

EXPLORING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND ENTREPRENEURIAL EMPOWERMENT AS DRIVERS OF ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION IN THE HALAL INDUSTRY

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Abstract

This study investigates how digital transformation and entrepreneurial empowerment drive entrepreneurial intention within the halal industry. While research on Muslim youth entrepreneurship has grown, evidence on how digital transformation boosts empowerment and intention in a Sharia-compliant context is limited. The study develops an integrated model combining the TOE framework and TPB to examine the determinants of entrepreneurial intention. Data from 186 Muslim students and young entrepreneurs across Indonesian universities were analyzed using SEM-PLS. Results show digital transformation enhances entrepreneurial empowerment by improving perceived behavioral control, technological readiness, and innovation. Empowerment mediates the effect of digital transformation on entrepreneurial intention, emphasizing digital capabilities' strategic role. The study offers an integrated model linking digital transformation with behavioral and organizational factors, with implications for policymakers and educators to foster digital literacy, ethical innovation, and sustainable halal entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Digital Transformation; Entrepreneurial Empowerment; Entrepreneurial Intention; Halal Industry, Muslim Youth; SEM-PLS

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Introduction

The halal industry has emerged as one of the fastest-growing sectors in the global economy, driven by increasing demand for halal products and services among both Muslim and non-Muslim consumers (Melewar & Alwi, 2017; Qadri & Bhatti, 2021). Beyond food and beverages, the halal industry now encompasses finance, fashion, tourism, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, and digital services (M. K. Hassan, Rabbani, et al., 2021; Hidayat et al., 2022; Mubarak & Imam, 2020). This expansion positions halal entrepreneurship as a strategic pathway for economic development, job creation, and ethical value creation, particularly in Muslim-majority countries like Indonesia (Randeree, 2020; Utomo et al., 2021).

As the halal industry grows, digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped the entrepreneurial ecosystem (Imani et al., 2022; Raimi, Abdur-Rauf, & Raimi, 2023; Salaheldeen, 2022). Advances in digital technologies, such as e-commerce platforms, social media marketing, fintech, and data-driven decision-making, have lowered barriers to entry for new ventures and enabled innovative business models (Battisti et al., 2022; Malhotra & Malhotra, 2023). For aspiring entrepreneurs, digital transformation not only provides market access but also increases efficiency, scalability, and competitiveness in an increasingly dynamic environment (Nambisan et al., 2019).

Muslim youth, especially university students, are a crucial demographic group for shaping the future and sustainability of the halal industry (Y. Hassan & Pandey, 2019; Randeree, 2020). As digital natives, they naturally embrace digital technologies like e-commerce, social media, and digital payments for entrepreneurial activities (Jarrahi & Eshraghi, 2019). However, evidence shows that despite their high digital exposure, many Muslim students still have low entrepreneurial intentions, particularly for halal-focused businesses (Lai et al., 2023). This gap reveals structural and psychological barriers, including limited self-efficacy, insufficient entrepreneurial skills, and insufficient institutional support. Consequently, merely accessing digital technology is not enough to spark entrepreneurial intent; comprehensive entrepreneurial empowerment that combines digital skills with Sharia-compliant values is necessary.

Entrepreneurial intention has long been recognized as a strong predictor of entrepreneurial behavior (Joensuu-Salo et al., 2020). Prior studies grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) emphasize that intention is shaped by attitudes toward entrepreneurship, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Zhang et al., 2019). Within the halal industry context, entrepreneurial intention is further influenced by Sharia-compliant values,

ethical considerations, and religious motivation, which differentiate halal entrepreneurship from conventional entrepreneurial settings (Raimi, Adekunle, et al., 2023).

Entrepreneurial empowerment plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between digital opportunities and entrepreneurial intention (Mir et al., 2023). Empowerment is the process by which individuals acquire the skills, confidence, resources, and autonomy needed to initiate and sustain entrepreneurial activities (Al-Dajani & Marlow, 2013). In the context of the halal industry, empowerment also involves the internalization of Islamic ethical principles, risk-sharing values, and compliance with Sharia norms, which collectively shape entrepreneurial decision-making (Bin Hasan, 2016).

