

A CONVERGENT THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION ACROSS CULTURAL CONTEXTS GLOBALLY

I Made Darsana

Institut Pariwisata dan Bisnis Internasional, Indonesia

*Correspondence: made.darsana@ipb-intl.ac.id

Abstract

Digital transformation has emerged as a critical driver of organizational change, yet its implementation and outcomes vary significantly across cultural contexts. Existing studies often treat technological adoption and cultural dynamics as separate domains, resulting in fragmented theoretical explanations. This article proposes a convergent theoretical framework that integrates digital transformation processes with cross-cultural perspectives to provide a holistic understanding of how organizations adapt to technological change globally. The framework synthesizes insights from institutional theory, socio-technical systems theory, and cultural dimensions theory to explain how cultural values, organizational structures, and technological infrastructures interact dynamically. Using a descriptive conceptual approach, this study identifies key dimensions influencing digital transformation across cultures, including power distance, uncertainty avoidance, digital readiness, and organizational learning capacity. The findings suggest that digital transformation is not merely a technological process but a culturally embedded phenomenon shaped by social norms, leadership styles, and institutional pressures. The proposed framework highlights the importance of cultural alignment in ensuring successful digital transformation initiatives and provides a multi-level analytical lens for researchers and practitioners. This study contributes to the literature by bridging the gap between digital transformation research and cross-cultural studies, offering a unified theoretical model that can guide future empirical research. Furthermore, it provides practical implications for multinational organizations seeking to implement digital strategies across diverse cultural environments. By emphasizing convergence rather than divergence, this framework advances a more integrative understanding of digital transformation in the global context.

Keywords: Digital Transformation; Cross-Cultural Framework; Organizational Change.

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has emerged as one of the most influential forces shaping contemporary organizations, economies, and societies. Driven by rapid advancements in technologies such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing, big data analytics, and the Internet of Things, organizations are increasingly compelled to rethink their strategies, structures, and processes. However, digital transformation is not merely a technological shift; it represents a profound reconfiguration of how organizations create value, interact with stakeholders, and sustain competitiveness in an interconnected world. Despite its global relevance, the processes and outcomes of digital transformation vary significantly across different cultural contexts, suggesting that culture plays a critical yet often underexplored role.

In its broadest sense, digital transformation refers to the integration of digital technologies into all areas of an organization, fundamentally changing how it operates and delivers value to customers. This transformation often involves changes in organizational culture, leadership, employee competencies, and business models. While many organizations invest heavily in technological infrastructure, the success of digital

transformation initiatives frequently depends on non-technical factors, particularly cultural alignment. This observation highlights the need to move beyond technology-centric perspectives and adopt a more holistic approach that considers cultural dynamics.

One of the central challenges in understanding digital transformation lies in its complexity. It is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that encompasses technological, organizational, and social elements. Existing research has provided valuable insights into these dimensions; however, much of the literature remains fragmented. Studies in information systems tend to focus on technological adoption and innovation, while research in organizational behavior emphasizes change management and leadership. Meanwhile, cross-cultural studies examine how cultural values influence behavior but rarely integrate technological considerations. As a result, there is a lack of a unified theoretical framework that captures the interplay among these domains.

Cultural context significantly influences how organizations perceive, implement, and adapt to digital transformation. Culture shapes individuals' attitudes toward change, risk, and innovation, which in turn affect organizational readiness and responsiveness. For instance, in cultures characterized by high uncertainty avoidance, employees may exhibit resistance to digital transformation due to concerns about risk and ambiguity. Conversely, cultures with lower uncertainty avoidance may be more open to experimentation and technological innovation. Similarly, power distance—the extent to which hierarchical differences are accepted—can influence decision-making processes and the speed of digital adoption.

Furthermore, digital transformation is increasingly occurring within a globalized environment, where organizations operate across multiple cultural contexts simultaneously. Multinational corporations, in particular, face the challenge of implementing standardized digital strategies while accommodating local cultural differences. This tension between global integration and local adaptation underscores the importance of understanding digital transformation as a culturally embedded process. Without such understanding, organizations risk implementing strategies that are technologically sound but culturally misaligned, leading to suboptimal outcomes or even failure.

