

Public Sector Management in Crisis Contexts: Digital Service Adaptation and Informal Governance

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study examines how public sector management adapted to prolonged crises through digital service adaptation and informal governance in Myanmar following the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2021 military coup. It aims to explain how these adaptive mechanisms interacted to sustain public service delivery and to develop a conceptual model of crisis governance for institutionally fragile contexts.

Subjects and Methods: This research employed an interpretive qualitative case study design using multiple documentary evidence and digital observation. Data were collected from government regulations, institutional reports, humanitarian publications, international organization reports, academic literature, and publicly accessible digital platforms. The data were analyzed through thematic analysis integrated with process tracing to identify the sequential mechanisms underlying governance transformation.

Results: The findings reveal that institutional disruption functioned as the primary catalyst for governance transformation, accelerating digital service adaptation and stimulating the emergence of informal governance. Digital technologies evolved beyond administrative tools into mechanisms supporting communication and collaboration, while community organizations compensated for weakened state capacity through flexible and trust-based service delivery. The interaction of these adaptive mechanisms gradually produced a hybrid governance model that strengthened public service continuity despite prolonged institutional instability.

Conclusions: This study contributes a conceptual framework integrating institutional disruption, digital adaptation, informal governance, and hybrid governance. The findings highlight that governance resilience depends on adaptive institutional collaboration and inclusive digital ecosystems rather than conventional bureaucratic capacity alone, providing practical implications for crisis governance in fragile institutional settings.

INTRODUCTION

Crisis is a phenomenon that fundamentally tests the capacity and resilience of the public sector in providing services to the public (Scognamiglio et al, 2023; Barbera et al., 2021; Boin & Lodge, 2016). In recent decades, the world has faced various forms of crises, ranging from natural disasters and political conflicts to global pandemics like COVID-19, which have drastically changed the way governments operate. Crises not only put pressure on formal bureaucratic systems but also force governments to adopt more flexible, adaptive, and innovative approaches to managing public services (Liu & Zhang, 2024; Janssen & Van, 2020; Tomaževič et al., 2023; Sotiropoulos, 2015). In this context, public sector management can no longer rely solely on rigid

administrative procedures but must instead be able to respond to rapid and unpredictable dynamics (Kristian et al., 2025).

One of the public sector's primary responses to the crisis has been the acceleration of digital transformation in service delivery. The digitalization of public services has become a crucial instrument for maintaining service continuity amidst limited physical mobility and operational disruptions (Latupeirissa et al., 2024). For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many governments worldwide developed digital platforms for healthcare, education, and public administration to ensure continued access (Chowdhury, 2022). This transformation reflects not only the adoption of technology but also a paradigm shift in governance, where speed, accessibility, and interoperability are key factors in the effectiveness of public services (Das, 2024).

The literature shows that digitalization in crisis contexts does not always proceed in a linear and structured manner. Many adaptation processes are improvisational, involving various actors outside the formal government structure (Mamedio et al., 2022). This is where the concept of informal governance becomes relevant. Informal governance refers to decision-making and coordination practices that are not fully regulated by formal rules but develop through social networks, personal relationships, and ad hoc mechanisms (Huang et al., 2022). In crisis situations, these practices often serve as crucial mechanisms for overcoming institutional limitations and accelerating policy responses (Papamichail et al., 2023).

The interaction between the digitalization of public services and informal governance creates new dynamics in public sector governance. On the one hand, digital technology enables increased transparency, efficiency, and service reach (Ikwuanusi et al., 2024). On the other hand, informal practices can enhance flexibility and responsiveness, but also potentially pose risks to accountability and policy consistency (Yordanova et al., 2025). Therefore, it is crucial to understand how these two elements interact, especially in the context of a crisis full of uncertainty (Arifin & Darmawan, 2022).

While numerous studies have addressed digital transformation and informal governance separately, there remains a gap in the literature integrating these two concepts within a framework of public sector management during a crisis. Most studies tend to focus on developed countries with relatively strong institutional capacity (Ahmad, 2025), thus paying less attention to the context of developing countries or countries experiencing political instability. In fact, in such contexts, the interaction between digitalization and informal practices becomes more complex and significant (Nguyen et al., 2024).

In this regard, Myanmar is a highly relevant case study. The country is not only facing the challenges of a health crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but has also experienced a significant political crisis since the Myanmar coup d'état (2021). The combination of the health crisis and political instability has placed tremendous pressure on the government's capacity to provide public services (Akindoyin, 2024). In this situation, many formal government functions have been disrupted, creating space for the emergence of various forms of informal governance involving civil society organizations, volunteer networks, and other non-state actors (Terzieva et al., 2026).

Myanmar's digital adaptation also exhibits unique characteristics. Amid limited infrastructure and internet access restrictions imposed by the military government, communities and informal actors have developed various alternative strategies to maintain the flow of information and services (Hossain, 2023). Digital platforms, including social media and instant messaging applications, have become crucial tools for coordinating aid, distributing health information, and mobilizing social support (Hutapea & Hutapea, 2025). This phenomenon demonstrates that digitalization is not solely the domain of the state, but is also being utilized by informal networks to fill gaps in public services.

This dynamic also poses various challenges. The use of digital platforms in the context of informal governance is often not accompanied by adequate oversight mechanisms, potentially giving rise to disinformation, unequal access, and security risks (Khan & Zaheer, 2024; Sanfilippo et al., 2025; Gorwa, 2019). Tensions between formal and informal actors can impact the effectiveness

of coordination in public service delivery (Bauer et al., 2022). Therefore, a more in-depth analysis is needed to understand how the interaction between digital adaptation and informal governance affects public sector performance in crisis situations.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze how public sector management adapts in a crisis context through the digitalization of services, as well as the role of informal governance in supporting or replacing formal mechanisms, with a specific focus on the Myanmar context. This study also seeks to identify the interaction mechanisms between these two elements and their implications for the effectiveness, accountability, and resilience of public services.

This study is expected to contribute to developing an understanding of hybrid crisis governance, namely a combination of digital systems and informal practices. Practically, the findings of this study are expected to form the basis for formulating more adaptive and inclusive policies in facing future crises, particularly in countries with limited institutional capacity and high levels of uncertainty.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

This study employed a qualitative research approach within an interpretative paradigm to examine how public sector management evolved during prolonged crises through digital service adaptation and informal governance in Myanmar. The interpretative approach was selected because governance transformation is a socially and institutionally constructed process that cannot be adequately understood through quantitative measurement alone. Instead, the study sought to explore how institutional actors, governance structures, and community initiatives adapted to rapidly changing crisis conditions. By emphasizing contextual interpretation, this approach enables a comprehensive understanding of governance dynamics and the mechanisms through which public services continued despite institutional disruption.

Research Design

This study employed an interpretive qualitative case study design to investigate the transformation of public sector management during prolonged crises in Myanmar. A qualitative case study was considered appropriate because the research sought to understand governance transformation as a complex institutional process shaped by multiple interacting political, administrative, and societal factors rather than as isolated organizational events. The study adopted a single embedded case design, with Myanmar serving as the principal case due to its unique experience of overlapping health and political crises following the COVID-19 pandemic and the military coup of February 2021. The embedded units of analysis comprised institutional disruption, digital service adaptation, informal governance, and the emergence of hybrid governance, which were examined as interconnected components of a broader governance transformation process.

