



The Role of Social Media in Increasing Public Trust in the Government in Parepare

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Abstract

Researchers conduct a study that evaluates how social media affects public trust in local government through a specific analysis of Parepare in South Sulawesi. A quantitative study analyzes the effects that the mayor's social media presence generates on resident's perceptions about government transparency and their trust levels. Four hundred residents were surveyed to analyze the frequency and variety of information shared by the mayor across Facebook Twitter and Instagram alongside their effect on public trust levels. Social media activity by the mayor results in higher public trust for local government according to 64% of respondents who believe the city became more transparent because of social media use. The municipality received the most favorable response to content focusing on government initiatives and public participation with 50% acceptance and 30% positive reaction. The results showed that trust levels increased uniformly in proportion to education level because people with higher education demonstrated stronger trust associations. These research outcomes support previous studies about how social media helps government agencies become transparent and engage the public yet stress the requirement for improved local communication methods. This research study addresses the lack of existing literature about social media use within local governments in lower-politicized regions while presenting applicable suggestions to build public trust in local governance.

Introduction

The rapid evolution of social media has significantly transformed communication patterns between individuals, organizations, and government institutions. Governments worldwide increasingly leverage digital technologies to facilitate engagement with their citizens, enhance transparency, and strengthen public trust. Social media platforms, particularly Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp, have become essential tools for governance, allowing authorities to provide real-time updates, address public concerns, and create interactive communication channels. Local governments, which operate closest to the citizens, have found social media to be an indispensable tool for governance, enabling them to enhance participation and responsiveness in decision-making processes.

In Indonesia, the use of social media by local government leaders has expanded in recent years as part of broader efforts to improve communication with citizens (Adnan et al., 2021; Yudarwati et al., 2022; Machmud et al., 2021). Many municipal leaders, including the Mayor of Parepare in South Sulawesi, have adopted social media as a strategic tool for political engagement, policy dissemination, and crisis management. By actively using digital platforms, local governments aim to increase transparency and accountability while ensuring the public remains informed about key developments and policy decisions (Anas et al., 2023). The ability

of social media to facilitate two-way communication allows local governments to solicit feedback from residents, address public grievances, and foster a sense of trust between citizens and governmental institutions.

Public trust is a critical element of good governance, shaping citizen compliance with government policies and influencing the success of policy implementation (Horgan et al., 2022; Mansoor, 2021; Mahmud, 2021). When citizens trust their government, they are more likely to engage with public programs, support institutional initiatives, and cooperate with authorities on civic matters. Trust in government is largely influenced by the effectiveness of communication between state institutions and the public (Msenge & Nzewi, 2021). Transparency, openness, and responsiveness are key factors in building and maintaining this trust, and social media has emerged as a platform that can either enhance or undermine these factors, depending on how it is used.

Social media enables governments to establish direct communication channels with citizens, making governance more accessible and interactive (Wukich, 2021; Cho & Melisa, 2021; Cantor et al., 2021). Unlike traditional communication methods such as television, radio, and print media, social media provides immediate and interactive engagement, allowing governments to disseminate information and receive feedback almost instantaneously. This direct access to government communication has the potential to build trust by fostering a perception of transparency, inclusivity, and government responsiveness. However, the effectiveness of this strategy depends on how governments use social media, the authenticity of their digital engagement, and the responsiveness of public officials to citizen concerns (Mansoor, 2021).

In Parepare, the Mayor and other local officials actively utilize social media to communicate with residents, provide updates on local policies, and respond to public inquiries (Sulvinajayanti, et al., 2024; Qadaruddin et al., 2023). The government's use of digital platforms extends beyond policy announcements to include interactive discussions, live Q&A sessions, and real-time updates on municipal developments. Local citizens have increasingly acknowledged that the mayor's extensive social media presence contributes to greater transparency and accessibility in governance. However, while these interactions can enhance trust, the relationship between social media engagement and public trust remains a subject of debate.

While there is extensive global research on social media's role in governance, studies on its impact at the local government level, particularly in Indonesia, remain scarce. Most existing studies focus on national government communication strategies and the role of social media in electoral campaigns, crisis communication, or public relations efforts. Although these studies provide valuable insights into how digital platforms facilitate governance at the national level, they do not adequately address how local governments interact with citizens through social media to enhance trust.

