PROCEEDINGS
ICHST
International Convention on Humanity Sustainability t Technology

Research
Article submitted to journal
https://conference.unupasurua.ac.id/index.php/ichst/index

Subject Areas:
Governance Transparency, Technology for Living,

Keywords:
two-way communication, participatory governance, public complaint channels, locality, transparency

***Author for correspondence:**
alhimnifahma@iaisyarifuddin.ac.id

"Digital Communication for Participatory Governance: Insights from *Wadul Gus'e* and *Sambat Bunda* Citizen Complaint Programs"

Alhimni Fahma [1*], Dewi Khuswandini [2], Muhammad Alif Alaudin [3]

[1]Universitas Islam Syarifuddin Lumajang, Indonesia
[2]Universitas Islam Syarifuddin Lumajang, Indonesia
[3]Erasmus University Rotterdam, Netherlands

The transformation of digital-based public complaint channels reflects a shift in government–citizen communication toward a more participatory, responsive, and transparent model. This study examines two initiatives, *Wadul Gus'e* (Jember) and *Sambat Bunda* (Lumajang), through the lens of Grunig's Two-Way Symmetrical Communication framework, combined with the stages of active listening, negotiation and dialogue, adjustment and policy alignment, and relationship maintenance. Using content analysis of official performance reports and media publications, and grounded in Habermas's concept of the public sphere alongside Papacharissi's virtual sphere, the research addresses gaps in prior studies by highlighting local complaint channels that cut through bureaucratic layers while prioritizing locality. Findings indicate that when digital public communication innovations and multi-channel integration are managed in a structured way—while respecting cultural and local contexts—they can accelerate bureaucratic responsiveness, expand citizen participation, and foster reciprocal relationships that are adaptive and oriented toward shared interests.

1. INTRODUCTION

Public complaint channels are a form of government initiative to open communication with citizens in order to realize transparent, participatory, effective, and solution-oriented governance. At the national level, the SP4N-LAPOR! (*Sistem Pengelolaan Pengaduan Pelayanan Publik Nasional – Layanan Aspirasi dan Pengaduan Online Rakyat*) was established through Presidential Regulation No. 76 of 2013 on the Management of Public Service Complaints. The system, part of Indonesia's electronic-based government (SPBE), utilizes information and communication technology (ICT) to serve stakeholders including central agencies, local governments, civil servants, citizens, and businesses.

© The Author. 2025. Published by UNU Pasuruan Conference under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/, which permits unrestricted use, provided the source and original author are credited.

The Province of East Java has actively and systematically implemented SP4N-LAPOR! and has even been considered a model for other regions due to its effective integration with 64 provincial agencies and 38 city/district governments. (Berliana, 2024; Pratama, 2024). (Berliana & Yudartha, 2024; Ritonga, 2021)

Since its introduction in 2013, the long process of socializing the use of digital complaint channels has continued. While SP4N-LAPOR! serves as the national "grand design," local governments are expected to develop localized versions tailored to their own contexts. Some regions have shown readiness, while others have faced obstacles such as technical integration, limited internet access, lack of human resources, inconsistent data, and declining complaint volumes. (I Gede Bayu, 2024) Nonetheless, local governments continue to innovate within their structural and cultural capacities, ensuring that these systems can be implemented collaboratively by both administrators and citizens.

Before the advent of digital complaint channels, local public service bureaucracies in Indonesia often faced classic challenges: lengthy procedures, layered communication structures, and limited transparency in handling citizen reports. Public complaints were frequently delayed by hierarchical administration, undermining public trust in local government effectiveness. For instance, in Lumajang—where many citizens live in rural areas with limited internet access—complaints were typically delivered through face-to-face meetings or written letters, often delaying responses to urgent issues such as healthcare or infrastructure. Meanwhile, in Jember—where digital connectivity is stronger—complaints often became "stuck" at the subdistrict or village level before reaching the relevant agencies.

These pre-digital realities demonstrate how social, geographical, and digital literacy differences shape both how citizens voice complaints and how governments respond. Urban communities with better internet access often turn to alternatives such as social media, while rural communities remain dependent on slower formal mechanisms. In this context, locally driven digital complaint channels such as *Wadul Gus'e* in Jember and *Sambat Bunda* in Lumajang emerge as important innovations, helping to cut through bureaucratic bottlenecks while reflecting local identities.

