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Digital Transformation, Strategic Agility and Organizational Resilience in African Firms: A Scoping Review of Management Practices

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ABSTRACT

Firms across Africa continue to operate amid volatile macroeconomic conditions, infrastructural deficits and accelerating digitalization, raising urgent questions about how strategic management practices shape organizational survival and performance. This study undertakes a scoping review to map the existing evidence on the relationships among digital transformation, strategic agility and organizational resilience, with particular attention to African and comparable emerging-market firms, and specifically aims to (i) characterize how these constructs have been conceptualized and measured, (ii) synthesize the empirical mechanisms linking them, (iii) identify context-specific enablers and constraints in African firms, and (iv) expose gaps for future research and practice. The review follows Arksey and O'Malley's five-stage scoping review framework, refined by Levac, Colquhoun and O'Brien, and is reported in line with the extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR). A structured search covering the period from 2020 to 2026 was conducted, and the findings were synthesized thematically. and interpreted through Dynamic Capabilities Theory. The reviewed evidence shows that digital transformation consistently strengthens organizational resilience by expanding absorptive, adaptive and innovation capacities, that strategic agility functions as a critical enabling capability rather than a direct substitute for resilience, and that African firms face resource, infrastructural and leadership-capacity constraints that shape how these global patterns manifest locally, with talent management, innovation capability and market leadership orientation emerging as important local enablers. The study recommends firm managers in African contexts should priorities investment in human-capital-centered dynamic capabilities, including talent management and leadership adaptability, alongside, rather than as a substitute for, digital transformation investment, given the comparatively high resilience leverage these capabilities demonstrate in resource-constrained settings. Digital transformation initiatives within African firms should be paired with deliberate investment in innovation capability and market sensing, since the reviewed evidence indicates that strategic agility's resilience benefits are substantially mediated through these complementary capabilities rather than delivered by digital adoption or agility practices alone.

Keywords: *Digital Transformation; Strategic Agility; Organizational Resilience.*

1. Introduction

The past half-decade has subjected firms worldwide, and African firms in particular, to an unusually dense sequence of disruptions: the COVID-19 pandemic, global supply-chain disorder, currency and inflation shocks, and an accelerating wave of digital technology adoption. In Nigeria specifically, this turbulence has been compounded by structural fragilities, including a rise in the combined unemployment and under-employment rate from roughly 30.5% in the third quarter of 2023 to 36.9% by the first quarter of 2024, alongside persistent infrastructural deficits and policy uncertainty. Firms operating in such environments cannot rely on stable planning cycles or

predictable demand; instead, their survival and competitiveness increasingly depend on dynamic capabilities that allow them to sense change, reconfigure resources, and absorb shocks in real time. However, three constructs have emerged as central to the strategic management literature's response to this turbulence: digital transformation, understood as the adoption and integration of digital technologies to reshape business processes, value propositions and organizational structures; strategic agility, understood as a firm's capacity to sense environmental change and reconfigure its strategy and resources swiftly in response; and organizational resilience, understood as a firm's capacity to anticipate, absorb, adapt to and recover from disruption while maintaining core functions. A substantial and rapidly growing body of scholarship, most of it produced since 2020, has examined these constructs individually and in combination, but this literature remains fragmented across disciplinary silos, geographic contexts and methodological traditions, making it difficult for scholars, managers and policymakers in Africa to draw a coherent, evidence-based picture of how these capabilities interact and what enables or constrains them locally.

Conversely, existing systematic and narrative reviews of digital transformation and organizational resilience have been conducted predominantly using evidence from Europe, North America and parts of Asia; one recent thirty-eight-country systematic review of SME resilience research found the United States, Italy, England and China accounting for the largest shares of contributing studies, with African representation comparatively marginal. Where African evidence does exist, it tends to be concentrated in single-country, single-construct empirical studies, such as Nigeria-focused analyses of strategic agility and resilience in industrial firms, or Ghana-focused analyses of organizational creativity and turbulence, without an integrative review that maps how digital transformation, strategic agility and organizational resilience jointly operate within African firms across the current decade. This fragmentation leaves a gap: no existing scoping review systematically charts the 2020–2026 evidence base connecting these three constructs specifically for African and comparable emerging-market firms. This study addresses that gap. The study is significant to strategic management scholars seeking a consolidated evidence map of a fast-growing literature; to managers and boards of African firms seeking guidance on which capabilities merit investment amid ongoing turbulence; and to policymakers designing digital economy and enterprise-support interventions, since the review's findings bear directly on how public support for digitalization and SME capacity-building might be designed to strengthen firm-level resilience.

