

## **The Impact of Digitalization on B2B Relationship Dissolution: Challenges and Opportunities in Communication Management**

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**Abstract.** The digital transformation of business-to-business relationships has reshaped communication and relationship management, offering advantages and challenges. While digitalization improves efficiency, transparency, and collaboration via AI-driven CRM systems and automation, it also brings risks like depersonalization, miscommunication, and heightened relational fragility. This article explores the paradox of digitalization in B2B interactions, examining how digital tools influence relationship resilience and dissolution. Through a theoretical analysis, we identify the critical challenges posed by digital communication in managing business relationships and propose strategies to mitigate potential risks. The study highlights the importance of hybrid communication strategies that balance digital efficiency with human-centered interactions to maintain sustainable and resilient B2B relationships.

**Keywords:** *Digitalization; B2B Relationships; Communication Management; Relationship Dissolution; Customer-Supplier Interaction.*

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### **1. Introduction**

Digitalization has profoundly transformed business-to-business (B2B) interactions, redefining the dynamics of communication and relationship management. The integration of digital technologies has enabled increased automation, greater operational efficiency, and expansion into international markets. Businesses now leverage tools such as collaborative platforms, intelligent Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems, and real-time digital communication channels to optimize data management and personalize interactions (Chatterjee et al., 2022). These innovations have improved coordination and responsiveness, fostering enhanced transparency and efficiency in business exchanges. However, this transformation is not without challenges, while digitalization facilitates engagement and strengthens collaboration, it also introduces new complexities in managing and dissolving customer-supplier relationships (Moncur et al., 2016). This shift raises a fundamental issue: Does digitalization reinforce the durability of B2B relationships, or does it, on the contrary, accelerate their breakdown by altering communication structures and interpersonal dynamics? More specifically, to what extent do digital tools impact the quality, fluidity, and resilience of business relationships, and what are their implications during relationship dissolution?

Despite the growing body of research on digital transformation in B2B environments, there is a clear gap in understanding how digitalization specifically influences the breakdown or dissolution of these relationships. While many studies highlight the positive impacts of digital tools, such as improved communication speed, cost reduction, and enhanced decision-making, few address how these same tools can amplify relational fragility, lead to depersonalization, or complicate conflict resolution when a partnership is under strain.

By investigating how technological innovations can both stabilize and destabilize a B2B partnership, our work offers an original perspective on a critical and underexplored paradox. This dual focus on both the ‘bright side’ (operational efficiency, collaborative innovation) and the ‘dark side’ (relationship fragility, depersonalization, reputational risks) of digital

transformation sets our study apart from previous research and underscores its value to practitioners in search of balanced digital strategies.

While digital technologies facilitate strategic alignment and enable firms to co-develop products and services, they also increase the risk of relational fragility due to the dehumanization of exchanges, digital misunderstandings, and the loss of personal trust mechanisms (Grant, 2025; Nipa & Nath, 2024). The asymmetry of digital communication, the absence of non-verbal cues, and the exposure of corporate interactions in public digital spaces can further complicate the separation process, leading to reputational and operational risks (Moncur et al., 2016).

This paper's added value therefore lies in its comprehensive exploration of this paradox. First, it synthesizes research on digital communication to highlight specific mechanisms through which technology can jeopardize trust, exacerbate miscommunications, or escalate conflicts. Second, it identifies practical, strategically informed countermeasures, such as hybrid communication models, transparent data practices, and proactive conflict resolution frameworks, that can help firms mitigate the negative effects of digitalization. By situating our analysis at the intersection of communication management and relationship dissolution, we illuminate how companies can strike a balance between embracing digital tools and maintaining resilient, trust-based partnerships.

The objective of this article is to analyze the impact of digitalization on B2B communication and its implications for the dissolution of customer-supplier relationships. Specifically, it aims to:

1. Examine the transformations in B2B communication driven by digitalization.
2. Assess the risks and challenges associated with digital communication in relationship management.
3. Investigate the role of digital tools in the dissolution of B2B relationships and their influence on trust and conflict resolution.
4. Propose strategic recommendations to mitigate the negative impacts of digitalization on business relationships.

To address these questions, this study adopts a theoretical approach based on an in-depth literature review. The analysis is structured around existing research in B2B relationship management, digital communication, and digital transformation, mobilizing conceptual frameworks to explore the paradoxes and opportunities of digitalization in managing customer-supplier interactions. While digital analysis tools provide insights into communication efficiency and relational trends, their integration into strategic decision-making remains limited (Järvinen, 2011). By examining dissolution through a distinct digital lens, we provide fresh insights into how firms can harness innovation while minimizing the potential harm that arises when technology supersedes human-centric elements in B2B exchanges.

