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SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING AS A DRIVER OF START-UP VISIBILITY: EVIDENCE FROM AGADIR, MOROCCO.

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Abstract:

This study investigates the impact of social media marketing on the visibility of startups in Agadir. In a context where young companies face limited resources and intense competition, social media platforms serve as an important tool for raising awareness, interacting with customers, and strengthening their market presence. The research focuses on three dimensions of social media marketing: content quality, posting frequency, and customer interaction. A quantitative approach was adopted, based on a positivist perspective and hypothetical-deductive reasoning. The data were analyzed using the PLS-SEM method to evaluate the measurement model and test the proposed hypotheses. The results confirm the reliability and convergent validity of the constructs. The structural model shows that content quality, customer interaction, and posting frequency positively influence the visibility of startups. Content quality has the strongest effect, closely followed by customer interaction, while posting frequency has a more moderate effect. The results highlight the strategic role of social media in enhancing the visibility of startups within a local entrepreneurial context.

Keywords: Social media marketing; Startup visibility; Content quality; Customer interaction; Agadir.

1. INTRODUCTION

In an economic environment marked by the digitization of business practices and rapidly changing consumer behavior, social media is playing an increasingly important role in companies' marketing strategies. This importance is even more evident in the case of startups, which seek to build brand awareness, establish their image, and attract their first customers, often with limited resources. Social platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp Business offer young companies' new opportunities to communicate with their audience, showcase their products or services, interact with customers, and strengthen their market presence. In the context of Agadir, startups operate in a local environment where visibility is a key factor in ensuring their growth. Indeed, a startup cannot build a lasting relationship with its customers if it is not first known and recognized by its target audience. Social media thus emerges as a strategic tool for overcoming certain constraints related to limited budgets, low initial brand awareness, and local competition. However, simply having a presence on digital platforms does not automatically guarantee greater visibility. Visibility depends on several factors, notably the quality of published content, posting frequency, and customer interaction.

Based on this observation, this research aims to analyze the impact of social media marketing on the visibility of startups in Agadir. More specifically, it seeks to examine the effect of three main components of social media marketing: content quality, posting frequency, and customer interaction. The study adopts a quantitative approach, grounded in a positivist framework and hypothetical-deductive reasoning. The collected data are analyzed using the PLS-SEM method to assess the quality of the measurement model and test the relationships between variables. This research thus provides a better understanding of how startups can use social media as a lever for visibility within a local entrepreneurial context.

2. Literature review

- Social Media Marketing and Entrepreneurship

Social media marketing is playing an increasingly important role in corporate marketing practices, particularly among small businesses and startups seeking to boost their visibility with limited resources. It can be defined as the set of communication, promotional, and interactive activities carried out through social media platforms to build relationships with target audiences. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as Web 2.0-based applications that enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content. This definition highlights the interactive and participatory nature of social media, which distinguishes it from traditional media based on one-way communication. In this context, companies are no longer the sole producers of marketing messages; consumers also participate in the dissemination, evaluation, and transformation of the brand image. In the entrepreneurial context, social media represents a particularly important lever, as startups often face financial, human, and organizational constraints. Unlike large companies, they do not always have large advertising budgets or strong prior brand recognition. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, or WhatsApp Business therefore allow them to quickly reach targeted audiences, present their offerings, and gradually build their market presence. Mangold and Faulds (2009) view social media as a hybrid element of the promotional mix, since it allows both the company to communicate with its customers and customers to interact with one another about the company. This dual function is essential for startups, as it facilitates the dissemination of information, word-of-mouth recommendations, and the establishment of an initial reputation.

