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Branding as a higher-order dynamic capability: a dynamic capability theory framework for governing brand meaning in AI-driven markets

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ABSTRACT

Brands increasingly operate in digital and AI driven markets where brand meaning is continuously shaped by algorithmic systems, platforms, and decentralized stakeholder interactions. While branding research has extensively examined brand equity, identity, and engagement, it offers limited explanation of how firms systematically adapt and govern brand meaning over time under conditions of technological turbulence. Addressing this gap, this study reconceptualizes branding as a dynamic organizational capability rather than a static strategic asset. Drawing on dynamic capability theory, the paper develops a process framework that explains how firms govern brand meaning through the coordinated operation of brand sensing, brand seizing, and brand reconfiguring capabilities. The framework theorizes how artificial intelligence simultaneously enhances adaptive branding through analytics and personalization while intensifying risks related to brand coherence, authenticity, and governance. By integrating branding theory with strategic adaptation, the study advances a process-oriented explanation of brand management that clarifies why some firms sustain brand trust and coherence in AI mediated environments while others experience fragmentation and erosion of brand meaning. The paper contributes to brand management theory by offering a unifying conceptual framework that informs future empirical research and provides strategic guidance for managing brands in digitally mediated markets.
Keywords: Brand management; Brand meaning; Dynamic capabilities; Artificial intelligence; Brand governance

INTRODUCTION

Brands have long been recognized as critical strategic assets that enable firms to differentiate themselves, create meaning, and build enduring relationships with customers (Barnes, 2003).

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Foundational branding theories emphasize brand identity, brand image, and brand equity as mechanisms through which firms influence consumer perceptions and behavior (Aaker, 1991; Singh & Dall'Olmo Riley, 2022). Within this tradition, brand management is typically portrayed as a deliberate and structured activity focused on consistency, control, and alignment between intended brand meaning and marketplace perceptions (Beverland, 2021). While this perspective has substantially advanced understanding of brand value creation, it implicitly assumes relatively stable environments and manageable levels of uncertainty (Helm & Jones, 2010). As a result, branding has often been conceptualized as a controllable marketing function rather than as an adaptive organizational capability that evolves in response to continuous environmental change.

The rapid diffusion of digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI) has fundamentally altered the conditions under which brands are created, communicated, and governed (Agarwal, Swami, & Malhotra, 2024; Kumar, Verma, & Mirza, 2024). Digital platforms, social media, algorithmic personalization, and AI driven analytics increasingly mediate brand–stakeholder interactions, reducing managerial control over brand meaning (Kozinets, 2022). In these environments, brand perceptions emerge through real time, multi actor interactions involving consumers, platforms, and intelligent systems rather than through unilateral managerial decisions. AI systems now shape content visibility, customer engagement, and brand experiences at scale, accelerating feedback loops and intensifying market volatility (Farhat, Chaney, & Khemakhem, 2025; Lambrecht, Baumgarth, & Henseler, 2025). These developments challenge traditional assumptions of brand stability and call for theoretical perspectives capable of explaining how brands adapt in technologically turbulent contexts.

Although recent branding research has begun to address digitalization and AI, much of this work remains fragmented and predominantly tool oriented (Kozinets, 2022). Studies on digital branding, brand co-creation, and AI enabled customer engagement to provide valuable insights into emerging practices (Gupta & Khan, 2024; M. Yang & Wang, 2025), yet they often treat technology as an external enabler rather than an integral component of strategic brand management. Consequently, existing models struggle to explain how firms systematically adapt brand meaning, authenticity, and value creation over time. Static representations of brand equity and identity offer limited guidance for understanding continuous brand evolution in algorithmically mediated markets, revealing a theoretical gap concerning the organizational processes that enable brands to remain relevant and trusted.

In parallel, strategic management research has increasingly emphasized the role of dynamic capabilities in enabling firms to achieve sustained competitive advantage in rapidly changing environments (Ambrosini & Bowman, 2009; Li & Liu, 2014). Dynamic capability theory focuses on firms' abilities to sense environmental changes, seize emerging opportunities, and reconfigure resources to maintain strategic alignment (Girod & Whittington, 2017; Samiei, Jafarpanah, & Mohammadi, 2025). This process-oriented perspective has been widely applied to innovation, digital transformation, and information systems research, where uncertainty and technological disruption are pervasive (Samiei et al., 2025). By emphasizing adaptation and renewal, dynamic capability theory offers a robust lens for analyzing organizational responses to turbulence. However, despite its relevance, this framework has rarely been systematically applied to branding.

The limited integration between branding research and dynamic capability theory represents a significant gap in the literature. While brands are frequently described as strategic assets, branding

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has seldom been theorized as a dynamic organizational capability that enables continuous adaptation. As a result, branding research lacks a coherent explanation of how firms align brand meaning with evolving market conditions, particularly in digital and AI driven environments. Conversely, dynamic capabilities research has largely overlooked branding as a mechanism through which sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring activities translate into market facing value. This theoretical separation constrains cumulative knowledge development and limits the relevance of branding theory for broader strategic debates on competitive advantage (Golob, Burghausen, Kernstock, & Davies, 2022; Hunt, 2014).

Addressing this gap, the present study reconceptualizes branding as a core brand management capability rather than a static strategic asset. Specifically, it positions branding as a higher order dynamic capability through which organizations deliberately govern, renew, and stabilize brand meaning over time in digitally and algorithmically mediated markets. Importantly, brand sensing concerns the generation and interpretation of brand related insights, whereas brand seizing involves the commitment of resources and execution of branding actions based on those insights, consistent with the functional separation emphasized in dynamic capability theory (Golob et al., 2022; Samiei et al., 2025).

This study differs from prior branding capability research in three important ways. First, while existing studies have examined branding capabilities as firm-level resources that support brand performance, they have paid less attention to how brand meaning is continuously governed under conditions of algorithmic mediation, real-time stakeholder interaction, and reduced managerial control. Second, the present framework positions branding not merely as a dynamic capability, but as a higher-order capability because it coordinates several lower-level capabilities, including digital analytics, customer engagement, marketing communication, experience design, and brand governance. In this sense, branding does not only adapt to market change; it organizes how other capabilities are translated into coherent and trusted market-facing meaning. Third, the framework advances prior models by explaining branding as a temporally sequenced process of sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring, through which firms identify shifts in brand meaning, commit to adaptive brand actions, and renew governance mechanisms to preserve authenticity and trust. Therefore, the contribution of this study lies in explaining how branding capabilities operate together as an orchestration system in AI-driven markets, rather than treating branding capability as a general predictor of brand performance.

Existing branding theories explain how brand equity is built and maintained under relatively stable conditions, but they offer limited insight into how brands adapt continuously when meaning is shaped by algorithmic systems, real time interactions, and decentralized stakeholder influence. The framework developed in this study explains how firms actively orchestrate brand meaning over time through capability sequencing rather than static control. By conceptualizing branding as a dynamic capability, this paper explains why some firms sustain brand coherence under AI driven volatility while others experience fragmentation, loss of authenticity, or erosion of trust phenomena that prior branding models could not adequately theorize.

By positioning branding as a dynamic capability, this study speaks directly to core debates in brand management concerning brand coherence, authenticity, and governance in digitally mediated environments. The Journal of Brand Management has long emphasized branding as a strategic, organization wide concern rather than a narrow communication function. This study extends that

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tradition by offering a process theory of brand management that explains how brands are continuously governed, stabilized, and renewed under conditions of AI driven volatility.

