Public Participation as a Basis for the Public Policy Process: New Dynamics and Challenges in the Digital Era

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Abstrac. This paper explores how digital technology has changed the way governments engage with citizens in formulating public policy. The digital era has transcended geographical limitations, allowing for wider public participation through online platforms. Government websites, discussion forums, and social media have become essential tools for civic engagement. In addition, online surveys support evidence-based policy decisions. However, challenges such as privacy issues and misinformation must be addressed. This paper defines public participation as the process by which individuals, groups, or organizations contribute to policy discussions. This can happen through a variety of ways, including online consultations and petitions. Digital advancements offer many advantages, such as inclusivity, diverse perspectives, transparency, legitimacy, increased policy acceptance and implementation, information accuracy, impact understanding, and responsiveness to change. However, challenges remain, including unequal internet access, low digital literacy, privacy concerns, misinformation, quality of participation, unfair engagement, mistrust of online platforms, information overload, technological barriers, and a generation gap. Case studies illustrate how public engagement influences policy. Recommendations include improving digital infrastructure, promoting digital literacy, ensuring data privacy, encouraging dialogue, encouraging active participation, increasing community engagement, ensuring transparency and accountability, promoting multi-stakeholder engagement, and conducting ongoing evaluations.

Keywords: Public Participation, Public Policy, Digital Technology, Inclusive Policy.

1 Introduction

Public participation is a process that allows individuals, groups, or organizations from different sectors of society to engage and contribute to the policy-making process[7], [8]. This implies that citizens have the right and opportunity to give their input on matters related to government policies [9]. This definition includes various forms of participation, including involvement in online public consultations as well as participation in physical meetings or ghaterings organized by the government.

It should also be noted that public participation is more than just giving opinions; but also listen to the perspective of a wide community. This digital approach creates

opportunities for citizens to shape the resulting policy-making process in line with their needs and aspirations.

This article aims to answer two factors why the process of making public policy based on public participation can be carried out today. As well as what are the challenges and dynamics faced from this change. First, the emergence of technology after Covid-19 has opened up a large enough space for participation so that the public can enter the government policy-making process. Overall, with public participation in the process of creating public policies, inclusive policies become real to be realized. The combination of these two elements can have a significant impact on the inclusiveness of a policy

This article presents three main arguments to answer the research question. First, increasing public participation has its own challenges and obstacles. First, the digital access gap, second, disinformation and misinformation, active participation in policy advocacy is smaller. Second, the author argues that active participation of society is only possible when technology is rapidly evolving. Third, active community participation is the basis for inclusive public policy. Overall, by combining the 3 (three) arguments, the active participation of the community has its own challenges and obstacles. However, with the current tangible results, inclusive policies are only possible because of the active participation of the community as the basis for the presence of public policies.

In addition, the digital era introduces the risk of spreading false information or hoaxes [6]. Misleading or inaccurate information can quickly circulate via social media and online platforms, shaping public perception of policy issues. However, along with these opportunities, new challenges arise that need to be overcome. One of them is the problem of information accuracy, where information spread on the internet is not always verified and can be a source of hoaxes or false information. In addition, the potential for disproportionate influence on social media is also a concern, as some groups or individuals with large resources can dominate online narratives, ignore minority voices, and disproportionately influence public opinion.

Despite the challenges in the digital era, digital technology is able to make public participation in making policies. One of the strategies carried out by the government to improve community services in order to realize effective and efficient services is to implement an electronic-based service system or called electronic government (Digital Governance). Digital Governance is an effort to develop electronic-based government administration. An arrangement of management systems and work processes in the government environment by optimizing information and communication technology. Through the optimization of information and communication technology, it is hoped that it can change the service system, while the strategy that must be carried out is to implement the digital governance policy.

They can leverage tools such as online platforms to gather public input, conduct virtual public consultations, and engage in more effective communication with their citizens.

The use of information technology can also make it easier for the public to access information to increase transparency and accountability in government agencies. In addition, digital governance is a form of utilizing information technology to support.

In the digital age, public participation is more than just voting; This involves active collaboration between the government and the community in shaping better policies. This collaborative approach provides an opportunity to build trust between citizens and the government, ensuring that the resulting policies are more aligned with the needs and aspirations of the public.

