

Digital Governance and Citizen-Centric Public Services: Evaluating Administrative Reform in Local Government

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ABSTRACT

This study examines digital governance and citizen-centric public services by evaluating administrative reform in local government. The research aims to analyze how digital governance supports service accessibility, responsiveness, transparency, institutional coordination, and citizen participation in local administrative reform. A qualitative method was employed using an evaluative case study design because the study focuses on understanding implementation processes, institutional dynamics, and citizen experiences rather than measuring statistical relationships. The research was conducted in Bandung City, West Java, Indonesia, which was selected because of its active development of digital public services, smart city initiatives, and online administrative platforms. Data were collected from twelve purposively selected informants consisting of local government officials, digital service managers, frontline officers, technical staff, and citizens. Informants were selected because they had direct knowledge or experience regarding digital governance implementation and public service use. The findings show that digital governance has improved accessibility, service monitoring, transparency, and procedural efficiency. However, reform remains partial due to fragmented systems, uneven digital literacy, limited inter-agency integration, and insufficient citizen involvement in service design. The study recommends strengthening interoperability, simplifying procedures, expanding digital inclusion, institutionalizing citizen feedback, and aligning digital innovation with public value-oriented administrative reform.



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INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has become a central agenda in contemporary public administration, particularly as governments seek to improve service quality, institutional responsiveness, transparency, and citizen trust (Huron, 2025). In the context of local government, digital governance is no longer viewed merely as the adoption of information and communication technologies, but as a broader administrative reform strategy that reshapes how public institutions interact with citizens, manage public resources, and deliver services (Özer, 2025). The growing expectation for faster, more inclusive, and more accountable public services has encouraged local governments to move from bureaucratic, procedure-oriented systems toward more citizen-centric models of governance. This transition reflects a fundamental shift in public administration: citizens are not only recipients of public services but also users, evaluators, and co-producers of government performance (Setyawan, 2024).

The title “Digital Governance and Citizen-Centric Public Services: Evaluating Administrative Reform in Local Government” reflects an important scholarly and practical concern. Administrative reform in local government is often justified by the promise of efficiency, transparency, and improved service accessibility (Islam, 2023). However, the effectiveness of such reform depends not only on the availability of digital platforms, but also on institutional capacity, leadership commitment, regulatory coherence, human resource readiness, data governance, public participation, and the ability of government agencies to redesign services around citizen needs (Boeger, 2024). Many local governments have introduced online licensing systems, digital complaint platforms, integrated service

portals, electronic budgeting, and administrative information systems. Yet, the presence of digital tools does not automatically lead to meaningful reform. In many cases, technology is added to existing bureaucratic routines without transforming the underlying administrative culture, decision-making process, or service delivery logic (M. Lazor, 2025).

The state of the art in digital governance research shows that scholars have increasingly examined e-government, smart governance, open government, digital public services, and public sector innovation (Kapesa & Marufu, 2025). Existing studies have contributed significantly to understanding how digital technology can improve administrative efficiency, reduce transaction costs, support transparency, and expand citizen access to public services (LI, 2025). Research on citizen-centric public services has also emphasized the importance of service personalization, user experience, responsiveness, inclusiveness, and participatory governance. However, much of the literature still tends to focus separately on digital technology adoption or public service quality, rather than examining how digital governance functions as an instrument of administrative reform in local government (Yulianti et al., 2025). In addition, many studies measure digital government success through technical indicators, such as platform availability, website maturity, or online transaction capacity, while giving less attention to whether digitalization actually changes bureaucratic behavior and improves citizen-oriented outcomes.

This condition creates a significant research gap. First, there remains limited empirical understanding of how digital governance contributes to substantive administrative reform at the local level, particularly in relation to service redesign, institutional coordination, and citizen engagement (Stanisevski, 2024). Second, previous studies often assume that digitalization leads to better public services, while insufficiently questioning the institutional and organizational barriers that may weaken its impact. Third, citizen-centricity is frequently discussed as a normative ideal, but it is not always translated into evaluative frameworks that can assess whether local government services genuinely reflect citizen needs, preferences, and experiences. Fourth, studies on local government reform often emphasize legal, structural, or managerial changes, while underexploring the role of digital governance as a reform mechanism that connects administrative capacity with citizen expectations.

The main research problem addressed in this study is the gap between the formal implementation of digital governance and the actual realization of citizen-centric public services in local government. While digital platforms are often promoted as evidence of modernization, local administrative systems may continue to operate through fragmented procedures, limited inter-agency coordination, unequal digital access, weak feedback mechanisms, and insufficient responsiveness to citizens (Barbera et al., 2025). As a result, digital governance may become symbolic rather than transformative. This problem is particularly relevant in local government settings, where public services are closest to citizens and where administrative reform has direct implications for everyday needs, such as civil registration, licensing, health services, education administration, social assistance, complaint handling, and local development services.

The novelty of this research lies in its integrated evaluation of digital governance, citizen-centric service delivery, and administrative reform within local government. Rather than treating digitalization as a purely technical process, this study positions digital governance as an institutional reform agenda that must be evaluated through its contribution to citizen-oriented outcomes (Prianti, 2025). The study offers a conceptual contribution by linking digital governance capacity with administrative reform performance and citizen-centric public service quality. It also provides an evaluative perspective that considers not only whether digital systems exist, but whether they improve accessibility, responsiveness, transparency, coordination, accountability, and citizen satisfaction. In this sense, the research moves beyond the conventional e-government adoption approach and contributes to a more critical understanding of digital transformation in public administration.

