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## Optimizing the Quality of Public Services in Village Government: A Qualitative Study in Kertawinangun Village, Mandirancan District, Kuningan Regency

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### Abstract

Public services at the village government level are strategic instruments in realizing accountable governance and supporting the economic development of rural communities. This research aims to analyze the quality of public services and formulate a service optimization strategy in Kertawinangun Village, Mandirancan District, Kuningan Regency. The research uses a qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study design. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation studies during the January-March 2024 period. The informants consist of village heads, village officials, BPD members, and service user communities. Data analysis used the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña through the stages of data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing by triangulating sources and methods. The results of the study show that the quality of service is relatively strong in the dimensions of empathy and social capital that build public trust. However, in the dimensions of reliability and responsiveness, there is still a dependence on certain apparatus, the standardization of procedures has not been optimal, and the digitization of administration is incremental. The findings show that social capital plays a role as a moderation variable in service implementation. Service optimization requires strengthening institutional capacity, standardizing SOPs, gradual digitalization, and institutionalizing community participation mechanisms. This study develops a social-administrative interaction model as a conceptual framework for village services that are adaptive to the local social context

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### INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, bureaucratic reform in Indonesia has placed improving the quality of public services as a strategic priority in governance (Rahmat et al., 2024; Salam, 2023; Wijayanti et al., 2025). Public services are no longer understood simply as an administrative obligation, but as a manifestation of the state's responsibility in fulfilling the rights of citizens and building institutional legitimacy (Sancoko, 2018; Wicaksono & Setiawan, 2022).

At the village level, governance transformation has become more significant since the enactment of Law Number 6 of 2014 concerning Villages (Al Khasyi & Michael, 2022; Faisal & Attas, 2025; Li et al., 2022; Yarni et al., 2023). The regulation gives broad authority to villages in managing government, development, and community empowerment. However, the expansion of authority has not been fully followed by an increase in institutional capacity and the quality of public services (Pramusinto & Latief, 2019; Nurmandi et al., 2020).

Various studies show that the quality of village services still faces structural and cultural problems, such as limited human resources, manual administrative systems, and non-optimal operational standards (Rahman & Yuliani, 2021; Arifin et al., 2022). In rural contexts, social capital and relational closeness between the apparatus and the community are often the dominant factors that affect the perception of service quality (Widodo, 2021).

Kertawinangun Village in Mandirancan District, Kuningan Regency is a village with agrarian characteristics and a strong communal social structure. Public services in this village include population administration, business certificates, social assistance services, and facilitation of community economic activities. This research is important to

understand how the quality of public services is practiced in rural social contexts and how optimization strategies can be formulated contextually.

The discourse of public service in public administration has undergone a significant paradigm shift. In the initial phase, the Weberian bureaucratic approach emphasized hierarchy, formal procedures, and adherence to rules as the main indicators of service performance. This model places the apparatus as the implementer of regulations that are administrative and normative.

Over time, the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm introduced the logic of efficiency, effectiveness, and results-orientation. In this perspective, public services are seen as similar to private sector services, so the measure of performance is determined by user satisfaction and operational efficiency. However, criticism of the NPM arises because of its tendency to reduce public services to mere managerial issues and ignore the democratic dimension.

In response, a New Public Service approach emerged (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015) which emphasizes that citizens are not just customers, but citizens who have the right to participate in the government process. Within this framework, the quality of public services is not only measured through speed and accuracy, but also through accountability, transparency, and community involvement in decision-making.

In the Indonesian context, bureaucratic reform leads to the integration of the values of efficiency and public participation (Sancoko, 2018). However, implementation at the village level shows different dynamics compared to urban governance. Villages have communal social characteristics that affect the way public services are carried out. Therefore, a theoretical approach to public services in villages needs to consider the interaction between the formal administrative system and the local social structure.

The concept of service quality broadly refers to the compatibility between public expectations and the performance of services received. The SERVQUAL model developed

by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) became one of the most influential analytical frameworks in the study of service quality. The model identifies five key dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

In the context of the public sector, the use of SERVQUAL has undergone adaptation. Fatmawati and Pratama (2019) emphasized that the reliability and responsiveness dimensions are the dominant indicators in assessing the effectiveness of local government services. Meanwhile, Suryadi (2020) shows that in public services at the local level, the assurance dimension is closely related to the perception of integrity and competence of the apparatus.

