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Public Trust and the Service-Participation Gap in Digital Government: Evidence from Kendari, Indonesia

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Abstract

Digital government is expected to support efficient service delivery and participatory government–citizen relations. This study examines service quality, public trust, user satisfaction, and digital participation among users of digital government services in Kendari City, Indonesia, and considers their implications for partnership-oriented local governance in relation to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Targets 17.16 and 17.17. A cross-sectional survey of 213 purposively selected users was analysed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, Pearson correlations, multiple linear regression, and Kruskal–Wallis tests. Service quality (M = 3.81), public trust (M = 3.91), and user satisfaction (M = 4.08) were rated more positively than digital participation (M = 3.29), while digital feedback received the lowest item score (M = 2.59). Digital participation was positively correlated with all three predictors. The regression model was significant, $F(3, 209) = 7.160$, $p < .001$, explaining 9.3% of the variance in participation. Public trust showed a significant positive association with participation ($\beta = .198$, $p = .005$), whereas service quality was not significant and user satisfaction was at the conventional significance boundary. Participation did not differ significantly across age or educational groups. The findings reveal a service-participation gap: favourable service experiences do not automatically translate into active citizen input. Digital participation may therefore provide a foundation for partnership-oriented local governance, but not direct evidence of multi-stakeholder partnerships or SDG achievement.

Keywords: *Digital Government; Digital Participation; Public Trust; Local Governance*

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Introduction

In recent years, public administration has come to depend heavily on digital technologies as a means of shaping, providing, and overseeing public services, a shift that has changed the way public administration operates at its core. Across both developed and developing countries, digital government has become a central strategy for public sector reform by improving administrative efficiency, expanding service accessibility, increasing transparency, and enhancing government accountability. However, contemporary digital transformation extends beyond the digitalisation of administrative procedures. Increasingly, governments are expected to develop digital ecosystems that facilitate interaction, collaboration, and co-creation with citizens, thereby shifting the focus from technology-driven administration towards citizen-centred governance (Lee-Geiller & Lee, 2022; Sanina et al., 2024; Tolbert et al., 2008). Digital government, then, is not simply the adoption of information and communication technology (ICT) in public administration, but an institutional means of reinforcing democratic governance through more inclusive and participatory government–citizen relations.

This relational dimension connects digital government with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17. Targets 17.16 and 17.17 emphasise cooperation among governments, civil society, private actors, and other stakeholders. Digital channels can support these objectives by improving access to public information, enabling two-way communication, and widening opportunities for participation (Bulmer & del Prado-Higuera, 2023; Marcovecchio et al., 2019; Rodrigues et al., 2021; Stafford-Smith et al., 2017; Zhao et al., 2023). Citizen participation alone does not constitute a multi-stakeholder partnership. It can, however, provide an institutional basis for more reciprocal relationships between government and society when public input is incorporated into administrative or policy processes.

Despite substantial progress, digital transformation remains uneven across countries because of differences in infrastructure, institutional capacity, digital literacy, and opportunities for citizen participation. These constraints are particularly salient across the Global South, where governments are expanding digital services amid persistent institutional and socioeconomic inequalities. Studies from developing-country contexts show that implementing e-government does not automatically produce meaningful participation or collaborative digital governance (Djatmiko et al., 2025; Jameel et al., 2019; Kampira & Mukonza, 2025; Kosherbayeva & Kylbayev, 2025; Sanina et al., 2024). Evidence from Asia, Africa, and Latin America consistently suggests that technological availability alone is insufficient to achieve sustainable digital transformation. Rather, digital government succeeds only when citizens trust public institutions, are satisfied with digital services, and are willing to engage in governance (Dioses et al., 2021; Faller, 2025; Galvez & Revinova, 2025; Kibria & Hong, 2024; Li & Li, 2022; Luo et al., 2024; Osah & Khene, 2018; Ramadimetjar et al., 2024; Usas & Streimikiene, 2025).

Existing scholarship has substantially advanced the understanding of digital government adoption by examining the technological, organisational, and behavioural

determinants of citizens' acceptance of digital public services (Alguliyev et al., 2018; Atique et al., 2024; Kampira & Mukonza, 2025; Wirtz & Piehler, 2016; Zhang & Pi, 2014). Much of this work focuses on technology adoption, system quality, institutional readiness, and organisational capacity through frameworks such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) (AlAwadhi & Morris, 2008; Dečman, 2019; Mensah et al., 2021; Umar et al., 2026; Zeebaree et al., 2022). A related body of research examines service quality, trust, and satisfaction as determinants of adoption or continuance (Dioses et al., 2021; Galvez & Revinova, 2025; Luo et al., 2024; Saldanha et al., 2022; Taufiqurokhman et al., 2024; Zubir & Abdul Latip, 2024). These studies clarify why citizens use digital services, but they provide a less complete account of whether positive service experiences extend to participation in digital government.