The remainder of the study is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the conceptual and empirical literature, the theoretical framework. Section 3 details the scoping review methodology. Section 4 presents the discussion and thematic synthesis. Section 5 concludes and presents recommendations.

2. Literature Review

Considering how businesses faced survival issues amidst a fast-changing and shape-shifting dynamic and complex environment, firms need to develop and adapt high levels of organizational capabilities not only to thrive and maintain their market status, but also to survive unprecedented threats and capitalize on emerging business opportunities to enhance performance. Digital transformation is regarded as the key to this task. Digital transformation includes an array of technologies, such as cloud systems, big data, predictive analysis, and interactive platform technologies, which create opportunities and challenges in organizations today (Jackson, 2019). Such technologies have the potential to revolutionize the way business is conducted and disrupt the current organizational structure, business process, and business model (Gao et al., 2020: Vial, 2019). In the opinion of Siano et al. (2021) the rapid development of digital technology has brought profound shifts in the strategies and operations in diverse sectors worldwide. Digital transformation has been described as the modern struggle to survive the threat of digital disruption (Li, 2020). The costly investment in digital transformation effort is expected to facilitate the generation of new business models, enhance the organization’s value generation, operational efficiency, customer experience, and promote sustainable growth of business organizations. (Rizana et al., 2025).

Equally, the increasing dynamism and complexity of the contemporary business environment, driven by rapid technological advancements, intensifying global competition, and heightening market volatility, have necessitated a paradigm shift from strategic planning toward strategic agility as a critical organizational capability for achieving sustained competitiveness and performance. It serves as a prism through which businesses negotiate the complexity of the modern marketplace, allowing them to transform uncertainty into opportunity and disruption into a tactical edge (Bessey et al., 2023).

The ability of an organization to swiftly recognize changes, strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and dangers is known as agility (Ekanem et al., 2023). This ability promotes a flexible and dynamic approach to strategic decision-making (Uwa, 2021). Fundamentally, in resource-constrained settings, strategic agility is a related but distinct construct, antifragility, describes firms that not only absorb shocks but convert them into performance gains. Organizations use

strategic agility as a dynamic and adaptable method to manage the constantly shifting business environment. In an era marked by swift technical progress, capricious market fluctuations, and changing consumer demands, strategic adaptability has emerged as an indispensable skill for maintaining resilience and competitiveness (Ekanem et al., 2023).

2.1 Global Empirical Evidence: Digital Transformation and Resilience

A substantial cluster of systematic reviews conducted since 2022 documents a consistent positive relationship between digital transformation and organizational resilience. He et al. (2022) finds that digital transformation builds organizational resilience in service-sector firms by expanding absorptive and adaptive capacity. A PRISMA-guided systematic review covering forty-seven papers on organizational resilience through digital technology adoption finds the diffusion of innovation theory recurrently invoked to explain adoption patterns and their resilience effects. A related PRISMA-based systematic review of fifty-one studies on SME and start-up resilience finds that digital transformation, sustainable supply-chain technologies, and digital skills and knowledge management are consistently identified as resilience-enhancing, with academic interest in the intersection of digitalization and resilience accelerating sharply between 2022 and 2024.

A further systematic review focused specifically on the COVID-19 period concludes that digital transformation served as a primary mechanism through which SMEs achieved resilience during the pandemic, while cautioning that resilience outcomes depended heavily on complementary organizational learning and entrepreneurial competencies. More recent systematic evidence extends this picture toward the concept of antifragility, distinguishing firms that merely absorb shocks from those that convert disruption into performance gains and identifies frugal innovation as a particularly suitable pathway for resource-constrained SMEs pursuing digital transformation incrementally. A thirty-eight-country systematic review published in 2026 similarly finds that building organizational resilience in SMEs depends jointly on digital technologies, transformational leadership and innovation capability, though the geographic concentration of this evidence in the United States, Italy, England and China, as noted underscores the limited direct applicability of these findings to African firm contexts without local validation.

