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## Article

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# JOURNAL OF BUSINESS MODELS

## EDITORIAL: Introduction to the Special Issue based on papers presented at the Business Model Conference 2023

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The Business Model Conference 2023, hosted at the University of Bologna (Forlì Campus) in early June, provided members of the academic community with an exceptional platform to exchange ideas on cutting-edge research, innovative teaching methodologies, and exemplary practices within the field of business models.

Approximately 100 academics and practitioners from multiple disciplines attended the conference. Five influential keynote speakers inspired and challenged the participants – Professor Oliver Gassmann, Dr. Bijan Khezri, Professor Yuliya Snihur, Professor Lorenzo Massa and Dr. Luca Gatti. The conference was further enriched by a PhD colloquium, a panel debate and a teaching forum.

Under the guidance of Professor Lorenzo Massa, Professor Charles Baden-Fuller, Professor Xavier Lecocq, and Professor Benoît Demil, the PhD colloquium delved into the intricacies of business model research, providing doctoral students with an overview of its challenges. Additionally, the colloquium served as a valuable platform for students to showcase and discuss their research projects with esteemed international scholars.

The panel debate, focusing on the theme “Reconfiguration of Business Models and Ecosystems: Decoupling and Resilience”, was chaired by Professor Svetla T. Marinova. The panel consisted of three contributors – Professor Marin A. Marinov, Dr. Winfried Mueller, and Dr. Agnieszka Nowinska – who underscored the relevance of having in place strategies to adapt to market changes, new technologies, and the impacts of unforeseen events such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The teaching forum was led by Professor Anna B. Holm and Professor Jan Kyhnau with the aim of introducing participants to innovative formats and best practices in business model teaching. In particular, the forum served as a platform for not only introducing novel methodologies but also delving into the intricacies of effective business model teaching. Through insightful discussions and practical examples, attendees were equipped with a diverse toolkit to enhance their teaching repertoire.

The Scientific Committee was highly active both before and after the conference. In the months leading up to the event, the Committee reviewed all submitted papers to uphold a rigorous standard of quality. Following this thorough review process, the selected papers were carefully categorized into 11 distinct streams for presentation during the conference – Resilience and flexibility; Digitalization; Sustainable ecosystems; Platforms and data; New frontiers; Open innovation; Circularity; Innovation; Managerial dimension; Ecosystems; Sustainability.

After the conference, the Scientific Committee selected the five papers that are included in this special issue of the *Journal of Business Models*. The selection criteria emphasized originality, significance, and rigor, resulting in a collection of papers that tackle business model challenges from diverse angles and methodologies. In the following sections, I will provide a brief overview of these papers, highlighting their individual objectives and contributions.

Ferlito and Faraci explore the structure of business ecosystem governance in network-based business models. A cross-sectional field study was conducted, focusing on six Italian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating as benefit corporations. The results indicate that the governance arrangement of business ecosystems within

network-based business models is hybrid in nature. This hybridity arises from the need for both centralized mechanisms, such as defining shared value, creating and orchestrating ecosystems, and managing risks and tensions, as well as decentralized mechanisms, including activities for value creation, external communication, and establishing network participation rules.

Fielt starts from the consideration that research on how external changes enable digital business model innovation has so far mainly taken an inside-out perspective focusing on, for example, the innovation process or dynamic capabilities of an organization. Differently from previous research, the paper presents a framework for digital business model innovation, adopting an external, outside-in perspective that focuses on how digital technologies, as environmental changes, enable business model innovation. In particular, the framework explains how digital technologies as external enablers influence business model innovation through their types, characteristics, mechanisms and roles. The paper also uses the core elements of the framework to derive specific research questions.

Mozheiko and Sund take as their starting point the consideration that when a multinational corporation operates diverse business models across different markets, a common dilemma arises between tailoring strategies to local markets and leveraging economies of scale and scope across markets. This paper aims to explore how a local subsidiary can innovate its business model to align with the specifics of the local market while maintaining coherence within the broader corporate framework. Through a single in-depth case study, the authors illustrate that the subsidiary successfully navigated the tensions typically associated with managing dual business models by upholding the overarching corporate strategic mission and adhering to the corporate culture, while also refraining from directly challenging the core corporate business model.

Perrillo and Gauthier investigate the significance of the organization's ecosystem within the dynamic between digitalization and business models for sustainability. Using a single in-depth case study of a multinational company operating in the energy sector, the authors uncover distinct roles played by the ecosystem. One critical role is in maintaining a delicate balance between the organization's core business model and its emerging models designed for sustainability, which are increasingly reliant on digitalization. Additionally, the ecosystem serves as a facilitator in optimizing the organization's digital resources specifically for these emerging sustainability-driven models. Moreover, the authors find that the ecosystem has the capacity to generate new value for the organization's sustainability-focused business models.

Roslender and Lund start from the consideration that over the past twenty-five years the academic business and management literature has increasingly emphasized the importance of integrating theory into its contributions. This period coincides with the emergence and evolution of the study of business models. Despite the wealth of content and practical relevance within the evolving business model literature, there has been a noticeable lack of emphasis on theoretical matters. The aim of this paper is to highlight several avenues that scholars interested in addressing the current dearth of theoretical engagement in the business model domain might explore. Drawing inspiration largely from the social sciences rather than the more traditional natural sciences, the paper

reflects the authors' personal journeys into the business model domain and their ongoing work within and beyond it.

This special issue is composed of *short papers*, an innovative publication format designed to fast-track the publishing process and thereby accelerate the development of business model research. This goal has been accomplished through the adoption of a streamlined template and standardized content, which directs authors to concentrate on conveying a single, well-defined message. Authors are encouraged to expand upon their contributions and develop them into full-length papers, which can then be submitted to the *Journal of Business Models* or other appropriate venues.

In conclusion, I am confident that the reader will find the short papers included here to be of great value. Being a part of the Scientific Committee for the Business Model Conference since its inception has afforded me the continual opportunity to stay updated on the diverse paths that business model researchers have explored. It has truly been a privilege.

I extend my gratitude to all the members of the Scientific Committee for their dedication in reviewing the submitted papers for presentation at the conference as well as in selecting the papers for this special issue. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to Professor Robin Roslender and Professor Christian Nielsen for their invaluable support throughout the production of this special issue.

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