Despite these contributions, two research gaps remain. First, existing studies have primarily examined service quality, public trust, and user satisfaction as determinants of digital government adoption, acceptance, and continued use, with less attention to their relationships with citizen participation beyond routine service use. Consequently, how positive service experiences relate to access to government information, perceived responsiveness, and active feedback remains insufficiently understood. Second, empirical evidence from medium-sized cities in the Global South remains limited, particularly at the subnational level, where institutional capacity, digital service implementation, and opportunities for citizen engagement vary. To address these gaps, this study examines the relationships between service quality, public trust, user satisfaction, and digital participation among digital government users in Kendari City, Indonesia. Its novelty lies in integrating service-delivery evaluations and citizen participation within a single empirical analysis, providing insights into the service-participation gap in local digital governance.

Table 1. Indonesia's Recent Progress in SPBE Implementation
Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2024)

Indicator	2022	2023	2024
National SPBE Index	2.34	2.79	3.12
Quality Category	Fair	Good	Good
UN EGDI Ranking	77th	–	64th

Indonesia provides a pertinent national setting for investigating this gap because rapid national progress in digital government coexists with decentralised implementation across diverse local governments. The national Electronic-Based Government System (Sistem Pemerintahan Berbasis Elektronik; SPBE) Index increased from 2.34 in 2022 to 3.12 in 2024, while Indonesia rose from 77th to 64th in the United Nations E-Government Development Index (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2024). As summarised in Table 1, these indicators point to broader national

progress in digital government. These gains demonstrate improved institutional readiness at the aggregate level, but they cannot establish whether citizens in particular municipalities trust digital services or use them to participate. A city-level analysis therefore links national transformation to citizen-level evidence and reveals dimensions that national rankings do not capture.

Kendari City offers an analytically relevant local case. The city has expanded digital services for population administration, licensing, taxation, public information, complaints, and other municipal functions. However, its 2024 SPBE score of 3.23 remained below the scores of South Konawe and Kolaka Regencies, both at 3.68 (Kementerian PANRB, 2024). As shown in Table 2, this comparison does not itself demonstrate weaker citizen participation; rather, it locates Kendari within subnational variation in digital government performance. Earlier local studies also identify continuing issues involving service awareness, access, and the use of government digital channels (La Tarifu et al., 2022; Loka et al., 2022; Ramdani et al., 2021). Kendari thus provides a suitable setting for examining whether the expansion of digital services is accompanied by trust, satisfaction, and participatory engagement among users.

Table 2. Comparative SPBE Performance of Selected Local Governments
Source: Kementerian PANRB (2024)

Local Government	SPBE Index	Performance Category
South Konawe Regency	3.68	Very Good
Kolaka Regency	3.68	Very Good
Kendari City	3.23	Good

In this setting, the central governance problem is a potential service-participation gap: digital services may improve transactional interactions without necessarily generating active citizen input. Assessing digital government solely through technological capacity or service standards can therefore overlook its relational and participatory outcomes. This study examines public trust and digital participation as citizen-side dimensions of more reciprocal local governance. Digital participation is operationalised through access to government information, perceived responsiveness, and the provision of feedback. These indicators do not directly measure deliberation, co-production, interorganisational collaboration, or the existence of a multi-stakeholder partnership; accordingly, SDG 17 is used as an interpretive governance framework rather than as a directly measured outcome.

Figure 1 summarises the analytical framework of the study by illustrating the relationships between citizens' evaluations of digital government services and their level of digital participation. Specifically, the framework positions service quality, public trust, and user satisfaction as key citizen-side assessments that may be associated with digital participation, as reflected in access to government information, perceived responsiveness, and the provision of feedback through digital channels. The framework

also situates digital participation within the broader context of partnership-oriented local governance and highlights its interpretive relevance to SDG Targets 17.16 and 17.17. However, the framework does not treat digital participation as direct evidence of multi-stakeholder partnerships or SDG achievement; rather, it conceptualises participation as a potential institutional foundation for more reciprocal and collaborative government–citizen relations.

