Crafting Digital Change Messages: Enablers for Multilevel Fashion Digital Readiness

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Digital transformation, profound digital change brought about by digital technologies, serves as a fundamental catalyst to reshape today's fashion industry businesses (Kraus et al., 2022). These technologies include smart wearable technology, 3D modeling and printing, virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and more. Transformative digital changes present a huge challenge for organizations to change their strategic capabilities, business operation processes, and more (Shah et al., 2017). Resistance from employees can also fail in digital transformation (Shah et al., 2017). In this light, the concept of digital readiness has been discussed as an approach to addressing these challenges (Nafz et al., 2022). However, there is very limited understanding dedicated to the fashion sector regarding how the industry is being enabled to change (Jin & Shin, 2021), and virtually no universally accepted definition of fashion digital readiness. Therefore, this study aims to conceptualize fashion digital readiness, understand the factors that facilitate digital readiness, and develop a conceptual framework for enablers of fashion digital readiness.

A multilevel theory of change readiness guided our study because digital readiness has been discussed as a context-specific change scenario where digital technologies play a crucial role in the theory of change readiness (Gfrerer et al., 2021). Change readiness is defined as an individual's belief that change is needed and an organization's capacity to undertake change (Armenakis et al., 1993). The change messages are thought to serve as antecedents to drive, coordinate, and facilitate the change (Armenakis et al., 1993). Bouckenooghe et al. (2009) proposed the tri-dimensions of readiness, including emotional, cognitive, and intentional readiness for change. According to Rafferty et al. (2013), change readiness has been examined at two levels: (a) the extent to which an individual is ready for change (i.e., individual level) and (b) the extent to which collective behavior commits to change and their capacity to change (i.e., organizational level). Furthermore, the internal factors that lead to change include internal organizational context enablers and personal characteristics (Rafferty et al., 2013). In this light, we define fashion digital readiness as the state of preparedness of an organization, personnel, and technology to undergo a transformative change driven by digital technology across emotional, cognitive, and intentional dimensions (grounded from Bouckenooghe et al., 2009; Nguyen et al., 2019). In addition, considering the role of digital technologies in the change process, we identified the additional technological level (Nguyen et al., 2019) in addition to individual and organizational levels to examine enablers for fashion digital readiness.

We employed the systematic review methodology guided by Kitchenham (2004) and the PRISMA 2020 checklist to systematically evaluate and analyze the existing literature (Page et al., 2021). Google Scholar database was chosen due to its comprehensive coverage of various publications (Mikki, 2009). The specific keywords "Digital" and "Fashion OR Textile OR

Apparel OR Clothing" were used for searching regardless of the time frame. The preliminary search in December 2023 yielded 42,000 articles, and the first 1,000 articles were reviewed by relevance. This study focused on change readiness in the fashion industry, particularly from the management perspective. After the inclusion and exclusion search process, 64 articles were analyzed and yielded a total of 3,479 codes and 22 themes of enablers (See Figure 1). The themes were summarized and calculated by induction rate, the extent to which each theme is represented within the data (Lim & Kumar, 2019).

We analyzed the enablers at three levels. First, for the organizational level, participation and communication (56.9%) were identified as the top enabler, indicating that the change will be facilitated if members are well informed, involved, communicated with, and engaged in the digital change process (Yu et al., 2022). Subsequently, organizational learning (41.4%) was identified as the second most mentioned enabler, suggesting the important role of educating/training/coaching and learning in cultivating a knowledge-based environment and providing opportunities for employees to learn must-have knowledge and skills to use digital technology in the workplace efficiently and effectively (Nafz et al., 2022). Second, at the individual level, digital efficacy (77.5%) was found to be the top enabler, indicating that employees' digital confidence and being equipped with the required digital knowledge and abilities are crucial for successful digital change (Choi, 2022). Third, at the technological level, IT infrastructure (72.7%) was identified as the most mentioned enabler, referring to the basic technical components that support digital change, such as, in the literature, basic IoT infrastructure, equipment, and software and hardware of the digital technology (Chen, 2020).

The findings provide an overview of change messages - enablers of fashion digital readiness as discussed in various literature in the field so far. The study contributes to and expands upon the change readiness theory within the context of digital transformation from a theoretical standpoint. Additionally, the study offers practical implications for industry practitioners who can leverage insights into digital strategies and reevaluate the business models from the multilevel perspective to better facilitate digital transformation. However, due to the limited scope of the Google Scholar database, it is advisable to consult additional databases for additional perspectives. The study provides a future research avenue for investigating enablers at each of these levels of the context within the entire supply chain, from manufacturing to the consumer.
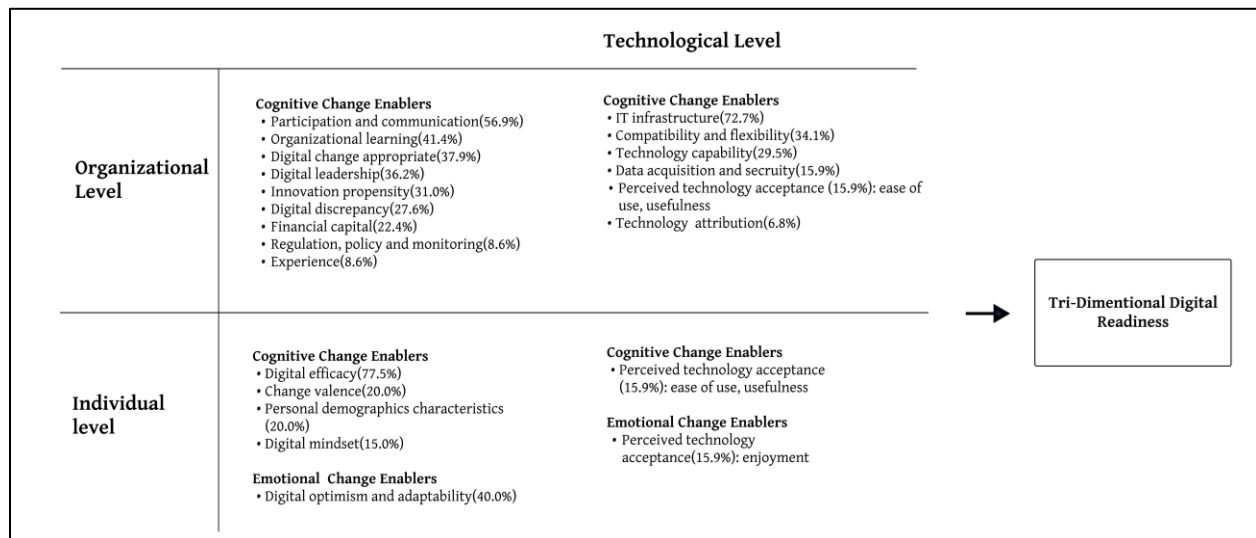
Figure 1 Multilevel Enablers for Fashion Digital Readiness Conceptual Framework

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