

Cooperative Entrepreneurship and Innovation through Digital Marketing in Post Crisis: Contributions and Challenges for Moroccan Cooperators

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ABSTRACT

The post health crisis has significantly impacted the continuity of all businesses across the globe including cooperative businesses. Further, the shift in customer behavior in this crisis makes the digital marketing innovation a new managerial approach to this category. As a result, various challenges have curtailed the use of this strategy. The article is devoted to the topical issue related to the factual role of digital innovation in marketing cooperative products in the environment of varying routines and the complexity of its formation in the post-crisis era. As a matter of fact, we embraced a qualitative approach which was grounded on eight case studies. The findings point towards the significance of creating routines in digital marketing in cooperatives in order to achieve successful implementation. Relevant information to the cooperatives and policymakers can therefore be collected to enable the creation of digital culture.

KEYWORDS: cooperative, crisis, innovation, digital marketing, strategy.

INTRODUCTION

The appearance of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to major disturbances in the global economy and ways of life (BOUAYAD & Hajar, 2022). Specifically, it has dramatically changed consumer behavior, where consumers have flocked digital platforms in their acquisition of goods and services (Bhatti et al., 2020; Grubor & Jakša, 2018; Li et al., 2021). With this kind of a fast change, cooperative enterprises, as in the case of other organizations, have been facing significant challenges, the most notable being a reduction in their turnover (Cheggag & Mokhlis, 2023). A response to this crisis has been the need to ensure that such company are effective in adopting new strategies, especially the digital marketing, to guarantee their survival and in order to meet the new requirements of the market (Arias et al., 2022; Cheggag & Mokhlis, 2023; ZOUAOU & ALLOUCHE, 2023). This has made the digital marketing innovation a very important managerial trend within cooperatives and has become an essential

form of sales channel, rather than a peripheral one (ZOUAOU & ALLOUCHE, 2023).

Although digital marketing gains more and more significance, the academic literature has gaps on how it needs to be specifically applied to cooperative enterprises, especially in the crisis setting. The need to determine the effect of digital marketing innovation on the commercialization of cooperative products is lacking empirical evidence (Jabbouri et al., 2022). In addition, the importance of marketing-innovation-strategies in managing crisis-related situations of cooperatives has not been discussed thoroughly as well as how these business should choose these strategies to enhance their visibility and update their sales operations following crises. The research question discussed in this article is the following one: Does digital marketing innovation aid the cooperative enterprises to overcome their commercialization difficulties in a post-crisis period?

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The paper has two significant contributions. To begin with, it complements the available literature outlining the role of marketing innovation policies in crisis management and cooperative business survival, as well as a typology of digital marketing innovation. Second, it offers empirical findings on the significance of resources and routines to ensure successful implementation of digital marketing in the context of this group of enterprises, investigating the intricate nature of digital integration into the organization and the organizational problems of the involved process. We used an exploratory qualitative approach in order to answer this research question. Our study is based on a multiple case study approach where we interviewed eight presidents or members of agricultural and craft cooperatives in Morocco using semi-structured interviews and enhanced by the analysis of their social media dynamics. This method allowed exploring in detail the input and challenges of digital marketing in the post-COVID-19 environment.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows: a literature review detailing the theoretical framework of cooperative entrepreneurship, innovation during crises, and digital marketing; followed by the presentation of the research methodology; then a discussion of the empirical results; and finally, a conclusion offering theoretical and managerial implications, as well as the study's limitations and avenues for future research.

1. Literature Review and theoretical Framework

1.1. Cooperative Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Crises

Cooperative entrepreneurship is a specific form of social entrepreneurship (Akbari et al., 2023). In the entrepreneurial literature, reference is primarily made to cooperative-type enterprises (Veyer & Sangiorgio, 2006), which are based on the principle of common and solidarity work; its starting point consists of building a collective group that aims to address the collective interests of its members (Walt, 2008). Like all other forms of enterprise, several factors constrain the expansion of this category of enterprise, mainly the lack of creative spirit in the face of the adversities of a changing world (Folch et al., 2019). In this regard, Schumpeter considered innovation as a determinant of the success or failure of the enterprise. He views the entrepreneur as a catalyst for change, who takes advantage of market disequilibria to introduce innovations: methods, products, processes, and raw materials (Frank, 1998). Entrepreneurship remains a process of value creation (Bruyat & Julien, 2001; Ronstadt, 1984).