Another important consideration is the role of institutional environments in shaping digital transformation. Organizations do not operate in isolation; they are influenced by regulatory frameworks, industry norms, and societal expectations. These institutional factors vary across countries and are often intertwined with cultural values. For example, regulatory support for digital innovation may differ significantly between developed and developing economies, affecting the pace and scope of transformation. Cultural attitudes toward privacy, data security, and technology adoption further complicate this landscape.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated digital transformation across sectors, highlighting both its importance and its challenges. Organizations were forced to rapidly adopt digital technologies to maintain operations, shifting to remote work, online services, and digital communication platforms. While some organizations adapted successfully, others struggled due to cultural barriers, lack of digital readiness, or resistance to change.

This global disruption has underscored the need for a deeper understanding of how cultural factors influence digital transformation, particularly in times of crisis.

Despite the growing recognition of these issues, there remains a significant gap in the literature. Most existing frameworks either focus on technological aspects or consider cultural factors in isolation. Few studies attempt to integrate these perspectives into a cohesive model. This gap limits the ability of researchers and practitioners to fully understand the dynamics of digital transformation across different cultural contexts. Addressing this limitation requires a convergent approach that synthesizes insights from multiple theoretical traditions.

This study responds to this need by proposing a convergent theoretical framework for understanding digital transformation across cultures. The framework integrates three key theoretical perspectives: institutional theory, socio-technical systems theory, and cultural dimensions theory. Institutional theory provides insights into how external pressures influence organizational behavior; socio-technical systems theory emphasizes the interaction between social and technological components; and cultural dimensions theory explains how cultural values shape attitudes and behaviors. By combining these perspectives, the proposed framework offers a comprehensive lens for analyzing digital transformation.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to advance both theory and practice. From a theoretical standpoint, it contributes to the integration of previously fragmented domains, providing a more holistic understanding of digital transformation. From a practical perspective, it offers valuable insights for organizations seeking to implement digital strategies in diverse cultural environments. By identifying key factors and relationships, the framework can guide decision-making and improve the likelihood of successful transformation.

Moreover, this study aligns with the growing emphasis on interdisciplinary research in addressing complex global challenges. Digital transformation is not solely a technological issue; it is a socio-cultural phenomenon that requires insights from multiple disciplines. By adopting a convergent approach, this research demonstrates the value of integrating diverse perspectives to generate more comprehensive and actionable knowledge.

In addition, the proposed framework has implications for policy-making and education. Policymakers can use the insights to design supportive environments for digital transformation, taking into account cultural and institutional factors. Educational institutions can incorporate these perspectives into curricula, preparing future leaders to navigate the complexities of digital transformation in a global context.

The primary objective of this study is to develop a theoretical framework that explains how digital transformation unfolds across different cultural contexts. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research question: How can digital transformation be understood through a convergent framework that integrates technological, organizational, and cultural dimensions? By addressing this question, the study aims to provide a foundation for future empirical research and practical application.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. The next section reviews relevant literature on digital transformation, institutional theory, socio-technical systems, and cultural

dimensions. The methodology section outlines the conceptual approach used in this study. The results and discussion section presents the proposed framework and explores its implications. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the key findings and suggests directions for future research.

In conclusion, digital transformation represents a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that cannot be fully understood through a single disciplinary lens. Cultural context plays a crucial role in shaping how organizations engage with technological change, yet it remains insufficiently integrated into existing frameworks. By proposing a convergent theoretical model, this study aims to bridge this gap and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of digital transformation in a globalized world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital transformation has attracted significant scholarly attention over the past decade, particularly in the fields of information systems, organizational studies, and strategic management. It is widely recognized as a complex and multi-layered phenomenon that involves the integration of digital technologies into organizational processes, structures, and value creation mechanisms. However, despite the growing body of literature, the theoretical foundations of digital transformation remain fragmented, with limited integration of cultural perspectives. This section reviews key theoretical streams relevant to this study, including digital transformation theory, institutional theory, socio-technical systems theory, and cultural dimensions theory, and identifies gaps that justify the need for a convergent framework.