The article is structured into several sections. The first section explores the transformation of B2B relationships under the influence of digitalization, analyzing key technological advancements and their impact on business interactions. The second section focuses on the evolution of digital communication modes and emerging relational paradoxes, particularly the tension between automation and personalization. The third section examines the factors that influence relational resilience and dissolution, with a focus on how digitalization contributes to or mitigates business relationship breakdowns. The discussion highlights managerial implications and provides recommendations for a balanced approach to digitalization, ensuring that technological advancements do not compromise long-term relational stability. Finally, the conclusion synthesizes the key findings and suggests future research avenues to further explore the evolving impact of digitalization on B2B relationship management.

Thus, this article seeks to shed theoretical light on the dual role of digitalization in B2B relationships, emphasizing both its advantages and its risks. While digital transformation

provides businesses with innovative tools for improving efficiency and strategic collaboration, it also necessitates a careful approach to communication management. Companies must strike a balance between digital automation and human-centered relational strategies to preserve trust and minimize risks associated with business relationship dissolution. As digitalization continues to evolve, ongoing adaptation and strategic reflection will be essential to maintaining stable and sustainable B2B interactions.

## **2. Digitization and transformation of customer-supplier relations**

Digital transformation has profoundly impacted the complex interplay between customers and suppliers in the B2B marketplace, giving rise to novel dynamics, unparalleled opportunities, and formidable challenges that necessitate redress. This substantial transformation has been propelled by the integration of advanced technologies, including but not limited to artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain technology, the Internet of Things (IoT), and sophisticated big data analytics. The implementation and utilization of these advanced technologies have not only improved collaboration and trust among stakeholders, but also increased transparency and operational efficiency, while facilitating strategic alignment and creating an environment conducive to innovation. However, this journey of change is not without significant obstacles, as organizations face a myriad of challenges including, but not limited to, data security issues, internal resistance to change, and the complexities associated with integrating new technologies into existing systems. Subsequent sections of this presentation will thoroughly examine and illuminate pivotal aspects of how digital transformation is fundamentally reshaping the intricate nature of the customer-supplier relationship in the context of the B2B marketplace. This will be achieved to gain a comprehensive understanding of this critical phenomenon.

## **3. Enhanced Collaboration and Trust**

Digital transformation has been instrumental in fostering deeper and more collaborative relationships between customers and suppliers. Advanced technologies, including real-time communication tools, centralized data-sharing platforms, and collaborative software, have been shown to streamline workflows and promote mutual trust (Grant, 2025; Nipa & Nath, 2024). For instance, blockchain technology has been instrumental in ensuring transparency and accountability by providing immutable records of transactions, thereby reducing disputes and enhancing trust (Grant, 2025) (Grant, 2024a). Similarly, the Internet of Things (IoT) and analytics have improved supply chain visibility, enabling both parties to align on shared goals and make data-driven decisions (Grant, 2025).

Trust, as a foundational element in these relationships, has been bolstered by the integration of tools that facilitate open communication and minimize disputes (Grant, 2025). In the context of e-commerce, digital technologies such as AI, blockchain, and IoT have enabled organizations to optimize supply chain operations, enhance transparency, and cultivate collaborative partnerships with suppliers (Grant, 2024a) (Grant, 2024b). These advancements have collectively engendered a robust ecosystem in which transparency and accountability are prioritized, enabling organizations and suppliers to collaborate more effectively (Grant, 2025).

### **a. Improved Operational Efficiency and Transparency**

Digital transformation has significantly influenced the augmentation of operational efficiency within B2B market. It has allowed for the automation of many processes, decreased the occurrence of human errors, and promoted the immediate exchange of information. The merging of cloud-driven platforms with Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems has enabled smooth communication and the sharing of information among different stakeholders, resulting in the enhancement of supply chain operations in a way that is both productive and proficient. (Nipa & Nath, 2024). Furthermore, the integration of automation technologies and artificial intelligence has played a pivotal role in streamlining workflows, as these innovations

have considerably diminished the necessity for manual intervention, thereby leading to a notable improvement in overall operational efficiency across various sectors (Cooper, 2024). The aspect of transparency has emerged as another critical beneficiary of the ongoing process of digital transformation in contemporary business environments. The integration of technologies such as blockchain and the Internet of Things (IoT) has facilitated comprehensive, end-to-end visibility throughout supply chains, a development that has been instrumental in ensuring product authenticity and traceability for consumers and stakeholders alike (Grant, 2025; Grant, 2024a). This unprecedented level of transparency has not only served to cultivate and strengthen trust among business partners and consumers but has also played a vital role in ensuring adherence to regulatory requirements, thereby significantly reducing the risk of fraud and mismanagement within various organizational frameworks (Grant, 2024a).