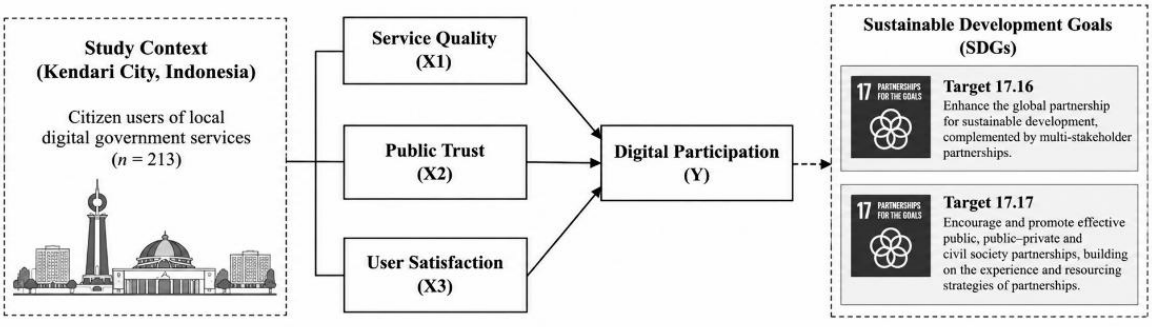


Figure 1. Analytical Framework of the Study
Source: Processed by the Authors (2026)

Against this background, the study asks three questions: (1) How do surveyed users evaluate service quality, public trust, user satisfaction, and digital participation? (2) How are these constructs statistically associated? (3) Does digital participation differ across age or educational groups? The study contributes by integrating service experience and participation within a single empirical analysis, examining which construct retains the clearest independent association with participation in the surveyed sample, and providing subnational evidence from a medium-sized city in the Global South. Its claims are limited to the surveyed users and do not establish the existence, quality, or outcomes of multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Research Methods

The study used a quantitative cross-sectional survey to examine the perceptions and experiences of digital government users in Kendari City. The city was selected as an analytically relevant case because its digital service ecosystem has expanded while its SPBE performance remains below that of several neighbouring local governments. The unit of observation was the individual user of a Kendari government digital service. The analysis concerns citizen-level experiences and associations among constructs; it does not evaluate government agencies, private organisations, or civil society actors as partners in a collaborative arrangement.

The target population comprised Kendari residents who had used at least one government digital service. A complete sampling frame and the exact number of users were unavailable; therefore, the study employed purposive sampling. Eligibility required prior use of a government digital service and access to a device and internet connection

for completing the questionnaire. Data were collected through Google Forms from 6 to 28 April 2026. The final analytical dataset contained 213 complete responses, with no missing values in the variables used in the analysis. Online purposive recruitment may underrepresent residents with limited internet access, low digital literacy, or little experience with digital services. The findings therefore describe relationships within the surveyed group of users and are not statistically representative of the entire population of Kendari City. This restriction is applied throughout the interpretation of the results.

The questionnaire first recorded gender, age, education, occupation, residential district, frequency of digital service use, and the service used most often. The service-use question listed specific channels and an "Other Digital Government Services" option that included health services, education services, public complaints, and other local government digital applications; separate subcategory counts were not collected. The second section contained twelve items measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Service quality comprised ease of access, information quality, and service speed. Public trust comprised data security, digital system management, and protection against misuse of personal data. User satisfaction comprised general satisfaction, continuance intention, and user experience. Digital participation comprised access to government information, perceived government responsiveness, and the provision of feedback through digital platforms.

Each composite score was calculated as the arithmetic mean of its three indicators. Means and standard deviations are reported without converting them into qualitative labels. The digital participation composite should be interpreted as a broad citizen-side measure spanning informational access, perceived responsiveness, and feedback behaviour. It does not represent a direct measurement of consultation, deliberation, co-production, or multi-stakeholder collaboration. More broadly, the empirical scope of the study is limited to citizen-side perceptions and experiences of digital government. The survey does not directly measure the presence, quality, or performance of multi-stakeholder partnerships involving government institutions, civil society organisations, private-sector actors, or other institutional stakeholders. Accordingly, the study distinguishes micro-level digital participation, including access to government information, perceived government responsiveness, and the provision of feedback, from structural partnership arrangements associated with broader collaborative governance. Digital participation is therefore interpreted as a potential citizen-side condition that may support the development of partnership-oriented local governance rather than as direct evidence that a multi-stakeholder partnership has already been achieved. The study does not claim to directly measure the attainment of SDG Targets 17.16 or 17.17.

Figure 2 summarises the overall research procedure, from the identification of the study population and purposive recruitment of eligible digital government users to measurement, reliability assessment, and statistical analysis. The figure is intended to clarify the sequence of the empirical procedures used in the study rather than to represent an additional analytical model.

