

Phenomenological Inquiry in Entrepreneurship and Small Business with Insights into the Digital Economy Research Context

Tamara Šmaguc, Marina Klacmer Čalopa

University of Zagreb

Faculty of Organization and Informatics

Pavlinka 2, 42000 Varaždin, Croatia

{tamara.smaguc,
marina.klacmer}@foi.unizg.hr

Mirjana Grčić Fabić

University of Rijeka

Faculty of Economics and Business

Ivana Filipovića 4, 51000 Rijeka, Croatia

mirjana.grcic.fabic@efri.uniri.hr

Abstract. *The paper aims to review phenomenology applications in entrepreneurship and small business research, with a special emphasis on the study of digitalization and digital transformation. In order to achieve research objectives, a narrative literature review was conducted. The collection of literature was carried out by searching Scopus. The results indicate a strong community of phenomenological scholars of entrepreneurship in the United Kingdom. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is a popular method, with in-depth and semi-structured interviews being the most common data collection techniques. Regarding the context of digitalization and digital transformation in entrepreneurship and small business, only six phenomenological journal papers were identified. The findings also show that the oldest study was published three years ago, suggesting the novelty and immaturity of the field. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first review paper dealing with the topic. Therefore, it is a good starting point for entrepreneurship and small business scholars interested in this type of qualitative methodology.*

Keywords. qualitative methodology, phenomenology, entrepreneurship, digitalization, digital transformation, narrative literature review

1 Introduction

Considering the role of digitalization in raising competitiveness and strengthening economic resilience, the interest in the subject has recently grown significantly (Vuković, Korent & Šmaguc, 2024). In the international scientific community, the topic has gained stronger scientific popularity since 2017, and three years later it was experiencing a publication proliferation (Kudelić, Šmaguc & Robinson, 2023; Zhai et al., 2023), primarily in the context of strengthening the firms' resistance to the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis (Kudelić, Šmaguc & Robinson,

2023; Vuković, Korent & Šmaguc, 2024). The importance of issues is also recognized at the level of European Union (EU) policymakers. They declared the period 2021-2030 Europe's Digital Decade, with the digital transformation of companies as one of the key EU priorities (European Commission, 2021).

Despite the exponential growth in popularity, digital transformation and digital entrepreneurship are still relatively new, empirically unsaturated research areas. As with any new research domain, the existing literature is dominated by works of a conceptual nature that offer definitions, systematizations of the area and conceptual frameworks, and implications for somewhat less represented empirical research (see for example Vial (2021), Verhoef et al. (2021), Nambisan (2017), Sussan and Acs (2017), Zaheer, Breyer and Dumay (2019), Reis et al. (2018), Nambisan, Wright and Feldman (2019), Osmundsen, Iden and Bygstad (2018)). In a notable conceptual paper, Verhoef et al. (2021) theorize about possible drivers of digitalization and strategic imperatives of digital transformation, warning about the insufficient focus on empirical studies of digital transformation as a process. Nambisan, Wright and Feldman (2019) note the need for multiple and multilevel empirical analyses that include examining a range of research questions and recommend the integration of ideas and concepts from multiple fields/disciplines. Considering the complex nature of the phenomenon of entrepreneurship (Bryat & Julien, 2001), such research should be based on ontological pluralism, supplementing the hypothetical-deductive orthodoxy (Drakopoulou-Dodd et al., 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 1994) with an interpretive research framework (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Cope, 2005). In this context, qualitative research methodology comes to the fore, ensuring the reconstruction of reality shaped from the perspective of real entrepreneurs "on the ground".

Despite the advantages of qualitative methods in the domain, the possibilities of researching digitalization phenomena in entrepreneurship and

small business using qualitative methodology have been poorly explored. Dealing with this research gap, this paper theoretically considers and reviews the application of phenomenology in entrepreneurship and small business, with a special emphasis on the study of digitalization and digital transformation. The latter two terms are distinguished and understood as defined by Verhoef et al. (2021). After a general insight into phenomenology as a research method and the potential of its application in entrepreneurship, the goals and methods of this review paper are presented. The second part of the paper provides a narrative review of phenomenological studies in entrepreneurship and small business in general, and specifically, in the topic of digitalization and digital transformation. The paper ends with concluding considerations, research limitations, and recommendations for future reviews in the field.

