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# From Resource-Based View to Digital Resource View: Re-theorizing Competitive Advantage in the Age of Digital Resources

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## Abstract

The Resource-Based View (RBV) has long explained competitive advantage through firm-specific resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable. Although this perspective remains influential in strategic management, its assumptions of resource stability, ownership, scarcity, and protection-based imitation barriers are increasingly challenged by the rise of digital resources. Digital resources such as data, platforms, analytics systems, algorithms, and digitally embedded routines are scalable, recombinable, non-rivalrous, and continuously evolving, making them difficult to explain through static resource logic. This paper advances the Digital Resource View (DRV) as a theoretical extension of RBV and as a more suitable framework for understanding competitive advantage in digitally intensive environments. The paper conceptualizes digital resources as strategically configured and contextually embedded assets whose value emerges through integration, orchestration, recombination, and adaptive deployment within organizational and institutional settings. It identifies four core mechanisms of digital-era competitive advantage: digital value creation, configuration-based digital rareness, uncertainty-driven imitation barriers, and normative digital pressure. The analysis argues that competitive advantage in the digital economy depends less on exclusive resource ownership and more on firms' capabilities to configure, reconfigure, and legitimize digital resources in response to technological, market, and institutional change. The paper contributes to strategic management and information systems literature by refining resource-based theory for the digital economy and providing a conceptual foundation for future empirical research on digital resource configuration, adaptive advantage, and digital-era firm performance.

**Keywords:** Resource-Based View; Digital Resource View; Digital Resources; Competitive Advantage; Digital Transformation; Resource Configuration; Strategic Management

## Introduction

Over the past three decades, the Resource-Based View (RBV) has served as one of the most influential theoretical frameworks for explaining competitive advantage in strategic management. RBV shifted scholarly attention away from industry structure toward internal sources of advantage, arguing that firms achieve sustained competitive advantage when they control resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (Barney, 2001; Barney & Arikan, 2005). This perspective has generated a vast body of empirical and conceptual research and continues to shape how scholars and practitioners understand value creation, strategic positioning, and performance heterogeneity among firms (Barney et al., 2021).

However, the contemporary competitive landscape is increasingly shaped by digital resources such as data, platforms, analytics systems, algorithms, and digitally embedded organizational routines. These resources differ fundamentally from the traditional assets and capabilities upon which RBV was originally built. Digital resources are scalable, recombinable, often non-rivalrous, and continuously evolving, enabling firms to reconfigure value creation processes at unprecedented speed (Amit & Han, 2017; Isaksson & Wennberg, 2016). As digitalization accelerates across industries and economies, questions arise as to whether RBV's core assumptions remain sufficient for explaining competitive advantage in such environments.

A growing body of scholarship has highlighted conceptual tensions between RBV and the realities of digital competition. Critics argue that RBV's emphasis on relatively stable resource heterogeneity and ownership-based rareness is ill-suited to contexts where digital resources can be widely accessed, rapidly replicated, and jointly created across organizational boundaries (El Shafeey & Trott, 2014; Madhani, 2010; Cuthbertson & Furseth, 2022). Moreover, learning-oriented and data-driven resources challenge RBV's static treatment of imitation barriers, as advantage increasingly depends on ongoing recombination, adaptation, and contextual deployment rather than on resource possession alone (Helfat et al., 2023). This suggests that digital competition requires a more dynamic resource logic in which advantage is produced through the capacity to configure, recombine, and orchestrate digital resources in ways that are difficult to reproduce.

These limitations have prompted renewed calls to re-theorize competitive advantage in ways that more accurately reflect the distinctive properties of digital resources. Rather than abandoning RBV altogether, recent work emphasizes the need to extend and refine its core insights to accommodate new technological contexts, new forms of value creation, and new mechanisms of sustainability (Barney & Mackey, 2016; Iliyas & Barca, 2025). In this regard, digitalization represents not merely an empirical anomaly but a theoretical inflection point that necessitates a re-examination of what constitutes a strategic resource in the contemporary economy.

Responding to this challenge, the Digital Resource View (DRV) has emerged as a novel theoretical perspective that reconceptualizes resources under conditions of digital disruption. Building on the foundational logic of RBV while addressing its digital-era limitations, the DRV emphasizes resource configuration, orchestration, contextual embeddedness, and recombinability rather than static ownership

(Adamu, 2025a; Adamu, 2025b; Adamu, 2026). The DRV introduces new explanatory mechanisms such as digital value creation, digital rareness, uncertainty-driven imitation, normative digital pressure, and digital recombability, which better capture how competitive advantage is generated and sustained in digitally transforming environments. Recent empirical evidence further supports the relevance of DRV by demonstrating how digital assets can be converted into strategic outcomes when they are effectively configured and aligned with organizational capabilities (Adamu & Bugaje, 2026).

Against this backdrop, the purpose of this paper is to re-theorize competitive advantage by transitioning from the Resource-Based View to the Digital Resource View. Rather than focusing on a specific technology, the paper develops a general theoretical argument explaining why digital resources require a distinct analytical lens and how DRV offers a more appropriate foundation for understanding advantage in the digital age. By systematically contrasting RBV and DRV, the study clarifies their underlying assumptions, mechanisms, and implications for theory and practice.

The paper makes three key contributions. First, it provides a structured critique of RBV's limitations in the context of digital resources, synthesizing long-standing and emerging criticisms within a coherent theoretical narrative. Second, it advances the DRV as a generalizable framework for explaining competitive advantage in digitally intensive environments, thereby contributing to the renewal of resource-based theory. Third, it offers a conceptual foundation to guide future empirical research on digital resources across industries and economies, particularly in contexts undergoing rapid digital transformation. The remainder of the paper proceeds by reviewing RBV foundations, examining its digital-era limitations, introducing the DRV framework, and re-theorizing competitive advantage through a DRV lens.

## **Resource-Based View (RBV): Foundations and Core Assumptions**

### **Origins and Evolution of the Resource-Based View**

The Resource-Based View (RBV) emerged as a dominant theoretical perspective in strategic management in response to limitations of industry-structure explanations of firm performance. Early RBV scholarship redirected attention from external market conditions to internal firm resources as the primary determinants of competitive advantage. Central to this shift was the argument that firms are heterogeneous bundles of resources and capabilities, and that such heterogeneity can persist over time, leading to performance differentials among firms (Barney, 2001; Barney & Arian, 2005). Over the years, RBV has evolved into a broad theoretical tradition encompassing strategy, human resources, entrepreneurship, and innovation research, becoming one of the most cited and applied frameworks in management studies (Barney et al., 2021).

