Digital business model design and transient competitive advantage among manufacturing firms in Kenya.

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Date Received: *11th Oct 2025*
Date Revised:*1st Nov 2025*
Date Published: *12th Dec 2025*

Website:
www.edithcowanjournal.org

ISSN: *2790-0657*

DOI:
10.55077/edithcowanjournalofstrategicmanagement.v8i1.140

Key Words:
Digital business model design strategy, digital transformation, transient competitive advantage, large scale manufacturing firms, strategic management, Kenya.

ABSTRACT

The manufacturing sector plays a critical role in Kenya's economic development, yet its contribution to national output remains modest, partly due to limited competitiveness in an increasingly digitalized business environment. This study examines the influence of digital business model design strategies on the attainment of transient competitive advantage among large-scale manufacturing firms in Kenya. Anchored on strategic management and digital transformation perspectives, the study adopts a correlational research design to assess the relationship between digital strategy dimensions and competitive outcomes. The target population comprised 857 large-scale manufacturing firms, from which a sample of 348 firms was drawn, achieving a response rate of 76.8%. Data were analysed using Pearson correlation and bivariate regression techniques. The findings indicate a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between digital business model design strategies and transient competitive advantage, demonstrating that firms with well-integrated digital strategies are better positioned to respond to rapidly changing market conditions. Regression results further confirm that digital business model design is a significant predictor of transient competitive advantage. The study concludes that deliberate investment in digital transformation, innovative revenue models, and integrated customer engagement platforms is essential for sustaining competitiveness. It recommends the development of supportive policy frameworks and firm-level strategic alignment to enhance the effective implementation of digital business model strategies within Kenya's manufacturing sector.

Introduction

Kenya, the most industrially advanced country in East Africa, has a manufacturing sector contributing only 14% to GDP (Kenya Association of Manufacturers [KAM], 2017). Recognizing the potential for growth, the Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM) partnered with the Association for Overseas Technical Cooperation and Sustainable Partnerships (AOTS) to drive automation and digital transformation. This partnership aimed to enhance business ties between KAM members and Japanese companies, fostering the adoption of Kaizen culture and lean automation using tools like the Internet of Things (IoTs) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) (Njeri, 2022). KAM's report highlights digitalization as a priority for improving the sector's growth (KAM, 2022).

Despite being the third-largest industrial sector, Kenya's manufacturing industry faces challenges. The growth rate has been below the average GDP growth rate, and there is a need for substantial reforms to achieve full industrialization by 2030 (KPMG, 2022). The annual average real growth rate from 2017 to 2022 was 3.7%, below the total real GDP's average annual growth rate of 4.6% (KPMG, 2022). The challenge could be attributed to the digital transformation strategies adopted by manufacturing firms and the digital policies implemented by governments. According to Warner and Wager (2019), companies that successfully embrace Digital Business Transformation (DBT) can achieve Transient Competitive Advantages (TCA), leading to improved performance and sustainability. On the flip side, enterprises struggling to adapt to the digital realm may face the risk of succumbing to digital Darwinism. This phenomenon describes a scenario where less adaptable incumbents fade away, leaving only the most agile businesses responsive to technological trends to thrive in the competitive landscape. The recent history of corporate technological advancements, both in Kenya and globally, has been marked by unsuccessful initiatives that focus solely on innovations without considering more comprehensive strategic decision-making processes (Ismail et al., 2017). This implies that merely adopting new technologies without a well-thought-out strategy may not lead to sustained success. A comprehensive digital business transformation strategy spans various aspects, including business strategy, digital strategy, business model design strategy, operations strategy, business structure strategy, communications strategy, and supply chain integration strategy (Matricano, 2021).

A digital business model design strategy serves as an abstract depiction of an organization, whether in conceptual, written, or visual form, encompassing all fundamental, interconnected structural, operational, and financial configurations devised and established by the organization, both presently and in the future. It also encompasses all principal products and/or services that the organization delivers or has delivered based on these configurations, essential for attaining its strategic aims and objectives (Panda, 2019). A digital business model design strategy is characterized as such when alterations in digital technologies initiate profound transformations in how business operations are conducted and how revenue is generated (Veit et al.,2014).

