

The Impact of Digital Marketing Tools on the E-Reputation of Startups in Algeria

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DOI: 10.24818/mer/2025.01-12

ABSTRACT

With the rapid digital transformation worldwide, it has become imperative for countries to adjust their economic strategies accordingly. In response, Algeria has incorporated startups into its future economic vision. This study utilises Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) through Smart PLS 4 software to measure the impact of digital marketing tools on the e-reputation of startups in Algeria. Four key tools were analysed: websites, social media platforms, mobile applications, and email. The impact of each tool was assessed individually and compared. The findings indicate that digital marketing tools have a positive effect on the e-reputation of Algerian startups, facilitating their expansion and contributing to the country's economic development and prosperity.

KEYWORDS: *Digital Marketing; E-reputation; Startups; Algeria.*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *M31, M39, M13, O55.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Algeria, in its path to move away from dependence on its oil-based economy, diversify, and develop in line with current global trends, has adopted a strategy that relies on startups as fundamental building blocks for constructing a flexible and robust national economy (Souiki, 2023). In recent years, it has sought to support these institutions and encourage youth and university graduates to establish their startups, leading to a significant increase in their number (Baddari & El Mahdi Oualid, 2023). This increase has necessitated that these institutions inevitably rely on digital marketing in their strategies to promote their brand amid growing competition. By utilising various digital marketing tools and building a positive online reputation, startups can ensure their sustainability in the domestic market and expand into global markets in the long run (Agarwal & Sharma, 2024).

The primary issue addressed in this study is measuring the impact of digital marketing tools on the e-reputation of startups in Algeria. This study is significant because the use of digital marketing in startup strategies has the potential to shape and improve their reputation in the Algerian market. By conducting a survey targeting employees of these institutions regarding their use of digital marketing tools and analysing the data using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) through Smart PLS 4 software, this study aims to provide valuable insights into how digital marketing tools contribute to increasing the reputation of startups in the digital environment.

Several previous studies and articles have addressed individual variables related to this research. For instance, the study by Nur Afifah and Haliza Nabila Putri examined the

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relationships between consumers' purchasing decisions, online reputation, the efficacy of digital advertisements, and the reliability of online reviews (Afifah & Putri, 2024).

Similarly, Zakraoui Saleh's research sought to understand how the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic affected businesses in Algeria and how consumer attitudes toward online shopping and media consumption shifted during and after the national lockdown (Zekraoui, 2022). Additionally, the study conducted by Yuri Ropol and his research team explored the role of digital marketing tools in the value chain of an innovative product (Robul et al., 2020). However, no previous research has comprehensively combined the two variables of this study—digital marketing tools and e-reputation—particularly in the context of startups. The Algerian government's current aim to diversify its economy and reduce its reliance on the oil industry centers on fostering these startups.

This study aspires to be a pioneer in the field, particularly within the context of developing economies in Africa. Its findings can be adopted in the marketing plans and strategies of startups in the short and medium term, aligning with the Algerian government's economic policies. Ultimately, this research contributes to the economic development and prosperity of Algeria and North Africa as a whole.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Digital Marketing

Digital marketing encompasses any marketing strategies carried out using electronic devices that operate with a computer, including online marketing initiatives that occur on the Internet. Websites, search engines, blogs, social media, video, email, and other comparable channels may all be utilised by organisations engaged in digital marketing to reach consumers (American Marketing Association, 2024).

Digital marketing can also be defined as the use of digital technology to provide integrated, quantifiable, and targeted communication that aids in customer acquisition, retention, and the development of stronger connections with existing customers (Digital Marketing Institute, 2024). From these definitions, digital marketing can be described as the use of digital media for communication, including the Internet and interactive channels, to develop marketing strategies, attract new customers, retain current customers, improve brand reputation, and increase sales.

Among the most commonly used digital marketing tools by startups today are:

Website: The website is a vital tool in digital marketing, serving as the primary digital interface between an organisation and its online audience (Miaskiewicz, 2022). It allows businesses to display a variety of products in attractive designs, utilising marketing strategies based on the creation of distinctive content (Truphème & Gastaud, 2020). This content helps improve the site's ranking on search engine results pages (SERP) through the application of search engine marketing (SEM) techniques, including Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), Search Engine Advertising (SEA), and Social Media Optimisation (SMO) (Aarchi et al., 2021).