Wadul Gus'e, launched by the Jember Regency government, allows citizens to directly submit complaints, aspirations, and suggestions to the regent and local agencies. Although integrated with the national SP4N-LAPOR! system, it is localized through the use of Javanese terminology, making it culturally familiar to citizens. It operates through official government social media, instant messaging apps, and websites, managed by a dedicated team under the Communication and Informatics Agency.

Similarly, *Sambat Bunda* in Lumajang combines digital tools with community-based communication. Accessible via WhatsApp and a web portal, it is strengthened by interactive sessions on the local government radio (LPPL). Its name, "Sambat Bunda," associates the channel with a maternal figure—reflecting the female regent's identity—making it feel approachable and personal. Unlike one-way channels, *Sambat Bunda* fosters two-way dialogue by involving citizens and government agencies in interactive communication, enabling quicker clarification and follow-up.

Figure 1. Program dissemination of Wadul Gus'e dan Sambat Bunda

Public participation in local governance is inseparable from the quality of communication between citizens and policymakers. Through channels such as *Wadul Gus'e* in Jember and *Sambat Bunda* in Lumajang, participatory public communication takes on a more concrete form. Both channels are designed to foster two-way, reciprocal exchanges—citizens submit aspirations, complaints, or proposals, and local government responds directly with clarification, follow-up, or solutions. Built on digital technologies, this process is no longer constrained by distance or time; interactions that were once hierarchical become more equitable and responsive.

The presence of these mechanisms also repositions citizens from mere service recipients to active partners in improving public services. Through *Wadul Gus'e*, the Jember Regency government can respond swiftly and in a measured way to reports submitted via official digital channels, while *Sambat Bunda* in Lumajang combines digital media with interactive sessions on the local public radio (LPPL), reaching residents who may be less familiar with online applications. Together, these channels demonstrate that two-way, reciprocal communication not only strengthens government–citizen connectedness but also nurtures a sense of ownership over public policies, as citizen input is genuinely considered in decision-making.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Participatory Public Communication

Public communication can be broadly defined as the exchange of information, ideas, and messages between public institutions—including government—and the wider society to achieve common goals. In governance, public communication is not limited to one-way information delivery from government to citizens; it also involves listening to aspirations, criticism, and feedback from the public. The scope of public communication ranges from face-to-face forums (e.g., community meetings and village deliberations) to mass media (television, radio, newspapers) and digital platforms such as government websites, social media, and online complaint applications (Effendy, 2017; Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman, & Toth, 2012).

The primary functions of public communication in government–citizen relations are to build transparency, accountability, and public trust, while strengthening citizen participation in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of policies.

Effective communication channels help governments accelerate information dissemination, respond to complaints promptly, and involve citizens in development planning. Strategically managed communication also reduces information gaps, minimizes conflicts, and improves the government's public image (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

Grunig and Hunt's (1984) Two-Way Symmetrical Communication Model provides a strong conceptual framework for participatory public communication. The model consists of four stages: 1) **Active Listening** – governments listen attentively to citizens' concerns;2) **Negotiation and Dialogue** – fostering mutual respect and collaboration;3) **Adjustment and Policy Alignment** – adapting policies based on feedback;4) **Relationship Maintenance** – sustaining long-term trust and interaction.

This model places governments and citizens in equal positions in communication, promoting mutual understanding as the basis for responsive policy decisions. In practice, it requires governments not only to inform or educate citizens but also to genuinely listen to feedback and complaints, leading to negotiation, policy adjustments, and collaborative solutions. Thus, citizen participation becomes an integral part of governance rather than a ceremonial exercise.
Applied at the local government level, the Two-Way Symmetrical Model enables complaint channels like *Wadul Gus'e* and *Sambat Bunda* to function optimally as responsive connectors between government and citizens.