Digital transformation can serve as a catalyst for entrepreneurial empowerment by enhancing technological readiness, innovation orientation, and perceived behavioral control (Soetjipto et al., 2022). Digital tools enable Muslim students to experiment with business ideas, access halal markets, and integrate ethical considerations into digital business practices (Rangkuti, 2023). Nevertheless, empirical research examining how digital transformation translates into entrepreneurial empowerment and, subsequently, entrepreneurial intention within the halal industry remains limited (Wijaya et al., 2023).

Existing studies on digital entrepreneurship largely focus on performance outcomes, innovation, or firm-level competitiveness, often overlooking the pre-venture phase of entrepreneurship (Zhou et al., 2019). Moreover, research on halal entrepreneurship tends to emphasize regulatory compliance, halal certification, or consumer behavior, rather than the psychological and empowerment-related antecedents of entrepreneurial intention among Muslim youth (Merguei & Costa, 2022).

From a theoretical perspective, the integration of technological and behavioral frameworks remains underdeveloped in halal entrepreneurship research (Raimi, Abdur-Rauf, & Ashafa, 2023). While the Technology–Organization–Environment (TOE) framework provides valuable insights into how technological and organizational readiness influence innovation adoption, it does not explicitly explain individual intentional behavior (Awa et al., 2017). Conversely, TPB explains intention formation but pays limited attention to digital and organizational contexts (Al-Mamary & Alraja, 2022).

Addressing this gap requires an integrated approach that connects digital transformation with entrepreneurial empowerment and intention formation (Ebrahimi et al., 2023). By combining TOE and TPB, it becomes possible to capture both contextual enablers (digital readiness,

organizational support, and environmental dynamics) and individual determinants (perceived behavioral control, attitudes, and norms) of entrepreneurial intention in the halal industry.

In the Indonesian context, higher education institutions, particularly faculties of Islamic economics and business, play a strategic role in fostering halal entrepreneurship (Utomo et al., 2021). Universities are not only centers of knowledge creation but also key actors in shaping students' entrepreneurial mindset, digital capabilities, and ethical orientation (Scuotto & Morellato, 2013). Understanding how digital transformation within academic environments influences entrepreneurial empowerment is therefore essential for designing effective entrepreneurship education and policy interventions (Tóth-Pajor et al., 2023).

Despite these developments, empirical evidence examining digital transformation, entrepreneurial empowerment, and entrepreneurial intention within the halal industry, especially among Muslim university students, remains scarce (I. Nuseir et al., 2020). Most prior studies treat these constructs in isolation, limiting their ability to explain the complex mechanisms through which digitalization fosters halal-oriented entrepreneurial intention (Raimi, Adekunle, et al., 2023).

This study offers a clear novelty by proposing and empirically testing an integrated TOE–TPB model that positions entrepreneurial empowerment as a mediating mechanism between digital transformation and entrepreneurial intention in the halal industry. Unlike prior research, this study explicitly situates entrepreneurial intention within a Sharia-compliant and halal industry context, focusing on Muslim university students as prospective halal entrepreneurs. By linking digital transformation with behavioral and empowerment perspectives, this research provides a novel theoretical contribution and practical insights for higher education institutions and policymakers seeking to cultivate digitally empowered and ethically grounded halal entrepreneurs.

Methods

This study adopted a quantitative research design to empirically test an integrated Technology–Organization–Environment (TOE) (Awa et al., 2017) and Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) model (Ajzen, 1985), with entrepreneurial empowerment positioned as a mediating variable between digital transformation and entrepreneurial intention in the halal industry. The research population comprised Muslim university students enrolled in faculties of Islamic economics and business in Indonesia, who represent prospective halal entrepreneurs. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that respondents

had been exposed to entrepreneurship education and digital business environments. A total of 186 valid questionnaires were collected and analyzed.

Data were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire distributed online. The measurement of digital transformation was operationalized based on the TOE framework, capturing technological readiness, organizational support, and environmental digital pressure. Entrepreneurial empowerment, as the mediating construct, was measured through indicators reflecting perceived behavioral control, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, and innovation capability, aligning with TPB's behavioral control dimension. Entrepreneurial intention was assessed using established TPB-based indicators that capture students' readiness and commitment to engage in halal-oriented entrepreneurial activities. All constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale.

Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS), which is appropriate for testing complex integrative models and mediation effects. The analysis followed a two-step procedure, starting with the evaluation of the measurement model to ensure construct reliability and validity, including convergent and discriminant validity. Subsequently, the structural model was assessed to examine the direct and indirect relationships among digital transformation, entrepreneurial empowerment, and entrepreneurial intention, with bootstrapping techniques applied to test the significance of the mediating effect and validate the proposed integrated TOE–TPB framework.