2.2 Africa and Emerging-Market Empirical Evidence

Africa-specific empirical evidence, while comparatively sparse, has grown steadily since 2023. Bouteraa and Bouaziz (2023), studying Tunisian companies, find that talent management practices significantly improve organizational resilience, positioning human capital management as a critical local enabler alongside technology adoption. In Nigeria, Okoli and colleagues (2025), studying micro-and-small service enterprises in a resource-constrained environment, find that adaptive capacity is the most dominant resilience indicator among Nigerian MSSEs, reinforcing the argument that under-resourced firms rely disproportionately on flexible, improvisational response strategies rather than on formal contingency planning. A study of Nigeria's industrial sectors finds that strategic agility exerts a significant positive effect on organizational resilience, and that this relationship is substantially mediated by market leadership orientation and innovation capability; notably, the study finds that the link between innovation capability and strategic agility intensifies in resource-constrained contexts such as Nigeria, where innovation functions as a survival imperative rather than merely a competitive lever, a finding the authors argue challenges assumptions drawn from developed-economy studies.

In Ghana, Cobbinah et al. (2025) find that organizational creativity and resilience jointly drive market success in manufacturing firms operating amid environmental turbulence, while a separate 2025 Ghana-focused study observes that empirical investigation of leadership adaptability and digital agility within firms remains comparatively underdeveloped relative to the greater scholarly attention paid to macro-level development challenges such as ICT access and government digital strategy, a disparity the authors argue is particularly consequential in the post-pandemic business environment where digital agility and resilient leadership are indispensable for sustained competitiveness and recovery.

Taken together, the reviewed literature establishes robust, if geographically uneven, support for positive relationships among digital transformation, strategic agility and organizational resilience. However, three gaps are evident. First, the largest systematic reviews remain geographically concentrated outside Africa. Second, the African studies that do exist tend to examine single-country, single-sector or single-construct relationships (talent management and resilience in Tunisia; strategic agility and resilience in Nigerian industry; creativity and resilience in Ghanaian manufacturing) rather than an integrated three-construct model. Third, no identified study applies a formal scoping review methodology to consolidate this fragmented African evidence within the 2020–2026 windows. The present study addresses all three gaps.

2.3 Theoretical Review

2.3.1 Dynamic Capabilities Theory

This review is anchored primarily on Dynamic Capabilities Theory, originally advanced by Teece et al. (1997) and subsequently extended by Teece (2018), which holds that sustained competitive advantage in turbulent environments depends not merely on the possession of valuable resources but on a firm's capacity to sense opportunities and threats, seize them through timely decision-making and resource reconfiguration, and transform its asset base as circumstances change. Strategic agility, in this framework, is best understood as an observable manifestation of dynamic capability, namely the speed and frequency with which a firm senses and reconfigures; organizational resilience is best understood as the outcome of successfully exercised dynamic capability under conditions of disruption; and digital transformation functions as both an enabler and an object of dynamic capability, since digital technologies expand a firm's sensing and reconfiguration options while simultaneously requiring dynamic capability to adopt and exploit effectively. This theoretical positioning explains why the empirical literature reviewed in Section 2 so consistently finds digital transformation and strategic agility acting as joint or mediated antecedents of resilience rather than as independent, unrelated predictors.

3.3.2 Resource-Base View as a Complementary Lens

The Resource-Based View complements Dynamic Capabilities Theory by explaining why identical digital technologies or agility practices can produce divergent resilience outcomes across firms: where resources such as digital infrastructure, technical skill or financial slack are scarce, as is frequently the case among African micro, small and medium enterprises, the same nominal capability yields a smaller resilience dividend. This lens helps account for the Nigerian and Tunisian evidence reviewed, in which adaptive capacity and talent management, both relatively low-cost, human-centered capabilities, emerge as dominant resilience drivers precisely because they do not presuppose the capital-intensive digital infrastructure more readily available to firms in the geographically concentrated contexts, such as the United States, Italy, England and China, that dominate the broader systematic-review literature.

2.3.3 Contingency Theory

Contingency Theory further supports the review's interpretive framework by holding that there is no universally optimal strategic configuration; rather, the effectiveness of a given strategy or capability depends on its fit with the firm's internal and external environment. Applied here, contingency reasoning explains why the mediating role of market leadership orientation and innovation capability identified in the Nigerian industrial-sector evidence, and the emphasis on leadership adaptability identified in the Ghanaian evidence, may be more pronounced in African firm contexts characterized by infrastructural volatility than in the more institutionally stable contexts that dominate the global systematic-review evidence base.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a scoping review design, following the five-stage framework originally proposed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), comprising (i) identifying the research question, (ii) identifying relevant studies, (iii) study selection, (iv) charting the data, and (v) collating, summarizing and reporting results, and refined by the methodological clarifications offered by Levac, Colquhoun and O'Brien (2010) regarding iterative search-term refinement and stakeholder relevance. A scoping review design, rather than a systematic review or meta-analysis, was selected because the objective of this study is to map the breadth, nature and distribution of an emerging, methodologically heterogeneous literature, encompassing quantitative surveys, qualitative case studies and prior systematic reviews, rather than to pool effect sizes or appraise a narrow set of comparable quantitative outcomes, a task for which meta-analytic methods would be premature given the current state of the African-specific evidence base. Reporting follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) checklist.

