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Case Study on the Strategic Digitization of a Retail Organization, Emphasizing the Tactical Integration and Embrace of Advanced Technological Initiatives

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Abstract*: The purpose of the research is to study the transformation of a retail firm in India that has undergone digitization by embracing advanced technological initiatives - implementation of Point of Sales, CRM solution, Endless Isle, watsapp shopping, Click and Collect in their stores with an objective of sales growth from the same set of stores. The authors have studied the end-to- end journey of implementation of these initiatives in the 500 exclusive business outlets in India of the organization. The phases of the transformation considered are – 1) Factors that have triggered the embracing of these technological initiatives 2) digital readiness as an antecedent to the adoption of the technology and 3) adoption of transformation initiatives in the organization. The authors have conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews of fourteen organization executives in scope. These experts have been part of the transformation of this organization. They had either been instrumental in making decisions or actual users of the digital initiatives. The data was content analyzed for themes. Post discussions with the experts on the three phases, themes were identified across the phases. Salient findings from the research include the support from leadership on initiating the program to implement technology initiatives, organization-wide communication including the adoption of initiatives, the impact of the Pandemic on digital transformation in the firm in scope importance of adoption and tracking adoption during this journey and more. The research plays an important part for academicians to understand that apart from triggering digital transformation projects in organizations, what else should companies do to increase readiness and adoption of initiatives in organizations. From this study, new theoretical contributions to the existing body of knowledge have been identified which are related to technology Transformation on all the 3 phases of digital transformation for organizations – Drivers which trigger digital transformation, digital readiness as an antecedent to digital transformation and adoption of technological initiatives by organizations. The findings from the study would help managers leading digital transformation initiatives in their firms. The findings would help the managers understand what went right and what could potentially go wrong during the implementation of initiatives in organizations. The study findings can act as a guiding principle workbook for organizations that are planning to embark on the journey of launching transformation in their organizations by focusing on internal and external factors. The study also sheds light on how organizations are driven by external catastrophic events like Covid-19 pandemic. The study findings will also be relevant for the change leaders of organizations to understand how to be the chief narrator of digital transformation.

Keywords: Adoption of Technology Initiatives, Technological Initiatives, Technology Readiness, Technology Transformation

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I. INTRODUCTION

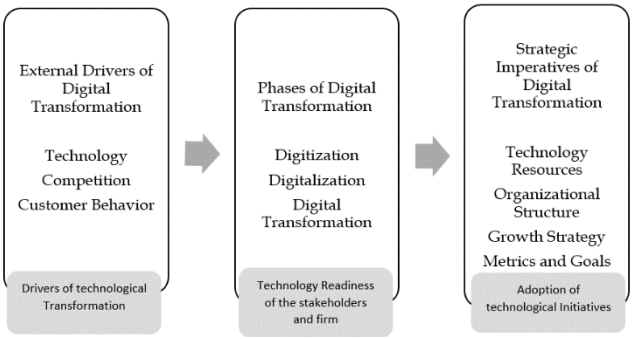
Digital transformation is the transformation of technology and digital initiatives to do business and deliver value to the customer. However, these technological initiatives are the catalysts for digital transformation, including various disruptions – artificial intelligence, analytics, machine learning, chatbots, mobile apps, and many other digital disruptors. Future extensive technologies will have significant outcomes for industrial structure, economic growth and the environment [10]. Despite the ubiquity and visible impact of technology transformation and resultant new digital business models, the academic literature has paid surprisingly little attention to these developments, only recently starting to address the topics of digitization in technology, digitalization in technology, and technology transformation [46]. Technology transformation, apart from integrating technology with the business, also involves a readiness change in an organization, which challenges the status quo and experiments and gets comfortable with failure. Digital market and Industry 4.0 have disrupted the ways organizations work and operate [32] which has led to various companies conducting multiple interventions to explore digital technologies to their benefit [51]. These can be social networks, mobile, artificial intelligence, and machine learning. For 2020, Gartner's top 10 strategic technology trends include hyper-automation, blockchain, and human augmentation. [14]. This essentially cannot be done without transforming business operations and disrupting the processes in an organization [31]. However, often the lead time for real technological transformation initiatives is longer to launch [49]. Often managers in organizations face more challenges than was expected [50]. Hence, for organizations digital domain change was just not enough to bring transformation or change to the organization [4]. The success of the transformation largely depended upon the adoption of the digital initiative by the people and processes of the organization as a whole and it was not specific to any department or function [26]. The objective of this research

