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# The Formation and Development of Takon Sobat as a Digital Innovation in Licensing Consultation Services in Surabaya

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**ABSTRACT**

*Digitalization does not automatically remove barriers to accessing complex public service information. In Surabaya, licensing consultations were previously conducted mainly through face-to-face visits and conventional communication channels, which limited access due to service hours, waiting times, and complicated procedures. This study examines the formation and development of Takon Sobat, a digital licensing and non-licensing consultation service operated by the Surabaya City Investment and One-Stop Integrated Services Office (DPMPTSP). It applies the six-dimensional public sector innovation framework proposed by Arundel, Bloch, and Ferguson. A descriptive qualitative case-study approach was employed. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five informants, consisting of four organizational actors and one service user, as well as observation and documentation. Data analysis involved data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that Takon Sobat has developed through cross-unit coordination, ideas derived from public needs and operational problems, adaptive organizational learning, and gradual integration of digital tools. The service provides an alternative channel for remote consultation, although its operation remains constrained by high message volumes, limited technical capacity, inter-agency dependencies, and platform verification issues. Monitoring data and user feedback are collected, but their systematic analysis and measurable contribution to service improvement remain limited. This study demonstrates that digital public service innovation requires organizational arrangements, human capabilities, collaboration, and continuous learning beyond technological adoption.*

**ABSTRAK**

*Digitalisasi tidak secara otomatis menghilangkan hambatan masyarakat dalam mengakses informasi pelayanan publik yang kompleks. Di Kota Surabaya, konsultasi perizinan sebelumnya lebih banyak dilakukan melalui kunjungan tatap muka dan saluran komunikasi konvensional, sehingga akses layanan terbatas oleh jam pelayanan, waktu tunggu, dan prosedur yang rumit. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis proses pembentukan dan pengembangan Takon Sobat sebagai inovasi digital dalam layanan konsultasi perizinan dan nonperizinan di Dinas Penanaman Modal dan Pelayanan Terpadu Satu Pintu (DPMPTSP) Kota Surabaya. Penelitian menggunakan enam dimensi proses inovasi sektor publik dari Arundel, Bloch, dan Ferguson. Metode yang digunakan adalah studi kasus*

*kualitatif deskriptif. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur terhadap lima informan, yang terdiri atas empat pihak organisasi dan satu pengguna layanan, serta melalui observasi dan dokumentasi. Analisis data dilakukan melalui kondensasi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Takon Sobat berkembang melalui koordinasi lintas unit, gagasan yang bersumber dari kebutuhan masyarakat dan permasalahan operasional, pembelajaran organisasi yang adaptif, serta integrasi perangkat digital secara bertahap. Layanan ini memberikan alternatif konsultasi jarak jauh, tetapi masih menghadapi kendala berupa tingginya volume pesan, keterbatasan kemampuan teknis, ketergantungan pada instansi lain, dan persoalan verifikasi platform. Data pemantauan dan umpan balik telah dikumpulkan, tetapi pemanfaatannya untuk menghasilkan perbaikan layanan yang terukur masih perlu diperkuat.*

## INTRODUCTION

Public services are increasingly expected to be accessible, responsive, and adaptive to citizens' needs. In licensing administration, access to accurate information is particularly important because applicants must understand various requirements, procedures, technical authorities, and administrative stages. The complexity of licensing services may create difficulties for citizens, particularly when consultation requires physical visits or communication through channels with limited operating hours. Consequently, service accessibility is not determined solely by the availability of administrative procedures but also by the ease with which citizens can obtain reliable information and assistance.

Digital technologies provide public organisations with opportunities to redesign service interactions, coordinate information, and improve responsiveness. However, digital innovation should not be understood merely as the introduction of a communication application. It also involves organisational arrangements, work practices, employee capabilities, collaboration, and the utilisation of information (Hund et al., 2021; Nambisan et al., 2017). Digital transformation in local government therefore requires organisational capacity and institutional readiness, alongside technological infrastructure (Aristovnik et al., 2025; Gasco-Hernandez et al., 2022; Roziqin et al., 2026). In this regard, digital public-service innovation is better understood as a process of organisational change rather than a technological intervention alone.