Moreover, numerous studies demonstrate the relationship between entrepreneurial innovation and crisis. According to (Denervaud et al., 2009), crisis acts as a catalyst for innovation. Thus, management literature treats innovation as a lever for organizational renewal and enterprise performance (Ayerbe et al., 2020; Roy & Sarkar, 2014). (Birkinshaw et al., 2008) agree that innovation represents a new process and a new management practice. The adoption of innovation depends on the external context and the enterprise's internal advantages (Wang et al., 2020). Consequently, enterprises must constantly adapt and integrate innovative strategies, such as digital marketing, to strengthen their commercial performance, especially during commercial crises (ZOUAOU & ALLOUCHE, 2023). The notion of performance is revisited in this framework, emphasizing that cooperatives' capacity for resistance to crises is intrinsically linked to their adaptability and strategic deployment of innovation (Valette, 2017). More specifically, cooperative entrepreneurship is characterized by engagement in collaborative interactions aimed at improving entrepreneurial performance, with an emphasis on values such as innovation, risk-taking, and the exploitation of new business opportunities (Azhari & LOTFI, 2022). As highlighted by (SFALI Ali & SABRI Rhita, 2025), the ability to exploit new ideas and opportunities in the context of failure is a resilience competency that ensures enterprise persistence.

1.2. Digital Marketing Innovation

Marketing innovation is a concept that has attracted the attention of numerous researchers due to its key role in developing commercial performance (Ding & Li, 2020; Harif et al., 2022). Innovation in the marketing process has essentially taken several forms. D'Attoma and Ieva, 2020 distinguish between several types: innovation in design and packaging, through the introduction of a new product, price promotion and/or new sales channels. With changes in consumer behaviors (Li et al., 2021), marketing innovation has become an essential means to address these challenges and innovate in a constantly evolving environment (Wang et al., 2020). Furthermore, an entrepreneur's ability to adapt to crises constitutes an entrepreneurial resilience competency (SFALI Ali & SABRI Rhita, 2025). More specifically, in an economic crisis context, Moroccan micro-enterprises have faced significant challenges, making the adoption of digital marketing strategies even more crucial for their survival and development, and adaptation to changes in consumer behavior (BOUAYAD & Hajar, 2022). Consequently,

numerous researchers note that the reorientation of consumer behaviors toward the digital realm in a crisis context, such as during the COVID-19 era, has provided opportunities for companies to develop various marketing innovations (Akbari et al., 2023; Ding & Li, 2020; Wang et al., 2020), such as digital marketing innovation adopted by certain cooperative enterprises (Maina et al., 2023), as a new management practice aimed at overcoming the effects of the pandemic (Shahzad et al., 2020), through the creation of new sales channels (Grubor & Jakša, 2018; Keke, 2022).

Digital marketing has reached its peak and achieved technological advancements worldwide (Pasaribu et al., 2022); it involves using advertisements on social networks (Grubor & Jakša, 2018; Ianenko et al., 2022; Jamil et al., 2022; Keke, 2022; Li et al., 2021; Nuseir & Refae, 2022), e-commerce sites, etc. (Ng'ang'a, 2015; Shahzad et al., 2020), to enhance companies' visibility in the digital space (Ding & Li, 2020; Keke, 2022; Outmane et al., 2024). This approach not only significantly reduces financial costs associated with physical sales spaces but also fosters remote customer loyalty, a crucial aspect during periods of economic disruption such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Bezanga, 2024).

1.3. Digital Marketing Innovation and Cooperatives' Performance

Digital marketing innovation is a volatile notion in literature in regard to its influence on joint ventures. The direct correlation between the digital marketing innovation strategy and enterprise performance is proved by many authors (Harif et al., 2022; Nuseir & Refae, 2022; Peter & Vecchia, 2020). The increase in commercial performance due to the use of new technologies in marketing strategies in a crisis situation can affect enterprise competitiveness (D'Attoma & Ieva, 2020), and a 1 percentage point growth in the market-oriented marketing innovation increases enterprise value by approximately 0.2% (Tang et al., 2021). It is even more relevant to the crisis situation when adaptability and the ability to innovate digitally become an important criterion of resilience and business continuity (Arias et al., 2022; Cheggag & Mokhlis, 2023). Digital marketing helps any enterprise to fulfill its marketing goals through the use of digital technologies and the Internet, which is crucial in the world that is becoming more digitalized (Mouldi, 2020).

