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THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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ABSTRACT: As a result of digital transformation, patterns of community participation in rural areas have undergone significant changes, especially in the development planning process. Through the digitisation of platforms such as e-Musrenbang, village websites, and the Village Management Information System, a new space has been created that is more flexible, inclusive, and transparent for residents to express their aspirations and monitor development progress. This study discusses various forms of community participation in the digital era, how technology integration improves village governance, issues that arise in its implementation, and optimisation strategies that may be applied. Based on the analysis results, digitisation can increase participation, improve budget transparency and accountability, and accelerate the processing of generated data. However, issues such as low digital skills, infrastructure limitations, lack of public trust, and data security risks remain significant challenges. Various strategies, such as technology training, infrastructure improvement, and digital platform development, are needed to ensure that everything runs smoothly.

Keywords: Community Participation, Village Digitalisation, e-Musrenbang, Village Governance, Transparency, Digital Literacy.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, rural development planning in Indonesia has undergone a profound paradigmatic transformation, shifting from a centralised, top-down technocratic model to a participatory, decentralised framework that emphasises regional autonomy, community empowerment, and deliberative democracy (Pinuji et al., 2024). This shift was legitimised by *Law No. 6 of 2014* concerning Villages, which repositioned the village from a mere object of central administration into an independent subject possessing budgetary authority and significant responsibilities. Theoretically, this process relies on the Development Planning Deliberation, or Musrenbang, as a bottom-up mechanism to align local aspirations with national goals, recognising that development sustainability requires the active engagement of beneficiaries (Manoby, Afriyanni, et al., 2021). However, implementation is frequently hindered by structural inefficiencies, where regulatory idealism clashes with rigid bureaucracy, elite capture, and logistical constraints. The lack of transparency in manual processes often a "black box" where community proposals vanish without explanation has triggered a phenomenon of pseudo-participation, which gradually erodes public trust (Syarifuddin et al., 2024).

Amidst the current complexities of governance, a wave of disruption has emerged in the digital era, marked by the rapid development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and the global shift toward *Industry 4.0* and *Society 5.0* paradigms (Putri et al., 2024). The convergence of participatory governance and digitalisation, conceptualised through the Smart Village or Digital Village framework, introduces a new dimension to rural development with the potential to reshape the fundamental dynamics of the relationship between citizens and the state (Putri et al., 2024). This transition is not merely technical; it contains deep socio-political aspects aimed at dismantling the spatial, temporal, and social hierarchical barriers that have historically limited inclusive participation. The Indonesian government, through various ministries, has launched initiatives such as Desa Pinter (Smart Village) and the Digital Village Index, while mandating the use of the Village Financial System (SISKEUDES) and Village Management Information System (SIMDES) to digitise the governance cycle (Kayudin et al., 2025). These initiatives aim to leverage digital connectivity to enhance the transparency of village fund management, streamline the aspiration-gathering process through e-Musrenbang platforms, and encourage government apparatuses to be more responsive. Consequently, the digitalisation of village planning is positioned as a key factor in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the local level, serving as a potential solution to the inefficiencies of manual deliberation to realise a more resilient, informed, and empowered rural society (Purnamasari et al., 2025a).

However, the migration of democratic processes to digital platforms presents a "digital paradox" that demands in-depth academic scrutiny. While digital tools theoretically democratise access by enabling remote participation, these technologies simultaneously risk exacerbating social inequality through a digital divide defined not only by a lack of physical infrastructure but also by disparities in digital literacy, device ownership, and cognitive access to

technology (Saputra & Tukiman, 2024). Research indicates the potential for adverse digital incorporation, where digital systems inadvertently benefit the tech-savvy youth and educated elites while further marginalising the elderly, the poor, and residents in frontier, outermost, and disadvantaged *(3T)* regions (Mujiyanti et al., 2025). The effectiveness of instruments like e-Musrenbang relies heavily on digital ecosystem readiness, which encompasses internet bandwidth availability and "soft infrastructure" such as public trust, data governance protocols, and the adaptive capacity of village officials to manage complex digital workflows. Furthermore, the implementation of technocratic e-government solutions without adequate social preparation can lead to "empty digitalisation", where systems are deployed merely for administrative compliance rather than substantive community empowerment, thereby failing to alter the power dynamics underlying village governance (Saputra & Tukiman, 2024).

