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THE CREATION OF PUBLIC VALUE IN THE PROCESS OF THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN KAZAKHSTAN

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Abstract. *This paper explores the concept of public value in the context of digital transformation in Kazakhstan's public administration. It investigates the creation of public value and assesses the outcomes of government digitalization efforts. The study employs a qualitative research methodology, including citizen questionnaires and the analysis of relevant documents. The aim is to not only understand public value creation but also identify the specific dimensions of value in Kazakhstan's case, filling a gap in the empirical research on public value in Central Asian countries' digital transformation initiatives.*

Keywords: *digital transformation, public value creation, Kazakhstan, public services.*

Reikšminiai žodžiai: *skaitmeninė transformacija, viešosios vertės kūrimas, Kazachstanas, viešosios paslaugos.*

Introduction

The concept of public value in government objectives encompasses various dimensions, including efficiency, public service delivery, equity, inclusivity, transparency, citizen engagement, and citizen well-being (Karunasena et al. 2011). E-government is recognized as a means to achieve these objectives by enhancing services, reducing costs, and increasing participation, which is essential for government accountability (Karunasena et al. 2011).

Public value theory, rooted in Mark Moore's work, defines public value as citizens'

collective expectations of government services (Moore 1995). It highlights the responsibility of public managers to enhance services and societal conditions to create public value (Moore 1995). Although Moore's theory does not directly address digitalization processes, it provides a foundation for assessing the impact of digital transformation on public values (Strathoff 2016; Naidoo and Holtzhausen 2020). Creating a robust framework for evaluating e-government and digital transformation is challenging due to the complexity of categorizing values and defining suitable measurement indicators (Karunasena et al. 2011; Kearns 2004; Kelly et al. 2002). There are ongoing debates about the elements and dimensions of public value, and a common classification or taxonomy has not been established (Bannister and Connolly 2014; Cordella and Paletti 2019). However, values can be broadly categorized as socially oriented, service-oriented, managerial, and democratic (Bonina and Cordella 2009; Cordella and Paletti 2019).

This paper aims to apply the conceptual framework of public value theory to preliminarily evaluate the impact of digitalization in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan has made remarkable progress in digitalization and e-government, ranking 15th in global citizen e-participation and 28th in e-government development in 2022 (Sputnik 2022). The country also holds a strong position in the Network Readiness Index, and it now ranks 56th out of 134 countries, surpassing Turkey, Ukraine, and Belarus (Finprom 2023). Digital literacy among Kazakhstani residents aged 6 to 74 has increased by 4.5% over the past 3 years, reaching 84.1% by the end of 2020 (Finprom 2023). In April 2023, Kazakhstan improved its global internet speed ranking to 72nd place, outperforming neighboring countries in the Eurasian Economic Union and Central Asia (Finprom 2023).

Thus, this paper enhances the understanding of digital transformation in Kazakhstan's public administration by applying public value theory. It seeks to answer the following question: ***"What public values are created through digital transformation in Kazakhstan?"***

The paper qualitatively analyzes responses from 274 survey participants, focusing on the contribution of digital platforms to public value across four dimensions: *trust, service delivery, desired outcomes,* and *service effectiveness*. It also includes the analysis of audit reports, strategies, and government announcements regarding Kazakhstan's digital programs. While the survey gathered the general opinions of citizens, it did not specifically investigate the concerns highlighted in state reports. Future research could involve more comprehensive methods, including structured interviews with high-level managers involved in digitalization and focus group investigation. This would lead to a more comprehensive evaluation of digitalization efforts.

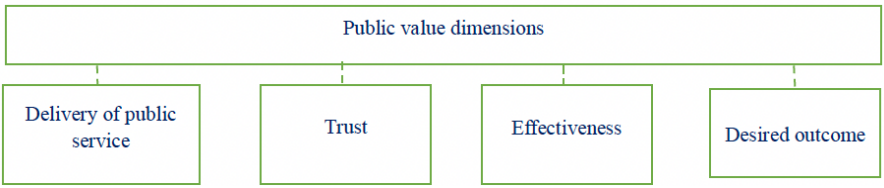
In recent years, Kazakhstan has prioritized digitalization efforts in public administration to improve efficiency, transparency, and service quality. Key initiatives include e-government, e-participation, e-procurement, and open platforms. Kazakhstan's approach blends international experiences with adjustments to suit its unique needs (Kassen 2018). The country has adopted a non-linear model of e-government implementation, marked by distinct stages: *creation of infrastructure*, *informatization and training*, *development of a cohesive ecosystem*, *interdepartmental integration*, *e-participation*, and *open government* (Lee 2010, as cited in Kassen 2019).