2.2 Virtual Sphere: Citizen Participation with Local Government

Habermas (1989) argued that the strength of the public sphere lies in its ability to shape public opinion and influence policy. However, his version of the public sphere faced limitations: it was often elitist, mediated by one-way mass media, and excluded marginalized groups. In today's context, where information flows are controlled by powerful institutions, there is a need for more open, decentralized, and accessible spheres of dialogue. This aligns with Rainie and Wellman's (2012) concept of networked individualism, where citizens' engagement shifts from hierarchical structures toward technology-mediated personal networks.

Papacharissi (2002) introduced the concept of the virtual sphere, describing the evolution of the public sphere in the internet era. The virtual sphere is a digital public discussion space where geographic, social, and economic boundaries become more fluid. Through many-to-many communication, individuals act simultaneously as producers and consumers of information, broadening opportunities for social and political participation, albeit with risks such as polarization and echo chambers.

Fakhrurroji (2024) explains that Papacharissi's virtual sphere extends Habermas's public sphere into a contemporary digital realm, where interaction is broad, asynchronous, and participatory. The virtual sphere is characterized by:1) **Decentralization** – communication is no longer controlled by media elites but dispersed across social media, online forums, complaint channels, and community blogs;2) **Inclusive interactivity** – citizens engage in more egalitarian dialogue;3) **Broad accessibility** – citizens with internet access can join discussions regardless of geography or demographics;4) **Reflectivity and rational participation** – opportunities for citizens to present arguments, discuss policy, and influence agendas.

In this sense, the virtual sphere provides the foundation for participatory governance in the digital era. Local complaint channels such as *Wadul Gus'e* and *Sambat Bunda* exemplify how government–citizen communication can become two-way, dialogic, and democratic rather than top-down information delivery.
Clark (2020) further emphasizes that smart city governance should expand citizens' rights to data and leverage technology to enhance participatory planning and urban governance. This underscores that digital technology is not merely an efficiency tool but also a means to empower citizens in policy-making and decision-making processes, strengthening the principles of good governance.

3. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using a comparative case study strategy to analyze participatory public communication through two complaint service programs: *Wadul Gus'e* in Jember Regency and *Sambat Bunda* in Lumajang Regency. This approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the context, processes, and dynamics of two-way communication between local governments and citizens, while also comparing the effectiveness of both programs in fostering constructive reciprocal interaction (Yin, 2018).