Social Media Platforms: Social media platforms are among the most common and widely used digital marketing tools. These platforms provide a space for creating innovative and engaging digital content for the target audience (Patil & Kumar, 2021). Additionally, their interactive features enable effective and direct communication between businesses and

customers, allowing consumers to engage with content, provide feedback, and make inquiries. This fosters strong relationships and trust between customers and brands (Bruce et al., 2023). Consequently, social media platforms contribute to enhancing brand awareness and building a positive online reputation (Charlesworth, 2023).

Email Marketing: Email marketing is a strategy that involves using email as a tool to send marketing messages to a targeted audience. This includes creating newsletters and sending offers, discounts, advertisements, and important information to potential and existing customers (Abdulqadir et al., 2023). Email marketing is also an effective promotional tool that enables businesses to engage with their audience electronically. It is one of the most accessible and cost-effective forms of promotion, with an immediate impact on sales and brand development (Anber et al., 2021). Additionally, email marketing allows businesses to achieve key objectives, such as strengthening customer relationships, encouraging business engagement, driving revenue growth, and increasing sales (Samantaray & Pradhan, 2020).

Mobile Applications: Mobile marketing encompasses strategies that allow organisations to connect and interact with their audience on any mobile device or network through dedicated applications. These applications enable businesses to deliver push notifications about services and promotions (The Mobile Marketing Association, 2009). Organisations can also use mobile apps to implement marketing strategies, such as sending targeted advertisements and offering special deals, in addition to measuring the effectiveness of their marketing campaigns and making data-driven adjustments (Hendijani Fard & Marvi, 2019). Furthermore, marketing through mobile applications integrates multiple digital marketing methods, particularly with the rise of smartphones and their advanced technological capabilities. Other tools in mobile marketing include SMS, MMS, QR (Quick Response) codes, and various mobile apps (Robayo et al., 2017).

2.2 E-reputation

E-reputation is a fundamental element in evaluating the performance of organisations in the digital age (Klabi et al., 2013). It represents the extent to which customer and consumer interactions with the organisation through online platforms are reflected, considering the increasing impact of digital media in communication processes. Customers are turning to the Internet as a primary source of information and reviews about products and services (Nisar et al., 2020). Hence, e-reputation serves as an indicator of the quality and reliability of the organisation in the face of digital challenges and changes. Therefore, improving e-reputation and responding to customer feedback and trends online are essential for the success and sustainability of the organisation in the market (Elmada et al., 2022).

There are several definitions of e-reputation, including: E-reputation is defined as an integral part of the organisation's real-world reputation, but it focuses on the use of digital tools (Boistel & Laroutis, 2019). The e-reputation has also been defined as the set of impressions created by the organisation according to the information it publishes on digital media (Dutot & Castellano, 2015). The e-reputation can also be defined as everything that is circulated digitally about the organisation, its brand, and its products (Grebe, 2024). Thus, it can be said that the e-reputation of an organisation represents the image or impression that is formed about the organisation or brand online, and is influenced by a variety of factors such as content shared on social media and websites, customer ratings, product reviews, and other online interactions. E-reputation can affect customer decisions and their impact on the organisation's reputation, making the management of e-reputation an important part of the digital marketing strategy of the organisation.

2.3 Startup

A startup can be defined as an organisation that seeks to market and introduce a new product or innovative service targeting a large market, regardless of the organisation's size, sector, or field of activity, and is characterised by high risk in exchange for strong and rapid growth with the potential to reap huge profits in case of success (Kaczam et al., 2021). The Algerian lawmaker defined startups as any organisation that complies with Algerian law and meets certain requirements, the most important of which are that the organisation must be founded on creative ideas, be no older than eight years, have a sizable growth potential, and employ no more than 250 individuals (Journal Officiel, 2020). There are several characteristics that define startups:

Adolescent organisations: These are distinguished by the fact that they are still in their infancy and have two options: develop into successful organisations or close their doors and lose money (Weiblen & Chesbrough, 2015).

Growth rate: A startup's capacity to expand quickly and make money far more quickly than it needs to cover operating expenses is one of its distinguishing traits; as a result, its profit margin grows exponentially (Skala, 2018).