The role of social media in small businesses is not limited to commercial promotion. It also contributes to improving customer relations, reducing marketing costs, and enhancing access to information. Ainin et al. (2015) show, in their study on SMEs, that the use of Facebook can have a positive effect on performance, particularly through improved customer service and communication with the market. For a startup, this contribution is strategic, as visibility is often a prerequisite for growth. Before convincing customers to buy, the company must first be known, recognized, and perceived as credible. Social media thus becomes a means of gradually building brand awareness through posts, interactions, reviews, shares, and recommendations. Digital marketing in an entrepreneurial context, however, has specific characteristics that distinguish it

from traditional marketing. It relies more on creativity, experimentation, proximity to the customer, and the smart use of limited resources. Morris, Schindehutte, and LaForge (2002) define entrepreneurial marketing as an approach that integrates innovation, proactivity, risk-taking, the utilization of available resources, and value creation. Social media aligns well with this approach, as it allows entrepreneurs to quickly test content, observe customer reactions, adjust their messaging, and strengthen their positioning. It also offers the opportunity to tell the story of the entrepreneurial venture, showcase the brand's values, and build a more human connection with consumers. However, the literature emphasizes that a mere presence on social media is not enough to guarantee a startup's visibility. The effectiveness of social media marketing depends on several factors, including content quality, posting frequency, platform selection, customer interaction, and the potential use of paid advertising. Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch (2017) emphasize the need for a coherent social media marketing strategy aligned with brand objectives and audience expectations. Similarly, Appel et al. (2020) note that the digital environment is characterized by content saturation, algorithms, and rapidly changing consumer behavior. Thus, in a local context such as Agadir, social media can be an essential tool for boosting the visibility of startups, provided it is used strategically, consistently, and tailored to the characteristics of the target market.

- Visibility of Startups in the Digital Age

Visibility is a key challenge for startups, as it represents a young company's ability to be known, recognized, and identified by its target audience. Unlike established companies, startups often suffer from a lack of initial brand awareness, low credibility among consumers, and a limited market presence. From this perspective, visibility is not limited to the exposure of the company's name; it also refers to the brand's ability to occupy a place in consumers' minds, capture their attention, and create an initial form of recognition. Keller (1993) emphasizes that brand awareness is based on brand recognition and brand image, two essential dimensions in building perceived value for the consumer. For startups, developing their visibility therefore means gradually building an identifiable and credible presence in a competitive environment. In the digital age, the visibility of startups depends heavily on their ability to leverage digital channels, particularly social media. These platforms allow young companies to transcend the limits of physical and local visibility by reaching broader, more targeted, and more interactive audiences. Online visibility can be measured

through several indicators, such as the number of people reached, the level of engagement, interactions generated, shares, comments, customer reviews, and the frequency of the brand's appearance in digital spaces. According to Kietzmann et al. (2011), social media operates across several dimensions, including identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. These dimensions demonstrate that digital visibility depends not only on content distribution but also on how that content circulates, is discussed, and is appropriated by users.

Digital visibility is also linked to the concept of brand awareness. Aaker (1991) considers brand awareness to be one of the fundamental components of brand equity, as it influences consumer recognition, recall, and preference. For a startup, brand awareness is a prerequisite for trust and purchase intent. A consumer will generally find it easier to take an interest in a company they have already seen, followed, or heard about through social media. Thus, regular posts, visual content, customer testimonials, collaborations with local influencers, and digital interactions can strengthen brand recall. In a local context like Agadir, where proximity and reputation play a significant role in consumer behavior, online visibility can help strengthen the startup's physical presence in its market.

However, digital visibility should not be confused with a mere accumulation of followers or views. The literature increasingly distinguishes between quantitative visibility, based on reach and exposure, and qualitative visibility, based on engagement, credibility, and content relevance. Brodie et al. (2011) show that customer engagement represents a form of active consumer participation in the relationship with the brand. This participation can take the form of comments, shares, recommendations, or direct exchanges with the company. For startups, engagement is particularly important, as it transforms a passive audience into an active community. A post viewed by a large number of people may have little effect if it does not generate any interaction, whereas content that is less widely shared but heavily commented on or shared can contribute more effectively to building lasting visibility. Thus, the visibility of startups in the digital age results from a gradual process combining online presence, relevant content, customer interaction, digital reputation, and brand recognition. It depends not only on the use of social media but also on the strategic quality of that use. The work of Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch (2017) highlights that social media marketing must align with brand objectives and the expectations of the target audience. In this vein, startups in Agadir can use social media to enhance their local visibility,

attract new customers, and build a more professional image. However, this visibility remains contingent on several factors, including the regularity of posts, content quality, adaptation to the platforms used, the capacity for interaction, and the consistency of the message conveyed. Digital visibility thus emerges not only as a strategic outcome of social media marketing but also as an essential condition for entrepreneurial growth.

