

## Digital Strategy and Citizen Engagement in Digital Government: Evidence from Generation

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### **Keywords:**

*E-Government Service Quality, Digital Strategy, Government Reputation, Trust in E-Government, Citizen Engagement*

### **Abstract**

*This study seeks to investigate the extent to which Digital Strategy and E-Government Service Quality influence Citizen Engagement within the context of local digital governance. It also explores the intermediary functions of Trust in E-Government and Government Reputation in shaping this relationship. Specifically, the research assesses not only the direct effects of the independent variables on citizen engagement but also the indirect effects that operate through trust and institutional reputation as mediating constructs. A quantitative survey approach was implemented. Data collection involved 150 Generation Z participants who are users of digital service platforms provided by the Jepara Regency government, recruited using purposive sampling. The data were examined using the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach, implemented through SmartPLS software. The empirical findings demonstrate that both Digital Strategy and the Quality of E-Government Services exert a positive and statistically significant effect on Citizen Engagement. Furthermore, Trust in E-Government and Government Reputation serve as mediating variables, transmitting the influence of the independent constructs to the level of citizen engagement. The implications underscore the necessity for local governments to move beyond technical digital improvements by strengthening trust and institutional credibility through enhanced transparency, reliable systems, and secure data governance. Further research should extend the study area and employ longitudinal methods to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of engagement patterns in the e-government environment.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Advancements in ICT have brought about structural changes in the manner public organisations plan, implement, and oversee service provision. The success of digital marketing initiatives cannot be attributed exclusively to their deployment, as it largely relies on user engagement that mediates the relationship between strategic actions and overall organisational effectiveness (Roosdhani et al., 2023). Public administrations across numerous countries are being urged to undertake digital transformation initiatives in order to enhance service efficiency, transparency, accountability, and responsiveness (Sekamadie et al., 2025). In this context, e-government is positioned as a strategic instrument that integrates digital technology into the governance process to improve administrative performance and the provision of citizen-oriented public services (Rustandy et al., 2023).

In Indonesia, the national Electronic-Based Government System (SPBE) policy encourages local governments to develop digital platforms as a means of improving the quality of public

services and citizen participation (Rusdy & Flambonita, 2023). One such initiative is the SAMUDRA Platform (One Data Management for Jepara Data), developed by the Jepara Regency Government as a digital interface for providing public information, handling public complaints, and delivering online administrative services.

However, the availability of e-government platforms does not automatically guarantee high levels of citizen participation. Generation Z is widely recognised as a technologically adaptive cohort that is highly familiar with rapid and efficient digital engagement; consequently, their level of participation is strongly shaped by user experience quality and the digital interaction approaches adopted by public institutions (Yuliani et al., 2026). From a digital governance perspective, Generation Z's participation is important because this group has the ability to quickly access, verify, and disseminate information through the digital ecosystem. Consequently, it can serve to advance greater transparency and strengthen accountability in the provision of public services. The SAMUDRA platform, designed as a portal for sectoral data integration and digital-based public services, provides an information infrastructure that allows the public to access regional data and monitor public services online.

From the perspective of Generation Z as users, the relevance of the SAMUDRA platform does not lie in its entertainment or interactivity aspects, as is the case with commercial digital platforms, but rather in the practical benefits it offers in providing quick and independent access to official information. Generation Z tends to use government platforms when they reduce the need to visit service offices in person and allow them to obtain administrative information or regional conditions instantly through digital devices. Thus, Generation Z's use of SAMUDRA is driven more by considerations of efficiency, ease of access, and the availability of official information in a single integrated portal, rather than visual appeal or entertainment features. The uniqueness of this platform for Generation Z lies in its role as the main digital access point to local government data and services that can be accessed at any time without time-consuming conventional procedures.

Generation Z's utilisation of e-government platforms contributes to the development of public data literacy while simultaneously influencing levels of trust in governmental institutions. The active involvement of this group has the potential to strengthen the legitimacy of data-based policies and encourage the formation of a participatory digital government ecosystem (Umayasari & Amantha, 2025). Conversely, low involvement can create a gap between the provision of digital infrastructure by the government and its level of utilisation by the community, so that investment in e-government systems does not fully produce a participatory impact. Therefore, understanding the factors that influence Generation Z's engagement in using the SAMUDRA platform is

important to ensure that local government digital transformation not only increases data availability but also encourages sustainable citizen engagement. Initial observations of the SAMUDRA platform show a relatively low level of engagement, as reflected in the dominance of one-star user reviews, which indicate dissatisfaction with the quality of services and government responsiveness.

Theoretically, this condition indicates a gap between the digital strategy and quality of e-government services designed by the government and the mechanisms of public perception that shape their engagement. The digitisation of public services does not always translate into increased public participation because psychological and institutional factors, such as trust and the reputation of the government, play an important role in shaping users' responses to digital public services (Maulan & Fitriani, 2025).

From a theoretical perspective, this study is grounded in Public Value Theory (Moore, 1997), which posits that the success of public sector initiatives is not solely determined by the provision of services or technological infrastructure, but by the extent to which these initiatives create value for citizens through improved transparency, trust, and participation. Within the sphere of digital governance, e-government platforms are anticipated to create public value by improving service performance, reinforcing governmental reputation, and cultivating citizen trust, all of which serve to stimulate active civic participation. Public Value Theory offers an integrative lens for explaining how digital strategic efforts and public service quality evolve into substantive engagement once citizens perceive governing institutions as capable, transparent, and responsive. Accordingly, this study applies the lens of Public Value Theory to examine how digital strategy and e-government service quality influence Generation Z's engagement through the mediating roles of trust in government and government reputation within the SAMUDRA platform context.

