

Fostering Digital Dialogue: A Case Study of Government Social Media Initiatives in Advocating Social Participation

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ABSTRACT

Engagement with the public and promoting social participation have emerged as essential aspects of democratic governance which have resulted in the focus towards social media by the Indonesian government. The role of social media has become increasingly vital for the Indonesian government and its governing agencies to reach and accommodate broad and diverse publics. Unfortunately, in developing nations, particularly Indonesia, using social media in government institutions to engage with the people and provide services is still deemed inconsistent and uneven. Hence, this case study explores an Indonesian provincial government's social media initiatives that have been nationally acknowledged as successful in strategies of fostering digital dialogue to facilitate social participation and could potentially become an exemplary implementation model for the country. The authors conducted a focus group discussion with public information and social media officials. Generally, the findings demonstrate how regional governments, with solid backing from the top leader and a well-designed strategic plan, could leverage social media platforms to meet public expectations while advancing democratic governance. Furthermore, the findings indicate that the social media initiatives undertaken by the provincial government have facilitated public participation, ensuring that citizens are heard and can actively participate in governmental decisions that impact their needs. This paper contributes to the existing literature on government public relations by highlighting the government's role in advocating democratic and participatory governance.

Keywords: *Digital dialogue, government public relations, Indonesia, social media, public participation.*

INTRODUCTION

At present, various governments increasingly recognise the need for more participatory and inclusive processes in communicating and implementing their programs. More participatory governance could positively contribute to the governing practice by gaining greater public trust and support through their participation (Graham, 2014). The presence of social media can improve the interaction between the government and the public because it reaches a larger demographic than traditional media. Internet and mainly social media facilitate new forms of participatory communication that were not feasible before the advent of social media. These platforms enable two-way interactions between people and organisations, as well as the emergence and growth of participatory groups beyond spatial and social boundaries (Lee et al., 2021). Because of that, using social media becomes a signature of a lively and transparent communications strategy, and social media serve this purpose

particularly well in participatory government implementation. Additionally, other reports highlighted that Government agencies and officials are some of the most engaged users on social media (Barnhart, 2022; Yuan et al., 2023).

In the past decade, scholarly research on social media as part of government communication strategy has flourished, covering topics such as national and local government social media use, digital public relations, and public involvement in policy implementation (Avery & Graham, 2013; Haryanti & Rusfian, 2019; Mickoleit, 2014; Sandoval-Almazan & Valle-Cruz, 2021). Other studies indicated the significance of social media platforms in providing governments with a direct channel of engagement with their constituents, making it easier for them to convey timely and transparent information regarding policies, decisions, and activities (Arief et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2022). Moreover, in times of crisis, government use of social media has enabled them to engage promptly with the public, convey important information, mitigate panic, and provide reassurance (Al-Omouh et al., 2023). By embracing the potential of social media, governments may strengthen their ties with their constituents, enhance trust and transparency, and develop a more democratic and active society.

Attention to the role of social media in governments has also begun to gain a place in Indonesia. As one of the largest populations in the world and the largest economy in Southeast Asia, the role of social media is becoming increasingly important for the Indonesian government and its agencies to reach and accommodate a vast and diverse public (Preiss, 2021). Unfortunately, in developing nations, particularly in Indonesia, using social media in government institutions to connect with the public and deliver services is still considered uneven and inadequate (CfDS, 2022; Rohayatin et al., 2018; Siregar, 2022; Suciska, 2016). The inadequacy of digital skills for professional account management and content development is one of Indonesia's most critical difficulties for government agencies' social media use.

In response, the central government has recognised the necessity of utilising social media as a medium for both public and strategic communication as well as the role of competent personnel in managing social media. Consequently, the central government encourages initiatives for regional or local governments to be more active and influential in optimising social media (Kominfo, 2018). The central government encourages all heads of government agencies, public relations officers, and government employees in the regions to use social media to communicate with the public.

