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The Problems and Opportunities of Digitalization for Sustainable Economic Growth

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ABSTRACT

Digitalization has become an important driver of economic transformation and sustainable development by reshaping production processes, business models, financial services, public administration, and consumption patterns. This study aims to examine the opportunities and challenges of digitalization in supporting sustainable economic growth. A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach was employed to identify, evaluate, and synthesize previous studies on digitalization, economic growth, sustainability, digital entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, resource efficiency, and digital transformation risks. The findings indicate that digitalization can support sustainable economic growth by increasing productivity, improving resource efficiency, encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship, expanding financial inclusion, strengthening market access, and improving public-service delivery. Digital technologies can also support sustainable development through smart systems, renewable-energy integration, sustainable consumption, and circular-economy practices. However, challenges such as the digital divide, employment insecurity, electronic waste, energy consumption, cybersecurity threats, data-privacy concerns, and market concentration remain significant. The study concludes that sustainable digital transformation requires inclusive infrastructure, digital literacy, workforce reskilling, environmental responsibility, effective governance, cybersecurity, and data protection.

Keywords: *Digital Economy, Digitalization, Economic Growth, Sustainability, Sustainable Development.*

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1. | INTRODUCTION

Digitalization has become an important structural force in contemporary economic development, transforming how firms produce goods and services, how governments deliver public services, and how individuals participate in economic activities. The expansion of digital technologies, including information and communication technologies (ICT), artificial intelligence, big data, cloud computing, the Internet of Things, blockchain, and digital platforms, has created new opportunities to improve productivity, innovation, resource allocation, and economic competitiveness. The digital economy is therefore increasingly regarded as an important factor supporting economic growth, particularly through technological innovation, human capital development, entrepreneurship, and improved access to markets and information (Niyazbekova et al., 2021; Novikova et al., 2022). However, the contribution of digitalization to economic development cannot be assessed only from the perspective of technological expansion because economic growth must also consider environmental sustainability, social inclusion, and the long-term welfare of society.

The relationship between digitalization and sustainable development has consequently attracted growing academic and policy attention. Digital technologies can contribute to sustainability by improving resource efficiency, supporting renewable energy integration, enabling smart cities, strengthening circular-economy practices, and encouraging more sustainable patterns of production and consumption. Big data and digital technologies, for example, can support organizations in monitoring resources and improving decision-making, while digital entrepreneurship can generate new business models that create economic, social, and environmental value (Fernandes et al., 2022; Raihan, 2024). Digitalization can also strengthen the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by expanding access to information, financial services, education, and public services. Digital financial inclusion is particularly relevant because digital financial services can broaden economic participation and support sustainable economic development, although disparities between urban and rural populations, income groups, and genders remain significant challenges (Tay et al., 2022).

Despite these opportunities, digitalization does not automatically produce sustainable economic growth. The rapid expansion of digital technologies can generate unintended economic, social, and environmental consequences. Existing research identifies electronic waste, increasing energy consumption, carbon emissions, digital inequality, employment insecurity, market concentration, and data-protection concerns as major challenges associated with the digital economy (Rosário & Dias, 2023; Shabur, 2024). Digital transformation may also disrupt traditional business models and labor markets as automation substitutes certain routine tasks. Without adequate reskilling, social protection, and institutional support, technological transformation may increase unemployment and widen socioeconomic inequalities. Furthermore, dependence on dominant digital platforms and foreign technological infrastructure may create concerns

regarding competition, economic sovereignty, cybersecurity, and national digital resilience (Guo et al., 2017; Orzkhanova et al., 2021).

These challenges demonstrate that the sustainability of digitalization depends not only on technological adoption but also on the quality of governance, regulatory frameworks, infrastructure, human capabilities, and institutional preparedness. A sustainable digital economy requires policies that simultaneously encourage innovation and address digital inequality, privacy, cybersecurity, employment transitions, environmental impacts, and market concentration. Nikitenko et al. (2019) emphasize that sustainable digital economic development requires strategic priorities that integrate technological progress with resource management, environmental protection, and social welfare. Similarly, Mambetova et al. (2023) argue that digital transformation should be connected with economic diversification and the development of new sectors capable of supporting sustainable development.