Despite the growing interest in social media marketing in the literature on SMEs and startups, several limitations remain. First, many studies analyze the general effect of social media on business performance without paying sufficient attention to visibility as a specific outcome of digital marketing. However, for startups, visibility is a prerequisite for brand awareness, trust, and customer acquisition. Second, most existing research focuses on broad international or national contexts, while local dynamics remain understudied, particularly in Moroccan cities such as Agadir. Finally, studies often treat social media as a single, overarching variable, without clearly distinguishing the specific components of digital marketing, such as content quality, posting frequency, and customer interaction.

This shortcoming constitutes a significant research gap, as not all startups benefit from social media in the same way. A digital presence can exist without generating real visibility if the content is weak, if posts are irregular, or if the company interacts little with its audience. Thus, it becomes necessary to analyze the components of social media marketing separately in order to better understand their contribution to startup visibility. In the context of Agadir, this question is particularly relevant, as young companies often seek to build their presence in the local market with limited resources and a heavy reliance on digital channels.

Based on this observation, the present research aims to answer the following question:

To what extent does social media marketing, through content quality, posting frequency, and customer interaction, influence the visibility of startups in Agadir?

On this basis, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1: Social media marketing positively influences the visibility of startups in Agadir.

H2: The quality of content published on social media positively influences the visibility of startups in Agadir.

H3: The frequency of social media posts positively influences the visibility of startups in Agadir.

H4: Interaction with customers on social media positively influences the visibility of startups in Agadir.

3. Methodology

This research adopts a positivist approach, in that it seeks to explain a causal relationship between social media marketing and the visibility of startups in Agadir. Positivism is based on the idea that social phenomena can be observed, measured, and analyzed objectively through empirical data. From this perspective, the visibility of startups is considered a measurable phenomenon based on indicators such as brand awareness, online reach, engagement, and the attraction of new customers. This epistemological choice is consistent with the study's objective, which is to test the effect of several components of social media marketing on the visibility of startups.

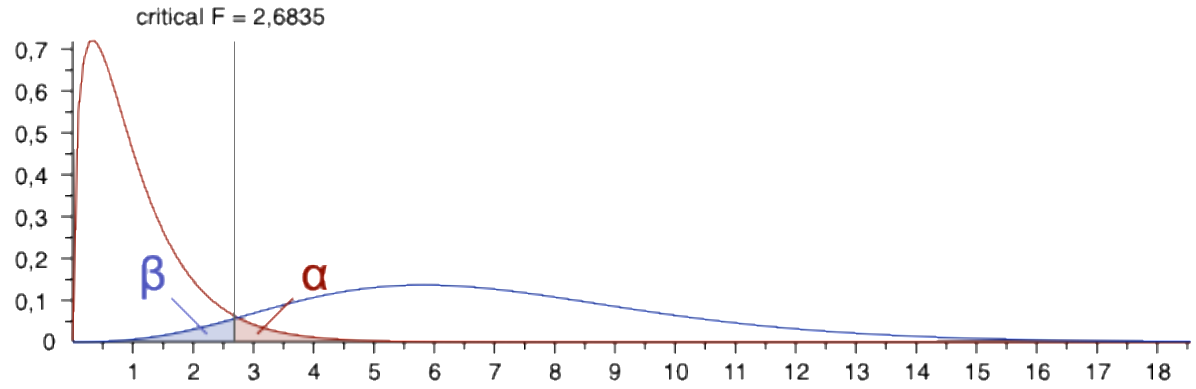
The research adopts a hypothetical-deductive approach. This approach involves drawing on existing literature to formulate hypotheses, then testing them empirically using data collected in the field. Thus, previous research on digital marketing, social media, and entrepreneurship allows us to identify three main components of social media marketing: content quality, posting frequency, and customer interaction. These components are then used to explain the visibility of startups. The objective is therefore not only to describe the use of social media by startups in Agadir, but to statistically verify whether these practices actually contribute to improving their visibility.