Among Indonesia's 38 provinces, West Java's provincial government emerged as one of the leading government entities in terms of social media use as a public communication medium. It is home to more than 49 million people, and the provincial administration of West Java is one of the most enthusiastic regional entities in responding to government initiatives related to social media optimisation. Since 2021, the province has won multiple national accolades for government public relations, digital innovation, and social media performance (Jabar, 2022, 2023; Yessy, 2021). The central government gave the awards since West Java province was able to meet several established indicators, such as the establishment of policy in optimising government social media platforms, active online engagement of the public, and availability of public data publication platform for more transparent and accessible government managed data (Achmad, 2021).

Social media offer governments the ability to enhance and improve government-citizen relations. Accordingly, the West Java province's social media initiatives could potentially become an exemplary implementation model for the country. However, in the Indonesian context, scholarly works in this area are extensive but are primarily concerned

with the social media content evaluation from the public or audience perspectives (Nugraha & Salamah, 2021; Purwanti et al., 2022; Rohayatin et al., 2018; Setiawan, 2021) rather than the program planning and evaluation, especially from the perspectives of the government as the communicator. Whereas exploring the planning, implementing, and evaluating process from the content producer perspective also constitute the essential marker of the overall performance of a government's digital public communication (Anthopoulos & Reddick, 2014).

Based on this rationale, this study aims to investigate and analyse how governments use social media to connect with the public and incorporate them into their communication strategies. As a case study, the authors explore how the provincial government in West Java, Indonesia, are meeting public expectation and advocating social participation through social media use. In addition, the following research questions are developed as the study guidelines: (1) How does the provincial government plan its social media initiatives?, and; (2) To what extent does the provincial government optimise social media to foster digital dialogue as part of social participation?

This study contributes to the expanding body of strategic communication research on social media. The findings are expected to shed light on the degree to which regional governments could meet public expectations and foster democratic ideals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Roles for Governments' Public Communication

Governments' use of the Internet to engage with their constituents is undoubtedly not new; these initiatives, commonly called "e-government," encompass all online communications and actions by governments (Dixon, 2010). The e-government paradigm, often known as digital government, is ideally adapted for this era of networking and governance, with a focus on digital users as governance partners and constituents (Graham, 2014). As a significant part of Internet advancement, social media has become the most rapidly growing Internet branch. Social media's growing popularity has changed how people, businesses, and government organisations communicate.

Previous scholarly works have highlighted how social media has profoundly impacted how governments communicate with their public. Social media provides a communication channel for governments to reach a diverse audience allowing them to communicate with citizens in real-time and provide immediate updates on policy decisions and government initiatives (Andersson et al., 2022; Arief et al., 2022). For example, Hao et al. (2016) examined 14,910 posts from China's 96 most popular official accounts. They discovered that optimising creative social media content could improve the government's and the public's interactivity. Moreover, in times of crisis, social media has been proven effective in mitigating the situation. This role of social media can be seen during the recent Covid-19 pandemic, where governments all across the globe extensively using social media to conduct emergency responses, share information and encourage social participation (Al-Omouh et al., 2023; Mansoor, 2021; Sandoval-Almazan & Valle-Cruz, 2021).

Social media's ability to establish interactivity and mediate dialogue can empower the public and help hold governments accountable for their commitments. Studies by Stamati et al. (2015) and Giacomini et al. (2021) indicated that social media could enhance governments' accountability since they can disclose information about their activities, finances, and performance indicators to be more accessible, transparent, and clear to the general public.

Similarly, Avery and Graham (2013) believed that this more open form of government communication via social media benefits local governments. They contended that citizens have the closest direct access to and potential importance in governance at the local level of government. Concerning the Indonesian context, with a total population of over 280 million people, the function of regional governments' communication in maintaining the connection with regional populations is critical.

However, while social media provides many opportunities for government agencies, challenges must always be addressed. Studies that analysed the challenges and risks of social media use in regional and central governments found the lack of control and media literacy to be the primary limitation of social media use (Falco et al., 2018; Setiawan, 2021). Then, social media interactions could potentially make government organisations vulnerable to internal and external crises. As described in a study by DiStaso et al. (2011), Internally, government organisations must be cautious about online activities that may affect their images, such as criticism of management, intellectual property leaks, and humiliating staff behavior. Externally, that study implied that criticism, false information postings, and rogue activist groups can also significantly damage the government organisations' image.

