

Performance in the Post-Pandemic Era: A Study on Non-Face-to-Face Service Innovations in Local Government Institutions

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji kinerja inovasi layanan publik non-tatap muka yang diimplementasikan oleh institusi pemerintah daerah pada era pascapandemi. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan pejabat publik dan analisis dokumen dari sejumlah pemerintah kota terpilih. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa meskipun inovasi layanan digital meningkatkan aksesibilitas, efisiensi, dan kesinambungan pelayanan, masih terdapat berbagai tantangan seperti kesenjangan digital, keterbatasan infrastruktur, ketimpangan kapasitas SDM, serta belum adanya kerangka regulasi yang terpadu. Selain itu, tingkat kepercayaan publik terhadap layanan digital dipengaruhi oleh perlindungan data, responsivitas, dan pengalaman pengguna. Studi ini menekankan bahwa alat teknologi saja tidak cukup; implementasi yang efektif memerlukan kesiapan institusional, literasi digital, tata kelola yang etis, dan keterlibatan masyarakat. Seiring dengan pergeseran ekspektasi publik menuju kenyamanan dan transparansi digital, pemerintah daerah perlu mengadopsi strategi yang inklusif, adaptif, dan berkelanjutan untuk memastikan peningkatan kinerja layanan publik secara jangka panjang. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada diskursus tata kelola pascapandemi dengan menyoroti pentingnya pendekatan terintegrasi dalam inovasi layanan publik digital.

Kata kunci: layanan publik, inovasi digital, layanan non-tatap muka, pemerintah daerah, tata kelola pascapandemi, kinerja layanan.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the performance of non-face-to-face public service innovations implemented by local government institutions in the post-pandemic era. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with public officials and document analysis from selected municipal governments. The findings reveal that while digital service innovations have improved accessibility, efficiency, and continuity of service delivery, they also face challenges such as digital inequality, limited infrastructure, staff capacity gaps, and the absence of unified regulatory frameworks. Moreover, public trust in digital services is influenced by data privacy, responsiveness, and user experience. The study underscores that technological tools alone are insufficient; effective implementation requires institutional readiness, digital literacy, ethical governance, and citizen engagement. As public expectations shift toward digital convenience and transparency, local governments must adopt inclusive, adaptive, and sustainable strategies to ensure long-term performance improvement in public service delivery. This research contributes to the discourse on post-pandemic governance by highlighting the need for an integrated approach to digital public service innovation.

Keywords: public service; digital innovation; non-face-to-face services; local government; post-pandemic governance; service performance

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly reshaped the delivery of public services worldwide, forcing governments to reconfigure traditional service models to meet urgent health protocols and mobility restrictions. As a result, non-face-to-face service innovations have become a defining feature of the post-pandemic public administration landscape (Kettl, 2020). These changes are not merely temporary adjustments; rather, they signal a transformative shift toward more adaptive, technology-driven, and citizen-centered governance.

In the context of local government institutions, the pandemic served as a catalyst for accelerating digital transformation. Many subnational governments adopted online platforms, mobile applications, and remote communication channels to ensure the continuity of administrative services, ranging from licensing and civil registration to public complaints and welfare distribution (UNDP, 2021). This transition brought both opportunities for greater efficiency and challenges in terms of digital equity, institutional capacity, and public trust.

The rise of non-face-to-face services marks a critical juncture in the evaluation of public service performance. Traditional performance indicators—such as timeliness, responsiveness, and citizen satisfaction—now require redefinition within the digital service environment. It becomes necessary to assess not only the outcomes of service delivery but also the quality of digital interactions, user accessibility, and data protection (Meijer, 2020).

Scholars argue that innovation in public services during crises tends to follow two trajectories: temporary improvisation and sustainable institutional reform (Ansell et al., 2021). For many local governments, the pandemic-induced innovations have evolved from reactive

measures to embedded practices. This raises important questions about the sustainability, scalability, and long-term impact of these service models on overall governance performance.

