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DIGITIZING THE BACK OFFICE, NOT YET THE FRONT DOOR: EVALUATING VILLAGE DIGITALIZATION POLICY IN RARANG SELATAN, EAST LOMBOK

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Abstract: Village-level digitalization is often judged by whether systems exist, not by whether residents can use them. This study evaluates the implementation of a village digitalization policy in Rarang Selatan Village, Terara District, East Lombok Regency, examining policy implementation, administrative and service efficiency, access and inclusion, and the barriers that persist. Using a qualitative case study design, data were gathered through in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis with village officials and residents, then analyzed through an interactive model of data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing, validated by source and method triangulation. The analysis draws on Edwards III's implementation framework, digital inclusion and citizen-centric governance concepts, and Dunn's policy evaluation criteria. Digitalization has strengthened internal administration, including data digitization, electronic archiving, and faster processing, but citizen-facing services remain limited: residents still visit the village office for many transactions, and gaps in internet connectivity, digital literacy, outreach, and SOPs continue to constrain use. The policy has digitized government, not yet transformed service delivery; closing that gap requires attention to access, usability, and equity alongside infrastructure.

Keywords*:* Village Digitalization Policy, Edwards III Implementation Model, Dunn's Policy Evaluation Criteria, Digital Inclusion, East Lombok Village Governance.

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INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has become a crucial component of public sector reform, as digital technology and data reshape not only information management but also work processes, coordination, service delivery models, and the relationship between government and the public. Digital transformation carries implications for efficiency, service quality, skills, trust, and the equitable distribution of benefits (OECD, 2019). Consequently, digital governance has shifted from a mere focus on technology provision toward a governance model that prioritizes user needs and experiences. These developments also reveal that digital achievements at the national level are not always matched by commensurate progress at the local level. Despite the ongoing expansion of digital governance, performance gaps between national and local levels persist (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UNDESA], 2024). This situation is particularly significant in the context of village governance, given the regional variations in institutional capacity, digital infrastructure, and community characteristics.

In Indonesia, increased internet access offers opportunities for the development of digital-based public services. By 2024, 72.78% of Indonesia's population had internet access, up from 69.21% in 2023 (Statistics Indonesia [BPS], 2025). However, this aggregate indicator fails to capture disparities regarding access, skills, connectivity quality, and the community's ability to derive benefits from technology. Literature on the digital divide indicates that the digital gap is no longer solely a matter of internet access ownership; it also encompasses skills, usage patterns, social support, and the benefits

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realized by the community (Lythreatis et al., 2022; Scheerder et al., 2017). Thus, the digitalization of village governance must be understood as a governance transformation process that takes into account both the conditions of the local government and the capabilities of the community as service users.

There are conceptual distinctions between digitization, digitalization, and digital transformation. Digitization refers to the conversion of analog information into a digital format, whereas digitalization refers to the use of technology to improve existing processes. Meanwhile, digital transformation encompasses broader changes affecting organizations, processes, culture, services, and stakeholder relationships (Mergel et al., 2019). Digital changes in the public sector often occur incrementally and can accumulate into broader transformations (Haug et al., 2023). This perspective is crucial for distinguishing between the successful digitalization of internal administration and the successful transformation of citizen-oriented public services.

In the context of public services, Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 25 of 2009 mandates that public services must meet community needs through services that are high-quality, fast, convenient, affordable, and measurable (Republic of Indonesia, 2009). Therefore, the implementation of technology in village governance must not merely yield internal efficiencies but also expand access and enhance the community's experience. The citizen-centricity perspective positions citizens as the focal point for service design, governance, and evaluation. In digital government, citizen-centricity encompasses user perspectives, governance, design, and

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service outcomes (Dechamps et al., 2025). Similarly, digital government inclusion requires equitable opportunities for the public to participate in and benefit from digital government services (Peeters et al., 2025).

These issues are evident in the digitalization efforts implemented in Rarang Selatan Village, Terara District, East Lombok Regency. The village government has utilized village information systems, digital data management, system-based administrative services, and digital media for public information dissemination. Digitalization has brought about changes in resident data storage, archive management, and the acceleration of administrative processes. However, research findings indicate that these changes have not yet fully evolved into digital public services that residents can use independently. Residents are still required to visit the village office for certain services, while obstacles persist regarding internet connectivity, digital literacy, public outreach, support, and the strengthening of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and electronic signatures. This situation reveals a gap between the government's internal readiness and the community's capacity to utilize digital services. In short, what has been done is digitizing the back office; what still needs to be done is extending that progress into services residents can actually use.

