

The Influence of Digital Public Engagement on Public Trust through Public Satisfaction with Public Services

Susi Sugiyarsih

Department of Public Administration, Universitas 17 Agustus 1945
Cirebon, Cirebon, Indonesia

Abstract: The rapid growth of digital public services has changed the way citizens interact with government institutions and digital public engagement has become a more and more important factor in shaping public perceptions of government performance. Even though investments in digital governance are growing, the mechanisms by which digital public engagement contributes to public trust are not well understood. This study explores the effect of Digital Public Engagement on Public Trust and the mediating effect of Public Satisfaction in this relationship. This research uses a quantitative method with data taken from a survey of 180 citizens of Cirebon City who had used digital public services in the last three months. Data were analyzed using PROCESS Macro Model 4 (regression-based mediation analysis). The results show that Digital Public Engagement has a positive and statistically significant impact on Public Satisfaction and Public Trust. Public Satisfaction has a positive effect on the Public Trust and a mediating effect between Digital Public Engagement and Public Trust partially. These findings suggest that citizens' trust in government institutions is not only shaped by their satisfaction with digital public services but also by their direct experiences of accessibility, responsiveness and interaction through government digital platforms. The research contributes to the digital governance literature by revealing the dual effect of digital public engagement on public trust. The findings also underscore the need to improve digital engagement strategies to enhance citizen satisfaction and institutional trust in the delivery of public services.

Keywords: Digital Public Engagement, Public Satisfaction, Public Trust, Digital Governance, Public Services.

Correspondents Author:

Susi Sugiyarsih, Department of Public Administration, Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Cirebon, Cirebon, Indonesia
Email: ssugiyarsih@gmail.com

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Introduction

The development of digital technology has fundamentally changed the relationship between government institutions and the communities they serve. In Indonesia, this transformation is supported by a massive digital population: by mid-2025, the number of internet users will reach 229.4 million, or 80.66 percent of the total national population. Social media users comprise approximately half of Indonesia's population, with an average daily usage of two to four hours per person. This massive connectivity creates a fertile space for what is now known as digital public engagement, namely the use of websites, mobile applications, and social media platforms by government agencies to disseminate information, respond to public complaints, and open channels for participation in policy-making (Demir, 2023; Lauterbach, 2023). As online interactions become a central part of citizens' experiences with government institutions, a deep understanding of how digital service quality and engagement shape public perceptions of government becomes increasingly important, especially as the quality dimension of e-services is widely recognized as a crucial factor in building and maintaining public trust (Bodó & Janssen, 2022; Ward, 2017). The Indonesian government has responded to this digital shift through its Electronic-Based Government System (SPBE) policy, which has demonstrated measurable progress at the international level (Tian et al., 2025). The national Public Satisfaction Index (IKM) reached 88.9 in 2024, the highest in five years, based on a survey of seven million service users. The Public Service Index (PSI) was 4.02, categorized as very good (Li et al., 2024; Suhendra & Santiko, 2022). However, increased satisfaction scores do not necessarily translate into increased trust in institutions. This gap between administrative performance indicators and the public's perceived trust is the primary question this research seeks to address improvements in digital infrastructure and formal satisfaction scores do not automatically guarantee a concomitant increase in public trust in government institutions (Edelenbos et al., 2010; Jiang et al., 2021). Several previous studies have examined the relationship between digital engagement, citizen satisfaction, and institutional trust, although the direction of the relationship and the mediating mechanisms found vary across studies. Research on e-government service quality indicates that the reliability and responsiveness of digital platforms significantly shape citizen satisfaction and trust, with service quality acting as an intermediary variable linking digital governance to user satisfaction. A study based on Expectation Confirmation Theory found that perceived usefulness and expectation confirmation significantly shape both satisfaction and trust in e-government platforms, with both constructing as parallel mediators of citizens' intention to continue using the service. Research on public engagement through social media also shows that participatory digital tools are more effective at increasing satisfaction and trust than traditional media, with public value creation acting as an intervening mechanism. Another

