KJMS 2026 VOL.8 (1): 131-150

KDU Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies (KJMS)
Volume 8. Issue 1 July 2026
DOI: https://doi.org/10.4038/kjms.v8i1.258

LINKING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION INITIATIVES TO ORGANISATIONAL EXCELLENCE THROUGH CUSTOMER SATISFACTION: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK IN THE SRI LANKAN TELECOM SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

The telecommunications industry plays a vital role in Sri Lanka's national development, yet it faces challenges, including customer dissatisfaction, outdated infrastructure, and high churn rates. Although digital transformation initiatives have been recognised as strategic enablers in developed economies, research examining their role in organisational excellence and the mediating influence of customer satisfaction remains limited in Asian contexts, particularly Sri Lanka. This study develops a framework linking digital transformation initiatives to organisational excellence, via customer satisfaction in the Sri Lankan telecom sector. A qualitative, exploratory approach is adopted, synthesising evidence from scholarly literature, case studies, and industry reports published between 2017 and 2025. The synthesis integrates digital transformation initiatives, operational efficiency, competitive advantage, customer satisfaction, and organisational excellence into a unified framework. The proposed framework provides theoretical and practical insights for understanding these relationships in the Sri Lankan telecom context and establishes a foundation for future empirical validation using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

KEYWORDS: Digital Transformation, Organisational Excellence, Customer Satisfaction, Conceptual Framework, Telecommunication Sector, Sri Lanka

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Since privatisation, Sri Lanka's telecom sector has evolved within an intensely competitive business environment. Restructuring made Sri Lanka one of the most competitive telecom markets in Asia-Pacific. Sri Lanka Telecom, Dialog Axiata, Mobitel, Airtel, and Hutch deliver essential services such as fixed-line telephony, mobile communication, broadband internet, and digital television. In mid-2024, Sri Lanka's total population was to be 22 million. By the end of December 2025, the country had approximately 3.5 million fixed access telephone subscribers and 28.7 million cellular mobile telephone subscribers. In addition, there were about 21.6 million mobile broadband subscribers and 2.5 million fixed broadband subscribers (TRCSL, 2025).

According to Kaskar and Patel (2022), the telecommunications industry is the world's second-largest sector within the information and communication technology (ICT) domain. Competitiveness has strengthened with the adoption of digital technologies that enhance operational efficiency, foster innovation, and support customer-oriented services. The Sri Lankan telecom industry faces challenges following privatisation, including high customer dissatisfaction and outdated technological infrastructure (Hanna, 2024). Digital platforms have improved complaint resolution, service quality, and customer experience (Achalan & Wickramarachchi, 2024). Telecom companies have adopted e-commerce, digital payment systems, and mobile banking to enhance customer service (Abd-Elrahman & Kamal, 2020; Elapanda, Rao, & Kumar, 2020). Additionally, these technologies reconfigure old business practices to enhance service quality and reduce inefficiencies. Digital transformation is a fundamental shift in business operations aimed at improving customer satisfaction (Erangi and Stecenko, 2024), .This study is purely conceptual and does not gather primary data, or test hypothesis empirically. Its purpose is to synthesise existing theoretical and empirical literature to develop a testable conceptual framework and propose hypotheses for future empirical validation.

1.2 Research Problem

In 2024, the Sri Lankan telecom sector had 28.9 million customers, including mobile and fixed telephone connections. Despite advances, the sector still faces outdated infrastructure, unmet customer expectations, and persistent dissatisfaction. Unresolved complaints and service inefficiencies increase churn. TRCSL reported 1,313 complaints in 2020, noting operators withhold full details. Prepaid dominance and multi-SIM use drive frequent switching.. Therefore, it is essential to investigate how adopting digital transformation can enhance customer satisfaction and, in turn, strengthen organisational excellence, thereby mitigating these challenges.

1.3 Research Questions

This study seeks to address the following research questions.

RQ1: How do technological and organisational factors of digital transformation initatives influence organisational excellance in the Sri Lanka’s telecommunication sector?

RQ2: In what ways do these digital transformation initatives affect customer satisfaction within the sector?

RQ3: To what extent does customer satisfaction mediate the relationship between digital transformation initiatives and organisational excellence?

1.4 Research Objectives

The objectives.of this study are to:

1. Conceptualise the role of technological and organisational aspects of digital transformation

initiatives in achieving organisational excellence in Sri Lanka's telecommunication sector.
2. Examine how digital transformation initiatives shape customer satisfaction.
3. Propose and justify the mediating role of customer satisfaction in linking digital transformation initiatives with organisational excellence.
4. Develop a conceptual framework grounded in relevant theories for future empirical validation.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to both theory and practice by addressing the underexplored issues of reducing customer complaints in the Sri Lankan telecommunications sector particularly through the mediating role of customer satisfaction . The findings provide strategic insights for industry practitioners and policymakers on how digital technologies can be leveraged to enhance customer experience, achieve sustainable competitive advantage, and streamline operations. By benchmarking global best practices and adapting them to the Sri Lankan context, the proposed conceptual framework establishes a valuable foundation for future empirical validation and supports the sector's long-term development.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Digital Transformation in the Telecommunication Sector

Digital transformation has reshaped global telecommunications by integrating emerging digital technologies into organisational practices (Goonawardena et al., 2023). Global initiatives such as Industry 4.0, Made in China 2025, High-Tech Strategy 2020 demonstae how digital technologies enhance efficiency, and competitiveness (Ghobakhloo & Iranmanesh, 2021; Zhou, 2017), highlighting Sri Lanka's a technological gap. In Sri Lanka, companies such as Sri Lanka Telecom, Mobitel, and Dialog Axiata have started fibre expansion and process automation, earning recognition through the National Business Excellence Award (TM Forum, 2021; LNW, 2022). However, the sector continues to face high churn rates, outdated infrastructure, and limited digital maturity (Hanna, 2024), underscoring significant organisational challenges.