To comprehensively understand the implications of this shift, it is necessary to examine the specific mechanisms and actors involved in the digital village ecosystem (Herpamudji et al., 2025). This governance architecture reflects a complex interaction between central mandates such as Ministry of Home Affairs regulations regarding SISKEUDES for financial accountability and Prodeskel for village profiling and local innovations as well as third-party collaborators through programmes like Smart Village Nusantara. By design, these systems operate synergistically: Prodeskel provides demographic and geospatial databases, e-Musrenbang facilitates the input of aspirations, and SISKEUDES ensures the tracking and auditing of budget allocations, all aiming to create an integrated data cycle for evidence-based decision-making and financial transparency. Case studies in Surabaya, a pioneer of e-Musrenbang, and the use of SIMDES in Banyumas confirm the potential of digital tools to rationalise planning (Herpamudji et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the variation in implementation models ranging from sophisticated "living laboratory" approaches based on Scrum methods to mere fragmented static websites indicates that the digital village is not a monolithic entity but rather a diverse spectrum of socio-technical experiments.

Theoretical frameworks such as Empowerment Theory and Actor-Network Theory *(ANT)* offer crucial analytical perspectives to dissect this development. Empowerment theory postulates that substantive participation demands an increase in perceived control, where the community possesses confidence in their efficacy to influence public decisions affecting their lives (Putri et al., 2024). In this context, digitalisation has the potential to strengthen such control through the provision of granular data and real-time feedback mechanisms, transforming the position of citizens from passive beneficiaries into active overseers and co-creators of development (Purnamasari et al., 2025b).

Conversely, ANT views digital platforms not as neutral instruments but as non-human actors that actively engineer social interactions, as exemplified by technical features in planning applications that may limit the validity of proposals and implicitly structure planning discourse. A deep understanding of these theoretical foundations is essential to distinguish between technology that

merely digitises bureaucratic procedures and technology that genuinely deepens the quality of democracy.

This report presents a comprehensive, critical, and scientific analysis of the role of community participation in rural development planning in the digital era (Manoby, Fitri, et al., 2021). Through the synthesis of diverse primary and secondary data sources spanning national regulations, cross-provincial case studies in Java and other regions, as well as comparative international literature this study seeks to transcend mere techno-optimist narratives to uncover the complex reality of digital implementation. The focus of the study is directed toward examining the specific benefits of digitalisation, including accessibility, transparency, efficiency, and empowerment, while considering structural limitations and the persistent digital divide. Furthermore, employing theory (Pinuji et al., 2024), the results and discussion section will specifically outline the tangible benefits of digital devices for community participation based on empirical evidence to build a profound argument regarding the function of digitalisation as a strategic instrument in the modernisation of rural governance to achieve inclusive and sustainable rural development.

THEORETICAL BASIS

Village community participation refers to the active involvement of village residents in the development process, encompassing decision-making, implementation, and supervision of development activities. The term "participation" is rooted in the Arabic word "syaraka", which means to join in and contribute. According to Koentjaraningrat, village community participation is governed by two principles: participation in joint activities within development projects and participation as individuals outside of such collective activities. The activation of this participation is paramount, as the success of village development relies heavily on citizen engagement. This is evident in the Village Law, which grants direct management authority of the village to the community. Furthermore, this participation fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility toward village development, ensuring that development initiatives are more targeted and sustainable (Kholik et al., 2025).

According to Moeljarto, the importance of community participation is underscored by several reasons: participation is a logical consequence of people-orientated development; it develops the self-esteem and capacity of citizens to engage in critical decisions; it creates a two-way flow of information between the community and the government; it assists in implementing development based on the actual conditions of society; it expands the scope and support for development; and it constitutes a form of democratic right for citizens to be involved in the development of their region. Consequently, participation is not limited to implementation but also extends to the supervision and support of development (Karim et al., 2024).

Participatory planning is the process of formulating development plans that involve the community consciously and actively to achieve goals or resolve village issues. This model positions the community and stakeholders as the primary decision-makers, assisted by experts, thereby rendering the process

more democratic. Village development plans formulated through participatory means are decided upon during the annual village deliberation (musyawarah desa), which cultivates a sense of ownership and acceptance of development outcomes. The digital era has brought changes to the methods of village community participation through the use of Information and Communication Technology *(ICT)*. Participatory digital villages utilise digital applications, online platforms, village websites, social media, and other communication technologies to amplify the community's voice in the development decision-making process. Thus, participation becomes broader, faster, more inclusive, and more transparent within the village development process. The community can provide input and align programme implementation directly, which encourages the accountability of the village government (Dewi, 2023).

