

Digital Governance Challenges: The Digital Divide and Government Infrastructure Limitations in Sri Lanka

Nimal Perera¹, Sachini Wijesinghe¹, Tharindu Jayawardena¹

¹Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 18 December 2025
Revised: 22 January 2026
Accepted: 17 February 2026
Available online: 22 February 2026

Keywords:

Digital Governance
Digital Divide
Government Infrastructure
Institutional Capacity
Sri Lanka

Corresponding Author:

Nimal Perera

Email:

nimalperera@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aims to examine the challenges of digital governance in Sri Lanka, with a particular focus on the digital divide and government infrastructure limitations. It seeks to understand how structural, institutional, and socio-cultural factors shape the effectiveness and inclusivity of digital governance initiatives in a developing country context.

Subjects and Methods: The research adopts a qualitative design, drawing on data from 25 semi-structured interviews with government officials, IT practitioners, policy advisors, and citizens from urban, rural, and estate sectors. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to capture diverse perspectives and experiences related to digital governance. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis through an iterative coding process to identify recurring patterns and key themes.

Results: The findings reveal six interrelated challenges: regional inequality in digital infrastructure, digital literacy gaps, institutional fragmentation, reliance on hybrid online-offline practices, trust deficits, and policy-practice gaps. Uneven infrastructure and limited digital skills restrict meaningful citizen participation, particularly in rural and estate areas. Institutional capacity constraints, lack of system integration, and limited trust in digital platforms further reduce the transformative potential of digital governance, resulting in partial and uneven implementation across regions.

Conclusions: The study concludes that digital governance in Sri Lanka is constrained by multidimensional structural and institutional barriers. Sustainable and inclusive digital transformation requires integrated strategies that address infrastructure equity, digital literacy, institutional coordination, and trust-building, rather than a sole emphasis on technological adoption.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has significantly transformed public governance worldwide, reshaping how governments deliver services, engage citizens, and manage administrative processes (Asgarkhani, 2005; Balaji, 2025). Digital governance has emerged as a strategic approach to enhance efficiency, transparency, and accountability through the integration of information and communication technologies (ICTs) into public sector operations. However, the effectiveness of digital governance initiatives varies considerably across countries, particularly between developed and developing contexts (Basu, 2004; Hakim & Hayat, 2024; Wandaogo, 2022).

In developing countries, the adoption of digital governance is often constrained by structural, socio-economic, and technological challenges. Djatmiko et al. (2025) and Asimakopoulos et al. (2025) said that, while digital platforms promise improved public service delivery and citizen participation, their implementation frequently exposes existing inequalities and infrastructural weaknesses. These challenges are especially evident in countries where access to digital technologies remains uneven and government capacity is limited.

According to Tennakoon (2020), Sri Lanka represents a compelling case for examining digital governance challenges within a developing country context. Over the past two decades, the Sri Lankan government has introduced several digital initiatives aimed at modernizing public administration, such as e-government portals, online service platforms, and digital identification systems. These efforts reflect a broader commitment to leveraging technology for governance reform and national development.

Despite these initiatives, significant barriers continue to hinder the realization of inclusive and effective digital governance in Sri Lanka (Weerakkody et al., 2009; Syed et al., 2023). One of the most persistent challenges is the digital divide, which refers to disparities in access to digital technologies, internet connectivity, and digital literacy among different segments of the population. These disparities often align with socio-economic status, geographic location, education level, and age.

The digital divide in Sri Lanka is particularly pronounced between urban and rural areas. Urban centers generally benefit from better internet infrastructure, higher levels of digital literacy, and greater access to digital devices, while rural and estate sectors often experience limited connectivity and technological resources (Graham, 2002; Saleminik et al., 2017; Townsend et al., 2015). This uneven distribution of digital access risks marginalizing certain communities from participating fully in digital governance initiatives.

