

Designing a Digital Transformation Model in Financial Services Marketing with a Data-Driven Approach: A Qualitative Study Based on Grounded Theory

Aza Yousif Merza¹, Naser Seifollahi Anar^{2*}, Ghasem Zarei³, Hossein Rahimi Kolour⁴

1. PhD student, Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, Ardabil, Iran. Email: azayousif751@gmail.com

2. Professor, Department of Business Management, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, Ardabil, Iran. (**Corresponding Author**) Email: naser_seifollahi@yahoo.com

3. Professor, Department of business management, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, Ardabil, Iran. Email: zareigz@gmail.com

4., Associate Professor, Department of Business Management, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, Ardabil, Iran. Email: hirk6809@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Digital transformation in the financial services industry has become a strategic imperative, as the emergence of financial technology (FinTech) firms, shifting customer expectations, and the massive volume of behavioral data have challenged traditional marketing models. However, the existing literature lacks a comprehensive model for designing digital transformation in financial services marketing from a data-driven perspective. This study adopts a qualitative approach using the grounded theory method, drawing on interviews with ten experts in digital transformation and financial services marketing, to design a digital transformation model for financial services marketing with a data-driven approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding. The findings indicate that the final model comprises six main components: causal conditions (contextual drivers of transformation), the core phenomenon (the data-driven digital transformation dynamic capability), contextual conditions (organizational and contextual moderators), intervening conditions (data governance and compliance), strategies (data-driven marketing processes), and consequences (customer value-creating outcomes and performance). This model can serve as a practical guide for financial services managers and a foundation for future empirical research.

KEYWORDS: Digital transformation, financial services marketing, data-driven approach, grounded theory, dynamic capability

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1. Introduction

Digital transformation in the financial services industry has moved beyond being a mere technological option and has become one of the central concerns of policy-making and strategic management. Traditional financial institutions are confronted with a redefinition of the financial services value chain by FinTech companies, and this process is no longer simply the “digitization” of existing channels; rather, it entails a transformation in the logic of value creation, the mode of customer engagement, and the organization's decision-making architecture (Papathomas & Konteos, 2024; Thottoli et al., 2023). Recent systematic reviews also show that, although the literature on digital transformation in financial services is growing, it still lacks integrated conceptualization and coherent theoretical evidence—particularly in the domain of marketing (Osei et al., 2023; Plekhanov et al., 2023).

Three contextual drivers underscore the urgency of this transformation. First, the rapid emergence and growth of the FinTech ecosystem, which, through lean and data-driven business models, has pushed the market toward competition based on speed, accessibility, and personalization (Mirzaei, 2022; Hanafizadeh & Amin, 2022). Second, changing customer expectations: today's financial services customer expects a seamless, uninterrupted, and personalized experience, and these expectations directly affect their perception of the value of financial services and their loyalty to the institution (Barbu et al., 2021). Third, the explosion of behavioral data: transactional and behavioral customer data have today become strategic resources that can underpin marketing decisions, but leveraging this data requires analytical, technological, and governance capabilities that many financial institutions still lack in full (Tian et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, financial services marketing in practice still relies predominantly on traditional models: intuitive decision-making, demographic-based segmentation, seasonal campaigns, and market-share-based budgeting. These models have increasingly lost their effectiveness in a market where the customer journey unfolds instantaneously, across multiple channels, and digitally, revealing the need for a fundamental redesign of the marketing approach (Cioppi et al., 2023).

Based on the existing literature review, three main gaps can be identified. First, existing studies have focused primarily on the technological or organizational dimensions of digital transformation, and relatively few have addressed financial services marketing in an integrated, data-driven context (Cioppi et al., 2023; Plekhanov et al., 2023). Papathomas and Konteos (2024) describe the stages of banks' digital transformation journey, but this model is merely a phasing scheme and does not offer a framework for designing data-driven marketing processes. Studies of data-driven marketing, moreover, have been conducted mainly in the context of retail or digitally native businesses, and their findings cannot be generalized to financial services without revision, because the regulatory complexity, risk-centeredness, and trust-based nature of financial services set it apart from other industries (Homburg & Wielgos, 2022; Sultana et al., 2022). Second, there is an absence of a complementary, process-oriented model: existing models either examine digital marketing

