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DIGITALISATION OF PUBLIC SERVICES IN ROMANIA. A CORRELATIONAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT. *The access to digital technologies is fundamentally changing the way that public administration works, transforming the citizen from a passive beneficiary into an active participant, and helping to identify solutions to governance challenges. An important objective of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan is the development of a coherent and integrated digital infrastructure at the level of the public administration in Romania that will provide high-quality digital services to both citizens and companies. The purpose of our research is to identify the factors that influence the process of the public service digitalisation acceleration in Romania and to establish the existing correlations between them. The conceptual model illustrates 6 research hypotheses, highlighting the association/correlation relationships between the proposed independent and dependent variables. The study is based on questionnaire analysis, carried out between September 2022 and December 2022, with 177 responses being validated, which formed the basis of further processing for statistical analysis with the help of the SPSS software, version 23. All 6 hypotheses formulated with the help of the concept model, were statistically validated. The correlational study highlights the factors that influence the digitalisation process of public services in Romania and illustrates a significant correlation between the predictor and the dependent variables.*

KEYWORDS: digitalisation, public services, public strategy, Romania

JEL classification : D73, H83, L32, O33.

Introduction

The digitalisation of public services leaves its mark on their efficiency, effectiveness and transparency (Cordella, Tempini, 2015; Choi, 2016; Ranerup – Henriksen, 2019; Wirtz *et al.*, 2019; Popova, 2021). Digital interfaces are becoming more and more present in public administration, a fact that determines the automation of certain processes (Boll *et al.*, 2015, Stoyanova, Markova, 2022; Paraschiv *et al.*, 2023). The digitalisation of public services has effects not only on the relationship between public service providers and citizens but also on the performance degree of activities within public entities. Most studies on the digitalisation of the public sector highlight the effects of digitalisation on the quality of public services (Marino *et al.*, 2022; Stoyanova *et al.*, 2022).

Research on the digitalisation of the public sector aims to study the results and the impact of the implemented technologies (Andrews *et al.*, 2016; Vial, 2019; Khalatur *et al.*, 2022; Krajčík *et al.*, 2023) on the quality of services, on the one hand, and the entity's internal processes, on the other. (Buffat, 2015; Taburchak *et al.*, 2022; Bartczak, 2022).

During the global pandemic, digital technologies became an essential enabler of connectivity, facilitating the continuity of our ordinary lives and connecting people more than ever before. The challenges of the pandemic highlighted some critical policy deficiencies that characterised the way digital public services worked.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated processes that were evolving slowly, such as automation, digitalisation or the implementation of remote work, all over the world, including in Romania. The physical limitations and restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic forced the migration of interactions with citizens to the online environment, a fact that stimulated the process of digital transformation of the public administration in Romania.

According to the data provided by the Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania (ADR), in March 2023, there were:

- 1.3 million active users on Ghiseul.ro, their number increasing recently.
- Over 200,000 entities registered on PEPS (Public Electronic Procurement Service), the public auction platform.
- More than 8,300 public institutions present on e-guvernare.ro, the National Electronic System (NES) through which all taxpayers can submit their NAFA (National Agency of Fiscal Administration) fiscal forms.
- 5,300 procedures and forms for accessing the central and local administration services, available through the electronic Single Point of Contact.
- 1.8 million requests submitted on aici.gov.ro. This intermediate mechanism allows the registration of documents addressed to public institutions that do not have their online registration system.
- More than 1.7 million transport permits issued using EAIS (The Electronic Assignment Information System in Transports).

Although progress is obvious, Romania is still in the last place in the EU in terms of public services digitalisation. There are major gaps regarding the use of electronic forms, which have the lowest score - below 10 points, the average at the level of the Union being 63 points. (Country Report DESI, 2022), but also regarding citizens' digital skills (at the EU level, 56% of citizens have at least basic digital skills while, for Romania, the percentage is 26%).

Accordingly, our research focuses on identifying the factors that influence the digitalisation process in the public administration from Romania but also on the existing

correlations between these factors and the acceleration of digitalisation in this field.

