

## **Focus Group Based Evaluation of Social Media Usage in Indonesia's Digital Government<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

This article attempts to explain social media use within the relationship between the public and government of Indonesia in the era of digital government, as well as to consider public opinion on this matter. This research is based on the application of social media logic and the theory of dialogic communication and action. A qualitative descriptive approach was used to observe the general behavior of social media use by 34 ministries in Indonesia, including interviews with the resource persons within the ministries and focus group discussions with members of the public and observers. The research shows that the relationship between the public and government is accommodative and in line with social media logic. The public sector implemented social media as its platform, which has been further adopted by all ministries. The public sector cannot avoid social media, as it has become part of basic connectivity, even though the use of social media by the government still tends to be in the form of presenting public information. There are advantages and disadvantages of the usage of social media by the government. The advantages include allowing the government to be more open via social media so that communication between the government as the ruling organization and its public can be more fluent. Social media provides space to the public sector in the practice of digital government. Some disadvantages arise as logical consequences that usage of social media cannot be separated from the implementation of digital government. The adaptive behavior of social media by the government can be found by following social media logic as part of digital government

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implementation. Social media logic causes the government to follow the rules of social media. In this context, the strength and power of the country seems to be regulated by social media. Therefore, more studies on how social media is managed in the context of its usage as digital government support is needed.

*Keywords:* digital government, focus group, public relations, public communication, social media logic

Social media is widely used by individuals, organizations, private companies, and government. They use social media for different reasons that vary from each other. However, there are similar behaviors that determine social media use, which is the agreement to follow the terms and conditions stated by such social media. Those terms and conditions indicate the differences between private rooms and public rooms in social media (Motion et al., 2016). On the one hand, social media provides the guarantee of secrecy, freedom, and responsibility of content owned by the individual as a user of the social media platform, but on the other hand, the owner of the application has the authority to use the data of users in accordance with the terms and conditions agreed to by the users. Basically, social media provides the application-owner the ability to use data for any purpose. This condition is not fully understood by the public, because people tend to have a lower commitment toward personal data safety. In other words, social media involves both interpersonal communication and mass communication, which is mediated by the social media platform. Discussions about social media are not about Internet technology or digital technology but are more about how to use digital technology while using social media. Therefore, the communication process and interactions that happen on social media are a reflection of interaction within the society (Motion et al., 2016). Some professionals and academics in the field of communication, public relations, or organizational communication state that social media influence the human interaction on the level of individuals and the general public, and in particular have changed the communication practice and public interaction globally (Holtz, 2002; Solis & Breakenridge, 2009; Philips & Young, 2009; Brown, 2009; Scott & Jacka, 2011; Nepal et al., 2015; Khan, 2017).

Reaction toward the shifting of communication patterns and public interaction has happened in almost all parts of the public sector, starting with individuals, organizations, and continuing to government sectors. On the individual level, communication practice via social media has changed the communication pattern from the limited environment of family and close friends to a sharing pattern involving the public (Dijck, 2013). For both profit-making organizations and non-profits, social media offers a potential way to inform the public and promote goods, services, or advocacy (Holtz, 2002). It is also understood that an organization's ability to be well-known depends on its ability to use the Internet and to be part of Internet culture

(Philips & Young, 2009). Social media, then, is necessary to become an integral part of daily social public activity (Dijck & Poell, 2013; Khan, 2017).

In the era of social media, almost all government activities are actually open to the public and are delivered via social media. The government sector is one of the parties that faces the impact of the adoption of social media. Nepal et al., (2015), stated that the Arab Spring is an example of social media influencing the governmental sector. Social media is considered to cause a transformational effect in government activities; it is used for formal communication, from commercial marketing to government communication (Falk et al., 2017). In Indonesia, government sectors have increased public communication via social media. The Minister of Communication and Information encouraged the government public relations to change communication with the public from top-down communication to participative and empowering communication. Within government sectors, communication practices via social media strengthen the concept of digital government, where social media can support digitalization for several kinds of public service information. For more than 40 years the government sectors used communication and information technology for their management procedures, which started the practice of modern, online, and digital government (Veit & Huntgeburth, 2014). The digital government aspect is indicated by the use of online resources in supporting government activities such as making public regulations, citizen participation, provision of references and information, and service support and public complaints. There is some research on social media as the medium for government public relations. Graham (2014) describes how social media is used as public relations to promote a model of participation and transparency in the government. The research showed that social media is deemed as a useful communication tool for the state government of Oklahoma, USA. The implementation of social media can build good relations with citizens and improves communication practice. Research conducted by Haro-de-Rosario et al. (2018) on the use of media to improve public involvement showed that Facebook is preferred over Twitter as the tool to participate in Spanish local government. Such research contributed significantly to an understanding of how the involvement of citizens is influenced by the type of adopted social media. Munandar and Suherman's (2016) research on the governance of Ridwan Kamil and the Bandung local government shows that social

media can ease the bureaucracy of government, which was usually slow and complicated, to smooth the connection to the public so the public can be better understood by leaders and local government. Meanwhile research conducted by Juanda (2017) showed that in distributing information to the public, the public relations of the Aceh government used social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, to share government information. Information shared via social media can create a positive image of the government.