capabilities and their relationship to institutional performance (Homburg & Wielgos, 2022) or focus on leveraging advanced analytics and data-driven decision-making (Johnson et al., 2021; Hossain et al., 2021), yet a comprehensive model that simultaneously explains causal conditions, the core phenomenon, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences within a coherent framework—and that can be used to design digital transformation in financial services marketing—is not available. This gap is particularly evident in developing economies and markets such as Iran, where the FinTech ecosystem is still taking shape while financial institutions face infrastructural, regulatory, and resource constraints (Mirzaei, 2022; Naimi-Sadigh et al., 2022). Third, there is a scarcity of qualitative, theory-grounded research and a neglect of data governance: most existing studies are quantitative and based on testing predetermined hypotheses, whereas the phenomenon of digital transformation in financial services marketing is open-ended, process-based, and context-dependent, requiring an approach that derives theory from field data (Birks & Mills, 2023). Moreover, the existing literature has paid insufficient attention to the role of data governance and compliance as a determining condition for success, even though evidence shows that data-protection regulations affect not only marketing processes but also redefine the structure and concentration of the information-technology market (Peukert et al., 2022; Dorfleitner et al., 2023).

In light of the gaps noted above, the main research question is formulated as follows: “How can a digital transformation model for financial services marketing be designed with a data-driven approach?” The main objective is to design and explain a theoretical model, grounded in field data, that integrates driver components, core capabilities, contextual and intervening conditions, operational strategies, and value-creating consequences.

This research makes contributions at three levels. At the theoretical level, by integrating the logic of dynamic capability (Ellström et al., 2022) with frameworks of artificial intelligence in marketing (Huang & Rust, 2022) and the literature on data exploitation in marketing (Johnson et al., 2021; Sultana et al., 2022), the proposed model brings digital transformation theory from the infrastructure level down to the level of financial services marketing processes, and conceptualizes the “data-driven digital transformation dynamic capability” as the core phenomenon. At the methodological level, by applying grounded theory in the context of financial services, this research provides a template for process-oriented qualitative research in this domain. At the practical level, the proposed model can guide financial services managers in prioritizing data-driven investments, designing data governance, and ensuring regulatory compliance (Peukert et al., 2022; Dorfleitner et al., 2023), as well as serving as a basis for future quantitative and empirical tests.

2. Theoretical Foundations and Framework

Digital transformation is a process through which organizations use digital technologies to bring about fundamental changes in their business model, customer experience, and operations. Verhoef

Designing a Digital Transformation Model in Financial Services Marketing with a Data-Driven Approach: A Qualitative Study Based on Grounded Theory

et al. (2021) view digital transformation as comprising three stages: digitization, digitalization, and digital transformation. Gong and Ribiere (2021), offering a unified definition, define it as a process of strategic and cultural change that enables an organization to use digital technologies to recreate value. Mergel et al. (2019), drawing on expert interviews, likewise regard digital transformation as a multidimensional process encompassing technology, data, organization, and culture. From a strategic perspective, Hess et al. (2016) and Matt et al. (2015) emphasize the necessity of formulating a digital transformation strategy. Kane et al. (2015) show that strategy, not technology, is the primary driver of digital transformation. Kane (2019) likewise emphasizes the role of people and organizational culture as the real key to transformation. Westerman et al. (2014) and Bonnet and Westerman (2021) introduce the nine—and newer—elements of digital transformation, including digital capabilities, leadership, and governance. Sebastian et al. (2020) show how large, established firms navigate the path of transformation through novel technologies.

