

Measuring the Relationship between Student Sentiment and West Java Governor's Popularity on Social Media: Spearman's Correlation Approach to Survey Data and Online Activity

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

students, social media, spearman correlations, governors, popularity, political communication.

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the relationship between student sentiment towards the Governor of West Java and his level of popularity on social media using the Spearman correlation approach. A total of 20 students became respondents through a 15-item Likert scale questionnaire. The results showed that support for leadership digitalization ($r = 0.485$) and active involvement in following the governor's official account ($r = 0.476$) had a moderate correlation with positive perceptions of students. In contrast, the perception of imaging (X9) showed a negative correlation ($r = -0.471$), indicating that the higher the students' perception that the governor's social media focused more on image than the substance of the policy, the lower their assessment of its performance. These findings provide insight into regional heads' digital political communication strategies in building social media-based image and legitimacy. With a data-driven approach, this research is expected to be a reference for academics, government practitioners, and the younger generation in understanding the relationship between public perception and digital interaction of regional leaders.

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Jurnal Restorasi : Hukum dan Politik

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INTRODUCTION

In today's digital era, social media has become one of the main channels of political communication in Indonesia. Regional heads, including the Governor of West Java, actively use social media as a means of conveying work programs, building a leadership image, and responding to issues that develop in the community. The presence of public figures on social media not only aims to convey information, but also to shape public perception, create emotional connection with constituents, and increase political legitimacy (Nugroho & Kurniawan, 2019).

Along with the development of technology, the pattern of people's interaction with their leaders has also changed. Where previously political communication took place conventionally through face-to-face meetings and mass media, now social media allows for faster, interactive, and direct relationships between leaders and the public. This provides an opportunity for regional heads to shape their own political narratives and respond to social issues in real-time. The popularity of leaders on social media can be an important indicator in assessing the effectiveness of political communication strategies implemented.

Students as part of a digital-native community group have a strategic role in shaping public opinion. They are not only recipients of information, but also participate in producing, disseminating, and criticizing information through social media. As active users of social media, students have a high level of involvement in online political discussions, both through opinion uploads and participation in discussion forums. Therefore, it is important to understand how students' perceptions and sentiments towards public figures, in this case the Governor of West Java, are shaped and influenced by these digital interactions (Arifianto, 2018).

However, the presence of leaders on social media does not always guarantee the formation of positive relationships with the community, especially students who have a high level of critical power. Excessive imagery without clear policy substance can negatively impact public trust. Previous research has shown that effective political communication must be able to combine visual aspects and strong policy content to not only attract attention but also increase political engagement and legitimacy (Prasetyo & Pambudi, 2022). Therefore, it is necessary to conduct an empirical study on how students assess the digital presence of a leader, whether it is only limited to imaging or really providing substantial information benefits.

Although the Governor of West Java is widely known as an active and innovative figure on social media, there has not been much empirical research that has quantitatively examined the relationship between the governor's digital activities and student sentiment. This is interesting to research considering the role of students as an intellectual group that has a critical view of the political communication strategies used by regional leaders. If the popularity of the governor's social media is directly proportional to the positive perception of students, then social media can be seen as an effective tool in building relationships between leaders and the community. On the other hand, if digital popularity is more influenced by imagery without policy substance, then the impact can be more temporary and less influential on political legitimacy.

This research makes a significant contribution to the development of digital political communication literature, especially in the context of local leadership in Indonesia. Unlike most previous studies that were descriptive or qualitative, this study uses the quantitative approach of Spearman correlation to identify and empirically measure the relationship between student perception and the popularity of the Governor of West Java on social media. Its main contribution is to offer an analytical framework based on primary data to understand the extent to which student sentiment, as a critical and active digital native group on social media, can influence perceptions of public figures. In addition, by using Likert scale instruments that include cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions, this study enriches a multidimensional approach in the study of digital political communication.

This study aims to fill this gap by conducting a Spearman correlation analysis between student sentiment and the governor's popularity on social media, based on primary data collected through a questionnaire. With a data-driven approach, this research is expected to provide insight for academics, government practitioners, and the younger generation in understanding the dynamics of digital political communication. In addition, the results of this research can be a reference for regional leaders in developing more effective public communication strategies based on community participation.

METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach with a correlational descriptive method, which aims to measure the relationship between student sentiment towards the Governor of West Java and his

popularity on social media. This approach was chosen because it allows the analysis of relationships between variables based on data obtained through surveys.

The subjects of the study are active students in West Java who interact directly or indirectly with the social media of the Governor of West Java. Students were chosen because they are a digitally active group and have critical skills for information circulating on social media. The sampling technique was carried out by convenience sampling, which is to select respondents based on availability and ease of access, without considering the full representation of the population. A total of 20 students became respondents to this study.

The main instrument used was a 15-item Likert scale questionnaire designed to measure three areas of learning, namely:

- Cognitive (5 items): measures students' knowledge and understanding of the governor's political communication strategy on social media.
- Affective (5 items): evaluate how students feel or emotionally attitude towards the governor's presence on social media.
- Conatif (5 items): assesses students' propensity to act, including their active involvement in digital interactions with the governor.

Before being used in research, the instrument has been tested for its validity and reliability through initial trials. Validity tests are carried out to ensure that the questions in the questionnaire can measure the concept in question. Meanwhile, a reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a value of 0.8937, showed that the instrument had an excellent level of internal consistency. This value is well above the minimum threshold of 0.7, which signifies that the instrument is reliable enough to be used in further analysis.

The data was collected through the distribution of online questionnaires to students at various universities in West Java. Before filling out the questionnaire, respondents were given an explanation of the purpose of the research as well as ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of the data. The data collection process was carried out for two weeks, with an effort to achieve a variety of responses from students who had different levels of involvement with the governor's social media accounts.

The data was analyzed using Spearman's correlation (Spearman's Rho), which functions to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between each item variable (X1-X15) and the variable of total student perception of the Governor of West Java (Y1). Spearman correlation was chosen for several reasons:

- The data is ordinal, so it does not require normal distribution assumptions.
- More flexibility in handling data that is not linear and does not meet parametric requirements.
- It can be used to measure the relationship between variables that have different scales, such as student sentiment and their level of engagement with the governor's social media accounts.

The results of Spearman's correlation are interpreted based on the correlation categories: weak (0.1-0.3), medium (0.3-0.5), and strong (>0.5), which provides an idea of the relationship between student sentiment and the popularity of the governor.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study used a non-parametric statistical approach with Spearman correlation analysis to see the relationship between items of student sentiment towards the Governor of West Java (variables X1–X15) and their general perception of the Governor's popularity on social media (variable Y1). Data was obtained from 20 student respondents who filled out a questionnaire containing 15 statements with a Likert scale of 1–5.

The results of the Spearman test showed that there was a variation in the level of relationship between items to the total score of student perception. The following table summarizes the values of the Spearman correlation coefficient of each item:

Table 1. Spearman Test Results

Yes	Variable X	Brief Statement	Coefisien Spearman (r-s)	Information
1	X15	Supporting leadership digitalization	0.485	Moderate (positive) correlation
2	X11	Follow the Governor's official account	0.476	Moderate (positive) correlation
3	X1	Knowing the Governor is active on social media	0.374	Weak correlation (positive)
4	X12	Share Governor's content	0.317	Weak correlation (positive)
5	X14	Willing to criticize through comments	0.303	Weak correlation (positive)
6	X13	Assessing performance based on social media	0.254	Weak correlation (positive)
7	X10	Understanding performance through uploads	0.244	Weak correlation (positive)
8	X7	The Governor's positive image on social media	0.186	Correlation is very weak
9	X5	Online popularity influences image	0.184	Correlation is very weak
10	X8	Content shows care	0.179	Correlation is very weak
11	X3	Differentiating informative/entertainment content	0.065	Meaningless
12	X4	Knowing the rise in popularity	0.033	Meaningless
13	X6	Social media builds closeness	-0.098	Meaningless

14	X2	Understanding the purpose of political communication	-0.098	Meaningless
15	X9	Social media = imagery	-0.471	Moderate (negative) correlation

Source: The results of the processing of primary data of student respondents, processed by the author using the Spearman test through SPSS 26.0 (2025).