As the RBV matured, scholars refined its conceptual foundations and clarified its scope. The theory has been applied to explain diverse phenomena, including firm performance, strategic positioning, human capital development, and organizational capabilities. Despite ongoing debates about its boundaries and operationalization, RBV has remained influential due to its parsimonious logic and its focus on firm-specific sources of value creation (Barney & Mackey, 2016). Importantly, RBV was developed in a predominantly industrial and pre-digital context, where resources were relatively stable, bounded within firms, and accumulated over time.

### **Core Assumptions of RBV**

At the heart of RBV are two fundamental assumptions: resource heterogeneity and resource immobility. Resource heterogeneity posits that firms possess different bundles of resources and capabilities, even within the same industry, while resource immobility suggests that these resources are imperfectly transferable across firms (Barney, 2001). Together, these assumptions explain why some firms consistently outperform others despite operating under similar market conditions.

Building on these assumptions, RBV formalizes the VRIN framework, which identifies resources as sources of sustained competitive advantage if they are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable. Valuable resources enable firms to exploit opportunities or neutralize threats; rare resources are not widely possessed by competitors; inimitable resources are difficult to replicate due to factors such as causal ambiguity, path dependence, or social complexity; and non-substitutable resources cannot be easily replaced by strategically equivalent alternatives (Barney, 2001; Barney & Arian, 2005). This logic has served as the cornerstone of RBV-based explanations of competitive advantage.

### **RBV and the Logic of Competitive Advantage**

RBV conceptualizes competitive advantage as a relatively stable outcome that arises when firms control resources that competitors cannot easily acquire or imitate. The sustainability of advantage depends largely on the effectiveness of imitation barriers, which protect valuable and rare resources from erosion. These barriers are typically rooted in historical conditions, complex social relationships, tacit knowledge, and causal ambiguity, making it difficult for rivals to identify and replicate the sources of success (Barney, 2001; Madhani, 2010).

In this framework, value creation and value appropriation are closely linked to resource ownership and control. Firms that possess superior resources are assumed to appropriate rents generated from their deployment, while competitors without access to similar resources are unable to erode these advantages quickly. As a result, RBV places strong emphasis on the internal accumulation and protection of strategic resources as the primary route to long-term performance superiority (Barney et al., 2021).

### **Enduring Contributions and Theoretical Strengths of RBV**

Despite subsequent critiques, RBV's contributions to strategic management theory are substantial. It provided a coherent explanation for persistent performance differences, offered a firm-centric alternative to industry-based theories, and stimulated extensive empirical research across multiple domains (Barney & Mackey, 2016; Helfat et al., 2023). The theory also influenced related perspectives, including the knowledge-based view and dynamic capabilities, which sought to address specific limitations while retaining RBV's core insights.

Importantly, RBV established common language resources, capabilities, imitation, and sustainability that continues to shape contemporary strategy debates. These strengths explain why RBV remains a foundational reference point even as scholars explore new theoretical lenses. However, as the next section argues, the very assumptions that underpinned RBV's success also constrain its explanatory power in the context of digital resources, thereby motivating the transition toward the Digital Resource View.

## Critiques and Limitations of the Resource-Based View in the Digital Era

### Static Resource Heterogeneity in a Dynamic Digital Environment

A central critique of the Resource-Based View (RBV) in the digital era concerns its reliance on relatively static assumptions of resource heterogeneity. RBV presumes that differences in firm performance persist because resources are unevenly distributed and remain difficult to replicate over time (Barney, 2001). However, digital resources such as software platforms, data analytics tools, and cloud infrastructure are characterized by rapid diffusion, scalability, and declining marginal costs, which undermine the durability of heterogeneity assumed under RBV (Amit & Han, 2017; Isaksson & Wennberg, 2016). As a result, firms operating in digitally intensive environments often have access to similar technological inputs, yet experience markedly different outcomes, suggesting that heterogeneity increasingly resides in *how* resources are configured rather than *what* resources are owned.

### Ownership-Centric Logic and the Rise of Shared Digital Resources

RBV's traditional emphasis on resource ownership and control presents another limitation in the context of digitalization. Many digital resources are not exclusively owned by firms but are accessed through platforms, ecosystems, cloud infrastructures, open-source communities, and inter-organizational arrangements. Cloud computing, open-source software, platform-based infrastructures, and data-sharing partnerships blur firm boundaries and weaken RBV's assumption that strategic resources are necessarily firm-bound, immobile, and exclusively controlled (Bharadwaj et al., 2013; Cuthbertson & Furseth, 2022; Parker et al., 2016; Rai et al., 2019).

In such settings, competitive advantage cannot be adequately explained by ownership alone, as firms frequently derive value from shared, accessed, or co-created digital resources whose strategic relevance depends on integration, recombination, orchestration, and ecosystem participation rather than exclusive possession (Amit & Han, 2017; Adamu, 2025a; Adamu, 2026; Adamu & Bugaje, 2026; Yoo et al., 2010). This suggests that digital-era advantage is increasingly shaped by how firms configure and coordinate distributed digital resources across organizational and ecosystem boundaries.

### Inadequacy for Learning-Oriented and Data-Driven Resources

RBV also struggles to account for learning-oriented and data-driven resources, which evolve continuously through use. Artificial intelligence systems, analytics capabilities, and algorithmic models improve as they interact with data and users, making their value inherently dynamic and path-dependent (Papagiannidis et al., 2021; Perifanis & Kitsios, 2023). RBV's focus on resource stocks and initial conditions provides limited insight into how such resources generate increasing returns through learning effects and recombination. Consequently, RBV underestimates the strategic significance of ongoing resource reconfiguration, which has become a defining feature of digital competition.

### Static Imitation Barriers and the Problem of Digital Replicability

Another key limitation lies in RBV's treatment of imitation barriers as largely static and structurally embedded. Traditional RBV explanations emphasize causal ambiguity, social complexity, and historical path dependence as sources of inimitability (Barney, 2001; Madhani, 2010). While these mechanisms remain relevant, they are insufficient for explaining imitation dynamics in digital contexts where technologies can be rapidly copied or substituted. Digital resources often exhibit high technical

replicability, yet firms continue to experience differential performance outcomes. This paradox suggests that imitation barriers in the digital era are increasingly shaped by uncertainty, complexity, and continuous change rather than by static protection mechanisms alone (Marzi, 2022; Matsunaga, 2024).