Methodologically, the study adopts a quantitative approach based on a structured questionnaire. This method is well-suited to the research objective, as it allows for measuring the perceptions of entrepreneurs, marketing managers, or startup executives regarding their digital practices and visibility. The questionnaire is constructed using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. This type of scale allows for the quantification of responses and the conduct of statistical analyses such as descriptive analysis, Cronbach's alpha reliability testing, correlation and linear regression, or PLS-SEM analysis. The target population for this research consists of start-ups and young companies located in the city of Agadir that use social media in their communication or promotional activities. Respondents may include founders, co-founders, marketing managers, community managers, or other managers of these organizations. Given the lack of a comprehensive database of startups in Agadir, the study may employ non-

probability sampling, specifically convenience and snowball sampling. This method is appropriate for research involving populations that are difficult to identify precisely, especially in a local entrepreneurial context.

To determine the minimum sample size, the G*Power software was used. The analysis was conducted using the F-tests – Linear multiple regression: Fixed model, R^2 deviation from zero test, with an a priori procedure designed to calculate the minimum required sample size. The parameters selected are as follows: an average effect size $f^2 = 0.15$, a significance level $\alpha = 0.05$, a high statistical power $1-\beta = 0.95$, and three predictors, corresponding to the three components of social media marketing: content quality, posting frequency, and customer interaction.

*Figure 1: G*Power Determination*



*Source: G*Power 3.1*

The results indicate a minimum sample size of 119 respondents, with a noncentrality parameter of $\lambda = 17.85$, a critical Fisher value of $F = 2.683$, a numerator degree of freedom of 3, and a denominator degree of freedom of 115. The actual statistical power obtained is 0.9509, which confirms that the calculated minimum sample size allows for the detection of a moderate effect with a satisfactory power level. Thus, for this study on Agadir-based startups, a minimum of 119 respondents is required. However, to account for incomplete questionnaires and unusable responses, and to improve the robustness of the statistical analyses, it is recommended to aim for a larger sample size, ranging from 130 to 150 respondents. This choice strengthens the empirical validity of the study and ensures greater reliability in hypothesis testing.

The variables in this study are operationalized based on the literature on social media marketing, entrepreneurship, and digital visibility. The dependent variable is the visibility of startups, while the independent variables correspond to the three components of social media marketing: content quality, posting frequency, and customer interaction.

Table 1: Operationalization of Variables

Variable	**Code**	**Measurement items**
Content quality	CQ1	The content published by our start-up on social media is attractive to customers.
Content quality	CQ2	Our start-up uses appropriate images, videos, or texts to present its products or services.
Content quality	CQ3	The published content clearly reflects the identity and values of our start-up.
Posting frequency	PF1	Our start-up regularly publishes content on social media.
Posting frequency	PF2	The regularity of our publications helps us remain visible to our audience.
Posting frequency	PF3	Our start-up maintains an active presence on social media.
Customer interaction	CI1	Our start-up responds to customers' comments and messages on social media.
Customer interaction	CI2	Interactions with customers on social media increase their interest in our start-up.
Customer interaction	CI3	Our start-up encourages customers to react, comment, or share its publications.
Start-up visibility	SV1	Social media allows more people to know our start-up.
Start-up visibility	SV2	Our presence on social media improves our local brand awareness.
Start-up visibility	SV3	Social media helps us attract new customers.

Source: Authors

After presenting the epistemological framework, the research rationale, the target population, the minimum sample size, and the operationalization of the variables, we will now proceed to the presentation of the empirical results. This section aims to analyze the data collected from startups in Agadir in order to assess the effect of social media marketing components on their visibility. The analysis will first focus on the general characteristics of the sample, then on the reliability of the measurement scales, before testing the research hypotheses using appropriate statistical analyses. This approach will allow us to verify whether content quality, posting frequency, and customer interaction significantly contribute to improving the visibility of the startups studied.

4. Results

After presenting the methodological framework of the study, this section is devoted to the analysis and interpretation of the results obtained. The objective is to empirically examine the effect of social media marketing components on the visibility of startups in Agadir. The collected data were analyzed using the PLS-SEM method, which allows for the evaluation of both the quality of the measurement model and the structural relationships between the variables. First, the analysis focuses on the reliability and validity of the constructs to verify the consistency of the measurement scales. Second, the structural model is examined to test the research hypotheses and determine the influence of content quality, posting frequency, and customer interaction on the visibility of startups.