Research Context and Unit of Analysis

The research was conducted between January and March 2025. Rather than examining events occurring exclusively during the research period, the study reconstructed the evolution of public sector governance throughout the dual crises beginning with the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and continuing through the prolonged institutional disruption following the military coup in February 2021. The unit of analysis comprised governance arrangements responsible for maintaining essential public services during the crisis, including interactions among formal government institutions, digital public service initiatives, civil society organizations, volunteer groups, and community-based governance networks. The analytical focus was directed toward understanding governance adaptation as an interconnected ecosystem rather than evaluating individual organizational performance.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was conducted between January and March 2025 using qualitative document analysis as the principal data collection strategy, complemented by limited digital observation. Documentary evidence was collected from multiple publicly accessible sources that documented

governance responses throughout the crisis period. These included government regulations, ministerial policy documents, institutional reports, publications from international organizations, humanitarian situation reports, academic journal articles, and publicly available digital documents addressing public sector management, digital service implementation, and governance adaptation in Myanmar. Digital observation was undertaken to complement documentary evidence by examining publicly accessible digital communication channels used during the crisis. The observation focused on official government websites, public service portals, institutional announcements, social media platforms, and digital communication practices employed by community organizations and humanitarian networks.

Table 1. Documentary Sources Used in the Study

Source Category	Examples of Documents	Analytical Purpose
Government Documents	Government regulations, ministerial announcements, administrative policies, public service guidelines	Examine formal policy responses and institutional changes during the crisis
International Organization Reports	WHO, UNDP, World Bank, United Nations OCHA publications	Assess crisis impacts, institutional capacity, and public service continuity
Humanitarian Organization Reports	International Crisis Group, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch	Identify governance disruption, humanitarian responses, and community adaptation
Academic Literature	Peer reviewed journal articles indexed in Scopus and other scholarly databases	Provide contextual understanding of digital governance, crisis management, and informal governance
Public Digital Platforms	Official government websites, institutional portals, publicly accessible social media pages, online announcements	Observe digital communication practices and patterns of public service adaptation

Source: Compiled by the authors (2025).

This approach enabled the identification of observable patterns of digital service adaptation, institutional communication, and interactions between formal administrative structures and informal governance initiatives. Combining documentary evidence with digital observation provided a comprehensive understanding of governance transformation while strengthening the credibility of the findings through source triangulation.

Data Sources

This study adopted a multiple documentary evidence strategy to strengthen analytical credibility through data triangulation. Documentary materials were collected from five complementary categories including government regulations, ministerial circulars, parliamentary documents, international organization reports, humanitarian situation reports, peer reviewed journal articles, policy briefs, publicly available institutional reports, and digital communication platforms. Digital observation was additionally conducted by examining official government websites, institutional portals, publicly accessible Facebook pages, humanitarian communication platforms, and online announcements used by governmental and community organizations during the crisis period. To ensure analytical relevance, documents were selected using purposive criteria. Eligible materials were required to discuss governance responses, digital public services, institutional disruption, humanitarian coordination, or community initiatives in Myanmar between 2020 and 2025. Documents lacking sufficient contextual relevance or empirical information were excluded from the analysis.

Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis integrated with process tracing. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring concepts, categories, and patterns emerging from documentary evidence and digital observations. The analytical procedure followed three consecutive stages consisting of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. During the

open coding stage, meaningful units related to institutional disruption, digital adaptation, informal governance, and public service resilience were identified.

Table 2. Analytical Framework

Analytical Stage	Analytical Procedure	Expected Output
Open Coding	Identification of significant concepts and units of meaning from documents and digital observations	Initial codes representing governance phenomena
Axial Coding	Grouping related codes into broader conceptual categories	Categories describing institutional disruption, digital adaptation, and informal governance
Selective Coding	Integration of categories into principal themes	Four analytical themes explaining governance transformation
Process Tracing	Reconstruction of chronological causal mechanisms	Explanation of governance evolution from institutional disruption to hybrid governance

Source: Developed by the authors (2025).

Axial coding subsequently organized these categories into broader conceptual relationships, while selective coding integrated them into overarching themes explaining governance transformation during prolonged crises. To enhance the explanatory capacity of the research, thematic analysis was combined with process tracing. This analytical approach enabled the reconstruction of chronological relationships linking the COVID-19 pandemic, the military coup, institutional disruption, digital adaptation, the emergence of informal governance, and the development of hybrid governance. Rather than merely describing governance changes, process tracing explains the mechanisms through which one institutional response generated conditions that facilitated subsequent governance adaptation. Consequently, the analytical framework provides both descriptive and explanatory insights into the evolution of public sector management under crisis conditions.

Trustworthiness of the Study

The trustworthiness of the research was ensured through several qualitative validation strategies. First, source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from government publications, reports produced by international organizations, humanitarian reports, academic literature, and digital observations. The convergence of evidence across different documentary sources enhanced the credibility of the findings and minimized dependence on individual documents. Second, thick description was employed throughout the analysis to provide detailed contextual explanations of institutional transformation, digital adaptation, and informal governance practices. Rich contextual descriptions improve the transferability of the findings by allowing readers to understand the broader governance environment in which the observed changes occurred. Finally, an audit trail was maintained by documenting each stage of data collection, coding, thematic development, and process tracing. Maintaining transparent analytical procedures strengthens the dependability and confirmability of the research by ensuring that interpretations can be traced directly to the documentary evidence analyzed.

Research Ethics

This study utilized publicly accessible documentary materials and digital information available in the public domain. No direct interaction with human participants was undertaken. Throughout the research process, academic integrity was maintained by ensuring that all documentary sources were appropriately cited, interpreted objectively, and analyzed systematically. The findings presented in this study are based exclusively on documentary evidence and digital observations, ensuring transparency and consistency throughout the analytical process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Crisis Dynamics and Institutional Disruption

The empirical evidence indicates that the transformation of public sector management in Myanmar cannot be understood as the consequence of a single crisis. Instead, it resulted from the interaction of two major disruptions that occurred within a relatively short period. The first disruption emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic, which substantially increased demand for healthcare services, social protection, and emergency administrative support. Before government institutions had fully recovered from these pressures, the military coup in February 2021 generated a second and more profound institutional crisis. Process tracing demonstrates that these consecutive events produced a cascading effect that significantly weakened administrative coordination, disrupted bureaucratic routines, and reduced the state's capacity to provide continuous public services. This sequence of events represents the initial mechanism through which the governance system shifted from conventional bureaucratic administration toward adaptive crisis management.

Document analysis further demonstrates that the political transition following the coup directly affected the operational continuity of public institutions. One of the most significant developments was the expansion of the Civil Disobedience Movement, during which large numbers of civil servants, healthcare professionals, and education personnel withdrew from government institutions. This phenomenon reduced the availability of skilled public employees and disrupted routine administrative functions across multiple sectors. Health facilities experienced interruptions in service delivery, educational institutions suspended normal operations, and population administration became increasingly inconsistent across different regions. Rather than representing isolated institutional failures, these disruptions formed interconnected governance challenges that collectively reduced the effectiveness of formal public administration.

