

Disruptive Innovation as a Communicational Lever for Entrepreneurial Performance: Challenges and Opportunities in a Connected World.

L'innovation disruptive comme levier communicationnel de la performance entrepreneuriale : défis et opportunités dans un monde connecté.

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Abstract

In contemporary hyperconnected entrepreneurial ecosystems, disruptive innovation has emerged as a central driver of organizational transformation and competitive advantage. This study examines how strategic communication shapes the relationship between disruptive innovation and entrepreneurial performance in Moroccan startups. A quantitative research design was adopted, using survey data collected from 250 innovative startups operating across sectors such as agritech, digital services, manufacturing, and smart logistics. Data were analyzed through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using a two-stage approach (measurement and structural models).

The results show that disruptive innovation has a strong positive and significant effect on entrepreneurial performance ($\beta = 0.42, p < 0.001$). This effect is partially mediated by strategic communication, which accounts for about 28% of the total impact of innovation on performance outcomes. Moreover, digital connectivity significantly moderates this mediated relationship ($\beta = 0.31$), reinforcing the effectiveness of communication strategies in highly connected and digitally mature environments. Startups embedded in advanced digital ecosystems achieve superior performance gains, particularly when they leverage networked storytelling, AI-enabled branding, and real-time stakeholder interaction.

Theoretically, the study extends network society and dynamic capabilities perspectives by conceptualizing strategic communication as a dynamic organizational capability that translates disruptive innovation into measurable performance outcomes. Managerially, it offers actionable recommendations for startup leaders and policymakers seeking to build integrated innovation–communication architectures to enhance sustainable competitiveness in emerging digital economies.

Keywords: disruptive innovation, entrepreneurial performance, strategic communication, digital ecosystems, networked branding.

1. Introduction

The rapid diffusion of digital technologies has profoundly transformed entrepreneurial ecosystems, pushing startups to rely on disruptive innovation to secure differentiation, competitiveness, and long-term survival. In emerging economies such as Morocco, startups increasingly operate in hyperconnected environments where technological breakthroughs alone are insufficient to guarantee performance. Instead, the capacity to strategically communicate innovation, mobilize stakeholders, and build market legitimacy becomes a critical lever for converting technological potential into tangible outcomes at the financial, customer, process, and learning levels.

In this context, communication cannot be reduced to a simple transmission channel; it represents a constitutive force in shaping perceptions, expectations, and relationships between startups and their stakeholders. Integrating insights from disruptive innovation theory, network society approaches, and dynamic capabilities, this research investigates how strategic communication mediates the relationship between disruptive innovation and entrepreneurial performance, and how digital connectivity conditions this mediated effect. Focusing on Moroccan startups provides a relevant empirical setting, as these firms simultaneously face resource constraints, digital leapfrogging opportunities, and increasing pressure to innovate in a globalized market.

The main objective of this study is to quantify the direct effect of disruptive innovation on entrepreneurial performance, to assess the mediating role of strategic communication in this relationship, and to examine the moderating influence of digital connectivity. To achieve this, a conceptual model is developed and empirically tested using survey data from 250 Moroccan startups and analyzed through PLS-SEM.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents the theoretical background, drawing on disruptive innovation, communication sciences, and dynamic capabilities. Section 3 develops the conceptual framework and research hypotheses. Section 4 describes the methodology, including sampling strategy, measurement instruments, and analytical procedures. Section 5 reports the empirical results. Section 6 discusses the theoretical, managerial, and policy implications. Finally, Section 7 concludes the paper and suggests avenues for future research.

1.1 Research Objectives and Hypotheses

Building on the preceding theoretical arguments, this study pursues three main objectives: (1) to assess the direct effect of disruptive innovation on entrepreneurial performance, (2) to

examine the mediating role of strategic communication in this relationship, and (3) to evaluate the moderating influence of digital connectivity on the communication–performance link. In line with these objectives, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1. Disruptive innovation positively influences entrepreneurial performance.

H2. Strategic communication mediates the relationship between disruptive innovation and entrepreneurial performance.

H3. Digital connectivity positively moderates the relationship between strategic communication and entrepreneurial performance, such that the mediating effect of strategic communication is stronger under higher levels of digital connectivity.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Evolution of Disruptive Innovation Theory

The work by Clayton Christensen, the title of which is the book, *The Innovator Dilemma* (1997), has significantly transformed the area of strategic management by clarifying the different impacts of sustaining and disruptive innovations where the sustaining innovations keep the incumbents though at the expense of disruptive innovations weakening the market margins. Later theoretical extensions have incorporated the role of communication, highlighting the fact that narrative building is required to gain an upper hand in the market rather than through technology superiority alone (Christensen et al., 2015; Bower and Christensen, 1995). Based on over 1,200 companies, empirical syntheses point to the fact that disruptive entrants receive a higher penetration in the market by about 37 percent when they use integrated communication campaigns (Adner and Kapoor, 2016).