In sum, social media has become an indispensable medium for the public communication of governments. Its advantages include direct and swift communication, two-way interaction, and transparency and accountability. Aside from the challenges and risks involved with its use, governments' efficient use of social media can ultimately increase social participation and enhance the quality of democracy. Furthermore, in today's media landscape, when anybody may post information online, government organisations must maintain an active and updated presence on official online channels to manage the material they release, and the public has a place to seek reliable information.

Dialogic Theory and Social Participation in Social Media

One of the earliest strategic frameworks for establishing dialogic relationships with the public through the Internet was provided by Kent and Taylor (2002), who described that the relationship is built on the equal and active engagement of all parties in an online conversation. In the current era of social media and digital natives, people expect dialogue as governments shift from viewing the public as consumers to permitting them to contribute online to the development of their governments. In order to foster a proper online dialogue, Kent (2013) further elaborated on the following five dialogic principles to aid organisations in establishing mediated, two-way, and dialogic relationships with their public on social media:

1. Dialogic loops, in the forms of commenting and responding to public
2. ease of interface, which refers to well designed and easy-to-use online system
3. Visitors conservation that can be seen when organisations provide links to their Websites and social networking sites
4. Generation of return visits in the forms of regularly updated information and inviting the public to participate
5. Information usefulness that can be inferred from how social media communication can satisfy the public's need for information

These principles follow the tenets of dialogic theory and are a compelling character to justify government organisations' active use of social media. The use of social media by government organisations has also become an essential platform for encouraging social

participation, as it allows the public to express their perspectives on a range of issues. At its core, social participation can be defined as an individual or group's engagement in activities that connect with others in society or the community (Schormans, 2014).

Previous studies have shown a positive relationship between dialogic communication and social participation in social media. Dialogic communication initiated by government organisations fosters greater engagement and participation among the public (Hand & Ching, 2011; Wang & Yang, 2020). The power of social media allows citizens to react or even influence government decision-making (Toscano, 2019). Then, Proper government digital dialogue initiatives allow for the exchange of information, ideas, and perspectives, leading to a greater understanding of social and political issues (Arief et al., 2022). In other words, social media has the potential to be a powerful instrument for government organisations to increase involvement and participation in social and political activities among their constituents. Hence, in this paper, the authors explore a case of how a provincial government in Indonesia uses social media to encourage social participation among the region's 49 million people.

METHODOLOGY

This section describes the methodology used to perform a qualitative case study examination of the social media initiatives of an Indonesian provincial administration. The authors conducted a qualitative case study method since it allows researchers to investigate a phenomenon within a specific context using diverse data sources and to explore using a variety of lenses to disclose multiple facets of the phenomenon (Yin, 2018). In this case, the authors seek to explore how the West Java provincial government optimises social media in establishing digital dialogue and public participation with its dense and diverse constituents. That is why a qualitative case study is suitable because it properly seeks answers to questions by investigating various social settings and the individuals who live in these settings (Lune & Berg, 2017).

In collecting the data, a focus group discussion with public information and social media officials were conducted to explore the advocating of social participation through social media at the provincial government level. Participants were recruited through criterion sampling initiated by identifying relevant public information officials responsible for the social media strategy implementation. In this study, the authors invited public information and social media officials from three departments under the provincial government: Public Relations, Education Department, and Jabar Quick Response (Provincial Humanitarian Aid). Those departments were selected since they have the highest social media engagement performance under the provincial administration.

Emails were sent to the selected departments asking for their participation by delegating relevant officials from each respective department to attend the focus group discussion (FGD). After the initial email, follow-up emails and text messages were used to confirm and schedule the FGD. This type of data collection is suitable for gathering perspectives from people with similar expertise to discuss a specific issue and elaborate on the meaning that lies from their perspectives (Mishra, 2016).

The authors focused the discussions on the following aspects of strategic communication; (1) identifying the communication goals and the available resources to achieve those goals, (2) studying the strategy implementation of social participation through social media, and (3) finding out the evaluation process of the conducted strategy. These discussion points were inspired by aspects of Argenti's (2009) effective strategic

communication strategy. The authors then continued to gather all the data and elaborated them to the point of saturation.