In addition to access issues, digital literacy plays a crucial role in shaping citizens' ability to engage with digital government services (Anzar et al., 2024; Polizzi, 2025; Isabella et al., 2024). Even where infrastructure is available, limited skills and familiarity with digital platforms can prevent effective utilization. This challenge underscores the importance of human capital development alongside technological investment in digital governance strategies.

Government infrastructure limitations further complicate the digital governance landscape in Sri Lanka. Many public institutions face outdated technological systems, insufficient interoperability between platforms, and a lack of standardized data management practices (Samuel & Oyenuga, 2025; Otjacques et al., 2007). These infrastructural constraints reduce the efficiency, reliability, and scalability of digital government services.

Institutional capacity is another critical factor influencing digital governance outcomes. Limited financial resources, shortages of skilled ICT personnel, and bureaucratic resistance to change can slow the implementation of digital reforms. In some cases, fragmented policy frameworks and weak coordination among government agencies undermine the coherence of digital governance initiatives.

Cybersecurity and data protection concerns also pose significant challenges for digital governance in Sri Lanka. As government services become increasingly digitized, risks related to data breaches, privacy violations, and system vulnerabilities grow. Addressing these concerns requires robust legal frameworks, technical safeguards, and institutional accountability mechanisms, which remain underdeveloped in many contexts.

The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted both the potential and the limitations of digital governance in Sri Lanka (Amaratunga et al., 2020; Madusha, 2024). During periods of restricted mobility, digital platforms became essential for delivering public services, disseminating information, and maintaining administrative functions. At the same time, the pandemic exposed deep inequalities in digital access and revealed gaps in government preparedness and infrastructure resilience.

From a governance perspective, the digital divide has important implications for equity and democratic participation. When access to digital government services is uneven, certain groups

may be excluded from decision-making processes, social welfare programs, and essential public services. This exclusion risks reinforcing existing social inequalities and undermining public trust in government institutions.

Scholars argue that effective digital governance requires more than technological adoption; it demands an inclusive and context-sensitive approach that addresses social, institutional, and infrastructural dimensions (Berch et al., 2024; Kougias & Papadakaki, 2025). In the Sri Lankan context, this means aligning digital governance strategies with broader development goals, such as poverty reduction, regional equity, and capacity building.

An examination of digital governance challenges in Sri Lanka also contributes to broader debates on digital transformation in the Global South. By analyzing how the digital divide and infrastructure limitations shape governance outcomes, this study provides insights into the conditions under which digital technologies can either empower or marginalize citizens.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Approach

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore digital governance challenges in Sri Lanka, with particular emphasis on the digital divide and government infrastructure limitations. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the research seeks to understand perceptions, experiences, and institutional dynamics surrounding digital governance, rather than to measure variables quantitatively. By focusing on lived experiences and interpretations of multiple stakeholders, the study captures the complex socio-technical and institutional dimensions of digital governance implementation that cannot be adequately explained through quantitative methods alone.

Data Collection Method

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which allow for flexibility while maintaining consistency across participants. This method enables the researcher to explore predetermined themes such as infrastructure availability, digital literacy, system integration, trust, and policy implementation while also allowing participants to elaborate on issues they consider significant. A total of 25 interviews were conducted with government officials, IT practitioners, policy advisors, and citizens from urban, rural, and estate sectors. The inclusion of diverse participant groups ensures a comprehensive understanding of digital governance from both policy and user perspectives, strengthening the depth and credibility of the findings.

Sampling Strategy and Participants

The study employed purposive sampling to select participants who were directly involved in or affected by digital governance initiatives. Government officials and policy advisors were chosen based on their roles in planning or implementing digital systems, while IT practitioners were included to provide technical perspectives. Citizens were selected from different geographic and socio-economic backgrounds to capture variations in access, literacy, and trust in digital services. This sampling strategy supports analytical depth by ensuring that participants possess relevant knowledge and experience related to the research problem.