Several researchers (Gottschalck & Günther, 2016; Mubako, 2017; Santalainen, 2019) assert that digital business transformation strategies enhance a firm's readiness to acquire and maintain transient competitive advantages (Forrest, 2018). Gaydarov and Ilieva (2022), Anwar (2018),

Dymitrowski and Mielcarek (2021), Park et al. (2017), and De-Lima-Santos et al. (2022) argue that adopting and implementing digital business model design strategies can lead to transient competitive advantages in various industries and contexts, supporting the importance of adapting to the digital landscape. The ability to promptly detect, capitalize, and transition between advantages aligns with the dynamic nature of TCA, increasing the likelihood of success.

Globally, TCA adoption is evident, with countries like Japan, the UK, the US, and Brazil leveraging this strategy across diverse sectors. In Japan, manufacturing firms embrace TCA to navigate a competitive and dynamic landscape and improving performance (Liao, Rice & Lu, 2018). In the UK, technology start-ups utilize TCA to remain competitive in a shifting tech landscape (Forrest et al., 2019). Established firms in the US also embrace TCA to navigate dynamic market trends effectively (Forrest & Nightingale, 2018). Brazil, facing economic volatility, witnesses a surge in TCA adoption across various sectors (Salgado et al., 2022). However, within Africa, including Kenya, there is a scarcity of research on TCA, particularly in the context of large-scale manufacturing. Existing studies Nyarku, 2017; Botes and Pretorius, 2020; Kaluyu and Odollo, 2023) in South Africa, Uganda, and Ghana focus on various latent variables associated with competitive advantage but lack comprehensive exploration of TCA and do not examine the influence of digital business model design strategy. Therefore, this research sought to examine the influence of digital business model design strategy on transient competitive advantage of large-scale manufacturing firms in Kenya. The research hypothesis (H01) is that digital business model design strategy does not possess a statistically significant impact on the transient competitive advantage of extensive manufacturing firms in Kenya.

Methods

Research Design

The research design used in the study was correlational, which involves the application of quantitative data and analysis methods to assess the extent and characteristics of relationships between variables (McClintock, 2018). This design is particularly suitable when the objective is to understand the connections between different dimensions (Bell et al., 2018), such as digital strategy, and transient competitive advantage. The correlational approach allows for the examination of causal correlations using quantitative data without modifying it, aligning with a positivist methodology (Krause, 2018).

Target Population

The study targeted a subset of 857 large-scale manufacturing firms in Kenya, identified based on criteria from the International Labour Organization and Kenya Association of Manufacturers. These firms constituted the unit of analysis. The focus was on 2571 managers from operational, marketing, and IT departments as the unit of observation.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The research employed a multi-stage sampling method. In the first stage, a representative sample of 857 large-scale manufacturing companies in Kenya was selected using stratified proportionate random sampling. The second stage involved the selection of operational, marketing, and ICT managers from these firms using stratified proportionate sampling. The sample size, determined using the Yamane formula, was 348 managers, distributed proportionately across the categories. Operational managers had a sample size of 125, marketing managers 115, and ICT managers 108. This approach aimed for cost efficiency, time management, and representative results.

Data Collection Instrument

Data collection in our study was conducted using a structured questionnaire designed to gather quantitative information and consistent manner. This approach, recommended by Kothari (2017) for large-sample cross-sectional studies, is in line with the scientific principles of data analysis outlined by Saunders et al. (2015). The questions were designed in Likert-scale format. Two research assistants were selected to help in questionnaire administration, data collection and entry. This method proved instrumental in efficiently collecting reliable quantitative data aligned with our research objectives.