1. Background Literature and Hypothesis Development

Technological innovation based on artificial intelligence (AI) is making progress in public administration, aiming at streamlining activities and minimising costs. The public governance model centred on innovative technologies involves citizens in the development of various processes, through digital platforms, and aims for a rapid delivery of services, without compromising quality (Dunleavy *et al.*, 2006; Pina, Avellaneda, 2017; Wirtz, Müller, 2018; Bogachov *et al.*, 2021). AI-based innovation has a profound impact not only on public sector employees but also on citizens and society. A comprehensive understanding of the contextual variables that influence the adoption and implementation of innovative technologies is essential for the creation of added value in public administration.

Although the literature does not provide a common definition of the term digital transformation, there is agreement on what digital transformation processes involve. After interviewing 40 European experts in the digital transformation of public administration, Mergel *et al.* (2019) conclude that digital transformation is a comprehensive organizational approach that relies heavily on technology to improve relations between public organizations and citizens, to increase citizen satisfaction and, most importantly, to minimize red tape.

The studies that analysed the digital transformation in local public administrations identified important differences between them and concluded that the adoption of technology at the local level is uneven, being conditioned by the existence of financial resources to support this process (Manoharan, Ingrams, 2018; Norris, Reddick, 2013). Thus, metropolitan areas are at the forefront of e-government adoption. (Styrin *et al.*, 2022)

1.1 Covid-19 Pandemic Impact on Public Entities

It has become obvious that the COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally changed the way of function for many organizations (Amankwah-Amoah *et al.*, 2020). The entities adapt their development models promptly (Sostero, *et al.*, 2020). The impact was visible in two directions: externally, how entities interface with citizens; and internally, how entities manage the relations between employer–employee and also the employees (Sostero *et al.*, 2020).

Public administration faces a constantly changing external environment, characterised by frequent policy changes. Turbulences in the external environment require public managers to develop internal strategies that support the growth of the organization's ability to integrate, build and reconfigure internal and external competencies to increase the degree of adaptability to change. (Ashok *et al.*, 2021, Ionescu *et al.*, 2022). According to the opinion of some authors (Xie *et al.*, 2020; Mäntymäki *et al.*, 2022), the Covid-19 pandemic has been a catalyst for digitalisation processes, both in the private and in the public domain. The pandemic context imposed an alert pace of digitalisation in the public administration, which led to an expansion of the digitized public service offer. Thus, a positive relationship between the Covid-19 pandemic and the acceleration of public service digitalisation is expected.

H1 – The Covid-19 pandemic favoured the acceleration of public service digitalisation.

1.2 Digital Transformations in Public Entities

Gong *et al.* (2020) state that digital transformation involves a fundamental change in the structures, processes, and culture of public sector organizations, which may involve the organizational structures of agencies, the administrative relationships between citizens who use public services and the organizations that provide them.

E-government involves the implementation and integration of digital platforms that connect public institutions to improve government services at the national level. E-government projects are often characterised as consuming high initial investments to create technologies for data storage and collection (Elnaghi *et al.*, 2019; Wirtz *et al.*, 2018). The successful implementation of these projects requires cultural, institutional and organizational changes (Rani, *et al.*, 2018; van Winden, van den Buuse, 2017).

Digitalisation projects in the public sector involve complex actions and inter-organizational collaboration (Luna-Reyes *et al.*, 2021; Mergel, 2016). The institutional environment, leadership behaviours, and the interaction between individuals and collaborative structures are essential elements for the successful implementation of digitalisation processes in the public sector.

Concerns regarding digital transformation also exist at the EU level and become manifest through the development of strategies that support digitalisation (DIGITAL EUROPE Vision 2025, eGovernment Action Plan). Also, by using the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI), based on key indicators regarding human capital, connectivity, digital technology integration and digital public services, the efficiency and effectiveness of digitalisation processes are monitored. Public institution improved their working models, by providing digital support for different activities (Baig *et al.*, 2020). Once an activity or a public service has been digitalised, can be associated with other services easily (Paris, 2023). Thus, the online appointments at public institutions, the opportunities to pay taxes and other fees online and the short response time of public institutions to citizens' requests are expected to have a positive relationship with the acceleration of public service digitalisation.

H2 – Online appointments at public institutions have proven their effectiveness by favouring the acceleration of public service digitalisation.

H3 – Capitalizing on the opportunities to pay taxes and other fees online favoured the acceleration of public institution service digitalisation.