Therefore, the central issue is not whether digitalization creates opportunities for economic growth, but how these opportunities can be maximized while minimizing its negative consequences. Although previous studies have examined digitalization, sustainability, and economic growth separately or through specific technological perspectives, an integrated understanding of the opportunities and problems of digitalization remains important. This study therefore aims to examine the problems and opportunities of digitalization in supporting sustainable economic growth, focusing on its contribution to economic efficiency, innovation, resource utilization, entrepreneurship, and sustainable development, while also considering the risks associated with inequality, employment, environmental pressures, cybersecurity, data protection, and market concentration. By examining these dimensions together, the study seeks to provide a broader understanding of how digital transformation can be directed toward an inclusive, resilient, and sustainable economic future (Raihan, 2024; Zhang & Khaskheli, 2025).

2. | LITERATURE REVIEW

Digitalization and Sustainable Economic Growth

Digitalization refers to the increasing integration of digital technologies into economic, social, and institutional activities. In the context of economic development, digitalization can improve productivity, reduce transaction costs, facilitate access to information, and create new business models. Niyazbekova et al. (2021) explain that the development of the digital economy can stimulate economic growth through technological development, investment, and human capital formation. Similarly, Novikova et al. (2022) demonstrate that digitalization creates opportunities for sustainable socioeconomic development and can contribute to economic growth when supported by appropriate infrastructure and institutional conditions. Digital entrepreneurship further strengthens this relationship by enabling innovative business models and creating economic, social, and environmental value (Fernandes et al., 2022). Thus, digitalization can become an important instrument for sustainable

economic growth when technological development is integrated with broader economic and social objectives.

Opportunities and Challenges of Digitalization for Sustainability

The relationship between digitalization and sustainability involves both opportunities and risks. Digital technologies can support renewable energy, smart urban development, sustainable consumption, circular-economy practices, and data-driven resource management (Raihan, 2024). Digital financial inclusion can also expand access to financial services and contribute to poverty reduction and sustainable development, although disparities in digital access remain a significant concern (Tay et al., 2022). However, digital transformation can simultaneously increase electronic waste, energy consumption, carbon emissions, employment insecurity, digital inequality, market concentration, and data-privacy risks (Rosário & Dias, 2023; Shabur, 2024). Zhang and Khaskheli (2025) further emphasize that effective policy and legal frameworks are necessary to ensure that digital technologies generate economic and environmental benefits. Therefore, sustainable digitalization requires a balanced approach that promotes technological innovation while strengthening digital inclusion, human capabilities, environmental responsibility, cybersecurity, and effective governance.

3. | RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to examine the problems and opportunities of digitalization in supporting sustainable economic growth. The SLR method was selected because it enables the systematic identification, evaluation, comparison, and synthesis of findings from previous academic studies related to digitalization, the digital economy, economic growth, and sustainability. The literature search focused on peer-reviewed academic publications relevant to the relationship between digital technologies and sustainable economic development. The main sources considered included studies addressing digitalization and economic growth, digital entrepreneurship, digital financial inclusion, resource efficiency, sustainable development, environmental impacts, employment, digital inequality, cybersecurity, and data protection. The selection of literature emphasized relevance to the research objectives and the consistency of the findings with the conceptual relationship between digitalization and sustainable economic growth. The reviewed studies were analyzed qualitatively by identifying recurring themes, similarities, differences, opportunities, and challenges associated with digital transformation. The analysis was organized around two principal dimensions: the positive contribution of digitalization to economic and sustainable development and the potential risks that may limit its effectiveness. The findings were then synthesized to develop an integrated understanding of how digital technologies can contribute to sustainable economic growth while creating economic, social, technological, and environmental challenges. This approach allows the study to provide a comprehensive interpretation of existing

research and identify the conditions required for digitalization to generate inclusive, resilient, and environmentally responsible economic development.