Data Analysis Methods

To facilitate data analysis, the collected data underwent preparation, coding, and entry into the SPSS version 26 data analysis program. Descriptive statistics, including measures of central tendency such as frequency, percentile distributions, mean, and standard deviation, were computed to provide a comprehensive overview. Diagnostic tests were conducted to assess the suitability of proposed statistical models for fitting the data. For inferential analysis, the study conducted Pearson Correlation and bivariate regression analysis. Pearson's correlation analysis offers a quick and straightforward assessment of the magnitude of the association between two variables. The study hypothesis was that there was no statistically significant influence of digital business model design strategy on the transient competitive advantage of Kenya's large manufacturing firms. To test the hypothesis, the empirical model (1) was utilized and the study failed to reject the hypothesis when p> 0.05, at 5% significance level.

$$TCA = \beta_0 + \beta_1 DBMS + \varepsilon \quad \text{..... (1)}$$

Where; TCA = Transient competitive advantage, $DBMS$ = Digital business model design strategy, β_0 = Constant term, β_1 = is the coefficient of digital strategy variable and ε = error term

Ethical Considerations

In adherence to ethical standards emphasized by Saunders et al. (2015), this study prioritized ethical considerations at every stage. Institutional Review Board (IRB) and National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) approvals were secured, underscoring a commitment to ethical research practices and ensuring permission for data collection.

Participants received comprehensive information about the study's purpose, guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality. Confidentiality was strictly maintained, and data were solely utilized for survey purposes, upholding impartiality and independence. Participants' voluntary contributions further safeguarded their responses.

Results

Response Rate

Table 1 displays the response rate for the questionnaires that were distributed. Overall, from the total of 348 questionnaires administered, 267 were returned, leading to a cumulative response rate of 76.8%.

Table 1 Response Rate

Category	Administered	Returned	Percentage Returned
Operational Managers	116	97	83.6
Marketing Managers	116	86	74.1
ICT Managers	116	84	72.4
Total	**348**	**267**	**76.8**

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 illustrates that the overall mean of 2.75 indicates a notably low level of transient competitive advantages among large manufacturing companies. This is influenced by factors such as limited product innovation, a narrow market focus, insufficient continuous reconfiguration, suboptimal proactive resource allocation, inadequate innovation proficiency, and underutilization of previously gained advantages. The implication is that, within a swiftly evolving landscape, large manufacturing firms in Kenya may encounter challenges in attracting and retaining customers. Additionally, they may struggle to adapt to dynamic business environments characterized by shifts in customer preferences, emerging technologies, and market trends. These organizations face potential disruptions due to rapid technological advancements, inefficient resource utilization, and missed opportunities to invest in more strategic initiatives.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for Transient Competitive Advantage

ID	Statement	Mean	Std
MF1	Our organization is able to recognize changes in the market	2.2	1.1
MF2	Our organization is able to adapt when faced with changes in business environment	1.7	1
MF3	Our organization is able to maintain old customers	1.8	1
MF4	Our organization is able to attract new customers even during the changing business environment	4.1	1.1
CR1	Our organization agility allows to change with the trends	1.8	1
CR2	Our organization organizes itself around the available opportunities.	1.8	1
CR3	Our organization is able to create temporary advantages over competitors	1.9	1

RA1	Our organization proactively removes obsolete resources in competitive terms	2.3	1.1
RA2	Our organization budgets in continuous rapid cycles	4.1	1.2
RA3	Our organization managers understand what opportunities present advantages to the business.	3.6	1.1
PI1	Our organization is able to innovate differential products that are valued in the market	3.6	1.3
PI2	Our organization managers search for new growth areas	1.8	1
LP1	Our organization considers the lost advantages as a way of freeing-up resources for new advantages rather than lost glory	4	1.2
LP2	Our organization considers disengaging from old advantages as normal business cycle	3.1	0.9
LP3	Our organization top leaders keep strategizing on how to get ahead of the competitors	3.5	1.4
	Aggregate	2.75	1.09