2.2 Advanced Digital Technologies in Telecoms

Digital transformation initiatives, driven by advanced digital technologies, are reshaping the global telecommunications industry. The deployment of 5G Networks offers high-speed data, low latency, and massive connectivity (Fernando, 2021). Dialog Axiata and Sri Lanka Telecom, have begun 5G trials and fibre network expansion through nationwide maturity remains limited. IoT and cloud computing promise operational effectiveness, and improveed service quality (Illakya, 2024; Ramzan et al., 2018), but barriers such as low digital maturity, regional divides, and employee resistance persist (Erangi & Stecenko, 2024).

AI and ML enhance customer service via chatbots, network optimisation, and predictive analytics (Balmer, Levin, & Schmidt, 2020; Edozie et al., 2025). Yet financial constraints hinder widespread adoption compared to other developing economies (Elapanda, Rao, & Kumar, 2020). Robotic Process Automation (RPA) reduces costs and accelerates fault clearance, with Dialog Axiata reporting significant improvements in service optimisation (TM Forum, 2021; Achalan, & Wickramarachchi, 2024). Big Data Analytics (BDA) supports churn prediction, and decision-making (Zahid et al., 2019) through lack of standardised data storage limits full-scale use. Cybersecurity and Blockchain strengthen transparency, trust,and data security (Li et al., 2022), but adoption remains uneven due to financial constraints and a pronounced digital divide between urban and rural regions (Erangi, & Stecenko, 2024). These challenges emphasis the brequirement for a conceptual framework to explore the latent potential of advanced digital technologies in Sri Lankan telecom industry.

2.3 Organisational Performance Vs Organisational Excellence

Organisational performance (OP) is typically measured by financial outcomes, efficiency, innovation and customer value (Hoque et al., 2018;

Lee et al., 2022). In telecommunications industry, KPIs include market share, revenue growth, and operational efficiency (Farida & Setiawan, 2022). Organisational excellence (OE) however, represents a broader philosophy of continuous improvement, supported by frameworks like the Balanced Scorecard, EFQM Model, McKinsey 7-S, the Resource-Based View (RBV), and the Competing Values Framework (CVF) (UnoPro, 2023). Unlike OP, which focuses on outcomes, OE emphasises integrated, sustainable practices. Studies show digital transformation aligns processes, reduces costs, and drives innovation (Suhari et al., 2024). When combined with excellence management practices, digital transformation capabilities foster organisational excellence (Oliveira, 2025). Evidence from Oman demonstrates how IT systems improved productivity, customer management, and service quality—dimensions of OE (Deeb et al., 2024). In Sri Lanka, however, OE remains underexplored, making it a more comprehansive and suitable dependent variable than OP.

2.4 Role of Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is a a critical mechanisum through which digital transformation initiatives contribute to broader organizational outcomes. In service industries, satisfaction mediators the relasionship between technology-enabled improvements and organisational excellence (Zariman et al., 2022). Digital transformation initiatives improve operational effecency and strengthens customer perceptions of service quality, convenience, responsiveness. In telecom sector, these initatives enhance customer-facing services and diliver them more effectively in line with evolving expectations. When technology-enabled services meet or exceed expectations, they foster satisfaction, loyalty, retention and perceived organizational value-dimensions that organizational excellance.

Emplerical evidence reinforces this pathway. For example, Robotic Process Automation (RPA) has been shown to improve customer experience while simultaneously boosting operational outcomes in the telecom sector (Achalan & Wickramarachchi, 2024), Such findings demonstrate, how technology-enabled enhancements in service delivery influence both customer perceptions and organizational outcomes. Concequently this study proposes that digital transformation initatives contribute to organizational excellance with customer satisfaction as a mediator. However, most existing evidence is drawn from developed economies, leaving a contextual gap in developing countries such as Sri Lanka. This gap underscores the importance of examining these relationships within the Sri Lankan telecommunications industry.

2.5 Integration of Theories and Research Gaps

Existing literature highlights positive relationships among digital transformation, customer satisfaction, and organisational performance; but perspectives remain fragmented. Most studies emphasise the direct impact of digital transformation initatives on organisational outcomes, focussing on digital technology adoption and capabilities that improve effecency, innovation, and competitive advantage (Suhari, et al., 2024; Oliveira, 2025). Others examine how technology-enabled services enhance customer satisfaction through improved quality, responsiveness, convenience, and personalisation (Abdel-Hamid et al., 2022; Achalan, & Wickramarachchi, 2024). While these findings underscore the importance of customer satisafction, they rarely explore its mediating role in linking digital transformation initatives on organisational excellance. Consequently, the three constructs-digital transformation initiatives, customer satisfaction, and organisational excellence are conceptually interconnected but insufficiently integrated. Most research investigates direct relationships, with limited attention to mediation pathways, particularly in developing economies.

The theoretical foundation for this study draws on three perspectives namely the Resource-Based View (RBV), Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT), and the Expectation-Disconfirmation Model (EDM) within a single conceptual framework in the Sri Lankan telecom sector. The RBV explains how digital capabilites constitute strategic, valuable, rare, inimitable, and non- substitutable (VRIN) resources

that support competitive advantage and organisational outcomes (Barney, 1991). DCT extends RBV by emphasising how organisations sense andtrasform resources in response to envirnmental changes and evolving customer needs (Teece, 2007; Warner, & Wager, 2019). EDM provides a customer centric lens, proposing that satisfaction depends on whether perceived service performance meets or exceeds expectations (Hom, 2000). While each theory explains part of the relationship, their collective application to digital transformation initatives, organisational excellence and customer satisfaction remains limited. Few studies have integrated these perspectives into a unified framework, and even fewer have examined them in developing nations like Sri Labnka where business environments and customer expectations differ significantly from those in developed countries.

