

## The Application of Digital Leadership in Managing Public Political Participation on Social Media: A Case Study of the North Maluku Provincial Government's Response

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### Keywords

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digital political participation  
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### ABSTRACT

The increasing role of social media as a space for digital political participation allows direct interaction between the public and the government, yet the extent to which digital leadership can effectively manage this participation remains underexplored. This research aim to analyzes the application of digital leadership in responding to public political participation through social media with a case study on the TikTok account of the Governor of North Maluku, Sherly Tjoanda. This research used a qualitative approach with a case study method through social media mining techniques and qualitative content analysis of public comments. The analytical framework combines the concepts of digital leadership, online political participation, and responsiveness to see the relationship between leadership character, forms of participation, and government responses. The results of the study show that the digital leadership applied meets four main dimensions, namely message suitability, timeliness, technical mastery, and the ability to build relationships. Public participation is dominated by forms of activism/extra-representational voices that show the high involvement of citizens in conveying direct demands, especially related to infrastructure. In addition, the government's response has evolved from informal responses to substantive actions in the form of field visits, involvement of relevant agencies, and policy and budget adjustments. These findings confirm that social media can serve as an arena for effective political participation while encouraging government transparency and accountability, as well as strengthening the relationship between government and society in the digital age.

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### INTRODUCTION

Today, social media has become a digital space that allows people to create, share, and respond to information quickly and interactively (Luttrell, 2025; Spielvogel et al., 2026; Suryani, 2024; Tran, 2025; Yusuf, 2025). As a two-way communication space, social media has become a new arena for the public to express their aspirations and views on policy issues (Alodat, et.al. 2023) The increase in the use of social media in the last decade has changed the pattern of interaction between citizens and the government, making it one of the important indicators of political participation in the digital era (Kurniawan, et al, 2024). One of the

platforms most visible in this context is TikTok, which now serves not only as an entertainment medium, but also as a means of public participation. Based on the We Are Social and Meltwater (2025) report, Tik Tok users reach 1.84 billion people globally, with Indonesia among the countries with the largest number of users. This makes TikTok a representative forum in capturing public sentiment against government policies (Guo et al., 2025; R. Zhang, 2025; W. Zhang et al., 2024).

The phenomenon of public involvement in the digital space can be explained through the theory of Online Political Participation which classifies citizen participation behavior in the online space into four forms, namely activism/extra-representational voice, formal political participation, consumer or exit-based participation, and undefined participation. This classification helps to understand the variations in the way citizens express their opinions, from those that are symbolic to those oriented to policy demands (Pandey et al. 2019). On the other hand, there is also a need for leadership figures who are able to manage digital interactions effectively, the concept of Digital Leadership describes the ability of leaders to influence, build relationships, and create constructive dialogue through digital media. Digital leadership is characterized by four main elements, namely message suitability, punctuality, technical competence, and the ability to build relationships, Through these four aspects, digital leaders not only convey information, but also form more open and responsive public participation (Narbona, 2016).

Digital leadership, according to Narbona (2016), is tested through four main criteria: appropriateness (whether the leader speaks according to context and competence), timeliness (quick response to public issues that evolve within hours), technical specialization (fluency in using the platform's digital features), and the ability to build relationships (quality of two-way interaction with the public) (Gao & Gao, 2024; Sagbas et al., 2023). A digital leader is not merely present on social media but must maintain authority through timely responses, relevant messages, and adequate technical skills (Orkamo et al., 2025; Criado et al., 2023). Public trust is not born from claims but from evidence of interaction such as comments, shares, support, and even criticism (Ernungtyas & Boer, 2023; Nguyen et al., 2024). Within this framework, digital leadership is understood as an effort to steer public conversation toward real institutional action (Criado & Villodre, 2022).