Table 3 shows that the aggregate mean score of 3.04 suggests a mixed perception among respondents regarding the digital business model design strategy employed by large manufacturing companies in Kenya. The mixed perception implies that some companies appreciate and have implemented strategies regarding customer engagement, value chain linkages, servitization, digital platforms and end to end customer designs, while some other companies have low appreciation and implementation of such strategies. This variation can also have effect on variation of transient competitive advantage among the large manufacturing companies. In terms of reliability, it can be inferred from the Cronbach Alpha of 0.901, that the scale was reliable. This suggests that the items in the scale effectively capture the variability in digital business model design strategy and provide a reliable measure of this construct. These results provide confidence in the consistency and dependability of the measurement scale used in the study.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics for Digital Business Model Design Strategy

	Statement	**Mean**	**Std**
BM1	We have effective customer identification process that ensures identification of new customers	3.5	1.3
BM2	We are able to identify customers that would purchase services in addition to products	3.4	1.3
BM3	Our business model emphasizes on customer engagement	3.9	1.2
BM4	We have deployed customer engagement channels to connect and create connections with customers	3.9	1.3
BM5	We employ customer engagement platforms such as social media, chatbots, and virtual reality	3.9	1.4
BM6	Our business model emphasizes on value chain linkages	4	1.2
BM7	We place significant effort to deliver valuable products to our customers	3.9	1.2
BM8	We offer value through cost advantages to our customers	3.9	1.2
BM9	We offer value through differentiation of the products	1.5	0.5
BM10	We have revenue models that satisfy customers in new and innovative ways	1.8	1

BM11	We utilize e-commerce to monetize and sell the products and services	2.4	1.1
BM12	We use information technology to monitor products conditions	3.8	1.3
BM13	We offer extra services over and above the main services/products.	1.8	0.9
BM14	We make use of digital platforms that are free models, that is, are supported by ads.	2.3	1
BM15	We adopt marketplace model where sellers and buyers use a third-party platform to trade goods and services.	1.6	0.8
BM16	We have adopted e-commerce approach of selling products	2.9	1.4
BM17	We encourage end-to-end interactions with the customers throughout the time of relationship	2.7	1.4
BM18	We have capabilities to digitally innovate our products and create more value	3.6	1.2
	Aggregate	**3.04**	**1.15**
	Reliability	**Items**	**Alpha**
	Digital business model design strategy	18	0.901

Inferential Statistical Results

Table 4. Correlation Analysis Results Matrix

		TCA	DBMDS
TCA	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Digital business model design strategy	Pearson Correlation	0.507**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002	
	N	267	267

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4. reveal that overall digital business model design strategy and transient competitive advantage are positively correlated with a coefficient of 0.507. This indicates moderate positive relationship between these two constructs. The correlation is significant at 5% significant level as shown by the p-value of 0.002.

Table 5 Regression Analysis Results (Digital Strategy and Transient Competitive Advantage)

TCA	Coef.	St.Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% Conf	Interval]
DBMS	0.635	0.066	9.58	0.002	0.505	0.766
Constant	0.946	0.189	5.00	0.01	0.573	1.319
R-squared		0.2574	Number of obs			267
F-test		91.85	Prob > F			0.002

As displayed in Table 5, the regression model is significant, as shown by the significant F-test (Prob >F =0.000) and R-squared value of 0.257. This suggests that 25.7% variation in transient competitive advantages is explained by digital business model design strategies. The constant has positive and significant effect (β =0.946, p-value = 0.01). This implies that even when all other

predictor variables are zero, the dependent variable is expected to have a positive value equal to the model constant. Digital business model design strategy has positive and significant effect on transient competitive advantage (β = 0.635, p-value = 0.002). This implies that, holding all everything else constant a standard deviation increase in digital business model design strategies will result into 0.292 increase in transient competitive advantage. Therefore, the study refutes the null hypothesis suggesting that digital business model design strategy does not possess a statistically significant impact on the transient competitive advantage of extensive manufacturing firms in Kenya. Following this result, the optimal regression model can be presented as follows:

$$TCA = \mathbf{0.946} + \mathbf{0.635}\, DBMS + \varepsilon \qquad (2)$$

Overall, the analysis suggests that digital business model design strategy varies from company to company. While some companies appreciate and have implemented digital business model design strategy, others have low implementation of the strategy. This also might explain the variations and low transient competitive advantages for large manufacturing companies in Kenya. This assertion is supported by correlation and regression analysis, which revealed that digital business model design strategy is beneficial to transient competitive advantage of large-scale manufacturing firms in Kenya.

