and aligns with a clear corporate purpose, SMEs can develop solutions that address the most pressing global challenges, such as environmental degradation, inequality, and resource scarcity. We will explore how SMEs can use responsible innovation not just to compete in the market, but to become agents of change that help drive a shift toward more generative systems. Consequently, we formulated our second research hypothesis:

***Hypothesis 2 (H2):** Responsible innovation positively moderates the relationship between corporate purpose and generativity, such that the relationship is stronger when responsible innovation is high.*

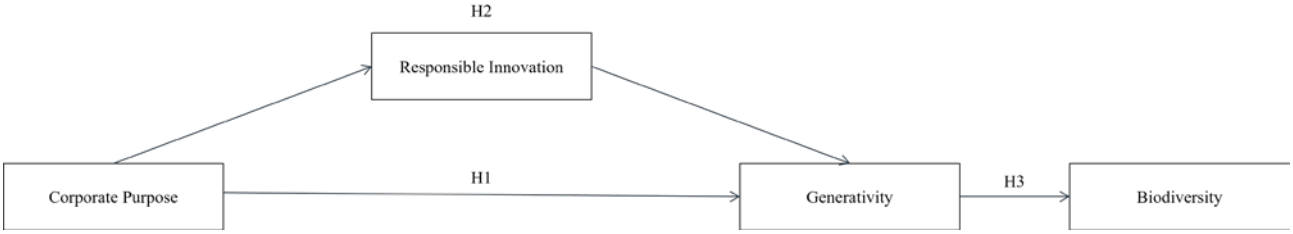
Additionally, the paper will explore how these concepts, generativity and corporate purpose, interact with biodiversity, another crucial factor in the sustainability transition. Biodiversity is not just an environmental issue but a central component of both social and economic well-being. The preservation of biodiversity is critical to maintaining

healthy ecosystems, which in turn support human life and prosperity. We will explore how SMEs, through their generative and purpose-driven activities, can contribute to the protection and restoration of biodiversity, whether by implementing sustainable practices, promoting circular economies, or innovating products and services that benefit both nature and society. By connecting these themes, we aim to offer a holistic framework for understanding how SMEs can drive sustainability at both the business and societal levels. Consequently, we formulated our third research hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): *Generativity positively contributes to biodiversity.*

Through the empirical analysis of Italian micro-enterprises and SMEs, we will collect data that supports the theoretical connections between these concepts, testing the following research model:

Fig. 1: Research model



This research will provide valuable insights into how SMEs can actively contribute to the achievement of sustainability goals, offering evidence-based recommendations for businesses to align their strategies with generativity and corporate purpose. The findings will contribute to the growing body of literature on sustainable business practices, particularly in the context of smaller enterprises, and offer a new perspective on how these businesses can serve as catalysts for positive social, environmental, and economic change. While much research has focused on large corporations as the primary drivers of change, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have often been overlooked despite their potential to influence broader economic and social dynamics. This study intends to bridge that gap by focusing on SMEs, particularly Italian micro-enterprises and small businesses, to understand how they can integrate generativity and purpose into their practices. The research will seek to answer how these enterprises can move from being seen as merely profit-driven entities to becoming key contributors to societal well-being and environmental sustainability. By exploring the interconnections between generativity, corporate purpose, responsible innovation, and biodiversity, we aim to develop a comprehensive framework that will guide SMEs in their transition toward sustainability, providing empirical evidence of how they can contribute to the solution of the crises we face today.