### **Limited Attention to Institutional and Contextual Forces**

RBV has also been criticized for its limited engagement with institutional and contextual forces that shape resource deployment and value realization. Digital competition is deeply influenced by regulatory frameworks, industry standards, ethical norms, and societal expectations surrounding data use, privacy, and digital responsibility (Bennich, 2024; Schrödter & Weißenberger, 2024). These forces condition how digital resources are adopted, configured, and legitimized, yet they remain largely peripheral in traditional RBV formulations. As digitalization intensifies, neglecting such contextual pressures limits RBV's explanatory power and practical relevance.

### **Summary of RBV Limitations and the Need for Theoretical Renewal**

Taken together, these critiques highlight a growing misalignment between RBV's foundational assumptions and the realities of digital competition. While RBV continues to offer valuable insights into the role of firm-specific resources, its static, ownership-centric, and internally focused logic constrains its ability to explain value creation and sustainability in digitally transforming environments. These limitations do not invalidate RBV but rather signal the need for theoretical renewal, one that preserves RBV's core insight while adapting it to the distinctive properties of digital resources. This need sets the stage for the emergence of the Digital Resource View as a more appropriate lens for re-theorizing competitive advantage in the age of digital resources.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design and Philosophical Orientation**

This study adopts a conceptual and theory-development research design, consistent with its objective of re-theorizing competitive advantage in the context of digital resources. Rather than testing hypotheses empirically, the paper seeks to refine, extend, and integrate existing theoretical perspectives to offer a coherent and analytically rigorous framework. The research is grounded in an interpretive and analytical tradition, which is commonly employed in theory-building studies within strategic management and information systems research (Barney & Mackey, 2016; Helfat et al., 2023).

### **Theory Synthesis and Analytical Approach**

The methodological approach involves a systematic synthesis of extant literature on the Resource-Based View (RBV), digital strategy, and emerging digital resource scholarship. Foundational RBV texts were examined to identify core assumptions, mechanisms, and explanatory boundaries, while recent digitalization and innovation studies were reviewed to uncover conceptual tensions and gaps. Through an iterative process of comparison and abstraction, the study identifies where RBV assumptions diverge from digital-era realities and articulates how the Digital Resource View (DRV) addresses these divergences.

This synthesis follows a theory extension logic, whereby an established theory is adapted to new contexts without discarding its core insights. The DRV is thus positioned as an evolutionary refinement of RBV rather than a competing or replacement theory. Comparative analysis between RBV and DRV forms a

central methodological tool, enabling the study to systematically contrast their assumptions, explanatory mechanisms, and implications for competitive advantage.

### **Conceptual Development and Framework Construction**

The development of the DRV framework proceeded through a structured conceptualization process. Conceptual development requires the clarification, differentiation, and organization of ideas into analytically meaningful categories, particularly where existing concepts no longer fully capture emerging phenomena (Keil, 1987; Gelman & Kalish, 2008). In this study, the process began by identifying the defining characteristics of digital resources, including scalability, recombining, embeddedness, and uncertainty, from extant literature on digital transformation, digital innovation, and resource-based theory. These characteristics were then mapped onto existing resource-based constructs to assess points of theoretical alignment, extension, and tension. This mapping was necessary because digital resources do not merely represent new forms of organizational assets; they also challenge the assumptions of scarcity, immobility, and ownership that underpin traditional RBV explanations.

The second stage involved comparing the distinctive properties of digital resources with established RBV constructs such as value, rareness, inimitability, non-substitutability, heterogeneity, and immobility. This comparison enabled the study to identify areas where RBV remains useful and areas where its explanatory logic requires refinement. Consistent with conceptual research traditions, the objective was not simply to rename existing constructs but to develop clearer theoretical categories that capture the distinctive behavior of digital resources in digitally intensive environments (Torraco, 2005; Jaakkola, 2020). In line with the logic of conceptual development, construct meaning was refined through categorization, differentiation, and boundary clarification (Keil, 1987; Reiss & Tunnicliffe, 1999).

The third stage involved articulating new conceptual mechanisms capable of explaining how competitive advantage emerges under digital conditions. These mechanisms include digital value creation, digital rareness, uncertainty-driven imitation, and normative digital pressure. Digital value creation explains how value emerges from the integration and use of digital resources rather than from possession alone. Digital rareness captures the uniqueness produced through configuration and recombination, even where underlying technologies are widely accessible. Uncertainty-driven imitation explains why competitors may struggle to reproduce complex digital systems despite access to similar technological inputs. Normative digital pressure captures the institutional, ethical, and regulatory forces that shape how digital resources are legitimized, governed, and scaled.

Throughout this process, emphasis was placed on construct clarity and boundary specification. This was necessary to ensure that DRV concepts remain analytically distinct from related constructs such as IT capability, dynamic capabilities, knowledge-based resources, and ordinary digital assets. Clear conceptual boundaries are central to theory development because they prevent construct overlap, enhance analytical precision, and improve the future measurability of theoretical constructs (Corley & Gioia, 2011; Jaakkola, 2020). This approach strengthens the internal coherence of the DRV framework and facilitates future empirical operationalization across different organizational, industrial, and institutional contexts.

### **Validity, Rigor, and Theoretical Contribution**

To enhance theoretical rigor, the study adheres to established criteria for high-quality conceptual research, including logical consistency, parsimony, explanatory relevance, construct clarity, and theoretical usefulness (Torraco, 2005; Corley & Gioia, 2011; Jaakkola, 2020). The propositions and arguments are

grounded in well-established resource-based literature and supported by recent empirical and conceptual insights from digital transformation, digital strategy, platform ecosystems, and institutional perspectives. The framework is evaluated against its ability to address known limitations of RBV and to provide additional explanatory power in digitally intensive contexts.

The rigor of the framework also derives from its structured movement from concept identification to theoretical integration. Conceptual development involves more than the accumulation of definitions; it requires the systematic organization of ideas into coherent explanatory relationships (Gelman & Kalish, 2008; Reiss & Tunnicliffe, 1999). Accordingly, the DRV framework was developed by first clarifying the nature of digital resources, then identifying the limitations of existing RBV assumptions, and finally specifying the mechanisms through which digital resources generate competitive advantage. This staged approach supports theoretical transparency and enables readers to trace how the framework was constructed.

Rather than offering prescriptive generalizations, the study aims to generate theoretically informed insights that can guide subsequent empirical research. Clearly articulating the assumptions, mechanisms, and boundary conditions of the DRV framework ensures that it can be tested, refined, and extended in future studies across different industries and institutional environments. In this respect, the study contributes to strategic management theory by extending resource-based logic beyond static ownership and toward a more dynamic explanation of competitive advantage based on configuration, recombination, orchestration, and institutional embeddedness.