The consequences of institutional disruption extended beyond organizational capacity and significantly affected the relationship between citizens and the state. As administrative services became increasingly unpredictable, communities sought alternative mechanisms to obtain information, healthcare assistance, humanitarian support, and administrative guidance. The analysis shows that declining confidence in formal institutions encouraged citizens to rely more heavily on locally organized networks capable of responding more rapidly than centralized bureaucratic structures. Consequently, governance adaptation was not driven solely by government initiatives but also by societal responses that emerged to compensate for institutional deficiencies. This shift illustrates that crisis management evolved through reciprocal interactions between weakening formal institutions and strengthening community-based initiatives rather than through unilateral governmental intervention.

Process tracing also reveals that institutional disruption followed a sequential rather than simultaneous pattern. The COVID-19 pandemic initially exposed structural weaknesses within public administration, particularly regarding emergency preparedness, interagency coordination, and digital readiness. The military coup subsequently intensified these vulnerabilities by generating political uncertainty, administrative fragmentation, and declining institutional legitimacy. Together, these events transformed governance from a relatively centralized administrative model into a fragmented environment characterized by overlapping formal and informal service providers.

Table 3. Chronology of Institutional Disruption and Governance Transformation in Myanmar

Period	Major Event	Impact on Public Sector Management	Governance Consequence
Early 2020	COVID-19 outbreak	Increased demand for healthcare, emergency response, and administrative services	Pressure on institutional capacity
Mid–Late 2020	Expansion of digital emergency responses	Accelerated adoption of digital communication and service platforms	Initial digital adaptation
February 2021	Military coup	Political instability and institutional fragmentation	Declining administrative coordination
2021 onward	Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM)	Withdrawal of civil servants and disruption of government services	Reduced operational capacity

2021– 2024	Expansion of community initiatives	Increasing involvement of volunteers, NGOs, and local networks	Emergence of informal governance
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Source: Synthesized by the authors from document analysis, process tracing, and the chronology of governance changes presented in this study (2025).

Institutional transformation occurred progressively rather than abruptly. Each stage generated new governance challenges while simultaneously encouraging adaptive responses from both governmental and societal actors. Instead of replacing previous governance arrangements, each crisis layer accumulated additional institutional pressures that reshaped the public service environment. This cumulative pattern explains why governance adaptation in Myanmar developed incrementally through continuous adjustment rather than through comprehensive institutional reform.

The first analytical theme demonstrates that the crisis fundamentally altered the institutional landscape within which public services operated. The evidence suggests that governance resilience during prolonged crises cannot be explained solely by formal governmental capacity. Rather, institutional disruption itself created opportunities for alternative coordination mechanisms to emerge, laying the foundation for subsequent digital adaptation and the increasing role of informal governance discussed in the following sections. This finding also establishes the causal starting point of the process tracing analysis, showing that institutional weakening preceded both the rapid adoption of digital service innovations and the expansion of community-based governance mechanisms.

Digital Service Adaptation under Institutional Constraints

The findings indicate that digital service adaptation emerged as one of the earliest institutional responses to the disruption of public administration during Myanmar's dual crises. Evidence from document analysis shows that the rapid spread of COVID-19 initially accelerated the use of digital technologies to maintain communication between government agencies and citizens, particularly for disseminating health information, coordinating emergency responses, and providing basic administrative services. The subsequent political crisis fundamentally altered the trajectory of digital transformation. Rather than evolving through structured government planning, digitalization increasingly became an improvised response shaped by institutional instability, declining bureaucratic capacity, and technological constraints. Consequently, digital adaptation developed unevenly across sectors and regions, reflecting the fragmented nature of governance throughout the crisis.

Process tracing reveals that the adaptation process followed several interconnected stages. During the early phase of the pandemic, public institutions attempted to maintain essential services by expanding the use of digital communication channels that required minimal financial and technical resources. Existing social media platforms, messaging applications, and web-based communication systems were utilized to compensate for restrictions on physical mobility. These initiatives initially functioned as temporary emergency measures, but gradually became essential components of public service delivery as face-to-face interactions remained limited. Following the military coup, however, internet restrictions, communication surveillance, and declining institutional legitimacy substantially reduced the effectiveness of official digital platforms. As a result, digital service provision shifted from centralized institutional systems toward decentralized and locally adapted communication practices.

The findings further demonstrate that digital adaptation was characterized by high levels of operational flexibility rather than technological sophistication. Government agencies frequently relied on readily available commercial applications instead of integrated public service platforms because these tools could be implemented rapidly under crisis conditions. Digital communication increasingly focused on maintaining the continuity of information exchange rather than achieving comprehensive administrative integration. This pattern illustrates that institutional resilience was supported more by the practical use of accessible technologies than by large-scale digital transformation programs. In many cases, the effectiveness of digital services depended on the initiative of individual agencies, local administrators, and frontline personnel rather than on coordinated national digital governance strategies.

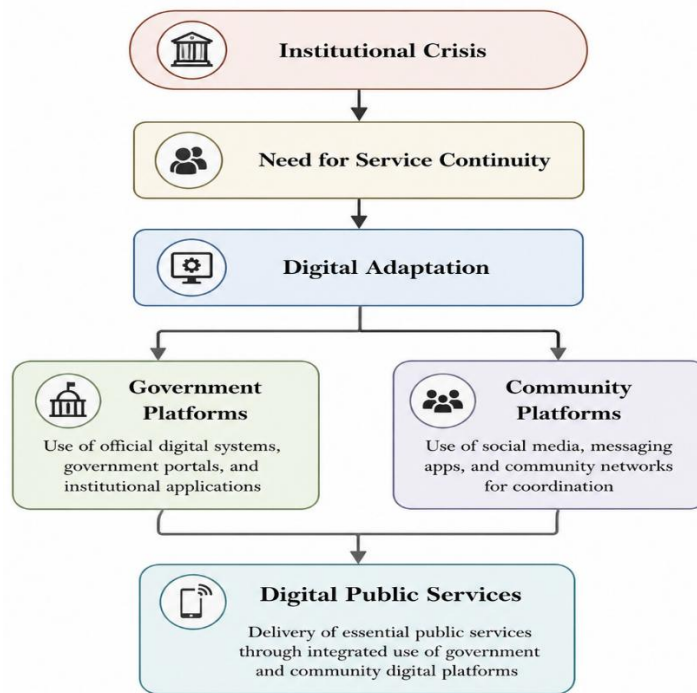


Figure 1. Institutional Response Pathway for Digital Service Adaptation during Myanmar's Dual Crisis

Source: Developed by the authors based on thematic analysis and process tracing (2025).

