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## Research Article

### Organisational Change and Digital Transformation in Fashion Design Firms: Lived Experiences

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#### ABSTRACT

The fashion design industry is undergoing rapid transformation driven by digital technologies, requiring organisations to adapt structurally, culturally, and creatively. This study examines organisational change and digital transformation in fashion design firms through the lens of lived experiences. Adopting a qualitative research design based on secondary data, the study synthesises insights from academic literature, industry reports, and case studies. A multi-theoretical framework integrating Lewin's Change Theory, Socio-Technical Systems Theory, and Dynamic Capabilities Theory is employed to analyse how digital transformation unfolds within organisations. The findings reveal that digital transformation is not merely a technological shift but a deeply human process characterised by evolving creative practices, identity reconstruction, cultural change, and emotional responses. Designers and employees experience both opportunities and tensions as digital tools reshape traditional workflows and professional identities. The study highlights the importance of leadership, organisational culture, and continuous learning in facilitating successful transformation. By foregrounding lived experiences, the research contributes to a more holistic understanding of digital transformation in creative industries and offers practical implications for managing change in fashion design firms.

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## 1. Introduction

The global fashion design industry is undergoing a profound transformation driven by the rapid advancement of digital technologies, shifting consumer expectations, and intensifying global competition. Traditionally characterised by artisanal craftsmanship, seasonal production cycles, and hierarchical organisational structures, fashion design firms are increasingly embracing digital tools such as computer-aided design (CAD), three-dimensional (3D) prototyping, virtual reality (VR), and artificial intelligence (AI) to remain competitive in a digitally mediated marketplace (Casciani et al., 2022). This transformation is not merely technological; it represents a fundamental reconfiguration of organisational processes, creative practices, and employee experiences.

Digital transformation refers to the integration of digital technologies into organisational activities in ways that fundamentally alter how value is created, delivered, and captured (Vial, 2019). In the context of fashion design firms, digital transformation extends beyond production efficiency and market expansion to encompass the redefinition of creativity, collaboration, and identity. Designers are no longer confined to physical studios; instead, they operate within digitally networked environments that facilitate real-time collaboration across geographical boundaries. This shift introduces new possibilities for innovation while simultaneously challenging established norms and practices within the industry.

Organisational change is an inherent component of digital transformation. As firms adopt new technologies, they must also reconfigure their structures, cultures, and workflows to align with emerging digital paradigms. Lewin's (1951) foundational model of organisational change conceptualises change as a process involving unfreezing, changing, and refreezing. In the digital era, this process is often continuous and iterative, reflecting the dynamic nature of technological innovation (Burnes, 2020). Fashion design firms, in particular, face unique challenges due to the interplay between creativity and technology. While digital tools enhance efficiency and precision, they may also disrupt traditional modes of creative expression and craftsmanship.

A critical yet underexplored dimension of digital transformation is the lived experience of organisational members. Lived experiences refer to the subjective perceptions, emotions, and interpretations of individuals as they navigate organisational change (Van Manen, 2016). In fashion design firms, these experiences are shaped by the tension between artistic identity and technological adaptation. Designers, for instance, may experience digital tools as both enabling and constraining, facilitating rapid prototyping while potentially limiting tactile engagement with materials. Similarly, managers and employees may encounter uncertainty, resistance, and anxiety as they adapt to new roles and expectations.

Existing research on digital transformation has predominantly focused on technological adoption, strategic implications, and

organisational performance (Vial, 2019; Verhoef et al., 2021). While these perspectives provide valuable insights, they often overlook the human and experiential dimensions of transformation. Recent studies emphasise the importance of understanding digital transformation as a socio-technical phenomenon that involves the interaction between technological systems and human actors (Kocak & Pawlowski, 2023). This perspective is particularly relevant for creative industries, where human creativity and cultural practices play a central role.