Before proceeding to hypothesis testing, it is necessary to assess the quality of the measurement model. This step allows us to verify whether the constructs used in the research are measured reliably and validly. Internal reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, while convergent validity was evaluated using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Generally accepted thresholds indicate that Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values must be greater than 0.70, while the AVE must exceed 0.50.

Table 2: Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability rho_a	Composite Reliability rho_c	AVE
Content quality	0.924	0.925	0.952	0.869
Customer interaction	0.920	0.922	0.950	0.863
Posting frequency	0.957	0.968	0.972	0.920
Start-up visibility	0.933	0.933	0.957	0.882

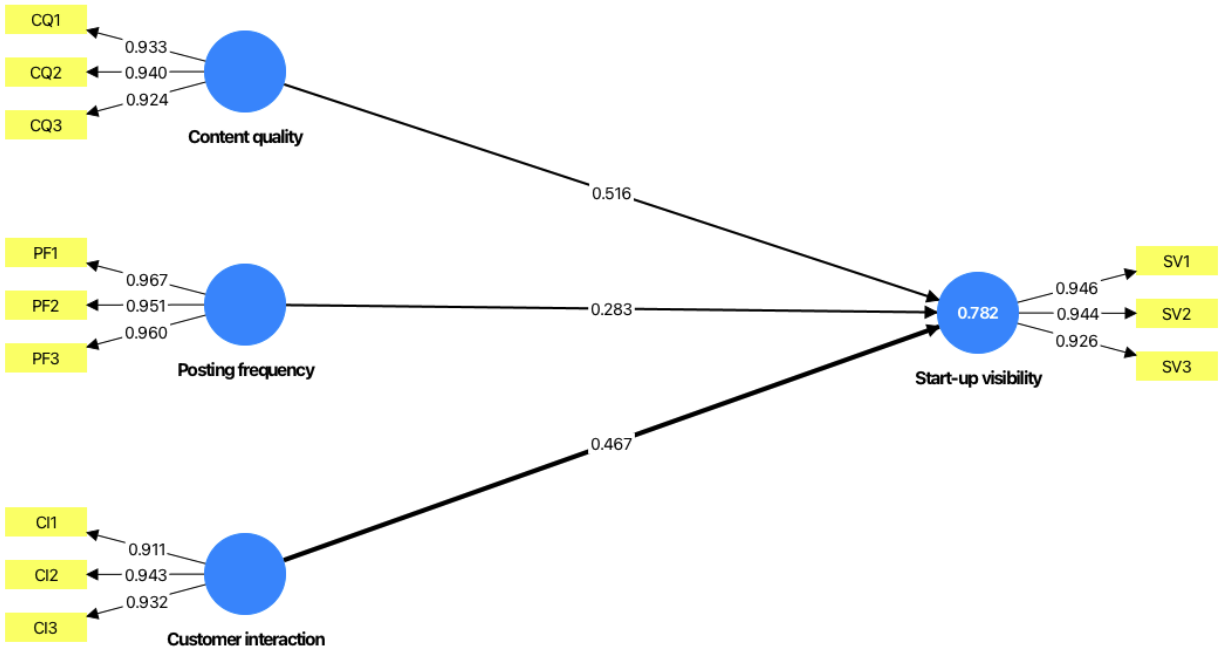
Source: Smart-PLS

The results show that all constructs exhibit very good internal reliability. Indeed, Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.920 to 0.957, which far exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.70. This means that the items associated with each variable are consistent with one another and accurately measure the same construct. Thus, the scales related to content quality, customer interaction, publication frequency, and startup visibility exhibit strong internal consistency. Composite reliability also confirms the robustness of the measurement model. The rho_a values range from 0.922 to 0.968, while the rho_c values range from 0.950 to 0.972. These results indicate that the indicators used to measure each construct are reliable and suitable for the analysis. Since the composite reliability is above the recommended threshold, it can be concluded that the variables selected for this study are measured satisfactorily.

Regarding convergent validity, the AVE values are all above 0.50. They range from 0.863 to 0.920, meaning that each construct explains a significant portion of the variance in its indicators. In other words, the items associated with each variable converge well toward the construct they are intended to measure. Convergent validity is therefore confirmed for all variables in the model

After validating the measurement model, structural equation modeling is used to assess the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable. In this study, the model examines the effect of three components of social media Marketing: content quality, posting frequency, and customer interaction, on the visibility of startups in Agadir.