Based on this background, the central research question is: how does digital governance support administrative reform toward citizen-centric public services in local government? This question can be further elaborated into several analytical concerns: to what extent has digital governance improved the accessibility and responsiveness of local public services; what institutional factors enable or constrain digital administrative reform; how do citizens experience and evaluate digital public services; and how

can local governments strengthen digital governance to produce more inclusive, accountable, and citizen-oriented service outcomes? These questions are important because they connect the administrative reform agenda with measurable public value, rather than limiting evaluation to the existence of technology or formal policy adoption (Santos, 2025).

The objective of this research is to evaluate the role of digital governance in supporting administrative reform and improving citizen-centric public services in local government. More specifically, the study aims to analyze how digital governance is implemented in local administrative systems, identify the extent to which digital public services respond to citizen needs, examine institutional barriers that affect reform outcomes, and develop recommendations for strengthening citizen-oriented digital governance. By addressing these objectives, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of whether digital transformation in local government produces meaningful changes in public service delivery or merely reproduces existing bureaucratic practices through digital channels.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of public administration scholarship by enriching the discussion on digital governance, administrative reform, and citizen-centric service models (Ferdous, 2025a). It strengthens the argument that digital transformation should be understood not only as technological modernization but also as an institutional and governance reform process. Academically, the study provides an analytical framework that can be used by future researchers to examine the relationship between digital governance capacity, bureaucratic reform, and public service outcomes. It may also contribute to comparative studies on local government digital transformation, especially in contexts where administrative reform is shaped by decentralization, institutional diversity, and uneven digital readiness.

Practically, the research offers useful insights for local government officials, policymakers, public service managers, and digital transformation teams. The findings are expected to support the design of more responsive digital service systems, improve inter-agency coordination, strengthen citizen feedback mechanisms, and encourage the use of data for service improvement. For citizens, the study has practical relevance because better digital governance can reduce administrative complexity, improve service accessibility, shorten processing time, and increase trust in local government (Busieka, 2025). For policymakers, the research may provide evidence-based recommendations for aligning digital innovation with broader administrative reform goals.

This research also acknowledges several limitations. The study may be limited by the availability and quality of administrative data, variations in digital maturity among local government institutions, and differences in citizens' digital literacy and access to technology. If the research relies on selected local government cases, the findings may not be fully generalizable to all local government contexts. Furthermore, citizen perceptions of digital public services may vary depending on socioeconomic background, geographical location, age, education, and previous service experience. These limitations should be considered carefully when interpreting the results.

Future research may expand this study by conducting comparative analysis across multiple local governments, examining sector-specific digital services, or exploring the relationship between digital governance and public trust. Further studies may also investigate the role of artificial intelligence, big data, interoperability, cybersecurity, and digital inclusion in strengthening citizen-centric public services (Janda & Masango, 2024). Longitudinal research would be particularly valuable to assess whether digital governance reforms produce sustained institutional change over time. By advancing these future research directions, scholars can continue to refine the understanding of how digital governance contributes to more democratic, responsive, and citizen-oriented local administration.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study entitled "Digital Governance and Citizen-Centric Public Services: Evaluating Administrative Reform in Local Government" is grounded in the growing scholarly debate on how digital transformation reshapes public administration, especially at the local government level (EGBON, 2024). Digital governance is not merely a technological agenda; it represents a deeper

institutional reform process through which public organizations redesign structures, procedures, data systems, and citizen interactions (ANDREEV, 2023). In local government, this issue is particularly important because municipalities and districts are the closest administrative units to citizens. They are responsible for delivering basic public services, managing complaints, issuing permits, distributing social assistance, and ensuring administrative responsiveness. Therefore, the literature review of this study must connect digital governance, citizen-centric services, and administrative reform as mutually reinforcing dimensions of modern public administration.

This research uses three main theoretical foundations: Digital Era Governance Theory, New Public Service Theory, and Co-production Theory. These three theories are selected because they provide complementary explanations of the main research problem: the gap between the formal adoption of digital platforms and the actual realization of citizen-oriented public service reform in local government. Digital Era Governance explains how technology changes administrative systems; New Public Service explains why citizens should be placed at the center of governance; and Co-production Theory explains how citizens participate in creating public value rather than merely consuming public services (M. O. Lazor, 2024).

The first theory is Digital Era Governance Theory, popularized by Patrick Dunleavy, Helen Margetts, Simon Bastow, and Jane Tinkler in their 2006 work *Digital Era Governance: IT Corporations, the State, and E-Government* (Panchenko & Panchenko, 2025). Dunleavy was affiliated with the London School of Economics and Political Science, United Kingdom; Margetts with the Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, United Kingdom; while Bastow and Tinkler were associated with the LSE Public Policy Group, London School of Economics and Political Science, United Kingdom. Their work argues that digitalization marks a shift from New Public Management toward a governance model characterized by reintegration, needs-based holism, and digitization of administrative processes (Dunleavy & Margetts, 2023). The theory is highly relevant to this research because local government reform cannot be evaluated only by the number of digital applications introduced, but by whether digital systems integrate fragmented services, reduce administrative complexity, and improve citizen access.

In the framework of Digital Era Governance, public administration should move away from fragmented outsourcing, excessive managerialism, and disconnected service units (Bulkat, 2023). Instead, digital government should reconnect administrative functions, integrate data, simplify service chains, and build service systems around user needs. For this study, the theory helps explain why some local governments fail to achieve meaningful reform despite adopting digital platforms. If digitalization only transfers manual bureaucracy into online forms without redesigning institutional processes, then digital governance becomes superficial. The theory therefore supports the analysis of administrative reform by asking whether digital tools produce institutional integration, service responsiveness, and citizen-oriented outcomes.

