

Resource-Advantage Theory in Digital Marketing Capabilities: A Systematic Literature Review and Future Research Agenda

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze how the literature on digital marketing capabilities explains competitive advantage and to assess the extent to which Resource-Advantage Theory can be used as an integrative lens for understanding the relationships among resources, capabilities, and market outcomes. This study employs a systematic literature review approach following the PRISMA. The review was conducted through descriptive bibliometric analysis and keyword mapping using VOSviewer, based on metadata and abstracts. The findings show a significant increase in publications in 2024-2025, with dominant themes including digital marketing, competitive advantage, business performance, social media, big data/AI, data governance, marketing agility, customer experience, and sustainability. The review also confirms that the resource-based view and dynamic capabilities are the dominant theoretical foundations, whereas Resource-Advantage Theory has not yet been used explicitly. Accordingly, this study proposes a Resource-Advantage process model and a future research agenda that emphasizes innovation, trust, data governance, and sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

Strategic marketing scholarship has consistently positioned capabilities as mechanisms that bridge organizational resources and competitive advantage. Day (1994) argues that market-driven organizations gain advantage when they are able to sense market changes, coordinate cross-functional responses, and sustain market orientation over time. In a similar vein, Vorhies

and Morgan (2005) show that marketing capabilities can be developed, measured, and improved as a means of organizational learning to generate sustainable competitive advantage. Morgan (2012) further emphasizes that marketing research must become increasingly accountable in explaining its contribution to business performance.

In the context of the digital economy, the relationships among resources, capabilities, and market outcomes have undergone a fundamental reconceptualization. Digital transformation not only changes customer expectations but also reorganizes value creation processes, the logic of market interaction, and organizational needs for increasingly complex digital assets (Verhoef et al., 2021). At the same time, advances in artificial intelligence expand opportunities for personalization, automation, and predictive analytics, while also raising issues of privacy, bias, and ethics that require serious attention in marketing research (Davenport et al., 2020). In addition, increasingly stringent regulation of data processing reinforces the importance of data governance as an integral component of digital marketing strategy (Xavier & Picoto, 2023). In such a landscape, sustainability has also become increasingly salient because competitive advantage is no longer determined solely by marketing efficiency, but also by organizational legitimacy and responsibility before stakeholders (Diez-Martin et al., 2019; Bashar et al., 2025).

These developments are reflected in the state of the art of the literature, which shows a shift in focus from the use of digital channels toward more integrated, dynamic, and competitively valuable configurations of strategic capabilities. The most highly cited articles highlight the use of machine learning-based analytical tools in digital marketing activities (Miklosik et al., 2019), the development of artificial intelligence in business and economics research (Ruiz-Real et al., 2021), sustainability challenges in digital marketing (Diez-Martin et al., 2019), the link between digital transformation capabilities and operational performance (Yu et al., 2022), and B2C smart retailing practices that underscore the importance of technology-consumer interaction in the value creation process (Vrontis et al., 2017). In addition, the selected studies also show that website capability and user engagement play important roles in strengthening brand name and digital competitive advantage in the logistics context (Sakas et al., 2022; Sakas et al., 2023), while more recent research indicates that brand image and Generation Z interaction function as mediating mechanisms in the relationship between digital marketing strategy and competitive advantage (Yasa et al., 2025; Liang et al., 2025).

Although this body of literature has grown rapidly, several important theoretical and methodological gaps remain. First, most studies still rely on the resource-based view and dynamic capabilities, but have not explicitly employed Resource-Advantage Theory, even though this theory offers a more direct explanation of how relative resource advantage can be transformed into comparative advantage and then evolve into competitive advantage and market performance (Hunt & Morgan, 1995, 1996). Second, the concept of digital marketing capabilities is still operationalized through highly diverse proxies, such as marketing analytics capability, website technical factors, and digitalization index, making the accumulation of

knowledge less standardized and more difficult to compare across contexts (Cherkasova & Slepushenko, 2021; Sakas et al., 2022; Venith Vijay et al., 2025). Third, some studies continue to emphasize perceptual outcomes or specific sectoral contexts, and therefore have not fully explained the dynamics through which competitive advantage is formed comparatively, over time, and across organizations.