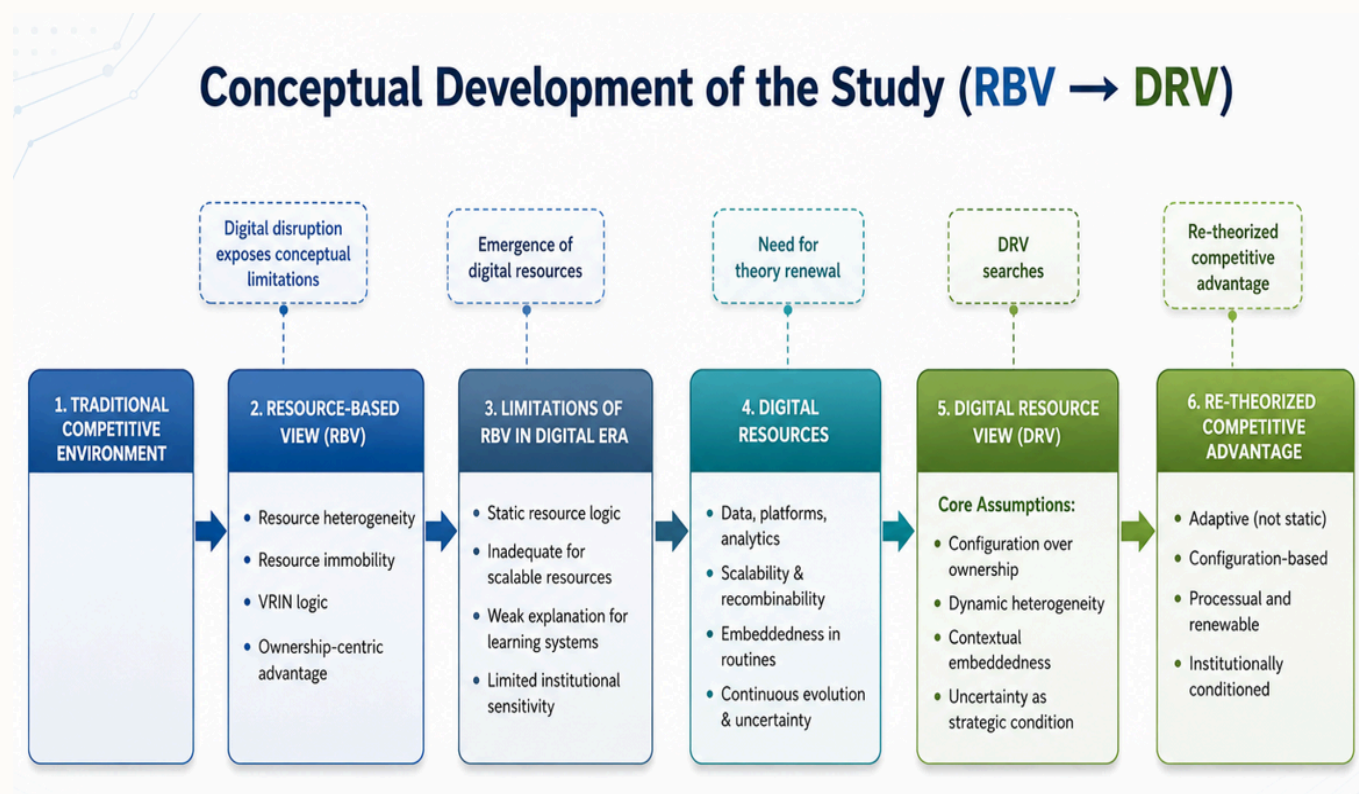


Figure 1 Conceptual Development

## Emergence of Digital Resources and the Need for Theoretical Renewal

### The Distinctive Nature of Digital Resources

The increasing centrality of digitalization in organizational strategy has given rise to a class of resources whose characteristics differ fundamentally from those traditionally examined under the Resource-Based View (RBV). Digital resources including data, software, platforms, analytics systems, and digitally embedded routines are inherently scalable, recombinable, and often non-rivalrous, enabling firms to deploy them across multiple activities without proportional increases in cost (Isaksson & Wennberg, 2016; Amit & Han, 2017). Unlike physical or location-bound assets, digital resources can be replicated, transferred, and integrated across organizational boundaries with relative ease, challenging RBV's assumptions regarding immobility and durability of heterogeneity.

Moreover, digital resources are deeply embedded within organizational processes, technologies, and ecosystems. Their value is rarely intrinsic; instead, it emerges through interaction with complementary resources, user practices, and institutional contexts (Cuthbertson & Furseth, 2022). This embeddedness implies that competitive advantage increasingly depends on how digital resources are configured and orchestrated rather than on their standalone characteristics. As such, digital resources demand a theoretical perspective that foregrounds configuration, interaction, and context as central explanatory elements.

### Digital Value Creation through Resource Reconfiguration

A defining feature of digital resources is their capacity to generate value through continuous reconfiguration and recombination. Digital technologies enable firms to recombine existing resources in novel ways, supporting new business models, service offerings, platform arrangements, and organizational processes (Amit & Han, 2017; Yoo et al., 2010). Value creation in digital environments is therefore less about accumulating superior resources and more about dynamically reconfiguring resource portfolios in response to technological, market, and institutional change (Ferreira et al., 2025; Goumagias et al., 2022; Plekhanov et al., 2023). This reflects the broader logic of digital innovation, where value emerges through the recombination of digital and non-digital resources, the integration of data-driven capabilities, and the continuous adaptation of organizational routines (Bharadwaj et al., 2013; Nambisan et al., 2017; Vial, 2021).

This logic of recombination undermines RBV's relatively static view of value creation, which emphasizes the exploitation of pre-existing resource advantages. In contrast, digital value creation is iterative, experimental, and adaptive, often unfolding through cycles of learning, feedback, adjustment, and renewed configuration (Teece, 2018; Helfat et al., 2023; Adamu, 2026). Firms that excel in digital contexts are those capable of sensing emerging opportunities, recombining resources rapidly, and scaling successful configurations across organizational and ecosystem boundaries (Parker et al., 2016; Cuthbertson & Furseth, 2022). These dynamics necessitate a theoretical renewal that accounts for the processual, temporal, and ecosystem-dependent dimensions of resource use, rather than treating resources as fixed inputs into strategy (Adamu, 2025a; Adamu & Bugaje, 2026).