was to study the transformation journey of a retail company in India that had an objective of improving the sales growth from the same number of stores by launching technology initiatives – implementation of single Point of sales solution, CRM solution, Endless Isle, Click and Collect, Whatsapp shopping, online virtual tour of the store during Pandemic [52].

The authors in this research study applied the theoretical perspectives of the Flow Model of Digital transformation [42]. A qualitative research approach has been used by the authors where the experts from the organization have been interviewed. These experts possessed experience in implementing digital initiatives for the firm. Thematic content analysis was used by the authors as a research methodology [33]. The authors in this study identified the factors that triggered technology transformation for the organization, ability for employees to be technology ready and adoption of technological initiatives in the organization. The has been structured in the following manner. In section 2, the authors presented the theoretical perspectives of the study. In section 3, the authors enumerated the qualitative research methodology adopted. In this section the authors also discussed the thematic content analysis and coding undertaken for data analysis. In section 4, the authors presented the study analysis and findings of the qualitative study. In section 5, the authors provided the study discussion. Finally, in section 6, the authors presented the study conclusion and managerial and theoretical implications of the study [53].

II. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The authors in this section presented the theoretical base of this study. The authors used the Flow Model of Digital transformation [42] as a basis for the research. The model describes the drivers, phases or levels, and imperatives of transformation [45]. The model includes the external drivers to implement technological initiatives, followed by the literature from multiple disciplines to discuss the phases of digital transformation. Based on an understanding of these phases, the strategic imperatives were discussed that result from technology transformation and the adoption of the initiatives in the organization.



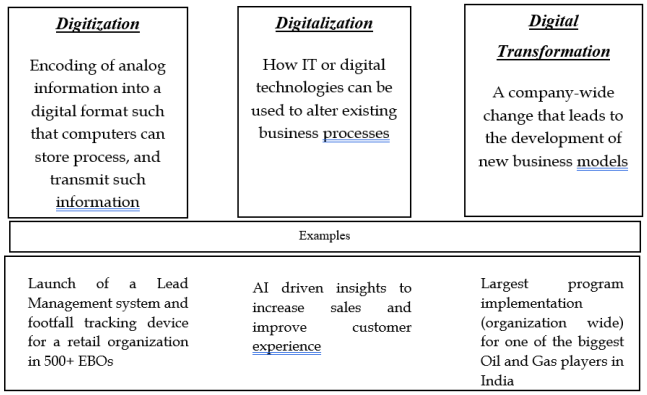
[Fig.1: Flow Model Linked to Phases of Technological Transformation]

Source: Author's Interpretation of Flow Model of Digital Transformation

Digitization is the encoding of analog information into a digital format which makes it easy for machines to store, handle, and transmit such information [11]. Digitization challenges business models and operations in non-digitally born industries [27]. Continuous organizational transformation is a common practice since many public agencies rapidly embrace new digital interventions to streamline the archaic operations [43]. The prompt enhancement of digital technology makes computing a part of everyday experiences [48]. Research suggests digitization to change manual tasks to digitize or theorizes it as the integration of Information Technology with existing tasks or activities [24].

Digitalization describes how technologies can be brought to use to amend and transform existing processes. For example, the creation of mobile communication channels that customers can leverage for communication viz a viz the earlier modes of traditional communication [39]. In digitalization, Information Technology serves as a critical enabler to seize new business possibilities by changing existing business processes, such as communication [45] distribution [27] or business relationship management [3].