In analysing the data, the authors employed case study data analysis to elaborate on the data generated from the FGD. The qualitative interview data were analysed using interpretive qualitative analysis adapted from Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) consisting of data reduction, data display, and verified conclusions. This type of analysis allows the authors to analyse and link the informants' perspectives and best practices regarding the social media methods they have employed. The authors transcribed the FGD results, coded them, and then grouped the codes according to broader conceptual themes. These themes were then reduced and arranged chronologically according to their emergence sequence. The authors used MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software to document, code, categorise, and analyse the data to assist the analysis.

Data source triangulation was conducted to strengthen the study's trustworthiness by converging diverse data sources. The study findings were triangulated, and findings from the FGD were cross-checked with the social media activities archived on the three departments' official accounts and other related public documents to strengthen the study's reliability.

Regarding ethical considerations, the writers adhered to the ethical research standards based on the Indonesian Researchers' Association's (2019) code of ethics. The focus group discussion was conducted with all the necessary consents. In the FGD process, the informants were notified of their rights to participate in the study. Their privacy will be protected. Each informant had the chance to sign an informed consent form to ensure the confidentiality of their information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section of the paper presents significant findings from the focus group discussion (FGD) on government social media initiatives to promote social participation. The analysis is divided into two parts. First, the analysis concentrates on the provincial government of West Java's public information and social media officials' strategic planning. Second, the analysis describes how the provincial government optimises social media to foster social participation among its constituents. In addition, a discussion of noteworthy findings is included in this section.

The Social Media Strategic Planning

Three primary themes emerged from the data analysis about how public information officials (PIO) planned their initiatives as the study's key informants. The FGD participants discussed common strategies for open communication and relationship development with key social media stakeholders. The first underlying theme was that innovation necessitates a leader's political will.

The FGD results revealed that the governor's directive to optimise social media was the impetus for their social media initiatives. Every government department and agency in West Java must have a solid presence on social media. "Every head of the department was directed to get their department more engaged with social media," said one participant (Informant Y4). Similarly, another participant from the education department affirmed:

I recall a formal meeting with the governor at the start of his term, and the direction to all departments was: first, we activate all platforms that are mostly viewed and used by the people, then both the department and its head must actively engage in social media and actively interact. (Informant Y1).

The comments indicate that the primary impetus for their social media initiatives is the directive from the top leader. This directive serves as the primary basis for conducting strategic planning for establishing an online presence and social media dialogue. Then, the POI started planning by determining the social media platform that would be their flagship platform.

The social media platforms that provincial governments use are Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok since they are Indonesia's most widely used social media platforms. A participant from the public relations department shared her experience, "we post the content to our Instagram, TikTok, and mirror the content to Facebook. We use them because now, they are the most used social media platforms in the country, and by sharing to those platforms, we can amplify our reach to a wider audience" (Informant Y4).

The next theme emerged in the discussion after encouragement from the leadership's directives. Establishing target audience and expected social participation. According to all FGD participants, their departments determined their target audience and expected responses based on each department's primary duties and responsibilities. An FGD participant remarked:

Because we are from the education office, it is obvious that our target market consists of educators and students. Our social media has grown very busy, especially now that new student registration is done online because it is filled with comments from people who require information or give us suggestions; certainly, this is one of the expected social involvement from our stakeholders... (Informant Y1).

Another participant supported this notion:

To manage more than 38 million people in the province, content diversification is needed. The public relations office or one social media account would not be able to handle all of the diverse interests of the people. That is why each government agency has its own established target. Then, frequently sharing relevant and interesting content based on the agencies' functions will naturally turn their social media into a valid source of information and knowledge. People will reflexively respond and participate socially from this point forward. (Informant Y4).

The FGD excerpts imply that having a defined target audience for social media initiatives allows the departments and agencies to focus their efforts on the right social media platforms and posts, allowing them to execute more relevant campaigns with a higher chance of online awareness and social participation. The last theme that appeared during the FGD was emotional bonding. Unanimously, local government PIOs believed that in order to meet

citizens' informational needs, they must create social media posts that can relate emotionally to the citizens. For instance, one participant said:

We do our best to create a sense of belonging in our content. We do this by making our online presence more relatable in ways that are relevant to our audience, such as by using words from the local language, making the tone of the content casual but polite, and writing about actual events. This is expected to lead to more interaction and participation, which will build public trust... (Informant Y6).

