Exploring the Use of Social Media as a Channel for Political Communication and Public Grievances by Local Governments

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the strategies employed by the Serang Regency Government in utilizing social media as both a channel for political communication and a platform for public grievances. A qualitative descriptive research method was applied, utilizing a case study approach focused on the Serang Regency Office of Communication, Informatics, Encryption, and Statistics (Diskominfosatik). Data were collected through digital observation of the official Instagram account @kabupaten.serang in-depth interviews with public communication managers and community representatives, and an analysis of local policy documentation. The findings indicate that social media is effectively used as an instrument for political communication, expanding the reach of policy dissemination, enhancing transparency regarding development information, and fostering a positive image of the local government. However, its utility as a channel for public grievances remains suboptimal and faces an ambivalent situation; digital interaction is still dominated by an asymmetrical, one-way (top-down) communication model. Furthermore, the resolution of citizen complaints particularly those concerning infrastructure and basic services encounters significant structural obstacles. These include strong sectoral ego among technical regional government agencies (OPD), limited human resource capacity for crisis communication management, and the absence of a cross-sectoral Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for integrating digital complaints. The study concludes that while cyber technology successfully bridges the communication gap, this must be balanced with an internal bureaucratic cultural reform fostering an agile and responsive environment—to achieve interactive and accountable local governance.

Keywords: Political Communication, Social Media, Public Grievances, Serang Regency, Digital Bureaucracy

Introduction

The development of information and communication technology (ICT) over the last two decades has fundamentally altered the global sociopolitical landscape. The advent of the internet, followed by the massive adoption of social media, has not only transformed patterns of personal interaction but has also redefined the relationship between the state and its citizens (Yanto et al., 2020). Governments can no longer rely on rigid, slow, and conventional communication models if they wish to remain relevant in the digital age. This phenomenon necessitates institutional adaptation, particularly at the local government level the frontline of

public service where authorities engage directly with the daily dynamics of society (Husain, 2011).

In the context of modern governance, effective political communication serves as a cornerstone for building legitimacy and public trust. Social media platforms such as Instagram, X (Twitter), and Facebook have emerged as a new public sphere, facilitating direct dialogue unencumbered by complex bureaucratic barriers (Suriadi, 2025). Through these digital platforms, local governments have a prime opportunity to disseminate policies, educate citizens, and cultivate a political image defined by transparency and accountability. Such interactive political communication has the potential to diminish public cynicism toward a bureaucracy often perceived as sluggish and elitist (Nurwitasari & Purike, 2026).

However, this shift in communication media has also significantly reshaped public expectations. Social media has democratized the flow of information, transforming citizens from mere consumers of information into prosumers both consumers and producers of content (Supriadi et al., 2026). Consequently, these digital channels have rapidly evolved into primary avenues for the public to voice grievances, criticisms, and complaints in real time. Citizens expect a prompt, transparent, and solution-oriented response from local governments regarding public issues ranging from damaged infrastructure to poor-quality administrative services (Minan et al., 2026).

Ironically, the reality on the ground reveals a significant gap between the public's digital expectations and the institutional response capacity of local governments. Many local governments use social media merely as a digital bulletin board or a tool for ceremonial propaganda (Goeyardi et al., 2026). When faced with a surge in public complaints and demands, these channels often become passive, or the responses provided are merely perfunctory and slow. This phenomenon indicates that the adoption of technology has not been matched by the development of an adaptive organizational culture within the bureaucracy (Yulianah, 2025).

These structural constraints are further exacerbated by a lack of operational standardization and limited human resource capacity within local government agencies. The management of government social media accounts is frequently assigned to staff who are already overburdened with other duties or who lack the necessary competence in crisis communication (Yulianah et al., 2024). Consequently, the handling of public complaints remains disconnected from the operational systems of the relevant technical departments; as a result, the resolution of citizens' issues often stagnates, remaining confined to the realm of social media rhetoric (Ramadhani & Hamdani, 2025).