In the financial services context, Scardovi (2017) presents digital transformation as the profound impact of digital technologies on financial business models. Porfirio et al. (2024) identify the factors influencing digital transformation in banking as strategy, culture, technology, and human skills. Porfirio et al. (2021) further show that leadership characteristics have a direct effect on the success of digital transformation. In financial services marketing, digital transformation means a shift from mass marketing toward personalized marketing based on customer data. Nambisan et al. (2019) emphasize the role of digital platforms and innovation ecosystems in value recreation. Elia et al. (2024) likewise offer a digital transformation canvas framework to guide the transformation process. The data-driven approach requires the collection, integration, and analysis of large volumes of data for marketing decision-making. Pousttchi et al. (2019) classify the types of impact of digital technologies along three dimensions: process, product, and business model. Teng et al. (2022) show that digital technology, employees' digital skills, and digital transformation strategy positively affect the financial performance of small and medium-sized enterprises. Chwiłkowska-Kubala et al. (2023) emphasize the role of human, technological, financial, and infrastructural resources in readiness for digital transformation. Gurbaxani and Dunkle (2019) introduce six firm-level dimensions of digital transformation, including strategic vision, investment alignment, leadership, culture, capabilities, and governance. Sousa and Rocha (2019) and Zhang and Chen (2024) point to the development of digital skills and human resource management in the digital era. Teichert (2019) presents digital transformation maturity as a prerequisite for sustainable change. Butt et al. (2024) regard cultural design for digital transformation as the key to success. Shaughnessy (2018) emphasizes the transition to a digital culture. Klein (2020) and Sow and Aborbie (2018) also emphasize the role of transformational leadership in guiding digital change. The literature review shows that, although numerous studies have addressed digital transformation, few offer a comprehensive model that specifically integrates financial services marketing with a data-driven approach. Accordingly, there is a need for an integrated framework that links the drivers, capabilities, processes, and data-driven outcomes together within financial services marketing.

Table 1. Research Background

No.	Researcher(s) & Year	Title	Method	Key Findings	Relevance to the Present Study
1	Vial (2021)	Understanding digital transformation	Systematic review	Digital transformation as an eight-block process	Foundational conceptual framework
2	Verhoef et al. (2021)	Digital transformation: A multidisciplinary reflection	Systematic review	Three stages: digitization, digitalization, transformation	Stages of transformation
3	Matt et al. (2015)	Digital transformation strategies	Case study	Digital transformation strategy	Strategic dimension
4	Nambisan et al. (2019)	The digital transformation of innovation and entrepreneurship	Systematic review	Role of platforms and ecosystems	Ecosystem dimension
5	Mergel et al. (2019)	Defining digital transformation	Expert interviews	Multidimensional definition of transformation	Operational definition
6	Hess et al. (2016)	Options for formulating a digital transformation strategy	Case study	Strategy formulation	Strategic dimension
7	Kane et al. (2015)	Strategy, not technology, drives digital transformation	Survey	Strategy as the main driver of transformation	Strategic dimension
8	Sebastian et al. (2020)	Large and established firms	Case study	Role of novel technologies	Technology dimension
9	Kraus et al. (2021)	Digital transformation: An overview	Systematic review	Three research clusters	Literature classification
10	Nadkarni & Prügl (2021)	Digital transformation: A review and synthesis	Systematic review	Conceptualization at the intersection of disruptive technologies	Theoretical framework
11	Reis et al. (2018)	Digital transformation: A literature review	Systematic review	Definition and directions for future research	Operational definition
12	Gong & Ribiere (2021)	A unified definition of digital transformation	Systematic review	Unified definition	Operational definition
13	Kane (2019)	The technology fallacy	Review	Role of people and culture	Cultural dimension
14	Kraus et al. (2021)	Digital transformation in healthcare	Systematic review	Analysis of the state of research	Sector-specific
15	Westerman et al. (2014)	The nine elements of digital transformation	Case study	Nine elements of transformation	Dimensions of transformation
16	Tabrizi et al. (2019)	Digital transformation is not about technology	Case study	Human and cultural factors	Cultural dimension

Designing a Digital Transformation Model in Financial Services Marketing with a Data-Driven Approach: A Qualitative Study Based on Grounded Theory

