

Local Government's Weakness in Using Social Media as a Medium of Public Communication

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Abstract. Traffic jams which often happen in cities result in lack of spaces for pedestrians. Thus, building pedestrian areas becomes one of priorities in developmental program of city. In order to ensure the success of program, social media is used to communicate development and maintenance program of pedestrian areas to people. However, local government of Bekasi seemed failing to relay those messages to people. Thus the present research aims to analyze how Bekasi government used social media to relay development and maintenance news related to pedestrian areas in Bekasi. The present research used a descriptive qualitative method through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Data reduction and triangulation were conducted using Nvivo 12 software. The latter was used to perform data coding and form main categories using theories and concepts. The results show social media accounts such as Facebook and Instagram have been used to communicate their programs such as initial development of pedestrian areas, development process, and maintenance to people. However, their usage was not maximized as Bekasi' government was considered less responsive when answering questions regarding pedestrian areas. This led to a speculation that social media is only used as a 'smoke and screen' for government's events. The present research recommends Bekasi' government to commit in renewing their messages continually and answering questions quickly as people will think their government as more communicative and caring people when the responses are given quickly.

Keywords: Bekasi government; government communication; local government; pedestrian; public communication; social media.

1 Introduction

Based data given in *World Health Organization (WHO) Global status report on road safety* [1], mortality rates of traffic accidents, especially in countries with average gross domestic income

is 80%, low gross domestic income is 13% and high gross domestic income is 7%. These numbers can also be caused by relatively high population of vehicle owners in the countries with average gross domestic income which reached 59% of total population. This may lead to the rise of traffic jams and accidents as from 2000 to 2016 WHO noted 1, 2 million deaths caused by traffic accidents. As one of satellite cities of Jakarta, the population growth of Bekasi is increasing. Data from Statistics Indonesia in 2018 indicated the population growth from 2008 to 2017 is around 150.000 per year. In the end of 2017, the population of Bekasi reached 2.873.484. This number is predicted to get higher every year. The side effect of population growth is traffic jams. According to *tempo.co* [2], data from Indonesian Police One Roof System recorded vehicles in Bekasi reached 1.613.317 unit. In average, there are 10.862 units of new vehicles per month. Besides causing traffic jams, it may compromise the safety of pedestrians. Data from Bekasi Traffic Police indicated 485 traffic accidents in 2018. 49 incidents are related to pedestrians and killed two of them [3].

In regards of above points, Bekasi government has started to build its pedestrian areas since 2016. The development gets more crucial to support the development of Mass Rapid Transportation where one of its stations is located in Bekasi. One of communication forms of participative development is giving a room for people to communicate with the government in developing and conducting development program [4]. Przeybilovicz et al. asserted three characteristics of smart city . Those characteristics are governance, asset, management [5]. Porumbescu suggested that social media is more effective form of information dissemination to improve people's relationship with government than using e-government's website, a more common form of communication form to send detailed information. It is suggested by his study in 2012 towards 110 people in Seoul, South Korea. The results suggest that the use of website indicated negative impacts to the level of public satisfaction and perception. On the other hand, the use of social media impacts positively to the level of public satisfaction and perception [6].

Regarding the above points, one of communication strategies made by Bekasi government is using social media to relay the government program to public. In this digital era, social media seems to be effective to communicate government's programs to its people. Therefore, the present study aims to describe the use of social media by Bekasi government to communicate and explain their programs, especially ones related to pedestrian's development programs.

2 Method

The present study applied qualitative method by using virtual ethnography approach to obtain data. The method was applied to conduct a thorough checking of various cases which occurred naturally in social lives [7]. Virtual ethnography is a realistic ethnography in which the researchers objectively report a specific situation [8]. Regarding the above points, as an ethnographer, a researcher should conduct an observation and documentation of communication strategy of Bekasi government, especially ones which used social media to promote communication programs related to the development of pedestrian areas' infrastructure. In this regard, social media sites used by Bekasi government are Facebook, and Instagram. Analysis units of the present study are development messages of Bekasi government in their official social media' accounts as well as similar messages concerning other government agencies. In addition, interviews to key informants

in Bekasi government were used to validate data found in social media. Thus, the interviews were conducted to the Mayor of Bekasi, Vice Mayor of Bekasi, public relations of Bekasi, Head of Regional Road Offices and Environmental Resources of Bekasi. Analysis is carried out using data triangulation techniques which combine and clarify the data derived from interviews from informants, field observations, documentation and theories used. Data reduction and analysis are assisted with Nvivo 12 software. According to Bandur, Nvivo 12 is used to do coding to help coding data and form the main categories according to data sources [9].