2 Background of the Study

Section 2.1 elaborates on the characteristics of phenomenology as a philosophical movement and research method. It is followed by a short overview of the advantages of applying phenomenology in entrepreneurship research in Section 2.2.

2.1 Phenomenology as a Philosophy and Research Method

The postulates of phenomenology as a research method derive from a broader understanding of it as a philosophical movement. Starting from the latter, Moran (2002, p. 4) views phenomenology as "a radical, anti-traditional style of philosophising, which emphasises the attempt to get to the truth of matters, to describe *phenomena*, in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that is as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experiencer". The beginnings of the movement are linked to the work of the German philosopher Edmond Husserl in the first half of the 20th century, with roots in the doctrines of Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle (Qutoshi, 2018). The main idea of the philosophy is the establishment of live contact with reality - observation and examination of people's life-worlds or lived experiences, with creating explanations devoid of any prejudice drawn from tradition, experience in advance, common sense, or even existing scientific knowledge (Berglund, 2015; Moran, 2002). The emphasis is on real experiences - getting to know the phenomenon as it really is, in nature, in its essence, capturing it directly from the world (Moran, 2002). Traditional ontological dichotomies (eg agent-structure, consciousness-matter, subject-object) are rejected by phenomenologists claiming that they do not respect the essential postures of the human being. According to them, people naturally perceive situations and objects as meaningful, considering the totality of their experiences. In other

words, the meanings attached to phenomena rest on the relationship between parts and the whole, as a result of a person's "historically spun web, or *referential whole*, of interrelated things, background understandings, and practices" (Dreyfus, 1991, pp. 97-99, as cited in Berglund, 2015, pp. 478-479).

Following philosophical foundations, as a qualitative method, phenomenology relies on the interpretative examination of special experiences, events, and states of participants in a specific interaction process (Halmi, 2005). As such, it is based on an empathetic approach to understanding and interpreting individual practices placed in (spatial, industrial, institutional, and other) contexts (Halmi, 2005; Kordeš, 2008). The focus is on the study of critical incidents, from the level of subjectively lived experiences, which enriches the understanding of the investigated phenomena (Cope, 2005).

The paradigmatic framework of phenomenology is interpretivism/constructivism (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), and the researcher's emphasis is on detailed description and interpretation of the investigated phenomena at a deeper level of understanding. From the position of "conceptual silence", the researcher puts "in brackets" theories, hunches, and assumptions, resisting premature judgments based on unreflected ideas (Kordeš, 2008). Such isolation from the fundamental attitudes of the sciences, excluding all transcendent objects and their essence, leads the researcher to a pure transcendental phenomenological experience (Halmi, 2005).

Considering the nature of the method, commonly used data collection strategies are phenomenological interviews, observations, discussions, and focus group meetings. Of course, textual analysis methods are also used, and in certain cases, action research (Qutoshi, 2018). Research participants are selected purposefully, with their eloquence and informativeness being an important selection criterion (Kordeš, 2008). Meaning creation runs parallel to data collection, where a minimum of structure is striven for, with messy analysis due to different ways of connecting different parts of the empirical material. The reporting of findings is usually vigorous in nature, using direct quotes from research participants, with an emphasis on detailed descriptions of phenomena rather than explanations (Qutoshi, 2018).

2.2 Phenomenology in Entrepreneurship and Small Business Research

The characteristics of the entrepreneurial process, such as radical uncertainty, creativity and judgment in the situation of unclear goals, make it quite a suitable research arena for phenomenological analyses. In the foreground of entrepreneurial activities are social relations, with the emotional involvement of the individual in the process of birth and development of business. The researcher-phenomenologist captures those social relations and the entrepreneur's lived

experiences with an empathic approach, trying to elucidate and appreciate them, rather than downplay and proclaim them as flaws or anomalies (Qutoshi, 2018). Only such research genres offer results that are sufficiently fruitful from the perspective of the need to create richer and contextually sensitive entrepreneurial policies (Korsgaard et al., 2020).