This gap is increasingly relevant because contemporary digital competition can no longer be understood merely as a matter of channel management. Rather, it concerns an organization's ability to manage data, build trust, maintain compliance, and integrate sustainability values into the value creation process. In an environment marked by the acceleration of artificial intelligence, data-driven personalization, and rising regulatory pressure, organizations need a competitive framework capable of explaining when digital capabilities become sources of hard-to-imitate advantage and when they instead create reputational and regulatory risks. Therefore, this study positions Resource-Advantage Theory as an integrative lens that brings together the resource-based view, dynamic capabilities, the Technology-Organization-Environment framework, service-dominant logic, and the triple bottom line to explain the mechanisms of digital competitive advantage more comprehensively.

Against this background, this study aims to map the development of the literature on digital marketing capabilities and competitive advantage while developing an integrative model based on Resource-Advantage Theory as a conceptual framework for explaining the mechanisms through which competitive advantage is formed in the digital era. Specifically, the study is directed toward answering four main questions: how the trends and bibliometric structure of the literature have developed (RQ1); how digital marketing capabilities are conceptualized and which theories are dominantly used (RQ2); what mechanisms bridge the relationship between digital capabilities and competitive advantage (RQ3); and what conceptual and methodological gaps remain open for future research agendas (RQ4).

METHOD

This study employs a systematic literature review approach aligned with the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021) and combined with descriptive bibliometrics and keyword network mapping using VOSviewer (van Eck & Waltman, 2010). Scopus was selected as the primary database because it provides adequate metadata export, citation information (cited by), and an analyze search results feature that allows trends to be traced by year, author, country, and subject area. To ensure process traceability, the search and data extraction were conducted on 17 March 2026 as the analytical snapshot.

The search string used in Scopus Advanced Search mode was TITLE-ABS-KEY (“digital marketing” AND “competitive advantage”). The selection process was then carried out in stages by applying filters for the 2015-2025 year range, article document type, English language, and open access status, so that the articles analyzed could be evaluated consistently based on the available metadata, abstracts, and keywords. In addition, Web of Science and

Google Scholar were used in a limited way as complementary sources to enrich the theoretical context and link the findings to more established strategic literature; nevertheless, the main bibliometric analysis was restricted to open access articles from Scopus to remain consistent with the extracted database. The variables analyzed included publication trends, author productivity, geographic distribution, subject area, keywords, theories used, the most influential articles, and thematic clusters relevant to the research questions.

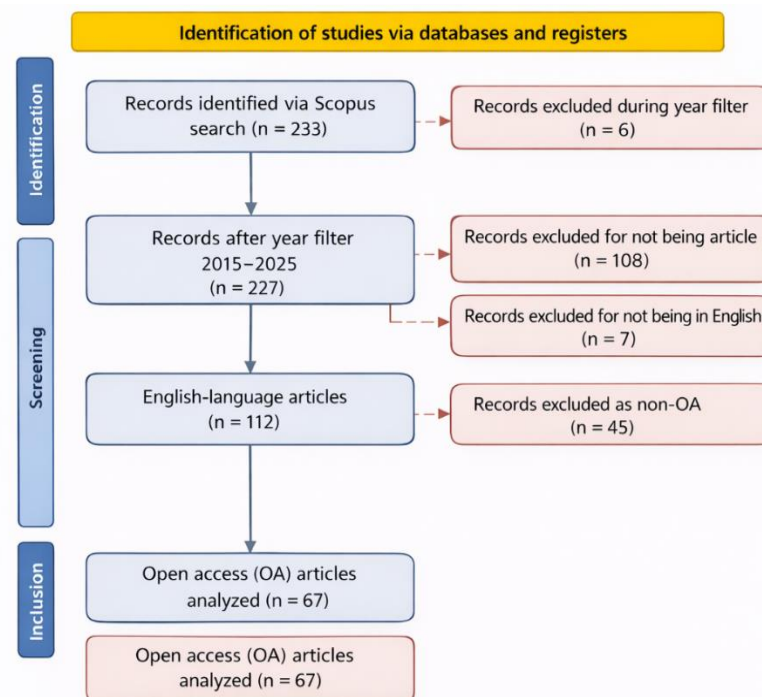


Figure 1. Article selection flow based on the PRISMA 2020 guidelines.