Digital transformation is the most pervasive phase and this is a change that is spread across the organization and across the various stakeholders of the organization. This is a company- wide change that can promote the development of a new business model [22]. It is imperative to understand how digital initiatives influences connections into a business interact and, subsequently, how value is co-created by actors in the digital period [36]. These business models are leveraged by the organization to develop an advantage over the competitors. This competitive advantage is used by the organizations to create and deliver value to customers and then the value is in turn converted into profits [6]. Service delivery quality and infrastructure quality are few factors which determine the success of transformation [25].



[Fig.2: Examples of Digitization, Digitalization and Digital Transformation]

Source: Author's interpretation from literature and discussions with experts

Using the above Flow model, the authors aimed to study the following research questions.

Research question 1- What were the factors that triggered the technology transformation in the organization

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Research question 2- How stakeholders were made technology ready to prepare for transformation

Research Question 3 – What measures were taken to increase adoption of the technological initiatives in the organization

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The authors in this section, presented the study research methodology. In the first subsection the research method has been presented.

A. Research Methodology

The authors have used qualitative research methodology. According to Burns and Grove [17] qualitative research was an approach that was systematic and subjective to highlight and explain experiences. All qualitative research seeks is to understand that the data is complex and can be approached only in context [40]. Authors have explored various qualitative methodologies - phenomenological, ethnographic, grounded theory, historical, case study, and content analysis [41]. Post studying the various models, the authors have chosen content analysis as a preferred way of research methodology. This was because the idea of the researchers was to "stay true" to the text and to achieve trustworthiness from the interactions with respondents [12].

B. Sampling and Data Collection

This study was conducted with experts from the organization who have been part of the transformation program leveraging technological initiatives. Expert interviews are a specialty within the semi-structured interview technique, which allows deliberate determination of the sample as suited for the research context [1]. Expert interview techniques also lend themselves well to the determination of important market success factors [34]. firm capabilities [7] and the impact of changes in industry [2].

The authors in this study used non-probabilistic purposive sampling for data collection [13]. The authors in this study interviewed fourteen experts who were part of the transformation program – implementation and adoption for the firm in scope. The experts belonged to different functions- IT, Omni Channel Team, Marketing function, Sales team, and strategy function of the organization. Furthermore, the experts in their respective functions apart from being part of the decision-making process were also actual users of the initiatives implemented [42].

C. Data Analysis Sampling and Data Collection

Experts from the organization were invited for a discussion on the transformation undertaken by the organization. The interview questions were meant to be simple, and direct with the main focus on understanding employee's perspectives on the organization's journey [8].

D. Thematic Saturation in Expert Interviews

The number of interviews required to identify the significant themes and patterns for the study is critical for ensuring that all likely possibilities have been explored. The minimum number of interviews required to achieve this objective has been suggested to be as low as ten [15] to as high as 20-30. Achieving thematic saturation is essential in the expert interview technique [21]. It helps ascertain whether the number of interviews conducted has contributed to the research objective of identifying the significant factors in the research context and whether further interviews would not lead to the discovery of new information [16]. Quantification of thematic saturation in interviews opined that although 100% is impossible, reasonable saturation above 85% can be achieved [28].

Thematic saturation was achieved after twelve interviews as no novel insights were discovered, and the process was closed after conducting fourteen interviews [19].

Once the interviews were conducted, data was analyzed as each response narrative was read and relevant information was placed into a table. After conducting and evaluating both the expert inventory of theories and literature reviews, the authoring team undertook a thematic analysis of the results. Thematic analysis refers to a form of pattern recognition that involves identifying core themes via the careful reading, and rereading, of the material [9]. A three-cycle coding process was followed to develop common trends (themes) from the interview transcripts. Post the interview, the narrative was coded using Delve Tool [20] the initial concepts in the data were analyzed and these were grouped into provisional categories and first-order concepts (open coding) – Level 1 coding [47]. In the next step, codes were narrowed down using the focus to a relatively few Level 2 codes and Level 3 coding involved a very fine focus using the gradual and progressive convergence of ideas from Level 2 as the basis of inquiry [47]. Themes were refined during Level 3 coding or thematic coding as ideas approached a critical density [35]. Once thematic coding was done, common patterns between and among these provisional categories were identified, which generated highly refined themes [35]. Post this, the theoretical concepts emerged from the refined themes. The authors ensured rigor and trustworthiness by following quality criteria for qualitative research [18]. In the study, the authors have used direct quotes from the experts in the findings so that readers could experience participants' views directly instead of paraphrased or interpreted descriptions of findings.