Phenomenological methods are a kind of niche between research focused on the cognition of entrepreneurs obtained through questionnaires and scales, and narrative and discursive approaches based on in-depth studies of local stories. They focus on lived experiences, the meanings that individuals attach to phenomena and the associated individual strategies. With extensive descriptions and illustrations, phenomenological findings enrich both quantitative cognitive studies and discursive analyses of entrepreneurship, often resulting in the strengthening of existing entrepreneurship theories or the development of new theoretical constructs (Berglund, 2007). As Cope (2005) concludes, although very challenging and demanding, phenomenological research is quite rewarding in the context of insight into the complexity and uniqueness of the perception and practice of entrepreneurial individuals. Thus, entrepreneurship and small business field need a larger number of studies of this type, not only in the context of supplementing quantitative research but also in terms of undertaking complete qualitative research projects, contributing to legitimizing the method.

3 Review Objectives and Method

This review is conducted with the following two research objectives:

- O1. To give an insight into influential phenomenological studies in entrepreneurship and small business domain with regard to authors, topics, contexts, and methodologies
- O2. To give an insight into phenomenological studies on the topic of digitalization and digital transformation in entrepreneurship and small business with regard to authors, contexts, and methodologies.

In order to achieve the objectives of the research, a narrative literature review was conducted (Ferrari, 2015; Green, Johnson & Adams, 2006). Unlike a systematic literature review that is standardized, a narrative review is based on a more informal data extraction process, with data synthesis based on a narrative juxtaposition of material (Xiao & Watson, 2019). The intention is not to summarize the entire structure of an intellectual field, but to find and describe key topics in the literature. Due to its characteristics, a narrative review cannot completely be objectified and isolated from biases arising from the author's experiences and beliefs (Xiao & Watson, 2019). However, to reduce these problems, applying at least some steps of a systematic literature review can

be useful (such as defining a literature search database and specifying publication selection criteria) (Ferrari, 2015).

The collection of literature for the review was carried out by searching Scopus as one of the most relevant scientific databases. The search was conducted on 13 May 2024. In accordance with the syntax of the database, two search queries were defined (one for each of the two research objectives). The search was performed within the title, abstract, and keywords. Due to practicality and an effort to include only the most relevant peer-reviewed literature, the following inclusion criteria were applied: 1) Language: English; 2) Document type: Article; 3) Source Type: Journal. It was decided that the O1 would be achieved by reviewing the five most cited empirical studies, and the O2 by reviewing all empirical studies relevant to the field. As a result of the first search query and after applying the specified search filters, 406 journal articles were found. In order to select the most influential articles, they were filtered according to the number of citations in Scopus. After that, screening was performed to identify the first five papers that are empirical research, and at the same time are thematically related to the field. Regarding the O2, a total of ten journal articles were found after applying the filters. Based on the screening of all ten articles, it was determined that four of them are not related to the field. The remaining six articles were included in the narrative review. The Scopus search queries for each research objective and the applied inclusion criteria are shown in Table 1.

A total of eleven selected articles (five for O1 and six for O2) were read and data extraction was performed. The results of the review are presented and discussed in Section 4, accompanied by data on the 11 analyzed publications summarized in Appendix 1.

4 Review results

Following the research objectives, this section is divided into two subsections. First, Section 4.1 presents the most influential phenomenological studies in entrepreneurship and small business in general. Afterward, Section 4.2 gives insight into phenomenological studies related to digitalization and digital transformation in entrepreneurship and small business domain.

4.1 Influential Phenomenological Studies in Entrepreneurship and Small Business

According to the number of citations in Scopus, the five most influential phenomenological studies of entrepreneurship and small business are Cope (2011), Cope and Watts (2000), Shaw and Carter (2007), Dixon and Clifford (2007), and Doern (2016),

respectively. These studies are significant for phenomenology because they increase the popularity of the method in entrepreneurship and small business. In that sense, they contributed to the broader framework of phenomenology as a research practice.

