

Leadership Through Social Media: Local Government Strategies for Innovation, Transparency, and Public Participation (A Study in Denpasar City, Bali)

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Abstract

Leadership in the digital era requires not only administrative capability but also the strategic use of information technology to foster transparency, innovation, and citizen participation. This study explores the role of digital leadership in local governance by analyzing the use of social media platforms by the Denpasar City Government, namely Instagram (@denpasarkota), TikTok (@pemkotdenpasar), and the community-driven account @infodenpasar. Using a mixed-methods approach that combines content analysis and comparative assessment of engagement metrics, the research examines how these platforms function as instruments of communication, legitimacy-building, and participatory governance. The findings reveal that while official government accounts emphasize policy dissemination, public service announcements, and cultural promotion, community-based platforms such as @infodenpasar demonstrate higher levels of interaction and responsiveness, thereby acting as complementary channels in the governance ecosystem. The study contributes theoretically by expanding the discourse on digital leadership and social media governance in local contexts, and practically by offering insights for municipal governments in developing more collaborative and innovative digital communication strategies to enhance public trust and engagement.

Keywords: digital leadership, e-governance, social media, transparency, citizen participation, Denpasar City

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is one of the key pillars in governance, particularly in promoting the realization of innovative, transparent, and participatory public administration (Soepomo, 2000; Natalia, 2021). Modern leadership theories have evolved from classical perspectives that emphasize traits (trait theory) and behaviors (behavioral theory), toward contemporary approaches such as transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006) and transglobal leadership (Javidan & Teagarden, 2011), which highlight adaptive capacity, collaboration, and openness to technological and social change. Transformational leadership, in particular, emphasizes idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration, which are crucial for fostering trust and engagement in public governance (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

In the context of governance, the model of digital leadership (Mergel, 2017; Hamzah, 2025; Susarianto, 2024) has become increasingly relevant, where leaders are not only required to master policy-making but also to utilize information technology to build legitimacy, strengthen transparency, and enhance public engagement. Digital leadership integrates leadership theory with practical skills in managing digital platforms, ensuring that public administration aligns with the evolving communication patterns of society (Mergel, 2019; Sugiyarti, 2025).

The advancement of digital technology has driven significant transformations in governance, including at the local level (Ciancarini, Giancarlo, & Grimaudo, 2023). Social media has now become a strategic instrument used by governments to strengthen communication, increase transparency, and foster public participation in development (Criado & Villodre, 2020; Medaglia & Zheng, 2017). In other words, leadership in the digital era is not merely about bureaucratic management but also about the ability to orchestrate public communication through social media channels that are trusted by citizens.

Denpasar City, as the capital of Bali Province, is among the local governments actively utilizing social media in governance. The Denpasar City Government manages the official Instagram account @denpasarkota, which is currently followed by more than 200,000 users, with an average interaction per post reaching 1,500–2,000 likes and 300–500 comments per month. This account is used to disseminate policy information, mayoral activities, public service announcements, and community education on issues such as environment and health. In addition, the Denpasar City Government also leverages the TikTok platform (@pemkotdenpasar), which has around 50,000 followers, actively sharing creative short videos about development programs, digital services, and the promotion of local culture.

However, these official government channels do not stand alone within Denpasar's digital communication ecosystem. Citizens also rely heavily on popular community-based channels such as Info Denpasar (Instagram @infodenpasar), which has more than 1 million followers and a significantly higher level of interaction—averaging 5,000 likes, 1,200 comments, and 800 shares per month. This channel functions as a communication bridge between the government and the public, characterized by a more informal, fast, and responsive communication style. The role of community-based digital platforms is crucial, as they complement formal governance structures by enabling participatory engagement and facilitating co-creation of public value (Natalia, 2021; Hamzah, 2025).

While previous studies on government social media use have largely emphasized official channels, there has been limited attention to popular community-based platforms such as Info Denpasar, which play a significant role in shaping public opinion (Criado & Villodre, 2020; Medaglia & Zheng, 2017). Existing scholarship also tends to focus on single platforms, particularly Facebook or Twitter, despite the shift in communication patterns toward more dynamic and visual platforms like Instagram and TikTok. Moreover, little research has explored how local governments strategically integrate their official social media presence with community-driven digital ecosystems, particularly within the Indonesian public sector (Susarianto, 2024; Ciancarini, Giancarlo, & Grimaudo, 2023).

This research presents several novel contributions. First, it emphasizes the integration of official and community-driven social media accounts as a hybrid governance strategy, moving beyond traditional studies that focus solely on institutional channels. Second, it provides empirical evidence from Indonesia, particularly from Denpasar City, which has been underrepresented in global e-governance literature. Third, it connects digital leadership practices directly to public sector outcomes, including transparency, innovation in service delivery, and participatory engagement, showing how social media can serve as a co-creation platform between government and citizens. By adopting a multi-platform perspective, this study advances the understanding of how collaborative digital leadership can enhance public sector governance in a contemporary, technology-driven context.