Engagement among citizens functions as a central indicator of effective e-government implementation, reflecting not only how frequently services are accessed, but also the active participation of citizens in providing input, expressing aspirations, and interacting with the government through digital channels (Bănică et al., 2024). In the context of Generation Z, engagement is becoming increasingly important given that this group will be the dominant actors in public digital governance in the future. One factor that influences citizen engagement is the government's digital strategy. Digital strategy encompasses the planning and targeted use of technology to achieve effective and inclusive public service objectives (Nugraha et al., 2022). For Generation Z, an effective strategy must be aligned with their preferences for speed of service, ease of navigation, visual appeal, and interactive communication. Digital strategies in public organisations serve not only as operational instruments, but also as mechanisms capable of

improving organisational performance by enhancing the quality of interactions and the value perceived by users. The implementation of adaptive and innovative digital strategies can strengthen user engagement and support the sustainable achievement of organisational performance (Riyoko, 2022).

Furthermore, e-government service quality plays a significant role in shaping how users perceive digital services and in determining their engagement. Service quality reflects the extent to which government digital systems are able to meet citizens' needs and expectations in terms of reliability, ease of use, relevance of information, responsiveness, and data security (Rustandy et al., 2023). Given that Generation Z is accustomed to high standards on commercial digital platforms, deficiencies in the quality of government services have the potential to reduce their motivation to engage on an ongoing basis (Suwanda & Tjenreng, 2025). Service quality reflects an organisation's ability to meet user needs through reliable, responsive and consistent services. Quality services will shape users' positive perceptions of institutional performance and increase trust in service provider organisations (Ali, 2012).

Beyond technical and functional aspects, citizen engagement is also influenced by perceptual factors, especially trust in government institutions. Trust can be defined as citizens' confidence that governmental bodies possess the capability, integrity, and good intentions to provide public services, including maintaining security and transparency of personal data in digital systems (Azhary et al., 2024).

This trust contributes to the formation of the government's reputation, which is understood as the collective perception of the public regarding the credibility, professionalism, and performance of public institutions in the long term (Suriadi, 2025). A positive reputation can strengthen the effectiveness of digital strategies and service quality in encouraging citizen engagement, while a negative reputation can weaken user response to government digital innovations.

Recent empirical studies indicate that service quality and digital transparency significantly influence citizen engagement and satisfaction (Zhao et al., 2023), while the use of e-government platforms shapes citizens' trust in government performance and institutional integrity (Li & Shang, 2023). Nevertheless, the majority of existing research has yet to thoroughly explore the mediating function of government reputation, particularly within the setting of local governance and among Generation Z users (Tran Pham & Le Hoang Thuy To Nguyen, 2024).

Prior research has reported mixed findings concerning the factors that influence citizen engagement in e-government initiatives. For instance, (Ghofur, 2022) demonstrated that digital strategy exerts a positive and statistically significant impact on citizen engagement, while (Harahap

& Harahap, 2023) reported an insignificant effect. Similar findings also emerged for the service quality variable, (Fatimah et al., 2024) reported a positive effect on citizen engagement, while (Sarif et al., 2025) found no significant relationship.

Inconsistencies are also evident in the role of trust and government reputation. (Maulan & Fitriani, 2025) indicate that trust exerts a statistically significant influence on citizen engagement, while (Baihaki, 2021) report different results. (Halomoan et al., 2023) found that government reputation has a positive effect on engagement, while (Judijanto et al., 2023) did not find a significant effect.

Theoretically, most e-government studies still position citizen engagement as a direct result of service quality or trust, without placing government reputation as a perceptual mechanism that bridges this relationship (Grimmelikhuijsen, 2012). On the other hand, although digital strategies are recognised as an important factor in public sector transformation, their indirect influence on citizen engagement through the reputation mechanism has rarely been studied empirically (Twizeyimana & Andersson, 2019).

Based on the preceding discussion, the engagement of Generation Z citizens with e-government platforms can be understood as a complex phenomenon shaped by multiple interrelated factors. Digital strategies and the quality of e-government services constitute primary determinants that directly influence citizen engagement, while trust in government and government reputation function as mediating mechanisms that may strengthen or weaken these relationships. In the context of the SAMUDRA platform in Jepara Regency, examining how strategic digital initiatives and service quality translate into citizen engagement through perceptual factors such as trust and reputation is therefore essential. Such an examination is expected to clarify the extent to which the provision of digital infrastructure and services by local government can foster meaningful and sustained engagement among younger citizens.

From a theoretical perspective, this research advances the e-government body of knowledge by positioning government reputation as a perceptual construct that serves as an explanatory mechanism linking strategic digital capabilities and the performance of e-government services with citizen engagement. By integrating perspectives on digital strategy, service quality, trust, and institutional reputation within a single analytical framework, this research delivers a more comprehensive explanation of how government digital programmes drive civic participation processes. Empirically, it advances prior studies by contributing findings from the local government environment while highlighting Generation Z as a strategic cohort expected to define the future landscape of digital governance and public service engagement (Campos et al., 2019).

## **METHODS**

## Design and Research Approach

The study utilises a quantitative survey approach to explore the structural relationships among five latent dimensions: Digital Strategy (DS), E-Government Service Quality (ESQ), Trust in E-Government (TE), Government Reputation (GP), and Citizen Engagement (CE). This methodological choice was made because quantitative methods support rigorous hypothesis examination based on numerical evidence gathered through standardised questionnaires (Halomoan et al., 2023).

A ten-point Likert scale was utilized to measure the research variables, where respondents rated each item on a continuum from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree). The measurement items were derived from well-established prior studies and subsequently adjusted to suit the operational context of the SAMUDRA Platform implemented in Jepara Regency.. All variables were operationalised using reflective measurement models. Before full-scale data collection, a preliminary pilot study was undertaken to evaluate item clarity and to test the instrument's initial reliability. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, with informed consent obtained from respondents in adherence to research ethics standards (Sugiyono & Lestari, 2021).