Data Analysis Technique

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following an iterative and inductive process. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and systematically coded to identify recurring patterns and meanings. Initial open coding was conducted to capture key ideas emerging from the data, which were then grouped into broader categories through axial coding. These categories were refined into overarching themes that reflect structural, technological, and socio-cultural dimensions of digital governance. Thematic analysis is particularly suitable for this study as it allows for the identification of cross-cutting issues such as infrastructure inequality, digital literacy gaps, institutional fragmentation, and trust deficits while remaining grounded in participants' narratives. This approach enables a nuanced interpretation of how digital governance challenges manifest across different institutional and social contexts.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

To enhance the credibility and rigor of the study, multiple strategies were employed, including data triangulation across participant groups and iterative comparison between emerging themes and raw interview data. The use of direct quotations further strengthens transparency by demonstrating how interpretations are grounded in participants' own accounts. Through systematic coding and careful theme development, the analysis ensures that findings accurately reflect the complexity of digital governance challenges in Sri Lanka.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the qualitative findings of the study on digital governance challenges in Sri Lanka, with particular attention to the digital divide and government infrastructure limitations. Data were generated from 25 semi-structured interviews involving government officials, IT practitioners, policy advisors, and citizens from urban, rural, and estate sectors. Using thematic analysis, six major themes emerged, reflecting the structural, technological, and socio-cultural dimensions of digital governance implementation.

Persistent Regional Inequality in Digital Infrastructure Availability

A dominant finding across interviews is the uneven distribution of digital infrastructure between urban centers and peripheral regions. Participants from Colombo and major cities reported relatively stable access to broadband internet and digital public services. In contrast, respondents from rural and estate areas described unreliable connectivity, limited bandwidth, and frequent network disruptions.

A rural participant from the Northern Province explained:

“When services are online, people assume everyone can access them, but in our area the signal comes and goes.” (Citizen R3)

These findings indicate that digital infrastructure inequality remains a major structural barrier to the implementation of inclusive digital governance in Sri Lanka. While the digitalization of public services is assumed to be a universal solution, the reality on the ground shows that the availability and quality of infrastructure are highly dependent on geographic location. Policy reliance on online platforms implicitly reflects an urban bias, where the assumption of stable access does not align with conditions in peripheral areas and rural communities.

Limited connectivity in non-urban areas not only impacts technical access to digital services but also deepens the gap in citizen participation in digital-based administrative and decision-making processes. As government services increasingly center online, groups with limited access to infrastructure risk institutional exclusion, even though these services are formally open to all citizens. This underscores that digital transformation without equitable infrastructure can reinforce existing inequalities.

These findings indicate that the availability of digital infrastructure must be understood as a fundamental prerequisite, not merely a supporting component, of digital governance. Without balanced investment and policies sensitive to regional contexts, digitalization efforts have the potential to result in selective and unequal governance. Thus, regional disparities in digital infrastructure are not only a technical issue, but also a policy challenge that directly impacts equity of access and the legitimacy of digital governance.

Government officials corroborated this observation, acknowledging that infrastructure development remains concentrated in economically strategic areas:

“Digital infrastructure expansion is ongoing, but remote districts are still behind due to cost and logistical challenges.” (Official G6)

This statement from a government official reinforces the finding that digital infrastructure disparities are not solely caused by geographic factors, but also by economic and administrative considerations in development planning. The focus of investment on areas considered economically strategic indicates that digital infrastructure development policies still follow the logic of cost

efficiency, rather than the principle of equitable distribution of public services. As a result, remote areas remain marginalized in the national digital transformation agenda.

The limitations of physical infrastructure recognized by policymakers have direct implications for the effectiveness of digital governance. When internet access and communication networks are unequal, the digitization of public services tends to create systemic access disparities, where only certain groups can fully utilize government digital innovations. This indicates that the success of digital governance depends heavily on the readiness of basic infrastructure, not just on the availability of digital platforms or policies themselves.