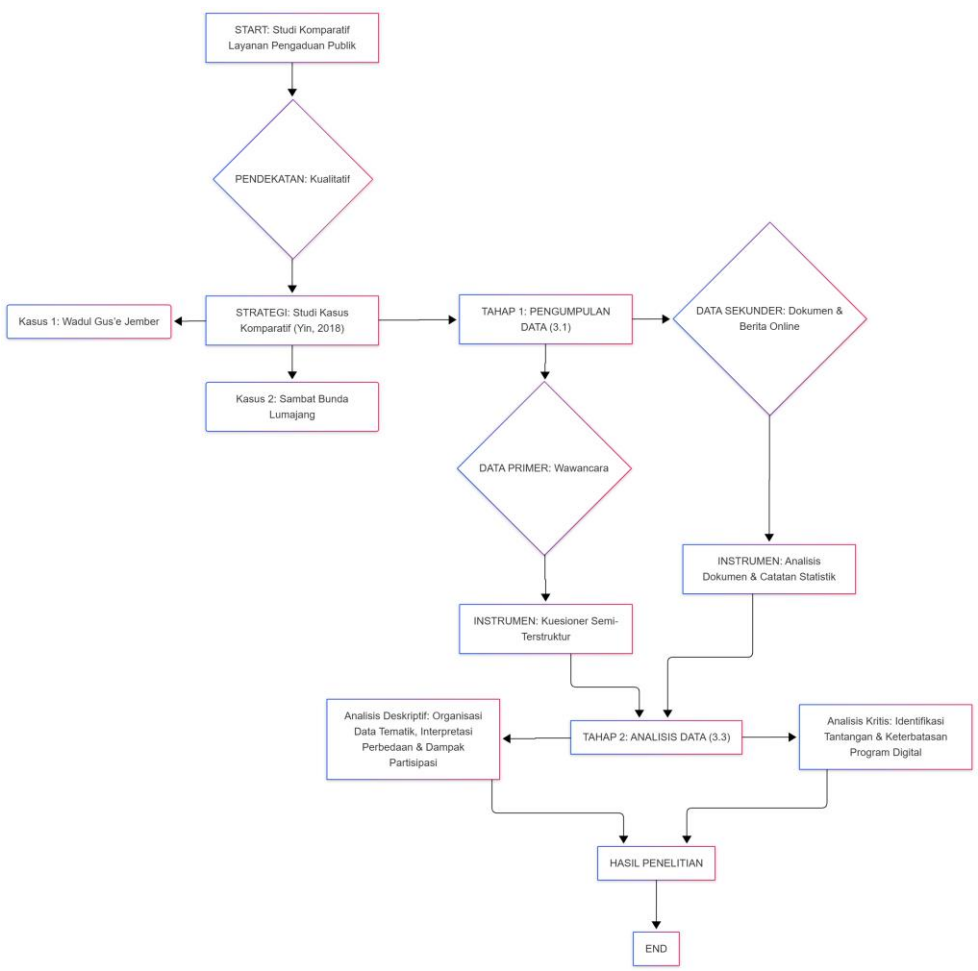

Figure 2. Flowchart Research Method

3.1 Data Collection

The study utilized both primary and secondary data. Primary data were gathered through interviews with program administrators, local government officials involved in the initiatives, and citizens who had accessed *Wadul Gus'e* or *Sambat Bunda*. Secondary data were obtained from official documentation, including annual government reports and complaint archives, as well as news coverage from online local media outlets such as *Radar Jember* and *Radar Semeru*.

3.2 Research Instruments

Two types of documents were analyzed: news articles and statistical records. News articles from local online newspapers provided accurate information on the development of *Wadul Gus'e* and *Sambat Bunda*. Statistical data were drawn from official reports to illustrate usage patterns and complaint resolution rates. Interviews were conducted using semi-structured questionnaires designed to gather insights into program implementation.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed descriptively and critically. Descriptive analysis involved organizing and interpreting both documentary and interview data thematically, beginning with statements of fact, followed by explanation and interpretation. This helped highlight differences between pre- and post-program implementation, as well as the impact of citizen participation on local public service delivery. Critical analysis, in turn, identified the challenges and limitations encountered during the operation of these digital communication programs.

4. RESULTS and DISCUSSION

The *Wadul Gus'e* and *Sambat Bunda* complaint channels have brought citizens closer to local government by enabling direct, open participation through digital communication. While both programs faced challenges, they also demonstrated important innovations in participatory communication. Their effectiveness can be explained using Grunig's (1984) Two-Way Symmetrical Model and Papacharissi's (2002) concept of the Virtual Sphere.

4.1 Active Listening

At the initial stage, local governments positioned themselves as active listeners, proactively opening channels that encouraged citizens to voice aspirations, complaints, and ideas. Active listening here goes beyond simply receiving messages; it includes efforts to understand the context, emotions, and needs behind those messages.

Digital tools made this possible. *Wadul Gus'e* facilitated complaints via WhatsApp, enabling citizens to submit reports with photos, locations, and chronology of events. An administrative desk team categorized incoming reports by urgency, ensuring rapid initial responses—often within 24 hours. Similarly, *Sambat Bunda* utilized WhatsApp, Facebook, the SP4N-LAPOR! national system, the official Lumajang website, and even call-in sessions via LPPL Suara Lumajang radio. This integration made it easier to identify recurring issues in specific areas.

Both programs demonstrated structured active listening consistent with the Two-Way Symmetrical Model, where citizens' input was not merely archived but systematically used as a database for follow-up and policy design.

Figure 3. Service Feeback from Wadul Gus'e dan Sambat Bunda

4.2 Negotiation and Dialogue

Once messages were received, governments moved into negotiation and dialogue, marked by reciprocal exchanges of information. The core principle was mutual respect, fostering collaboration rather than defensive or top-down responses.