IV. STUDY ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The authors in this section presented the study results and findings based upon the data analysis. The study was designed to answer the research questions defined above.

A. Themes Related to Factors that Triggered Technology Transformation in the Organization in Scope

Theme 1 Implementation of technological initiatives which lead to improvement in internal KPIs, get more robust support from internal stakeholders and leadership

"Transformation was primarily a business led decision with the idea of technological innovation supporting the business transformation keeping the main the objective in mind - same store sales growth"

Experts believed that push to initiate the transformation is internal and is often triggered from leaders or a new entrant to the team (either in leadership or a new team formation). Initiating transformation was provoked internally when the leadership felt the need to drive sales efficiencies in the organization. It was driven by

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internal leadership. Digital Transformation is also initiated when a key leadership member joins the organization from an external organization and changes the legacy. Getting the right leaders on board is a must. Few experts believe that getting the right people is crucial across verticals (the process started in 2016) – when the organization onboarded leaders under Big Data, AI, and ML. Critical success factors are also used in some organizations to plan the transformation [37].

Theme 2 Pandemic accelerated the transformation but did not trigger it

"The organization launched an initiative where customers would be able to explore products on the whatsapp brochure and also get on a conversation with the agents or the bot to place the order for the customer"

Covid-19 had a huge role to play in many organizations across the globe and in many industries. Although the pandemic has hurt many businesses, it has also uncovered new opportunities for entrepreneurship. For this organization, COVID-19 gave way to many technological transformation initiatives, which include the below:

- Video calling in stores - to do a virtual walk-through of the store and products
- Placing orders on WatsApp – Create a digital Watsapp brochure to place the orders
- Click and Collect – Ability to place the order online and head to the store to collect the product without having to wait in the queue for billing or exploring.

B. Themes Related to Technology Readiness of the Stakeholders to Prepare for Transformation

Theme 3 Right people and right communication with support from Leadership is important for organizations to embark on the transformation journey

"Having the right people on a project is critically important at this point, because the capabilities of the team may convince budget holders of the project's likelihood of success"

It was a common observation from experts that the organization needs to ensure all the stakeholders are on board with the process and are ready to invest their time and energy in undertaking such initiatives. For organizations going through a big transformation, it is essential to ensure the entire team is on board with the project. Experts feel that Constant support from all the relevant parties is of critical importance. The firm believes the most crucial element an organization needs to initiate any transformation is the acceptance that the process is not going to be easy. There is ample uniform agreement regarding importance and feasibility, but cooperation is the most crucial success factor [38].

Theme 4 "Cultural change is imperative to be ready for the transformation in organizations"

"The most important thing for transformation in this firm to be initiated well and to be successful is to ensure the readiness is on track for all the functions concerned and the employees part of the process"

Being technologically ready was one of the key factors in initiating the transformation journey. The organization was ready to transition into digitized workflows enabled by software and technology. Technological readiness also varied from function to function. A technology-ready workforce does not essentially mean automating every task/process in the organization or function. It is about creating teams that are self-confident in leveraging new technologies. A technology-ready team has a growth mindset when approached with new working methods. New tools should make work more efficient. Collaborative leadership, networking with right stakeholders (internal or external) and flexibility in the organization are the key elements which fuel the readiness and adoption of digital initiatives in the organization [44].

C. Themes Related to Adoption of Technological Initiatives in the Organization

Theme 5 Communication and guidance from leadership for the adoption of technology initiatives in organization

"Continued communication on the benefits of the projects to the Leadership / Board / Stakeholders / internal IT employees who would execute on the projects is critical"

The first win is when the implementation of the initiatives is completed. The second win is when the team gradually starts using these innovative initiatives, making them part of the business processes.