Methodology. *The methodology for this research consists of three key phases: design, data collection, and data analysis. In the design phase, we developed a structured questionnaire for CEOs and general managers of micro-enterprises and SMEs in Italy, aimed at assessing the influence of generativity on corporate purpose, the impact of responsible innovation on biodiversity, and the combined effects of these factors. The constructs are defined based on recent literature, and each of them is measured following established frameworks. For generativity, we take into account three generativity phases and three dimensions with a 7-points Likert scale. The first phase, "creative generativity", assesses the business's ability to generate new ideas and projects. The second phase, "organizational generativity", focuses on how the business supports and nurtures ideas and projects over the long term. The third phase, "transitive generativity", evaluates the business's ability to help projects grow autonomously, with respondents rating their company's support for ongoing innovation. As far as concerns dimensions, we measure the "intertemporal" dimension to understand how the company creates value with a medium-to-long-term perspective, taking into account future generations. The "intersubjective" dimension examines the extent to which the company engages, values, and nurtures external partners. Lastly, the "contextual" dimension assesses how the company stimulates change and inspires new initiatives in the surrounding community, city, or territory.*

For corporate purpose, we refer to the construct developed by Jasinenko & Steuber (2023), which emphasizes the perceived organizational purpose by employees and its alignment with both internal values and external societal needs. The measurement of corporate purpose is grounded in a scale that evaluates four dimensions of purpose: authenticity, guidance, contribution and inspiration. This approach allows us to capture the perception of purpose as a guiding principle in strategy, with a focus on its impact on common good.

For responsible innovation, we employed the scale developed by Zhang et al. (2023). This scale focuses on four factors: anticipation, reactivity, inclusion and reflexivity. Companies are asked to rate how their innovation practices contribute to these areas, using a 7-points Likert scale. The scale is designed to capture both the degree to which innovation is integrated with responsible practices and the extent to which the organization prioritizes the inclusion of stakeholders in its innovation processes.

Finally, biodiversity is measured based on its key components: monitoring, restoration, compensation and prevention, measured with a 5-points Likert scale. This approach is informed by established practices for assessing biodiversity conservation efforts in organizations. The items capture the extent to which companies are currently engaging in biodiversity-related actions, as well as their willingness or potential interest in doing so. This approach aligns with

standard practices for assessing biodiversity conservation in organizations and helps to gauge both the current state of engagement and the potential for future involvement.

In the data collection phase, we collected data through the method of Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) to ensure a high response rate and representative sample. This method allows us to conduct structured interviews with business owners, managers, and directors, providing strategic insights into their organizational practices. The CATI method will facilitate real-time data collection, ensuring accuracy and reducing errors typically associated with other survey methods. The interviews will be conducted with 200 micro-enterprises and 200 SMEs across Italy, ensuring a diverse sample that reflects different industries and regional contexts. Respondents will be asked to provide their answers to the questions based on their company's current practices regarding generativity, corporate purpose, responsible innovation, and biodiversity.

In the data analysis phase, we will employ both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Specifically, we will test our hypotheses through multiple regression models based on Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), also considering the impact of control variables such as firm size, industry, and regional context influence the results. SEM will be used to examine the causal connections and the strength of relationships between the themes, allowing us to test the theoretical framework. SEM will help us assess direct and indirect effects, providing a comprehensive understanding of the relationships between the variables. This multivariate approach will allow us to identify patterns, assess their significance, and offer a robust picture of how generativity, corporate purpose, responsible innovation, and biodiversity influence sustainability outcomes.

Results. *We anticipate that our findings will offer robust insights into the dynamic relationship between generativity, corporate purpose, innovation, and biodiversity. We expect to identify key patterns that demonstrate how generativity drives purpose-driven business strategies, fostering long-term biodiversity and innovation. Specifically, we hypothesize that companies with a strong generative orientation will demonstrate greater commitment to sustainable practices, enhanced stakeholder engagement, and increased innovation linked to social and environmental impact. Additionally, we expect our findings to reveal how biodiversity-focused strategies - both in ecological terms and in promoting diverse organizational models - enhance business adaptability and long-term viability.*

In addition to testing the proposed hypotheses, this research aims to develop a comprehensive framework for the "Generative Principle" that can serve as a practical guide for businesses. This framework will outline actionable strategies and best practices to help organizations foster generativity, leveraging corporate purpose, responsible innovation and biodiversity initiatives. By doing so, the study seeks to provide managers and decision-makers with concrete tools to enhance their positive impact on prosperity. We will analyze how responsible innovation practices strengthen biodiversity initiatives, drive environmentally conscious decision-making and helping businesses navigate the complexities of today's volatile landscape. Furthermore, we aim to provide evidence that companies embracing these interconnected themes are better positioned to transition from growth-focused capitalism to sustainability-driven models.

