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Digital Strategies and Business Efficiency

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Abstract

This article examines the influence of digital strategy integration on a company's commercial effectiveness. Specifically, the study aims to present the digital strategies implemented or adopted by Cameroonian companies and to understand and explain the effects, positions, or contributions of digital strategy use in building and achieving commercial effectiveness within the selected companies.

Keywords: Strategy, digitalization, digitization, digital strategies, commercial efficiency

1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, new technologies have shaped everyday life and have increasingly permeated the business world, much like the industrial revolution that profoundly transformed society before the twentieth century (Henderson & Venkatraman, 1993). The digital economy now represents between 4.5% and 15.5% of global GDP. Digitalization within firms can be defined as the integration, into daily operations, of innovative digital tools such as big data, artificial intelligence, dematerialized information systems, social networks, and the Internet of Things (Varadarajan, 2010; Westerman et al., 2014).

The introduction and widespread diffusion of new digital technologies such as social media, mobile technologies, big data, the Internet of Things, and cloud computing have prompted firms across almost all sectors to undertake numerous initiatives aimed at exploiting the advantages of these technologies (Ross et al., 2016). In this regard, Davenport and Westerman (2020), focusing on the reasons why successful digital transformation is often difficult to achieve, identify several firms that failed in their digitalization efforts, including Nokia, Kodak, Motorola, BlackBerry, and Polaroid.

Conversely, the development of new technologies has significantly contributed to the growth in the number of

organizations. The massive introduction of digital technologies has particularly benefited startups, some of which have become global technology giants and continue to gain influence, such as the GAFAM¹ firms. According to GICAM² (2020), in Cameroon, the diffusion of information and communication technologies reveals that nearly 85% of companies in the productive sector have engaged in digitalization initiatives.

A review of the literature highlights two opposing perspectives. The first, referred to as the "traditionalist" view, argues that the Internet does not bring about real organizational change or transformation but rather serves as a new technology supporting existing relationships. The second, known as the "opportunistic" view, considers the Internet as a disruptive force that challenges traditional business models through phenomena such as dematerialization, disintermediation, and reduced transaction costs. Among the studies supporting the traditionalist perspective are those based on the "layered theory" (Kalika, 2002), which emphasizes that the accumulation of communication tools within organizations often lacks coherence and complementarity.

¹ GAFAM : Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft

² GICAM : Cameroon Inter – Employer Group



Other studies support the opportunistic perspective. Henderson and Venkatraman (1993) developed a model of organizational transformation that specifically addresses the requirements for leveraging the emergence and evolution of information technologies. According to these authors, organizations must align their business strategies with their information technology strategies in order to remain competitive. Similarly, Luftman et al. (2000) show how to achieve and sustain harmony between business and IT, how to assess alignment maturity, and the potential impacts that misalignment may have on organizational performance.

One issue that has not yet been fully resolved in the literature and which constitutes the focus of this study concerns the effectiveness of digital strategies within the tertiary sector, a sector characterized by intensified international competition, significant job losses resulting from technical, technological, environmental, and/or managerial changes, and growing pressure on firms to reinvent themselves or risk disappearing. Taking this concern as the central focus of our research, this study aims, on the one hand, to identify the various digital strategies implemented by firms and, on the other hand, to demonstrate how these strategies influence commercial efficiency in Cameroonian companies.

The research problem can therefore be summarized by the following central question :

How do digital strategies contribute to improving the commercial efficiency of firms in Cameroon ?

More specifically, this study seeks to identify the different digital strategies adopted by firms in Cameroon, while also clarifying the resources and processes that enable their implementation. It then examines the impact of these digital strategies on the achievement of firms’ commercial objectives, thereby allowing us to determine the nature of the relationship between digital strategies and commercial efficiency. This main research question is supported by the following sub-questions :

- What are the different digital strategies implemented by firms in Cameroon ?
- What resources and processes enable the implementation of these digital strategies in Cameroonian firms ?
- What relationships exist between digital strategies and commercial efficiency in firms in Cameroon ?