## Population and Sampling Technique

The study population comprised Generation Z residents in Jepara Regency, defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012 who actively engage with government digital service platforms. Referring to (Sugiyono & Lestari, 2021), a sample constitutes a segment of the broader population chosen to represent its essential attributes. In the present study, purposive sampling was applied to ensure that participants had direct relevance to the phenomenon being examined. Eligibility criteria stipulated that respondents be aged between 17 and 27 years, reside within Jepara Regency, and have prior experience using the SAMUDRA platform. These criteria were established to ensure that the selected respondents had sufficient familiarity with local digital public services and were able to provide informed responses regarding their engagement with the platform.

## Determining Sample Size

The calculation of the required sample size was guided by established recommendations for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) (Hair Jr et al., 2021), suggest that when the exact population size cannot be determined, the minimum sample should range from five to ten times the total number of indicators included in the model. Given that this study incorporates 24 indicators, the suggested minimum sample size is therefore calculated as follows:

Hair Formula:

$$\text{Sample} = n \geq 5 \text{ Therefore } 10 \times \text{Number of indicators}$$

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Sample} &= \text{Number of indicators} \times 5 \\ &= 24 \times 5 \\ &= 120\end{aligned}$$

This study involved 150 respondents, so the sample size used exceeded the recommended minimum and was considered adequate to produce stable parameter estimates and reliable structural relationship testing. Furthermore, this study also complies with the ‘10-times rule’ (Chin, 1998) as the number of respondents exceeds ten times the largest structural path leading to the endogenous construct in the model, thus ensuring sufficient sample size for PLS-SEM analysis.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

Data were analyzed using the SEM-PLS approach, with SmartPLS version 4.1.1.6 serving as the primary analytical software. The analytical process was conducted in two consecutive phases. The first phase focused on evaluating the measurement model, followed by an examination of the structural model in the second phase.

The evaluation of the measurement model involved testing convergent validity, discriminant validity, and internal consistency reliability. Convergent validity was confirmed when indicator loadings exceeded 0.70 and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were above 0.50. Reliability assessment was based on Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability coefficients, both of which were required to meet or surpass the recommended threshold of 0.70. (Hair Jr et al., 2021).

Subsequently, the structural model was analyzed by assessing the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), effect size ( $f^2$ ), and potential multicollinearity through the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), ensuring that VIF values remained below the cut-off value of 5. Hypotheses, including mediation effects, were tested using a bootstrapping technique with 5,000 resampling iterations to evaluate the statistical significance of both direct effects and indirect pathways.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Respondent Characteristics**

The study sample consisted of 150 participants, all of whom satisfied the established research eligibility criteria, namely aged between 17 and 28 years old, residing in Jepara Regency, and having used the SAMUDRA Platform to access local government services. Respondents were selected to ensure that the data obtained represented the perceptions and behaviours of Generation Z as the main user group of local government digital services.

Table 4.1 Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage(%)
<b>Gender</b>	Male	79	52.67%
	Female	71	47.33%
<b>Age</b>	21–28 years	113	75.33%
	17–20 years	37	24.67%
<b>Education</b>	Bachelor's (S1)	93	62.00%
	Senior High (SMA/SMK)	52	34.67%
	Master's (S2)	5	3.33%
<b>Occupation</b>	Student	83	55.33%
	Civil Servant / Contract Staff	46	30.67%
	Entrepreneur	14	9.33%
	Others	7	4.67%
<b>Total Respondents</b>		150	100,00%

*Source: Processed Data, 2026*

Table 4.1 shows that the research sample consisted of 150 Generation Z respondents with a relatively balanced gender distribution. The majority of respondents were aged between 21 and 29 years (79%). All respondents resided in Jepara Regency and had used the SAMUDRA Platform, so the sample characteristics were considered relevant for analysing citizen engagement in local e-government services.

### Testing the Measurement Model (Outer Model)

Data processing in this research was carried out using SmartPLS version 4.0. The results of the PLS Algorithm estimation for the measurement (outer) model are illustrated in Figure 4.1:

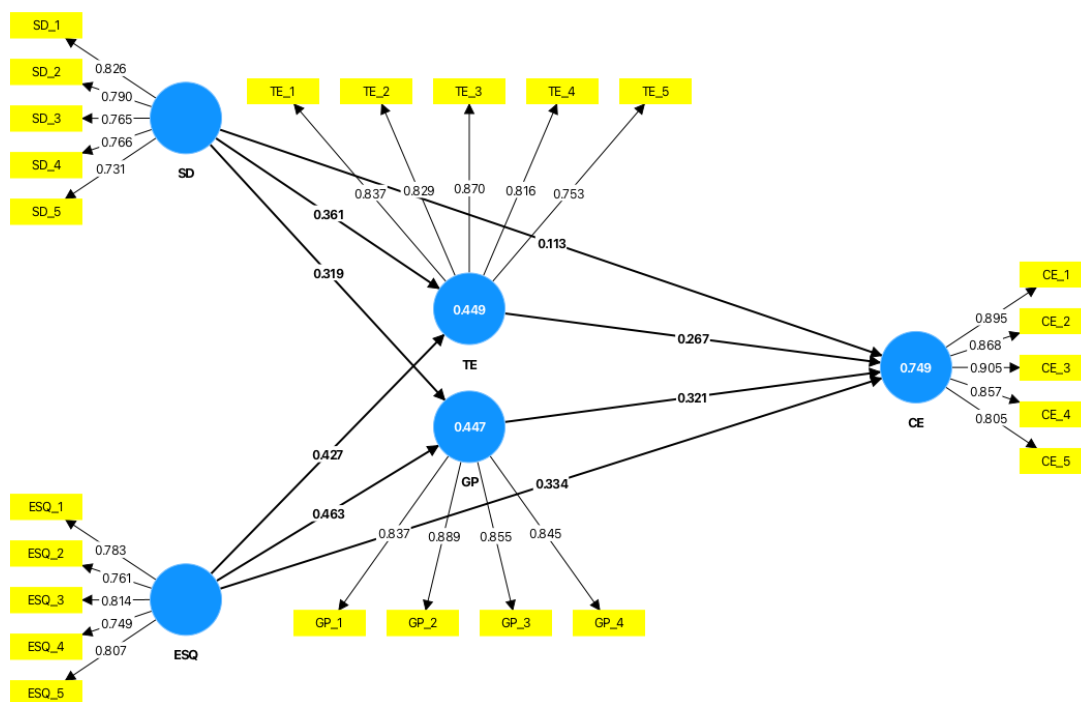


Figure 4.1 PLS Algorithm Model

Image Source: SmartPLS 4

The assessment of the measurement (outer) model in this research was conducted using three analytical criteria: convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability, each of which is described in detail below.