The implementation of participatory digital villages yields positive impacts, such as increasing citizen participation in policymaking and development monitoring, enhancing transparency in the use of village budgets, improving the efficiency of public services through online systems, and elevating the quality of village human resources through digital technology education. Digital villages also foster innovation and collaboration among the community, government, NGOs, and the private sector to build a more advanced and sustainable village (Astuti & Suyatno, 2025).

However, several barriers exist in implementing participatory digital villages, including a lack of technological facilities (such as internet access and electricity), low community proficiency in using technology, a lack of enthusiasm among residents to engage, minimal allocated funds, and threats of data breaches. To overcome these issues, training, socialisation, collaboration, and adequate funding are required to ensure the participatory digital village operates effectively. Key strategies to enhance citizen participation in digital villages include organising training and workshops on information and communication technology, developing user-friendly village applications, utilising social media for education and communication, providing awards to active citizens, fundraising, and partnering with educational institutions and the private sector. Additionally, routine evaluation and monitoring are necessary to ensure that participation remains sustainable and achieves optimal results (Mannayong et al., 2024).

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to analyse how digitalisation influences community participation in village development planning. This approach was selected because the research focus extends beyond mere numerical data to essentially understand the processes, behavioural patterns, and interaction dynamics between citizens and the village government within a digital context.

Research data was obtained through library research by collecting and reviewing scientific journals, books, policy reports, previous research findings, and regulations related to village digitalisation and participatory governance. The references utilised encompass various relevant national and international sources, including studies on e-Musrenbang, SIMDes, SISKEUDES, and smart

villages, as well as the challenges of digitalisation in rural areas. The collected data was subsequently analysed using content analysis techniques to identify patterns, benefits, barriers, and strategies discussed across various sources.

The analysis was conducted by categorising findings based on four key themes:

1) Forms of community participation in the digital era;
2) Benefits of digitalisation on village governance;
3) Emerging challenges and barriers; and
4) Optimisation strategies.

The results of the analysis are presented descriptively to provide a coherent and accessible overview of the state of community participation within the digital village context. Through this method, the research aims to offer a comprehensive understanding regarding the role and impact of digitalisation in strengthening local democracy and improving the quality of village development planning.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Forms of Community Participation in the Digital Era

Community participation in the digital era has emerged in forms that are far more diverse compared to traditional face-to-face forums. Society is no longer limited by physical presence, as aspirations can now be channelled through digital platforms such as e-Musrenbang, village applications, information websites, and village social media (Satria, 2024). This model renders the proposal gathering process more inclusive, as citizens can voice their opinions at any time without being bound by time or distance constraints. The younger generation, previously less active in formal forums, has also become more vocal. They tend to be more comfortable discussing or providing opinions through digital channels that align with their habits, such as online surveys or virtual discussion rooms (Damayanti et al., 2021). This shift also assists housewives, daily wage workers, and residents in remote hamlets who were previously often hindered from attending enabling them to participate.

Beyond submitting proposals, this new form of participation is also evident in digital monitoring activities. Citizens participate in overseeing budgets and development progress through SIMDes dashboards or financial reports in SISKEUDES (Supraja, 2025). Such digital-based supervision encourages a more transparent development process and fosters public trust in the village government. In other words, digitalisation does not merely open new communication channels but also strengthens the two-way relationship between citizens and the village government, aligning with the concept of an adaptive and inclusive digital village (Manoby, Fitri, et al., 2021).

Benefits of Digitalisation for Community Participation

The digitalisation of village governance has fundamentally restructured accessibility and inclusivity, functioning as a crucial equaliser in the dynamics of participatory planning. Empirical evidence from the widespread implementation of e-Musrenbang and virtual forums confirms that digital instruments effectively dismantle the physical and temporal barriers that historically stratified community engagement. Conventional Musrenbang forums, bound by rigid schedules and centralised locations, structurally tended to marginalise specific

population segments such as daily labourers, farmers, women with domestic burdens, and residents of remote hamlets constrained by the opportunity costs of attendance (Anindito et al., 2022).

The transition toward digital platforms facilitates the decoupling of spatial and temporal dimensions, allowing citizens to review planning documents and channel aspirations asynchronously via mobile applications or web portals, thereby accommodating the diverse schedules and lifestyles of the community. This expansion of accessibility is quantitatively confirmed in studies showing that digital participation frameworks like e-Musrenbang significantly enhance social inclusion, particularly in regions with high mobile penetration rates (Anindito et al., 2022).

