

Exploring the Impact of Digital Transformation on Brand Loyalty in Emerging Markets

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of digital transformation on brand loyalty in emerging markets, where digital adoption is expanding but remains uneven across consumer segments. The research aims to analyze whether digital transformation initiatives contribute to stronger brand loyalty by enhancing consumer experiences and long-term engagement. A quantitative research design is employed using a cross-sectional survey of consumers who interact with brands implementing digital platforms, mobile applications, and online engagement tools. Data are collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the proposed relationship. The results indicate that digital transformation has a positive and statistically significant effect on brand loyalty, demonstrating that higher levels of perceived digital integration and responsiveness are associated with stronger consumer commitment and repeat purchase intentions. The findings highlight that digital transformation functions not only as an operational improvement but also as a strategic instrument for strengthening brand–consumer relationships. This study provides practical insights for firms in emerging markets to position digital transformation as a core branding strategy and contributes empirically to the limited literature on digital transformation and brand loyalty within emerging market contexts.

Keywords: Digital Transformation, Brand Loyalty, Emerging Markets, Consumer Engagement, Branding Strategy.

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1. Introduction

Digital transformation has become a defining characteristic of contemporary business environments, reshaping how firms operate, compete, and create value. It refers to the strategic integration of digital technologies into organizational processes and decision-making structures, enabling firms to respond more effectively to environmental uncertainty and market dynamics [1]. In emerging markets, the rapid diffusion of mobile technologies and platform-based services has accelerated this transformation, forcing firms to reconsider traditional business models and competitive strategies [2]. As competition intensifies, digital transformation is increasingly viewed as a key driver of long-term organizational adaptability and performance [3].

Within the marketing and branding literature, digital transformation is recognized as an important mechanism for enhancing brand-related outcomes, as it reshapes how firms design, communicate, and deliver value to their customers in increasingly digitalized environments. Digital technologies enable firms to interact with consumers across multiple touchpoints, allowing for more responsive, interactive, and personalized brand experiences that align more closely with individual consumer needs and preferences [4]. Such experiences contribute to the development of customer-based brand equity by strengthening emotional attachment, perceived value, and favorable brand associations formed through consistent and meaningful engagement [5]. Over time, repeated

positive digital interactions reinforce customer satisfaction and trust, which are essential foundations of brand loyalty, ultimately encouraging repeat purchase behavior, positive word-of-mouth, and long-term relational commitment between consumers and brands [6].

Brand loyalty reflects a consumer's enduring commitment to a brand, manifested through repeat purchase behavior and resistance to competitive alternatives. Rather than being formed through isolated transactions, loyalty emerges from long-term relational processes between consumers and brands [7]. Relationship marketing theory emphasizes that trust and commitment are central mechanisms sustaining these relationships [8]. In digitally mediated environments, these mechanisms are increasingly shaped by technology-enabled interactions, including personalization, data-driven communication, and continuous engagement [9].

Despite growing academic interest in digital transformation and brand loyalty, most empirical studies have predominantly focused on developed economies, where market conditions are relatively stable and supported by advanced technological ecosystems. These markets typically exhibit high levels of digital infrastructure, consumer digital literacy, and strong institutional support, enabling firms to implement digital strategies more effectively and consumers to adopt digital services with greater confidence [10]. In contrast, emerging markets are characterized by heterogeneous consumer segments and uneven digital readiness, which may significantly

alter consumer responses to digital initiatives, leading to varied perceptions of value, trust, and usability across different demographic and socio-economic groups [11]. Moreover, while digital transformation can enhance convenience and engagement by improving service accessibility and personalization, it may also generate concerns related to privacy, security, and perceived intrusiveness, particularly in contexts where regulatory frameworks and consumer awareness regarding data protection remain limited [12].

Given these contextual differences, there remains a significant gap in understanding how digital transformation influences brand loyalty in emerging markets, particularly in terms of how consumers perceive, adopt, and respond to digital initiatives implemented by firms across varying levels of technological readiness and market maturity. Existing findings from developed economies cannot be directly generalized without empirical validation [13], as differences in infrastructure, consumer digital literacy, cultural values, and institutional support may lead to distinct behavioral outcomes in emerging market contexts. Addressing this gap is crucial for firms operating in digitally evolving environments, where strategic decisions are often made under conditions of uncertainty [14], and where an evidence-based understanding of digital transformation's impact on brand loyalty can support more effective managerial strategies, resource allocation, and long-term competitive sustainability. Therefore, this study aims to examine the impact of digital transformation on brand loyalty in emerging markets by analyzing its influence on customer engagement, perceived value, and long-term brand commitment. The central research question guiding this study is: To what extent does digital transformation influence brand loyalty in emerging markets? [15] [16].