study identified information quality, perceived ease of use, and perceived security as key antecedents of public trust in government social media services, which in turn shaped their willingness to engage further. Several complementary frameworks can explain, theoretically, the relationship between digital public engagement, public satisfaction and public trust. According to Expectation Confirmation Theory, citizens will be satisfied when the public services are delivered at their expectations or even more than that. Then this will affect their attitude towards government institutions ([Anthony Jnr et al., 2019](#); [Schirm, 2016](#)). Furthermore, public trust theory emphasizes that trust is built on citizens' assessments of government ability, responsiveness, and reliability to provide public services. Public engagement on websites, mobile applications and social media platforms can enhance these evaluations by facilitating access to information, responsiveness and interaction between the citizens and the government institutions in the digital governance realm. Public satisfaction may be an important mechanism connecting digital public engagement to the development of public trust. There is a growing body of literature on e-government, digital governance and public trust, but several issues are still under-examined. Previous studies have reported mixed findings regarding the relationship between satisfaction and trust. Some studies put trust as a predecessor of satisfaction, while other studies suggest that satisfaction is a predecessor of the development of trust [15]. Further, the bulk of existing research concentrates on digital service quality and transactional e-government services with limited consideration of broader types of digital public engagement encompassing participatory communication, mechanisms for public feedback and social media interactions. Meanwhile, empirical studies examining the digital public engagement, public satisfaction and public trust in one mediation framework are also relatively scarce, especially in the context of Indonesian public service. Such gaps reveal the need for more research on the mechanisms through which digital public engagement influences the development of public trust. Active users of Malang city government's integrated digital services found that digital integration significantly increased e-government transparency, which in turn boosted institutional trust, with institutional trust ultimately being the strongest predictor of citizen satisfaction, explaining 71% of the variance in satisfaction through full sequential mediation. While other studies position satisfaction and trust as two parallel outcomes from the same antecedent without establishing a sequential path between them ([Bolger et al., 2021](#); [Tao et al., 2025](#)). There is little research that empirically tests the alternative pathway in which satisfaction serves as a mediating mechanism that channels the influence of digital public engagement on trust, even though this sequence makes theoretical sense in models where service experience forms the basis for attitudinal evaluations such as institutional trust ([PytlikZillig et al., 2017](#)). Furthermore, most of the available evidence, including studies in Malang City, still focuses on a relatively narrow operationalization of digital integration, centered on transactional service platforms such as

licensing and population administration, with limited attention to the broader two-way communication dimension of digital public engagement, including social media interactions, public feedback channels, and participatory consultations. In the Indonesian context specifically, although national indicators such as the SPBE Index and the Public Satisfaction Index have improved significantly, empirical research that simultaneously examines digital public engagement, public satisfaction, and public trust within a single mediation model—particularly those that examine satisfaction as a mediating pathway to trust—remains very limited, so that neither the theoretical sequence nor the practical implications for designing digital engagement strategies are adequately understood. Based on the background, problems, and research gaps outlined above, this study aims to analyze the influence of digital public engagement on public trust, both directly and indirectly through public satisfaction with public services as a mediating variable. Specifically, this study aims to determine the extent to which digital public engagement contributes to public satisfaction, the extent to which public satisfaction contributes to public trust, and whether public satisfaction mediates the relationship between digital public engagement and public trust. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on direct relationships among these variables, this study proposes and tests a mediation model in which public satisfaction functions as a mechanism through which digital public engagement influences public trust. The results of this study are expected to enrich the theoretical literature on digital governance and the formation of public trust, while also providing practical guidance for government agencies in optimizing digital public engagement strategies to build more substantive and sustainable public trust. Based on the theoretical arguments and research gaps identified in previous studies, this study proposes a conceptual framework to explain the relationship between digital public engagement, public satisfaction, and public trust. The framework assumes that digital public engagement influences public trust both directly and indirectly through public satisfaction as a mediating variable. The proposed conceptual framework is presented in Figure 1.