The government PIOs also believe that by building emotional connections with citizens through social media, the government can generate broader public support and participation through continuous improvement of social participation. In summary, the themes generated from the FGD can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Social media strategic planning

Provincial Government Social Media Strategic Planning	
Themes	Description
Starting from a leader's political will	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • innovation necessitates a leader's political will • the governor's directive was the impetus for their social media initiatives • Establishing a social media presence by optimising the most widely used platforms among citizens
Establishing target audience and expected social participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having a defined target audience and creating a niche is the basic strategy • Information usefulness is built based on the relevance to each department's duties and responsibilities
Creating emotional bonding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information and social awareness as the expected social participation • construct social media posts that can emotionally connect with citizens • emotional bonding will lead to more interaction, which eventually builds public trust and participation

The authors would now like to discuss several noteworthy aspects that emerged from the findings in order to further address the research questions. Concerning the first research question, the findings clearly demonstrate that social media have contributed significantly to today's government public relations strategies. Strategic planning is imminent in optimising social media as a public communication tool. One of the most notable themes to address about strategic planning is that innovating and optimising social media communication requires solid political will from the top leader.

As described in Table 1, a directive from the highest-rank official, in this instance, the governor, was the impetus for social media initiatives among West Java government departments and agencies. The governor's instruction required active participation on social media platforms, laying the groundwork for strategic planning and establishing an online presence. In relation to this notion, government public relations require solid political will since it includes changing how the institution communicates and interacts with its audience (Graham, 2014).

As further described by Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013), this political will can include allocating resources, applying new policies and procedures, and providing assistance and training to public relations personnel. Without significant support from the top leader,

innovating government social media communication will be difficult. Moreover, this solid support is inseparable from the personal image of the governor of West Java, who, according to numerous studies, relies extensively on social media for public communication (Hafizatullah et al., 2017; Muldani & Muksin, 2022; Setiawan, 2021). Hence, the social media awareness of the governor of West Java plays a crucial role in accelerating the provincial government's social media optimisation.

The next significant strategic plan is promoting emotional bonding with the public. The West Java province government's social media content created social media posts that can emotionally resonate with the audience. Using local language, adopting a casual yet respectful tone, and recounting genuine occurrences all strive to foster a sense of belonging and public trust. This finding is congruent with the study from Lozano et al. (2020), who emphasise that social media enabled a more direct or personalised engagement with campaign participants through content and direct conversation so that the advocacy impact and social action can be boosted. Thus, it is not surprising that the West Java government PIOs aim to build broader public support and continual progress in social participation by fostering emotional relationships.

Fostering the Digital Dialogue

The second phase of the FGD focused on how the provincial government departments and agencies implement their digital dialogue initiatives through social media. The discussion resulted in five primary strategies implemented by the PIOs at their respective government units and agencies. The main themes derived from the study will be described below, and only the most illustrative FGD quotes were presented in this part.

a. Content Categorisation

All FGD participants revealed that they categorise content they believe may stimulate public engagement. An informant from the provincial education department stated that they had designed thematic content for each day by focusing on giving interesting facts about education and updated educational information. She gave an example that the department created a dedicated content slot known as "the students' voice" to display stories of inspirational students or schools in West Java (Informant Y2). The department actively invites its followers to send inspirational stories so they can select and make a special news feature to be posted as their content.

Similarly, the other participants acknowledged the significance of the content category. The FGD participants all agreed that categorised content could provide value to consumers, and they are more likely to return for more. By consistently delivering high-quality content in specific categories, the agencies or departments can establish themselves as dependable source of information or even entertainment on those subjects. The FGD participants believe this practice can instil a sense of anticipation and closeness in the public.

b. The FAIR Approach

The following emerging theme is the "FAIR" approach. This term stands for Followers, Activities, Interactions, and Responsiveness. FAIR become their core strategy in fostering digital dialogue on social media. An informant from Jabar Quick Response (a provincial humanitarian agency) gave more detailed information on this:

The term "Followers" means that our content must be designed to nurture and increase the number of followers. "Activities" refers to the notion that PIOs must continually provide content that is presented creatively to sustain traffic engagement. "Interactions" is about inviting audiences to respond to content and vice versa; PIOs also always respond to inquiries from the audience. Finally, "responsiveness" requires that every question or concern from the public delivered to our social media account must be addressed as soon as possible, even if we cannot provide immediate solutions, but at least the public knows that their concerns have been heard or acknowledged... (Informant Y6).