As mentioned before, research on social media use by government public relations stressed the role and function of social media to improve the government's image, reputation, and transparency. Social media was used for the distribution of government information and policies. Meanwhile, the research concerning the logic of social media is still rare in the research of communication science. Kalsnes et al. (2017) stated that in Norway, Facebook is more popular than Twitter from the perspective of political interaction between people and politicians. Therefore, the popularity of Facebook creates the possibility of new relationships between citizens and politicians without a mediator. Olsson and Eriksson (2016) stated that the pattern across all institutions indicates the signal of social media logic. Social media logic causes agencies to distribute their resources through social media, which involves a small number of agents as public informants, without considering the responsibility of the government to communicate with citizens more widely. Meanwhile, Haryanti and Kartikawangi (2017) conducted research on how social media logic applies in the implementation of social media usage by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, which stated that social media logic is implemented and communication with the public is conducted more fluently.

This research is aimed at studying this phenomenon from a different point of view, which is from the side of social media itself. Many aspects within social media that make it more attractive, useful, and almost unavoidable are in line with the logical theory of social media proposed by van Dijck and Poell (2013). According to van Dijck and Poell, to understand how social media reshapes social events, there is a logic to social media that must be taken into account. They formulated the four elements of social media logic, which are programmability, popularity, connectivity, and

datafication. These elements of social media logic act as rules of social media; the logic attracts users to follow these rules.

In addition, the use of social media to share information with the public needs to be evaluated by the public perspective. Public opinion is applied in this research through the use of the Theory of Dialogic Communication and Action (Kent, in Mahoney & Tang, 2017). This theory describes the importance of transactional communication to maintain relationships via social media. This shows the type of relational interaction in which ideas and opinions are negotiated via communication exchange on social media. Both theories used in this research make the argument that social media logic theory can explain the way governments use social media, whether it is appropriate or not. Meanwhile, the theory of dialogic communication and action can be used to explore public opinion as a form of evaluation from the target audience's perspective.

### **Methodology**

Using qualitative descriptive research, the social media accounts of 34 ministries were observed and analyzed based on social media logic theory to see the strategy and implementation of government social media.

Meanwhile, to assess public opinion, three focus groups with different kinds of expertise and experiences in the field of communication were selected to provide their academic and professional insight. The first group consisted of 10 academics in the field of communication from various universities, 5 male and 5 female, age 35-50. They were recruited by open invitation to members of the Indonesia Communication Higher Education Association. The second was 11 public relations professionals from different types of organizations in Jakarta, 5 male and 6 female, age 30-45. They were recruited by open invitation to members of Indonesia Public Relations Association. The third was 11 students studying communication from universities in Jakarta, 5 male and 6 female, age 18-21. They were recruited by calls via the Communication Students Association network. In leading the focus group discussions, the researcher used a list of questions that were generated from the concept of dialogic communication and action theory.

Therefore, the analysis on the strategy of social media usage included ethical principles, employee guidelines, a review of mix (the integration of social media usage), and interrelatedness. Meanwhile the interaction analysis with the public on social media includes reach, engagement, impressions, and responses/interactions.

## **Results**

The observation of the social media of 34 ministries showed that the account content of social media in the public sector indicates the mediatization process of the public sector or governmental sector. In this case, communication practices conducted by the government self-adjust to the format or design determined by the social media. The methods used by the governmental sector to communicate and to interact with the public via social media automatically involved social media logic.

Social media also provides space for governmental public relations to practice digital government easily and rapidly, so that social media becomes a mediatization tool for governmental sector activity. At present, the public can access much information on government activities via a website or government social media account, from the central government to local governments. Governmental social media acts like a big window that is opened for all people to see what is behind it. The characteristics of an interactive social media and the type of information flow, from many resources to many recipients (many to many), causes governmental public relations to become a way for the public to gain information. Public relations have changed to become information producers, a position that is the domain of journalists. It is known that the public does not actively participate in government activities directly, but within the principle of participation and sharing social media, they are involved online and fulfill their own need for information about the government, thanks to the transparency of government organizations. It is obvious that social media use is a response to public demand of the government.

