

Entrepreneurial Networking, Digital Distraction, and Innovation Performance: An Integrated Model

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Research Article

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of social network use on the innovation performance of entrepreneurial firms, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of digital distraction. Drawing on an integrated perspective of network-based resource access and attention allocation, this research addresses a critical gap in understanding the dual effects of social networks in entrepreneurial contexts. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey was conducted among managers and employees of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Using stratified random sampling, data were collected from 375 respondents and analyzed through variance-based structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM).

The findings reveal that social network use has a positive and significant effect on innovation performance. However, digital distraction negatively mediates this relationship, such that increased distraction weakens the beneficial impact of social networks on innovation outcomes. These results highlight the paradoxical role of social networks as both enablers of knowledge exchange and sources of cognitive interference.

This study contributes to the entrepreneurship and innovation literature by integrating the bright and dark sides of social network use within a single model. Practically, the findings suggest that entrepreneurial firms should adopt structured policies and attention-management strategies to mitigate digital distraction while leveraging the benefits of social networks for innovation.

Introduction

In today's highly competitive and digitally interconnected environment, social networks have emerged as a critical enabler of entrepreneurial activity by facilitating communication, knowledge exchange, and market access (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann et al., 2011). For entrepreneurial firms, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), these platforms serve as strategic tools for identifying opportunities, engaging customers, and fostering innovation (Amin et al., 2018; Tajvidi & Karami, 2021). Prior research has consistently highlighted the positive role of social networks in enhancing entrepreneurial outcomes, including opportunity recognition, business performance, and innovation capacity (Parida et al., 2019; Scuotto et al., 2017).

Specifically, social networks contribute to innovation by enabling access to diverse information sources, strengthening relational ties, and facilitating the transfer and recombination of knowledge (Granovetter, 1973; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Through these mechanisms, firms can enhance their social capital, improve absorptive capacity, and expand into new markets (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Zahra & George, 2002). As a result, social networks are increasingly viewed as key drivers of innovation performance in entrepreneurial contexts (Ferraris et al., 2019).

However, despite these benefits, emerging evidence suggests that the use of social networks also entails significant drawbacks. One of the most critical yet underexplored challenges is digital distraction,

defined as the fragmentation of attention caused by excessive or unstructured engagement with digital platforms (Rosen et al., 2013; Mark et al., 2018). Digital distraction can reduce employees' cognitive focus, impair decision-making, and ultimately weaken productivity and innovation outcomes (Baethge & Rigotti, 2013; Leroy, 2009). This creates a paradox in which the same tools that enable knowledge access and collaboration may simultaneously undermine the attention required for innovative thinking.

Although prior studies have separately examined the positive effects of social networks and the negative consequences of digital distraction, there remains limited understanding of how these dynamics interact within a unified framework. In particular, the mediating role of digital distraction in the relationship between social network use and innovation performance has not been sufficiently addressed in the entrepreneurship literature. This gap is especially relevant when considered through the attention-based view, which posits that organizational outcomes depend on how decision-makers allocate their limited cognitive resources (Ocasio, 1997).

Addressing this gap, the present study develops and tests an integrated model that examines both the enabling and constraining effects of social networks on innovation performance through the mediating role of digital distraction. By doing so, this research moves beyond the traditional one-sided perspective and provides a more nuanced understanding of digital platform use in entrepreneurial settings.

Empirically, this study focuses on SMEs in the Jeddah region of Saudi Arabia, a context characterized by rapid digital transformation and strong policy support for entrepreneurship under Saudi Vision 2030. SMEs play a central role in economic diversification, job creation, and regional development, making them an important setting for examining innovation dynamics. The high level of internet penetration and widespread adoption of social media among businesses in this region further underscore the relevance of investigating both the opportunities and risks associated with social network use.