Adopting a sustainable model: Startups adopt a sustainability-oriented model, where their business is designed to balance the environmental, economic, and social dimensions, contributing to long-term sustainable development (Centobelli et al., 2017).

Technology dependence: One of the main characteristics of startups is their reliance on technology, which allows them to innovate and adapt rapidly. Digital marketing tools offer a useful means of accomplishing this through precise audience targeting, data analysis, and creative and long-lasting customer engagement (Spender et al., 2017).

2.4 Role of digital marketing tools in building and enhancing the e-reputation of startups

Digital marketing tools play a significant role in building and enhancing the e-reputation of startups by providing effective communication channels with the target audience (Mkalaf et al., 2024). Through these tools, organisations can directly and attractively highlight the advantages of their products and provide interactive and personalised customer experiences. Moreover, these tools can be used to offer special deals and discounts to customers and respond quickly to their inquiries and feedback (Behera et al., 2019).

The image presented by the organisation's website plays a significant role in its e-reputation, as the website serves as the company's online facade and the first experience for potential customers (Salam & Bushra, 2015). A website can reflect the credibility and professionalism of the organisation and provide a good user experience, contributing to attracting more customers and improving communication with them (Dutot & Castellano, 2015). Furthermore, the website helps increase the organisation's presence in the digital arena and improve the chances of reaching a wider audience. By presenting products attractively, the website can influence customers' purchasing decisions and enhance the organisation's e-reputation as a reliable online resource (Marrone & Gallic, 2018).

Social media platforms are considered a key tool for organisations to communicate informally and directly with customers and enhance interaction and engagement among them (Yevseitseva et al., 2022). These platforms provide a means to promote offers and marketing campaigns, contributing to building the e-reputation and enhancing the digital presence and

reach of the organisation (Al Olaimat et al., 2022). From the essence of social media platforms, which is two-way interaction, the public is provided the opportunity to express their opinions about the content and products offered by the organisation (Schulze Horn et al., 2015). This is done through comments, responses, and ratings, or what is known as electronically spoken word, which in turn is considered a key indicator of the organisation's e-reputation on these platforms (Dutot et al., 2016).

In comparison, email is an important tool for direct and formal communication between organisations and their customers, as it can be used to deliver messages and marketing offers in a more controlled and directed manner (Braca & Dondio, 2023). Email is also an effective means of building two-way relationships with customers, where they can respond directly via email replies, thus allowing the measurement of their satisfaction and interest in the content and offers presented (Rabab'ah et al., 2024). This tool also allows organisations to provide information directly and personally to targeted customers, contributing to enhancing the e-reputation and increasing engagement with the brand (Amahjour & El-khalkhali, 2024).

Mobile applications are also a fundamental tool for enhancing communication with customers and improving the e-reputation of organisations. These applications provide an effective and convenient way for customers to access the organisation's services and products easily and at any time (Alghizzawi et al., 2023). In addition, the applications enable users to interact directly with the organisation, whether through live chat service, providing advice, or receiving inquiries (Chang & Ku, 2023). This interaction contributes to the building of strong relationships and trust between the customer and the organisation. Moreover, customers can provide ratings and reviews within the app, which enhances the organisation's e-reputation and contributes to attracting more customers (Kaushik et al., 2019).

Overall, digital marketing tools can be considered integrated tools that work together to build and enhance the e-reputation of startups by providing effective means of communication and interaction with the audience and presenting services and offers directly and attractively, ultimately leading to increased spread, sales, and improved performance of these organisations (Jayaram et al., 2015).

3. METHOD

3.1 Study hypotheses

H1: Marketing through a company's website has a statistically significant positive impact on the e-reputation of startups.

H2: Marketing through social media platforms has a statistically significant positive impact on the e-reputation of startups.

H3: Marketing through mobile applications has a statistically significant positive impact on the e-reputation of startups.

H4: Marketing through E-mail has a statistically significant positive impact on the e-reputation of startups.