Digital Transformation and Organizational Change

Digital transformation is often conceptualized as more than the adoption of new technologies; it represents a fundamental shift in how organizations operate and compete. Scholars argue that digital transformation involves changes in business models, customer engagement, and operational processes. It requires organizations to develop new capabilities, such as data-driven decision-making and digital innovation.

A key perspective in this domain emphasizes dynamic capabilities, which refer to an organization's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies in response to rapidly changing environments. Digital transformation, in this sense, is viewed as a continuous and iterative process rather than a one-time initiative. Organizations must constantly adapt to technological advancements and market demands, which necessitates flexibility and learning.

Another important aspect of digital transformation is organizational change management. Successful transformation requires not only technological investment but also changes in organizational culture, leadership, and employee behavior. Resistance to change is a common challenge, often stemming from uncertainty, lack of skills, or misalignment between technology and organizational values. These challenges highlight the importance of considering human and cultural factors in digital transformation initiatives.

Institutional Theory and External Pressures

Institutional theory provides a useful lens for understanding how external environments influence organizational behavior. According to this perspective, organizations are shaped by three types of pressures: coercive, mimetic, and normative. Coercive pressures arise from regulations and legal requirements, mimetic pressures result from imitation of successful competitors, and normative pressures stem from professional standards and social expectations.

In the context of digital transformation, institutional pressures play a significant role in driving technology adoption. For example, governments may mandate digital reporting systems, or industry standards may encourage the use of specific technologies. Organizations may also adopt digital innovations to remain competitive or to gain legitimacy within their industry.

However, the impact of institutional pressures is not uniform across contexts. Cultural factors influence how organizations interpret and respond to these pressures. In some cultures, compliance with regulations may be prioritized, while in others, innovation and differentiation may take precedence. This variation suggests that institutional theory must be integrated with cultural perspectives to fully explain digital transformation across different settings.

Socio-Technical Systems Theory

Socio-technical systems theory emphasizes the interdependence between social and technical components within organizations. According to this theory, organizational effectiveness depends on the alignment between technological systems and social structures, including people, processes, and culture. Digital transformation, therefore, cannot be understood solely in terms of technology; it must also consider how technology interacts with human and organizational factors.

One of the key principles of socio-technical systems theory is joint optimization, which suggests that both social and technical systems should be designed together to achieve optimal performance. In the context of digital transformation, this means that technological implementation should be accompanied by changes in organizational structures, workflows, and cultural practices.

Failure to achieve this alignment can result in suboptimal outcomes. For instance, implementing advanced digital tools without adequate training or cultural support may lead to low adoption rates and reduced productivity. Conversely, organizations that successfully align their social and technical systems are more likely to achieve sustainable transformation.

Socio-technical systems theory also highlights the importance of user participation and engagement. Employees are not passive recipients of technology; they actively shape how it is used and integrated into organizational processes. This perspective reinforces the need to consider cultural values and social dynamics in digital transformation initiatives.

Cultural Dimensions and Cross-Cultural Perspectives

Cultural dimensions theory provides a framework for understanding how cultural values influence behavior within organizations. One of the most widely used models identifies several key dimensions, including power distance, individualism versus collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity versus femininity, and long-term orientation.

These dimensions have significant implications for digital transformation. For example, in high power distance cultures, decision-making is often centralized, which may slow down innovation but ensure consistency in implementation. In contrast, low power distance cultures may encourage decentralized decision-making and experimentation, facilitating rapid digital adoption.

Individualism versus collectivism also plays a role in shaping organizational behavior. Individualistic cultures tend to emphasize personal achievement and autonomy, which may support innovation and risk-taking. Collectivist cultures, on the other hand, prioritize group harmony and collaboration, which can enhance teamwork but may discourage disruptive change.

Uncertainty avoidance is particularly relevant to digital transformation, as it reflects the extent to which individuals feel comfortable with ambiguity and risk. High uncertainty avoidance cultures may resist digital transformation due to perceived risks, while low uncertainty avoidance cultures may be more open to experimentation and change.

Despite the relevance of cultural dimensions, many studies treat culture as a contextual variable rather than an integral component of digital transformation. This limited perspective restricts the ability to fully understand how cultural values shape technological adoption and organizational change.