4. | RESULTS

The results of the literature review indicate that digitalization has become an important factor in shaping sustainable economic growth through improvements in productivity, innovation, resource efficiency, market access, and public-service delivery. The reviewed literature consistently shows that digital technologies are not limited to supporting communication and information exchange but have increasingly become integrated into economic production and consumption processes. Digitalization affects the structure of economic activities by changing how businesses operate, how consumers access products and services, and how governments manage economic and social systems. Niyazbekova et al. (2021) identify the digital economy as an important factor of national economic growth because technological development can stimulate investment, strengthen human capital, and create new opportunities for economic activity. Similarly, Novikova et al. (2022) find that digitalization creates opportunities for sustainable socioeconomic development and contributes to economic growth through the development of the digital sector and the wider adoption of digital technologies.

The development of digital connectivity provides an important empirical indication of the expanding role of digitalization in economic activity. The increasing number of internet users reflects the wider penetration of digital technologies into society, while changes in GDP indicate the broader economic development occurring alongside digital transformation. The relationship between the growth of internet users and GDP in Uzbekistan is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Growth of Internet Users and GDP in Uzbekistan

Figure 1 shows the increasing number of internet users during the 2015–2023 period, indicating the rapid expansion of digital connectivity. The number of internet users increased consistently throughout the period, while GDP-related indicators also demonstrate changes in economic performance. The simultaneous expansion of digital connectivity and economic activity indicates the growing importance of digital infrastructure as part of the modern economic system. However, this relationship should not be interpreted as a direct causal relationship because economic growth is influenced by multiple economic, institutional, and technological factors.

A major result identified in the literature is the contribution of digitalization to economic efficiency. Digital technologies enable automation, real-time data collection, digital monitoring, and faster information processing, allowing organizations to improve the efficiency of their operations. The application of big data, cloud technologies, artificial intelligence, and Internet-based systems can support more accurate decision-making and reduce the costs associated with traditional economic processes. Aksin-Sivrikaya and Bhattacharya (2017) explain that digitalization can reduce frictions and costs related to information collection and processing, energy use, manufacturing, and logistics. These improvements can increase organizational productivity and strengthen competitiveness. Therefore, the literature indicates that digitalization contributes to sustainable economic growth not only by creating new digital industries but also by improving efficiency in existing sectors.

The results also demonstrate that digitalization creates opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship. The expansion of digital platforms and technological infrastructure has reduced some barriers to market entry and enabled entrepreneurs to develop new products, services, and business models. Fernandes et al. (2022) identify digital transformation, innovation and entrepreneurship, and sustainability as closely interconnected research areas. Digital entrepreneurship can create economic value while simultaneously supporting social and environmental objectives when digital technologies are incorporated into sustainable business strategies. This finding is consistent with Raihan (2024), who identifies sustainable business models, sustainable products, consumer empowerment, and value co-creation as important opportunities emerging from the digital economy. Consequently, digitalization can expand the economic role of entrepreneurship by providing opportunities for businesses to reach consumers, manage resources, and develop innovative solutions through digital channels.

Another significant result concerns the relationship between digitalization and resource efficiency. The reviewed studies show that digital technologies can contribute to sustainability by improving the monitoring and management of energy, materials, and other resources. Digital systems can provide information that enables businesses and governments to identify inefficiencies and optimize resource use. Raihan (2024) identifies the integration of renewable energy with digital technologies, big data

analytics, sustainable urbanization, circular-economy practices, and sustainable consumption as important opportunities for connecting the digital economy with sustainability. Rosário and Dias (2023) similarly find that digital technologies can facilitate renewable energy development, smart cities, sustainable urbanization, and sustainable consumption. These findings indicate that digitalization has the potential to support economic growth while reducing resource inefficiencies when digital technologies are applied within sustainability-oriented economic systems.