This study makes three key theoretical contributions. First, it advances branding theory by reframing branding as a higher order dynamic capability that orchestrates multiple functional domains over time. Second, it integrates AI into the micro foundations of branding capabilities, explicitly theorizing the paradox whereby AI enables adaptive branding while simultaneously increasing risks related to authenticity and governance (Kim, Yoo, & Doh, 2021; M. Yang & Wang, 2025). Third, the paper bridges branding, strategy, and digital transformation literatures by offering a unifying conceptual foundation that future empirical research can operationalize across contexts, industries, and technological regimes. Unlike prior branding frameworks that conceptualize adaptation as episodic repositioning or reactive engagement, this study offers a process theory of brand management that explains how brand meaning is continuously governed, stabilized, and renewed through capability sequencing over time. The framework is most applicable to digitally mediated, high velocity markets and may be less salient in highly commoditized or low involvement contexts.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Branding Beyond Assets: From Symbolic Constructs to Organizational Capabilities

Classical branding theory conceptualizes brands primarily as symbolic and relational assets that reside in the minds of consumers (Grassi, 1998). Seminal contributions emphasize brand identity, brand image, and customer-based brand equity as mechanisms through which firms generate differentiation, loyalty, and financial value (Aaker, 1991; Abimbola & Kocak, 2007). Within this tradition, brand management is largely concerned with designing and maintaining consistent brand meaning across touchpoints (Heding, Knudtzen, & Bjerre, 2020). While this perspective has been foundational, it implicitly treats branding as an outcome-oriented construct and under theorizes the organizational processes through which brand value is continuously produced and reproduced over time.

Subsequent advances in branding research have challenged this static view by emphasizing interaction, co-creation, and stakeholder engagement. Scholars increasingly conceptualize brands as dynamic systems that emerge through ongoing interactions among firms, consumers, and broader ecosystems (Foroudi, 2023). Digital platforms and social media intensify these dynamics by accelerating feedback loops and decentralizing brand meaning creation. However, despite acknowledging brand dynamism, much of this literature remains descriptive and lacks a robust theoretical explanation of how organizations deliberately manage and renew branding processes (Järventie-Thesleff, Moisander, & Laine, 2011; Miller, Merrilees, & Yakimova, 2014). As a result, branding scholarship still lacks a capability-based foundation that explains how firms systematically adapt brand meaning under conditions of persistent change. From a brand management perspective, this shift foregrounds governance as a central concern, as firms must actively steward brand meaning across decentralized interactions rather than merely design and communicate it.

Positioning the Framework within Core Branding Theory

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The proposed framework builds upon rather than replaces established branding theories. From a Brand Equity Theory perspective, brands create value by generating favorable associations, awareness, loyalty, and perceived quality in the minds of consumers (Foroudi, 2023). While this perspective explains the outcomes of successful branding, it provides limited explanation of how firms continuously adapt brand meaning when stakeholder expectations and technological environments change rapidly. The dynamic capability perspective complements Brand Equity Theory by focusing on the organizational processes that enable firms to sustain and renew brand equity over time.

Similarly, Brand Identity Theory emphasizes the strategic role of organizations in defining and communicating a coherent brand identity. Traditional identity-based approaches assume that firms can intentionally shape and maintain relatively stable brand meanings. However, digital platforms, social media ecosystems, and AI-enabled interactions increasingly decentralize brand meaning creation. The proposed framework extends identity-based perspectives by explaining how firms continuously sense shifts in stakeholder interpretations, adapt branding actions, and reconfigure governance mechanisms while preserving core identity elements.

The framework also complements Corporate Branding Theory, which views branding as an organization-wide responsibility involving multiple stakeholders and organizational functions. By conceptualizing branding as a higher-order dynamic capability, the present study further develops this perspective by explaining how branding orchestrates diverse organizational capabilities, including communication, customer experience management, analytics, and governance. In doing so, branding becomes not only a representation of organizational identity but also a mechanism for strategic adaptation.

Finally, the framework acknowledges insights from Brand Co-Creation literature, which emphasizes that brand meaning emerges through interactions among organizations, consumers, communities, and other stakeholders. While co-creation perspectives explain how brand meanings are collectively constructed, they provide less guidance regarding how organizations actively govern and stabilize those meanings over time. The concept of branding as a dynamic capability complements co-creation theory by explaining how firms continuously coordinate sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring activities to maintain brand coherence, authenticity, and trust despite increasingly decentralized processes of meaning creation.

Dynamic Capability Theory: Adaptation, Renewal, and Strategic Change

Dynamic capability theory offers a powerful framework for explaining how firms adapt and sustain competitive advantage in volatile environments (Hasan Al-Obaidy, Abdullah Alshammary, & Al-Dulaimi, 2025). Originally articulated by Girod and Whittington (2017), dynamic capabilities refer to the firm's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies in response to environmental change. Unlike ordinary capabilities, which enable efficient execution of existing routines, dynamic capabilities are concerned with strategic change, renewal, and long-term alignment(Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997; Tripathi, Bachmann, Brunner, & Jodlbauer, 2025). This distinction is critical in contexts characterized by technological disruption and market uncertainty.

Later refinements of the theory specify three core processes: sensing opportunities and threats, seizing opportunities through strategic commitments, and reconfiguring assets and organizational

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structures to maintain evolutionary fitness (Samiei et al., 2025). This process-oriented logic emphasizes managerial cognition, learning, and orchestration rather than static resource possession. Dynamic capability theory has been widely applied to innovation, digital transformation, and information systems research, where adaptation is essential for survival (Larabi, 2025; Samiei et al., 2025). However, despite its relevance, branding has remained largely peripheral within this literature, leaving unexplored the role of branding in strategic adaptation.

Why Branding Requires a Dynamic Capability Perspective

Branding represents a particularly salient domain for the application of dynamic capability theory because brands operate at the intersection of organizational processes and external stakeholder perceptions. Brand meaning is inherently sensitive to environmental shifts, including technological change, cultural evolution, and institutional pressures. In digital and AI driven markets, these shifts occur rapidly and continuously, rendering static branding models insufficient. From a dynamic capability perspective, effective brand management requires the ability to sense emerging interpretations of brand meaning, seize opportunities to adapt brand positioning and engagement strategies, and reconfigure brand related resources to sustain coherence and legitimacy.

Existing branding research has not fully theorized these adaptive processes. While studies on digital branding and brand engagement acknowledge increased complexity, they often focus on tools or outcomes rather than on the underlying organizational capabilities that enable adaptation (Gupta & Khan, 2024; Lambrecht et al., 2025). As a result, branding theory lacks a process-based explanation of how firms manage brand evolution over time. Integrating branding with dynamic capability theory addresses this gap by shifting attention from brand states to brand processes, thereby enabling a more rigorous understanding of adaptive brand management.

Traditional brand management frameworks emphasize identity alignment, consistency, and control, yet they offer limited guidance for explaining how brands remain coherent when meaning is continuously reshaped by algorithms, platforms, and decentralized stakeholders. While brand governance research highlights control mechanisms, it has not fully theorized how governance itself must evolve dynamically. This limitation underscores the need for a capability-based explanation of brand adaptation.

Artificial Intelligence and the Reconfiguration of Branding Processes

Artificial intelligence fundamentally reshapes the conditions under which branding capability operate. AI enhances firms' abilities to collect, analyze, and act upon vast volumes of brand related data, strengthening sensing and seizing processes through real time analytics, personalization, and automation (Kim et al., 2021; M. Yang & Wang, 2025). At the same time, AI introduces new forms of opacity, bias, and loss of managerial control that complicate brand governance and threaten authenticity. These dual effects position AI not merely as a technological enabler but as a structural force that transforms branding processes.

Artificial intelligence should not be viewed as a single, uniform technology. Different forms of AI influence branding capabilities in distinct ways and therefore have different implications for adaptive brand management. Predictive AI primarily supports brand sensing activities by identifying patterns, forecasting stakeholder responses, detecting sentiment trends, and recognizing emerging shifts in brand meaning through large-scale data analysis (Elfar, 2025). By

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improving the firm's ability to detect weak signals and emerging opportunities, predictive AI strengthens the sensing dimension of branding capabilities.

Generative AI influences branding in a fundamentally different manner because it participates directly in the creation and communication of brand meaning. Through automated content generation, conversational interfaces, virtual assistants, and creative brand communications, generative AI increasingly shapes how stakeholders experience and interpret brands. While these capabilities provide unprecedented opportunities for personalization and scalability, they also introduce challenges related to authenticity, consistency, and managerial control (Mariani & Mancini, 2025; Mishra, 2024).