To clarify the article selection process, Figure 1 presents the sequential literature screening flow in accordance with PRISMA 2020 principles. Figure 1 shows that, of the 233 documents initially identified, only 67 open access articles met the criteria for the final analysis. This screening pattern confirms that the selection process was conducted rigorously and transparently, while also showing that limiting the sample to open access articles strengthens data readability, although it may also introduce coverage bias against non-open access articles. On the basis of these selection criteria, the following section presents the results sequentially in line with the focus of each research question.

RESULTS

The results section presents descriptive and thematic findings used to answer RQ1-RQ4 systematically. The discussion begins with publication trends, author productivity, and geographic distribution, followed by multidisciplinary patterns, keyword mapping, theories used, the most influential articles, and the synthesis of thematic clusters. As an initial step,

Table 1 presents the annual distribution of documents in the selected articles to show the growth dynamics of the literature.

Table 1. Annual distribution of documents in the selected articles

Year	Docs	Year	Docs
2015	1	2021	7
2016	0	2022	4
2017	1	2023	5
2018	0	2024	17
2019	2	2025	21
2020	4	2026	5

Table 1 shows that publications on digital marketing capabilities and competitive advantage were still relatively limited in the early period, namely 2015-2020. The number of publications began to increase in 2021, although it continued to fluctuate in 2022 and 2023. The most significant surge occurred in 2024 and 2025, indicating that this topic has gained increasing attention in the scholarly literature. Thus, RQ1 is initially answered by showing that this field is entering a strong growth phase. The 2026 entries should be interpreted cautiously because they most likely reflect early access status or indexing lag at the time the data were extracted.

In addition to annual trends, the bibliometric structure also needs to be examined from the perspective of author productivity to assess the degree of consolidation in the field. In this regard, Table 2 presents the authors with the highest number of publications.

Table 2. Top Authors By Number Of Documents

Author	Docs
Reklitis, D.P.	3
Sakas, D.P.	3
Allahham, M.	2
Duralia, O.	2
Giannakopoulos, N.T.	2
Terzi, M.C.	2
Trivellas, P.	2

Table 2 indicates that the field remains relatively fragmented because the most productive authors have produced only three articles. This finding suggests that there is not yet a strong epistemic dominance by a small group of authors, leaving considerable room for

theoretical consolidation. This condition further reinforces the relevance of the present study in proposing Resource-Advantage Theory as a more integrative conceptual umbrella.

To complete the overview of the literature structure, Table 3 presents the distribution of publications by country or territory.

Table 3. Documents By Top Country Or Territory

Country/territory	Docs
Indonesia	11
Jordan	6
United Kingdom	6
China	5
India	5
Australia	4
Saudi Arabia	4
Greece	3
Portugal	3
Spain	3

Table 3 shows that Indonesia is the largest contributor among the selected articles, followed by Jordan and the United Kingdom. This pattern indicates that competitive advantage through digital capabilities is highly relevant in emerging market contexts, particularly when organizations face resource constraints while still being required to pursue digital transformation. The large number of studies situated in the contexts of small and medium-sized enterprises, tourism, education, and logistics strengthens the assumption that digital capabilities are viewed as a strategic instrument for improving competitive position in sectors exposed to intense environmental change. The multidisciplinary footprint of this topic can be observed more clearly through the composition of subject areas. Accordingly, Figure 2 presents the distribution of articles by the fields of knowledge within which the selected articles are situated.