The literature review reveals four key gaps. First, although some studies in Sri Lanka have examined individual digital technologies such as 5G, AI, and blockchain in relation to customer satisfaction and performance, none have investigated their impact on organisational excellence, indicating a technological gap (Aruppala et al., 2025). Second, research on digital transformation initiatives in Sri Lanka's telecommunications sector remains scarce, often overlooking critical organisational and technological factors, highlighting contextual limitations (Rassool & Dissanayake, 2019). Third, while cultural and organisational barriers are acknowledged, the role of employee attitudes and organisational culture in shaping digital transformation initiatives has received little scholarly attention (Nadkarni & Prugl, 2020). Fourth, the mediating role of customer satisfaction in linking digital transformation initiatives with organisational excellence remains underexplored in developing economies, representing a mediating gap (Guo and Xu 2021; Masoud & Basahel, 2023). Addressing these gaps, this study proposes a systematic conceptual framework that integrates technological, organisational, cultural, and mediating dimensions to advance both theory and practice in Sri Lanka's telecommunications sector.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a conceptual and exploratory research design to develop a framework linking digital transformation initiatives (DT) and organisational excellence (OE) through customer satisfaction (CS), with CS serving as a mediating variable in the Sri Lankan telecommunications sector. As a conceptual study, it does not empirically test hypotheses; instead, it proposes a framework grounded in a qualitative synthesis of scholarly literature, industry reports, and case studies. This method identifies patterns and provides theoretical justification for future empirical validation. Since this is a conceptual stuady, itsynthesises disparate theoretical paradigms such as the Resource- Based View (RBV), Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT), and the Expectation-Disconfirmation Model (EDM) into a novel framework cater to an emerging telecom market setting.. It also establilishes the structural roadmap for future empirical validation. It futher addresses the underexplored relationships among key constructs towards the Sri Lankan telecom sector with limited research exists.

3.2 Study Approach

This study relies exclusively on secondary evidence from peer-reviewed journal articles, company case studies, industry reports, and reputable academic databases. The review covers the period from 2017 to 2025, and applied explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria in the literature synthesis. The review followed three stages: (1) keyword search, (2) quality/context screening and (3) thematic synthesis of credible sources.

3.2.1 Literature Search Strategy

A structured literature review approach was employed to identify, screen, and synthesise relevant evidence for conceptual framework development. Relevant publications were identified through the academic databases Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. A combination of keywords using Boolean search operators was employed to search studies such as “Digital Transformation” AND

"Telecommunications"; "Digital Technologies" AND "Telecom"; " Sri Lanka" AND "Telecommunication"; "Telecommunication Industry" AND "Digital Transformation"; " Organisational Excellence" AND "Digital Transformation"; "Customer Satisfaction" AND "Telecom". Applied tracking citations forward and backwards to find additional useful studies. Complementary industry reports and regulatory data from TRCSL, GSMA, and telecom operators were also included

3.2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria were used for literature selection. Inclusion criteria include peer-reviewed journal articles, indexed articles in Scopus or Web of Science, International conference proceedings, recognised industry reports, and peer-reviewed articles published only in English between 2017 and 2025. All the included studies were relevant to the subject matter and selected using keywords. Exclusion criteria included non-English publications, editorials, commentaries and opinion papers, duplicate publications, non–peer-reviewed web articles, articles unrelated to digital transformation or telecommunications, and articles with insufficient methodologies.

3.2.3 Literature Screening Procedure

The screening followed a PRISMA–inspired process to support framework development. The flowdiagram is shwn in Figure 3.1. Initial database searches and citation tracking identified 840 records. After removing 210 duplicates, 630 records remained. Title screening removed 410 records, leaving 220. Abstract screening excluded 145 records, leaving 75. In the full-text stage, 51 records were removed due to unrelated telecom context, no focus on DTI, missing CS and OE, and prior to 2017; finally, 24 synthesised studies remained. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the 24 selected studies were synthesised thematically according to the key constructs of this research. The outcome was used to develop the proposed conceptual framework and formulate the research hypotheses.

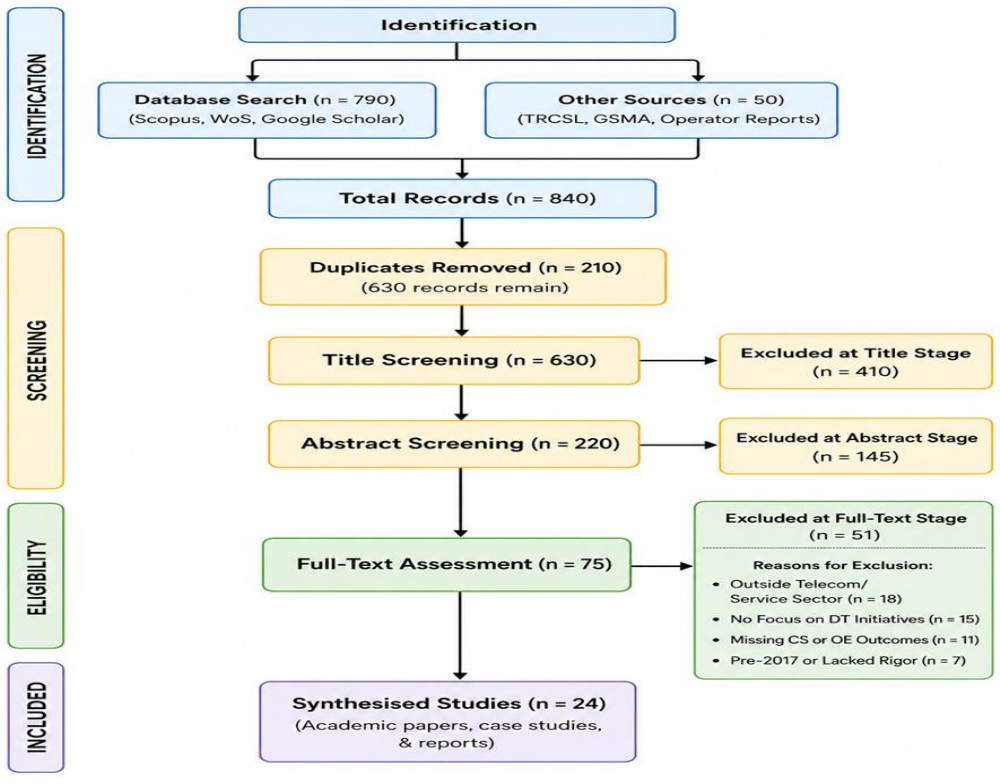

Figure 3.1: PRISMA Flow Diagram (Author Developed)