The above results show that support for leadership digitalization (X15) has the highest correlation value ($r = 0.485$) to students' general perception of the Governor of West Java. This indicates that students positively assess the efforts of the Governor of West Java in presenting policies and communication based on digital technology. This is reinforced by the results of item X11, which follows the official account of the Governor, which also shows a fairly high correlation ($r = 0.476$). This means that direct engagement with the Governor's social media accounts correlates with a positive perception of his performance in general.

This finding is in line with a study by Ramadhani (2021) which states that digital engagement such as following regional leaders' accounts, liking, sharing, and commenting on uploads is a form of student digital political participation. This proves that students' interaction with political content is not only passive, but also reflects a form of support or rejection of public figures.

In addition, these results strengthen the view of Nugroho and Kurniawan (2019) that digital-based political communication, when carried out consistently and transparently, is able to increase symbolic closeness between leaders and the community. Digitally active governors are considered more open, responsive, and relevant in the eyes of technology-literate students.

However, of interest was the findings of item X9 "Social media is only used for imaging" which showed a moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.471$) on the general perception of college students. This shows that the higher the perception of students that the governor's social media contains only imagery without substance, the lower their assessment of his performance. This shows that the credibility of content has a great influence on public trust. If students think the content features too much personal stuff, humor, or excessive imagery without touching on important policy issues, it will have a negative impact on the overall perception.

These findings corroborate the results of Prasetyo and Pambudi (2022) who stated that political communication that emphasizes too much on visual branding or personal image, but ignores policy values, will be considered a form of symbolic manipulation by educated community groups such as students.

Most of the other items, such as X3 (distinguishing between entertainment and informative content), X4 (knowing popularity), and X6 (proximity to leaders through social media), showed very weak correlation values to mean nothing. This can be caused by several factors, including the gap between students' expectations of the leader's social media content and the reality of the content, or the direct disconnect between digital activities and policies that they feel in real life on campus.

The novelty of this study lies in the use of 15 student sentiment indicators that were developed specifically based on their interaction experience with the official account of the Governor of West Java on social media. Through the Spearman correlation approach, this study empirically shows that indicators such as support for leadership digitalization and active involvement in following the governor's official account are positively correlated with students' perceptions of the governor's performance. In contrast, the perception that social media is only used as an imaging tool shows a negative correlation with the governor's popularity in the eyes of students.

These findings reveal the important reality that the success of digital political communication cannot be sustained only by the intensity of uploads or visual appearances alone, but also is highly determined by the authenticity of the message, the substance of the policy, and the value of the information communicated. This research provides strategic insights for regional heads and government public relations teams in designing public communication strategies that are more

transparent, dialogical, and based on public participation. In addition to enriching the literature on digital political communication in Indonesia, this study also opens up academic and practical discussion space for the development of a digital public perception index for local leaders in the future.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of analysis and discussion, this study succeeded in revealing a significant relationship between student sentiment and the popularity of the Governor of West Java on social media. Positive student sentiment, especially support for leadership digitization and involvement in following the governor's official account, showed a moderate positive correlation with the perception of the governor's performance. In contrast, the perception that social media is only used as an imaging tool shows a significant negative correlation, confirming that the substance and authenticity of messages are key factors in building legitimacy in the eyes of critical young generations. This research makes a real contribution to the study of digital political communication at the local level, by presenting a quantitative approach based on Spearman correlation. The main novelty lies in the multidimensional measurement of student sentiment towards regional leaders using valid and reliable instruments, as well as the mapping of relationships between sentiment indicators that have not been widely revealed in previous studies. Thus, these findings not only strengthen the academic literature on digital political participation, but also provide practical implications for public officials in designing more authentic, participatory, and substance-based digital communication strategies for policy. For further development, similar research is recommended to be carried out with a larger sample number and a mixed quantitative-qualitative approach to enrich understanding of the dynamics of public perception in the social media era.

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