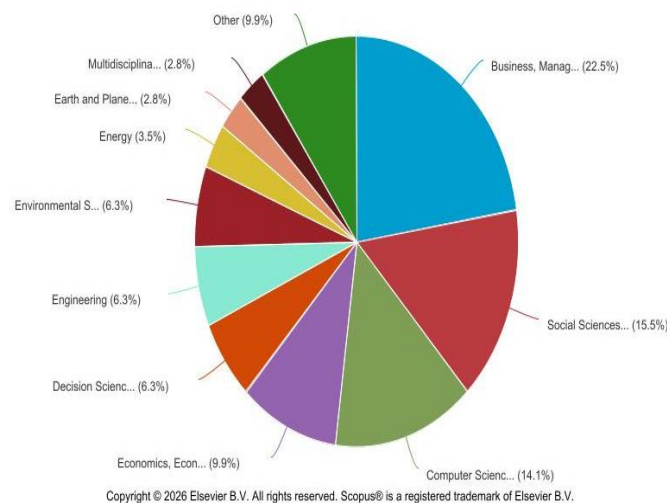


Figure 2. Distribution of documents by subject area

Figure 2 shows that the digital marketing-competitive advantage theme is multidisciplinary, with the largest contribution coming from Business, Management and Accounting, followed by Social Sciences and Computer Science. This composition indicates that the discussion of digital marketing capabilities cannot be separated from developments in technology, analytics, and decision management issues. Meanwhile, the emergence of Environmental Science shows that sustainability is beginning to become a significant part of the academic conversation on digital competitive advantage.

After mapping the bibliometric structure, the analysis proceeds to the thematic structure of the literature. Figure 3 displays the VOSviewer network map to show the connections among the main keywords in the selected articles.

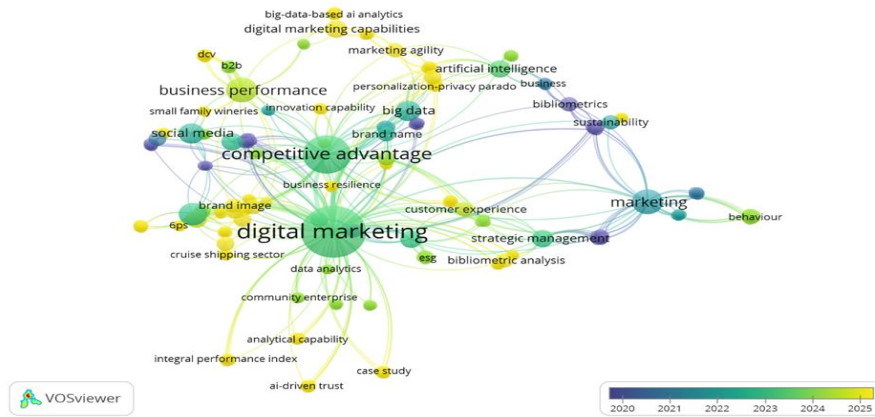


Figure 3. Keyword Network Map (Vosviewer Network)

Figure 3 shows that digital marketing is the central node closely connected with competitive advantage, business performance, social media, big data, artificial intelligence, digital marketing capabilities, marketing agility, customer experience, and sustainability. This configuration indicates that the literature no longer treats digital marketing merely as a matter of channels, but as a configuration of strategic capabilities involving data, technology, organizational agility, customer experience, and sustainability legitimacy. To strengthen the interpretation of this network map, Table 4 presents the most frequently occurring keywords in the selected articles.

Table 4. Top Keywords Based On Author Keywords

Keyword	Freq.
digital marketing	26
competitive advantage	14
business performance	6
marketing	6
social media marketing	5
big data	4

social media	4
artificial intelligence	3
digital marketing capabilities	3
strategic management	3

Table 4 confirms that digital capabilities and data resources are increasingly prominent foci, while the appearance of the term strategic management shows that the field is moving toward increasingly strategic, rather than merely tactical or operational, discussions. This finding provides an initial basis for answering RQ2, namely that the conceptualization of digital marketing capabilities has developed through a variety of interrelated terms.

To identify the theoretical foundations supporting this development, Table 5 summarizes the theories explicitly mentioned in the abstracts or keywords of the articles.