The digital age has shown how change is happening so quickly and easily, substantial changes in the way governments engage with society and how citizens can participate in the policy-making process. While there are challenges to address, the opportunities provided by these technologies for crafting more inclusive and responsive policies are immense. It is important for all circles, both the community and the government, to contribute and use digital technology as best as possible so as to produce positive benefits.

2   Definition of Public Participation

individuals, groups, or organizations from different sectors of society to engage and contribute to the policy-making process[7], [8]. This implies that citizens have the right and opportunity to give their input on matters related to government policies [9]. This definition includes various forms of participation, including involvement in online public consultations as well as participation in physical meetings or ghaterings organized by the government.

It should also be noted that public participation is more than just giving opinions; but also listen to the perspective of a wide community. This digital approach creates opportunities for citizens to shape the resulting policy-making process in line with their needs and aspirations.

Online platforms are emerging as a tool to facilitate public participation in the digital age [14], [15]. Government websites, online discussion forums and other online communication media can make it easier for citizens to engage with the government and others. Through online platforms, any individual can give input, suggest, comment, and even start their own business or venture. In this context, public participation can take various forms, such as

1. Online Public Consultations: Governments can organize online public consultations, inviting citizens to contribute their input on various policy issues through official websites. In this case, all people can post comments, fill out surveys, and provide ideas and ideas online.
2. Online Petitions: Citizens have the ability to start online petitions to rally support for specific issues they are passionate about. This online petition was able to get thousands or even millions of hands in a short time, thus attracting attention from the government significantly so as to influence government policy decisions.

3. Online Discussion Forums: Many online forums, whether organized by governments or independent initiatives, provide a space where citizens can engage in discussions on policy issues and exchange their views with others.
4. Social Media: Platforms such as online or online mass media such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter are also one of the public spaces for them to participate in policy issues. Through these platforms, individuals can ask questions, provide input, criticize policies, or advocate for specific issues, fostering a broader public dialogue.

There are various forms of public space generated by digital technology, every individual or group from all groups has the opportunity to be involved in government policies, from those that were initially limited by geography. This means that it is important to involve the community in making policies that can affect their survival, and also shows that digital technology is important in facilitating the public to give their opinions on their policies.

3   The Role of Technology

The development of digital technology has significantly changed the way people participate in public policymaking[12]. Technology has facilitated new ways for citizens to engage in the policy process, making participation easier, more inclusive, and broader than ever before[13], [14]. The presence of various polling platforms, petitions, and online discussion forums is a concrete example of this role. However, it must also be emphasized that public participation through digital transformation is not only related to the presence and implementation of new technologies, but also inherent in changes in work culture, bureaucratic reasoning and social interaction at large[15], [16]:

Table 1. Characteristics of Technological Developments in Public Policy

No	Form of change	Challenge
1	Easy access To Internet	Rural and Urban internet access growth gap
2	The community easily responds	The bias of social norms in expressing opinions
3	Society has a more significant role (autonomous)	The definition of freedom becomes biased
4	Significant sharing awareness	Often misinformation and disinformation
5	Availability of diverse participation platforms	

Source : Field Data Analysis, 2024

The very significant development of technology has led to several changes in various forms. These changes have become a distinctive character of technological developments. With these changes, public participation in the public policy process has a two-sided fact. So there is a complex dynamic between ease of access and challenges in participation in the digital era.[12]

Public participation in the local policy-making process has changed the lives of the community as a whole, even the presence of significant challenges in the digital era which shows that there are 3 important aspects. First, the role of technology has

become quite large which accelerates change. Second, these changes have triggered many very dynamic challenges, and third, public awareness to be involved in the government policy process is getting higher which aims to realize inclusive policies. This is shown in table 3 regarding the form of change ranging from easy access, ease of response, autonomy of opinion, and significance for sharing. Public participation in local policy-making processes has undergone significant changes with the acceleration of digital development[13][17][15].

The era of society 5.0 with all its characteristics has presented a huge opportunity for participation to the community in fulfilling the inclusive public policy-making process. Although there are still challenges in the dynamics of the public policy-making process through various existing platforms, this is a considerable progress for now. The various challenges present are in the form of cultural and structural challenges. Such as uneven development between regions, the concept of center-periphery that still exists in the development process and the bias of social norms and perceptions that have become global[16]..

4 Evaluation and Effectiveness of Public Participation in The Policy-Making Process: Dynamics and Challenges

Public participation is a key element in the democratic policy-making process[18]. This reflects the principle that public policy should reflect the needs, aspirations, and values of the people who will be affected by the policy. In this context, public participation has a very important benefit as it opens the door to listening to many diverse voices and provides valuable data for policymakers[8][15][17], [19].