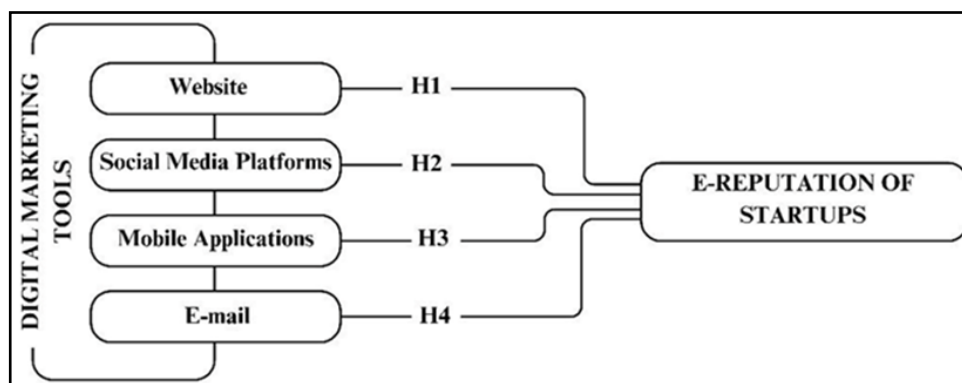


Figure 1. Study Model

Source: Prepared by the two researchers.

3.2 Research Community and Sample, and Data Collection

The research community consists of marketing department employees of startups active in the service sector in Algeria (Volz, WeeWee Delivery, Nrecycli, Moustachir, Farm Ai, Yinvesti, Esaboura, Sky startup) that are less than 8 years old. For collecting primary data related to this research, a random sampling method was used. The total number of responses was 119 and, after preliminary examination and deleting invalid responses, the answers used in the statistical analysis were 115 individuals, representing 96.63% of the total responses.

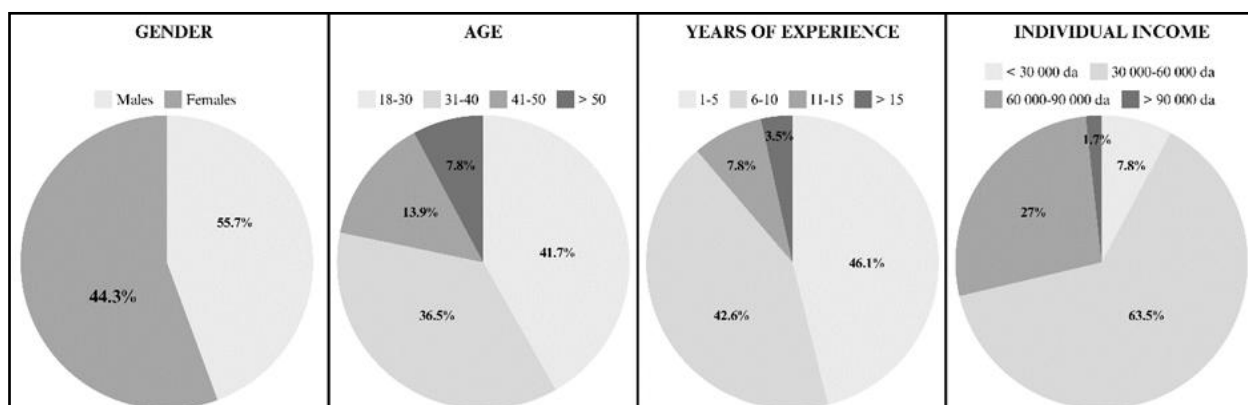


Figure 2. Personal variables for the study

Source: Prepared by the two researchers.

3.3 Study Tool

The study tool was designed online using Google Forms and distributed through the LinkedIn network and email to startups. A self-administered survey was conducted as a primary source for this research, which consists of three sections as follows:

Independent variable: Digital marketing tools were considered the independent variable for this research, consisting of 12 items distributed over four dimensions:

First dimension: Website, consisting of 3 items, for example: the website organisation is easily accessible. It was coded as WS.

Second dimension: Social media platforms, consisting of 3 items, for example: the organisation continuously and consistently interacts with its followers on its different social media pages. It was coded as SM.

Third dimension: Mobile applications, consisting of 3 items, for example: the organisation provides a mobile application that customers can use easily and smoothly. It was coded as MA.

Fourth dimension: Email, consisting of 3 items, for example: the organisation informs customers about its new services via email. It was coded as EM.

Dependent variable: The e-reputation of startups was considered the dependent variable, which consists of eight items, for example: regular updates of the website content enhance the organisation's e-reputation; customer comments on social media platforms are an important factor in building the organisation's e-reputation. It was coded as ERS. Each of these elements was measured using a five-point Likert scale.