Table 5. Theories Explicitly Used In The Selected Articles

Theory	Articles
Resource-based view/theory (RBV/RBT)	5
Dynamic capabilities (DC)	7
Technology–Organization–Environment (TOE)	2
Triple bottom line (TBL)	2
Service-dominant logic (SDL)	0
Resource-Advantage theory (R-A)	0

Table 5 shows that dynamic capabilities and the resource-based view are the most dominant theoretical foundations, whereas Resource-Advantage Theory has not yet appeared explicitly. This absence is important because it indicates that the literature is empirically rich but does not yet fully possess a competitive framework capable of explaining the relationships among resources, capabilities, relative advantage, and market outcomes in an integrated way.

To enrich the interpretation of the state of the art, Table 6 presents the articles with the highest citation influence.

Table 6. Most Influential Articles By Citations

Authors (year)	Short title	Outlet	Cited by
Miklosik et al. (2019)	ML tools for digital marketing	IEEE Access	142
Ruiz-Real et al. (2021)	AI trends (business & economics)	JBEM	111
Diez-Martin et al. (2019)	Sustainability challenges	Sustainability	76
Yu et al. (2022)	Digital transformation capability -> performance	Sustainability	69
Vrontis et al. (2017)	B2C smart retailing	TFSC	67
Nguyen et al. (2023)	DC in tourism	RMS	37
Lorenzo-Romero et al. (2020)	Omnichannel fashion (supply side)	Heliyon	29
Sakas et al. (2022)	Website technical factors -> brand name	Processes	25
Lemos et al. (2022)	Blockchain marketing management	Sustainability	21
Hamilton (2020)	Strategic change matrix and sustainability	Sustainability	21

Table 6 shows that the most influential articles are largely centered on analytics and AI, digital transformation, sustainability, channel orchestration, and innovation. Accordingly, these

influential articles provide an overview of the central themes shaping the recent development of the literature. Based on this citation pattern, a thematic synthesis was then developed to capture the mechanisms that recur most frequently in the relationship between digital capabilities and competitive advantage.

Table 7. Thematic Clusters And Mechanisms Leading To Competitive Advantage (Based On Vosviewer And Abstracts)

Cluster	Dominant construct	Mechanism	Corpus examples
Digital capabilities as strategic resource bundle	Digital transformation; website capability	Reconfiguration -> capability productivity -> advantage	Yu et al. (2022); Sakas et al. (2022); Sakas et al. (2023)
Analytics/AI and data governance	Big data; AI; ML; governance	Insight -> responsiveness/retention -> performance	Miklosik et al. (2019); Ruiz-Real et al. (2021); Venith Vijay et al. (2025); Zong et al. (2025)
Brand and customer experience (CX)	Social media; engagement; brand image/loyalty	Engagement/brand asset -> advantage	Singla & Durga (2015); Yasa et al. (2025); Liang et al. (2025)
Sustainability and trust/privacy	Sustainability; personalization-privacy paradox	Legitimacy/trust -> sustainable advantage	Diez-Martin et al. (2019); Bashar et al. (2025); Duralia et al. (2025); Althuwaini et al. (2025)

Table 7 shows that the most dominant mechanism pathways include the analytics and AI pathway, the agility and innovation pathway, the brand and engagement pathway, and the trust-governance-sustainability pathway. This finding clarifies the answer to RQ3, namely that digital competitive advantage is formed through the orchestration of multiple capabilities rather than through a single resource. To translate this thematic synthesis into a more integrative theoretical framework, Figure 4 maps the VOSviewer clusters onto the constructs of Resource-Advantage Theory.

Figure 4 shows how the results of the thematic synthesis can be reread through the relationships among resources, capabilities, relative advantage, and market outcomes.