Previous studies have demonstrated that social media's impact on public trust is not uniform. Some research suggests that social media fosters transparency and strengthens government accountability, leading to higher levels of public trust (Ngai et al., 2023). However, other studies indicate that the effectiveness of social media in building trust varies depending on communication strategies, response times, and the perceived authenticity of digital interactions (Mari et al., 2022). In Indonesia, the increasing use of social media in governance warrants deeper investigation, particularly at the municipal level where digital engagement is more direct and immediate.

This study aims to fill this gap by examining how the local government of Parepare utilizes social media to enhance public trust. By analyzing social media interactions between government officials and citizens, this research seeks to understand how digital engagement shapes trust perceptions in a local governance context. The study will assess the frequency of social media use by officials, the type of content shared, the level of public engagement, and the impact of these factors on citizens' trust in their government.

Understanding how social media influences public trust at the local government level is crucial for designing effective digital governance strategies. Local governments operate in a unique context where they are subject to closer public scrutiny and immediate citizen feedback. Unlike national governments, which primarily use social media for large-scale policy announcements and political messaging, local governments engage with citizens on a more personal and direct level. This study provides an opportunity to analyze how social media fosters trust in a localized setting, where governmental actions have a more immediate and tangible impact on citizens' lives.

Additionally, this research contributes to the broader discourse on digital governance by offering a framework that can be applied to other municipalities in Indonesia and beyond. By identifying best practices for leveraging social media in governance, the study will provide insights that can help public officials improve transparency, responsiveness, and citizen engagement. These findings can be instrumental for policymakers and government communication strategists in optimizing digital platforms to build and maintain public trust.

Method

The research used quantitative methods to assess how social media influences public trust toward Parepare government officials in South Sulawesi. A study of the association between the Mayor of Parepare social media engagement and public trust in local government was performed using survey methodology. The research used a quantitative strategy since it delivered structured empirical measurements which produced clear patterns as well as correlations connecting social media usage to public trust. The study employed a cross-sectional survey method to obtain its data which researchers collected during one specific moment in time. The survey design proved suitable for examining the direct relationship between social media activities from local government officials and public trust levels in Parepare at the present time. Research investigators designed the survey to measure the mayor's social media behavior patterns and communication practices with citizens and governmental transparency and responsiveness ratings.

The study population consisted of active social media users from Parepare who maintained accounts on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter which also contained the Mayor of Parepare's presence. The researchers employed simple random sampling to pick their respondents from the existing social media users listing in the city. The survey included 500 participants as respondents. Researchers decided that 500 participants would offer convincing results and maintain the reliability of data while guaranteeing statistical significance in the findings. Adult residents who utilized social media platforms served as the survey's target respondents because they followed or interacted with the official social media pages of the mayor. A self-administered online questionnaire served for data collection and researchers distributed it using social media networks combined with email outreach.

Questions in the survey consisted of multiple-choice style along with Likert-scale rating formats and demographic questionnaire segments. Two primary variables served as the focus of measurement through the designed assessment items. The survey asked about how often posts appeared and what types of content were displayed (government programs updates and

citizen inquiry responses) along with ratings of communication interactivity and transparency from the mayor. The assessment of the mayor's leadership together with government transparency and accountability and responsiveness to citizen needs used statements presented to the respondents. Survey participants used a 5-point Likert scale where "Strongly Agree" was the highest agreement and "Strongly Disagree" was the lowest to evaluate each provided statement. A preliminary test of the survey instrument took place on a test group to confirm its clarity along with its reliability levels. The survey ran for three weeks after sending a reminder to participants one week into the distribution phase with the goal to enhance participant response.

The researchers analyzed the gathered data through both descriptive statistical and inferential statistical methods. The researchers utilized descriptive statistics to present both demographic and perceived social media and trust data through frequency distributions and percentages alongside means and standard deviations. The research determined the connection between social media usage by mayors and public trust through calculation of Pearson's correlation coefficient. The two variables' linear relationship pattern was measured using this statistical procedure. Multiple regression analysis served to evaluate the impact of social media usage on public trust by factoring out age, educational background, and political affiliation as possible influencing variables. Through the regression model researchers established the level of social media involvement from the mayor that resulted in public trust fluctuations.