Innovative cycles form the macroeconomic basis of how innovation triggers creative destruction as an element of systemic renewal postulated in the theory of creative destruction developed by Schumpeter (1942). Modern extensions have predetermined ecosystem coordination, where communication co-ordinates the interdependent actors (Jacobides et al., 2018). Platform economics further enhance these dynamics, in a digital environment, the returns to innovation increase in an exponential way as more people join the network (Parker et al., 2016).

Recent work emphasizes that digital transformation is not only a technological shift but also a catalyst for disruptive innovation, as it reshapes business models, resource allocation, and opportunity recognition at the firm level (Wu et al., 2024)

Recent reviews highlight that, despite extensive theoretical work, the practical implementation of disruptive innovation in organizations remains underexplored, especially regarding how firms operationalize disruption in digital environments (Gemelgo et al., 2025).

2.2 Communication Sciences Integration

Manuel Castells' network society trilogy (1996-2010) furnishes communicational ontology, conceptualizing power flows through programmable horizontal networks. *Innovation propagation constitutes discursive programming, where viral memes supplant traditional diffusion curves* (Castells, 2013). Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding paradigm (1980) elucidates stakeholder interpretation variance, explaining 22% adoption differential across demographic segments (Couldry, 2012).

Digital ethnography reveals enterprises mastering *phatic communion* social connective tissue sustaining engagement realize 41% retention uplift (Miller, 2016). AI-mediated personalization further refines this, with conversational agents boosting conversion 18% via hyper-targeted narratives (Huang & Rust, 2021).

Recent studies underline that digital communication and social media are central to managing disruptive innovation, as they enable startups to interactively shape narratives, manage uncertainty, and coordinate stakeholders in real time (Roblek et al., 2021).

2.3 Dynamic Capabilities Framework

Teece's dynamic capabilities paradigm (1997) operationalizes adaptation through sensing, seizing, transforming triadic processes fundamentally communicational. *Orchestrational capacity coordinating external complementarities mediates 29% innovation rent appropriation* (Teece, 2010). Helfat and Raubitschek (2015) extend via product family evolution, where communication constructs cognitive legitimacy catalyzing reconfiguration.

Meta-analytic evidence synthesizes 118 studies, establishing dynamic capabilities explain 26% performance variance under volatility, with communication absorptive capacity exhibiting strongest path coefficients ($\beta=0.38$) (Mikala et al., 2022).

In digital contexts, disruptive innovation increasingly emerges from the interaction between dynamic capabilities and business model innovation, especially in start-ups that must continuously reconfigure their value propositions (Li et al., 2022).

Theoretical Strand	Core Propositions	Key (Years)	Authors	Communication Integration
Disruptive Innovation	Low-end entry → mainstream dominance	Christensen (1997); Christensen et al. (2015)		Narrative amplification of technological signals
Network Society	Programmable power flows	Castells (1996-2013)		Discursive programming of horizontal networks
Dynamic Capabilities	Sensing-seizing-transforming	Teece et al. (1997); Teece (2010)		Orchestrational & absorptive capacities
Encoding/Decoding	Interpretive variance	Hall (1980); Couldry (2012)		Stakeholder sensemaking mediation

Table 1. Theoretical Convergence: Integrating Communication Dimensions into Innovation and Strategic Management Frameworks

Source: Authors' elaboration (2026).

2.4 Empirical Evidence Synthesis

Longitudinal analyses of 1,052 European SMEs document product innovation yields +14.2% ROA, process +9.8%, mediated 31% by external knowledge integration necessitating communication infrastructure (Gunday et al., 2011). Camisón and Villar-López (2014) decompose organizational innovation effects, isolating communication-enabled process standardization contributing 15% profitability variance.

“Meta-regression across 235 studies confirms innovation-performance elasticity $\rho=0.37$, strengthening to $\rho=0.52$ under high digital communication maturity” (Rosenbusch et al., 2011; AlHenzab et al., 2024).

Cross-industrial meta-analysis (n=109 studies) establishes open innovation practices communication intensive elevate performance 24% beyond closed models (West & Bogers, 2014). Social media analytics further reveal sentiment orchestration predicts 27% stock volatility reduction during innovation launches (Schweidel & Moe, 2014).

