

TOWARDS A BUSINESS MODELS CLASSIFICATION

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Abstract: *In the contemporary environment, companies are configured not only as traditional economic actors, but as veritable nodes of intermediation of ideas and creations, capable of articulating new forms of value and competitiveness in a context marked by complexity and volatility. This study systematically addresses the conceptual differences between typologies and taxonomies in business models, leveraging the comparative analysis of various business model archetypes to establish an innovative typology of business models, capable of providing a coherent framework for classification and strategic development. The methodology used in this paper involves the analysis of business models, focusing on existing essentialist perspectives, with the aim of identifying and understanding the fundamental characteristics that shape the diversity of business models discussed in the specialized literature. Based on these observations, this study aims to answer two essential research questions: How can essentialist and empirical classification reveal the fundamental structures of business models? To what extent can these classifications, combined with the investigation of the main categories of business models, lead to the proposal of a typology for them? This analysis aims to propose a new typology, which provides a clear framework for framing the different business models.*

Keywords: *business models; business model typology; business model taxonomy; classification framework; innovative typology.*

JEL classification: M10; M19; L20

1. Introduction

The paper explores the specialized literature through a descriptive-analytical approach, aiming to examine relevant studies regarding taxonomies, typologies, and types of business models, with the intention of identifying the conceptual foundations that can underlie the development of a new typology capable of providing a coherent framework for classification and strategic interpretation of them.

The analysis of these theoretical contributions allows for understanding how the various structural, functional, and contextual perspectives have shaped the evolution of existing classifications.

Schoormann (2023:6) highlights the relevance of research on taxonomies and typologies, emphasizing the variety of ways in which they are developed, communicated, and integrated into theoretical and practical processes, an aspect that underlines the necessity of a rigorous and innovative approach in defining the

classification frameworks of business models. In this context, the present paper aims to contribute to the consolidation of the conceptual foundation of the field through a comparative and critical analysis of the specialized literature.

2. Conceptual perspectives on business model taxonomies, typologies and classification

Bailey (1994) emphasizes the fundamental difference between typologies and taxonomies, highlighting their distinct nature. Typology is based on theoretical concepts, each element representing an ideal model that helps in understanding phenomena at an abstract level. In contrast, taxonomy is anchored in empirical data, transforming concrete observations into verifiable classifications. Thus, typology provides the theoretical framework that guides interpretation, while taxonomy supplies the necessary empirical support, and together they allow a complete and balanced understanding of the studied phenomena.

The fundamental difference between typologies and taxonomies lies in the nature of the approach: typologies are conceptual and qualitative, whereas taxonomies are empirical and quantitative (Lüdeke-Freund et al. 2018:14).

Although there are notable differences between typologies, taxonomies, and classifications, the terms are often used somewhat carelessly, both in practice and in scientific literature. Table 1 presents a partial synthesis of the classification of business models, with the caveat that even here the term “classification” is used interchangeably with “taxonomy” or “typology.”

Another term used in organizing types of business models is classification. Classification differs from taxonomy and typology in that it represents a general form of organizing objects based on shared characteristics, while taxonomy is an empirical, inductively constructed classification that groups real-world instances according to observable similarities, and typology is a theoretical, deductively constructed classification that defines ideal or conceptual types derived from existing theoretical foundations.

Kamprath and Halecker (2012) propose a systematic approach for classifying business models at the industry level, using taxonomy methods to operationalize and compare large quantities of models through a four-dimensional grid applied to companies in the personalized medicine sector, thus offering a strategic tool for analysis and innovation. Also, Schoormann et al. (2023) conduct a comprehensive comparative analysis of existing classification tools (typologies, taxonomies, and classification schemes), highlighting conceptual and methodological differences among them and providing an analytical framework for the rigorous design of new business model classification tools. Groth and Nielsen (2015) propose a methodological research design for creating valid and reliable business model taxonomies using statistical methods such as cluster analysis and latent class analysis, emphasizing the need for large-scale empirical studies to underpin such classifications. Lambert (2015) underscores the importance of classification in business model research and proposes a structured method for designing classification schemes, arguing that rigorous taxonomies can accelerate theory building in this emerging field. Möller et al. (2021) synthesize insights from information systems research to guide the design of empirical business model taxonomies, analyzing their diffusion across industries and technologies and offering

methodological recommendations for future taxonomy design studies. Finally, Weking et al. (2018) develop a hierarchical taxonomy of business model patterns based on recurring successful configurations, structuring 194 elements identified in the literature into a hierarchy of generalizations and specializations that facilitates business model innovation and reduces the complexity of the design process.