In Surabaya, the Investment and One-Stop Integrated Services Office (DPMPTSP) is responsible for coordinating licensing and non-licensing services. Before the introduction of Takon Sobat, citizens generally obtained consultation services through direct visits to the One-Stop Integrated Services Unit (UPTSA) or the Siola Public Service Mall, as well as conventional telephone communication. This arrangement required citizens to adjust to service hours and potentially spend additional time waiting for information. The complexity of licensing matters also meant that questions about requirements, procedures, permit validity, payment arrangements, and application progress sometimes required confirmation from different technical units.

These conditions encouraged the development of Takon Sobat as a digital consultation channel using WhatsApp. The service was introduced in 2023 to facilitate communication between citizens and DPMPTSP without requiring every consultation to begin with a physical visit. Its development subsequently involved improvements in communication management, the involvement of relevant technical personnel, the use of an omnichannel platform, and the implementation of a monitoring dashboard. Thus, Takon Sobat is not simply a WhatsApp-

based service but an organisational arrangement connecting citizens, administrators, service coordinators, and technical agencies.

The development of digital public services has been examined through several perspectives. Research on digital transformation in local government highlights the importance of organisational capacity, leadership, collaboration, and institutional readiness (Gasco-Hernandez et al., 2022; Kurniyanta et al., 2026; Roziqin et al., 2026). Other studies examine the relationship between digital transformation, organisational capabilities, and public-service performance (Aldhi et al., 2026; Muttaqin & Kurniawan, 2026; Razak et al., 2026). Research on citizen engagement also shows that public-service innovation can be influenced by interactions between public organisations and service users (Callens, 2023; Mannak et al., 2025; Nguyen et al., 2024). Meanwhile, digital platforms and social media can support organisational learning and the development of citizen-oriented services (Reddick et al., 2017).

Studies in Indonesia have also discussed digital innovation in local government, including village-service digitalisation, licensing applications, digital governance, and public-sector innovation (Cahya Ningtyas & Angin, 2023; Fauziah & Oktariyanda, 2022; Hakim & Eprilianto, 2024; Hilmawan et al., 2023). Research by Fahrozi and Ridho (2026) specifically discusses Takon Sobat through the attributes of innovation. However, examining the characteristics or implementation of an innovation does not necessarily explain the organisational process through which the innovation is formed, managed, and continuously developed.

The research gap addressed in this article concerns how organisational arrangements, sources of ideas, innovation culture, capabilities, objectives, obstacles, and data collection shape the development of Takon Sobat. This perspective is important because digital consultation services depend not only on the communication platform but also on the ability of public organisations to coordinate responses, manage increasing inquiries, and translate operational experiences into service improvements. Research on digital transformation in cities similarly emphasises the multidimensional relationship between technology, organisational arrangements, and public-sector innovation (Mariani & Bianchi, 2023).

To analyse these processes, this study applies the six dimensions of public-sector innovation proposed by (Arundel et al., 2019): Governance and Innovation; Sources of Ideas for Innovation; Innovation Culture; Capabilities and Tools; Objectives, Outcomes, Drivers, and Obstacles; and Collecting Innovation Data for Single Innovation. The study aims to explain how Takon Sobat was formed, managed, and developed as a digital innovation in licensing and non-licensing consultation services in Surabaya. Its contribution is an organisational perspective on digital consultation innovation, including the operational arrangements and limitations that influence its continuing development.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital innovation in public services involves the use of digital technologies to create or improve services, processes, and organisational arrangements. Nambisan et al. (2017) explain that digital innovation enables new combinations of technologies, actors, and organisational processes. Hund et al. (2021) similarly emphasise that digital innovation requires attention to the interaction between technological developments and organisational practices. In public administration, digital transformation extends beyond the digitisation of existing procedures. It may involve changes in coordination, institutional responsibilities, service delivery, and

relationships between government and citizens (Andersson et al., 2022; Mariani & Bianchi, 2023). Therefore, the development of a digital consultation service needs to be examined through both its technological components and the organisational processes that sustain its operation.