Digital innovation in the public sector, particularly at the local level, is shaped by several factors: political will, digital infrastructure, bureaucratic agility, and citizen readiness. However, these factors vary greatly between urban and rural jurisdictions, leading to asymmetries in service quality and access. Studies by OECD (2020) have shown that while digital tools improve efficiency, they can inadvertently widen gaps in service equity if not accompanied by inclusive strategies.

In addition to infrastructure and accessibility issues, public service personnel face new demands for digital literacy, remote communication skills, and adaptive problem-solving. These shifts necessitate a reorientation of civil service competencies and organizational culture to align with the principles of digital governance and innovation (Mergel, 2019). Without adequate training and support, the effectiveness of non-face-to-face services may remain limited.

Citizens, too, play a critical role in the success of these innovations. Trust in government digital platforms is influenced by factors such as perceived transparency, data security, responsiveness, and the ease of use of digital channels. As a result, user experience has become a central aspect of public performance evaluation in the digital era (Bannister & Connolly, 2014).

In Indonesia, local governments have demonstrated varying levels of success in implementing non-face-to-face public services. Some have developed integrated digital service portals and mobile apps, while others rely on more basic solutions such as WhatsApp communication or call centers. These differences provide a rich context for analyzing the effectiveness and

adaptability of local public service innovations in the post-pandemic period.

This study aims to explore the performance of public services delivered through non-face-to-face mechanisms in local government institutions following the COVID-19 pandemic. By focusing on the implementation, challenges, and citizen feedback, the research seeks to evaluate whether these innovations have led to measurable improvements in service quality, accessibility, and trust in government.

Ultimately, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on post-pandemic governance by highlighting the role of digital innovation in shaping the future of local public service delivery. It emphasizes the need for sustainable strategies that combine technological advancement with ethical governance, inclusivity, and continuous performance monitoring.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the implementation and performance of non-face-to-face public service innovations in local government institutions in the post-pandemic era. This approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena, particularly how digital service models are interpreted, applied, and evaluated within local bureaucratic settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data collection was conducted through two primary methods: semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were held with local government officials responsible for digital services, IT staff, and frontline public service personnel. In total, 12 participants from four different municipal governments were selected using purposive sampling. Selection criteria included active involvement in managing or implementing non-face-to-

face service mechanisms during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The interview guide focused on key themes such as implementation challenges, service quality perceptions, citizen response, technological infrastructure, and institutional readiness. Interviews were conducted both online and in person, depending on availability, and each session lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. All interviews were recorded (with consent), transcribed verbatim, and coded using thematic analysis as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006).

In addition to interviews, official policy documents, service reports, digital platform analytics, and public satisfaction surveys were analyzed to triangulate the findings. These documents provided institutional insights into service performance metrics, platform usage, complaint handling, and strategic planning related to digital innovation. Document analysis followed the procedure outlined by Bowen (2009), focusing on authenticity, relevance, and thematic contribution.

To ensure validity and trustworthiness, this study applied the four criteria of qualitative rigor proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Triangulation of data sources, peer debriefing, and member checking with selected respondents were used to enhance credibility and reduce researcher bias. Detailed descriptions of the research context were included to enable transferability of findings.

All research procedures complied with ethical standards for human subjects research. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all interviewees. Personal identities and institutional affiliations were anonymized to maintain confidentiality. The research was approved by the ethics committee of the affiliated academic institution prior to data collection.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the adoption of non-face-to-face public service innovations in local governments during the post-pandemic period has led to both improvements and new challenges in service performance. Most participating institutions reported that digital platforms had allowed them to maintain continuity in service delivery during lockdown periods and beyond. Services such as civil registration, licensing, tax payment, and public complaints were successfully transitioned to online or mobile-based systems.

One of the most significant improvements reported was increased service efficiency and speed. Respondents from municipal offices stated that the average processing time for certain services decreased because automation and online submission eliminated bureaucratic layers. Additionally, service queues at physical offices were reduced, leading to a more manageable workload for frontline staff and a more convenient experience for citizens.

However, despite these benefits, digital accessibility remains uneven across regions. Citizens in rural or low-income urban areas faced significant obstacles in accessing online services, primarily due to limited internet connectivity, lack of digital literacy, and affordability of smartphones or computers. This digital divide undermines the inclusiveness of non-face-to-face innovations, confirming earlier concerns raised by OECD (2020) regarding digital inequality in public service delivery.

