



Exploring Connected Volunteering and Social Entrepreneurship among Algerian Youth: A Qualitative Descriptive Study

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Abstract

This study explores how connected volunteering acts as a catalyst for the emergence of social entrepreneurship among Algerian youth. Using an exploratory qualitative approach based on three initiatives (ACSE, Algérie Verte, and SIDRA), it identifies three key mechanisms: the development of digital and organizational skills, the formation of social capital through online networks, and the creation of innovative solutions to social and environmental challenges. The findings show that connected volunteering provides a low-risk learning environment that fosters entrepreneurial mindsets. The study also proposes an integrated model linking digital engagement to social entrepreneurship and offers practical implications for supporting youth-driven social innovation.

Keywords: Social entrepreneurship. Innovation ecosystems. Social capital formation. Sustainable development.

1. Introduction

The emergence of entrepreneurial dynamics has long been the subject of debate among scholars seeking to understand the motivations, processes, and societal implications of entrepreneurial action. While early theoretical contributions—most notably those of Schumpeter—placed the entrepreneur at the center of economic transformation, contemporary research highlights the multiplicity of forms that entrepreneurship can take in response to evolving social, economic, and technological environments. As Schumpeter (1934) famously stated, “the function of the entrepreneur is to reform or revolutionize the pattern of production,” a principle that continues to shape modern conceptualizations of entrepreneurship across economic and social domains.

In recent decades, a growing body of literature has emphasized the rise of social entrepreneurship, a hybrid model that combines economic viability with a mission to address unmet social and environmental needs. Defined by authors such as Dees (1998) and Yunus (2010), social entrepreneurship represents a paradigm shift toward innovation-driven, sustainable, and socially oriented value creation. Parallel to this evolution, the widespread adoption of digital technologies has transformed the ways individuals engage in civic and voluntary action. The emergence of connected volunteering, supported by social media, collaborative platforms, and mobile applications, enables rapid coordination, broader visibility, and scalable collective action unconstrained by physical proximity. Digital sociologists highlight this transformation: Jouët (2021) argues that connected participation allows “new forms of mobilization where digital interactions become the foundation of collective engagement.”



In Algeria, these global transformations intersect with a specific socio-economic context marked by a youthful population, rising demand for inclusive development, and the proliferation of grassroots initiatives supported by digital platforms. Youth-led civic collectives and associations increasingly rely on digital tools to mobilize volunteers, coordinate local actions, and test socially innovative solutions. This evolving landscape suggests that connected volunteering may play a critical role in cultivating the skills, networks, and innovation capabilities that underpin the emergence of social entrepreneurial trajectories.

However, despite the growing importance of digital civic engagement, the academic literature remains limited in explaining how connected volunteering concretely contributes to the development of social entrepreneurship, particularly in developing-country contexts such as Algeria. Current research often treats volunteering and entrepreneurship as separate phenomena, and only a few studies explore their intersection within a digital transformation perspective.

To address this gap, the present study investigates the following research question: How does connected volunteering serve as a catalyst for skill development, social networking, and innovation dynamics that facilitate the emergence of social entrepreneurship in Algeria?

Based on the theoretical perspectives of digital engagement, social innovation, and social capital development, we formulate the following research hypothesis:

H1. Connected volunteering positively contributes to the emergence of social entrepreneurship by enhancing digital skills, expanding social networks, and fostering social innovation capabilities among young volunteers.

To examine this hypothesis, we analyze three emblematic initiatives—SIDRA Association, The Algerian Corporation for Social Engagement (ACSE), and “Algérie Verte.” These cases shed light on the mechanisms through which digital engagement evolves into structured projects with measurable societal impact. More broadly, this research contributes to understanding how digitally mediated civic practices can nurture a supportive ecosystem for social entrepreneurship in emerging economies.