Table 1: Overview of Business Model Classification Approaches

No.	Authors / Year	Main Focus / Contribution	Type of Classification Proposed
1	Kamprath & Halecker (2012)	Develop a systematic approach to compare and classify large numbers of business models in an industry context, integrating system thinking and activity system perspectives.	Four-dimensional business model taxonomy grid based on nine components, 27 indicators, and 132 characteristics (applied to Personalized Medicine).
2	Lambert (2015)	Emphasizes the importance of rigorous classification for theory building in business model research and proposes a structured process for classification design.	General classification design method for business model research - integrates conceptual and empirical classification logic (typology vs. taxonomy).
3	Groth & Nielsen (2015)	Present a research design ("recipe") for constructing reliable taxonomies using empirical methods and statistical clustering techniques.	Empirical business model taxonomy framework based on cluster analysis and latent class analysis for grouping firms by business model similarity.
4	Weking, Hein, Böhm & Krcmar (2018)	Build a hierarchical taxonomy of business model patterns to structure 194 recurring configurations that support business model innovation.	Hierarchical taxonomy of business model patterns, organizes generalizations and specializations based on inheritance among business model elements.
5	Möller, Stachon, Azkan, Schoormann & Otto (2021)	Synthesizes existing research to identify how taxonomies are designed across industries and technologies; provides guidance for empirical taxonomy construction.	Design framework for empirical taxonomies, identifies design dimensions (context, method, visualization, iteration) and maps taxonomy diffusion by sector/technology.
6	Schoormann, Schweihoff, Jussen & Möller (2023)	Provide a meta-analysis of classification tools (typologies, taxonomies, classification schemes) and a	Analytical grid for classification tools - distinguishes and compares taxonomy,

		framework for understanding their conceptual and methodological foundations.	typology, and classification scheme according to design principles and use contexts.
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3. Methodology: a systematic approach for business models classification development

The purpose of the research is to achieve a classification of existing business models in the specialized literature. The objectives that are subordinate to this purpose are to identify existing business models (at least the best-known ones) and then find some classification criteria that meet the methodological and epistemological requirements. The working method consisted of the systematic analysis of business models presented in the specialized literature. The design of research is presented in Figure 1. We chose Google Scholar as the database due to the large number of works and chose a single database to avoid overlaps. The time interval of the research articles was a wide one, starting with the year 2000, the working method was based on Grounded Theory (Glaser, Strauss, 1998). The search interval was 2000-2024 and resulted in 57,800 articles that have the term "business models" in the title and abstract. The articles were listed according to the frequency of access, the number of citations being linked to the frequency of access. The results were consulted and only the articles that present a business model not found in the previous articles were selected. In the next stage, an inventory of these models and their characteristics was made.

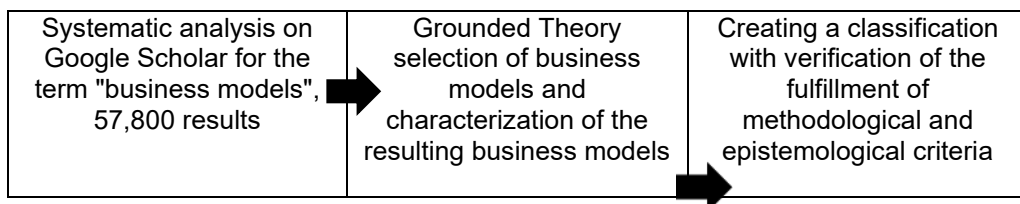


Figure 1: Research design
(Source: created by authors)