### Uncertainty, Complexity, and the Changing Basis of Advantage

The rise of digital resources has also altered the nature of uncertainty and complexity in competitive environments. Digital systems operate under conditions of rapid technological change, data volatility, algorithmic opacity, platform interdependence, and evolving user behaviors, making outcomes difficult to

predict and causal relationships difficult to observe (Marzi, 2022; Matsunaga, 2024; Nambisan et al., 2017). Under such conditions, competitive advantage is increasingly shaped by firms' abilities to navigate uncertainty, absorb learning from digital interactions, and adapt resource configurations rather than by their capacity to protect static resources from imitation (Teece, 2018; Helfat et al., 2023; Adamu, 2026).

In digital contexts, imitation barriers arise not primarily from exclusivity or legal protection but from complexity, opacity, data dependency, and continuous change. Even when competitors can access similar digital technologies, they may struggle to replicate the performance outcomes achieved by leading firms due to differences in learning trajectories, contextual knowledge, accumulated data, organizational routines, and resource interactions (Amit & Han, 2017; Yoo et al., 2010; Ferreira et al., 2025). This is because digital advantage often resides in the interaction among technologies, data architectures, routines, and ecosystem relationships, rather than in any single digital asset (Bharadwaj et al., 2013; Cuthbertson & Furseth, 2022; Rai et al., 2019). This shift in the basis of advantage highlights the inadequacy of RBV's traditional imitation logic and underscores the need for a framework that explicitly incorporates uncertainty, complexity, and adaptive reconfiguration as core explanatory mechanisms (Adamu, 2025a; Adamu & Bugaje, 2026).

### **Institutional and Ecosystem Forces in Digital Competition**

Another defining feature of digital resources is their entanglement with institutional and ecosystem-level forces. Digital competition unfolds within regulatory regimes, industry standards, ethical norms, data governance requirements, and platform ecosystems that shape how resources are deployed, legitimized, and valued (Bennich, 2024; Cuthbertson & Furseth, 2022; Parker et al., 2016; Schrödter & Weißenberger, 2024). These forces influence not only adoption decisions but also the governance, scalability, legitimacy, and strategic usefulness of digital resources. Institutional theory suggests that organizations do not operate in isolation but are shaped by regulative, normative, and cognitive pressures that influence strategic action and legitimacy-seeking behavior (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2014; Suchman, 1995). In digitally intensive environments, these pressures become even more salient because firms must align digital resource deployment with privacy regulations, cybersecurity expectations, ethical AI principles, platform governance rules, and societal expectations concerning responsible digitalization (Bharadwaj et al., 2013; Rai et al., 2019; Vial, 2021).

RBV's limited engagement with such contextual pressures constrains its ability to explain competitive advantage in digital environments, where legitimacy, compliance, and ecosystem positioning often condition value realization. The increasing prominence of data protection laws, digital compliance requirements, responsible innovation norms, and platform-based governance illustrates how institutional forces shape the strategic use of digital resources (Bennich, 2024; Schrödter & Weißenberger, 2024; Zaoui & Souissi, 2020). Firms may possess or access advanced digital technologies, yet their ability to transform these resources into competitive advantage depends on whether such resources are configured in ways that satisfy regulatory requirements, stakeholder expectations, and ecosystem rules (Adamu, 2025a; Adamu & Bugaje, 2026; Xing et al., 2025). Any renewed theory of competitive advantage must therefore integrate contextual, institutional, and normative dimensions alongside firm-level resource considerations.

### **Toward a Renewed Theory of Competitive Advantage**

Collectively, the distinctive properties of digital resources—their scalability, recombability, embeddedness, and uncertainty-driven dynamics—signal the need for a renewed theoretical lens. While

RBV provided a foundational understanding of how firm-specific resources generate advantage, its assumptions are increasingly misaligned with the realities of digital competition, where value often emerges from configuration, orchestration, ecosystem participation, and continuous recombination rather than from ownership alone (Amit & Han, 2017; Barney et al., 2021; Helfat et al., 2023; Yoo et al., 2010). The emergence of digital resources does not render RBV obsolete; instead, it calls for a conceptual evolution that preserves RBV's core insight while adapting it to contemporary conditions of digital transformation, platform interdependence, and institutional complexity (Adamu, 2025a; Adamu, 2026; Bharadwaj et al., 2013; Nambisan et al., 2017).

This need for theoretical renewal provides the intellectual foundation for the Digital Resource View (DRV). The DRV reconceptualizes resources in terms of configuration, orchestration, recombability, and contextual embeddedness, thereby offering a more suitable framework for explaining competitive advantage in the age of digital resources (Adamu, 2025a; Adamu, 2025b; Adamu, 2026). The framework explains how firms convert digital assets into strategic outcomes through unique resource configurations, adaptive recombination, uncertainty management, and institutional alignment (Adamu & Bugaje, 2026). The following section introduces the DRV in detail, outlining its conceptual foundations, assumptions, and mechanisms, and positioning it as a necessary extension of resource-based theory.

## **Digital Resource View (DRV): A New Theoretical Lens**

### **Conceptual Foundations of the Digital Resource View**

The Digital Resource View (DRV) emerges as a theoretical response to the growing inadequacy of traditional resource-based explanations in digitally intensive environments. While building on the foundational insight of the Resource-Based View (RBV) that internal resources matter for competitive advantage, the DRV reconceptualizes what constitutes a strategic resource under conditions of digital disruption. Rather than treating digital technologies as extensions of conventional assets, the DRV positions digital resources as strategically configured, context-dependent, and dynamically reconfigurable entities whose value is realized through orchestration rather than ownership (Adamu, 2025a; Adamu, 2025b).

The DRV shifts analytical focus from the stock of resources held by a firm to the configuration, recombination, and deployment of digital resources within organizational and institutional contexts. Digital resources are viewed not as isolated inputs but as components of broader socio-technical systems embedded in organizational routines, digital platforms, ecosystem relationships, and regulatory environments (Orlikowski, 2007; Yoo et al., 2010; Bharadwaj et al., 2013; Vial, 2021). This perspective aligns with the realities of digital competition, where value creation increasingly depends on integration, timing, adaptability, and orchestration rather than on exclusivity or resource ownership alone (Amit & Han, 2017; Cuthbertson & Furseth, 2022; Helfat et al., 2023; Adamu, 2025a; Adamu, 2026). Under the DRV, competitive advantage emerges when firms configure accessible digital assets into distinctive resource architectures that are contextually aligned, difficult to reproduce, and capable of continuous renewal (Ferreira et al., 2025; Adamu & Bugaje, 2026).

