



Entrepreneurial Communication in Start-Ups in the Digital Era

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Abstract

This article analyzes the strategic importance of digital communication in the reconfiguration of entrepreneurial strategies within start-ups. In digitally intensive environments, communication has evolved beyond an operational function to become a central strategic resource influencing innovation, organizational identity, and stakeholder engagement. Grounded in strategic communication and digital entrepreneurship literature, the study examines how start-ups use digital platforms to enhance strategic agility, visibility, and competitive positioning. Adopting a conceptual and theoretical-analytical approach, the paper advances an integrated understanding of digital communication as a mechanism that supports strategic adaptation and long-term sustainability. The article contributes to the growing field of entrepreneurial communication by emphasizing the constitutive role of digital communication in navigating uncertainty and fostering resilience in dynamic ecosystems.

Keywords: digital communication; start-ups; entrepreneurial strategy; strategic communication; digital entrepreneurship.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary entrepreneurial contexts, digital communication has become a decisive factor in the way start-ups conceptualize, implement, and sustain their strategic orientations. The rapid diffusion of digital technologies has profoundly altered traditional conceptions of communication, shifting it from a peripheral operational activity toward a central strategic function that shapes innovation processes, organizational identity, and competitive positioning (Berman, Schallmo, & Kraus, 2024). For start-ups operating in environments characterized by uncertainty, accelerated change, and resource constraints, digital communication constitutes a primary means through which entrepreneurial actors interpret their surroundings, mobilize stakeholders, and respond to market and technological disruptions.

Despite its growing relevance, the strategic role of digital communication in start-up development remains insufficiently theorized within existing academic literature. While research on digital entrepreneurship has largely focused on technological adoption, platform utilization, and performance outcomes, considerably less attention has been devoted to communication as a strategic resource embedded in entrepreneurial decision-making and strategic adaptation (Wolf, Godulla, Beck, & Neubert, 2022). Communication is still frequently approached as a technical instrument or a marketing support function, rather than as a constitutive process that structures entrepreneurial intent, coordinates collective action, and enables learning and strategic coherence. From a communication studies perspective, this represents a significant conceptual limitation. Strategic communication extends beyond information transmission or promotional activity; it actively contributes to the construction of organizational meaning, the legitimization of entrepreneurial initiatives, and the configuration of relationships within digital ecosystems (Cornelissen, 2020). In start-up contexts, where formal structures are fluid and strategic directions evolve rapidly, communication plays a central role in shaping how opportunities are interpreted, how uncertainty is managed, and how strategic priorities are collectively aligned.

Moreover, the increasing reliance on interactive, dialogical, and networked forms of digital communication further complicates traditional distinctions between internal and external communication. Social media platforms, collaborative digital tools, and online communities facilitate continuous feedback, co-creation, and shared sense-making processes that directly influence entrepreneurial strategy formation (Fischer & Reuber, 2014). Yet, existing research has not sufficiently explained how these communicative dynamics contribute to strategic agility, legitimacy building, and innovation within start-ups, leaving communication under-theorized as a driver of entrepreneurial strategy (Nambisan, 2017).

Against this backdrop, the specific problem addressed in this study concerns how digital communication operates as a strategic lever capable of redefining entrepreneurial strategies within start-ups. More precisely, the study seeks to understand how communicative processes contribute to entrepreneurial sense-making, strategic alignment, and adaptive capacity in digitally mediated



environments. Addressing this issue requires moving beyond a functionalist understanding of communication toward a constitutive perspective in which communication is viewed as a core mechanism through which entrepreneurial strategies are continuously constructed, enacted, and revised (Heath & Johansen, 2018).

To respond to this problem, the present research adopts a conceptual and theoretical–analytical strategy that integrates insights from strategic management and entrepreneurial communication theory. Through a systematic synthesis of relevant theoretical models and empirical contributions, the study develops a conceptual framework that positions digital communication as both an enabling mechanism and a driving force of strategic transformation in start-ups. By doing so, the article aims to contribute to the emergence of a renewed paradigm of entrepreneurial communication, emphasizing communication as a foundational strategic process that supports innovation, adaptability, and long-term sustainability in dynamic digital ecosystems.

2. Conceptual framework

Understanding the strategic role of digital communication in start-ups requires an integrative conceptual framework that bridges strategic communication theory, entrepreneurship studies, and digital innovation research. Rather than approaching communication as a peripheral or instrumental activity, this framework conceptualizes digital communication as a strategic and constitutive process through which entrepreneurial action, organizational meaning, and competitive positioning are continuously produced. In digitally mediated environments, communication becomes a central mechanism shaping how start-ups interpret uncertainty, mobilize resources, and construct strategic coherence.

2.1 Digital Communication as a Strategic Resource in Entrepreneurial Contexts

From a strategic communication perspective, communication extends beyond information transmission to encompass processes of meaning construction, legitimacy building, and relationship management between organizations and their environments (Cornelissen, 2020). In start-up settings, digital communication platforms—such as social media, professional networks, and collaborative tools—constitute interactive spaces where strategic narratives are articulated, tested, and negotiated with multiple stakeholders in real time. These platforms enable entrepreneurs to make their strategic intentions visible while remaining responsive to ongoing feedback and environmental signals.