However, a number of recent studies have shown that the measurement of the quality of public services cannot rely entirely on standard quantitative instruments. Widodo (2021) found that in rural contexts, the dimensions of empathy and social closeness have a greater influence on community satisfaction than formal procedural aspects. This indicates that the quality of public services is contextual and influenced by the social capital of the community.

Thus, in this study, the SERVQUAL model was used as an initial analysis framework, but it was developed contextually by considering the social characteristics of Kertanginangun Village.

Village governance is an integral part of the local government system within the framework of decentralization. The concept of good governance, which includes the principles of transparency, accountability, participation, effectiveness, and the rule of law, is the normative foundation in village government management.

Pramusinto and Latief (2019) emphasized that the success of local governance is highly dependent on the institutional capacity and leadership of the village. Meanwhile, Nurmandi et al. (2020) show that village governance reform in Indonesia still faces challenges in terms of coordination, human resource capacity, and administrative system.

In the context of public services, good village governance requires clear operational standards, procedures, a transparent documentation system, and participatory oversight mechanisms. However, the implementation of these principles often clashes with the social reality of the village which prioritizes family relationships and personal closeness.

This raises a dilemma between bureaucratic professionalization and social flexibility. Professionalization demands uniform and documented standards, while social flexibility allows adaptation based on the needs of citizens. This research departs from the assumption that the optimization of village services must be able to balance these two dimensions.

Government digitalization is a global agenda in improving the quality of public services. Mergel (2019) explained that digital transformation is not only the application of technology, but changes in work processes, organizational culture, and interaction between the government and citizens.

In Indonesia, village digitalization has begun to be encouraged through the Village Information System (SID) program and the strengthening of e-government at the local level. Arifin et al. (2022) show that the digitalization of village administration can increase efficiency and transparency, but its success is highly dependent on the readiness of human

resources and infrastructure support.

In rural contexts, digitalization faces additional challenges such as limited digital literacy, uneven internet access, and resistance to changes in manual procedures. Therefore, the approach to digital transformation must be gradual and contextual.

This research views digitalization not as the final goal, but as an instrument to strengthen the existing service system. The integration of technology with village social capital is the key so that the transformation is not symbolic.

Social capital refers to networks, norms, and beliefs that facilitate coordination and cooperation in society. In the context of villages, social capital is often the main force in the administration of government.

Widodo (2021) shows that public trust in village officials can increase the perception of service quality even though physical facilities are limited. However, social capital can also give rise to the practice of exclusivity if it is not managed professionally.

In public service, social capital can serve as a catalyst that accelerates the service process through informal communication and personal relationships. However, if not balanced with a transparent formal system, relationship-based service practices have the potential to cause bias and inequality of access.

This study adopts the perspective that social capital is not a substitute for the administrative system, but a contextual factor that must be integrated in the design of village services.

Village administration services have direct implications for the economic development of the community. Business legality, domicile certificates, and social assistance recommendations are important instruments in expanding people's access to economic resources.

Iskandar and Rahayu (2023) show that the ease of obtaining business legality contributes to increasing access to MSME financing. In rural contexts, the quality of

administrative services can affect the level of community participation in economic empowerment programs.

Thus, the optimization of village public services not only has an impact on administrative satisfaction, but also on strengthening local economic capacity. Fast, accurate, and transparent public services create an institutional environment that supports the growth of community businesses.

Based on the above literature description, it can be concluded that the quality of public services at the village level is influenced by the interaction between:

1. Administrative dimension (standard procedures and apparatus capacity)
2. Technology dimension (digitization of services)
3. Social dimension (social capital and community participation)
4. Economic dimension (implications for local development)

This research positions these four dimensions in an integrated analysis framework to understand the dynamics of public services in Kertanginangun Village.

Based on these conditions, this study aims to analyze the quality of public services in

Kertawinangun Village and formulate strategies for optimizing village government services in accordance with the local social context. Specifically, this study seeks to examine the dimensions of service quality, identify obstacles in service implementation, understand the role of social capital in village services, and develop a contextual optimization strategy through institutional strengthening, SOP standardization, gradual digitalization, and community participation mechanisms.