Document analysis also indicates considerable variation in digital service implementation across different sectors. Health-related communication exhibited the highest degree of digital adaptation because continuous dissemination of public health information remained essential throughout the pandemic. Emergency announcements, disease prevention guidelines, and coordination of humanitarian assistance increasingly relied on online communication channels. Administrative services, meanwhile, experienced greater disruption because many procedures required institutional verification, documentation, or direct interaction that could not easily be transferred into digital formats. Educational services likewise encountered substantial limitations due to unequal internet access and interruptions to institutional operations following the political crisis. These sectoral differences demonstrate that digital adaptation was influenced not only by technological readiness but also by the operational characteristics of each public service.

Another important finding concerns the relationship between digital infrastructure and public trust. The analysis suggests that technological availability alone did not determine the effectiveness of digital services. Instead, declining confidence in formal institutions significantly influenced citizens' willingness to use official communication channels. Following the political crisis, many communities increasingly relied on alternative digital networks managed by local organizations, volunteer groups, and community leaders because these channels were perceived as more responsive and accessible. Consequently, information circulated simultaneously through official and informal platforms, creating multiple parallel communication systems that operated with varying degrees of credibility and institutional authority. This pattern demonstrates that digital transformation during prolonged crises is fundamentally a social and institutional process rather than merely a technological one.

The sequential analysis also shows that digital adaptation became progressively more decentralized over time. Initial government-led initiatives gradually evolved into collaborative practices involving multiple actors outside formal bureaucratic structures. Local communities, humanitarian organizations, volunteer groups, and civil society organizations utilized digital technologies to coordinate emergency assistance, distribute information, and facilitate communication among affected populations. Although many of these initiatives operated independently of formal governmental systems, they contributed significantly to maintaining

public service continuity when institutional capacity declined. This evolution illustrates that digital technologies served not only as administrative tools but also as mechanisms that enabled broader societal participation in crisis governance.

The findings further identify several structural constraints that limited the sustainability of digital adaptation. Internet shutdowns, unstable telecommunications infrastructure, unequal digital literacy, and disparities in technology access created uneven opportunities for citizens to benefit from digital services. Rural communities experienced greater barriers than urban populations because communication infrastructure remained less developed and access to digital devices was more limited. Furthermore, the absence of standardized digital governance frameworks resulted in inconsistent implementation across public institutions, reducing interoperability and complicating interagency coordination. These conditions suggest that digital adaptation succeeded primarily in preserving minimum service continuity rather than achieving comprehensive digital transformation.

Table 4. Patterns of Digital Service Adaptation during Myanmar's Dual Crisis

Phase	Digital Adaptation	Primary Objective	Main Constraints	Observed Governance Outcome
Early COVID-19 (2020)	Expansion of digital communication for health information and emergency coordination	Maintain essential public services during mobility restrictions	Limited digital infrastructure and institutional preparedness	Initial acceleration of digital public services
Pandemic Response (2020–2021)	Increased use of social media, messaging applications, and online administrative communication	Improve accessibility and service continuity	Uneven digital literacy and fragmented institutional capacity	Growing dependence on low-cost digital platforms
Post-Coup Crisis (2021 onward)	Decentralized digital communication through multiple formal and informal actors	Sustain public information and humanitarian coordination	Internet restrictions, declining public trust, communication surveillance	Fragmented digital governance ecosystem
Prolonged Institutional Crisis (2022–2024)	Collaborative digital coordination involving communities, volunteers, and civil society organizations	Preserve continuity of essential services despite weakened institutions	Lack of integrated governance standards and interoperability	Expansion of adaptive but fragmented digital governance

Source: Synthesized by the authors from document analysis, process tracing, and observations of digital public service adaptation in Myanmar (2025).

Digital transformation during the crisis did not occur through a single coordinated reform program but evolved incrementally as institutions responded to successive disruptions. Each stage introduced new adaptive practices while simultaneously exposing additional structural limitations that constrained long-term institutional development. Rather than replacing conventional governance arrangements, digital technologies functioned as adaptive instruments that enabled governments and communities to maintain essential services under conditions of prolonged uncertainty.

Taken together, these findings indicate that digital adaptation represented an evolving governance strategy shaped by institutional disruption rather than technological modernization alone. The empirical evidence suggests that the effectiveness of digital public services depended on the interaction between technological accessibility, institutional legitimacy, and collaborative capacity among multiple actors. This adaptive process subsequently created favorable conditions for the expansion of informal governance mechanisms, which increasingly complemented and, in

some situations, substituted formal public service delivery during the prolonged crisis. The emergence of these informal governance practices is examined in the following section.

Emergence of Informal Governance as an Adaptive Response

The findings demonstrate that the weakening of formal governmental institutions created conditions that facilitated the rapid emergence of informal governance mechanisms across Myanmar. Process tracing indicates that informal governance did not develop independently of the institutional crisis but emerged progressively as formal administrative capacity declined during the COVID-19 pandemic and intensified after the military coup in February 2021. As routine bureaucratic functions became increasingly disrupted, local communities, civil society organizations, volunteer groups, and faith-based organizations assumed greater responsibility for maintaining the continuity of essential public services. This transition reflects an adaptive governance process in which societal actors increasingly compensated for institutional limitations rather than replacing the state entirely.

The analysis shows that informal governance initially appeared through localized community initiatives designed to address immediate humanitarian needs. During the early stages of the pandemic, community organizations mobilized volunteers to distribute food, health supplies, and public health information within neighborhoods that experienced limited access to government assistance. These activities expanded significantly following the political crisis when many public institutions experienced operational disruption due to administrative fragmentation and workforce shortages. Rather than functioning under centralized coordination, most initiatives relied on locally developed networks characterized by rapid communication, flexible decision making, and strong interpersonal trust among participants.

Document analysis further indicates that informal governance gradually expanded beyond humanitarian assistance into broader public service functions. Community networks increasingly became involved in coordinating emergency healthcare referrals, facilitating information exchange regarding public services, supporting vulnerable households, and organizing local resource mobilization. These activities emerged because formal administrative procedures were frequently unable to respond to rapidly changing community needs. Consequently, citizens increasingly viewed locally organized initiatives as practical alternatives for obtaining essential services, particularly in areas where government institutions experienced prolonged operational difficulties.

One important finding concerns the role of social trust in sustaining informal governance. The evidence suggests that the effectiveness of community-based initiatives depended less on formal organizational structures than on established social relationships among local actors. Community leaders, volunteer coordinators, religious organizations, and neighborhood associations possessed strong local legitimacy that enabled rapid collective action without requiring complex administrative procedures. Decision making was therefore based primarily on mutual trust, shared community responsibility, and direct communication rather than hierarchical bureaucratic authority. These characteristics allowed informal governance to respond quickly to changing local conditions while maintaining relatively high levels of public participation.

The analysis also reveals considerable functional diversity among informal governance actors. Civil society organizations frequently coordinated humanitarian assistance and advocacy activities, while volunteer groups focused on direct service delivery within local communities. Religious institutions contributed logistical support, temporary shelter, and community mobilization, particularly in areas experiencing severe institutional disruption. Local residents themselves played an increasingly active role by organizing neighborhood-based communication networks, identifying vulnerable households, and coordinating community responses to urgent social needs. Rather than operating independently, these actors established interconnected support networks that strengthened collective resilience despite the absence of centralized coordination.

