

Digital Public Participation and Responsive Governance in Village Development Planning

Digital Public
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I Wayan Astawa^{1*}, Gede Wirata², Sri Sulandari³

^{1,2,3}Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,
Universitas Ngurah Rai; Denpasar, Indonesia

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*Corresponding Author E-Mail: astawa261@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examines how digital public participation supports village development planning as a manifestation of responsive regional autonomy in the 2025 era. Village development in Indonesia increasingly emphasizes participatory governance, but citizen involvement is often limited due to elite dominance, low digital literacy, and unequal access. The purpose of this study is to analyze the mechanisms of digital participation, supporting factors, challenges, and their implications for regional autonomy. The method used is a qualitative literature study through analysis of academic publications, policy documents, and related empirical findings. The results show that digital participation occurs in various forms, ranging from information disclosure, online consultations, interactive feedback tools, to co-creation mechanisms, but its implementation varies across villages. Factors such as infrastructure, digital literacy, leadership, and institutional integration influence the effectiveness of participation, while key challenges include the digital divide, weak platform maintenance, and minimal integration with formal planning. In conclusion, digital participation can strengthen autonomy if supported by strong governance, a hybrid model, and consistent feedback mechanisms.

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INTRODUCTION

Village development in Indonesia has increasingly become a central focus of national policy over the past decade, particularly through instruments such as village funds and participatory village planning (Putra, 2023). Public participation in village planning is considered essential because local communities possess the most accurate knowledge of their own needs, conditions, and potential (Hardiyanti & Zetra, 2021; Laliboso et al., 2025). However, in practice, community participation is often limited to village authorities, and local elites tend to dominate planning processes, marginalizing citizens' opportunities to contribute meaningfully to strategic decision-making (Rompas et al., 2023).

Alongside the rapid development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), new opportunities have emerged to expand public participation through digital platforms that allow villagers to submit aspirations and feedback and to strengthen social oversight in the development process (Salsabila, 2024; Purnamasari et al., 2025). Digital transformation at the village level has been recognized as part of broader efforts to create more transparent, accountable, and responsive governance (Zulmasyhur et al., 2024). Entering the 2025 era, the demand for more inclusive and effective village development is increasingly urgent, especially as disparities among villages persist and many communities still face difficulties in participating optimally in development planning (Larisu & Jopang, 2022).

Nevertheless, digitalization at the village level does not automatically guarantee meaningful public participation. A study by Khaerunnisa et al. (2025) indicates that

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village e-government platforms often emphasize administrative efficiency and financial transparency rather than facilitating interactive citizen engagement in planning or decision-making processes. Factors such as digital literacy, internet accessibility, and the limited interactive features of digital platforms significantly constrain the effectiveness of digital participation (Salsabila, 2024). Therefore, participatory approaches that utilize digital channels require systematic examination, particularly to determine the extent to which digitalization enables substantive public participation in village development planning, and whether such initiatives align with the broader goal of achieving people-responsive regional autonomy. The 2025 era, characterized by technological progress and the growing demand for inclusive governance, presents both opportunities and challenges for advancing democratic and participatory village administration.

The urgency of this study arises from the empirical need to understand how effective digital public participation can be within the context of village development. On one hand, the literature on traditional forms of participation, such as village meetings, community forums, and face-to-face consultations, is extensive, but research on digital participation mechanisms at the village level in Indonesia remains limited and fragmented (Salsabila, 2024; Purnamasari et al., 2025). On the other hand, national policies continue to accelerate village-level digitalization, making it crucial to provide evidence-based insights into how digital participation can be strengthened and institutionalized.

A previous study by Putra (2024) has examined community participation in village development planning through conventional approaches, showing that such participation often remains symbolic or limited, with citizens generally positioned as recipients of information rather than active contributors to decision-making. Meanwhile, research by Casnoto (2024) and Salsabila (2024) on e-participation in public policy highlights its potential to create two-way digital communication between governments and citizens, yet this potential is frequently hindered by digital divides and limited ICT capacities among both officials and communities. These findings suggest that despite growing opportunities, there is still no comprehensive understanding of how digital participation can be effectively implemented in the context of village development in Indonesia.