Although previous research has explored the topics of gathering digital input and implementing e-government, most studies have focused on the central government level or have examined the use of social media solely as a tool for political image-building (Latuprissa, 2022). There is limited research that comprehensively explores the dual role of social media at the local government level namely, as an instrument for political communication and as a channel for crisis management regarding public grievances, integrated within the bureaucratic structure. This research gap serves as the basis for the importance of conducting this study (Hikmat, 2018).

Based on this background, this study aims to explore in depth how local governments utilize social media as a dual-purpose channel for political communication and the handling of public grievances. The research seeks to map out the communication strategies employed, the operational obstacles encountered, and an ideal model for integrating public complaints. The findings are essential for providing practical recommendations to improve the governance of digital communication within local government, ultimately fostering public services that are more inclusive, responsive, and democratic.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive case study method, focusing on the Serang Regency Government. This location was selected because Serang Regency is actively developing the digitalization of public services to bridge communication between its urban and rural areas (Rukin, 2019). The primary unit of analysis is the Serang Regency Office of Communication, Informatics, Encryption, and Statistics (Diskominfosatik), which serves as the central authority for the regency's digital communication. Primary data were collected through purposive sampling, involving in-depth interviews with the Head of the Public Communication Division at Diskominfosatik, administrators of official social media accounts, and Serang Regency residents who actively engage in the digital space. Meanwhile, secondary data were gathered through digital observation analyzing posts, interaction patterns, and comment sections on official social media accounts and regional complaint channels complemented by a documentary review of local regulations concerning public communication governance.

All collected data were systematically analyzed using an interactive qualitative analysis model, which encompasses data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During the reduction phase, the researcher applied coding to categorize data into two streams: political communication/policy dissemination and public grievances (such as issues regarding road

infrastructure, civil registration services, and healthcare facilities within Serang Regency). To ensure the authenticity and validity of the data, this study employs techniques of source triangulation and method triangulation (Satori & Komariah, 2009). This is achieved by cross-referencing data from interviews with Diskominfosatik officials against the reality of citizen interactions on social media, as well as the existing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for information management, thereby yielding objective and credible conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Utilization of Social Media as a Channel for Political Communication by the Serang Regency Government

The evolution of cyberspace has compelled local government institutions to reconstruct their patterns of political communication. The Serang Regency Government, through its Department of Communication, Informatics, Encryption, and Statistics (Diskominfosatik), has responded to this shift by transforming social media specifically Instagram (@kabupaten.serang) Facebook, and YouTube into the region's primary digital showcase. This move is not merely a matter of following technological trends; rather, it represents a structural adaptation aimed at bringing the apparatus of power closer to the public across 29 sub-districts. Social media functions here as a form of soft infrastructure, ensuring that the narrative of regional development remains accessible to constituents in real-time, unencumbered by rigid protocol-driven barriers.

Theoretically, this digital space serves as a formal channel for political communication, representing the voice of the executive branch. The local issues addressed in daily posts range from the dissemination of strategic policies and the work agendas of the Regent and Vice-Regent to the socialization of local regulations (perda). Through carefully curated content, the Serang Regency Government seeks to construct a positive political reality in the public eye. This aligns with the concept of political image branding, where visual elements such as brightly colored infographics, short cinematic videos, and persuasive captions are employed to shape public perception in line with the region's development vision.

Digital observation reveals that the structure of the messages produced by the @kabupaten.serang account is heavily dominated by official ceremonial activities and the personal representation of the political elite. The consistent presence of the regional head in the documentation of these activities points to a strong personalization of political communication. The local government utilizes this digital stage to highlight the success of its programs, including the receipt of national-level awards, the inauguration of infrastructure projects, and

the distribution of social assistance. This broadcasting pattern suggests that social media is still viewed as a one-way publicity tool, focused on the government's achievements rather than the collective needs or sentiments of the public.