Online political participation (Pandey et al., 2019) is not merely an expansion of communication channels but a change in the structure of citizen-state relations. Forms of participation include activism/extra-representational voice (direct complaints with clear arguments), formal political participation (communication with officials through digital procedures), consumer/exit-based participation (symbolic support without demands), and undefined participation (ambiguous messages without clear political objectives). Responsiveness (Meijer & Torenvlied, 2014) explains how public pressure in the online space translates into government action. Responsiveness is not just a spontaneous reaction but the institutional and personal capacity to harmonize public perception, political communication, and administrative decision-making. The time sequence between the escalation of citizen conversations, official statements, and field actions becomes a key indicator of responsiveness quality. Thus, the comment space on a digital leader's account is no longer merely an opinion space but an arena for micro-power negotiation.

These two concepts complement each other, digital leadership is able to explain the characteristics of a leader, and digital political participation explains how people are involved, thus elicit a response from the government. This study wants to analyze the case on the TikTok account of the Governor of North Maluku, Sherly Tjoanda, which can be a real example of interaction between citizens and the government in the digital space. This study looks at public comments regarding the condition of roads, infrastructure, and public services, directly responded to by local governments through clarification or corrective actions. This phenomenon proves that social media has become an effective means of digital political participation, where ordinary people can influence public discourse and encourage direct government accountability.

In previous studies (Simonofski, et.al.2024; Shin, et,al 2024; Adie, et.al.2024; Giest, et,al,2025, Manoharan, et,al, 2023) discusses a lot about digital leadership encouraging organizations to adapt to new technologies, but less in discussing how to encourage the government's response to political participation, so this paper wants to fill the gap in the previous study, by being able to answer the question in this study "How is the implementation of digital leadership by the North Maluku provincial government in responding to public participation through the comment column TikTok?" Therefore, this study aims to analyze the application of digital leadership in responding to public political participation on social media, as well as assess the extent to which digital communication can encourage transparency and accountability of local governments.

The development of social media has changed the way political leaders build authority and how citizens express their interests in public spaces. Digital leadership, Narbona Juan (2016) in this context is no longer just about online presence, but concerns the ability of leaders to read and manage the flow of public conversation that continues to move. The flow of conversation is manifested through online political participation, Pandey et al. (2019), which are various forms of citizen involvement that are present ranging from direct criticism to symbolic expression. This dynamic of participation raises new questions about the extent to which governments are able to respond to digital pressures in a timely and meaningful manner. On that basis, the concept of responsiveness, Meijer and Torenvlied (2014) is used to explain how digital leadership, online political participation, and government responses are interconnected in a single analytical set.

Previous studies (Simonofski et al., 2024; Shin et al., 2024; Adie et al., 2024; Giest et al., 2025; Manoharan et al., 2023) have extensively discussed digital leadership encouraging organizations to adapt to new technologies, but they have paid less attention to how to encourage government responses to political participation. Therefore, this research aims to fill that gap by answering the research question: "How is digital leadership implemented by the North Maluku provincial government in responding to public participation through the TikTok comment column?" Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the application of digital leadership in responding to public political participation on social media and to assess the extent to which digital communication can encourage local government transparency and accountability. The brief benefits of this research are threefold. Theoretically, it enriches the literature on digital leadership and online political participation by providing an empirical case from a local government context in Eastern Indonesia. Practically, the findings offer insights for government officials on how to effectively manage public aspirations through social media,

transform informal responses into substantive policies, and strengthen public trust. For policymakers, this study serves as a reference for designing responsive digital governance strategies that integrate citizen feedback into bureaucratic decision-making processes.

## METHOD

This writing used a qualitative method with a case study on the Tiktok Post of the Governor of North Maluku, with data collection carried out by collecting primary data on social media with social media mining techniques and literature from several supporting studies, the data then goes through a cleaning process to ensure that only content and comments that have relevance are classified based on the theoretical framework. Data is analyzed using Qualitative Content Analysis through collection, cleansing, and coding (Pretoriu, 2024)

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Digital Leadership Analysis

Analysis of digital leadership skills on the TikTok account of the Governor of North Maluku, Sherly Tjoanda, seen through *the digital leadership* approach of Narbona Juan (2016) through 4 main criteria, data collection and cleaning were carried out to answer the analysis questions, in order to be able to see the *digital leadership* of Mrs. Sherly Tjoanda, the results of the analysis are explained in Table.1.