Several studies have examined citizens' satisfaction with digitalized public services in Kazakhstan, identifying areas for improvement (Bokayev et al. 2021). Authors have highlighted the importance of sectoral changes and the transformation of public services and e-government implementation (Kassen 2016; Knox and Janenova 2019). Knox and Janenova (2019) discussed a paradox where e-government, despite addressing bureaucracy and corruption, can lead to unintended consequences, particularly in post-Soviet states. Notably, open government initiatives in Kazakhstan have struggled to engage citizens actively, with unofficial platforms such as social media becoming more popular for one-way communication (Knox and Janenova 2019). These studies emphasize principles such as openness, transparency, inclusiveness, public satisfaction, and engagement as essential outcomes of state development programs. However, a limited amount of research has focused on open communication between the government and citizens and the creation of public value in the digitalization of the public sector in Kazakhstan.

Research methodology

This paper adopts the conceptual framework of public value theory, which includes four main dimensions: delivery of public service, outcomes, trust, and effectiveness (Karunasena et al. 2011), in alignment with the frameworks of Kelly (2002) and Kearns (2004). The choice of this framework was driven by two primary reasons. First, Kazakhstan, as a developing country, has successfully digitized its public services. Second, the concept of public value provides an analytical structure to assess policy implementation results, the quality of public services, and the value created for citizens by the government. Examining a country's digital transformation from a value-based perspective allows for a comprehensive understanding of the context of transformation and the relationship between technology and society (Kearns 2004).

Table 1. *The conceptual framework – public value dimensions*



Source: Developed by the authors based on the frameworks of Karunasena (2011), Kelly (2002) and Kearns (2004).

Public service delivery signifies the quality of services offered to the public (Kearns 2004; Heeks 2008). This dimension encompasses various aspects, including information availability, relevance to citizens' needs, multiple service delivery channels, cost savings, fairness, citizens' satisfaction, and the number of users accessing at least one service (Kearns 2004; Karunasena et al. 2011). Desired outcomes focus on socially desirable impacts,

deliverables, and consequences of public service delivery, spanning initial, intermediate, and long-term effects (Codagnone and Undheim 2008). The trust dimension is assessed from various perspectives, such as security, privacy transparency, trust in e-services, and citizens' participation in government (Kearns 2004; Heeks 2008). Effectiveness gauges the public value created through e-government, and is measured by factors such as efficiency, public body accountability, and citizens' perceptions of public organizations (Moore 1995). E-government efficiency is determined by criteria such as cost savings, financial returns, employee empowerment, and ICT infrastructure development (eGEP 2006).

Faulkner and Kaufman's systematic review (2017, 3) emphasized the need for empirical measures to test hypotheses regarding the causes and consequences of public value creation. This study aims to assess the practical application of these frameworks in the digital transformation of Kazakhstan's public administration and the country's efforts to generate public value. The research utilizes the conceptual framework of public value theory and employs qualitative research methods, including the distribution of questionnaires to citizens. It also involves the analysis of secondary data sources such as policy papers and government releases. Surveys have previously been used to evaluate the design-reality gap and assess the utility of online government services (Heeks 2003; Bwalya and Mutula 2014; Makoza, 2016). This approach not only aids in comprehending public value creation, but also uncovers specific dimensions of values within the context of Kazakhstan, which is an expected research outcome. The study combines citizens' questionnaires and the analysis of strategic documents related to digital transformation. The questionnaire was administered through Google Surveys, and consisted of 13 closed questions. It was distributed to participants from various sectors through randomly shared links on social networks, resulting in the collection of 274 responses between April and May 2023.