Although informal governance significantly improved service continuity, the findings also identify several operational limitations. Most initiatives depended heavily on voluntary participation, locally available resources, and informal coordination mechanisms, making their

sustainability vulnerable to prolonged crisis conditions. Resource availability differed considerably among communities, resulting in unequal service capacity across regions. Furthermore, the absence of standardized operational procedures occasionally created overlapping responsibilities and inconsistencies in service delivery. Document analysis indicates that coordination between different community organizations often relied on personal relationships rather than institutional agreements, limiting opportunities for systematic collaboration beyond local contexts.

Another important finding concerns the relationship between informal governance and formal state institutions. Rather than representing two entirely separate systems, the evidence suggests that interactions between formal and informal actors evolved throughout the crisis. In several instances, local government personnel informally collaborated with community organizations to facilitate information sharing and service coordination despite broader institutional fragmentation. These interactions demonstrate that governance adaptation occurred through continuous negotiation between institutional authority and community initiative rather than through complete institutional substitution. Consequently, informal governance functioned as a complementary mechanism that reduced service gaps while maintaining limited connections with formal administrative structures whenever possible.

Table 5. Characteristics of Informal Governance during Myanmar's Institutional Crisis

Informal Governance Actor	Primary Functions	Coordination Mechanism	Main Contribution to Public Services
Community volunteer groups	Distribution of humanitarian assistance and emergency support	Local community networks	Rapid response to urgent community needs
Civil society organizations	Coordination of aid, advocacy, and community services	Organizational collaboration and digital communication	Maintenance of essential social services
Religious institutions	Community mobilization, temporary shelter, logistical assistance	Faith-based community networks	Strengthening local social resilience
Neighborhood associations	Identification of vulnerable households and information dissemination	Direct interpersonal communication	Improving accessibility of local services
Informal collaborations involving local officials	Information sharing and limited service coordination	Personal and professional relationships	Bridging formal administrative systems and community initiatives

Source: Synthesized by the authors from document analysis, thematic analysis, and process tracing of governance adaptation in Myanmar (2025).

Informal governance evolved into a multidimensional governance mechanism rather than a collection of isolated community initiatives. Different actors assumed complementary responsibilities according to their organizational capacities, social legitimacy, and access to local resources. The diversity of functions illustrates that governance resilience during prolonged crises depended on collaborative interactions among multiple societal actors rather than on a single institutional authority.

The findings indicate that informal governance became an essential adaptive mechanism that enabled communities to maintain service continuity under conditions of severe institutional disruption. Its development was driven not only by the declining operational capacity of formal institutions but also by the existence of strong community networks capable of mobilizing local resources rapidly and flexibly. While these mechanisms substantially enhanced short-term resilience, they also revealed structural limitations related to coordination, accountability, and long-term sustainability. Most importantly, the expansion of informal governance created the institutional conditions necessary for the emergence of a broader hybrid governance system in

which digital technologies increasingly connected formal administrative structures with community-based initiatives. This interaction is examined in the following section.

Interaction between Digitalization and Informal Governance: The Emergence of Hybrid Governance

The findings indicate that digital adaptation and informal governance did not evolve as independent responses to the prolonged crisis in Myanmar. Instead, process tracing reveals that both mechanisms became increasingly interconnected as institutional disruption intensified. During the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, digital technologies primarily functioned as instruments for maintaining communication between public institutions and citizens. However, following the military coup in February 2021 and the subsequent weakening of governmental capacity, these digital platforms gradually evolved into collaborative spaces where government personnel, community organizations, volunteer groups, and citizens interacted to sustain essential public services. This transformation represents the emergence of a hybrid governance system in which formal institutional authority and informal community initiatives became mutually dependent in responding to crisis conditions.

The analysis demonstrates that digital platforms substantially altered coordination mechanisms among governance actors. Prior to the crisis, communication and decision making were predominantly organized through hierarchical bureaucratic procedures characterized by formal administrative reporting and institutional supervision. During the crisis, however, digital communication enabled more decentralized patterns of coordination that reduced dependence on conventional administrative structures. Community organizations increasingly utilized messaging applications, social media platforms, and online communication networks to coordinate humanitarian assistance, disseminate public information, identify vulnerable households, and organize emergency responses. Although these activities frequently operated outside formal governmental procedures, they remained closely connected to the broader objective of maintaining public service continuity.

An important finding emerging from the thematic analysis is that digital technology functioned primarily as an enabling infrastructure rather than as the principal driver of governance adaptation. The effectiveness of digital platforms depended largely on the willingness of formal and informal actors to exchange information, coordinate activities, and share available resources despite institutional fragmentation. In areas where collaborative relationships between local officials and community organizations remained relatively strong, digital communication facilitated more effective service coordination than in areas where institutional trust had significantly deteriorated. This finding suggests that technological accessibility alone was insufficient to ensure effective governance outcomes without corresponding social and institutional collaboration. The findings further reveal that hybrid governance developed incrementally through continuous institutional adjustment rather than through deliberate governmental reform. As formal administrative capacity declined, local government personnel increasingly relied on information generated by community organizations to identify urgent service needs. Conversely, informal actors occasionally depended on government institutions for administrative verification, technical guidance, or access to limited public resources. These reciprocal interactions gradually blurred the traditional boundaries separating formal bureaucracy from community-based governance. Rather than replacing one another, both governance arrangements became interconnected components of a broader adaptive service delivery system.

Another significant observation concerns the transformation of citizens' role within the governance process. Under conventional public administration, citizens primarily functioned as recipients of government services. During the prolonged crisis, however, communities increasingly assumed active responsibilities in identifying local problems, coordinating emergency responses, disseminating verified information, and supporting vulnerable populations. Digital communication platforms enabled this transition by reducing barriers to participation and facilitating more direct interaction among government agencies, civil society organizations, and community members. Consequently, governance became increasingly participatory despite the weakening of formal institutional structures. Despite these adaptive

developments, the findings also identify important structural challenges associated with hybrid governance. The coexistence of multiple digital communication channels generated inconsistencies in information dissemination, making it difficult to establish authoritative sources during rapidly changing situations. Differences in digital literacy and internet accessibility further contributed to unequal participation across communities, particularly between urban and rural areas.

The absence of integrated governance standards created overlapping responsibilities among institutions and community organizations, occasionally resulting in duplicated efforts or inconsistent service provision. These limitations indicate that while hybrid governance enhanced institutional adaptability, it also introduced new coordination and accountability challenges that require long-term policy attention. Process tracing further demonstrates that governance transformation followed a cumulative sequence rather than isolated institutional changes. Each phase of the crisis generated new adaptive responses that gradually strengthened interactions between digital technology and informal governance. The resulting governance arrangement therefore reflects continuous institutional evolution instead of temporary emergency improvisation. Figure 1 summarizes the principal causal pathway identified through the analysis.



Figure 2. Process Tracing of Governance Transformation during Myanmar's Dual Crisis
Source: Authors' synthesis based on process tracing and document analysis (2025).