Research Objective

The primary objective of this study is to analyze how connected volunteering acts as a catalyst for the emergence of social entrepreneurship in Algeria. Specifically, the research seeks to (1) identify the digital practices that structure connected forms of volunteering, (2) examine how these practices enhance volunteers’ competencies and social capital, and (3) explore the conditions under which digitally mediated civic engagement evolves into sustainable, socially oriented entrepreneurial initiatives.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Connected Volunteering in the Digital Era

Traditional volunteering has historically been associated with local, face-to-face forms of civic participation. However, the diffusion of digital technologies—social media, collaborative platforms, and mobile applications—has transformed the landscape of civic engagement by enabling new modes of participation that transcend spatial and temporal constraints. Connected volunteering (or digital volunteering) refers to a set of practices where individuals engage in social causes through digitally mediated interactions. According to Cardon (2019), digital platforms facilitate “a reconfiguration of citizen participation where visibility, coordination, and engagement are amplified through networked interactions.” Similarly, Jouët (2021) argues that digital participation fosters new forms of collective action by lowering the barriers to engagement and enabling volunteers to self-organize around shared causes.

Recent international studies (Sharma, 2020; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) show that digital volunteering promotes large-scale mobilization through what is termed connective action, a form of digitally enabled



activism where individuals coordinate informally via social media rather than through hierarchical organizations. These digital dynamics enable rapid dissemination of information, real-time coordination, and broader outreach, making large-scale social mobilizations more accessible to young digital natives. In the Algerian context, digital volunteering has become increasingly prominent, particularly among youth. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok serve as primary tools for mobilizing volunteers, raising awareness, and disseminating humanitarian or environmental initiatives. This growing reliance on digital tools creates a fertile ground for emerging forms of civic innovation and skill development.

2.2 Social Entrepreneurship as a Hybrid Model

Social entrepreneurship is commonly defined as the creation of innovative solutions that address unmet social or environmental needs through economically sustainable models. Dees (1998) conceptualizes the social entrepreneur as a “change agent” who combines mission-driven logic with entrepreneurial practices. Yunus (2010) further emphasizes the hybrid nature of social enterprises, which leverage market mechanisms while prioritizing social value creation over profit maximization.

More recent work distinguishes several core pillars of social entrepreneurship:

- Social innovation (Mulgan, 2019): designing new solutions to societal challenges.
- Economic sustainability (Nicholls, 2006): ensuring sufficient financial autonomy.
- Measurable social impact (Zahra et al., 2009): evaluating transformative outcomes.

These pillars are especially relevant in developing countries, where institutional voids, unemployment, and social inequalities create opportunities for entrepreneurial responses to societal challenges. In Algeria, social entrepreneurship remains emerging but is gaining traction through youth-led initiatives, grassroots collectives, and digitally mediated volunteer movements.

2.3. The Link Between Digital Volunteering and Social Entrepreneurship

While digital volunteering and social entrepreneurship have often been studied separately, recent literature highlights the intersections between the two fields. Digital volunteering offers new opportunities for experiential learning, skill acquisition, and network-building—key factors identified as antecedents of social entrepreneurship.

Skill development

Digital volunteering fosters transferable competences such as:

- digital communication,
- project management,
- community coordination,
- problem solving.

Research by Alvord, Brown and Letts (2004) notes that these competencies form the foundation for social innovation and entrepreneurial problem-solving.

Social capital and networking

Connected volunteering strengthens digital social capital through repeated interactions, shared interests, and online communities. Putnam (2000) defines social capital as the “features of social organization such as networks and trust that facilitate coordinated action,” an essential mechanism for entrepreneurial mobilization.

Social media-based interactions facilitate broader, more diverse, and more dynamic networks than traditional volunteering, increasing access to resources, mentors, collaborators, and supporters.

Innovation and project prototyping



Digital volunteering also provides a low-risk environment for experimenting with ideas and prototyping social solutions. Scholars argue that early experimentation is crucial for the emergence of viable social enterprises (Dacin et al., 2011).

In the Algerian context, youth-led digital initiatives increasingly transform online engagement into structured projects, particularly in environmental, educational, and community development domains.

Based on the insights derived from the literature, a conceptual framework was developed to articulate the mechanisms through which connected volunteering may foster social entrepreneurial emergence.

3. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual foundation of this study is built on the assumption that connected volunteering—enabled by social media, digital platforms, and online collaborative tools—creates a favorable environment for the emergence of social entrepreneurship. Drawing on theories of digital engagement, social capital, and social innovation, this framework articulates the mechanisms through which digital volunteering contributes to the development of socially oriented entrepreneurial initiatives.

3.1 Connected Volunteering as a Digital Learning Environment

Connected volunteering functions as a digitally mediated space where individuals engage in collective action, acquire new skills, and interact with broader communities. Prior research suggests that online civic participation enhances digital literacy, project management capabilities, and communication skills (Cardon, 2019; Jouët, 2021). These competencies constitute critical precursors to entrepreneurial behavior, particularly in contexts where traditional training opportunities are limited.