When these initiatives gradually become an integral and inseparable part of business processes, one can say that transformation is working at an organization. Communication is usually done through workshops, café briefings, and writing through emails, newsletters, etc. Communication to the teams is leadership-driven. Team members take communication between the organization's leader and the respective function seriously. A chief Change Officer is appointed to ensure the change is being implemented through the right channel and push using communication. The attitude of the actual users of the application plays a huge role in determining the degree of adoption [5].

Theme 6 Training and motivation are vital for the adoption of technological initiatives

"Training is highly important for any project. Even after all this, it is important to make people adopt. Including training material, workshops, hand holding. Initial handholding is highly important"

The culture of learning and development is crucial. An organization that values continuous skill-building and provides training for digital tools can accelerate adoption for all transformation initiatives, which more often than not involve a technology change; the team is trained before they start using the revised system or process. Authors came to understand the two main reasons why a user would limit the adoption of transformation initiatives – he/she is not skilled enough, or he/she is not motivated enough. Hence, to solve this, the firm either provided continuous training to the user to use the system or provided incentives that will help increase the motivation to use the system.

A combination of both these schemes helped improve the adoption and sustained the usage of technology transformation initiatives. As companies grow, they develop silos—centralized functions and divisions that

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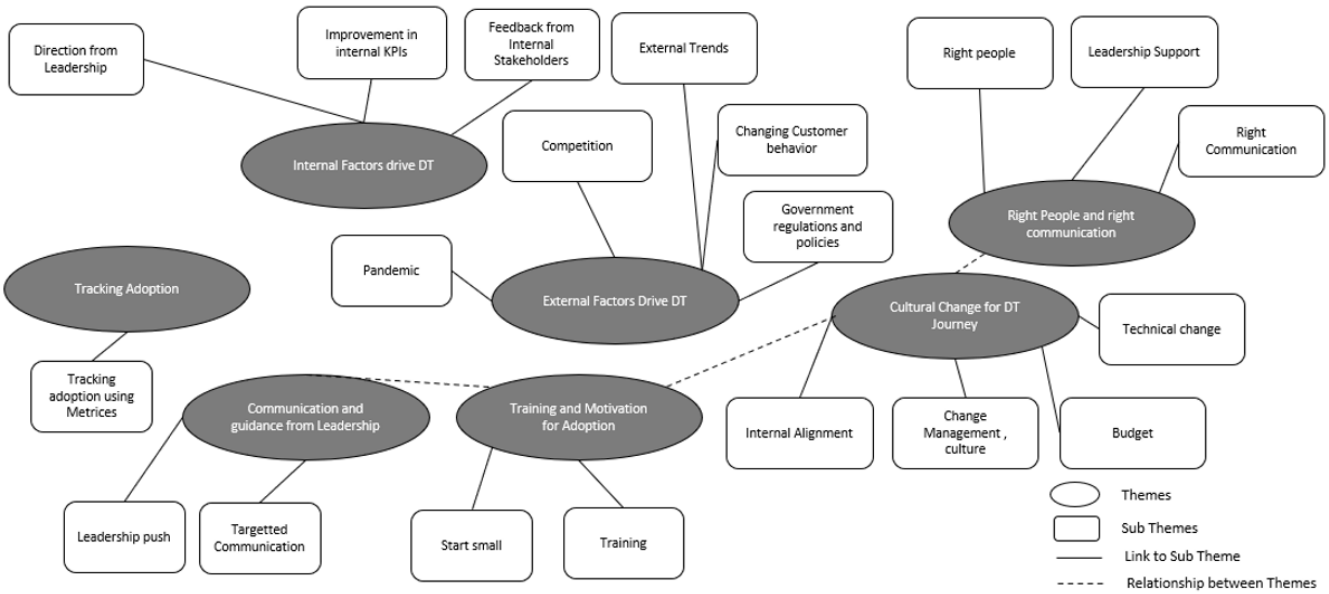
often focus on their internal needs inhibiting collaboration. Training, including training material, workshops, and handholding, is essential for any project. Initial handholding is highly important. Few projects do not need any incentive; for example, if any project is mandated, it is essential to use the app. An organization's knowledge absorption capacity depends upon the characteristics of external knowledge [29].