To understand this issue, this study integrates perspectives from Edwards III's policy implementation framework, public sector digital transformation, digital inclusion, citizen-centric digital government, and Dunn's policy evaluation model. The Edwards III model identifies communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure as critical factors in policy implementation

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(Edwards III, 1980). Meanwhile, policy evaluation can be conducted using criteria such as effectiveness, adequacy, equity, responsiveness, and appropriateness (Dunn, 2018). Integrating these perspectives enables an evaluation that encompasses not only technological readiness and administrative efficiency but also access, usage capabilities, equitable benefit distribution, responsiveness, and the public's experience.

Against this backdrop, this study aims to analyze the implementation of the village digitalization policy in Rarang Selatan Village, evaluate its impact on administrative and public service effectiveness, analyze community access to and inclusion in digital-based services, and identify the institutional, resource, technological, communication, and social factors hindering implementation. This research is expected to contribute to the study of digital government at the village level by demonstrating that the success of digitalization must be understood as a socio-technical and policy process that links government capacity, technology, and the community's ability to derive benefits from digital services. The remainder of this article presents the study's method, reports findings on policy implementation, administrative efficiency, digital inclusion, and a Dunn-criteria evaluation, and closes with conclusions and directions for future research.

METHOD

This study employs an interpretive philosophical orientation, utilizing a qualitative descriptive approach and a case study design. The interpretive orientation is used to understand how the village digitalization policy is interpreted and implemented by officials, as well

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as how the community experiences and utilizes digital services within specific social and institutional contexts. A qualitative approach was selected because the research focuses on implementation processes, the experiences of the actors involved, and the factors facilitating or hindering policy execution, rather than on statistically testing relationships between variables. The case study was conducted in Rarang Selatan Village, Terara District, East Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara, to examine the interconnections among policy, institutional capacity, technology, officials, and the community. Conceptually, the study distinguishes between the digitalization of internal administration and citizen-oriented digital transformation. Mergel et al. (2019) explain that digital transformation encompasses changes to organizational structures and work processes, while Haug et al. (2023) emphasize the nature of digital change in the public sector, noting that it can occur incrementally.

The research data consists of both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews and observations, while secondary data were collected through document review. In-depth interviews involved the village head, village officials, system operators, service staff, residents using digital services, and residents not yet using digital services. The interviews aimed to explore experiences, perceptions regarding benefits, usage barriers, and support needs concerning the implementation of village digitalization. Observations were conducted to examine the use of digital systems in village administrative and government service processes, including the practices of officials and the experiences of residents when accessing services. Documentation included policy documents, service Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), village information system records,

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service statistics, village government documents, population data, government reports, Statistics Indonesia (BPS) publications, as well as central and regional government policies. These three techniques were employed to gather contextual information and to cross-reference informants' accounts with actual practices and administrative evidence. Details regarding the number of informants, the data collection period, and specific documents need to be supplemented based on the original research records.

Data analysis employed an interactive model comprising data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. During the reduction stage, data from interviews, observations, and documentation were sorted and categorized according to the research focus. The data were then presented in an organized manner to identify patterns, similarities, differences, and relationships among the findings. Conclusions were drawn by examining emerging patterns and cross-verifying supporting evidence from various sources. The analysis focused on five domains: policy implementation, digital transformation, digital inclusion, citizen-centricity, and policy evaluation. Policy implementation was examined through the lenses of communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure. Digital inclusion was analyzed in terms of access, skills, usage, and support, while policy evaluation utilized the criteria of effectiveness, adequacy, equity, responsiveness, and appropriateness (Dunn, 2018). Data validity was reinforced through source and method triangulation by comparing information across informant groups and findings from interviews, observations, and documentation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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The study's theoretical framework integrates theories regarding public sector digital transformation, policy implementation, digital inclusion, citizen-oriented service delivery, and policy evaluation. Mergel et al. (2019) explain that digital transformation extends beyond digitization and digitalization, encompassing changes in organizational structures, work processes, and stakeholder relationships. Haug et al. (2023) emphasize that digital transformation in the public sector can occur incrementally. Implementation factors are analyzed using Edwards III's (1980) model, which covers communication, resources, dispositions, and bureaucratic structure. Meanwhile, digital inclusion is understood in terms of access, skills, usage, and the benefits derived from technology (Lythreatis et al., 2022; Scheerder et al., 2017).