Public-sector innovation is influenced by organisational, institutional, and environmental conditions. De Vries et al. (2016) identify several factors that influence innovation, including organisational characteristics, leadership, collaboration, and external pressures. Collaborative innovation is also important because public-service problems frequently involve multiple actors and organisational boundaries (Torfing, 2019). The continuity of public-sector innovation requires feedback, accountability, and organisational learning (Van Acker & Bouckaert, 2018). In addition, user involvement can provide information about service needs and encourage the development of more responsive public services (Callens, 2023; Nguyen et al., 2024). These perspectives indicate that innovation is not a single event but an ongoing process involving the identification of problems, the development of solutions, and organisational adjustments.

Arundel et al. (2019) propose six dimensions for examining public-sector innovation. First, Governance and Innovation concerns organisational direction, responsibilities, decision-making, and coordination. Second, Sources of Ideas for Innovation identifies the origins of innovation ideas, including employees, service users, and external actors. Third, Innovation Culture examines organisational norms and practices that encourage learning, experimentation, and improvement. Fourth, Capabilities and Tools focuses on the human resources, organisational capacities, and technological infrastructure required to develop and operate innovation. Fifth, Objectives, Outcomes, Drivers, and Obstacles examines innovation objectives, perceived outcomes, supporting factors, and implementation constraints. Sixth, Collecting Innovation Data for Single Innovation concerns the collection and utilisation of information about a particular innovation for monitoring, evaluation, and improvement.

These dimensions provide an analytical framework for understanding innovation as an organisational process. They are relevant to Takon Sobat because the service involves coordination across organisational units, the identification of citizen needs, employee learning, technological development, operational constraints, and the collection of service-related data.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a case-study design to examine the formation and development of Takon Sobat in its organisational context. The research was conducted at the Surabaya City Investment and One-Stop Integrated Services Office (DPMPTSP), which coordinates licensing and non-licensing services in Surabaya. The qualitative approach was selected because the research focuses on organisational roles, experiences, coordination practices, and operational constraints rather than testing relationships between variables (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Informants were selected purposively based on their knowledge and involvement in the operation and development of Takon Sobat. Five informants participated in this study: (1) the technical officer responsible for Takon Sobat; (2) the Coordinator of Non-Business Licensing and Non-Licensing Services; (3) the Coordinator of Business Licensing Services; (4) the DPMPTSP public-relations officer; and (5) one citizen who had used Takon Sobat. The four organisational informants provided information about the innovation process, while the service user provided supporting information regarding accessibility and user experience.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted between September and October 2026. Interview questions were organised around the six dimensions of Arundel et al. (2019), while allowing informants to explain their experiences and provide examples. Observation focused on the consultation workflow, communication tools, coordination practices, and supporting facilities. Documentation included institutional information, service records, monitoring-dashboard screenshots, and monthly visitor reports. The supporting quantitative records were used descriptively to complement the qualitative findings. The first dataset was the MPP online visitor recap for July–September 2026. The second was a screenshot of the dashboard monitoring for 1–30 September 2026.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles et al. (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Interview findings were organised according to the six analytical dimensions and compared with observation and documentary evidence. Source and technique triangulation were used to examine the consistency of information obtained from organisational informants, the service user, observations, and service documentation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings show that the formation and development of Takon Sobat involved interconnected organisational processes. The service initially provided a WhatsApp-based consultation channel and subsequently developed through adjustments in administrative responsibilities, technical coordination, digital infrastructure, and monitoring practices. These processes are discussed using the six dimensions of (Arundel et al., 2019).

1. Governance and Innovation

Takon Sobat is managed through a division of responsibilities involving administrators, service coordinators, technical personnel, and relevant agencies. Administrators receive and identify incoming consultations, while questions requiring specialised knowledge are forwarded to the relevant person in charge (PIC) or technical unit. The Coordinator of Business Licensing Services explained that questions concerning matters such as the issuance of a Business Identification Number (NIB) can be directed to the relevant PIC. If citizens require further assistance, consultation may continue through telephone, video calls, or face-to-face guidance.

The governance arrangement has also changed in response to service demand. According to the Coordinator of Non-Business Licensing and Non-Licensing Services, Takon Sobat was initially managed by one administrator, while incoming questions could exceed 100 per day. The number of administrators subsequently increased to two or three. This adjustment indicates that the organisation responded to operational pressure by expanding personnel and distributing responsibilities.