The excerpt above implies that the PIOs use the "FAIR" approach as their core standard in performing their digital dialogue initiatives. Additionally, another informant explained that the "FAIR" approach is also used as one of the evaluation tools. All departments and units typically have a monthly measurement report of the engagement rate and the number of followers to serve as evaluation material (Informant Y7).

Overall, the "FAIR" approach becomes the core strategy for building a positive digital relationship with the public. By having interactive-based content and promptly addressing public queries, resolving issues, or simply acknowledging positive feedback, the government's social media platforms try to show that they are attentive and reliable to their constituent.

c. Friendly and Lively Persona

The following emerging theme is related to the dominant use of lively and friendly tones and narratives in all government entities' social media platforms. The FGD participants expressed that although they usually inform formal and government-related news, they still tried to deliver it in a friendly and communicative way. Some excerpts from the FGD reflect this succinctly:

Our social media Engagement is typically low when content is presented in a serious tone. So, we must include jokes or memes to break the ice and urge the public to engage in the comments section. However, when there is bad news or a natural calamity, we modify the tone accordingly. So, we tried to maintain the sense of conversational nature, so the public would not hesitate to interact with us... (Informant Y4).

The friendly and relaxed vibes personalise our identity and, at the same time, show that government social media accounts aren't always rigid and serious as has been widely assumed. So we want to participate in conversations naturally. We want to give our social media followers someone to talk about, not just something to talk about... (Informant Y6).

These responses indicate that the Public Information Officials (PIO) want to demonstrate that the government's social media accounts are approachable and actively engage their followers in conversation. Interestingly, based on the authors' visual review of their social media accounts, the official logos of the social media accounts were designed with a more contemporary and aesthetic style as opposed to the original formal logo, which has a

very strong bureaucratic aura. This suggests that they endeavor to create a relatable and engaging online presence by setting a friendly persona, cultural proximity, and sharing content, as well as initiating discussions that stimulate the interest of their followers and encourage dialogue.

d. Social Media Ambassadors and Awards System

As additional elements in fostering digital dialogue, the FGD findings suggested that the PIOs designed two supplemental strategies. Externally, they invited the public to become their social media ambassadors. Internally, they have created an award system for social media performance among the departments under the provincial government. The online ambassadors are volunteer roles supporting the promotion of the governmental departments' program and mission. A PIO from the education department explained the motives behind that initiative:

We recruit these "*duta*" (ambassadors) as citizen volunteers to help to raise our department profile on our social channels. Thousands of questions were received. Our manpower is similarly limited, and we cannot respond one by one. Luckily we have the "*duta*". They can help our social admin answer the citizens' questions in the comment sections. The role is more like peer-to-peer information. They give information with their personal social media account. However, since this is a public role and to ensure a safe, welcoming, and positive social media experience for the entire community, we prepare those social media with particular guidelines... (Informant Y1).

Another participant added that this effort is particularly significant for the education department, as they are frequently bombarded with inquiries from the public during the state's public schools' student admission period, and the ambassadors became a great help in coping with the situation (Informant Y2). In other words, the ambassadors assist the social media admin to monitor the online comments traffic. To the best of their ability, they can promptly identify any feedback and take action to mitigate the issue. Aside from this collaborative initiative, the provincial government regularly organises awards for departments or units that do exceptionally well on social media. This award is managed by the public relations department, as explained by one of the FGD participants:

We hold awarding activities known as the West Java Public Relations Cup. We always communicate with our regional department colleagues about the key performance factors for earning the award. Our KPI is now known as FAIR. These metrics will also be included in our report to the governor to monitor the online activity of multiple departments within the provincial government... (Informant Y5).