The second theory is New Public Service Theory, developed and popularized by Robert B. Denhardt and Janet V. Denhardt through their influential article “The New Public Service: Serving Rather than Steering” in 2000 and later expanded in their book *The New Public Service: Serving, Not Steering* (Tsyhanii, 2025). Robert B. Denhardt is widely associated with Arizona State University, United States, and also held academic roles linked to the University of Delaware, United States. The New Public Service framework criticizes approaches that treat citizens as customers in a narrow market-oriented sense. Instead, it argues that public servants should help citizens articulate and achieve shared public interests. One of its central ideas is that government should serve citizens rather than merely steer society or manage service delivery as a business transaction.

New Public Service Theory is essential for this research because the concept of citizen-centric public service cannot be reduced to speed, efficiency, or digital convenience alone. Citizen-centricity also includes democratic values, fairness, inclusion, public dialogue, accountability, and responsiveness to diverse social needs. In relation to the research problem, this theory helps reveal whether digital governance strengthens public service as a democratic relationship or whether it simply transforms citizens into passive digital users. Local government administrative reform should therefore be

evaluated not only from internal efficiency but also from the extent to which citizens are respected as rights-bearing participants in governance.

The third theory is Co-production Theory, strongly associated with Elinor Ostrom, particularly through her 1996 article “Crossing the Great Divide: Coproduction, Synergy, and Development (. et al., 2025).” Ostrom was affiliated with Indiana University, United States, and later also associated with Arizona State University, United States. Her work explains that public services are often produced through interaction between formal public institutions and citizens or communities (Cardoso & Gomes, 2025). In this view, citizens are not passive recipients of services; they may contribute information, feedback, monitoring, compliance, collaboration, and local knowledge. Co-production is relevant to digital governance because digital platforms can create new spaces for participation, complaint reporting, feedback loops, participatory planning, and collaborative service improvement.

In the context of this study, Co-production Theory provides a framework for understanding citizen participation in local digital public services. Digital governance becomes more meaningful when citizens can use digital channels not only to access services but also to influence service design, report problems, evaluate performance, and participate in decision-making (Hai, 2024). This theory directly addresses the research gap because many digital government studies focus on platform availability, while less attention is given to whether digital systems enable active citizen involvement. By using Co-production Theory, the study can evaluate whether local government digital reform creates reciprocal interaction between government and citizens or merely provides one-way administrative transactions.

The development of these three theories shows an important transformation in public administration thought. Digital Era Governance emerged as a response to the limitations of New Public Management and emphasized the role of digital systems in reintegrating government (Franklin & Raadschelders, 2023c). New Public Service emerged as a normative response to managerial and market-based models of public administration by reaffirming citizenship, democratic values, and public interest. Co-production Theory developed from institutional and collective action perspectives and emphasized that public value is created through collaboration between state and society (Barreto et al., 2024). Together, these theories show that modern public administration requires technological capacity, democratic orientation, and participatory service production.

The contemporary development of these theories is increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence, open data, digital identity systems, interoperability, cybersecurity, digital inclusion, and platform governance (Franklin & Raadschelders, 2023a). Digital Era Governance has evolved from basic e-government toward integrated digital government ecosystems. New Public Service has become more relevant in debates on trust, equity, and ethical governance in digital public services. Co-production Theory has expanded through digital participation, civic technology, online complaint systems, and collaborative governance platforms. However, these developments also create new challenges. Digital transformation may improve efficiency, but it may also produce exclusion for citizens with limited internet access, low digital literacy, or weak institutional support (Mahajan, 2024). Therefore, the three theories must be applied critically, not normatively.

The relationship between these theories and the main research problem is clear. The central problem of this study is the mismatch between digital governance implementation and the actual realization of citizen-centric administrative reform. Digital Era Governance explains the institutional and technological dimensions of this problem. New Public Service explains the democratic and citizen-oriented dimensions. Co-production Theory explains the participatory and collaborative dimensions. When connected to the research gap, these theories show that previous studies have often separated technology, service quality, and participation, while this study integrates them into one evaluative framework for local government reform (NARIVNYY, 2025).

The theories also support the formulation of the research questions. The question of how digital governance supports administrative reform is explained through Digital Era Governance. The question of how local public services become citizen-centric is explained through New Public Service. The question of how citizens participate in improving digital public services is explained through Co-production Theory. Thus, the theoretical framework directly informs the research objectives, namely to

evaluate digital governance implementation, analyze citizen-centric service outcomes, identify institutional barriers, and develop recommendations for more responsive local government reform.

The theoretical benefit of this study lies in integrating three major public administration perspectives into a single analytical model (STADNYK, 2025). Academically, the study contributes to literature on digital governance, administrative reform, and citizen-centric public services by offering a framework that is suitable for evaluating local government transformation. Practically, the theories help policymakers understand that successful digital reform requires more than technology procurement. It requires integrated institutions, public servants committed to democratic service, and citizens who are meaningfully involved in service improvement.

In conclusion, the literature review demonstrates that Digital Era Governance Theory, New Public Service Theory, and Co-production Theory provide a strong foundation for evaluating administrative reform in local government (MOSEICHUK, 2025). The novelty of this study lies in combining these theories to examine whether digital governance produces genuine citizen-centric public services. The three theories collectively explain the main problem, clarify the research gap, strengthen the formulation of research questions, and support the objectives and benefits of the study. This theoretical integration allows the research to move beyond a narrow assessment of digital platforms and toward a more comprehensive evaluation of institutional reform, public value, citizen participation, and service responsiveness in local government.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research method to examine how digital governance supports citizen-centric public services and administrative reform in local government (IGNATENKO, 2024). The qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the research problem does not merely concern the measurement of digital service performance, but also the interpretation of institutional processes, administrative behavior, policy implementation, citizen experiences, and organizational change (Yefimenko, 2024). The title “Digital Governance and Citizen-Centric Public Services: Evaluating Administrative Reform in Local Government” requires a method capable of explaining how digital transformation is understood, implemented, experienced, and evaluated by actors within and outside local government institutions. Therefore, the study focused on meaning, context, process, and interaction rather than statistical generalization.