### **Focus Group Evaluations**

Starting from the information about social media use by ministries, it is said that the public sector, particularly within the ministries in Indonesia, is open to and

wants to adopt social media as a public communication media. A ministry's public relations can take advantage and manage their presence on social media. Social media is becoming a media for a ministry's public relations to promote their institution, program, or leaders, and this development cannot be avoided. The nature of a public bureaucracy and solid institution doesn't make a ministry resistant to the development of communication practice and contemporary interaction of social media. It is said that a ministry's public relations in Indonesia is accommodative and in line with social media logic. However, some public opinion ought to be considered to improve quality by considering safety. Tables 1 and 2 present the result of the evaluation on government social media based on public opinion as expressed in focus group discussions.



**Table 1**

*Analysis of Strategy for Social Media Usage*

Strategy of Social Media Usage	Academics	PR Professionals	Communication Students (18 – 21 years)
Ethical principles	Unseen ethical concepts implemented in social media management. Less consistency about whether the message is intended for internal or external consumption.	A lot of followers but less interaction. Are they real followers or purchased?	Content in the videos is not edited.  The highlighted content is sometimes out of focus.  Are there any rules on ethics that should be implemented? Are there any guidelines on aesthetics?
Employee guidelines	How about guidance for management officer? If there is no trust and clear guidance to produce a message, it will be seen by the public. There is no interaction.	Social media management can't be delivered part-time. There is a certain unit to manage and to be monitored based on its task.  Some of them look professional but most of them are less than professional.	The uploaded information is not in a proper place and the admin rarely updates information, particularly on the website. Information for social media is not followed by its development and looks less open for the public from the perspective of how to respond to audience's comment.

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Strategy of Social Media Usage	Academics	PR Professionals	Communication Students (18 – 21 years)
Review of mix	If decided to use some social media, it is better to understand each characteristic which then should be followed by content synchronization. It looks like such matters are not unified yet.	Needs to understand type of content for each social media.  Can't leave one media because of higher trend of other.	Some of them didn't improve the usage of social media platform. It looks like they do not understand the use of some social media in line with its audience target. The usage of social media features is not optimum.
Review Interrelatedness	Understanding social media characteristics includes its audience so that it can adjust content and its performance for the intended audience. This one is not seen.	Consistency on content and how to correlate isn't clear yet.	Less interaction on how to divide activities and to answer questions using normative and short response. Some of them didn't mention the social media characteristics.

**Table 2**

*Interaction Analysis with Public in Social Media*

Analysis of interactions with public in social media	Academics	PR Professionals	Communication Students (18 – 21 years)
Reach	Seems like it doesn't have sociographic data needed to determine the reach. If the content is in accordance with public need, it should be aimed to share with the public across a wider range.	Reach for each media must be determined.	Less reach to the public.  Improper delivery of messages.
Engagements	Reach will determine engagement. Wider reach and good interaction will create engagement. Seems not to reach all. More followers but no engagement.	Less interaction, it is one way.	Less engagement. Not responsive. Engagement seems rigid. Seems like they don't understand how to use social media features to increase engagement.
Impressions	Its content is more suitable for internal organization. Information provided ought to be suitable to the public need in related social media.	Unclear objective so that the content doesn't reflect its objective.	There are rarely content updates on social media. Content and design is less attractive. Website layout causing difficulty for users. Integrated application isn't optimum.

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Analysis of interactions with public in social media	Academics	PR Professionals	Communication Students (18 – 21 years)
Responses/ Interactions	Seems no appropriate response and interaction, neither dialogue nor discussion.	The content is still in publication (one way). Late response or even none and if so, there is no answer	Answering questions normatively (rigid) or no answer at all.

### Discussion

Based on previous observations of formal websites of ministries in Indonesia done by Haryanti and Kartikawangi (2017), it is known that such ministries actively use social media and their own formal website. All ministries had Facebook accounts, but not all ministries had other social media accounts. All ministries already use social media as their primary communication media to conduct interaction with their public. Some ministries display a passive interactivity and some ministries showed more interactivity, which means that such government social media involved participation and sharing with its public to maintain a good relationship. The results showed that the ministries succeed in maintaining the uses of social media, the interaction with its public are increasing for some ministries. Therefore, the researcher agrees with the argument of previous researchers that the number of friends, followers, and content activity are signals of an organization that has managed to self-adjust to the social media logic (Kalsnes et al., 2017). Social media platforms have become one of the important informal communication media between the government and the public.