3.2.4 Thematic Synthesis of Literature

Literature was analysed thematically, following a systematic approach adopted from Thomas, J., & Harden, A., (2008). First line by line coding for technologies, customer experience, organisational capabilities, organisational excellence, mediators, moderators, theories and challenges. Then developed the descriptive themes. The initial codes were organised into descriptive themes reflecting the main concept of the study. After that analytical themes were developed to integrate these concepts into a coherent framework. The conceptual framework was developed by integrating the resulting themes, and the synthesised evidence is used to develop the research hypotheses. Although this research study does not constitute a formal systematic literature review, it was conducted using systematic principles, including predefined search strategies, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, and a PRISMA-inspired screening process to ensure rigour and transparency in the literature review section. To develop models and propositions in conceptual research, this approach is widely accepted (Jaakkola, 2020).

3.3 Methodological Boundaries and Research Design Justification

This study has inherent limitations regarding the statistical verification of causal directions and the mathematical validation of customer satisfaction as a mediator. It thus adopts a purely conceptual and exploratory design. Since this is a conceptual study, it does not involve primary data collection, statistical modelling or computing statistical parameters. However, its objective is to synthesise disparate theoretical paradigms such as the Resource-Based View (RBV), Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT), and the Expectation-Disconfirmation Model (EDM) into a novel framework tailored to an emerging telecom market setting. For rigorous quantitative research, a structurally sound conceptualisation is a compulsory prerequisite, although the lack of empirical data points prevents immediate causal generalizability. This article establishes the structural roadmap necessary for subsequent empirical validation by formulating explicit theoretical paths. This study upholds academic integrity by properly citing all sources. This study employs thematic synthesis and theoretical reasoning to investigate the relationships among digital transformation initiatives (DTI), customer satisfaction (CS), and organisational excellence (OE) as distinct constructs. This approach is widely accepted for developing models and propositions in conceptual research (Jaakkola, 2020). This proposed conceptual framework is particularly significant for future researchers to test empirically. They can deploy survey instruments across managerial and professional employees in the Sri Lankan telecommunication sector, collect data and evaluate hypothesised paths using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) and appropriate reliability and validity assessments.

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The framework explains the phenomenon under study by synthesising existing literature to clarify the relationships among variables, thereby guiding the investigation of the research problem (McGaghie, Bordage, & Shea, 2001). It is the research philosophy and guideline for the study and serves as a foundation.

4.1 Proposed Conceptual Framework

I used three theoretical perspectives to develop the proposed conceptual framework. The Expectation Disconfirmation Model (EDM) posits that customer satisfaction is determined by whether service delivery meets or exceeds expectations (Hom, 2000). Grounding the analysis in the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Dynamic Capabilities theory, Digital Transformation initiatives (DTI) are proposed to generate VRIN resources. These resources are proposed to enhance Customer Satisfaction (CS) by enabling personalised, superior service, which cultivates customer loyalty and strengthens competitiveness, thereby culminating in sustainable Organisational Excellence (OE) (Barney, 1991). The conceptual model paths are supported by integrating these theories. The RBV suggests that digital technologies enable effective resource management, enhancing competitive advantage and organisational excellence (H1: Direct effect of DT → OE). Dynamic Capabilities theory extends this, proposing that

technological transformation improves customer satisfaction through superior resource management (H2: Direct impact of DT → CS). These theories suggest that effective resource management may enhance customer satisfaction, enhancing sustainable organisational excellence (H3a: Direct effect of CS → OE). EDM articulates this relationship, stating that organisational excellence may increase when service performance meets or exceeds customer expectations. These theories, both directly and indirectly, demonstrate how digital transformation initiatives enhance organisational excellence through customer satisfaction (H3b: Mediating pathway of DT•CS•OE). Thus, the proposed framework suggests that by integrating these theories for analysing how digital transformation initiatives may drive organisational excellence, both directly and through the mediating effect of customer satisfaction.

4.1.1 Supporting Theoretical Grounding

By integrating these theories, the conceptual framework establishes holistic explanatory power.

Table 4.1: Supporting Theories with Definitions and Applications

Supporting Theory	Structural Path	Definition	Citations
Resource-Based View (RBV)	DTI → OE	Digital technologies and digital capabilities constitute strategic, VRIN (valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable) resources that facilitate efficient resource management, improve competitive advantage, and directly result in sustainable organisational success.	Barney (1991)
Expectation-Disconfirmation Model (EDM)	CS → OE & Mediating Pathway	Customer satisfaction is a function of the conformance of perceived service delivery to expectations of the service, with the result being the dependent variable influencing organisational performance and success.	Hom (2000). Festinger, (1957)
Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT)/ TOE contextual grounding	DTI → CS	DCT: Builds on RBV by illustrating how organisations dynamically and continuously recombine their technological and human resources in response to evolving market environments and changing customer needs	Warner & Wager, (2019)
		TOE/TAM Background: Although they were not directly adopted for the construction of the models, TOE and TAM introduce the concept of technology adoption barriers and their operational value, while RBV, DCT, and EDM introduce more general strategic and customer-centric perspectives.	Tornatzky, Fleischer, & Chakrabarti (1990); Davis, (1989)

(Source: Literature Review)

4.1.2 Theoretical Integration and Differentiation

Although both RBV and DCT address how organisational internal characteristics drive competitive advantage, they operate on different conceptual logics: resource state and resource adaptation. RBV focuses on the stock of resources and the availability of valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) assets. In other words, DCT give emphasis to the flow of capabilities such as the ability to sense, seize, and transform resources responding to environmental change. Accordingly,

RBV describes what resources matter, whereas DCT classifies how organisations energetically use these resources to achieve sustainable competitive advantage (Teece, 2007).