Following the analysis of the Google Scholar database, 16 business models were identified, for which a series of characteristics were presented in Table 2. A valid classification must meet several essential criteria to ensure its scientific rigor, clarity, and usefulness (Bailey, 1994; Lambert, 2015; Groth, Nielsen 2015). It should be comprehensive, meaning it must include all relevant categories that adequately represent the studied phenomenon, and mutually exclusive, so that each object belongs to only one category without conceptual overlap. The classification must also be exhaustive, ensuring that every instance can be classified within its structure, and clear,

with well-defined, transparent classification criteria that allow replication by other researchers. Logical consistency is required so that the relationships among dimensions and categories follow a coherent and non-contradictory rationale. Moreover, a good classification must be useful, serving analytical or practical purposes such as comparison, evaluation, or innovation. Empirical robustness is another key requirement, as the classification's categories should be validated through data analysis or theoretical justification. Simplicity and parsimony are equally important, as the number of dimensions and classes should capture the phenomenon sufficiently without unnecessary complexity. Finally, stability and extendibility ensure that the classification remains valid over time but can also adapt to new developments or emerging categories.

Table 2: Characteristics of business models identified in the literature

Business model name	Characteristics of business model
Retailer business model	Value creation for customers; Adaptability to market changes; Variety of sales formats (physical, online, hybrid); Operational activities; Interdependent governance structures; Digital expansion; Direct-to-consumer through digital platforms, flagship stores, and shop-in-shop concepts (Prepletaný, 2013; Haas, 2019).
Manufacturer business model	Customer embedded in operational and engineering flows; Alignment of production with business activities through evolutionary manufacturing; Evolutionary manufacturing synchronizing production and commercial activities; Distribution remains separate (Browne et al. 1995).
Subscription business model	Perceived value and relevance of the service; Beliefs about transaction fairness; Attitudes toward paying for previously free services; Ease of access; Importance of the service; Additional benefits; Perceived standard; Usage frequency; Perceived fairness; Perceived security risks (Wang et al. 2005).
Bundling business model	Integration of products and services into a single offer; Preferential pricing; Increased accessibility for previously untargeted customer segments; Price differentiation opportunities; Optimization of commercial expenses; Strengthened competitive positioning; Creation of entry barriers for potential competitors (Dominique-Ferreira et al. 2020).
Product-as-a-service business model	Combined package of products and services; Economic, social, and ecological sustainability; Focus on satisfying customer requirements and needs (Annarelli et al. 2016).

Leasing business model	Goods rented instead of purchased; Ownership retained by the manufacturer (Browne et al. 1995).
Franchise business model	Franchisor grants the right to use a brand or trade name; Operations governed by predefined terms and conditions (Lee et al. 2016).
Distribution business model	Optimization of distribution channels; Reexamination of post-sale services; Adjustments for economic efficiency; Strategic reconfiguration for financial sustainability (Loomba, 1996).
Freemium business model	Provision of free services to users; Reduction of access barriers; Attraction of a larger audience compared to paid-only models (Voigt et al. 2016).
Advertising or affiliate marketing business model	Promotion and sale of products or services through external channels; Transmission of relevant information to customers; Focus on generating online transactions; Earning commissions for affiliate partners (Patrick et al. 2021).
Digital business models	Transformation of operational structure through digital technologies; Strategic integration of digital technologies; Development of innovative business models, operational flows, software systems, and digital infrastructures; Increased profitability; Strengthened competitive advantage; Optimized organizational efficiency (Veit et al. 2014; Schwertner 2017).
Platform business model	Value derived from reciprocal and collaborative interactions among participants; Co-creation processes; Continuously adapting platform structure and governance; Adjustment to participant activities and network behaviors; Responsiveness to network requirements (Fehrer et al. 2018).
Big-data business models	Value generated through advanced processing and analysis of data; Transformation of raw data into actionable insights; Creation of innovative products and services; Significant impact on organizational decision-making and performance (Davenport et al. 2013).
Circular economy business models	Adoption of innovations to generate and capture value; Strict adherence to circular principles; Alignment of internal processes and strategies with circularity; Coordinated collaboration with stakeholders; Simultaneous economic, social, and environmental benefits; Long-term sustainability (Lahti et al. 2018).
Canvas business model	Analytical and visual tool; Identification and examination of fundamental business model components; Clear mapping for organizing and

	documenting essential details; Facilitation of understanding and strategic business planning (Osterwalder and Pigneur, 2010; Carter et al. 2020).
Sustainable business models	Integration of eco-innovations; Promotion of ecological efficiency; Implementation of corporate social responsibility practices; Definition of sustainability priorities and strategic directions (Bocken et al. 2014).