3.2 Social Capital Formation Through Digital Networks

Social capital theory (Putnam, 2000) provides a useful lens to understand how connected volunteers accumulate relational resources. Digital platforms facilitate the creation of dense, heterogeneous networks linking volunteers, associations, local communities, and institutional actors. These connections expand access to information, mentorship, collaboration opportunities, and potential partners, all of which are essential for social entrepreneurial emergence (Zahra et al., 2009). Connected volunteering therefore strengthens both bonding (intra-community) and bridging (inter-community) social capital.

4.3 Social Innovation as a Mediating Mechanism

The transition from volunteering to social entrepreneurship often involves the ability to identify unmet social needs and to design innovative responses. The social innovation literature (Mulgan, 2019; Nicholls, 2006) suggests that digitally mediated volunteer spaces act as laboratories where ideas can be tested, refined, and scaled. Connected volunteers engage in problem-solving, experimentation, and iterative learning—all central components of social innovation processes.

4.4 Digital Engagement as a Low-Risk Incubation Space

Connected volunteering offers a low-cost, low-risk setting for youth to explore entrepreneurial roles by testing micro-initiatives, organizing online campaigns, or managing small-scale community projects. This “pre-entrepreneurial stage” enables volunteers to develop confidence, leadership skills, and organizational experience—key antecedents of social entrepreneurial intention.

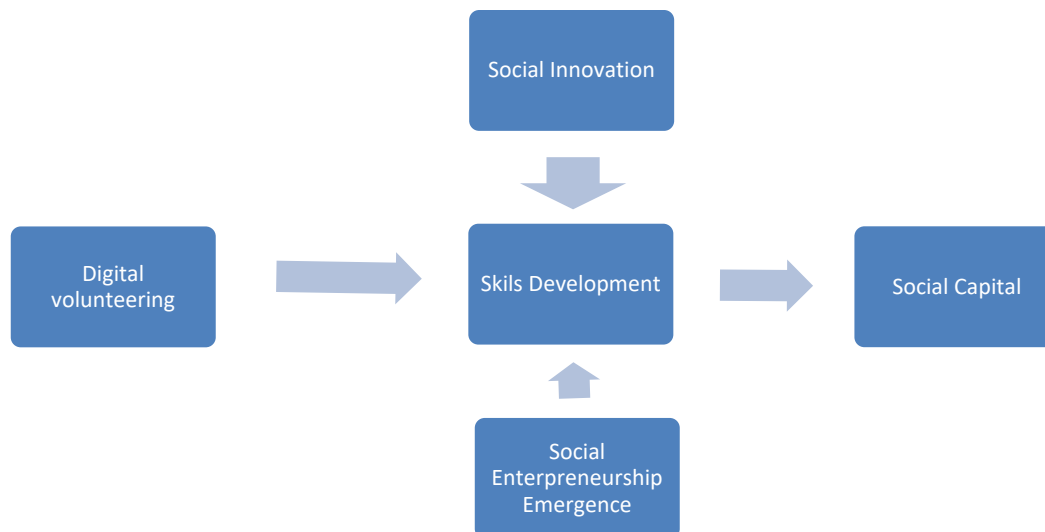
4.5 Conceptual Proposition

Based on these theoretical underpinnings, we posit that:

Connected volunteering enhances digital skills, builds social capital, and fosters social innovation capabilities, which collectively increase the likelihood of transitioning from civic engagement to social entrepreneurship.

This framework informs our empirical analysis and guides the interpretation of results by identifying the causal mechanisms linking digital civic participation to the emergence of social entrepreneurial initiatives in Algeria.

Fig.1. Pathway from Digital Volunteering to Social Entrepreneurship



Source: Author's own elaboration

5. Empirical Analysis

This empirical section examines how connected volunteering initiatives contribute to the emergence of social entrepreneurship in Algeria. The analysis focuses on three emblematic cases—The Algerian Corporation for Social Engagement (ACSE), Algérie Verte, and SIDRA Association—each representing a distinct form of digitally mediated civic engagement.