Drawing on the resource-based view of the firm, digital communication can be understood as an intangible strategic resource that contributes to value creation when it is embedded in organizational routines and aligned with entrepreneurial intent (Barney, 1991). For start-ups facing structural constraints such as limited capital or market access, communication practices become critical assets that support differentiation, stakeholder engagement, and opportunity development. When strategically mobilized, digital communication functions as a capability that enhances visibility, credibility, and relational capital, thereby compensating for organizational fragility (Fischer & Reuber, 2014).



Within this framework, communication is not positioned as a tactical function subordinate to strategy, but as a strategic resource that actively shapes entrepreneurial choices. Digital interaction influences how entrepreneurs interpret market information, frame opportunities, and coordinate collective action, reinforcing the idea that communication and strategy are mutually constitutive processes in start-up development.

2.2 Digital Communication, Strategy Formation, and Organizational Adaptability

Entrepreneurial strategy in start-ups is typically emergent, experimental, and shaped through learning under uncertainty rather than formal planning (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985; Sarasvathy, 2001). Strategic direction often evolves through iterative interaction with users, partners, and investors, making communication a central mechanism in strategy formation. Digital communication facilitates this process by enabling continuous dialogue, rapid feedback, and shared sense-making across organizational and ecosystem boundaries.

From this perspective, digital communication supports digitally enabled entrepreneurial processes, where opportunity recognition, resource mobilization, and value co-creation unfold through networked interaction (Nambisan, 2017). Communication does not merely follow strategic decisions; it actively contributes to shaping them by influencing how environmental cues are interpreted and translated into strategic responses. This dynamic underscores the role of communication as a structuring force in entrepreneurial decision-making.

A further dimension of this framework concerns the relationship between digital communication, organizational identity, and legitimacy. Start-ups often lack established reputations, making legitimacy a critical strategic challenge (Suchman, 1995). Through digital communication, entrepreneurs engage in identity work by constructing narratives that express values, purpose, and vision, while simultaneously responding to stakeholder expectations (Fischer & Reuber, 2011). These narratives play a central role in reducing uncertainty, building trust, and gaining social acceptance within competitive ecosystems.

The framework also integrates the concept of dynamic capabilities, defined as the capacity to sense opportunities, seize them, and reconfigure resources in response to environmental change (Teece, 2007). Digital communication enhances these capabilities by supporting rapid information exchange, collective learning, and coordination. Interactive platforms enable start-ups to monitor market dynamics, engage users in dialogue, and adapt offerings accordingly, reinforcing strategic agility and innovation (Heath & Johansen, 2018).

Taken together, these elements support the emergence of a new paradigm of entrepreneurial communication, in which communication is understood as constitutive of strategy rather than subordinate to it. Digital communication is conceptualized as a multidimensional process linking strategic intent, identity construction, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive capacity. By positioning communication at the intersection of entrepreneurial strategy and organizational dynamics, this conceptual framework offers a holistic lens for analyzing how start-ups create value, sustain legitimacy, and achieve resilience in digitally mediated environments.



3. Analytical dimension of the study

Based on the proposed conceptual framework, the analysis of the strategic role of digital communication in start-ups is organized around a set of interrelated analytical dimensions. These dimensions operationalize the theoretical constructs discussed earlier by translating them into analytically observable components. Together, they provide a structured lens for examining how digital communication contributes to entrepreneurial strategy formation, implementation, and transformation within digitally mediated environments.

2.1 Strategic Integration of Digital Communication

The first analytical dimension concerns the degree to which digital communication is strategically integrated into the entrepreneurial orientation of start-ups, rather than treated as a peripheral or purely operational function. This dimension examines how communication objectives are aligned with broader strategic goals, such as market positioning, growth trajectories, and innovation ambitions. In start-up contexts, where strategies are often emergent rather than formally planned, digital communication may evolve through planned, adaptive, or hybrid patterns that reflect ongoing strategic learning (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985).

From an analytical standpoint, this dimension captures how communication participates in entrepreneurial sense-making and decision-making processes. It focuses on the ways in which digital communication supports the articulation of strategic intent, facilitates internal coordination, and enables entrepreneurs to navigate uncertainty by continuously interpreting environmental signals.

3.2 Digital Communication, Entrepreneurial Identity, and Legitimacy

The second dimension addresses the role of digital communication in the construction of entrepreneurial identity and the pursuit of organizational legitimacy. Start-ups typically lack established reputations, making legitimacy a critical strategic concern. Through digital platforms, entrepreneurs engage in narrative practices that express values, vision, and purpose, thereby shaping how the venture is perceived by stakeholders.