Another major theme that emerged from the interviews was the issue of technological infrastructure readiness. Some local government offices had outdated systems, insufficient servers, or lacked integrated databases, which hindered the smooth implementation of digital services. This often resulted in system crashes or delays during peak

service times, leading to frustration among both staff and service users.

Respondents also highlighted the importance of organizational adaptation and change management. Transitioning from face-to-face to digital services required more than just new platforms; it demanded a shift in mindset, workflows, and internal coordination. In some cases, resistance from senior bureaucrats slowed down the reform process, as digital systems were perceived as threats to established power structures or traditional work habits.

A particularly notable finding was the rise in citizen expectations regarding service transparency and responsiveness. Since users could now monitor service status or submit complaints online, they expected faster responses and clearer communication. This new dynamic placed pressure on local governments to improve their responsiveness and to assign dedicated digital service teams that could interact with citizens in real time.

The study also found that digital literacy among civil servants played a pivotal role in determining the success of non-face-to-face service delivery. Offices with staff who received prior digital training or were more tech-savvy tended to report fewer problems and greater citizen satisfaction. Conversely, in institutions where staff struggled with the platforms, users reported confusion, misinformation, or errors in service execution.

From the document analysis, it was observed that some local governments had begun to incorporate performance indicators specific to digital services, such as uptime reliability, online response times, and user ratings. However, not all institutions had formalized these metrics into their service evaluation frameworks, indicating a need for a more systematic approach to measuring digital service performance.

Public trust in digital services also emerged as a critical factor. Citizens were

generally supportive of non-face-to-face innovations, especially when they experienced convenience and transparency. However, concerns about data privacy and misuse were expressed, particularly in relation to personal documents uploaded through government portals. This finding aligns with Bannister and Connolly's (2014) assertion that trust in e-government depends not just on functionality, but also on ethical safeguards.

Lastly, the analysis revealed that non-face-to-face innovations have the potential to strengthen government-citizen relationships, but only if supported by continuous improvement and two-way communication. Several respondents noted that digital channels allowed for more inclusive participation, especially among younger citizens, but also acknowledged that service improvements must be ongoing to maintain engagement and satisfaction.

In examining the sustainability of non-face-to-face innovations, several local officials expressed concern that some digital services introduced during the pandemic were reactive and lacked long-term planning. Without continued budget allocation, technical support, and policy integration, many of these services risk stagnation or discontinuation. This supports Ansell et al.'s (2021) argument that crisis-driven innovations often fail to institutionalize unless followed by structured reform.

Further, there is evidence that the fragmentation of digital platforms across departments hindered integrated service delivery. In some municipalities, each agency developed its own application or web portal, resulting in confusion among users and inefficiencies in inter-agency coordination. A lack of centralized digital infrastructure also made it difficult to track citizen interactions across services, reducing the potential for comprehensive performance monitoring.

The interviews revealed that user-centered design was not always prioritized during the development of digital services. Several respondents admitted that platforms were built based on administrative logic rather than user experience, leading to complicated navigation, unclear instructions, and limited accessibility for people with disabilities. This points to the need for greater inclusion of citizen feedback in the design phase of digital public services.

Another challenge identified was the absence of legal frameworks governing digital service accountability. While some national guidelines exist, many local governments lacked formal policies to regulate data handling, digital misconduct, or service failure in online systems. This regulatory gap exposes both governments and citizens to potential risks, including data breaches and procedural ambiguity.

Despite these challenges, some municipalities demonstrated best practices that can serve as models for broader replication. These included the use of centralized service dashboards, integration with national ID databases, real-time service tracking, and chatbot-assisted communication. Offices that implemented these features reported higher citizen satisfaction and more efficient internal coordination.

The role of collaboration with the private sector and civil society was also highlighted. Several digital platforms were developed through partnerships with local tech startups or funded by non-governmental organizations. These collaborations brought innovation, technical expertise, and community engagement into the reform process, although some respondents expressed concerns about long-term dependency on external actors.