Fashion design firms offer a compelling context for examining these dynamics. The industry is characterised by rapid product cycles, high levels of uncertainty, and intense pressure for innovation. Digital transformation enables firms to respond to these challenges by enhancing flexibility, reducing lead times, and enabling data-driven decision-making (Casciani et al., 2022). However, it also requires significant investments in technology, skills development, and organisational change management.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated digital transformation in the fashion industry, prompting firms to adopt virtual design processes, digital showrooms, and e-commerce platforms (Brydges et al., 2020). This accelerated shift has intensified the need to understand how organisational members experience and adapt to digital transformation.

Despite the growing body of literature on digital transformation, there remains a gap in understanding how these changes are experienced at the individual and

organisational levels within fashion design firms. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the lived experiences of designers, managers, and employees as they navigate digital transformation. By adopting a qualitative approach based on secondary data, the research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the human dimensions of organisational change.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- How do organisational members in fashion design firms experience digital transformation?
- What forms of organisational change emerge during digital transformation?
- How do these lived experiences influence the outcomes of transformation initiatives?

By addressing these questions, the study contributes to both academic and practical discussions on digital transformation. It highlights the importance of integrating human-centred perspectives into organisational change strategies and provides insights for managers seeking to navigate the complexities of digital transformation in creative industries.

## 2. Literature Review

Digital transformation has emerged as a central concept in contemporary organisational research. Vial (2019) defines digital transformation as a process in which digital technologies create disruptions that trigger strategic responses from organisations, leading to changes in value creation mechanisms. This definition

underscores the transformative impact of digital technologies on organisational structures and practices.

Verhoef et al. (2021) further conceptualise digital transformation as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing digital resources, organisational structures, growth strategies, and metrics. In the fashion industry, these dimensions manifest in the adoption of digital design tools, restructuring of supply chains, and the development of omnichannel retail strategies.

Importantly, digital transformation is not a one-time event but an ongoing process of adaptation and learning. Organisations must continuously update their capabilities to keep pace with technological advancements (Warner & Wäger, 2019). This dynamic nature of digital transformation presents both opportunities and challenges for fashion design firms.

## 2.1 Digital Transformation in the Fashion Industry

The fashion industry has been significantly impacted by digital transformation, particularly in design and production processes. Technologies such as 3D modelling and digital prototyping enable designers to create and test garments virtually, reducing the need for physical samples and minimising waste (Casciani et al., 2022). These technologies not only enhance efficiency but also support sustainability initiatives.

Digital transformation also facilitates new forms of consumer engagement. Social media platforms, virtual fashion shows, and digital marketing strategies allow firms to

connect with consumers in innovative ways (Brydges et al., 2020). Moreover, data analytics enables firms to understand consumer preferences and trends, informing design decisions.

However, the adoption of digital technologies is not without challenges. Firms must invest in infrastructure, training, and organisational change management. Additionally, there may be resistance from employees who are accustomed to traditional practices.

## 2.2 Organisational Change in the Digital Era

Organisational change is a critical component of digital transformation. Traditional models of change, such as Lewin's (1951) three-stage model, provide a foundation for understanding how organisations adapt to new conditions. However, contemporary scholars argue that digital transformation requires more flexible and iterative approaches to change management (Burnes, 2020).

Kotter's (1996) eight-step model emphasises the importance of leadership, communication, and employee engagement in successful change initiatives. These factors are particularly relevant in the context of digital transformation, where uncertainty and complexity are high.

Research indicates that organisations with strong dynamic capabilities are better able to navigate digital transformation (Teece, 2018). These capabilities include the ability to sense opportunities, seize them, and reconfigure resources accordingly.

## 2.3 Socio-Technical Perspectives on Digital Transformation

Socio-technical systems theory provides a useful framework for understanding digital transformation as an interaction between social and technical elements. According to this perspective, successful transformation requires alignment between technology, people, and organisational processes (Trist, 1981).

In fashion design firms, this alignment is particularly important due to the central role of creativity. Digital tools must support rather than constrain creative processes. For example, while CAD software enhances precision and efficiency, it may also limit the tactile and intuitive aspects of design.