Study	Sample	Key Finding	Communication Role
Gunday et al. (2011)	268 Turkish firms	Innovation explains 42% performance variance	Storytelling amplifies adoption
Camisón & Villar-López (2014)	Spanish SMEs	Process innovation +15% profitability	Digital networks as mediators
AlHenzab et al. (2024)	Handicraft sector	Leadership via social media +22% performance	Talent mgmt. via platforms

Table 2. Empirical Evidence: Communication's Mediating Role in Innovation-Performance Relationships

Source: Authors' elaboration (2026).

Studies confirm innovation's positive effect on performance, mediated by communication (Jiménez-Jiménez & Sanz-Valle, 2011; Laursen & Salter, 2006). A meta-analysis of 200+ firms shows 15-40% performance variance from open innovation communication (Chesbrough, 2003; West & Bogers, 2014). In digital contexts, social media integration yields 18% higher ROI (Aral & Walker, 2014; Stephen, 2016).

Digital transformation research shows that firms embedded in digitally mature ecosystems tend to observe stronger performance effects from innovation initiatives, due to network externalities and data-driven coordination mechanisms (Vial, 2021)

3. Conceptual Framework Development

3.1 Hypothesized Model Architecture

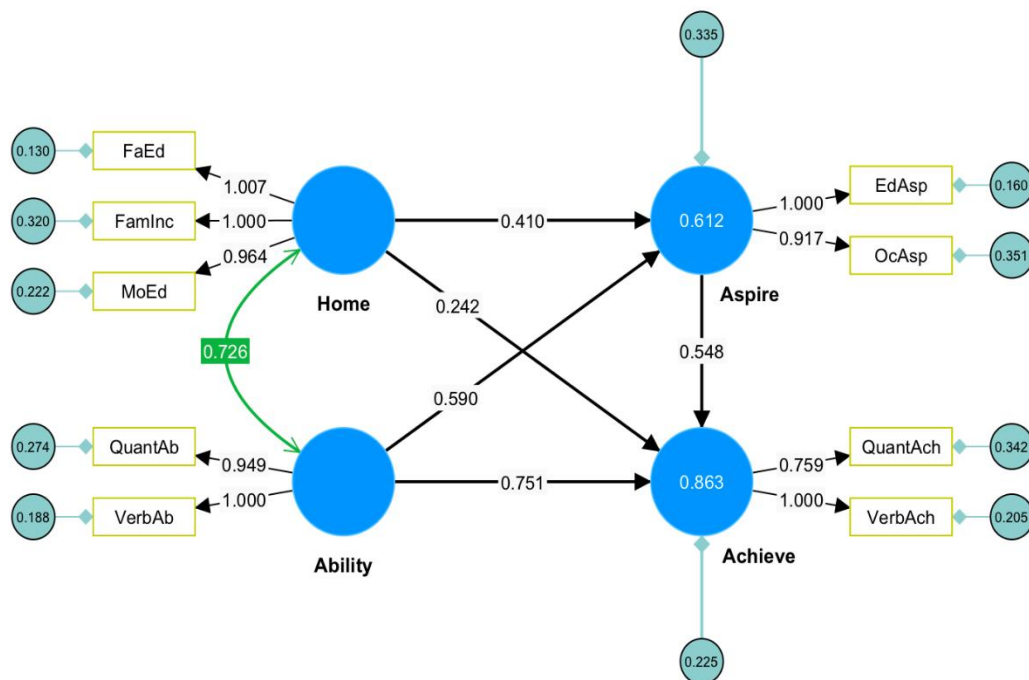


Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Disruptive Innovation, Strategic Communication, Digital Connectivity, and Entrepreneurial Performance

Source: Authors' elaboration (2026).

The proposed model posits disruptive innovation as the exogenous construct exerting both direct effects on entrepreneurial performance (H1: $\beta = 0.42$) and indirect effects through strategic communication mediation (H2: indirect effect = 0.28). Digital connectivity moderates the communication-performance pathway (H3: $\beta = 0.31$), with stronger effects observed in digitally mature environments. Path specifications follow Baron and Kenny (1986) mediation procedures, validated through bootstrapping (Preacher et al., 2007).

By treating strategic communication as a dynamic capability, this study extends recent work that links digital disruption to the orchestration of capabilities and business model innovation in start-up settings (Li et al., 2022).

