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# Exploring the role of Artificial Intelligence in startups: A review-based study

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**Abstract**
The way startups function, innovate, and compete is being altered by artificial intelligence (AI), which is changing the entrepreneurial landscape. In order to investigate the strategic significance of AI in startup situations, this study does a thorough literature assessment of 40 peer-reviewed journal and conference articles. The results show that AI lowers startup failure rates while improving decision-making, operational effectiveness, and innovation. By examining consumer behavior and industry trends, artificial intelligence (AI) technologies facilitate data-driven decision-making, customized product development, and idea generation. Startups must contend with issues like high implementation costs, the requirement for specialized knowledge, and moral dilemmas like algorithmic prejudice and data privacy. The influence of AI is categorized into five theme clusters in this study using a conceptual framework that includes decision-making, competitive advantage, idea generation, challenges, and ethical considerations. The study also provides future research directions, such as Cross-cultural investigations, ethical governance, and investor perceptions. AI has been positioned not only as a technological advancement but as a vigorous driver for startup's sustainability and competitiveness.

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence, startups, decision making, idea generation, competitive advantage, challenges and ethical considerations

## 1. Introduction
The entrepreneurial atmosphere is being redefined by artificial intelligence (AI), which is acting as a catalyst to transform how startups operate, create, and grow. Startups may improve their competitive advantage, rationalize operations, and make improved decisions by integrating AI technologies. By utilizing technologies like machine learning, data mining, natural language processing, and picture identification, artificial intelligence (AI) refers to devices or computer programs that mimic human intelligence. AI has the power to significantly increase operational effectiveness, lower expenses, improve product quality, and boost customer support. In this situation, an organization's competencies are essential for seeing and seizing commercial possibilities via AI integration (Chen *et al*., 2022) [6]. Artificial Intelligence (AI) occupies a prominent position at the forefront of the contemporary technological revolution, serving a crucial function in the reformation of task execution and problem resolution methodologies. In a broad sense, AI denotes the cognitive capabilities demonstrated by machines, and as a scholarly field, it concentrates on the mechanisms through which digital computers and algorithms are able to undertake tasks and address intricate dilemmas that conventionally necessitate or exceed human cognitive functions, reasoning capabilities, and adaptability (Obschonka *et al*., 2017) [22].
This investigation is both pertinent and opportune for a multitude of compelling justifications. First, there exists an urgent necessity to systematically integrate the findings of extant academic literature to fully exploit their insights. While numerous significant and perceptive contributions have been documented, to the best of our knowledge, this study constitutes the initial structured endeavor to synthesize this corpus of work (Sreenivasan & Suresh, 2023) [31].
Second, the escalating prevalence of artificial intelligence (AI) is facilitating unprecedented business prospects. AI technologies, once regarded as futuristic or exclusive to large-scale enterprises, are now becoming increasingly accessible to entrepreneurs at relatively modest costs. This democratization of AI instruments indicates that their utilization is no longer

confined to established corporations (Verganti *et al*., 2020) [35]. Consequently, AI possesses the potential to significantly enhance entrepreneurial endeavors, particularly in nascent and resource-limited contexts.

This paper makes a twofold contribution. First, at the theoretical level, it represents the first known effort to systematically organize and synthesize the existing literature at the intersection of startups and artificial intelligence (AI). Through a comprehensive systematic literature review, we identify and categorize the existing research into five well-defined thematic clusters: decision-making, competitive advantage, idea generation, challenges, and ethical considerations. Each of these clusters is examined within the structure of what we term the "AI-enabled entrepreneurial process", providing a coherent lens to understand how AI influences various stages of entrepreneurial activity.

Second, the study proposes an interpretative framework to evaluate the impact of AI on startups. This framework not only helps conceptualize current developments but also identifies promising directions for future research. It is designed to be valuable for academic researchers, practicing and aspiring entrepreneurs, and intrapreneurs within established organizations who are seeking to leverage the transformative potential of AI.