The innovation of digital marketing has already brought significant benefits, and entrepreneurs can utilize and manage the data gathered via the social network (Silva et al., 2023), on online shopping

products (Outmane et al., 2024), to formulate their operations by obtaining more customers (Ding & Li, 2020; Jamil et al., 2022; Pasaribu et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2020) and promoting trust in the entrepreneurship among customers/patients. Furthermore, it also leads to the increase of turnover and the profitability of the enterprise (Ding & Li, 2020; Li et al., 2021). In addition, the literature on management science emphasizes the contribution of information and communication technologies (ICT) to the enhancement of the performance of enterprises, especially in times of economic crises (Civelek, 2025). In this respect, a research by ATTOUCH & TALAY, 2014 indicates that the use of ICT save operational cost as well as enhance efficiency of commercial processes and this is quite rewarding to the dairy cooperatives. A different set of research by Maina et al., 2023 proved the significance of the digital marketing platform in the commercialization of the local products of the collective businesses in Kenya, to enhance the income of farmers; through this platform they are able to express their prices and product features thus lowering the costs of making transactions. Digital transformation is needed in an environment where competition is intensified to increase the efficiency, productivity, and access to the market of cooperative business (Silva et al., 2023). However, ICT adoption by cooperatives is not necessarily followed by the complete utilization of their potential in managing customer relationship, as well as customer loyalty, despite their ability to maximize these operations (ATTOUCH & TALAY, 2014). It is usually caused by the shortage of resources, the absence of skills, or outdated technologies (Peter & Vecchia, 2020). Similarly, many investigators note that the creation of digital marketing in a collaborative enterprise is associated with various challenges associated with it, most prominently with the need of managerial commitment and consistency as a digital technology use requires sufficient resources in terms of financing, infrastructure, and workforce to be efficient (Dwivedi & Pawsey, 2022; Peter & Vecchia, 2020; Prasetyo et al., 2022; Silva et al., 2023); moreover, members of the cooperative need to have digital skills and culture to provide The critical part is to improve the marketing assessment by building skills and capabilities of managers in new technological trends (Akbari et al., 2023), as it allows the managers to help in the marketing of the cooperative enterprise. This can be transferred to the knowledge of the relevance of user-friendly and secure e-commerce platforms, which is an essential consideration when engaging customers and gaining their trust in implementing transactions online (Nuseir & Refae, 2022).

2. Methodology and Data Analysis

In order to analyze the roles and issues of online marketing on the activity of cooperative enterprises, we use a case study methodology, which enables the researcher to form more precise and in-depth concepts regarding such phenomena, which have not been thoroughly studied before on the basis of numerous data points. The qualitative approach is a method that allows the deep examination of the phenomena (Lewis, 2015), as it is possible to obtain the complexity of the dynamics of digitalization in cooperatives. Thus, a qualitative study fits the needs to answer our research question and determine the stakes of digital marketing. The given approach will enable the recognition of the most applicable measurement indicators of digital marketing in the particular setting of cooperatives with a specific focus on the environment of the coronavirus era in Tunisia (ZOUAOU & ALLOUCHE, 2023). To ensure that we obtain subtle insights on strategies implemented and challenges faced in the Moroccan-based context, our literature study will be based on semi-structured interviews with cooperative leaders and digital marketing professionals. In the South more particularly. The interviews were completed in eight presidents of agricultural cooperatives to gather the qualitative data in depth on the structural issues and the implementation of e-commerce (Jabbouri et al., 2022). It was the regional fair of local products arranged in Tinghir that the interviews took place at the end of December 2023.