(Source: created by authors)

Highlighting the diversity of types of business models constitutes a solid basis for a relevant comparative analysis, which emphasizes both their differences and complementarities, particularly with regard to sustainability, innovation, modularity, and social/ecological impact, thus reflecting the significant variety of approaches to adaptability in the context of a dynamic market. The comparative analysis includes a wide range of business models, such as the retailer model (Prepletaný 2013; Haas, 2019), the manufacturer model (Browne, et al. 1995; Kiel, et al. 2017), subscription (Wang, et al. 2005; Oat, 2013), bundling model (Dominique-Ferreira et al. 2020; Madhavaram, et al. 2023), product-as-a-service business model (Annarelli, et al. 2016), leasing model (Browne et al. 1995; Kuo, et al. 2019), franchise model (Lee, et al. 2016; Baresa, et al. 2017), distribution model (Loomba, 1996; Castaneda, et al. 1998), freemium (Voigt et al. 2016; Rietveld, 2018), advertising or affiliate marketing business model (Brown, 2009; Patrick et al. 2021), digital models (Veit et al. 2014; Schwertner 2017; Kotarba, 2018) and platform business models (Fehrer et al. 2018; Zhao, et al. 2020), big data models (Davenport et al. 2013; Schroeder, 2016), circular economy business models (Lahti et al. 2018; Kalmykova, et al. 2018), Canvas business model (Osterwalder, Pigneur, 2010; Carter et al. 2020; Perciun, et al. 2022) and sustainable business model (Schaltegger, et al. 2011; Bocken et al. 2014; Gauthier, et al. 2016), each highlighting essential particularities regarding sustainability, innovation, modularity, and social impact. Traditional models, such as the retailer and manufacturer models, emphasize optimizing the value chain and adapting to competitive changes, but they integrate sustainability and social responsibility aspects to a limited extent. In contrast, modern models, such as those based on the circular economy and sustainable models, explicitly incorporate ecological, economic, and social principles, promoting innovation through resource reuse and reducing environmental impact. Digital models, platforms, and big data-based models stand out for their modularity and high adaptability, facilitating co-creation of value and rapid response to market changes. At the same time, product-as-a-service and leasing models reflect a strong commitment to sustainability by extending product lifecycles and promoting responsible consumption. Social impact is emphasized in models that include corporate social responsibility and eco-innovations, integrating ethical dimensions into business strategy. In conclusion, these typologies provide a comprehensive framework for understanding and applying sustainability in the design and implementation of innovative, flexible, and socially and ecologically responsible business models. This theoretical foundation serves as a starting point for further exploration of business models, highlighting how the distinct characteristics of archetypes can guide the process of innovation and the integration of social responsibility and economic efficiency principles into organizational practices.

4. Proposing a classification of business models

The analysis of the business model is oriented toward identifying and understanding the fundamental archetypes that structure the diversity of business models existing in the specialized literature. The importance of careful selection of these archetypes is emphasized, a process that involves not only their formal classification but also an examination of the defining characteristics that differentiate them in relation to operating principles and their strategic potential. This approach allows a clear delineation of the intrinsic qualities of each type of business model, highlighting how they can be correlated with the specific objectives of an organization. The analysis aims to demonstrate that choosing an appropriate archetype does not represent a static process, but a dynamic one, influenced by factors such as technological innovation, changes in consumer behavior, sustainability pressures, and global market trends.

