

CALL FOR PAPERS
Special Issue: Transformative Business Models

Guest Editors:

V Kumar (Brock University)[†]

Philip Kotler (Northwestern University)

Shaphali Gupta (Indian Institute of Management, Kozhikode)

Barry Wright (Dean, Goodman School of Business, Brock University)

Zhi Yang (Dean, School of Management, HUST, Wuhan China)

Across industries and sectors, organizations are facing an inflection point where transformative change is not only desired but essential. Global disruptions – from climate change and pandemics to digital disintermediation and geopolitical shifts – are pushing firms to revisit how they create, deliver, and capture value. As businesses strive for long-term competitiveness, adaptability, and relevance, traditional business models are proving insufficient. The motivation behind this special issue stems from the critical need to understand and theorize *the emerging generation of transformative business models* – those that are enabled by next-generation technologies and grounded in societal imperatives.

New-age technologies (NATs) like artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, cloud computing, IoT, and data-driven platforms are not merely incremental improvements; they are now at the core of business model innovation (Kumar and Kotler 2024). Such NATs are radically redefining how firms reconfigure their value propositions and operations for agility and impact (Aker et al. 2022). For instance, researchers have emphasized that AI-driven transformations worldwide significantly impact economic resources at the country level; adaptation efforts to local culture at the company level; and consumer ethics and privacy concerns at the consumer level (Kopalle et al. 2022). How are these NATs contributing to transformative business models (TBMs)? Why does it matter? The transformations can occur in a siloed business function (e.g., Marketing) as well as through an integration of relevant business functions. These are some of the critical topics that this special issue aims to explore.

Writing about transformative business models, Kavadias et al. (2016) offer that the more a business model links market needs with emerging technologies, the more likely it is that the business model will be transformative. The concept of a transformative business model for operations is introduced and defined by Kumar and Kotler (2025) as *the transformation of organizational systems, resources, and processes using new-age technologies to improve business functions that can generate superior value offerings to all stakeholders*. They identify three triggers that drive the unique and synergistic impacts of these technologies —the tension of

[†] Corresponding Guest Editor

uncertainty, adaptive capabilities, and operational elasticity. These triggers result in transformative changes through (a) foundational shifts in organizations, (b) strategy design, execution, and optimization, (c) unified ecosystem creation, and (d) pioneering business operations solutions.

Further, the shift to platform-based business models and ecosystem thinking is another cornerstone of transformation. Such configurations require firms to orchestrate multiple actors, data flows, and digital assets. As a result, the rise of consumer-centric disruptive technologies is urging organizations to reshape their structures around agility, modularity, and openness, among others (Hopp et al. 2018). Based on these platform-based business models, the rise of NATs is accelerating overall organizational business transformation, in general, and marketing, in particular (Kumar 2018). From a branding strategy perspective, Kumar, Kotler and Rajan (2025) present a framework that incorporates marketing-mix variables (4Ps) adapted for intangible and dynamic technology offerings. In doing so, their study discusses the benefits of branding NATs separately (via differentiation and positioning, trust, user adoption, and value recognition) and identifies boundary objects and contingencies (via technical brand-technology alignment, regulatory regime, specialist market needs, and cost structure) that limit branding. In other words, firms must explore various business models to decide when to brand and when not to brand products arising out of NATs.

From an industry perspective, for example, the education industry is also transforming. Here, a transformative marketing education can lead to (a) personalized marketing education, (b) enhanced student engagement, and (c) closer stakeholder connections (Kumar, Rajan and Garg (2025). Similarly, from an ethical perspective, the use of NATs like Generative AI has resulted in benefitting the firm but harming the key stakeholders. In investigating generative AI's impact on society and policy implications, Kumar, Kotler, Gupta and Rajan (2025) find that transformative business models using NATs can create efficiency and effectiveness but also introduce bias in their execution.

New business models are also increasingly being tied to sustainability-oriented innovation and stakeholder capitalism, where value extends beyond profit to social and ecological outcomes. Böttcher et al. (2024) explore how digital technologies can embed ecological sustainability into the heart of business models, promoting “digital sustainable business models” as the next frontier in transformation. Grewal et al. (2024) argue that the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer powerful frameworks for transformative business logic that combines marketing with inclusive growth and long-term responsibility. Research has also investigated the role of business models in transforming social reality. From this perspective, Marti (2018) conceptualizes transformational business models to possess elements such as participatory forms

of architecture, multivocal inscriptions, scaffolding, and displaying a caring concern for the “other”.

With academic and practitioner interest in Transformative Business Models on the rise, this special issue of California Management Review (CMR) calls for original and interdisciplinary research that pushes the boundaries of current knowledge on transformative business models. We aim to explore both the theoretical underpinnings and practical implementations that enable businesses to adapt in the face of complex global challenges and technological disruption. Particularly, this special issue is focused on research about *ways of transforming business models based in the industry, business function, product, market, customer, ethics, leadership, and competition contexts*.

While digital transformation in businesses has been seen to bring about changes in firms’ value chains and interfirm relationships, and the modalities of value co-generation and delivery (e.g., Cennamo et al. 2020), in addition to changes in overall organizational design (e.g., Kretschmer and Khashabi 2020), *this special issue is primarily concerned with how Transformative Business Models might enable organizations to navigate significant uncertainties while recognizing and strategizing for the new opportunities and risks embedded within them and doing so sustainably and inclusively from a societal perspective*. We invite submissions of original, evidence-based articles addressing (*without being limited to*) the following sample topics and current management challenges in Transformative Business Models:

Transformative Business Models in Organizations

- What are early-warning indicators that suggest a need for business model reconfiguration?
- What are the best practices for benchmarking TBM effectiveness across industries or geographies?
- How do NATs (e.g., AI, blockchain, cloud platforms) enable new business model archetypes in traditional firms?
- How do organizations balance digital efficiency with business model experimentation?
- What dynamic capabilities are required for the successful implementation of transformative business models?
- How does organizational culture influence the success or failure of business model innovation?

