

The Impact of Engagement Interpretation on Efforts to Foster Social Media Engagement of The Bandung City Government, Indonesia

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Received: January 2, 2025

Accepted: March 4, 2025

Online Published: March 17, 2025

doi:10.11114/smc.v13i2.7438

URL: <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v13i2.7438>

Abstract

Public engagement with the social media managed by the Bandung City Government remains suboptimal, with low average scores on Instagram and Twitter (X). This situation is attributed to the misinterpretation of engagement by the administrators of the city's social media platforms. This study analyzes how social media administrators interpret engagement and how that interpretation influences strategies to foster meaningful engagement. Using a case study approach, the research gathers data from interviews, observations, document analysis, and quantitative content analysis. The research findings indicate that the interpretation of engagement and an excessive focus on likes has led to a lack of deeper public interaction. Therefore, a shift in approach toward more dialogical two-way communication is necessary.

Keywords: engagement, social media, two-way communication, Bandung City Government, quality of interaction

1. Introduction

Social media has emerged as a crucial communication tool for local governments in their interactions with the public. In Indonesia, the Bandung City Government (Pemkot Bandung) is among the entities that actively employ social media as a communication channel, primarily utilizing Instagram and Twitter (X) (Atnan & Abrar, 2023). Nevertheless, notwithstanding more than a decade of engagement on these platforms, the Bandung City Government has struggled to foster meaningful engagement with its constituents. Data from 2022 reveals that the average engagement score on Instagram was only 21.2%, while on Twitter (X), it was even lower at 0.03%. These figures suggest that the Bandung City Government's initiatives to enhance public engagement have not been effective (Atnan et al., 2024).

The subpar engagement quality is demonstrated by the little public interaction with the Bandung City Government's social media pages. For instance, only 0.1% of the total 1.04 million accounts reached on Instagram actively commented throughout 2022. A similar situation occurred on Twitter (X), where merely 0.05% of the 2.6 million accounts engaged in commenting during the same year. These figures indicate that most of the public is either disinterested or unmotivated to engage further with the content presented by the Bandung City Government (Atnan et al., 2024).

The Bandung City Government has formed a specialized team overseeing social media initiatives. Comprising around 10 members, this team functions under the Bandung City Department of Communication and Information. In principle, the expertise and establishment of this dedicated team should enhance engagement levels. However, data reveal that more than ten years of experience and the team's existence have not been adequate to cultivate meaningful engagement. The observed low engagement rates may stem from additional factors not adequately addressed in the management strategy.

Numerous studies show that a number of factors affect how well people interact on local government social media sites. Research by Bonsón et al. (2017) in Western Europe and Bonsón et al. (2019) in Andalusia indicates that content quality significantly impacts public engagement levels (Bonsón et al., 2017, 2019). A similar study in Indonesia by Santoso et al. (2020) also highlights the importance of content quality in capturing public attention. In addition to content-related factors, interaction is also deemed crucial (Santoso et al., 2020). Research by Gálvez-Rodríguez et al. (2018) in Latin America, Rexhepi et al. (2021) in Kosovo, Alam et al. (2022) in New Zealand, and Haro-de-Rosario et al. (2018) in Spain all affirm that active interaction from social media administrators significantly enhances engagement (Alam et al., 2022; Gálvez-Rodríguez et al., 2018; Haro-de-Rosario et al., 2018; Rexhepi et al., 2021).

However, additional factors have not been extensively researched but have the potential to influence engagement, specifically how management and social media administrators interpret engagement. Is engagement understood solely in terms of the number of likes, or does it encompass more meaningful interactions, such as active participation through comments and discussions? This perspective is critical, as it can significantly affect the strategies employed by social media administrators to cultivate higher-quality engagement. If administrators focus solely on surface metrics, the resulting engagement will likely be superficial.

This study focuses on a thorough analysis of how management and administrators' understanding of engagement affects their initiatives to promote quality engagement in the Bandung City Government's social media channels. Utilizing a case study approach, the research explores the nuances of how social media management and administrators conceptualize engagement and how this understanding influences their communication strategies. The study seeks to offer novel insights for local government social media administrators concerning the significance of a profound understanding of engagement to foster meaningful interactions with the public.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *Engagement on Social Media Within the Context of Organizational Communication*

Social media is a significant facilitator of citizen participation in public decision-making processes conducted by local governments (Toker, 2017). These platforms allow residents to engage in discussions concerning emerging local issues (Bonsón et al., 2019). The accessibility and large user base of social media platforms make them effective instruments for promoting online participation (Ainin et al., 2020; Chugh et al., 2019; Mostafa, 2020). This setting helps local governments increase public involvement in social and political issues (Haro-de-Rosario et al., 2018).