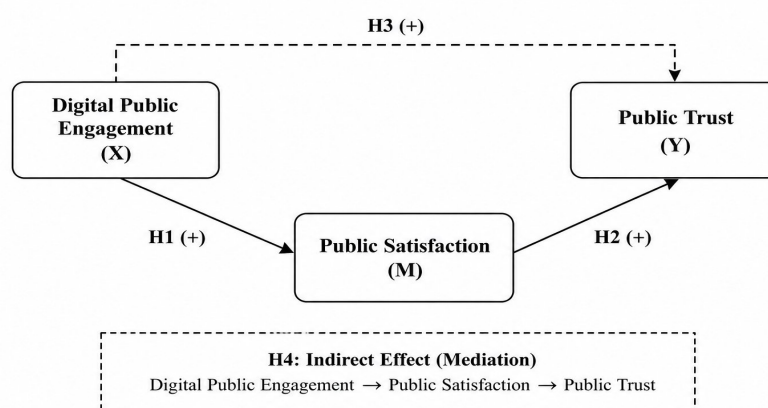


Figure 1 Proposed Conceptual Framework

As shown in Figure 1, it is expected that there is a direct and indirect effect of digital public engagement on public trust through public satisfaction. The proposed framework assumes that citizens with effective digital engagement, such as accessible information, responsive communication and opportunities to interact with government institutions, are more likely to report higher levels of satisfaction with public services. The increase in satisfaction is expected to reinforce the public's trust in government institutions. Furthermore, digital public engagement may also directly contribute to public trust by enhancing perceptions of transparency, responsiveness and openness of institutions. The following research hypotheses are formulated on the basis of the proposed framework.

Research Method

The proposed mediation model was tested, and the research objectives were met using a quantitative research approach. This approach was found appropriate since the study aims at analyzing the relationships between Digital Public Engagement, Public Satisfaction and Public Trust based on empirical data collected from citizens with experience of digital public services. The methodological procedures adopted in this study include research design, population and sampling, instrument development, data collection and statistical analysis techniques ([Firmstone & Coleman, 2015](#)).

Research Design

In the present study, a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional explanatory research design was used to test the relationships between Digital Public Engagement, Public Satisfaction, and Public Trust ([Chien & Thanh, 2022](#); [Dharmika & Subanda, 2023](#)). A quantitative approach was selected as it allows for the statistical testing of hypotheses and measurement of relationships between variables using numerical data. The data were collected from the respondents at a single point in time and this enabled the study to examine perceptions of digital public engagement, public satisfaction and public trust at the same time and so a cross-sectional design was used. The study also used the mediation model to examine the direct effect of Digital Public Engagement on Public Trust and the indirect effect through Public Satisfaction. This design was considered appropriate because the objective of the study was to explain the mechanism through which digital public engagement contributes to the development of public trust in digital public services.

Population and Sample

The population of this study was the citizens who had used digital public services provided by the Cirebon City Government in the last three months. The services were official government websites, mobile service applications and government-run social media platforms for

disseminating information, communication and delivery of services to the public (Rude, 2023). Purposive sampling technique was used as a non-probability sampling. This technique is considered appropriate since the study required respondents with direct experience of digital public services and thus able to assess digital public engagement, public satisfaction and public trust. Respondents who are required to be able to provide relevant responses must meet the following criteria: (1) aged at least 17 years, (2) living in Cirebon City, (3) having interacted with at least one digital public service channel in the last three months. The data were collected through an online questionnaire that was distributed to the eligible respondents. Following data screening, the total number of valid responses retained for the final analysis was 180. This sample size was considered adequate for mediation analysis using PROCESS Macro Model 4 because it surpassed the minimum sample requirements generally recommended for regression-based mediation testing. The study examined three main variables: Digital Public Engagement, Public Satisfaction, and Public Trust. The operational definitions of these variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Operational Definitions of Research Variables