Building on the integrated TOE–TPB framework, this study conceptualizes digital transformation as a significant contextual driver of individual empowerment and entrepreneurial intention in the halal industry. Digital readiness, organizational support, and a dynamic digital environment are anticipated to augment students' perceived behavioral control, innovation capability, and confidence in engaging in halal-oriented entrepreneurial activities. Consequently, empowered individuals are more inclined to develop stronger entrepreneurial intentions, as empowerment bridges the gap between technological opportunities and intentional behavior. Accordingly, to empirically examine these theoretical relationships and validate the proposed mediating mechanism, the following hypotheses are formulated.

H1: Digital transformation has a positive and significant effect on entrepreneurial empowerment in the halal industry.

H2: Digital transformation has a positive and significant effect on entrepreneurial intention in the halal industry.

H3: Entrepreneurial empowerment has a positive and significant effect on entrepreneurial intention in the halal industry.

H4: Entrepreneurial empowerment mediates the relationship between digital transformation and entrepreneurial intention in the halal industry.

Results and Discussion

Characteristics of Respondents

The respondents of this study comprised 186 Muslim university students enrolled in the faculties of Islamic Economics and Business in Indonesia, representing prospective contributors to the halal industry. Regarding gender distribution, the majority of respondents were female, reflecting the student population in Islamic Economics programs. The predominant age range of respondents was 20-24 years, suggesting that the sample primarily included students in their productive and formative entrepreneurial years.

Regarding academic background, the majority of respondents were undergraduate students in their third to seventh semesters and had already taken entrepreneurship-related courses. A significant proportion of respondents reported having basic experience with digital platforms, such as online marketplaces, social media business accounts, and digital payment systems. However, only a limited number had formally established halal-oriented businesses, indicating that most respondents were still in the pre-venture stage of entrepreneurship.

In terms of entrepreneurial exposure, many respondents expressed interest in entrepreneurship, yet fewer reported strong confidence in initiating a halal business independently. This finding supports the relevance of examining entrepreneurial intention rather than actual entrepreneurial behavior, as well as the importance of entrepreneurial empowerment in strengthening students' readiness to engage in halal entrepreneurship.

Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model evaluation demonstrated that all constructs met the recommended criteria for reliability and validity. Indicator loadings for digital transformation, entrepreneurial empowerment, and entrepreneurial intention exceeded the acceptable threshold, indicating adequate convergent validity. Composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs were above the minimum recommended levels, confirming internal consistency reliability.

Table 1. Measurement Model

Construct	Item	Loading	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Digital Transformation	DT1	0.864	0.918	0.738
	DT2	0.877		
	DT3	0.894		
	DT4	0.798		
Entrepreneurial Empowerment	EE1	0.738	0.910	0.628
	EE2	0.830		
	EE3	0.844		
	EE4	0.774		
	EE5	0.791		
	EE6	0.772		
Entrepreneurial intention toward halal industry	EI1	0.852	0.926	0.677
	EI2	0.804		
	EI3	0.773		
	EI4	0.804		
	EI5	0.864		
	EI6	0.836		

Sources: (output of Smart PLS 3.0, 2023)

Discriminant validity was established using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and cross-loadings, which indicated that each construct was empirically distinct from the others. These results confirm that digital transformation, entrepreneurial empowerment, and entrepreneurial intention represent conceptually and statistically separate constructs within the integrated TOE–TPB framework.

Structural Model Results

The structural model analysis revealed that digital transformation has a significant positive effect on entrepreneurial empowerment, indicating that technological readiness, organizational support, and digital environmental pressure enhance students' sense of empowerment. This finding suggests that digital transformation strengthens perceived behavioral control, innovation capability, and confidence to engage in halal-oriented entrepreneurial activities.

Table 2. Structural Equation Model Hypothesis Test Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	Coefficien	P- Value	Explanation	R ²	f ²
H1	DT → EE	0,494	0,000	Confirmed	0.622	0.390
H2	DT → EI	0,380	0,000	Confirmed	0.679	0.135
H3	EE → EI	0,311	0,000	Confirmed		0.231
H7	DT → EE →EI	0,118	0,002	Confirmed		

Sources: (output of Smart PLS 3.0, 2023)

Furthermore, entrepreneurial empowerment was found to have a significant positive influence on entrepreneurial intention, confirming its central role in shaping students' intention to pursue entrepreneurship in the halal industry. Students who perceived themselves as more empowered demonstrated stronger commitment and readiness to start halal-based ventures.