This study addresses these gaps by highlighting the collaborative digital leadership strategies of the Denpasar City Government, specifically through the integration of official accounts (@denpasar-

kota on Instagram and @pemkotdenpasar on TikTok) with the widely influential community-based channel @infodenpasar. By adopting a multi-platform perspective that reflects contemporary digital communication trends, this research advances the discourse on innovation in the public sector, demonstrating how social media can function not only as a communication tool but also as an instrument for transparency, service innovation, and real-time citizen participation (Soepomo, 2000; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Javidan & Teagarden, 2011; Mergel, 2017; Natalia, 2021).

Table 1. Comparison of Denpasar City Government's Official Social Media and Community-Based Channels

| Platform / Account | Number of Followers | Average Interaction | Type of Content | Communication Style | Target Audience |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|---|--|------------------------------|---|
| Instagram @denpasarkota (official) | ±200,000 | 1,500–2,000 likes, 300–500 comments/month | Policy information, public services, mayoral activities | Formal, educative | General citizens, civil servants, urban community |
| Instagram @infodenpasar (community) | ±1,000,000 | 5,000 likes, 1,200 comments, 800 shares/month | Daily updates, local news, community issues, entertainment | Informal, fast, interactive | Local residents, tourists, digital community |
| TikTok @pemkotdenpasar (official) | ±50,000 | 2,000–5,000 views/video, 300–600 likes | Creative videos: culture, development programs, digital services | Relaxed, visual, interactive | Youth, active TikTok users |

While previous studies on government social media use have largely emphasized official channels, there has been limited attention to popular community-based platforms such as Info Denpasar, which play a significant role in shaping public opinion. Existing scholarship also tends to focus on single platforms, particularly Facebook or Twitter, despite the shift in communication patterns toward more dynamic and visual platforms like Instagram and TikTok. Moreover, little research has explored how local governments strategically integrate their official social media presence with community-driven digital ecosystems, particularly within the Indonesian context. This study addresses these gaps by highlighting the collaborative digital leadership strategies of the Denpasar City Government, specifically through the integration of official accounts (@denpasarkota on Instagram and @pemkotdenpasar on TikTok) with the widely influential community-based channel @infodenpasar. By adopting a multi-platform perspective that reflects contemporary digital communication trends, this research advances the discourse on innovation in the public sector, demonstrating how social media can function not only as a communication tool but also as an instrument for transparency, service innovation, and real-time citizen participation. In doing so, the study introduces a novel perspective on how local governments in Indonesia can leverage both formal and informal digital channels to strengthen governance and public trust.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore how social media leadership strategies are applied by the Denpasar City Government to enhance innovation, transparency, and public participation (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Mergel, 2017). The research focuses on three main accounts: the official Instagram account (@denpasarkota), its TikTok account (@pemkotdenpasar), and the community-driven Instagram account @infodenpasar, highlighting a novel multi-platform perspective that bridges institutional governance with community-based digital engagement (Susarianto, 2024; Natalia, 2021).

The procedures consisted of four stages:

1. Preliminary observation to identify relevant accounts and digital communication patterns, reflecting digital leadership in practice (Mergel, 2017; Hamzah, 2025).
2. Data collection through social media content monitoring for six months, combined with semi-structured interviews with government officials from the Denpasar City Communication and Information Office and administrators of Info Denpasar, capturing insights on both top-down and bottom-up leadership practices (Javidan & Teagarden, 2011).
3. Validation through triangulation of observational data, interview results, and secondary documents, ensuring reliability and accuracy in a public sector context (Soepomo, 2000; Ciancarini, Giancarlo, & Grimaudo, 2023).
4. Interpretation of findings using relevant leadership theories, including transformational, digital, and transglobal leadership, with implications for participatory governance (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Mergel, 2019).