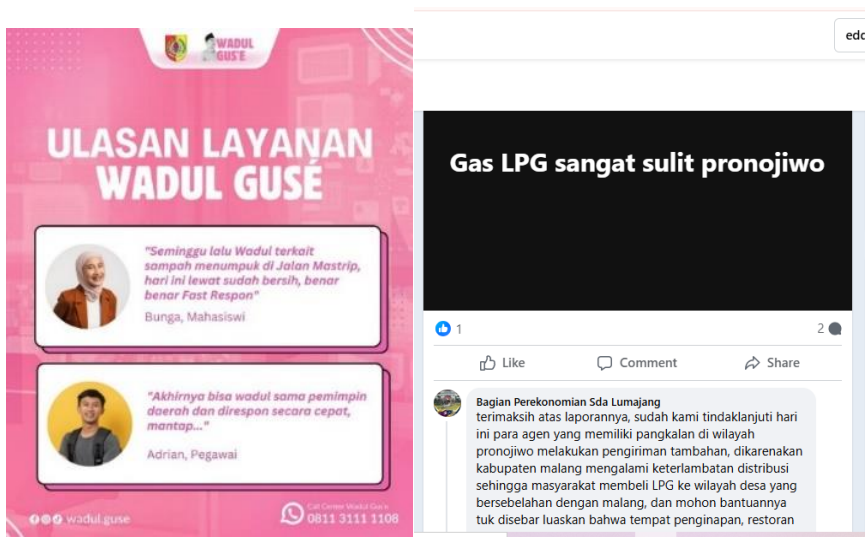

Figure 4. Dialogue and outcomes of complaints through Wadul Guse dan Sambat Bunda

In *Wadul Gus'e*, follow-up chats allowed government staff to clarify progress on complaints and even propose alternative solutions when citizens' requests could not be fulfilled directly. *Sambat Bunda* often went a step further, inviting relevant agencies (OPD) to respond directly to citizens in public forums or social media comment threads.

This openness reflects how dialogue is not confined to formal spaces but can take place in flexible, accessible environments. Citizens could continue conversations after receiving responses, while governments had the opportunity to explain

constraints or action plans transparently. Such exchanges-built trust and strengthened citizens' sense of involvement in governance.

4.3 Adjustment and Policy Alignment

The next stage involved using complaint data not only for individual case resolution but also as input for policy adjustment and alignment. This represents the feedback loop envisioned in both the Two-Way Symmetrical Model and the Virtual Sphere, where dialogue results in concrete policy changes.

For example, recurring complaints about road infrastructure in *Wadul Gus'e* led to prioritization of road repairs in Jember's local government work plan. In *Sambat Bunda*, frequent reports on rural health services influenced the distribution of medical staff and the improvement of village health centers.

These cases demonstrate that participatory digital communication can serve as a policy feedback mechanism, ensuring that citizen input directly informs local government decisions. Publishing follow-up reports on official websites further enhanced transparency and public trust.

4.4 Relationship Maintenance

Participatory communication does not end when a problem is resolved. Long-term trust requires relationship maintenance, ensuring continuity of positive interaction between government and citizens.

Wadul Gus'e maintained this relationship by sending regular notifications about policy developments and new programs. *Sambat Bunda* employed storytelling through social media, sharing success stories of complaint resolutions. Both strategies strengthened emotional bonds, reinforced public trust, and cultivated a sense of belonging among citizens.

By consistently maintaining relationships, these programs moved beyond event-based communication and established participatory communication as part of the culture of governance.

Table 1. Comparison of Results in Wadul Gus'e and Sambat Bunda

Stage	***Wadul Gus'e* (Jember)**	***Sambat Bunda* (Lumajang)**
Active Listening	WhatsApp application with integrated features (photo, location, chronology); reports filtered by urgency; initial response within 24 hours.	Multiple channels: WhatsApp, Facebook, SP4N-LAPOR! official website, and LPPL radio; automatic alert system for urgent cases.
Negotiation & Dialogue	Follow-up chats to clarify complaints; alternative solutions offered if requests cannot be met; communication often private between citizen and staff.	Relevant agencies (OPD) respond directly in public forums/social media; open dialogue builds trust and collective participation.
Policy Adjustment	Complaint data used to prioritize infrastructure and public services in local work plans (RKPD); monthly reports submitted to local leaders.	Health-related complaints influenced medical staff distribution; education issues prompted school facility improvements; complaint data informed cross-agency programs.
Relationship Maintenance	Regular notifications about complaint progress and new	Storytelling on social media about successful

	policies; internal success stories published on the app.	case resolutions; routine citizen engagement campaigns; fostered sense of ownership of local programs.