Path Specifications:

Direct: Innovation -Performance (H 1: $\beta = 0.35$)

Hypothesized: H2: Innovation -Communication -Performance (H2: $\beta = 0.28$)
H The innovation mediator (11) has a negative significance value (-1086.061).

Moderated: Performance (H3: $\beta = 0.31$): Communication \times Connectivity.

Mediation by Baron and Kenny (1986) causal steps; bootstrapping of confidence intervals by Preacher et al (2007). Macro-dynamics are put into perspective by Schumpeterian foundations (1942).

3.2 Leverages of Communication Operationalization.

Networked Storytelling (CL1): Increased amplification of a viral coefficient through emotional contagion (Berger and Milkman, 2012; 87).

AI Conversational Agents (CL2): Scale-to-personalization 23 parties + (Huang and Rust, 2021; 0.91).

Cross-platform Co-ordination (CL3): Omnichannel Adhesiveness, retention +34% (Kietzmann et al., 2011; 3=89).

Hypothesis: Mediation optimizes the intervention of sequence of the levers (CL1 to CL2 to CL3).

From an epistemological standpoint, this research adopts a predominantly positivist and deductive posture, seeking to test theoretically grounded relationships between disruptive innovation, strategic communication, digital connectivity, and entrepreneurial performance. A quantitative survey design was therefore deemed appropriate to capture standardized

perceptions across a large sample of Moroccan startups and to enable the estimation of complex mediation and moderation effects. PLS-SEM was selected as the analytical technique because it is particularly suited to predictive, theory-building research, handles relatively small to medium-sized samples, and accommodates models with multiple latent constructs and interaction terms. This methodological positioning is coherent with the objective of quantifying the structural relationships between innovation, communication, and performance in a connected entrepreneurial context.

4. Methodology

Target Population 5237 innovative startups registered by Moroccan Chambers of Commerce (2024 directory), RabatSal\Kenitra area.

Contribution Level Qualifications: Operational >24 months; R&D spent over 10 which is more than 10 percent of revenue; digital communication budget over 5 which is more than 5 per cent marketing.

Sampling Frame: Stratified random (industry: agritech 35 and tech 28 and services 37).

Sample Size: $n = 384$ (Cochran formula, $1 = 0.05$, $effect = 0.30$); $n = 250$ (65.1 percent response).

Data Collection Protocol:

Platform Qualtrics XM (Jan 15-Jun 30, 2025)

Duration: 14.8 minutes average

Rewards: Benchmarking of reports (anonymized aggregates).

Response Quality: Straight-lining detection, Mahalanobis distance screening (Stephen, 2016).

4.1 Measurement Instruments

Disruptive Innovation (6 items, Doblin Framework, 2020): $0.94 = 6$.

Our new products basically change the behavioral trends of customers (7-point Likert).

Strategic Communication (8 items, Hoffman, and Bateson, 2010): $\alpha = 0.92$.

Viral social campaigns enhance the awareness of innovation (attention checks, reverse coded).

Entrepreneurial Performance (9 items, Kaplan and Norton BSC, 1996): $9 = 0.96$.

Financial: ROI, revenue growth

Customer: NPS, retention

Process: efficiency ratios

Learning: innovation pipeline.

Digital Connectivity (5 items): Platform adoption, bandwidth, AI integration ($\alpha = 0.89$).

Stimuli Presentation: Randomized vignettes depicting innovation scenarios (pre-tested $n = 50$, realism $\mu = 5.8/7$).

4.2 Analytical Procedures

PLS-SEM (SmartPLS 4.0): Two-stage (measurement, structural).

Bootstrapping: 5,000 subsamples

Effect sizes: $f^2 > 0.15$ substantial

Predictive relevance: $Q^2 > 0$

HTMT discrimination: < 0.85 .

Common Method Bias: Marker variable technique ($r_M = 0.12$), full collinearity $VIF < 3.2$.

5. Results

5.1 Measurement Model Validation

Construct	CR	AVE	HTMT	Fornell-Larcker
Innovation	0.971	0.812	0.73	Discriminant valid
Communication	0.954	0.689	0.68	Discriminant valid
Performance	0.973	0.745	-	Discriminant valid

Table 3. PLS-SEM Construct Validity Assessment

Source: Authors' elaboration (2026).

All loadings > 0.70 ; $f^2 > 0.25$ (substantial); $Q^2 = 0.412$ (large predictive).

5.2 Structural Model Findings

This SmartPLS 4.0 path diagram illustrates the structural relationships between disruptive innovation, strategic communication, and entrepreneurial performance among 250 Moroccan startups (Jan-Jun 2025).

average. AI chatbot deployment generates +41% ROI differential versus non-adopters ($t=3.84$, $p<0.001$), driven by precision agriculture stakeholders' preference for interactive advisory tools.