The social media of the Ministry for Finance and the Ministry for Education and Culture in 2017 were 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> in the competition for public relations media conducted by the Ministry for Communication and Information. The results of this research showed that nowadays those two ministries are very active in using four social media accounts, i.e., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram. In general,

those four social media accounts indicated active communication to the public via posts, which were continuously updated with the content dominated by the minister's activity and working program of each ministry.

Both ministries conducted mediatization of their main activities via social media. Schillemans (2012) states that government sectors can manage public services at all levels by mediatization. Some experts on media effect and sociologists studying public change have stated that media plays an important role for public information support. Based on the information above concerning terms and conditions of each social media, a similar thing happens, that is, the agreement accepted by the media users of the terms and conditions of social media to be used is also a process that must be followed by the government social media accounts. This condition puts government institutions, which are represented by government public relations, to be in a complicated position. Such conditions involve all parties in the process of communication and interaction. Governmental public relations face the rule of management on public relations, which is stated in the Regulation of Minister of PAN and RB Number 83-year 2012 concerning the Guidance of Social Media Usage of Governmental Institutions. The definition on implementation of e-Government is stated in President Instruction Number 3-year 2003, Law Number 19-year 2016 Concerning Information and Electronic Transaction and Law Number 14-year 2008 Concerning the Open Public Information. Government public relations also faces demand for good governance from the public, which can be seen on social media. Meanwhile, questions remain about the implementation of global digital government on the risks and challenges faced due to technological changes. The case of the hacking of government sites like [kominfo.go.id](http://kominfo.go.id) in 2016 and [polri.go.id](http://polri.go.id) in 2015 were examples of a lack of security for Indonesia government sites. Those cases happened because government institutions did less maintenance on their sites after its installation (Yusuf, 2016). The Indonesian government didn't have the Guidance of Cyber Safety Risk on Social Media Usage as does the Canadian government, which regulates matters on threats and risks of cyber social media, strategy mitigation for safety practices, and methods of safety for officers (Canadian Centre for Cyber Security, 2013). The regulation of Ministry for PAN Number 83-year 2012 Concerning the Government Institution Social Media Usage is limited as to how to plan, manage, and evaluate the usage of social media within government institutions.

However, government public relations cannot avoid the use and demands of social media. For example, the terms and conditions document can be considered as social media logic. The government sector must follow the terms of social media whenever it decides to use it. However, the presence of social media users in society indicates a problem that cannot be avoided by government public relations that conduct relationships with its public. This matters if the government neglects the risk that must be faced and responds to the demands of social media logic (Olsson & Eriksson, 2016).

This paper uses the concept of social media logic formulated by van Dijck and Poell, which states that social media logic is a process, principle, and practice by which the platform of social media processes information, news, communication, and social traffic (2013). Social media, with its attractiveness for the practice of public-government relations and implementation of digital government, carries the consequences of responsibility, including the interest of the government as a public sector with regards to image, reputation, and supremacy, public demand toward good governance, and the demands of social media logic as the mediation channel for its public relation activities. Lastly, some demands may gradually bring the change in the practice of communication between government public relations with its public. Communication in the era of conventional media between government and the public was one-way communication. Meanwhile in the digital era, the government is expected to facilitate two-way communication. As mentioned above, it is seen that conventional public relations practice, which often involves press releases via some mass media channel, tends to be one-way with postponed feedback. In the era of digital government, the press releases shift to be social media releases, which creates the possibility of sharing news more rapidly and getting feedback directly.

There are advantages and disadvantages to the use of social media by the government. The advantage of social media usage is that government can be more open via social media so that the communication between the government and its public can be more fluid. In addition, social media provides space to the public sector in the practice of digital government. The disadvantages arise as the logical consequences of the use of social media that cannot be separated from the

implementation of digital government. The adaptive behavior of social media use by the government can be found by following the social media logic as part of digital government implementation. The social media logic causes the government to follow the rules of social media. In this context, the strength and power of a country seems regulated by social media. Therefore, the study of the determinism of social media logic within the practice of digital government has become an important research topic to determine if the use of social media in the public sector will not be trapped by “what is social media and what can be done for public sector.” The study on this phenomenon can enrich the envisioning of the study of public relations toward social media beyond the use of application users.

### **Conclusion**

Whether users are aware or not, social media logic already has widespread influence in each public organization involved in it. Through social media, every person has the chance to be an information producer, by their use of social media communication at the regional and global level, including government agencies. However, it should be remembered that on social media, information control is handled by each party involved in the communication process, i.e., the application owner, application users, advertisement owners, and the public in general both as the audience or as participants (van Dijck & Poell, 2013; Motion et al., 2016). Online interactions among involved parties can trigger impacts, both positive and negative to the government. With this in mind, the usage of social media by the government needs particular management in its planning and implementation and proper evaluation.

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