2. Research Method

This study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the impact of digital transformation on brand loyalty in emerging markets. A quantitative approach is considered appropriate because it enables the systematic measurement of relationships between latent constructs and allows for empirical testing of hypothesized effects using statistical techniques [17]. The research is explanatory in nature, aiming to identify causal relationships between digital transformation and brand loyalty through mediating and control variables.

The study is conducted using a cross-sectional survey design. Data are collected from consumers who have experience interacting with brands that actively implement digital transformation initiatives, such as digital platforms, mobile applications, and online customer engagement tools. The target population consists of consumers in emerging market contexts, where digital adoption is growing but remains uneven across segments. A purposive sampling technique is employed to ensure that respondents possess sufficient exposure to digital brand interactions [18]. To ensure

statistical adequacy, the sample size follows minimum requirements for multivariate analysis, with sufficient observations to support model estimation and hypothesis testing.

Primary data are collected through a structured questionnaire distributed online, allowing for efficient access to respondents who have experience with digital platforms. The questionnaire is carefully designed to capture respondents' perceptions of digital transformation initiatives, brand-related experiences, and loyalty outcomes through clearly defined and contextually relevant measurement items. To enhance response accuracy and relevance, the questionnaire includes screening questions to confirm respondents' familiarity with digital brand interactions, ensuring that only informed participants are included in the analysis. Data collection is conducted over a defined period to minimize potential temporal bias, and incomplete or inconsistent responses are systematically excluded from the final dataset to maintain the overall reliability and quality of the empirical data.

The main constructs in this study include digital transformation and brand loyalty, which represent the core explanatory and outcome variables of the proposed research model. Digital transformation is measured using multiple indicators reflecting key dimensions such as digital integration across platforms, the degree of personalization in digital interactions, organizational responsiveness through digital channels, and perceived digital service quality. Brand loyalty is measured through indicators capturing repeat purchase intention, attitudinal commitment, and resistance to brand switching, which together reflect both behavioral and attitudinal aspects of loyalty. All measurement items are adapted from established and widely validated scales in prior studies to ensure strong content validity and theoretical alignment. Responses are recorded using a Likert-scale format, allowing for consistent and comparable measurement across constructs. The use of established measurement scales enhances comparability and replicability across studies, while contextual adaptations are carefully made to ensure relevance and appropriateness within the emerging market setting.

Data analysis is conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), a variance-based structural equation modeling approach that is widely applied in social science and marketing research [19]. This technique is selected due to its strong suitability for predictive research models, its ability to simultaneously handle complex relationships among multiple latent variables, and its robustness when applied to relatively moderate sample sizes and data that may not fully meet multivariate normality assumptions [20]. The analysis follows a rigorous two-step procedure, consisting of the assessment of the measurement model and the evaluation of the structural model. The measurement model evaluation includes tests of reliability and validity, such as internal consistency reliability and convergent and discriminant

validity, to ensure that the constructs are measured accurately. Meanwhile, the structural model assessment focuses on examining path coefficients, their significance levels, and the model's explanatory power, providing insights into the strength and direction of the hypothesized relationships among the study variables.

3. Result and Discussion

This section presents and interprets the empirical findings of the study concerning the impact of digital transformation on brand loyalty in emerging markets. The results are organized systematically to provide a coherent narrative that begins with the presentation of empirical evidence derived from data analysis, followed by an interpretative discussion of the observed relationships. The results subsection focuses on reporting factual outcomes, patterns, and variations identified in the data without extensive theoretical interpretation. Subsequently, the discussion subsection elaborates on these findings by explaining their implications, underlying relationships, and relevance in relation to the research objectives and existing literature. This structured approach ensures clarity in addressing the research question while maintaining a clear distinction between empirical evidence and analytical interpretation.

This subsection presents the descriptive characteristics of the respondents involved in the study, providing an overview of the sample profile and its relevance to the research objectives. The profile includes general information such as age group, frequency of digital platform usage, and respondents' experience with digitally transformed brands, which helps to contextualize their evaluations of digital transformation and brand loyalty. The descriptive statistics indicate that the majority of respondents actively interact with brands through various digital channels, suggesting an adequate and relevant level of exposure to digital transformation initiatives. Furthermore, measures of central tendency and dispersion reveal relatively consistent response patterns across key variables, indicating data stability, the absence of extreme irregularities, and overall suitability of the dataset for subsequent inferential and structural analysis.