The technical officer also explained that incoming questions requiring technical responses can be forwarded through a connected complaint-handling platform. This arrangement enables the consultation service to connect citizens with personnel who have the relevant authority and knowledge. Such coordination reflects the collaborative nature of public-sector innovation, in which service delivery depends on cooperation across organisational boundaries (Gasco-Hernandez et al., 2022; Torfing, 2019).

Nevertheless, the referral mechanism also creates dependencies. Administrators cannot independently resolve every technical question, and the time required to obtain

responses from other units may affect the consultation process. Therefore, the governance dimension is reflected in the division of responsibilities and coordination mechanisms, although its effectiveness still depends on clear referral procedures and timely responses.

2. Sources of Ideas for Innovation

The ideas behind Takon Sobat emerged from service needs and operational problems encountered by DPMPTSP. Before the innovation was introduced, citizens frequently visited service counters to ask about licensing procedures, permit validity, payment arrangements, and application progress. These recurring questions demonstrated the need for a consultation channel that could provide information without requiring every citizen to visit the office.

The service-user interview supports this finding. One user explained that before knowing Takon Sobat, she had to visit Siola and wait during working hours to obtain information. After learning about the service from an officer, she began using WhatsApp to ask about licensing requirements and resolve problems when she could not visit the office. She described the service as more flexible because it could be accessed from different locations.

Ideas for further development also emerged from operational experiences. The technical officer explained that complaints about parties impersonating Takon Sobat encouraged employees to propose improvements to the official account's verification and credibility. In addition, the high volume of incoming questions and the difficulty of managing numerous licensing matters encouraged adjustments to administrative staffing and coordination.

These findings show that ideas for innovation did not originate from a single source. They developed through citizen needs, complaints, employee observations, and operational problem-solving. This is consistent with research emphasising the role of user involvement and collaboration in public-service innovation (Callens, 2023; Mannak et al., 2025; Nguyen et al., 2024). However, the evidence does not indicate that every development decision was directly initiated by citizens. Rather, employees interpreted public needs and translated them into organisational proposals.

3. Innovation Culture

The development of Takon Sobat reflects an adaptive and problem-oriented organisational culture. Employees and technical personnel have opportunities to propose improvements, while administrators develop their consultation skills through practical experience and guidance from technical colleagues.

The Coordinator of Non-Business Licensing and Non-Licensing Services explained that administrators initially learned how to manage digital consultations independently. They also sought guidance from technical personnel when encountering questions that could not be answered using existing knowledge. Repeated questions were collected and used to develop response references and a knowledge database.

This practice demonstrates that organisational learning takes place through daily service activities. Employees encounter new questions, seek clarification, and adjust response practices based on operational experience. The collection of recurring questions and answers also provides knowledge that can support the development of other information services, including Sipintar, which is a separate AI-supported information service. Takon Sobat itself remains a consultation channel and should not be equated with Sipintar.

The findings are consistent with Van Acker and Bouckaert (2018), who highlight the role of feedback and organisational learning in sustaining public-sector innovation. They also support the view that digital transformation requires changes in organisational routines rather than technological adoption alone (Andersson et al., 2022; Kurniyanta et al., 2026).

Nevertheless, the available evidence indicates that learning is still largely practical and experience-based. A more structured knowledge-management system, regular technical training, and documented evaluation of recurring problems could strengthen the innovation culture. Thus, the Innovation Culture dimension is reflected in employees' willingness to learn and adapt, although formal mechanisms for institutionalising that learning remain an area for improvement.

4. Capabilities and Tools

Takon Sobat's operational capabilities involve human resources, communication infrastructure, and digital management tools. The technical officer identified computers, internet access, headsets, and telephone facilities as supporting resources. The service has also developed from a single WhatsApp communication channel into an omnichannel arrangement that integrates WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, email, and other communication sources into one management platform.

The integration allows administrators to manage messages from multiple channels through a centralised interface. In addition, the monitoring dashboard provides information about answered and unanswered messages and service-level response times. A telephone channel has also been introduced to provide another means of communication for citizens.