Public engagement on social media is vital for local governments, as it can enhance public participation, increase transparency, and promote interaction with the community (Graham, 2014; Park et al., 2015). Additionally, social media has the potential to fortify democratic processes and improve governmental accountability (Romero, 2016). In a broader sense, engagement is a psychological state in which individuals feel at ease interacting and establishing relationships with others (Johnston, 2023).

In the digital context, engagement occurs when individuals purposefully participate in interactions and communications on digital platforms, such as social media (Johnston, 2023). Actions such as liking, commenting, and sharing content reflect varying levels of engagement (Yoon et al., 2018). Low levels of engagement are characterized by mere likes or comments, whereas high levels of engagement involve more active collaboration and the sharing of information (Johnston & Taylor, 2018).

2.2 *The Interpretation of Engagement by Social Media Administrators*

In the digital context, engagement refers to the state in which individuals interact and influence one another on digital platforms with specific intent (Johnston, 2023). Social media engagement is typically defined by liking, commenting, and sharing content (Yoon et al., 2018). According to Johnston and Taylor (2018), more active forms of interaction and collaboration, such as information sharing, indicate high-quality engagement (Johnston & Taylor, 2018). Social media has emerged as a potential avenue for enhancing public participation in governmental processes, addressing the historically low levels of civic involvement in political affairs (Castells, 2017; Dahlgren, 2009).

Social media platforms facilitate rapid and efficient civic engagement (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014). Research demonstrates a strong correlation between social media use and political participation, with more active users being more likely to engage in civic and political activities (Chung & Shim, 2020). Moreover, social media fosters inclusive and meaningful civic participation at a low cost, effectively removing barriers between content producers and consumers (Tai et al., 2020; Wachhaus, 2017). These platforms are also instrumental in mobilizing underrepresented groups to engage with governmental entities, ensuring that feedback better reflects the interests of the diverse citizenry (Lee & Kim, 2018).

Van Zyl (2009) identifies three key criteria for citizen engagement via social media: the support of social networking, the provision of mechanisms for feedback, and the facilitation of multiple modes of communication (Van Zyl, 2009). Social media enables governments to encourage democratic participation in decision-making processes. It also promotes collaboration between citizens and governments in providing feedback for public service improvement while fostering innovation and offering solutions to governance challenges (Bertot et al., 2012).

2.3 *Engagement Strategies from a Theoretical Perspective*

This study employs three theories to understand the relationship between how engagement is conceptualized by administrators and efforts to create high-quality engagement. The first is Impression Management Theory. Introduced by Erving Goffman (2016), this theory highlights the importance of how individuals or organizations control the

impressions they convey to the public (Goffman, 2016). In social media, administrators who interpret engagement as maintaining a positive image are likelier to use impression management strategies to build favourable public perceptions (Kang, 2014).

The second theory is the Social Construction of Reality, developed by Berger and Luckmann (1966), which posits that social reality is constructed through social interactions. In public organizations, how engagement is conceptualized can shape how the organization communicates with its audience. When engagement is understood as dialogue and participation, the strategies are more likely to be interactive and collaborative (Light et al., 1967).

The third theory is the Dialogic Communication Theory. Kent and Taylor (2002) argue that dialogic communication is key to building high-quality engagement. This approach requires organizations to listen, respond, and involve the public in meaningful conversations. The theory suggests that organizations adopting a dialogic approach are more successful in fostering high-quality engagement than those focusing solely on one-way information dissemination (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

2.4 Empirical Research on Governmental Social Media Engagement

Various scholars across countries have researched engagement in local governments' social media platforms. Terms such as citizen engagement, public engagement, and civic engagement are frequently employed to characterize the relationship between citizens and official government accounts. Studies by Bonsón et al. (2017) in Western Europe and Santoso et al. (2020) in Indonesia indicate that citizen engagement remains low due to content inadequately addressing public needs. Moreover, the content presented in photographs and videos effectively elicits citizen involvement (Bonsón et al., 2017; Santoso et al., 2020).

Several studies advocate for the implementation of interactive dialogue strategies to enhance engagement. Research by Gálvez-Rodríguez et al. (2018) in Latin America and Purwadi et al. (2021) in Indonesia demonstrates that dialogic strategies foster higher levels of citizen involvement (Gálvez-Rodríguez et al., 2018; Purwadi et al., 2021). Furthermore, Rexhepi et al. (2021) in Kosovo and Alam et al. (2022) in New Zealand emphasize the importance of fostering intensive dialogue between social media administrators and citizens (Alam et al., 2022; Rexhepi et al., 2021). Additional research underscores the significance of transparency and content control in enhancing citizen engagement (Evans et al., 2018; Haro-de-Rosario et al., 2018).