H5 – The short response time of public institutions to citizens' requests favoured the acceleration of public institution service digitalisation.

1.3 Digital Communication in Public Entities

The transition from traditional communication to digital and collaborative communication is a huge challenge for public entities. The digital transformation in the public sector is increasing, offering the opportunity to transform technology into a connective tool and ensuring transparency. Garatli Nygren *et al.* (2014) analysed multi-channel service management in the Swedish public sector, highlighting the e-government work practice. To build an efficient communications strategy, public entities choose channels with the greatest impact and successful for them in connecting with citizens (Larson, Teigland, 2020).

Social media is an important factor in the development of public entities' communication strategies. In the current context of the digital era governance, social media is an interactive and engaging experience, that ensures the support to build public entities

visibility and trust of the citizens. To increase public awareness and for a better understanding of citizen needs, public entities use as a communication channel, different social media tools (Urse, Tasente, 2023, Paris, 2023).

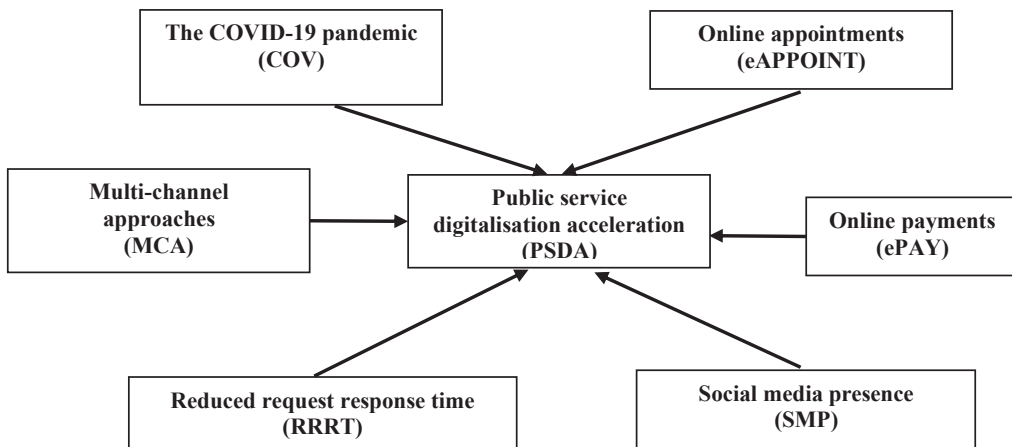
Based on the studies mentioned we designed the following hypothesis:

H4 – The multi-channel approach of public institutions by citizens favoured the acceleration of public service digitalisation.

H6 – Monitoring the content of the posts shared on social media by public institutions favoured the acceleration of public service digitalisation.

2. Research Methodology

The identification of the factors which can accelerate or slow down the digitalisation process of public services and determining their impact constitute the objectives of the quantitative study. In this respect, we developed a 12-item questionnaire, with a 5-point Likert scale (Total Disagreement – Total Agreement), which highlights the influence factors and their impact on public service digitalisation. For the respondents' profiles, we used criteria such as civil status, age, education, professional category, and income level.



Source: own elaboration.

Figure 1. The Conceptual Model

The conceptual model, represented in *Figure 1*, was designed by highlighting the 6-research hypothesis mentioned above.

Before handing out the questionnaire, we organised a meeting attended by 15 people, during which we drafted the final form of the questions included in the questionnaire. The study took place between September 2022 and December 2022, and 177 responses were validated, which were subsequently processed using the SPSS software, version 23.

3. Results and Discussions

The mean value of the items in this study is close to the maximum threshold value of the 5-point Likert rating scale, and the standard deviation reflects the variability of the

analysed data set, which is increased (*Table 1*).

Table 1. Descriptive statistical indicators

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
The acceleration of public institution service digitalisation	4.06	.827	177
The Covid-19 pandemic favoured the acceleration of public institution service digitalisation	4.27	.741	177
Online appointments at public institutions have proven their effectiveness.	4.03	.786	177
Reduced response time of public institutions to citizens' requests	3.63	.952	177
The multi-channel approach to public institutions by citizens	3.56	1.228	177
Following the content of posts shared on social media by public institutions.	3.57	1.026	177
Taking advantage of opportunities to pay taxes and other fees online	4.21	.816	177

Source: own elaboration.