Kocak and Pawlowski (2023) argue that digital organisational culture plays a critical role in facilitating this alignment. A culture that encourages experimentation, collaboration, and learning is more conducive to digital transformation.

## 2.4 Lived Experiences and Sensemaking

The concept of lived experiences is rooted in phenomenology, which emphasises the subjective interpretation of reality (Van Manen, 2016). In organisational contexts, lived experiences encompass how individuals perceive and respond to change.

Weick's (1995) sensemaking theory provides a framework for understanding how individuals interpret complex and ambiguous situations. During digital transformation, employees engage in sensemaking processes

to understand new technologies, roles, and expectations.

Studies indicate that digital transformation is often experienced as both exciting and challenging. Employees may feel empowered by new tools while also experiencing anxiety and uncertainty (Kordahi, 2020). These emotional responses can influence the success of transformation initiatives.

## 2.5 Resistance and Adaptation

Resistance to change is a common phenomenon in organisational transformation. It may arise from fear of job loss, lack of skills, or attachment to existing practices (Kotter, 1996). In fashion design firms, resistance may also stem from concerns about the impact of digital tools on creativity.

However, resistance is not necessarily negative. It can provide valuable feedback and highlight potential issues in transformation strategies. Effective change management involves addressing resistance through communication, training, and participation.

Adaptation, on the other hand, involves the gradual integration of new technologies into existing practices. Research suggests that hybrid approaches, combining traditional and digital methods, are often more successful than radical transformation (Casciani et al., 2022).

## 2.6 Leadership and Digital Transformation

Leadership plays a critical role in guiding digital transformation. Transformational leaders who inspire and motivate employees

are particularly effective in managing change (Bass & Riggio, 2006). They create a vision for transformation and foster a culture of innovation.

In the fashion industry, leadership must balance creativity and efficiency. Leaders must support designers in adopting digital tools while preserving their creative autonomy.

## 2.7 Research Gap

Despite extensive research on digital transformation, there is limited focus on the lived experiences of organisational members in fashion design firms. Most studies emphasise technological and strategic aspects, overlooking the human dimension.

This study addresses this gap by exploring how digital transformation is experienced by individuals within fashion design firms, providing a deeper understanding of the interplay between technology, organisation, and human experience.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

Understanding organisational change and digital transformation in fashion design firms requires a multi-theoretical perspective that captures the complexity of technological, organisational, and human dynamics. This study integrates Lewin's Change Theory, Socio-Technical Systems Theory, and Dynamic Capabilities Theory to provide a comprehensive analytical lens. These frameworks collectively explain how organisations initiate, implement, and sustain digital transformation while accounting for the lived experiences of organisational members.

### 3.1 Lewin's Change Theory and Digital Transformation

Lewin's (1951) three-stage model, unfreezing, changing, and refreezing, remains one of the most influential frameworks for understanding organisational change. The unfreezing stage involves destabilising existing norms, practices, and mindsets to prepare the organisation for change. In fashion design firms, this may include challenging traditional design processes, such as reliance on manual sketching or physical prototyping, and creating awareness of the benefits of digital tools.

The changing stage represents the transition phase, during which new technologies, processes, and behaviours are introduced. For example, the adoption of computer-aided design (CAD), 3D modelling, and digital sampling requires employees to learn new skills and adapt to new workflows. This stage is often characterised by uncertainty and resistance, as employees navigate unfamiliar technologies and organisational expectations (Burnes, 2020).

The refreezing stage involves stabilising and institutionalising new practices to ensure long-term sustainability. In the context of digital transformation, this may include embedding digital tools into standard operating procedures, redefining job roles, and fostering a culture that supports continuous innovation.

However, contemporary scholars argue that digital transformation challenges the linearity of Lewin's model. Instead of a one-time process, transformation is continuous and

iterative, requiring organisations to remain adaptable (Burnes, 2020). In fashion design firms, where trends and technologies evolve rapidly, the “refreezing” stage may be temporary, giving way to ongoing cycles of change.