This study makes three key contributions. First, it integrates the "bright" and "dark" sides of social network use within a single conceptual framework. Second, it introduces digital distraction as a critical mediating mechanism linking social networks to innovation performance. Third, it provides empirical evidence from an emerging economy context, offering insights for both policymakers and entrepreneurial practitioners seeking to balance digital engagement with effective attention management.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Theoretical Foundation

This study is grounded in the Attention-Based View (ABV) of the firm, which posits that organizational outcomes depend on how decision-makers allocate their limited cognitive resources (Ocasio, 1997). In digital environments, where information is abundant and continuous, attention becomes a scarce and strategically significant resource. While social networks provide access to valuable external knowledge

and relational resources, they simultaneously impose cognitive demands that may fragment attention and reduce task focus.

In addition, this study draws on social capital theory, which emphasizes the value derived from networks of relationships in facilitating access to information, resources, and opportunities (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). From this perspective, social networks enhance innovation by enabling knowledge exchange and collaboration. However, integrating these perspectives suggests a dual-effect mechanism: social networks can both enhance innovation through resource access and hinder it through attention fragmentation.

2.2 Social Networks and Innovation Performance

Social networks enable firms to access diverse and non-redundant information, which is essential for generating novel ideas and enhancing innovation performance. According to social capital theory, network ties facilitate knowledge sharing and recombination, leading to improved organizational outcomes (Granovetter, 1973; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Empirical studies have confirmed that social network use positively influences innovation by enhancing opportunity recognition, knowledge acquisition, and collaboration (Scuotto et al., 2017; Ferraris et al., 2019).

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1

Social network use has a positive and significant effect on innovation performance.

2.3 Social Networks and Digital Distraction

Despite their benefits, social networks can also act as sources of interruption and cognitive overload. The attention-based view suggests that excessive exposure to digital stimuli can fragment attention and reduce individuals' ability to focus on complex tasks (Ocasio, 1997). Frequent notifications, multitasking, and unstructured engagement with social media platforms contribute to digital distraction, leading to diminished work efficiency (Rosen et al., 2013; Mark et al., 2018).

Thus, increased use of social networks is likely to intensify digital distraction:

H2

Social network use has a positive and significant effect on digital distraction.

2.4 Digital Distraction and Innovation Performance

Innovation requires sustained cognitive effort, deep thinking, and creativity, all of which depend on focused attention. Digital distraction disrupts cognitive processes by reducing concentration and increasing task-switching behavior, which negatively affects creativity and problem-solving capabilities

(Leroy, 2009; Baethge & Rigotti, 2013). As a result, higher levels of distraction are expected to undermine innovation performance.

Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3

Digital distraction has a negative and significant effect on innovation performance.

2.5 Mediating Role of Digital Distraction

Integrating the above arguments, this study proposes that digital distraction acts as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between social network use and innovation performance. While social networks provide access to valuable knowledge resources that enhance innovation, they also increase the likelihood of distraction, which weakens this positive effect. This dual mechanism reflects the “bright” and “dark” sides of social network use.

Therefore, the indirect effect of social networks on innovation through digital distraction is expected to **be** negative:

H4: Digital distraction negatively mediates the relationship between social network use and innovation performance.

Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design using a survey-based approach to examine the relationships among social network use, digital distraction, and innovation performance. Given the objective of testing theoretically grounded relationships and mediation effects, a correlational design is considered appropriate (Hair et al., 2019). The target population consists of managers and employees of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Jeddah region of Saudi Arabia, selected due to their critical role in innovation and economic development within emerging economies. A sample of 375 respondents was determined using the Cochran formula to ensure adequate statistical power, and stratified random sampling was employed to enhance representativeness across firms and organizational roles. Data were collected a structured questionnaire comprising four sections: demographic information, social network use (measured a researcher-developed scale), innovation performance (measured using the scale developed by Baker and Sinkula, 1999), and digital distraction (measured using the scale proposed by Zanet et al., 2019). All constructs were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). Content validity was established through expert evaluation to ensure the relevance and clarity of measurement items, while reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha coefficients, with all constructs exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating acceptable internal consistency (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The collected data were analyzed using SPSS and SmartPLS software, employing variance-based

structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), which is particularly suitable for complex models, mediation analysis, and predictive research contexts (Hair et al., 2021; Henseler et al., 2015). The analysis was conducted in two stages, including the assessment of the measurement model (reliability and validity) and the evaluation of the structural model (hypothesis testing and mediation analysis).