The Cronbach Alpha indicator highlights the internal consistency and, by default, the reliability of the research tool, as well as the degree of correlation between the items included in the study (Hair *et al.*, 2021). The minimum threshold accepted by statisticians for this indicator is 0.7(Hall, 2005). As we can see in *Table 2*, the item with the highest correlation index is “The Covid-19 pandemic favoured the acceleration of public institution service digitalisation” ($r=0.856$). On the “Cronbach’s Alpha if Item Deleted” column, we notice that the values of this indicator, associated with the items, are close to the global Cronbach’s Alpha value, therefore we can state that the items of our study are correlated (*Table 2*).

Table 2. Statistical indicators associated with the analysis based on Cronbach Alpha

	Item-Total Statistics				Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	
The acceleration of public institution service digitalisation	23.27	16.889	.622	.510	.823
The Covid-19 pandemic favoured the acceleration of public institution service digitalisation.	23.06	18.956	.356	.306	.856
Online appointments at public institutions have proven their effectiveness	23.30	16.347	.760	.645	.806
Reduced response time of public institutions to citizens' requests	23.70	15.370	.740	.578	.803
The multi-channel approach to public institutions by citizens	23.76	14.977	.559	.469	.841
Following the content of posts shared on social media by public institutions.	23.76	15.583	.637	.464	.820
Taking advantage of opportunities to pay taxes and other fees online	23.12	16.867	.637	.544	.822

Source: own elaboration.

Within the study, we used The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test, which measures the “suitability” of the sample and is based on comparing the values of the coefficients in the correlation matrix with partial correlation coefficients (Kaiser 1970, 1974). In this case, the

value of the KMO indicator is 0.824 for all items in the questionnaire, demonstrating the relevance of the selected sample, as its value exceeds the critical threshold of 0.5.

The Bartlett's test of sphericity (Bartlett, 1950) is used to test the hypothesis that the variables are uncorrelated in the study population (each variable is perfectly correlated with itself, but not correlated with any other variable). In the case of this test, the values of Chi-Square=555,996 and of the asymptotic significance Sig=0,000) give us the explanation that the composite variables of the conceptual model are correlated and, as a result, there is a strong relationship between the data (*Table 3*)

Table 3. The results of applying the KMO and Bartlett tests

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.824
	Approx. Chi-Square	555.996
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	df	21
	Sig.	.000

Source: own elaboration.

The implementation of the Principal Components Analysis (PCA) method shows us two main components, associated with the factors that meet the selection criteria (Eigenvalues ≥ 1). The total variation of the factors must be greater than 60% (in this case it is 70.1%) – *Table 4*.

Table 4. Explanation of total variation

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.799	54.269	54.269	3.799	54.269	54.269	3.040	43.424	43.424
2	1.110	15.856	70.125	1.110	15.856	70.125	1.869	26.701	70.125
3	.666	9.507	79.632						
4	.477	6.807	86.440						
5	.388	5.541	91.981						
6	.319	4.563	96.544						
7	.242	3.456	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

Source: own elaboration.

The increase in the proportion of the total variation explained by component no. 2 (The Covid-19 pandemic favoured the acceleration of public institution service digitalisation) is the result of the increase in the intensity of the correlation between the 12 items of the questionnaire.

The solution from the rotated factor matrix is useful to further refine the factors. If an item is not significantly correlated with any of the factors (generally, a correlation is considered insignificant for values less than 0.3) (Hair *et al.* 1995) and does not provide a vital conceptual dimension to the model, the item should be removed. Loadings of +/- 0.4 are considered important and loadings greater than +/- 0.5 are considered practically significant.

Table 5 Component matrix considering the Varimax rotation

Rotated Component Matrix^a

	Component	
	1	2
The multi-channel approach to public institutions by citizens	.810	
Online appointments at public institutions have proven their effectiveness.	.808	.313
Following the content of posts shared on social media by public institutions.	.806	.104
Reduced response time of public institutions to citizens' requests	.723	.426
Taking advantage of opportunities to pay taxes and other fees online.	.640	.428
The Covid-19 pandemic favoured the acceleration of public services digitalisation.		.893
The acceleration of public services digitalisation	.385	.774

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.