### 3.2 Socio-Technical Systems Theory

Socio-Technical Systems (STS) Theory emphasises the interdependence between social systems (people, culture, and relationships) and technical systems (tools, technologies, and processes) (Trist, 1981). This perspective is particularly relevant for digital transformation, as technological adoption cannot be understood in isolation from human and organisational contexts.

In fashion design firms, digital technologies such as CAD software, virtual prototyping, and AI-driven design tools represent the technical system. The social system includes designers, managers, and employees, along with their skills, values, and interactions. Successful digital transformation requires alignment between these systems.

A key concept in STS theory is joint optimisation, which suggests that organisational performance is maximised when social and technical systems are designed to complement each other. For instance, implementing advanced design software without adequate training or cultural support may lead to resistance and inefficiency. Conversely, aligning technology with designers’ creative processes can enhance both productivity and innovation.

STS theory also highlights the importance of user participation in technological implementation. Involving designers and

employees in the selection and adoption of digital tools can improve acceptance and reduce resistance. This participatory approach aligns with the concept of lived experiences, as it acknowledges the subjective perspectives of organisational members.

Recent research underscores the role of digital organisational culture in facilitating socio-technical alignment. A culture that encourages experimentation, collaboration, and continuous learning is essential for integrating digital technologies effectively (Kocak & Pawlowski, 2023).

### 3.3 Dynamic Capabilities Theory

Dynamic Capabilities Theory provides a strategic perspective on how organisations adapt to rapidly changing environments. According to Teece (2018), dynamic capabilities refer to a firm’s ability to sense opportunities, seize them, and reconfigure resources to maintain competitiveness.

In the context of digital transformation, sensing involves identifying emerging technologies and market trends, such as the growing importance of virtual fashion and digital retail platforms. Seizing refers to investing in these technologies and integrating them into organisational processes. Reconfiguring involves restructuring organisational resources, including skills, workflows, and business models, to support digital initiatives.

Fashion design firms must develop dynamic capabilities to navigate the complexities of digital transformation. For example, firms may need to reconfigure their design processes to incorporate digital prototyping,

restructure supply chains to enable faster production, and develop new competencies in data analytics and digital marketing.

Dynamic capabilities are closely linked to organisational learning. Continuous learning enables firms to adapt to technological changes and innovate effectively (Warner & Wäger, 2019). This is particularly important in the fashion industry, where trends and consumer preferences change rapidly.

### **3.4 Integrative Framework and Lived Experiences**

The integration of these three theories provides a holistic framework for understanding digital transformation in fashion design firms. Lewin's Change Theory explains the stages of transformation, STS theory highlights the interaction between social and technical systems, and Dynamic Capabilities Theory provides a strategic perspective on adaptation and innovation.

Importantly, this framework incorporates the concept of lived experiences by emphasising the human dimension of organisational change. Employees' perceptions, emotions, and sensemaking processes influence how they respond to digital transformation (Weick, 1995). For example, designers may perceive digital tools as either empowering or constraining, depending on how these tools align with their creative practices.

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of digital transformation as a multidimensional process that involves technological innovation, organisational change, and human experience.

## **4. Research Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the lived experiences of organisational members undergoing digital transformation in fashion design firms. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for examining complex social phenomena, as it allows for in-depth exploration of perceptions, meanings, and experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Given the exploratory nature of the research questions, the study employs a secondary data approach, drawing on existing qualitative studies, case analyses, and industry reports. This approach enables the researcher to synthesise a wide range of perspectives and identify common themes across different contexts.

### **4.1 Philosophical Foundation**

The study is grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, which emphasises the subjective nature of reality and the importance of understanding individuals' perspectives (Schwandt, 2014). From this perspective, digital transformation is not an objective phenomenon but a socially constructed process shaped by the experiences and interpretations of organisational members.