### **Key Assumptions Distinguishing DRV from RBV**

The DRV is distinguished from RBV by several foundational assumptions. First, the DRV assumes dynamic heterogeneity, recognizing that differences in digital resource configurations emerge continuously through learning, recombination, and adaptation rather than remaining fixed over time. Competitive

advantage is therefore viewed as fluid and evolving, shaped by firms' ongoing capabilities to reconfigure digital resources in response to change.

Second, the DRV deemphasizes ownership-centric logic in favor of configuration-centric logic. Digital resources may be shared, accessed, or co-created across organizational boundaries, yet still generate firm-specific advantages when configured in unique and contextually embedded ways. This assumption reflects the platformized and ecosystem-based nature of digital competition, where control is exercised through orchestration rather than possession.

Third, the DRV explicitly incorporates contextual embeddedness into its explanatory framework. Digital resources are understood to operate within institutional, regulatory, and normative environments that shape their legitimacy and effectiveness. Competitive advantage thus depends not only on internal resource configurations but also on alignment with external expectations and constraints.

### **DRV Mechanisms of Competitive Advantage**

Central to the DRV are four interrelated mechanisms that explain how digital resources generate and sustain competitive advantage. The first is digital value creation, which refers to the enhancement of organizational outcomes through digital resource configurations that improve efficiency, decision quality, innovation, and strategic responsiveness. Digital value is realized through embedding digital resources into workflows and decision processes rather than through standalone technological adoption.

The second mechanism is digital rareness, which reconceptualizes rareness as configuration-specific uniqueness rather than technological scarcity. In digital contexts, rareness arises from idiosyncratic combinations of data, systems, routines, and human expertise that are difficult to standardize or replicate across firms (Adamu, 2025a).

The third mechanism, uncertainty-driven imitation, reflects the role of complexity, opacity, and continuous change in sustaining advantage. Digital resources often operate under conditions of high uncertainty, where causal relationships between inputs and outcomes are difficult to observe. This uncertainty creates dynamic imitation barriers that protect competitive advantages even when underlying technologies are widely accessible.

Finally, normative digital pressure captures the influence of institutional forces such as regulations, industry standards, and societal expectations on digital resource deployment. Rather than being peripheral constraints, these pressures shape how digital resources are configured, governed, and legitimized, thereby conditioning their value-creation potential (Adamu, 2025b).

### **DRV as a Framework for Theoretical Renewal**

Taken together, these assumptions and mechanisms position the DRV as a comprehensive framework for re-theorizing competitive advantage in the digital era. The DRV does not reject RBV's core insight that firm-specific resources matter; instead, it extends and refines this insight to reflect the distinctive properties of digital resources. By foregrounding configuration, uncertainty, and contextual embeddedness, the DRV offers a more nuanced and empirically relevant explanation of competitive advantage in digitally transforming environments.

In doing so, the DRV provides a conceptual bridge between traditional strategy theory and contemporary digital phenomena. It establishes a foundation for integrating emerging technologies, platforms, and

data-driven capabilities into resource-based explanations of firm performance. The following section builds on this foundation by explicitly re-theorizing competitive advantage through a comparative analysis of RBV and DRV, highlighting how the DRV reshapes our understanding of advantage in the age of digital resources.

## **Re-theorizing Competitive Advantage: From RBV to DRV**

### **Comparative Logic of Competitive Advantage under RBV and DRV**

The transition from the Resource-Based View (RBV) to the Digital Resource View (DRV) represents a major conceptual shift in how competitive advantage is understood in strategic management. RBV explains competitive advantage through the possession and protection of valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources that are imperfectly mobile across firms (Barney, 1991, 2001; Barney & Arian, 2005). Within this logic, firms achieve superior performance when they control resource endowments that competitors cannot easily acquire, imitate, or substitute. Advantage is therefore sustained through resource heterogeneity, causal ambiguity, path dependence, and social complexity (Barney, 2001; Kraaijenbrink et al., 2010; Madhani, 2010).

The DRV extends this logic by arguing that digital competitive advantage is not adequately explained by resource possession alone. Digital resources such as data, platforms, algorithms, analytics systems, cloud infrastructures, and digitally embedded routines often derive their value from how they are configured, recombined, and deployed within organizational and ecosystem contexts (Yoo et al., 2010; Bharadwaj et al., 2013; Amit & Han, 2017). The strategic question therefore shifts from what resources a firm owns to how digital resources are orchestrated into distinctive configurations that generate value under changing technological and institutional conditions (Adamu, 2025a; Adamu, 2025b; Adamu, 2026).

This shift is important because many digital resources are scalable, recombinable, non-rivalrous, and accessible across organizational boundaries. Cloud computing, platform ecosystems, open-source technologies, and shared data infrastructures weaken the assumption that strategic resources must be exclusively owned or immobile to generate advantage (Parker et al., 2016; Cuthbertson & Furseth, 2022; Rai et al., 2019). Under DRV logic, competitive advantage is less about isolating resources from rivals and more about maintaining superior configuration, integration, and orchestration capabilities in environments characterized by rapid technological change, ecosystem interdependence, and institutional pressure (Vial, 2021; Helfat et al., 2023; Adamu & Bugaje, 2026).

### **From Static Sustainability to Adaptive Advantage**

A central implication of DRV is the movement from sustained competitive advantage, as traditionally conceptualized under RBV, to adaptive competitive advantage in digital contexts. RBV assumes that once a firm secures a strong VRIN resource position, it can preserve advantage over time through imitation barriers and resource protection (Barney, 1991, 2001). This assumption is useful in relatively stable environments, but it becomes less sufficient in digital markets where innovation cycles are rapid, technological standards shift quickly, and the value of digital resources changes through use, feedback, and recombination (Nambisan et al., 2017; Vial, 2021; Plekhanov et al., 2023).

The DRV responds to this condition by conceptualizing advantage as temporary but renewable. Firms sustain competitive advantage not by freezing competitors out of resource access, but through continuous reconfiguration of digital resource architectures. This means that advantage is renewed when firms sense

emerging opportunities, recombine existing digital and non-digital resources, and scale successful configurations before competitors can replicate their performance logic (Teece, 2018; Goumagias et al., 2022; Helfat et al., 2023). Adaptive advantage therefore depends on learning, experimentation, agility, and the capacity to redesign resource configurations in response to technological and market changes (Adamu, 2026; Ferreira et al., 2025).