The selection of this area is justified by the fact that there are a lot of agricultural cooperatives there, and the products of the region are very diverse, which provides a representative sample of the problems and opportunities connected with digitalization in this

field. The strategy will enable the examination of regional peculiarities and the responsiveness strategies adopted according to the market limitations and the digital transformation necessities, resembling the problems that cooperatives in Morocco experience. Our study sample was cooperatives. Each of the cooperatives is no less than six years old, has been certified by an authoritative body, and has shown financial stability during its operations before integrating digital marketing (KONE et al., 2021). This stringent filtering allows isolating the effect of digital marketing on the cooperative performance by reducing the number of extraneous factors associated with the startup stage or institutional awareness.

The interviews were recorded, with the prior consent of the participants, and transcribed carefully to ensure the fidelity of the collected data and to facilitate an in-depth thematic analysis. They were structured around exchanges with cooperators, using open-ended questions related to the research problem, the contributions of digital marketing, and the challenges of its development. Active listening was thus practiced. Within the first series of case studies, several interviews were conducted per case, whenever possible, to gather multiple perspectives, thereby strengthening the validity of the results. The interviews lasted a total of five hours, representing an average of 35 minutes per interview.

This study was complemented by an analysis of the cooperatives' dynamics on social networks, which provide detailed and precise information on past activities. These analyses help understand content management and consumer interactions on their posts, offering detailed information that can be difficult to obtain through interviews alone.

Table. Profiles of the Studied Cooperatives.

Case	Type of Cooperative	Year of Creation	Certificate	City	Size	Interviews With
Case 1	Tapestry	2009	–	Midelt	36 women	President & Member
Case 2	Agricultural	2014	ONSSA	Midelt	8 persons	President
Case 3	Beauty	2017	ONSSA	Kelaa M'gouna	6 women	Member
Case 4	Beauty	2011	ONSSA	Guelmim	7 persons	Member
Case 5	Agricultural	2012	ONSSA	Tinghir	5 persons	—
Case 6	Weaving / Braiding	2015	–	Zagora	6 persons	President
Case 7	Beauty	2017	–	Kelaa M'gouna	6 persons	Member
Case 8	Fashion	2014	–	Midelt	6 persons	Member

Source: author's own elaboration

The table that we have analyzed gives a comprehensive summary of the eight cooperatives that took part in the study and it is essential information about their diversity. It categorizes the cooperatives based on their type, creation date, and is used to show the certification (usually ONSSA to the agricultural and beauty sectors). The geographical location as well is identified with the geographical presence of the cooperatives spread over the cities of Midelt, Kelaa M'gouna, Guelmim, Tinghir and Zagora, which points to the availability of the cooperatives in the Draa Tafilalet region. The number of people in each cooperative also is indicated, especially

a tapestries cooperative which has 36 workers. Lastly, the table determines the types of people who have been interviewed in each cooperative including the president or a member. This introduction demonstrates the diversity of the activities, place, and the size of the cooperatives under analysis that is necessary to explain the observations of the research regarding the role of digital marketing to their performance.

3. Results of the Empirical Study

The analysis of the situation shows that there are complicated dynamics in terms of digital marketing integration into Moroccan cooperatives on both the positive and negative fronts of the opportunity to become more visible and the difficulties in mastering digital tools. The discussion will be based on three themes. The former demonstrates that the consumer behavior changes towards digital is compelling companies, especially cooperatives, into embracing digital solutions. The second puts forward the benefits of digital marketing. The third is the solution to the challenges and obstacles.

In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic and the essential conditions of the speed-up of consumer behaviors oriented towards online purchases ever more, the cooperatives have embarked on the task of integrating digital tools. This change happens against a backdrop of digital imposing its needs as a necessity to maintain visibility, expectations of emergent market demands and to be more responsive to a demand that has become more connected and demanding. According to the interviews, the crisis has reshaped the virtual world and turned it into a peripheral alternative to a sales channel, which can be evidenced using the testimony provided by Case 1: the crisis has made it clear that digital should be taken as a new channel of sales. The analysis of the profile of the cooperatives supports this dynamic since they all embraced the digital tools after the crisis, including the ones that have emerged recently. Moreover, this development is indicative of a macroscopic trend in which the health restrictions have necessitated the proactive approach to management and strategic adjustment to new buying patterns (Filali & FARAJ, 2022). The necessity to resort to digital platforms in the pandemic situation increased the critical role of the online presence, which is essential to the activity continuation and expansion (ZOUAOUÏ & ALLOUCHE, 2023). To sum up, the empirical analysis testifies to the existence of an acute rapidity of digital adoption following the crisis, which creates new vistas of the market despite the consistent challenges.

