



Digital Transformation in Retail: Challenges and Opportunities for Multinational Corporations (A Case Study of PT Hisense International Indonesia)

Liana Kesuma^{1*}, Ronnie Resdianto Masman²
Tarumanagara University

Corresponding Author: Liana Kesuma liana.126252174@stu.untar.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Digital transformation has emerged as a strategic necessity for multinational corporations (MNCs) in the electronic retail industry to sustain competitiveness amid market upheaval. This study sought to examine the potential and challenges encountered by PT Hisense International Indonesia in implementing digital transformation. This research employed a qualitative narrative methodology with documentary narrative analysis to examine the company's history, strategies, and challenges through official press releases, digital traces in national media, and content activity on Hisense's digital retail platforms. The findings suggested that the main potential resides in the incorporation of omnichannel methods, market growth via live commerce, and the exploitation of the smart home ecosystem. Conversely, PT Hisense International Indonesia encounters substantial obstacles, including the adaptation to local digital legislation, fierce pricing rivalry in e-commerce, and logistical difficulties inherent to an archipelagic geography. This narrative offers an impartial analysis of how a multinational corporation digitally adjusts in an emerging market, drawing on public conversation and its digital history.

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has radically altered the global commerce scene, shifting the corporate paradigm from traditional retail models to an ecosystem based on a more interconnected, dynamic, and customer experience-oriented digital platform. This change is characterized not only by a transition in distribution channels from offline to online but also by the introduction of new business models that integrate digital technology, data analytics, artificial intelligence, and real-time customer engagement. In the consumer electronics industry, dynamics progress more rapidly than in other sectors due to short product life cycles, high levels of technological innovation, and swift changes in consumer preferences. From the standpoint of digital transformation, digitalization is no longer perceived merely as a tool for operational assistance, but rather as a strategic competence that determines a company's competitive sustainability and market supremacy (Vial, 2019). Consequently, for Multinational Corporations (MNCs), digital retail transformation is strategically essential to preserve market relevance, expand market share, and address the threats posed by disruptions resulting from the evolution of global e-commerce.

Previous literature indicates that digital transformation in multinational corporations is influenced by the organization's ability to integrate digital resources, develop dynamic capabilities, and adapt global strategies to local contexts (Teece, 2018). The study by Verhoef et al. (2021) elucidates that digital transformation transcends mere technological adoption; it encompasses a comprehensive organizational change that involves the restructuring of business models, modifications in operational processes, and the cultivation of a digitally oriented organizational culture. Meanwhile, Fernando and Christiarini (2025) found that the success of digital transformation in global firms is significantly driven by the company's capacity to develop strategic flexibility and adapt to local market conditions. Within the realm of electronic retail, an omnichannel strategy, live commerce, and the utilization of consumer data are pivotal in enhancing customer interaction and fortifying the competitive stance of enterprises in the digital economy.

Indonesia is among the most promising digital markets in Southeast Asia and is anticipated to emerge as a key driver of the regional digital economy. The growing population, an expanding middle class, and increasing internet penetration and smartphone usage have created significant opportunities for global enterprises to expand their digital-based businesses. Nevertheless, the Indonesian market exhibits distinct complexities (Akbariani & Setiyowati, 2024). The geographical characteristics of an archipelagic nation result in disparities in infrastructure, logistics, and digital connectivity among regions. Dynamic regulations in digital commerce rapidly alter customer behavior, while intense pricing rivalry on e-commerce platforms fosters an atmosphere rife with market uncertainty. From the standpoint of institutional theory, these conditions demand that multinational corporations undertake an adaptation process to ensure that their global strategy is harmoniously aligned with local realities. Consequently, successful digital transformation is influenced not just by technological proficiency but also by the company's capacity to comprehend the

social, economic, and institutional contexts of the target market (Hanifah et al., 2024).