Based on the background and existing gaps in the literature, this study aims to analyze how digital public participation in village development planning can serve as a manifestation of people-responsive regional autonomy in the 2025 era by focusing on its mechanisms, challenges, and supporting factors. Specifically, this study seeks to describe the forms and levels of digital public participation in village development planning, identify the factors influencing the effectiveness of digital participation, and provide policy recommendations for village governments to enhance citizen participation through digital channels.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public Participation in Village Development Planning

Public participation in village development planning is a critical element for achieving responsive and democratic governance. This concept emphasizes the involvement of local communities, as they possess the most accurate knowledge about the needs, conditions, and potentials of their villages (Saputra & Jayawarsa, 2023; Chakim et al., 2023; Ramaano, 2024). Traditionally, participation occurs through village meetings, community forums, and face-to-face consultations, enabling citizens to provide aspirations and input on development plans. However, empirical studies indicate that in practice, participation is often symbolic and limited. Local elites and village authorities dominate the planning process, leaving citizens primarily as recipients of information rather than active contributors to strategic decision-making (Srirejeki & Khairurriszqo, 2025; Kuhlengisa et al., 2025). In addition, limited institutional capacity and informal participation mechanisms hinder optimal community involvement. The concept of public participation also emphasizes government accountability, transparency in decision-making processes, and the creation of inclusive decisions that reflect community needs (Rijal, 2023; Sari, 2023). Therefore, public participation serves as a foundational element

for realizing people-responsive village autonomy and supporting development that aligns with citizens' real aspirations. A clear understanding of this concept provides the basis for exploring how digitalization can enhance citizen engagement in village development planning.

The Role of Digitalization in Public Participation

Digitalization in village governance has emerged as a key innovation to enhance public participation through electronic platforms, applications, and online media (Yar, 2024). This transformation enables citizens to submit aspirations, provide feedback, and monitor village development processes in real-time (Salsabila, 2024; Purnamasari et al., 2025). Unlike traditional participation, digital mechanisms offer interactive features such as online consultations, digital suggestion collection, and collaborative planning, reaching a broader audience without limitations of location or time (Sharma et al., 2022; Secinaro et al., 2022). These platforms allow more inclusive engagement, potentially improving transparency and accountability in village governance. However, the effectiveness of digital participation is contingent on several factors, including the availability of digital infrastructure, citizens' digital literacy, leadership commitment, and the integration of digital platforms into formal planning processes (Anzar et al., 2024; Khaerunnisa et al., 2025). Without these conditions, the intended benefits of digitalization may not be fully realized, and some communities risk being excluded.

Despite its potential, the implementation of digital participation faces challenges such as digital divides between villages, weak platform maintenance, unequal citizen involvement, and data security concerns (Zulmasyhur et al., 2024). Studies indicate that successful digitalization requires hybrid approaches that combine online mechanisms with traditional face-to-face participation, ensuring consistent feedback loops and genuine accommodation of citizen aspirations. Digitalization, therefore, is not merely an administrative tool but a strategic instrument to achieve inclusive and people-responsive village autonomy in the 2025 era. By addressing infrastructure gaps, enhancing digital literacy, and fostering committed leadership, villages can leverage technology to strengthen democratic engagement and co-creation in local development planning (Anzar et al., 2024; Khaerunnisa et al., 2025).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a literature study design, aiming to analyze concepts, empirical findings, and theoretical developments related to digital public participation in village development planning as a manifestation of people-responsive regional autonomy in the 2025 era. The literature study method was chosen because this research does not involve direct field data collection but instead focuses on a critical examination of previously published scholarly works, including journal articles, academic books, policy reports, and governmental regulations. Creswell (2021) explains that qualitative research based on literature allows researchers to interpret various sources comprehensively, leading to an in-depth conceptual understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

The study relies exclusively on secondary data, consisting of reputable national and international journal articles, academic books, research reports, legislation such as Law Number 6 of 2014 on Villages, and official policy documents related to digital governance and community participation. Secondary data is used to enrich perspectives and provide a strong scientific foundation for analyzing the conceptualization of digital participation and regional autonomy. According to Zed (2018), literature-based research utilizes written references systematically to build an analytical framework.

Data collection was carried out through systematic searching and screening techniques using academic databases such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, Scopus, and Garuda. Keywords employed included "digital public participation," "e-participation," "village development planning," and "regional autonomy." Each identified source was screened using the following inclusion criteria: relevance to the research topic, publication within

the last ten years, and containing conceptual or empirical insights related to digital participation in village governance. This systematic selection process follows the guidelines of literature review methodology outlined by Snyder (2019), who emphasizes the importance of structured searching, screening, and synthesizing to ensure the quality and relevance of academic sources.