In the frames of their marketing practices, the cooperatives can, therefore, capitalize on the opportunity of innovating in a significant way by placing the emphasis on the innovation, which the marketing digital is, as a new practice. moreover, the use of the digital as a new channel can be viewed as such initiatives that are innovative in this category of businesses since it allows them to stand up to the complex reality. Such a shift towards the various canals digital (reseau social, marketplaces and websites e-commerce) will aim to both consolidate the presence of the marque in the digital realm and to improve the financial profitability of the cooperatives.

Table 2. Marketing Channels and Obstacles to Developing a Digital Strategy by Cooperatives.

Case	Digital Channels	Results	Obstacles	Verbatim
Case 1	Social media	Brand awareness, customer interaction	- Lack of skills and expertise to run ads- Funding issues	“The training I received was mostly theoretical; I need more practical training to achieve the desired results.”
	E-commerce platforms	No results	Very complicated procedures on existing platforms	—
Case 2	Social media, E-commerce website	Increase in sales (through outsourced marketing service)	Lack of internal expertise	“We lack internal expertise, which requires us to partner with a digital marketing agency.”
Case 3	Social media	Limited results	Financial constraints and marketing costs (packaging, advertising)	“Few results due to lack of digital skills and financial constraints.”
Case 4	Does not use digital tools	—	Lack of digital culture and trust	“I don’t use digital tools because consumers do not trust online services.”
Case 5	WhatsApp and Facebook	Few results	Lack of digital experience and funding	“Even I don’t know how to create ads properly. There is also a funding constraint.”

Case 6	Social media (Facebook, Instagram)	Limited and slow results	- Internet network problems- Lack of training to increase sales- Delivery and logistics issues	“The internet doesn’t always work, and I don’t really know how to optimize my posts. Even delivery is a problem.”
Case 7	Facebook page + WhatsApp Business	Visibility only, no direct impact on sales	- Digital marketing does not give immediate results- Lack of advertising budget- Long-term marketing culture	“Digital marketing doesn’t bring quick results; at first, it’s more about visibility.”
Case 8	No structured digital tools (only phone calls + word of mouth)	Very limited reach	- Lack of digital skills- No funding for digitalization- No digital culture- Telecommunications network problems	“We know digital is important, but without training and budget, it’s hard to start. There is also a network problem.”

Source: author's own elaboration

The findings of Table 2 indicate that there is a low and dispersed usage of digital marketing among the eight cooperatives that were examined. Case 2 is the only one to experience a substantial revenue growth courtesy of the utilization of social networks and a store, which is maintained by the cooperation with a third-party company that can fill the gap of expertise. The other cases report modest or no results, primarily due to the same obstacles: digital skills and training deficit, financial and budget constraints, issues with infrastructure, e.g. internet outages or telecom network failures, lack of digital culture and trust, and logistical issues or complicated processes. All in all, these data highlight that the potential of digital remains is under-utilized because of the structural barriers, although the opportunities can be observed in terms of visibility and sales, which requires pragmatic training, secret funds, and strategic alliances as a key to the successful digital transformation.

The case studies analysis shows that even though the entrepreneurs have embraced the use of social networks as primary communication media, their application is more intuitively inclined and poorly organized, a factor that limits the realisation of tangible output. Digital platforms are mostly used to create brand awareness and not as an immediate sales generator, which proves that digital marketing needs to be invested in in the long run and has a long-term perspective (Harif et al., 2022; Nuseir & Refae, 2022; Peter & Vecchia, 2020). This scenario is an indication of a structural shortage of digital skills, which has been further compounded by the absence of practical training, funding of sponsored campaigns and the existence of logistical and technical challenges like telecommunication network failures or delivery challenges. Together, these barriers indicate a low level of digital maturity among the analyzed businesses, as well as the culture of entrepreneurship, which is still geared towards the desire to obtain

immediate results. Therefore, low effectiveness of digital tools does not imply that such tools have no potential, but a simple incompatibility between the tools that are available and the ability of the entrepreneurs to implement them strategically, which explains the necessity of improving support and developing digital skills to utilize the opportunities of digital channels fully.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