Importantly, the mediation analysis showed that entrepreneurial empowerment significantly mediates the relationship between digital transformation and entrepreneurial intention. While digital transformation also exerted a direct effect on entrepreneurial intention, its indirect effect through entrepreneurial empowerment was stronger, underscoring that it primarily influences entrepreneurial intention by strengthening empowerment mechanisms. These findings empirically validate the proposed integrated TOE–TPB model and highlight entrepreneurial empowerment as a key explanatory pathway linking digital transformation and entrepreneurial intention in the halal industry.

Digital transformation has a positive and significant effect on entrepreneurial empowerment in the halal industry

The findings confirm that digital transformation has a positive and significant effect on entrepreneurial empowerment among Muslim university students in the halal industry. This result indicates that increased digital readiness, access to digital infrastructure, and exposure to digital ecosystems enhance students' perceived ability to initiate and manage halal-oriented business activities. Digital technologies reduce information asymmetry and enable students to explore entrepreneurial opportunities at lower cost and risk.

From the perspective of the TOE framework, this result underscores the importance of technological and environmental contexts in shaping individual-level empowerment

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(Makridis & Han, 2021). Digital tools such as e-commerce platforms, social media, and fintech services create supportive environments that facilitate learning, experimentation, and innovation (Lagna & Ravishankar, 2022). When students perceive that their organizational and digital environments are conducive, they feel more empowered to translate ideas into viable entrepreneurial plans (Scuotto & Morellato, 2013).

In the halal industry, digital transformation also enables better alignment between entrepreneurship and Sharia-compliant values (M. K. Hassan, Muneeza, et al., 2021). Digital platforms enable transparent transactions, traceability of halal products, and ethical marketing practices, thereby strengthening students' confidence in engaging in halal businesses (Hidayat et al., 2022). This alignment reinforces empowerment by integrating technological capability with ethical legitimacy (Huda, 2019).

This finding extends prior entrepreneurship research by empirically demonstrating that digital transformation functions not merely as a technical enabler but as a psychological and capability-enhancing mechanism. By linking digital transformation to entrepreneurial empowerment, this study contributes to the halal entrepreneurship literature, which has traditionally emphasized compliance issues rather than empowerment processes.

Digital transformation has a positive and significant effect on entrepreneurial intention in the halal industry

The results reveal that digital transformation directly and positively influences entrepreneurial intention among Muslim students in the halal industry. This suggests that students who perceive higher levels of digital readiness and technological opportunity are more inclined to pursue entrepreneurial careers. Digitalization lowers entry barriers, enhances market access, and increases the perceived feasibility of starting halal-oriented ventures.

Consistent with TPB, digital transformation strengthens perceived behavioral control, thereby enhancing entrepreneurial intention (Al-Mamary & Alraja, 2022). When students believe that digital technologies enable them to manage business operations efficiently, their confidence in entrepreneurial success increases (Scuotto & Morellato, 2013). This perception fosters a stronger, more intentional commitment to entrepreneurship as a career choice (Liguori et al., 2020).

In the halal industry, digital transformation also supports the emergence of new business models, such as online halal marketplaces, Islamic fintech, and digital halal services (Bukhari et al., 2019). These models resonate with the aspirations of Muslim youth who seek flexible,

innovative, and value-driven entrepreneurial pathways. As a result, digital transformation acts as a motivational force that aligns economic opportunity with religious and ethical values. This finding contributes to the literature by highlighting that digital transformation affects entrepreneurial intention not only indirectly through empowerment but also directly (Cahyani et al., 2022; Jawad et al., 2021). However, the presence of a significant mediation effect suggests that the influence of digital transformation is more effective when accompanied by empowerment mechanisms, reinforcing the integrated TOE–TPB approach.

