

# Digital Governance: Citizen Perceptions and Expectations of Online Public Services

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This study aims to explore citizen perceptions and expectations of online public services within the context of digital governance. It seeks to identify the key factors that influence user satisfaction and trust in digital public services, thereby providing insights into how these services can be optimized to meet the evolving needs of the public. Adopting a qualitative research approach, the study conducted semi-structured interviews with 28 participants, selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in age, gender, socioeconomic status, and digital literacy levels. The interviews focused on participants' experiences and expectations regarding digital governance. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis to achieve theoretical saturation, identifying recurring themes and concepts related to digital public services. The analysis revealed four main themes: Access and Usability, Service Quality, Citizen Engagement, and Policy and Regulation. Within these themes, several categories and concepts were identified, including digital literacy, platform accessibility, service availability, user support, efficiency and speed, reliability, personalization, transparency, feedback and improvement, communication channels, participation opportunities, education and awareness, digital inclusion policies, data governance, e-government strategies, and cybersecurity measures. The study concludes that citizens' perceptions and expectations of online public services are shaped by a complex interplay of factors related to access, service quality, engagement, and regulatory policies. To enhance the effectiveness and equity of digital public services, it is imperative for policymakers and practitioners to adopt a citizen-centric approach that prioritizes accessibility, inclusivity, engagement, and ethical considerations.

**Keywords:** Digital Governance, Online Public Services, Citizen Perceptions, Service Quality, Citizen Engagement, Digital Inclusion, Data Governance.

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## 1. Introduction

The digital era has brought about a transformative shift in the way public services are delivered and consumed. The advent of digital government initiatives across the globe has not only reshaped the interface between government entities and citizens but has also prompted a reevaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of public service delivery. The pandemic has acted as a catalyst, accelerating digital transformation in

public service delivery, compelling governments and public agencies to rapidly adapt and innovate their digital offerings to meet the heightened demands and expectations of citizens (Agostino et al., 2020).

Digital transformation in the public sector encompasses the integration of digital technology into all areas of public service, fundamentally changing how services are delivered and citizens engage with their government. This transformation aims to improve the accessibility, transparency, and responsiveness of public services,



thereby enhancing the overall quality of citizen-government interactions (Gil-García et al., 2017). As governments worldwide strive to digitalize public services, understanding citizens' perceptions and expectations becomes crucial in designing, implementing, and evaluating digital government initiatives.

Citizen engagement and satisfaction with digital public services are contingent upon a myriad of factors, including the quality and reliability of online services, the ease of access and usability of digital platforms, and the transparency and responsiveness of digital governance mechanisms (Andrews & Walle, 2013). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of digital public services in ensuring continuity of government functions and services amidst unprecedented challenges, highlighting the role of digital governance as a critical component in crisis response and management (Amosun et al., 2021).

The literature on digital governance suggests that citizens' expectations of online public services are influenced by their experiences and interactions with digital platforms, which in turn shape their perceptions of government efficiency, effectiveness, and equity (Belanche et al., 2010). These perceptions are critical in fostering trust and confidence in digital government initiatives, which are essential for encouraging adoption and sustained use of digital public services (Janssen et al., 2017). Moreover, the digitalization of public services presents opportunities and challenges in addressing the digital divide, ensuring that digital government initiatives are inclusive and accessible to all segments of the population (Distel & Lindgren, 2019).

Research has also highlighted the role of digital governance in enhancing citizen participation and engagement in public service delivery and decision-making processes. Digital platforms offer new avenues for citizen involvement, facilitating more direct and interactive forms of communication between citizens and government officials (Naranjo-Zolotov et al., 2019). This enhanced engagement is pivotal in promoting transparency, accountability, and co-creation of public services, thereby contributing to more democratic and participatory governance models (El-Haddadeh et al., 2019).

However, the successful implementation of digital government initiatives is not without its challenges.

Concerns regarding privacy, data security, and the ethical use of technology in public administration underscore the need for robust governance frameworks that prioritize ethical considerations and protect citizens' rights in the digital realm (Floridi, 2018). Furthermore, achieving transparency and accountability in digital governance requires continuous monitoring and evaluation of digital services, ensuring that they meet the evolving needs and expectations of citizens (Lindquist & Huse, 2017).

In light of these considerations, this study aims to explore citizen perceptions and expectations of online public services, with a particular focus on the impact of digital transformation on public service delivery. Through qualitative research involving semi-structured interviews with citizens, this study seeks to uncover the nuanced dynamics of digital governance from the perspective of those it serves. The findings of this research are expected to contribute to the ongoing discourse on digital governance, offering insights into how digital public services can be optimized to meet the diverse needs and expectations of citizens.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology to explore citizen perceptions and expectations of online public services. The qualitative approach is chosen due to its suitability in understanding complex phenomena from the perspective of those experiencing it. This method allows for in-depth insights into citizens' attitudes, experiences, and expectations regarding digital governance.