3.2 Limitations of the Review Methodology

As a scoping review, this study prioritizes breadth of evidence mapping over the depth of methodological quality appraisal characteristic of a full systematic review, and it does not compute pooled effect sizes as a meta-analysis would; these limitations are appropriate given the objective of mapping an emerging, heterogeneous field, but they mean the review's conclusions should be read as a synthesis of documented patterns rather than as a definitive causal estimate of the strength of relationships among the three focal constructs. The search, though comprehensive across three major databases, may not have captured unpublished or non-English African management literature, a limitation partially mitigated through reference-list hand-searching.

4. Discussion

Table 2 presents a data-charting summary of eight representative studies from the final review set, illustrating the range of contexts, constructs and findings synthesized in this section.

Study	Context / Design	Focal Constructs	Key Insight
He et al. (2022)	Service sector; conceptual/empirical	Digital transformation, organizational resilience	Digital transformation strengthens resilience through absorptive and adaptive capacity
Bouteraa and Bouaziz (2023)	Tunisia; survey of firms	Talent management, organizational resilience	Talent management practices significantly improve organizational resilience in African firms
Okoli et al. (2025)	Nigeria; micro/small service enterprises	Adaptive capacity, resource-constrained resilience	Adaptive capacity is the dominant resilience indicator among resource-constrained Nigerian MSSEs
Ogbeta-Ogwu and Chidi (2025)	Nigeria; industrial sector survey	Strategic agility, innovation capability, market leadership orientation, resilience	Innovation capability and market leadership orientation mediate the strategic agility–resilience link
Cobbinah et al. (2025)	Ghana; manufacturing firms	Organizational creativity, resilience, turbulence	Creativity and resilience jointly drive market success amid environmental turbulence
Danquash (2025)	Ghana; firm-level study	Leadership adaptability, digital agility, technological readiness	Leadership adaptability and digital agility are under-studied relative to macro-level ICT access in African firm research
Corvello et al. (2023); Corvello, Verteramo et al. (2023)	Cross-country SLR	SME antifragility, shock absorption	Resilient SMEs absorb shocks; anti fragile SMEs convert shocks into performance gains
Malik and Terzidie (2026)	38-country systematic review	SME resilience roadmap, digital age	SME resilience research is geographically concentrated in the US, Italy, England and China, with limited African representation

4.1 Theme One: Digital Transformation as a Resilience Enabler

Across both the global and African-specific evidence reviewed in section 2, digital transformation emerges consistently as a resilience-enhancing mechanism, operating primarily by expanding firms' absorptive and adaptive capacity, the very capabilities identified as central to Dynamic Capabilities Theory in section 3. This pattern held across service, manufacturing and SME contexts, and across systematic reviews spanning multiple continents, lending it a degree of robustness rarely found in a literature this young. However, the charted evidence also suggests that the strength of this relationship is conditional: studies emphasizing SME and resource-constrained contexts

consistently qualify the digital-transformation-resilience link with caveats about digital leadership, knowledge management, and monitoring and control competencies, echoing the Resource-Based View's prediction that identical technologies yield divergent outcomes depending on complementary organizational capabilities.

4.2 Theme Two: Strategic Agility as a Mediating, Not Merely Direct, Capability

A second clear pattern is that strategic agility rarely operates as a standalone predictor of resilience in the reviewed studies; instead, it is more often positioned as a mediating or interacting capability, working through, or alongside, innovation capability, market leadership orientation, and organizational creativity. The Nigerian industrial-sector evidence reviewed in Section 2.3 is illustrative: strategic agility's effect on resilience operates substantially through innovation capability and market leadership orientation rather than directly, a finding that has direct implications for practice, since it suggests that investment in agility-enhancing processes (faster decision cycles, flatter reconfiguration structures) will yield limited resilience dividends unless paired with complementary investment in innovation capability and market sensing.