This perspective is broadened to include considerations of equitable access to digital services (Peeters et al., 2025). The citizen-oriented service approach draws upon the user-driven principle in digital governance (OECD, 2020) and research on citizen-centricity by Dechamps et al. (2025). Policy evaluation employs Dunn's (2018) five criteria: effectiveness, adequacy, equity, responsiveness, and appropriateness. The study's conceptual model links village digitalization policy with policy implementation, digital transformation, digital inclusion, citizen-oriented service delivery, public value, and policy evaluation. This framework is used to analyze whether internal administrative changes are accompanied by improvements in service access, user experience, and benefits for the community.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Across the areas examined, one pattern repeats: Rarang Selatan Village has digitalized itself more successfully than it has digitalized its services. Internally, resident data is now stored digitally, archives are searchable, and administrative processing is faster, concrete, measurable gains in how the village government works. Measured against Dunn's (2018) five evaluation criteria, this is where the policy scores best: effectiveness and appropriateness are strong for internal administration. Adequacy, equity, and responsiveness fare worse, because the public-facing side of digitalization has not caught up; residents with limited connectivity, lower digital literacy, or less access to assistance still have to visit the village office, and the benefits of digitalization are not yet shared evenly across the community.

These results track closely with existing research rather than departing from it. The internal/external split echoes Mergel et al.'s (2019) distinction between digitalization (improving existing processes) and digital transformation (change that reaches stakeholders and services), and supports Haug et al.'s (2023) view that public-sector digital change tends to arrive in incremental stages rather than all at once. The access and skills gaps found here also match the digital-divide literature: Lythreatis et al. (2022) and Scheerder et al. (2017) both argue that the divide is no longer just about owning a device, and Rarang Selatan's experience, where connectivity, literacy, and outreach matter as much as the system itself, confirms that argument at the village level. Where this case adds something is in showing how far that gap can persist even after a government fully digitalizes its own internal operations:

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administrative efficiency and inclusive public service are not the same achievement, and reaching one does not guarantee the other.

The implementation of the digitalization policy in Rarang Selatan Village, Terara District, East Lombok Regency, demonstrates a shift in how village administration and government services are conducted. Digitalization is utilized to support resident data management, document archiving, system-based administrative services, and the dissemination of public information via digital media. Prior to digitalization, many administrative processes were carried out manually. This resulted in slower service delivery, a reliance on physical documents for data management, and limited public access to village government information.

Following the implementation of digitalization, resident data is stored in a digital system, and archiving no longer relies entirely on physical documents. The Village Head stated, "Resident data is now stored in the system; archives are no longer solely in physical form, and service times have been significantly reduced." This statement indicates that digitalization has transformed internal administrative processes particularly regarding data storage, archive management, and the speed at which officials complete their work.

However, the policy implementation has not yet resulted in digital services that residents can access independently. Citizens must still visit the village office in person to obtain certain services. Consequently, there is a disparity between the village government's ability to use technology for internal operations and the community's ability to utilize that same technology to access services.

These findings can be explained through the Edwards III (1980) policy implementation model, which encompasses

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communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure. Regarding communication, there is a need to strengthen outreach concerning service types, usage procedures, and the benefits of the digital system. In terms of resources, limited internet connectivity and varying levels of digital literacy among the community act as obstacles to service utilization. Regarding disposition, the officials' commitment to using technology appears relatively positive, as digitalization helps streamline their work. Meanwhile, regarding bureaucratic structure, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and electronic signature mechanisms need to be strengthened to support more integrated digital services.

In summary, while the digitalization policy implementation in Rarang Selatan Village has shown progress in internal administration, it has not yet fully evolved into a citizen-centric service transformation. This situation demonstrates that the presence of technology must be supported by effective policy communication, adequate resources, the commitment of implementers, and bureaucratic procedures aligned with the requirements of digital services.

The research findings reveal three key changes in village government administration. First, data storage has become more structured; as resident data is now managed digitally, reliance on physical records has decreased. Second, service times have been reduced because administrative processes that previously required manual recording are now supported by digital systems. Third, the administrative burden on officials has lessened, as data recording and management can now be carried out more systematically.

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These changes demonstrate the creation of public value within the government itself specifically through administrative efficiency, organized information management, and enhanced organizational capacity. Digitalization enables officials to perform their duties in a more structured manner and reduces dependence on manual procedures. In this context, technology serves as a tool to improve village government work processes.