Source: own elaboration.

The results generated by the SPSS computer program for the matrix of the main components following the Varimax rotation highlight loadings greater than 0.4 for the following items “*Reduced response time of public institutions to citizens' requests*” and “*Taking advantage of opportunities to pay taxes and other fees online*”. We can also observe loadings greater than 0.5 for the items “*The Covid-19 pandemic favoured the acceleration of public services digitalisation.*” and “*The acceleration of public services digitalisation.*” (Table 5).

Hypothesis testing through regression analyses.

H₁: COV->PSDA

The first hypothesis follows the existence of the causal relationship between the respondents' perception of hypothesis H₁ - The Covid-19 pandemic favoured the acceleration of public services digitalisation and the respondents' perception of the public services digitalisation acceleration. We used linear regression analysis, in which the predictor is represented by the respondents' perception of hypothesis H₁ - The Covid-19 pandemic favoured the acceleration of public services digitalisation, and the dependent variable is the respondents' perception of the public services digitalisation acceleration.

The Pearson R correlation coefficient has a value of 0.548, which illustrates a significant correlation between the predictor and the dependent variable. The determination coefficient ($R^2 = 0.301$) highlights the fact that 30.1% of the variation in the respondents' perceptions of the public service digitalisation acceleration is explained by the respondents' perceptions of hypothesis H₁ - The Covid-19 pandemic favoured the acceleration of public institution service digitalisation (Table 6).

Table 6. Correlational model ratio related to hypothesis H₁

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.548 ^a	.301	.297	.693

a. Predictors: (Constant), The Covid-19 pandemic favoured the acceleration of public services digitalisation.

Source: own elaboration.

The regression model for hypothesis H₁ is represented by the equation:

$$PSDA = 1.451 + 0.612 \times COV \quad (1)$$

PSDA = respondents' perception of the public service digitalisation acceleration

COV = respondents' perception of "The Covid-19 pandemic favoured the acceleration of public services digitalisation."

Table 7. Correlation coefficients associated with the linear model related to hypothesis H₁

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.451	.306		4.749	.000
	The Covid-19 pandemic favoured the acceleration of public services digitalisation.	.612	.071	.548	8.672	.000

a. Dependent Variable: The acceleration of public services digitalisation.

Source: own elaboration.

The results of the regression coefficients show that COV contributes significantly to the regression model ($\beta = 0.548$, $t = 8.672$, $p = 0.000$) and can be used to predict the dependent variable PSDA. For each additional unit of COV, PSDA is expected to increase by an average of 0.612 units (Table 7). Consequently, **hypothesis H₁ is statistically validated**. Our findings align with the results from previous studies (Baig *et al.*, 2020; Sostero *et al.*, 2020), that highlight a correlation between Covid 19 pandemic and public service digitalisation acceleration.

H₂: eAPPOINT->PSDA

The second hypothesis relies on the existence of a causal relationship between the respondents' perception of online appointments at public institutions and the respondents' perception of the public services digitalisation acceleration.

The Pearson R correlation coefficient calculated by the SPSS software has a value of 0.504, which illustrates a correlation between the predictor (respondents' perception of online appointments at public institutions) and the dependent variable (respondents' perception of the public services digitalisation acceleration). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.254$) shows that 25% of the variation in respondents' perceptions of the public services digitalisation acceleration is explained by the respondents' perceptions of online appointments at public institutions (Table 8).

Table 8. Correlational model ratio related to hypothesis H₂

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.504 ^a	.254	.250	.716

a. Predictors: (Constant), Online appointments at public institutions have proven their effectiveness

Source: own elaboration.

The regression model for hypothesis H₂ is represented by the equation:

$$PSDA = 1.927 + 0.530 \times eAPPOINT \quad (2)$$

PSDA = respondents' perception of the public service digitalisation acceleration.

eAPPOINT = respondents' perception of online appointments at public institutions.

Table 9. Correlation coefficients associated with the linear model related to hypothesis H₂

Coefficients		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.927	.282		6.843	.000
	Online appointments at public institutions have proven their effectiveness	.530	.069	.504	7.721	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Public service digitalisation acceleration
Source: own elaboration.