Result and Discussion

Public opinion and citizen engagement through social media platforms has caused authorities to focus more on establishing effective government-citizen communication channels. The leaders of local government shift their attention to social media platforms to implement transparent communication while developing bonds with citizens for improving public trust. The mayor of Parepare holds social media as a vital strategic system to develop trust between citizens and their local government in South Sulawesi. Local leaders use social media to deliver government programs while resolving citizen issues so they can build a knowledgeable and involved populace through their direct public interaction. The research examines the mayor's social media activity while investigating its influence on local government trust levels among citizens by studying information frequency and content representation altogether with educational backgrounds as population variables. The research evaluates these relationship dynamics to enhance knowledge about digital governance especially in areas that lack social media implementation in political communication. The research investigates this knowledge gap in academic discourse about social media usage in local governance to analyze its utility for public institution trust-building.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	230	46%
Female	270	54%
Age Group		
18-25	100	20%
26-35	150	30%
36-45	120	24%
46-60	90	18%
60+	40	8%
Education Level		

High School	50	10%
Undergraduate	250	50%
Graduate and above	200	40%
Social Media Platform Used		
Facebook	300	60%
Instagram	150	30%
Twitter	50	10%

This table shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents, including their gender, age group, education level, and the social media platforms they use. The majority of respondents were female (54%) and in the age group of 26-35 (30%). Facebook was the most commonly used platform among participants (60%).

Table 2. Frequency of Social Media Usage by the Mayor of Parepare

Frequency of Social Media Usage	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Daily	180	36%
2-3 times a week	210	42%
Once a week	70	14%
Less than once a week	40	8%

This table illustrates the frequency with which the Mayor of Parepare used social media. The largest group of respondents (42%) reported that the mayor posted 2-3 times a week, while 36% indicated that the mayor posted daily. This suggests that social media activity by the mayor was relatively frequent.

Table 3. Types of Content Shared by the Mayor of Parepare

Type of Content	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Government Program Updates	250	50%
Public Engagement/Feedback	150	30%
Crisis Communication/Information	70	14%
Other (e.g., personal)	30	6%

This table presents the types of content shared by the mayor on social media. Half of the respondents (50%) noted that government program updates were the most common type of content, followed by public engagement and feedback (30%). Crisis communication was less frequent (14%).

Table 4. Public Trust in Government (Likert Scale)

Statement	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
The mayor's use of social media makes me trust the local government more.	3.85	0.92
Social media communication from the mayor is transparent and honest.	3.72	0.87
I believe the mayor responds to public concerns raised on social media.	3.91	0.81
Social media has increased my overall trust in local government.	3.80	0.90

The mayor's use of social media makes me feel more connected to local government.	3.75	0.85
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This table shows the respondents' perceptions of public trust in the government, as measured by a Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The mean scores indicate that the public generally agreed that the mayor's use of social media increased their trust in the local government, with the highest mean score being for the statement "I believe the mayor responds to public concerns raised on social media" (mean = 3.91).

Table 5. Correlation Between Social Media Usage and Public Trust in Government

Variable	Pearson Correlation (r)	p-value
Social Media Usage by the Mayor and Public Trust	0.68	0.0001

This table presents the correlation coefficient between social media usage by the mayor and public trust in government. The Pearson correlation of 0.68 indicates a moderate to strong positive relationship between the two variables, with a statistically significant p-value of 0.0001 (below the 0.05 threshold), suggesting that increased social media usage by the mayor is positively associated with greater public trust in the government.

Table 6. Multiple Regression Analysis Results

Predictor Variable	Beta Coefficient	t-value	p-value
Social Media Usage (Frequency)	0.42	4.38	0.0001
Respondent Age Group (36 and above)	0.10	1.90	0.057
Education Level (Undergraduate)	0.15	2.52	0.012
Political Affiliation (Non-partisan)	0.08	1.35	0.177

This table shows the results of a multiple regression analysis examining the impact of social media usage by the mayor on public trust, while controlling for age, education level, and political affiliation. The significant predictors of public trust were social media usage frequency (Beta = 0.42, p = 0.0001) and education level (Beta = 0.15, p = 0.012). Respondents with a higher level of education showed a stronger correlation with trust in government. Age group and political affiliation did not show a significant effect.