A further distinction can be made between customer-facing AI systems and internal analytical AI systems. Customer-facing applications, such as chatbots, recommendation engines, virtual assistants, and AI-generated content, directly influence stakeholder perceptions and therefore become part of the brand experience itself. Internal analytical systems, by contrast, support managerial decision-making by generating insights that guide branding strategies without directly interacting with stakeholders. Because these two forms of AI operate at different points in the branding process, they create different governance challenges and require different forms of managerial oversight (Salamzadeh, Ashkani, & Asgharifar, 2025).

Recognizing these distinctions strengthens the dynamic capability perspective developed in this study. Predictive and analytical AI primarily enhance brand sensing, while generative and customer-facing AI increasingly influence brand seizing and reconfiguring activities. Consequently, the effectiveness of branding as a dynamic capability depends not only on AI adoption itself but also on how different forms of AI are integrated, governed, and aligned with broader brand objectives over time.

From a dynamic capability perspective, AI intensifies the need for reconfiguring capabilities that govern how brands are enacted through algorithmic systems. Firms must continuously realign brand identity frameworks, organizational roles, and ethical guidelines to ensure that AI driven interactions remain consistent with brand values and stakeholder expectations (Al Chami, 2025; M. Yang & Wang, 2025). This paradox where AI simultaneously enables adaptive branding and increases governance risk underscores the necessity of conceptualizing branding as a dynamic capability capable of orchestrating technological change rather than merely responding to it.

Branding as a Higher Order Dynamic Capability

Conceptualizing branding as a higher order dynamic capability extends both branding theory and strategic management research. Branding qualifies as higher order because it orchestrates multiple functional capability such as marketing communication, digital analytics, customer experience management, and governance across time and organizational boundaries. Unlike domain specific dynamic capability, branding shapes how other capabilities are aligned, interpreted, and translated into market facing value (Ferreira & Coelho, 2020; Samiei et al., 2025). Through this orchestration role, branding influences not only adaptation but also the legitimacy and coherence of organizational change.

This perspective positions branding as a central mechanism through which firms manage meaning, trust, and long-term value creation in turbulent environments. By embedding branding within dynamic capability theory, the present study provides a theoretically rigorous foundation for

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understanding how brands evolve as strategic capabilities in digital and AI driven markets. This foundation enables the development of a conceptual framework that explicates the core processes through which branding capabilities operate and interact over time, setting the stage for theory development in subsequent sections.

RESEARCH GAP AND NEED FOR THEORY DEVELOPMENT

Despite the richness of branding scholarship, existing research remains limited in its ability to explain how brands adapt systematically over time in environments characterized by continuous technological and market change. Much of the branding literature continues to adopt an outcome-oriented perspective, emphasizing constructs such as brand equity, loyalty, and engagement as dependent variables (Abimbola & Kocak, 2007; Singh & Dall'Olmo Riley, 2022). While these constructs are valuable for explaining brand performance, they offer limited insight into the organizational processes that enable brands to evolve in response to environmental turbulence. As a result, branding theory lacks a process-based explanation of how firms actively manage brand adaptation rather than merely observe its outcomes.

A second gap concerns the conceptual treatment of digital technologies and artificial intelligence in branding research. Although recent studies increasingly acknowledge the transformative role of AI in shaping customer interactions and brand experiences, these technologies are frequently conceptualized as tools or contextual moderators rather than as integral components of strategic brand management (Farhat et al., 2025; Kozinets, 2022). This instrumental view limits theoretical understanding of how AI reshapes the underlying capabilities through which firms sense changes in brand meaning, seize branding opportunities, and govern brand enactment. Consequently, existing models struggle to explain the paradoxical effects of AI, whereby increased automation simultaneously enhances adaptability and heightens risks related to authenticity, trust, and control.

A third and more fundamental gap lies in the weak integration between branding research and strategic management theory. While brands are routinely described as strategic assets, branding has rarely been theorized using core strategy frameworks that explicitly address adaptation, renewal, and competitive advantage under uncertainty (Golob et al., 2022; Samiei et al., 2025). Conversely, dynamic capabilities research has largely overlooked branding as a mechanism through which firms translate internal adaptation into externally perceived value (Karami, 2025; Pitelis, Teece, & Yang, 2024; Sheng, 2017). This theoretical separation constrains cumulative knowledge development and limits the ability of branding scholarship to contribute to broader debates on organizational resilience and long-term competitiveness.

Taken together, these gaps point to the need for a theory building effort that reconceptualizes branding as a dynamic organizational capability rather than a static asset or outcome. Such a perspective must explain how firms continuously sense evolving brand meanings, seize opportunities to adapt brand strategies, and reconfigure branding processes in response to digital and AI driven market dynamics. By integrating branding research with dynamic capability theory, the present study addresses these gaps and provides a unifying conceptual framework capable of explaining adaptive brand management in turbulent environments. This theoretical development is essential for advancing branding scholarship beyond descriptive accounts toward a more rigorous, process-oriented understanding of brand evolution.

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Methodologically, this study adopts a theory building conceptual approach that integrates dynamic capabilities as a meta theoretical lens for advancing brand management theory. The framework is intended to guide future empirical research by offering clearly specified processes and propositions that can be operationalized across branding contexts. Methodologically, this study adopts a theory building conceptual approach consistent with prior brand management research that advances integrative frameworks rather than empirical testing. The objective is not hypothesis testing but the development of a process theory capable of guiding future empirical research in branding.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT

Reconceptualizing Branding as a Dynamic Capability

Building on dynamic capability theory, this study reconceptualizes branding as a dynamic organizational capability that enables firms to continuously adapt brand meaning and value creation in response to environmental change. Dynamic capabilities are defined as higher order processes through which firms sense opportunities and threats, seize opportunities through strategic commitment, and reconfigure resources to maintain evolutionary fitness (Girod & Whittington, 2017; Samiei et al., 2025). Applying this logic to branding shifts the focus from managing brand outcomes to understanding how firms deliberately renew branding processes over time. In digitally mediated markets, where brand meaning is continuously shaped by stakeholder interactions and algorithmic systems, branding must function as an adaptive capability rather than a static asset.

Importantly, branding qualifies as a higher order dynamic capability because it orchestrates multiple functional domains including marketing communication, digital analytics, customer experience management, and governance across time horizons and organizational boundaries (Ferreira & Coelho, 2020; Samiei et al., 2025). Through this orchestration role, branding shapes how other organizational capabilities are aligned and interpreted externally. As such, branding does not merely respond to environmental change but actively structures how firms translate internal adaptation into coherent, market facing meaning and legitimacy.

Brand Sensing Capability

Brand sensing capability refers to the firm's ability to systematically identify, interpret, and anticipate shifts in brand related meanings emerging from digitally mediated environments. In contemporary markets, brand signals are dispersed across social media discourse, online communities, platform interactions, and AI generated feedback loops. Dynamic capability theory emphasizes sensing as a forward-looking process that enables firms to detect weak signals and emerging trends before they become fully articulated (Golob et al., 2022; Samiei et al., 2025). For branding, sensing involves understanding not only what stakeholders say about a brand but how meanings evolve across contexts and time.

Artificial intelligence substantially enhances brand sensing by enabling large scale data aggregation, sentiment analysis, and pattern recognition across heterogeneous data sources (Kim et al., 2021). However, effective sensing extends beyond analytics. Managerial interpretation and organizational learning are essential to translate algorithmic outputs into strategic brand insight. Without such interpretive processes, firms risk information overload rather than improved

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understanding. Brand sensing therefore represents a socio technical capability that combines AI enabled analytics with human judgment.