4. MEASUREMENT MODEL

The measurement model, as shown in Figure 3, shows the relationships between the indicators (items) and the latent variables that these indicators measure, as well as the expected relationships between these variables. It shows that digital marketing comprises four tools, along with their measurable components: email, social media platforms, websites, and mobile applications. Next, it shows the expected relationship between the independent variable, digital marketing tools, and the dependent variable, startups' e-reputation.

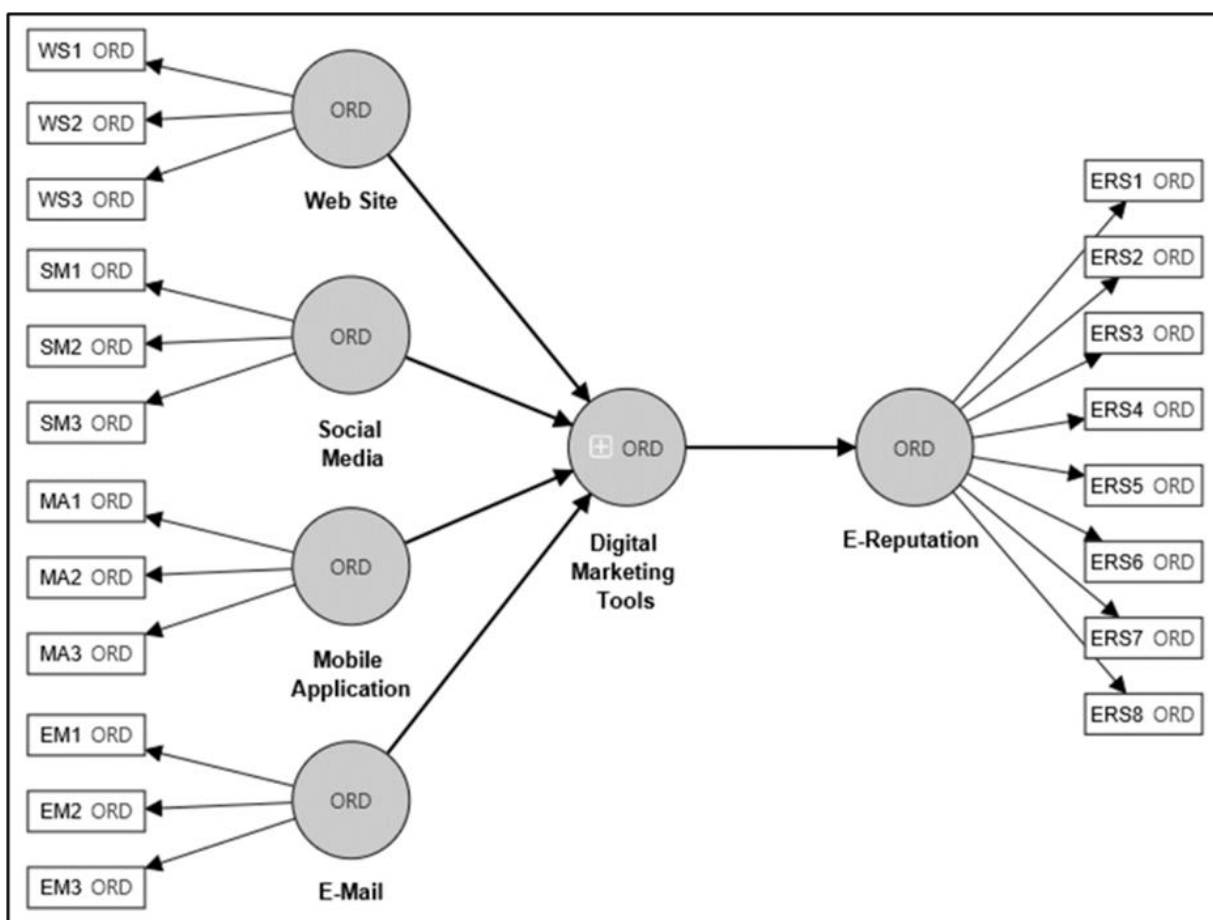


Figure 3. The model for measuring
 Source: Outputs of Smart PLS software

Using factor loadings, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE), as recommended by Christian Ringle (2015), the researcher made sure that the indicators accurately reflect their latent variables and that the questions had enough convergent and discriminant validity. Every item passed this test and satisfied the necessary requirements. Indicators of convergent credibility are included in Table 1:

Table 1. Convergent validity

Item Indicators	Type of Measure	Item Loadings/Weights	Composite Reliability	Cronbach Alpha	AVE
Web Site					
WS 1	Reflective	0.919	0.813	0.784	0.611
WS 2		0.809			
WS 3		0.752			
Social Media Platforms					
SM 1	Reflective	0.710	0.959	0.801	0.684
SM 2		0.958			
SM 3		0.744			
Mobile Application					
MA 1	Reflective	0.801	0.801	0.793	0.507
MA 2		0.732			
MA 3		0.712			
E-Mail					
EM 1	Reflective	0.752	0.768	0.706	0.512
EM 2		0.871			
EM 3		0.726			
E-Reputation of Startup					
ERS 1	Reflective	0.729	0.903	0.855	0.609
ERS 2		0.815			
ERS 3		0.777			
ERS 4		0.706			
ERS 5		0.790			
ERS 6		0.926			
ERS 7		0.742			
ERS 8		0.886			

Source: Results of statistical analysis performed with the Smart PLS software.

Table 1 shows that all reflective indicator loadings were higher than the necessary minimum threshold of 0.60, as suggested by Nurul Aida Yaacob (2021). The composite dependability values for all reflective combinations were higher than the suggested threshold value of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2005) where the ideal value of 0.50 per build is exceeded by AVEs, as proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981). According to Taber (2018), the Cronbach alpha values are within the range of 0.70 to 0.85, making them suitable for an embryo. These signals indicate that the affinity has been validated. To determine how much the various compositional measures varied from one another, the researcher used discriminant analysis. He used the square root of the structure's AVE to compare structural correlations in order to do the discriminant analysis (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

The findings of the discriminant validity are shown in Table 2:

Table 2. Discriminant validity

	Web Site	Social Media Platforms	Mobile Application	E-Mail	E-Reputation of Startup
Web Site	0.642				
Social Media	0.312	0.607			
Mobile Application	0.274	0.092	0.708		
E-Mail	0.195	0.418	0.072	0.719	

	Web Site	Social Media Platforms	Mobile Application	E-Mail	E-Reputation of Startup
E-Reputation of Startup	0.220	0.502	0.417	0.357	0.735

Source: Results of statistical analysis performed with the Smart PLS software.

According to Table 2, the values on the diagonals of the matrix that represented the square root of AVEs were always higher than the non-diagonal components in the row and column that corresponded to them. This indicates that each variable has a higher correlation with itself than with the other factors under study. The fulfilment of the discriminatory validity is confirmed by this.

5. STRUCTURAL MODEL

An examination of the model's assumed relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables is part of the structural model. The path coefficient and the regression result for the structural model are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. Structural model’s path coefficient and regression result

Hypo	Relationship	Std. Beta	Std. Error	t-Value	p-Value	Decision
H1	WS => ERS	0.794	0.058	13.076	0.000	Supported ***
H2	SM => ERS	0.817	0.060	14.451	0.000	Supported ***
H3	MA => ERS	0.681	0.047	7.755	0.002	Supported **
H4	EM => ERS	0.603	0.041	7.235	0.002	Supported **

Significant at *** p = <0.001, ** p = <0.01, * p = <0.05

Source: Results of statistical analysis performed with the Smart PLS software.

Hypothesis 1 (H1). Marketing through a website has a statistically significant positive impact on the e-reputation of startups. As shown in Table 3, the value of the standard beta (Std. Beta) was (0.794), which is statistically significant, and the p-value was (0.000), which is less than the adopted significance level of 0.05. This indicates that the first hypothesis is valid. Therefore, there is a positive effect of marketing through a website on the e-reputation of startups.

Hypothesis 2 (H2). Marketing through Social Media platforms has a statistically significant positive impact on the e-reputation of startups. As shown in Table 3, the value of the standard beta (Std. Beta) was (0.817), which is statistically significant, and the p-value was (0.000), which is less than the adopted significance level of 0.05. This means that the second hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there is a positive effect of Marketing through Social Media platforms on the e-reputation of startups.