From the table above, it is evident that the four pillars of participatory communication within the two-way symmetrical communication model—active listening, negotiation and dialogue, adjustment and policy alignment, and relationship maintenance—provide concrete benefits for citizens and local governments in managing community issues. The complaint flow can be outlined as follows:

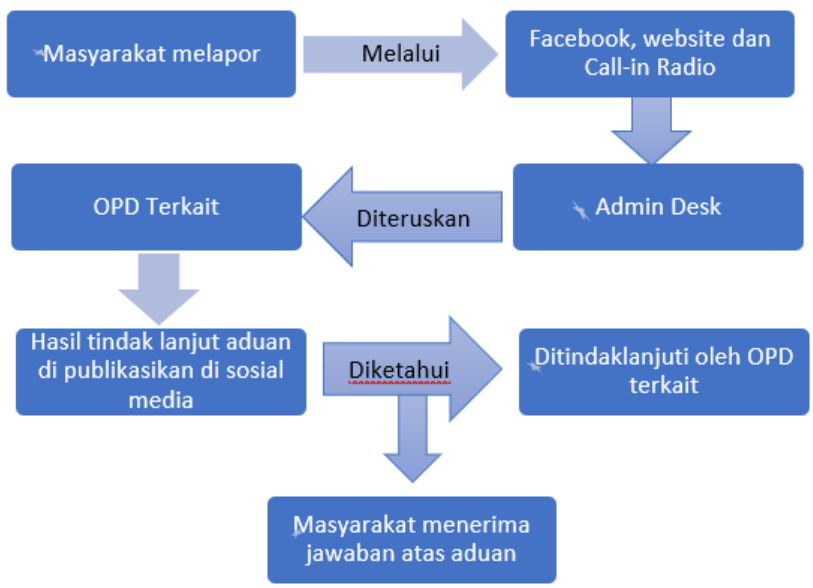

Figure 5. Complaint flow in Sambat Bunda

4.5 The Value of Digital Communication in Participatory Governance

The *Wadul Gus'e* channel, officially launched on 14 March 2025, received thousands of reports in a short time. During the first three months (14 March – 14 June 2025), 3,252 complaints were recorded, with approximately 72–79% resolved or closed—an indicator of significantly faster bureaucratic response compared to traditional mechanisms, which often resulted in month-long backlogs.

In Lumajang, the *Sambat Bunda* channel was formally introduced in early 2025 through official announcements and media coverage. The Communication and Informatics Agency documented its launch in March–April 2025, including a formal socialization session and admin coordination meeting on 23 April 2025. In its first quarter of operation, *Sambat Bunda* received dozens of complaints via multiple channels: 13 through SP4N-LAPOR! 10 via the Lumajang complaint portal, 30 from a Facebook group, and 25 through the *Sambat Bunda* WhatsApp and web platform. All reports were processed and resolved according to local government mechanisms.

These results highlight two key points:

1. Digital channels help cut bureaucratic layers that previously caused complaints to be "stuck" at subdistrict or village offices before reaching the relevant agency (a common issue in densely populated Jember).

2. Local channels that integrate non-digital elements (such as radio LPPL and community engagement) with digital tools (e.g., AI-based WhatsApp chatbots) create adaptive strategies for areas with rural populations and uneven internet access, as in Lumajang.

Thus, local innovations are not simply duplicates of national programs but adaptive formats tailored to different social, cultural, and infrastructural contexts.