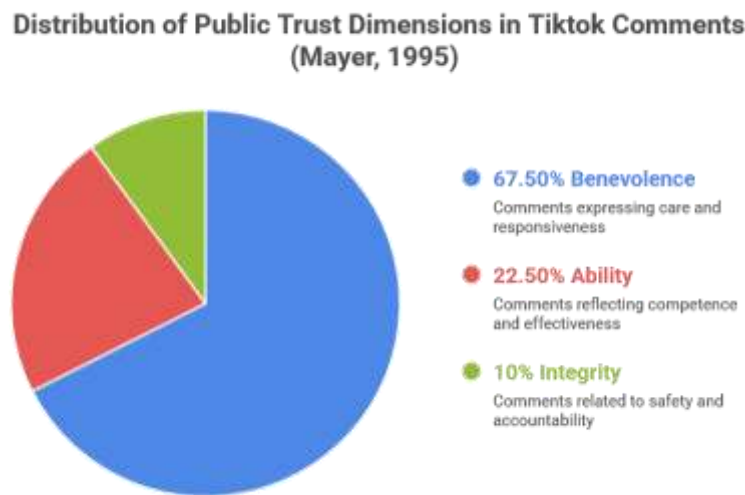
**Table.1 Analysis of Four Characteristics of *Digital Leadership* Narbona Juan (2016)**

<b>Characteristics of Digital Leadership</b>	<b>Definition of Characteristics</b>	<b>Analysis Questions</b>	<b>Compatibility with supporting data</b>
<i>Appropriateness</i>	Alignment of leaders' messages with contexts, issues, and <i>digital spaces</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is Mrs. Sherly's upload relevant to public issues?</li> <li>- Is the communication style in accordance with the role of the governor?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Yes, Mrs. Sherly uses social media to ask the public to report the location of damaged roads, relevant to infrastructure development in North Maluku and involving public participation (Figure 1).</li> <li>- Yes, his communication style is in line with the governor's role, as he goes to the field to respond to public complaints and uses TikTok to interact directly (Figure 2).</li> </ul>
<i>Timeliness</i>	The speed and timeliness of leaders respond to issues that are growing on social media.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did Sherly's mom respond at the right time?</li> <li>- How long does it take for a</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Yes, Mrs. Sherly responded to community comments on the same day (3-29) regarding road construction, showing a quick and timely response. (Figure 3).</li> </ul>

Characteristics of Digital Leadership	Definition of Characteristics	Analysis Questions	Compatibility with supporting data
		response to appear after a comment is crowded?	- Yes, Mrs. Sherly responded immediately after the comment, showing timeliness in responding to the issues raised by the community. (Figure 3).
<i>Technical Specialization</i>	Leader's ability to use the platform's technical features and rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does Ibu Sherly use TikTok features effectively?</li> <li>- Does the technical message (video format, sound, <i>hashtag</i>) support credibility?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Yes, Mrs. Sherly makes good use of the TikTok feature, using videos to explain problems and invite public participation clearly. (Figure 1).</li> <li>- Yes, the use of a video format with a clear narrative and related hashtags (<i>#ceritastjo #gubsherly #malukuutara #sherlylaos</i>) strengthens the credibility of the message and increases the visibility of the video among the public, allowing for wider interaction with the public. (Figure 4).</li> </ul>
<i>Relationship</i>	Leaders' ability to build <i>digital relationships</i> with the public through two-way interactions, connectivity, and consistency of communication.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is Mrs. Sherly's account involved in building relationships with the community?</li> <li>- Do residents feel heard?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Yes, Ms. Sherly actively builds relationships with the public through direct interaction in the TikTok comment column. He responded to questions and clarifications from the public openly. (Figure 3).</li> <li>- Yes, the community feels heard, because Mrs. Sherly immediately provides answers to their questions and explains the problems at hand, showing that she is open to receiving and responding to input from the public. (Figure 2).</li> </ul>