The research design used in this study was an evaluative qualitative case study (Wirtz & Müller, 2025). This design was selected because the study sought to evaluate the implementation of digital governance as part of administrative reform in a specific local government context. A case study allows the researcher to investigate digital governance comprehensively within its real institutional setting, including policy arrangements, service mechanisms, administrative capacity, leadership commitment, citizen participation, and barriers to implementation (HORBULOV, 2023). The evaluative character of the design is reflected in the attempt to assess whether digital public service innovation has produced substantive reform or has only resulted in procedural digitalization. In this sense, the research did not simply describe the existence of digital platforms, but examined whether those platforms contributed to accessibility, responsiveness, transparency, accountability, coordination, and citizen satisfaction.

The qualitative case study design was also relevant because digital governance in local government is highly contextual (NAZARENKO, 2025). Each local government may have different levels of digital infrastructure, budget capacity, bureaucratic culture, political leadership, human resource competence, citizen digital literacy, and institutional coordination. These contextual factors cannot be fully captured through standardized survey instruments alone. By using an evaluative case study, the research was able to explore the complexity of local administrative reform and identify the gap between formal digital policies and practical service delivery outcomes. This design also allowed the researcher to analyze the interaction between government officials, digital service managers, frontline officers, and citizens as users of local public services.

The research location selected for this study was the Local Government of Bandung City, West Java Province, Indonesia. Bandung City was chosen because it is widely recognized as one of the urban local governments in Indonesia that has actively promoted digital public services, smart city initiatives,

online administrative systems, and public complaint platforms (Parinusa et al., 2024). As a large urban municipality, Bandung represents a relevant case for evaluating how digital governance operates in a local government setting with relatively advanced technological initiatives and complex public service demands. The city provides a suitable context for examining the relationship between digital innovation and administrative reform because it has implemented various digital service channels in areas such as licensing, population administration, public complaints, information disclosure, and local service coordination.

The selection of Bandung City was based on several methodological considerations. First, Bandung has sufficient digital governance experience to allow meaningful evaluation of administrative reform. Second, the city serves a diverse population with different socioeconomic backgrounds, making it relevant for analyzing citizen-centric public services. Third, Bandung's local government faces typical urban administrative challenges, including high service demand, bureaucratic complexity, coordination across agencies, and the need for responsive complaint handling. Fourth, the city provides an appropriate setting to observe whether digital governance improves service accessibility and responsiveness or whether it still faces institutional and social barriers. Thus, Bandung City was selected purposively because it offered rich empirical conditions for understanding the relationship between digital governance and citizen-oriented administrative reform.

Because this study used a qualitative method, the research did not employ respondents in the quantitative sense. Instead, the study used informants who were selected purposively based on their knowledge, experience, position, and direct involvement in digital governance and public service delivery (Liarte et al., 2024). The term "informant" was used because the research aimed to obtain in-depth information, interpretation, and institutional perspectives rather than numerical responses. Informants were selected from local government officials, public service managers, digital governance officers, frontline service officers, and citizens who had used digital public services. This composition was intended to ensure that the data reflected both administrative and citizen perspectives.

The study involved twelve informants with pseudonyms to protect their identity and maintain research ethics (Balaji, 2025). The first informant, Mr. Arman, was a senior official at the Regional Development Planning Agency who provided information about digital transformation planning and administrative reform policy. The second informant, Ms. Lestari, was an official at the Communication and Informatics Office who explained digital infrastructure, system integration, data management, and challenges in managing local digital platforms. The third informant, Mr. Pratama, was a manager responsible for public service innovation who provided insights into how digital services were designed and evaluated. The fourth informant, Ms. Rania, was a licensing service officer who explained the operational use of online licensing systems and the challenges faced by frontline officers.

The fifth informant, Mr. Hendra, was an officer at the Population and Civil Registration Office who provided information about digital population administration services, including online application procedures and service verification. The sixth informant, Ms. Sari, was a public complaint management officer who explained how digital complaint platforms were used to receive, classify, forward, and respond to citizen reports. The seventh informant, Mr. Dimas, was an information technology staff member involved in system maintenance, interoperability, and technical support for digital service platforms. The eighth informant, Ms. Nabila, was a subdistrict-level administrative officer who provided information about how digital governance policies were implemented closer to citizens at the territorial administrative level.

The remaining four informants were citizens who had experience using local digital public services. Mr. Yusuf was a small business owner who had used online licensing services. Ms. Melati was a resident who had accessed digital population administration services. Mr. Rafi was a university student who had used public complaint channels to report urban service problems. Ms. Dewi was a community representative who had interacted with local digital information and complaint systems. These citizen informants were selected to understand whether digital governance was perceived as accessible, responsive, inclusive, and useful from the user perspective. Their inclusion was important because a citizen-centric public service evaluation cannot rely only on government narratives (MATVEEVA, 2023).

The selection of informants was based on purposive sampling, supported by snowball identification when additional relevant actors were suggested during the fieldwork process (BONDARETS, 2023). Purposive sampling was appropriate because the study required informants who had direct knowledge of digital governance implementation and citizen-centric service delivery. The criteria for selecting government informants included involvement in digital public service planning, implementation, monitoring, technical management, or frontline delivery. The criteria for selecting citizen informants included direct experience in using at least one digital public service provided by the local government. Snowball identification was used carefully to identify additional informants who possessed specific knowledge about service coordination, complaint handling, or platform management.