Toward a Convergent Theoretical Framework

While each of the theoretical perspectives discussed above provides valuable insights, they are often applied in isolation. Digital transformation research tends to focus on technological and organizational factors, institutional theory emphasizes external pressures, socio-technical systems theory highlights system alignment, and cultural dimensions theory examines value systems. However, real-world digital transformation involves the interaction of all these elements.

The lack of integration among these perspectives represents a significant gap in the literature. Without a convergent framework, it is difficult to capture the complexity of digital transformation across different cultural contexts. This limitation is particularly evident in global organizations, where technological initiatives must be adapted to diverse cultural environments.

A convergent theoretical framework offers a solution by synthesizing insights from multiple disciplines. Such a framework can provide a more comprehensive understanding of digital transformation, highlighting the dynamic interplay between technology, organization, and culture. It can also facilitate the development of more effective strategies for implementing digital transformation in diverse contexts.

The literature suggests that digital transformation is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by technological, organizational, institutional, and cultural factors. However, existing studies often fail to integrate these dimensions into a unified model. This study addresses this gap by proposing a convergent theoretical framework that brings together these perspectives, offering a holistic understanding of digital transformation across cultures.

METHOD

This study adopts a descriptive conceptual research design to develop a convergent theoretical framework for understanding digital transformation across cultural contexts. Rather than collecting primary empirical data, the study focuses on synthesizing and integrating existing theoretical perspectives to construct a comprehensive and coherent model. This approach is appropriate given the study's objective of theory building and conceptual integration.

The data sources for this research consist of peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and reputable conference proceedings drawn from interdisciplinary fields, including information systems, organizational studies, strategic management, and cross-cultural research. The literature was selected based on three main criteria: (1) relevance to digital transformation, (2) contribution to cultural or institutional theory, and (3) theoretical or empirical rigor. Priority was given to widely cited and foundational works to ensure the robustness of the conceptual synthesis.

The analytical procedure was conducted in three stages. First, a thematic identification process was used to extract key constructs and variables from the literature, such as technological infrastructure, organizational dynamics, cultural values, and institutional pressures. Second, a comparative analysis was performed to examine relationships and overlaps among these constructs across different theoretical perspectives. This step enabled the identification of common patterns and complementary insights. Third, an integrative synthesis was carried out to develop a unified framework that captures the interaction among technological, organizational, and cultural dimensions.

To enhance conceptual validity, the proposed framework was iteratively refined by comparing it with established theories, including institutional theory, socio-technical systems theory, and cultural dimensions theory. This iterative process ensured internal consistency and theoretical coherence.

Although the study does not employ statistical validation, its rigor lies in the systematic selection and synthesis of literature. The resulting framework provides a foundational model that can be empirically tested and further developed in future research, particularly in cross-cultural and multinational organizational settings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study proposes a convergent theoretical framework that explains digital transformation as the result of dynamic interactions among three core dimensions: technological infrastructure, organizational dynamics, and cultural context. Unlike prior fragmented models, the framework integrates these dimensions into a unified structure,

emphasizing that digital transformation is not a linear or purely technical process but a multi-level, culturally embedded phenomenon.

Core Dimensions of the Convergent Framework

1. Technological Infrastructure

Technological infrastructure represents the foundational layer of digital transformation, encompassing digital platforms, data systems, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, and communication technologies. These tools enable organizations to redesign processes, enhance efficiency, and create new value propositions.

However, the findings of this study suggest that technological sophistication alone does not guarantee successful transformation. Many organizations invest heavily in advanced technologies but fail to achieve expected outcomes due to misalignment with organizational and cultural factors. Therefore, technology should be viewed as an enabler rather than a driver, whose effectiveness depends on its integration with human and institutional elements.

Furthermore, technological infrastructure varies significantly across regions, influenced by economic development, regulatory environments, and digital readiness. Organizations operating in developing contexts may face limitations in infrastructure, which can constrain digital transformation efforts. Conversely, highly developed digital ecosystems can accelerate transformation but may also increase complexity and competition.

2. Organizational Dynamics

Organizational dynamics refer to internal structures, leadership styles, decision-making processes, and learning capabilities. These factors determine how organizations adopt, implement, and sustain digital transformation initiatives.