Variable	Operational Definition	Number of Items
Digital Public Engagement (X)	Citizens' interaction with government digital platforms, including websites, mobile applications, and social media channels used for communication, information dissemination, and public participation.	6
Public Satisfaction (M)	Citizens' overall evaluation of their experiences when using digital public services provided by government institutions.	6
Public Trust (Y)	Citizens' confidence in the competence, reliability, and integrity of government institutions in delivering public services.	6

As shown in Table 1, Digital Public Engagement represents citizens' interactions with government digital platforms, Public Satisfaction reflects citizens' evaluations of service experiences, and Public Trust refers to citizens' confidence in government institutions. These variables form the basis of the mediation model tested in this study.

Research Instrument

Data was collected through a structured questionnaire developed to measure the three variables under study; Digital Public Engagement, Public Satisfaction and Public Trust. The questionnaire included 18 statement items for the three variables. Each construct was

measured with six items. Respondents were asked to assess their perception and experience of the Cirebon City Government's digital public services. The questionnaire was administered online to facilitate data collection from citizens who have experience in using digital public service platforms. Validity and reliability tests were performed before testing the hypothesis to preserve the quality of the measurement tool. The validity test was conducted using the method of corrected item total correlation and the reliability was checked using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. All questionnaire items satisfied the validity and reliability criteria necessary and were, therefore, valid for further analysis.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics, and PROCESS Macro Model 4 developed by Hayes. The analysis was performed in several stages. First, validity and reliability tests were performed to assess the quality of the measurement instrument. Second, classical assumption tests such as normality, multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity, and linearity tests were performed to check the appropriateness of the regression model. Third, study carried out the hypothesis testing using PROCESS Macro Model 4 for regression-based mediation analysis. The analysis was used to examine the direct effect of Digital Public Engagement on Public Trust, the effect of Digital Public Engagement on Public Satisfaction, the effect of Public Satisfaction on Public Trust, and the indirect effect of Digital Public Engagement on Public Trust through Public Satisfaction. The rationale for selecting PROCESS Macro Model 4 is that the primary objective of the study was to test a simple mediation model that involved one independent variable, one mediator, and one dependent variable. PROCESS Macro is often used in mediation studies as a more parsimonious way of estimating direct, indirect and total effects compared with Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). A bootstrapping procedure and confidence interval estimation were used to test the mediation effect.

Result and Discussion

This section presents the results of the empirical analysis and discusses the results in relation to the proposed research framework and prior studies. The analysis involves instrument testing, classical assumption testing, hypothesis testing and the mediating role of Public Satisfaction in the relationship between Digital Public Engagement and Public Trust.

Validity and Reliability Test Results

Before testing the research hypothesis, the quality of the measuring instrument was tested by validity and reliability testing. The validity test results indicate that 18 items of the questionnaire are valid with the data from 180 respondents who had used digital public services of the Cirebon City Government. The corrected item-total correlation values ranged

from 0.391 to 0.715 which was greater than the critical value of 0.1463 at 5 percent level of significance. Hence, all items in the questionnaire were valid and appropriate to measure the constructs. The reliability test was carried out using the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Reliability Test Results

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Information
Digital Public Engagement (X)	0.860	Reliable
Public Satisfaction (M)	0.739	Reliable
Public Trust (Y)	0.763	Reliable

Table 2 shows that all variables were above the recommended threshold of 0.70 for Cronbach's Alpha. The reliability coefficient of Digital Public Engagement was the highest ($\alpha = 0.860$), followed by Public Trust ($\alpha = 0.763$) and Public Satisfaction ($\alpha = 0.739$). The results show that the measuring tool has a satisfactory internal consistency and is suitable for further statistical analysis.