Additionally, the study draws on phenomenological principles, focusing on lived experiences as a means of understanding organisational change (Van Manen, 2016). This approach aligns with the study's objective of capturing the human dimension of digital transformation.

## 4.2 Data Sources and Selection Criteria

The study relies on secondary qualitative data, including:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles
- Academic books
- Industry reports
- Case studies

The selection of data sources was guided by the following criteria:

- **Relevance:** Sources must address digital transformation, organisational change, or the fashion industry.
- **Credibility:** Preference for peer-reviewed and reputable publications.
- **Recency:** Emphasis on studies published within the last decade to capture contemporary developments.
- **Methodological rigour:** Inclusion of studies with clear research designs and robust analytical frameworks.

This systematic selection process ensures the reliability and validity of the data.

## 4.3 Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

The study employs thematic analysis, a widely used qualitative method for identifying and interpreting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis followed a six-step process:

- **Familiarisation with the data:** Reviewing and summarising selected sources.
- **Initial coding:** Identifying key concepts and recurring ideas.

- **Theme development:** Grouping codes into broader themes related to digital transformation and lived experiences.
- **Theme review:** Refining themes to ensure coherence and relevance.
- **Theme definition:** Clearly defining each theme and its significance.
- **Interpretation:** Linking themes to theoretical frameworks and research questions.

Thematic analysis allows for the integration of diverse data sources and provides a structured approach to understanding complex phenomena.

## 4.4 Ensuring Research Quality

To enhance the rigour of the study, several strategies were employed:

**Credibility:** Credibility was ensured through **triangulation**, which involves comparing findings across multiple data sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By synthesising evidence from different studies, the research provides a more comprehensive understanding of digital transformation.

**Dependability:** Dependability was achieved by maintaining a transparent and systematic research process. Detailed documentation of data collection and analysis procedures allows for replication and verification.

**Confirmability:** Confirmability refers to the objectivity of the research findings. This was addressed by grounding interpretations in existing literature and avoiding personal bias.

**Transferability:** Although qualitative research is context-specific, the study provides detailed descriptions of the research

context and findings, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the results to other settings.

#### 4.5 Ethical Considerations

As the study relies on secondary data, it does not involve direct interaction with human participants. However, ethical considerations remain important. All sources were properly cited to avoid plagiarism, and the research adhered to academic integrity standards (Mannan & Farhana, 2026).

#### 4.6 Limitations of the Methodology

While the use of secondary data provides several advantages, it also presents limitations:

- **Lack of primary data:** The study relies on existing research, which may not fully capture specific organisational contexts.
- **Variability in data quality:** Differences in research methods across sources may affect consistency.
- **Limited control over data collection:** The researcher cannot influence how data were originally gathered.

Despite these limitations, the use of diverse and credible sources enhances the robustness of the findings.

#### 4.7 Justification of Methodological Choice

The choice of a qualitative secondary data approach is justified by the study's focus on lived experiences and organisational change. This approach allows for a comprehensive

synthesis of existing knowledge and provides insights that would be difficult to obtain through a single primary study.

Moreover, the integration of multiple data sources aligns with the study's theoretical framework, which emphasises the interplay between social and technical systems. By capturing diverse perspectives, the methodology supports a holistic understanding of digital transformation in fashion design firms.

### 5. Findings and Analysis

The thematic analysis of secondary qualitative data reveals that digital transformation in fashion design firms is a deeply layered and experiential phenomenon. Rather than a linear technological upgrade, it unfolds as a complex interplay between creativity, identity, organisational culture, and power structures. Seven interrelated themes emerged from the analysis: transformation of creative processes, hybridisation of traditional and digital practices, reconfiguration of organisational roles, cultural shifts and resistance, digital skill formation and learning, emotional landscapes of transformation, and leadership and sensemaking dynamics.