The literature further reveals that digitalization can contribute to sustainable economic development through digital financial inclusion. Digital financial services have expanded opportunities for individuals and businesses to access financial products and participate in economic activities. Tay et al. (2022) find that digital financial inclusion can support sustainable development and reduce poverty, particularly in developing economies. Digital financial services can make transactions more accessible and facilitate participation in formal financial systems. However, the results also show that access to digital financial services remains unequal across gender, income, and geographical groups. This indicates that the economic benefits of digitalization depend partly on the accessibility of digital infrastructure and the capacity of individuals to use digital services effectively. The contribution of digitalization to sustainable development extends across the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, although the magnitude and direction of its effects vary according to the technology applied and the development objective concerned. Figure 3 summarizes the potential impacts of major digital technologies on the 17 SDGs.

The reviewed literature also identifies digitalization as an instrument for improving governance and public-service delivery. Digital technologies enable governments to collect, manage, and exchange information more efficiently and can increase the accessibility and transparency of public services. The development of digital government is therefore connected to broader economic modernization because more efficient public administration can reduce transaction costs for citizens and businesses. Nikitenko et al. (2019) emphasize that modern governance and civic engagement are increasingly connected with knowledge and use of digital services. The results suggest that digital government can contribute to sustainable development when digital infrastructure, institutional capacity, regulatory systems, and public digital literacy develop simultaneously. The contribution of digitalization to sustainable development extends across the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, although the magnitude and direction of its effects vary according to the technology applied and the development objective concerned. Figure 2 summarizes the potential impacts of major digital technologies on the 17 SDGs.

Table 1. Impact of digital technologies on 17 SDGs

Digital technologies	Sustainable development goals																
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Artificial intelligence																	
Big data																	
Cloud technologies																	
Additive technologies																	
Internet items																	
Virtual and filled universe																	
Blockchain																	
Robotization and drones																	
Quantum technologies																	
Platforms																	
ICT																	

The probability of a positive effect is high
It can have positive and negative effects
There is a high probability of negative effects
The scope of the effect has not been studied

Tabel 1 indicates that digital technologies can generate positive, mixed, or potentially negative effects across the SDGs. Technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data, cloud technologies, the Internet of Things, blockchain, and ICT have broad potential to support sustainable development, while technologies associated with automation and robotics may also create challenges related to employment and inequality.

However, the results clearly indicate that digitalization also produces substantial challenges for sustainable economic growth. One of the most frequently identified problems is the digital divide. Although digital technologies can expand access to markets, information, finance, and public services, unequal access to digital infrastructure and digital skills can prevent certain groups from benefiting from digital transformation. Tay et al. (2022) identify persistent disparities between urban and rural populations, wealthy and poorer groups, and men and women in access to and use of digital financial services. Shabur (2024) similarly identifies technological division as one of the major obstacles to achieving sustainability through the digital economy. Thus, the economic benefits generated by digitalization may not be distributed equally across society.

The opportunities and challenges identified in the literature can be further summarized through a SWOT analysis. This analysis provides an integrated view of the internal strengths and weaknesses of digitalization, as well as the external opportunities and threats that may influence its contribution to sustainable economic development. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. SWOT Analysis of Digitalization's Impact on the Sustainable Development of the National Economy

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
–increasing the efficiency and speed of economic operations through automation of processes; –collection of large amounts of information, automatic monitoring and data processing; –effective cost management; –achievement of competitive advantage	–insufficient state participation, unprepared regulatory and legal framework; –insufficient development of economic systems, which leads to a low level of digitalization, lack of investment; –lack of digital literacy among employees, citizens' distrust of the digital environment
Opportunities	**Threads**
–emergence of new business models, technological entrepreneurship; –increasing access to resources and increasing the efficiency of their use; –expanding opportunities for individuals, social integration, the emergence of new highly intellectual and highly paid professions; –improving the quality and transparency of services provided by state organizations	–increasing digital inequality, encouraging excessive consumption, increasing the number of unemployed; –overabundance of information in resource databases; –spread of cybercrime, loss of data, threat to privacy; –negative impact on the emotional state and health of citizens

Table 2 shows that the main strengths of digitalization are related to increased operational efficiency, faster information processing, improved cost management, and the achievement of competitive advantages. At the same time, weaknesses include insufficient regulatory preparedness, limited investment, inadequate digital infrastructure, low digital literacy, and public distrust of digital systems. The opportunities indicate that digitalization can support new business models, technological entrepreneurship, more efficient resource utilization, social integration, and improved public services. However, these opportunities are accompanied by threats such as digital inequality, employment disruption, excessive consumption, cybercrime, data loss, privacy risks, and potential negative effects on individual well-being.