Hypothesis 3 (H3). Marketing through mobile applications has a statistically significant positive impact on the e-reputation of startups. As shown in Table 3, the value of the standard beta (Std. Beta) was (0.681), which is statistically significant, and the p-value was (0.003), which is less than the adopted significance level of 0.05. This means that the third hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there is a positive effect of Marketing through mobile applications on the E-reputation of startups.

Hypothesis 4 (H4). Marketing through email has a statistically significant positive impact on the e-reputation of startups. As shown in Table 3, the value of the standard beta (Std. Beta) was (0.603), which is statistically significant, and the p-value was (0.002), which is less than the adopted significance level of 0.05. This means that the fourth hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there is a positive effect of Marketing through email on the e-reputation of startups.

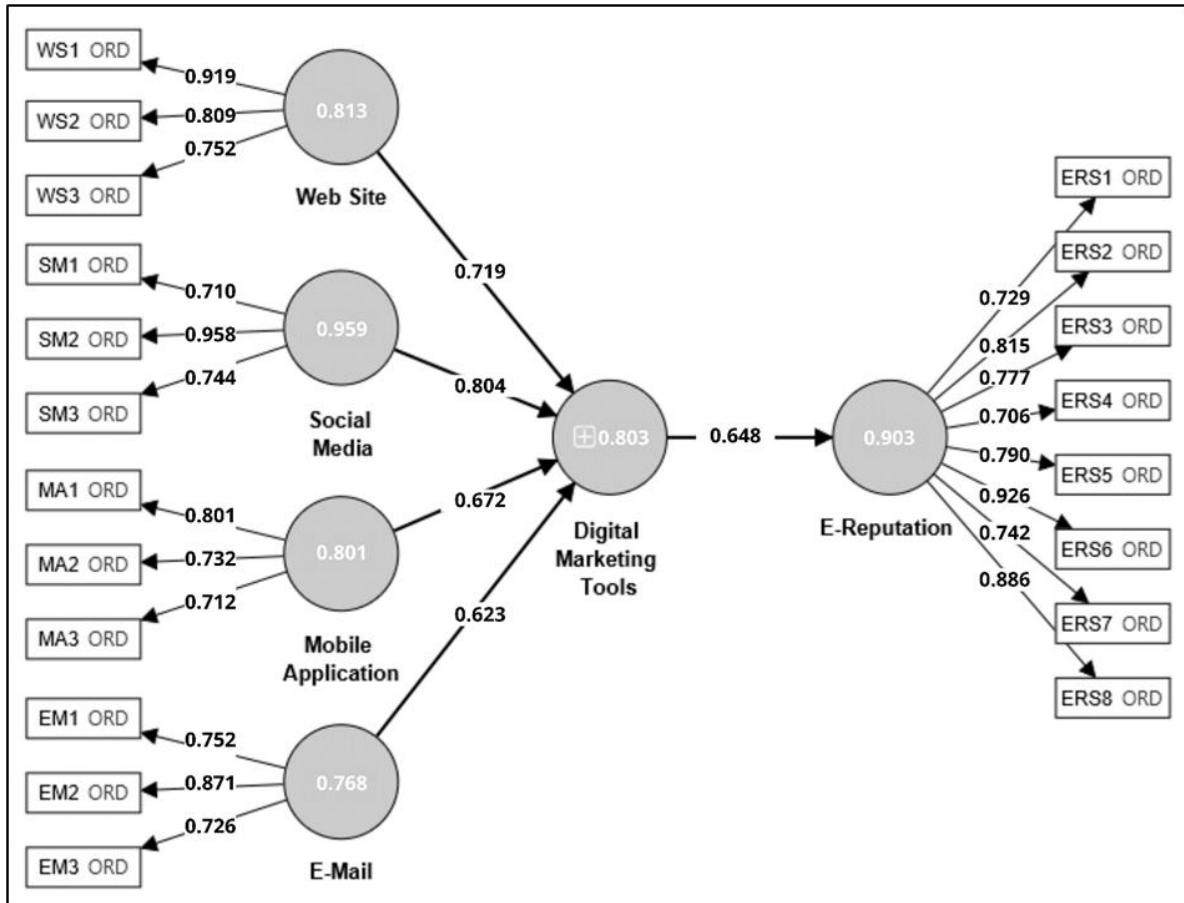


Figure 4. The ultimate structural model for this study

Source: Results of statistical analysis with the measurement model taken into account using Smart PLS software

6. DISCUSSION

The data was gathered and analysed utilising the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach with Smart PLS 4 software. The findings revealed that all tools of digital marketing positively influenced the e-reputation of the startups.