Table 7. Respondents' Perceptions of Social Media Impact on Government Transparency

Statement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Social media usage by the mayor increases government transparency.	320	64%
Social media does not affect my perception of government transparency.	150	30%
I believe that social media usage by the mayor is a way to conceal information.	30	6%

This table provides insights into respondents' perceptions of how social media affects the transparency of the government. The majority (64%) felt that social media usage by the mayor increased government transparency, while 30% believed it had no impact on their perception of transparency.

Research outcomes for this study match earlier findings that indicate social media usage by government officials builds better public trust. Social media posts made by the mayor in Parepare had a significant impact on public trust because most respondents experienced better connection to government and improved trust in local administration through his social media

presence. Research findings from Ojo (2022) support the connection between government leaders who use social media actively because this practice guarantees transparency while boosting civic engagement which ultimately increases public trust.

Study results validate how social media platforms serve governments to deliver transparent information to citizens effectively thus resolving public trust issues (Khan et al., 2021). Through his continuous social media posts on official government programs and public engagement initiatives the mayor seems to enhance transparency levels as social media functions as a key tool to improve government-to-citizen communication.

The research study uncovered unidentified areas in existing literature about how particular demographics including age and education background determine societal views toward government social media use. This study revealed that public trust in government through social media shows a positive association with educational background but age does not appear to influence trust decisions. Results from earlier research demonstrate that people with higher educational qualifications tend to believe government digital transparency initiatives more easily. Contrary to conventional expectations the research failed to uncover any direct relationship between political allegiance and public trust levels despite existing evidence demonstrating political views can distort government assessments through social media communication (Maheshwari & Kha, 2022). The political outlook of Parepare residents seems to have less influence on opinions regarding government transparency and trust compared to larger political areas.

The mayor dedicated half of his social media content to providing program updates (50%) and spent thirty percent of effort on community engagement. Previous studies indicate that governments achieving trust through transparency succeed by using social media both for information dissemination about their activities and citizen interaction. When the government distributes information about its programs the public learns about initiatives but also gets an opportunity for interactive communication that raises citizen satisfaction and trust. Public engagement reached 30% of the social media content which supports the established view that participatory governance represents an effective method to increase governmental.

Despite its crucial nature crisis communication took up just 14% of the content published by the public sector. Government communication strategies based on available literature demonstrate that crisis communication remains specific to emergencies and important events. According to Obi et al. (2024) research governments improve their credibility through timely and transparent crisis communication methods for uncertain periods. This study demonstrates that the Parepare mayor mainly uses social media for day-to-day governance activities instead of crisis management. The lack of crisis communication on social media by local governments appears to showcase an urgent need for platforms optimization because such platforms should function optimally when crises occur.

This research uncovered notable results regarding population demographic traits especially in the education sector. Research has shown that educational background fundamentally influences how people think about government communication together with their degree of trust. People holding higher educational degrees demonstrated stronger trust in government authorities when their mayors remained socially active online. Education helps people develop better information evaluation skills on social media which enables them to form trustful relationships with their sources of information. The research advances earlier conclusions about education functioning as the element that connects social media usage to public trust levels.

Research reveals Facebook continues to maintain its leading role as a government communication platform since it was detected as the primary platform used by 60% of the respondents. Facebook demonstrates effectiveness as a communication channel for South Sulawesi local governments because it lets them broadcast information broadly while encouraging public interaction. Governments must select their social media platforms wisely because their target audiences primarily use platforms such as Twitter and Instagram at minimal rates.

Several research deficiencies in the field of government communication and public trust receive attention through this study. The research examines social media practices by local government officials within Parepare which represents a small and less politically diverse governmental area. Empirical analysis from Parepare contributes to the existing understanding of social media usage in building public trust for local government through investigation of an area that lacks representation in studies.

This research enhances academic knowledge about how education determines public trust perceptions formed through social media usage. This research shows education level acts as an essential modifying variable between social media usage and public trust while past studies mainly reviewed general trust factors. Additional assessments of these findings should become research priorities for future studies.

Conclusion

The research demonstrates that public trust in local government significantly increases due to the Mayor of Parepare presence on social media which produces positive effects on public trust measurements. Government transparency and public official relations have increased through regular updates about governmental programs on social media platforms. The research verifies how educational levels directly impact public trust regarding government social media communication because educated individuals trust these platforms more. The study adds new understanding to social media governance research by examining small municipalities with reduced political affiliation as it aids both academic and practical local government objectives.

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