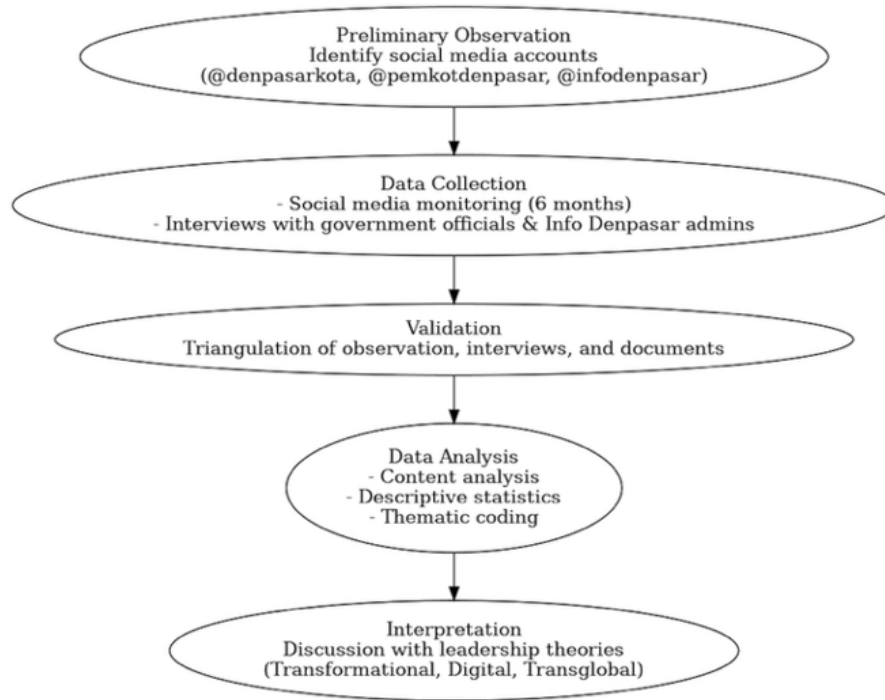


Figure 1. Research Methodology Flowchart

Primary instruments included observation guidelines for analyzing content and engagement patterns, interview protocols to capture leadership perspectives, and document analysis sheets for reviewing government reports and publications. Data sources consisted of both primary data (interviews, direct social media observation) and secondary data (social media analytics such as followers, likes, comments, and shares, as well as government documents and academic literature). Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis supported by descriptive statistics, allowing comparison of engagement across platforms and thematic coding to identify leadership attributes related to innovation, transparency, and participation in the public sector (Sugiyarti, 2025; Hamzah, 2025).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Official Accounts Engagement

The Denpasar City Government demonstrates a strategic use of official social media accounts to communicate public policies and services. On Instagram, the official account @denpasarkota has accumulated over 200,000 followers, generating an average of 1,500–2,000 likes and 300–500 comments per month. This account is primarily used for disseminating information regarding mayoral activities, public service announcements, and educational campaigns. Similarly, the TikTok account @pemkotdenpasar, followed by approximately 50,000 users, focuses on creative short videos highlighting digital public services, cultural promotion, and government programs. While these accounts establish institutional legitimacy, their engagement rates remain modest in comparison to community-based platforms.

2. Community-Based Accounts Engagement

The Instagram account @infodenpasar represents a powerful community-driven digital intermediary with over 1 million followers and significantly higher engagement metrics. On average, posts from this account receive more than 5,000 likes, 1,200 comments, and 800 shares per month. Unlike the formal tone of government accounts, Info Denpasar employs a more informal, responsive, and visually appealing communication style, making it more effective in capturing public attention and stimulating discourse. This platform plays a crucial role in shaping public perception, amplifying government initiatives, and facilitating real-time feedback loops between citizens and authorities.

Table 1. Comparison of Engagement Levels on Denpasar Government and Community Accounts

| Account | Followers | Average Likes/Month | Average Comments/Month | Average Shares/Month |
|-------------------------|------------|---------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| Instagram @denpasarkota | 200,000+ | 1,500–2,000 | 300–500 | <100 |
| TikTok @pemkotdenpasar | 50,000+ | 800–1,200 | 150–200 | 200–300 |
| Instagram @infodenpasar | 1,000,000+ | 5,000+ | 1,200+ | 800+ |

3. Theoretical Implications

These results support Mergel's (2017) framework on digital leadership, which emphasizes that digital platforms should not only serve as channels for information dissemination but also as participatory spaces. The disparity between official and community-driven accounts reflects the essence of transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006), where leaders must influence through adaptability, charisma, and responsiveness to citizen preferences. Furthermore, Denpasar's integration of official channels with community-based digital platforms resonates with Javidan and Teagarden's (2011) transglobal leadership model, which stresses cross-boundary collaboration and technological adaptability in governance.

4. Comparison with Previous Studies

Compared to global studies, this research highlights a unique Indonesian context. Prior research in Western countries often focuses on Facebook and Twitter as primary e-government communication tools (Criado & Villodre, 2020; Medaglia & Zheng, 2017). However, the Denpasar case shows that Instagram and TikTok are more dominant in shaping public interactions, particularly among younger demographics. Moreover, while much of the literature has prioritized the analysis of official government channels, this study reveals the strategic importance of community-based intermediaries like Info Denpasar. These platforms not only extend the reach of government messages but also enhance trust, interactivity, and participatory governance.