Viewed through the lens of Jürgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere, the emergence of social media in Serang Regency initially offered a breath of fresh air for the democratization of communication at the local level. These digital platforms hold the potential to provide an egalitarian, inclusive, and accessible space for all citizens from urban areas like Kramatwatu to rural regions like Cinangka to participate in local political discourse. Social media has the capacity to erode the feudalistic hierarchies often embedded within bureaucratic institutions, allowing ordinary citizens to, in effect, share the same room with policymakers through digital interaction.

However, empirical reality shows that this potential for a democratic and deliberative public sphere has yet to fully materialize in Serang Regency. The patterns of political communication observed on these official accounts remain trapped in an outdated paradigm: a one-way, asymmetrical model. The local communications department (Diskominfosatik) acts as the dominant, sole producer of information, while citizens are relegated to the role of a passive audience, expected to receive messages without any opportunity for substantive debate. Interactions in the comments sections rarely evolve into healthy, two-way discussions regarding the substance of public policy or regional planning.

This imbalance is further exacerbated by the tendency of account administrators to be selective—or even dismissive of comments that are critical or that demand logical justification. When a post highlighting regional development successes is met with criticism regarding the stark realities on the ground, the local government's response is frequently either absent or limited to automated, template-based replies. This lack of egalitarian dialogue diminishes the function of social media originally designed as an interactive social networking medium reducing it to little more than a conventional mass medium in digital form, or simply an electronic bulletin board.

The situation in Serang Regency reflects a persistent digital divide within the process of political communication. Although local government social media accounts appear active, digital political participation is dominated by individuals residing in administrative centers or industrial zones areas characterized by stable internet access and sufficient political literacy. Conversely, the aspirations of residents in agrarian or coastal regions, which lack robust digital infrastructure, remain unrepresented in this online space. Consequently, the landscape of

political communication as perceived by policymakers through social media tends to be biased, failing to capture the full scope of the sociopolitical dynamics within Serang Regency.

Beyond serving as a tool for publicizing policies, social media in Serang Regency is also employed to mitigate negative sentiment and manage local political issues or crises. When social unrest or public protests arise regarding local policies, official accounts are frequently used to provide clarifications or counter-narratives aimed at stabilizing the situation. This strategy involves releasing digital press statements or infographics designed to correct information and dampen the potential for conflict. Such anticipatory measures demonstrate that the local government is acutely aware of the destructive power of digital public opinion specifically the phenomenon of virality which, if not managed promptly, could undermine the legitimacy of those in power within a matter of hours.

The use of social media as a channel for political communication in Serang Regency is also inextricably linked to electoral motives and the preservation of institutional power. In the era of digital democracy, public perception cultivated on social media correlates directly with the level of public satisfaction regarding the performance of incumbents. Therefore, the consistent promotion of success stories serves as a long-term political investment to maintain a stable base of support. Social media functions as a vital instrument for validating that the machinery of government is operating effectively, transparently, and with a focus on public welfare even when macroeconomic or social indicators in the real world might suggest otherwise.

From an institutional perspective, the integration of social media into the political communication structure of Serang Regency faces cultural obstacles specifically, resistance from some civil servants (ASN) who remain rooted in a conventional, closed bureaucratic culture. The process of drafting political content and policy information must navigate multiple layers of rigid bureaucratic approval, often causing the timeliness of the message to be lost. A fear of potential miscommunication leads to messages that are overly cautious and stiff, failing to foster a sense of engagement with local netizens, who generally prefer a more relaxed and egalitarian tone.

On the other hand, the efforts of the Serang Regency Communication, Informatics, Statistics, and Encryption Office (Diskominfosatik) to improve the aesthetic quality of their digital content deserve recognition. The visual transformation shifting from rigid, low-resolution documentation to modern infographics and trend-driven short-form videos (in the style of Reels or TikTok) demonstrates a willingness to adapt to the psychology of a contemporary audience. This aesthetic approach has been quite successful in capturing the

attention of the younger generation in Serang Regency, significantly increasing follower counts and expanding the reach of the local government's political messaging to first-time voters.