Research findings

The demographic characteristics of the sample are as follows: the average age of respondents was 34.8 years (minimum 23 and maximum 52 years), the average work experience was 8.3 years, 42% of the companies had less than 50 employees, 38% between 50 and 100 employees and 20% more than 100 employees. In terms of education level, 61% had a bachelor's degree, 32% a master's degree and 7% a doctorate. This statistic indicates sufficient experience and university education of the respondents, which makes the sample suitable for analyzing organizational innovation.

Table 1 presents the coding of items in the variables examined in the study with a factor loading column for each item based on standard values from Smart PLS software:

Table 1
Coding of items in the variables examined in the research

Variable	Code	Item Text (Summary)	Factorial Load
Social Networks	SN1	Using networks helps me find new ideas.	0.78
	SN2	We establish direct communication with customers through networks.	0.81
	SN3	Networks provide opportunities to collaborate with other entrepreneurs.	0.76
	SN4	Networks provide rapid awareness of market changes.	0.79
	SN5	Using networks increases the flow of information within the company.	0.82
Digital distraction	DD1	When working, network notifications disrupt my concentration	0.75
	DD2	Using networks too much causes me to postpone my main tasks	0.77
	DD3	The volume of network information causes mental fragmentation	0.73
	DD4	Networks waste a lot of time and energy	0.78
	DD5	Networks cause numerous interruptions in the work process	0.76
Innovation	IN1	The company has introduced new products/services in recent years	0.80
	IN2	We use new methods to improve processes	0.82
	IN3	Innovative ideas from employees are welcomed in the company	0.79
	IN4	The company brings ideas to market faster than competitors	0.81
	IN5	The organizational culture encourages creativity and innovation	0.77

This table is actually a coding table (items → code) that shows that each main research variable (social networks, digital distraction, and innovation) is measured with a set of items and an abbreviation code (SN, DD, IN) is defined for each item. This type of table is usually presented in the methodology and data collection tool section to determine what indicators each construct has been operationalized with.

The analysis of the coding table is divided into three main sections: social networks, digital distraction, and innovation. Social networks (SN1–SN5) refer to positive functions such as finding new ideas, connecting with customers, collaborating with entrepreneurs, being aware of market changes, and

increasing information, and are in line with the open innovation literature. Digital distraction (DD1–DD5) indicate negative effects such as lack of focus, time wasting, and work interruptions that are related to information overload issues. The innovation section (IN1–IN5) focuses on product and process innovation and emphasizes the importance of new products, process improvement, and an innovative organizational culture, and is connected to the innovation management literature. According to Table 2, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) were used to assess the reliability of the questionnaire. Convergent validity was also examined using the average variance extracted (AVE):

Table 2
Reliability and validity of the variables studied in the study

Variable	Cronbach's alpha	Combined Reliability (CR)	AVE
Social Media Use	0.86	0.91	0.67
Digital Distraction	0.81	0.89	0.64
Innovation	0.85	0.93	0.71

According to the results of Table 2, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all variables were reported to be above 0.7, indicating the desirable reliability of the measurement tool. Also, composite reliability (CR) for all variables was above 0.7, indicating the appropriate adequacy of convergence between indicators and constructs. The average variance extracted (AVE) for all variables was more than 0.5, indicating that a significant portion of the variance of the observed variables is explained by the latent constructs and the convergent validity is confirmed. In general, the research instrument has adequate reliability and validity, and the data obtained are sufficiently valid for structural model analysis.