4.3 Theme Three: Contextual Peculiarity of African Firms

The African-specific evidence charted in this review consistently foregrounds resource constraints, infrastructural volatility and macroeconomic turbulence as conditioning factors that are largely absent, or present in muted form, in the geographically concentrated global systematic-review literature. Nigerian MSSEs' reliance on adaptive capacity as their dominant resilience mechanism, rather than on formal contingency planning or capital-intensive digital infrastructure, and the finding that innovation capability's link to strategic agility intensifies specifically in resource-constrained settings, together suggest that African firms are not simply lagging adopters of a universal global resilience model but are developing a distinct, resource-efficient variant of dynamic capability suited to their operating environment. This has an important implication for the transferability of policy and management prescriptions drawn from the dominant United States, Italian, English and Chinese evidence base: such prescriptions may require substantial local adaptation rather than direct application.

4.4 Theme Four: Leadership, Talent Management and Innovation Capability As Local Enabler

A fourth theme concerns the human and leadership dimensions of resilience-building. The Tunisian evidence on talent management, the Ghanaian evidence on leadership adaptability and digital agility, and the Nigerian evidence on innovation capability collectively point to human-capital-centered capabilities as comparatively under-resourced but high-leverage levers for African firms, particularly relative to capital-intensive digital infrastructure investment. The identified scholarly gap around leadership adaptability in African firm research, noted in Section 2.3, is itself a finding of practical significance: it suggests that African management scholarship and practice would benefit from redirecting some of the disproportionate attention currently paid to macro-level ICT access and government digital strategy toward firm-level leadership development.

4.5 Synthesis Through Dynamic Capabilities Theory

Read together, the four themes support a coherent synthesis consistent with the theoretical framework outlined in section three: digital transformation expands the sensing and reconfiguration options available to a firm; strategic agility represents the exercised capacity to act on those options swiftly; and organizational resilience is the observed outcome when that capacity is successfully deployed under disruption. In African firms specifically, this chain is conditioned by resource constraints that elevate the relative importance of low-capital, human-centered capabilities, namely talent management, leadership adaptability and innovation capability, relative to the capital-intensive digital infrastructure emphasized in the dominant global literature. This synthesis reframes the African evidence not as a deficient or lagging version of the global pattern, but as a distinct, theoretically coherent adaptation of dynamic capability to a resource-constrained operating environment.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This scoping review set out to map and synthesize the 2020–2026 evidence on digital transformation, strategic agility and organizational resilience, with particular attention to African firms, addressing a gap left by systematic reviews whose evidence base remains geographically concentrated outside the continent. Following the Arksey and O'Malley (2005) scoping review framework and PRISMA-ScR reporting standards, the review charted 37 studies drawn from an initial pool of 612 records and found consistent, theoretically coherent support, anchored in Dynamic Capabilities Theory, for digital transformation as a resilience-enabling mechanism and strategic agility as a resilience-enabling capability mediated by innovation capability and market leadership orientation. The review further finds that African firms exhibit a distinct, resource-efficient variant of this global pattern, in which adaptive capacity, talent management and leadership adaptability function as comparatively high-leverage local enablers. The evidence base, while growing rapidly since 2023, remains fragmented across single-

country and single-construct studies, underscoring the continued need for integrative, Africa-focused empirical research.

5.1 Recommendations

Based on the synthesis presented above, this study proposes the following recommendations Firm managers and boards in African contexts should priorities investment in human-capital-centered dynamic capabilities, including talent management and leadership adaptability, alongside, rather than as a substitute for, digital transformation investment, given the comparatively high resilience leverage these capabilities demonstrate in resource-constrained settings. Digital transformation initiatives within African firms should be paired with deliberate investment in innovation capability and market sensing, since the reviewed evidence indicates that strategic agility's resilience benefits are substantially mediated through these complementary capabilities rather than delivered by digital adoption or agility practices alone. Policymakers and development-finance institutions designing SME digitalization support programmes should incorporate leadership-development and adaptive-capacity-building components rather than focusing narrowly on ICT infrastructure access, in line with the identified gap between macro-level digital access initiatives and firm-level leadership capability research.

Collectively, these recommendations recognize that resilience-building in African firms is not simply a matter of importing digital-transformation prescriptions developed in more resource-abundant contexts, but requires a locally calibrated blend of digital, strategic and human-capital investment consistent with the dynamic-capabilities synthesis developed in this review.

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