No.	Researcher(s) & Year	Title	Method	Key Findings	Relevance to the Present Study
17	Schwertner (2017)	Digital business transformation	Review	Integration of technology and culture	Cultural dimension
18	Plekhanov et al. (2023)	Digital transformation: A review and research agenda	Systematic review	Research database	Research agenda
19	Morakanyane et al. (2017)	Conceptualizing digital transformation	Systematic review	Definition of transformation	Operational definition
20	Elia et al. (2024)	The digital transformation canvas	Case study	Canvas framework	Conceptual framework
21	Porfirio et al. (2021)	Leadership characteristics and digital transformation	Survey	Impact of leadership	Leadership dimension
22	Butt et al. (2024)	Strategic design of culture for digital transformation	Case study	Culture as the key to success	Cultural dimension
23	Sousa & Rocha (2019)	Digital learning	Survey	Digital skills	Skills dimension
24	Zhang & Chen (2024)	Digital human resource management	Review	Digital transformation of HR	Skills dimension
25	Scardovi (2017)	Digital transformation in financial services	Book	Profound impact of technology	Financial sector

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach using the grounded theory method. Grounded theory is a systematic method for generating theory from empirical data, whereby data are inductively coded, categorized, and ultimately transformed into a paradigmatic model. The study population comprised experts in digital transformation and financial services marketing in Iran. The criteria for expert selection included a minimum of ten years of experience in the financial services industry, familiarity with digital and data-driven technologies, and managerial or advisory experience in digital transformation projects. On this basis, ten experts were selected through purposive and snowball sampling. Interviews were semi-structured and continued until theoretical saturation was reached. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. The resulting data were analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding. To enhance the study's rigor, the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were applied. Peer debriefing and member-checking with participants were also used to ensure the accuracy of interpretations.

4. Findings

4.1. Descriptive Demographic Characteristics of the Experts

The demographic profile of the study's experts comprised 10 specialists in digital transformation and financial services marketing. Of these, 6 were male and 4 were female. The experts' mean age was 46 years. In terms of educational attainment, 4 held doctoral degrees, 5 held master's degrees, and 1 held a bachelor's degree. In terms of work experience, 4 had more than 20 years, 4 had between 15 and 20 years, and 2 had between 10 and 15 years of experience in the financial services industry. In terms of area of expertise, 4 worked in banking, 3 in insurance, 2 in financial technology, and 1 in digital transformation consulting. In terms of organizational role, 3 were senior executives, 4 were middle managers, and 3 were consultants or researchers. This diverse composition of experts enhances the credibility of the study's findings.

4.2. Open Coding

In the open-coding stage, 40 initial codes were extracted from the interview transcripts, each representing a key concept in the digital transformation of financial services marketing. These codes are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Open Coding (40 Initial Codes) with Interview Excerpts

No.	Open Code	Interview Excerpt (Sample Quote)	Expert
1	Customer expectations for personalized services	"Today's customer expects the bank to know when and with what offer to contact them; mass marketing no longer works."	Expert 1
2	Competition from financial technology companies	"FinTechs attract our younger customers with lower costs and a better user experience."	Expert 2
3	Regulatory pressure and compliance requirements	"Every data-driven marketing campaign must align with privacy regulations and the central bank."	Expert 3
4	Digital maturity of the financial services industry	"Compared with online retail, our industry lags behind in digital maturity."	Expert 4
5	Macro-level economic and social pressures	"Economic conditions and social expectations have forced us to offer cheaper and faster digital services."	Expert 5
6	Data infrastructure and integrated architecture	"Without a unified data architecture, any attempt at data-driven marketing results in information silos."	Expert 6
7	Integration of multichannel data sources	"Branch, mobile, web, and phone data must be integrated into a single platform."	Expert 7
8	Advanced analytics and predictive modeling	"We use predictive models to try to forecast the likelihood of a customer's next purchase."	Expert 8
9	Artificial intelligence and machine learning	"AI helps us generate personalized offers in real time."	Expert 9
10	Data governance and data quality	"Data quality matters more than volume; bad data leads to bad decisions."	Expert 10

Designing a Digital Transformation Model in Financial Services Marketing with a Data-Driven Approach: A Qualitative Study Based on Grounded Theory