Source: Author's analysis based on research data, 2025)

The table found results that showed that the communication carried out was in accordance with the context of public issues, and by sharing his activities in video format showed that he was able to adapt the message to the characteristics of *digital* spaces that prioritize visuals and emotional closeness. Mrs. Sherly also showed a good level of timeliness in responding to comments and responses given not only in the form of reply comments but clarifications and advanced through advanced videos in the field, characteristics described in the table on *technical specialization* that utilizes video formats supported by narrative types, informative, and the use of hashtags. Ms. Sherly was able to build a two-way relationship with a direct response to public comments that signifies dialogical communication, rather than the one-way communication that usually occurs in traditional government channels. This proves the characteristics of *digital leadership* by Narbona Juan (2016), owned by Mrs. Sherly as *digital leadership*.



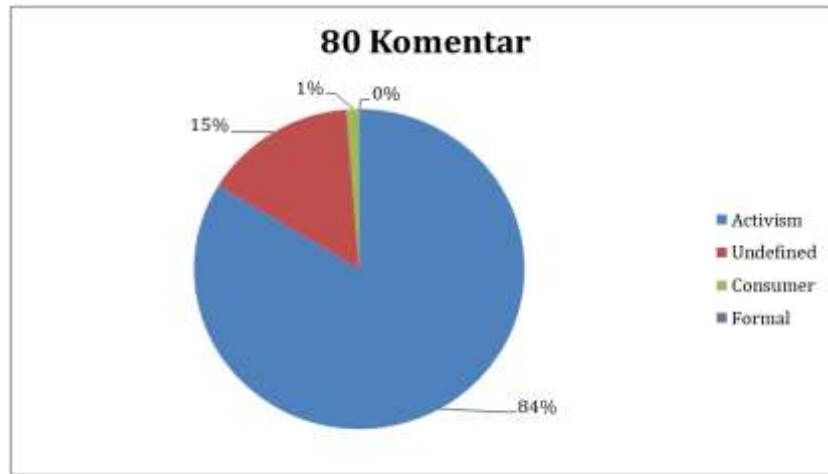
**Figure 1. Pie Chart as a result of the spread of public trust in tiktok comments with Mayer's concept (1995)**

Source: Author's analysis of TikTok comment data, 2025

### ***Analisis online political participation***

In this part of the discussion, the data was analyzed based on the TikTok upload of the Governor of North Maluku which featured comments on the TikTok account of Mrs. Sherly, a resident who submitted complaints about the condition of the road infrastructure in her area. The content was uploaded on March 29, 2025 through the Governor's official account on TikTok. The video triggered various responses from the public, ranging from demands, to short comments that were requests for help. For analysis purposes, the comments used in this study were collected from the period March 29 - April 29, 2025, with the source entirely coming from the TikTok platform (Source: TikTok, 2025). To facilitate the analysis process, all comments collected from the North Maluku Governor's TikTok upload were then encoded based on the digital political participation framework of Pandey et al. (2019). Each comment is coded according to its characteristics. *Activism/extra-representational voice* (A), *formal political participation* (F), *consumer participation/exit-based* (C), and *Undefined participation* (U). These codes are used to compile a table containing all comments and their categorization,

so that the pattern of citizen participation in the TikTok comment column can be systematically analyzed with the details of the comments in Table.2 in appendix 1, and the results of the classification are shown in the presentation in the figure.2.



**Figure2. Pie Chart results of online participation analysis with the concept of Pandey et al. (2019)**

Source: Author's analysis of TikTok comments, March–April 2025

The results of the classification using the digital political participation framework Pandey et al. (2019), which include 4 categories, show *activism/extra-representational voice*, which is comments containing complaints, demands, or direct arguments to officials which amount to 84% of comments, in *formal political participation*, which is comments that are clearly addressed to government officials or institutions, consisting of 0% of comments, and *consumer participation/exit-based*, i.e. short comments without arguments or tagging other accounts, has a percentage of 1%, and *Undefined participation*, i.e. unclear comments, no arguments but directed at officials, has 15%. from these results produce a pattern of the tendency of citizen political participation which can then be seen in Figure 2 which depicts the tendency of citizen participation more clearly and comparatively at the district level in North Maluku Province.