The collected data were analyzed using content analysis, following the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing as proposed by Miles et al. (2020). Content analysis was applied to identify major themes emerging from the literature, including forms of digital public participation, enabling and constraining factors, implications for village development planning, and the relationship between digital participatory governance and people-responsive regional autonomy. The analysis was conducted inductively, whereby patterns and conceptual relationships were derived from the literature. This approach enables the researcher to understand how digitalization strengthens public participation and enhances the effectiveness of village development planning within the broader context of regional autonomy in the 2025 era.

RESULTS

Digital Public Participation in Village Development Planning

Digital public participation in village-level planning manifests in several distinct forms. First, there is digital information disclosure, such as posting draft village development plans (*Rencana Kerja Pemerintah Desa/RKPD*es), budget allocations, and project timelines on village websites or digital dashboards, allowing residents to access, review, and understand planning documents. Second, digital consultation mechanisms, for example, using e-government platforms or online feedback forms where villagers submit aspirations or suggestions, have been implemented in various “smart village” initiatives (Syaljumairi et al., 2024). Third, interactive participation through polls, voting, or priority-setting exercises is emerging, sometimes in combination with traditional deliberations to decide village development priorities (Hart & Connolly, 2022; Hall et al., 2023). Fourth, co-creation and monitoring, wherein community members can track progress of development projects, report issues, or contribute ideas, is seen in villages using comprehensive digital governance systems (Lang et al., 2024; Hajar & Arma, 2024).

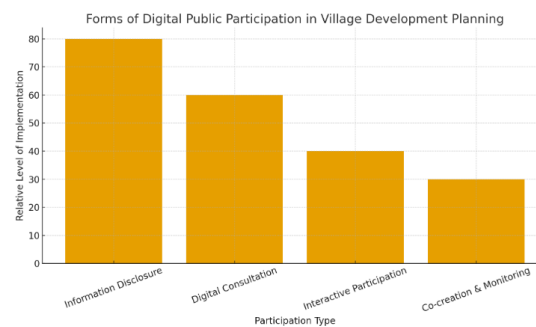


Figure 1. Forms of Digital Public Participation in Village Development Planning

Figure 1 shows that the level of participation across villages varies widely. In villages equipped with adequate infrastructure and active smart-village programs, participation tends to reach beyond mere information access, some communities report active engagement with decision-making processes via digital channels (Hutauruk et al., 2023; Purnamasari et al., 2025). Conversely, in villages lacking digital infrastructure or with low digital literacy, participation remains superficial or limited to administrative interactions rather than planning or decision-making (Adnan et al., 2024; Saputra & Tukiman, 2024). This disparity reflects a phenomenon like a “digital divide”: digital participation often mirrors existing social and infrastructural inequalities.

A concrete case illustrating higher-level engagement is the “smart village” program in Banyuwangi Regency, where village governments deploy digital platforms to disseminate

planning documents, collect public input, and publicize development progress, contributing to increased transparency, citizen engagement, and even village branding (Wargadinata, 2021; Oktarina et al., 2023). On the other hand, studies in villages such as Talaga Jaya (Garut) or Socorejo (Tuban) report that digital governance often remains limited to service delivery or administrative functions, while participatory planning remains informal or offline (Adnan et al., 2024; Saputra & Tukiman, 2024). Thus, while digital tools for participation exist in many Indonesian villages, their use for participatory planning is uneven, with most villages still operating at the lower tiers of “information” or “consultation,” and only a few reaching “active participation/co-creation.”

Determinants, Mechanisms, and Challenges of Digital Participation

Based on literature and case studies, several mechanisms enable digital public participation to effectively influence village planning. First, transparency through information disclosure allows village governments to publish planning documents and budget data online, enabling residents to review priorities and proposed allocations and provide informed input (Saputra & Tukiman, 2024). Second, interactive digital engagement tools, such as feedback forms, comment sections, polls, or surveys, allow villagers to express their preferences or concerns remotely and asynchronously (Hutauruk et al., 2023; Purnamasari et al., 2025). Third, integration with formal planning cycles makes digital input meaningful when village administrations include it in official planning stages (Hart & Connolly, 2022; Hall et al., 2023). Fourth, institutional support and follow-up through a “feedback loop” strengthen trust and ongoing participation when village governments acknowledge, discuss, and act on residents’ suggestions (Lang et al., 2024; Hajar & Arma, 2024). Fifth, local leadership and community facilitation, through motivated village leaders or “digital champions” who guide and encourage community use of digital tools, enhance participation and bridge the gap between technology and local social dynamics (Hutauruk et al., 2023; Purnamasari et al., 2025). Thus, these mechanisms form a model of digital-participatory governance, where ICT-based participation is not merely optional but structurally embedded in government and decision-making processes.