Internal consistency was assessed separately for each construct. Cronbach's alpha was 0.755 for service quality, 0.789 for public trust, 0.788 for user satisfaction, and 0.678

for digital participation. Corrected item-total correlations (CITC) ranged from 0.459 to 0.676 and exceeded 0.30 for every item. The participation scale was retained for exploratory analysis because it contained only three indicators, all item-total correlations were adequate, and deleting an indicator would not increase its alpha. Its lower reliability nevertheless limits the precision of inference and is addressed in the limitations.

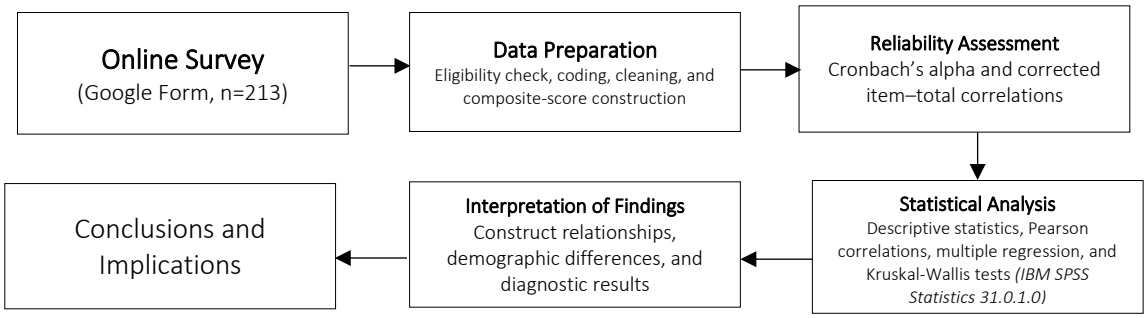


Figure 2. Research Flow
Source: Processed by the Authors (2026)

Analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 31.0.1.0. Frequencies and percentages summarised categorical variables, while means and standard deviations summarised individual items and composite scores. Pearson correlations assessed bivariate associations among the four composite constructs. An exploratory multiple linear regression entered service quality, public trust, and user satisfaction simultaneously to estimate their independent associations with the composite digital participation score. Because the design was cross-sectional and the sample was non-probabilistic, regression coefficients are interpreted as associations within the sample rather than as causal effects.

The regression model was specified as: DP_i = beta_0 + beta_1 SQ_i + beta_2 PT_i + beta_3 US_i + epsilon_i where DP denotes digital participation, SQ service quality, PT public trust, US user satisfaction, beta_0 the intercept, beta_1 to beta_3 the regression coefficients, and epsilon_i the error term.

To assess the robustness of the regression estimates, a non-parametric bootstrap analysis was conducted using 5,000 resamples and 95% bias-corrected and accelerated (BCa) confidence intervals. The bootstrap analysis re-estimated the same multiple regression model, with service quality, public trust, and user satisfaction as predictors of digital participation. The consistency of the estimates was assessed by comparing the direction and statistical significance of the bootstrap coefficients with the conventional regression results and by examining whether the BCa confidence intervals included zero. This procedure provided an additional assessment of the stability of the regression estimates under repeated resampling.

Regression diagnostics included tolerance and variance inflation factors for multicollinearity, a histogram and normal probability plot for residual normality, and a scatterplot of standardised residuals against standardised predicted values for

homoscedasticity. Kruskal-Wallis H tests examined differences in digital participation across age and educational groups because the grouping variables had unequal sizes and several small categories. All tests were two-tailed. The conventional significance level was $p < .05$; estimates at the displayed boundary of $p = .050$ are reported transparently and interpreted cautiously.

Participation in the study was voluntary. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the research prior to completing the questionnaire, and the collected data were used exclusively for academic purposes. No personally identifying information was included in the analytical dataset. Individual responses were treated confidentially throughout data processing and analysis.

Results and Discussion

The results are presented in five interconnected stages. The analysis first describes the respondents and their use of digital government services, followed by their evaluations of service quality, public trust, user satisfaction, and digital participation. It then examines the relationships among these constructs and assesses their independent associations with digital participation. Differences in participation across age and educational groups are subsequently examined before the findings are discussed in relation to partnership-oriented local governance and SDG Targets 17.16 and 17.17.