The innovation created by digital marketing has been a worthy innovation to cooperatives after the crisis in terms of marketing their products. This significance is based on the fact that sales processes have been modernized in the use of digital tools. These new channels provide the social entrepreneurs with an opportunity to easily communicate with the customers, minimize the expenses, and enhance the profitability of the cooperatives, which will guarantee the existence of this type of business. This confirms some of the studies (Harif et al., 2022; Nuseir & Refae, 2022; Peter & Vecchia, 2020). The given observation is especially applicable in the context of the Covid-19 health crisis when digital marketing turned into an essential means of allowing businesses to establish and establish digital closeness with their customers (CHOUFARI & SBITI, 2022). This is why the execution of this digital strategy by cooperatives faces several obstacles, which include the absence of a digital culture and skills among social entrepreneurs that negatively affect the efficiency of the digital marketing strategy, and some other logistical barriers such as delivery complications and the failure of telecommunication networks.

This research will fill the gaps in the previous literature especially in cooperative entrepreneurship by emphasizing that marketing innovation strategies can be used in managing crises. This is one of the facets that have not been given much thought. The current research paper fills this gap by defining digital marketing innovation typology among cooperative

enterprises and by considering how companies must choose such strategies in the crisis and post-COVID environment in two dimensions: enhancing brand awareness and digitalizing sales processes. It also looks at the ways the companies need to select these channels in the overlap of their business model.

Furthermore, this paper identifies the connection between marketing innovation and the likelihood of businesses surviving in a crisis; this significance can be explained not only by the increase in performance (Harif et al., 2022; Peter & Vecchia, 2020), but also by the creation of cooperative businesses (Tang et al., 2021). The previous literature has not researched on the application of this strategy in crisis situations, thus our research contributes to this gap by investigating the role of resources and routines in successful application of the strategy and thereby adds to existing literature on marketing adoption by this type of enterprise. Nevertheless, a closer examination of the structural issues associated with the adoption of e-commerce by Moroccan cooperatives shows that gaps in policies and digital integration programs persist (Jabbouri et al., 2022), leading to some critical questions.

Such as any other business in the world, cooperatives are not spared by economic and commercial crisis, so there is a need to seek digital innovations to guarantee the survival of the enterprise. This article is a report of good experience and hardships of other people. This was successful by means of building digital capabilities or outsourcing these functions. Difficulties of others will be caused by the lack of resources, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient digital culture among partners. The research will assist social enterprises to redefine their commercialization strategies to focus on the digital channel and the value of skill growth and digital literacy; additionally, the low-cost marketing will have to be budgeted when developing its strategic plan (Murti et al., 2023). This strategy can be maintained by proper governance of resources (Prasetio et al., 2022; Silva et al., 2023). More so, it is not only the question of consumer trust but of culture and agility that can make this strategy effective as applied to certified cooperatives.

The information related to cooperatives and policymakers can be collected to make it easy to implement digital transformation by using support strategies (training and assistance), with the objective of spreading an online commerce culture among cooperatives. Increasing the popularity of local products online not only positively influences the financial profitability of cooperatives but also marketing and the territorial growth.

This study, like any other, has two limitations. First, the scarcity of data on the topic. Second, data were collected from a small sample of cooperatives from diverse regions, each with unique cultural specificities; larger samples could reveal additional contributions and challenges in fostering a digital mindset for this enterprise category, whether culturally homogeneous or heterogeneous. Future research using different methodologies is also recommended. Future studies should also consider the varying perceptions of digital transformation among cooperatives of different sizes, as larger entities may assimilate and value technological impacts differently (Fernández-Torres et al., 2019). Further investigation into the appropriation of Information and Communication Technologies by different cooperative types, beyond merely dairy processing cooperatives, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of their commercial utilization and overall impact on business performance (ATTOUCH & TALAY, 2014). Additionally, the specific challenges encountered by cooperatives, such as limited qualified personnel and financing, along with a general lack of understanding of the digital medium, warrant deeper exploration to formulate targeted policy interventions (Fransi et al., 2023).

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