Theme 7 Tracking adoption is essential to measure the success of technology initiatives in organizations
"The change management committee is formed led by the Chief change officer to track the usage by the end users on a day to day basis"

A culture that encourages the sharing and adopting best practices in technology implementation can lead to more efficient and effective use of technology. Technology interventions that are being implemented to introduce agility in organizations are influencing organizations' choice of relevant technologies to fulfill their business objective, which can be to improve customer experience and enhance sales. Once a transformation project goes live, it becomes essential to understand the end users and socialize with them about the benefits of using the new process or system.

From the themes identified above, below thematic map was prepared by the authors.



[Fig.3: Thematic Map Between the Themes and Sub-Themes]

Source – Author's findings from interviews

V. DISCUSSION

Transformation in this organization was not only about tech; it was more about people. It is essential to use this to drive many efficiencies, but organizations must be cautious of the consequences it may bring. Organizational restructuring also happens often, and people may also lose jobs. Many organizations globally are embracing technology transformation to stay relevant and competitive. Embracing technology or embarking on a transformation journey means integrating technology into various organization operations and ranging from customer interaction to internal processes. However, not all transformation stories are successful for an organization. Few organizations do not see the light of the success of transformation and have to face challenges as they embark on this journey. Technology transformation success depends on technology readiness and adoption of technology in the people and processes of the organization as a whole, and it is not specific to any department.

While technologies enhance and accelerate work processes and improve business operational processes, many believe that employees might not keep pace with this high-speed train and feel left behind. It is uncertain how such an interchange is considered and how firms could handle linked struggles.

VI. CONCLUSION

The authors in this section presented the conclusion of the study. Implementation of technology initiatives has recently increased in the present-day business world. The success of an implementation of any initiative is largely dependent on the adoption of these initiatives in an organization.

In conclusion, the authors believed that the onus of ensuring the success of transformation was based upon the leadership of the IT leader leading it. The motivation of managers and employees actually work hands-on with the technology. From the study, authors have concluded that the factors that impacted the success of transformation initiatives were having a measurable goal documented before embarking on the journey, complete readiness of organizations while providing 100% commitment from leaders; knowledge, trust, and high perceived usefulness of the initiatives. Authors also believed that though it was important to understand these elements, it was also highly important to track the adoption of these initiatives in the organization once implemented to break the initial resistance users have to use a new technology in their organizations.

A. Contribution to Academics

Main Findings: Post research and interviewing the participants from India

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organizations, it is evident that the transformation in organizations should be studied from the lens of understanding what triggered transformation in organizations, how organizations can be technology ready and what can help improve adoption of technology initiatives in organizations.

The findings from the study will contribute to the already existing literature on technological transformation by adding findings from all the phases.

Organizations adapt or transform when they are faced with external or internal opportunities or threats. In the existing management literature, there is limited study which consolidates all the phases of technology transformation in organizations.

Transformation is not only the digitization of processes in organizations but is considered a continuous process of change including

1) Factors leading to technology transformation in organizations [30]

2) Technological readiness - digital capabilities, strategies, culture, and talent development [23] and

3) Adopting technology initiatives at various organizational levels [23]

B. Managerial Contribution

The findings from the study would help managers understand transformation initiatives in their firms. The findings would help the managers understand what went right and what could potentially go wrong during the implementation of initiatives in organizations. The study findings can act as a guiding principle workbook for organizations that are planning to embark on the journey of launching transformation in their organizations by focusing on internal and external factors. The study also sheds light on how organizations are driven by external catastrophic events like the Covid-19 pandemic. The study findings will also be relevant for the change leaders of organizations to understand how to be the chief narrator of the transformation. Furthermore, it would also help executives regarding how to track adoption to measure success of the digital initiatives in organizations.

DECLARATION STATEMENT

After aggregating input from all authors, I must verify the accuracy of the following information as the article's author.

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- **Data Access Statement and Material Availability:** The adequate resources of this article are publicly accessible.
- **Authors Contributions:** The authorship of this article is contributed equally to all participating individuals.

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