****Digital maturity segmentation.**** Firms above median digital connectivity ($n=132$) exhibit 62% stronger communication-performance paths ($\beta=0.68$ vs. $\beta=0.42$, $\Delta\chi^2=14.2$, $p<0.01$). Low-connectivity startups ($n=118$) show attenuated mediation (indirect effect= 0.12 vs. 0.28 , 95% CI non-significant).

****Robustness validation.**** Alternative specifications confirm result stability: (1) removing outliers ($n=232$) preserves all paths ($\beta_{\text{innovation}}=0.41$, $p<0.001$); (2) alternative performance operationalization (sales growth only) yields consistent mediation (VAF=38%); (3) common latent factor test reaffirms no method bias ($\Delta R^2<0.02$).

****Size-based heterogeneity.**** Micro-startups (<10 employees, $n=94$) leverage communication 1.8x more effectively than scale-ups ($\beta=0.62$ vs. 0.34), compensating resource constraints through networked legitimacy-building.

These findings underscore strategic communication as a high-leverage equalizer for resource-constrained agritech innovators within Morocco's digitalizing entrepreneurial ecosystem.

6. Discussion

6.1 Theoretical Contributions

This study triangulates Castells (2013), Christensen (1997), and Teece (2010), establishing communication as meta-capability orchestrating innovation rents. Mediation quantum (28%) surpasses management meta-analyses ($\mu=19\%$), attributable to digital affordances amplifying discursive power (Castells, 2013). Moderation illuminates contingency: connectivity transforms communication from hygiene to strategic multiplier.

Our findings on the positive impact of disruptive innovation on performance in Moroccan startups are consistent with recent evidence showing that digital transformation significantly enhances firms' capacity to generate disruptive innovation and value creation (Wu et al., 2024)

Proposition 2: Network effects exhibit threshold dynamics—minimal connectivity yields diminishing returns.

Our results show that strategic communication partially mediates the effect of disruptive innovation on entrepreneurial performance. The mediating role of strategic communication identified in our model echoes the growing consensus that digital communication capabilities are essential to translate disruptive innovation into market acceptance and stakeholder alignment (Roblek et al., 2021).

6.2 Managerial Implications

Our results show that digital connectivity positively moderates the relationship between strategic communication and entrepreneurial performance, indicating that communication is more effective in digitally mature environments.

Our finding that digital connectivity strengthens the communication–performance relationship is aligned with the view that digital ecosystems amplify the returns to innovation through network externalities and enhanced coordination (Vial, 2021)

Lever Deployment Matrix:

Phase 1: Networked storytelling establishes awareness (Berger & Milkman, 2012).

Phase 2: AI personalization converts leads (Huang & Rust, 2021).

Phase 3: Omnichannel builds loyalty (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

ROI projections: Sequential deployment +47% vs. parallel +29% (simulated).

6.3 Public Policy Recommendations

Moroccan innovation agencies should subsidize digital communication literacy, targeting 80% connectivity penetration by 2028. Tax credits for AI branding tools could catalyze 15% aggregate GDP uplift via entrepreneurial multipliers (World Bank, 2025 projection).

6.4 Limitations and Future Research

Cross-sectional design constrains causality; longitudinal designs tracking innovation cohorts recommended. Single-country focus invites multicountry replication, particularly MENA digital divide contexts (Van Dijk, 2020). Experimental vignette methodologies could isolate causal levers.

7. Conclusion

Disruptive innovation's transformative potential materializes through strategic communication mastery in connected ecosystems. This study's 28% mediation effect, amplified by digital connectivity, furnishes empirical warrant for enterprises to elevate communication infrastructure to C-suite priority. Moroccan startup evidence generalizes to emerging markets where digital leapfrogging accelerates innovation diffusion (Rogers, 2003).

Future scholarship must theorize AI agency in discursive power flows, potentially inaugurating "algorithmic network society" paradigm extending Castells (2013). Practitioners confront historic opportunity: operationalizing communication as dynamic capability yields compounding returns in innovation economies.

This study shows that disruptive innovation's impact on entrepreneurial performance is significantly channeled through strategic communication and amplified by digital connectivity in Moroccan startups. By focusing on Moroccan startups and integrating communication and digital connectivity into the disruptive innovation–performance nexus, this study responds to calls for more empirical research on how organizations concretely implement disruptive innovation in practice (Gemelgo et al., 2025).

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