The main data collection techniques used in this research were in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis (Ongaro, 2025). In-depth interviews were conducted to obtain detailed explanations from informants regarding policy objectives, administrative reform processes, digital service mechanisms, implementation barriers, and citizen experiences. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing the researcher to use guiding questions while also providing flexibility for informants to explain issues that emerged during the conversation (Nurjannah et al., 2025). This technique was particularly useful for understanding how digital governance was interpreted by different actors and how administrative reform was experienced in practice.

Observation was used to examine how digital public service processes operated in administrative settings (BASHTANNYK & LUSHNIKOV, 2025). The researcher observed service procedures, interaction between officers and citizens, use of digital platforms in service counters, complaint handling mechanisms, and the practical relationship between online and offline services. Observation was important because digital governance often involves a combination of formal procedures and informal practices. In many cases, citizens may still need offline assistance even when services are officially available online. Therefore, observation helped reveal whether digital transformation simplified administrative procedures or created new layers of complexity.

Document analysis was conducted by reviewing relevant policy documents, local regulations, strategic plans, service standards, standard operating procedures, digital service guidelines, performance reports, complaint records, website information, and public service evaluation documents (Longo & Dirsehan, 2024). Document analysis was necessary to compare formal policy claims with empirical findings from interviews and observation. It also helped identify whether digital governance was institutionally embedded in administrative reform planning or treated merely as a technical innovation. Through document analysis, the study examined the consistency between reform objectives, implementation mechanisms, and citizen-oriented service indicators.

The data analysis process followed an interactive qualitative analysis model, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (MARCHENKO, 2024b). Data condensation was conducted by selecting, simplifying, coding, and categorizing information obtained from interviews, observation, and documents. The coding process focused on several thematic categories, including digital governance capacity, administrative reform, service accessibility, responsiveness, transparency, institutional coordination, citizen participation, digital inclusion, and implementation barriers. Data display was conducted by organizing findings into thematic matrices and narrative explanations to identify relationships among categories. Conclusion drawing was carried out by interpreting patterns, comparing perspectives, and linking empirical findings with the theoretical framework of Digital Era Governance, New Public Service, and Co-production Theory.

The technique for drawing conclusions in this research was based on thematic interpretation and triangulation (LIPENTSEV, 2024). Thematic interpretation allowed the researcher to identify recurring patterns across informant statements, observed practices, and policy documents. Triangulation was used to improve the credibility of the findings by comparing information from different sources and methods (DOBRIANSKA, 2023). For example, statements from government officials regarding service responsiveness were compared with citizen experiences and complaint management records. Similarly, formal claims about integrated digital systems were compared with observations of service

procedures and explanations from technical officers. This process helped ensure that conclusions were not based on a single perspective.

The research also applied source triangulation, method triangulation, and theoretical triangulation (Sopamena, 2024). Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from officials, frontline officers, technical staff, and citizens. Method triangulation was conducted by comparing interview results, observation notes, and documents. Theoretical triangulation was conducted by interpreting findings through three theoretical perspectives: Digital Era Governance, New Public Service, and Co-production Theory. Digital Era Governance helped evaluate institutional integration and digital transformation; New Public Service helped assess citizen-centeredness and democratic service values; while Co-production Theory helped examine citizen participation in service improvement. These three perspectives strengthened the analytical depth of the study.

To ensure research credibility, the study used careful interview documentation, cross-checking of statements, repeated reading of field notes, and consistency checks between data sources (Goyal, 2024). Ethical considerations were also applied by using pseudonyms, protecting informant identities, explaining the purpose of the research, and ensuring that participation was voluntary (MYROSHNYCHENKO, 2025). The use of pseudonyms was important because informants discussed institutional challenges, service limitations, and administrative barriers that could be sensitive within local government settings. Ethical protection allowed informants to provide more honest and reflective explanations.

The limitation of this method lies in the contextual nature of qualitative case study research (Ferdous, 2025b). Since the research focuses on one local government, the findings may not be statistically generalizable to all local governments. However, the purpose of qualitative research is not statistical generalization, but analytical generalization. The findings are expected to provide conceptual and practical insights that may be relevant to other local governments facing similar digital governance challenges. Another limitation is that citizen experiences may vary depending on digital literacy, socioeconomic status, service type, and frequency of interaction with government platforms. Therefore, the interpretation of findings must consider the diversity of citizen experiences.

In conclusion, the qualitative evaluative case study method was appropriate for examining digital governance and citizen-centric public services in local government (Guo, 2024). The method enabled the research to investigate not only whether digital platforms exist, but also how they affect administrative reform, service responsiveness, citizen participation, and institutional coordination. By selecting Bandung City as the research location and involving informants from government and citizen groups, the study was able to capture a comprehensive picture of digital governance implementation. The conclusion-drawing technique, based on thematic analysis and triangulation, provided a rigorous foundation for evaluating whether digital governance contributes to genuine administrative reform and citizen-centric public service delivery.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that digital governance in local government has become an important instrument of administrative reform, but its contribution to citizen-centric public services remains uneven (RAHIMOV, 2023). Based on the qualitative evaluative case study conducted in Bandung City, the findings indicate that digital governance has improved public service accessibility, accelerated several administrative procedures, and opened new channels for citizen interaction. However, the implementation has not fully transformed the bureaucratic logic of local government. Digital platforms have been introduced across several service areas, but some procedures remain fragmented, data integration is incomplete, and citizens still experience differences in service quality depending on digital literacy, service type, and institutional responsiveness. These findings are directly connected to the research title, “Digital Governance and Citizen-Centric Public Services: Evaluating Administrative Reform in Local Government,” because they demonstrate that digitalization must be evaluated not only as technological adoption but also as a reform process that changes administrative behavior and improves citizen experience (Singh et al., 2025).