5.1. Methodological Approach

The empirical investigation is based on a qualitative descriptive approach combining:

- Document analysis: review of social media pages (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn), public statements, and digital content produced by the initiatives.
- Observation of online practices: types of posts, mobilisation strategies, and interaction patterns.
- Secondary data from media coverage, association reports, and online archives.

This approach enables the identification of recurring patterns, digital routines, and organizational mechanisms through which connected volunteering fosters skills, networks, and social innovation.

The collected data were analyzed using an inductive thematic coding approach, which allowed us to identify recurring patterns and mechanisms aligned with the conceptual framework and to structure the findings into coherent analytical categories.

To ensure validity and reliability, data were triangulated across multiple sources, and recurring patterns were cross-checked to reduce bias. The consistency of themes was reinforced through systematic coding and comparison of emerging categories.

The analysis is structured around three thematic dimensions derived from the conceptual framework:

1. Skill Development
2. Social Capital Formation

3. Social Innovation and Project Structuring

5.2. Case 1: The Algerian Corporation for Social Engagement (ACSE)



ACSE represents a new generation of Algerian civic actors combining community engagement with strategic use of digital tools. Created by young professionals and students, ACSE leverages social media to:

- mobilize volunteers across multiple regions,
- disseminate content on social engagement and sustainable development,
- coordinate national campaigns and training programs.

Digital Skill Development



ACSE strengthens volunteers' abilities in digital communication—such as content creation and moderation—as well as event coordination through online platforms. It also develops leadership and project management competencies, enabling volunteers to take on more structured responsibilities. These combined skills directly support the first mechanism of the conceptual model, which emphasizes the role of connected volunteering in fostering essential entrepreneurial capacities.

Social Capital Formation

ACSE builds a **national network** of volunteers, mentors, and local partners. Social media platforms allow ACSE to:

- connect geographically dispersed youth,
- share best practices,
- create collaborative online communities.

This fosters both bonding and bridging social capital.

Social Innovation



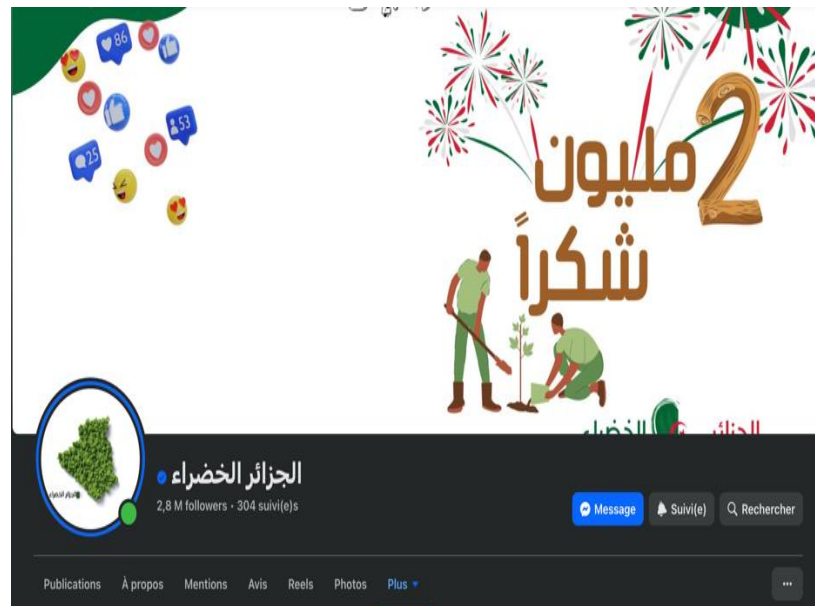
ACSE acts as a **social incubator**, supporting the emergence of projects such as:

- eco-friendly micro-enterprises,
- educational start-ups,
- community-based development actions.

Through training and mentorship, ACSE transforms online engagement into structured, socially impactful initiatives.

5.3. Case 2: Algérie Verte (“Algeria Green”)

Algérie Verte is a citizen-led digital initiative focused on environmental awareness and sustainable community engagement. Its digital presence on Facebook and Instagram is central to its mobilization strategy.



Skill Development

Volunteers engaging with the Algérie Verte platform develop key competencies in environmental advocacy, visual communication through photos and videos, and the coordination of community events such as tree-planting and clean-up campaigns. These skills contribute to building the foundational capacities required for collective action and socially oriented project development.