No.	Open Code	Interview Excerpt (Sample Quote)	Expert
11	Cybersecurity and data protection	"Data security and preventing information leaks are a precondition for customer trust."	Expert 1
12	Written digital transformation strategy	"We have a digital transformation strategy document that maps out a three-year path."	Expert 2
13	Strategic vision and organizational alignment	"Without alignment among the marketing unit, IT, and operations, digital transformation fails."	Expert 3
14	Transformational leadership and senior management support	"Our CEO personally leads digital transformation meetings, and this matters a great deal."	Expert 4
15	Data-driven culture and evidence-based decision-making	"Our organizational culture must shift from intuitive decision-making to data-driven decision-making."	Expert 5
16	Employees' digital skills and data literacy	"Our staff need training in data analysis and digital tools."	Expert 6
17	Agile organizational structure and cross-functional teams	"We have formed cross-functional teams from marketing, data, and technology."	Expert 7
18	Change management and cultural transition	"Resistance to change is the biggest obstacle to digital transformation."	Expert 8
19	Real-time collection of customer data	"We collect and analyze customer behavioral data at the moment of interaction."	Expert 9
20	Dynamic, behavior-based customer segmentation	"Traditional segmentation has given way to dynamic segmentation based on behavioral data."	Expert 10
21	Real-time personalization and smart offers	"Our system delivers the best offer to the customer at the right moment."	Expert 1
22	Customer experience management across the lifecycle	"We manage the customer experience from the first contact through long-term loyalty."	Expert 2
23	Dynamic pricing and revenue optimization	"The pricing of financial products can become dynamic, based on behavioral data."	Expert 3
24	Engagement through digital and mobile platforms	"Most of our interactions now take place through the mobile app."	Expert 4
25	Data-driven content marketing and communications	"Our marketing content is personalized based on customer interests and behavior."	Expert 5
26	Measurement and evaluation of marketing performance	"We measure the return of every campaign with precise indicators."	Expert 6
27	Perceived customer value and service quality	"When customers perceive value, they are willing to pay more."	Expert 7
28	Customer trust and psychological security	"Customer trust in the protection of their data is our most important asset."	Expert 8
29	Customer loyalty and retention	"Data-driven personalization has increased customer loyalty."	Expert 9

Designing a Digital Transformation Model in Financial Services Marketing with a Data-Driven Approach: A Qualitative Study Based on Grounded Theory

No.	Open Code	Interview Excerpt (Sample Quote)	Expert
30	Marketing performance and profitability	"Data-driven marketing has doubled our return on investment."	Expert 10
31	Sustainable competitive advantage	"Data and the capability to analyze it are our sustainable competitive advantage over rivals."	Expert 1
32	Sustainable development and social responsibility	"Digital transformation must contribute to our sustainable development and social responsibility."	Expert 2
33	Data readiness and analytical maturity	"Our data readiness is still at a moderate level and needs improvement."	Expert 3
34	Organizational size and structural complexity	"Larger organizations carry out digital transformation more slowly."	Expert 4
35	Type of financial service and sector characteristics	"Digital transformation in insurance differs fundamentally from that in banking."	Expert 5
36	Privacy and customer consent	"Without the customer's explicit consent, we cannot use their data."	Expert 6
37	Technology partnership and collaborative ecosystems	"We collaborate with FinTech startups to accelerate innovation."	Expert 7
38	Innovation in the financial services business model	"Digital transformation has pushed us toward platform-based business models."	Expert 8
39	Talent management and recruiting a digital workforce	"Recruiting data and AI specialists is a major challenge for us."	Expert 9
40	Organizational learning and continuous improvement	"Digital transformation is a continuous learning process, not a one-time project."	Expert 10

4.3. Axial Coding

In the axial-coding stage, the open codes were categorized into 10 main categories, each representing a key dimension of the digital transformation model in financial services marketing. These categories are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Axial Coding (10 Category Codes)

No.	Axial Code	Related Open Codes	Supporting Interview Excerpt
1	Contextual drivers of transformation	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	"Pressure from customers, competitors, and regulators has compelled us toward digital transformation."
2	Data-driven infrastructure and capabilities	6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11	"Without strong data infrastructure and data governance, data-driven marketing is not possible."
3	Digital transformation strategy and leadership	12, 13, 14	"Senior leadership and a written strategy are the pillars of our transformation."
4	Digital culture and human capital	15, 16, 17, 18, 39, 40	"A data-driven culture and employees' digital skills are a precondition for success."