Table 2. Evaluation Indicators and Effectiveness of Public Participation as Key Elements of Policy

No	Mandate	Description	Impact
1	Inclusive	Public participation allows various community groups to participate in the policy-making process. This includes minority groups, vulnerable groups, and those who may not have direct access to political power.	Increasing legitimacy because many people feel that their voices are represented by the policies that are present.
2	Diverse Perspectives	All communities with different educational backgrounds, views and experiences have the opportunity to contribute to the policies being made	The policy made will be perceived by the community as a comprehensive policy
3	Openness	Transparency is the beginning, process and result of the policy-making process	Implementation of the principle of accountability in public policy design
4	Acceptance	The policies that are present are more easily accepted by the public at large	Can be implemented quickly and on target
5	Easily mitigate potential impacts	Policymakers will comprehensively and quickly	Policymakers adaptively minimize the risk of a

		understand the impact of the policy being made	policy to be implemented
6	Accurate	Policies made based on social facts	Validity

Source : Field Data Analysis, 2024

Based on table 2 above, we can understand that public awareness that cares about their contribution to the policy-making process has significant benefits. Because, with participation, the policy-making process meets the principle of policy-making based on the needs of the community as a whole while still paying attention to the needs of vulnerable groups. Through a wide range of community participation, the public policy-making process has many benefits ranging from inclusiveness, openness, having diverse perspectives, acceptance of implementation, easy risk mitigation and accuracy. Therefore, participation not only provides benefits on the one hand, but also has an impact on ensuring the inclusiveness of a policy from downstream to upstream[17], [20].

Public policy requires evaluation and effectiveness both in its design, implementation and monitoring process. As shown by Table 2, there are 3 key aspects in the process of evaluating the effectiveness of public involvement in the policy-making process. First, the quality of public policies is better, second, the legitimacy and acceptance of implementation from the public at large as well as more effective risk management related to values and ethics. These three aspects are the core of the benefits of community involvement and active participation in a public policy design process. In fact, it can strengthen the implementation achievements planned in the field when the policy is implemented[17].

The data from table 2 also shows the context and contextualization of public involvement in the public policy design process. The three contexts are related to the principles of public policy design that ensure the achievement of public policy implementation, namely inclusive, transparent and responsive. Meanwhile, contextualized, the public policy benefit evaluation indicator shows that the government upholds the ethical reflection of a community group such as the ethics of justice, equality, freedom and social responsibility[16].

Although high public participation in the policy design process has represented values and ethics, there are dilemmas in its implementation. Active participation from the community with rapid technological acceleration has its own challenges by reflecting on the development process in developing countries. This means that the gap is the main challenge both in terms of access, infrastructure, education level, knowledge and values, as well as the validity and reliability of information [21], [22], [23], [24], [25].

Table 3. Dynamics and Challenges of Digital Transformation in Public Engagement in Public Policy Design

No	Challenge	Statement Informan	Recommendations
1	Inequality of Access and Digital Infrastructure	"Sometimes we are lazy to get involved in surveys and petition signatures, that's because the internet network here is very difficult, if we have to go to the city, it can make us not work all day". AA, 47 years old.	Equitable access to the internet and digital infrastructure
2	Lack of competence and Digital literacy	"There is a considerable difference today about digital competence between generations, for those of us who are new to the internet and social media in the mid-2000s, it is indeed difficult for us to explore the world of the internet. Unlike the current generation, from babies they have held cellphones and explored cyberspace. AB, 35 years old.	Increasing competence and digital literacy for all groups.
3	No Cybersecurity Standards	"It seems that there are still many people who are skeptical about various online platforms about trying to criticize, we are afraid that later what will happen to our data, our cellphone number, or email, who can guarantee that?". HJK. 35 Years.	Strengthening the Cybersecurity Law and the Law on Data Privacy
4	Increasing false information (hoax)	"With so much information circulating on the internet, it can sometimes be difficult to make sure that the information is true and from a reliable source. Moreover, we are now very easy to press the 'share' button or share as we please". YT. 38 Years.	Strengthening digital literacy socialization, reaching valid information and increasing the quantity of digitally proficient influencers.
5	Participation as a symbolic activity	"In many communities, I see those who have concerns about a public state policy, but the results achieved from our active involvement are sometimes very long and we don't even know where the advocacy has gone," Ja, 32 years old.	Strengthening the network and organization of civil society in policy advocacy through online platforms.