Table 2. Complaint Outcomes of Wadul Gus'e and Sambat Bunda (2025)

Aspect	***Wadul Gus'e* (Jember)**	***Sambat Bunda* (Lumajang)**
Launch Date	14 March 2025	March–April 2025 (formal socialization, admin coordination on 23 April)
Data Period	14 March – 14 June 2025	First Quarter (Q1) 2025
Total Complaints	3,252	78 (13 SP4N-LAPOR!, 10 Portal, 30 Facebook, 25 *Sambat Bunda*)
Resolution Rate	72–79% resolved within 3 months	100% resolved according to local mechanisms
Channels Used	WhatsApp app (with photo, location, chronology), integrated with SP4N	SP4N-LAPOR!, Lumajang Portal, Facebook group, *Sambat Bunda* WhatsApp + web, LPPL radio
Key Performance	Significant increase in response speed, reducing backlog of months	Multi-channel integration (national + local systems), ensuring broader citizen participation
Effectiveness	Thousands of reports processed and followed up; regular updates published on social media	100% resolution rate, with outcomes broadcast across all complaint channels

Together, these comparisons show two effective approaches to managing digital public complaints. *Wadul Gus'e* excels in handling large complaint volumes with quick responses, reducing administrative backlog, while *Sambat Bunda* emphasizes multi-channel integration—bridging national systems with local media—to expand participation and achieve complete follow-up. These findings highlight that the success of e-governance depends not only on the number of complaints processed but also on the quality of citizen engagement and the adaptability of government communication channels.

5. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the transformation of public complaint mechanisms into digital communication channels has significantly improved bureaucratic responsiveness at the local level. In Jember, the *Wadul Gus'e* channel recorded 3,252 complaints between 14 March and 14 June 2025, with a resolution rate of 72–79% within the first three months. This outcome illustrates a remarkable

acceleration compared to conventional mechanisms, which were often delayed by lengthy administrative layers.

In Lumajang, the *Sambat Bunda* channel highlighted the effectiveness of multi-channel integration. By combining national platforms (SP4N-LAPOR!), local digital tools (WhatsApp, web portal, Facebook), and traditional media (LPPL Suara Semeru radio), the program achieved a 100% resolution rate during its first reporting quarter.

These findings affirm that digital public communication innovations—when implemented systematically, with attention to cultural and local contexts—do more than improve service delivery. They also expand opportunities for citizen participation, strengthen transparency, and foster sustainable, reciprocal relationships between local governments and their communities.

Thus, both *Wadul Gus'e* and *Sambat Bunda* exemplify how participatory e-governance can serve as a model for other regions, not only by accelerating complaint handling but also by embedding collaboration, accountability, and mutual trust at the heart of local governance.

6. REFERENCES

Berliana, R. E. (2024). Implementasi SP4N LAPOR! (Sistem Pengelolaan Pengaduan Pelayanan Publik Nasional Layanan Aspirasi dan Pengaduan Online Rakyat) dalam meningkatkan kualitas pelayanan publik (Studi kasus: Beberapa instansi pemerintah yang ada di Indonesia). *Jurnal Socio-political Communication and Policy Review, 1*.

Clark, J. J. (2020). *Uneven innovation: The work of smart cities*. Columbia University Press.

Effendy, O. U. (2017). *Ilmu komunikasi: Teori dan praktek*. Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya.

Fakhrurroji, M. (2024). *Teori-teori new media: Perspektif komunikasi, sosial-budaya, dan politik-ekonomi* (hlm. 176–184). Bandung: Simbiosa Rekatama Media.

Grunig, J. E., & Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing public relations*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Habermas, J. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. MIT Press.

Lattimore, D., Baskin, O. W., Heiman, S. T., & Toth, E. L. (2012). *Public relations: The profession and the practice*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Papacharissi, Z. (2002). The virtual sphere: The internet as a public sphere. *New Media & Society, 4*(1), 9–27. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614440222226244

Pratama, I. G. B. A. (2024). Penerapan SP4N LAPOR! dalam meningkatkan kualitas pelayanan Dinas Kependudukan dan Pencatatan Sipil Kabupaten Badung. *Jurnal Ilmiah Global Education (JIGE), 5*(3). https://doi.org/10.55681/jige.v5i3.3315

Rainie, L., & Wellman, B. (2012). *Networked: The new social operating system*. MIT Press.

Taylor, A. (2014). *The people's platform: Taking back power and culture in the digital age*. Picador.

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. SAGE Publication