2. Methodology

This study is exploratory in nature ; therefore, we adopt an inductive qualitative approach based on case studies in order to contribute to theory building. An interpretive research stance is adopted (Bendarkawi, 2022, p. 631), relying on a case study methodology. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which were recorded with the participants’ consent and subsequently transcribed for thematic content analysis. The qualitative data were analyzed using NVivo software.

Research Propositions

A review of the literature on the relationship between digital strategies and commercial efficiency enabled the identification of the key variables relevant to this study, namely customer engagement, the use of digitized solutions, and changes in business models. These variables formed the basis for the development of two research propositions : a main proposition and a rival proposition.

• **Main research proposition :**

The case study will demonstrate how and why customer engagement, digitized solutions, and changes in business models contribute to improving a firm’s commercial efficiency.

• **Rival research proposition :**

The case study will demonstrate how and why customer engagement, digitized solutions, and changes in business models constitute necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for improving a firm’s commercial efficiency.

3. Discussion and Interpretation of the Survey Results

To ensure rigorous analysis of the findings, the qualitative data analysis software **NVivo** was used. In this study, data segmentation and the processes of decontextualization and recontextualization were initially based on themes derived from the research propositions linked to the theoretical framework. These were subsequently complemented by a grounded theory approach.

For the construction of the interview guide, several key themes were retained: the problem addressed, the resources mobilized, the results observed, the difficulties encountered, and general information about the firm.

3.1. Discussion and Analysis of the Results Related to Theme 1 : The Problem Addressed

The questions related to the problem addressed were designed to determine whether firms actually undertake actions aimed at digitalizing their operations. Following the analysis of the interviews and the processing of verbatim responses, the results highlight several key issues, including technological adaptation, performance improvement, competitive advantage, emotional value creation, operational efficiency, the autonomous corporate citizen, process facilitation, work facilitation, the COVID-19 pandemic, facilitation of customer relationships, time savings, and visibility.

These findings are summarized in a recapitulatory table presenting the frequency, expressed as percentages, of the issues identified by the respondents.

Table 1 : Objectives of Digital Actions

Problem Addressed	Percentage
Technological adaptation	6%
Performance improvement	8%



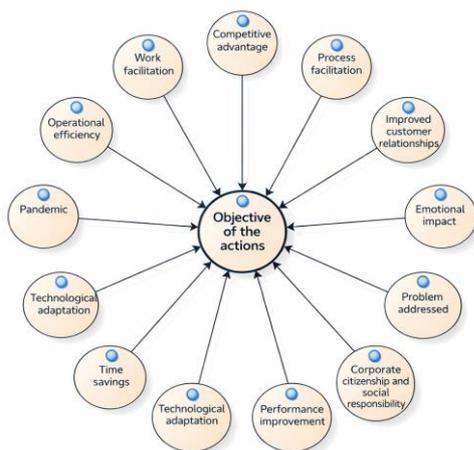
Competitive advantage	8%
Emotional value creation	8%
Operational efficiency	8%
Autonomous corporate citizenship	8%
Process facilitation	8%
Facilitation of customer relationships	5%
Work facilitation	10%
Time savings	10%
Pandemic (COVID-19)	16%
Visibility	5%

Source : Author’s own elaboration based on qualitative survey data.

Among the identified issues related to the problem addressed, the most recurrent is the COVID-19 pandemic, cited by 16% of respondents. This is followed by work facilitation and time savings, each accounting for 10%. Facilitating customer relationships and technological adaptation were also frequently mentioned.

This context is closely linked to the COVID-19 health crisis, which severely disrupted economic activities and compelled firms to rethink their operating modes. While several companies had already begun to engage in digitalization prior to the pandemic—often through mimetic behavior—they are now required to fundamentally reassess their organizational practices by integrating task automation and digital processes. To further illustrate these findings, figure 1 presents the different objectives of digital actions adopted by firms in Cameroon.

Figure 1 : the different objectives of digital actions adopted by firms in Cameroon.



Source : Author.