PT Hisense International Indonesia serves as a pertinent case study for examining the phenomena of digital retail transformation in multinational corporations within emerging nations. Hisense Group, a firm headquartered in Qingdao, China, adopts a premium yet accessible stance by providing high-quality electronic products at affordable prices. This positioning requires the company to bridge global corporate standards with the diverse demands and preferences of Indonesian consumers. The adoption of live shopping platforms, market penetration via e-commerce, the development of a smart home ecosystem, and collaboration with diverse digital platforms are elements of a transformation plan that must be executed adaptively. Nonetheless, the execution of this plan does not necessarily occur in a linear fashion. Diverse challenges such as competitive pressure, regulatory uncertainty, shifting consumer behavior, and infrastructural restrictions can induce friction and necessitate sophisticated strategy adjustments at the operational level of the organization.

While research on digital transformation in multinational corporations has significantly advanced, substantial studies have predominantly employed a quantitative approach that emphasizes testing inter-variable relationships, including digital capability, innovation performance, organizational agility, and firm performance (Syarkani, 2025). This body of research provides significant insights into the determinants and consequences of digital transformation; however, it still leaves a theoretical gap regarding the understanding of how the digital transformation process is constructed, negotiated, and interpreted by multinational corporations in the context of emerging market dynamics (Nurcahyo et al., 2025). Research investigating digital transformation using narrative approaches and digital artifacts remains relatively scarce, particularly within the context of the consumer electronics industry in Indonesia. Moreover, a methodological vacuum exists as many major studies rely on surveys and cross-sectional data, which inadequately elucidate the dynamics of ongoing processes, conflicts, and strategic adaptations in a sustainable manner (Fitriani et al., 2026).

This research used a qualitative narrative technique to produce an objective account of the digital retail transformation journey of PT Hisense International Indonesia, as indicated by the identified gap. Research conducted through a comparative research of corporate documents, company press releases, independent economic media coverage, and digital artefacts generated from the company's online retail interactions. Non-interactive technique enables researchers to identify the channel narrative (strategic plot), involved individuals, market opportunities, and structural obstacles that influence the company's digital transformation process. This research is anticipated to contribute theoretically by enriching the literature on the digital transformation of multinational corporations (MNCs) in developing countries through a narrative perspective, while simultaneously providing practical insights for multinational companies in formulating a more adaptive, contextual, and sustainable digital retail strategy amid the disruptions of the digital economy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital transformation in the retail sector is characterized by a multifaceted alteration initiated by the comprehensive incorporation of digital technologies into all facets of corporate operations, thereby altering how organizations generate and deliver value to customers. According to Nuraeni et al. (2025), the contemporary retail landscape is defined by the dissolution of barriers between physical and digital buying environments via the omnichannel concept (Baso et al., 2024).

Cloud technologies, data analytics, and e-commerce platforms have revolutionized corporate interactions with consumers and resource utilization (Asrul et al., 2025). Companies no longer utilize online platforms merely as supplementary sales channels through a multi channeling; instead, they establish a cohesive shopping ecosystem. Consumers can recognize products via live commerce displays, compare characteristics on digital platforms, and complete transactions through e-commerce applications, facilitated by integrated smart logistics distribution.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design: Qualitative Narrative

This study employs a qualitative approach with a documentary narrative analysis method to reconstruct the corporate journey and dynamics through a chronological text analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A non-interactive approach was chosen to minimize the subjectivity that generally appears in direct interviews. Through a review of publicly available documents published consistently, this research is capable of identifying empirical facts, the company's strategic decisions, as well as documented changes in market responses permanently embedded within the digital ecosystem that can be objectively traced.

Units of Analysis and Limitations of the Text Corpus

The unit of analysis in this study is narrative texts that represents the strategic activities, opportunities, and challenges of PT Hisense International Indonesia's digital transformation. The data collection period was limited from 2020 to 2026. This limitation is considered crucial because this period represents the largest e-commerce acceleration phase in Indonesia post-pandemic, leading into the current consolidation phase of the smart retail market based on artificial intelligence (AI) and IoT.