Overall, while numerous studies focus on content, interaction, and dialogic strategies, managing government social media requires alternative approaches. Although the City of Bandung has implemented several strategies, the outcomes have not resulted in high-quality engagement. Therefore, an analysis of additional factors that could augment citizen involvement in government social media is warranted. One such factor to be explored in this study is the concept of meaning-making.

3. Method

This study used a case study methodology to analyze how the administrators and social media managers of the Bandung City Government perceive public participation. This methodological choice is justified by its capacity to provide profound insights into how these conceptualizations impact their strategies for promoting high-quality engagement with citizens. By gathering detailed and comprehensive data, this research aims to address its critical questions with precision and validity.

According to Yin (2018), the case study approach is one effective method for acquiring in-depth data concerning a specific case. This methodology is instrumental in elucidating the underlying factors associated with the phenomena under investigation (Yin, 2018). In the present study, data were systematically gathered through interviews, observations, and document analysis, thereby facilitating the acquisition of comprehensive information.

Two distinct groups of informants—principal informants and auxiliary informants—were interviewed. The principal informants in this study included administrators and social media managers from the Bandung City Government's Department of Communication and Informatics. These individuals were selected based on their substantive involvement in the planning, implementing, and evaluating social media management strategies. Conversely, the auxiliary informants were drawn from the Indonesian Air Force (TNI Angkatan Udara Republik Indonesia, or TNI AU RI), which was selected due to its exemplary social media management practices that have earned recognition from the Ministry of Communication and Informatics (see Table 2).

In addition to the TNI AU RI, the auxiliary informants included actively engaged netizens. The researcher employed purposive sampling to select three active netizens from Instagram and three from Twitter (X). The selection criterion emphasized individuals exhibiting significant interaction and a strong awareness of the content shared via the official social media channels of the Bandung City Government. The insights provided by these netizens are critical for understanding the state of engagement from their unique perspectives.

Table 1. Compilation of principal informants and auxiliary informants

ID	Principal informants	ID	Auxiliary informants
A.1	Head of the communication and information agency of Bandung City	B.1	Social media coordinator, Indonesian Air Force
A.2	Head of Information Dissemination Division	B.2	Netizen Instagram 1
A.3	Head of public information openness strengthening section	B.3	Netizen Instagram 2
A.4	Social media staff 1	B.4	Netizen Instagram 3
A.5	Social media staff 2	B.5	Netizen Twitter (X) 1
A.6	Social media staff 3	B.6	Netizen Twitter (X) 2
		B.7	Netizen Twitter (X) 3

Source: Processed by the Researcher, 2024

Observations were conducted on the social media management team, concentrating on their activities during content planning, strategic discussions, and public interactions on various social media platforms. This observational methodology provided a nuanced understanding of the dynamics and strategies employed by the team to cultivate engagement. Moreover, document analysis constituted a pivotal component of this research. The document analyzed is the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) created by the Public Relations Office of Bandung City, which outlines the fundamental processes regulating social media management within the Bandung City Government. The SOP regulates multiple facets, including content sourcing, content production, management approval processes, and posting protocols.

This study employed a quantitative content analysis method to assess engagement levels on the official Instagram and Twitter (X) accounts of the Bandung City Government. Data were collected by scrutinizing the content and interactions on both social media platforms from January 2022 to December 2022. This temporal framework was selected because, within the preceding five years (2019-2023), the highest volume of posting activity was recorded in 2022; nevertheless, netizen interactions, encompassing inquiries and comments, remained markedly low.

The data procured through the case study approach were subjected to selection, presentation, and interpretation processes. Data from interviews, observations, and documents were categorized into three principal themes: the conceptualization of engagement, the significance of engagement, and the implications of this conceptualization for efforts to foster engagement. Subsequently, the data were presented in a format that is both accessible and conducive to further analysis employing relevant theories and concepts.

This research utilized the Intelligence Socio Analytics (ISA) program for quantitative content analysis. ISA was employed to assess the degree of participation exhibited on the official social media platforms of the Bandung City Government. Key indicators included the number of accounts that liked and commented on the posted content. Additionally, ISA enabled the researcher to assess the average number of accounts that shared content from the official social media accounts of the Bandung City Government with their networks.