The interaction between digitalization and informal governance is further summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Interaction between Digital Adaptation and Informal Governance

Governance Dimension	Digital Adaptation	Informal Governance	Hybrid Outcome
Communication	Online information sharing and digital coordination	Community-based information exchange	Faster dissemination of public information
Service Delivery	Digital administrative support and online communication	Volunteer-led humanitarian assistance	Improved continuity of essential services
Decision Making	Institutional digital communication	Local collaborative decision making	Shared governance arrangements
Resource Mobilization	Digital coordination of available resources	Community fundraising and volunteer mobilization	More flexible emergency response

Institutional Relationship	Formal governmental authority	Community legitimacy and social trust	Complementary governance structure
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Source: Synthesized from thematic analysis, document analysis, and process tracing (2025).

Hybrid governance emerged through the integration of complementary institutional strengths rather than through competition between formal and informal actors. Digital technologies enhanced communication efficiency, while informal governance contributed flexibility, rapid response capacity, and strong community legitimacy. Together, these elements enabled public services to continue operating despite prolonged institutional instability.

The findings identify hybrid governance as the principal adaptive mechanism explaining the resilience of Myanmar's public sector during the dual crises. Rather than representing a temporary emergency arrangement, the interaction between digital service adaptation and informal governance evolved into a new governance configuration capable of compensating for institutional weaknesses while maintaining essential public services. This finding provides the central empirical contribution of the study and serves as the foundation for the subsequent discussion regarding the implications of hybrid governance for crisis management, public sector resilience, and adaptive governance in institutionally fragile contexts.

Cross Theme Analysis: From Institutional Disruption to Hybrid Governance

The final stage of the analysis integrates the four themes identified through thematic analysis and process tracing to explain the overall transformation of public sector management during Myanmar's prolonged crisis. Rather than representing isolated findings, each theme forms part of a sequential governance adaptation process in which institutional disruption generated new organizational responses that progressively reshaped public service delivery. The thematic integration demonstrates that governance transformation occurred through cumulative interactions among institutional constraints, digital adaptation, informal governance, and collaborative service provision. This pattern illustrates the causal mechanism underlying governance resilience in contexts characterized by prolonged political instability and limited institutional capacity.

The first theme established that the combined effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the military coup fundamentally weakened the operational capacity of formal public institutions. Institutional fragmentation, administrative disruption, and declining public confidence reduced the ability of government agencies to maintain conventional service delivery mechanisms. These conditions constituted the initial trigger that forced both governmental and societal actors to seek alternative approaches for maintaining essential public services. Rather than representing a temporary administrative disturbance, institutional disruption became the principal contextual factor shaping subsequent governance adaptation.

The second theme demonstrated that digital technologies provided an immediate operational response to these institutional challenges. The findings indicate that digital adaptation was driven primarily by pragmatic considerations rather than comprehensive technological reform. Existing communication platforms and digital applications were rapidly repurposed to sustain administrative coordination and facilitate information exchange under highly constrained conditions. Digitalization therefore functioned as an adaptive instrument that enabled institutional continuity despite limited technological infrastructure, uneven digital literacy, and declining trust in official communication channels.

The third theme highlighted the growing importance of informal governance as institutional disruption continued. Community organizations, volunteer groups, civil society organizations, and neighborhood networks increasingly assumed responsibilities traditionally associated with formal public administration. Their effectiveness depended largely on social trust, local legitimacy, and organizational flexibility, allowing them to respond rapidly to changing community needs. Importantly, these initiatives did not emerge in opposition to government institutions but rather evolved to compensate for service gaps created by declining state capacity.

The integration of these three themes explains the emergence of the fourth and most significant finding of the study, namely the development of hybrid governance. The evidence suggests that

governance resilience during the crisis resulted from continuous interaction between formal institutional structures and informal community-based initiatives supported by digital communication technologies. Instead of functioning independently, formal and informal actors increasingly exchanged information, coordinated service delivery, and mobilized available resources through interconnected digital networks. Consequently, public service continuity depended less on the performance of individual institutions and more on the collective adaptive capacity of the governance ecosystem as a whole.

Table 5. Cross Theme Synthesis of Governance Adaptation

Analytical Theme	Principal Empirical Findings	Governance Implications
Institutional disruption	Dual crises weakened administrative coordination, public service delivery, and institutional legitimacy	Declining state capacity created pressure for governance adaptation
Digital service adaptation	Existing digital platforms were rapidly adapted to maintain communication and essential services	Digital technologies became operational tools for institutional resilience
Emergence of informal governance	Community organizations, volunteers, and civil society increasingly assumed service delivery functions	Social trust and local collaboration strengthened community resilience
Hybrid governance	Formal institutions and informal actors coordinated through digital communication networks	Governance effectiveness depended on collaborative adaptive capacity rather than institutional hierarchy alone

Source: Synthesized by the authors from thematic analysis, document analysis, and process tracing (2025).

Governance transformation followed a progressive sequence in which each adaptive response generated conditions that enabled the next stage of institutional development. Institutional disruption encouraged digital adaptation, digital communication facilitated broader community participation, and sustained interaction between formal and informal actors ultimately produced a hybrid governance arrangement. This sequence confirms the causal pathway identified through process tracing and demonstrates that governance resilience emerged through gradual institutional evolution rather than through isolated policy interventions.

The cross-theme analysis indicates that public sector management in Myanmar underwent a significant structural transformation during the dual crises. The findings reveal that adaptive governance was shaped not by the restoration of conventional bureaucratic capacity but by the integration of digital communication, community participation, and collaborative institutional arrangements. This integrated governance model enabled essential public services to continue despite severe institutional disruption and forms the central empirical contribution of this study. The implications of these findings for crisis governance theory, public sector management, and adaptive institutional resilience are discussed in the following section.

Discussion

Institutional Disruption as the Catalyst for Governance Transformation

The findings demonstrate that institutional disruption should not be understood merely as a consequence of crisis but rather as the principal catalyst for governance transformation. In Myanmar, the convergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the military coup fundamentally altered the institutional environment within which public services operated. Rather than experiencing a temporary decline in administrative performance, public institutions encountered a structural breakdown characterized by weakened bureaucratic coordination, declining institutional legitimacy, and reduced operational capacity. These conditions generated governance pressures that conventional administrative mechanisms could no longer address effectively. Consequently, governance transformation emerged as an adaptive response to institutional instability, supporting the argument that crises often accelerate organizational change by exposing structural weaknesses that remain less visible under normal conditions. This interpretation extends the findings presented in the Results by emphasizing that institutional

disruption itself became the mechanism through which governance innovation was initiated rather than merely the context within which adaptation occurred.

These findings are consistent with the work of Liu and Zhang (2024), who argue that crises fundamentally reshape public sector governance by forcing governments to abandon rigid administrative routines in favor of more adaptive institutional arrangements. Similarly, Das (2024) explains that governance resilience depends not only on technological modernization but also on institutional flexibility that enables rapid organizational adjustment under conditions of uncertainty. The Myanmar case reinforces these perspectives while demonstrating that institutional adaptation becomes substantially more complex when health emergencies coincide with political instability (Passeri, 2022; Grundy et al., 2014). Unlike many countries examined in previous studies, Myanmar experienced simultaneous pressures arising from public health demands, administrative fragmentation, and declining political legitimacy. As a result, governance transformation was driven by multiple interconnected crises rather than by a single external shock, producing a more fragmented but adaptive institutional response.