Unlike generic market sensing or customer analytics capabilities, brand sensing is uniquely concerned with the interpretation of meaning, symbolism, and identity rather than functional preferences alone. Brand sensing focuses on how stakeholders interpret what the brand stands for, how those interpretations evolve across digital contexts, and how they align with the firm's intended brand identity. This meaning-oriented focus distinguishes brand sensing from broader sensing capabilities and anchors it firmly within brand management, where the central challenge lies not in detecting market change per se, but in governing the evolution of brand meaning under conditions of reduced managerial control. Unlike general market sensing, brand sensing is centrally concerned with the interpretation of symbolic meaning, identity coherence, and legitimacy rather than functional preferences or demand trends. The primary output of brand sensing is not action itself but the development of informed awareness regarding evolving brand meanings and stakeholder expectations.

Brand Seizing Capability

Brand seizing capability captures the firm's ability to translate sensed brand insights into strategic branding actions. In dynamic capability theory, seizing involves committing resources and making strategic choices to capitalize on identified opportunities (Samiei et al., 2025). In branding contexts, this includes adapting brand positioning, redesigning engagement strategies, and innovating brand experiences across digital touchpoints. Effective seizing ensures that sensing activities do not remain abstract interpretations but are converted into concrete, value creating actions.

In AI driven markets, brand seizing is increasingly supported by algorithmic personalization, real time interaction management, and adaptive content delivery (M. Yang & Wang, 2025). These technologies enable firms to tailor brand expressions dynamically at scale. However, such flexibility also introduces the risk of fragmented brand meaning if adaptive actions are not strategically coordinated. Brand seizing therefore requires managerial oversight to balance responsiveness with coherence, ensuring that adaptive brand actions remain aligned with core brand values and long-term strategic intent.

Brand seizing differs fundamentally from generic strategic seizing because it involves committing resources to actions that shape brand meaning rather than merely capturing economic opportunities. While innovation or digital seizing capabilities focus on speed, efficiency, or adoption, brand seizing requires deliberate choices about which aspects of brand identity may adapt and which must remain stable. This emphasis on meaning consistency, narrative continuity, and symbolic coherence positions brand seizing as a distinctly brand management activity rather than a purely operational or technological response. Unlike brand sensing, which generates understanding, brand seizing generates strategic action by converting interpreted insights into branding decisions and resource commitments.

Brand Reconfiguring Capability and the AI Governance Paradox

Brand reconfiguring capability refers to the firm's ability to realign brand related resources, structures, and governance mechanisms to sustain brand authenticity and legitimacy over time.

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Reconfiguring is central to dynamic capabilities, as it enables organizations to renew competencies and adjust routines in response to environmental change (Larabi, 2025; Samiei et al., 2025). In branding contexts, reconfiguring includes revisiting brand identity frameworks, redefining organizational roles, and modifying processes that shape how the brand is enacted.

Artificial intelligence introduces a fundamental branding paradox: while AI enhances adaptive branding through scalability and personalization, it simultaneously increases risks related to opacity, bias, and loss of managerial control (Al Chami, 2025; M. Yang & Wang, 2025). Brand reconfiguring capability is therefore essential for governing AI driven brand interactions (Al Chami, 2025; Hesami, 2025). Through ethical guidelines, accountability structures, and continuous monitoring, firms can adapt branding processes while preserving authenticity and trust in algorithmically mediated environments.

Whereas organizational reconfiguration often emphasizes structural efficiency or resource redeployment, brand reconfiguring is uniquely concerned with preserving brand authenticity and legitimacy over time. Reconfiguring branding processes involves redefining governance structures, identity frameworks, and accountability mechanisms to ensure that adaptive brand actions remain aligned with core brand values. This focus on legitimacy and trust differentiates brand reconfiguring from other renewal capabilities and reinforces its central role within brand management rather than general organizational change. Whereas sensing emphasizes interpretation and seizing emphasizes action, reconfiguring focuses on maintaining long-term legitimacy through governance, renewal, and organizational alignment.

Integrated Conceptual Framework

The central explanatory mechanism underlying the proposed framework is adaptive brand meaning orchestration, defined as the firm's ability to continuously align evolving brand meanings with strategic intent through coordinated sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring processes. This mechanism explains how branding capabilities translate environmental change into coherent, market facing meaning over time.

Adaptive brand meaning orchestration should not be interpreted as an independent organizational capability or as a branding outcome. Rather, it is conceptualized as the central explanatory mechanism through which branding capabilities collectively influence brand-level outcomes. Specifically, adaptive brand meaning orchestration refers to the ongoing process by which organizations interpret evolving stakeholder meanings, translate those interpretations into adaptive branding actions, and continuously renew governance mechanisms to maintain coherence, authenticity, and legitimacy over time. Unlike brand governance, which focuses primarily on control and oversight mechanisms, adaptive brand meaning orchestration encompasses the broader coordination of sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring activities. Likewise, it differs from brand management because it emphasizes dynamic adaptation rather than the administration of branding activities. It also differs from brand co-creation because its primary concern is not how stakeholders collectively generate meaning, but how organizations continuously coordinate and stabilize evolving meanings across increasingly decentralized and algorithmically mediated environments. Therefore, adaptive brand meaning orchestration functions as the central process mechanism that links branding capabilities to long-term brand outcomes.

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Integrating the three sub-capabilities, branding as a dynamic capability emerges from the continuous interaction of brand sensing, brand seizing, and brand reconfiguring processes. These capabilities operate as an iterative system rather than as isolated functions, enabling firms to adapt brand meaning while maintaining coherence and legitimacy in turbulent environments. Artificial intelligence strengthens sensing and seizing processes but simultaneously amplifies the need for reconfiguring and governance, reinforcing the systemic nature of branding capabilities.

The effectiveness of branding as a dynamic capability depends not only on the existence of sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring capabilities but also on how these capabilities interact to generate stakeholder confidence in the brand. Brand trust emerges when stakeholders experience consistency between what a brand promises and how it behaves across interactions and over time. Brand sensing contributes to trust by helping firms recognize emerging concerns, expectations, and shifts in stakeholder perceptions before they escalate into reputational risks. Brand seizing reinforces trust by translating these insights into relevant actions and experiences that demonstrate responsiveness without abandoning core brand commitments. Brand reconfiguring further strengthens trust by ensuring that adaptation occurs within stable governance structures that preserve legitimacy and accountability (Kyambade & Namatovu, 2025).

Authenticity develops through a similar process. While brands must evolve to remain relevant, stakeholders also expect continuity in values, purpose, and identity. Excessive adaptation may create perceptions of inconsistency, whereas insufficient adaptation may reduce relevance. The interaction of sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring capabilities helps organizations balance these competing demands. Sensing identifies changing expectations, seizing enables appropriate responses, and reconfiguring ensures that adaptive actions remain aligned with the brand's underlying identity. Through this balancing process, firms are better positioned to preserve perceptions of authenticity while adapting to changing market conditions (Arshad, 2025; Jarrahi, 2018).

Over time, trust and authenticity function as strategic mechanisms through which branding capabilities contribute to competitive advantage. Stakeholders are more likely to engage with, remain loyal to, and advocate for brands they perceive as trustworthy and authentic. These outcomes improve customer retention, strengthen reputation, enhance resilience during periods of uncertainty, and support long-term value creation. From a dynamic capability perspective, competitive advantage therefore arises not simply because firms possess branding capabilities, but because those capabilities continuously generate and protect stakeholder-based sources of value that are difficult for competitors to replicate (Elfar, 2025).

As illustrated in Figure 1, branding as a dynamic capability enables firms to translate technological adaptation into market facing outcomes such as brand authenticity, trust, long term brand value, and sustained competitive advantage. The framework provides a process-oriented explanation of adaptive brand management in digital and AI driven markets and serves as the foundation for the propositions developed in the following section. Taken together, the proposed framework constitutes a process theory of brand management rather than a variance-based model. It explains how branding unfolds through temporally ordered sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring processes that jointly govern the evolution of brand meaning. By emphasizing sequencing, feedback loops, and governance rather than static relationships, the framework captures the dynamic nature of brand management in algorithmically mediated environments.