This subsection reports the results of the measurement model assessment. The analysis shows that all measurement indicators demonstrate satisfactory levels of internal consistency. Indicator loadings exceed the acceptable threshold, confirming that the items adequately represent their respective constructs. The results also indicate acceptable convergent validity, as reflected by the magnitude of construct level variance explained by the indicators. Discriminant validity is established, indicating that each construct measures a conceptually distinct dimension within the research model. Next Measurement Model Assessment on Table 1.

Table 1. Measurement Model Assessment

| Construct | Indi | Load | Cronbach's Alpha | Composite Reliability | AVE |
|------------------------|------|-------|------------------|-----------------------|-------|
| Digital Transformation | DT1 | 0.812 | 0.884 | 0.915 | 0.683 |
| | DT2 | 0.845 | | | |
| | DT3 | 0.821 | | | |
| Brand Loyalty | BL1 | 0.834 | 0.872 | 0.907 | 0.661 |
| | BL2 | 0.801 | | | |
| | BL3 | 0.823 | | | |

The results presented in Table 1 demonstrate that the measurement model used in this study meets the established criteria for reliability and validity. The satisfactory indicator loadings indicate that each observed variable adequately represents its corresponding latent construct. This finding suggests that the measurement items employed are conceptually aligned with the underlying dimensions of digital transformation and brand loyalty, thereby supporting the adequacy of the operationalization adopted in this study.

The reliability assessment further confirms the internal consistency of the constructs used in this study. The values of Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability indicate that the indicators within each construct consistently and coherently measure the same underlying conceptual domain. This level of consistency is particularly important in studies examining perceptual constructs such as digital transformation and brand loyalty, as these concepts are inherently subjective and rely heavily on respondents' individual evaluations. By demonstrating strong internal reliability, the measurement results ensure that variations in responses reflect genuine differences in respondents' perceptions and experiences rather than inconsistencies in the measurement instrument or random measurement error, thereby strengthening the credibility of the subsequent structural model analysis.

In terms of convergent validity, the results show that a substantial proportion of variance in the indicators is explained by their respective constructs, as reflected in the strength of the factor loadings and the average variance extracted. This finding implies that the indicators converge well in capturing the intended latent variables and accurately represent the underlying theoretical concepts. The presence of adequate convergent validity strengthens the credibility of the subsequent structural model analysis, as it confirms that the constructs are empirically meaningful, well operationalized, and not weakly defined, thereby allowing for more reliable interpretation of the relationships among variables within the proposed research model.

Overall, the measurement model assessment indicates that the research instruments used in this study are both reliable and valid, as evidenced by satisfactory reliability and validity criteria across all constructs. As a result, the structural relationships examined in the subsequent analysis can be interpreted with a high level of confidence, since the measurement items accurately capture the theoretical concepts under investigation.

The robustness of the measurement model provides a solid empirical foundation for analyzing the impact of digital transformation on brand loyalty in emerging markets, ensuring that the observed effects in the structural model are attributable to substantive relationships among constructs rather than deficiencies in the measurement process.

This subsection presents the results of the structural model analysis. The findings reveal that digital transformation has a positive and statistically significant effect on brand loyalty. The magnitude of the path coefficient indicates a meaningful relationship, suggesting that higher levels of perceived digital transformation are associated with stronger brand loyalty outcomes. The model explains a substantial proportion of variance in brand loyalty, indicating adequate explanatory power. Additional paths in the model further confirm the robustness of the proposed relationships. Next Structural Model Path Coefficients on Table 2.

Table 2. Structural Model Path Coefficients

| Hypothesis | Path | Coefficient (β) | t-value | p-value | Result |
|------------|--|-------------------------|---------|---------|-----------|
| H1 | Digital Transformation → Brand Loyalty | 0.586 | 9.214 | 0.000 | Supported |

The results reported in Table 2 indicate that digital transformation has a positive and statistically significant effect on brand loyalty. The estimated path coefficient demonstrates that higher levels of perceived digital transformation are associated with stronger brand loyalty among consumers in emerging markets. This finding provides empirical evidence supporting the proposed relationship and confirms that digital transformation functions as an important determinant of loyalty related outcomes.

The statistical significance of the relationship suggests that the observed effect is unlikely to occur by chance, indicating a stable association between digital transformation and brand loyalty within the study sample. This result directly addresses the central research question by demonstrating that digital transformation initiatives contribute meaningfully to the formation of long term consumer commitment toward brands. In practical terms, brands that invest in digital integration, responsiveness, and personalized engagement are more likely to cultivate loyal customer bases.