Although there is no typology of business models in the specialized literature, numerous authors propose partial classifications or taxonomies based on specific criteria and examples. Building on these contributions, we aim to develop our own classification, which integrates the main identified models, groups them according to relevant criteria, and provides a coherent conceptual framework for their analysis and comparison in the current business environment. In constructing the proposed classification of business models, classification criteria derived from the analysis of the defining characteristics of the types identified in the specialized literature were used. The first criterion refers to the main source of revenue, as it reflects the fundamental mechanism through which organizations ensure their financial sustainability (e.g., direct sales, subscriptions, licensing, advertising). The second criterion is the nature of the value proposition, which allows differentiation between models centered on physical products, intangible services, combinations of these, or brand experiences, aspects that directly influence market positioning. A third criterion is the main delivery channel, physical, digital, or hybrid, since the mode of value distribution has a major impact on cost structure and market access. Additionally, the degree of innovation and orientation toward sustainability was considered an essential criterion, given the increasing importance of technology-based, digital, and ecologically principled models in long-term competitiveness.

Table 3: Proposed classification of business models

Criterion 1: Business models generating revenue through direct sales, focused on efficiency, reliability, and short-term transactional customer relationships.	Criterion 2: Business models generating stable, recurring revenue by providing continuous access to products or services, fostering long-term customer relationships.	Criterion 3: Business models generating revenue from digital platforms or data, leveraging connectivity, network effects, and evolving customer relationships.
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Traditional Transactional Business Models ▪ Retailer Business Model ▪ Manufacturer Business Model ▪ Distribution Business Model	Recurring Revenue Business Models ▪ Subscription Business Model ▪ Leasing Business Model ▪ Product-as-a-Service Business Model	Digital Business Models ▪ E-business/ Digital Business Model ▪ Platform Business Model ▪ Big Data Business Model
Criterion 4: Business models generating revenue from sustainable products or services, highlighting environmental, social, and economic value with ethical customer relationships.	Criterion 5: Business models generating revenue from licensing, partnerships, or bundled offerings, emphasizing brand access, marketing reach, and contract-based customer or partner relationships.	Criterion 6: Business models generating revenue from hybrid offerings, combining free and premium services or analytical tools, emphasizing accessibility, strategic insight, and participatory customer relationships.
Sustainable-Oriented Business Models ▪ Sustainable Business Model ▪ Circular Economy Business Model	Licensing and Partnership Business Models ▪ Franchise Business Model ▪ Advertising & Affiliate Marketing Business Model ▪ Bundling Business Model	Hybrid and Innovative Business Models ▪ Freemium Business Model ▪ Business Model Canvas

(Source: created by authors)

Furthermore, the criterion of the type of customer relationship distinguishes between transactional, continuous, partnership, or community relationships, highlighting customer loyalty and engagement strategy. The selection of these criteria aimed to ensure a coherent classification, with theoretical relevance and practical applicability, capable of integrating the diversity of encountered models and facilitating their adaptation to different organizational and market contexts. Although the proposed typology provides a clear framework for categorizing different business models, it also presents a series of inherent limitations.

First, the classification has a conceptual nature and is based on the interpretation of the general characteristics of models from the literature, which means it may be influenced by the researcher's subjectivity and the selection of consulted sources.

Second, given the dynamics of the business environment, models are in continuous evolution, making the typology valid in a certain temporal context but requiring periodic updates. Additionally, there are overlaps between some categories, as in practice many models are hybrid, borrowing elements from multiple types, which may complicate strict classification into a single category.

Furthermore, the typology does not capture in detail sectoral specificities or cultural and legislative differences that may influence the applicability of models in various regions. Ultimately, the purpose of the typology is not to provide an exhaustive or universally valid classification, but to constitute an analytical and guiding tool, adaptable according to the particularities of each organization and market context.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that the proposed classification framework offers a structured perspective on the diversity of business models identified in the literature. By distinguishing between typologies, taxonomies, and classifications, the paper contributes to clarifying conceptual ambiguities and provides a coherent foundation for future research. The analysis integrates both theoretical and empirical dimensions, suggesting that business models can be better understood when examined through multiple criteria such as revenue sources, value proposition, delivery channels, and sustainability orientation. The methodological approach, based on a systematic literature review and elements of grounded theory, ensures a balanced combination between conceptual rigor and practical applicability. Although the classification remains provisional and context-dependent, it represents a useful analytical tool for organizing existing models and identifying emerging forms of value creation and innovation in the business environment.

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