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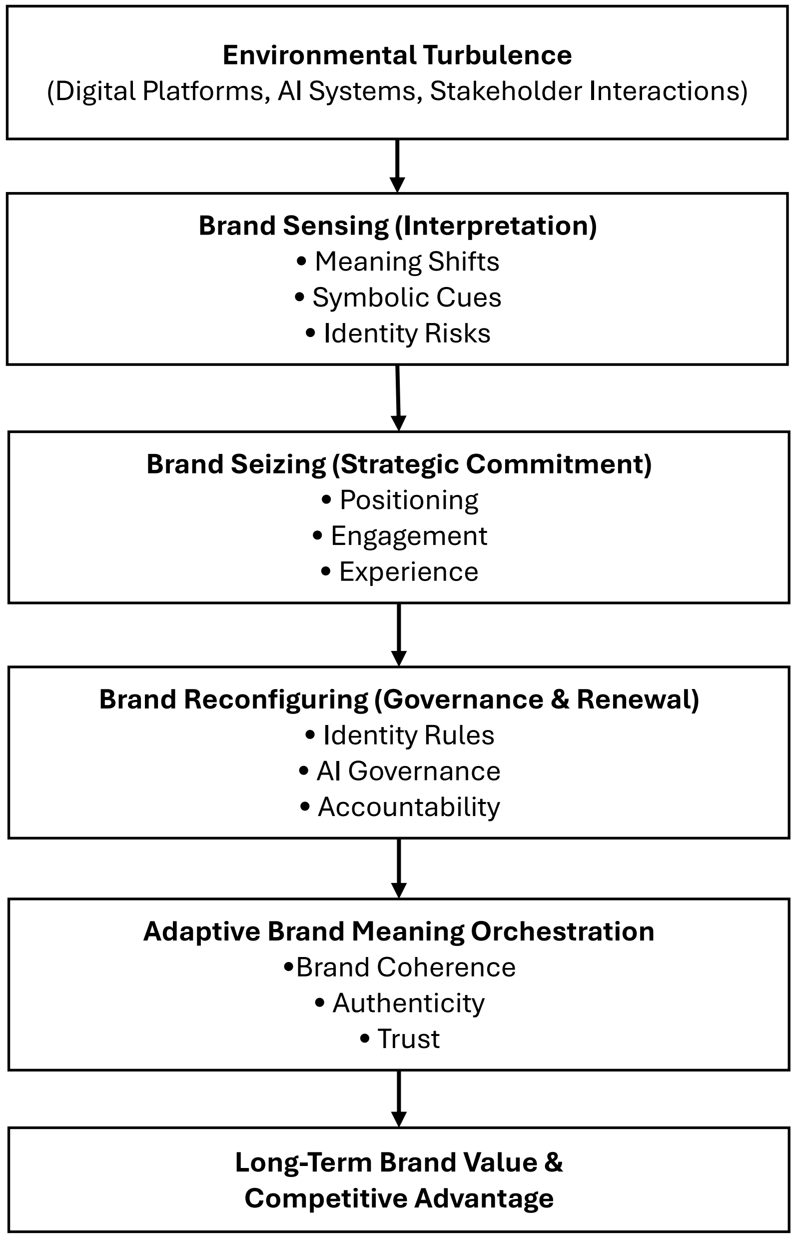

Figure 1. Branding as a Dynamic Capability: Adaptive Brand Meaning Orchestration

The figure illustrates branding as a higher order dynamic capability composed of temporally sequenced sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring processes. Through adaptive brand meaning orchestration, firms interpret evolving brand meanings, commit to strategic brand actions, and continuously renew governance mechanisms to stabilize brand coherence, authenticity, and trust in digitally and algorithmically mediated markets.

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Boundary Conditions of Branding as a Dynamic Capability

Although the proposed framework offers a general explanation of how branding functions as a dynamic capability, its relevance is likely to vary across different organizational and market contexts. Branding does not play the same strategic role in every industry, and the value of branding capabilities depends largely on the extent to which brand meaning contributes to competitive advantage. In industries such as technology, professional services, hospitality, luxury goods, and platform-based businesses, customers often evaluate organizations based on reputation, experience, trust, and symbolic value rather than purely functional attributes. In these environments, the continuous management and adaptation of brand meaning become strategically important. This suggests that branding is more likely to operate as a higher-order dynamic capability when organizational success depends heavily on stakeholder perceptions and relationships (Rehman & Jajja, 2023; P. Yang, Huang, Guan, & Xiao, 2025).

The framework may also operate differently across business-to-consumer and business-to-business settings. In consumer markets, brand meaning is frequently shaped through social media interactions, online communities, influencers, and digital platforms, creating a constant need for firms to monitor and respond to evolving stakeholder interpretations. Consequently, brand sensing and brand seizing capabilities may play a particularly prominent role. In contrast, business-to-business brands often rely on long-term relationships, organizational reputation, service quality, and trust accumulated over extended periods. Under these conditions, governance and reconfiguring capabilities may become more critical because maintaining consistency, credibility, and legitimacy is often more important than rapidly adapting brand expressions (Dangelico, Pujari, & Pontrandolfo, 2017; Mustikasari & Ciptono, 2025).

Industry characteristics may further influence how branding capabilities contribute to organizational outcomes. In highly dynamic environments characterized by technological disruption, platform competition, and intensive stakeholder interaction, firms are likely to benefit from strong sensing and seizing capabilities that allow them to identify emerging shifts in brand meaning and respond effectively. Conversely, in relatively stable industries, branding efforts may place greater emphasis on governance, continuity, and long-term trust building. The framework may also be less applicable in highly commoditized markets where purchasing decisions are driven primarily by price and operational efficiency rather than symbolic differentiation or brand experience (Farrukh & Sajjad, 2025).

Finally, the strategic importance of the brand itself is likely to influence the effectiveness of the proposed framework. Organizations whose value creation depends heavily on reputation, customer experience, legitimacy, and emotional connections with stakeholders are expected to gain greater benefits from branding capabilities than firms whose competitive advantage is based mainly on cost efficiency, scale, or operational performance. Consequently, the proposed framework should be viewed as particularly relevant in contexts where brand meaning represents a significant strategic resource. Recognizing these boundary conditions helps clarify where branding is most likely to function as a higher-order dynamic capability and provides a clearer foundation for future empirical investigation (Chin, Shi, Singh, Agbanyo, & Ferraris, 2022).

PROPOSITIONS DEVELOPMENT

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Building on the conceptual framework developed in the previous section, this study advances a set of propositions that articulate how branding operates as a dynamic capability in digital and AI driven markets (Fouad, Wefki, & Kouta, 2025). Consistent with dynamic capability theory, the propositions emphasize process logic rather than static relationships, focusing on how sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring capabilities enable firms to adapt brand meaning over time (Samiei et al., 2025). Rather than treating branding outcomes as direct consequences of isolated branding actions, this section conceptualizes branding capabilities as higher order mechanisms that translate environmental change into coherent, market facing brand value. In doing so, the propositions clarify the causal pathways through which branding capabilities influence brand trust, authenticity, and long-term value creation under conditions of technological turbulence.
To enhance conceptual clarity and theoretical transparency, Table 1 summarizes the core branding capabilities developed in this study. The table explicitly anchors each capability in dynamic capability theory, clarifies the functional role of artificial intelligence, and distinguishes branding capabilities from ordinary branding activities. By making these distinctions explicit, the table supports the propositions by delineating the theoretical boundaries of branding as a dynamic capability and providing a reusable conceptual foundation for future empirical research.