Developments in Transformative Business Models

- How do organizations reconfigure their processes, structures, and talent models in response to AI-led transformation?
- How do organizations integrate environmental and social sustainability into core business model design?
- What trade-offs arise between economic performance and sustainability imperatives in transformative business models?

- How can firms benchmark technological enablers (e.g., platform agility, data monetization) across industries?
- How do business ecosystems co-create value through sustainability-oriented transformation?
- How are business models evolving in response to convergence between sectors (e.g., fintech, health-tech, edtech)?

Challenges in implementing Transformative Business Models

- How do firms transition from product-based models to platform-based business models?
- What governance mechanisms enable effective ecosystem orchestration in transformative models?
- What models of agility can firms adopt to reconfigure offerings rapidly in response to market or societal shocks?
- How do firms create “antifragile” business models that thrive amid volatility?
- What are the strategic tensions in hybrid models combining social purpose with commercial logic?
- How do privacy, transparency, and fairness shape customer trust and adoption of new models?

Measuring the effectiveness of Transformative Business Models

- How do TBMs affect short-term vs. long-term firm profitability and growth?
- What governance structures are needed to ensure accountability in AI-powered business environments?
- How do TBMs contribute to ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) performance indicators?
- How can the trade-offs between sustainability and scalability be measured and optimized?
- What models or tools best capture partner alignment and ecosystem synergy in platform-based TBMs?
- How can collaborative innovation be quantified in networked or open business models?

Manuscripts must be submitted no later than March 31, 2026.

Authors should submit a full, “In Depth” manuscript via [CMR’s online submission portal](#) to the attention of corresponding co-editor, V. Kumar.

Manuscripts should run between 5,000 and 8,000 words (excluding charts, tables, figures, and endnotes). Please remember that CMR publishes original, research-based articles that provide practical advice to managers. Thus, submissions should clearly state:

- The purpose and motivation of the study
- The management or leadership issues addressed
- The contexts in which phenomena are examined
- The relevance of the study for practitioners and academic scholars

Submissions should also feature:

- Rich case studies
- Practically relevant frameworks, and
- Actionable insights for decision-makers in business and/or policy

Additional submission guidelines can be found at <http://cmr.berkeley.edu/resources/submit/>.

Both the Guest Editors and CMR Editors will collectively select submissions that are likely to result in first-rate, high-impact contributions for peer-review. Please note that while Guest Editors make esteemed publication recommendations, all final decisions are made by the CMR Editorial Team.

References

- Akter, S., Michael, K., Uddin, M. R., McCarthy, G., & Rahman, M. (2022). Transforming business using digital innovations: The application of AI, blockchain, cloud and data analytics. *Annals of Operations Research*, 1-33.
- Böttcher, T. P., Empelmann, S., Weking, J., Hein, A., & Krcmar, H. (2024). Digital sustainable business models: Using digital technology to integrate ecological sustainability into the core of business models. *Information Systems Journal*, 34(3), 736-761.
- Cennamo, C., Dagnino, G. B., Di Minin, A., & Lanzolla, G. (2020). Managing digital transformation: Scope of transformation and modalities of value co-generation and delivery. *California Management Review*, 62(4), 5-16.
- Grewal, D., Kopalle, P. K., & Hulland, J. (2024). Addressing the greatest global challenges (UN SDGs) with a marketing lens. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 52(5), 1263-1272.
- Hopp, C., Antons, D., Kaminski, J., & Oliver Salge, T. (2018). Disruptive innovation: Conceptual foundations, empirical evidence, and research opportunities in the digital age. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 35(3).
- Kavadias, S., Ladas, K., & Loch, C. (2016). The transformative business model. *Harvard Business Review*, 94(10), 91-98.
- Kopalle, P. K., Gangwar, M., Kaplan, A., Ramachandran, D., Reinartz, W., & Rindfleisch, A. (2022). Examining artificial intelligence (AI) technologies in marketing via a global lens: Current trends and future research opportunities. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 39(2), 522-540.
- Kretschmer, T., & Khashabi, P. (2020). Digital transformation and organization design: An integrated approach. *California Management Review*, 62(4), 86-104.
- Kumar, V. (2018). Transformative marketing: The next 20 years. *Journal of marketing*, 82(4), 1-12.
- Kumar, V., & Kotler, P. (2024). *Transformative marketing: Combining new age technologies and human insights*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kumar, V., & Kotler, P. (2025). A market management approach to transformative business operations. *Marketing Strategy Journal*, 1, 100005. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.msj.2025.100005>

- Kumar, V., Kotler, P., Gupta, S., & Rajan, B. (2025). Generative AI in Marketing: Promises, Perils, and Public Policy Implications. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 44(3), pp. 309-331.
- Kumar, V., Kotler, P., & Rajan, B. (2025). To Brand, or Not to Brand? – The Role of Branding of New-Age Technologies. Working paper.
- Kumar, V., Rajan, B., & Garg, V. (2025). Transformative marketing education: Drivers, outcomes, and research agenda. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 47(1), 42-60.