5. Practical Implications

The findings suggest that local governments should adopt a hybrid strategy, combining top-down communication through official accounts with bottom-up engagement via community-driven channels. Such integration ensures more inclusive, transparent, and participatory governance. By leveraging the credibility and broad reach of community accounts alongside official platforms, governments can foster greater public trust, responsiveness, and innovation in service delivery.

6. Leadership Dimensions Reflected in Government and Community Accounts

a. Leadership Through Official Accounts (@denpasarkota & @pemkotdenpasar)

The use of Instagram and TikTok by the Denpasar City Government reflects a form of digital leadership (Mergel, 2017), where leaders harness technology to promote transparency, service innovation, and legitimacy. By consistently disseminating information about mayoral activities, digital services, and cultural programs, the city government demonstrates aspects of transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006), particularly the dimensions of idealized influence and inspirational motivation. These accounts build trust by showing governmental presence and direction, although their relatively lower interaction levels indicate a one-way communication tendency. This pattern illustrates that while the government fulfills its institutional role, it still faces challenges in achieving the individualized consideration dimension of transformational leadership, where responsiveness to citizen feedback is essential.

b. Leadership Through Community Accounts (@infodenpasar)

In contrast, the @infodenpasar account illustrates how community-based platforms can embody elements of collaborative and adaptive leadership. Its informal, fast, and interactive

style resonates more with citizens, fostering a sense of proximity and responsiveness. In the lens of transglobal leadership (Javidan & Teagarden, 2011), Info Denpasar represents the capacity to cross cultural and institutional boundaries, creating a participatory space that connects government, civil society, and grassroots communities. Unlike official accounts, Info Denpasar engages in real-time dialogue, reflecting a bottom-up leadership model where legitimacy is co-produced with the public. This demonstrates how community-driven leadership practices can complement formal governance, creating a hybrid digital ecosystem that strengthens accountability and participation.

c. Integrating Leadership Models in Digital Governance

Taken together, the dual role of official and community accounts underscores the importance of multi-actor leadership in digital governance. The government channels symbolize top-down institutional leadership, ensuring credibility, policy alignment, and information accuracy, while Info Denpasar illustrates bottom-up networked leadership, characterized by adaptability, responsiveness, and emotional resonance with the public. When analyzed through Mergel's digital leadership lens, this integration exemplifies how governments can enhance transparency and citizen trust by collaborating with non-state digital actors. Similarly, when viewed through the framework of transformational leadership, the synergy between formal authority (official accounts) and informal influence (community accounts) demonstrates a collective form of leadership that is more effective in mobilizing citizen participation.

d. Theoretical Contribution

This discussion contributes to the broader theoretical discourse by showing that leadership in the digital era is no longer confined to hierarchical authority but must embrace networked, collaborative, and transglobal dimensions. The Denpasar case illustrates how official and community accounts can jointly enact a form of collaborative digital leadership, bridging institutional communication with grassroots interaction. This aligns with global governance trends, where public leadership increasingly relies on partnerships with community-driven digital actors to ensure greater inclusivity, responsiveness, and legitimacy.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that digital leadership through social media plays a vital role in strengthening innovation, transparency, and public participation in local governance. The case of Denpasar City demonstrates that integrating official government accounts, such as Instagram and TikTok, with community-based channels like *Info Denpasar* creates a more dynamic, transparent, and participatory model of communication. Such integration highlights the significance of collaborative strategies in digital governance, where leadership is not confined to formal institutions but extends into broader community networks. This approach addresses critical gaps in the literature, particularly regarding the interplay between official and community-driven platforms, and demonstrates how social media can evolve into a governance instrument that goes beyond information dissemination to become a space for co-creation and public engagement.

The implications of this study extend both theoretically and practically, as it enriches the discourse on digital leadership and participatory governance by showing how multi-platform strategies and

collaborations with community-based channels can enhance innovation and transparency in public administration. Practically, it offers valuable insights for local governments to integrate official social media accounts with community-driven platforms such as *Info Denpasar* in order to strengthen citizen engagement, trust, and service delivery. Nevertheless, the study has several limitations, including its focus on Denpasar City as a single case, which restricts the generalizability of findings to other regions, as well as its reliance on engagement metrics and content analysis that may not fully capture the nuances of citizen behavior or perception. Moreover, the fast-changing nature of social media trends presents challenges for the long-term applicability of platform-specific insights. Based on these limitations, future research is recommended to expand comparative studies across multiple cities, adopt mixed-method approaches such as surveys, interviews, and digital ethnography to provide deeper insights into citizen perceptions, and encourage policymakers to institutionalize partnerships with community-based digital platforms so that participatory communication can be more sustainable and impactful in the context of local governance innovation.

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