### Convergent Validity Test

The findings of the convergent validity assessment in this study are reflected in the outer loading coefficients, which are summarised in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2 Outer Loading Values

Construct	Outer Loading	AVE	Statement	Source
CE_1	0,895	0,751	I actively use the SAMUDRA Platform to access government services.	(Bănică et al., 2024)
CE_2	0,868		I provide feedback or submit complaints through the SAMUDRA Platform.	

Construct	Outer Loading	AVE	Statement	Source
CE_3	0,905		I interact with local government through the digital features on the SAMUDRA Platform.	
CE_4	0,857		I feel involved in public services through the SAMUDRA Platform.	(Bănică et al., 2024)
CE_5	0,805		The SAMUDRA Platform encourages my participation in government services.	
ESQ_1	0,783	0,613	SAMUDRA clearly explains how user data and online services are managed.	
ESQ_2	0,761		Searching for public service information on SAMUDRA is quick and easy.	
ESQ_3	0,814		Using SAMUDRA helps me save time when accessing public services.	(Sharma, 2015)
ESQ_4	0,749		SAMUDRA can be accessed anytime I need it.	
ESQ_5	0,807		The information provided by SAMUDRA is consistently accurate and regularly updated to ensure its relevance..	
GP_1	0,837	0,734	The Jepara Regency Government has a good reputation for providing public services.	
GP_2	0,889		The Jepara Regency Government is known as a professional and trustworthy institution.	(Campos et al., 2019)

Construct	Outer Loading	AVE	Statement	Source
GP_3	0,855		The performance of the Jepara Regency Government is viewed positively by the community.	(Campos et al., 2019)
GP_4	0,845		Digital innovations such as the SAMUDRA Platform enhance the image of the Jepara Regency Government.	
SD_1	0,826	0,602	Digitalisation through the SAMUDRA platform is one of the main priorities of the Jepara Regency Government.	(Proksch et al., 2024)
SD_2	0,79		The Jepara Regency Government actively follows the latest digital trends to develop SAMUDRA services.	
SD_3	0,765		The development of digital services such as SAMUDRA is a priority in local government planning and decision-making.	
SD_4	0,766		The Jepara Regency Government continues to evaluate and improve the SAMUDRA digital strategy.	
SD_5	0,731		The Jepara Regency Government is regarded as one of the pioneers of digital public service innovation through SAMUDRA.	
TE_1	0,837	0,676	I feel confident that the SAMUDRA Platform protects my personal data.	(Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2025)

Construct	Outer Loading	AVE	Statement	Source
TE_2	0,829		The local government is transparent in its services through the SAMUDRA Platform.	
TE_3	0,87		The SAMUDRA Platform has increased my trust in the government.	(Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2025)
TE_4	0,816		The information on the SAMUDRA Platform is reliable.	
TE_5	0,753		I feel confident using the SAMUDRA Platform.	

*Source: Processed Data, 2026*

Referring to Table 4.2, the outer loading values are consistently above the 0.70 threshold, and the AVE scores surpass 0.50. This evidence demonstrates that the indicators associated with Digital Strategy, Trust in E-Government, E-Government Service Quality, Government Reputation, and Citizen Engagement are valid for use in this study.

### Discriminant Validity Test

In assessing discriminant validity, the Fornell–Larcker criterion stipulates that each construct must exhibit a value greater than 0.70 to confirm adequate distinctiveness.

**Table 4.3 Fornell Larcker Criterion**

Konstruk	CE	ESQ	GP	SD	TE	Description
CE	0,867					
ESQ	0,734	0,783				
GP	0,756	0,604	0,857			Valid
SD	0,575	0,442	0,523	0,776		
TE	0,735	0,587	0,655	0,550	0,822	

*Source: Processed Data, 2026*

As presented in Table 4.3, the cross-loading values for Digital Strategy, E-Government Service Quality, Trust in E-Government, Government Reputation, and Citizen Engagement all exceed the 0.70 threshold. Thus, each research variable can be considered valid.

## Reliability Test

The results of the reliability testing of this study were conducted using two methods, namely composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha, which can be seen in Table 4.4 below.

**Table 4.4 Nilai Composite Reliability dan Cronbach's Alpha**

Konstruk	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Description
CE	0.917	0.938	
SD	0.842	0.888	
ESQ	0.879	0.917	Reliabel
GP	0.836	0.883	
TE	0.879	0.912	

*Source: Primary Data Processed, 2026*

As presented in Table 4.4, every latent construct reports Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability coefficients above the 0.70 threshold. These results confirm that the measurement scales applied in this research achieve acceptable levels of internal consistency and overall reliability.

## Structural Model Testing (Inner Model)

### Goodness of Fit (GoF)

The Goodness of Fit (GoF) index in this study was utilised to evaluate the overall adequacy and model fit. The resulting GoF values are presented in Table 4.5 below:

**Table 4.5 Goodnes of Fit (GoF) Value**

Konstruk	Saturated Model	Estimated Model	Description
SRMR	0,064	0,075	Compatibility
NFI	0,791	0,788	

*Source: Primary Data Processed, 2026*

Referring to Table 4.5, the Goodness of Fit (GoF) index is classified within the strong category, with a value exceeding 0.36. This finding indicates a high level of alignment between the observed data and the expected model estimations.