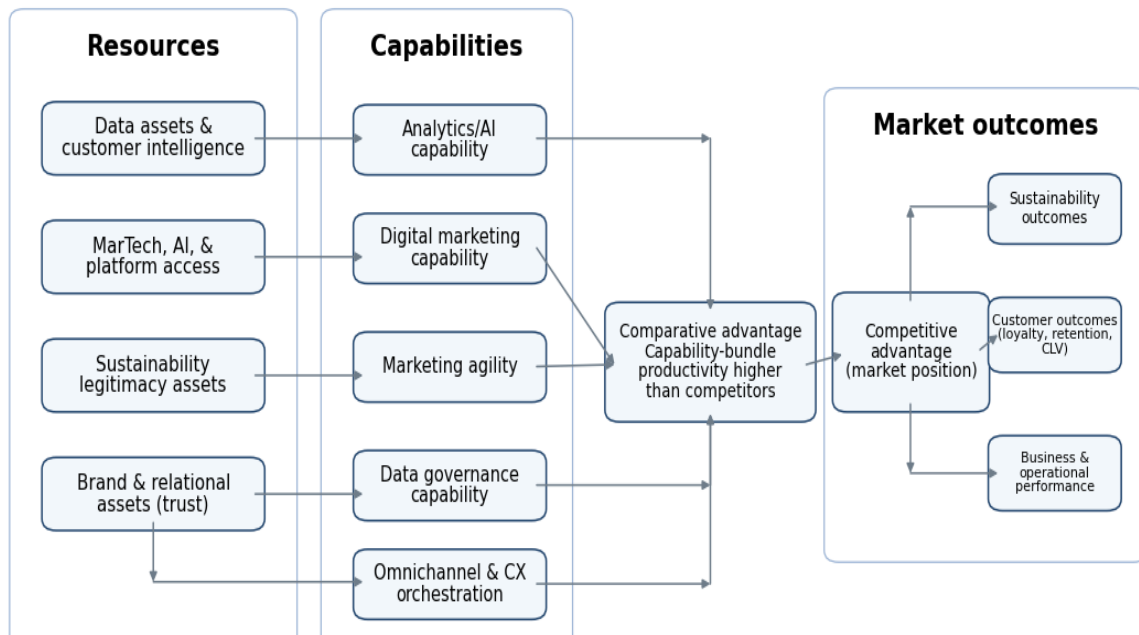


Figure 4. Mapping Vosviewer Clusters Onto The Constructs Of Resource-Advantage Theory

Figure 4 confirms that the literature findings can be interpreted as a Resource-Advantage process, in which digital resources, relational assets, and sustainability legitimacy are transformed into capabilities that are more productive than those of competitors and are then translated into competitive position and market performance. Thus, the results section not only maps bibliometric patterns but also provides a conceptual basis for a deeper discussion in the following section.

DISCUSSION

The discussion section interprets the findings in greater depth by linking them directly to each research question. The discussion is organized sequentially to show clearly how the bibliometric findings, thematic findings, and theoretical gaps are interconnected and how they generate conceptual contributions relevant to theory development and future research.

Trends and Emerging Bibliometric Structure of the Literature

The literature on digital marketing capabilities and competitive advantage is entering an acceleration phase, especially in the 2024-2025 period, as shown in Table 1. At the same time, the fragmented author structure (Table 2) indicates that the field is developing rapidly but has not yet reached a high level of theoretical maturity. The geographic distribution, marked by strong contributions from Indonesia, Jordan, and several other developing countries (Table 3), suggests that digital transformation is understood as a pressing strategic need in environments characterized by intense competitive pressure and resource constraints. The multidisciplinary

footprint shown in Figure 2 further confirms that the development of this field is shaped by intersections among marketing, strategic management, computer science, analytics, and sustainability. Overall, this bibliometric structure indicates that the field is rich in contextual and thematic variation, yet still requires a stronger theoretical synthesis so that knowledge accumulation can proceed cumulatively.

Digital Marketing Capabilities: Conceptualization and Theory

The conceptualization of digital marketing capabilities has developed broadly, but it has not yet been fully consolidated. Different studies use different proxies, ranging from marketing analytics capability, website capability, social engagement, and digitalization index to omnichannel orchestration. This diversity demonstrates the empirical richness of the field, but at the same time creates problems of conceptual comparability. The dominance of the resource-based view and dynamic capabilities indicates that the literature has recognized the importance of valuable resources and the ability to reconfigure resources, but both perspectives tend to stop at the internal logic of the organization. Resource-Advantage Theory offers a significant extension because it requires digital capabilities to be read within a relative competitive context, so that advantage is not sufficiently explained by resource ownership alone but by the productivity of capability bundles compared with competitors in the same market.