Drawing on legitimacy theory, this dimension analyzes how communicative practices contribute to reducing uncertainty and fostering social acceptance in competitive and digitally saturated environments (Suchman, 1995). Digital communication is examined as a symbolic and relational process through which start-ups establish credibility, align stakeholder expectations, and position themselves as legitimate actors within entrepreneurial ecosystems.

3.3 Stakeholder Engagement and Relational Capital Formation

The third analytical dimension focuses on digital communication as a mechanism for stakeholder engagement and the development of relational capital. It examines how interactive and dialogical communication practices enable start-ups to build and sustain relationships with customers, partners, investors, and online communities. In contrast to one-way information dissemination, digital communication facilitates ongoing dialogue, feedback exchange, and



collaborative interaction.

From a communication perspective, this dimension highlights the strategic importance of networked interaction in supporting opportunity refinement and value co-creation (Fischer & Reuber, 2014). Analytically, it considers the quality, intensity, and strategic orientation of digitally mediated interactions, emphasizing how relational dynamics contribute to entrepreneurial learning and strategic positioning.

3.4 Digital Communication and Strategic Agility

The fourth dimension examines the contribution of digital communication to strategic agility and adaptive capacity within start-ups. Operating in volatile environments, start-ups must continuously sense emerging trends, interpret market signals, and adjust strategic actions accordingly. Digital communication supports these processes by enabling rapid information flows, collective interpretation, and coordinated responses.

By facilitating learning and responsiveness, digital communication strengthens dynamic capabilities that are essential for innovation and competitiveness (Teece, 2007). This dimension emphasizes communication as an enabler of continuous strategic adjustment rather than static planning, highlighting its role in supporting resilience and long-term adaptability.

3.5 Communication-Driven Innovation and Value Creation

The final analytical dimension explores the relationship between digital communication and innovation processes in start-ups. It examines how communication supports opportunity identification, experimentation, and iterative development of products or services. Digital platforms often serve as spaces for testing ideas, engaging users, and refining value propositions through real-time interaction.

Building on digital entrepreneurship research, this dimension positions communication as a generative force that contributes to entrepreneurial learning and sustainable value creation (Nambisan, 2017). Communication is thus analyzed not only as a facilitator of innovation but as a constitutive process through which innovative outcomes are co-produced with stakeholders.

Collectively, these analytical dimensions reflect a shift toward a strategic and constitutive understanding of digital communication in entrepreneurial contexts. Rather than isolating communication as a functional activity, the framework demonstrates how digital communication intersects with strategy, identity, legitimacy, stakeholder relations, strategic agility, and innovation. This multidimensional approach provides a coherent basis for analyzing how start-ups mobilize communication as a strategic resource within digitally mediated entrepreneurial ecosystems..

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Epistemological Positioning and Research Design

This study is grounded in a qualitative theoretical–analytical research design, situated within an interpretive epistemological paradigm. The methodological orientation is justified by the conceptual nature of the research problem, which aims to explain how digital communication operates as a strategic resource in the redefinition of entrepreneurial strategies within start-ups.



Rather than seeking empirical measurement or hypothesis testing, the study focuses on analytical understanding and theoretical clarification. From this perspective, communication is approached as a constitutive process that shapes meaning, strategic orientation, and organizational action. Strategy is therefore conceptualized not as a fixed or linear plan, but as an evolving communicative construction emerging through discourse, interaction, and symbolic practices within digitally mediated environments (Cornelissen, 2020; Heath & Johansen, 2018).

4.2 Theoretical–Analytical Procedure

The methodological approach relies on a systematic theoretical analysis of peer-reviewed academic literature drawn from strategic communication, digital entrepreneurship, organizational communication, and innovation studies. No empirical techniques such as interviews, surveys, or case studies are employed. Instead, the analysis is based on the critical examination, comparison, and synthesis of existing theoretical frameworks and conceptual models. This approach enables the identification of conceptual convergences, divergences, and analytical gaps concerning the strategic role of digital communication in entrepreneurial contexts (Jaakkola, 2020).

The analysis follows a concept-driven qualitative logic, focusing on key constructs such as digital communication, entrepreneurial strategy, strategic adaptation, legitimacy, and stakeholder engagement. Through iterative reading and thematic interpretation, the study examines how these concepts are defined, interconnected, and mobilized across different scholarly traditions. This process allows for the abstraction of higher-order meanings and supports the reconceptualization of digital communication as a strategic and generative mechanism rather than a merely instrumental function in start-up development (Nambisan, 2017; Fischer & Reuber, 2011).

The analytical process unfolds in three stages. First, relevant theories are mapped to establish the intellectual foundations of digital entrepreneurial communication. Second, these theories are critically analyzed to explain how communication processes contribute to sense-making, legitimacy construction, and strategic alignment in uncertain and dynamic entrepreneurial environments. Third, the insights derived from this analysis are integrated into a coherent conceptual framework that explicates the strategic contribution of digital communication to start-up resilience and growth.