The new phase of social media utilization as a political communication channel by the Serang Regency Government presents an ambivalent performance. While these digital platforms have been effectively optimized for the rapid dissemination of development-related information, the enhancement of the government's political image, and the strengthening of administrative transparency, the failure to establish a deliberative, interactive, and inclusive form of political communication remains a shortcoming. Consequently, these channels have yet to function as a true bridge for digital democracy; instead, they serve merely as a modernized instrument for a top-down, command-style bureaucratic communication model.

Public Complaint Management and Bureaucratic Integration Obstacles

The transformation of social media evolving from a mere information channel into a platform for citizen complaints is an inevitable phenomenon in Serang Regency. Residents have organically repurposed the official account, @kabupaten.serang into a 24-hour digital complaint center. Virtually every post by the local government regardless of the topic is inundated with comments from citizens demanding improvements in public services. This reflects a phenomenon of bypassing the bureaucracy, where residents deliberately circumvent formal administrative channels perceived as overly convoluted in favor of social media, which offers direct access and high public visibility.

In terms of typology, the complaints submitted by the residents of Serang Regency primarily concern basic public services that directly affect the daily lives of the general population. Data analysis of these comments reveals that the most frequent grievances center on damaged roads and poor physical infrastructure, particularly along routes connecting suburban and rural districts. Furthermore, delays in the issuance of civil registration documents (such as electronic ID cards and family registration cards) at the sub-district level, as well as inadequate waste management systems and seasonal flooding in industrial areas, are recurring themes that appear extensively across the digital space.

Providing a space for these digital complaints theoretically signals a shift toward open government. However, the effectiveness of addressing these issues depends entirely on the response mechanisms operating behind the scenes. The Serang Regency Communication, Informatics, Statistics, and Encryption Office (Diskominfosatik) serves as the primary gatekeeper, receiving, filtering, and verifying every incoming complaint. This curation process is crucial for distinguishing between constructive criticism, genuine grievances requiring

immediate attention, and comments containing disinformation or hate speech—content that could undermine the stability of the local digital space.

The primary challenge in managing these complaints lies in response speed and cross-sectoral coordination. Once a complaint is verified by the Diskominfosatik (Communication, Informatics, Statistics, and Encryption Agency) administrative team, it must be routed to the relevant regional government agency (OPD) such as the Public Works and Spatial Planning Agency, the Environmental Agency, or the Population and Civil Registration Agency that holds the authority to take action. This is where structural obstacles arise. Because the routing process is still handled manually or only partially digitized, a significant time lag occurs between the moment a citizen submits a complaint and the point at which the responsible agency takes concrete action on the ground.

The sluggish response from these technical agencies stems from deep-seated sectoral ego and a rigid, conventional bureaucratic work culture. Many technical departments within the Serang Regency Government lack the critical awareness that complaints raised on social media carry the same level of urgency as formal official correspondence. Social media is often dismissed as merely a virtual realm that does not demand an immediate response. Consequently, digital complaint referrals frequently languish within the bureaucracy, only being addressed once an issue has already gone viral or triggered widespread public outrage among netizens.

Beyond issues of organizational culture, the absence of binding Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for integration creates a critical legal and operational gap. To date, there are no local regulations or directives from the Regent that explicitly mandate regional government agencies (OPDs) to provide a response or concrete action within a strict timeframe regarding complaints received via social media. In the absence of a legal framework that carries clear institutional sanctions, the commitment of these agencies to address citizen complaints on the @kabupatenserang account remains inconsistent, relying heavily on the good will or personal initiative of individual department heads.

This situation is further exacerbated by limitations in both the quantity and quality of human resources tasked with crisis communication management. The administrative team at the Serang Regency Communication, Informatics, Statistics, and Encryption Office (Diskominfosatik) faces hundreds of comments and direct messages daily, yet the number of personnel dedicated full-time to managing these interactions is minimal. These constraints often force administrators to rely on generic, repetitive, template-based responses such as, Thank you for your report; we will coordinate with the relevant department. Rather than providing reassurance, such responses frequently fuel digital frustration and cynicism among the public.