The results of the regression coefficients show that eAPPOINT contributes significantly to the regression model ($\beta = 0.504$, $t = 7.721$, $p = 0.000$) and predicts the dependent variable PSDA. For each additional unit of eAPPOINT, PSDA is expected to increase by an average of 0.530 units (Table 9).

Consequently, **hypothesis H₂ is statistically validated**. Results seem to indicate that online appointments at public institutions have proven their effectiveness in public service digitalisation acceleration, as also evidenced by Luna-Reyes *et al.* (2021). Wirtz *et al.* (2019) conducted a study that suggest similar findings.

H₃: ePAY->PSDA

The third hypothesis focuses on the existence of a causal relationship between the respondents' perception of the opportunities to pay taxes and other fees online and the respondents' perception of the public service digitalisation acceleration.

The calculated Pearson R correlation coefficient is 0.486, which reflects a very strong correlation between the predictor (the respondents' perception of the opportunities to pay taxes and other fees online) and the dependent variable (the respondents' perception of public service digitalisation acceleration). The determination coefficient ($R^2 = 0.236$) shows that 23.6% of the variation in the respondents' perception of public service digitalisation acceleration is explained by the respondents' perception of the opportunities to pay taxes and other fees online (Table 10).

Table 10. Correlational model ratio related to hypothesis H₃

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.486 ^a	.236	.232	.725

a. Predictors: (Constant), Taking advantage of opportunities to pay taxes and other fees online

Source: own elaboration.

The regression model for hypothesis H₃ is represented by the equation:

$$PSDA = 0.885 + 0.779 \times ePAY \quad (3)$$

PSDA = respondents' perception of public service digitalisation acceleration.

ePAY = respondents' perception of opportunities to pay taxes and other fees online.

Table 11. The correlation coefficients associated with the linear model related to hypothesis H₃

Coefficients		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.991	.287		6.939	.000
	Taking advantage of opportunities to pay taxes and other fees online	.492	.067	.486	7.352	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Public service digitalisation acceleration

Source: own elaboration.

The results of the regression coefficients show that ePAY significantly contributes to the regression model ($\beta = 0.486$, $t = 7.352$, $p = 0.000$) and can be used to predict the dependent variable PSDA. For each additional unit of ePAY, PSDA is expected to increase by an average of 0.492 units (Table 11).

Consequently, **hypothesis H₃ is statistically validated**. Baig *et al.* (2020) findings suggest an association between digital transformation in public entities, materialised in opportunities to pay taxes and other fees online and public service digitalisation acceleration.

H₄: MCA->PSDA

The fourth hypothesis focuses on the existence of a causal relationship between the respondents' perception of the multi-channel approach of public institutions and the respondents' perception of public service digitalisation acceleration.

The calculated Pearson R correlation coefficient is 0.335, which reflects a correlation between the predictor (the respondents' perception of the multi-channel approach of public institutions) and the dependent variable (the respondents' perception of the acceleration of digitalisation of public institutions' services). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.112$) shows that 11.2% of the variation in respondents' perception of public service digitalisation acceleration is explained by the respondents' perceptions of the multi-channel approach of public institutions (Table 12).

Table 12. Correlational model ratio related to hypothesis H₄

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.335 ^a	.112	.107	.781

a. Predictors: (Constant), The multi-channel approach to public institutions by citizens

Source: own elaboration.

The regression model for hypothesis H₄ is represented by the equation:

$$PSDA = 3.259 + 0.225 \times MCA \quad (4)$$

PSDA = respondents' perception of public service digitalisation acceleration.

MCA = respondents' perception of the multi-channel approach of public institutions.

Table 13. Correlation coefficients associated with the linear model related to hypothesis H4

Coefficients		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	3.259	.181		18.031	.000
	The multi-channel approach to public institutions by citizens	.225	.048	.335	4.696	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Public service digitalisation acceleration

Source: own elaboration.

The results of the regression coefficients show that AMC significantly contributes to the regression model ($\beta = 0.335$, $t = 4.696$, $p = 0.000$) and can be used to predict the dependent variable PSDA. For each additional unit of MCA, PSDA is expected to increase by an average of 0.225 units (Table 13).