Designing a Digital Transformation Model in Financial Services Marketing with a Data-Driven Approach: A Qualitative Study Based on Grounded Theory

No.	Axial Code	Related Codes	Open	Supporting Interview Excerpt
5	Data-driven marketing processes	19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26		“Real-time personalization, dynamic segmentation, and precise measurement are the heart of data-driven marketing.”
6	Customer value-creating outcomes	27, 28, 29		“Perceived value, trust, and customer loyalty are the primary outcomes of transformation.”
7	Performance and competitive advantage	30, 31, 32		“Marketing return and sustainable competitive advantage are the ultimate result of digital transformation.”
8	Organizational and contextual moderators	33, 34, 35		“Data readiness, organizational size, and the type of financial service moderate the pace of transformation.”
9	Data governance and compliance	10, 11, 36		“Privacy, security, and data governance form the legal framework of our transformation.”
10	Open innovation and ecosystem	37, 38		“Collaboration with the FinTech ecosystem accelerates innovation in the business model.”

4.4. Selective Coding

In the selective-coding stage, two core codes were extracted from among the ten axial categories, representing the essential core of the digital transformation model in financial services marketing. These two codes are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Selective Coding (2 Core Codes)

No.	Selective Code	Related Codes	Axial	Supporting Interview Excerpt
1	Data-driven digital transformation capability	1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10		“Our organization's ability to sense change, seize opportunities, and reconfigure resources is the core of digital transformation.”
2	Customer-centric value creation in the digital financial ecosystem	5, 6, 7		“The ultimate goal of digital transformation is to create sustainable value for the customer within the digital financial ecosystem.”

4.5. Final Model of the Data-Driven Approach

Based on the paradigmatic model of grounded theory, the study's final model comprises six main components: causal conditions, the core phenomenon, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences. Table 5 presents this model.

Table 5. Final Model of the Data-Driven Approach

Component	Axial Categories	Open Codes	Mechanism
Causal conditions	Contextual drivers of transformation	1–5	Creating pressure for transformation

Designing a Digital Transformation Model in Financial Services Marketing with a Data-Driven Approach: A Qualitative Study Based on Grounded Theory

Component	Axial Categories	Open Codes	Mechanism
Core phenomenon	Data-driven digital transformation dynamic capability	6–18	Enabling the organization
Contextual conditions	Organizational and contextual moderators	33–35	Moderating relationships
Intervening conditions	Data governance and compliance	10, 11, 36	Facilitating or constraining
Strategies	Data-driven marketing processes	19–26	Converting capability into value
Consequences	Customer value-creating outcomes and performance	27–32	Creating sustainable value

4.6. Analysis of Findings

The findings of the open-coding stage show that digital transformation in financial services marketing is a multidimensional phenomenon that can be conceptualized across five main domains. First, contextual drivers—comprising customer expectations, competition from FinTech firms, regulatory pressure, industry digital maturity, and economic and social pressures—push financial organizations toward transformation. The experts repeatedly referred to these factors in the interviews and emphasized that, without understanding these drivers, the design of a digital transformation model would remain incomplete. Second, foundational data-driven capabilities—comprising data infrastructure, integration, advanced analytics, artificial intelligence, data governance, and security—form the technical backbone of marketing's digital transformation. The experts emphasized that data quality and data governance matter more than data volume, and that without an integrated architecture, data-driven marketing efforts are doomed to fail. Third, organizational and leadership capabilities—comprising strategy, transformational leadership, a data-driven culture, digital skills, and an agile structure—play an enabling and moderating role for data capabilities. The experts emphasized the role of senior leadership and organizational culture as critical success factors and noted that resistance to change is the greatest obstacle to digital transformation. Fourth, data-driven marketing processes—comprising data collection, dynamic segmentation, real-time personalization, experience management, dynamic pricing, and platform-based engagement—act as the mechanisms that convert capabilities into value. The experts showed that real-time personalization and behavior-based segmentation are the most important data-driven marketing tools in financial services. Fifth, value-creating outcomes—comprising perceived value, trust, loyalty, performance, and competitive advantage—reflect the effectiveness of digital transformation in financial services marketing. The experts emphasized that customer trust in the protection of their data is the most important asset of financial organizations in the digital era.