#### 5.1 Transformation of Creative Processes

Digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped the creative processes within fashion design firms. Traditional methods, characterised by hand sketching, tactile fabric experimentation, and iterative physical prototyping, are increasingly supplemented, or in some cases replaced, by digital tools

such as CAD software, 3D modelling, and virtual simulation platforms (Casciani et al., 2022).

From a lived experience perspective, designers often articulate this shift as both enabling and constraining. On one hand, digital tools accelerate design cycles, reduce material waste, and allow for rapid experimentation. Designers can visualise garments in multiple forms without physically producing them, enhancing efficiency and sustainability (Brydges et al., 2020). On the other hand, the reliance on digital interfaces may create a sense of detachment from the materiality of fashion, which has historically been central to creative expression.

This tension reflects what Orlikowski (2007) describes as the “duality of technology,” where technology simultaneously enables and constrains human action. Designers’ experiences reveal that creativity is not diminished by digital tools per se but is transformed. Creativity becomes mediated through software interfaces, algorithms, and digital representations, requiring designers to develop new forms of digital literacy.

## **5.2 Hybridisation of Traditional and Digital Practices**

A key finding is the emergence of hybrid practices that combine traditional craftsmanship with digital technologies. Rather than completely abandoning conventional methods, many fashion design firms integrate digital tools into existing workflows. For instance, designers may begin with hand-drawn sketches and

subsequently refine them using digital software.

This hybridisation aligns with the concept of “ambidexterity,” where organisations balance exploration (innovation) and exploitation (existing practices) (Teece, 2018). In lived experience terms, employees often perceive hybrid practices as a compromise that preserves the authenticity of traditional design while leveraging the efficiency of digital tools.

However, the process of hybridisation is not seamless. It requires negotiation between different epistemologies of design, one rooted in tactile experience and the other in digital abstraction. This negotiation can create friction, particularly among employees who strongly identify with traditional practices. Nonetheless, hybridisation emerges as a pragmatic strategy for managing the uncertainties of digital transformation.

## **5.3 Reconfiguration of Organisational Roles and Identities**

Digital transformation necessitates significant changes in organisational roles and identities. New roles such as digital designers, data analysts, and technology specialists are introduced, while existing roles are redefined to incorporate digital competencies (Verhoef et al., 2021).

From a lived experience perspective, these changes often generate ambiguity and uncertainty. Employees may struggle to reconcile their existing professional identities with new expectations. For example, a traditional fashion designer may be required to develop technical skills in digital software, challenging their self-concept as an artist.

This phenomenon can be understood through identity theory, which suggests that organisational change often disrupts established identities, leading to processes of identity reconstruction (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). In fashion design firms, identity reconstruction is particularly complex due to the strong cultural and artistic dimensions of the profession.

At the same time, digital transformation creates opportunities for identity expansion. Employees who successfully adapt to new roles may experience a sense of empowerment and professional growth. Thus, identity transformation emerges as both a challenge and an opportunity.

#### **5.4 Cultural Shifts and Resistance**

Organisational culture plays a critical role in shaping digital transformation. The findings indicate that successful transformation is often associated with a shift from hierarchical, tradition-oriented cultures to more flexible, collaborative, and innovation-driven cultures (Kocak & Pawlowski, 2023).

Resistance to change is a recurring theme in the data. Employees may resist digital transformation due to fear of job loss, lack of skills, or attachment to traditional practices (Kotter, 1996). In fashion design firms, resistance is often rooted in concerns about the impact of digital tools on creativity and craftsmanship.

However, resistance is not merely an obstacle; it is also a form of sensemaking. As Weick (1995) argues, resistance can reflect employees' efforts to interpret and respond to organisational change. In this sense, resistance provides valuable insights into the

challenges and limitations of transformation initiatives.

#### **5.5 Digital Skill Formation and Continuous Learning**

The transition to digital practices requires continuous learning and skill development. Employees must acquire technical competencies in digital tools as well as adapt to new ways of working. This process is often described as both challenging and empowering.