Social Capital Formation



The page federates thousands of followers across multiple wilayas, enabling:

- rapid dissemination of environmental messages,
- creation of local volunteer groups,
- long-term partnerships with schools and associations.

The initiative illustrates how digital communities coalesce into offline environmental action.

Social Innovation

Algérie Verte promotes:

- eco-entrepreneurial ideas,
- recycling micro-projects,
- green initiatives that can evolve into social enterprises.

This reflects the pathway from online volunteering to sustainability-oriented entrepreneurship.



5.4. Case 3: SIDRA Association

SIDRA is one of Algeria's most recognized youth-led associations, known for its strong digital presence and national programs in civic engagement, environmental protection, and social inclusion.

Skill Development

SIDRA provides volunteers with training in leadership, teamwork, community project planning, and digital mobilisation. Through these learning opportunities, participants develop organizational and coordination capacities that strengthen their ability to design and manage initiatives. Such competencies directly contribute to entrepreneurial readiness by equipping volunteers with the practical skills needed to transition from civic engagement to structured social innovation.

Social Capital Formation



SIDRA's online platforms build large digital communities, enabling:

- recruitment of volunteers,
- dissemination of impactful stories,
- cross-regional collaboration.

This dense digital network facilitates access to resources and partnerships.

Social Innovation and Entrepreneurial Transition

SIDRA plays a catalytic role in:

- transforming volunteer actions into structured projects,
- mentoring young innovators,
- encouraging the creation of social start-ups.

Former volunteers often transition into launching socially oriented initiatives.

6. discussion

Table 1. Comparative Summary of the Three Connected Volunteering Initiatives

Dimensions	ACSE	Algérie Verte	SIDRA Association
Type of Digital Engagement	Structured civic engagement using social media and online training platforms	Environmental awareness campaigns and community mobilization via Facebook & Instagram	Large-scale youth civic engagement with strong digital presence and national programs
Main Activities	Training programs, national campaigns, social engagement content	Environmental campaigns, clean-up actions, awareness events	Leadership training, community projects, inclusion initiatives
Skills Developed	Digital communication, event coordination, leadership, project management	Environmental advocacy, visual communication, local event coordination	Leadership, teamwork, planning, digital mobilization



Social Capital Generated	National network of volunteers, mentors, and partners	Large online community across multiple regions; local volunteer groups	Dense, cross-regional digital community enabling collaborations
Social Innovation Mechanisms	Incubation of eco-friendly and educational micro-projects	Promotion of green initiatives and recycling micro-projects	Transformation of volunteer actions into structured social projects
Entrepreneurial Potential	High: several initiatives inspired volunteers to start social projects or start-ups	Medium to high: emergence of eco-entrepreneurial ideas	Very high: multiple volunteers transition into launching or joining social enterprises
Key Contribution to Social Entrepreneurship	Provides structured digital pathways for skill-building and mentorship	Offers a platform for environmental innovation and micro-project prototyping	Acts as a mature incubator enabling sustained entrepreneurial transitions

Source: Author's own elaboration

The analysis reveals three key insights. First, connected volunteering builds core entrepreneurial competencies, including communication, organization, digital literacy, problem-solving, and leadership. Second, digital platforms generate valuable social capital, as online interactions evolve into offline collaborations, shared identities, and multi-actor partnerships. Third, digital engagement supports social innovation by enabling volunteers to identify needs, test ideas, and mobilize support. Together, these mechanisms show that connected volunteering acts as a pre-entrepreneurial incubation environment.

The findings from the three initiatives—ACSE, Algérie Verte, and SIDRA—provide compelling evidence that connected volunteering plays a pivotal role in enabling the emergence of social entrepreneurship in Algeria. The empirical results demonstrate that digital platforms serve not merely as communication tools, but as transformative spaces that foster competence development, social capital formation, and social innovation. These insights align with and extend the theoretical perspectives mobilized in this study.

6.1 Digital volunteering as a driver of skill development

The initiatives analyzed show that volunteers systematically acquire digital, organizational, and leadership skills through online engagement. This observation corroborates Cardon (2019) and Jouët (2021), who argue that digital participation enhances individual capacities for coordination and collective action. Our results extend their findings by showing that these skills do not remain confined to civic participation but spill over into entrepreneurial competencies. This confirms the first mechanism of our conceptual framework: **digital volunteering → skill development → entrepreneurial readiness**.