This reconceptualization changes the meaning of sustainability. Under RBV, sustainability is associated with resource protection and barriers to imitation. Under DRV, sustainability is associated with renewal capacity, configuration speed, and the ability to continuously adapt digital resources to emerging conditions. Competitive advantage becomes a process rather than a position; it is produced through ongoing cycles of digital experimentation, feedback, recombination, and institutional alignment (Amit & Han, 2017; Yoo et al., 2010; Adamu & Bugaje, 2026).

### **Reinterpreting Rareness and Imitation in Digital Contexts**

The DRV also reinterprets the concepts of rareness and imitation, which are central to RBV explanations of competitive advantage. In traditional RBV, rareness is usually understood as scarcity: a resource is rare when it is possessed by few existing or potential competitors (Barney, 1991). In digital environments, however, rareness no longer primarily reflects scarcity of technology or exclusivity of ownership. Many digital technologies, platforms, and analytical tools are widely available, yet firms continue to experience different performance outcomes (Bharadwaj et al., 2013; Cuthbertson & Furseth, 2022; Plekhanov et al., 2023).

The DRV explains this divergence through configuration-based rareness. Digital rareness arises from unique combinations of digital resources, organizational routines, data architectures, user interactions, managerial capabilities, and ecosystem relationships (Adamu, 2025a; Ferreira et al., 2025). A technology may be common, but the way it is configured within a firm's operational processes, customer interface, data infrastructure, and decision-making routines may be highly distinctive. This means that rareness shifts from the scarcity of individual resources to the uniqueness of the architecture through which resources are integrated and deployed.

Imitation barriers are also reinterpreted under DRV. RBV traditionally emphasizes causal ambiguity, path dependence, and social complexity as mechanisms that prevent competitors from replicating valuable resources (Barney, 2001; Kraaijenbrink et al., 2010). In digital contexts, imitation barriers are increasingly uncertainty-driven and dynamic. Algorithmic opacity, data dependency, system complexity, platform interdependence, and continuous learning make it difficult for competitors to identify the precise causal mechanisms linking digital resource configurations to performance outcomes (Marzi, 2022; Matsunaga, 2024; Rai et al., 2019). Even when competitors access similar technologies, they may struggle to reproduce the same results because they lack equivalent data histories, routines, ecosystem positions, and learning trajectories (Yoo et al., 2010; Amit & Han, 2017; Adamu, 2026).

This shift changes the strategic meaning of imitation. The key issue is no longer merely whether competitors can copy a resource, but whether they can understand, reproduce, and stabilize the complex configuration through which the resource produces value. DRV therefore shifts attention from preventing imitation to managing complexity, opacity, and uncertainty as strategic conditions that sustain advantage.

## The Role of Context and Institutions in Competitive Advantage

Another important dimension of re-theorizing competitive advantage under DRV is the explicit incorporation of institutional and contextual forces. Traditional RBV treats resources mainly as internally controlled assets and gives limited analytical attention to the regulatory, normative, and ecosystem conditions that shape value realization (Barney, 2001; Kraaijenbrink et al., 2010). In contrast, DRV recognizes that digital resources operate within broader institutional environments, including data protection regimes, digital compliance requirements, ethical standards, platform governance rules, industry norms, and societal expectations (Bennich, 2024; Schrödter & Weißenberger, 2024; Xing et al., 2025).

This contextual dimension is especially important because digital value creation depends not only on technical efficiency but also on legitimacy, compliance, trust, and ecosystem alignment. A firm may possess advanced digital capabilities, but those capabilities may fail to generate competitive advantage if they violate privacy expectations, regulatory requirements, ethical AI standards, or platform governance norms (Suchman, 1995; Scott, 2014; Vial, 2021). Institutional alignment therefore becomes a strategic condition for digital value realization. DRV captures this condition through the mechanism of normative digital pressure, which explains how institutional and societal expectations shape the deployment, governance, and scaling of digital resources (Adamu, 2025b; Bennich, 2024).

This perspective is particularly relevant in digitally transforming and emerging economies, where infrastructure gaps, regulatory uncertainty, institutional trust deficits, and uneven digital readiness influence how firms configure and benefit from digital resources (Zaoui & Souissi, 2020; Xing et al., 2025). Competitive advantage in such contexts is not determined solely by internal digital capabilities; it also depends on whether firms can align digital resource configurations with external expectations, regulatory demands, and ecosystem conditions (Adamu & Bugaje, 2026). DRV therefore broadens the explanation of competitive advantage from an internal resource logic to a socio-technical and institutionally embedded logic.

## Toward a Revised Understanding of Competitive Advantage

Taken together, the DRV advances a revised understanding of competitive advantage that is more consistent with the realities of digital competition. Advantage is no longer viewed primarily as a stable outcome derived from protected resource positions. Instead, it is understood as a processual, relational, and adaptive phenomenon that emerges through continuous digital resource configuration, recombination, orchestration, uncertainty management, and contextual alignment (Adamu, 2025a; Adamu, 2026; Helfat et al., 2023).

This reconceptualization preserves RBV's core insight that resources matter, but it extends that insight by recognizing that digital resources behave differently from traditional strategic assets. Their value is not fixed at the point of ownership; it emerges through use, interaction, data accumulation, feedback, and recombination within socio-technical systems (Orlikowski, 2007; Yoo et al., 2010; Ferreira et al., 2025). DRV therefore moves strategic management theory beyond a stock-based view of resources toward a configuration-based, dynamic, and institutionally embedded understanding of advantage.

Re-theorizing competitive advantage through the DRV provides a coherent framework for integrating digital resources into strategic management theory. The DRV serves not merely as a minor extension of RBV but as a necessary theoretical evolution for explaining competition in the age of digital resources. It clarifies how firms convert digital assets into strategic outcomes through distinctive configurations,

adaptive recombination, uncertainty-driven imitation barriers, and institutional alignment (Adamu & Bugaje, 2026). This framework provides a foundation for future empirical research on digital resource dynamics across industries, economies, and institutional settings.

## **Implications of the Digital Resource View Perspective**

### **Theoretical Implications**

The Digital Resource View (DRV) offers important implications for the advancement of strategic management theory. First, it contributes to the renewal of resource-based theory by addressing long-standing criticisms of RBV related to static resource assumptions, ownership-centric logic, and limited contextual sensitivity. Therefore, shifting analytical focus from resource possession to configuration, orchestration, and contextual embeddedness, the DRV provides a more dynamic and empirically relevant explanation of competitive advantage in digitally intensive environments.