Table 1. Branding as a Dynamic Capability

Branding Capability	Dynamic Capability Function	Conceptual Definition	Key AI Enabled Mechanisms	Distinction from Ordinary Branding Activities	Primary Brand Management Outcome
Brand Sensing Capability	Sensing (Interpretation)	The firm's ability to continuously identify, interpret, and anticipate shifts in brand related meanings emerging from digitally mediated environments	Social listening, sentiment analysis, real time analytics, pattern recognition	Goes beyond brand monitoring by enabling forward looking interpretation of evolving brand meaning	Brand meaning awareness
Brand Seizing Capability	Seizing (Strategic Commitment)	The firm's capacity to translate sensed brand insights into strategic branding actions and resource commitments	Algorithmic personalization, adaptive content delivery, experience orchestration	Goes beyond campaign execution by committing resources to adaptive brand meaning and positioning	Brand coherence and relevance
Brand Reconfiguring Capability	Reconfiguring (Renewal & Governance)	The firm's ability to realign brand related resources, structures, and governance mechanisms to sustain authenticity and legitimacy over time	AI governance, ethical oversight, organizational redesign	Goes beyond brand control by continuously renewing brand processes and governance	Brand authenticity and trust

Source: *Authors' conceptual development, informed by dynamic capability theory (Samiei et al., 2025) and branding research (Abimbola & Kocak, 2007; Singh & Dall'Olmo Riley, 2022).*

To further clarify the conceptual boundaries of the proposed framework, it is important to distinguish the primary purpose, activities, and outputs associated with each branding capability. Although brand sensing, brand seizing, and brand reconfiguring operate as an integrated system, they perform different functions within the adaptive brand management process. Brand sensing

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focuses on interpretation and understanding, brand seizing focuses on strategic action and commitment, and brand reconfiguring focuses on renewal and governance. Maintaining these distinctions improves theoretical clarity and provides a stronger foundation for future empirical operationalization (Frick, Mirbabaie, Stieglitz, & Salomon, 2021; Wamba, Queiroz, Jabbour, & Shi, 2023).

Table 2. Distinguishing the Core Branding Capabilities

Capability	Primary Purpose	Key Activities	Primary Output
Brand Sensing Capability	Interpret evolving brand meaning	Social listening, sentiment analysis, stakeholder monitoring, environmental scanning, managerial interpretation	Brand meaning awareness and identification of emerging opportunities or risks
Brand Seizing Capability	Convert insights into strategic branding actions	Brand positioning adjustments, engagement initiatives, personalized interactions, brand experience design	Adaptive brand responses and strategic brand relevance
Brand Reconfiguring Capability	Preserve authenticity and legitimacy while adapting	Governance redesign, identity refinement, AI oversight, accountability mechanisms, process renewal	Brand authenticity, trust, and long-term alignment

Brand Sensing Capability and the Interpretation of Dynamic Brand Meaning

Brand sensing capability enables firms to systematically identify and interpret evolving brand meanings that emerge through stakeholder interactions in digitally mediated environments. Unlike traditional brand tracking, which is often retrospective and episodic, brand sensing is continuous, forward looking, and interpretive in nature. Dynamic capability theory emphasizes sensing as a process through which firms detect weak signals and emerging trends before they become fully articulated in the market (Golob et al., 2022; Samiei et al., 2025). In branding contexts, this involves understanding not only explicit consumer feedback but also subtle shifts in narratives, symbols, and cultural associations that shape brand meaning across platforms and over time.

Artificial intelligence significantly enhances brand sensing by enabling large scale data aggregation, real time sentiment analysis, and pattern recognition across heterogeneous digital touchpoints (Kim et al., 2021). However, effective brand sensing is not purely technological. Managerial cognition and organizational learning are essential to contextualize algorithmic outputs and distinguish meaningful signals from short term noise. Firms that successfully integrate AI enabled analytics with human interpretation are therefore better positioned to anticipate emerging brand risks and opportunities and to respond proactively rather than reactively to changes in stakeholder expectations.

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Although AI significantly enhances the scale and speed of brand sensing, excessive dependence on algorithmic systems may create unintended consequences. Dynamic capability theory emphasizes that sensing requires not only data acquisition but also managerial interpretation and judgment. AI systems are optimized to detect patterns and fluctuations within large data streams, yet they often struggle to distinguish between temporary anomalies and meaningful long-term shifts in stakeholder perceptions. Digital environments are characterized by rapid cycles of attention, viral events, and short-lived sentiment fluctuations that may not accurately reflect enduring brand meanings. When organizations rely primarily on automated signals without sufficient interpretive governance, they may overreact to transient trends and repeatedly adjust branding activities in response to short-term volatility. Such reactions can gradually weaken brand coherence by creating inconsistent brand expressions across time and platforms.

P1: Brand sensing capability positively influences a firm's ability to identify emerging shifts in brand meaning in digital and AI driven markets.

P2: Excessive reliance on AI enabled brand sensing without interpretive governance weakens brand coherence over time by amplifying short term signal volatility.

Brand Seizing Capability and Strategic Brand Adaptation

Brand seizing capability reflects the firm's ability to convert sensed brand insights into strategic branding actions and resource commitments. In dynamic capability theory, seizing involves making deliberate strategic choices and allocating resources to capitalize on identified opportunities (Samiei et al., 2025). Applied to branding, this includes adapting brand positioning, redesigning engagement strategies, and innovating brand experiences across digital channels. Effective brand seizing ensures that sensing activities lead to concrete actions that enhance brand relevance and competitiveness rather than remaining abstract interpretations or analytical outputs. In AI driven markets, brand seizing is increasingly supported by algorithmic personalization, adaptive content delivery, and real time interaction management (M. Yang & Wang, 2025). These technologies enable firms to tailor brand expressions dynamically at scale, enhancing responsiveness and customer engagement. However, such flexibility also increases the risk of fragmented brand meaning if adaptive actions are not strategically coordinated. Brand seizing therefore requires managerial oversight to balance AI enabled responsiveness with strategic coherence, ensuring that adaptive brand actions remain aligned with core brand values and long-term brand narratives.

The relationship between personalization and brand coherence deserves particular attention. Personalization technologies allow firms to adapt brand messages, experiences, and interactions to the preferences of individual stakeholders. From a dynamic capability perspective, such adaptive responses strengthen the seizing process because firms can rapidly capitalize on emerging opportunities and evolving customer expectations. However, personalization does not automatically preserve coherence. Brand coherence is maintained only when adaptive interactions remain anchored to a stable set of brand values, identity principles, and strategic narratives. Consequently, AI-enabled personalization can simultaneously increase relevance and strengthen engagement while preserving coherence when organizations establish clear strategic boundaries governing how brand expressions may vary across audiences and contexts.

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P3: Brand seizing capability positively influences adaptive brand meaning and positioning in digitally mediated markets.
P4: AI enabled brand seizing capability strengthens personalized brand engagement while preserving strategic brand coherence.

Brand Reconfiguring Capability and the Governance of Brand Authenticity

Brand reconfiguring capability enables firms to realign brand related resources, organizational structures, and governance mechanisms in response to ongoing environmental change. Reconfiguring is central to dynamic capability theory because it allows organizations to renew competencies, redesign routines, and maintain alignment over time (Larabi, 2025; Samiei et al., 2025). In branding contexts, reconfiguring involves revisiting brand identity frameworks, redefining internal roles, and modifying processes that shape how the brand is enacted across touchpoints and technologies.

Artificial intelligence introduces a governance paradox for branding. While AI enhances scalability and personalization, it simultaneously increases risks related to opacity, bias, and loss of managerial control (Al Chami, 2025; M. Yang & Wang, 2025). Brand reconfiguring capability is therefore critical for governing AI driven brand interactions. Through ethical guidelines, accountability structures, and continuous monitoring, firms can adapt branding processes while preserving authenticity, legitimacy, and stakeholder trust in algorithmically mediated environments.

While reconfiguration is essential for adaptation, excessive or poorly governed reconfiguration may create unintended consequences for stakeholder trust. Branding research consistently suggests that trust develops through perceptions of consistency, predictability, and authenticity. Frequent modifications to brand positioning, identity elements, communication styles, or customer experiences may generate uncertainty regarding what the brand represents. Dynamic capability theory recognizes that adaptation and stability must coexist for organizations to maintain legitimacy over time. Therefore, although reconfiguration enhances adaptability, repeated changes that are not supported by governance mechanisms may undermine stakeholder confidence by creating ambiguity regarding brand values and long-term commitments. Effective governance serves as a stabilizing force that allows adaptation to occur without eroding trust.
P5: Brand reconfiguring capability positively influences the alignment between brand identity and evolving digital market conditions.
P6: Frequent brand reconfiguration enhances adaptability but reduces perceived brand trust when governance mechanisms fail to stabilize brand meaning over time.

