

Strategic Public Communication in Urban Governance: A Study on Government–Citizen Interaction in Bekasi City

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi dinamika komunikasi publik antara pemerintah daerah Kota Bekasi dengan warganya, dengan fokus pada bagaimana strategi komunikasi memengaruhi kepercayaan publik, partisipasi, dan responsivitas layanan. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui wawancara dan analisis dokumen, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa meskipun platform digital seperti media sosial dan aplikasi layanan kota telah meningkatkan akses informasi, masih terdapat kesenjangan dalam kejelasan pesan, penargetan audiens, dan integrasi umpan balik. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman komunikasi pemerintah-warga yang efektif sebagai elemen penting dalam tata kelola perkotaan yang demokratis.

Kunci Kunci: komunikasi publik, tata kelola perkotaan, transparansi pemerintah, keterlibatan warga, Kota Bekasi

ABSTRACT

This research explores the dynamics of public communication between the local government of Bekasi City and its citizens, focusing on how communication strategies affect public trust, participation, and service responsiveness. Utilizing a qualitative approach through interviews and document analysis, the study finds that while digital platforms such as social media and city service applications have improved access to information, gaps remain in message clarity, audience targeting, and feedback integration. The research contributes to the understanding of effective government-citizen communication as a vital element in democratic urban governance.

Kunci Kunci : *public communication; urban governance; government transparency; citizen engagement; Bekasi City*

1. INTRODUCTION

Public communication is a central pillar in democratic governance, acting as the bridge between the state and society. In urban settings such as Bekasi City—a metropolitan satellite city of Jakarta—effective government communication is essential to manage complex service demands, diverse

citizen expectations, and rapid policy responses. Public communication, in this context, refers to the planned, strategic dissemination of information and interaction by government institutions aimed at informing, engaging, and responding to the public (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

Kota Bekasi, with a population of over 2.5 million residents (BPS, 2021), faces typical challenges of urban governance, including congestion, waste management, public health, and education services. These issues demand not only efficient policy but also transparent and interactive communication. The COVID-19 pandemic has further amplified the need for timely, clear, and trustworthy communication to maintain public order and safety.

Despite increased investment in digital communication—such as the Bekasi Smart City program, online complaint systems, and social media accounts—there are public concerns about the responsiveness and clarity of government messaging. Citizens often report slow replies, unclear procedures, or one-way information flow that undermines participation.

This study aims to examine how the local government of Bekasi communicates with its residents and the extent to which such communication strategies influence trust, participation, and service satisfaction. The research addresses three main questions: (1) What communication channels and strategies are used by the Bekasi City Government? (2) How do citizens perceive the effectiveness and transparency of these communications? (3) What challenges and improvements are needed to enhance public communication practices?

Theoretically, the study is informed by the Public Communication Model by Grunig and Hunt (1984), focusing on two-way symmetrical communication, and the concept of governance responsiveness (Pierre & Peters, 2000), which emphasizes accountability through dialogue and engagement. By focusing on Bekasi as a case study, this research contributes to broader discussions on local government innovation and citizen-centered communication in urban Indonesia

2. METHOD

This research employs a qualitative case study approach to explore the public communication practices of the Bekasi City Government. The choice of qualitative methodology allows for an in-depth understanding of communication processes, challenges, and perceptions from both institutional and citizen perspectives. Data collection was conducted through three primary techniques: semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and social media content analysis. Interviews were held with 12 key informants, including public relations officers from the Communication and Informatics Office (Diskominfo), staff from the Mayor's Office, and community members across several urban districts in Bekasi. These interviews aimed to capture institutional strategies and citizen experiences regarding communication effectiveness.

Documents reviewed include strategic communication plans, public announcements, press releases, official reports on Smart City initiatives, and complaint-handling procedures.

Additionally, data were gathered from the official social media accounts of the city government (Instagram, Twitter, Facebook), which were analyzed for frequency, tone, and interaction with followers.

The period of study focuses on activities between January and December 2021, ensuring the relevance of the data in post-pandemic recovery communication. Ethical clearance was obtained, and informed consent was ensured for all participants. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the research process. Data analysis was conducted thematically using the Miles and Huberman model (1994), which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Emerging themes were categorized under effectiveness, responsiveness, participation, clarity, and feedback mechanisms.