However, increased internal efficiency cannot be equated with comprehensive digital transformation. Mergel et al. (2019) distinguish between digitization, digitalization, and digital transformation. Digitization involves converting information into a digital format, whereas digitalization refers to leveraging technology to improve existing processes. Digital transformation, meanwhile, encompasses broader changes affecting the organization, work processes, culture, services, and stakeholder relationships.

Based on these distinctions, the digitalization efforts in Rarang Selatan Village have achieved success in internal administrative digitalization. However, transformation regarding citizen services remains limited, as some community members are unable to access services independently. Haug et al. (2023) explain that digital change in the public sector often unfolds in gradual, incremental stages before evolving into broader transformation. Therefore, the internal achievements in Rarang Selatan Village should be viewed as a foundation for future transformation, rather than proof that the entire transformation process is complete.

These findings also highlight the importance of distinguishing between indicators of organizational success and indicators of service success. Staff work speed, data organization, and reduced reliance on

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physical records are key indicators of organizational efficiency. Conversely, ease of access, the ability to use services independently, and the community's experience are essential indicators for evaluating service changes from the citizens' perspective. Both sets of indicators need to be used concurrently so that the evaluation reflects not only the technology's benefits for the government but also its benefits for the public.

Research findings indicate that the issue of village digitalization relates not only to the availability of devices or systems but also to the community's ability to access and utilize services. Three primary obstacles were identified: limited internet connectivity, uneven levels of digital literacy among the population, and the need for enhanced outreach and support.

First, limited internet connectivity prevents all residents from consistently accessing digital services. Connectivity quality is a crucial factor, as the use of digital services relies on adequate network availability. Second, digital capabilities vary across the community; some residents still struggle to understand procedures and use service systems independently. Third, outreach and support efforts need to be strengthened so that residents are aware of available services, understand how to use them, and can obtain assistance when facing difficulties.

These findings align with studies on the digital divide, which demonstrate that the gap is not solely a matter of device ownership or internet access. Lythreatis et al. (2022) explain that the digital divide is also influenced by skills, usage patterns, social support, infrastructure, training, and socioeconomic conditions. Scheerder et

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al. (2017) distinguish between digital divides at the levels of access, skills and usage, and the outcomes or benefits derived from technology use.

In the context of Rarang Selatan Village, network limitations relate to the access gap, while the community's ability to use services relates to gaps in skills and usage. If residents cannot use services independently or do not derive equal benefits, these disparities can also affect the outcomes experienced by the community. Therefore, the mere existence of a digital system is insufficient to ensure digital inclusion.

Peeters et al. (2025) frame inclusion in digital governance as an effort to ensure everyone has a fair opportunity to participate in and benefit from digital governance procedures. From this perspective, outreach, training, support, and the provision of assistance channels should be understood as integral parts of policy implementation, rather than merely supplementary activities conducted after the system is already in place. Consequently, the development of village digitalization must take into account the varying capabilities and circumstances of the community. Digital services need to be accompanied by easily understandable information, simple procedures, and assistance for residents facing limitations regarding devices, connectivity, or skills. As long as these barriers persist, in-person service channels and assisted digital services remain necessary to ensure that digitalization does not become a new source of administrative hurdles.

The evaluation of the digitalization policy in Rarang Selatan Village employs Dunn's (2018) five criteria: effectiveness, adequacy, equity, responsiveness, and appropriateness. These five criteria are

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used to assess digitalization achievements while identifying aspects that still require strengthening.

Effectiveness. Based on the effectiveness criterion, digitalization has enhanced internal administrative efficiency through digital resident data management, electronic archiving, and the acceleration of administrative service processes. However, service effectiveness for the community has not been fully realized, as some residents must still visit the village office to obtain specific services. Furthermore, limitations regarding internet connectivity and digital skills hinder the independent use of these services. This situation indicates that effectiveness gains are more evident in internal administration, whereas digital services accessed by the public still require improvement.

Adequacy. Regarding adequacy, digitalization has helped alleviate issues associated with manual administration and supported the modernization of village governance particularly in data management, archiving, and the acceleration of work processes. Nevertheless, the policy has not fully resolved challenges such as limited internet access, unequal digital literacy, the need for assistance, and institutional barriers. This demonstrates that merely providing a digital system is insufficient to resolve all public service issues. The adequacy of the policy must be viewed in terms of its ability to both improve the work of village officials and address the obstacles faced by the community.