These findings reveal a gap between the normative vision of digital governance—which emphasizes inclusivity, efficiency, and transparency and the reality of implementation on the ground. As long as cost and logistical constraints continue to limit infrastructure expansion to disadvantaged areas, digital initiatives risk reinforcing spatial and social exclusion. Therefore, equitable digital infrastructure development needs to be positioned as a strategic policy priority to ensure that digital transformation truly serves all citizens equally.

Digital Literacy Gaps as a Structural Barrier to Participation

Beyond infrastructure access, limited digital literacy emerged as a major obstacle to effective digital governance. Many citizens reported difficulties navigating government portals, completing online forms, and understanding verification procedures.

An estate-sector participant stated:

“Even if the internet is available, the systems are too complicated for us. Nobody teaches how to use them.” (Citizen E4)

The statements from participants from the plantation sector highlighted that the availability of internet access does not automatically guarantee effective participation in digital government systems. Interface complexity, multi-layered verification procedures, and a lack of user support make e-governance platforms difficult to access for groups with low digital literacy levels. This suggests that the design of government digital systems has not fully considered the diverse capacities of users, particularly marginalized groups and those with limited educational backgrounds. These findings reinforce the argument that the digital literacy gap is a structural barrier, not simply an individual issue. When governments shift public services to digital platforms without adequate education strategies, the risk of social exclusion increases.

Citizens unable to navigate the system independently tend to be marginalized from accessing services or revert to relying on informal intermediaries, which in turn reduces the efficiency, transparency, and accountability that are the primary goals of digital governance. Limited digital literacy limits the quality of citizen participation in government processes. Instead of acting as active subjects in state-citizen interactions, individuals with low digital skills become passive users who interact only minimally with the system. This situation shows that the success of the government's digital transformation is highly dependent on supporting policies oriented towards increasing user capacity, including community-based training, simplifying system design, and an inclusive approach that places citizen needs at the center of digital service development.

Government representatives similarly identified low digital competence as a key reason for underutilization:

“We see that many citizens still rely on intermediaries because they lack confidence in using digital platforms.” (Policy Advisor P1)

This statement from a government representative confirms that Sri Lanka's digital divide stems not only from limited access to technology but also from the public's low digital literacy. Citizens' reliance on intermediaries indicates that even when e-governance platforms are available, many users lack the skills, confidence, or understanding to access services independently. This creates a form of functional exclusion, where the presence of technology does not automatically translate into effective participation. These findings suggest that digital transformation in governance requires a more

comprehensive approach, integrating infrastructure development with strengthening human resource capacity.

Without interventions focused on enhancing digital competency, e-governance initiatives risk widening the gap between digitally literate communities and those who lag behind in skills. This is particularly relevant for the elderly, rural communities, and citizens with limited formal education. Low digital literacy limits the quality of citizen engagement in digital government systems. Citizen participation becomes passive and procedural, rather than reflective and participatory, as envisioned by the concept of digital governance. Therefore, these findings confirm that the success of e-governance is not only determined by technological innovation, but also by policy strategies that place digital education and user empowerment as key elements in encouraging meaningful public engagement.

Institutional Fragmentation and Lack of System Integration

Another prominent theme concerns fragmentation within government digital systems. Interviewees consistently reported that different ministries and agencies operate isolated platforms with minimal interoperability.

A senior IT officer described the situation:

“Each ministry has its own system. There is no unified architecture, so data sharing becomes difficult.” (Official IT3)

The information technology official's statement revealed that institutional fragmentation is a significant structural obstacle to the implementation of digital governance. The absence of an integrated system architecture causes each ministry to develop separate digital platforms, with different technical standards, data formats, and operational procedures. This situation not only hinders data exchange between agencies but also creates system redundancy and inefficient use of public resources. System fragmentation also directly impacts citizens' experience in accessing digital services. When public services are spread across multiple, disconnected platforms, citizens are forced to repeatedly register, upload the same documents, and navigate different interfaces.