The findings reveal a notable distinction between positive evaluations of digital government services and active citizen participation. Respondents reported relatively favourable levels of service quality, public trust, and satisfaction, whereas digital participation was lower, particularly in providing feedback through digital platforms. The statistical analyses further indicate that these dimensions are related but not interchangeable, with public trust showing the clearest independent association with digital participation. This pattern provides the empirical basis for examining the service-participation gap identified in the Introduction.

Respondent Profile and Digital Government Service Utilisation

The sample contained 111 women (52.1%) and 102 men (47.9%), indicating a relatively balanced gender distribution among the respondents. In terms of age, the largest group was 20–29 years (30.5%), followed by respondents aged 30–39 years (24.4%) and those younger than 20 years (22.1%). Smaller proportions were recorded among respondents aged 40–49 years (16.4%) and those aged 50 years or older (6.6%). These figures show that the sample included respondents across a broad age range, although younger and early middle-aged users formed the largest shares.

Educational attainment was more concentrated. Senior high school graduates constituted the largest educational group (52.6%), followed by bachelor's degree holders (31.5%), while smaller proportions had junior high or elementary education, diploma qualifications, or postgraduate degrees. Respondents were also drawn from all ten districts of Kendari City, providing geographic coverage across the municipality. Taken together, these characteristics indicate diversity within the user sample in terms of

gender, age, education, and place of residence. However, this diversity does not eliminate the selection effects associated with online purposive recruitment, and the sample should therefore not be interpreted as statistically representative of the wider population of Kendari City. Table 3 summarises the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 3. Characteristics of Respondents
Source: Processed by the Authors (2026)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	111	52.1
	Male	102	47.9
Age	<20 years	47	22.1
	20–29 years	65	30.5
	30–39 years	52	24.4
	40–49 years	35	16.4
	≥50 years	14	6.6
Education	Junior High/Elementary School	25	11.7
	Senior High School	112	52.6
	Diploma	6	2.8
	Bachelor's Degree (S1)	67	31.5
	Master's/Doctoral Degree (S2/S3)	3	1.4
District	Poasia	36	16.9
	Kendari	28	13.1
	Puuwatu	28	13.1
	Mandonga	26	12.2
	Kadia	22	10.3
	Abeli	18	8.5
	West Kendari	18	8.5
	Kambu	13	6.1
	Wua-Wua	13	6.1
	Baruga	11	5.2

Service use was distributed across multiple channels, as shown in Table 4. “Other Digital Government Services” was the largest response category (31.9%). This category included health services, education services, public complaints, and other local government digital applications. Because the questionnaire grouped these services under one response option and did not record separate counts for each subcategory, the 31.9%

cannot be assigned to a single platform or disaggregated further. Among the individually identified channels, government social media was used most often (30.5%), followed by online civil registration (20.2%) and government websites (9.4%).

Table 4. Most Frequently Used Digital Government Services
Source: Processed by the Authors (2026)

Digital Government Service	n	%
Other unspecified	68	31.9
Government social media	65	30.5
Online civil registration	43	20.2
Government website	20	9.4
Online licensing	7	3.3
SP4N-LAPOR!	6	2.8
Online tax	4	1.9
Total	**213**	**100.0**

Note. [a] Includes health services, education services, public complaints, and other local government digital applications. Separate counts for these subcategories were not recorded.

Use intensity remained moderate. Approximately 35.7% of respondents used digital government services occasionally and 31.5% frequently. Another 16.0% used them very rarely, 15.0% rarely, and 1.9% very frequently. Routine use therefore did not necessarily indicate participatory engagement: respondents could use a platform regularly to obtain information or complete an administrative transaction without entering consultation or deliberation (Cegarra-Navarro et al., 2012; Fedorova & Malceva, 2017).

Citizen Evaluations of Digital Government

Table 5 reports the item-level and composite statistics. User satisfaction recorded the highest composite mean (M = 4.08, SD = .68), followed by public trust (M = 3.91, SD = .70) and service quality (M = 3.81, SD = .70). Digital participation was lower (M = 3.29, SD = .70). The clearest difference occurred within the participation construct: access to government information averaged 3.72 and perceived government responsiveness 3.55, whereas providing feedback through digital platforms averaged 2.59.

The service-quality results suggest that surveyed users generally experienced digital government as accessible, informative, and relatively efficient. Information quality recorded the highest service-quality score (M = 3.86), followed by service speed (M = 3.81) and ease of access (M = 3.77). These findings are consistent with previous research emphasising accessibility, usability, and information quality as important dimensions of

citizens' evaluations of digital public services (Dioses et al., 2021; Galushi & Malatji, 2022; Jibladze et al., 2024; Patergiannaki & Pollalis, 2024; Pham et al., 2023; Saldanha et al., 2022; Wirata et al., 2025). They also align with technology-acceptance research emphasising perceived usefulness and ease of use in shaping citizens' engagement with government technologies (Davis, 1989; Thi Uyen Nguyen et al., 2024; Zubir & Abdul Latip, 2024).

