

THE ROLE OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION IN THE SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF PUBLIC POLICY: A CASE STUDY IN MAKASSAR CITY GOVERNMENT

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ABSTRAK

Kemajuan teknologi digital mendorong pemerintah daerah di Indonesia mengadopsi konsep kota pintar untuk meningkatkan kualitas layanan publik. Di Makassar, implementasi dilakukan melalui e-government, portal layanan digital, dan aplikasi publik. Implementasi ini masih menghadapi kendala berupa rendahnya partisipasi masyarakat, keterbatasan literasi digital, dan kurang optimalnya sosialisasi kebijakan. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis peran komunikasi strategis dalam meningkatkan pemahaman dan partisipasi masyarakat terhadap layanan digital. Metode yang digunakan adalah kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan studi dokumentasi terhadap pemerintah, pengelola layanan, dan masyarakat. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa komunikasi strategis melalui media digital, sosialisasi langsung, dan kolaborasi komunitas meningkatkan kesadaran dan penggunaan layanan. Pendekatan partisipatif terbukti efektif, meskipun literasi digital yang rendah dan inkonsistensi informasi masih menjadi hambatan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa komunikasi strategis berperan penting dalam keberhasilan implementasi kota pintar melalui strategi yang inklusif dan berkelanjutan.

ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Strategic Communication;
 Public Policy;
 Smart City;
 Public Service;

Advances in digital technology have encouraged local governments in Indonesia to adopt the concept of smart cities to improve the quality of public services. In Makassar, implementation is carried out through e-government, digital service portals, and public applications. This implementation still faces obstacles in the form of low public participation, limited digital literacy, and less optimal policy socialization. This research aims to analyze the role of strategic communication in increasing public understanding and participation in digital services. The method used is descriptive qualitative with in-depth interview techniques, observation, and documentation studies of the government, service managers, and the community. The results of the study show that strategic communication through digital media, direct socialization, and community collaboration increase awareness and use of services. Participatory approaches have proven effective, although low digital literacy and information

inconsistencies are still barriers. This study concludes that strategic communication plays an important role in the successful implementation of smart cities through inclusive and sustainable strategies.

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, the development of information and communication technologies has driven fundamental transformations in governance and the delivery of public services. Digital transformation encourages governments to reform the administrative system to achieve greater effectiveness, efficiency, and responsiveness to increasingly complex societal demands. In this context, the application of information technology is a strategic instrument to improve the quality of public services while strengthening the principles of transparency and accountability (Amri, 2016). This condition is in line with the theory of public policy implementation put forward by George C. Edwards III, which places communication as a key variable in determining the success of policy implementation, (Edwards, 1980).

The transformation then develops through the implementation of an electronic-based government system or e-government, which allows the government to provide public services digitally so that it is more accessible to the public. The digitalization of public services also contributes to improving bureaucratic efficiency and strengthening the relationship between the government and the community through the use of information technology (Nasrullah, 2021). E-government can be understood through a strategic communication approach, as put forward by James E. Grunig, who emphasizes the importance of planned communication to build public understanding and engagement, (Grunig & Grunig, 2013).

Along with these developments, a number of local governments in Indonesia have begun to adopt the smart city paradigm as a strategic approach in integrating digital technology into urban governance. The smart city concept not only emphasizes the use of technology, but also system integration, collaboration between stakeholders, and community participation in improving the welfare and quality of public services (Nurdiassa et al., 2021). In this context, smart city implementation is closely related to the concept of public participation in governance.

Makassar is one of the regions that has adopted the concept of smart city through various digital service innovations, such as e-government systems, public service portals, and community-based applications. This initiative aims to create more efficient, transparent, and responsive governance (Nurdiassa et al., 2021). The use of technology in the smart city program in Makassar also reflects the government's efforts to strengthen the interaction between the government and the community, where communication is an

important element in ensuring that services can be understood and utilized optimally (Harlina & Mustafa, 2018).

However, the implementation of smart city policies in public services has not been fully optimal. A number of studies show that low public participation is still the main challenge in the use of digital services that have been provided (Mas et al., 2025). In addition, the digital literacy gap also affects people's ability to access and utilize these services. In addition, the digital literacy gap also affects people's ability to access and utilize these services, (Rustiyana et al., 2025). Another problem that also arises is the lack of optimal policy socialization, so that some people do not know the existence of digital services. This condition shows that technological readiness is not enough without the support of an effective communication strategy.