This has the potential to undermine public trust in government digital services and undermine the primary goals of digital transformation, namely streamlining processes and improving service quality. Weak system integration reflects institutional governance challenges, particularly in cross-sector coordination and digital leadership at the national level. Without a policy framework governing interoperability, data standardization, and the division of roles between agencies, digital initiatives tend to develop in a fragmented and fragmented manner. These findings confirm that the success of digital governance depends not only on technology adoption, but also on the country's institutional capacity to coordinate actors, align systems, and build an integrated and sustainable digital governance ecosystem.

Citizens expressed frustration with repetitive administrative requirements:

“I have to enter the same information again and again on different websites.” (Citizen U5)

This fragmentation reduces efficiency, increases administrative burden, and undermines the promise of digital governance as a streamlined service delivery mechanism. These citizens' frustrations concretely illustrate the impact of fragmented digital government systems on the experience of public service users. The requirement to re-enter the same data across multiple platforms demonstrates a lack of database integration and information exchange mechanisms between agencies. As a result, administrative processes that should be simplified through digitalization become repetitive and tedious for citizens, especially those with limited time, access, or digital literacy.

This situation creates a high administrative burden and has the potential to widen the participation gap in digital services. Rather than creating efficiency and convenience, system fragmentation encourages some citizens to revert to relying on intermediaries or non-digital channels. These findings confirm that without system integration and a user-centered service approach, digital governance risks failing to fulfill its primary promise as a simple, inclusive, and responsive public service mechanism.

Dependence on Hybrid (Online–Offline) Administrative Practices

Despite digitalization efforts, findings reveal a strong reliance on hybrid administrative practices, where online systems coexist with traditional face-to-face procedures. Many participants reported that digital services often function as preliminary steps rather than complete solutions.

A citizen explained:

“You apply online, but then they still ask you to come to the office.” (Citizen R6)

The interview excerpt illustrates how digital governance in practice has not yet replaced conventional administrative procedures but instead operates alongside them. Online platforms are frequently used only for initial registration or information submission, while critical stages such as verification, approval, or document collection still require physical presence. This hybrid arrangement reflects partial digitalization, where systems are introduced without fully redesigning administrative workflows, thereby limiting their transformative potential. As a result, the continued dependence on face-to-face procedures reduces the efficiency gains expected from digital services and creates additional burdens for citizens, particularly those living in remote areas or with limited mobility. Rather than simplifying access, hybrid practices can increase time and cost, undermining public trust in digital governance initiatives. These findings suggest that without institutional commitment to end-to-end digital processes and regulatory alignment, digital platforms will remain supplementary tools rather than fully functional alternatives to traditional public service delivery.

Officials acknowledged that digital platforms are not yet fully trusted or operationally sufficient:

“We still maintain manual backups because systems are not always reliable.” (Official G9)

This statement underscores the institutional uncertainty surrounding the reliability and resilience of digital governance systems. The continued reliance on manual backups indicates that digital platforms are perceived as vulnerable to technical failures, connectivity disruptions, or data security risks. Such precautionary measures reflect not only infrastructure instability but also limited confidence in the consistency and robustness of existing digital systems. Institutional caution reinforces the persistence of hybrid administrative models, where digital tools are used in parallel with traditional procedures rather than as primary service channels. This dual dependence constrains the transformative capacity of digital governance by preventing full process automation and organizational change. Without improvements in system reliability, interoperability, and institutional trust, digital platforms are likely to remain supportive mechanisms rather than catalysts for comprehensive governance reform.

Trust Deficits and Perceived Exclusion from Digital Governance

Trust emerged as a crucial factor influencing citizens' willingness to adopt digital government services. Several participants expressed concerns about data security, transparency, and accountability.