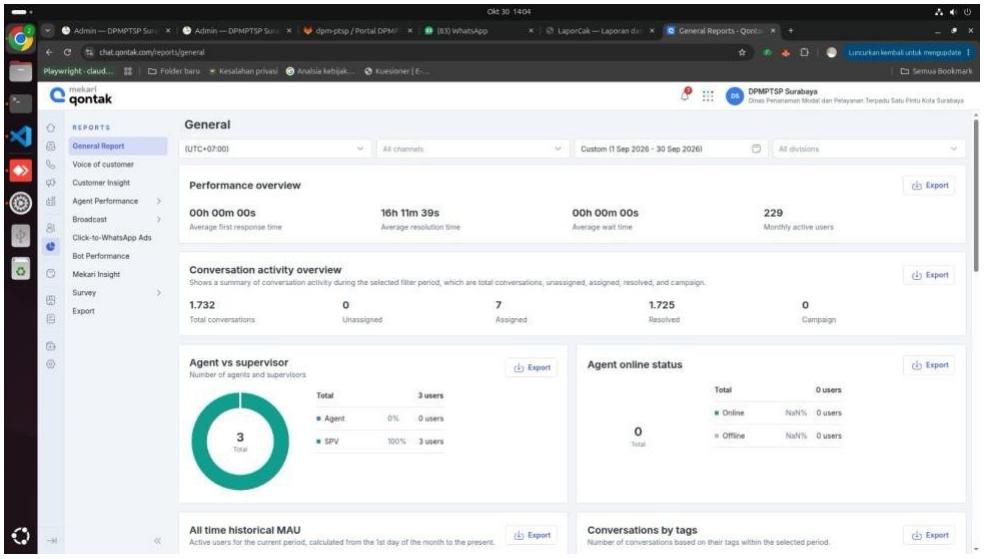


Figure 1 Dashboard Monitoring Takon Sobat

The dashboard monitoring screenshot provides documentary evidence of the service's monitoring capacity, for the period of 1–30 September 2026. The dashboard also displayed agent and supervisor information, online-status monitoring, and conversation reports by tags. These features indicate that the service is supported by tools for monitoring communication activity and managing incoming consultations.

However, technological infrastructure alone is insufficient to ensure that every consultation can be resolved. Administrators must understand incoming questions,

identify the appropriate authority, communicate clearly, and recognise when technical escalation is necessary. The coordinators explained that the diversity of licensing matters makes it difficult for a small administrative team to master every technical issue. This finding reflects the importance of organisational and human capabilities in digital transformation (Aldhi et al., 2026; Aristovnik et al., 2025; Gasco-Hernandez et al., 2022).

Accordingly, the Capabilities and Tools dimension is reflected in the gradual integration of digital infrastructure and the development of administrative arrangements. Nevertheless, strengthening technical knowledge, staffing capacity, and coordination remains necessary to ensure that the available tools are supported by adequate human resources.

5. Objectives, Outcomes, Drivers, and Obstacles

The primary objective of Takon Sobat is to provide more accessible licensing and non-licensing consultations by enabling citizens to ask questions remotely. The service also functions as an intermediary that directs questions to the relevant service unit or technical agency. Its development was driven by the need for remote consultation, increasing demand for licensing information, the complexity of licensing matters, and the need to maintain the credibility of the official communication channel.

The service-user interview illustrates the perceived benefits of this arrangement. The user explained that she previously had to visit Siola and wait to obtain information. Through Takon Sobat, she could ask about required documents and licensing problems without always coming to the office. She also considered the service accessible and helpful, particularly when questions were submitted during working hours.

Table 1 Number of Takon Sobat users from July to September 2026

| Month | Recorded Visits |
|---|---|
| July 2026 | 6.862 |
| Agustus 2026 | 5.745 |
| September 2026 | 6.446 |
| Total | 19.053 |

The data show that the highest monthly number of visits occurred in July, followed by a decrease in August and an increase in September. These figures indicate that Takon Sobat was accessed throughout the observation period. However, the report records visits rather than verified unique individuals. Therefore, the figures should not be interpreted as the number of distinct citizens using the service.

Several obstacles remain. First, the number of incoming questions can be high relative to the available administrative personnel. Second, some questions require specialised technical knowledge that administrators do not possess, resulting in referrals and additional waiting time. Third, certain licensing matters fall outside the authority of the city government and require coordination with provincial or central-government institutions. Fourth, the technical officer reported that changes in Meta's verification requirements required the submission of updated documents and a review process.

