

REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR-58732

Title: DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AS A CATALYST FOR BRAND DEVELOPMENT: STRATEGIC INSIGHTS FROM EMERGING MARKETS.

Recommendation:

Accept as it is

Accept after minor revision.....

Accept after major revision

Do not accept (*Reasons below*)

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality		✓		
Techn. Quality		✓		
Clarity	✓			
Significance	✓			

Reviewer's ID: JPR-130

Detailed Reviewer's Report

1. Overall Evaluation

The manuscript, "Digital Transformation as a Catalyst for Brand Development: Strategic Insights from Emerging Markets," addresses a relevant and contemporary issue at the intersection of digital transformation, brand equity, customer experience, and emerging-market marketing. The paper develops the Digital Transformation Brand Catalyst (DTBC) framework, arguing that digital transformation should not be treated as an independent driver of brand equity but as a conditional catalyst whose effectiveness depends on customer-experience integration, organisational capabilities, digital maturity, strategic clarity, sector characteristics, and market context. The manuscript is based on an interpretive integrative review of 118 sources published between 2010 and 2024 and uses illustrative cases from India, Nigeria, Brazil, and Indonesia. The manuscript has a strong conceptual orientation, good theoretical grounding, and clear practical relevance. The integration of four streams of literature and the identification of seven configurations provide a useful framework for understanding why digital investments may either strengthen or fail to strengthen brand equity. The methodology and limitations are also explicitly discussed, which improves the credibility of the paper. However, the paper would benefit from greater methodological transparency, stronger empirical substantiation of the proposed configurations, clearer evidence supporting some claims, and improved presentation of the framework. Since the cases are illustrative rather than hypothesis-testing evidence, the manuscript should be careful not to imply stronger empirical validation than the methodology permits.

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2. Strengths

- a. Relevant and contemporary topic** - The manuscript focuses on digital transformation and brand development, an increasingly important issue for firms operating in emerging markets. The discussion effectively highlights that technological investment does not automatically result in stronger brand equity.
- b. Strong theoretical contribution** - The proposed DTBC framework is the major strength of the manuscript. It provides a mediated-moderated explanation of the relationship between digital transformation and brand equity and identifies two mediating mechanisms—customer-experience integration and organisational capabilities—and four moderators.
- c. Good integration of literature** - The manuscript successfully brings together digital transformation, brand equity, digital customer experience, and emerging-market marketing literature, with dynamic capabilities theory serving as the theoretical foundation.
- d. Configurational perspective** - The identification of four configurations associated with sustainable brand equity and three configurations associated with value dissipation adds originality and practical usefulness to the framework.
- e. Appropriate acknowledgement of limitations** - The authors clearly recognise that the review is interpretive and that the case vignettes cannot establish causal relationships. The discussion of geographic and linguistic limitations is also appropriate.
- f. Practical relevance** - The framework offers useful managerial implications by suggesting that firms should develop strategic clarity and organisational capabilities rather than simply increase digital investment.

3. Areas for Improvement

- a. Methodological transparency needs strengthening** - Although the paper states that 412 sources were initially identified and reduced to 118, the search and screening process requires more detail. The authors should provide the databases searched, complete search strings, screening stages, exclusion criteria, and preferably a systematic flow diagram. This would make the review more reproducible.
- b. Stronger justification for the 118-source corpus** - The statement that the 118 sources were sufficient for “saturation” requires clearer justification. The authors should explain how theoretical saturation was assessed and how source quality was evaluated.
- c. Empirical support for the seven configurations** - The seven configurations are interesting, but the evidence supporting each configuration should be presented more systematically. A summary table linking each configuration to supporting studies/cases and observable indicators would considerably strengthen the manuscript.

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d. Clarify the status of the illustrative cases - The paper appropriately states that the cases are illustrative rather than evidentiary. Nevertheless, specific organisations are not consistently identified, making it difficult for readers to assess the basis of the cases. Where disclosure is possible, the authors should provide clearer case-selection details and references to the underlying evidence.

e. Avoid overstatement of causal language - Terms such as “produces,” “converts,” and “causes” should be used cautiously because the study is based on an interpretive review rather than primary empirical testing. The conclusions should consistently distinguish between theoretical propositions and empirically established relationships.

f. Improve framework presentation - The DTBC framework would benefit from a clear conceptual diagram showing the relationship between digital transformation, the two mediators, four moderators, and brand equity. The seven configurations could also be presented in a concise table for easier comparison.

g. Strengthen measurement implications - The manuscript would be more useful for future empirical researchers if it proposed possible operational measures for constructs such as strategic clarity, CX integration, organisational capability, digital maturity, and brand equity.

h. Improve balance across emerging markets - Although India, Nigeria, Brazil, and Indonesia provide useful illustrations, emerging markets are highly heterogeneous. The authors acknowledge this limitation, but the discussion should avoid generalising the findings across all emerging economies.

i. Reference and citation verification - The authors should carefully verify that all cited studies accurately support the specific claims made and ensure consistency and completeness in the reference list.