The Mechanisms Linking Digital Capabilities and Competitive Advantage

The findings of this study show that the relationship between digital capabilities and competitive advantage is not straightforward, but is mediated by several interconnected intermediate mechanisms. In the analytics and AI cluster, organizational capabilities in managing big data, utilizing machine learning, and building data governance contribute to decision quality, response speed, and customer retention. In the innovation and agility cluster, digital transformation encourages organizations to reconfigure resources, strengthen learning loops, and generate innovations that are more relevant to market changes. Thus, digital capabilities operate as operant resources whose value becomes fully visible only when they are productively orchestrated and evaluated relative to competitors.

Another prominent mechanism concerns the strengthening of relational assets and market legitimacy. Studies on social media, brand image, Generation Z interaction, trust, and the personalization-privacy paradox show that digital competitive advantage depends on an organization's ability to build customer experience, perceptions of fairness, loyalty, and sustainability legitimacy. In other words, digital capabilities function not only to improve marketing efficiency but also to build symbolic and relational value that is more difficult to imitate. This finding explains why the synthesis in Table 7 and the conceptual mapping in Figure 4 position trust, innovation, customer experience, and sustainability as important mediators in the pathway toward competitive advantage.

Conceptual and Methodological Gaps and Future Research Agenda

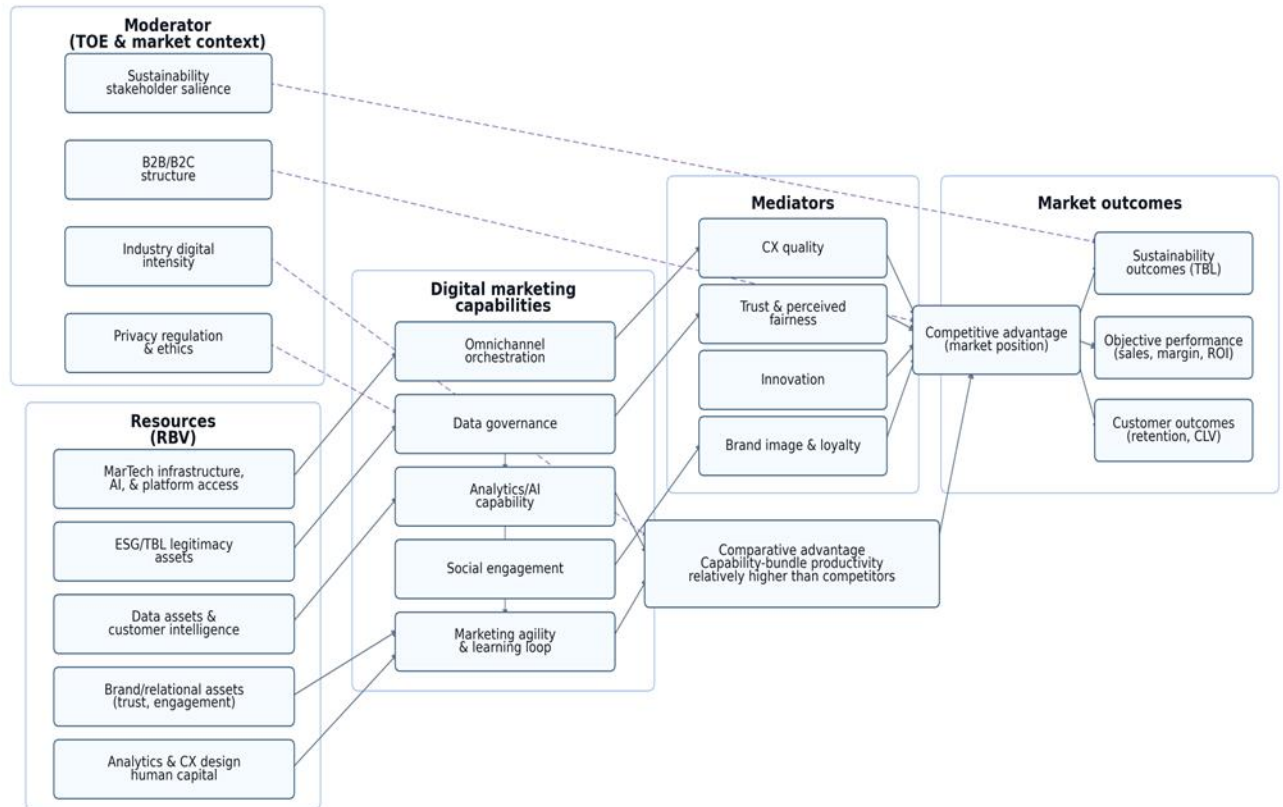


Figure 5. Integrative Resource-Advantage Process Model

The findings in Table 5 indicate that the largest gap in the literature lies in the fact that Resource-Advantage Theory has not yet been used explicitly, even though the literature has extensively discussed resources, capabilities, and market outcomes. As a result, many studies stop at explaining the direct relationship between digital capabilities and performance without clearly distinguishing between comparative advantage and competitive advantage. Methodologically, the selected articles are also still dominated by cross-sectional designs, perceptual measures, and specific sectoral contexts, making them insufficiently strong to explain the dynamic and comparative process through which competitive advantage is formed. Therefore, future research should be directed toward integrating Resource-Advantage Theory with the Technology-Organization-Environment framework, service-dominant logic, and the triple bottom line in order to explain how technological, organizational, and environmental conditions, value co-creation processes, and sustainability demands moderate the formation of digital capabilities and their impact on market outcomes. At this point, the integrative model in Figure 5 becomes relevant as a basis for developing propositions and future research designs.