Employment disruption represents another important result. The increasing use of automation, artificial intelligence, robotics, and other advanced technologies can alter the demand for labor and reduce the need for certain routine occupations. Although digitalization simultaneously creates new professions and entrepreneurial opportunities, the transition may produce employment instability for workers whose skills are no longer aligned with changing labor-market requirements. Raihan (2024) identifies job insecurity as one of the major challenges associated with the digital economy. Rosário and Dias (2023) also highlight employment insecurity as a factor that may hinder the contribution of digitalization to sustainability. The findings therefore show that digital economic transformation has both employment-generating and employment-displacing effects.

Environmental pressures are also identified as an important limitation. Digital technologies can improve resource efficiency, but their infrastructure requires substantial amounts of electricity and generates electronic waste. The literature consistently identifies increasing electronic waste, energy consumption, and carbon emissions as potential negative consequences of digitalization (Raihan, 2024; Rosário & Dias, 2023; Shabur, 2024). This creates a dual relationship between digitalization and environmental sustainability: digital technologies can provide solutions for monitoring and reducing environmental impacts while simultaneously generating environmental pressures through the expansion of digital infrastructure and devices. Consequently, the sustainability of digitalization depends on how technological development is combined with renewable energy, responsible consumption, resource efficiency, and circular-economy practices.

Data protection, cybersecurity, and market concentration also emerge as significant challenges. The expansion of digital platforms and the collection of large amounts of data increase the importance of protecting personal and organizational information. Shabur (2024) identifies data privacy as a major concern in the development of a sustainable digital economy, while Rosário and Dias (2023) highlight data protection and growing monopolies as important challenges. Guo et al. (2017) further emphasize the importance of appropriate governance to address cybersecurity and disparities between countries with different levels of digital development. These findings demonstrate that digitalization requires institutional and regulatory capacity to ensure that technological development does not create new forms of economic vulnerability.

Overall, the results show that digitalization has a multidimensional relationship with sustainable economic growth. Its positive contributions are primarily reflected in increased efficiency, innovation, entrepreneurship, resource optimization, financial inclusion, improved public services, and the development of new economic activities (Niyazbekova et al., 2021; Novikova et al., 2022; Fernandes et al., 2022). At the same time, the literature identifies digital inequality, employment insecurity, environmental impacts, cybersecurity threats, data-privacy concerns, and market concentration as major challenges that can weaken the sustainability of digital transformation (Rosário & Dias, 2023; Raihan, 2024; Shabur, 2024). The findings therefore establish that digitalization provides substantial opportunities for sustainable economic growth, but its outcomes depend on the accessibility, governance, environmental responsibility, and institutional preparedness surrounding the adoption of digital technologies.

5. | DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that digitalization should be understood not simply as the adoption of advanced technologies, but as a structural transformation that influences the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. The positive relationship between digitalization and economic growth is mainly reflected in increased productivity, improved resource allocation, innovation, entrepreneurship, and access to markets and financial services. This finding is consistent with Novikova

et al. (2022), who argue that digitalization creates opportunities for sustainable socioeconomic development and can strengthen economic growth when supported by appropriate national conditions. Niyazbekova et al. (2021) similarly emphasize that digital economic development can stimulate investment, technological progress, and human capital development. Therefore, the economic contribution of digitalization depends on its ability to transform technological capacity into productive and inclusive economic activities.