Overall, this qualitative theoretical–analytical methodology contributes to theory building rather than theory testing. It responds to growing calls in entrepreneurship and communication research for conceptually grounded studies that move beyond functionalist perspectives and recognize communication as a central strategic resource within contemporary entrepreneurial ecosystems (Wolf et al., 2022).

5. Digital Communication as a Strategic Construct in Start-Ups

5.1 Digital Communication and Strategic Sense-Making

In entrepreneurial environments characterized by high uncertainty, limited foresight, and rapid change, strategic sense-making serves as a central mechanism through which start-ups interpret environmental signals and transform ambiguity into actionable decisions. Digital communication significantly enhances this process by shaping how information is selected, interpreted, and



collectively validated. Communication is no longer a mere conduit for transmitting data; instead, digitally mediated environments actively influence the cognitive and symbolic processes through which entrepreneurial actors construct and refine meaning.

According to Weick (1995), sense-making is an ongoing, socially constructed activity grounded in interaction, retrospection, and plausibility rather than objective accuracy. In start-ups, where decisions are frequently made under conditions of incomplete or uncertain information, digital communication platforms facilitate the continuous circulation of interpretations that reduce ambiguity. Internal digital tools—such as collaborative platforms, shared documents, and instant messaging systems—enable rapid exchanges, allowing team members to collectively interpret market developments, technological trends, and organizational challenges. These exchanges promote the convergence of individual understandings into shared interpretive frames that guide strategic action.

Digital communication also shapes how entrepreneurial opportunities are discursively constructed. Opportunities are not merely discovered; they are narrated, framed, and legitimized through interaction and language (Cornelissen & Clarke, 2010). Within digital environments, start-ups experiment with strategic meanings, articulate intentions, test narratives, and refine value propositions. These narratives often circulate between internal teams and external audiences, including investors and early adopters. Feedback generated through these interactions informs the ongoing sense-making process, either reinforcing or challenging prior interpretations.

Furthermore, digital communication strengthens strategic alignment by enabling dialogical sense-making across organizational boundaries. Start-ups frequently operate with fluid structures and overlapping roles, increasing the need for continuous coordination. Digital interaction allows entrepreneurs and team members to align perceptions of goals, risks, and priorities without relying on formal hierarchies. This shared interpretive space enhances coherence while maintaining adaptability, enabling start-ups to recalibrate their strategic vision in response to evolving circumstances (Cornelissen, 2020).

From a strategic communication perspective, sense-making is closely linked to identity construction. Digital communication contributes to articulating who the start-up is, what it seeks to achieve, and how it positions itself within the ecosystem. These identity narratives, co-constructed through online discourse, influence strategic choices by framing what is considered legitimate, desirable, or feasible (Gioia, Patvardhan, Hamilton, & Corley, 2013). Consequently, digital communication embeds sense-making within broader processes of organizational identity and strategic orientation.

Overall, digital communication functions as a constitutive element of strategic sense-making in start-ups. It enables continuous interpretation of uncertainty, supports the collective construction of opportunity meanings, and aligns entrepreneurial vision through sustained interaction. By integrating sense-making into digitally mediated communicative practices, start-ups enhance their capacity to navigate complex environments and adapt strategically within dynamic digital



ecosystems.

5.2 Communicative Construction of Entrepreneurial Identity and Legitimacy

In the early stages of venture creation, start-ups face a structural deficit of legitimacy stemming from their novelty, limited history, and uncertain future prospects. Within this context, digital communication becomes a central mechanism through which entrepreneurial identity is constructed and legitimacy is negotiated. Rather than being inherent attributes, identity and legitimacy are communicative accomplishments that emerge through sustained interaction, narrative framing, and symbolic expression across digital environments.

From a communication perspective, entrepreneurial identity is formed through the narratives entrepreneurs articulate about who they are, what they seek to achieve, and how their venture creates value. Digital platforms provide start-ups with continuous spaces for identity narration, allowing them to present coherent stories that link personal entrepreneurial vision with organizational purpose. These narratives do not merely describe the venture; they actively shape stakeholder perceptions by framing the start-up as credible, innovative, and worthy of engagement (Cornelissen & Clarke, 2010). Through websites, social media profiles, and professional networks, start-ups symbolically position themselves within broader market and societal discourses, thereby constructing a recognizable and interpretable identity.

Legitimacy, in turn, can be understood as the generalized perception that a venture's actions are appropriate, desirable, and aligned with prevailing norms and expectations (Suchman, 1995). Digital communication plays a decisive role in this process by enabling start-ups to demonstrate conformity, competence, and distinctiveness simultaneously. Symbolic cues—such as professional language, visual identity, affiliations, and endorsements—serve as communicative signals that reduce uncertainty for stakeholders who lack direct experience with the venture. In digitally mediated contexts, these signals are continuously evaluated, shared, and reinterpreted, making legitimacy an ongoing communicative achievement rather than a fixed status.