Correspondingly, another participant affirmed that the award system is an effort to provide both encouragement and recognition that can keep the social media PIOs motivated and boost performance engagement (Informant Y6). These excerpts imply that the West Java government social media strategists use a collaborative initiative to strengthen the digital dialogue and simultaneously provide awards to appreciate and recognise all of the departments' social media activities.

e. Constant Evaluation

The last emerging theme from the discussion is the evaluation of the implemented initiatives. This study identified that constant social media evaluation is imminent to track the digital dialogue progress. At the unit or department level, evaluations are conducted weekly due to the high dynamics of social media traffic. For instance, one participant said that weekly evaluation is a place where everyone can share their ideas, evaluate the current performance and, at the same time, adjust the strategy accordingly (Informant Y3). Then, the FGD also revealed that aside from the unit or department-level evaluation, a general evaluation involving all government social media officials is conducted quarterly to systematically assess the initiatives to determine their overall engagement effectiveness and sustainability.

Based on the FGD, in applying the social media initiatives, the departments and units still face challenges such as understaffing, regeneration of the PIOs, and internal communication flow. Despite these challenges, the social media teams have been thriving by evaluating their strategy regularly and reaching out to other related departments and partners to work together in fostering the digital dialogue as well as advocating social participation.

Overall, the operational implementation of the provincial government's social media initiative is illustrated in the Figure 1:

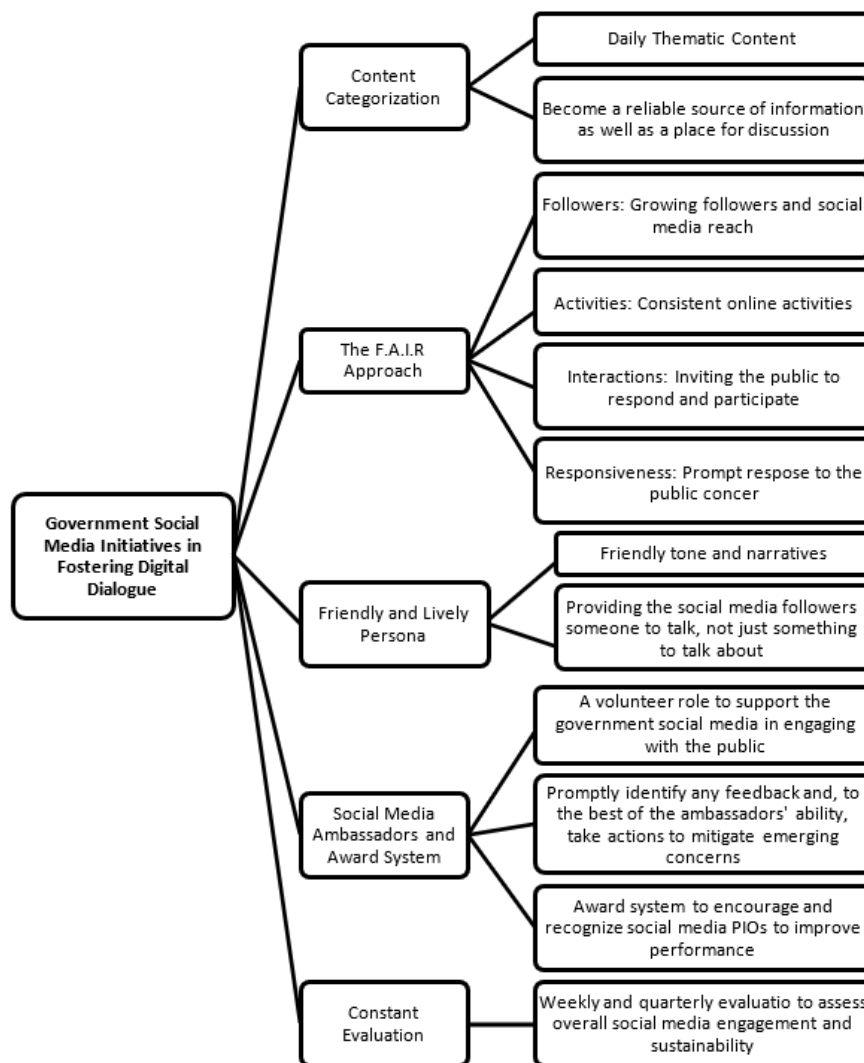


Figure 1: Government social media initiatives in fostering digital dialogue

As visually summarised in Figure 1, the findings have highlighted the strategies for fostering digital dialogue where the PIOs implemented distinctive strategies. One of the most notable findings is the concept of FAIR (Followers, Activities, Interaction, and Responsiveness) has emerged as an essential strategy for encouraging social participation. This concept has been applied as the primary foundation to cultivate and grow their social media engagement by regularly offering original content that encourages participation. In addition, the social media officials support the foundation by delivering visual storytelling on each of their postings in the form of infographics, motion graphics, and visual notes. The provincial social media officials actively invite audiences to contribute to their content and respond promptly to questions and concerns from the public.