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of Digital Government Constructs
Source: Processed by the Authors (2026)

Construct	Indicator	Mean	SD
Service Quality	Ease of access	3.77	0.88
	Information quality	3.86	0.86
	Service speed	3.81	0.84
Public Trust	Data security	3.86	0.84
	Digital system management	3.86	0.84
	Protection against misuse of personal data	4.01	0.85
User Satisfaction	General satisfaction	4.03	0.83
	Continuance intention	4.03	0.82
	User experience	4.18	0.77
Digital Participation	Access to government information	3.72	0.89
	Government responsiveness	3.55	0.91
	Providing feedback through digital platforms	2.59	0.89

Note. Composite scores: Service Quality M = 3.81, SD = .70; Public Trust M = 3.91, SD = .70; User Satisfaction M = 4.08, SD = .68; Digital Participation M = 3.29, SD = .70.

Public trust was similarly positive. Protection against the misuse of personal data recorded the highest trust score (M = 4.01), while data security and digital system management each recorded a mean of 3.86. These findings indicate that respondents' confidence extended beyond the technological interface to perceptions of the institutions responsible for managing digital services. This interpretation is consistent with research conceptualising digital trust as both technological and institutional, involving expectations of security, accountability, transparency, and responsible data governance (Galvez & Revinova, 2025; Jameel et al., 2019; Mwangi, 2021; Ramadimetjar et al., 2024; Suradi et al., 2026).

User satisfaction produced the strongest overall evaluations. General satisfaction and continuance intention both recorded means of 4.03, while user experience obtained the highest individual score in the study (M = 4.18). These findings reinforce earlier research linking usability, perceived usefulness, and service performance with satisfaction and continued use of digital government services (AlAwadhi & Morris, 2008; Dečman, 2019; Idoughi & Abdelhakim, 2018; Pham et al., 2023).

In contrast, providing feedback through digital platforms recorded the lowest individual score (M = 2.59). This score applies specifically to feedback provision and should not be interpreted as the overall participation mean, which was 3.29. The pattern indicates that informational access and positive service experiences coexist with weaker active citizen input. Similar studies suggest that government platforms can remain primarily oriented towards information provision and transactions even where digital access has expanded (Gwaka, 2025; Jimoh, 2026; Zhao et al., 2023).

Relationships among the Four Constructs

As shown in Table 6, digital participation was positively correlated with service quality ($r = .167$, $p = .015$), public trust ($r = .256$, $p < .001$), and user satisfaction ($r = .227$, $p < .001$). Public trust showed the strongest bivariate association with participation, although all three associations were modest. The predictors were also positively correlated with one another, with coefficients ranging from .265 to .405.

Table 6. Correlations among Digital Government Constructs
Source: Processed by the Authors (2026)

Variable	1	2	3	4
Service Quality	1			
Public Trust	.265***	1		
User Satisfaction	.405***	.299***	1	
Digital Participation	.167*	.256***	.227***	1

*Note. N = 213. *p < .05. **p < .001. Two-tailed tests.

These results indicate that favourable assessments of digital government are associated with stronger digital participation at the bivariate level. However, the relatively modest magnitude of the correlations suggests that participation cannot be explained simply as an extension of positive service evaluations. Public trust had the largest correlation with participation ($r = .256$), followed by user satisfaction ($r = .227$) and service quality ($r = .167$). By contrast, service quality was more strongly associated with satisfaction ($r = .405$) than with participation. This pattern is consistent with a distinction between evaluating a digital service favourably and taking an active role in digital governance. Research on e-government has linked service experience to satisfaction, trust, and continued use, but these outcomes do not necessarily entail citizens contributing ideas or feedback to government (Li & Shang, 2020).

The findings therefore suggest that the transactional and participatory dimensions of digital government should be examined separately. Citizens may value accessible and reliable services while seeing little reason, opportunity, or benefit in contributing to decisions about those services. Linders (2012) similarly distinguishes citizens' roles as service users from their roles as partners in public-service co-production. In the present

study, the modest correlations indicate that positive service assessments accompany participation to some degree but do not account for most differences in participation among respondents. Because the measures were collected through a cross-sectional survey, the direction of these relationships cannot be established.