Hypotheses were tested using partial least squares (PLS) structural equation modeling. The model fit indices were reasonably good, with GOF being 0.52, which is considered to be a strong level above 0.36. Also, the R^2 of innovation was 0.46 and the R^2 of digital distraction was 0.38, indicating good explanatory power of the research model. In Table 2, the path coefficients and significance values (t-values) are as follows:

Table 3
, Path coefficients and significance values (t-value)

Hypothesis	Path	β coefficient	t-value	Result
H1	Social Networks → Innovation	0.41	6.12	Confirmed
H2	Social Networks → Digital Distraction	0.52	8.07	Confirmed
H3	Digital Distraction → Innovation	-0.33	5.21	Confirmed
H4	The Mediating Role of Digital Distraction	0.17 (Indirect)	4.35	Confirmed

According to the results presented in Table 3, the use of social networks in entrepreneurial companies (H1) has a positive and significant effect on innovation ($\beta = 0.41$, $t = 6.12$). This finding indicates that the

targeted use of social networks can help increase access to new knowledge, exchange ideas, identify creative opportunities, and thus improve the level of innovation in businesses.

The results of the second hypothesis (H2) showed that social networks increase digital distraction with a relatively strong coefficient ($\beta = 0.52$, $t = 8.07$). This finding confirms that excessive or inappropriate use of social networks can distract employees from their primary tasks and reduce their focus on key activities. In addition, the third path indicates a negative and significant effect of digital distraction on innovation ($\beta = 0.33$, $t = 5.21$), which indicates that increasing the level of distraction caused by social networks can reduce employee productivity and creativity and act as a serious obstacle to innovation. The third path (H3) in this study indicates a significant negative effect of digital distraction, especially from social media, on innovation, as indicated by a correlation coefficient ($\beta = 0.33$) and a t-statistic ($t = 5.21$). These results indicate that increased levels of distraction can have a significant negative impact on employee productivity and creativity. In other words, digital distraction cannot only be a challenge to focus but also act as a serious obstacle to innovation in the workplace.

The test of the mediating role (H4) showed that digital distraction significantly mediates the relationship between social media use and innovation ($\beta = 0.17$, $t = 4.35$). This means that part of the effect of social media on innovation is mediated through an increase or decrease in digital distraction. This finding emphasizes that although social media can help promote innovation, if poorly managed, distraction from these networks can have a negative effect on innovation.

Therefore, the results show that social networks have two opposing characteristics: on the one hand, they can help facilitate innovation, and on the other hand, they can hinder it by creating digital distraction. Therefore, it is suggested that entrepreneurial companies, by optimally utilizing the capacities of social networks, take measures to manage digital distraction, such as developing control policies, training employees, and scheduling use, in order to be able to exploit its benefits in order to promote innovation. To examine the mediating role in more detail, the direct, indirect, and total effects of the variables in Table 4 were calculated:

Table 4
Path analysis and hypothesis testing using structural equation modeling (SEM)

Path	Path coefficient (β)	t-value	Significance level	Result
Social Networks → Innovation (H1)	0.45	5.21	$p < 0.001$	Confirmed
Social Networks → Digital Senses (H2)	0.60	6.02	$p < 0.001$	Confirmed
Digital Distraction → Innovation (H3)	-0.35	-3.88	$p < 0.001$	Confirmed

Path analysis and hypothesis testing results using structural equation modeling (SEM) in Table 4 show that the relationships between the research variables are statistically significant.

The effect of social networks on innovation (H1): The path coefficient of 0.45 and the t-value of 5.21 ($p < 0.001$) indicate that the use of social networks in entrepreneurial firms directly promotes innovation. This increase in innovation may result from increased information flow, knowledge exchange, expansion of collaborations, and identification of new opportunities in the social network environment.

The effect of social networks on digital distraction (H2): The path coefficient of 0.50 and the t-value of 6.02 indicate that social networks have a positive and significant effect on increasing digital distraction. The findings indicate that although social networks have informational and communication benefits, their excessive use can lead to a decrease in employees' focus on core tasks and a waste of work time.