The dashboard also recorded an average resolution time of 16 hours, 11 minutes, and 39 seconds in September 2026. This indicator provides information about the time recorded by the platform to reach a resolved conversation status. However, it should not automatically be interpreted as the time required to solve the citizen's underlying licensing

problem. Similarly, the number of resolved conversation statuses does not independently demonstrate the accuracy or completeness of the consultation.

These findings show that the objectives and perceived benefits of Takon Sobat coexist with operational and institutional constraints. Digital access may reduce the need for some physical consultations, but service quality remains dependent on personnel capacity, technical expertise, coordination, and platform reliability. This is consistent with research linking organisational readiness and adaptive capabilities to digital public-service performance (Danso & Opoku, 2025; Nurlinah et al., 2025; Razak et al., 2026).

6. Collecting Innovation Data for Single Innovation

DPMPTSP collects information about Takon Sobat through monitoring dashboards, operational reports, user feedback, and periodic evaluation. The technical officer explained that users can provide suggestions through a survey form after consultation. The monitoring dashboard also provides information about incoming messages, answered and unanswered conversations, and response times.

The Coordinator of Non-Business Licensing and Non-Licensing Services explained that monthly monitoring is conducted to identify the number of citizens served and the questions most frequently raised. Complaints are also examined to identify problems experienced by citizens, including difficulties in obtaining information or being directed between service units. Repeated questions can be used to prepare response references and explanatory content for public communication.

The existence of monitoring data does not necessarily mean that the data have been fully utilised for innovation improvement. A conversation marked as resolved does not automatically indicate that the citizen's underlying problem has been solved. Likewise, response-time indicators do not directly measure the accuracy of information or the extent to which citizens understand the licensing procedures provided.

Therefore, data utilisation could be strengthened through more systematic classification of consultation topics, tracking of referrals to technical agencies, recording of final problem resolution, and documentation of corrective actions based on evaluation results. This is consistent with the emphasis on systematic innovation information in the Oslo Manual (OECD & Eurostat, 2018) and research on organisational learning through digital service data (Reddick et al., 2017; Waheduzzaman, 2026).

Overall, the Collecting Innovation Data for Single Innovation dimension is reflected in the availability of dashboards, visitor records, surveys, and periodic monitoring. Nevertheless, the findings show that the collection of information is more clearly established than the systematic use of that information to demonstrate measurable service improvements. The contribution of the Takon Sobat case is to show that monitoring tools make service activities more visible, but their value for innovation depends on whether the collected information is analysed and translated into documented improvements.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that Takon Sobat has developed as an organisational and digital innovation in licensing and non-licensing consultation services, rather than merely as the use of WhatsApp for public communication. Its formation and development were shaped by the need to improve access to licensing information, recurring citizen questions, increasing consultation demand, and operational problems encountered during service delivery.

The six dimensions of Arundel et al. (2019) provide a useful framework for explaining the development of Takon Sobat. Governance and Innovation is reflected in the division of

responsibilities and coordination between administrators, service units, and technical agencies. Sources of Ideas for Innovation emerge from citizen needs, complaints, and employees' operational experiences. Innovation Culture is reflected in practical learning and employees' willingness to propose improvements. Capabilities and Tools are demonstrated through the development of human resources, communication infrastructure, omnichannel integration, and dashboard monitoring. Objectives, Outcomes, Drivers, and Obstacles show that the service provides a more flexible consultation channel while continuing to face technical and organisational constraints. Finally, Collecting Innovation Data for Single Innovation is reflected in the use of visitor records, dashboards, surveys, and periodic monitoring, although systematic data utilisation remains limited.

Supporting records show 19,053 visits during July–September 2026, while the September Qontak dashboard recorded 1,732 conversations and 1,725 resolved conversation statuses. These figures provide an overview of service activity, but they do not independently establish the number of unique users, the quality of consultation outcomes, or the causal impact of Takon Sobat on service effectiveness.

This study contributes to public-administration research by explaining the organisational processes that sustain a local-government digital consultation innovation. Practically, DPMPTSP needs to strengthen administrator capacity, clarify referral responsibilities with technical agencies, maintain the reliability of official communication channels, and improve the use of service data. Monitoring should not focus only on the number of incoming and resolved conversations but also on referral completion, the quality of information, and citizens' actual problem resolution. Future research may involve a broader range of service users, examine the relationship between monitoring data and service improvements, and compare digital consultation innovations across local governments.

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