Secondary Data Collection Procedures and Digital Artifacts

Data collection was conducted through structured digital searches utilizing documentary techniques and virtual text observation. The data corpus in this study is classified under three main categories (Table 1):

Table 1. Corpus of Business Data and Public Documents Analyzed

Document Code	Document Type	Publisher/ Source	Time span	Focus Information for Narrative
KD-01	Official press release	PT Hisense International Indonesia	2020 - 2026	Chronology of smart product launches, official collaborations with e-commerce platforms, and the opening of digital experience centers.
KD-02	Economic and business news archives	Kontan, bisnis Indonesia, detik finance	2020 - 2026	The reality of macro market obstacles, regional logistics challenges, digital import trade regulations, and the competitive landscape.
KD-03	Retail sector market research reports	Statista and IDC Indonesia	2024 - 2025	E-commerce growth trends for electronic products in Southeast Asia and macro data on Indonesian consumer shopping behavior.
KD-04	Digital review artifacts (user reviews)	Google Play Store, Shopee, and Tokopedia Mall	2025 - 2026	Local consumer sentiment regarding the functionality of the smart home control application (ConnectLife) and the delivery efficiency of large cargo.

Data Analysis Techniques (Restorying & Narrative Structure)

Data analysis followed the restorying technique adapted from Creswell and Poth (2018), with the following operational steps:

- a) Text exploration and deconstruction by collecting all documents, reading them in depth, and separating them based on temporal data elements (temporal cues).

- b) Restorying (chronological reordering) of data fragments.
- c) Synthesis of texts from various media sources into a coherent timeline to form a single, coherent story plot about the company's digital transformation journey from 2020 to 2026.
- d) TOE-based thematic coding by selecting narrative sections of the story into categories of opportunities and challenges using the TOE framework.
- e) Contextualization and resolution, which connects the macro story of the retail industry with the micro story of PT Hisense International Indonesia's operations in order to extract the deepest essence of the study.

Data Validity (Documentary Source Triangulation)

The credibility of the qualitative data was meticulously evaluated by data source triangulation. Researchers confirmed the data's accuracy by juxtaposing unilateral assertions in the company's official press release (KD-01) with objective analyses published in independent media (KD-02) and by contrasting them with authentic textual data derived from direct consumer reviews on online retail platforms (KD-04). If all three clusters demonstrate a consistent narrative, then the evidence is deemed validated.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Chronology of Digital Travel Narrative Reconstruction (2020-2026)

PT Hisense International Indonesia serves as a representative of the rise of the Chinese electronics industry in the highly competitive Indonesian market. Japan and South Korea have traditionally dominated the market, with corporations employing a positioning approach as providers of advanced electrical technology products at competitive and affordable costs. Products like Laser TVs and multidoor freezers serve as instruments for brand distinction to enhance brand image. In this context, Hisense's market penetration is influenced not only by the quality of its products but also by the company's ability to develop an agile and adaptive retail strategy that alters consumer behavior in the digital commerce era.

The reconstruction story for the 2020–2021 timeframe indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic initiated the acceleration of digital transformation inside PT Hisense International Indonesia. Restrictions on social activities have led to a fall in the performance of physical shops, prompting companies to redirect their marketing strategies towards digital platforms. Companies responded by diverting resources towards marketing on e-commerce platforms and expanding their presence through official shopfronts in various national marketplaces. This phase reflects the organization's resilient efforts to maintain company continuity through the primary use of e-tailing as a distribution channel, while simultaneously establishing a basis for the creation of a more integrated digital retail strategy in the future.