Axial coding shows that these open codes can be classified into ten main categories, and the logical relationships among them shape the final model. The categories of contextual drivers, data infrastructure, strategy and leadership, culture and human capital, marketing processes, customer outcomes, performance and competitive advantage, moderators, data governance, and the

innovation ecosystem all operate within an interconnected network. The key point is that success in the digital transformation of financial services marketing is not achieved through technology investment alone, but requires simultaneous alignment among strategy, culture, leadership, data, and ecosystem. Finally, selective coding reveals two core categories: the data-driven digital transformation dynamic capability and customer-centric value creation in the digital financial ecosystem. These two cores show that the digital transformation of financial services marketing is, ultimately, a dynamic and continuous process aimed at creating sustainable value for the customer and the organization within the context of digital financial ecosystems. Based on these findings, the proposed model can serve as a foundation for future empirical research in banks, insurance companies, and other financial institutions.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Using the grounded theory method and interviews with ten experts, this study set out to design a digital transformation model for financial services marketing with a data-driven approach. The findings show that the final model comprises six main components: causal conditions (contextual drivers of transformation), the core phenomenon (the data-driven digital transformation dynamic capability), contextual conditions (organizational and contextual moderators), intervening conditions (data governance and compliance), strategies (data-driven marketing processes), and consequences (customer value-creating outcomes and performance). This model is consistent with the existing literature: Kane et al. (2015) likewise emphasized the role of strategy as the primary driver of transformation, and Kane (2019) pointed to the importance of culture and people as the true key to transformation. Likewise, the findings of this study align with those of Porfirio et al. (2024) regarding the factors influencing digital transformation in banking, including strategy, culture, technology, and human skills. On the other hand, the findings show that data governance and compliance with privacy regulations, as intervening conditions, play a critical role in the success of digital transformation in financial services marketing—a finding that aligns with the results of Fletcher and Griffiths (2020) and Yang et al. (2024).

The proposed model of this study carries important implications for financial services managers. First, managers should recognize that the digital transformation of marketing is not merely a matter of purchasing technology; rather, it requires investment in data infrastructure, data governance, employees' digital skills, and a data-driven culture. Second, leaders must play an active role in promoting a culture of change and articulate a clear vision of the digital future. Third, organizations should form cross-functional teams spanning marketing, data, and technology to achieve the alignment necessary for transformation. Fourth, attention to privacy and data security is critical for maintaining customer trust, and organizations should establish robust data governance frameworks. Fifth, collaboration with FinTech ecosystems and startups can accelerate the pace of innovation. At the policy level, developing legal frameworks for data governance and privacy protection in financial services can facilitate data-driven innovation.

This study also has limitations. First, it is qualitative in nature, and its findings require empirical testing using quantitative methods such as structural equation modeling. Second, the sample comprised ten experts, which reached theoretical saturation but limits the generalizability of the findings. Third, the study was conducted within the context of Iran's financial services industry, and the findings may differ in other cultural and institutional settings. Future research could test the model quantitatively in banks and insurance companies. Multi-case qualitative studies would also be useful for a deeper understanding of data-driven processes. Longitudinal and cross-cultural comparative studies are also recommended. Future studies could examine the role of generative artificial intelligence, machine learning, and privacy in financial services marketing. In conclusion, digital transformation in financial services marketing is a multidimensional, data-driven process that, without attention to organizational capabilities, leadership, and culture, is bound to fail. By offering a comprehensive paradigmatic model, this study provides a framework for designing and implementing digital transformation in financial services marketing that can serve as a foundation for future empirical research and a practical guide for managers.

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Authenticity of the texts, honesty and fidelity has been observed.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Author/s confirmed no conflict of interest.