The benefits of this study are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of public administration studies by integrating service quality theory, social capital, institutional capacity, and digital governance in the context of village government. Practically, this study can serve as a reference for village governments in improving service systems, strengthening the competence of apparatus, developing more transparent procedures, and designing public services that are adaptive to community needs. In addition, the findings may support policymakers in formulating more contextual village service reform strategies that not only improve administrative satisfaction but also strengthen local economic development and accountable village governance.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Research Approach and Design**

This study used a qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to understand in depth the dynamics of the quality of public services in the rural social context, not to test quantitative hypotheses or make statistical generalizations. The focus of the research lies in the meaning, experience, and practice of services carried out by village officials and felt by the community using services.

The intrinsic case study design is used because this study seeks to understand the phenomenon of service quality contextually in Kertawinangun Village as a case that has specific social and institutional characteristics. Case studies allow researchers to explore phenomena holistically within the boundaries of a bounded system, namely the scope of village public services in the research period. Epistemologically, this research departs from a constructivist paradigm that views social reality as the result of the construction of interactions between social actors. Thus, the quality of public services is understood as a reality formed through the interaction between village officials, the community, and existing institutional structures.

### **Research Location and Time**

The research was carried out in Kertawinangun Village, Mandirancan District, Kuningan Regency, West Java Province. Field data collection was carried out for three months, namely January to March 2024. The period includes the initial observation stage, the implementation of in-depth interviews, village administration documentation, and the process of clarifying and verifying data through member checking. The selection of a location is based on several considerations:

1. Villages have strong communal social characteristics.
2. Village administration services are the main entrance for the community to access social assistance and business legality.

3. Villages are in the early stages of adapting to administrative digitalization.

Data collection was carried out during a phased field research period, including initial observation, in-depth interviews, and data clarification.

### **Research Subjects and Informants**

The research informants were selected using the purposive sampling technique, which is the selection of informants based on the consideration that they have direct knowledge and experience related to village public services. The informants consist of, village head (1 person), village secretary (1 person), head of general and planning (1 person), village administration operator (1 person), members of the village consultative body (2 people), the community of service users (10 people), consisting of msme actors, social assistance recipients, and the general public the total number of informants is 16 people. The selection of service users takes into account the variety of experiences in order to obtain a comprehensive picture of the perception of service quality.

### **Data collection techniques**

This study uses three main data collection techniques to ensure the depth and validity of information.

### **In-Depth Interviews**

The interview is conducted in a semi-structured manner with open-ended question guidelines. This technique allows researchers to explore information flexibly while maintaining a focus on the research theme.

The interview covers several aspects: administrative service procedures, community experience in receiving services, service obstacles and obstacles, perception of administrative digitalization, the impact of services on the community's economic activities each interview lasted between 30–60 minutes and was documented in the form of field notes as well as voice recordings (with the consent of the informant).

### **Participatory Observation**

Observations are carried out directly at the village office during service hours. Researchers observed: administrative service flow, interaction between the apparatus and the community, service turnaround time, use of facilities and infrastructure. Observations were carried out to obtain factual data that complemented the interview results, as well as to identify the suitability between the stated procedures and practices in the field.

### **Documentation Studies**

The documents analyzed include: service registration book, correspondence archive, SOP documents (if available), village profile, and service activity report, documentation is used to verify the consistency of information and strengthen data triangulation.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

Data analysis was carried out simultaneously from the data collection stage using the interactive model Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) which includes three main stages:

### **Data Condensation**

At this stage, the researcher selects, focuses, and simplifies the raw data obtained from interviews and observations. This process is carried out through open coding techniques to identify initial themes such as "social relationship-based services", "dependence on key

apparatus", and "limited digitalisation".

### **Data Display**

The data that has been categorized is then presented in the form of a descriptive narrative and a qualitative findings matrix. This presentation aims to make it easier for researchers to see the patterns of relationships between categories.

### **Conclusion Drawing and Verification**

Conclusions are drawn gradually through a process of interpretation and theoretical reflection. Verification is carried out by comparing field findings with the literature and re-clarifying to informants if there is data that requires confirmation.

### **Data Validity Test**

1. To guarantee the credibility of the research, several validation techniques are used: Source Triangulation, which is comparing information from village officials and the community.
2. Triangulation Method, which is comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation.
3. Member Checking, which is reconfirming the summary of the interview results to the informant.
4. Trail Audit, which documents the entire research process systematically.  
This approach is carried out to ensure that the researcher's interpretation does not deviate from empirical reality.

### **Research Ethical Considerations**

This study pays attention to the ethical aspects of social research. Each informant was given an explanation of the purpose of the research and was guaranteed the confidentiality of his identity. Interview consent is obtained orally before the data collection process is carried out. The data obtained is used solely for academic purposes.