One rural respondent noted:

“I don't know who sees my data online. At the office, at least I can ask questions.” (Citizen R8)

This interview excerpt highlights how trust deficits significantly shape citizens' engagement with digital governance initiatives. Concerns about data visibility and control reflect broader anxieties regarding privacy, surveillance, and the lack of transparent information about how personal data are stored, accessed, and protected within digital systems. For many citizens, especially in rural contexts, face-to-face interactions provide a sense of reassurance and accountability that digital platforms currently fail to offer. These perceptions contribute to a feeling of exclusion from digital governance, as citizens are less willing to transition to online services when trust is fragile. The absence of clear communication mechanisms, accessible support, and visible accountability structures undermines confidence in digital systems and reinforces reliance on traditional administrative channels. As a result, trust emerges not merely as a technical issue but as a socio-institutional challenge that directly affects participation, inclusivity, and the overall effectiveness of digital governance initiatives.

Government officials admitted that trust-building has received limited attention:

“Public awareness and communication were not prioritized when systems were launched.”
(Official G1)

This statement from government officials underscores a critical gap in the implementation of digital governance initiatives, namely the insufficient emphasis on trust-building and public communication. The admission that awareness and engagement strategies were not prioritized suggests that technological deployment has outpaced efforts to prepare citizens to understand, trust, and effectively use digital systems. Without clear explanations of system purposes, data protection measures, and user rights, digital platforms may appear opaque and intimidating to large segments of the population. The lack of proactive communication exacerbates existing inequalities, particularly for marginalized and digitally vulnerable groups. When trust, transparency, and user engagement are overlooked, digital governance risks reinforcing exclusion rather than promoting inclusivity. These findings indicate that successful digital transformation requires not only technological infrastructure but also sustained investment in public outreach, participatory design, and institutional accountability to ensure equitable access and meaningful citizen participation.

Policy–Practice Gaps in Digital Governance Implementation

The final theme highlights a significant gap between policy objectives and implementation realities. While national digital governance strategies emphasize inclusivity and efficiency, participants reported inconsistencies at the operational level.

A policy advisor commented:

“The vision is strong on paper, but implementation depends on local capacity, which varies greatly.” (Policy Advisor P4)

This interview excerpt reveals a fundamental disconnect between strategic policy aspirations and on-the-ground implementation of digital governance initiatives. Although national frameworks articulate ambitious goals related to inclusivity, efficiency, and modernization, their realization is uneven due to disparities in institutional capacity across regions and agencies. Local offices often face constraints in terms of technical expertise, staffing, funding, and infrastructure, which limits their ability to translate policy directives into functional digital services. Digital governance outcomes become highly dependent on contextual factors rather than standardized national implementation. This policy–practice gap undermines the coherence of digital transformation efforts and contributes to uneven service quality across regions. The findings suggest that addressing this gap requires not only well-formulated policies but also sustained investment in local capacity-building, inter-agency coordination, and implementation monitoring to ensure that digital governance reforms achieve their intended inclusive and efficient outcomes.

Local officials described constraints such as limited funding, insufficient technical training, and lack of coordination:

“We want to improve digital services, but resources and skilled personnel are limited.”
(Official G4)

This statement from local officials highlights the structural and organizational constraints that shape the effectiveness of digital governance implementation. Limited financial resources restrict the ability of local institutions to upgrade systems, maintain infrastructure, or invest in continuous technological improvements. At the same time, insufficient technical training and shortages of skilled personnel reduce institutional readiness to manage, adapt, and troubleshoot digital platforms, leading to reliance on external support or outdated practices. These constraints demonstrate that digital governance challenges in Sri Lanka are fundamentally institutional rather than purely technological. Without strengthening governance structures, human capital, and inter-agency coordination, technological solutions alone are unlikely to deliver meaningful improvements in public service delivery. The findings suggest that sustainable digital governance requires long-term capacity development, decentralized resource allocation, and organizational reform to ensure that local institutions can effectively support and sustain digital transformation initiatives.