Table 1. Scopus search queries and inclusion criteria with the associated number of publications after applying each filter (search was conducted on May 13, 2024)

Search query 1 (for O1)	No. of pub.
phenomenolog* AND entrepren* OR "small AND business*" OR "small AND firm*" OR "small AND compan*" OR "small AND enterpris*" OR "sme" OR "smes" OR "msme" OR "msmes" OR "small AND medium*" OR "self- emplo*" OR "start-up" OR "startup" OR "new AND venture*"	Total: 551 Language (English): 524 Document Type (Article): 409 Source Type (Journal): 406 Included in the analysis: 5 most cited
Search query 2 (for O2)	No. of pub.
phenomenolog* AND entrepren* OR "small AND business*" OR "small AND firm*" OR "small AND compan*" OR "small AND enterpris*" OR "sme" OR "smes" OR "msme" OR "msmes" OR "small AND medium*" OR "self- emplo*" OR "start-up" OR "startup" OR "new AND venture*" AND digital*	Total: 16 Language (English): 13 Document Type (Article): 10 Source Type (Journal): 10 Remaining for analysis after screening: 6

The most significant phenomenological scientist of entrepreneurship is Jason Cope from the University of Strathclyde. In addition to two empirical studies that lead by the number of citations (Cope, 2011; Cope & Watts, 2000), he is also the author of a very notable conceptual paper in the field (Cope, 2005). The top five most cited publications are signed by a total of eight authors from five institutions (University of Strathclyde, University of Stirling, University of Gloucestershire, Kingston upon Thames, University of London). As can be seen, all institutions are from the United Kingdom, indicating a potentially strong community of phenomenological scholars of entrepreneurship in that country.

When it comes to the thematic focus of the analyzed studies, all of them deal with complex phenomena formed by interweaving the personal and professional lives of entrepreneurs, with immersion in entrepreneurial events filled with a strong dose of emotional engagement of the individual. Specifically, the topics refer to the examination of the process of

entrepreneurial learning (Cope, 2011; Cope & Watts, 2000), the investigation of harmonizing the social values of the entrepreneur and the economic goals, in social entrepreneurship (Shaw & Carter, 2007), as well as, ecopreneurship (Dixon & Clifford, 2007), and the research of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial strategies in the context of crisis management (Doern, 2016). Regarding the methodology, analyzed papers usually use phenomenological case studies and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Developed by Smith, Jarman and Osborn (1999), IPA is a phenomenological method specific for its "commitment to producing a fine-grained interpretive account that is grounded in, and does justice to, each participant's unique lived experience" (Cope, 2011, p. 609). The aim of IPA-based research is a detailed study of each case individually, before starting to compare cases looking for convergences and divergences. Along with phenomenological philosophy, the intellectual roots of IPA lie in hermeneutics (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

The most common data collection techniques in the analyzed studies are in-depth or semi-structured interviews, sometimes accompanied by document analysis. Participant selection is based on purposeful sampling, with small sample sizes of between 6 and 15 entrepreneurs (the exception is a study by Shaw and Carter (2007) with 80 research participants). Data analysis is based on an inductive approach aimed at developing new theoretical concepts.

In the end, it is relevant to single out the most cited paper *Entrepreneurial learning from failure: An interpretative phenomenological analysis*, published in Journal of Business Venturing by Cope (2011). The study developed a deep and rich understanding of the experience of business failure from the lens of entrepreneurial learning. The emphasis was on examining outcomes and impacts of failure, and the learning process experienced by the entrepreneur as a result of active grieving and recovery. The research methodology was based on IPA. The data was collected by highly unstructured phenomenological interviewing of eight entrepreneurs who experienced business failure. To allow for cross-country comparisons, four participants were from the United Kingdom and the same number came from Silicon Valley, California. The paper provides important contributions to the entrepreneurship literature, especially in the segment of extending Shepherd's (2003) learning theory of grief recovery.

4.2 Phenomenological Studies on the Topic of Digitalization and Digital Transformation in Entrepreneurship and Small Business

Regarding the context of digital entrepreneurship and the digitalization of small businesses, only six phenomenological papers were identified. These are the following publications ordered by the number of

citations: Ano and Bent (2022), Guinez-Cabrera and Aqueveque (2022), Allataifeh and Moghavvemi (2021), Imiren et al. (2024), Allataifeh, Moghavvemi and Peerally (2023), and Setiawati, Sutarjo and Primasari (2022). As can be seen, all papers date from the past three years, indicating that the application of phenomenology in this thematic milieu is still in its infancy. This is not surprising considering the immaturity of the digital economy research context in entrepreneurship and small business in general.

