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## **Digital Strategy Design & Transformation in International Marketing**

### Overview of the Special Issue

Digital strategy design and digital transformation are related concepts that refer to the extensive and rapidly advancing transformation of business operations, skills, and frameworks, to effectively utilize the advancements and benefits of digital technologies and their effects on society in a strategic and prioritized manner. Adding to this, digital transformation operates as the basis for new networking possibilities for businesses and enables cooperation between different actors, such as customers, stakeholders, business partners, and even competitors (He et al., 2020). At the same time, as part of their digital transformation, businesses are focused on establishing an effective customer interface by gathering and analysing large amounts of data from various sources, and utilizing digital technologies to enhance connections between different business processes (Diaz et al., 2022; Homburg & Wielgos, 2022; Makri et al., 2019).

In recent years, we have seen a major transformation to Industry 5.0 (Kumar, 2021), the so-called fifth phase of the industrial revolution that was brought about by developments in automation, machine learning, interconnectivity, and real-time data (Guha et al., 2021). This revolution has led to a digital transformation for marketers (Marketing 5.0) causing businesses to reconsider investments in digital products and services, ways to enhance customer engagement, and new market entry decisions (Petersen et al., 2022; Varadarajan et al., 2022; Verhoef et al., 2021).

Moreover, during the COVID-19 pandemic, digital communication has become increasingly influential compared to traditional communication (Özturan, & Grinstein, 2022). The pandemic has caused significant disruptions, highlighting the advantages of digital communication. According to a CMO Survey, over 80% of consumers have become more receptive to digital offerings and place higher value on digital experiences with companies. However, the pandemic has also slowed down globalization trends in the short term, presenting challenges for digital communication and exposing vulnerabilities in global trade and travel. Nonetheless, it has created new opportunities for digital marketing, as the diffusion of communication technologies and changing perceptions towards digital experiences could foster more digital cross-border interactions. To adapt to this new reality, companies are accelerating their digital transformation efforts (Shankar et al., 2022).

Despite the benefits of digital transformation on digital marketing communication, implementing effective strategies in global markets remains difficult due to differences in consumer behavior and service delivery options, especially between emerging and developed markets. As a result, businesses and marketing managers are confronted with important questions regarding their digital marketing communication strategies. For example, what should be the objectives of the strategy? How can companies utilize communication channels, media, and platforms to optimize marketing communication effectiveness? What content is suitable for the communication goals? And what kind of responses can be expected from digital communications? (Shankar et al., 2022).

Furthermore, current research overlooks the potential impact of digital design thinking and digital transformation on the interaction between culture, brands, and consumers in a globalized world. Adding to this, while digital transformation enables brands to engage with consumers worldwide more rapidly and interactively, it also raises concerns about cyber insecurity, privacy issues, and the proliferation of unverified digital content. These crucial issues have not been thoroughly explored in the current international marketing literature on cross-cultural differences in consumer-brand relationships (Gürhan-Canli et al., 2018).

Continuing, the rapid expansion of global trade has generated a greater demand for market information worldwide. Interestingly, this requirement for information is usually studied from the perspective of large multinational corporations. However, the emergence of global value chains and the digital transformation of the economy provide new prospects for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to participate in the global economy, which were previously underrepresented in international trade (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2021). The improved accessibility to digital technologies has substantially decreased the barriers to entry for SMEs in global markets. This advancement allows SMEs to expand internationally at a fraction of the cost, facilitating the acquisition of new customers abroad and participation in global trade and export. Paradoxically, despite this digital revolution enabling firms to discover new export opportunities, it remains unclear how can SMEs use the marketing capabilities provided by digital transformation in order to enter in foreign markets (Gielens, 2021).

On another note, at the micro-level of analysis, the explosive growth of digital technologies has drastically transformed the way customers shop for information, compare products and services, make purchases, and interact with businesses and other customers. Customers today use multiple online touch points across different channels and media to engage with firms and other customers. Despite the fact that digital innovations are based on similar technologies worldwide, the nature of customers' interactions with different touch points in a digital environment differs greatly across global markets. For example, in some markets,

customers engage with individual touch points that each focus on ecommerce, social media, search, or entertainment, while in others, customers engage with one large ecosystem or hub that integrates all of these functions. These differences have significant implications for how companies approach each market, design their touch points, and attract and retain customers globally. However, academic research in this area is scarce (Nam & Kannan, 2020; Jean et al., 2020). Accordingly, the need for research insights to inform international marketing theory and practice is of great importance.

This Special Issue aims on providing insights and tools to help marketing scholars, as well as executives of MNEs, emerging market multinationals (EMNEs), and global brands, understand and be informed about the role of and interplay between digital transformation and international marketing. The Special Issue seeks contributions that will help develop and enhance international marketing theory in the context of digital strategy design and transformation, and thereby assist marketing practitioners adjust and align in the current digital business environment. Papers considered for the Special Issue must address a real-world international marketing question, advance international marketing theory, and provide an understanding of the role of digital strategy design and transformation within the international marketing context. Purely theoretical papers are welcome, as are empirical papers that contribute to theory using any methodological approach (e.g., longitudinal studies, time-lag studies, surveys, case-studies, cross-national comparative studies).

Papers considered for the Special Issue will focus on topics that include, but are not limited to, the following ones:

- Digital strategy adoption and its impact on international marketing strategies
- AI and international marketing
- The impact of digital transformation on customer behavior in international markets
- Digital international marketing design: business model transformation
- The role of data analytics in international marketing
- The potential impact of digital design thinking and digital transformation on the interaction between culture, brands, and consumers in a globalized world
- Digitized solutions: customer-centric products/services, e-commerce, ERP, customers engagement, digital workplace, in MNEs, EMNES, born globals, etc.
- Digital transformation and its impact on organizational performance and stakeholders
- Strategic Leadership (CMOs) and digital transformation
- How social media is transforming international marketing
- The impact of digital transformation on the internationalization process
- Digital transformation and the international marketing capabilities

# Submission Information

Submission opening: October 01, 2023

Submission deadline: January 31, 2024.

Submissions should be prepared using the [International Marketing Review Guide for Authors](#).

Papers to be considered for this special issue should be submitted online at: <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/imrev>. Please select the “Digital Strategy & International Marketing” option.

## Pre-submission Special Issue Conference Track

The guest editors are planning to hold an IMR Special Issue track, to be held at both the:

- 12th International Research Meeting in Business and Management and;
- 16th Annual EuroMed Academy of Business (EMAB) conference.

Authors submitting to the special issue tracks/workshops will be able to present their work, get feedback on the suitability of the papers for the special issue, and build on this feedback prior to submitting to the special issue. Attending the conferences and/or submitting a manuscript to IMR for publication consideration in this special issue are independent activities; authors are welcome to engage in any of these activities.

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