Table 2 : Summary of Digital Actions in Cameroonian Firms

Problem Addressed	Percentage
COVID-19 pandemic	16%
Work facilitation	10%
Profitability	10%

Source : Author.

Table 2 presents a synthesis of the problems addressed, which form part of the first theme discussed above. The results indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic represents the most significant issue, accounting for 16% of responses. This is followed by work facilitation and profitability, each representing 10%.

3.2. Discussion and Analysis of the Results Related to Theme 2 : Resources Mobilized

The second theme focuses on the resources mobilized by firms to support their digital transformation. The findings show that companies rely on several categories of resources, namely human resources, financial resources, technical and technological resources, and organizational resources.

Human resources include qualified labor; financial resources refer to the financial capacity mobilized to achieve digitalization objectives ; technical and technological resources encompass existing technological infrastructure and skills; finally, organizational resources refer to existing organizational characteristics, such as firm size and age. These resources are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3 : Resources Used for Firm Digitalization

Resources Mobilized	Percentages
Human resources	56%
Financial resources	32%
Technical and technological resources	10%
Organizational resources	2%

Source : Author’s survey data.

The results in Table 3 show that human resources represent the largest share of mobilized resources (56%), followed by financial resources (32%). The remaining resources account for only a marginal proportion. Interview analyses indicate a strong emphasis on human resources, which confirms the primary position of human capital in the digital transformation process.

Although resources are increasingly accessible through the Internet, training requires a structured pedagogical framework to be considered effective. E-learning therefore refers to any system of knowledge transmission and learning that uses the Internet as a delivery channel. It represents a comprehensive pedagogical model that is primarily conducted online, with appropriate support mechanisms.

The e-learning system is hybrid in nature, combining self-directed learning with guided training provided by an

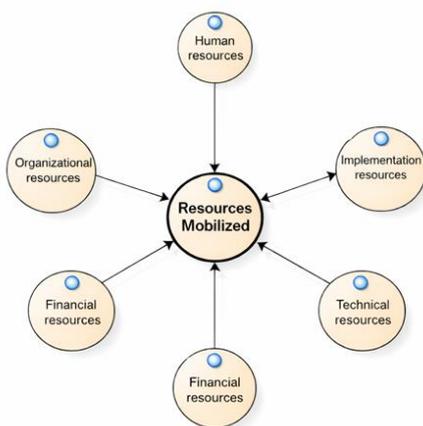
instructor or facilitator. To address technical and motivational challenges, some firms using e-learning have established structured internal organizations, including dedicated workspaces for facilitators within the Human Resources Department.

From this perspective, digital training emerges as a key lever of competitiveness, as it enables both management and employees to develop critical skills. For executives and managers, this involves acquiring new competencies necessary to analyze the integration of digital technologies into the firm's value chain, design relevant digital strategies, identify emerging job roles, and implement agile organizational structures and collaborative management practices. This finding is consistent with Nkakleu (2019), who argues that personnel equipped with multiple digital skills are better able to effectively use digital tools at the core of value creation.

Financial resources rank third in importance, as many firms emphasize that the financial requirements for digitalization are substantial. Investments in computer equipment, digital platforms, and Internet connectivity represent significant costs that cannot be overlooked.

Finally, organizational resources are primarily reflected through management style. Over the past two decades, the profound changes associated with digitalization have affected firms of all sizes and across all sectors worldwide. As with any transformation of such magnitude, the Human Resources function is positioned at the forefront and must once again demonstrate agility and adaptability to new ways of working and living.

Figure 4 : Resources Required for Firm Digitalization in Cameroon



Source : Author.

3.3. Discussion and Analysis of the Results Related to Theme 3: Naming of Digital Actions

The different ways in which digital actions are labeled constitute a central issue in this study, due to the conceptual confusion surrounding the notion of digitalization observed within Cameroonian firms. Identifying these denominations makes it possible to compare organizational practices with

those reported in the academic literature. The following terms were identified: digitalization or digitization, Internet, digital marketing, numerical, and digital.