### Coefficient of Determination (R-Square)

The R-square value is utilized to determine the extent to which variability in the dependent construct can be accounted for by the independent constructs. An R-square of 0.67 is interpreted as indicating a substantial level of explanatory power, 0.33 reflects a moderate level, and 0.19

denotes a weak level of explanation. The  $R^2$  outcomes obtained in this research are displayed in Table 4.5 below.

**Table 4.6 Value (R-Square)**

Variabel (Konstruk)	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted	Description
<b>CE</b>	0.749	0.742	
<b>GP</b>	0.447	0.439	Significant
<b>TE</b>	0.449	0.442	

*Source: Primary Data Processed, 2026*

As indicated in Table 4.6, the R-square value for the Citizen Engagement construct is reported at 0.749, while the adjusted R-square value is 0.742. This indicates that all exogenous constructs together have an impact of 74.9% on CE, which can be considered a strong influence. Meanwhile, the remaining 25.1% can be explained by other variables and indicators not described in this study.

### Q-Square Analysis

Within this research, the structural model's predictive performance is assessed through the Q-square ( $Q^2$ ) predictive relevance measure. A  $Q^2$  value above zero signifies that the model possesses adequate predictive relevance, while a value less than zero indicates that the model does not exhibit predictive capability. The corresponding Q-square results are presented as follows:

**Table 4.7 Value (Q-Square)**

	SSO	SSE	$Q^2 (=1 - \text{SSE}/\text{SSO})$	Description
<b>CE</b>	750,000	336,392	0,551	
<b>ESQ</b>	750,000	750,000	0,000	Significant
<b>GP</b>	600,000	408,745	0,319	
<b>SD</b>	750,000	750,000	0,000	

*Source: Primary Data Processed, 2026*

Table 4.7 reports a  $Q^2$  value of 0.551 for Citizen Engagement, surpassing the zero threshold. This finding signifies that the model has predictive relevance and reflects acceptable predictive performance. Therefore, the model can be regarded as having meaningful predictive power.

### Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis testing in this research was performed using the bootstrapping procedure, as illustrated in Figure 4.2 below.

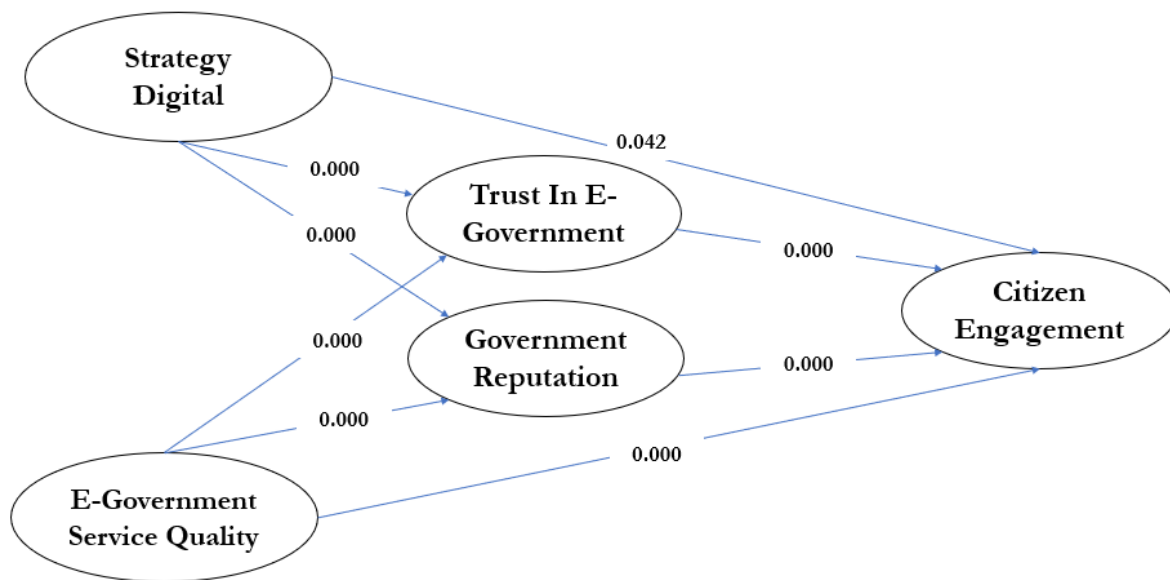


Figure 4.2 PLS Bootstrapping Model

Image Source: SmartPLS 4

Gambar 4.2 merupakan model bootstrapping pada penelitian ini yang meliputi pengujian direct effect dan pengujian specific indirect effect dengan penjelasan sebagai berikut.

### Direct Effect Test Results

The evaluation of direct effects was conducted by analyzing the original sample estimates alongside their corresponding t-statistics. A parameter is deemed statistically significant when the t-value exceeds 1.65 at the 5% significance level and the associated p-value is below 0.05. The direct path coefficient results are presented in Table 4.8 below.