The virtualisation of public participation, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has proven to bring significant transformation for marginalised groups, primarily through the adoption of hybrid meeting formats and social media. These have successfully opened spaces for the voices of youth and the diaspora, who were previously absent from village development discourse. Regarding youth engagement, U-Report polling data confirms the high aspiration of the younger generation to contribute to their communities a potential now effectively accommodated by digital platforms aligned with the characteristics of digital natives (Damayanti et al., 2021). Furthermore, in the context of gender inclusion, digital technology offers an alternative space that is more egalitarian, and safe compared to conventional forums often dominated by male hegemony due to patriarchal cultural norms, as seen in Javanese and Balinese traditions. This virtual environment enables women to voice crucial issues related to health, education, and economic empowerment without the social intimidation or hierarchical pressure common in male-dominated face-to-face forums (Damayanti et al., 2021).

The second fundamental benefit manifests in the strengthening of transparency and the restoration of public trust, responding to the failure of manual planning systems that often operated like a "black box", where community proposals vanished into an opaque bureaucratic machine without feedback a primary trigger for citizen apathy. Digitalisation introduces a mechanism of radical transparency through the implementation of the Village Financial System (SISKEUDES) and the Village Management Information System (SIMDes), which function as digital ledgers to record every stage of planning and budgeting for open access (Supraja, 2025).

The integration of SISKEUDES with local SIMDes applications not only ensures financial reporting compliance with national standards but also provides full visibility to village constituents. This is supported by empirical research indicating that the quality of information, systems, and services on the SISKEUDES application correlates positively with increased user satisfaction, public trust, and the quality of village governance. Furthermore, the conceptual framework of SIMDes underscores the vital role of this system in enhancing accountability and reducing information asymmetry in village governance (Supraja, 2025).

The third strategic benefit is manifested in operational efficiency and data-driven precision, which functions to optimise the allocation of limited village resources while introducing agile working methodologies. The digitalisation of the planning process effectively streamlines the aggregation of development data, drastically cutting the administrative burden previously weighed down by the manual recapitulation of thousands of physical proposals. Studies show that the e-Musrenbang system significantly minimises the duration of the deliberation-to-budgeting cycle and accelerates the integration of village proposals into regional work plans (Damayanti et al., 2021). Beyond mere speed, the integration of Smart Village technology enables a transition toward evidence-based planning. Here, village governments can utilise real-time precision data via IoT sensors, drone mapping, and digital census applications to accurately identify specific needs such as soil conditions or pockets of poverty rather than relying merely on intuition. This approach aligns with findings from the Smart Kampung programme in Banyuwangi, proving that digital transformation facilitates context-sensitive and data-driven planning in the governance, economic, and tourism sectors (Jayanthi et al., 2022).

Digitalisation also serves as a vital catalyst for socio-economic empowerment, expanding the spectrum of participation benefits from mere administrative compliance to substantial improvements in living standards. In the Smart Village ecosystem, governance participation is intrinsically integrated with economic opportunities, as evidenced in progressive villages like Ponggok. There, the digital management of Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes) and tourism assets has successfully generated significant revenue and stimulated a positive feedback loop for citizen engagement motivated by tangible welfare dividends. The significance of participatory, transparent, and sustainable BUMDes governance in sustaining long-term economic and social performance has been confirmed by empirical studies (Jayanthi et al., 2022). Concurrently, research on public service innovation indicates that the adoption of digital marketing and e-governance in BUMDes operations has a significant impact on increasing Village Own-Source Revenue (PADes) and community productivity (Anindito et al., 2022). Furthermore, digital literacy training programmes accompanying village transformation have proven to enhance residents' self-efficacy and entrepreneurial capacity, which positively correlates with subjective well-being levels in digitally transformed rural areas (Fahmi & Sari, 2020).

Finally, digitalisation strengthens the structural resilience and social capital of rural communities by fostering horizontal connectivity that transcends mere vertical communication with the government, facilitating inter-citizen interaction and the organic formation of communities of practice and interest groups. This connectivity proved vital during the COVID-19 pandemic, when digital villages possessed a better capacity to coordinate health responses, distribute aid, and maintain social cohesion amidst mobility restrictions. The flattening of organisational structures offered by digital tools encourages a collaborative culture that often adopts a "living lab" approach to integrate citizens, developers, and the government in a co-creation process. Although it must be acknowledged that the distribution of these benefits is not yet fully equitable with impacts on

the Developing Village Index (IDM) still showing marginal results in some regions the transformation in villages that have successfully crossed the digital threshold is profound. It is capable of shifting the paradigm of village development from a mere bureaucratic obligation to a dynamic driven by the community, as seen in the trajectory of the Smart Kampung initiative in Banyuwangi (Jayanthi et al., 2022).