Interactive digital communication further reinforces legitimacy by enabling dialogical engagement with stakeholders. Fischer and Reuber (2014) emphasize that online interaction allows entrepreneurs to engage audiences in conversations that humanize the venture and foster relational trust. Through feedback exchanges, responsiveness, and transparency, start-ups signal openness and accountability, which strengthens perceived legitimacy among customers, investors, and partners. These interactions also allow entrepreneurs to adapt their narratives in response to stakeholder expectations, aligning identity claims with external interpretations.

Moreover, digital communication supports the alignment between internal identity construction and external legitimacy claims. As entrepreneurial teams negotiate meaning internally through digital collaboration tools, these shared interpretations inform the external narratives communicated to stakeholders. This alignment enhances strategic coherence by ensuring that identity expressions are not merely performative but grounded in collective understanding and organizational intent (Gioia et al., 2013). In this sense, communication bridges internal sense-



making and external legitimation processes.

Ultimately, the communicative construction of entrepreneurial identity and legitimacy underscores the strategic nature of digital communication in start-ups. By enabling narrative articulation, symbolic positioning, and interactive engagement, digital communication allows early-stage ventures to overcome legitimacy deficits and establish a credible presence within competitive ecosystems. Identity and legitimacy thus emerge not as static attributes, but as dynamic outcomes of sustained communicative practice embedded in digital entrepreneurial activity (Suchman, 1995; Fischer & Reuber, 2014).

5.3 Digital Interaction and Strategic Agility

In volatile and rapidly evolving entrepreneurial environments, strategic agility represents a critical capability that enables start-ups to respond effectively to uncertainty, technological change, and shifting stakeholder expectations. Strategic agility refers not only to the speed of decision-making, but also to the capacity to continuously reframe strategic priorities through learning, interpretation, and coordinated action. Within this context, digital interaction plays a central role in enhancing the adaptive potential of start-ups by supporting ongoing dialogue, real-time feedback, and distributed sense-making across networks.

Digital interaction transforms communication from a linear transmission process into a dialogical and networked practice. Through digital platforms—such as social media, collaborative tools, and online communities—start-ups engage in continuous exchanges with users, partners, and ecosystem actors. These interactions generate streams of feedback that allow entrepreneurial teams to detect weak signals, anticipate emerging trends, and reassess strategic assumptions. As Nambisan (2017) argues, digitally enabled interaction reshapes entrepreneurial processes by embedding opportunity development and strategic adjustment within interconnected digital networks rather than isolated organizational boundaries.

From a strategic management perspective, digital interaction strengthens dynamic capabilities, particularly the abilities to sense, seize, and reconfigure resources in response to environmental change (Teece, 2018). Interactive communication channels facilitate rapid sensing by providing immediate access to market reactions, user experiences, and competitive signals. This real-time communicative exposure allows start-ups to move beyond delayed or formalized information flows and engage in continuous strategic monitoring. In doing so, digital interaction reduces the temporal gap between environmental change and strategic response.

Moreover, dialogical communication supports organizational learning by enabling collective interpretation and experimentation. Strategic agility in start-ups is often achieved through iterative cycles of action and reflection rather than through predefined plans. Digital interaction creates spaces where ideas can be tested, contested, and refined through communicative engagement with diverse stakeholders. These exchanges foster learning-by-interaction, allowing start-ups to adjust their strategic direction while maintaining coherence and shared understanding among team members and external partners (Cornelissen, 2020).



Digital interaction also contributes to strategic flexibility by lowering coordination costs and facilitating decentralized decision-making. In start-ups with fluid structures and overlapping roles, strategic agility depends on the ability to align actions without rigid hierarchies. Networked communication enables rapid coordination and alignment through shared digital narratives, collective interpretations, and mutual responsiveness. This communicative flexibility allows start-ups to reconfigure strategic priorities without destabilizing organizational identity or stakeholder relationships.

Ultimately, digital interaction functions as a key enabler of strategic agility in start-ups. By fostering responsiveness, continuous learning, and adaptive coordination, dialogical and networked communication practices allow entrepreneurial ventures to navigate uncertainty and sustain strategic momentum in dynamic digital ecosystems. In this sense, agility emerges not merely from strategic intent or technological capability, but from the quality and intensity of digital communicative interaction embedded in entrepreneurial practice.

5.4 Communication as a Driver of Innovation and Value Co-Creation

In contemporary entrepreneurial ecosystems, innovation increasingly emerges from interaction rather than isolated inventive activity. For start-ups in particular, limited internal resources and high environmental uncertainty make collaborative and communicative processes central to innovation outcomes. Digital communication plays a pivotal role in this shift by enabling value co-creation through continuous interaction, shared meaning-making, and collective problem solving across networks of users, partners, and ecosystem actors.

From a communication perspective, innovation can be understood as a socially constructed process in which ideas are developed, evaluated, and transformed through dialogue. Digital communication platforms provide start-ups with accessible spaces for engaging diverse stakeholders in the innovation process, allowing knowledge, expectations, and experiences to circulate beyond organizational boundaries. Through online communities, social media, and collaborative digital environments, start-ups invite users and partners to participate actively in shaping products, services, and business models. This communicative openness supports co-creation by integrating external perspectives into entrepreneurial decision-making (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2018).