### **Research Limitations**

As a qualitative research with a case study design, the results of this study are not intended to be generalized statistically to all villages in Indonesia. However, the findings of the study have analytical generalization relevance in understanding the dynamics of public services in villages with similar social characteristics.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Qualitative Findings Matrix**

**Table 1. Matrix of Service Quality Findings in Kertawinangun Village**

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Empirical Findings</b>	<b>Critical Analysis</b>	<b>Implications</b>
Tangible	The facilities are quite representative yet manual	Digitalization is not yet optimal	Efficiency has not been maximized
Reliability	Fast service but depending on the specific individual	The system is not yet institutional	Risk of service stagnation

Responsiveness	Personally responsive apparatus	No formal complaint system	Undocumented evaluation
Insurance	Apparatus understands basic regulations	Lack of Excellent Service Training	Service standards are not yet uniform
Empathy	High social proximity	Potential subjectivity	Social capital is both a strength and a challenge

Source: Processed by the author based on interview, observation, and documentation data, 2024

### Critical Discussion and Quasi-Conceptual Analysis Empathy, Social Capital, and Service Rationality

The findings of the study show that the dimension of empathy is the main foundation in public service practices in Kertanginangun Village. Social closeness between the apparatus and the community forms a dialistic, flexible, and minimal bureaucratic service relationship. The Village Head said: In this village, we don't want the service to feel rigid. Residents come like family, so as much as possible they can be helped first and then the administration is adjusted. The statement shows that the practice of service is understood as a moral responsibility based on social values, not merely an administrative obligation. In line with that, the Village Secretary added: Because we already know each other, residents do not hesitate to convey their needs. Sometimes even before we are asked, we already know what they need. These interpersonal relationships reflect the high level of social capital bonding, where trust and internal social networks accelerate coordination and communication (Widodo, 2021). In rural contexts, social capital is a source of legitimacy for services, often even more dominant than formal procedural completeness.

However, the dominance of empathy as a service base also has normative consequences. One of the residents revealed: If you know them closely, they are usually faster. But if a new person may need more time because they don't know the procedure. This statement shows the possibility of differentiating service experience based on relational proximity. In the perspective of Weberian bureaucratic rationality, public services should ideally be carried out based on the principle of impersonality and uniformity of procedures (Pramusinto & Latief, 2019). When services rely more on social relations, the principle of impersonality has the potential to be reduced. This phenomenon can be analyzed through the framework of institutional logics theory, which explains the tension between two different logics: communitarian logic (solidarity, proximity, flexibility) and bureaucratic logic (standardization, formal rules, impersonality). In Kertanginangun Village, service practices show the dominance of communitarian logic, while bureaucratic logic has not been fully institutionalized.

BPD members also gave critical reflections: The family approach is indeed good, but there is still a need for clear rules so that all residents feel fair. This statement shows an internal awareness that empathy is not enough to be the sole foundation of service. Without clear standardization of procedures, relationship-based services have the potential to cause inequality of access. Thus, the findings of this study not only confirm Widodo's (2021) argument about the role of social capital in rural services, but also expand it by showing that social capital functions as a moderation variable in the implementation of formal standards. Social capital can strengthen the legitimacy of services, but it can also influence how procedures are implemented in the field. Theoretically, this condition shows that the quality

of village services is the result of a dynamic interaction between local social values and the demands of administrative professionalization. Village service reform cannot erase the deep-rooted relational character, but must integrate it in a system that guarantees justice and accountability. In other words, empathy must be institutionalized—not just practiced personally—through service standards that are transparent, documented, and accessible to all citizens without relational discrimination.

### Reliability and Institutional Capacity: The Problem of Competency Distribution

The reliability dimension in the context of public services refers to the ability of the organization to provide services consistently, on time, and according to established procedures (Parasuraman et al., 1988). The results of the study show that services in Kertawinangun Village are relatively fast and can be completed in one day for most types of administration. However, this consistency is highly dependent on the presence of certain apparatus. The village administration operator said: For population data and letters, I do take care of more. If I don't come in, it usually takes time for my friends to adjust.