Participants were selected using a purposive sampling strategy to ensure a diverse representation of citizens in terms of age, gender, socioeconomic status, and digital literacy levels. This strategy aimed to capture a wide range of experiences and expectations concerning online public services.

Interviews were conducted until theoretical saturation was achieved, meaning no new themes or insights were emerging from the data. This saturation point was determined after analyzing the data from initial interviews and continuously comparing it with data from subsequent interviews. In total, 28 interviews were conducted, each lasting approximately 30 to 60 minutes.

All interviews were conducted either in person or via secure online platforms, depending on participants' preferences and ensuring adherence to ethical considerations and data protection protocols.

Participants were informed about the study's purpose, their voluntary participation, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any time without any consequences. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before conducting the interviews.

## 2.2. Measures

### 2.2.1. Semi-Structured Interview

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which were designed to elicit detailed responses from participants. The semi-structured format provided a flexible interview guide with predetermined questions, yet allowed for spontaneous follow-up questions and probes based on interviewee responses. This approach facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives while maintaining focus on the research objectives.

## 2.3. Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved a rigorous process of coding the data in stages, starting with open coding to identify initial themes, followed by axial coding to explore relationships between themes, and finally, selective coding to refine and finalize the themes. The

analysis was performed using MaxQDA, which facilitated the organization and management of the data.

## 3. Findings and Results

In the study, a total of 28 participants were engaged to explore their perceptions and expectations of online public services within the realm of digital governance. The demographic composition of the participants was diverse, aimed at capturing a broad spectrum of experiences and viewpoints. Of these, 15 identified as female and 13 as male, providing a balanced gender perspective. The age distribution spanned from young adults to older citizens, with 6 participants aged 18-25, 8 participants aged 26-35, 7 participants aged 36-50, and 7 participants over the age of 50, ensuring a wide range of digital literacy and engagement levels. In terms of employment status, 10 were employed full-time, 5 were part-time workers, 8 were self-employed, and 5 were retirees, reflecting a variety of experiences with online public services in both professional and personal capacities. The participants also varied in educational background, with 4 holding a high school diploma, 12 having completed undergraduate degrees, and 12 possessing postgraduate qualifications, providing insights into the accessibility and usability of digital governance across different levels of educational attainment. This demographic diversity supports a comprehensive analysis of citizen perceptions and expectations, contributing valuable perspectives to the study of digital governance.

**Table 1**

*Categories, Subcategories and Concepts*

Categories	Subcategories	Concepts (Open Codes)
Access and Usability	Digital Literacy	Self-efficacy, Online navigation skills, Information searching, Technological barriers, Comfort level
	Platform Accessibility	Mobile optimization, Website navigation, User interface, Language options, Accessibility features
	Service Availability	24/7 access, Service downtime, Maintenance schedules, Response times, Multi-platform support
	User Support	FAQs, Live chat support, Hotline services, User manuals, Tutorial videos
Service Quality	Privacy and Security	Data protection, User authentication, Encryption, Privacy policies, Anonymity
	Efficiency and Speed	Transaction speed, Process simplification, Real-time updates, Automated responses, Queue management
	Reliability	Service consistency, Accuracy of information, System reliability, Bug frequency, Update regularity
	Personalization	User preferences, Custom notifications, Tailored services, Personal data usage, Account settings
	Transparency	Policy clarity, Service procedures, Decision-making processes, User feedback mechanisms, Outcome visibility

Citizen Engagement	Feedback and Improvement	User reviews, Satisfaction surveys, Complaint handling, Improvement cycles, Feedback utilization
	Communication Channels	Social media, Email newsletters, Public forums, Official websites, Notification services
	Participation Opportunities	Surveys and polls, Public consultations, Volunteer programs, Community projects, Feedback loops
Policy and Regulation	Education and Awareness	Informational campaigns, Educational programs, Public service announcements, Resource availability, Workshop and seminars
	Digital Inclusion Policies	Accessibility standards, Digital divide mitigation, Inclusive design, Subsidized access programs, Special needs accommodation
	Data Governance	Data collection policies, Usage restrictions, Sharing regulations, International standards, Compliance monitoring
	E-Government Strategies	Digital transformation goals, Strategic planning, Implementation frameworks, Partnership models, Innovation incentives
	Cybersecurity Measures	Threat detection, Risk management, Incident response plans, Security training, Cross-sector collaboration

### 3.1. Access and Usability

Access and Usability emerged as a fundamental category, highlighting citizens' experiences with the digital interface of public services. Subthemes within this category include Digital Literacy, Platform Accessibility, Service Availability, and User Support.

Digital Literacy: Participants expressed varying levels of comfort and skill in navigating online services. One interviewee noted, "I sometimes find it hard to know where to click next, which makes me anxious about using online services."