National Programs and Strategies on the Digitalization of Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan's political and socio-economic reforms, initiated with the "Declaration on State Sovereignty" in 1990 and the Law "On State Independence," aimed to transition to a democratic, secular, and market-based economy. Over two decades, the country pursued a policy of establishing a Unified Information Space, reducing budget costs and fostering a unified communication environment. In 1997, a Presidential Decree addressed issues of inadequate interaction between state information systems, emphasizing the importance of efficient information flow management for decision-making and security. Electronic document management played a pivotal role in this initiative (Supreme Audit Institution of Kazakhstan 2022, Table 1). In 2017, Kazakhstan launched the "Digital Kazakhstan" program, inspired by the Fourth Industrial Revolution, focusing on emerging technologies such as *big data, blockchain, AI,* and *3D printing*. The program aimed to boost economic development through five key directions: *digitizing economic sectors, transitioning to a digital government, implementing the digital Silk Road, enhancing human capital,* and *fostering innovation* (Decree of the Government No. 827, 2017).

It ended in 2022, but laid the groundwork for subsequent initiatives. It aimed to digitize public administration and streamline bureaucratic procedures, involving citizens, government officials, and businesses. The program sought to redefine the state-citizen relationship, encourage business-government collaboration, enhance digital literacy, and stimulate innovation (Supreme Audit Institution of Kazakhstan 2022). The eGov Mobile application provided access to 641 public services, benefiting approximately 1.2 million monthly users (e-Gov, n.d.).

The National Development Plan of Kazakhstan until 2025 is the foundational document guiding the country's digital development, with a strong focus on key sectors such as education, healthcare, agriculture, infrastructure, and government digitalization (Presidential Decree No. 521, 2021).

The "Technological Leap through Digitization, Science, and Innovation" document outlines tasks from 2021 to 2025, with a focus on science, economic and social digitization, economic diversification, and balanced development. It aims to achieve outcomes such as GDP growth in the ICT sector, revenue from the crypto industry, private co-financing for R&D, and improved government services. The "Methodological Recommendations for Building Smart Cities" guide the construction of innovative "Smart Cities" in Kazakhstan, with oversight by authorized bodies and digitization offices to regulate development and monitor progress through key indicators (Decree of the Government No. 727, 2021).

The "Concept of Digital Transformation, Information-Communication Technologies Industry Development, and Cybersecurity for 2023–2029" initiative involves stages to ensure the country's security, protect personal data, and enhance cyber hygiene. It represents the phased implementation of Kazakhstan's digital segment (Decree of the Government No. 269, 2023).

Results and Discussion

Of the 13 questions in the survey, eight were directly related to the four dimensions of public value: trust, service delivery, desired outcomes, and service effectiveness, as illustrated in Figures 1–4. The remaining questions assess the potential of state digital initiatives in generating public goods and public values. Preliminary feedback from citizens indicates their satisfaction with public services delivered by state bodies. Kazakhstan's e-government system is viewed as a successful model for creating public value in the digitalization of public administration. It offers citizens a convenient one-stop online service, reducing the need for physical government office visits, cutting corruption and bureaucracy, and enhancing transparency and efficiency in government interactions.

Table 2. *Phases of the digital transformation of public administration in Kazakhstan*

Year	Purpose	Reforms	Results
1997–2001	The initial phase of the establishment of a robust infrastructure.	Reforms aimed at the development of the public sector.	*Active computerization; building a technological infrastructure basis; initial creation of telecommunications network; establishing first internet and intranet connections in public institutions; introducing internal corporate e-mail systems; procuring servers, software, terminals, websites, etc.*
2001–2004	Focus on the informatization of public institutions.	Building a powerful national infrastructure.	*Formulation of important conceptual and legislative foundations, initiation of civil service professionalization.*
2004–2006	Focus on a centralized ecosystem for e-government.	Formation of an "electronic government."	*The establishment of the E-Gov web portal (www.egov.kz).*
2007–2010	A new phase of technology-driven public-sector reforms.	Transitioning to a cloud platform, the first stage of the state cloud initiative.	*Adoption of the second e-government strategy and the e-procurement Law.*
2010–2012	Focus shifted towards establishing a service-oriented state.	Implementation and development of the architecture of the "electronic government."	*Kazakhstan's e-government matured with tools, international practices, and public-private partnerships.*
2013–2016	Focus on advancement of open government and open data platforms.	Implementation of an architectural approach to improve the efficiency of the government system.	*The "Information Kazakhstan – 2020" strategy aimed to reduce bureaucracy and improve services and e-participation.*
2017–ongoing	Proactive phase.	Digitization of internal activities of government agencies, transition to a "Digital State."	*"Government for Citizens" was launched, which introduced cloud services, mobile technologies, and other government technologies.*
2017–2022	"Digital Kazakhstan."	The "Digital Kazakhstan" State Program was designed to guide the country's digital transformation efforts, with a focus on promoting innovation, economic growth, and social development through the use of digital technologies.	*The launch of the eGov Mobile application and other e-platforms.*