The effectiveness of digital public participation at the village level depends on several interrelated factors. Technical and infrastructure factors are fundamental, including adequate internet connectivity, the availability of devices such as smartphones or computers, and stable digital platforms. Villages with poor connectivity, limited access, or a lack of devices tend to have low or negligible digital participation (Oklikah et al., 2025; Latip et al., 2025). In addition, residents’ digital literacy and socio-cultural readiness play a crucial role, as even when infrastructure exists, villagers need the skills to interact with online platforms.

Digital literacy gaps, particularly among older adults, women, or economically marginalized groups, can result in unequal participation and reproduce existing inequalities, while socio-cultural factors such as trust in government, traditions of participation, and a sense of ownership also influence willingness to engage (Hutauruk et al., 2023; Ubed et al., 2025). Institutional and governance capacity is also essential, as village administrations require human, financial, and organizational resources to maintain digital platforms, process inputs, and ensure follow-up; without these capacities, digital participation tends to be episodic or symbolic (Adnan et al., 2024; Saputra & Tukiman, 2024). Furthermore, local leadership and community facilitation are crucial, where village leaders or “digital-governance champions” who guide, encourage, and facilitate community use of digital tools enhance participation and bridge the gap between technology and local social dynamics (Rinayuhani & Wachidah, 2025). Institutionalization and policy integration are important, digital participation must be formally recognized within village regulations and planning cycles to prevent digital input from being ignored or treated as informal (Purnamasari et al., 2025). Therefore, the combination of these factors determines whether digital platforms remain passive

information repositories or become dynamic arenas for genuine citizen engagement and participatory planning.

Table 1. Key Challenges and Risks in Digital Public Participation

No	Challenge / Risk	Description
1	Digital Divide	Limited internet access, low digital literacy, uneven device ownership (Hutauruk et al., 2021; Adnan et al., 2024).
2	Institutional Inertia & Limited Resources	Village websites/apps created but abandoned due to lack of funding or skilled staff (Saadah et al., 2024; Saputra & Tukiman, 2024).
3	Unequal Participation	Digital platforms are dominated by youth/educated users; marginalized groups rarely participate (Syaljumairi et al., 2024).
4	Weak Integration with Formal Planning	Digital inputs not linked to Musrenbangdes or official planning cycles (Purnamasari et al., 2025).
5	Data Privacy & Security Risks	Concerns over misuse of personal data; weak cybersecurity in village platforms (Saadah et al., 2024).

Table 1 shows that digital public participation in villages faces structural, institutional, and technological barriers. Without addressing issues like the digital divide, limited resources, unequal access, weak planning integration, and data security, digital participation risks becoming symbolic rather than truly empowering citizens.

Implications for People-Responsive Regional Autonomy and Policy Directions

Effectively implemented digital public participation can enhance the responsiveness of regional (village) autonomy through several mechanisms. First, it broadens the base of citizen input, enabling more inclusive representation beyond traditional power holders or elite groups, thereby aligning village development with the real needs and preferences of the community (Hutauruk et al., 2023; Oktarina et al., 2024). Second, digital participation increases transparency and accountability, as planning documents, budget allocations, and project statuses are publicly accessible and subject to critical scrutiny (Saadah et al., 2024). Third, it enables faster feedback and flexible adaptive planning, which is particularly relevant in dynamic or crisis contexts, such as pandemics or economic shocks, and is an essential attribute of responsive local governance. Digital tools alone do not guarantee responsiveness. Without adequate institutional commitment, including formalizing digital participation in planning protocols, allocating resources for platform maintenance, building capacity, and implementing systematic feedback mechanisms, the potential of e-participation remains underutilized (Saputra & Tukiman, 2024; Purnamasari et al., 2025). Therefore, digital governance must be embedded within a broader governance culture that values citizen voice, equity, and transparency to realize the promise of people-responsive regional autonomy.