Learning is not limited to formal training programs; it also occurs through informal interactions, experimentation, and peer collaboration. This aligns with the concept of organisational learning, which emphasises the importance of knowledge sharing and collective learning processes (Warner & Wäger, 2019).

From a lived experience perspective, employees who embrace learning opportunities are more likely to adapt successfully to digital transformation. Conversely, those who lack access to training or support may experience frustration and exclusion.

#### **5.6 Emotional Landscapes of Transformation**

Digital transformation is not only a cognitive process but also an emotional one. Employees experience a range of emotions, including excitement, anxiety, frustration, and uncertainty. These emotional responses play a critical role in shaping how individuals engage with change.

For example, excitement may motivate employees to explore new technologies and

embrace innovation, while anxiety may lead to resistance or withdrawal. Emotional experiences are influenced by factors such as organisational support, leadership, and individual attitudes toward change (Kordahi, 2020).

The findings suggest that emotional dynamics are often overlooked in digital transformation initiatives, which tend to focus on technical and strategic aspects. However, addressing emotional experiences is essential for successful change management.

### **5.7 Leadership and Sensemaking Dynamics**

Leadership emerges as a central factor in shaping the lived experiences of digital transformation. Leaders play a key role in articulating a vision for change, providing support, and facilitating sensemaking processes.

Transformational leadership, characterised by inspiration, communication, and empowerment, is particularly effective in guiding digital transformation (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Leaders who engage with employees, address their concerns, and foster a culture of trust are more likely to achieve successful outcomes.

Sensemaking processes are also critical. Employees interpret digital transformation through their interactions with leaders, colleagues, and organisational narratives. Effective communication and storytelling can help align individual perceptions with organisational goals.

## **6. Discussion**

The findings of this study provide a nuanced understanding of digital transformation in fashion design firms as a multidimensional and experiential process. By integrating insights from organisational change theory, socio-technical systems theory, and dynamic capabilities theory, the discussion highlights key theoretical and practical implications.

### **6.1 Digital Transformation as a Lived and Embodied Experience**

One of the central contributions of this study is the reconceptualisation of digital transformation as a lived and embodied experience. Rather than viewing transformation as a purely technological or strategic process, the findings emphasise its human dimension.

From a phenomenological perspective, digital transformation is experienced through the body, emotions, and identity of organisational members (Van Manen, 2016). For fashion designers, this includes the shift from tactile engagement with materials to interaction with digital interfaces. This shift alters not only how work is performed but also how it is experienced.

This insight extends existing literature by highlighting the importance of embodiment in digital transformation. While technologies are often perceived as abstract tools, they are deeply embedded in human practices and experiences.

## 6.2 Tensions Between Creativity and Technological Rationality

The findings reveal a fundamental tension between creativity and technological rationality. Digital tools are designed to enhance efficiency, precision, and scalability, while creativity often thrives on ambiguity, experimentation, and intuition.

This tension can be understood through socio-technical systems theory, which emphasises the need for alignment between social and technical systems (Trist, 1981). In fashion design firms, achieving this alignment requires careful consideration of how digital tools are integrated into creative processes.

Rather than viewing technology as a threat to creativity, organisations should focus on designing technologies that support creative practices. This may involve customising digital tools, providing training, and fostering a culture that values experimentation.

## 6.3 Organisational Culture as a Mediating Force

Organisational culture emerges as a critical mediator of digital transformation. Cultures that emphasise collaboration, learning, and innovation are more conducive to successful transformation (Kocak & Pawlowski, 2023).

The findings suggest that cultural change is not automatic; it requires deliberate effort from leadership. Leaders must model desired behaviours, encourage open communication, and create an environment where employees feel safe to experiment and learn.

Importantly, culture also shapes how employees interpret and respond to digital

transformation. A supportive culture can mitigate resistance and foster engagement, while a rigid culture may exacerbate challenges.