The effect of digital distraction on innovation (H3): The third path shows a coefficient of -0.35 with a t-value of -3.88, which is also considered statistically significant. Increased digital distraction has a significant negative impact on the level of innovation in companies, meaning that the more time employees spend on irrelevant and distracting activities in the digital space, the less focus they have on creative activities and the generation of new ideas.

Table 5
Analysis of the intensity of social media use

Intensity of use	Distraction Average	Average innovation
Low	2.8	3.9
Medium	3.4	3.8
High	4.1	3.5

Table 5 provides valuable information about the relationship between social media usage intensity, digital distraction, and innovation. Based on this table, the following analysis and conclusions can be drawn:

The results of the study show that the increase in the intensity of social media use was accompanied by an increase in digital distraction. The average distraction at low and high levels of social media use was 2.8 and 4.1, respectively, which indicates a decrease in employees' mental focus and an increase in their distraction from their main tasks. This study suggests that excessive use of social media can be considered a risk factor for reduced cognitive productivity. On the other hand, the average innovation at different levels of social media use shows different patterns. At the low level, the average innovation score is 3.9, which is relatively high. At the medium level, this number drops to 3.8, and at the high level, it reaches 3.5. This trend clearly shows that while limited and balanced use of social networks can help boost innovation, excessive use not only does not increase innovation, but leads to its decrease.

The overall conclusion of this research suggests that the relationship between social media use and innovation appears as an inverted U-shaped curve, meaning that moderate use can maintain innovation at relatively high levels, while excessive use leads to a decrease in innovation due to increased digital distraction.

According to Fig. 1, the path of social networks → innovation with a coefficient of 0.45 indicates that social networks have a direct and significant positive effect on firms' innovation. This finding is consistent with previous studies that have introduced social networks as a driver of innovation.

The path of social networks → digital distraction with a coefficient of 0.60 indicates that the use of social networks can increase digital distraction.

The path of digital distraction → innovation with a coefficient of -0.35 indicates a negative effect of digital distraction on innovation, meaning that increasing digital distraction can reduce the ability of companies to innovate.

Table 6
Results of testing research hypotheses

Hypothesis	Path coefficient	t-value	Significance level	Test result
The use of social networks by entrepreneurial companies has a positive impact on their innovation.	0.45	4.2	0.000	Confirmed (Significant)
The use of social networks by entrepreneurial companies has a positive impact on employees' digital distraction.	0.60	5.1	0.000	Confirmed (Significant)
Digital distraction has a negative impact on the innovation of entrepreneurial companies.	-0.35	3.0	0.003	Confirmed (Significant)

Table 6, the results of testing the research hypotheses on the effect of using social networks on the innovation of entrepreneurial companies, show that this use has a positive and significant effect with a path coefficient of 0.45 and a significance level of 0.000. Companies that actively use social networks are more likely to innovate because these networks allow them to access new information and interact with customers.

On the other hand, extensive use of social media, with a path coefficient of 0.60 and a t-statistic of 5.1, is associated with increased digital distraction among employees. This suggests that although social media serves as a powerful tool for information exchange, excessive use of it can reduce employee focus. In addition, digital distraction, with a negative path coefficient of -0.35 and a significance level of 0.003, has a negative effect on innovation, and its increase reduces the ability to generate ideas. In general analysis, it can be concluded that digital distraction plays a negative mediating role in the relationship between the use of social networks and innovation, so that part of the positive effect of social networks on innovation may be reduced due to the increase in digital distraction.

The results of the research show that social networks can be significantly effective in promoting innovation in entrepreneurial companies. These findings indicate that although access to these

platforms provides opportunities for exchanging ideas and collaborating, their excessive and untargeted use can cause digital distraction. Following this distraction, the positive relationship between the use of social networks and innovation is disrupted. Therefore, to optimally utilize these tools and reduce the negative effects associated with them, it is necessary to develop an intelligent and targeted approach to the use of social networks.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the literature by highlighting the dual role of social networks in entrepreneurial firms. The findings demonstrate that social networks act as a valuable resource for enhancing innovation by facilitating knowledge exchange, collaboration, and access to new ideas (Parvin et al., 2016; Kapoor et al., 2018). At the same time, excessive or unstructured use of these platforms can generate digital distraction, which undermines employees' focus and reduces innovative performance (Brooks, 2015; Cao & Yu, 2019).