Platform Accessibility: Many underscored the importance of mobile-friendly services, with a participant stating, "If I can't access it on my phone smoothly, it's as if the service doesn't exist for me."

Service Availability: Availability was crucial, with an interviewee mentioning, "I appreciate that I can access the service any time, but when it's down, it's really disruptive."

User Support: Effective support mechanisms were valued, as highlighted by a participant: "When I get stuck, a quick chat with support or a helpful video makes a huge difference."

### 3.2. Service Quality

Service Quality was identified as a critical category, encompassing Efficiency and Speed, Reliability, Personalization, Transparency, and Feedback and Improvement.

Efficiency and Speed: The speed of completing transactions was a significant concern. "The quicker I can

get things done, the better. Time is precious," one user mentioned.

Reliability: Reliability of information and services was paramount, with a participant stating, "I need to trust that the service will work as expected every time."

Personalization: Users appreciated personalized experiences. "Seeing services tailored to my needs makes the whole experience feel more human," an interviewee reflected.

### 3.3. Citizen Engagement

Citizen Engagement focused on how individuals interact with and contribute to digital governance, including Communication Channels, Participation Opportunities, and Education and Awareness.

Communication Channels: Effective communication was deemed essential. "I rely on updates through their social media; it feels more direct," said a participant.

Participation Opportunities: Opportunities for feedback and involvement were valued, with one stating, "I feel more part of the community when I can contribute my views on new services."

### 3.4. Policy and Regulation

Policy and Regulation encompassed Digital Inclusion Policies, Data Governance, E-Government Strategies, and Cybersecurity Measures.

Digital Inclusion Policies: The need for inclusive access was highlighted, "It's important that everyone, regardless of their background, can use these services."

Data Governance: Concerns around data privacy were common, with an interviewee expressing, "I want to know my data is handled responsibly and with respect."

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The thematic analysis of citizen perceptions and expectations regarding online public services revealed four main themes, each encompassing several categories that collectively capture the nuances of digital governance. These themes are Access and Usability, Service Quality, Citizen Engagement, and Policy and Regulation. Within these themes, the study identified a diverse range of categories, such as Digital Literacy, Platform Accessibility, Service Availability, and User Support under Access and Usability; Efficiency and Speed, Reliability, Personalization, Transparency, and Feedback and Improvement under Service Quality; Communication Channels, Participation Opportunities, and Education and Awareness under Citizen Engagement; and Digital Inclusion Policies, Data Governance, E-Government Strategies, and Cybersecurity Measures under Policy and Regulation.

The theme of Access and Usability underscored the foundational aspects of citizens' interactions with online public services. Within this theme, categories such as Digital Literacy highlighted concepts like self-efficacy and online navigation skills, emphasizing the need for services that accommodate varying levels of digital proficiency. Platform Accessibility focused on making digital services navigable and user-friendly across different devices, with concepts like mobile optimization and user interface design being paramount. Service Availability and User Support were identified as critical for ensuring that digital services are accessible when needed and that help is available through various means, including FAQs and live chat support, to assist users in navigating these services.

Service Quality emerged as a critical theme, reflecting the expectations citizens have regarding the performance of online public services. Efficiency and Speed were underscored by concepts such as transaction speed and process simplification, highlighting the demand for quick and streamlined services. Reliability was another category, where accuracy of information and system reliability were key concepts, pointing to the importance of dependable services. Personalization, Transparency, and Feedback and Improvement were also identified as categories within this theme, emphasizing the need for services that cater to individual user needs, are

transparent in their operations, and continuously incorporate user feedback for service enhancement.

Under the theme of Citizen Engagement, the study identified the significance of fostering a two-way interaction between the government and citizens. Communication Channels such as social media and email newsletters were emphasized, along with Participation Opportunities that include surveys and public consultations, highlighting the diverse avenues for citizen involvement in public service design and delivery. Education and Awareness focused on the role of informational campaigns and educational programs in enhancing public understanding and engagement with digital services.

The theme of Policy and Regulation highlighted the overarching frameworks that govern the provision of digital public services. Digital Inclusion Policies and Data Governance were central categories, with concepts such as accessibility standards and data protection policies underscoring the need for inclusive and secure digital services. E-Government Strategies and Cybersecurity Measures were also identified, emphasizing the strategic planning and security protocols necessary to support the sustainable and safe delivery of digital services.

The accelerated digital transformation of public service delivery, catalyzed by the COVID-19 pandemic, has underscored the urgency of enhancing digital capabilities to meet citizens' evolving needs ([Agostino et al., 2020](#)). This transformation is not merely about the adoption of digital technologies but also involves a fundamental shift in how services are conceptualized, designed, and delivered, with a strong emphasis on accessibility, usability, and reliability. The pandemic has served as a stark reminder of the indispensability of robust, efficient, and inclusive digital public services in times of crisis ([Amosun et al., 2021](#)).