6.2 Social capital formation through digital networks

The data reveal that online platforms foster dense and diverse social networks, connecting volunteers, associations, and local communities. This reinforces Putnam's (2000) theory that social capital emerges through shared interactions and trust-building processes. In the Algerian context, digital networks substitute for weak formal infrastructures and create new relational opportunities for youth. The cross-case analysis demonstrates that these social connections evolve into partnerships, collaborations, and resource mobilization essential for launching social ventures. Thus, our findings validate the second mechanism: **skill development → social capital → opportunity access**.

6.3 Digital spaces as incubators of social innovation



The cases illustrate that connected volunteering enables experimentation, prototyping, and iterative problem-solving—key components of the social innovation process described by Mulgan (2019). Volunteers identify unmet needs, coordinate collective responses, test ideas, and scale successful initiatives. This process is particularly evident in ACSE's incubator programs and in Algérie Verte's environmental micro-initiatives. These patterns demonstrate the mediating role of social innovation and support the third mechanism: **social capital** → **social innovation** → **structured project development**.

6.4 Transition from volunteering to social entrepreneurship

A major contribution of this study is its demonstration that connected volunteering can serve as a pre-entrepreneurial stage, offering a low-risk environment where youth can experiment with roles and solutions before formalizing them into enterprises. This extends the work of Dees (1998) and Zahra et al. (2009) by showing that **digital civic engagement acts as a pathway into social entrepreneurship**, especially in developing-country contexts where traditional incubators and support systems remain limited. SIDRA and ACSE exemplify cases where volunteers transition from organizing community activities to launching or joining socially oriented start-ups.

6.5 The Algerian context as an accelerator or constraint

Finally, the Algerian socio-economic landscape shapes how connected volunteering operates. On the one hand, high youth digital penetration and the vitality of online communities accelerate civic mobilization and social innovation. On the other hand, institutional fragilities, limited funding opportunities, and bureaucratic barriers constrain the scaling of social entrepreneurial initiatives. This duality highlights the importance of supportive ecosystems—training, legal frameworks, and partnerships—to fully leverage the transformative potential of connected volunteering.

7. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that connected volunteering has become a significant catalyst for the emergence of social entrepreneurship in Algeria. Through the analysis of three emblematic initiatives—ACSE, Algérie Verte, and SIDRA—the findings reveal that digital platforms not only facilitate civic mobilization but also create an enabling environment for the development of skills, networks, and social innovation capacities that are essential for entrepreneurial action. Digital volunteering thus operates as a formative process in which young individuals acquire competencies, build social capital, and experiment with solutions to unmet social needs, ultimately paving the way for the creation of socially oriented initiatives.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study contributes to bridging two research fields—digital volunteering and social entrepreneurship—that have traditionally been examined separately. By proposing and validating a processual model linking digital engagement to entrepreneurial emergence, the research extends existing theories on social innovation, digital participation, and social capital formation. It highlights the mediating role of skills development and network expansion, offering a more integrated understanding of how digitally mediated civic practices evolve into social entrepreneurial trajectories, particularly in developing-country contexts.

Practically, the findings underscore the potential of connected volunteering as a strategic lever for youth empowerment and socio-economic development in Algeria. Associations, policymakers, and development organizations can leverage these insights to design programs that strengthen digital skills, support volunteer-driven project incubation, and facilitate partnerships between civic actors and institutions. Enhancing the visibility, coordination, and sustainability of volunteer initiatives could accelerate the transition toward a more structured and impactful social entrepreneurship ecosystem.



Nevertheless, the study acknowledges contextual constraints that may hinder the scaling of such initiatives, including limited institutional support, fragmented funding opportunities, and regulatory uncertainties. Addressing these gaps will be essential for fully unlocking the transformative potential of connected volunteering.

Future research could expand this work by conducting comparative studies across regions or countries, by exploring longitudinal trajectories of volunteers who transition into social entrepreneurs, or by examining the role of digital platforms and algorithms in shaping civic engagement. Such investigations would further refine the theoretical framework and offer deeper insights into the mechanisms driving social entrepreneurship in digitally connected societies.

In sum, connected volunteering represents a powerful and emerging pathway toward social entrepreneurship in Algeria, capable of fostering a new generation of socially engaged and digitally empowered actors committed to driving inclusive and sustainable development.

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