Digital communication also enables iterative feedback loops that are essential for innovation under conditions of uncertainty. Rather than relying on linear development processes, start-ups increasingly adopt experimentation-based approaches in which ideas are continuously tested and refined. Interactive communication allows entrepreneurs to receive immediate responses from users, interpret reactions, and adjust value propositions accordingly. These feedback mechanisms reduce informational asymmetries and enhance learning, making innovation a dynamic and communicatively mediated process rather than a discrete outcome (Nambisan, 2017).

Moreover, communicative co-creation contributes to the generation of symbolic and relational value alongside functional innovation. Through participation in digital dialogue, stakeholders



develop a sense of involvement and shared ownership, which strengthens relational ties and enhances the perceived value of entrepreneurial offerings. This relational dimension of innovation highlights the role of communication in shaping not only what is created, but how value is experienced and legitimized within the ecosystem (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

From a strategic standpoint, communication-driven co-creation supports start-ups in aligning innovation with evolving market expectations while preserving flexibility. By maintaining open communicative channels, start-ups can adapt innovation trajectories without committing prematurely to rigid solutions. This communicative adaptability enhances strategic resilience and allows innovation to unfold as a collaborative, context-sensitive process embedded in ongoing interaction (Teece, 2018).

In sum, digital communication functions as a core driver of innovation and value co-creation in start-ups. By facilitating collaborative engagement, enabling feedback-based learning, and fostering relational value, communication becomes an integral component of entrepreneurial innovation. This perspective reinforces the view that innovation in digital ecosystems is not solely a technological or strategic achievement, but a communicative accomplishment grounded in sustained interaction and shared meaning.

6. Practical Implications for Start-Up Management

The integration of digital communication as a strategic resource has profound implications for start-ups. Translating theoretical insights into actionable practices enables entrepreneurial actors to leverage communication for strategic coherence, legitimacy, and innovation. This section outlines how start-ups can operationalize digital communication strategies, optimize stakeholder engagement, and enhance value co-creation.

6.1 Operationalizing Digital Communication Strategies

Start-ups can transform digital communication from a functional instrument into a central strategic lever by embedding it systematically within the core of organizational operations. Operationalization entails more than occasional social media posts or marketing campaigns; it requires the intentional integration of communication into every layer of strategic activity, from market positioning and resource mobilization to product development and investor relations (Cornelissen, 2020). Entrepreneurs should cultivate a holistic communication mindset, recognizing that each digital touchpoint—whether on social media, collaborative platforms, or internal messaging systems—serves as an avenue for reinforcing organizational purpose and strategic vision.

To effectively operationalize communication strategies, start-ups must establish clear communication objectives aligned with their business priorities. These objectives should define the intended outcomes for each stakeholder group, such as increasing brand awareness among potential clients, establishing credibility with investors, or fostering engagement with online communities. By mapping communication goals to strategic milestones, start-ups ensure that messaging is purposeful, coherent, and capable of influencing decision-making processes.



Monitoring and evaluation are critical components of operationalization. Entrepreneurs should implement real-time analytics tools and sentiment tracking mechanisms that assess the impact of digital interactions. Monitoring metrics may include engagement rates, content reach, sentiment analysis, and the responsiveness of stakeholders. Insights derived from these measures allow start-ups to adapt communication practices dynamically, enhancing strategic responsiveness and facilitating iterative learning cycles (Heath & Johansen, 2018).

Furthermore, digital communication enables start-ups to create and sustain a coherent narrative that reflects evolving organizational identity. This involves crafting messages that consistently articulate the venture's mission, values, and unique value proposition while remaining sensitive to stakeholder feedback. For example, product updates shared via collaborative platforms or social media campaigns can be framed to demonstrate innovation, responsiveness, and thought leadership, reinforcing legitimacy and trustworthiness (Fischer & Reuber, 2014).

Operationalization also requires internal alignment and employee engagement. Start-up teams must be educated on the strategic purpose of communication practices, ensuring that all internal actors act as consistent ambassadors of the organizational narrative. This approach not only amplifies external reach but also strengthens internal cohesion, creating a shared understanding of strategic priorities that supports collective decision-making (Nambisan, 2017).

Finally, operationalized digital communication functions as a strategic feedback loop, bridging the gap between internal strategy formulation and external stakeholder perception. Continuous dialogue with users, partners, and investors generates actionable insights that inform strategic adjustments, allowing start-ups to iterate offerings, refine positioning, and anticipate market shifts. In this sense, communication evolves from a supporting tool to a constitutive mechanism of entrepreneurial strategy, enhancing adaptability, innovation, and long-term resilience (Teece, 2007).

6.2 Integrating Communication into Entrepreneurial Decision-Making

Beyond operational alignment, digital communication should be understood as an integral component of entrepreneurial decision-making rather than a supplementary support function. In start-up environments characterized by uncertainty, compressed timeframes, and evolving market conditions, strategic choices are rarely based on complete or stable information. Under such circumstances, communication plays a pivotal role in reducing ambiguity by enabling continuous sense-making, shared interpretation, and coordinated action among entrepreneurial actors (Weick, 1995).