4.1.3 Justification for Theory Integration

A single theoretical foundation can not fully describe the multi-layered causal pathway from internal digital transformation initiatives to greater organisational excellence through micro customer perceptions. Having integrated RBV, DCT and EDM theories collectively produce a solid multi-level theoricital model and the conceptual framework achieves holistic explanatory power in this study. Accordingly, RBV grounds the technological resouces, DCT grounds the organisational capabilities required to operationalise them and EDM grounds the mediating role of customer perception and satisfaction. This framework provides a theoretical foundation for explain how digital investments of telecom companies may contribute to sustainable organisational excellance.

4.1.4 Key Variables in the Conceptual Framework

Based on the conceptual framework, the variables can be categorised as follows.

Table 4.2: Key Variables and their Dimensions in the Conceptual Framework

Variable Category	Variable	Components/ Dimensions	Role in the Framework	Citations
Independent Variable (IV)	Digital Transformation Initiatives (DTI)	Technological Factors: AI, Cloud Computing, IoT, Big Data, Digital Platforms, Data Analytics, Automation, Cybersecurity	Primary independent variables influencing Customer Satisfaction and Organisational Excellence	Warner, & Wager, (2019); Vial, (2021); Bhatti, (2021); Melchor, (2017)
		Organisational Factors: Leadership & Vision, Organisational Readiness, Digital Skills & Talent, Change Management, Process Reengineering		Araujo et al., (2021); Kawiana, (2023); Lin, (2024); Fakhfakh et al.,, (2025)
Mediator	Customer Satisfaction (CS)	Service Quality, Reliability, Responsiveness, Customer Experience, Perceived Value	Mediates the relationship between Digital Transformation Initiatives and Organisational Excellence (H3b Pathway)	(Al-Weshah et al., 2019); Goyal, & Kar, (2019); Hom, (2000); Majka, (2024)
Dependent Variable (DV)	Organisational Excellence (OE)	Operational Excellence, Financial Performance, Customer Loyalty, & Retention, Innovation Capacity, Sustainability & Growth	Outcome variable	Arsovski et al., (2010); Barney, (1991); UnoPro, (2023); Suhari, Putra, & Sain, (2024); Oliveira, (2025); Deeb et al., (2024); McKinsey, (2025)

(Source: Literature Review)

4.1.5 Moderating Varaiables

Table 4.3: Moderating Variables with Relationships

Moderator	Moderator Relationships	Citations
Organisational Culture	DTI → OE, DTI → CS, CS → OE	Ke, & Wei, (2008); Chan, Shaffer, & Snape, (2004); Martínez-Caro, Cegarra-Navarro, & Alfonso-Ruiz, (2020); Khaira, Triyonggo, & Sukmawati, (2023); Nadkarni, & Prugl (2020/ 2021)
Regulatory Environment	DTI → OE, DTI → CS	Hanna, (2024); TRCSL, (2020, 2023, 2025)
Environmental Uncertainty	DTI → OE	Ghobakhloo, & Iranmanesh, (2021); (Warner, & Wager, (2019)
Competitive Intensity	DTI → OE and CS → OE	(Farida, & Setiawan, (2022); Zahid et al., (2019)
The strength or direction of the relationships among the main constructs are influenced by these moderating variables		

(Source: Literature Review)

Table 4.4 Envirnmental Factors with Components

External Factors	Components	Citations
Technological Environment	Technology Infrastructure, Technology Dynamism	Fernando, (2021); TM Forum, (2021); Erangi, & Stecenko, (2024); Tornatzky, Fleischer, & Chakrabarti, (1990)
Market Environment	Market Demand, Competitor Behaviour, Customer Expectations	Hom, (2000); Farida, & Setiawan, (2022); Zahid, (2019)
Economic Environment	Economic Conditions, Cost involvements/ Pressure, Investment ambition/ Climate	Hanna (2024). Elapanda, Rao, & Kumar (2020)
Political- Legal Environment	Social Norms, Digital Literacy, Cultural Values	Erangi, & Stecenko, (2024); Nadkarni & Prugl (2020/2021)
Socio-cultural Environment	Industry Regulations, Government Polices, Data Pivacy Laws	TRCSL, (2020.2023, 2025); Li et al., (2022)

(Source: Literature Review)

4.1.6 External Environmental Factors

External environmental factors influence digital transformation initiatives are called contextual variables. These control/ contextual variables are generally not direct constructs in the hypotheses.