Triangulation was applied across methods and sources to enhance validity. For instance, interview data were cross-checked with actual posts and responses on social media platforms, as well as official communication materials. This strategy ensured a more holistic understanding of communication performance. This methodological design offers rich, contextual insights into the dynamics of public communication within urban governance, positioning the Bekasi City case as a reflective model for similar metropolitan governments across Indonesia.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION (12 PT)

3.1 Communication Channels and Institutional Strategy

The Bekasi City Government employs a variety of communication channels to interact with citizens, including traditional media (radio, banners), digital platforms (social media, website, and mobile apps), and face-to-face public forums such as Musrenbang and Kelurahan meetings. According to Diskominfo officials, Instagram and WhatsApp are the most used platforms for updates and feedback, particularly among younger residents. However, the city still relies on printed banners and loudspeaker announcements for reaching older or digitally disconnected citizens.

The communication strategy is embedded within the Smart City framework and the mayor's performance-based governance plan. Despite formal documents outlining transparency and participation principles, their implementation remains uneven across departments. Communication often follows a top-down pattern, where citizens are treated as passive recipients rather than engaged partners.

3.2 Citizen Perceptions on Communication Effectiveness

Interviews with residents indicate mixed perceptions. Many appreciate the faster dissemination of information through Instagram and the city website, particularly during COVID-19 and flood alerts. However, some citizens report confusion due to inconsistent updates across different platforms. For instance, information on school closures or aid distribution was sometimes delayed or contradictory.

Moreover, while online complaint channels such as "Lapor Bekasi" exist, respondents expressed

dissatisfaction with the feedback process. Complaints were often acknowledged but not followed up, reducing citizens' trust in the system. As one respondent noted, "We report through the app, but there is no real resolution. It feels like a formality."

3.3 Responsiveness and Interactivity

The city's responsiveness varies depending on the issue and platform. Social media monitoring staff respond promptly to general queries but are slower when handling complaints that require interdepartmental coordination. For instance, questions about road damage are forwarded to the Public Works Department, which may take days or weeks to act. This fragmented approach undermines the potential of digital communication as a two-way dialogue. Interviewees suggest the need for a centralized digital response unit or an integrated command center to streamline public feedback and accelerate resolution.

3.4 Barriers to Inclusive Communication

The study identified several barriers to effective and inclusive public communication. First, digital divide issues persist among low-income and elderly groups, who may lack access to smartphones or digital literacy. Second, government staff still perceive communication as information delivery rather than mutual engagement. Third, technical limitations, such as outdated websites or limited server capacity, affect accessibility. These challenges imply the need for capacity building, both in infrastructure and in changing bureaucratic mindsets. A communication culture based on empathy, responsiveness, and clarity

must be institutionalized at all levels of governance.

3.5 Toward Strategic Public Communication

Based on the findings, Bekasi City's public communication system exhibits potential but requires strategic refinement. Embracing two-way symmetrical communication means not only broadcasting policies but also listening to citizens, acknowledging their concerns, and co-creating solutions. Transparency is not just about disclosure, but also about ensuring information is understandable, accessible, and actionable.

In practical terms, this includes standardizing message formats, training staff in digital communication, expanding multilingual access, and integrating citizen feedback into decision-making. As urban populations grow and diversify, the ability of local governments to communicate effectively will become a cornerstone of legitimacy and policy success.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the critical role of strategic public communication in urban governance, particularly within the context of Bekasi City. Findings indicate that while the government has embraced various digital and traditional platforms to engage with citizens, significant gaps remain in message consistency, responsiveness, and inclusiveness. These issues impact the level of public trust, satisfaction, and willingness to participate in governance

The research affirms the relevance of the two-way symmetrical

communication model as a normative standard for effective public engagement. Efforts to improve communication must not only focus on expanding access to information but also on ensuring that feedback mechanisms are functional, inclusive, and integrated into decision-making processes.

Institutional challenges such as technical capacity, organizational culture, and interdepartmental coordination must be addressed to realize the full potential of citizen-centered communication. Building the competencies of communication officers, improving ICT infrastructure, and developing guidelines for crisis and routine communication will be key to enhancing government legitimacy and responsiveness.

Bekasi City offers an important case for learning and replication. As Indonesian cities continue to grow and

diversify, public communication must evolve from a tool of control to a medium of collaboration. By embracing transparency, empathy, and strategic dialogue, local governments can foster a more informed, engaged, and resilient urban society. Future research could explore comparative analyses between cities, examine communication during specific crisis events, or assess the long-term impact of strategic communication reforms on citizen behavior and policy compliance.

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