Our findings underscore the importance of digital literacy and platform accessibility as pivotal components of access and usability, aligning with [Distel and Lindgren \(2019\)](#), who highlighted the diverse user base of digital public services. Ensuring that online platforms are accessible and navigable for all citizens, irrespective of their digital proficiency, is essential for fostering inclusive digital governance ([Distel & Lindgren, 2019](#)). This aspect is crucial for mitigating the digital divide and ensuring that the benefits of digital transformation are



equitably distributed across all segments of the population.

Moreover, the study highlights the significance of service quality, particularly the efficiency, reliability, and personalization of online services. These factors are instrumental in shaping citizens' satisfaction and trust in digital government initiatives (Belanche et al., 2010). Trustworthiness, as elaborated by Janssen et al. (2017), emerges as a cornerstone of effective digital governance, with transparency and accountability playing vital roles in cultivating trust and confidence among citizens (Janssen et al., 2017).

Citizen engagement and participation are also identified as key facets of digital governance, echoing the findings of Naranjo-Zolotov et al. (2019), who emphasized the potential of digital platforms to enhance e-participation and civic engagement (Naranjo-Zolotov et al., 2019). The study further reveals that effective communication and participatory opportunities can significantly enhance citizens' perceptions of government responsiveness and effectiveness, supporting the assertions made by Porumbescu (2016) regarding the positive impact of transparency on government performance perceptions (Porumbescu, 2016).

Additionally, our research aligns with the ethical considerations and governance challenges highlighted by Floridi (2018) and Pakhnenko and Kuan (2023), underscoring the imperative of embedding ethical principles in the design and implementation of digital government initiatives (Floridi, 2018; Pakhnenko & Kuan, 2023). Addressing ethical concerns, particularly in relation to privacy and data security, is critical for ensuring that digital transformation efforts are grounded in respect for citizens' rights and privacy.

In discussing the results, it is evident that the successful delivery of online public services hinges on a holistic approach that encompasses not only the technological aspects but also the socio-ethical dimensions of digital governance. As Gil-García et al. (2017) suggest, finding the crossroads between digital government and public management research is essential for advancing our understanding of digital governance and enhancing the effectiveness of digital public services (Gil-García et al., 2017).

This study has provided a comprehensive analysis of citizen perceptions and expectations regarding online public services within the context of digital governance.

The findings underscore the importance of access and usability, with specific emphasis on digital literacy and platform accessibility, as critical factors that influence citizen engagement with digital public services. Service quality, characterized by efficiency, reliability, and personalization, emerged as a pivotal determinant of user satisfaction and trust in digital government initiatives. Furthermore, the study highlighted the significance of citizen engagement, revealing that enhanced communication channels and participatory opportunities could bolster perceptions of government responsiveness and effectiveness. Ethical considerations and governance challenges, particularly concerning privacy and data security, were also identified as crucial elements that must be addressed to foster trust and confidence among citizens in digital governance initiatives.

In synthesizing these findings, it is evident that digital transformation in public service delivery presents both opportunities and challenges. To maximize the benefits and mitigate potential drawbacks, it is imperative for policymakers and practitioners to adopt a citizen-centric approach that prioritizes accessibility, inclusivity, and engagement. Ensuring the ethical use of digital technologies and safeguarding citizens' privacy and data security are essential to maintaining trust and confidence in digital government services.

The study's limitations include its reliance on qualitative methods and the potential for selection bias in the sample of participants. While the qualitative approach facilitated in-depth insights into citizen perceptions and expectations, the findings may not be generalizable to all populations. Additionally, the focus on semi-structured interviews, though valuable for capturing nuanced perspectives, may have limited the scope of feedback and overlooked broader trends that could be identified through quantitative methods.

Future research should aim to address the limitations of this study by incorporating a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative insights with quantitative data to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, longitudinal studies could offer valuable perspectives on how citizen perceptions and expectations evolve over time, particularly in response to rapid technological advancements and changes in digital governance practices. Exploring the impact of cultural and socioeconomic factors on the adoption and satisfaction

with digital public services would also enrich the understanding of digital governance dynamics. For practitioners, the study emphasizes the importance of designing and implementing digital public services that are accessible, reliable, and personalized. Governments should invest in digital literacy programs to ensure that all citizens can benefit from online services, thereby reducing the digital divide. Engagement strategies should be reevaluated to include more interactive and participatory platforms, fostering a sense of community and co-creation in public service delivery. Additionally, ethical considerations and data security measures must be integral to digital governance frameworks to maintain citizen trust. By prioritizing these areas, policymakers and public administrators can enhance the effectiveness and equity of digital public services, contributing to more inclusive and responsive governance.

### Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

### Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

### Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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### Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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### Ethics Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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