Classical Assumption Test Results

Classical assumption tests were conducted to validate the suitability of the regression model before hypothesis testing. These tests were normality, multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity, and linearity. The normality test was done by the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test. The results showed a test statistic of 0.040, with a significance value of 0.920 ($p > 0.05$), which indicated the residuals were normally distributed. The results of the multicollinearity test indicate that the predictor variables have a Tolerance value of 0.555 and a Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) value of 1.803. These values were in acceptable range indicating the nonexistence of multicollinearity. Heteroscedasticity test was performed by glejser method. The significance values for Digital Public Engagement and Public Satisfaction were 0.341 and 0.771, respectively ($p > 0.05$), indicating the presence of heteroscedasticity in the model. The linearity test also confirmed the existence of significant positive relationships among the study variables ($p < 0.001$) satisfying the linearity assumption. In summary, the results show that all classical assumptions were fulfilled, indicating that the regression model was appropriate for subsequent hypothesis testing and mediation analysis.

Hypothesis Testing Results

After ensuring the measurement quality and regression assumptions, hypothesis testing was performed using PROCESS Macro Model 4. The current study aimed to investigate the direct

effects of Digital Public Engagement on Public Satisfaction and Public Trust, as well as the mediating role of Public Satisfaction in the relationship between Digital Public Engagement and Public Trust. The results for direct, indirect and total effects are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	Coefficient (B)	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Digital Public Engagement → Public Satisfaction (a)	0.537	11.954	0.000	Supported
H2	Public Satisfaction → Public Trust (b)	0.187	2.418	0.017	Supported
H3	Digital Public Engagement → Public Trust (Direct Effect, c')	0.397	6.395	0.000	Supported
H4	Digital Public Engagement → Public Trust (Total Effect, c)	0.497	10.610	0.000	Supported
H5	Indirect Effect (a × b)	0.100	95% CI [0.017, 0.199]	–	Supported

Table 3 shows that Digital Public Engagement is a significant variable that affects both Public Satisfaction and Public Trust. The citizens who felt better engaged through digital public service platforms were more likely to report higher satisfaction levels. Higher satisfaction was, in turn, associated with more trust in government institutions. The analysis also found that Digital Public Engagement still had an impact on Public Trust when Public Satisfaction was controlled for. At the same time, the indirect path via Public Satisfaction was statistically significant. The results suggest that Public Satisfaction is one mechanism through which Digital Public Engagement affects Public Trust, although a large part of the effect is still direct.

The Effect of Digital Public Engagement on Public Satisfaction

The quality of citizens' interactions with government digital platforms seems to have a close relationship with public satisfaction. When information is readily available, public queries are answered promptly and communication channels are operating smoothly, citizens are more likely to give positive assessments of public services. In this sense, digital public engagement is not only a communication tool but also part of the overall service experience perceived by the citizens. The findings suggest that citizens' expectations are increasing that government institutions should deliver services that are accessible and responsive through digital channels. Websites, mobile applications and social media are no longer seen as supplementary services, but as constituent parts of public service delivery. Positive experiences during the interactions may contribute to more favorable assessments of public services and eventually

lead to enhanced public satisfaction. For Cirebon City, the greater use of digital platforms for obtaining information, filing complaints, and interacting with public institutions may play a role in linking digital public engagement with higher levels of satisfaction. If digital services are easier to use and more responsive, citizens are likely to develop more positive judgments of government performance. This indicates that the improvement of public satisfaction should create a better quality of communication and interaction between government institutions and citizens via digital platforms and the extension of digital infrastructure.

The Effect of Public Satisfaction on Public Trust

The results indicate that satisfaction with digital public services is positively associated with higher levels of trust in government institutions. Satisfaction captures the evaluation of citizens' experiences with service, while trust captures the more general evaluation of the government's capacity to serve the public well. Citizens are more likely to perceive government performance positively when public services are perceived to be delivered timely, accessible and responsive. In digital public services, satisfaction can be reached if citizens are able to access information easily, submit requests and get answers efficiently through digital platforms without any undue obstacles. Such positive experiences can foster trust in government institutions as citizens experience that public services are functioning as they should. Therefore, satisfaction is one of the components that foster the development of public trust. But the smaller effect of Public Satisfaction indicates that trust is influenced by a broader set of considerations than service experiences alone. Citizens may also judge government institutions on the basis of transparency, accountability, credibility, and consistency in public policy. Trust can therefore not be explained by satisfaction with digital services alone, even though satisfaction is an important element in shaping positive perceptions of government institutions.