In the present study, the following research questions have been answered:

*RQ1: What gaps exist in the current body of research, and what future directions can be proposed to further explore the role of AI in startup contexts?*

To address these research questions, the study is structured as follows. First, the key concepts of artificial intelligence and entrepreneurship are examined to establish a conceptual foundation. This is followed by a detailed explanation of the methodology employed for the systematic literature review. The subsequent sections present a discussion of the findings and a thematic synthesis of the reviewed literature. Finally, the paper concludes by summarizing the main insights, acknowledging the limitations encountered, and proposing directions for future research.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1 Entrepreneurship

"Entrepreneurship is the process of creating or seizing an opportunity and pursuing it regardless of the regardless of the resources currently controlled". Expecting the positive result from the opportunities initiated is difficult to enumerate. They are the people who develop an idea and try to convert it into a tangible product, start a business and manage it, take the risk and generate employment opportunities and also contribute to the economic development of the country. Many Entrepreneurs also experience constraints in terms of capital, opportunities, and many more (Lv *et al*., 2022) [17]. Even entrepreneurs have to come across various constraints and challenges in the process of their development (Markman *et al*., n.d.) [19]. The internet-based relations differ qualitatively from those based on human relations, in the digital world entrepreneurship has moved further towards social interactions which change communications, uses and relationships (Braune *et al*., 2019) [4]. The importance of research has emphasized the decision-making capability of entrepreneurs in the development process, especially within the entrepreneurial ecosystem, in addition, few studies have focused on the link between entrepreneurial competencies and subsequent ventures by adopting appropriate strategies M (Mosey *et al*., 2017) [21]. Entrepreneurship is all about experimentation required to be successful from the set of principles that stays consistent and emphasizes uncertainty and the associated experiments toward firm survival (Paladino, 2022) [23]. The exemplars are developed in close collaboration with customers and create designing an experiment. Designing an experiment is a complex field, perhaps with highly covered subjects such as open innovation, which is more critical to some extent of experimentation related to entrepreneurship (Frederiksen & Brem, 2017) [7]. Entrepreneurship research focuses on multiple components such as innovation, individuals, creativity, and increasing business opportunities which leads to business success (Provasnek *et al*., 2017) [24]. Entrepreneurship is defined as the process of identifying or creating an opportunity and pursuing it, regardless of the resources currently at hand (Lv *et al*., 2022) [17].

### 2.2 Startups

A startup is an initiative by its founders centered around an idea with the potential to develop into a business that can make an impact. This effort involves a committed team with the necessary skills and abilities to validate a problem or solution, leading to product development. The relationship between finance and innovation is influenced by varying institutional qualities across countries. Advancements in the financial sector can enhance innovation, and tailored policies are required to stimulate innovative efforts in diverse institutional settings (Law *et al*., 2018) [14]. Serial entrepreneurship involves starting multiple businesses over time, each building on lessons learned from previous ventures. Entrepreneurs willing to give away more equity in their first startup can gain valuable experience, networks, and reputation, making future fundraising easier. Each subsequent venture benefits from this accumulated experience and credibility, attracting investors more easily and negotiating better terms. By aiming for incremental successes—singles with their first company, doubles with the next, and home runs with subsequent businesses—entrepreneurs can increase their chances of long-term success and create a legacy of innovation and impact (Broude & Levangie, 2006) [5].

Studies on startups often focus on knowledge acquisition, exploring the origins, accessibility, and classifications of knowledge. Researchers categorize knowledge sources into intra-organizational, inter-organizational, market-based, and institutional-based categories, examining their impact on innovation (Guckenbiehl *et al*., 2021) [8]. Traditional funding avenues, such as grants, donations, debt financing, venture capital, and private equity, exhibit significant shortcomings in supporting the scalability of social technology startups (Arena *et al*., 2018) [2].

External equity investors, like angel investors or venture capital firms, may request a significant ownership stake due to limited information about the founder or enterprise's prospects. For owner-founders, internal financing is preferred, followed by external debt, with external equity financing as a last resort (Mann & Sanyal, 2012) [18]. Understanding entrepreneurial finance involves exploring trade-offs in various capital sources and their impact on innovation, particularly in emerging markets where product/service innovation faces significant risk

uncertainties (Wu *et al*., 2016) [36]. Factors linked to innovation and firm boundaries are examined, considering whether a startup will remain independent or adopt a hybrid model with characteristics of both a standalone startup and an in-house R&D division within a larger corporation (Hall, 2015) [11]. Investor experimentation varies by context, period, and sector, with strategies adjusting to financing risks. Highly innovative ventures face a delicate balance between shielding from financing risk and maximizing real option value, especially in buoyant financial markets (Kerr *et al*., 2009) [12].