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, this study shows that publications on digital marketing capabilities and competitive advantage have increased sharply in the recent period, developed within a multidisciplinary landscape, and are dominated by themes such as analytics, AI, customer experience, data governance, marketing agility, and sustainability. Theoretically, the literature remains dominated by the resource-based view and dynamic capabilities, while Resource-Advantage Theory has not yet been adopted explicitly. These findings confirm that the main contribution of this study lies in connecting dispersed empirical evidence into a more complete competitive framework. Through bibliometric and thematic synthesis, this study shows that digital marketing capabilities constitute a bundle of strategic capabilities that generate competitive advantage when they are able to improve an organization's relative productivity compared with competitors.

Based on these findings, the future research agenda should be directed toward developing and testing propositions that are stronger both theoretically and methodologically. First, future research needs to examine how bundles of capabilities, including analytics and AI capabilities, omnichannel orchestration, social engagement, marketing agility, and data governance, form comparative advantage. Second, the roles of innovation, customer experience, trust, and sustainability legitimacy as mediators in the relationship between digital capabilities and competitive advantage should be examined more deeply. Third, longitudinal, multi-source research designs using objective performance indicators need to be expanded so that the dynamics of advantage formation can be observed more accurately. Thus, this article not only maps the literature but also offers a direction for research development that has the potential to make more significant conceptual and empirical contributions to strategic marketing studies in the digital era.

This study has several limitations that should be noted. First, the analysis is limited to metadata, abstracts, keywords, and VOSviewer outputs, so the details of variable operationalization in each article have not yet been extracted from the full text. Second, the restriction to open access Scopus articles may have prevented some important works in highly reputable journals from being accommodated in the analysis. Third, the focus on English-language articles limits the possibility of reading discourse developments in local contexts, including Indonesian-language publications. Fourth, the presence of 2026 entries in the 17 March 2026 snapshot is most likely related to early access status or indexing lag. Nevertheless, these limitations do not diminish the main contribution of this study in mapping the development of the literature and formulating an integrative Resource-Advantage Theory model for future research.

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