#### **b. Strategic Alignment and Innovation**

Digital transformation has facilitated the alignment of organizations' strategic objectives with those of their suppliers, thereby cultivating an environment conducive to innovation and collaborative advancement. For instance, digital platforms have facilitated joint innovation efforts, enabling customers and suppliers to co-develop products and services (Grant, 2024c). This collaborative approach has accelerated product development cycles and enhanced market competitiveness (Grant, 2024c).

Furthermore, the adoption of digital transformation has prompted organizations to allocate resources towards digital innovation and maintain a strong reputation, both of which are critical for fortifying buyer-supplier relationships (Evensius & Riza, 2024). Supply chain flexibility, a pivotal outcome of digital innovation, has enabled organizations to respond more expeditiously to evolving market demands and customer needs (Evensius & Riza, 2024).

### **4. Analysis of Changing Communication Patterns and the Challenges of Managing Breakdowns in the Customer-Supplier Relationship**

#### **a. Changing Communication Patterns in Customer-Supplier Relationships**

The importance of communication in enabling effective connections between clients and vendors is thoroughly recorded. However, the dynamics of communication are undergoing significant transformation due to technological innovations, cultural transitions, and the growing intricacy of global supply chains. The following points outline the primary alterations in communication patterns:

##### **i. Digital Transformation and Real-Time Communication**

Cutting-edge digital tools like cloud services, enterprise resource planning systems, blockchain technology, and automation have transformed the way communication occurs in customer-supplier interactions. These tools enable real-time data exchange, enhance transparency, and facilitate collaboration. (Nipa & Nath, 2024) (Grant, 2024d) (Grant, 2024a) (Grant, 2024e) For example, blockchain technology enables the secure and clear monitoring of transactions, minimizing the chances of misunderstandings and promoting trust (Grant, 2024a).

##### **ii. Shifting from Transactional to Collaborative Communication**

There exists an increasing focus on collaborative discourse, wherein both entities engage in a concerted effort to attain shared objectives. This transformation is propelled by the acknowledgment that enduring alliances yield greater advantages than ephemeral profits (Grant, 2024f) (Cooper, 2025). Collaborative discourse encompasses collective problem resolution, joint risk management, and co-investment in technological advancements, thereby fortifying the relationship and augmenting resilience (Grant, 2024e) (Cooper, 2025).

### **iii. Cultural Sensitivity in Cross-Cultural Communication**

In the context of global supply chains, cultural differences can profoundly influence communication patterns. For instance, buyers and suppliers from diverse cultural backgrounds may interpret contractual terms in divergent ways, resulting in misunderstandings (Squire et al., 2023). Addressing this challenge necessitates a high degree of cultural sensitivity and adaptability. It is imperative for suppliers and buyers to be cognizant of each other's cultural norms to ensure effective communication and avert potential conflicts (Squire et al., 2023) (Cooper, 2025).

### **iv. The Role of Trust and Transparency**

The establishment of trust serves as a fundamental element in facilitating effective communication within the dynamics of customer-supplier relationships. Transparent communication fosters trust, which in turn enhances collaboration and mutual understanding (Shahzad et al., 2020) (Grant, 2024d). However, a lack of transparency can lead to mistrust and breakdowns in the relationship (Nath & Nipa, 2024).

### **v. The Impact of Economic Crises on Communication**

Economic downturns, exemplified by the global financial crisis, have underscored the critical necessity of transparent and anticipatory communication in preserving supplier affiliations. During such times, suppliers and buyers must communicate openly about financial stress, risks, and mitigation strategies to ensure mutual survival (Handfield, 2011).

## **b. Challenges in Managing Breakdowns in Customer-Supplier Relationships**

Despite the significance of effective communication, breakdowns in customer-supplier relationships are unavoidable. These breakdowns can arise from various factors, including conflicts, cultural differences, and external disruptions. The following points explore the key challenges:

### **i. Conflict Resolution and Communication Breakdowns**

Conflicts frequently arise within customer-supplier dynamics, and the effectiveness of communication in their amelioration constitutes a pivotal element. According to empirical studies it is shown that strategies centered on problem-solving are the most favored methodologies for conflict resolution, whereas legalistic approaches are typically perceived as a measure of last resort (Shahzad et al., 2020). Nevertheless, communication breakdowns have been observed to exacerbate conflicts, resulting in damaged relationships and diminished performance (Shahzad et al., 2020; Celuch et al., 2012).