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Social Media as a Channel for Government's Communication

Internet allows people to communicate with each other. This type of communication is called *computer-mediated communication* (CMC). It covers all forms of communication which use computer or other electronical devices which connect with internet such as e-mail, text messages, blog, social media, or else. Following are some characteristics of CMC; the sender is private with hidden identity, the identity is revealed when he/she wants to, receivers are almost limitless, a message can be taken by others or relayed verbatim to a third party or thousand parties, a broadcast depends on displayed text messages, photos, or videos [10]. Chun and Reyes considered the local government' use of social media as a sophisticated innovative move as well as transforming people's involvement in rootgrass campaign and activism by promoting good practice of democracy [11]. Sanders and Canel described local government's communication strategy through various perspectives; from local government to its people [12]. Government communication through *e-government* can promote high moral level and program which aimed to development purposes [13] (Bassey, 2016, p. 69).

Social media is one of mediums used by Bekasi government to communicate information related to a planning, a process, as well as an evaluation of particular development program. Its citizens can also quickly respond certain information through the government's social media account. According to Vice Mayor of Bekasi, TA, the use of internet through government' official website or social media exceed accelerates government's communication with its people. In order to manage its social media account, a rapid reaction unit (URC) was formed to specifically monitor the account as well as an application made by Bekasi government which called POT (Integrated Online Complaints). This unit will respond every complaint or suggestion made but Bekasi people. Bekasi Government also communicates the progress of development program through comments made by people in those applications. As one of district heads, TA has a specific account to communicate government's programs and respond every complaint made by people. Following is a comment from TA: "[Bekasi] government has its personal website or social media accounts. People can complain through POT and we can respond soon if the damage is not big. Just follow my IG account, we'll see if we can manage it soon," (TA, personal communication, February 12, 2019).

On the other hand, public relations of Bekasi, SR, 55 year old, said that the socialization of city's government, especially ones related to infrastructure of pedestrian area is also relayed through social media such as Instagram or Facebook. The head of Communication and

Information, Statistics, and Coding of Bekasi (DiskominfoBekasi), TM, said that in principal, any information, no matter how little or big should be informed to people. Thus, the use of social media really helps in the process of informing people. TM commented related to the use social media in socializing the development of Bekasi: “Mass media, online or print, is under the coordination of public relations. The public relations of Bekasi will facilitate every information channel because we want to provide information to everyone.” (TM, personal communication, October 1, 2018).

The statement of TM suggested a relationship among concerned government agencies. In this sense, each government agency has their roles. While DiskominfoBekasi manages the communication through social media, the public relations of Bekasi become a bridge between Bekasi government and mass media. Nevertheless, the public relations of Bekasi still have their official social media accounts to communicate Bekasi government’s programs to people.

3.2 The Illustration of the Development of Pedestrian Areas in Bekasi through Social Media

Chun and Reyes considered the local government’ use of social media as a sophisticated innovative move as well as transforming people’s involvement in rootgrass campaign and activism by promoting good practice of democracy. Social media focuses on building relationship among social actors, user identity, a conversation among social actors, sharing contents, social attendance (the ability to know whether other users can be accessed), reputation management and how far people can create groups. For example, a social network website is a type of social media which focused on social relationship among social actors whereas YouTube is one which focused on video sharing [14]. A study of Khan illustrated three main points of information deliverance; (1) *Information socialization*; (2) *Mass Collaboration*; and (3) *Social Transaction*. aBased on their survey, implementation conducted by the government should cover three scenarios; *standalone*, *nested* and *hybrid implementation*. Public who use and get connected with government’s website are its citizens, business people, and other government agencies [15]. Thus, the discussion in this section will be organized based on the points made by Khan. In regards of the development of pedestrian areas in Bekasi, the information socialization found in their Facebook’s official account showed a vital role of Bekasi government as a center of public information as well as a medium to inform people about the development of pedestrian areas. The concerned information is ranging from widening road and sidewalks to demolishing infrastructure around pedestrian areas to adjust with existing rules concerning the development process of pedestrian areas. In addition, their social media accounts shared the activities of Mayor of Bekasi when he monitored the development of pedestrian areas as well as the use of facilities there. Graphic 1 illustrates type of information posted by Bekasi government in their Facebook account from 2014 to 2018.