Alignment of Branding Capabilities and Long-Term Brand Outcomes

Dynamic capability theory emphasizes that sustained competitive advantage arises from the alignment and interaction of sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring processes rather than from isolated capabilities (Samiei et al., 2025). In branding contexts, this implies that brand sensing, brand seizing, and brand reconfiguring capabilities must operate as an integrated system. Weaknesses in any single capability can undermine overall brand adaptability and limit the firm's ability to respond effectively to environmental change and technological disruption.

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When branding capabilities are aligned, firms are better equipped to manage the tensions between automation, personalization, and authenticity in AI driven markets. Brand trust and authenticity function as intermediate mechanisms through which branding capabilities translate into competitive advantage by enhancing customer loyalty, willingness to pay, and resilience to reputational shocks (Abimbola & Kocak, 2007; Balmer, 2012). This systemic alignment transforms branding into a higher order dynamic capability that supports long term brand value creation and sustained competitive advantage.

Brand trust is conceptualized as an intermediate outcome that translates branding capability alignment into longer-term strategic outcomes. The influence of branding capabilities on competitive advantage is expected to occur primarily through the development of trusted and authentic stakeholder relationships.

P7: The alignment of brand sensing, brand seizing, and brand reconfiguring capabilities positively influences brand trust in AI driven markets.

P8: Branding as a dynamic capability positively influences long term brand value and sustained competitive advantage.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Strategic Reframing of Branding as a Dynamic Capability

For chief marketing officers, chief brand officers, and senior brand leaders, this perspective clarifies their role as long term stewards of brand meaning rather than short term managers of communication outputs. Rather than offering an exhaustive list of best practices, the following implications focus on critical decision points managers face when sequencing branding capabilities under AI driven uncertainty. For chief marketing officers, chief brand officers, and senior brand leaders, the most fundamental implication is the need to reconceptualize branding as a dynamic, organization wide capability rather than a functional responsibility confined to marketing. In digital and AI driven markets, brand outcomes increasingly depend on how effectively firms orchestrate sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring activities over time. This reframing requires top management to embed branding into corporate strategy, digital transformation initiatives, and governance structures (Samiei et al., 2025; Singh & Dall'Olmo Riley, 2022). Viewing branding as a dynamic capability clarifies that sustainable brand value arises from adaptive processes rather than isolated branding campaigns or communication activities.

This strategic reframing also highlights a critical managerial trade-off between short term efficiency gains from automation and long-term investments in adaptive branding capabilities. While AI enabled tools can improve operational efficiency and responsiveness, overemphasis on short term metrics may undermine capability development. Senior executives must therefore allocate resources not only to technology deployment but also to learning, coordination, and governance mechanisms that support long term brand adaptation. This implication strengthens the strategic level sensing and orchestration functions emphasized in dynamic capability theory.

If branding is treated primarily as a tactical communication function, firms risk prioritizing short term efficiency gains over the development of adaptive capabilities, resulting in delayed responses to shifts in brand meaning. Over time, this misalignment weakens the firm’s ability to sense

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emerging brand risks and opportunities, underscoring that strategic reframing is a prerequisite for effective dynamic capability orchestration (Samiei et al., 2025).

Sequencing AI Enabled Brand Sensing Before Strategic Action

For brand, insight, and analytics managers, the first operational priority is to establish robust brand sensing capability before pursuing adaptive brand actions. AI enabled analytics such as social listening, sentiment analysis, and real time monitoring enhance the firm's ability to detect emerging shifts in brand meaning (Kim et al., 2021). However, managers face a trade-off between speed and interpretive depth. Rapid analytics may increase responsiveness but risk superficial or misleading interpretations if not contextualized.

Effective brand sensing therefore requires sequencing AI deployment with managerial sensemaking routines that translate data into strategic insight (Golob et al., 2022; Weick & Weick, 1995). Cross functional collaboration between brand managers, data scientists, and strategists is essential to distinguish meaningful signals from short term noise. Without this sequencing, firms may prematurely act on incomplete insights, weakening subsequent seizing decisions. This implication directly reinforces the sensing function of dynamic capabilities by emphasizing interpretation rather than mere data accumulation (Abu-Rumman, Al Shraah, Al-Madi, & Alfalah, 2021; Shuen, Feiler, & Teece, 2014).

A practical example of brand sensing can be observed when organizations use AI-powered social listening platforms to monitor customer conversations across social media channels. For example, a hospitality company may identify emerging dissatisfaction regarding service responsiveness through sentiment analysis before formal complaints increase. Managers can then investigate the underlying causes and respond proactively, allowing the organization to address concerns before they negatively affect brand perceptions. In this way, AI supports early detection, while managerial interpretation ensures that branding decisions are based on meaningful insights rather than temporary fluctuations.

When brand sensing is underdeveloped, managers may act on incomplete or misleading signals, leading to reactive branding decisions that amplify volatility rather than reduce uncertainty. In the short term, AI enabled analytics increase responsiveness, but long-term value depends on institutionalizing interpretive routines that strengthen the sensing function of dynamic capabilities (Golob et al., 2022; Samiei et al., 2025).

Balancing Adaptive Brand Seizing with Strategic Coherence

For brand and marketing managers, brand seizing capability involves translating sensed insights into adaptive branding actions while maintaining strategic coherence. AI driven personalization and real time engagement technologies enable rapid adaptation across touchpoints, enhancing relevance and customer engagement (M. Yang & Wang, 2025). However, these capabilities introduce a central trade-off between local responsiveness and global brand consistency. Excessive variation across interactions may fragment brand meaning and dilute long-term positioning.

Effective brand seizing requires sequencing adaptive actions after robust sensing and anchoring them in clearly articulated brand principles. Managers must decide which elements of the brand are flexible and which must remain stable over time. This balance ensures that responsiveness does not come at the expense of coherence. By emphasizing strategic commitment rather than reactive

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execution, this implication strengthens the seizing function of dynamic capabilities and ensures that adaptive branding actions contribute to sustained brand value. Without clear strategic boundaries, excessive personalization may fragment brand meaning across touchpoints, weakening cumulative brand coherence over time. Managers should prioritize coherence over responsiveness when brand trust is fragile, and responsiveness over coherence when brand meaning is stable, reinforcing the strategic commitment logic central to the seizing function of dynamic capabilities (Samiei et al., 2025).

Brand seizing can be illustrated through AI-enabled personalization initiatives. For example, an online retail platform may tailor product recommendations, promotional messages, and digital experiences to individual customers using machine learning algorithms. While such personalization can improve customer engagement and relevance, managers must ensure that all interactions continue to reflect the brand's core identity and values. Effective brand seizing therefore involves balancing personalization with consistency so that adaptive interactions strengthen rather than fragment overall brand meaning.

Reconfiguring Governance to Manage the AI–Authenticity Trade-Off

For senior brand leaders, digital governance teams, and compliance managers, brand reconfiguring capability becomes critical once AI enabled branding actions are scaled. AI introduces a fundamental trade-off between personalization efficiency and brand authenticity, as automated interactions may erode trust if poorly governed (Al Chami, 2025; M. Yang & Wang, 2025). Managers must therefore establish governance mechanisms that oversee how brands are enacted through algorithmic systems.

Reconfiguring branding processes involves redefining organizational roles, updating brand identity frameworks, and implementing ethical guidelines and accountability structures. Importantly, these governance mechanisms must evolve over time as technologies and stakeholder expectations change. By sequencing governance after seizing and continuously renewing it, firms can stabilize adaptive branding without constraining innovation. This implication maps directly onto the reconfiguring function of dynamic capabilities by emphasizing renewal, legitimacy, and long-term alignment. Absent effective reconfiguring capability, AI enabled branding initiatives may gradually erode brand authenticity, even when short term engagement metrics appear favorable. As AI adoption matures over time, continuous renewal of governance mechanisms becomes essential to sustain legitimacy, highlighting the reconfiguring function as a long-term stabilizer of branding capabilities (Samiei et al., 2025; M. Yang & Wang, 2025).