Consequently, **hypothesis H4 is statistically validated**. Our results highlight a correlation between the multi-channel approach to public institutions by citizens and public service digitalisation acceleration, in line with Garatli Nygren *et al.* (2014), and Lovari, Valentini (2019).

H5: RRRT->PSDA

The fifth hypothesis focuses on the existence of a causal relationship between the respondents' perception of the speed of public institutions' responses to citizens' requests and the respondents' perception of the public service institution's digitalisation acceleration.

The calculated Pearson R correlation coefficient is 0.586, which reflects a correlation between the predictor (the respondents' perception of the response speed of public institutions to citizens' requests) and the dependent variable (the respondents' perception of the public service institution digitalisation acceleration). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.343$) shows that 34.3% of the variation in the respondents' perception of the public service digitalisation acceleration is explained by the respondents' perceptions of the response speed of public institutions to citizens' requests (Table 14).

Table 14. Correlational model ratio related to hypothesis H5

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.586 ^a	.343	.339	.672

a. Predictors: (Constant), Reduced response time of public institutions to citizens' requests

Source: own elaboration.

The regression model for hypothesis H5 is represented by the equation:

$$PSDA = 2.217 + 0.509 \times RRRT \quad (5)$$

PSDA = respondents' perception of the public service digitalisation acceleration.

RRRT = respondents' perception of the response speed of public institutions to citizens' requests.

Table 15. Correlation coefficients associated with the linear model related to hypothesis H₅

Coefficients		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	2.217	.200		11.106	.000
	Reduced response time of public institutions to citizens' requests	.509	.053	.586	9.558	.000

a. Dependent Variable: The public service digitalisation acceleration

Source: own elaboration.

The results of the regression coefficients show that RRRT significantly contributes to the regression model ($\beta = 0.586$, $t = 9.558$, $p = 0.000$) and can be used to predict the dependent variable PSDA. For each additional unit of RRRT, PSDA is expected to increase by an average of 0.509 units (Table 15).

Consequently, **hypothesis H₅ is statistically validated**. Our findings align with the results from previous studies (Larsson and Teigland, 2020; Styrin *et al.*, 2022) regarding the causal relationship between the reduced response time of public institutions to citizens' requests and public service digitalisation acceleration.

H₆: SMP ->PSDA

The sixth hypothesis focuses on the existence of a causal relationship between the respondents' perception of the posts distributed on social media by public institutions and the respondents' perception of the public service digitalisation acceleration.

The calculated Pearson R correlation coefficient is 0.380, which reflects a correlation between the predictor (the respondents' perception of the posts distributed on social media by public institutions) and the dependent variable (the respondents' perception of the public service digitalisation acceleration). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.144$) shows that 14.4% of the variation in respondents' perception of the public service institution digitalisation acceleration is explained by the respondents' perceptions of the posts distributed on social media by public institutions (Table 16).

Table 16. Correlational model ratio related to hypothesis H₆

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.380 ^a	.144	.139	.767

a. Predictors: (Constant), Following the content of posts shared on social media by public institutions

Source: own elaboration.

The regression model for hypothesis H₆ is represented by the equation:

$$PSDA = 2.970 + 0.306 \times SMP \quad (6)$$

PSDA = respondents' perception of the public service digitalisation acceleration.

SMP = respondents' perception of posts shared on social media by public institutions.

Table 17. Correlation coefficients associated with the linear model related to hypothesis H₆

Model	Coefficients	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	2.970	.209		14.191	.000
	Following the content of posts shared on social media by public institutions	.306	.056	.380	5.432	.000

a. Dependent Variable: The public service digitalisation acceleration

Source: own elaboration.

The results of the regression coefficients show that SMP significantly contributes to the regression model ($\beta = 0.380$, $t = 5.432$, $p = 0.000$) and can be used to predict the dependent variable PSDA. For each additional unit of SMP, PSDA is expected to increase by an average of 0.306 units (Table 17).

Consequently, **hypothesis H₆ is statistically validated**. Previous studies (Urse and Tasente, 2023, Paris, 2023) emphasise the importance of digital and collaborative communication strategy at the public entities level, based on social media, to increase transparency and citizens' awareness. Our findings suggest the existence of a causal relationship between the respondents' perception of the posts distributed on social media by public institutions and the public service digitalisation acceleration. Similar findings were provided by Mergel, Bretschneider (2013) and Todico *et al.* (2021) in their research studies.