Second, the DRV reframes core RBV concepts such as rareness, imitation, and sustainability in ways that better reflect digital realities. Rareness is no longer tied primarily to scarcity of resources but to the uniqueness of digital configurations and learning trajectories. Similarly, imitation barriers are reinterpreted as uncertainty-driven and evolving, rather than as fixed structural constraints. This reconceptualization advances theoretical precision and opens new avenues for studying how competitive advantage is created and renewed over time.

Third, the DRV strengthens the integration of strategic management and information systems research. Hence, explicitly theorizing digital resources as strategic assets rather than operational tools, the DRV provides a common conceptual language for bridging strategy, digital innovation, and IS scholarship. This integration responds to recent calls for theories that can accommodate new technologies, new organizational forms, and digitally enabled value creation processes.

### **Managerial Implications**

From a managerial perspective, the DRV underscores the need to rethink how digital resources are evaluated and managed. Rather than focusing on technology acquisition or benchmarking against competitors, managers should prioritize the strategic configuration and orchestration of digital resources within their organizations. Competitive advantage arises not from adopting the same digital tools as rivals but from embedding those tools into firm-specific routines, data contexts, and decision processes.

The DRV also highlights the importance of continuous reconfiguration. Managers operating in digital environments must treat advantage as adaptive rather than permanent, investing in learning, experimentation, and organizational flexibility. This implies developing governance structures, cross-functional coordination, and digital skills that enable rapid recombination of resources in response to environmental change.

Furthermore, managers must recognize and actively manage normative digital pressures. Regulatory compliance, ethical considerations, and stakeholder expectations are not merely constraints but strategic factors that shape digital value creation. Firms that proactively align digital resource configurations with institutional expectations are more likely to achieve legitimacy and sustain advantage over time.

## Policy and Institutional Implications

The DRV also carries important implications for policymakers and institutional actors. First, it suggests that policies aimed at enhancing digital competitiveness should move beyond technology diffusion toward capability and ecosystem development. Providing access to digital infrastructure is necessary but insufficient; institutions must also support skills development, data governance frameworks, and organizational learning capabilities that enable effective digital resource configuration.

Second, the DRV emphasizes the role of institutional alignment in digital value realization. Regulatory clarity, ethical standards, and supportive digital governance frameworks can enhance firms' ability to deploy digital resources strategically. Conversely, fragmented or uncertain institutional environments may constrain the value-creation potential of digital resources, particularly in emerging and digitally transforming economies.

Finally, the DRV provides a framework for understanding how national and sectoral digital strategies influence firm-level competitiveness. Such that, shaping normative digital pressures, policymakers indirectly affect how digital resources are configured and leveraged within organizations, highlighting the interdependence between firm strategy and institutional context.

## Conclusion and Future Research Directions

This paper re-theorized competitive advantage in response to the growing dominance of digital resources in contemporary organizations. Although the Resource-Based View (RBV) remains one of the most influential explanations of firm-level performance differences, its assumptions of resource stability, ownership, scarcity, and protection-based imitation barriers are increasingly strained by the realities of digital competition. Digital resources such as data, platforms, algorithms, analytics systems, and digitally embedded routines are scalable, recombining, ecosystem-dependent, and continuously evolving. These characteristics require a renewed theoretical lens capable of explaining how advantage is created and sustained when resources are no longer necessarily scarce, immobile, or exclusively controlled.

The paper advances the Digital Resource View (DRV) as an extension of RBV and as a more contextually appropriate framework for understanding competitive advantage in digitally intensive environments. The central argument is that digital competitive advantage emerges not from resource possession alone but from the effective configuration, orchestration, and recombination of digital resources within organizational, technological, and institutional contexts. This position preserves RBV's foundational insight that resources matter, while refining its explanatory logic to reflect the distinctive properties of digital resources. In this regard, the DRV shifts strategic analysis from static resource ownership to adaptive resource configuration, from scarcity-based rareness to configuration-based rareness, and from protection-based imitation barriers to uncertainty-driven imitation barriers.

The main theoretical contribution of the paper lies in reconceptualizing competitive advantage as a dynamic, adaptive, and contextually embedded outcome. Through the DRV, advantage is understood as an ongoing process shaped by digital resource configuration, learning, feedback, uncertainty management, and institutional alignment. This interpretation moves beyond the traditional view of sustained advantage as the defence of protected resource positions. Instead, it frames sustainability as a capacity for continuous renewal, where firms maintain advantage by recombining digital resources, adapting to technological change, and aligning their digital practices with regulatory, normative, and ecosystem expectations.

The paper also contributes to strategic management theory by clarifying the mechanisms through which digital resources generate advantage. Digital value creation explains how resources become strategically meaningful through use, integration, and deployment. Digital rareness explains how uniqueness emerges from configurations rather than from scarcity of individual assets. Uncertainty-driven imitation explains why competitors may struggle to reproduce digital advantage even when similar technologies are accessible. Normative digital pressure explains how institutional forces shape the legitimacy, governance, and scalability of digital resource deployment. Together, these mechanisms provide a coherent foundation for extending resource-based theory into the digital economy.

Several future research directions arise from this conceptual development. First, empirical studies are needed to operationalize DRV constructs and test the relationships among digital resource configuration, digital rareness, reconfiguration capability, uncertainty-driven imitation barriers, institutional alignment, and competitive advantage. Quantitative studies may apply structural equation modelling, while qualitative studies may examine how firms configure digital resources in specific organizational and sectoral contexts. Second, longitudinal research is needed to examine how digital resource configurations evolve over time and how firms renew advantage across successive waves of technological change. Such studies would provide deeper insight into the temporal and processual dimensions of digital competitive advantage.

Third, comparative studies across industries and national contexts would enrich understanding of how institutional conditions shape DRV mechanisms. This is particularly important in emerging economies, where infrastructure gaps, regulatory uncertainty, digital trust deficits, and uneven technological readiness may influence how firms create value from digital resources. Fourth, future studies may integrate DRV with complementary theoretical perspectives such as dynamic capabilities, platform ecosystem theory, institutional theory, knowledge-based view, and digital responsibility. Such integration would help explain how firms not only configure digital resources but also govern them responsibly within complex socio-technical and institutional environments.

The Digital Resource View provides a timely and necessary evolution of resource-based theory. As digitalization continues to reshape competitive landscapes, firms require more than ownership of valuable resources; they require the capability to configure, recombine, orchestrate, and legitimize digital resources in ways that produce adaptive and renewable advantage. The DRV therefore offers scholars and practitioners a robust theoretical lens for understanding how competitive advantage is created, renewed, and sustained in the age of digital resources.

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