### **ii. Cultural Mismatches and Misinterpretations**

Cultural differences can lead to misinterpretations of contractual terms and communication styles. For example, buyers from individualistic cultures may prefer direct and assertive communication, while suppliers from collectivist cultures may value harmony and indirect communication (Squire et al., 2023). These incongruences have the potential to engender misunderstandings and relationship ruptures (Squire et al., 2023; Cooper, 2025).

### **iii. Power Dynamics and Dependence**

Power imbalances between customers and suppliers can create challenges in managing breakdowns. Suppliers exhibiting a significant level of reliance on a specific client may encounter substantial pressure to acquiesce to requests, even in cases where such requests are regarded as inequitable (Bourguignon et al., 2023). Conversely, customers, wielding their own influence, may employ their authority to enforce the stipulations within a contract, a practice



that has the potential to engender feelings of resentment and result in the emergence of conflict (Bourguignon et al., 2023).

#### **iv. Digitalization and Technological Barriers**

While digital technologies have improved communication, they also present challenges. For instance, smaller businesses may lack the technical expertise or financial resources to adopt advanced digital tools, creating a digital divide (Nipa & Nath, 2024) (Nath & Nipa, 2024). Additionally, cybersecurity concerns and data privacy issues can hinder the adoption of digital communication platforms (Grant, 2024a) (Green, 2023).

#### **v. Economic and Supply Chain Disruptions**

External disruptions, such as economic crises or supply chain disruptions, can strain customer-supplier relationships. These disruptions often require rapid and effective communication to mitigate risks and ensure continuity (Handfield, 2011) (Holloway, 2024). However, communication breakdowns during such times can exacerbate the challenges and lead to further breakdowns in the relationship (Handfield, 2011).

### **c. Strategies for Managing Breakdowns and Enhancing Communication**

To address the challenges associated with the management of breakdowns and the enhancement of communication, several strategies can be employed:

#### **i. Adopting Collaborative Conflict Resolution Strategies**

Collaborative conflict resolution strategies, such as principled negotiation and problem-solving approaches, can help to resolve disputes while preserving the relationship (Shahzad et al., 2020) (Grant, 2024g). These strategies involve active listening, empathy, and a focus on mutual benefits, which result in enhancing trust and reducing the likelihood of breakdowns (Shahzad et al., 2020) (Cooper, 2025).

#### **ii. Investing in Digital Communication Tools**

Digital communication tools, such as cloud-based platforms and real-time tracking systems, can enhance the speed and accuracy of communication. These tools also facilitate information sharing, which is critical for building trust and collaboration (Nipa & Nath, 2024) (Grant, 2024d) (Johnson, 2025). However, organizations must address the challenges associated with digitalization, such as cybersecurity and data privacy concerns (Grant, 2024a) (Green, 2023).

#### **iii. Cultural Sensitivity and Training**

Cultural sensitivity training can help to bridge the gap between buyers and suppliers from different cultural backgrounds. By understanding each other's cultural norms and communication styles, both parties can avoid misunderstandings and improve collaboration (Squire et al., 2023) (Cooper, 2025).

#### **iv. Proactive Risk Management and Contingency Planning**

Proactive risk management and contingency planning are essential for mitigating the impact of external disruptions. Organizations should identify critical suppliers, assess risks, and develop mitigation strategies to ensure continuity during disruptions (Handfield, 2011) (Green, 2023). Clear communication of these strategies to suppliers can enhance trust and collaboration (Handfield, 2011).

#### **v. Building Trust Through Transparent Communication**

Transparent communication is critical for building and maintaining trust in customer-supplier

relationships. Organizations are encouraged to engage in transparent communication regarding their anticipations, obstacles, and methodologies to cultivate an atmosphere of reciprocal comprehension and collaboration (Shahzad et al., 2020) (Grant, 2024d). Transparent communication can also help to resolve conflicts and prevent breakdowns in the relationship (Shahzad et al., 2020) (Celuch et al., 2012).

#### **vi. Fostering a Collaborative Mindset**

A collaborative mindset is essential for managing breakdowns and enhancing communication. Organizations should encourage joint problem-solving, shared risk management, and co-investment in technology to strengthen the relationship (Grant, 2024e) (Cooper, 2025). This collaborative approach can also enhance resilience and adaptability in the face of disruptions (Holloway, 2024).