Leadership emerges as a critical determinant in aligning technological initiatives with organizational goals. Transformational leadership, in particular, plays a vital role in fostering innovation, motivating employees, and managing resistance to change. Leaders act as mediators between technological possibilities and cultural realities, translating digital strategies into actionable practices.

Organizational learning is another key component. Digital transformation requires continuous learning and adaptation, as technologies evolve rapidly. Organizations that cultivate a learning-oriented culture—through training, knowledge sharing, and experimentation—are more likely to succeed. In contrast, rigid structures and resistance to change can hinder transformation efforts.

Additionally, organizational agility is essential in navigating digital transformation. Agile organizations can respond quickly to technological and market changes, adjusting strategies as needed. This agility is closely linked to decentralized decision-making and flexible structures, which may be influenced by cultural norms.

3. Cultural Context

Cultural context forms the third pillar of the framework and serves as a critical lens through which digital transformation is interpreted and enacted. Culture shapes values, beliefs, and behaviors, influencing how individuals and organizations respond to technological change.

Key cultural dimensions identified in this study include power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, and long-term orientation. These dimensions affect various aspects of digital transformation, such as decision-making speed, risk tolerance, collaboration, and innovation.

For instance, in high power distance cultures, hierarchical structures may centralize decision-making, potentially slowing down innovation but ensuring consistency and control. In low power distance cultures, decentralized structures may encourage experimentation and rapid adoption of digital technologies.

Uncertainty avoidance significantly impacts attitudes toward digital transformation. High uncertainty avoidance cultures may resist change due to perceived risks, while low uncertainty avoidance cultures are more likely to embrace innovation and experimentation. Similarly, collectivist cultures may emphasize teamwork and shared responsibility, which can support collaborative digital initiatives, whereas individualist cultures may promote autonomy and creativity.

Interaction Among Dimensions

The central contribution of this framework lies in its emphasis on the interaction among technological, organizational, and cultural dimensions. These dimensions do not operate independently; rather, they are interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

1. Technology–Organization Interaction

The interaction between technology and organizational dynamics is a core principle of socio-technical systems theory. Effective digital transformation requires alignment between technological tools and organizational structures. For example, implementing advanced analytics systems requires not only technical expertise but also organizational processes that support data-driven decision-making.

Misalignment can lead to inefficiencies and resistance. For instance, introducing collaborative digital platforms in organizations with rigid hierarchical structures may result in underutilization, as employees may not feel empowered to engage fully. Conversely, alignment enhances adoption and effectiveness.

2. Organization–Culture Interaction

Organizational dynamics are deeply embedded in cultural contexts. Leadership styles, communication patterns, and decision-making processes are influenced by cultural values. For example, participative leadership may be more effective in low power distance cultures, while directive leadership may be more accepted in high power distance environments.

Organizational learning is also shaped by culture. In collectivist cultures, knowledge sharing and collaboration may be more prevalent, facilitating collective learning. In

individualist cultures, learning may be more self-directed, emphasizing personal development.

3. Culture–Technology Interaction

Cultural values directly influence how technology is perceived and used. For example, attitudes toward privacy and data security vary across cultures, affecting the adoption of digital platforms. Similarly, trust in technology and institutions can influence willingness to engage with digital systems.

This interaction highlights the importance of cultural alignment in technology implementation. Technologies that are designed without considering cultural context may face resistance or fail to achieve intended outcomes.

Mediating and Moderating Factors

The framework identifies several mediating and moderating factors that influence the relationships among the three core dimensions:

- a) Leadership acts as a mediator, translating technological capabilities into organizational practices while aligning them with cultural values.
- b) Organizational learning mediates the relationship between technology and performance, enabling adaptation and continuous improvement.
- c) Institutional pressures (regulatory, normative, and competitive) moderate digital transformation by shaping organizational priorities and constraints.
- d) Digital readiness moderates the effectiveness of technological infrastructure, reflecting the availability of skills, resources, and infrastructure.

These factors add depth to the framework, demonstrating that digital transformation is influenced by multiple layers of interaction.

Theoretical Implications

The proposed framework makes several contributions to theory. First, it bridges the gap between digital transformation research and cross-cultural studies by integrating previously disconnected perspectives. This integration provides a more comprehensive understanding of digital transformation as a socio-cultural phenomenon.