Table 4.8 Path Coefficients (Direct Effect)

Variable	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV )	P Values	Description
SD -> CE	0.334	0.333	0.064	5.216	0.000	Significant
SD -> GP	0.463	0.465	0.067	6.945	0.000	
SD -> TE	0.427	0.427	0.069	6.205	0.000	
ESQ -> CE	0.321	0.324	0.065	4.942	0.000	

Variable	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV )	P Values	Description
ESQ-> GP	0.113	0.115	0.056	2.032	0.042	
ESQ -> TE	0.319	0.319	0.071	4.487	0.000	Significant
GP -> CE	0.361	0.364	0.075	4.803	0.000	
TE -> CE	0.267	0.263	0.075	3.587	0.000	

*Source: Primary Data Processed, 2026*

Based on the results displayed in Table 4.8, the direct path analysis indicates that Digital Strategy has a positive and statistically significant impact on Citizen Engagement, as reflected by a path coefficient of 0.334, a t-value of 5.216, and a p-value below 0.05, thereby confirming the proposed hypothesis. Furthermore, Digital Strategy significantly contributes to Government Reputation ( $\beta = 0.463$ ;  $t = 6.945$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) and Trust in E-Government ( $\beta = 0.427$ ;  $t = 6.205$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). These findings imply that the development and implementation of digital governance strategies play a crucial role in shaping public evaluations of institutional credibility and fostering trust in digital public service delivery.

Similarly, E-Government Service Quality is found to exert a positive and significant influence on Citizen Engagement ( $\beta = 0.321$ ;  $t = 4.942$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), Government Reputation ( $\beta = 0.113$ ;  $t = 2.032$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), and Trust in E-Government ( $\beta = 0.319$ ;  $t = 4.487$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). This suggests that citizens' assessments of service dependability, ease of access, and responsiveness are key determinants in strengthening the government's institutional image and reinforcing public trust in e-government platforms.

In addition, the analysis demonstrates that Trust in E-Government significantly and positively affects Citizen Engagement ( $\beta = 0.361$ ;  $t = 4.803$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Government Reputation also exhibits a positive and statistically significant relationship with Citizen Engagement ( $\beta = 0.267$ ;  $t = 3.587$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), further underscoring the importance of institutional credibility and public trust in promoting active citizen involvement. These results confirm that perceptual factors, particularly trust and reputation of public institutions, play a key role in encouraging Generation Z's active participation in the use of e-government platforms.

### Specific Indirect Effect Test Results

The mediation analysis in this study was evaluated by examining the original sample estimates and corresponding t-statistics of the specific indirect effects. These indirect effect values were generated through the bootstrapping procedure, as presented in Table 4.8 below.

**Table 4.8 Specific Indirect Effect**

Variabel	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV )	P Values	Description
SD -> TE -> CE	0.102	0.104	0.033	3.083	0.002	Significant
SD -> GP -> CE	0.114	0.111	0.034	3.343	0.001	
ESQ -> TE -> CE	0.149	0.150	0.035	4.267	0.000	
ESQ -> GP -> CE	0.097	0.095	0.034	2.878	0.004	

*Source: Primary Data Processed, 2026*

Referring to the indirect effect results presented in Table 4.8, Trust in E-Government was found to significantly mediate the linkage between Digital Strategy and Citizen Engagement, as indicated by an indirect coefficient ( $\beta$ ) of 0.102, a t-statistic of 3.083 ( $> 1.65$ ), and a p-value of 0.002 ( $< 0.05$ ). Government Reputation likewise demonstrated a significant mediating function within the same relationship ( $\beta = 0.114$ ;  $t = 3.343$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ).

Additional examination indicates that Trust in E-Government plays a statistically significant mediating role in the relationship between E-Government Service Quality and Citizen Engagement, as evidenced by an indirect effect coefficient of 0.149, a t-value of 4.267, and a p-value below 0.05. Likewise, Government Reputation is also verified as a significant intermediary variable linking E-Government Service Quality to Citizen Engagement ( $\beta = 0.097$ ;  $t = 2.878$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), confirming the presence of an indirect effect through institutional reputation.. Collectively, these results underscore the critical role of perceptual mechanisms—namely institutional trust and reputation—in transmitting the effects of digital strategic capacity and service quality to Generation Z's engagement with e-government platforms.

## DISCUSSION

### The Influence of Digital Strategy on Citizen Engagement (H1)

The findings demonstrate that Digital Strategy exerts a positive and statistically significant effect on Citizen Engagement. This suggests that more effective planning and execution of governmental digital initiatives—such as improved service accessibility, clearer information provision, and consistent platform design and functionality—enhance citizens' propensity to utilise and actively engage with e-government services. From a theoretical standpoint, these results align with Public Value Theory within the digital governance domain, which posits that governmental technologies and digital strategies operate not merely as technical instruments but

as mechanisms for generating societal value by strengthening the quality of government–citizen relationships (Panagiotopoulos et al., 2019) When citizens feel that digital services are designed to meet their real needs, they will be more motivated to actively engage in using these services. These results support the findings of a study (Lee, 2023) which shows that government digital strategies can increase citizen engagement by strengthening perceptions of the benefits, convenience, and relevance of technology-based public services to people's daily lives.

### **The Influence of Digital Strategy on Government Reputation**

Digital Strategy has been proven to have a positive and significant influence on Government Reputation. This shows that the direction of digital policy and the sustainability of service innovation contribute directly to the formation of the government's image as a professional and credible institution. Reputation in the public sector is formed from the accumulation of citizens' experiences with the quality of policies and consistency of service performance, including digital services. (Campos et al., 2019) states that government digital innovation can strengthen perceptions of institutional reputation through increased transparency and professionalism in governance.

Theoretically, these findings are in line with public sector reputation theory, which explains that the government's reputation is shaped by performance signals received by the public through direct experience and information provided by institutions (Panagiotopoulos et al., 2019) In the context of e-government, digital strategies serve as the primary medium for conveying these signals. When digital services are reliable, transparent, and responsive, the public tends to view the government as a competent and trustworthy institution.

### **The Influence of Digital Strategy on Trust in E-Government**

Digital Strategy exerts a positive and statistically significant effect on Trust in E-Government.. According to (Mensah & Luo, 2021), the quality of governance and strategic design of e-government systems play an important role in building public trust through perceptions of security, reliability, and clarity of service procedures. These findings indicate that systematically designed digital strategies, such as establishing system security standards, consistency in service processes, and clarity of information conveyed through digital platforms, can increase public confidence in the reliability and integrity of electronic-based government services.