4.1.7 Conceptual Framework

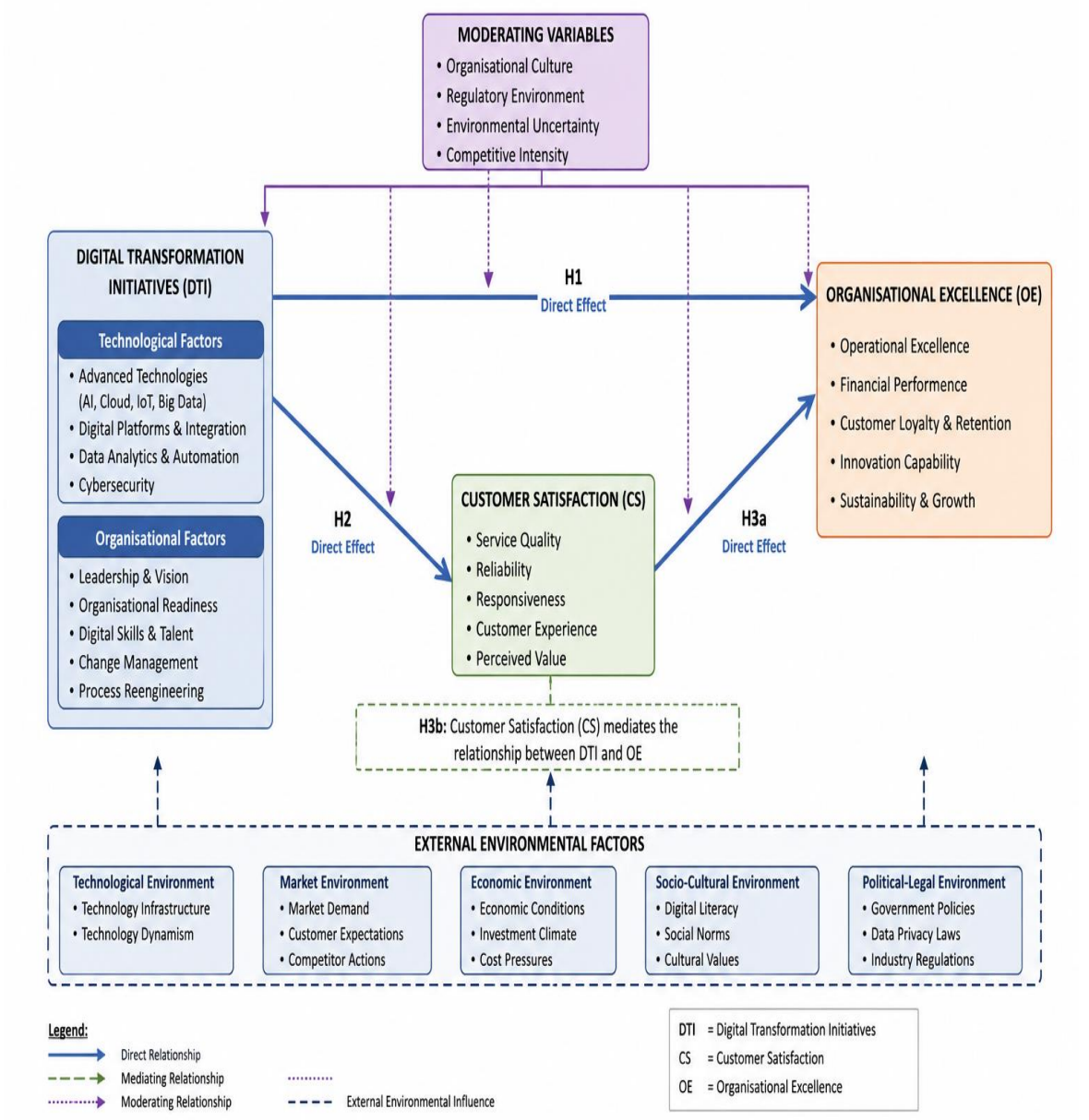

Figure 4.1: Conceptual Framework (Source: Developed by the author)

Building on the existing literature and research, I request that future researchers validate the proposed conceptual framework. I selected the two key factors illustrated under independent variables to measure separately to visualise the big picture of the research problem.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Digital Transformation Initiatives in the Telecommunications

Global and local literature suggests that digital transformation initiatives have contributed to the telecommunications industry's transformation by enhancing operational performance and customer

experience. Previous studies indicate that DT is associated with improvements in profitability, efficiency, and competitive advantage (Suhari, Putra, & Sain, 2024; Al-Ayed et al., 2023).

5.1.1 Technological Factors

Integrating emerging technologies such as AI, IoT, big data, RPA, and 5G networks into telecom companies can improve network management, deliver personalised services, and automate business processes (Warner & Wager, 2019; Vial, 2021). Big data analytics and IoT capabilities positively influence organisational performance, whereas blockchain has a less pronounced impact (Bhatti et al., 2021). Digital platforms in the telecommunication industry, such as Vodafone Live! (UK, 2002), Deutsche Telekom - Cloud Business Marketplace & QIVICON (Germany, 2012, 2013), NTT DoCoMo-i-mode (Japan,1999), AT&T Digital Life (USA, 2013), adopted to support organisational excellence by developing customer loyalty, driving innovation, escalating service portfolios, and long-term competitiveness in the digital era (Melchor, 2017). Benchmarking global telecom operators shows that IT and technology excellence—particularly in data, cloud, and AI—is a key driver of organisational excellence.

5.1.2 Organisational Factors

Organisational factors such as digital leadership (DL), process automation (PA), digital culture (DC), and employee skills (ES) are proposed to contribute to long-term organisational excellence. For example, digital leadership (DL) is an essential concept in modern business and effectively utilises digital technology within organisations (Araujo et al., 2021). A company vision is created by integrating technology into business strategy, enhancing employees' digital skills, customer focus, organisational flexibility, and an innovative culture to achieve better outcomes (Kawiana, 2023). Digital leaders' qualities are digital strategic thinking, digital change management, digital insights, and digital talent development. Additionally, they can adapt dynamically, empower digitally, motivate vision, collaborate across boundaries, and innovate and be entrepreneurial (Lin, 2024). Digital leadership leverages digital transformation to achieve business objectives and considers technology (Araujo et al., 2021). Digital leaders attempt to enhance long-term organisational performance, leading to sustainable organisational excellence by digital transformation in telecom organisations (Fakhfakh et al., 2025; Munir et al., 2023). Process automation (PA) is the replacement of traditional manual tasks with automated processes. It uses technologies such as speech recognition, robotics, and natural language processing. The reviewd literature indicates that it improves operational efficiency, reduces the time employees spend on repetitive tasks, and enables cost reduction and big data processing across different systems, thereby enhancing long-term organisational excellence in telecom companies (Chachorovska et al., 2022). Organisational culture is how people think about organisational behaviour (Ke & Wei, 2008). It sustains competitive advantage and is the key factor for company effectiveness by addressing challenges (Chan, Shaffer, & Snape, 2004; Zheng, Yang, & McLean, 2010). Companies can slowly develop a digital culture by recognising existing behaviours and aligning them with digital goals. Through shared digital strategy, digital culture promotes creativity, collaboration, initiative, innovation, and continuous improvement. The prior literature indicate that culture embedded with digital technologies enhances organisational excellence (Martínez-Caro, Cegarra-Navarro, & Alfonso-Ruiz, 2020). The study's findings reveal that digital culture enhances teamwork, employee attitudes, and work design, strengthening customer focus, innovation, responsiveness, and productivity. Thus, digital culture is a key driver of excellence in the telecommunications sector (Khaira, Triyonggo, & Sukmawati, 2023).