Year	Purpose	Reforms	Results
2022–2029	Concept of Digital Transformation, Information-Communication Technologies Industry Development, and Cybersecurity for 2023–2029.	This is based on the "National Development Plan of the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2025." Similar to the "Digital Kazakhstan" program, the target groups and associated tasks can be divided into several categories: - population; - business and economy; - governmental structures.	*This concept was approved by the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan on March 28, 2023, and is still ongoing.*

Sources: *Developed by the authors on the basis of following documents and authors: Kassen 2018: Bokayev et al. 2021; Presidential Decree No. 3787, 1997; The Government Resolution No. 715, 1998; The "Informatization Law" (Law No. 412, 2003); Presidential Decree No. 1471, 2004; Government Resolution No. 1155-1, 2007; Presidential Decree No. 958, 2010; Government Resolution No. 983, 2010; Presidential Decree No. 464, 2013; Government Directive No. 39, 2016; Decree of the Government No. 269, 2023.*

Answers to the questions regarding the creation of public value: 50% of respondents believe digital transformation can enhance effective state management and increase public well-being; 45.3% believe digital transformation can promote inclusiveness and democratic values through accessible public services and transparent governance processes; 55.5% view e-government services as enhancing transparency and accountability; and 54.4% provide a "mostly positive" evaluation of the impact of digital transformation on information openness, accessibility, and accountability.

However, 40.5% stress the importance of proper implementation and careful management. Moreover, 42.7% emphasize the need for projects tailored to various population groups and personal data security, while around 40% see the need for regulations and the protection of citizens' and businesses' rights. Approximately 30% call for adequate control over government process accountability. Respondents believe that the service-oriented model of transformation is ongoing, but note that not all personnel meet high standards, potentially hindering goal achievement.

Answers to the questions on the aspects, impacts, and quality of digitalization and state programs: 63.5% consider Kazakhstan's e-government platform significant for reducing bureaucracy and increasing transparency. However, fewer respondents believe in the impact of the state's economic development. Around 29.9% see digitalization as positively impacting Kazakhstan's development, while 28.5% emphasize the importance of digital infrastructure, and a similar proportion highlight digital economy development. The quality of public services is the primary benefit of digital transformation, with 31.4% noting increased transparency and openness. The "Listening State"[1] program is seen as a means to enhance feedback from citizens and stakeholders, with 24.8% urging the consideration of citizens' opinions and needs in decision-making processes.

1 See the "Listening State" concept in https://www.akorda.kz/en/addresses/addresses_of_president/president-of-kazakhstan-kassym-jomart-tokayevs-state-of-the-nation-address-september-2-2019

Answers to the questions on the necessary conditions and challenges in digital transformation: 40.1% believe reliable infrastructure with high-speed data transfer is a crucial condition for maximizing digital transformation opportunities. Data security and privacy concerns, specifically information leakage, are the primary worries for 48.9% of respondents. Respondents show less concern about inclusiveness, social group and regional disparities, and the need for digital technology training. The long-term goals of Kazakhstan in e-government and digitalization are perceived very positively by 56.2% of respondents. Another challenge involves establishing effective communication channels between citizens and government agencies, reflecting Knox and Janenova's (2019, 12) findings of one-sided communication and limited interaction between the government and citizens.