Entrepreneurial empowerment has a positive and significant effect on entrepreneurial intention in the halal industry

The analysis demonstrates that entrepreneurial empowerment has a strong and significant effect on entrepreneurial intention among Muslim university students. Empowered individuals, those who perceive themselves as capable, autonomous, and resourceful, are more likely to develop clear intentions to engage in halal entrepreneurship. This finding supports TPB's assertion that perceived behavioral control is a key determinant of intention. Entrepreneurial empowerment encompasses not only technical skills but also psychological readiness and ethical confidence (Schmidt & Heidenreich, 2019). In the halal industry, empowerment includes understanding Sharia principles, managing halal compliance, and balancing profit with ethical responsibility (Widodo et al., 2022). Students who feel empowered in these dimensions are more confident in their ability to operate within halal market constraints.

This result highlights the central role of higher education institutions in fostering empowerment through entrepreneurship education, digital training, and mentorship (Srivastava & Thomas, 2017). Universities that integrate digital tools with halal entrepreneurship curricula can enhance students' empowerment and, consequently, their entrepreneurial intention (T. Nuseir et al., 2020). Empowerment thus serves as a critical link between education, technology, and entrepreneurial outcomes (Al-Dajani & Marlow, 2013). By empirically validating the empowerment–intention relationship in a halal context, this study extends existing entrepreneurship models that often overlook ethical and religious dimensions. It demonstrates that empowerment is particularly salient in value-based entrepreneurial settings, where intention formation requires both capability and moral assurance.

Entrepreneurial empowerment mediates the relationship between digital transformation and entrepreneurial intention in the halal industry

The mediation analysis confirms that entrepreneurial empowerment significantly mediates the relationship between digital transformation and entrepreneurial intention. This finding indicates that digital transformation influences entrepreneurial intention primarily by enhancing individuals' sense of empowerment. Without empowerment, digital exposure alone may not translate into strong entrepreneurial intentions.

This result provides empirical support for the integrated TOE–TPB model proposed in this study. Digital transformation, as conceptualized within the TOE framework, shapes the contextual environment, while entrepreneurial empowerment represents the behavioral mechanism through which intention is formed, consistent with TPB. The mediation effect highlights the importance of linking contextual and behavioral perspectives.

In the halal industry, the mediating role of empowerment is particularly critical due to the additional ethical and religious considerations involved in entrepreneurship. Digital tools may offer opportunities, but students must feel empowered to navigate halal compliance, ethical decision-making, and market uncertainties. Empowerment enables them to internalize digital opportunities in line with Sharia values.

This finding represents a key novelty of the study by empirically demonstrating how entrepreneurial empowerment bridges digital transformation and entrepreneurial intention in halal entrepreneurship. It offers practical implications for policymakers and educators, suggesting that digital entrepreneurship initiatives should prioritize empowerment-based interventions, such as capacity building, ethical training, and mentorship, to effectively stimulate halal-oriented entrepreneurial intention.

Conclusions

This study concludes that digital transformation plays a pivotal role in shaping entrepreneurial intention in the halal industry, both directly and indirectly through entrepreneurial empowerment. The empirical findings confirm that digital readiness, technological opportunities, and supportive digital environments significantly enhance entrepreneurial empowerment among Muslim university students. Furthermore, empowered individuals demonstrate stronger entrepreneurial intentions, highlighting the importance of psychological readiness, perceived behavioral control, and innovation capability in fostering halal-oriented entrepreneurship. The mediating role of entrepreneurial empowerment validates the

proposed integrated TOE–TPB model and underscores the need to link digital transformation with empowerment mechanisms within a Sharia-compliant entrepreneurial context.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the entrepreneurship and halal industry literature by integrating technological, organizational, and behavioral frameworks into a unified explanatory model. By positioning entrepreneurial empowerment as a central mediating construct, the research extends existing models of entrepreneurial intention, which often overlook the interplay between digital transformation and value-based empowerment. This integrative approach offers a more comprehensive understanding of how digital ecosystems influence intention formation among Muslim youth in the halal industry.

Based on these findings, several practical recommendations are proposed. Higher education institutions, particularly faculties of Islamic economics and business, should strengthen digital entrepreneurship curricula by integrating hands-on digital business training with halal and Sharia-compliant principles. Policymakers are encouraged to design empowerment-based programs that go beyond digital access, focusing on capacity building, mentorship, and ethical innovation to nurture future halal entrepreneurs. Finally, future research may expand this model by incorporating longitudinal designs, comparative analyses across regions or countries, and additional constructs, such as Islamic entrepreneurial values or institutional support, to further enrich the understanding of halal entrepreneurship in the digital era.

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