An example of brand reconfiguring can be found in organizations that deploy customer-facing AI chatbots. As these systems become increasingly involved in stakeholder interactions, firms often establish governance mechanisms such as content review procedures, ethical guidelines, escalation protocols, and human oversight processes. These governance structures help ensure that AI-generated responses remain aligned with organizational values and brand identity while maintaining stakeholder trust. Such practices demonstrate how reconfiguring capability supports both adaptation and legitimacy in AI-mediated environments.

Integrating Branding Capabilities for Sustained Brand Value

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At the organizational level, the ultimate managerial challenge lies in integrating brand sensing, brand seizing, and brand reconfiguring capabilities into a coherent system. Managers face a trade-off between isolated capability investments and systemic capability alignment. Investing heavily in analytics or personalization without corresponding governance and renewal mechanisms may undermine long-term brand value (Samiei et al., 2025).

Effective integration requires explicit sequencing: sensing informs seizing, seizing triggers reconfiguring, and reconfiguring stabilizes value creation over time. Brand trust and authenticity emerge as intermediate outcomes that translate adaptive branding into customer loyalty, willingness to pay, and resilience to reputational shocks (Abimbola & Kocak, 2007; Balmer, 2012). This systemic alignment anchors branding as a higher order dynamic capability that supports sustained competitive advantage in AI driven markets.

When branding capabilities are developed in isolation, firms may achieve localized improvements while undermining system wide brand coherence and trust. Managers should monitor variance in brand meaning across AI driven touchpoints as an early indicator of misalignment, reinforcing the need for systemic integration central to higher order dynamic capabilities (Abimbola & Kocak, 2007; Balmer, 2012).

Consider a technology company launching a new AI-enabled service. The organization first uses brand sensing to identify stakeholder expectations and concerns, then employs brand seizing to adapt communications and customer experiences accordingly. As AI applications become integrated into customer interactions, the firm introduces governance mechanisms and oversight processes through brand reconfiguring. The combined operation of these capabilities helps maintain trust, authenticity, and long-term brand value despite ongoing technological change.

FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

The framework developed in this study opens several promising avenues for future research on branding in digitally mediated and AI-driven environments. A primary priority is the empirical validation of branding as a higher-order dynamic capability. While the present study conceptualizes brand sensing, brand seizing, and brand reconfiguring as distinct but interconnected capabilities, future studies should develop robust measurement scales capable of capturing these dimensions and their interactions. Researchers may operationalize these capabilities as higher-order formative constructs composed of multiple organizational routines and practices, thereby reflecting their process-oriented nature. Survey-based studies across diverse organizational settings would provide an appropriate starting point for examining how branding capabilities influence brand trust, authenticity, and long-term brand value. Structural equation modeling, including both covariance-based and partial least squares approaches, could be employed to test the proposed relationships and further refine the conceptual framework (Samiei et al., 2025; Wilden & Gudergan, 2015).

Future research should also examine the dynamic and evolutionary nature of branding capabilities through longitudinal research designs. Because dynamic capabilities develop over time rather than emerging instantaneously, cross-sectional studies may underestimate their effects or fail to capture important sequencing relationships. Longitudinal investigations using repeated surveys, panel data, or archival brand information could provide valuable insight into how branding capabilities

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evolve, interact, and influence organizational outcomes under changing environmental conditions. Such approaches would also allow scholars to examine whether capability alignment produces cumulative effects on brand trust, authenticity, and competitive advantage. Mixed-method research designs that combine quantitative analyses with qualitative evidence may be particularly valuable for understanding both capability development and capability outcomes (Ferreira & Coelho, 2020).
A second important avenue concerns the micro-foundations of adaptive brand management. Dynamic capability theory suggests that organizational adaptation is ultimately shaped by managerial cognition, learning, interpretation, and decision-making processes. Future studies should therefore investigate how managers interpret AI-generated brand insights, identify emerging shifts in stakeholder expectations, and balance competing demands for responsiveness, consistency, authenticity, and efficiency. Qualitative approaches such as case studies, interviews, and ethnographic research may be especially useful for uncovering how branding capabilities are enacted in practice (Hunt, 2014).
Artificial intelligence itself represents a particularly important area for future investigation. Although the present framework recognizes AI as a key enabler of branding capabilities, future research should explore how different forms of AI influence branding outcomes in distinct ways. Predictive AI, generative AI, conversational agents, recommendation systems, and other customer-facing applications may create different opportunities and challenges for adaptive brand management. At the same time, AI introduces ethical concerns related to transparency, bias, accountability, and privacy that may influence stakeholder trust and perceptions of authenticity. Future studies could examine how organizations design and govern AI-enabled branding systems, investigate the effectiveness of alternative governance mechanisms, and assess how ethical oversight shapes the relationship between AI adoption and brand-related outcomes (Eisenhardt, 1989; Weick & Weick, 1995).
Finally, future scholarship should explore the contextual conditions under which branding functions most effectively as a higher-order dynamic capability. Cross-industry comparative studies could examine whether the relative importance of brand sensing, brand seizing, and brand reconfiguring differs across service industries, manufacturing firms, platform businesses, and technology-intensive sectors. Similarly, cross-national research may reveal how cultural norms, regulatory environments, and technological infrastructures shape adaptive brand management practices. Beyond contextual comparisons, future studies could integrate branding capabilities with complementary theoretical perspectives such as stakeholder theory, institutional theory, and service-dominant logic. Researchers may also investigate how branding capabilities interact with innovation, sustainability, digital transformation, and data governance capabilities to influence long-term organizational performance. Such efforts would strengthen understanding of how organizations create, protect, and renew brand value in increasingly complex and algorithmically mediated environments (Al Chami, 2025; M. Yang & Wang, 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study advances branding theory by reconceptualizing branding as a dynamic capability that enables firms to adapt brand meaning and value creation in digital and AI driven markets. By integrating branding research with dynamic capability theory, the paper shifts attention from static

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brand assets and outcomes toward the organizational processes through which brands are continuously sensed, seized, and reconfigured over time (Abimbola & Kocak, 2007; Samiei et al., 2025). The proposed framework clarifies how artificial intelligence simultaneously enhances adaptive branding while intensifying governance challenges related to authenticity and trust. In doing so, the study provides a process-oriented explanation of adaptive brand management that extends existing branding and strategy literatures and offers a coherent theoretical foundation for future empirical research. While co-creation perspectives emphasize distributed agency in brand meaning formation, this study complements that view by explaining how organizations actively govern and stabilize brand meaning despite reduced control. A central contribution of the study is the introduction of adaptive brand meaning orchestration as the process mechanism through which branding capabilities translate environmental change into coherent and trusted market-facing meaning.

The framework developed in this study is subject to important boundary conditions. Branding as a dynamic capability is most salient in contexts where brand meaning is central to value creation, such as service industries, platform-based businesses, technology firms, and experience centric brands operating in digitally mediated environments. In contrast, the framework may be less applicable in highly commoditized markets where brand differentiation is minimal and purchasing decisions are primarily price driven. Recognizing these boundary conditions helps prevent overly universalistic interpretations and clarifies the contexts in which adaptive brand management capabilities are most likely to generate strategic value.

Beyond its theoretical contributions, this paper offers clear implications for managerial practice and future scholarship. By framing branding as a higher order capability, the study highlights the importance of capability sequencing, managerial trade-offs, and long-term governance in sustaining brand value under technological turbulence (Samiei et al., 2025; Singh & Dall'Olmo Riley, 2022). The future research agenda outlines pathways for operationalizing branding capabilities, examining micro foundations, and addressing ethical challenges associated with AI driven branding. Collectively, these contributions position branding as a central mechanism through which organizations manage meaning, legitimacy, and competitive advantage in increasingly algorithmic market environments.

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