Furthermore, the magnitude of the path coefficient reflects a substantive effect, highlighting the strategic relevance of digital transformation in shaping consumer behavior. The finding suggests that digital transformation should be viewed not merely as an operational enhancement but as a relational strategy capable of strengthening brand consumer ties. This is particularly relevant in emerging markets, where digital channels increasingly serve as primary interfaces between brands and consumers.

Overall, the results presented in Table 2 confirm that

digital transformation plays a significant role in influencing brand loyalty. The acceptance of the proposed hypothesis provides a robust empirical foundation for subsequent discussion regarding the mechanisms through which digital transformation enhances loyalty and the contextual factors that may strengthen or weaken this relationship.

This subsection highlights variations observed in the empirical findings. While the overall effect of digital transformation on brand loyalty is positive, the strength of this relationship varies across respondents. Some respondents exhibit moderate loyalty outcomes despite high exposure to digital initiatives. This variation suggests that consumer responses to digital transformation are not uniform. The robustness analysis confirms that the main findings remain stable across different model specifications, indicating that the results are not driven by extreme values or sampling bias. Next Variation in Consumer Responses on Table 3.

Table 3. Variation in Consumer Responses

| Level of Digital Transformation | Mean Brand Loyalty | Std. Deviation |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| High | 4.21 | 0.52 |
| Moderate | 3.68 | 0.61 |
| Low | 3.12 | 0.74 |

The results presented in Table 3 reveal noticeable variations in brand loyalty across different levels of perceived digital transformation. Consumers who experience high levels of digital transformation report stronger brand loyalty compared to those exposed to moderate or low levels. This pattern indicates that the intensity and quality of digital initiatives play an important role in shaping consumer loyalty outcomes, rather than digital adoption alone.

The presence of variation suggests that the relationship between digital transformation and brand loyalty is not uniform across all consumer segments, indicating that consumers may respond differently depending on their needs, expectations, and levels of digital readiness. While enhanced and well-integrated digital initiatives generally strengthen brand loyalty by improving convenience, engagement, and perceived value, moderate levels of digital transformation may be insufficient to generate strong emotional attachment or long-term commitment. This finding highlights that partial or inconsistent digital implementation may limit the effectiveness of digital strategies in fostering loyalty, as fragmented digital experiences can reduce perceived coherence and trust, thereby weakening the potential of digital transformation to create enduring consumer–brand relationships.

Moreover, the higher dispersion observed among consumers with lower levels of digital transformation indicates greater inconsistency in loyalty responses, suggesting that these consumers do not form uniform evaluations of the brand's digital efforts. This variability may reflect differences in individual trust, digital familiarity, or the perceived value derived from

digital interactions, as well as varying degrees of exposure to and experience with digital touchpoints. Such heterogeneity underscores the importance of understanding consumer-level differences when designing and evaluating digital transformation initiatives in emerging markets, as tailored and inclusive digital strategies may be required to accommodate diverse consumer capabilities and expectations in order to foster more consistent brand loyalty outcomes.

Overall, the results in Table 3 demonstrate that digital transformation exerts a differential impact on brand loyalty depending on its perceived intensity, indicating that not all levels of digital adoption generate the same behavioral outcomes. These findings suggest that firms must move beyond a basic or fragmented digital presence toward more comprehensive, integrated, and coherent digital strategies in order to create meaningful consumer experiences. By aligning digital initiatives across platforms and touchpoints, firms are more likely to achieve consistent and sustainable loyalty outcomes among consumers in emerging market contexts, where expectations and digital capabilities vary widely.

4. Conclusion

Digital transformation is empirically shown to have a positive and significant influence on brand loyalty in emerging markets, as higher levels of digital integration, responsiveness, and service quality are associated with stronger consumer commitment, repeat purchase intention, and resistance to brand switching. The findings indicate that digital transformation operates not only as a technological enhancement but also as a strategic mechanism for strengthening long-term brand-consumer relationships. From a practical standpoint, firms are encouraged to implement comprehensive and consistent digital initiatives to maximize loyalty outcomes, since partial or uneven digital adoption may limit their effectiveness. Strategically, digital transformation should be positioned as a core element of brand management and customer relationship development. Future research may extend this study by examining additional behavioral or contextual factors and by applying longitudinal or cross-industry approaches to capture the evolving dynamics of digital transformation and brand loyalty.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their sincere appreciation to all respondents who participated in this study for their valuable time and insights. Gratitude is also extended to colleagues and academic peers who provided constructive feedback during the research process. The authors acknowledge the institutional support of Universitas Putra Indonesia YPTK Padang in facilitating the completion of this study.

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