From a managerial standpoint, integrating communication into decision-making requires recognizing digital interaction as a cognitive and relational infrastructure that shapes strategic judgment. Digital exchanges with customers, partners, and online communities generate real-time insights into market expectations, emerging needs, and competitive dynamics. These communicative signals allow entrepreneurs to refine opportunity evaluation, reassess risk, and recalibrate strategic priorities as conditions evolve. Rather than relying exclusively on formal analytical tools or individual intuition, start-up leaders can draw on communicative feedback as an



interpretive resource that enriches strategic reasoning and supports more informed decision-making processes (Nambisan, 2017).

Internally, digital communication platforms such as collaborative workspaces, instant messaging tools, and shared knowledge systems facilitate participatory decision-making by promoting dialogue and transparency. These platforms enable the circulation of diverse perspectives across fluid organizational roles, allowing strategic issues to be collectively discussed and negotiated. Such dialogical practices contribute to the construction of shared understanding and collective ownership of strategic choices, which is particularly valuable in start-ups where hierarchical structures are minimal and adaptability is essential. Communication, in this sense, becomes a mechanism through which strategic coherence is maintained without constraining entrepreneurial flexibility (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985).

Moreover, integrating communication into entrepreneurial decision-making enhances organizational learning by linking reflection and action. Through iterative digital interaction, start-ups can assess the outcomes of prior decisions, reinterpret feedback, and adjust future strategic moves accordingly. This ongoing communicative loop strengthens the capacity for adaptive decision-making and supports the development of dynamic capabilities in volatile environments (Teece, 2018). Consequently, digital communication functions not only as a channel for information exchange but as a strategic process through which entrepreneurial judgment, coordination, and adaptability are continuously cultivated.

6.3 Enhancing Stakeholder Engagement, Innovation, and Legitimacy

A further practical implication of this study concerns the strategic management of stakeholder relationships through digital communication. Early-stage ventures typically face significant legitimacy challenges stemming from their limited track record, weak institutional anchoring, and low visibility within competitive markets. In this context, digital communication provides start-ups with critical opportunities to construct, articulate, and disseminate narratives that signal credibility, purpose, and value to diverse stakeholder groups (Suchman, 1995). These narratives function as symbolic resources through which entrepreneurial actors seek recognition and acceptance within their ecosystems.

From a managerial perspective, effective stakeholder engagement requires moving beyond unidirectional information dissemination toward dialogical and relational communication practices. Digital platforms enable continuous interaction with customers, partners, investors, and online communities, allowing start-ups to listen, respond, and co-create rather than merely broadcast messages. Such dialogical engagement contributes to the development of relational capital by fostering trust, mutual understanding, and long-term commitment. Research on entrepreneurial communication suggests that these interactive practices play a decisive role in shaping stakeholder perceptions and reinforcing organizational legitimacy, particularly in digitally mediated environments (Fischer & Reuber, 2014).

Digital communication also acts as a catalyst for innovation by facilitating feedback loops and



collaborative learning processes. Through online interaction, start-ups can involve stakeholders directly in opportunity refinement, product experimentation, and problem-solving activities. This communicative openness supports co-creation dynamics in which value is jointly produced across entrepreneurial ecosystems rather than internally generated alone. By integrating stakeholders into innovation processes, start-ups not only enhance the relevance and adaptability of their offerings but also strengthen legitimacy by demonstrating responsiveness and inclusivity (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2018).

From a practical standpoint, legitimacy-building through digital communication requires coherence between symbolic expressions and observable practices. Entrepreneurs must ensure that communicated values, missions, and strategic claims are consistently reflected in organizational behavior and interactive engagement. Inconsistencies between discourse and action risk undermining trust and eroding credibility. Strategically managed digital communication thus functions as both a relational and performative process through which legitimacy is continuously constructed and maintained.

Overall, enhancing stakeholder engagement, innovation, and legitimacy through digital communication underscores its centrality as a managerial concern in start-up development. By deliberately leveraging communication as a strategic capability, entrepreneurs can strengthen stakeholder relationships, stimulate collaborative innovation, and consolidate their position within competitive digital environments. This applied perspective reinforces the article's broader argument that digital communication is not merely a supportive activity, but a foundational mechanism through which entrepreneurial value creation and sustainable growth are achieved.

7. Analysis and Discussion

This section integrates the conceptual framework and analytical dimensions developed in the preceding parts in order to critically analyze the strategic role of digital communication in start-ups and to discuss its theoretical implications for communication and entrepreneurship research. Rather than presenting empirical findings, the analysis is grounded in a theoretical–interpretive reading of the literature, allowing for a deeper understanding of how communication operates as a constitutive element of entrepreneurial strategy in digitally mediated contexts.