Factors Associated with Digital Participation

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine whether service quality, public trust, and user satisfaction retained independent associations with digital participation when entered simultaneously. The overall model was statistically significant, $F(3, 209) = 7.160$, $p < .001$, with $R^2 = .093$ and adjusted $R^2 = .080$. Thus, the three predictors jointly accounted for approximately 9.3% of the observed variation in digital participation. Table 7 presents the regression estimates.

Table 7. Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Digital Participation
Source: Processed by the Authors (2026)

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI for B	VIF
Constant	1.697	0.355	—	4.776	<.001	[0.996, 2.397]	—
Service Quality	0.055	0.073	0.055	0.757	.450	[-0.088, 0.198]	1.230
Public Trust	0.196	0.069	0.198	2.832	.005	[0.060, 0.333]	1.129
User Satisfaction	0.150	0.076	0.146	1.973	.050	[0.000, 0.300]	1.256

Note. Dependent variable = composite Digital Participation score. N = 213. $R^2 = .093$; adjusted $R^2 = .080$; $F(3, 209) = 7.160$, $p < .001$.

The model clarifies that favourable service assessments are not interchangeable with participation. Once trust and satisfaction were considered simultaneously, service quality no longer showed a statistically significant independent association with the composite participation score. Public trust retained the clearest relationship, suggesting that confidence in institutional handling of digital systems and personal data may matter for citizens' willingness to move beyond routine consumption of services. User satisfaction was at the conventional significance boundary ($p = .050$) and should therefore be interpreted cautiously. The model's modest explanatory power also indicates that most variation in participation is associated with factors outside the three predictors examined here.

Diagnostics did not indicate substantial problems. VIF values ranged from 1.129 to 1.256, the residual histogram and P-P plot showed no major departure from normality, and the residual scatterplot showed no clear heteroscedastic pattern.

The independent association of public trust is substantively plausible: contributing feedback may require citizens to believe that engaging with government is worthwhile. However, the study does not identify the process through which trust is related to participation, nor does it establish that greater trust causes citizens to participate.

Evidence from other digital settings is also not uniform. For example, Arshad and Khurram (2020) found that trust in a government agency did not independently predict online political participation in their study of agency social media. Differences in platforms and participation measures therefore caution against treating trust as a universal predictor. The present finding is more precisely understood as an association between public trust and the composite participation measure among the surveyed users in Kendari.

The non-significant coefficient for service quality should likewise not be interpreted as evidence that service quality is irrelevant. Its positive bivariate correlation with participation, alongside its associations with trust and satisfaction, raises the possibility of more complex relationships, but the current regression does not test mediation. Other factors, such as opportunities to contribute, perceived responsiveness, digital skills, and the perceived value of participation, may also matter. Research on sustained e-participation, for instance, shows that citizens' continued engagement involves considerations beyond initial platform use (Naranjo-Zolotov et al., 2019). Future studies could test these proposed pathways using longitudinal data and structural equation modelling.

Importantly, the regression predicts the composite participation score. It does not establish which variables are specifically associated with the feedback item that recorded a mean of 2.59. A separate item-level model would be required to address that narrower question. The present evidence therefore supports conclusions about broader citizen-side participation and the descriptive identification of weak feedback provision, rather than a claim that trust directly explains the low feedback score.

Demographic Differences in Digital Participation

The Kruskal–Wallis tests presented in Table 8 did not detect statistically significant differences in composite digital participation across age groups, $H(4) = 1.809$, $p = .771$, or educational groups, $H(4) = .870$, $p = .929$. These results indicate an absence of evidence for group differences within the surveyed sample.

Table 8. Kruskal–Wallis Tests for Demographic Differences in Digital Participation
Source: Processed by the Authors (2026)

Grouping variable	H	df	p
Age group	1.809	4	.771
Educational attainment	0.870	4	.929

Note. Dependent variable = composite Digital Participation score. Two-tailed asymptotic significance values.

The results suggest that the participation gap observed in the survey did not concentrate on the particular age or educational groups. This finding is noteworthy because younger and more highly educated citizens are often assumed to engage more

actively with digital technologies. Within the present sample of digital government users, however, differences in age and education did not translate into statistically distinguishable levels of digital participation.