Some entrepreneurs seize business opportunities without patent filings, particularly in the software industry, where a significant portion of startups operate without patents. Models of startup financing account for whether startups acquire patents or not, integrating the probability of bankruptcy, which increases with debt accumulation. Investors demand compensation for the inherent risks associated with startups (Hahn & Kwon, 2017) [10].

### 2.3 Artificial Intelligence

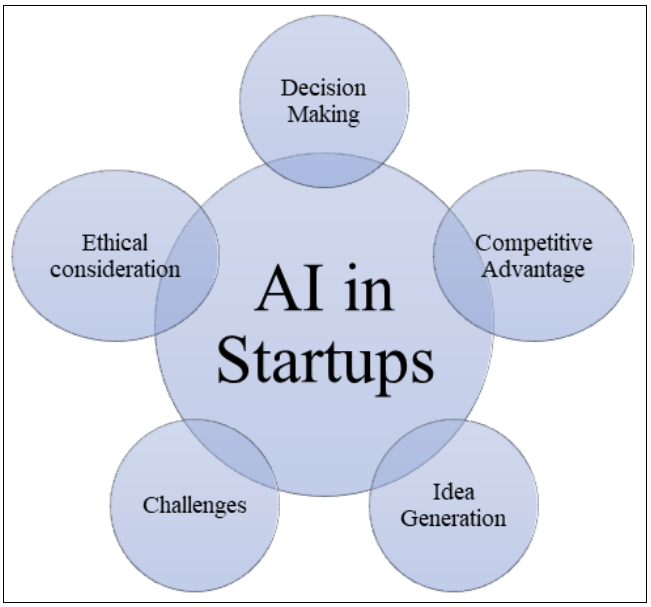
Artificial Intelligence (AI) is engendering a transformative shift in business practices, particularly within the realms of startups and small enterprises. Instruments such as OpenAI's ChatGPT epitomize the pinnacle of this technological evolution, providing novel methodologies to enhance operational efficiency, refine customer engagement, and expedite business expansion. This article delves into the domain of generative AI, scrutinizing its principal applications, the opportunities it affords, the associated risks, and culminates in pragmatic strategies that entrepreneurs may employ to successfully incorporate these technologies into their business frameworks (Townsend, 2023) [33].

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of AI development guidelines emerging from academic institutions, governmental entities, and the corporate sector. These guidelines encompass a spectrum ranging from broad ethical tenets to more granular technical recommendations (Merilehto & Poudel, 2025) [20]. Nevertheless, a considerable number of these directives fail to account for the societal ramifications of AI, particularly its repercussions on the labor market. Empirical studies have rigorously assessed the extant AI guidelines, underscoring recurring deficiencies most prominently the neglect of cultural sensitivity, sustainability, and practical application. Although ethical frameworks often underscore overarching principles such as privacy and trustworthiness, they frequently do not provide concrete methodologies for their operationalization. For AI ethics to attain genuine efficacy, especially for startups and smaller enterprises with constrained resources, guidelines must be context-specific and meticulously tailored to the distinct requirements of specific industries and real-world applications (Rojas & Tuomi, 2022) [28].

## 3. Methodology

To conduct a rigorous analysis of startups and AI as a research domain, as well as to aggregate and connect a comprehensive array of relevant studies, we undertook a systematic literature review. The iterative search methodology for our systematic literature review commenced with the delineation of two principal categories of search terms: one pertaining to "startups" and the other to "artificial intelligence." For the former, we employed variations of the term such as “startup*” and “start-up*.” For the latter, we incorporated “artificial intelligence,” its abbreviation “AI” (including “A I.”), and affiliated subfields such as “machine learning” and “deep learning.” The conclusive search query that was utilized was: (“startup*” OR “start-up*”) AND (“artificial intelligence” OR “AI” OR “A.I.”). The search was confined to English-language, peer-reviewed journal articles published up to May 2025 and was executed across four principal academic databases: Scopus, Emerald, Web of Science, and EBSCO. The search specifically targeted keywords appearing in article titles, abstracts, and keyword sections.

In the initial phase, a cumulative total of 421 articles were retrieved: 232 from Scopus, 56 from Emerald, 86 from Web of Science, and 47 from EBSCO. The subsequent step involved the identification and removal of duplicate entries, which resulted in the exclusion of 135 papers. This process yielded 286 unique studies. In the third step, all abstracts were meticulously screened for relevance. A total of 246 articles were excluded for failing to meet the inclusion criteria, specifically those that did not concentrate on AI, did not address startups, or did not establish a correlation between the two.