5.2 Mediating variable: Customer Satisfaction (CS)

The study proposes customer satisfaction as a critical mediator between digital transformation and organisational performance. Customer Satisfaction (CS) has been empirically shown to predict loyalty, retention, and financial performance (Al-Weshah et al., 2019). Customer satisfaction is positively influenced by pricing fairness, network reliability,

service quality, and responsiveness (Goyal & Kar, 2019).

5.3 Dependent variable: Organisational Excellence (OE)

The book by Arsovski et al. (2010) demonstrated that organisational excellence is a means by which a company achieves superior performance by streamlining employees, technology, strategy, and processes within an integrated framework. It also encourages innovation, continuous improvement, and stakeholder satisfaction in entities by integrating management systems such as ISO standards and Balanced Scorecards. Companies can achieve employee engagement, customer loyalty, and overall competitiveness by concentrating on process efficiency, strategic clarity, and responsiveness to change. Organisational excellence is not a destination but a journey in a changing environment. Organisational performance has two components: Balanced Scorecard (BSC) and user performance. BSC has four dimensions: financial performance, learning and growth, customers, and internal business processes.

5.4 Hypotheses development

The following hypotheses are proposed, grounded in empirical evidence and theoretical reasoning. The findings show that digital transformation improves profitability, efficiency, and competitive advantage (Suhari, Putra, & Sain, 2024; Al-Ayed et al., 2023). Digital transformation strategy significantly impacts customer satisfaction in the Palestinian telecom industry (Iriqat & Jaradat, 2021). Worldwide studies, such as Starbucks' Digital Flywheel, demonstrate how digital tools can foster customer loyalty and deliver personalised customer experiences (Ullagaddi, 2024). Research shows that DT uplifts responsiveness, service quality, and customer loyalty (Al-Hashem et al., 2022; Gharib, 2019). Dialog Axiata in Sri Lanka has developed self-service digital platforms to reduce complaint resolution times and enhance customer engagement. According to TRCSL (2023), digital transformation initiatives positively influence organisational excellence in the Sri Lankan telecom industry by improving efficiency and effectiveness, driving innovation, and achieving more exhaustive market coverage. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H1: Digital transformation initiatives significantly affect organisational excellence in Sri Lanka's telecommunication sector.

Research shows that Digital transformation initiatives uplift responsiveness, service quality, and customer loyalty (Al-Hashem et al., 2022; Gharib, 2019). Erangi and Stecenko (2024) noted that digital transformation enhances customer service delivery. Customer trust has grown through the use of digital services for their needs, indicating customer satisfaction with digital tools in Sri Lanka. Additionally, Sri Lanka Telecom's 2023 Annual Report stated that digital transformation initiatives, including customer-centric innovations, app-based services, and expanded connectivity, support customers' daily needs and enhance their experience and satisfaction. The reviewed literature suggests that digital transformation strategies are positively associated with customer satisfaction in the telecom industry. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H2: Digital transformation initiatives have a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction in Sri Lanka's telecommunications sector.

It was suggested that customer satisfaction and organisational excellence are positively related (Achalan & Wickramarachchi, 2024). Further, prior empirical studies found that customer satisfaction improves business excellence (Sheikholeslam & Emamian, 2016). Therefore, prior literature suggests that customer satisfaction may contribute to organisational excellence, and the following hypothesis is proposed

H3a: Customer satisfaction significantly affects organisational excellence in Sri Lanka's telecommunication sector.

Zariman et al. (2022) stated that digital initiatives influence customer satisfaction. Achalan & Wickramarachchi (2024) noted that customer

satisfaction and organisational excellence are positively related. Accordingly, based on the above evidence, customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between technology adoption and business outcomes. The results of a study showed that customer satisfaction significantly mediates the relationship between e-service quality and customer loyalty in the telecom sector (Maharani et al., 2024). Furthermore, Prabhakar and Ram (2021) found that operational improvements and service quality have a significant positive mediating effect on customer satisfaction. Based on the reviewed literature, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H3b: Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between digital transformation and organisational excellence in Sri Lanka's telecom sector.

5.5 Theoretical Contributions and Industry Grounding

5.5.1 Theoretical Contributions and Integration

This research study is grounded in three theoretical perspectives. The Resource-Based View (RBV) posits that digital technologies are strategic resources that enhance competitiveness. The Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT) highlights the need for continuous reconfiguring of telecom firms' technological and human resources to respond effectively to market dynamics. The Expectations Disconfirmation Model (EDM) posits that customer satisfaction may increase when digital transformation initiatives meet or exceed customer expectations, thereby strengthening organisational outcomes. This study expands the RBV by considering digital technology as a VRIN (valuable, rare, inimitable, non-substitutable) framework for sustainable competitive advantage in the emerging telecommunications industry. Integrating RBV with DCT may provide a useful theoretical foundation for addressing the low-maturity gap, while EDM can be employed to capture customer expectations in telecommunications service delivery. This study does not employ TAM or TOE, as they are relatively limited and adoption-focused models more suitable for introductory technology studies. In contrast, RBV, DCT, and EDM provide strategic, comprehensive, and customer-focused frameworks better suited to explaining technology adoption alongside long-term organisational performance and sustainable excellence (Barney, 1991; Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990; Davis, 1989). Integrating these perspectives strengthens the explanatory power of the proposed conceptual framework in capturing the DT–CS–OP relationship within developing economies such as Sri Lanka.