4. Results

4.1 The Interpretation of Engagement by Management and Social Media Administrators of the Bandung City Government

The Bandung City Government's social media profiles are administered by the Department of Communication and Informatics (Dinas Komunikasi dan Informatika, henceforth referred to as Diskominfo). Although the operational framework for social media utilization within the Bandung City Government is governed solely by Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), without the support of any local-level regulations, Diskominfo strategically positions social media as a vital communication medium. Within the institutional structure, Diskominfo delegates the responsibility of social media management to the Public Information Disclosure Strengthening Section within the Information Dissemination Division. This management role is an additional duty and involves allocating two civil service personnel. Such an arrangement signifies a commitment to enhancing the efficacy of social media as a mechanism for disseminating information to the public.

Integrating social media management and optimization as a public communication tool necessitates that Diskominfo rigorously attends to the dimensions of engagement. The management of Diskominfo, in conjunction with the social media administration team, regards engagement as a critical performance indicator for their social media management initiatives. Adopting engagement as a benchmark, they define and conceptualize its parameters operationally. The diverse backgrounds and experiences of the management and the staff members involved in social media management may engender varied interpretations of engagement from their distinct perspectives. Furthermore, as of today, no established

guidelines for social media management at the municipal level in Bandung can serve as a standardized reference.

For the Head of the Department of Communication and Informatics (Kadiskominfo) of Bandung City, engagement signifies a scenario wherein many citizens are cognizant of the programs initiated by the city government. The content shared on the Bandung City Government's social media platforms greatly enhances people's understanding of past achievements and forthcoming efforts (Interview findings, informant A.1). The motivation to consistently monitor updates on the city government's social media channels reflects a tangible level of public engagement. Consequently, the challenge facing the Bandung City Government, particularly Diskominfo, lies in producing content that effectively stimulates public curiosity and fosters a sustained desire for information regarding updates disseminated via social media. Moreover, for the Kadiskominfo of Bandung City, the most favourable outcome of engagement is characterized by increased community participation in city government programs, including a demonstrated propensity for citizens to actively provide constructive feedback (Interview findings, informant A.1).

The Head of the Information Dissemination Division, who holds a structurally subordinate position relative to the Kadiskominfo of Bandung City, articulates a unique perspective on engagement. For him, the volume of community members who express approval through likes on content shared by the city government on social media is a significant indicator of public engagement. The act of liking by the public suggests that the posted content resonates positively with the audience. However, he concedes that ideal engagement extends beyond mere likes and encompasses the establishment of meaningful interactions between citizens and the government. Such interactions indicate a deeper level of engagement (Interview findings, informant A.2).

At the management level, for instance, the Head of the Public Information Disclosure Strengthening Section shares a perspective analogous to that of the Head of the Information Dissemination Division. Engagement is conceptualized as an indicator signifying that public communication via social media content has captured the community's attention. This attention may manifest as mere observation without further action; however, it can also take the form of appreciation, as evidenced by likes. More critically, engagement is deemed substantial when citizens comment and interact with the city government through social media administrators (Interview findings, informant A.3).

At the technical level, members of the social media management team contend that engagement refers to the effective dissemination of the content produced, complemented by feedback from the audience. When the Bandung City Government's social media profiles effectively reach the public, the technical team deems them active. They emphasize engagement primarily in content reach; if the content created and posted attains a broad audience, they perceive it as meeting the criteria for engagement (Interview findings, informants A.4, A.5, and A.6).

The technical social media management team of the Bandung City Government and Diskominfo's management have different perspectives on how they engage. The differences predominantly lie in their areas of emphasis. For example, the Head of the Department of Communication and Informatics defines engagement primarily in relation to public awareness. In contrast, the Head of the Information Dissemination Division articulates engagement within the context of the number of likes received. At the same time, the Head of the Public Information Disclosure Strengthening Section correlates engagement with the extent of public responses through comments. Meanwhile, for the technical staff, the measure of engagement is fundamentally based on content reach.

Likes serve as a visible way for the Bandung City Government's social media representatives to support the content they post. A like is indicated by selecting the love symbol on platforms like Instagram and Twitter (X). Likes represent a spontaneous and rapid expression of public sentiment, consciously enacted in response to content that captures their interest, impresses them, or entertains them. For the Bandung City Government, likes constitute a component of the engagement indicators anticipated for each content they publish.

On the other hand, the technical management team and Diskominfo management have both emphasized that leaving comments on content serves as a gauge of public engagement with the Bandung City Government's social media accounts. Commenting is often executed spontaneously or through a reflective process, occasionally following contemplation. Spontaneous comments typically pertain to lighter content, such as topics related to tourism, culinary experiences, and entertainment activities. In contrast, more serious comments are generally directed toward content concerning public services.