The results further suggest that digitalization can support sustainability by improving resource efficiency. Technologies such as big data, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and the Internet of Things can facilitate monitoring, forecasting, and optimization of economic processes. Raihan (2024) identifies renewable energy integration, sustainable urbanization, circular-economy practices, and sustainable consumption as important opportunities associated with the digital economy. This indicates that digital technologies can become instruments for achieving environmental objectives while simultaneously improving economic efficiency. However, digitalization itself has environmental costs. Increasing electronic waste, energy consumption, and carbon emissions demonstrate that technological expansion does not automatically guarantee environmental sustainability (Rosário & Dias, 2023; Shabur, 2024). Consequently, digital transformation should be accompanied by renewable energy use, responsible resource management, and circular-economy principles.

Another important issue concerns inclusiveness. Digitalization can expand financial inclusion, entrepreneurship, and access to services, but unequal access to infrastructure and digital skills may prevent some groups from benefiting from these opportunities. Tay et al. (2022) identify persistent digital disparities across gender, income, and geographical groups, demonstrating that technological progress can reproduce existing inequalities if access is uneven. This finding implies that sustainable digitalization requires investment not only in physical infrastructure but also in digital literacy, education, and affordable access to digital services.

The findings also highlight the need for stronger governance. Employment insecurity, cybersecurity threats, data-privacy concerns, and market concentration can weaken the long-term benefits of digital transformation (Raihan, 2024; Shabur, 2024). Guo et al. (2017) emphasize that effective governance is necessary to address digital disparities and cybersecurity risks, while Zhang and Khaskheli (2025) demonstrate the importance of integrating digital technologies with policy, legal frameworks, and environmental economic objectives. Thus, governments have an important role in creating regulatory environments that encourage innovation while protecting workers, consumers, businesses, and data.

Overall, the discussion confirms that digitalization represents both an opportunity and a challenge for sustainable economic growth. Its contribution becomes stronger when technological innovation is combined with inclusive infrastructure, human-capital development, environmental responsibility, cybersecurity, and effective

governance. Digitalization should therefore be directed toward a balanced development model in which economic efficiency and innovation are pursued together with social inclusion and environmental sustainability (Fernandes et al., 2022; Nikitenko et al., 2019).

6. | CONCLUSION

Digitalization has become an important component of sustainable economic growth because it influences economic productivity, innovation, entrepreneurship, resource efficiency, financial inclusion, and public-service delivery. The results of this study demonstrate that the application of digital technologies can improve the efficiency of economic activities by accelerating information processing, supporting data-based decision-making, reducing operational costs, and creating new opportunities for businesses and entrepreneurs. Digitalization also provides opportunities to strengthen sustainable development through smart technologies, sustainable consumption, renewable-energy integration, circular-economy practices, and more efficient resource management.

However, the benefits of digitalization are accompanied by significant economic, social, technological, and environmental challenges. Unequal access to digital infrastructure and digital skills can increase the digital divide, while automation and technological transformation may create employment insecurity for workers whose skills are not aligned with changing labor-market requirements. The expansion of digital technologies can also increase electronic waste, energy consumption, and carbon emissions. In addition, cybersecurity threats, data-privacy risks, dependence on digital platforms, and increasing market concentration can create vulnerabilities that reduce the sustainability of digital economic development.

Therefore, digitalization should not be pursued solely through rapid technological adoption. Sustainable digital transformation requires an integrated approach that combines technological innovation with inclusive infrastructure development, digital literacy, workforce reskilling, environmental responsibility, cybersecurity, data protection, and effective institutional governance. Governments, businesses, and other stakeholders need to ensure that the benefits of digitalization are accessible across different social and economic groups while minimizing its negative consequences. Ultimately, digitalization can make a substantial contribution to sustainable economic growth when it is strategically managed to balance economic efficiency, social inclusion, technological resilience, and environmental sustainability. A well-planned digital transformation can therefore support a more productive, inclusive, and resilient economic system capable of responding to future economic and technological changes.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval and Originality Statement

Ethical approval was obtained for this study. The manuscript represents original work and has not been previously published, nor is it under consideration by another journal.

Data Disclosure Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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