5.5.2 Sri Lanka Telecom Industry Evidence & Case Examples

Table4.5: Summary Synthesis for Framework Validation

Theory	Role	Emperical Evidence & Case Examples	Key Metrics & Industry Statistics
RBV	Primary Technology Asserts (DTI → OE) (Barney, 1991)	Countrywide FTTH fiber rollouts, Submarine Cable landing across sea, and 5G trail deployments by SLT-Mobitel and Diialog Axiata (Fernando, 2021; LNW, 2022).	28.7M Mobile Suscribers (TRCSL, 2025)
			21.6M Mobile Broadband Lines (TRCSL, 2025)
			2.5M Fixed Broadband Connections (TRCSL, 2025)
DCT	Process reenginnering & agility (DTI → CS); (Warner, & Wager, 2019)	Dialog Axiata introduced RPA integration for customer fults clearance (Achalan & Wickramarachchi, 2024); (TM Forum, 2021); Mobitel & Hutch mobile companies introduced Big Data analytics for prepaid mobile customer churn prediction (Palraj, & Ramanayake, 2024; Zahid et al., 2019).	Automated RPA platforms are used by 80% of mobile customers (TM Forum, 2021).
EDM	Customer satisfaction as mediation (CS → OE); (Hom, 2000)	Self-service ecosystems namely MyDialog, MySLT, and AI chatbots are designed to reduce complints escalation and customer churn (Erangi, & Stecenko, 2024; SLT, 2023).	1313+TRCSL public complaint escalations (TRCSL, 2025) Mitigation of prepaid /multi-SIM churn (Palraj, & Ramanayake, 2024)

5.6 Managerial Implications

The findings provide several practical implications for policymakers and managers in Sri Lanka's telecommunications sector. Telecom operators should establish efficient 24/7 customer service channels, including AI-driven chatbots, to minimise customer wait times. In contrast, telecom managers' key performance indicators (KPIs) should include complaint resolution time, Net Promoter Score (NPS), and churn rate. Furthermore, telecom operators in Sri Lanka must develop mobile applications to facilitate user-friendly access to digital payment systems.

Policymakers should prioritise cost-effective digital infrastructure investments, such as policy-level support for 5G networks with tax incentives, while modernising legacy systems to enhance service quality and operational efficiency. Telecom companies should leverage AI to systematically collect, analyse, and utilise customer data for proactive customer service delivery, predictive maintenance, and personalised employee dashboards.

Strengthening cybersecurity protocols is essential to safeguard customer data and reduce customer service disruptions. Additionally, telecom stakeholders should invest in targeted digital skills and cultural change initiatives to mitigate employee resistance and ensure the successful implementation of digital transformation initiatives.

5.7 Comparison with Existing Literature

The proposed model is consistent with prior research. Abdel-Hamid et al. (2022) found that digital transformation enhances customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction, in turn, is a critical determinant of customer loyalty and organisational excellence (Ndubisi & Nwankwo, 2019; Hill & Brierley, 2017). Customer satisfaction and organisational excellence are positively related (Achalan & Wickramarachchi, 2024). Furthermore, digital technologies enable firms to strengthen customer service and operational efficiency (Masoud & Basahel, 2023; Al-Ayed et al., 2023). Nevertheless, innovation within Sri Lanka's telecommunications sector is hindered by distinct challenges—namely, regulatory constraints, low digital maturity, and limited investment capacity—highlighting the need for further empirical investigation.

6. CONCLUSION

This study conceptually explores how digital transformation (DT) initiatives enhance organisational excellence (OE) in Sri Lanka's telecommunications sector, with customer satisfaction (CS) as a mediating variable. Drawing on the Resource-Based View (RBV), Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT), and the Expectation–Disconfirmation Model (EDM), this study proposes a conceptual model that positions digital transformation as a strategic driver of organisational excellence, both directly and indirectly through customer satisfaction. Contextually, it addresses the paucity of research on digital transformation initiatives in developing economies, with a particular focus on the South Asian telecommunications industry. It also contributes novel conceptual insights in service-oriented sectors by emphasising the mediating role of customer satisfaction (CS) in driving excellence outcomes.

A synthesis of literature and case studies suggests that emerging technologies—such as 5G networks, AI, IoT, big data, RPA, and cloud computing—are extensively recognised for enhancing service quality, operational efficiency, and innovation capacity. However, the literature reveals that cultural resistance, regulatory challenges, and infrastructural gaps have prevented Sri Lanka's telecom sector from fully realising its potential for digital transformation. Further, it also suggests that customer satisfaction is both an outcome of digital transformation initiatives and a contributor to boosting organisational excellence. Conversely, when digital transformation initiatives fail to enhance customer experience, they do not yield improved organisational excellence.

This study provides four key insights for practitioners and policymakers. Managers should prioritise employee training, foster cultural adaptation to reduce resistance, and align employees with digital transformation strategies. Telecom operators can minimise complaints and strengthen customer loyalty by deploying customer-oriented digital platforms,

including chatbots, predictive analytics, and self-service applications. Investors and stakeholders should support initiatives that generate customer value and organisational excellence. Policymakers should reinforce digital infrastructure and establish regulatory frameworks that promote cybersecurity and consumer protection while encouraging innovation.

The proposed framework suggests that digital transformation can mitigate service inefficiencies, enhance customer satisfaction, and drive sustainable organisational excellence in the Sri Lankan telecommunications sector. This study demonstrates the significance of the customer in the digital era by positioning customer satisfaction (CS) as a mediating variable. The proposed conceptual framework provides both a practical pathway for industry experts and stakeholders and a theoretical foundation for future research by leveraging digital transformation to achieve long-term competitiveness and national development.

7. Limitations and Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study is subject to several limitations. It does not distinguish between individual digital technologies or examine their specific effects on customer satisfaction and organisational excellence, relying instead on a broad conceptual synthesis. It does not include empirical validation and is limited to developing a conceptual framework derived from a synthesis of secondary data. The scope of this study is limited to Sri Lanka's telecommunications industry, which constrains the generalisability of its findings to other service sectors and cross-industry comparisons, such as hospitality and banking.

Future researchers can expand this study in several ways. Researchers could incorporate environmental and external factors—such as regulatory frameworks, competition, customer expectations, and stakeholder pressure—to provide deeper insights into the enablers of more effective digital transformation (DT) outcomes. They may also empirically validate the proposed framework using quantitative techniques such as Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), complemented by mixed-methods approaches, such as qualitative interviews with telecom sector managers. Finally, further research may explore the long-term sustainability of digital transformation initiatives and their role in advancing corporate social responsibility (CSR).

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