As the corporation enters the 2022–2024 period, its digital strategy evolves towards a more participatory communication model through the integration of an Online-to-Offline (O2O) approach. PT Hisense International Indonesia is not only using the marketplace as a digital shopfront but is also developing live commerce to facilitate direct engagement with consumers. Concurrently, the

company is constructing experience zones in several major cities to provide customers with a tangible interaction with high-quality products prior to completing the online purchase process. The integration of digital channels with offline experiences demonstrates the company's capacity to implement an omnichannel strategy aimed at enhancing customer trust and engagement, as well as bolstering its competitiveness in the Indonesian electronics industry. The consolidation phase of the IoT-based smart home ecosystem is projected for 2025-2026. Recent product launches indicate that Hisense's business strategy has evolved from merely selling individual electronic devices to providing a comprehensive smart home ecosystem managed by the VIDAA Smart OS platform and the ConnectLife application.

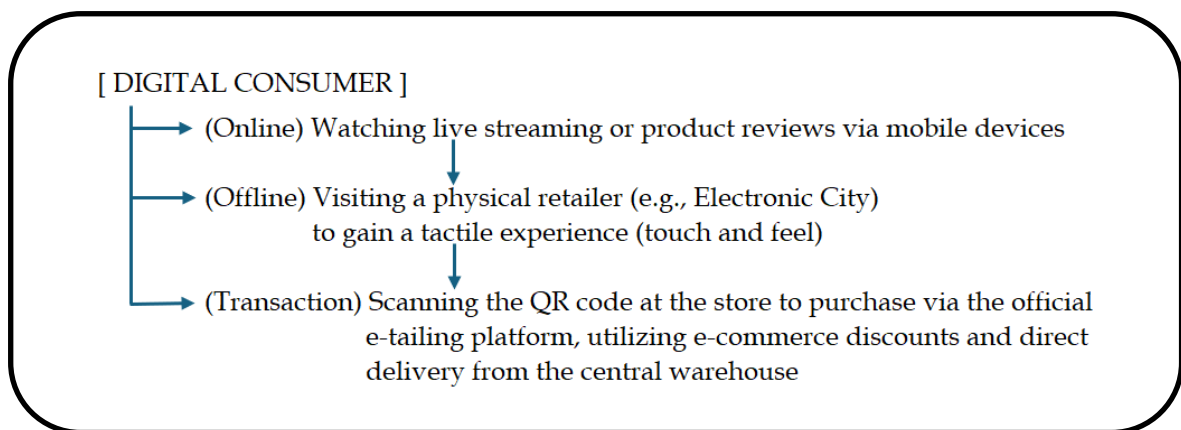


Figure 1. O2O (Online-to-Offline) Strategy Flow of PT Hisense International Indonesia

Analysis of Strategic Opportunities for Digital-Based Electronic Retail

Secondary data analysis on matrices indicates that digital transformation presents strategic prospects for the acceleration of PT Hisense International Indonesia's operations, particularly through the implementation of live commerce on platforms such as TikTok Shop and Shopee Live. This strategy enables the organization to broaden its market reach, educate consumers interactively about product superiority, and expedite the transaction process directly, without reliance on conventional distribution intermediaries.

Table 2. PT Hisense International Indonesia's Digitalization Opportunity Extraction Matrix

Dimensions (TOE)	Identified Opportunities	Contextual Evidence (Public Document Text)	Impact towards Multinational Company (MNC) Strategy
Technology	Modern IoT ecosystem via the ConnectLife application	The press release for the launch of the smart AC and refrigerator (KD-01)	Positioning Hisense as a pioneer of smart home appliances

Dimensions (TOE)	Identified Opportunities	Contextual Evidence (Public Document Text)	Impact towards Multinational Company (MNC) Strategy
		shows the readiness of long-range wireless interconnection.	that are appealing to the younger generation of digital natives.
Organization	Streamlining the distribution channel via live commerce utilization	The economic news archive (KD-02) records a 35% increase in direct sales via regular live shopping sessions.	Reducing dependency on conventional physical distributors, accelerating inventory turnover, and increasing profit margins.
Environment	Growth in the population of connected consumers	The IDC and Statista market reports (KD-03) show that the majority of the middle class prioritizes home automation features.	Premium accessible products without technological education barriers.