**Source:** Authors own work

## 4. Literature Review

A synthesis of the current literature, along with the variables identified and findings, is illustrated in Table 1. The principal dimensions examined in previous studies are depicted in Table 1.

| Reference | Key Findings | DM | CA | IG | C | EC |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Rezazadeh *et al*., 2025) [27] | Managers are compelled to prioritize the formulation of efficacious generative AI-enhanced growth hacking methodologies while concurrently foreseeing and addressing potential inadvertent repercussions at the organizational, competitive, and societal strata. | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| (Tang *et al*., 2025) [32] | Digital startups frequently encounter both practical and cognitive legitimacy obstacles when integrating novel technologies. To overcome these challenges, it is imperative for them to harness the advantages of strategic pivoting, utilize local search algorithms (LSAs) to probe varied markets, and engage advocates to enhance their credibility. | √ | | √ | √ | |
| (Güner Gültekin *et al*., 2024) [9] | The research elucidates that external determinants exert a substantial influence on market expansion prospects. Crucial success determinants encompass client augmentation, international visibility, and financial accessibility. Nonetheless, the regional ecosystem is deficient in support, particularly in the domains of marketing and sales. Rectifying this deficiency through fiscal incentives and knowledge dissemination is of paramount importance. | √ | √ | √ | √ | |
| (Lauterbach, 2019) [13] | Policymakers exhibit a deficiency in a coherent, scientifically-informed, and forward-looking framework for AI governance. The principal risks remain ambiguous, and an absence of a collaborative structure for delineating AI design views and regulatory measures persists. Existing technological determinations are poised to exert enduring effects on societal dynamics and global business competitiveness. | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| (Schiavone *et al*., 2023) [30] | AI facilitates the entrepreneurial paradigm by diminishing operational costs, instituting novel organizational processes, and broadening networks that are indispensable for the initiation of ventures. | √ | | √ | √ | |
| (Raneri *et al*., 2023) [26] | It forecasts the desirability of product design decisions (PDDs) pertinent to digital products. Furthermore, it identifies predictions with low confidence and provides a definitive desirability metric. The model adeptly navigates uncertainty through data-informed learning, elucidating unknown variables, and bolstering both predictive and adaptive design methodologies. | √ | | √ | | |
| (Truong, 2024) [34] | Members operating within core AI domains attracted a greater quantum of investor capital compared to their peripheral counterparts. Significant factors positively correlated with funding include team size, the quantity of lead investors, patent holdings, and executive endorsement. | √ | | | √ | √ |
| (Roundy, 2022) [29] | The theory posits that the substitution of AI for ecosystem interactions influences both the pursuit of opportunities and the instrumentation of local entrepreneurial ecosystems. | √ | | √ | | √ |
| (Leszkiewicz *et al*., 2022) [16] | Outlines the contributions of AI to social value by emphasizing its benefits across various stakeholders, including individuals within organizations, business customers, supply chain partners, and society as a whole. | √ | √ | | | |
| (Lee *et al*., 2024) [15] | The analysis reveals that the subject area and the founder's strategic mindset are key to the competitiveness and success of AI startups. AI experts prioritized the subject itself, while startup experts emphasized the environment, highlighting significant differences in perspectives between the two groups. | √ | √ | √ | | |
| (Abuzaid & Alsbou, 2024) [1] | Empirical evidence and case studies confirm that AI adoption enhances innovation, operational efficiency, and overall business performance in startups. | √ | √ | √ | | |
| (Rajendran *et al*., 2024) [25] | Leveraging the AI driven perspective can transform startups to handle complex market dynamics and increase the success rate. | √ | √ | √ | | √ |
| | | | | | | |

***Source:*** Modified (Arunachalam *et al*., 2018) [3]

Note: Titles of last five columns: DM - Decision Making, CA - Competitive Advantage, IG - Idea Generation, C - Challenges, EC - Ethical Considerations.

## 5. Findings and Discussion

This study examined the function of artificial intelligence (AI) in startup settings by analyzing 40 peer-reviewed journal and conference articles. These studies concentrated on the strategic significance of AI adoption for business growth and sustainability, as well as the ways in which AI technologies are being applied across different startup functions.