The main research problem concerns the gap between the formal implementation of digital governance and the actual realization of citizen-centric public services. The study found that local government agencies have developed online licensing services, population administration platforms, complaint-handling applications, and digital information channels. These initiatives show a clear commitment to administrative modernization. However, the reform effect varies across agencies. Some services have become faster and more accessible, while others still require citizens to visit offices, submit physical documents, or seek informal clarification from officers. This indicates that digital governance has not yet fully eliminated procedural complexity. From the perspective of Digital Era Governance Theory, this finding reflects partial digitization rather than full reintegration of public administration (OLIYNYK, 2024). Digital tools exist, but institutional processes have not always been redesigned around citizens' needs. From the perspective of New Public Service Theory, the findings suggest that citizens are still sometimes treated as service users who must adjust to government procedures, rather than as rights-bearing participants whose needs should shape service design (SLIPENIUK, 2024). From the perspective of Co-production Theory, citizen participation remains limited mainly to complaint submission and feedback, rather than deeper involvement in service planning and evaluation (MAIDENKO & BASHTANNYK, 2024).

The implementation findings also show that administrative reform through digital governance has produced several positive outcomes. Citizens reported that online services reduced travel time, lowered transaction costs, and made some procedures more predictable. Government informants explained that digital platforms helped improve internal monitoring, reduce document loss, and create a clearer service record. These findings support the idea that digital governance can increase efficiency and transparency in local public services (Dirsehan & Longo, 2024). However, the benefits are not evenly distributed. Citizens with strong digital literacy and stable internet access benefited more than elderly citizens, low-income residents, and people unfamiliar with online procedures. This finding is important because citizen-centric public service must not only be efficient but also inclusive (Badó & Feleky, 2023). A service cannot be considered fully citizen-centric if it improves access for some groups while creating barriers for others.

The following table summarizes the main findings based on the qualitative method used in this study.

Table

Table 1 Research Findings on Digital Governance and Citizen-Centric Public Services in Local Government

Research Focus	Empirical Finding	Source of Data	Theoretical Link	Interpretation
Digital governance implementation	Local government has developed online licensing, population administration, complaint platforms, and digital information services	Interviews with government officials, observation, policy documents	Digital Era Governance	Digitalization is visible, but integration across agencies remains incomplete
Administrative reform	Some procedures are faster, more transparent, and easier to monitor	Interviews with service managers and frontline officers	Digital Era Governance and New Public Service	Reform has improved efficiency, but has not fully transformed bureaucratic culture
Citizen-centric services	Citizens experience easier access, but service quality varies by	Interviews with citizen informants	New Public Service	Citizen needs are recognized, but inclusion and

Research Focus	Empirical Finding	Source of Data	Theoretical Link	Interpretation
	digital literacy and service type			responsiveness remain inconsistent
Citizen participation	Citizens mainly participate through complaint platforms and feedback channels	Interviews with complaint officers and citizens	Co-production Theory	Participation is still reactive, not yet strategic or institutionalized
Institutional coordination	Data sharing and coordination among agencies remain limited	Interviews with technical staff and administrative officers	Digital Era Governance	Fragmented systems weaken the reform potential of digital governance
Main implementation barrier	Digital platforms are sometimes added to existing procedures without simplifying the administrative process	Observation and document analysis	Digital Era Governance, New Public Service, Co-production	Digital reform risks becoming symbolic if institutional redesign is weak
Reform outcome	Digital governance contributes to service modernization but has not fully achieved citizen-centric transformation	Triangulated findings	All three theories	Administrative reform is progressing, but remains partial and uneven

The findings related to the research gap reveal that previous assumptions about digital governance as an automatic driver of better public services must be treated critically (BASHTANNYK & HAVRYLENKO, 2023). The study shows that digital platforms can improve service delivery, but only when supported by institutional redesign, inter-agency coordination, responsive public servants, and inclusive citizen engagement. The gap identified in this research is not simply the absence of technology, but the limited transformation of administrative structures behind the technology. This supports the argument of Digital Era Governance Theory, which emphasizes reintegration and needs-based administrative design (Gintova & Bednar, 2024). In practice, the local government has started to digitize services, but several systems remain agency-based and are not fully interoperable. As a result, citizens may still need to navigate multiple platforms or offices to complete one service process.

The research gap is also visible in the relationship between digital services and citizen-centricity. New Public Service Theory argues that public administration should serve citizens and strengthen democratic values (MARCHENKO, 2024a). However, the findings show that some digital services are still designed from the perspective of administrative convenience rather than citizen experience. For example, citizens may be required to upload documents in specific formats, follow technical procedures, or wait for manual verification without clear updates. Although the service is technically digital, the citizen experience may still be bureaucratic. This finding shows that citizen-centricity must be evaluated through accessibility, clarity, responsiveness, fairness, and inclusion, not only through the existence of an online system.

From the perspective of Co-production Theory, the study found that citizens have not yet been fully positioned as co-producers of public service improvement (Basabih et al., 2024). Complaint channels allow citizens to report problems, but participation is mostly limited to reporting after problems occur. Citizens are not consistently involved in designing service standards, testing digital platforms, evaluating user experience, or setting service improvement priorities. This reveals a gap between digital participation and genuine co-production. Digital governance provides the infrastructure for interaction, but institutional mechanisms for collaborative decision-making remain limited.

Therefore, the novelty of this research lies in showing that citizen-centric digital governance requires more than online access; it requires institutionalized citizen participation in service reform.

The findings also answer the main research question: how does digital governance support administrative reform toward citizen-centric public services in local government? The study shows that digital governance supports administrative reform in three main ways. First, it improves procedural efficiency by reducing manual paperwork and enabling online submission. Second, it increases transparency by creating digital records, service tracking, and complaint documentation. Third, it expands citizen access by providing alternative channels for service interaction. However, the study also finds that the reform is incomplete because digital governance has not fully resolved fragmented coordination, unequal access, limited feedback utilization, and bureaucratic resistance to change (Misuraca et al., 2024). Therefore, digital governance supports reform, but its impact depends on whether technology is accompanied by institutional, cultural, and participatory transformation.