Analysis of Structural Challenges and Barriers to the National Ecosystem

Despite the wide-open opportunities, a critical discourse analysis of public track records also reveals a narrative of structural barriers that have the potential to hinder the sustainability of MNC digital expansions in Indonesia (Table 3):

Table 3. Exploration Matrix of MNC Logistics and Regulatory Challenges

Strategic Issue	Related Documents	Barrier Identified	Narrative	Company Policy Resolution
Regulatory volatility in digital commerce	KD-02 and KD-03	Tightening of government regulations (Permendag) regarding the governance of social-commerce platforms and restrictions on electronic imports.		Adjusting import schemes and increasing investment in local assembly (TKDN) to comply with local market regulations.

Strategic Issue	Related Documents	Barrier Identified	Narrative	Company Policy Resolution
Archipelagic geography and logistical friction	KD-04 (user reviews)	Written complaints regarding high freight rates for large cargo (Refrigerator/Washing Machine) outside Java Island and the risk of physical damage.		Developing a dedicated cargo expedition partner network supported by a digital tracking system (real-time tracking).
Price war anomalies	KD-02 and KD-04	Behavioral patterns of Indonesian e-commerce consumers who tend to hunt for aggressive discounts, triggering unhealthy global inter-brand price competition.		Diverting the competitive focus to consumer protection aspects (providing a TV panel warranty of up to 4 years via application registration).

Logistical issues are the most prevalent impediment noted in digital artefacts of consumer reviews (KD-04). In contrast to minor retail items, large electronic goods (major appliances) necessitate highly specialized logistical management. Graphical textual data (Figure 2) illustrates an accumulation of negative sentiment in shipping regions beyond Java, highlighting a deficiency in the national digital logistics infrastructure that the multinational retail ecosystem must rectify.

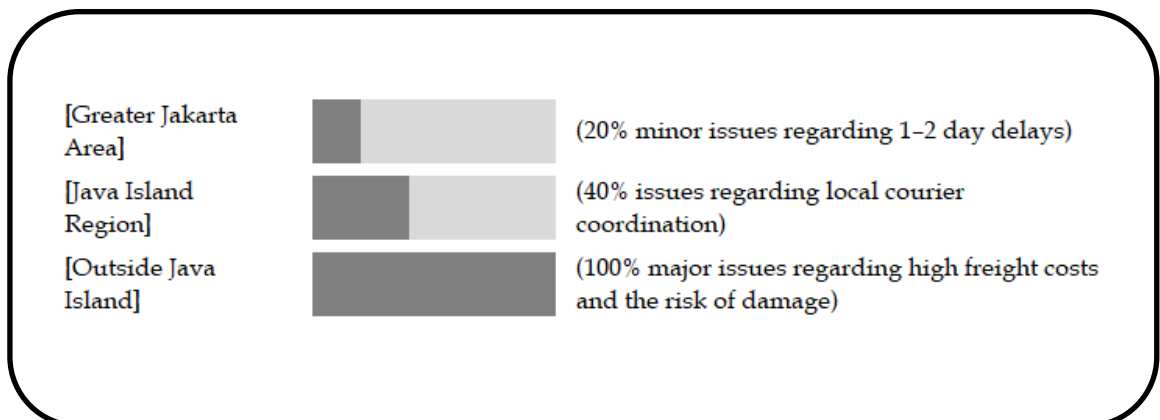


Figure 2: Distribution Map of Consumer Complaints Related to E-commerce Logistics

Discursive Synthesis Using the TOE Framework Lens

According to the TOE Framework perspective, PT Hisense International Indonesia's digital transformation is bolstered by superior technology, which is facilitated by global R&D support and an adaptable organization that advances live commerce. However, the environmental dimension presents significant challenges due to fluctuations in regulations and inter-island logistical limitations. These conditions necessitate that the company continuously adapts its global digital strategy to align with the local market and ecosystem dynamics in Indonesia.