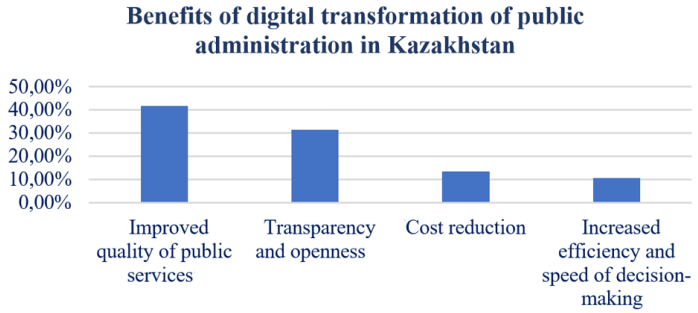


Figure 1. *Service delivery*

Source: Developed by authors on the basis of the respondents' answers.

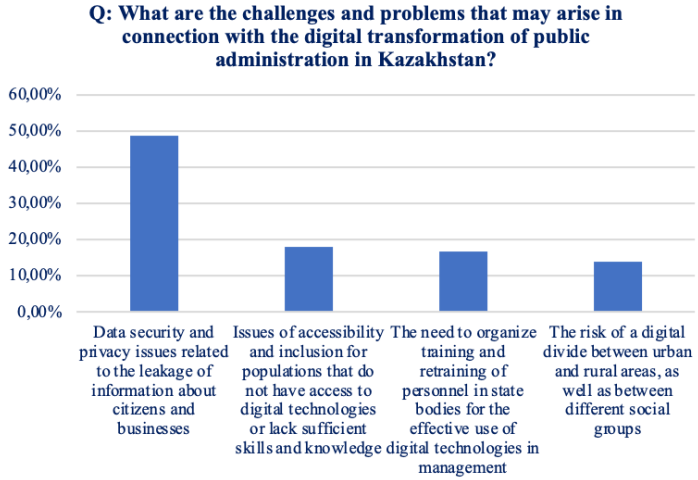


Figure 2. *Trust*

Source: Developed by authors on the basis of the respondents' answers.

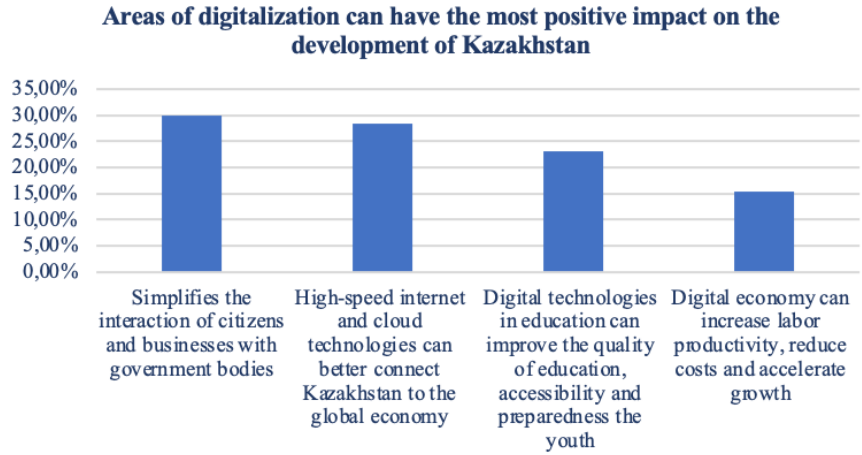


Figure 3. *Effectiveness*

Source: Developed by authors on the basis of the respondents' answers.

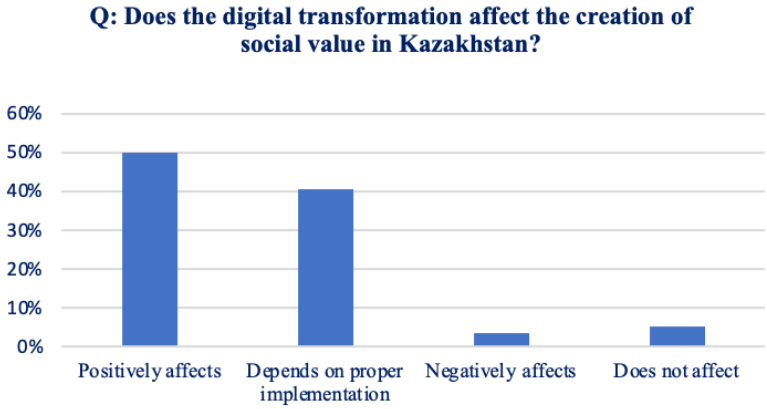


Figure 4. *Desired outcomes*

Source: Developed by authors on the basis of the respondents' answers.