Equity. Based on the equity criterion, the benefits of digitalization have not been distributed equally; residents possessing the necessary devices, internet connections, and digital skills tend to

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access services more easily than those facing such limitations. This situation relates to the concept of digital inclusion, which emphasizes the importance of fair opportunities to access and benefit from technology. Peeters et al. (2025) assert that government digitalization must ensure that population groups facing barriers to usage are not left behind. Therefore, ensuring the equitable distribution of digitalization benefits in Rarang Selatan Village requires support regarding access, guidance, easily understandable information, and alternative service options for residents unable to use digital services independently.

Responsiveness. Regarding responsiveness, village officials have shown a positive attitude toward technology adoption, as digitalization simplifies and accelerates their work. However, the policy response to community needs requires strengthening, particularly in addressing limitations related to access, digital literacy, and the need for assistance. Responsiveness can be enhanced through continuous outreach, the provision of clear procedural information, service usage support, and community feedback mechanisms. Simple service designs and alternative channels are also necessary to ensure that residents with varying levels of digital proficiency can still access services.

Appropriateness. In terms of appropriateness, digitalization is a relevant strategy for improving manual administration, data management, and village government service processes. However, the appropriateness of the policy must be evaluated beyond its benefits for internal operations; it must also consider the policy's capacity to address issues of access, usage skills, and the equitable distribution of benefits. If segments of the community cannot yet use services

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independently, policy development must be accompanied by the strengthening of infrastructure, official capacity, digital literacy, and support systems. Thus, while digitalization in Rarang Selatan Village is an appropriate strategy for administrative modernization, it requires further development to evolve into an inclusive, citizen-oriented public service transformation. Overall, an evaluation based on Dunn's criteria indicates that the digitalization achievements of Rarang Selatan Village are most evident in improved internal administrative efficiency, whereas adequacy, equity, responsiveness, and accuracy in digital services still require strengthening. Therefore, the development of digitalization needs to be integrated with improvements in infrastructure, staff capacity, digital literacy, community support, and institutional refinement to ensure that the transformation of public services proceeds inclusively and remains oriented toward the needs of the residents.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how the village digitalization policy in Rarang Selatan Village has been implemented, what it has done for administrative and public-service effectiveness, how accessible and inclusive the resulting digital services are, and which factors are holding broader adoption back. The short answer: digitalization has modernized the back office but not yet the front door. Internal administration is faster and better organized, population data are digitized, archives are searchable, and routine processing has sped up, but the criteria that matter most to residents, adequacy, equity, responsiveness, and appropriateness, still fall short, limited by patchy internet connectivity, uneven digital literacy, thin

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outreach, and gaps in SOPs and resident assistance. Rarang Selatan Village has taken a genuine step toward modern governance, but that step remains incomplete until these access and usability gaps close.

One finding worth dwelling on is how cleanly the village's progress splits along the line Mergel et al. (2019) draw between digitalization and digital transformation: Rarang Selatan has clearly digitalized its internal administration but has not yet transformed how residents experience public service. That tracks with Haug et al.'s (2023) observation that public-sector digital change tends to arrive in increments rather than all at once, so the efficiency gains documented here look less like an endpoint than a foundation. The digital-inclusion results point the same way: they confirm Lythreatis et al. (2022) and Scheerder et al.'s (2017) argument that the digital divide is about skills and usage as much as access, and they extend it by showing, at the village level, that connectivity, literacy, and outreach can matter almost as much as the system itself. What this case adds is a distinction the data make hard to miss: the same digitalization effort can register as an administrative success and a stalled service transformation at the same time, depending on whose outcomes are being measured, the government's or the resident's.

The study has limits worth naming. As a single-case qualitative study, it describes one village's trajectory and is not meant to generalize across Indonesia's many thousands of villages, which differ widely in infrastructure, institutional capacity, and community composition. Future research should test whether the organizational-success/service-success gap identified here holds in villages with different starting conditions, ideally through comparative or mixed-methods designs that can measure service performance and resident

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experience alongside the interview and document evidence used here. Longitudinal work would also help show whether today's internal gains eventually convert into the citizen-facing transformation this case has not yet reached. For practice, the implication is direct: village digitalization programs that stop at back-office systems risk mistaking administrative tidiness for public value; closing the connectivity, literacy, and outreach gaps identified here is not a follow-up task but part of the policy itself.

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