The results are presented in terms of frequency expressed as percentages. The percentages reported by respondents are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4 : Different Denominations of Digital Actions

Denomination of Actions	Percentage
Digitalization or digitization	42%
Internet	16%
Digital marketing	14%
Numerical	14%
Digital	14%

Source : Author's survey data.

The most frequently used term is *digitalization or digitization*, accounting for 42% of responses. Most respondents tend to equate digital strategies with digitalization itself and are unable to distinguish between a comprehensive digital strategy and specific actions such as digital marketing, which represents only one component of a broader digital transformation program.

3.4. Discussion and Analysis of the Results Related to Theme 4: Motivation for Digital Actions

This theme was selected to capture the underlying motivations that drive firms to adopt digital strategies in their activities. These motivations include decision anticipation, value creation, consumer analysis, work facilitation, coping with competition, innovation, service quality, the search for efficiency, profitability, and the digital revolution.

The findings reveal ten main motivational factors, as illustrated below. Firms seek to anticipate decisions in order to create value, analyze consumer behavior, and facilitate work processes. These efforts are primarily aimed at coping with competition, which in turn requires innovation, adequate service quality, and efficiency considered the ultimate objective of firms in Cameroon in order to achieve profitability and adapt to the digital revolution.

Table 5 : Percentages of Motivations for the Use of Digital Strategies

Motivations for Digital Actions	Percentage
Decision anticipation	5%
Value creation	5%
Consumer analysis	5%
Work facilitation	14%
Coping with competition	35%
Innovation	5%



Motivations for Digital Actions	Percentage
Service quality	5%
Search for efficiency	8%
Profitability	8%
Digital revolution	10%

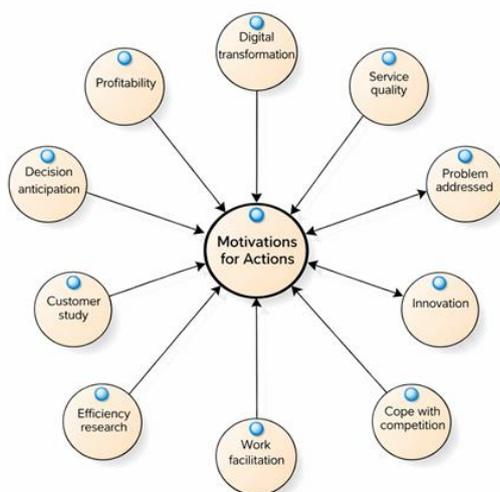
Source : Author.

Coping with competition emerges as the dominant motivation for adopting digital strategies, representing 35% of responses, while work facilitation accounts for 14%, which is approximately one-third of the share attributed to competitive pressure. Other motivations, such as the search for efficiency, profitability, and adaptation to the digital revolution, each account for around 10%. The remaining motivations are marginal.

Overall, the results indicate that firms' motivations for digitalization are primarily driven by the need to cope with competition, with approximately 70% of favorable responses reported in the verbatim analysis. This finding can be explained by the current business environment, characterized by intensified competition resulting from the erosion of entry barriers. This situation challenges Porter's (1985) five forces framework, which traditionally regulated market competition. Today, a firm's most formidable competitor may be a 14-year-old adolescent equipped only with a smartphone and an Internet connection.

In contrast, the relatively low percentages associated with decision anticipation, value creation, innovation, and service quality once again reflect a cultural or mindset issue observed within Cameroonian firms, where the emphasis is placed on profit maximization at the expense of customer orientation.

Figure 6 : Motivations for the Use of Digital Strategies



Source : Author

Table 6 : Frequency of Motivations

Motivations	Percentages
Competition	35%
Digital revolution	10%
Work facilitation and profitability	22%

Source : Author's survey data.

The table above presents the dominant motivations behind digital actions. Coping with competition represents the primary motivation (35%), followed by the digital revolution (10%) and the combined objectives of work facilitation and profitability (22%).

4. Conclusion and Future Research Directions

The initial objective of this research was to examine the different digital strategies implemented by firms in Cameroon, the processes enabling the implementation of these strategies, and the nature of the relationships between digital strategy and firm efficiency.