Based on the results of the classification of public comments taken from uploads on the TikTok account @Sherlytjoanda (Governor of North Maluku) with the title "Report Road and Bridge Damage in North Maluku", it was found that West Halmahera became the area with the highest number of requests for road construction or repair, reaching 36% of all comments. This illustrates that the condition of road infrastructure in the area is the most felt problem by the community.

Meanwhile, South Halmahera was in second place with 31% of comments, indicating the high urgency of infrastructure improvements in various villages and sub-districts. These findings can be an important reference in the development planning process, especially to direct management priorities in areas with the highest levels of road damage. Thus, this collection based on community aspirations can help the government set a focus on infrastructure development that is more on target and according to the needs of the field.



**Figure 3. Percentage of Public Comments Regarding Road Damage per Regency/City in North Maluku**

Source: Processed from comment data on the Governor of North Maluku's TikTok account, March 29 – April 29, 2025

### **Analysis of Government Response**

The stages of analysis of the government's response on the TikTok account of the Governor of North Maluku, @Sherlytjoanda, show responsiveness *Digital* comprehensive framework *Digital Governance* (Meijer & Torenvlied, 2014; Pandey et al., 2019). The response starts from the level of informal responsiveness, in the form of personal actions such as *Like* and comments, which prove that there is active monitoring of residents' complaints. It can be seen in appendix 4.2 The follow-up then increases to the level of procedural responsiveness (evidenced by the upload of location visits and official instructions) and the culmination of substantive responsiveness through the real actions of the Public Works Office and the change in agenda/budget for road infrastructure improvement. This concludes that the North Maluku Provincial Government does not only respond in a positive way. *online*, but has integrated aspirations *Digital* into the administrative and public policy processes, making social media an effective platform for accountability and resolution of real problems on the ground.

From the four indicators of responsiveness, it can be concluded that the North Maluku government actually listens to public comments submitted through social media. Starting from acknowledgments (likes), field reviews, technical actions by related agencies, to budget adjustment agendas, everything shows that citizens' complaints through TikTok do not stop as discourse, but become a trigger for real policy changes and administrative actions. This indicates that the *Digital* in North Maluku is running effectively, and social media is a channel for public participation that has a significant influence on the direction of government policies.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study showed that the digital leadership implemented by the Governor of North Maluku, Mrs. Sherly Tjoanda, has proven to be effective in responding to public political participation through social media, especially TikTok. Ms. Sherly has leveraged digital platforms to build two-way communication with the public, increase transparency, and drive government accountability. The application of the four characteristics of digital leadership described by Narbona (2016), namely appropriateness, timeliness, technical specialization, and the ability to build relationships, is clearly seen in the actions taken by the North Maluku Provincial government. This leadership is not only limited to providing information, but also

involves active interaction that results in real changes in policy and infrastructure improvements. By using social media strategically, Ms. Sherly has shown that responsive digital leadership can influence public policy, increase public participation, and improve the quality of public services. It reflects inclusive leadership, where the voice of the community is heard and forms the basis for policy actions. To reinforce this success in the context of leadership, it is recommended that the North Maluku provincial government integrate these digital leadership principles in their bureaucratic policies and procedures on a permanent basis. Responsiveness that has been tested can be institutionalized through SOPs that regulate the management of digital interactions, thus ensuring that the response to people's aspirations remains consistent and does not depend on certain moments. In addition, other local governments can emulate North Maluku's success in using digital leadership to manage people's political participation. With the right approach, digital leadership can be a highly effective tool in building stronger relationships between leaders and people, increasing transparency, and ensuring that policies taken are in line with the needs of society.

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