This finding is aligned with the social media dialogic principles proposed by Kent (2013). He went on to point out that dialogic loops, ease of interface, regularly updated information, invitations to participate, and information usefulness can help institutions foster meaningful dialogue, improve user experience, encourage social participation, and meet their audiences' information needs on social media platforms (Kent, 2013). In addition, these statements follow the premise of democratic theory that suggests governments must be actively involved with their citizenry (OECD, 2020). Subsequently, this method helps West Java government PIOs to establish constructive digital interactions with the public while displaying attentiveness and trustworthiness.

Then, it is interesting to discuss how the social media PIOs employ a friendly and communicative tone throughout their government's social media platforms. While still disseminating official and government-related information, the West Java PIOs endeavor to deliver warm and engaging content. The use of jokes, memes, and a conversational tone in their posts aids in breaking the ice and encourages public participation in the comments section. However, they adjust their tone based on the nature of the news or events, ensuring appropriate communication under difficult circumstances. As Wang and Yang (2020) described, social media is a universal channel; using a pleasant and enthusiastic persona can personalise formal institutions' social media accounts, making them more approachable, lessening their bureaucratic image, and encouraging followers' participation.

Finally, government social media officials have implemented two additional strategies to enhance digital dialogue. Externally, they recruit social media ambassadors, who are volunteer citizens who promote the programs and missions of government departments. This initiative can aid the workload of social media PIOs. This type of citizen volunteer program can assist social media administrators in disseminating information, and this collaborative effort ensures that the entire community has a safe, welcoming, and positive social media experience (Sundstrom et al., 2022). The provincial government has also established an internal awards system to recognise departments or units with exceptional social media performance. It recognises and appreciates the departments' social media activities, providing encouragement and acknowledgment. In accordance with this, previous studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between rewards and employee motivation, productivity, and retention in an organisation, as well as a sense of competition to perform better (Francis et al., 2020; Graul, 2020). Overall, this case study shows that government organisations can improve communication, establish connections with key stakeholders, and cultivate a more responsive and engaging digital presence by implementing these strategies.

Although our study contributed to a better understanding of how public participation can be fostered through social media digital dialogue, there were limitations to the study. First, only three government entities were used to gather important informants for this study. This limits the findings' generalisability and may contribute to the lack of representation among public information officials (PIO). Secondly, the FGD was only conducted once due to the PIOs' busy schedules. As a result, the authors could not ask for follow-up discussions face-to-face. Although member checking confirmed that the emergent themes adequately mirrored the participants' shared experiences, conducting additional interviews might have yielded even more comprehensive data.

The authors also would like to recommend that future studies might look into how these techniques affect public trust, satisfaction, and engagement based on the audience demographic status. Furthermore, the role of social media ambassadors in stimulating online interactions and the effectiveness of the awards system in boosting social media performance may be quantitatively assessed.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the purpose of this study was to contribute to the field of strategic communication research on social media, specifically in the context of government programs that foster citizen participation and democratic principles. The findings highlight the extent to which regional governments and a solid support from the top leader could utilise social media platforms to meet public expectations while strengthening democratic governance. The current paper emphasises the significance of social media in promoting public participation and engagement. It stressed that social media platforms offer governments a unique opportunity to communicate with citizens, collect feedback, and address their problems. Governments can use social media to bridge the gap between themselves and the public, generating a sense of inclusivity, transparency, and emotional proximity.

This paper is expected to provide additional insight into governments' challenges and opportunities in effectively utilising social media platforms. By addressing the limitations and recommendations highlighted in this paper, future studies can build on these findings and expand the understanding of how social media shape participatory governance.

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