Engagement, at its core, transcends mere quantity. As acknowledged by both the management of Diskominfo and the technical, social media management team, engagement extends beyond the mere count of likes or interactions; it must also possess qualitative dimensions. From their perspective, engagement is considered high quality when the public experiences a sense of interest and connection to the Bandung City Government through the presented content. Despite this emerging understanding within Diskominfo that leans toward high-quality engagement, nearly all informants—including department heads, division heads, section heads, and operational staff—indicate that engagement's primary measure or target remains the number of likes.

Operationally, the prevailing understanding of engagement is heavily weighted toward likes. Thus, the target engagement pursued primarily revolves around likes. If the presented content generates a significant number of likes, their efforts in social media management are deemed successful. They cannot ensure that their social media management activities will achieve high-quality engagement. This mindset significantly impacts the strategies they employ to cultivate engagement. Generally, their efforts are predominantly focused on designing and producing content, with relatively less emphasis on developing interactive strategies.

4.2 The Significance of High-Quality Engagement on Social Media

High levels of involvement on the Bandung City Government's social media accounts are crucial, according to the Department of Communication and Informatics (Diskominfo), particularly the Department Head. In management meetings and weekly evaluations, the achievement of engagement metrics has emerged as a central focal point. From January to March 2022, the Head of the Department, the Head of the Public Information Dissemination Division, and the Head of the Public Information Disclosure Strengthening Section consistently attended weekly evaluation meetings, maintaining their presence throughout these three months. Although their attendance became less regular from April 2022 until the end of the year, they continued to participate at least once a month, consistently prioritizing discussions concerning engagement metrics (Observation findings 1).

The gravity with which Diskominfo's management addresses the engagement issue is further exemplified by the Head of Diskominfo's directive to conduct weekly evaluations. These evaluations typically occur every Friday with agenda-setting activities (Observation Findings 2). The evaluative materials are derived from weekly reports from the technical team responsible for social media management. These reports analyze various metrics, including content reach, the most liked posts, the most appreciated reels, the highest-reaching Instagram stories, and the top three tweets mentioning Bandung City (Interview findings, informant A.3). All analyzed dimensions relate to engagement indicators, culminating in a summary score for engagement achievement, which constitutes a primary focus for management (Interview findings, informant A.4).

The commitment to the importance of engagement is not confined to the Head of Diskominfo; it resonates throughout the organization at various levels. The Head of the Public Information Dissemination Division analogizes engagement to the suitability of a dish: if a dish is well-received, it signifies that it meets the audience's needs. Engagement, therefore, is perceived as aligning the disseminated information with the public's requirements. The success of the content presented on social media can be evaluated, in part, by its level of engagement. High engagement indicates that the content has resonated with the public, a resonance critical for facilitating the Bandung City Government's efforts to convey key messages regarding services, programs, and the performance achievements of the city government (Interview findings, informant A.2).

The perception of the importance of engagement among management aligns with the views of the social media management staff. One staff member interviewed indicated that high engagement levels enable the city government to receive valuable feedback or evaluations from the public regarding the presented content. Such feedback assists the social media team in crafting more compelling content for subsequent posts. Furthermore, engagement indicates the impact of disseminated content; a favourable level of engagement suggests that the content has garnered public attention and provided tangible value to the community (Interview findings, informant A.4).

The practices observed in various governmental institutions, such as the Indonesian Air Force (TNI AU), illustrate management's robust commitment to public engagement on social media. The Chief of Staff of the Indonesian Air Force (KASAU) exemplifies this commitment through meticulous attention to the content disseminated on the official TNI AU accounts. According to interview findings, KASAU checks the social media accounts approximately four times daily, often while in transit. This vigilance underscores the recognition that information is a critical component of military operations, with social media serving as a primary medium for supporting information dissemination (Interview findings, informant B.1).

The emphasis on the significance of engagement, as exhibited by the TNI AU's top management, profoundly influences the dedication of the social media management team within the TNI AU's Public Information Division. This dedication is reflected in establishing guidelines, organizational support, resources, and legal frameworks. Interview findings suggest that management policies encourage team members to work diligently to produce compelling content that meets public needs. The team engages in meticulous content planning, conducting thorough audience analysis to identify themes relevant to netizens. Content is developed as creatively as possible, with efforts to mitigate the rigid image typically associated with military communications by adopting a more relaxed, entertaining, and humorous tone (Interview findings, informant B.1).

Despite the substantial differences in bureaucratic culture between the Bandung City Government and the TNI AU, the approach to social media management, particularly the management mindset, could be effectively adopted. This

mindset pertains to strategic orientation rather than mere operational methodologies. The Bandung City Government is vested in cultivating a positive public image, significantly influencing public reception of its programs. A favourable public perception enhances the government's capacity to engage citizens in initiatives aimed at progress. Conversely, a negative public image undermines the government's ability to mobilize citizens toward advancement. This image can be cultivated through strategic communication that emphasizes the importance of information. The Bandung City Government is thus urged not only to acquire information but also to manage it effectively. To facilitate this, the ethos of information operations exemplified by the TNI AU can gradually be integrated into the operational framework of the Bandung City Government.