The Village Secretary also acknowledged: Indeed, not all devices are used to the digital administration system. So if there is no one who usually manages data, the process is a little hampered. The statement shows that service reliability is still based on individual competencies, not on an institutionally distributed system. In the framework of institutional capacity theory, the capacity of public organizations is not only measured by the speed of service, but also by the ability of the system to remain stable without dependence on certain individuals. When knowledge and skills are concentrated in one or two people, the organization is not yet fully institutionalized. These findings are consistent with the research of Rahman and Yuliani (2021) which shows that many village governments still face problems with internal capacity distribution and the lack of cross-functional training. This condition shows that village service reform is often administrative, but has not touched on the aspect of strengthening organizational structures. Furthermore, a member of the BPD gave a critical reflection: If the system is standard and all devices understand their duties, the service will not depend on one person only. This statement emphasizes the importance of transforming from person-based services to system-based services. From the perspective of institutional theory, the conditions that occur in Kertawinangun Village can be explained through the concept of path dependency, where work practices develop based on historical habits and informal division of labor, rather than based on systemic and documented organizational design. Performative reliability—depending on individual performance—has the potential to pose a risk of service stagnation when there is a rotation of positions or the absence of key apparatus. This shows that reliability has not fully become a structural character of the organization. On the other hand, the community considers that the service so far is quite reliable.

A resident stated: So far, there has never been a big problem. Letters are usually completed that day. This statement shows that from the perspective of service users, reliability is perceived through first-hand experience, not through internal system evaluation. Within the framework of service quality theory, there is a difference between perceived reliability and structural reliability. Kertawinangun Village has a fairly good perceived reliability, but structural reliability still needs to be strengthened. Theoretically, this condition shows a gap between social legitimacy and institutional readiness. Social capital is able to maintain a positive public perception of services, but without strengthening the distribution of

competencies and standardizing procedures, the long-term sustainability of services has the potential to be disrupted. Therefore, optimizing the reliability of village services requires:

1. Clear SOP documentation and publication
2. Cross-functional training to avoid a competency monopoly
3. Archiving and database systems that can be accessed by more than one operator
4. Strengthening team-based collective work culture

Thus, the reliability of services in Kertawinangun Village must move from individual dependence to system institutionalization. Village service reform is not enough to rely only on empathy and social closeness, but also requires institutional engineering that ensures service consistency in the long term.

#### Responsiveness and Participation: Between Informal Interaction and Formal Accountability

The dimension of responsiveness in the quality of public services refers to the ability of organizations to respond quickly and appropriately to the needs of the community (Parasuraman et al., 1988). In the context of Kertawinangun Village, the findings of the study show that the village apparatus is considered quite responsive to the needs of residents, especially in urgent situations.

A resident of the social assistance recipient stated: "At that time, I needed a certificate of inability to register for children's schools. That day was also immediately made." MSME actors also said: "Business documents usually don't take long. Come in the morning, the afternoon is over. The statement shows that operationally, the village apparatus is able to provide a quick response to service requests. The Village Head affirmed: We try not to let residents wait for a long time. If it can be finished that day, it will be completed. This quick and interpersonal responsiveness shows the moral commitment of the apparatus to public services. In the perspective of the New Public Service (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015), public servants are seen as servants of citizens, not just providers of administrative services. These findings show that normatively, the orientation of service in Kertawinangun Village is in line with the spirit of participatory service. However, a more in-depth analysis shows that this responsiveness is still personal and has not been institutionalized systemically. The Village Secretary admits: Indeed, there has been no satisfaction survey or official complaint box. If there are complaints, they are usually submitted directly. BPD members also stated: Complaints are usually submitted during deliberations or directly to the device. There is no written mechanism yet. These findings suggest that although personalized responses are going well, formal feedback mechanisms are not yet available. In the perspective of public accountability theory, effective responsiveness is determined not only by the speed of service, but also by the existence of a documented and publicly accessible evaluation system (Wicaksono & Setiawan, 2022). The absence of a formal complaint mechanism limits the organization's ability to conduct organizational learning. Without complaint documentation and systematic evaluation, the village government does not have an adequate database to identify service problem patterns.

Theoretically, this condition can be analyzed through the concepts of administrative accountability and democratic accountability. Personal responses reflect administrative accountability based on social relations, while formal survey and complaint mechanisms are a form of structured democratic accountability. Kertawinangun Village shows strength in the first aspect, but is not optimal in the second aspect. Furthermore, one of the residents said: If there is something that is not satisfied, it is usually discussed carefully. But there is no special place to express criticism.