Theoretically, these findings are in line with institutional trust theory, which explains that public trust is formed when citizens perceive that institutions have competence, honesty, and concern in carrying out their functions (Kim et al., 2024). In the context of e-government, digital

strategies serve as a framework that ensures that digital interactions are secure, transparent, and predictable. When citizens feel that government systems are stable and protect their interests, their level of trust in government digital services will increase.

### **The Influence of E-Government Service Quality on Citizen Engagement**

The results indicate that E-Government Service Quality has a positive and statistically significant impact on Citizen Engagement. This finding implies that enhancing the performance of digital public services—especially with respect to system dependability, prompt responsiveness, ease of use, and clarity of information—contributes to greater citizen involvement in the use of e-government platforms. When digital services are perceived as reliable, accessible, and user-oriented, citizens are more likely not only to utilize them but also to engage more actively through feedback provision and interactive communication with governmental institutions.

Theoretically, this finding is in line with service quality theory in the context of digital public services, which states that users' service experience is a major factor in shaping their attitudes and subsequent behaviour, including their intention to continue using and participating in services provided by public institutions. When citizens assess that government digital services meet or exceed their expectations, they will tend to show higher engagement through repeated interactions, providing feedback, and utilising available service features (Wardhana, 2024).

These results support research (Al-Hujran et al., 2015) which demonstrates that the quality of e-government services is a critical driver of citizen engagement and participation by enhancing user satisfaction and strengthening perceptions of the value derived from digital public services.

### **The Influence of E-Government Service Quality on Government Reputation**

The findings demonstrate that E-Government Service Quality positively and significantly influences Government Reputation. The empirical evidence confirms that improvements in the quality of digital public services contribute meaningfully to strengthening the government's institutional image and credibility.. These findings show that consistent digital service experiences contribute to the formation of the government's image in the long term. Institutional reputation is not only influenced by policy communication, but also by the operational performance of services that are directly experienced by the public. When citizens feel that digital services are consistent and reliable, they tend to view the government as a competent and responsible institution in meeting public needs.

Theoretically, this finding is in line with public sector reputation theory, which states that institutional reputation is built through performance signals received by the public from direct

experience and institutional communication. In the context of e-government, the quality of digital services serves as the main source of these signals, as citizens' interactions with the government increasingly take place through technology-based platforms. Therefore, positive service experiences contribute directly to the formation of the government's image and legitimacy in the eyes of the public.

These results are supported by research (Bănică et al., 2024) which highlights that the standard of digitally delivered public services, together with the transparency of governmental procedures, constitutes a critical factor in enhancing governmental reputation. This effect is particularly evident at the local government level, where platform-based public service delivery positions service quality as a central pillar underpinning public sector reputation within the broader digital ecosystem.

### **The Influence of E-Government Service Quality on Trust in E-Government**

The results indicate that E-Government Service Quality has a positive and statistically significant influence on Trust in E-Government.. This indicates that higher levels of service performance in digital government platforms contribute directly to strengthening public trust in e-government systems. This finding indicates that the quality of government digital services, as reflected in system reliability, data security, procedural clarity, and service responsiveness, shapes citizens' confidence in the integrity and competence of the government as a provider of electronic-based public services. When citizens feel that digital services are stable, transparent, and protect their interests, their level of trust in the government tends to increase.

From a theoretical perspective, this result aligns with institutional trust theory, which posits that public trust develops through evaluations of an institution's competence, integrity, and benevolence in fulfilling its responsibilities. Within the e-government context, service quality represents concrete proof of governmental dedication to delivering equitable and dependable services, thereby reinforcing trust-based relationships between citizens and the state.

These results are supported by research (Mensah & Luo, 2021) which states that public trust in digital services is built through repeated evaluation of consistent and uninterrupted service experiences.

### **The Influence of Government Reputation on Citizen Engagement**

Government reputation has a positive and significant influence on citizen engagement. According to (Kuswati et al., 2025), reputation functions as social capital that strengthens the legitimacy of the government and encourages citizens to engage normatively in public activities, including through digital platforms. The results of this study indicate that Government Reputation has a positive and significant effect on Citizen Engagement. These findings indicate that the better the image and reputation of the government in the eyes of the public, as reflected in perceptions of credibility, consistency of performance, and commitment to serving the public interest, the greater the tendency for citizens to actively engage in the use of e-government services and interact with the government through digital channels.

Theoretically, this finding is in line with public sector reputation theory, which states that reputation functions as a normative mechanism that influences the attitudes and behaviour of stakeholders. In the context of digital services, the government's reputation signals the quality and reliability of the institution, thereby reducing uncertainty and increasing citizens' motivation to participate in technology-based public service processes.

These results are supported by research (Bănică et al., 2024) showing that government reputation plays an important role in encouraging citizen engagement and participation, particularly through increased perceptions of legitimacy and trust in public institutions in a digital government environment.

### **The Influence of Trust in E-Government on Citizen Engagement**

The results of the study indicate that trust in e-government has a positive and significant influence on citizen engagement. Trust acts as a psychological prerequisite that reduces barriers to participation, especially in digital environments involving data exchange and online interaction. When citizens are confident in the security and transparency of the system, they are more inclined to use services on an ongoing basis and participate in the governance process. These findings indicate that the higher the level of citizens' trust in government digital services, as reflected in their confidence in data security, system reliability, and service process integrity, the greater their tendency to actively engage in the use of e-government services. Trust reduces perceptions of risk and hesitation in online interactions, thereby encouraging citizens to utilise service features, provide feedback, and participate in digital-based public service processes.