From the perspective of public policy implementation, communication plays an important role in shaping public understanding and participation. Ineffective communication has the potential to lead to misunderstandings and low public involvement in policy implementation, (Sitokdana, 2015). Therefore, strategic communication is a relevant approach, not only as a means of conveying information, but also as an effort to build understanding, encourage participation, and strengthen the relationship between the government and the community.

Although various studies have discussed the implementation of smart cities and the digitalization of public services, there is still a research gap related to the role of strategic communication in increasing community understanding and participation at the local government level. Most research tends to focus on technology and systems aspects, while the communication dimension has not been extensively studied in depth as a determining factor for policy success.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to analyze the role of strategic communication in increasing public understanding and participation in digital public services within the framework of smart city policies in Makassar City. The research questions asked are: how does strategic communication affect the level of public understanding and participation in the implementation of smart city policies? This research is expected to make a theoretical and empirical contribution to the development of public policy and communication studies, especially in the context of digitization of public services at the local government level.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldaña, 2021; Takona, 2024) to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of strategic communication in supporting the implementation of smart city policies in Makassar. This approach was selected because it enables contextual exploration of policy phenomena and allows for a detailed interpretation of communication dynamics between government and society in digital public services. The research subjects consist of key stakeholders involved in the implementation of smart city policies, including government officials, digital service managers, and community members as service users. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, with criteria based on their involvement, knowledge, and experience related to digital public services and policy communication.

Data sources include both primary and secondary data, obtained through in-depth interviews, observation of digital service implementation, and analysis of policy documents, official government reports, and relevant previous studies, (Costa et al., 2016; Dahal, 2025; Phillips, 2023). Data collection techniques include: (1) in-depth interviews to explore perceptions and experiences of stakeholders; (2) observation to understand the actual implementation of digital services; and (3) document analysis to examine policy frameworks and communication strategies. Data analysis follows the interactive model of Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, (Miles et al., 2014; Regmi, 2024; Saldaña, 2021). To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, this study applies triangulation of data sources and methods, member checking with selected informants, and prolonged engagement in data analysis. These procedures are intended to enhance the validity, reliability, and overall rigor of the research, ensuring that the findings accurately reflect the reality of strategic communication practices in the implementation of smart city policies.

3. Result and Discussion

The implementation of the smart city policy in Makassar City is part of the local government's efforts to improve the quality of public services through the use of information and communication technology. The smart city program was developed as a strategy to improve the public service system to be more efficient, transparent, and easily accessible to the public. In practice, this policy is realized through various digital-based public services that allow people to obtain government services more quickly and practically through electronic systems integrated with information technology (Nurdiassa et al., 2021).

The implementation of the smart city concept in Makassar City is inseparable from the efforts of the local government in developing an information technology-based government system that can support bureaucratic performance and improve the quality of services to the community. The use of information technology in the administration of government allows various public administration processes to be carried out more efficiently so that services to the community can be provided more quickly and transparently. Information technology in the context of smart cities also functions as a means that allows the government to manage various public services in an integrated manner so that the service process can be carried out more effectively (Amri, 2016)A .

In the implementation of the smart city policy, the Makassar City government develops various digital-based public service innovations that aim to make it easier for people to access government services. These various services include digital public service systems, community service portals, and various government applications that allow the public to obtain government information and services online. The development of digital services is a form of local government efforts to improve the quality of public services and strengthen the information technology-based government system (Herlina & Oktaviani, 2022).

Although a number of digital innovations have been implemented in the framework of public services in Makassar City, the implementation of smart city policies empirically

still faces various obstacles. The primary obstacle that often arises is the low involvement of the public in using digital public service platforms. Citizen involvement plays a central role in the successful implementation of smart city policies, considering that the community is the main beneficiary of public services provided by the government. The absence of active participation from the public will cause government digital services to fail to achieve maximum effectiveness in improving the quality of public services (Mas et al., 2025).

A number of studies indicate that the degree of citizen involvement in smart city policies in Makassar City is still relatively minimal. Public involvement in the implementation of these policies tends to be limited, with participation generally only covering the receipt of information or providing feedback on policies that have been formalized by the government. This situation reflects that the dynamics of public involvement in the policy process have not developed optimally, so the government needs to hold a more decisive initiative to spur public participation in utilizing digital services (Mas et al., 2025).