4.3 The Impact of Engagement Interpretation on Efforts to Foster Engagement

The findings of this study indicate that the focus of management and social media administrators on engagement exclusively at the level of likes has detrimentally affected the establishment of meaningful two-way interactions. Two-way interaction is a pivotal indicator of engagement, and a fundamental aspect of this interaction is the active response to inquiries posed by the public. An observational study of the Bandung City Government's social media accounts, particularly Instagram and Twitter (X), from January to December 2022 reveals a serious lack of response to questions or comments from the public. On Instagram, out of 1,932 questions posed by netizens, only 259 were answered, yielding a response rate of approximately 13.4%. This response rate is relatively low for a platform facilitating two-way communication (Observation findings for Instagram account @humas_bandung using ISA).

This insufficient level of interaction has resulted in negative perceptions among netizens regarding social media administrators. Several active followers of the Bandung City Government's Instagram account articulated that two-way communication is essential for maintaining engagement. One netizen specifically emphasized the value they felt when social media administrators addressed every comment or question (Interview Findings, Informant B.2). Unfortunately, this respectful engagement is seldom observed, as administrators overlook messages or inquiries, even though even minimal responses can significantly enhance interaction.

In subsequent interviews, another netizen expressed disappointment regarding the inconsistency of the administrators in responding to inquiries. For instance, one Instagram netizen recounted an experience in which they inquired about the operating hours of a recreational location promoted on social media but received no response whatsoever (Interview findings, informant B.3). A similar sentiment was expressed by another netizen, who indicated that they often felt ignored, as their questions submitted via comments or direct messages went unanswered (Interview Findings, Informant B.4).

The Bandung City Government's Twitter account (X) displays a similar situation. Only 106 of the 891 inquiries that netizens submitted throughout 2022 received an answer, yielding an 11.9% response rate (Observation Findings for Twitter Account (X) @humasbandung_ utilizing ISA). This figure is lower than that of Instagram and consistently reflects the inadequate efforts of the administrators to address public comments. Some netizens, such as Twitter (X) netizens 1 and 2, highlighted the minimal two-way communication, noting that administrators often disregard critical messages or significant inquiries raised through the platform (Interview findings, informants B.5 and B.6).

Consistency in responding to public interactions is imperative for building trust and enhancing engagement. When netizens feel overlooked, they are likely to lose interest in further interaction. One Twitter (X) netizen asserted that administrators should adopt a more proactive stance in addressing questions, as open and responsive communication would facilitate greater community participation in discussions on social media (Interview findings, informant B.7). Unfortunately, administrators frequently prioritize increasing the number of "likes," neglecting other dimensions of deeper interaction.

In addition to the inconsistencies in responsiveness, several users criticized the quality of the responses. Twitter (X) netizens 2 and 3 emphasized that although the administrators responded to some inquiries, the answers were often inadequate or even irrelevant to the questions. For instance, certain inquiries received brief responses that failed to provide the necessary information, resulting in netizens feeling dissatisfied and disengaging from the discussion (Interview findings, informants B.6 and B.7).

This lack of responsiveness has fostered negative perceptions of the administrators among netizens. One Twitter (X) netizen indicated that administrators should be more attuned to incoming comments or messages, particularly concerning issues of significant public concern. However, the inconsistency in responses has led netizens to perceive that social media administrators are primarily focused on image management rather than fostering open and effective communication (Interview findings, informant B.5).

The restricted participation demonstrated by the Bandung City Government's social media administrators, owing to their constricted interpretation of engagement as solely "likes," has adversely impacted overall engagement metrics. This study indicates that public interaction on the Bandung City Government's Instagram and Twitter (X) accounts is

significantly low, with an average engagement score of 21.2% for Instagram and merely 0.03% for Twitter (X). The findings indicate that, despite the substantial volume of content generated, public participation remains insufficient.

The limited engagement of the Bandung City Government on social media sites Instagram and Twitter (X) is clearly demonstrated by metrics such likes, comments, shares, and content creation. Among the four metrics, shares represent the lowest figure, with merely 0.1% on Instagram and 0.04% on Twitter (X). The study reveals that public interaction with content disseminated by the Bandung City Government on its social media channels is significantly minimal.

Moreover, the content creation indicator further highlights the deficiency in public engagement. The study indicates that the content creation score on Instagram is only 0.2%, while on Twitter (X), it is even lower at 0.03%. These figures imply that public participation in generating new content, disseminating information, posing inquiries, or offering critiques and feedback on government programs and policies remains inadequate.