This statement suggests that a harmonious social culture serves as a mechanism for informal conflict resolution. However, within the framework of good governance, community participation should ideally not only be informal, but also institutionalized through a transparent and documented system (Pramusinto & Latief, 2019). In this context, service responsiveness in Kertawinangun Village can be categorized as relational responsiveness, namely responses based on social closeness and interpersonal communication. While effective in the context of small communities, this model has limitations in guaranteeing long-term accountability. When compared to the findings of Arifin et al. (2022), villages that have integrated a digital complaint system tend to have more systematic service evaluation documentation. However, this transformation requires adequate institutional readiness and digital literacy. Thus, the main challenge in the responsiveness dimension in Kertawinangun Village does not lie in the speed of service, but in the institutionalization of the participation and evaluation mechanism. Strong personal responses need to be reinforced through formal systems such as:

1. Periodic public satisfaction surveys
2. Complaint box or digital channel of complaint
3. Documentation and publication of complaint follow-up
4. Integration of evaluation results in village deliberations

Conceptually, this study shows that responsiveness in villages is the result of interaction between a harmonious social culture and a simple bureaucratic structure. Social capital accelerates responses, but without strengthening formal accountability, responsiveness is potentially undocumented and difficult to evaluate systemically. In other words, Kertawinangun Village already has a good perceived responsiveness in the eyes of the community, but it is necessary to build institutionalized responsiveness so that public services are not only fast, but also transparent, measurable, and sustainable.

#### Digitalization and Organizational Transformation: Incremental Modernization

Digital transformation in public services is seen as one of the main instruments of bureaucratic reform to improve efficiency, transparency, and accountability (Mergel, 2019). In the context of Kertawinangun Village, the results of the study show that administrative digitalization has begun to be carried out, but it is still in the early stages and incremental. The village administration operator stated: Now a lot of data is stored on the computer, but to submit

a letter you still have to come directly to the village office. Kaur Planning adds: We don't have a dedicated online system yet. So it is still manual, only the storage is digital. The statement shows that digitalization has not been integrated into a comprehensive service system. The service process still relies on face-to-face interaction, while the use of technology functions more as an archiving tool, rather than as a mechanism for transforming service processes.

In the framework of digital governance theory, digital transformation does not only mean the use of technology, but fundamental changes in organizational design, work patterns, and relationships between the government and citizens (Mergel, 2019). The digitalization that occurs in Kertawinangun Village can be categorized as digitization, namely the conversion of manual data to digital format, but it has not yet reached the stage of digital transformation, namely structural changes in service models. The Village Head said: We want a more modern system in the future, but we do need the readiness of human resources and budget. This statement shows a normative awareness of the importance of administrative modernization. However, organizational transformation requires more than just intention; Changes in work culture and digital competency distribution are needed. From the perspective of institutional change theory, the changes that occur in Kertawinangun Village can be categorized as incremental institutional change, which is a gradual change that does not shake the existing social structure. Villages with stable communal social structures tend to adopt innovation slowly to maintain social balance. The village operator also revealed: Sometimes if the power goes out or the network is slow, work is hampered. So it is not yet fully able to rely on the digital system.

Limited infrastructure and digital literacy are limiting factors for transformation. This is in line with the findings of Arifin et al. (2022) that the success of village digitalization is greatly influenced by the readiness of human resources and local infrastructure support. Further, a member of the BPD stated: Digitalization is important, but don't let people who are not used to technology find it difficult. This statement indicates that there is awareness of the potential for digital exclusion (digital divide). In the rural context, digital transformation must pay attention to inclusivity so as not to create inequality in access to services. Theoretically, this condition shows that the digitization of village services is at the intersection between the logic of administrative modernization and rural social reality. Digital governance in the context of villages cannot be equated with big cities that have high infrastructure and digital literacy. Within the framework of socio-technical systems theory, the success of digital transformation is determined by the alignment between technological systems and social systems. In Kertawinangun Village, the social system (social capital, interpersonal relations) is still the main foundation of services, so technology functions as a complement, not the main driver. Furthermore, a resident said: If you can do it online, it's good, but we are also used to coming directly to the village. This statement shows that face-to-face practices are still considered effective and in accordance with the local culture. This emphasizes that digital transformation in villages cannot be disruptive, but must be adaptive and contextual. Thus, the digitization of

services in Kertawinangun Village can be understood as a gradual and adaptive administrative modernization process. The main challenge is not only in the technical aspect, but in the integration of technology with organizational culture and social structure.