The result should nevertheless be interpreted in relation to the sampling design. Completing an online questionnaire about digital government services presupposed some degree of digital access and prior service use. Residents facing the greatest barriers to access may consequently be underrepresented in the data. Moreover, the diploma and postgraduate groups contained only six and three respondents, respectively, limiting the precision of comparisons involving these categories. Digital-divide research shows that inequalities extend beyond access to differences in skills, forms of use, and benefits obtained online (Scheerder et al., 2017). The non-significant tests should therefore not be interpreted as evidence that age- or education-related inequalities are absent in the wider population of Kendari City. A population-based or mixed-mode study would be better suited to assessing whether excluded and less-connected residents encounter different barriers.

Implications for Partnership-Oriented Local Governance and SDG 17

Considered together, the findings point to a service-participation gap within the surveyed sample: relatively favourable assessments of digital government coexist with weaker active feedback. This matters because the public value of digital government extends beyond efficient transactions to the quality of relationships between citizens and public institutions (Twizeyimana & Andersson, 2019). Yet a digital channel creates an opportunity for input, not a guarantee that such input will be submitted, considered, or reflected in decisions. Analyses of participatory tools likewise distinguish their capacity to collect contributions from their capacity to support inclusive deliberation and influence policy action (Shin et al., 2024).

This distinction also bounds the study's relationship to SDG 17. Targets 17.16 and 17.17 concern multi-stakeholder partnerships involving institutional and societal actors. This survey captures only citizens' perceptions and experiences. Public trust and digital participation may support the citizen side of future partnerships, but the study does not measure whether citizen input enters joint decision-making or whether public agencies collaborate with civil society and private organisations. Assessing these processes requires multi-actor and institutional evidence (ElMassah & Mohieldin, 2020; Onyango & Ondiek, 2021; Pattberg & Widerberg, 2016; Stafford-Smith et al., 2017). The present results therefore identify a potential citizen-side foundation for partnership-oriented local governance while leaving open whether citizen input reaches joint decisions involving government, civil society, and other organisations. Establishing that connection requires future research combining citizen surveys with platform records, institutional documents, and evidence from participating organisations.

Conclusion

This study identifies a clear service-participation gap among the surveyed users of digital government services in Kendari City. Service quality (M = 3.81), public trust (M = 3.91), and user satisfaction (M = 4.08) were evaluated more positively than digital participation (M = 3.29), while providing feedback through digital platforms recorded the lowest individual score (M = 2.59). The regression model explained 9.3% of the variance in the composite participation score, with public trust showing the clearest independent association (β = .198, p = .005); service quality was not statistically significant, while user satisfaction remained at the conventional significance boundary. These findings show that positive service experiences do not automatically generate active citizen input. They support a bounded interpretation of trust and participation as citizen-side conditions for partnership-oriented local governance rather than as direct evidence that multi-stakeholder partnerships under SDG 17 have been achieved.

Three data-driven practical priorities follow from these results. First, the city government should develop an integrated e-consultation function across its digital service channels, through which each submission receives a reference number, responsible unit, response deadline, status update, and documented resolution. This would directly address the low feedback score and make government responsiveness more visible to users. Second, e-consultation outputs should be linked to existing e-planning and e-budgeting processes so that proposals can be categorised, assigned to the relevant agency, and publicly reported as accepted, deferred, or not adopted, together with reasons and any budgetary follow-up. Third, Kendari should monitor and publish platform-level indicators, including the number of submissions, response and closure times, resolution rates, repeated participation, and coverage across service channels and user groups. Assisted and offline access should remain available to ensure that stronger digital participation does not exclude residents with limited connectivity or digital skills.

This study has several limitations that frame these conclusions. The purposive online sample was drawn from a single city and may overrepresent residents with internet access, adequate digital skills, and prior experience using digital services; therefore, the findings cannot be generalised statistically to the wider population. The cross-sectional and self-reported data establish associations but cannot determine temporal order or causality. Measurement limitations should also be acknowledged: the digital participation construct had lower internal consistency than the other constructs (α = .678), combined informational access, perceived responsiveness, and feedback within a single composite score, and did not directly capture consultation, deliberation, or co-production. Moreover, the broad "Other Digital Government Services" category was not disaggregated, and the study examined only citizen perceptions rather than the behaviour and interactions of government, civil society, and private-sector actors. Future research should use larger probability-based, multi-city, and longitudinal samples and distinguish between service types and dimensions of participation. Following confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modelling (SEM) could test the direct and indirect relationships among service quality, public trust, user satisfaction, and

digital participation, including whether trust and satisfaction act as mediators and whether digital literacy, access conditions, or service type moderate these relationships. Multi-actor evidence and administrative platform data are also needed to determine whether citizen input influences planning, budgeting, service improvement, and collaborative outcomes consistent with SDG 17.

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