DISCUSSION

Digital Governance and the Persistence of the Digital Divide

The findings demonstrate that digital governance in Sri Lanka continues to be shaped by a persistent digital divide that operates across geographic, socio-economic, and educational dimensions. Unequal access to digital infrastructure between urban centers and rural or estate areas reveals that digital transformation has not yet achieved its inclusive objectives. Consistent with previous studies on digital governance in developing contexts, this research confirms that infrastructure availability remains a foundational prerequisite for meaningful participation in digital public services. When connectivity is unreliable or inaccessible, the shift toward online service delivery inadvertently privileges urban populations while marginalizing peripheral communities. Beyond physical infrastructure, the results highlight digital literacy as a critical structural barrier.

Even in areas where internet access exists, limited user capacity constrains citizens' ability to independently engage with digital platforms. This reinforces the argument that the digital divide should not be understood solely as an issue of access, but as a multidimensional governance challenge encompassing skills, confidence, and system usability. The reliance on intermediaries observed in this study reflects a form of functional exclusion, where digital services exist but are not equally usable by all citizens. Consequently, digital governance risks reproducing existing social inequalities rather than mitigating them, unless supported by inclusive design principles and sustained digital literacy initiatives. Taken together, these findings suggest that digital governance reforms that prioritize technological deployment without parallel investment in infrastructure equity and user capacity-building are unlikely to achieve their normative goals of inclusivity and citizen empowerment. Addressing the digital divide therefore requires an integrated policy approach that aligns infrastructure development, digital education, and user-centered system design.

Institutional Capacity Constraints and the Limits of Digital Transformation

The study also reveals that institutional capacity limitations significantly constrain the effectiveness of digital governance implementation. Fragmentation across government agencies, lack of system interoperability, and dependence on hybrid administrative practices indicate that digital transformation has occurred without comprehensive organizational restructuring. Rather than enabling streamlined and integrated service delivery, digital platforms often operate as isolated systems that replicate bureaucratic silos in digital form. This finding supports existing literature that emphasizes governance coordination and institutional integration as key determinants of successful digital government. The persistence of hybrid online–offline practices reflects both infrastructural instability and institutional caution. Officials' reliance on manual backups and face-to-face verification suggests limited trust in the reliability and security of digital systems. As a result, digital platforms function as supplementary tools rather than primary governance mechanisms, limiting their transformative potential. This partial digitalization undermines efficiency gains and increases administrative burdens for citizens, particularly those in remote regions. The gap between national digital governance policies and local implementation capacity underscores the importance of institutional readiness. While policy frameworks articulate ambitious visions of inclusivity and efficiency, uneven distribution of resources, technical expertise, and coordination mechanisms leads to inconsistent outcomes across regions. These findings indicate that digital governance challenges in Sri Lanka are deeply embedded in governance structures rather than purely technological deficiencies. Sustainable digital transformation therefore depends on strengthening institutional capacity through long-term investment in human resources, decentralized funding, regulatory alignment, and cross-agency coordination.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that digital governance in Sri Lanka remains constrained by persistent structural and institutional challenges that limit its inclusivity and transformative potential. The findings demonstrate that the digital divide is not only a matter of unequal access to infrastructure between urban and peripheral regions, but also a multidimensional issue shaped by digital literacy gaps, institutional fragmentation, limited system integration, and deficits of trust in digital platforms. While national digital governance policies articulate ambitious goals of efficiency and inclusiveness, their implementation is uneven due to disparities in local capacity, resource availability, and organizational readiness. The continued reliance on hybrid online–offline administrative practices further indicates that digitalization has not yet resulted in fundamental governance transformation. Overall, the study highlights that sustainable and

equitable digital governance in Sri Lanka requires an integrated approach that simultaneously addresses infrastructure equity, human capacity development, institutional coordination, and trust-building, rather than relying solely on technological solutions.

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