Strategic Navigation of PT Hisense International Indonesia: Narrative Synthesis of Opportunities and Challenges of Digital Transformation Through SWOT and TOWS Approaches

This research demonstrates the use of a qualitative narrative method that integrates SWOT-TOWS analysis. The digital transformation of PT Hisense International Indonesia is a dynamic strategic adaptation process, rather than merely the adoption of technology from the global headquarters. The company transforms internal strengths and weaknesses into a hybrid approach to leverage omnichannel potential while confronting the challenges posed by the PDP Law and fierce competition from global rivals in the Indonesian market.

Table 4. Matrix of Opportunities and Challenges of Digital Transformation Through SWOT and TOWS Approaches

<p>Internal Factors External Factors</p>	<p>STRENGTHS (S) 1. Access to Research and Development (R&D) and the global digital ecosystem (Smart Home/ConnectLife). 2. MNC-level economies of scale (high bargaining power with large platforms). 3. The adaptation of digital best practices from other global branches.</p>	<p>WEAKNESSES (W) 1. High dependence on traditional and physical retail distribution track. 2. Tension between global system standardization and local Indonesian market adaptation. 3. A digital data literacy gap within the local workforce.</p>
<p>OPPORTUNITIES (O) 1. The booming trend of e-commerce and live commerce in Indonesia. 2. A shift in the middle-class lifestyle toward smart appliances. 3. Massive local partnerships in</p>	<p>STRATEGY SO (Growth/Acceleration) Leveraging global technological capabilities to capitalize on emerging market opportunities. * S1, S2, O1, O2: Aggressively launch an integrated Smart Home ecosystem through Omnichannel and Live Commerce campaigns by leveraging MNC economies</p>	<p>STRATEGY WO (Stability/Evolution) Utilizing market opportunities to mitigate internal limitations. * W1, O1: Building an O2O (Online-to-Offline) platform to engage traditional distributors with Hisense's digital ecosystem (to reduce resistance from conventional channels). * W2, W3, O3: Localizing the payment system and UI/UX of</p>

digital logistics and fintech.	of scale. * S3, O3: Adapt a successful D2C (Direct-to-Consumer) model globally by collaborating with local fintech and logistics partners to accelerate retail supply chain operations.	the retail platform by leveraging Indonesia's user-friendly digital ecosystem to accelerate the learning process of local human resources.
<p>THREATS (T)</p> <p>1. Tight rivalry from fellow electronic MNCs (Samsung, Xiaomi, LG). 2. Strict local regulations regarding data protection (PDP Law). 3. Digital infrastructure gaps outside Java Island.</p>	<p>ST STRATEGY (Diversification/Defense)</p> <p>Utilizing internal strengths to mitigate external threats.</p> <p>* S1, T1: Differentiating the brand from competitors by highlighting the narrative of the unique interconnected features of Smart Home products supported by global R&D.</p> <p>* S2, T2: Leverage financial advantages and global IT infrastructure to build a cybersecurity system that is fully compliant with the PDP Law to build a trusted brand reputation.</p>	<p>WT STRATEGY (Defensive/Rescue)</p> <p>Minimizing internal weaknesses to avoid the critical impacts of external threats.</p> <p>* W3, T2: Conducting periodic training programs on data regulation and digital literacy for the local workforce to mitigate human error and avoid legal sanctions under the PDP Law.</p> <p>* W1, T3: Developing a hybrid retail strategy in areas with low digital infrastructure (outside Java), maintaining conventional B2B methods while gradually injecting digital logistics efficiencies.</p>

The sustainability of PT Hisense International Indonesia relies on the company's ability to develop an adaptive hybrid strategy that integrates global R&D expertise with local market requirements. The development of an omnichannel ecosystem through live commerce and the digitalization of the traditional distribution network are essential for market acceleration. The strategy must be underpinned by enhancing corporate governance and risk management, augmenting data literacy among individuals, and ensuring compliance with the PDP Law. Through this approach, Hisense can enhance its competitiveness and solidify its position as a pioneer in the innovative and trusted smart home ecosystem in Indonesia.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Derived from a qualitative narrative reconstruction utilizing secondary data for the timeframe 2020–2026 period, the digital transformation of PT Hisense International Indonesia demonstrates a strategic adaptation process that is both progressive and dynamic. The transformation involves the expansion of efforts

to sustain online sales throughout the pandemic, leading to the utilization of live commerce and the building of an ecosystem centered around Internet of Things (IoT) based smart homes. This organization has the capability to translate global technology strategies within the framework of the ever-evolving Indonesian market. Consequently, digital transformation serves not only as an operational efficiency tool but also as a method to develop a novel business model that is adaptive, responsive, and customer experience-oriented in the digital economy era.