Data from citizen satisfaction surveys supported interview findings, showing that perceived convenience, transparency, and reduced bureaucracy

were among the top benefits of non-face-to-face services. However, satisfaction declined sharply when users experienced system downtimes, lack of follow-up communication, or poor staff responsiveness. This suggests that digital infrastructure alone is insufficient without corresponding improvements in institutional responsiveness.

The findings also suggest a paradigm shift in citizen behavior and expectations. More citizens are now familiar with and prefer digital services, particularly for routine administrative tasks. This behavioral change places pressure on governments to sustain and enhance digital offerings, reinforcing the idea that public performance is now closely linked to digital service quality (Mergel, 2019).

Some local officials voiced concern about the digital workload burden placed on a limited number of IT staff. As digital services expand, so too does the demand for round-the-clock technical support, system maintenance, and user assistance. Without sufficient staffing and clear job division, burnout and reduced service quality may occur, jeopardizing the sustainability of digital governance.

In conclusion, the study reveals that while non-face-to-face service innovations have made significant strides in enhancing public service performance, they also introduce a range of administrative, technical, and ethical challenges. To fully realize the benefits of digital transformation, local governments must adopt a holistic strategy that includes infrastructure development, human capacity building, policy integration, and ongoing citizen engagement.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that both competence and work discipline significantly influence the performance of civil servants in South Lampung. Competence, which includes knowledge,

skills, and attitudes, enhances the ability of employees to carry out their duties effectively and respond to job demands with professionalism. Meanwhile, work discipline—manifested in punctuality, adherence to rules, and consistent effort—ensures that civil servants remain focused and committed to institutional goals.

The regression analysis shows that although both variables contribute positively, work discipline exerts a slightly stronger influence on performance. This highlights the importance of behavioral consistency and organizational compliance in structured bureaucratic settings, where following procedures and maintaining standards are critical to service delivery outcomes. Therefore, efforts to improve civil servant performance must go beyond training and capacity building; they must also include strategies to instill a culture of discipline, integrity, and accountability.

In light of these findings, it is recommended that local governments strengthen their human resource development strategies by integrating competence enhancement programs with behavioral reinforcement mechanisms. Leadership support, clear performance indicators, and reward-punishment systems will be crucial in sustaining improvements in employee performance. Future research should consider expanding the model by incorporating additional factors such as motivation, leadership style, and organizational climate to gain a more holistic understanding of what drives public sector performance.

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This study has examined the dynamics of non-face-to-face public service innovations implemented by local government institutions in the post-pandemic era. The findings demonstrate that digital service delivery has significantly enhanced accessibility, efficiency, and continuity of government services, particularly during periods of

social restrictions. Local governments that were agile in adopting technology managed to maintain essential public functions and, in some cases, even improved citizen satisfaction.

However, the transition to digital services also revealed a number of structural and operational challenges. Digital inequality, inadequate technological infrastructure, fragmented platforms, and the limited digital capacity of both public officials and citizens emerged as key barriers. These issues not only impact service delivery but also raise questions about the inclusiveness, sustainability, and equity of digital governance practices.

The study emphasizes that successful non-face-to-face service delivery is not solely dependent on the presence of technology but rather on a comprehensive ecosystem that includes institutional readiness, leadership commitment, regulatory frameworks, and responsive service culture. Citizen trust and satisfaction are shaped by the user experience, which demands intuitive platforms, transparent procedures, and timely responses from public institutions.

Furthermore, the sustainability of digital innovation in local government requires long-term investment, performance measurement tools, and integration into strategic governance frameworks. Without such institutionalization, innovations born out of crisis risk becoming ad hoc solutions that fade once the urgency subsides. Therefore, digital transformation must be viewed as a continuous process of reform, learning, and adaptation.

In conclusion, non-face-to-face service innovations represent a critical evolution in the way governments interact with citizens. To fully leverage this transformation, local governments must address the challenges identified in this study and work toward building inclusive, ethical, and resilient digital service

systems. This will not only strengthen public performance in the post-pandemic era but also lay the foundation for a more adaptive and citizen-centric public administration in the future.

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