### AI and Decision Making

AI plays a ornamental role towards decision making process for startups. By considering vast amount of data, AI powered tools provide insights that enable entrepreneurs to make conversant decisions regarding resource allocation, market trends and risk management. AI driven analysis can forecast future growth, helping startups to better strategically plan for scaling. AI also automates routine tasks such as financial data interpretation and customer relationship management and other core business activities.

### AI driven Innovation and Competitive advantage

AI stimulates innovation in startups by utilizing machine learning and natural language processing to create customized goods and services that satisfy the unique needs of customers. It also makes it easier to explore new markets, allowing startups to challenge established business models and gain a competitive advantage.

### Supporting Idea Generation

By analyzing consumer behavior and industry trends, artificial intelligence (AI) is being used more and more to support human creativity in the idea development process. It has the ability to spot market gaps and offer creative fixes. Based on real-time data, AI systems can produce concepts for new goods or services, enabling business owners to venture into uncharted areas. This combination of AI-driven insights and human creativity transforms entrepreneurial ideas.

### Challenges in AI Adoption

AI adoption in startups is not without its difficulties. High implementation costs, specialized knowledge, and other major obstacles. To guarantee responsible usage of AI in startups, it is also important to properly manage the ethical aspects of AI, such as bias and data privacy.

### Ethical Considerations

To ensure that AI is utilized responsibly, companies should

consider the ethical implications of AI, including data privacy, algorithmic prejudice, and the possibility of employment displacement. In order to establish trust with their stakeholders and customers and achieve long-term success, startups should place a high priority on accountability and transparency in their AI adoption procedures. This will help to ensure that ethical standards are maintained throughout the development process.

## 6. Conclusion, Future Direction and Limitations

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into the operational frameworks of startups has been consistently documented in the scholarly literature to result in enhanced decision-making capabilities, improved operational efficiency, and accelerated innovation. Furthermore, empirical evidence indicates that the implementation of AI tools and systems alleviates the significant risks typically encountered by startups, thereby leading to a reduction in the failure rates of these enterprises. In conclusion, the data corroborates that the adoption of AI is not solely a technological advancement but also an essential mechanism for ensuring the long-term sustainability and competitive viability of businesses.

Artificial Intelligence signifies a transformative paradigm within the startup ecosystem, offering considerable opportunities for innovation, operational efficiency, and expansion. By strategically harnessing AI technologies, startups are positioned to improve their decision-making processes, stimulate innovation, and achieve a competitive advantage in the marketplace. However, the assimilation of AI is fraught with challenges, including substantial implementation costs, the requisite for specialized expertise, and ethical considerations. As AI technologies continue to evolve, it is imperative for startups to adeptly navigate these challenges in a conscientious manner to fully exploit the potential of AI and contribute to the formation of a sustainable and equitable digital economy.

The trajectory of AI within the startup sector seems to be promising, characterized by significant prospects for growth and innovation. Future research initiatives should focus on sector-specific applications of AI to identify disparities in adoption across industries such as healthcare, financial technology, and retail, thereby facilitating tailored strategies that are conducive to the success of startups. Longitudinal studies are necessary to assess the lasting impacts of AI on startup growth, sustainability, and failure rates, moving beyond mere correlation to the establishment of causal relationships. Additional exploration into the influence of AI on entrepreneurial decision-making could enhance the development of robust theoretical frameworks that integrate behavioral and cognitive dimensions. Furthermore, subsequent research should investigate the collaborative potential of AI in augmenting human creativity throughout the innovation process. Given the considerable costs associated with implementation, it is essential to identify scalable and cost-effective AI solutions that are adaptable to early-stage startups. Ethical considerations relating to data confidentiality and algorithmic bias require thorough investigation within the context of resource-constrained startups to ensure the accountable application of AI.

Additionally, studies ought to examine the impact of AI adoption on startup culture, workforce dynamics, and organizational structures. Gaining insights into investor perceptions of AI-driven startups and the influence of AI on funding decisions represents another pertinent area of examination. Cross-cultural investigations into AI adoption, particularly in developing economies, will produce a more nuanced global perspective. Finally, an assessment of the role of government policies, startup ecosystems, and institutional support can provide valuable insights into promoting responsible AI adoption and fostering sustainable startup entrepreneurship.

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