The findings also support Ahmad's (2025) observation that governance models developed in countries with relatively strong institutional capacity cannot always be transferred directly to politically unstable contexts. Existing literature frequently assumes that governments retain sufficient administrative authority to coordinate crisis responses even under severe disruption. The Myanmar case demonstrates that institutional capacity itself may become one of the principal casualties of prolonged crises. Under these circumstances, governance adaptation depends less on hierarchical decision making and more on the ability of institutions to accommodate decentralized forms of coordination. This finding broadens the current understanding of crisis governance by illustrating that governance resilience may emerge despite institutional weakening, provided that alternative coordination mechanisms develop to compensate for declining bureaucratic performance.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the growing literature on crisis governance by proposing institutional disruption as the initial causal mechanism underlying adaptive governance transformation. Previous studies have primarily examined crisis management from the perspectives of emergency response, digital government, or organizational resilience. The present findings suggest that institutional disruption should be conceptualized as an enabling condition that stimulates subsequent governance innovation, including digital adaptation, informal governance, and eventually hybrid governance. Rather than interpreting governance resilience solely as the ability of public institutions to maintain existing administrative functions, this study demonstrates that resilience also involves the capacity of governance systems to reorganize institutional relationships in response to prolonged uncertainty. This perspective enriches adaptive governance theory by emphasizing dynamic institutional evolution instead of organizational stability as the foundation of resilience.

The discussion further indicates that governance transformation in Myanmar followed a cumulative rather than linear process. Each successive disruption generated additional institutional pressures while simultaneously creating opportunities for adaptive responses by governmental and societal actors. This sequential pattern aligns with the principles of process tracing adopted in this study, demonstrating that governance change resulted from interconnected causal mechanisms rather than isolated policy interventions. Christensen et al. (2016), Matczak et al. (2018), Kuhlmann et al. (2024), Esposito (2025), said that the interaction between institutional fragmentation, declining public trust, and increasing reliance on alternative governance arrangements illustrates that crisis governance evolves progressively through continuous adjustment. Consequently, institutional disruption should be viewed not solely as a governance failure but also as a critical transition point that redefines the distribution of authority, responsibility, and collaboration among governance actors.

The implications of these findings extend beyond the Myanmar context and are particularly relevant for countries characterized by limited institutional capacity, political instability, or recurring humanitarian crises. Governments operating under fragile institutional conditions should recognize that maintaining governance resilience requires more than preserving bureaucratic structures. Strengthening adaptive institutional capacity, improving

interorganizational coordination, and enabling collaborative relationships between state institutions and societal actors are equally important for sustaining essential public services during prolonged crises. Therefore, crisis governance policies should prioritize institutional flexibility alongside administrative effectiveness, allowing governance systems to evolve in response to rapidly changing circumstances while preserving legitimacy, service continuity, and public trust. By positioning institutional disruption as the catalyst for governance transformation, this study provides a broader conceptual foundation for understanding how public sector management can remain functional under conditions where conventional bureaucratic capacity is significantly constrained.

Digital Adaptation Beyond Technological Transformation

The findings indicate that digital adaptation in Myanmar should not be interpreted merely as the introduction or expansion of digital technologies within public administration. Instead, digitalization functioned as an adaptive organizational mechanism that enabled governance continuity under conditions of severe institutional disruption. The results demonstrate that digital technologies were adopted pragmatically to sustain communication, coordinate public services, and facilitate interactions among governmental institutions, community organizations, and citizens when conventional administrative mechanisms became increasingly ineffective. This interpretation supports the view that digital transformation during crises is fundamentally an institutional adaptation process rather than a purely technological initiative. Consequently, the effectiveness of digital governance depends not only on the availability of technological infrastructure but also on the institutional capacity to reorganize administrative processes and collaborative relationships in response to rapidly changing environments.

These findings are broadly consistent with the digital government literature, which argues that digital technologies enhance administrative efficiency, transparency, and service accessibility when supported by appropriate institutional capacity. Studies by Liu and Zhang (2024) emphasize that digital government strengthens organizational resilience by enabling governments to maintain essential services during emergencies through flexible communication and data-driven decision making. Similarly, Das (2024) argues that successful digital transformation requires adaptive institutional arrangements that integrate technology with organizational learning and responsive governance. However, the Myanmar case reveals a different trajectory from that described in much of the existing literature. Rather than being implemented through planned digital government reforms, digital adaptation emerged incrementally through improvised institutional responses to simultaneous health and political crises. Digital platforms therefore functioned primarily as operational tools for crisis management instead of instruments for administrative modernization, illustrating a form of adaptive digital governance that develops under institutional fragility rather than stable bureaucratic conditions.

The empirical evidence further distinguishes Myanmar from many developing countries where digital government initiatives generally remain state-led and supported by relatively stable administrative institutions. In Myanmar, declining governmental capacity following the military coup substantially altered the institutional context within which digital transformation occurred. The weakening of formal bureaucratic structures encouraged community organizations, volunteer networks, and civil society actors to assume increasingly significant roles in digital communication and service coordination (Theocharis et al., 2017; Park & Johnston, 2019; Anheier et al., 2019). Consequently, digital governance evolved through decentralized interactions between formal and informal actors rather than through centralized governmental leadership. This finding suggests that digital adaptation in institutionally fragile settings is shaped more by collaborative governance capacity than by technological investment alone. It also highlights that political instability can fundamentally redefine the organizational architecture through which digital public services are delivered, producing governance arrangements that differ considerably from conventional digital government models documented in previous studies.

The principal contribution of this study lies in extending the concept of digital adaptation beyond technological transformation toward a broader understanding of adaptive governance. While

previous research has predominantly examined digital government from perspectives of technological innovation, service efficiency, and administrative modernization, the present findings demonstrate that digital technologies also serve as institutional connectors that facilitate collaboration among diverse governance actors during prolonged crises. The Myanmar case illustrates that digital adaptation is not an end in itself but a dynamic governance process through which formal institutions and community-based initiatives collectively sustain public service continuity despite declining state capacity. By positioning digitalization as an organizational adaptation mechanism embedded within crisis governance rather than solely within digital government reform, this study contributes a novel perspective to the literature on public sector management and provides a conceptual foundation for understanding digital governance in politically unstable and institutionally constrained environments.

Informal Governance as an Institutional Complement

The findings demonstrate that the emergence of informal governance in Myanmar was not intended to replace formal governmental institutions but rather to compensate for the operational limitations created by prolonged institutional disruption (Bünthe, 2018; Danquah & Sen, 2022). As bureaucratic capacity declined, community organizations, volunteer groups, civil society organizations, and religious institutions progressively assumed responsibilities that formal administrative structures were no longer able to perform effectively. This adaptive response reflects the central principles of collaborative governance, which emphasize that complex public problems cannot be addressed solely through hierarchical state institutions but require coordinated participation among governmental and non-governmental actors. Rather than relying on formal authority, these collaborative arrangements were sustained through social capital characterized by interpersonal trust, reciprocal relationships, and shared community responsibility. These findings are consistent with adaptive governance theory, which argues that governance resilience depends on the capacity of multiple actors to reorganize institutional relationships in response to rapidly changing conditions instead of maintaining rigid administrative structures. The Myanmar case therefore illustrates that institutional resilience during prolonged crises is generated not only through organizational flexibility within government but also through the collective ability of communities to mobilize existing social networks and local knowledge to sustain essential public services.