At the same time, approximately 24% of respondents emphasized the inclusion of citizens' opinions and needs in the decision-making process.

The obstacles identified in the State Interim Evaluation Report primarily result from the lack of systematic planning, organizational continuity, and clear indicators in the development and implementation of informatization and digitization programs. This poor implementation quality poses risks to fundamental processes, including budgeting and

public service provision. Key recommendations include establishing systematic planning, ensuring organizational continuity during state body reorganization, improving the quality of indicators and benchmarks within state programs, and reducing bureaucratic processes for these initiatives to have a significant impact across all sectors and the entire population (Supreme Audit Institution of Kazakhstan 2022).

While these activities closely relate to the work of state bodies, from an academic perspective they can be complemented by systematic analysis and monitoring activities. For sectoral development, as the report concludes, the impact of digital technologies on increasing labor productivity remains insufficient. For example, according to the "Digital Kazakhstan" State Program, the growth of labor productivity in the mining and quarrying sector from 2018–2020 was 13.7%; in agriculture, forestry, and fishing it was 36.6%; and in the manufacturing industry it was 19.2%. However, the utilization of digital technologies by large and medium-sized enterprises in Kazakhstan has remained low, not exceeding 10% in the past two years (5.9% in 2019 and 7.8% in 2020). In addition to this, only around 23% of respondents believe that digitalization has had a positive impact on the development of Kazakhstan's digital economy.

Apart from these challenges, the e-government system is seen as a successful case, streamlining access to services, reducing corruption and bureaucracy, increasing transparency, and improving communication with government services.

Conclusion

1. The digitalization of public administration in Kazakhstan is a significant endeavor to modernize government services and enhance efficiency. To effectively assess the progress and outcomes of state programs, it is essential to use specific and measurable criteria, avoiding vague formulations such as "reporting information."
2. This study has highlighted the potential for creating public value through digitalization, including enhancing: the accountability of state bodies; the effectiveness and availability of public services; transparency; information openness; and reducing bureaucratization. However, challenges such as data security and the protection of citizens' and businesses' rights must be addressed.
3. The achievement of the goals of digitalization depends on robust infrastructure, a skilled workforce, and efficient governance structures, which, in turn, impact the creation of public goods and value.
4. Future recommendations include:
    a. developing a methodology for measuring key indicators in the effectiveness of national projects and their impact on socio-economic development;
    b. conducting systematic analysis of feedback from digital e-platforms and sociological and sectoral assessments to evaluate specific public value creation;
    c. expanding research methods and comparing digitalization achievements in developing countries using the framework of public value theory.

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VIEŠOSIOS VERTĖS KŪRIMAS VIEŠOJO ADMINISTRAVIMO SKAITMENINĖS TRANSFORMACIJOS PROCESE KAZACHSTANE

Anotacija. *Šiame straipsnyje nagrinėjama viešosios vertės samprata Kazachstano viešojo administravimo skaitmeninės transformacijos kontekste. Tiriamas viešųjų vertybių kūrimas ir vertinami Vyriausybės institucijų skaitmeninimo pastangų rezultatai. Atliekant tyrimą taikoma kokybinė tyrimo metodika, apimanti piliečių anketas ir atitinkamų dokumentų analizę. Siekiama ne tik suprasti viešosios vertės kūrimą, bet ir nustatyti kon-*

krečias vertės dimensijas Kazachstano atveju. Taip pat Centrinės Azijos šalių skaitmeninės transformacijos iniciatyvų kontekste siekiama užpildyti empirinių viešosios vertės tyrimų spragą.

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