Discussion

The study found that there is a mixed perception among respondents regarding the digital business model design strategy employed by large-scale manufacturing firms in Kenya. This variability in perception suggests that while some firms have implemented and appreciated digital business model design strategies, others have not adopted such practices. The regression analysis results reveal a statistically significant and favourable impact of well-crafted digital business models on the transient competitive advantage of these firms. This implies that when these firms effectively implement digital business model design strategies, it positively influences their ability to gain a competitive edge in the short term.

Existing empirical studies, including those by Gaydarov and Ilieva (2022), Anwar (2018), Dymitrowski and Mielcarek (2021), Park et al. (2017), and De-Lima-Santos et al. (2022), align with this finding. They collectively emphasize that adopting and implementing digital business model design strategies can lead to transient competitive advantages in various industries and contexts, supporting the importance of adapting to the digital landscape. Effective implementation of digital business model design strategy plays a significant role in enhancing the transient competitive advantage of large-scale manufacturing firms in Kenya. Companies that successfully embrace and execute well-crafted digital business models benefit from improved customer engagement, optimized value chain linkages, integration of servitization components, and leverage of digital platforms. These elements contribute to a firm's ability to create and sustain competitive advantages in the short term. The adoption of digital business models promotes adaptability, innovation, and continuous improvement, facilitating expansion into new markets, which is a vital aspect for large-scale manufacturing firms aiming for growth and diversification.

Implications

The study concludes that there is a variation in the degree of implementation of digital business model design strategies among the large manufacturing companies in Kenya. While some companies have embraced and successfully implemented customer-centric and value-focused approaches, others have not fully adopted such strategies. This variation in investment and implementation of digital business model design strategies has an implication for the level of transient competitive advantage attained by these companies. Those who have effectively integrated digital strategies enjoy a stronger transient competitive advantage compared to those who have not fully utilized the potential of digital transformation in their business models.

The study further concludes that digital business model design strategy positively impacts the transient competitive advantages of large-scale manufacturing facilities in Kenya. This implies that a greater commitment to investing in and implementing the digital business model design strategy aligns with heightened prospects for large manufacturing firms in Kenya to identify and leverage available opportunities, ultimately resulting in the attainment of transient competitive advantages. In other words, companies that effectively embrace and implement digital business model design strategies are more likely to experience higher levels of competitive advantage, enabling them to stay ahead in a rapidly evolving digital business landscape.

Based on the conclusion that a digital business model design strategy is beneficial for transient competitive advantage; the study proposes several recommendations for practical implementation. Firstly, large-scale manufacturing companies should develop and implement clear digital policies that guide the process of digitalization throughout the organization. These policies need to articulate the company's approach to digital transformation, data privacy, cybersecurity, and other critical aspects of the digital strategy. Having clear and well-defined policies will provide a roadmap for digital initiatives, ensuring consistency in digitalization efforts.

Secondly, manufacturing companies should explore innovative revenue models. They should develop revenue models that offer new and creative ways to meet customer needs. Consideration can be given to subscription-based services, recurring revenue streams, or value-added services to create a unique value proposition. Additionally, large manufacturing firms should explore marketplace models, allowing sellers and buyers to use third-party platforms for trading goods and services. This can open up additional revenue streams and expand the company’s market presence. Lastly, large manufacturing firms should pay attention to end-to-end interactions with customers throughout their relationship with the company. This approach helps identify areas for improvement and ensures consistent and positive customer experiences, ultimately fostering loyalty.

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