This capability gap gives rise to a communication risk known as a digital backlash. Citizens who feel their social media complaints are merely being acknowledged—without any clear path toward tangible action—often express their disappointment through increasingly aggressive narratives. Such digital dissatisfaction has the potential to escalate into a broader loss of confidence in the overall credibility of the Serang Regency Government. Consequently, a digital space originally intended to bolster the government's political image can backfire, generating widespread negative sentiment due to poor management of public complaints. In terms of technological infrastructure, the integration between social media and the local government's internal complaint management system is not yet automated. Complaints submitted via the @kabupatenserang social media account are still managed separately from the government's formal complaint application system (such as SP4N-LAPOR!). This lack of system integration leads to overlapping complaint data and inefficient tracking of the resolution status of issues raised by citizens. Consequently, the public cannot monitor whether a reported problem—such as a damaged road—has reached the planning or budgeting stage, or if it has simply been ignored.

Despite these internal obstacles, the use of social media for lodging complaints exerts a positive, latent influence by generating democratic social pressure. The open nature of the comment section on the @kabupatenserang Instagram account visible to thousands of netizens effectively creates a mechanism for horizontal oversight. Technical government agencies (OPD) that perform poorly or are slow to respond to complaints inevitably face public scrutiny and negative sentiment. In several instances, this digital pressure has proven effective in compelling the bureaucracy to act more swiftly than it would through formal administrative channels.

To address this disorganized approach to complaint management, the Serang Regency Government must urgently initiate the development of an Integrated Complaint Information Management System. This requires a digital dashboard platform capable of automatically aggregating complaints from social media using artificial intelligence, categorizing the issues, and routing them directly to the mobile devices of the heads of the relevant technical agencies. The system should incorporate real-time key performance indicators (KPIs) to monitor how long it takes for a department to respond to and resolve a citizen's complaint originating from the digital sphere.

Fundamentally, the current use of social media as a channel for public complaints in Serang Regency stands at a crossroads: caught between improved accessibility and the systemic unpreparedness of the bureaucracy. The success in shortening the communication gap with

citizens has yet to be matched by the modernization of the bureaucratic machinery at the operational level—the very apparatus tasked with executing solutions. Digital complaint management will never reach its full potential as long as local governments merely focus on polishing their outward-facing presence on social media, while failing to overhaul the rigid internal bureaucratic culture to become more agile, responsive, and oriented toward accountable public service.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the use of social media by the Serang Regency Government facilitated through the Department of Communication, Informatics, Statistics, and Encryption (Diskominfosatik) reflects an ambivalent situation in its digital governance. On one hand, digital platforms such as the official Instagram account @kabupatenserang have been effectively optimized as instruments for political communication and policy dissemination; they are aesthetically pleasing, modern, and successful in broadening the reach of information regarding regional development. On the other hand, the role of social media as a deliberative space and a channel for public grievances has yet to function optimally. The prevailing model of political communication remains dominated by an asymmetric, top-down, one-way approach, while a steady stream of public complaints concerning basic services and local infrastructure often stalls due to the systemic rigidity of the bureaucracy at the operational level.

The primary obstacle to effectively handling public grievances in this digital space is rooted in structural and institutional issues, rather than technological limitations. The lack of responsiveness in addressing citizen complaints stems from strong sectoral egoism among technical regional government agencies (OPD), a shortage of personnel and a lack of specialized competence in crisis communication management, and the absence of a binding legal framework, such as Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), to integrate complaint handling across different sectors. Consequently, the Serang Regency Government requires a reform of its internal bureaucratic culture and the establishment of an integrated complaint management system one directly linked to the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of each agency to transform the commitment to responsiveness from mere digital rhetoric into tangible, accountable public service action.

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