Second, the framework advances socio-technical systems theory by explicitly incorporating cultural dimensions, which are often treated as external factors. By positioning culture as a core component, the framework enhances the explanatory power of socio-technical models.

Third, the study contributes to institutional theory by highlighting the role of culture in shaping responses to institutional pressures. This perspective suggests that institutional influences cannot be fully understood without considering cultural context.

Finally, the framework introduces the concept of convergence, emphasizing the integration of multiple dimensions rather than their separation. This approach aligns with the complexity of real-world digital transformation and supports interdisciplinary research.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study have important implications for practitioners, particularly organizations operating in global or multicultural environments.

First, organizations should conduct cultural assessments before implementing digital transformation initiatives. Understanding cultural values can help identify potential barriers and design strategies that align with local contexts.

Second, leadership development is crucial. Leaders must be equipped with cross-cultural competencies to navigate diverse environments and align digital strategies with cultural expectations.

Third, organizations should invest in organizational learning and capacity building. Training programs should be tailored to cultural contexts, ensuring that employees are prepared to adopt and use digital technologies effectively.

Fourth, organizations should adopt a flexible approach to digital transformation. Rather than applying standardized solutions, they should adapt strategies to fit cultural and institutional contexts.

Finally, policymakers can use the framework to design supportive ecosystems for digital transformation, including regulatory frameworks, education systems, and infrastructure development.

Toward a Convergent Understanding of Digital Transformation

The overarching insight from this study is that digital transformation is inherently contextual and relational. It cannot be reduced to technological adoption or organizational change alone. Instead, it emerges from the interaction of multiple dimensions, each shaped by cultural and institutional contexts.

The concept of convergence emphasizes the need to integrate these dimensions into a coherent framework. This approach not only enhances theoretical understanding but also provides practical guidance for managing digital transformation in diverse environments.

In conclusion, the proposed framework offers a comprehensive and integrative model that captures the complexity of digital transformation across cultures. By highlighting the interplay among technology, organization, and culture, it provides a foundation for future research and practice, contributing to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of digital transformation in the global context.

CLOSING

Conclusion

This study develops a convergent theoretical framework to explain digital transformation as an integrated process shaped by technological, organizational, and cultural dimensions. The findings demonstrate that digital transformation cannot be understood solely as a technological upgrade or organizational change initiative; rather, it is a complex and context-dependent phenomenon embedded within cultural and institutional environments.

The proposed framework highlights the importance of alignment among its three core dimensions. Technological infrastructure provides the tools and capabilities necessary for transformation, but its effectiveness depends on organizational dynamics such as leadership, learning capacity, and structural flexibility. At the same time, cultural context plays a critical role in shaping how technology is perceived, adopted, and utilized. Cultural values such as power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and collectivism influence decision-making processes, risk tolerance, and collaboration patterns, ultimately affecting transformation outcomes.

One of the key contributions of this study is its emphasis on convergence. By integrating insights from institutional theory, socio-technical systems theory, and cultural dimensions theory, the framework offers a more comprehensive understanding of digital transformation across diverse contexts. This integrative approach addresses the limitations of fragmented research and provides a foundation for future empirical studies.

Practically, the framework suggests that organizations should adopt culturally informed digital strategies, invest in leadership and organizational learning, and remain adaptable to varying institutional environments. For multinational organizations, this means balancing global digital standardization with local cultural adaptation.

Future research is encouraged to empirically validate the proposed framework and explore its applicability across industries and regions. Overall, this study contributes to advancing both theoretical and practical understanding of digital transformation in an increasingly globalized and culturally diverse world.

AI Policy Statement

This article was developed with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools to support language structuring, coherence, and clarity of academic writing. The conceptual framework, theoretical integration, analysis, and interpretation are the original work of the author. All sources referenced were critically evaluated and synthesized to ensure academic rigor and integrity. The use of AI was limited to enhancing linguistic quality and does not replace scholarly judgment or intellectual contribution. The author has carefully reviewed and revised the content to ensure originality, minimize similarity, and comply with ethical standards for academic publication.

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