In a thematic sense, the papers look at the complex business and social processes associated with digitalization and digital transformation. Ano and Bent (2022) investigate the processes of digital strategy implementation in a family business environment, Allataifeh and Moghavvemi (2021) and Allataifeh, Moghavvemi and Peerally (2023) deal with the phenomenon of digital innovation development, and Imiren et al. (2024) study the creation of legitimacy in the context of digital entrepreneurship. There are also topics on entrepreneurial motives and paths of social media influencers (Guinez-Cabrera & Aqueveque, 2022), and marketing communication strategies of women small business owners in the digital age (Setiawati, Sutarjo & Primasari, 2022).

As is typical of phenomenology, the most frequent data collection methods are in-depth or semi-structured interviews, with a purposeful sample that is very small (a few participants) or small (eg 35 participants in the study by Guinez-Cabrera and Aqueveque (2022)). The methodology of the most cited study by Ano and Bent (2022) is based on IPA, including eight semi-structured interviews within five case studies from France. Data analysis was performed by manual coding and thematic analysis, following the approach developed by Yin (2010). The research deals with the role of human and cultural capital in the processes of shaping and implementing digital strategy in five family firms. The focus was on understanding the company's idiosyncrasies and uniqueness, by diving into the perceptions and personal experiences of individuals. The contributions of the paper are important since it is one of the first studies of the digital transformation of family firms from the lens of human capital. The findings are relevant for entrepreneurs from practice, pointing to the possibilities of identifying and cultivating specific forms of capital to achieve a market advantage based on digital transformation (Ano & Bent, 2022). In this context, they are also important for policymakers aiming at designing measures to support the digitalization of entrepreneurship.

5 Concluding Remarks

Entrepreneurship and small business research has been predominantly characterized by employing the deductive research approach, using the existing theory to shape the research process and data analysis. This refers primarily to the application of quantitative

research methodology with an emphasis on setting explicit hypotheses to be confirmed or rejected, and testing already existing theories, postulates and assumptions, leaving a very narrow space for detailed interpretation and understanding of the complex nature of the phenomenon. That especially refers to the importance of looking into the context specificities and variation in unfolding the processes, practices and experiences of entrepreneurial individuals, organizations and the environment within which they operate.

The qualitative research methodology, which assumes an inductive research logic and draws conclusions based on observations and data, opens up opportunities to gain insights into the multifaceted nature and more detailed contextual data that reveal vivid perceptions and experiences that entrepreneurs face in their specific environments.

The necessity of this approach is emphasized even more strongly in the area of examining entrepreneurial initiatives within the framework of digital transformation. Digital entrepreneurship as a relatively new research context where affordances of digital technologies represent a novel framework for examining and interpreting current understanding of processes and effects of entrepreneurial activity, sets the need for implementing qualitative research and strengthening existing and building new theoretical insights.

Phenomenology as a qualitative research approach has great potential for exploring and revealing the lived experiences of individuals involved in entrepreneurial endeavors, especially in the context of digital entrepreneurship. The research results with the given inclusion criteria, which point to only a few published papers in the last three years on the topic of phenomenological studies in the field of digitalization in entrepreneurship and small businesses, further, confirm the great prospect of applying this methodology.

This review paper represents a good initial framework for readers who have no experience with phenomenology but are interested in the method application in entrepreneurship and small business domain. The insight into the most cited empirical publications, authors, and methodological settings provided by the paper is a relevant guideline for further familiarization with the field. However, some limitations must be acknowledged. The review is based on a small number of publications, using a narrative approach with a somewhat lower level of research rigor. Future studies should consider a larger number of publications from several scientific databases and include publications in languages other than English. Minimizing data restrictions can also refer to including not only journal articles but also proceeding papers and book chapters. Finally, depending on the research objectives, a more rigorous methodology should be applied, such as a systematic literature review and/or bibliometric analysis, which can provide insight into

the current state and trends in phenomenological research within this area.