Figure 2: Smart-PLS



Source: Smart-PLS

The results of the structural model indicate that the three components of social media marketing have a positive influence on the visibility of startups. Content quality has the strongest effect on visibility, with a β coefficient of 0.516, showing that engaging, clear posts that align with the startup's identity significantly contribute to strengthening its presence among the target audience. Interaction with customers also has a significant positive effect, with a coefficient β = 0.467, indicating that engagement through comments, messages, reactions, and shares helps improve digital visibility. Posting frequency, meanwhile, shows a more moderate positive effect, with a coefficient β = 0.283, meaning that a regular presence on social media helps keep the startup visible, even if its influence appears less strong than that of content quality and customer interaction. Finally, the value of the coefficient of determination $R^2 = 0.782$ shows that the model explains 78.2% of the variance in startup visibility, reflecting the high explanatory power of the three selected variables.

5. Discussion

The results regarding reliability and convergent validity indicate that the measurement model is satisfactory. The Cronbach's alpha values are all above the recommended threshold of 0.70, ranging from 0.920 to 0.957, confirming strong internal consistency among the constructs. Similarly, the composite reliability values rho_a and rho_c far exceed the 0.70 threshold, indicating that the scales used are reliable. The AVE values are also above 0.50, ranging from 0.863 to 0.920, confirming convergent validity. Thus, the items accurately measure their respective variables, namely content quality, posting frequency, customer interaction, and startup visibility.

The PLS-SEM structural model analysis shows that the three components of social media marketing positively influence startup visibility. Content quality has the strongest effect with a β coefficient of 0.516, followed by customer interaction with $\beta = 0.467$. Posting frequency also has a positive, though more moderate, effect, with $\beta = 0.283$. These results indicate that engaging content, active customer engagement, and consistent posting contribute to enhancing the visibility of startups. Furthermore, the R^2 value is 0.782, meaning that the model explains 78.2% of the variance in startup visibility, thus demonstrating high explanatory power.

These results confirm that social media is a key lever for improving the visibility of startups in Agadir. However, visibility does not depend solely on a presence on social platforms, but above all on how these platforms are used. Content quality emerges as the most decisive factor, indicating that startups must produce posts that are clear, engaging, and consistent with their brand identity. Interaction with customers also plays a key role, as it fosters closeness, engagement, and trust. Posting frequency remains useful, but its weaker effect suggests that posting often is not enough; above all, it is essential to publish relevant content and maintain an active relationship with the audience.

Conclusion

The objective of this research was to examine the impact of social media marketing on the visibility of startups in Agadir. Using a quantitative approach based on the PLS-SEM method, the study examined the effect of three key components of social media marketing: content quality, posting frequency, and customer interaction. The results show that these three dimensions positively influence the visibility of startups, with content quality and customer interaction having a particularly significant effect. The results regarding the measurement model confirm the reliability and validity of the constructs used in this research. The values for Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and AVE meet the recommended thresholds, indicating that the measurement scales are consistent and statistically acceptable. The structural equation model analysis also shows high explanatory power, with an R^2 of 0.782. This means that content quality, posting frequency, and customer interaction account for a significant portion of the visibility of the startups studied.

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to the literature on entrepreneurial marketing and digital marketing by demonstrating that social media can serve as a strategic lever for visibility for young companies. From a managerial perspective, the results suggest that Agadir-based startups should pay particular attention to the quality of their posts, the consistency of their digital communication, and their interaction with their audience. Posting frequency remains important, but it must be accompanied by relevant content and an active relationship with customers. However, this research has certain limitations. The study focuses solely on startups located in Agadir, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other cities or regions. Furthermore, the data is based on a questionnaire, which primarily reflects the respondents' perceptions. Future research could expand the sample to include other Moroccan cities, compare different industry sectors, or incorporate a qualitative approach to better understand entrepreneurs' digital practices. Despite these limitations, this study shows that social media is an essential tool for enhancing the visibility of startups in an increasingly digital entrepreneurial environment.

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