Empirical results confirm that social network use has a positive and significant effect on innovation, supporting prior research that emphasizes their role in accelerating information flow and fostering creativity (Parvin et al., 2016; Kapoor et al., 2018). However, the study also shows that social networks significantly increase digital distraction, which in turn has a negative impact on innovation. These findings align with previous studies indicating that frequent interruptions and multitasking reduce cognitive efficiency and creative output (Junco, 2012; Rosen et al., 2013).

Importantly, the results reveal that digital distraction plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between social networks and innovation. This suggests that the overall impact of social networks is not purely beneficial but depends on how effectively their use is managed within organizations. In other words, social networks simultaneously create opportunities for innovation and risks that may hinder it, which is consistent with the "bright" and "dark" side perspectives in digital technology research.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The sample is limited to small and medium-sized enterprises in the Jeddah region, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the use of self-reported questionnaire data may introduce response bias. Furthermore, the study focuses only on digital distraction as a mediating variable, while other potentially relevant mechanisms, such as organizational culture or knowledge management capabilities, were not examined.

Future research is encouraged to replicate this study in different geographical and industrial contexts to enhance generalizability. Researchers may also explore additional mediating and moderating variables, such as organizational resilience or absorptive capacity, and employ longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to better capture the dynamic effects of social network use on innovation over time.

From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that organizations should adopt a balanced and strategic approach to social network use. This includes implementing guidelines to regulate usage, reducing unnecessary notifications, promoting professional platforms, and training employees in digital

time management and attention control. By minimizing digital distraction while leveraging the informational benefits of social networks, firms can more effectively enhance their innovation performance.

Declarations

Author Contribution

Tarek Meshref Do all the manuscript

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Figures

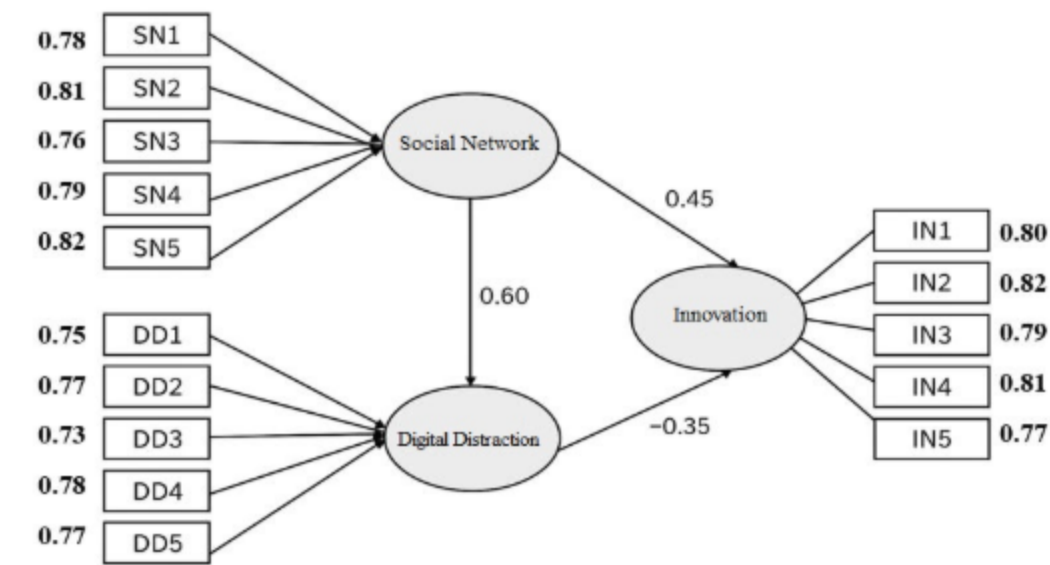


Figure 1

Research model using factor loading validity indicators