Research limitations. *We acknowledge several potential limitations in our study. First, the sample size, while extensive, is limited to Italian micro-enterprises and SMEs, which may restrict the generalizability of our findings to other regions or larger firms. Additionally, as our data relies on self-reported questionnaires, there is a risk of response bias. Future research should expand the scope by including international comparisons and exploring sector-specific dynamics to build on our insights.*

Managerial implications. *Our findings will offer actionable insights for managers and business leaders seeking to integrate generativity into their strategic frameworks. By adopting generativity-driven practices, firms can develop purpose-driven strategies that balance economic performance with social and environmental responsibility. Managers will gain guidance on how to foster organizational cultures that embrace innovation, collaboration, and long-term thinking. In particular, our research emphasizes the importance of cultivating a workplace environment that actively encourages experimentation, knowledge-sharing, and collective problem-solving. Managers who embed generativity principles into their leadership styles can enhance employee engagement, foster greater innovation, and improve decision-making processes that prioritize long-term value creation over short-term gains. Moreover, these insights can support businesses in building stronger stakeholder relationships, as a generative approach often aligns corporate values with social and environmental objectives.*

Additionally, the insights on biodiversity will inform businesses on how promoting diversity in organizational structures, products, and partnerships can drive resilience and innovation. By aligning these strategies with corporate purpose, managers can position their firms as forward-thinking leaders in sustainability, meeting the growing demand for ethical, environmentally responsible business practices.

Our research further highlights that by adopting generativity-focused strategies, managers can leverage biodiversity as a tool for fostering adaptability in rapidly changing market conditions. By diversifying supply chains, encouraging multi-disciplinary collaborations, and engaging in open innovation processes, firms can reduce their dependency on rigid business models and enhance their capacity to innovate in response to emerging challenges.

Originality of the paper. *This paper will offer a novel approach by integrating the emerging fields of corporate purpose and generativity within the broader context of responsible innovation and biodiversity. While current literature tends to treat these topics as separate entities, we seek to merge them into a unified framework that consider the inherent complexity of pressing societal and environmental challenges of our time. The originality of this paper lies in its conceptualization of the "Generative Principle", which serves as the central framework linking these diverse yet*

interrelated concepts. Additionally, we place a strong emphasis on the role of businesses as transformative agents capable of bridging the gap between theoretical models and real-world applications in the pursuit of biodiversity. The exploration of how businesses can contribute to generativity through actions that foster social equity and environmental well-being is particularly timely, given the current urgency for change in both societal structures and organizational practices.

A key element that distinguishes this research is its focus on micro-enterprises and SMEs, which have traditionally been overlooked in strategic and sustainability-oriented studies. While large corporations have long been the focal point of discussions on corporate responsibility and sustainable practices, smaller companies are often neglected, despite their substantial potential to foster positive change in local economies and broader societal contexts. This paper will fill an important gap in the literature by examining how micro-enterprises and SMEs can actively contribute to generativity, corporate purpose, responsible innovation and biodiversity, thus serving as key catalysts for social and environmental transformation. Through this unique lens, we aim to demonstrate that smaller enterprises, far from being mere bystanders, can drive innovation and sustainability within their respective sectors and communities.

The paper also stands out for its empirical research design, which involves surveying Italian micro-enterprises and SMEs to gather data that supports the theoretical framework. By employing a quantitative approach, this study will offer robust empirical evidence that connects the concepts of corporate purpose, responsible innovation, generativity, and biodiversity. The use of a survey allows us to directly capture insights from businesses actively engaged in sustainability practices, providing a clearer understanding of how these smaller entities are contributing to environmental and social well-being. Furthermore, this research aims to contribute to the literature by offering new insights into how businesses can shift from traditional profit-driven models to more purpose-driven models, thereby promoting a broader transition toward a sustainability-focused economy.

Keywords: *generativity; purpose; biodiversity; responsible innovation*

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