Public Satisfaction as a Mediator

A key finding of this study is that Public Satisfaction serves as a partial mediator in the relationship between Digital Public Engagement and Public Trust. This finding suggests that digital public engagement influences public trust not only through citizens' appraisals of service experiences but also through other mechanisms that are independent of satisfaction. The existence of a notable indirect effect indicates that positive encounters with digital public services could enhance trust by boosting satisfaction with government services among the citizens. Citizens' perceptions of digital platforms as accessible, responsive, and useful are more likely to positively evaluate public services. These positive evaluations may subsequently reinforce the trust in government institutions. This finding supports the view that trust is affected not only by institutional performance itself but also by the way in which citizens

experience and evaluate public services. At the same time, the direct effect of Digital Public Engagement on Public Trust was stronger than the indirect pathway through Public Satisfaction. This pattern indicates that citizens may develop trust directly from their interactions with government digital platforms without going through a satisfaction-based evaluation process. Transparency of information, responsiveness of communication channels and opportunities for participation, may directly contribute to perceptions of government credibility and openness. These findings add further insight into the relation between satisfaction and trust in digital governance. Although prior research mainly considered satisfaction and trust as concurrent consequences of digital service quality, the current study shows that satisfaction can also serve as a mediating process between digital public engagement and trust. However, due to the partial rather than full mediation effect, public trust should be regarded as a multidimensional construct that is formed by multiple factors beyond satisfaction alone.

Research Implications

The findings of this study add to the growing body of literature on digital governance by providing empirical evidence of Public Satisfaction as a partial mediating mechanism between Digital Public Engagement and Public Trust. The results suggest that the formation of trust in digital public services is not only explained by citizens' satisfaction with their service experience. Instead, direct experience with government digital platforms suggests that satisfaction and trust should be viewed as related but distinct constructs in digital governance research. From a practical perspective, the findings underscore the need to improve digital public engagement strategies to enhance citizen satisfaction and public trust. The government institutions need to increase the infrastructure of digital services, and also focus on responsiveness, accessibility, transparency and two-way communication through digital platforms. Efforts to improve the quality of digital interaction in the context of Cirebon City can be a contribution to the strengthening of public confidence towards government institutions and support the wider objectives of digital public service transformation.

Conclusions

This study examined the relationship between Digital Public Engagement, Public Satisfaction, and Public Trust in the context of Digital Public Service in Cirebon City. The results suggest that Digital Public Engagement has a positive impact on Public Satisfaction and Public Trust. We also found Public Satisfaction to have a positive effect on Public Trust and partially mediated the relationship between Digital Public Engagement and Public Trust. The findings suggest that citizens' interactions with government digital platforms contribute to the development of trust, both directly and indirectly, through their experiences with services.

Our study contributes to the digital governance literature by providing empirical evidence that Public Satisfaction mediates the relationship between Digital Public Engagement and Public Trust. Satisfaction and trust have often been treated as concurrent outcomes of digital service quality in prior research. The present results suggest, however, that satisfaction may play a mediating role by which digital engagement influences trust. Furthermore, the stronger direct effect found in this study highlights that trust may be directly related to citizens' perceptions of transparency, responsiveness, and accessibility in digital public services. The results have practical implications in terms of the need to strengthen digital public engagement strategies in order to increase citizen satisfaction and public trust. Government institutions should concentrate on improving not only the digital service infrastructure, but also the quality of communication, response and interaction through digital platforms. This study has some limitations. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal conclusions about the relationships among variables. Second, the study was conducted in one local government setting which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other local government settings. Longitudinal designs, broader geographical scope and the inclusion of additional variables such as transparency, digital service quality, institutional credibility or citizen participation may be used in future research to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the formation of public trust in digital governance environments.

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