Social media platforms marketing showed the highest impact among the tools used (standardized beta = 0.817, t value = 14.451, p value = 0.000), highlighting the pivotal role of these platforms in enhancing startups' digital marketing strategies. This is due to the widespread use of social media platforms among the target groups of the studied startups, as well as their relatively low costs compared to traditional methods, making them an ideal option that is in line with the limited budgets of this type of organisations.

Moreover, these platforms have unique features, such as the ability to accurately target audiences based on their interests and behaviours, and enabling companies to get immediate feedback from customers. These advantages contribute to optimising services and adapting to

market changes flexibly and quickly, which is in line with the needs of the startup lifecycle, especially during the growth and peak phases.

Subsequently, the website emerged, as the results (Std.Beta = 0.794, t value = 13.076, p value = 0.000) showed its great importance in enhancing the digital presence of startups. It is characterised by providing an attractive and professional user interface (UI) that is the first point of contact with customers, leaving a positive impression and encouraging interaction. In addition, easy navigation and an organised presentation of services improve the user experience (UX), a key element for startups with technology at the core of their characteristics. This integration of UI and UX contributes to building a positive and strong digital brand image, which supports the success of this type of organisation in the market.

Following that, mobile applications (standardized beta = 0.681, t-value = 7.755, p-value = 0.002) have emerged as an effective tool for startups, supported by the widespread proliferation of smartphones and the increasing reliance on them in daily life. This proliferation provides tremendous opportunities for these organisations to reach a wide and diverse audience at lower costs compared to traditional means. Apps offer the ability to provide personalised services that meet customer needs in real time, building a stronger relationship between the organisation and its customers. In addition, these apps expand the market for startups, supporting the rapid growth characteristic of this type of organisation

Lastly, the email tool stood out (Standardized Beta = 0.603, t-value = 7.235, p-value = 0.002). These results confirm the reliance of the studied startups on this tool, thanks to its low costs compared to the limited budget of this type of organisation and its ability to customise based on the types of mailings available, which contributes to building strong customer relationships and loyalty. In addition, the email tool provides good opportunities for these organisations to communicate directly with their target audience, which improves the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies and contributes to continuously expanding the customer base.

7. CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this study is to measure the impact of digital marketing on the e-reputation of a group of startups in Algeria by analysing the most commonly used digital marketing tools: websites, social media platforms, mobile applications, and email.

The findings indicated that digital marketing plays a significant role in shaping the e-reputation of the studied startups. We found a positive relationship between each of the digital marketing tools (websites, social media platforms, mobile applications, and email) and the enhancement of these startups' e-reputation, due to the published digital content and the two-way digital interaction between the startups and their customers.

The results also demonstrated that digital marketing tools can increase sales volume by leveraging customer data and digital behaviours, thereby, enhancing their experience and fostering their loyalty.

Based on these findings, we propose the following recommendations:

- Startups should integrate digital marketing tools with modern AI strategies to enhance their e-reputation and improve user's experience.
- Startups should continuously enhance their knowledge of various aspects of digital marketing through ongoing employee improvement to keep pace with the current digital boom.

- Efforts should be made to improve institutional interaction with customers by providing useful and engaging content across all digital communication channels.
- Startups should study the risks associated with the digital environment and work to mitigate them to ensure a safe consumer experience, thereby, enhancing their e-reputation.
- Institutions should maintain transparency in their dealings with customers and strive to build trust through continuous communication and clear information dissemination.

Despite the importance of these findings, this study has several limitations :

- The research was conducted in a specific environment, and the results may vary in different contexts.
- The sample size is relatively small due to the limited number of employees in the studied startups.
- The study relied on self-assessment by employees, which may indicate a degree of social bias.

We recommend that future studies should be conducted in diverse environments, over different periods, with various dimensions of study, and using diverse measures and research methods to enhance our understanding of the impact of digital marketing tools on the e-reputation of startups.

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