Finally, attention should be paid to potential specific topics and emerging research questions in the field. Phenomenology as a method could yield fruitful results in researching the experiences of entrepreneurs in the context of COVID-19 conditions, including new digitalization opportunities arising from the crisis. It is also very suitable for situational examinations of obstacles and drivers of digitalization at the level of entrepreneurs, companies and the environment. Phenomenological research would make it possible to retrieve digitalization drivers and obstacles from the level of lived experience, enriching existing knowledge. Multiple phenomenological studies conducted in different industrial contexts would contribute to the understanding of how digitalization practices are shaped in different environments.

Acknowledgments

This work has been fully supported by the Croatian Science Foundation under the project IP-2022-10-6703.

References

- Allataifeh, H., & Moghavvemi, S. (2021). The individual dimension of digital innovation: The altered roles of innovation agents and market actors. *Sustainability*, 13(16), 8971.
- Allataifeh, H., Moghavvemi, S., & Peerally, J. A. (2023). How does the digital innovation process unfold in practice? A novel third-generation and empirical-based need–solution pairing model. *European Journal of Innovation Management*, 26(3), 730-754.
- Ano, B., & Bent, R. (2022). Human determinants influencing the digital transformation strategy of multigenerational family businesses: a multiple-case study of five French growth-oriented family firms. *Journal of Family Business Management*, 12(4), 876-891.
- Berglund, H. (2007). Researching entrepreneurship as lived experience. In H. Neergaard & J. P. Ullhøi (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research methods in entrepreneurship* (pp. 75-93). Edward Elgar.
- Berglund, H. (2015). Between cognition and discourse: Phenomenology and the study of entrepreneurship. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 21(3), 472-488.
- Bruyat, C., & Julien, P. A. (2001). Defining the field of research in entrepreneurship. *Journal of business venturing*, 16(2), 165-180.
- Burrell, G., & Morgan, G. (1979). *Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis: Elements of the Sociology of Corporate Life*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company.
- Cope, J. (2005). Researching Entrepreneurship Through Phenomenological Inquiry: Philosophical and Methodological Issues, *International Small Business Journal*, 23(2), 163-189.
- Cope, J. (2011). Entrepreneurial learning from failure: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Journal of business venturing*, 26(6), 604-623.
- Cope, J., & Watts, G. (2000). Learning by doing—an exploration of experience, critical incidents and reflection in entrepreneurial learning. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 6(3), 104-124.
- Dixon, S. E., & Clifford, A. (2007). Ecopreneurship—a new approach to managing the triple bottom line. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 20(3), 326-345.
- Doern, R. (2016). Entrepreneurship and crisis management: The experiences of small businesses during the London 2011 riots. *International small business journal*, 34(3), 276-302.
- Dodd Drakopoulou, S., Mconald, S., Mcelwee, G., & Smith, R. (2014). A bourdieuan analysis of qualitative authorship in entrepreneurship scholarship. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 52(4), pp. 633–654.
- Dreyfus, H. (1991). *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Eatough, V., & Smith, J. A. (2017). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In C. Willing & W. S. Rogers (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research in psychology* (pp. 193-209). London: Sage.
- European Commission - Europska komisija (2021). Digitalno desetljeće Europe: digitalni ciljevi za 2030. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/europes-digital-decade-digital-targets-2030_hr
- Ferrari, R. (2015). Writing narrative style literature reviews. *Medical writing*, 24(4), 230-235.
- Green, B. N., Johnson, C. D., & Adams, A. (2006). Writing narrative literature reviews for peer-reviewed journals: secrets of the trade. *Journal of chiropractic medicine*, 5(3), 101-117.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research. In N. K. Denzin & S. Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105–117). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