Following an extensive literature review and consultations with experts, it became evident that there is still no consensus regarding the definition and scope of firm digitalization. This study therefore focused on digital strategies through a case study approach. The research problem emphasized factors primarily related to firm resources. In other words, the objective was to identify the human, technical, financial, and organizational resources that firms must mobilize in order to effectively implement digital strategies and to demonstrate how these strategies contribute to improving commercial efficiency.

Although this theme has not yet reached consensus in the literature, the shift toward digitalization is clearly underway within organizations. Accordingly, this research sought to understand how and why digital strategies enable firms to improve their commercial objectives. To address the central research question, several specific questions were formulated, namely:

- What digital strategies are implemented by firms in Cameroon ?
- What resources and processes enable the implementation of these digital strategies in Cameroonian firms ?
- What relationships exist between digital strategies and commercial efficiency in firms in Cameroon ?

To address these questions, the study adopted an interpretivist and phenomenological qualitative approach, combined with a case study strategy as a data collection method, in order to capture the lived experiences surrounding digitalization. Qualitative inquiry was preferred over quantitative methods due to its stronger interpretive capacity. This methodological framework was applied in Cameroon, geographically delimited to the city of Douala, and involved seven firms

operating in the tertiary sector over the period from April 2021 to April 2022.

The study also identified several challenges facing digitalization in Cameroon by empirically examining how theoretical models are experienced by organizational actors. Furthermore, research validity was discussed, highlighting rigor, credibility (internal validity), authenticity, transferability, and reliability.

After selecting relevant actors involved in the digitalization process and among target populations, data collection was conducted and analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The findings emphasize the importance of both human-centered and financial dimensions in the implementation of digitalization processes.

Through the use of NVivo Pro 12 software, grounded theory techniques were employed to identify recurring concepts within the empirical corpus that were not initially included in the base theoretical model. The results were then compared with prior empirical research, revealing several theoretical and managerial ambiguities, as well as avenues for future research.

Theoretical contributions were formulated in relation to the mobilized frameworks, particularly the extended resource-based view. Based on the analysis, several key insights can be drawn.

The tertiary sector in Cameroon, characterized by intense competition, demonstrates that firms increasingly adopt digital practices through the use of computers, mobile and/or fixed telephony, fax services, and Internet connectivity. The use of Information and Communication Technologies is therefore a tangible reality within the firms studied. The main motivations for this adoption include technological adaptation, performance improvement, competitive advantage, emotional value creation, operational efficiency, autonomous corporate citizenship, process facilitation, and improved customer relationships. The most recurrent strategies involve process automation and dematerialization through digital tools such as cloud computing and applications like WhatsApp and Facebook.

In Cameroonian firms, leaders who share a clear strategic vision, support innovation, and foster internal and external collaboration are more likely to succeed in their digital transformation and, consequently, achieve higher levels of efficiency than their competitors. Such deployment must be aligned with a clearly defined strategy, qualified human resources, a strong digital culture, evolving mindsets, and a technological infrastructure that meets the digital expectations of customers, employees, and partners.

In sum, digitized solutions, automation and dematerialization processes, technological resources, and customer relationship management constitute key sources of commercial efficiency, thereby confirming the main research proposition. However, financial resources, managerial strategic vision, digital culture, mindset change, and generational conflicts also emerge as essential levers for successful digital

transformation, thus confirming the rival proposition. Consequently, both the main and rival research propositions are validated.

This study was conducted with 16 respondents aged between 33 and 55, representing a relatively narrow age range that excludes younger and older individuals. Future research could therefore benefit from examining a broader age spectrum in order to identify potential age-related influencing variables. Additionally, the firms surveyed were located in metropolitan areas; future studies could extend the analysis to firms in peri-urban or rural zones. Incorporating additional data sources could also enhance reliability through triangulation, and involving multiple analysts could further strengthen the robustness of the findings.

Ultimately, firms that lag behind in digital deployment risk being overtaken by more agile competitors who integrate technology into their marketing strategies to acquire, engage, and retain consumers increasingly attracted by offerings available across multiple digital and physical channels.

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