

The Role of Social Media in Supporting the WhatsApp Complaint Channel of Surabaya City Government

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Abstract. Digital transformation has become an indispensable strategy for governments to maintain public service delivery during times of uncertainty and crisis. In Surabaya, the Deputy Mayor launched an innovative WhatsApp Complaint Channel as a direct communication line between citizens and government. To broaden its reach, the program was promoted through the official Instagram and TikTok accounts @cakjl, opening a new space for citizens to express support, voice concerns, and provide constructive feedback. This study aims to explore how public comments on the TikTok announcement contribute to the effectiveness of the complaint channel. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach with interpretive point-of-view analysis, the research examines selected citizen comments to identify patterns of appreciation, social legitimacy, and factual complaints. The findings reveal that beyond mere expressions of support, TikTok comments function as participatory inputs that can accelerate problem-solving and enhance government responsiveness. This highlights the strategic role of social media not only as a promotional tool but also as a collaborative arena for strengthening public trust and inclusiveness in digital governance.

Keywords: Digital Governance, Citizen Trust, Social Media Communication, Digital Public Participation, Complaint Handling System.

I. Introduction

Digital transformation has become the backbone of bureaucratic reform in the era of smart governance, driving the use of information technology to create faster, more transparent, and participatory public services (Rudianto, 2024). Such innovations reflect the evolution of the e-government concept, which emphasizes effective interaction between government and society through digital platforms (Indrajit, 2022).

In Indonesia, digital complaint channels such as LAPOR!, online applications, and the utilization of social media have become concrete strategies for absorbing public aspirations (Wulandari, 2023). Social media is widely used as a two-way communicative space between citizens and government due to its wide penetration and familiarity among the public (Hutahae et al. 2023). In particular, TikTok has evolved beyond entertainment into a medium for advocacy, policy campaigns, and public opinion formation (Hayatulnupus, 2025).

In the local context of Surabaya, the innovation of a WhatsApp Complaint Channel launched by the Deputy Mayor represents a significant step toward digital transformation, offering accessibility, responsiveness, and citizen convenience (Satrio, 2022). Dissemination through TikTok is also designed to anticipate the involvement of digital natives in innovative public services (Ratnastuti et al. 2023).

Public participation is a critical indicator in evaluating the effectiveness of digital service innovations; not only the availability of the channel, but also how citizens respond and engage in interaction and collaboration (Ulung et al. 2024). This study is designed to examine citizen engagement through social media, particularly TikTok, in the context of the WhatsApp Complaint Channel provided by the Surabaya City Government.

Accordingly, the study aims to describe patterns of communication and interaction reflected in TikTok comments about the complaint service, identify thematic categories as representations of citizen participation, and formulate strategic recommendations to strengthen responsiveness and collaboration in digital public services.

II. Literature Review

The development of digital governance has transformed the paradigm of public service delivery, shifting from traditional bureaucratic mechanisms to more transparent, participatory, and technology-driven systems (Rudianto, 2024). The concept of e-government emphasizes the role of information and communication technology (ICT) in enabling effective interaction between government and citizens (Indrajit, 2022). Digital transformation in public administration is not merely a matter of efficiency but also relates to inclusiveness, accountability, and responsiveness (Wulandari, 2023).

Social media has increasingly been recognized as a key driver of citizen engagement in governance. According to (Chen et al. 2021), the effectiveness of government social media accounts depends on the quality of information shared and the responsiveness of authorities to citizen inputs. TikTok, in particular, has emerged as a medium not only for entertainment but also for advocacy, political campaigns, and public communication (HayatunNupus, 2025). Recent studies show that citizens tend to perceive social media as a more egalitarian arena compared to formal institutions, making it a valuable tool for digital participation (Asmuddin, 2025).