#### **vii. Addressing Power Imbalances**

Addressing power imbalances is critical for managing breakdowns in customer-supplier relationships. Organizations should strive for equitable negotiations and avoid exploiting power dynamics. This objective can be realized by employing equitably structured contractual stipulations and emphasizing reciprocal advantages (Bourguignon et al., 2023).

#### **viii. Enhancing Communication Skills**

Effective communication skills, such as active listening and empathy, are essential for managing breakdowns and improving communication. Organizations should invest in training programs that enhance these skills to foster better understanding and collaboration (Cooper, 2025).

### **5. B2B relationship breakdown and the role of digitalization**

Digital tools assume a vital function in fostering relational robustness by empowering individuals and institutions to acclimatize to and recuperate from disturbances. These tools facilitate communication, enhance socio-emotional skills, and support economic activities, thereby fostering resilience in various contexts. The key factors that promote relational resilience through digital tools include the enhancement of socio-emotional skills, the facilitation of communication and connectivity, and the support of economic activities. Among these factors:

#### **a. Enhancement of Socio-Emotional Skills**

Digital innovations in educational settings, such as emotional self-regulation apps and interactive games, have been shown to improve socio-emotional skills like empathy and self-regulation. These skills are essential for coping with adversity and building resilience in students (Magnago & Nunes, 2024). Digital resilience training programs, which focus on psychological skills such as mindfulness and optimism, help individuals develop personal resilience. These programs are often delivered through apps or online platforms, making them accessible and scalable (Göritz et al., 2024).

#### **b. Facilitation of Communication and Connectivity**

Digital communication technologies have been instrumental in maintaining relationships, especially during disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, virtual contact facilitated by digital devices has allowed children in foster care to maintain connections with their birth families, highlighting the role of digital tools in sustaining relational resilience (MacDonald et al., 2022). The use of digital media for business networking has enabled women to develop commercial relationships, thereby enhancing their economic resilience and

supporting family economic stability (Madonna, 2020).

### **c. Support of Economic Activities**

Digital tools have been pivotal in sustaining economic activities during external shocks. For example, eBay's Charity Connect initiative helped UK charities continue selling donated items during the COVID-19 lockdown, demonstrating how digital platforms can support economic resilience (Richey et al., 2024). In the logistics industry, digital technology has significantly enhanced resilience by promoting industrial collaboration and improving the ability to withstand external shocks. This is particularly evident in regions with high digital integration (Zhang et al., 2024).

Digital tools provide considerable advantages in fostering relational resilience; nevertheless, they also introduce challenges that necessitate attention. The efficacy of these instruments is contingent upon variables such as technological framework, the necessity for ongoing education, and the equilibrium between digital and human engagements. In educational settings, the lack of infrastructure and the necessity for teacher mediation are critical challenges that must be overcome to fully realize the potential of digital tools in fostering resilience (Magnago & Nunes, 2024).

The resilience of the digital tools themselves is crucial, as they must be reliable, accessible, and up to date to effectively support communities and individuals in building resilience (Wright & Wright, 2016). In educational settings, the lack of infrastructure and the necessity for teacher mediation are critical challenges that must be overcome to fully realize the potential of digital tools in fostering resilience (Magnago & Nunes, 2024). The robustness of the digital instruments themselves is imperative, as they must be dependable, attainable, and contemporary to efficiently aid communities and individuals in fostering resilience (Wright & Wright, 2016).

## **6. Conclusion**

The digitization of B2B interactions has fundamentally transformed communication and the management of relational dynamics, presenting both prospects and obstacles.

Although digital instruments augment efficiency, transparency, and collaborative efforts, they concurrently give rise to the perils of depersonalization, miscommunication, and heightened relational vulnerability. The reliance on AI-driven CRM systems and automated platforms improves decision-making but may weaken trust and complicate relationship dissolution (Chatterjee et al., 2022; Moncur et al., 2016). This study highlights the paradox of digitalization, while it strengthens operational efficiency, it can also accelerate business relationship breakdowns if not managed carefully. To mitigate these risks, companies must adopt hybrid communication strategies that balance digital efficiency with human-centered interactions. Transparent communication, ethical data management, and proactive conflict resolution are essential to ensuring stable and resilient business relationships.

Future research should explore empirical insights across industries to refine best practices for managing digitalized relationships. Ultimately, digitalization is neither inherently positive nor negative, its impact depends on how strategically businesses integrate it while preserving trust and relational stability.

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