Table 2. Data on likes, comments, shares, and content creation on the Bandung City Government's Instagram (January 2022 - December 2022 period)

Bulan	Reach	Like		Comment		Share		Create Content	
		Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value
Jan.	54.020	21.345	40%	91	0,2%	179	0,3%	120	0,2%
Feb.	62.325	42.641	68%	223	0,4%	122	0,2%	354	0,6%
Mar.	120.546	32.326	27%	65	0,1%	35	0,03%	684	0,6%
Apr.	100.020	53.033	53%	182	0,2%	53	0,1%	110	0,1%
May	100.690	47.259	47%	112	0,1%	30	0,0%	89	0,1%
Jun.	102.500	57.972	57%	77	0,1%	78	0,1%	290	0,3%
Jul.	100.820	49.351	49%	188	0,2%	93	0,1%	116	0,1%
Aug	100.000	40.300	40%	68	0,1%	79	0,1%	39	0,04%
Sept.	100.000	63.644	64%	70	0,1%	66	0,1%	0	0,0%
Oct.	100.000	71.983	72%	38	0,0%	20	0,02%	0	0,0%
Nov.	100.000	6.793	7%	82	0,1%	180	0,2%	0	0,0%
Dec.	7.500	1.500	20%	97	1,3%	119	1,6%	0	0,0%
Tot.	1.048.421	488.147	47%	1.293	0,1%	1.054	0,1%	1.802	0,2%

Source: (Atnan et al., 2024)

Another indicator, specifically comments and likes, further illustrates the low levels of engagement. The comment score on Instagram is a mere 0.1%, while on Twitter (X), it is even lower at 0.05%. Regarding likes, the score on Instagram stands at 47%, whereas on Twitter (X), it is a mere 0.1%. Although the scores for comments and likes are comparatively higher than those for shares and content creation, they remain insufficient when assessed within the broader context of overall engagement.

Table 3. Data on likes, comments, shares, and content creation on Twitter (X) of the Bandung City Government (January 2022 - December 2022)

Month	Reach	Like		Comment		Share		Create Content	
		Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value
Jan.	105.250	246	0,2%	91	0,1%	179	0,2%	94	0,1%
Feb.	100.000	221	0,2%	223	0,2%	122	0,1%	227	0,2%
Mar.	110.000	52	0,05%	65	0,1%	36	0,03%	49	0,04%
Apr.	90.565	92	0,1%	182	0,2%	53	0,1%	75	0,1%
May	107.900	81	0,1%	112	0,1%	30	0,03%	33	0,03%
Jun.	84.765	123	0,1%	77	0,1%	81	0,1%	30	0,04%
Jul.	275.335	64	0,02%	188	0,1%	95	0,03%	74	0,03%
Aug	741.975	110	0,01%	68	0,01%	79	0,01%	48	0,01%
Sept.	120.935	161	0,1%	70	0,1%	66	0,1%	58	0,05%
Oct.	87.485	24	0,03%	38	0,04%	20	0,02%	36	0,04%
Nov.	205.965	342	0,2%	82	0,04%	179	0,1%	74	0,04%
Dec.	614.520	466	0,1%	97	0,02%	119	0,02%	93	0,02%
Tot.	2.644.695	1.982	0,1%	1.293	0,05%	1.059	0,04%	891	0,03%

Source: (Atnan et al., 2024)

These data suggest that the public does not fully engage or invest in the content the Bandung City Government disseminates via social media. Despite the occurrence of interactions such as likes and comments, their frequency remains significantly below optimal levels. This indicates a lack of motivation among the public to engage more deeply with the uploaded content.

The findings indicate that the engagement targets established by management and social media administrators predominantly prioritize achieving likes, which is inadequate for cultivating a positive relationship with the public. Such an emphasis on likes may undermine the motivation of administrators to promote more profound interactions. In contrast, fostering more meaningful engagement—such as responding to inquiries and expressing appreciation to netizens—proves essential for establishing a constructive communication environment. When netizens perceive themselves as valued through active two-way communication, they are more likely to participate in discussions and develop a stronger connection with social media administrators.

5. Discussion

This analysis correlates research findings indicating low public engagement on the Bandung City Government's social media platforms with three foundational theories: Impression Management Theory, Social Construction of Reality Theory, and Dialogic Communication Theory.