Conclusions

The correlational study highlights both the factors that influence the digitalisation process of public services in Romania and the statistical correlations between the analysed variables. All 6 hypotheses formulated with the help of the concept model, were statistically validated. Thus, we can state that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant influence on the public service digitalisation acceleration (the 0.548 Pearson coefficient value illustrates a significant correlation between the predictor and the dependent variable).

Also, in the case of hypothesis H₂, the 0.504 Pearson correlation coefficient value illustrates a correlation between the predictor (*The respondents' perception of online appointments at public institutions*) and the dependent variable (*The respondents' perception of public service institution digitalisation acceleration*). Moreover, the other hypotheses as well illustrate strong correlations between the predictor variables (*Taking advantage of the opportunities to pay taxes and other fees online; The multi-channel approach to public institutions by citizens; Reduced response time of public institutions to citizens' requests; Following the content of posts shared on social media by public institutions*) and the dependent variable (*The respondents' perception of the acceleration of public service institution digitalisation acceleration*).

To understand more about the remodelling of public services in public administration with the help of the digitalisation process, we turned our attention to the interactions through which the digitalisation activity is carried out, involving the analysis of the factors that influence this activity. The present research contributes to a clearer understanding of how digitalisation processes are carried out, how innovative technologies based on artificial intelligence constitute the premise of digital transformation in public administration and the

role that leadership and institutional design play in the process of implementing e-government.

The computerization and use of ICT in the daily lives of citizens create pressure on governments to expand the offer of digitized public services to be delivered most efficiently and transparently. Therefore, e-government is a part of the classical government program and brings many benefits to citizens (time and cost savings, 24/7 availability). The government and other institutions must cooperate in the development of e-government and ensure that government services are fully available online so that the number of users of e-government services will increase.

Practical implications - Our findings can help policymakers to shape development strategies in a view of preparing the public sector to face the digital transformation process.

Research limitations - The findings can't be generalized because the research is based on a sample of Romanian citizens. As future research direction, we intend to extend our research at the European level, as cross-countries studies.

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VIEŠŪJŲ PASLAUGŲ SKAITMENIZAVIMAS RUMUNIJOJE. KORELIACINIS TYRIMAS

SANTRAUKA

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Galimybė naudotis skaitmeninėmis technologijomis iš esmės keičia viešojo administravimo veiklą, piliečiai iš pasyvių naudos gavėjų tampa aktyviais dalyviais ir padeda rasti valdymo iššūkių sprendimus. Svarbus Nacionalinio atkūrimo ir tvarumo plano tikslas yra sukurti nuoseklią ir integruotą skaitmeninę infrastruktūrą Rumunijos viešojo administravimo lygmeniu, kuri teiktų aukštos kokybės skaitmenines paslaugas piliečiams ir įmonėms. Tyrimo tikslas – išsiaiškinti viešųjų paslaugų skaitmenizavimo spartinimo procesui Rumunijoje įtaką darančius veiksnius ir nustatyti tarp jų esamas sąsajas. Konceptualusis modelis iliustruoja šešias tyrimo hipotezes pabrėždamas siūlomų nepriklausomų ir priklausomų kintamųjų sąsajas ir (arba) ryšį. Tyrimas grindžiamas klausimyno analize, atlikta nuo 2023 m. rugsėjo mėn. iki 2023 m. gruodžio mėn., patvirtinti 177 atsakymai, kurie sudarė pagrindą tolesniam statistinės analizės apdorojimui naudojant 23-ią SPSS programinės įrangos versiją. Visos šešios hipotezės, suformuluotos taikant koncepcinį modelį, buvo statistiškai patvirtintos. Koreliacinis tyrimas išryškina veiksnius, kurie daro įtaką viešųjų paslaugų skaitmenizavimo procesui Rumunijoje ir parodo reikšmingą ryšį tarp prognozuojamųjų ir priklausomų kintamųjų.

RAKTINIAI ŽODŽIAI: skaitmenizavimas; viešosios paslaugos; viešoji strategija; Rumunija.