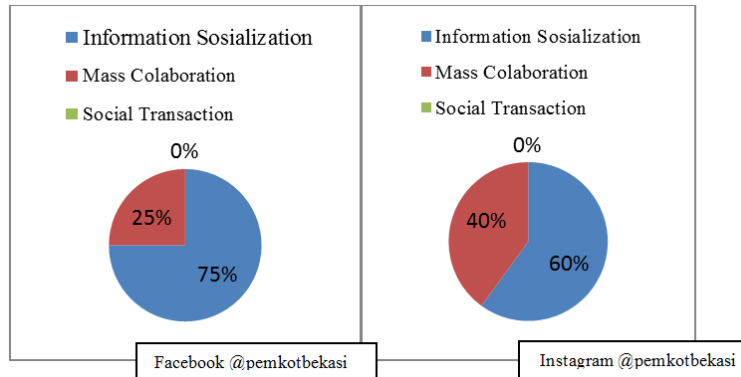


Fig 1. Facebook and Instagram Information

There are 21 references to the development of pedestrian areas of Bekasi government in their Facebook account, @pemkotbekasi. 16 references were made by the government while the rest were from its people. Many references related to pedestrian are made in order to apprehend the needs of pedestrians. The violation in pedestrian areas such as when a motorcyclist trespasses the pedestrian area has also been discussed in their social media account. People also ask for good and safe pedestrian areas, considering that the areas are prone of traffic jams and accidents. Few of pedestrian areas which have become the focus of their posts are ones in Jalan Ahmad Yani and Jalan KH Noer Ali. Both areas are located in major arterial roads and connect Bekasi with Jakarta. Both streets are the representation of the beauty of Bekasi. One of public relations officers of Bekasi, SR stated that pedestrian areas are made to ensure the comfort of pedestrians. Thus, optic fibers and other cables are located under the pedestrian areas. Following are the results of analysis of Facebook comments from Nvivo. The above analysis suggests the utilization of Facebook account of Bekasi government, @pemkotbekasi where several development messages related to lack of optimization of pedestrian areas are found. As claimed by Khan, social media is a participative medium which opens to feedback and participation [16]. The analysis towards the official accounts of Bekasi government in Facebook and Instagram indicate lack of continual posts which related to development of Bekasi as well as lack of interaction with Bekasi people. From 2014 to 2018, the official account of Bekasi government, @pemkotbekasi in Facebook only has eight posts related to the planning, process, and maintenance of pedestrian areas. In Instagram, the official account only has five posts related to same topic. Following graphic illustrates the detail.

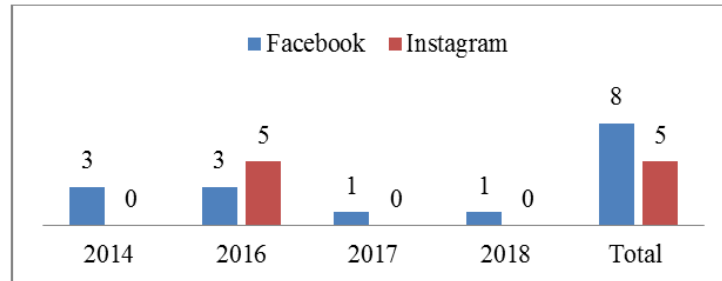


Fig 2. Number of Posts Related to the Development of Pedestrian Areas in Official Accounts of Bekasi Government, @pemkotbekasi

Graphic 2 suggests lack of effort from Bekasi government to provide information related the development of pedestrian areas. In four years, there are only eight posts in Facebook while Instagram only records five posts related to the development of pedestrian areas. Most posts were made before and after the development. After the development, there seems to be lack of continuous efforts made by Bekasi government in their social media to inform its people to maintain infrastructures in pedestrian areas.

4 Conclusion

The results of present research show that the use of social media by Bekasi government is not optimal. The conclusion is derived from the lack of posts in their social media accounts (Facebook and Instagram) related to on-going program of pedestrian areas' development. An active communication to its people is imperative as an evaluation for development program. Thus, the use of social media needs to be improved and sustained so that it can reach wider public.

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