Based on the findings, several policy recommendations are proposed to strengthen digital public participation at the village level. First, a hybrid participation model combining digital tools, such as portals, feedback forms, and dashboards, with traditional deliberate forums, including village meetings and community gatherings, should be adopted to ensure inclusive participation, particularly for residents with limited digital access or literacy (Hutauruk et al., 2023; Oktarina et al., 2024). Second, investment in infrastructure and access is essential, including expanding internet connectivity in rural areas, providing public access points like village digital kiosks, and subsidizing devices or data for low-income populations. Third, digital literacy and community facilitation should be enhanced through targeted training programs for older adults, women, and marginalized groups, while appointing local “digital champions” to bridge the gap between technology and the community. Fourth, digital participation should be institutionalized within village planning cycles by revising regulations to formally include online consultation and citizen input mechanisms. Fifth, transparent feedback and accountability systems need to be established, ensuring that village administrations respond publicly to digital submissions, document follow-up actions, and report progress. Sixth, dedicated budgets and human resources should be allocated to maintain platforms, manage data, and support consistent community engagement. Finally, data privacy must

be protected, and citizen trust fostered through clear data governance policies and transparency regarding data use. By implementing these measures, digital public participation can move beyond limited administrative interactions toward meaningful community engagement, ultimately promoting democratic, responsive, and accountable village governance.

DISCUSSION

Digital public participation in village development planning holds significant potential to enhance people-responsive regional autonomy, yet its implementation faces multiple challenges (Hart & Connolly, 2022; Hall et al., 2023). According to the literature and case studies, digital participation in villages appears in several forms, including information disclosure, digital consultation, interactive participation, and co-creation with project monitoring (Saputra & Tukiman, 2024; Purnamasari et al., 2025). Information disclosure, such as posting RKPDes/RPJMDes drafts, budget allocations, and project schedules online, enables residents to access and understand development plans. Digital consultation mechanisms, including online feedback forms or e-government platforms, provide opportunities for citizens to submit aspirations and suggestions. Interactive participation, such as polls or priority-setting exercises, engages residents more actively, while co-creation and monitoring allow communities to track project progress and contribute directly to planning processes (Hutauruk et al., 2021; Setiawan et al., 2025).

However, participation levels vary widely between villages. Villages with adequate infrastructure and active “smart village” programs show higher citizen engagement, including in decision-making processes, whereas villages with limited digital literacy or infrastructure mostly achieve only information or administrative-level participation (Adnan et al., 2024; Saputra & Tukiman, 2024). This reflects a digital divide that mirrors existing social and infrastructural inequalities. The effectiveness of digital participation depends on a combination of technical factors, institutional capacity, residents’ digital literacy, local leadership, and the integration of digital mechanisms into formal planning cycles. Villages with proactive leadership and local digital champions tend to have more sustainable and effective digital participation ecosystems (Setiawan et al., 2025; Rinayuhani & Wachidah, 2025).

Despite its potential, digital participation faces significant challenges. Digital divides, limited resources, unequal engagement, weak integration with formal planning, and data privacy concerns are major barriers that may hinder meaningful e-participation (Saadah et al., 2024; Syaljumairi et al., 2024). Without institutional support and formal policy backing, digitalization risks remaining symbolic rather than empowering citizens. Digital public participation can broaden citizen input, increase transparency and accountability, and enable adaptive planning in dynamic or crisis situations (Hutauruk et al., 2023; Oktarina et al., 2024). However, its success depends on adopting a hybrid participation model (digital + offline), improving infrastructure and digital literacy, institutionalizing participation within planning cycles, establishing clear feedback mechanisms, and safeguarding citizen data (Oklikah et al., 2025; Latip et al., 2025). With these strategies, digitalization can transform public participation from limited administrative interaction to meaningful civic engagement, strengthening democratic, responsive, and accountable village governance in the 2025 era.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that digital public participation holds significant potential to support village development planning and strengthen people-responsive regional autonomy. Digital participation takes various forms, including online information disclosure, digital consultation mechanisms, interactive engagement, and co-creation with project monitoring. Participation levels, however, vary across villages. Those with adequate infrastructure and active “smart village” programs demonstrate higher citizen engagement, while villages with limited digital literacy or access tend to operate primarily

at the informational or administrative level. The effectiveness of digital participation is influenced by infrastructure availability, digital literacy, institutional capacity, leadership commitment, and the integration of digital mechanisms into formal planning cycles.

The findings imply that digital participation can enhance transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in village planning while improving the responsiveness of local governance. Yet, without institutional support, budget allocation, and systematic feedback mechanisms, the full potential of e-participation remains unrealized. Based on these insights, it is recommended that village governments adopt hybrid participation models combining digital and offline approaches, invest in infrastructure and digital literacy, formalize digital participation in planning regulations, ensure transparent feedback systems, protect data privacy, and allocate dedicated budgets and personnel for platform management. Future research should conduct field-based assessments of digital participation practices, evaluate their impact on decision-making quality, and explore community perceptions of digital governance across different village types and levels of digital maturity to provide a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to successful digital engagement.

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