- Guinez-Cabrera, N., & Aqueveque, C. (2022). Entrepreneurial influencers and influential entrepreneurs: two sides of the same coin. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 28(1), 231-254.
- Halmi, A. (2005). *Strategije kvalitativnih istraživanja u primijenjenim društvenim znanostima*. Jastrebarsko: Naklada Slap.
- Imiren, E., Lassalle, P., Mwaura, S., & Nicolopoulou, K. (2024). Understanding legitimacy building in contexts through digital entrepreneurship. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 30(2/3), 548-571.
- Kordeš, U. (2008). Fenomenološko istraživanje. In N. Koller-Trbović & A. Žižak (Eds.), *Kvalitativni pristup u društvenim znanostima* (pp. 13–35). Zagreb: Edukacijsko-rehabilitacijski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu.
- Korsgaard, S., Hunt, R. A., Townsend, D. M., & Ingstrup, M. B. (2020). COVID-19 and the importance of space in entrepreneurship research and policy. *International Small Business Journal*, 38(8), 697-710.
- Kudelić, R., Šmaguc, T., & Robinson, S. (2023). Artificial Intelligence in the Service of Entrepreneurial Finance: Knowledge Structure and the Foundational Algorithmic Paradigm. arXiv preprint arXiv:2311.13213.
- Moran, D. (2002). *Introduction to phenomenology*. London: Routledge.
- Nambisan, S. (2017). Digital entrepreneurship: Toward a digital technology perspective of entrepreneurship. *Entrepreneurship theory and practice*, 41(6), 1029-1055.
- Nambisan, S., Wright, M., & Feldman, M. (2019). The digital transformation of innovation and entrepreneurship: Progress, challenges and key themes. *Research Policy*, 48(8), 103773.
- Osmundsen, K., Iden, J., & Bygstad, B. (2018). Digital Transformation: Drivers, Success Factors, and Implications. In *MCIS 2018 Proceedings*. The 12th Mediterranean Conference on Information Systems (MCIS), Corfu, Greece. Retrieved from <https://aisel.aisnet.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1004&context=mcis2018>
- Qutoshi, S. B. (2018). Phenomenology: A philosophy and method of inquiry. *Journal of Education and Educational Development*, 5(1), 215-222.
- Reis, J., Amorim, M., Melão, N., & Matos, P. (2018). Digital transformation: a literature review and guidelines for future research. In *World conference on information systems and technologies* (pp. 411-421). Cham: Springer.
- Setiawati, S. D., Sutarjo, M. A. S., & Primasari, I. (2022). Self-Existence in Social Media as a Communication Strategy for Women Entrepreneurs. *Res Militaris*, 12(2), 1927-1938.
- Shaw, E., & Carter, S. (2007). Social entrepreneurship: Theoretical antecedents and empirical analysis of entrepreneurial processes and outcomes. *Journal of small business and enterprise development*, 14(3), 418-434.
- Shepherd, D. A. (2003). Learning from business failure: Propositions of grief recovery for the self-employed. *Academy of Management Review*, 28(2), 318-328.
- Smith, J.A., Jarman, M., & Osborn, M. (1999). Doing interpretative phenomenological analysis. In M. Murray & K. Chamberlain, (Eds.), *Qualitative health psychology: Theories and methods* (pp. 218-240). London: Sage.
- Sussan, F., & Acs, Z. J. (2017). The digital entrepreneurial ecosystem. *Small Business Economics*, 49(1), 55-73.
- Verhoef, P. C., Broekhuizen, T., Bart, Y., Bhattacharya, A., Dong, J. Q., Fabian, N., & Haenlein, M. (2021). Digital transformation: A multidisciplinary reflection and research agenda. *Journal of Business Research*, 122, 889-901.
- Vial, G. (2021). Understanding digital transformation: A review and a research agenda. In A. Hinterhuber, T. Vescovi & F. Checchinato (Eds.), *Managing Digital Transformation* (pp. 13-66). London: Routledge.
- Vuković, K., Korent, D., & Šmaguc, T. (2024). *Poduzetničko društvo u europskom kontekstu*. Varaždin: Sveučilište u Zagrebu Fakultet organizacije i informatike.
- Xiao, Y., & Watson, M. (2019). Guidance on conducting a systematic literature review. *Journal of planning education and research*, 39(1), 93-112.
- Yin, R. K. (2010). *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*. New York: Guilford Publications.
- Zaheer, H., Breyer, Y., & Dumay, J. (2019). Digital entrepreneurship: An interdisciplinary structured literature review and research agenda. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 148, 119735.
- Zhai, Y., Yang, K., Chen, L., Lin, H., Yu, M., & Jin, R. (2023). Digital entrepreneurship: global maps and trends of research. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 38(3), 637-655.