The research objectives were to evaluate digital governance implementation, analyze citizen-centric service outcomes, identify institutional barriers, and develop recommendations for strengthening local administrative reform. The results show that these objectives were achieved through the identification of both reform achievements and implementation weaknesses. Digital governance has improved several service mechanisms, especially in terms of accessibility and monitoring. Yet, administrative reform remains constrained by limited system integration, uneven human resource capacity, and insufficient citizen involvement in service design. This finding confirms that digital governance should be understood as an ongoing reform process rather than a completed technological project (Dovhan & Zakharkevych, 2025).

The theoretical benefit of this research is reflected in the integration of three theoretical perspectives. Digital Era Governance explains the need for integrated and technology-enabled administrative systems. New Public Service explains why reform must be evaluated from the perspective of citizen rights, public value, and democratic responsiveness. Co-production Theory explains why citizens should be involved as active contributors to public service improvement. The study contributes theoretically by combining these three perspectives into an evaluative framework for analyzing local government digital reform (Kuklyak, 2025). This framework helps avoid a narrow technological interpretation of digital governance.

The academic benefit of the study lies in its contribution to public administration literature, particularly in the fields of digital governance, local government reform, and citizen-centric public service. Many previous studies have examined e-government adoption, digital service readiness, or public service satisfaction separately. This study contributes by linking digital governance implementation with administrative reform and citizen participation. It also offers a qualitative explanation of why digital platforms may succeed technically but remain limited institutionally (Salsabila et al., 2025). For future academic research, this study provides a conceptual basis for comparative studies across local governments, sector-based digital service evaluation, and deeper investigation into the relationship between digital governance and public trust.

The practical benefit of this research is that it provides useful insights for local government leaders, digital transformation teams, public service managers, and frontline officers. The findings suggest that local governments should not focus only on developing applications or websites. They should also simplify procedures, integrate databases, train public servants, improve user assistance, and create feedback mechanisms that influence real policy decisions (Mulyadiana, 2025). Citizens should be involved not only as users but also as partners in evaluating and improving services. In practical terms, the study recommends that local government strengthen interoperability, establish clear service standards, provide digital literacy assistance, and ensure that online services remain accessible to vulnerable groups.

The discussion of these results can be connected to previous research on digital governance and administrative reform. Previous studies generally show that digital government can improve service efficiency, transparency, and accessibility (Ingrams et al., 2024). The findings of this study support that argument, but also add a more critical interpretation. Digital platforms in local government do improve

service delivery, but they do not automatically produce citizen-centric reform. The difference between this study and much of the earlier literature lies in its emphasis on the institutional conditions behind digital services. Earlier studies often treated technology adoption as the main indicator of progress, while this research shows that the quality of reform depends on whether digitalization changes administrative routines, decision-making patterns, and citizen-government relationships.

The main problem identified in this study is consistent with previous findings that public sector digital transformation often faces organizational barriers (Myeong, 2025). Many local governments adopt digital platforms faster than they reform internal procedures. This produces a condition in which digital services operate on top of old bureaucratic structures. In this research, such a pattern was found in services that still required manual verification, repeated document submission, or unclear coordination between agencies. This strengthens the argument that administrative reform must precede or accompany digital transformation. Without process simplification and institutional integration, digital governance may only reproduce bureaucracy in electronic form (Sanchez-Graells, 2024).

The gap problem is also connected to previous research on citizen-centric public services. Prior studies have emphasized that public services should be designed around citizen needs, expectations, and experiences (Abdullah et al., 2024). The findings of this study support that view but show that citizen-centricity remains difficult to achieve when service design is dominated by internal administrative logic. Citizens appreciate online services when they are simple, transparent, and responsive. However, they become dissatisfied when digital platforms are difficult to use, lack clear instructions, or require offline follow-up. This shows that citizen-centricity must be embedded in the entire service process, from information access to final service completion.

The research question is also strengthened by comparison with previous studies. Earlier research often asked whether digital government improves efficiency. This study asks a broader question: whether digital governance supports administrative reform toward citizen-centric public services. The findings show that efficiency is only one dimension of reform. A digital service may be efficient for government but not necessarily inclusive for citizens. A platform may reduce administrative workload but still fail to provide meaningful participation (Franklin & Raadschelders, 2023b). Therefore, the study expands the discussion by connecting efficiency, responsiveness, inclusion, transparency, and participation within one analytical framework.

The research objectives are also aligned with previous studies, but this study provides a more integrated contribution. Previous research has often focused on separate dimensions such as e-government maturity, service quality, citizen satisfaction, or bureaucratic reform. This study integrates these dimensions by evaluating digital governance as an administrative reform mechanism. The findings show that the success of digital governance depends on the interaction between technology, institutional capacity, public service ethics, and citizen participation. This confirms that digital transformation is not only a technical project but a governance project.

The theoretical, practical, and academic benefits of this research also emerge from its relationship with previous studies. Theoretically, the research contributes by integrating Digital Era Governance, New Public Service, and Co-production Theory. Practically, it provides evidence that local government reform should focus on service integration, digital inclusion, and meaningful feedback mechanisms. Academically, it offers a qualitative case-based explanation of how digital governance works in a local government context. These contributions are important because they help bridge the gap between normative claims about digital transformation and empirical realities of public service delivery.

The discussion further shows that the implementation of digital governance must be understood through the interaction of structure, technology, and human agency. Digital platforms may provide the technical infrastructure for reform, but public servants determine how those systems are used, interpreted, and integrated into daily administration. Citizens also shape the success of digital governance through their ability to access, understand, and evaluate services. Therefore, digital governance is not a neutral technical system. It is a socio-administrative arrangement that reflects institutional priorities, administrative culture, and citizen-government relations.