To achieve a more systematic transformation, it is necessary:

1. Digital literacy training for all apparatus
2. Development of a simple and integrated village information system
3. Integration of a digital complaint system as part of accountability
4. Preparation of a digitalization roadmap based on local capacity

Conceptually, this study shows that village digitalization is not just a technocratic agenda, but part of the process of institutionalization of public services. Modernization must run in harmony with social capital which has become the foundation of the legitimacy of village services. In other words, digital transformation in Kertawinangun Village must not replace strong social relations, but must strengthen them through a more efficient, transparent, and documented system.

### **Public Services as Economic Institutional Infrastructure**

In contemporary public administration discourse, public services are no longer understood solely as administrative functions, but as part of the state's capacity in providing institutional infrastructure for development (Pramusinto & Latief, 2019). In the context of Kertawinangun Village, the findings of the study show that administrative services have direct implications for the economic activities of the community, especially micro business actors and beneficiaries of empowerment programs. An MSME actor said: After having a business certificate from the village, I can participate in training and a list of capital assistance. Other business actors added: If the administration from the village is fast, it will be easier for us to take care of it to the sub-district or bank. So be more confident.

The statement shows that administrative legality is not just a formal document, but a prerequisite for access to economic resources. From the perspective of institutional development theory, the quality of public services creates legal certainty and administrative legitimacy that allows economic actors to participate in the formal system (Iskandar & Rahayu, 2023). The Village Head also acknowledged the strategic role of services in supporting MSMEs: We are trying to make it easier for businesses so that residents can develop and participate in government programs. This shows that village officials are aware of the function of service as an instrument of local economic development. In the framework of rural governance, the village government not only functions as an administrator, but also as a facilitator of community economic development and empowerment. However, the effectiveness of services as an economic infrastructure is highly dependent on the reliability and standardization of procedures. When services depend on certain individuals or have not been systematically digitized, economic access also has the potential to be hampered. A member of the BPD stated: If the administrative services are strong and clear, residents are more confident to develop their businesses.

This statement shows a direct relationship between service quality and economic confidence. In the perspective of state capacity theory, good administrative capacity strengthens the legitimacy of the state at the local level and encourages community participation in formal economic activities. Furthermore, these findings show that village public services function as institutional infrastructure, namely institutional structures that allow people to access economic rights, programs, and opportunities. Without effective administrative services, communities will experience structural barriers in accessing financing, training, and assistance programs. In this context, village public services cannot be separated from local economic development. The quality of service affects:

1. Speed of business legalization
2. Access to empowerment programs
3. Community trust in the village government
4. Integration of economic actors into the formal system

Theoretically, this condition shows that public services in Kertawinangun Village have a structural dimension that goes beyond administrative functions. Services act as a link between the community and the formal economic system, so that the quality of services contributes to the formation of a village economic ecosystem. However, if the service is not fully standardized and documented, then the role has the potential to be suboptimal. The transformation of services towards a more professional and digitized system will strengthen the function of the village as a local development agent.

Thus, the findings of this study expand the discourse on the quality of village public services by placing them in the framework of economic institutional development. Public services are not only an indicator of administrative performance, but also a determinant of village capacity in supporting inclusive and sustainable economic development. Conceptually, the integration of social capital, institutional capacity, digital transformation, and economic functions forms an interdependent village service system. Public services are the nodes that connect social legitimacy, bureaucratic professionalization, administrative modernization, and local economic development.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study examined public service quality in Kertawinangun Village, Kuningan Regency, finding that services operate in a transitional phase between informal, relationship-based practices and formal administrative professionalization. Through qualitative methods including interviews, observations, and documentation the study identifies social capital and interpersonal proximity as the village's primary service strengths, while also highlighting structural challenges such as uneven institutional capacity, the absence of a formalized community feedback mechanism, and incremental rather than integrated digitalization. The study proposes an integrative reform model that combines apparatus capacity-building, gradual administrative digitization, standardized SOPs, and institutionalized community participation, recognizing that village services cannot rely solely on informal social mechanisms nor ignore

the local communitarian character. It further establishes that public service quality directly underpins local economic development, with administrative services functioning as institutional infrastructure for community empowerment and financing access. As this study is limited to a single-case analysis restricting generalizability to analytical rather than statistical conclusions future research is recommended to conduct comparative studies across villages with varying social characteristics, geographic contexts, and levels of digital readiness, in order to develop a more robust and transferable theoretical model of rural public service reform in Indonesia.

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