

Call for papers – Special Issue

Navigating Social, Environmental, and Technological Transformations in Turbulent Times: Business Model Innovation at the crossroads

Guest Editor(s):

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For decades, organisations have fully embraced the opportunity – and necessity – to transform their business models in response to technological, environmental and social changes. What is more recent, however, is that such transformations now unfold in the context of a ‘global polycrisis’ (Lawrence et al., 2024). These intertwined crises – wars, extreme weather conditions, hunger, inflation, energy shortages, pandemics, political instabilities – must be addressed holistically, as they are mutually reinforcing and generate new forms of antagonism.

Thus, despite growing awareness of the climate emergency (IPCC, 2023), organisations are often paralysed in their business model innovations (BMIs), facing increasingly significant gaps between their visions and the concrete strategies to be implemented (Bocken et al., 2025). Similarly, technology and digitally enabled BMIs have provoked ambivalent social reactions – exemplified by the rise of the gig economy (Trabucchi & Buganza, 2021) – while struggling to face the ecological challenge.

Strategic action and BMI must therefore occur within increasingly turbulent environments characterised by growing volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity and call for a holistic integration (Loann, 2024). Organisations are bearing the brunt of paradoxical tensions inherent in environmental, social and/or technological transformations (Do Vale et al., 2025). This is coupled with mounting difficulties in sensing and seizing opportunities, mitigating risks, and transforming business models, while engaging diverse stakeholders to remain resilient and impactful (Ciacci & Penco, 2024; Hamani & Simon, 2020; Snihur & Bocken, 2022).

In this context, BMI has emerged as a critical lever for organisations seeking not only to respond to but also to shape and thrive amid these transformations. BMI can be defined as “*designed, novel, nontrivial changes to the key elements of a firm’s business model and/or the architecture linking these elements*” (Foss & Saebi, 2017, p. 201). And as Teece (2010, p. 187) earlier emphasized, BMI “*involves the search for new logics of the firm and new ways to create and capture value for its stakeholders.*”

BMI can entail the transformation of an entire industry – through new entrants challenging entry barriers and reshaping competitive landscape (Markides & Sosa, 2013) – or the transformation of a single firm and eventually its broader ecosystem (Berends et al., 2016; Do Vale et al., 2025). Recent research has highlighted BMI’s role in leveraging digital technologies to create novel forms of value for business and ecosystems (Ancillai et al., 2023; Böttcher et al., 2024; Trabucchi et al., 2022; Vaska et al., 2021), enabling more circular business models (Maucuer et al., 2022), through, for example, new co-creation platforms that promote the interests of all stakeholders (Leiting et al., 2023), fostering transition thinking (Martí, 2018; Trabucchi & Buganza, 2021), supporting sustainability transitions (Bolton & Hannon, 2016; Snihur & Bocken, 2022) and inducing social innovations aligned with Grand Challenges (Gasparin et al., 2021; Rosati et al., 2023; Talebian et al., 2025).

Despite a growing body of research at the intersection of BMI and transformation processes, several critical knowledge gaps remain. While significant progress has been made in adopting BMI as a unit of analysis and in understanding firm-level transformation pathways, the complex interrelations among technological, social, and environmental transformations are still poorly understood – particularly the interaction between social, economic and environmental value

creation processes (Schneider & Clauß, 2020). The rapid evolution of pervasive and transformative digital technologies, including AI, and the development of green technologies introduce new tensions and trade-offs (Jorzik et al., 2024; Trapp & Kanbach, 2021), raising ethical and responsibility concerns (Leone & Belingheri, 2017) that remain largely unexplored in the BMI literature.

Moreover, the question of how companies introducing BMI to the market are held accountable for their negative externalities deserves greater scholarly attention (Lecocq et al., 2023). The BMI literature calls for a more detailed exploration of how its antecedents, processes, moderators and outcomes vary across transformation contexts, organisational levels (from micro to macro) and under increasing turbulent times. The current state of a global polycrisis (Lawrence et al., 2024) further challenges scholarly communities to bring clarity and guidance to the field, by examining the temporal dynamics of BMI, the roles of learning and experimentation, and the mechanisms through which organisations, leaders, and managers navigate the tensions between established business models and emerging transformation requirements (Dagilienė & Varaniūtė, 2023; Do Vale et al., 2025), while policy makers grapple with regulatory and institutional constraints (Bolton & Hannon, 2016; Delorme, 2023).

The research gaps identified in this call represent both challenges and opportunities for the academic community. They call for bridging theoretical perspectives, advancing multi-level analyses, and fostering critical thinking approaches. The intersection of BMI and transformations studies offers fertile ground for developing new theoretical frameworks, refining conceptual clarity, pursuing innovative empirical research, and generating practical insights for organisations navigating an increasingly complex environment.

The future of BMI research lies in its ability to embrace the complexity of contemporary transformations while maintaining theoretical rigor and practical relevance. This requires cross-disciplinary collaboration, innovative methodologies, and sustained attention to multi-level dynamics. By encouraging submissions that advance theory, provide empirical insights, and offer practical guidance, this special issue aims to build a more integrated and impactful body of knowledge at the intersection of BMI and transformations.

The call particularly encourages submissions that focus on BMI as the object of investigation and:

- Develop integrative theoretical frameworks that explain BMI across multiple transformation dimensions (technological, digital, environmental and/or social).
- Provide empirical evidence from diverse industries, organisational contexts, and geographic settings.
- Explore novel methodological approaches for studying the complex transformation-BMI intersections.
- Address practical challenges faced by organisations and stakeholders attempting to innovate their business models in turbulent contexts.
- Examine multi-level dynamics including managers-, firm-, ecosystem-, and territorial-level perspectives

In addition, the special issue invites (but is not limited to) submissions addressing the following key themes:

- Technology-Sustainability Nexus: What are the trade-offs and synergies between technological – or digital – transformation and sustainability transitions? How do emerging technologies – including greentech, cleantech, fintech – enable or reshape business model innovation?
- Dynamic Capabilities for Transformation: What organisational capabilities enhance BMI in turbulent contexts, and how do these capabilities evolve over time? How can start-ups and SMEs cope with resource constraints when developing dynamic capabilities to implement BMI?
- Alternative Forms of Organizing: What links exist between new forms of organisation (meta-organisations, social and solidarity-based economies, etc.), BMI and sustainability?
- Ecosystem Orchestration: How do keystone organisations coordinate BMI across ecosystem boundaries? What governance mechanisms enable successful ecosystem-level transformations?
- Territorial Embeddedness: How do local contexts influence BMI patterns? What role do territorial characteristics play in shaping transformation pathways?
- ‘Global polycrisis’ and BMI: How is BMI enacted under conditions of systemic turbulence? How do organisations manage paradoxes and tensions throughout BMI processes? To what extent can business model innovation provide solutions to multiple contemporary crises?
- BMI, social impact and sustainability: How can BMI address pressing social challenges? What mechanisms enable inclusive value creation? How should organisations introducing BMI into traditional sectors be held accountable or rewarded for their environmental and/or social externalities? How can economic, social, and environmental value be reconciled within a single business model? How can BMI be aligned with post-growth or degrowth perspectives? How can innovative sustainable business models anticipate or mitigate rebound effects?

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Timetable for submission and acceptance of papers:

- **June 30, 2026:** Deadline for complete manuscripts through online paper submission: <https://jiem.manuscriptmanager.net/>
- Guideline for authors: <http://innovations.cairn.info/en/instructions-for-authors/>
- **June 30, 2027:** Final notification for acceptance:

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