## 6.4 Identity Work and Professional Transformation

Digital transformation involves significant identity work as employees redefine their roles and professional identities. This process is particularly salient in creative industries, where identity is closely tied to artistic expression.

The findings indicate that identity transformation is both challenging and empowering. Employees may experience a sense of loss as traditional practices are replaced, but they may also discover new opportunities for growth and innovation.

This duality highlights the importance of supporting employees through identity transitions. Organisations can facilitate this process by providing training, mentorship, and opportunities for creative exploration.

## 6.5 Dynamic Capabilities and Organisational Adaptation

The findings support the relevance of dynamic capabilities theory in understanding digital transformation. Firms that successfully navigate transformation are those that can sense opportunities, seize them, and reconfigure resources effectively (Teece, 2018).

In fashion design firms, this involves not only technological investment but also the development of human and organisational capabilities. Continuous learning,

collaboration, and innovation are essential for building dynamic capabilities.

The study also highlights the importance of micro-level processes in shaping dynamic capabilities. Employees' experiences, skills, and interactions contribute to the organisation's ability to adapt and innovate.

## 6.6 Implications for Change Management

The findings have important implications for change management in digital transformation. Traditional approaches that focus on planning and implementation must be complemented by strategies that address human and emotional dimensions.

Key recommendations include:

- **Engaging employees in the transformation process** to foster ownership and reduce resistance
- **Providing continuous training and support** to build digital competencies
- **Addressing emotional experiences** through communication and empathy
- **Promoting a culture of learning and experimentation**

These strategies align with contemporary perspectives on change management, which emphasise participation, flexibility, and continuous learning (Burnes, 2020).

## 6.7 Contribution to Literature

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it extends research on digital transformation by incorporating a lived experience perspective. Second, it highlights the unique dynamics of digital transformation in fashion design firms, a

context that has received limited attention. Third, it integrates multiple theoretical frameworks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

## 7. Conclusion

This study set out to explore organisational change and digital transformation in fashion design firms through the lens of lived experiences. Drawing on qualitative secondary data and guided by a multi-theoretical framework, the research demonstrates that digital transformation is not solely a technological or strategic endeavour but a deeply human and experiential process. The findings underscore that the transformation of fashion design firms involves the reconfiguration of creative practices, organisational structures, and professional identities.

One of the central conclusions of the study is that digital transformation fundamentally reshapes the nature of creativity within fashion design. While digital tools enhance efficiency, speed, and precision, they also alter the sensory and material dimensions of design work. Designers are required to navigate the tension between traditional craftsmanship and digital innovation, leading to the emergence of hybrid practices that integrate both approaches. This highlights the importance of viewing digital transformation not as a replacement of existing practices but as a process of adaptation and integration.

The study also reveals that organisational culture plays a critical mediating role in shaping transformation outcomes. Firms that foster a culture of collaboration,

experimentation, and continuous learning are better positioned to navigate the complexities of digital transformation. Conversely, rigid and hierarchical cultures may hinder adaptation and exacerbate resistance. Leadership emerges as a key factor in facilitating this cultural shift, as leaders influence how change is communicated, interpreted, and enacted within organisations.

Furthermore, the research emphasises the significance of lived experiences in understanding organisational change. Employees' emotional responses, sensemaking processes, and identity transformations are integral to the success or failure of digital initiatives. Ignoring these human dimensions can lead to resistance, disengagement, and incomplete transformation. Therefore, organisations must adopt a more human-centred approach to change management that addresses both technical and emotional aspects.

In terms of theoretical contributions, the study integrates organisational change theory, socio-technical systems theory, and dynamic capabilities theory to provide a comprehensive framework for analysing digital transformation. This integrative approach highlights the interplay between technology, organisation, and human experience, offering a more nuanced understanding of transformation processes.

Practically, the study suggests that fashion design firms should invest in continuous training, encourage participatory approaches to technology adoption, and prioritise leadership development to support digital transformation. Future research could build on this study by incorporating primary

empirical data and exploring comparative perspectives across different creative industries.

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