Theoretically, these findings are in line with institutional trust theory, which states that trust in public institutions is a key prerequisite for the emergence of cooperative and participatory behaviour from citizens. In the context of e-government, when the government is perceived as a competent, fair, and reliable institution in managing digital services, citizens will be more

encouraged to build sustainable interactive relationships with the government. These results are supported by research (Li & Shang, 2023) showing that trust in the government and e-government systems has a direct influence on engagement and sustainable use of technology-based public services, as trust increases perceived benefits and reduces psychological barriers to digital interaction.

### **The Mediating Role of Trust in E-Government in the Relationship between Digital Strategy and Citizen Engagement**

The mediation analysis results show that trust in e-government mediates the relationship between digital strategy and citizen engagement. These findings indicate that the government's digital strategy not only directly influences citizen engagement but also indirectly through the formation of trust in government digital services. In other words, digital strategies that are designed consistently and oriented towards user needs, such as clarity of service flows, system security, and information transparency, can increase citizen trust, which in turn encourages active participation in the use of e-government services.

Theoretically, these findings are in line with institutional trust theory, which emphasises that trust in public institutions is a key mechanism that bridges the gap between organisational policies or strategies and community behaviour (Mensah & Luo, 2021). In the context of e-government, digital strategies serve as initial signals of the government's commitment and capacity, while trust acts as a psychological factor that transforms these signals into concrete actions in the form of citizen engagement in digital services.

### **The Mediating Role of Government Reputation in the Relationship between Digital Strategy and Citizen Engagement**

The study's findings indicate that Government Reputation significantly mediates the relationship between Digital Strategy and Citizen Engagement. The implementation of a coherent and innovative digital strategy enhances the perception of the government as a responsive, adaptive, and professional institution, thereby fostering greater citizen involvement. These results suggest that a government's digital strategy influences citizen engagement not only through direct effects but also indirectly by shaping public evaluations of institutional image and credibility, which subsequently stimulate active participation in e-government utilization. Transparent, consistent, and user-oriented digital strategies serve as signals of institutional performance that reinforce public assessments of the government's professionalism and commitment to providing services.

Theoretically, these findings are in line with public sector reputation theory, which states that reputation is an institutional asset formed from the experiences and information received by the public regarding the performance of public organisations (Panagiotopoulos et al., 2019). In the context of e-government, the quality and consistency of digital strategies are the main sources of reputation formation, as citizen interactions with the government increasingly occur through technology-based platforms. When the government's reputation is positively formed, citizens tend to be more trusting and motivated to actively engage in the digital services provided.

### **The Role of Trust Mediation in E-Government: The Relationship between E-Government Service Quality and Citizen Engagement**

The findings demonstrate that Trust in E-Government functions as a significant mediating factor in the association between E-Government Service Quality and Citizen Engagement. Positive service experiences strengthen citizens' trust in the system, which in turn increases long-term engagement. These findings indicate that service quality has a dual role, namely as a direct determinant of participation and as a trust builder that functions as a mechanism for sustaining engagement.

Theoretically, these findings are in line with service quality and institutional trust theories, which state that users' perceived service experiences form the basis for trust in public service providers (Wardhana, 2024). In the context of e-government, when citizens assess that digital services are reliable, secure, and transparent, they tend to develop confidence in the competence and integrity of the government. This trust then functions as a psychological mechanism that transforms service experiences into participatory behaviour in the form of continued use and active engagement in digital platforms.

### **The Mediating Role of Government Reputation in the Relationship between E-Government Service Quality and Citizen Engagement**

The findings indicate that Government Reputation serves as a statistically significant mediating variable in the linkage between E-Government Service Quality and Citizen Engagement. The quality of government digital services not only has a direct impact on citizen engagement but also shapes public perceptions of the image and credibility of government institutions, which in turn encourages citizen participation in the use of e-government services. Reliable, transparent, and responsive service experiences strengthen public assessments of the government's professionalism and commitment to providing services, thereby increasing citizens' tendency to actively engage. These findings indicate that the accumulation of digital service experiences helps

shape the institutional image that influences citizen participation. Reputation is more stable and long-term, so its role reflects the cumulative effect of service performance on government legitimacy. When service quality is perceived positively, the government's reputation will strengthen and act as a relational mechanism that connects service experience with citizens' participatory behaviour. These results are consistent with the literature that emphasises reputation as a strategic asset in digital public governance (Twizeyimana & Andersson, 2019).

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Digital Strategy and E-Government Service Quality exert positive and statistically significant effects on Citizen Engagement, operating through both direct pathways and indirect mechanisms mediated by Trust in E-Government and Government Reputation. The findings suggest that the effectiveness of public sector digital transformation extends beyond the provision of technological infrastructure, encompassing the development of favorable institutional perceptions shaped by citizens' interactions with digital government services.

Moreover, the structural model exhibits substantial explanatory capacity, as reflected in an R-square value of 0.749 for Citizen Engagement. This indicates that 74.9% of the variance in citizen engagement is accounted for by Digital Strategy, E-Government Service Quality, Trust in E-Government, and Government Reputation. This result confirms that strategic digital initiatives and service performance are key determinants in fostering participatory behaviour among citizens in the e-government ecosystem. Theoretically, the study strengthens the perspectives of public value and institutional trust by showing that digital strategy and service quality function not only as operational tools but also as mechanisms that shape perceptions of legitimacy, credibility, and institutional reliability. By positioning government reputation as a mediating construct, this study extends the citizen engagement literature by explaining how digital capabilities are translated into participatory behaviour through perceptual evaluation processes.

From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest that local governments should prioritise improving the reliability of digital systems, transparency of service processes, and protection of user data in order to strengthen public trust and institutional reputation. Digital strategies should also be oriented towards user-centred design and consistent communication across platforms to ensure sustained citizen engagement. Although the model explains a substantial proportion of citizen engagement, the remaining 25.1% of variance indicates that engagement is influenced by additional factors beyond the scope of this study. Future research is therefore encouraged to

incorporate contextual variables such as digital literacy, user experience, and policy transparency to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of citizen engagement in digital governance.

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