Table 3 above shows that there are dynamics and challenges related to technological acceleration which are directly proportional to the level of public participation in the public policy-making process. This dilemma is reflected in the facts that exist in the field. Based on the results of the interviews that have been conducted, the informants shared their anxiety and doubts due to the limited internet access and the infrastructure gap between urban and rural areas. The significance of these challenges shows different problems in each generation, both the baby boomers, the millennial generation, and Generation Z as well as the level of education and the sociodemographic distribution of society as a whole[11].

5   Lessons from Active Community Participation In Public Policy

Public awareness in participating in the process of designing policies that are public has become one of the aspects that cannot be rejected today. To realize the inclusiveness of a policy, it is a guarantee and guarantee provided by the government. In this section, the author will show several studies related to active community involvement that lead to the fulfillment of the principle of inclusiveness of a policy. The cases taken by the author aim to show how structure, equitable access and technology, competence and strong digital literacy are the basic foundations for significant improvement so that a policy is inclusive, gains legitimacy and meets the principle of accountability.

There are three case studies that show what has been described above, and this case was taken purposively with the aim of showing an inclusive policy design process. The first case is about public participation in the process of designing government policies, the second in environmental policies and the last in education policies. The three cases in policy design with different aspects show that inclusivity efforts continue to be encouraged in all aspects of people's lives in general[26].

The mainstreaming of public participation in public policy can be seen from the Indian government's efforts through the 'MyGov' program. The program was adopted by the Indian government to reach the community at large with the aim that the community can provide their views, inputs and opinions through the online platform on sustainable development policies, education equity policies and efforts to overcome various health issues. The same is true of the Romanian government, which engages its people in responding to policies aimed at addressing social problems[26], [27].

However, Germany and Kenya show almost the same regarding public participation in the environment-related policy-making process. The community is widely involved in the formulation of sustainable energy policies and electronic waste management through social media platforms in the form of campaigns. In Germany and Kenya, an important lesson to be learned is the involvement of actors who drive participation, the presence of civil society organizations and strategies. The rationality of high public involvement in policy is a very important encouragement [28], [29], [30], [31].

However, something is somewhat different in Indonesia if we look at how public participation in encouraged, formulated and criticized policies. From several existing cases and the use of various platforms, the lesson we can learn is that in Indonesia, the presence of civil elements and even indigenous communities is very influential in various programs of recognition of resource management by Indigenous peoples. In addition, from the case of decentralization of regional autonomy, the Save KPK movement and the Movement to Reject the Omnibus Law show that elites, both central and regional, are the nodes of efforts to support, and direct wider participation from the public. In fact, the data shows that public engagement efforts at large are very collaborative [32], [33], [34].

From some of the cases that have been shown, there is a common thread that connects the three, namely public participation as the main component so that public policies become inclusive, responsive and humanist. In addition, the involvement factor of civil and community elements is the enabler of various challenges that arise so that the public policies present can cover the shortcomings both in terms of education level, biased views, ambiguous ethics and values, and pseudo-or symbolic participation.

6   Conclusion

Public participation is one of the main instruments in the process of designing, implementing, and evaluating public policies today. Moreover, with the advent of digital acceleration, this participation now covers a very broad range of socio-demographic diversity. However, there are various challenges that naturally accompany the changes brought by digital acceleration, which are directly proportional to public participation. Several findings from both literature and field data show that the greatest challenges faced in involving the wider community through digital technology acceleration have revealed significant gaps in terms of access, infrastructure, digital competence, as well as the phenomenon of echo chambers and disinformation.

Through the integration of field data and literature studies, research related to public participation as the basis for public policy indicates the need for deeper reinforcement of public participation through equitable access, infrastructure, and strengthening of digital literacy competence. Additionally, this study found that the phenomena of echo chambers and disinformation are frequent challenges that are difficult to address comprehensively in efforts to strengthen public participation in policy-making.

However, this study still has limitations in both methodology and novelty. First, the author is too general in the discussion without strong emphasis on a specific case that would illustrate the contextual nature of the challenges encountered in the field. Second, the approach used by the author is limited, as employing a robust mixed-method approach would yield results that are closer to the full reality of the challenges faced in efforts to strengthen public involvement in the policymaking process.

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