This study also reveals that the success of Hisense's digital transformation is bolstered by the company's ability to leverage digital opportunities through omnichannel strategies, social commerce, and the positioning of its products as a premium yet accessible brand. Digital channel integration allows the company to eliminate traditional distribution chains, thereby reducing the distance between the manufacturer and consumers, while also fostering more personalized interactions with customers. The development of an IoT-based smart home ecosystem via the ConnectLife platform enhances the company's competitive differentiation in an increasingly saturated electronics industry. This demonstrates that retail digitalization can serve as a strategic instrument to enhance brand equity, augment customer engagement, and broaden market penetration among digital customers in Indonesia.

Consequently, the digital transformation process of PT Hisense International Indonesia still in progress. Confronted with multifaceted external challenges, including regulatory volatility in digital trade and data governance, infrastructural limits in inter-island logistics, and aggressive pricing pressures from e-commerce platforms amid wartime conditions. This managerial study underscores the significance of optimizing decentralized digital logistics networks, enhancing non-price value propositions through digital service ecosystems, and improving the role of local management as a strategic intermediary adept at adapting global systems to the specific characteristics of the Indonesian market. Furthermore, the company must enhance cross-functional integration and cultivate a data-driven organizational culture to ensure the sustainability of digital transformation and improve long-term competitive resilience.

According to the research findings, PT Hisense International Indonesia should enhance its digital transformation initiatives by developing a decentralized supply chain infrastructure, which includes establishing smart warehouse hubs in critical locations across Indonesia to improve distribution efficiency and mitigate logistics risks. The corporation must transition its marketing focus from price competition to building a value-driven ecosystem by enhancing digital after-sales services and optimizing the ConnectLife platform. Accelerating the adoption of IoT technology requires the implementation of social and live commerce tactics, as well as transforming traditional retail into an online-to-offline (O2O) hub through strategic partnerships. This process requires support through the enhancement of consumer data governance, cybersecurity systems, and digital literacy to promote sustainable transformation and a long-term competitive advantage.

From an academic perspective, this study research developing a more comprehensive approach through a mixed-methods design, combining qualitative analysis with quantitative testing, such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), to assess the influence of technological, organizational, and environmental factors on multinational corporation retail performance. Future research could also include sentiment analysis utilizing artificial intelligence (AI) and natural language processing (NLP) to study consumer perceptions in a broader and more dynamic manner. Furthermore, a multiple-case study approach, which compares several multinational electronics companies from diverse countries of origin, will enhance the understanding of variations in corporate strategy, cultural dynamics, and digital transformation agility in response to the challenges of emerging markets such as Indonesia.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

This study's findings establish a sophisticated research agenda by illustrating that digital transformation in multinational corporations (MNCs) within emerging markets transcends mere technology adoption, representing instead a dynamic capability to perpetually reconcile global strategies with local market conditions. Future studies should establish a comprehensive framework that amalgamates digital transformation, institutional adaptation, and ecosystem orchestration perspectives to elucidate how multinational corporations convert omnichannel strategies, live commerce, and smart home ecosystems into sustainable competitive advantages. Furthermore, longitudinal and comparative studies involving various multinational corporations and emerging economies are essential to investigate how regulatory uncertainty, digital logistics infrastructure, and local consumer behavior influence digital transformation trajectories, thereby enhancing the theoretical comprehension of adaptive digital transformation within international business and retail management frameworks.

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