In addition to citizen involvement, another element that shapes the successful implementation of smart city policies is the level of digital proficiency of the community. Digital proficiency is defined as the ability of citizens to master and apply information technology in their daily routine. In the realm of digital public services, digital proficiency serves as the main determinant of whether the public can take advantage of the digital platforms offered by the government. Citizens with limited digital literacy often face barriers to operating existing digital services, which ultimately undermines the effectiveness of smart city policy implementation (Rustiyana et al., 2025).

In a number of situations, the lack of digital literacy among the public is also related to the lack of policy socialization to the public. Many residents are not fully aware of the various digital services from the government, so the usage rate remains low. This situation underlines that the success of the implementation of smart city policies is not only determined by the availability of information technology, but also by the government's proficiency in delivering policy information effectively to the public.

In the scope of public policy implementation, communication plays a crucial role as a determinant of the success of the implementation of a policy. Optimal communication facilitates the government in conveying policy information transparently to the public, so that citizens are able to capture the essence and benefits of the policies implemented. In contrast, suboptimal communication has the potential to trigger misconceptions and reduce the level of public involvement in the public policy implementation process (Sitokdana, 2015).

Therefore, strategic communication plays an essential role in strengthening the successful implementation of smart city policies. In the framework of governance, strategic communication refers to the process of drafting and arranging communication by the government to effectively convey policy information to the public. Through strategic communication, government officials can improve citizens' understanding of the policies implemented and motivate public participation in using digital public services.

In the implementation of the smart city policy in Makassar City, the government's strategic communication can be realized through various strategies, such as policy socialization campaigns to citizens, optimization of digital media channels, and the provision of comprehensive information about available public services. Open and accountable communication has the potential to build public trust in the government and inspire the public to take advantage of digital public service platforms from local governments.

In addition to communication to the community, communication coordination between government agencies is also an important factor in the implementation of smart city policies. An effective digital public service system requires good coordination between various government agencies so that various public services can be integrated in one coordinated system. The integration of public service systems allows the government to provide more efficient services and makes it easier for people to access various government services they need (Parera, 2018).

The successful implementation of smart city policies also depends on the synergy between the government and citizens in the dynamics of public services. This synergy can be realized through various channels of community involvement on digital public service platforms. In the smart city paradigm, the public does not only act as a consumer of public services, but also as a strategic partner of the government in improving public services to be more efficient and adaptive to people's aspirations (Rustiyana et al., 2025).

Therefore, the implementation of the smart city policy in Makassar City underlines that the success of the digital transformation of public services is not solely determined by the availability of information technology, but also by other elements such as policy communication, citizen involvement, digital literacy, and harmonization between government agencies. In this framework, strategic communication plays a vital function as a liaison between the government and the public in the dynamics of implementing smart city policies.

Through optimal strategic communication, government officials can improve citizens' understanding of smart city policies and motivate active community participation in utilizing digital public services. Strategic communication also facilitates the formation of a more solid relationship between the government and the community, so that the policies implemented can be accepted and exploited optimally by the public. From these findings, it can be concluded that strategic communication is one of the main pillars in strengthening the successful implementation of smart city policies in Makassar City. Effective communication serves not only as a channel for policy information, but also as a forum that enables productive interaction between the government and citizens in the digital public service process.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study confirm that strategic communication plays a decisive role in supporting the successful implementation of smart city policies in Makassar, particularly in the context of digital public service transformation. This study answers the research objective by demonstrating that effective, transparent, and structured communication significantly enhances public understanding, increases citizen

participation, and strengthens the relationship between government and society. The results indicate that policy success is not solely determined by technological infrastructure but also by how well communication strategies are designed and implemented to reach diverse segments of the population. From a practical perspective, these findings imply that policymakers need to prioritize strategic communication as an integral component of smart city governance. Efforts should include intensifying public outreach, utilizing multiple communication channels, adopting inclusive and easily understandable messaging, and strengthening digital literacy programs. Institutional coordination among government agencies is also essential to ensure consistent and integrated communication across digital service systems. This study is not without limitations. The scope is limited to a qualitative approach within a specific regional context, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research is recommended to employ mixed methods or comparative studies across different regions to provide broader insights into the role of strategic communication in digital governance.

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