The analysis confirms that digital communication cannot be adequately explained through a functional or instrumental lens. Across the examined theoretical perspectives, communication consistently emerges as a process through which entrepreneurial actors interpret uncertainty, construct strategic meaning, and coordinate collective action. This finding aligns with sense-making theory, which emphasizes that strategy in volatile environments is not simply designed and implemented, but continuously enacted through interaction and discourse (Weick, 1995; Cornelissen, 2020). In start-ups, where ambiguity and rapid change are structural conditions, digital communication platforms intensify these sense-making processes by accelerating feedback, amplifying interpretations, and stabilizing shared frames of understanding.

A central insight of the analysis concerns the strategic integration of communication into



entrepreneurial activity. The literature suggests that when digital communication is aligned with strategic intent, it functions as an intangible capability that supports differentiation, adaptability, and growth. This observation extends the resource-based view by highlighting communication not merely as a supportive resource, but as a strategic construct embedded in organizational routines and narratives (Barney, 1991; Fischer & Reuber, 2014). The discussion therefore reinforces the argument that start-ups compensate for material resource constraints through communicative capabilities that enable visibility, legitimacy, and stakeholder engagement.

The analysis further demonstrates that entrepreneurial identity and legitimacy are communicatively produced rather than structurally given. Digital narratives, symbolic expressions, and online presence allow start-ups to frame who they are and why they matter within competitive ecosystems. This process is particularly critical in early-stage ventures, where legitimacy deficits pose significant strategic risks. By engaging stakeholders through consistent and meaningful communication, start-ups construct legitimacy as a relational and discursive achievement, supporting Suchman's (1995) view of legitimacy as socially conferred rather than inherently possessed. The discussion highlights that identity construction and legitimacy building are not parallel processes, but mutually reinforcing outcomes of strategic communication.

Another key dimension emerging from the analysis is the role of digital communication in enhancing strategic agility. Dialogical and networked communication enables rapid learning, collective interpretation, and timely strategic adjustment. This supports dynamic capability theory by illustrating how sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring processes are communicatively mediated in entrepreneurial contexts (Teece, 2018). The discussion underscores that agility in start-ups is less about speed alone and more about communicative responsiveness—the ability to interpret signals, negotiate meaning, and recalibrate action through interaction.

Finally, the analysis emphasizes communication as a driver of innovation and value co-creation. Innovation appears not as a linear outcome of internal planning, but as an emergent process shaped through continuous interaction with users and ecosystem actors. Digital communication facilitates co-creation by opening innovation processes to dialogue, feedback, and collaborative sense-making (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2018). The discussion thus reframes innovation as a communicative accomplishment, where value is jointly produced through participation and shared understanding rather than unilaterally delivered.

Overall, the discussion advances a constitutive view of digital communication in entrepreneurship. By synthesizing insights from communication theory, strategic management, and digital entrepreneurship, this section argues that communication is not subordinate to entrepreneurial strategy, but foundational to it. Digital communication structures how start-ups interpret their environments, define their identities, engage stakeholders, and innovate under uncertainty. This integrative perspective contributes to the ongoing re-theorization of entrepreneurial communication and opens avenues for future research that further bridges communication studies and entrepreneurship scholarship.



8. CONCLUSION

This article set out to examine the strategic significance of digital communication in reshaping entrepreneurial strategies within start-ups operating in digitally mediated and uncertain environments. Departing from traditional views that treat communication as a supportive or operational function, the study adopted a conceptual and theoretical–analytical approach to reposition digital communication as a constitutive element of entrepreneurial strategy. By integrating insights from strategic communication, entrepreneurship theory, and digital innovation studies, the paper addressed a central gap in the literature concerning the under-theorization of communication as a strategic resource in start-up contexts.

The analysis demonstrated that digital communication plays a foundational role in entrepreneurial sense-making, enabling start-ups to interpret uncertainty, align strategic vision, and coordinate collective action. It further showed that entrepreneurial identity and organizational legitimacy are communicatively constructed through digital narratives, symbolic interaction, and sustained online presence, particularly in early-stage ventures facing credibility constraints. In addition, the study highlighted how dialogical and networked communication enhances strategic agility by supporting learning, responsiveness, and adaptive decision-making. Finally, the findings emphasized the contribution of digital communication to innovation and value co-creation, framing innovation as an interactive and communicative process embedded within entrepreneurial ecosystems.

By synthesizing these dimensions, the article contributes to the development of an emerging paradigm of entrepreneurial communication that views communication not as subordinate to strategy, but as central to its formation and evolution. The proposed conceptual framework offers a holistic lens for understanding how start-ups mobilize digital communication to create meaning, build legitimacy, engage stakeholders, and sustain competitive advantage. While the study is theoretical in nature, it provides a robust foundation for future empirical research and invites scholars to further explore the strategic implications of communication in entrepreneurial settings. Ultimately, recognizing digital communication as a core strategic construct enhances both academic understanding and practical insight into how start-ups navigate complexity and pursue sustainable growth in the digital age.



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