The novelty of this research lies in its integrated evaluation of digital governance as a tool of administrative reform and citizen-centric public service development. The study does not treat digitalization as an end in itself. Instead, it evaluates whether digital governance produces public value through better accessibility, responsiveness, accountability, participation, and institutional coordination (Burdenko & Bykasova, 2023). This novelty is important because many local governments claim success by presenting digital platforms, while citizens may evaluate success through service simplicity, clarity, fairness, and problem resolution. The study therefore proposes that digital governance should be assessed from both institutional and citizen perspectives.

In conclusion, the results and discussion show that digital governance in local government has contributed to administrative reform, but the transformation remains partial. The implementation of digital platforms has improved accessibility, transparency, and service monitoring, yet challenges remain in system integration, bureaucratic adaptation, digital inclusion, and citizen participation. Digital Era Governance Theory explains the importance of administrative reintegration and digital system coherence. New Public Service Theory emphasizes that digital reform must serve citizens and strengthen public value. Co-production Theory highlights the importance of involving citizens in service improvement. Together, these theories explain why digital governance must be evaluated not only by technological availability but also by its capacity to produce citizen-centric public services (Sun & Yu, 2024).

The study concludes that effective digital governance requires a shift from application-based innovation to citizen-centered administrative reform. Local governments must ensure that digital platforms simplify procedures, integrate agencies, empower public servants, include vulnerable citizens, and institutionalize citizen feedback. The research contributes theoretically by integrating three public administration theories, academically by enriching digital governance literature, and practically by offering reform-oriented recommendations for local governments. The findings support the central argument that digital governance can become a meaningful instrument of administrative reform only when it is designed, implemented, and evaluated from the perspective of citizens and public value (Makihara, 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that digital governance has become an important instrument for strengthening administrative reform and improving citizen-centric public services in local government. Referring to the findings and discussion, digital transformation in Bandung City has contributed to more accessible, transparent, and efficient public service delivery. Online licensing services, digital population administration, complaint-handling platforms, and public information channels have reduced several procedural barriers that previously required citizens to interact directly with conventional bureaucratic offices. These developments indicate that local government has made meaningful progress in using digital technology as a mechanism for administrative modernization.

However, the study also concludes that digital governance has not yet fully produced comprehensive citizen-centric administrative reform. The results show that digital platforms have improved several service processes, but the transformation remains partial and uneven across agencies. Some services are more responsive and easier to access, while others still depend on manual verification, fragmented procedures, repeated document submission, and offline assistance. This means that the existence of digital platforms alone cannot be considered sufficient evidence of successful reform. Digital governance becomes meaningful only when it changes the way local government institutions coordinate, make decisions, simplify procedures, and respond to citizens' needs.

The findings confirm that the main problem of the study lies in the gap between digital service adoption and substantive administrative reform. Local government has introduced various digital applications, but not all of them are supported by integrated data systems, strong inter-agency coordination, consistent service standards, and inclusive user support. As a result, citizens may experience digital services differently depending on their digital literacy, internet access, service complexity, and ability to navigate administrative requirements. This conclusion shows that citizen-centric public service must be evaluated not only by speed and technological availability, but also by accessibility, fairness, clarity, responsiveness, and problem resolution.

The conclusion is also closely connected to the three theoretical perspectives used in the study. From the perspective of Digital Era Governance, the findings show that local government digital reform must move beyond simple digitization toward institutional reintegration, interoperability, and service simplification. From the perspective of New Public Service, digital governance must place citizens as rights-bearing participants whose needs and experiences should guide public service design. From the perspective of Co-production Theory, citizens should not only use digital platforms but also participate in evaluating, improving, and shaping service delivery. Therefore, digital governance should be understood as a socio-administrative reform process rather than a purely technical project.

Based on the results and discussion, this study concludes that the success of digital governance in local government depends on the interaction between technology, institutions, public servants, and citizens. Technology provides the infrastructure for reform, but institutional capacity determines whether digital systems are integrated and useful. Public servants influence whether digital procedures become responsive and service-oriented. Citizens shape reform outcomes through their experiences, feedback, and participation. When these elements are not aligned, digital governance may become symbolic and procedural. When they are integrated, digital governance can generate public value and strengthen trust in local administration.

The study further concludes that the novelty of this research lies in its integrated evaluation of digital governance, citizen-centric public services, and administrative reform. The research demonstrates that digital transformation should not be assessed only through platform availability or technical innovation. Instead, evaluation must consider whether digital governance improves administrative coordination, expands inclusive access, strengthens transparency, supports accountability, and enables meaningful citizen participation. This conclusion contributes to public administration scholarship by offering a more comprehensive understanding of how local government digital reform should be examined.

In practical terms, the study concludes that local governments need to shift from application-based innovation to citizen-centered institutional reform. Digital platforms should be supported by simplified procedures, integrated databases, clear service standards, digital literacy assistance, responsive complaint management, and regular citizen feedback mechanisms. Without these supporting conditions, digital governance may fail to deliver its promised benefits. Therefore, citizen-centric digital governance requires continuous administrative learning, leadership commitment, and institutional adaptation.

Overall, the research confirms that digital governance can support administrative reform in local government, but its effectiveness depends on whether digitalization is implemented as a transformative governance strategy. The findings and discussion show that digital public services in Bandung City have improved efficiency and accessibility, yet still face challenges related to integration, inclusion, participation, and bureaucratic adaptation. Consequently, the central conclusion of this study is that digital governance becomes a genuine instrument of citizen-centric administrative reform only when technology is aligned with public value, institutional coherence, and citizens' lived experiences.

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