Optimisation Strategies

Technology Training for the Community and Village Staff Training regarding digital literacy and the use of village applications is essential to build the capacity of the community and village staff in utilising digital platforms. This training also helps reduce technology access disparities and enables citizens to participate actively in village development planning and supervision.

Development of Participatory Digital Platforms Village websites, mobile applications, online discussion forums, and cloud-based storage systems must be managed effectively. These platforms serve as a means for citizens to monitor village budgets directly, participate in digital discussions, and oversee development progress in an open and responsible manner (Wibisono et al., 2021).

Refining Village Technology Infrastructure

The equitable distribution of internet access and technological devices in villages is a fundamental baseline. The village government, together with relevant parties, must ensure adequate infrastructure so that all segments of society can access technology without obstruction.

Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration and Cooperation Cooperation between the village government, NGOs, historians, the private sector, and the local community is highly beneficial in strengthening human resource capacity and technological support. This collaboration reinforces the village digital ecosystem and provides effective communication channels.

Continuous Campaigning and Socialisation Increasing citizen awareness through digital campaigns and socialisation using social media, video tutorials, and community activities is crucial to encourage active participation in technology-based village management.

Strengthening Transparency and Accountability Utilising digital tools builds transparent management through direct reporting of village fund usage and development management that can be accessed online by citizens. This transparency increases citizen trust and encourages higher participation.

Digital Evaluation and Supervision The implementation of online evaluation systems connected to the village database is necessary to measure participation rates and development success sustainably. Evaluation results are used to improve strategies adaptively according to the needs of the village community.

Awards and Incentives for Participation Providing appreciation and rewards to citizens who actively contribute to village activities digitally whether in the form of official recognition, additional training, or digital business opportunity assistance can motivate continued participation.

Challenges and Barriers

Although the digitalisation of village participation offers numerous opportunities, its implementation still faces several obstacles. The greatest

challenge stems from infrastructure gaps and the digital divide. Not all village areas possess adequate internet access, and many citizens still struggle to use village digital applications or platforms (Saputra & Tukiman, 2024). This condition causes digital participation to often be enjoyed only by more tech-savvy groups, meaning inclusivity is not yet fully achieved. Another barrier arises from the capacity of village apparatuses. Some village officials are not yet fully prepared to operate digital systems like e-Musrenbang or SIMDes optimally. Consequently, features that should support transparency and responsiveness are not utilised to their maximum potential (Pinuji et al., 2024). This can create "hollow" digitalisation where the system exists, but it does not substantially change the way work is done.

Furthermore, the issue of public trust remains a challenge. Some community members feel doubtful whether proposals sent through digital systems are genuinely considered. The phenomenon of "black box planning", such as the disappearance of proposals without explanation, still occurs and has the potential to trigger community apathy (Syarifuddin et al., 2024). Without clear feedback mechanisms, digital platforms may be perceived merely as a formality.

Equally important, digitalisation brings data security risks. Village systems that lack adequate data protection standards are vulnerable to information leaks or misuse (Herpamudji et al., 2025). On the other hand, some villages face budget constraints for procuring devices, HR training, and technology maintenance (Mujiyanti et al., 2025), causing digital transformation to be unsustainable.

This series of obstacles indicates that digitalisation requires social readiness, infrastructure, and strong governance. It is here that optimisation strategies (point 3), such as training, infrastructure strengthening, and transparency enhancement, become key so that digital participation does not merely exist on paper but truly improves the quality of village governance.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Digitalisation brings profound changes to the way the community engages in village development planning. Through platforms such as e-Musrenbang, village websites, SISKEUDES, and SIMDes, the participation process becomes more accessible, transparent, and responsive to citizen needs. The community is no longer constrained by space and time, enabling groups that were previously difficult to engage such as youth, women, daily wage workers, and residents in remote areas to contribute more actively. Analysis results indicate that digitalisation not only expands the space for participation but also enhances efficiency, budget transparency, and the quality of public oversight.

However, these benefits are not yet fully equitable due to persisting obstacles such as limited digital literacy, uneven infrastructure, low public trust in digital processes, and data security risks. This condition demonstrates that digitalisation is not merely about providing technology but requires social, cultural, and institutional readiness at the village level.Therefore, optimisation strategies such as technology training, infrastructure improvement, transparency reinforcement, digital platform refinement, and multi-stakeholder collaboration

serve as crucial steps to ensure digital participation is truly inclusive and sustainable. With the support of appropriate strategies, digitalisation can become an effective instrument to strengthen local democracy, improve the quality of village governance, and ensure development that is more adaptive and aligned with community needs.

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