Appendix 1

Table 2. Publications included in the review (*number of citations in Scopus)

Publication	Cit.*	Research objective	Methodology
<i>Influential phenomenological studies in entrepreneurship and small business domain (in general)</i>			
Cope, J. (2011). Entrepreneurial learning from failure: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. <i>Journal of business venturing</i> .	639	to create a theoretical model of learning from entrepreneurial failure with key stages in the entrepreneurial learning process	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA); Phenomenological interviewing; 8 participants (4 from the USA, 4 from the UK)
Cope, J., & Watts, G. (2000). Learning by doing—an exploration of experience, critical incidents and reflection in entrepreneurial learning. <i>International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research</i> .	614	to examine the entrepreneurial learning process and its relations with the personal and career development of an entrepreneur	Phenomenological case study approach; 6 participants (small business owners); emphasis on critical incident analysis
Shaw, E., & Carter, S. (2007). Social entrepreneurship: Theoretical antecedents and empirical analysis of entrepreneurial processes and outcomes. <i>Journal of small business and enterprise development</i> .	499	to examine entrepreneurial processes in social entrepreneurship (financial risk, network embeddedness, reward and profit, innovation, etc.)	Phenomenological approach; 80 in-depth interviews with social entrepreneurs from the UK; inductive analysis, and grounded theory
Dixon, S. E., & Clifford, A. (2007). Ecopreneurship—a new approach to managing the triple bottom line. <i>Journal of Organizational Change Management</i> .	229	to investigate the practices of ecopreneurs by which they create an economically sustainable business, aligned with their social and environmental values	Single case study of Green-Works from the UK; semi structured interviews, micro-ethnography, and document analysis; inductive analysis
Doern, R. (2016). Entrepreneurship and crisis management: The experiences of small businesses during the London 2011 riots. <i>International small business journal</i> .	184	to examine the impact of the crisis on small businesses and strategies to respond (the context of the London 2011 riots)	Phenomenological approach; in-depth interviews with 15 owner-managers of small businesses in London
<i>Phenomenological studies on the topic of digitalization in entrepreneurship and small business domain</i>			
Ano, B., & Bent, R. (2022). Human determinants influencing the digital transformation strategy of multigenerational family businesses: a multiple-case study of five French growth-oriented family firms. <i>Journal of Family Business Management</i> .	19	to investigate the impact of human and cultural capital on the creation and implementation of the digital transformation strategy of family businesses	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA); 8 semi-structured interviews with family business owners (different generational cohorts); 5 case studies from France
Guinez-Cabrera, N., & Aqueveque, C. (2022). Entrepreneurial influencers and influential entrepreneurs: two sides of the same coin. <i>International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research</i> .	10	to investigate entrepreneurial motives and paths of social media users who became social media influencers (SMIs)	Phenomenological approach; 35 semi-structured face-to-face interviews with SMIs
Allataifeh, H., & Moghavvemi, S. (2021). The individual dimension of digital innovation: The altered roles of innovation agents and market actors. <i>Sustainability</i> .	3	to examine the processes in the development of digital innovation and the roles of a heterogeneous set of actors in these processes	Phenomenological approach; semi-structured interview with 21 SMEs entrepreneurs from the ICT sector in Malaysia
Imiren, E. et al. (2024). Understanding legitimacy building in contexts through digital entrepreneurship. <i>International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research</i> .	0	to explore the challenges of building the legitimacy of entrepreneurs operating in the digital context	Phenomenological approach to analysis; semi-structured interviews with 21 entrepreneurs in Nigeria
Allataifeh, H. et al. (2023). How does the digital innovation process unfold in practice? A novel third-generation and empirical-based need–solution pairing model. <i>European Journal of Innovation Management</i> .	0	to develop a model explaining the digital innovation process from practice	Exploratory and phenomenological study; 21 Malaysian SMEs from ICT sector
Setiawati, S. D. et al. (2022). Self-Existence in Social Media as a Communication Strategy for Women Entrepreneurs. <i>Res Militaris</i> .	0	to examine the marketing communication strategies of women small business owners in the digital age	Phenomenological approach; in-depth interviews with 5 women SMEs