Within the context of public complaint handling, the integration of social media channels with official complaint systems has been shown to enhance problem identification and accelerate government responses (Guo et al. 2025). Fansuri et al. (2024) highlighted that digital complaints allow governments to expand monitoring capacity by capturing citizen grievances in real time. However, the challenge lies in distinguishing substantive feedback from irrelevant or sarcastic comments, which requires appropriate moderation mechanisms (Ekasakti et al. 2021).

In summary, prior literature demonstrates that digital platforms, especially social media, serve a dual function in governance: building political legitimacy and improving the effectiveness of public service delivery. This study contributes by analyzing how TikTok interactions related to the WhatsApp Complaint Channel in Surabaya reflect these dynamics, and how they can inform strategies to strengthen citizen–government collaboration in digital public services.

III. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach with an interpretive point of view to understand patterns of citizen participation through comments on TikTok posts featuring the WhatsApp Complaint Channel of the Surabaya City Government.

The research data were obtained from publicly available comments on the official TikTok account @cakjl. Data collection was conducted through digital documentation, which included recording and capturing relevant comments that reflected public interaction with the complaint service.

The data were analyzed using content analysis to identify perspectives emerging from the comments. Each comment was interpreted based on attitudinal tendencies (positive, negative, neutral) and thematic categories representing public participation. This approach provided an in-depth understanding of how social media functions in building interaction and collaboration between citizens and government.

IV. Results and Discussion

The observation of TikTok comments revealed that public interactions were not merely reactive but also included substantive inputs regarding problem-solving in complaint services. This finding demonstrates citizen awareness to actively engage in improving public service delivery, even through informal channels such as social media. These findings align with Ekasakti et al. (2021), who argued that digital platforms can function as collaborative arenas between citizens and government when managed with openness and responsiveness.

The analysis of interactions on the @cakjl account identified three main patterns. First, appreciation of government initiatives, reflected in comments that emphasized approval of actions considered to benefit the public. Such expressions represent forms of social legitimacy granted to government officials and indicate public endorsement of digital complaint innovations (Ekasakti et al. 2021).

Second, emotional support and expressions of political identity, where citizens expressed solidarity and alignment with the deputy mayor as a leader. This illustrates that social media serves not only as a platform for information dissemination but also as a medium for building socio-political trust and strengthening government–citizen ties (Asmuddin, 2025).

Third, factual complaints related to public services, where citizens highlighted practical problems in service delivery. These interactions show the potential of social media to serve as an early monitoring tool, enabling faster identification of public concerns that could later be integrated into formal complaint systems (Guo et al. 2025).

These patterns emphasize the dual role of social media: as an instrument of political legitimacy and as a mechanism for collecting service-related feedback. Fansuri et al. (2024) noted that such interactions expand citizen oversight while enhancing the effectiveness of public service innovations.

Furthermore, this form of participation indicates a paradigm shift from conventional, formal participation toward more egalitarian, digital-based models. Such models simplify the process of voicing aspirations and accelerate government recognition of public issues. However, their effectiveness depends on how transparently and systematically the government can respond to digital inputs (Asmuddin, 2025).

Nonetheless, limitations were identified, including the prevalence of non-substantive interactions such as humor or sarcasm, which can obscure meaningful feedback. Therefore, establishing comment moderation mechanisms and integrating social media analytics into official complaint-handling systems are recommended to maximize the utility of citizen interactions in digital platforms.

V. Conclusion

This study confirms that the WhatsApp Complaint Channel in Surabaya, promoted through TikTok @cakj1, has become an important medium for strengthening digital public participation. Citizen comments reflect three dominant patterns: appreciation, emotional/political identity support, and factual complaints. These patterns demonstrate the dual role of social media as both a legitimizing space and an instrument for addressing public service issues.

The practical implications of this study are the necessity for government to:

1. integrate citizen comments from social media into official complaint-handling systems,
2. develop comment moderation systems to filter relevant inputs, and
3. employ digital interactions as performance indicators of public service responsiveness.

By adopting these measures, social media can evolve beyond a promotional medium into a collaborative arena that strengthens public service innovation.

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