From the perspective of Impression Management Theory, the Bandung City Government appears to prioritize cultivating a positive image through its social media presence. Erving Goffman posits that organizations such as the Bandung City Government utilize social media to shape favourable public perceptions, measuring success through straightforward metrics such as likes. In this study, likes to emerge as the primary indicator of engagement success as determined by the Communication and Information Agency (Diskominfo), suggesting an emphasis on image construction despite the superficial nature of such engagement. Although the public indicates an appreciation for the content through likes, this metric does not necessarily reflect deeper involvement.

A critical limitation of this approach is that likes alone are insufficient to foster quality engagement. Likes indicate that the content from the Bandung City Government is either favoured or visually appealing. However, they do not represent more meaningful interactions, such as comments, shares, or dialogues that could enhance the relationship between the government and the community. In other words, the impression management strategy focuses excessively on surface-level metrics while neglecting the more profound aspects of engagement.

In parallel, Berger and Luckmann's Social Construction of Reality Theory asserts that social interactions construct social reality. In the context of the Bandung City Government, social interactions facilitated through social media are crucial for building public understanding and awareness of governmental programs. However, the observed low levels of engagement, particularly regarding comments and content creation, suggest that meaningful social interactions are minimal. Although the public may view the content uploaded by the government, they infrequently engage actively by providing feedback or responding to it.

The limited public participation in comments and content creation indicates that the Bandung City Government has not fully realized the potential for creating an interactive dialogue space. This shortcoming suggests that the desired social reality has not been optimally established. The presented content has not stimulated active public participation in more substantive discussions. Consequently, the social reality constructed by the Bandung City Government remains predominantly focused on one-way information dissemination rather than fostering a space for more collaborative interaction.

Furthermore, Kent and Taylor's Dialogic Communication Theory emphasizes the significance of two-way communication in fostering quality public engagement. This theory underscores that organizations, such as the Bandung City Government, must adopt a more proactive approach to listening to and responding to the public rather than merely disseminating information in a one-way manner. However, in the case of the Bandung City Government, engagement is more frequently assessed through likes, representing one-way interaction, with minimal effort to encourage deeper dialogue.

The significantly low number of comments and shares suggests that the communication strategy lacks a dialogic quality. The Communication and Information Agency (Diskominfo) and the social media managers of the Bandung City Government appear to prioritize information transmission over cultivating meaningful engagement with the public. Consequently, the engagement generated does not contribute to developing a stronger and more productive relationship between the government and the community.

This like-oriented approach has significant implications for the quality of engagement. As revealed in this study, the targets pursued by the Bandung City Government emphasise quantitative achievements, specifically the acquisition of as many likes as possible. This focus neglects the qualitative dimensions of engagement, such as active public participation in providing feedback, suggestions, or even sharing information relevant to government programs. As a result, the level of public engagement achieved remains predominantly superficial.

The Communication and Information Agency (Diskominfo) of Bandung City recognizes the significance of quality engagement, a sentiment echoed by several leaders in this study. They comprehend that high-quality engagement entails

more profound public interactions, wherein individuals contribute comments, share content, and provide feedback that can substantially influence governmental decision-making. Nevertheless, despite this understanding, the practical implementation continues prioritizing likes as the predominant indicator of success, thereby obstructing the advancement of quality engagement.

The little engagement on the Bandung City Government's social media platforms suggests that the existing digital communication strategies require substantial improvement. The Bandung City Government must actively seek methods to cultivate a more interactive digital environment where the public feels incentivized to engage in discussions and offer meaningful feedback. While likes undoubtedly serve as important indicators of interest, fostering more profound and dialogic relationships necessitates a more proactive approach to encourage public participation through relevant and interactive content.

6. Conclusion

This investigation concludes that the minimal involvement on the Bandung City Government's social media channels stems from a restricted understanding of engagement. The Bandung City Government prioritizes likes as the sole indicator of success, while other critical dimensions—such as dialogue, active participation, and two-way interaction—are significantly underemphasized. To cultivate high-quality engagement, the Bandung City Government must realign its focus from an exclusive emphasis on likes to promoting a more open, responsive, and participatory communication strategy with the public.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the Communication and Informatics Office of Bandung City for being willing to be an informant in this research. We would also like to thank Telkom University for funding this research.

Authors contributions

Authors Nur Atnan and Ayub Ilfandy Imran were both responsible for the article writing and data analysis. The data itself were collected by Nur Atnan. Both authors also involved in revising the paper according to the corrections given by the reviewers. In terms of authorship arrangement, Nur Atnan contributed more than Ayub Ilfandy Imran, and therefore, Nur Atnan was placed as the first author and Ayub Ilfandy Imran as the second author.

Funding

This work was supported by Telkom University [project number 145/LIT06/PPM-LIT/2024].

Competing interests

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose in relation to this study.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Redfame Publishing.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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