The present findings also reinforce and extend previous research on volunteer governance and community-based crisis management. Earlier studies generally conclude that volunteer organizations enhance emergency response by providing rapid humanitarian assistance, mobilizing local resources, and improving community participation, particularly where governmental capacity is limited. Most of this literature examines volunteer initiatives as temporary supplements to formal emergency management systems. The Myanmar experience demonstrates a broader governance transformation in which volunteer networks evolved into enduring institutional partners that contributed to information dissemination, service coordination, humanitarian assistance, and local decision making throughout an extended period of political and institutional instability. This sustained involvement indicates that volunteer governance can become an integral component of public sector management when crises fundamentally alter state capacity. Accordingly, the contribution of this study extends beyond confirming the importance of community participation by demonstrating that informal governance represents an institutional complement embedded within a broader adaptive governance system, where collaboration among public institutions, civil society, and community actors becomes essential for preserving governance continuity under conditions of prolonged uncertainty.

Hybrid Governance as a New Crisis Governance Model

The most significant contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that governance transformation in Myanmar ultimately evolved into a hybrid governance model that integrated digital adaptation with informal governance practices. Unlike the earlier stages of the crisis, where digital technologies and community initiatives developed as relatively independent adaptive responses, the findings indicate that prolonged institutional disruption progressively strengthened the interaction between these two mechanisms. Digital platforms became essential

communication infrastructures connecting governmental institutions, civil society organizations, volunteer groups, and local communities, while informal governance supplied the flexibility and localized responsiveness that formal administrative structures increasingly lacked. This interaction enabled essential public services to continue despite declining institutional capacity and persistent political instability. Therefore, the principal finding of this research is not merely that digital adaptation and informal governance emerged simultaneously, but that their convergence produced a distinct governance arrangement capable of sustaining public administration under conditions where conventional bureaucratic systems alone could no longer function effectively.

The hybrid governance model identified in this study differs from conventional governance frameworks that generally distinguish formal and informal institutions as separate or even competing spheres of authority. Instead, the findings demonstrate that governance resilience emerged through complementary interactions among diverse actors whose functions became increasingly interdependent during the crisis (Gonçalves et al., 2025; Minniti et al., 2025; Sonesson et al., 2021). Formal institutions continued to provide regulatory legitimacy, administrative knowledge, and limited public resources, whereas informal actors contributed operational flexibility, local knowledge, social trust, and rapid community mobilization. Digital technologies acted as the connecting infrastructure that facilitated information exchange, resource coordination, and collaborative decision making across these institutional boundaries. Rather than replacing one governance arrangement with another, the crisis encouraged the gradual integration of both systems into a more adaptive governance configuration capable of responding to evolving societal needs. This interpretation extends existing understandings of hybrid governance by emphasizing that institutional integration is driven not solely by deliberate policy reform but also by prolonged crisis conditions that require continuous organizational adaptation.

From the perspective of public administration theory, these findings contribute to an emerging understanding of governance as a dynamic and relational system rather than a stable bureaucratic structure. Traditional public administration has generally emphasized hierarchical authority, formal accountability, and institutional control as the primary foundations of effective governance. The Myanmar experience demonstrates that these principles remain important but become insufficient when institutional capacity is substantially weakened by overlapping crises. Under such conditions, governance effectiveness increasingly depends on the ability of formal institutions to collaborate with actors operating beyond conventional bureaucratic boundaries. Consequently, this study contributes to the literature by proposing that governance resilience should be understood as the capacity to sustain functional relationships among multiple institutional actors rather than solely the capacity of governmental organizations to preserve administrative routines. This perspective broadens contemporary public administration theory by integrating insights from adaptive governance, collaborative governance, and digital governance into a unified explanation of crisis management.

The practical implications of this study are particularly relevant for governments operating in politically unstable environments or countries characterized by limited institutional capacity. The findings suggest that crisis preparedness should extend beyond investments in digital infrastructure or administrative reform alone (Sikder & Harvey, 2023; Monstadt & Schmidt, 2019). Governments should also strengthen collaborative governance mechanisms that facilitate cooperation with civil society organizations, volunteer networks, humanitarian institutions, and local communities before crises occur. Establishing institutional channels for information sharing, developing interoperable digital communication systems, and promoting mutual trust among governance actors can substantially enhance the continuity of public services when formal administrative structures experience disruption. These findings further indicate that policies aimed at improving crisis resilience should recognize community organizations as strategic governance partners rather than temporary emergency responders, thereby enabling more inclusive and flexible public service systems capable of adapting to rapidly changing circumstances.

Building upon these findings, this study proposes a conceptual model of crisis governance in which institutional disruption functions as the initial catalyst that triggers sequential governance adaptation. The model begins with institutional crisis, which creates an urgent need for service continuity and accelerates digital adaptation across formal and community-based platforms. As institutional fragmentation intensifies, informal governance expands to compensate for declining administrative capacity, while digital technologies facilitate coordination among governmental and societal actors. The interaction between these complementary mechanisms gradually produces a hybrid governance system that enables the continuity of essential public services despite prolonged uncertainty. This conceptual pathway provides a theoretical explanation for how governance systems evolve under institutional stress and represents the principal novelty of the present study. By integrating institutional disruption, digital adaptation, informal governance, and hybrid governance into a single explanatory framework, the study offers a comprehensive model that can inform future comparative research on public sector management in fragile states and other crisis affected governance contexts.

CONCLUSION

The transformation of public sector management in Myanmar during the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2021 military coup was driven by a sequential process of institutional adaptation rather than by conventional bureaucratic reform. Institutional disruption emerged as the primary catalyst that accelerated digital service adaptation, stimulated the expansion of informal governance, and ultimately facilitated the development of a hybrid governance model capable of sustaining essential public services despite prolonged political instability and declining state capacity. The findings demonstrate that digital technologies functioned not merely as technological innovations but as adaptive organizational mechanisms that enabled collaboration among formal institutions, civil society organizations, volunteer networks, and local communities. At the same time, informal governance complemented rather than replaced formal administrative structures by mobilizing social trust, community participation, and local resources to address service gaps created by institutional fragmentation. The principal theoretical contribution of this study is the development of a conceptual crisis governance model that integrates institutional disruption, digital adaptation, informal governance, and hybrid governance into a unified explanatory framework for understanding governance resilience in institutionally fragile contexts. Practically, the findings suggest that governments facing prolonged crises should prioritize adaptive governance, collaborative institutional arrangements, and inclusive digital ecosystems alongside conventional administrative capacity to strengthen the continuity and resilience of public service delivery.

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