

Transforming Public Policy Communication through Social Media: Enhancing Public Engagement

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Abstract

Social media has transformed public policy communication by reshaping how governments distribute information, interact with citizens, and encourage public engagement. This study examines the transformation of public policy communication through social media and identifies the factors that support or constrain citizen engagement. A literature review approach was employed by synthesizing recent peer-reviewed studies on government communication, social media, transparency, responsiveness, trust, and public participation. The findings show that social media has shifted policy communication from predominantly one-way and institution-centered practices toward more immediate, accessible, interactive, and networked communication. Government–citizen interaction occurs at different levels, ranging from information access and simple digital reactions to feedback, consultation, participation, and collaboration. Transparency, information quality, responsiveness, and public trust emerge as important conditions that can strengthen engagement, although their effects depend on the quality of dialogue and the extent to which citizen input is acknowledged. The review also identifies several persistent challenges, including misinformation, disinformation, digital polarization, algorithmic fragmentation, unequal access, limited digital literacy, and institutional capacity constraints. These findings indicate that visible platform metrics such as likes, shares, and comments do not necessarily represent meaningful participation. Effective social media-based policy communication therefore requires governments to integrate clear and credible information, dialogic practices, responsive institutional behavior, and inclusive participation mechanisms. Social media is most valuable when it complements, rather than replaces, broader channels of public communication and participation. This synthesis highlights the need to evaluate engagement through communication quality, inclusiveness, and substantive citizen involvement.

Keywords: Public Policy Communication, Social Media, Public Engagement, Government–Citizen Interaction, Digital Governance

Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital communication has altered the way governments communicate public policies and interact with citizens. Traditionally, public policy communication was dominated by formal, top-down channels in which government institutions acted as information providers while citizens were positioned as passive recipients. Social media has challenged this model by creating communication environments that are faster, more interactive, and more participatory. Government agencies can now disseminate policy information directly, clarify public concerns, respond to questions, and observe public reactions in real time. Social media has become part of government communication infrastructure and digital transformation strategies. Lin & Kant (2021) show that government social media can support public goals by improving information reach and encouraging citizens' participation in digital initiatives, while Wukich (2022) emphasizes that social media

engagement involves different directions and forms of information exchange between government and the public.

This transformation is important in public policy because policy effectiveness is influenced not only by formulation and implementation, but also by how policies are communicated, interpreted, and discussed. Social media enables public institutions to present complex policies through text, video, infographics, live discussions, and interactive formats that improve accessibility. Citizens can also respond immediately through comments, shares, questions, criticism, and digital interaction. Evidence from government communication during crises demonstrates that social media can facilitate stakeholder engagement when information is timely, relevant, and responsive to citizens' needs (Fissi et al., 2022). Similarly, Bajouk and Ferré-Pavia (2024) found that government social media strategies shape patterns of public engagement, although engagement varies according to message characteristics and communication practices.

However, government presence on social media does not automatically produce meaningful public engagement. Engagement is often measured using visible metrics such as likes, shares, views, and comments, yet these indicators do not necessarily show that citizens understand a policy, trust the information, or participate substantively in policy processes. Gherheş et al. (2023), for example, found that public reactions to government social media campaigns could simultaneously include positive click-based responses and critical or negative comments. This suggests that interaction metrics alone may provide an incomplete picture of engagement. Recent evidence also indicates that greater transparency in government social media communication can improve citizens' understanding of government activities without necessarily increasing engagement or collaboration (Hsu, 2026). Public engagement should therefore be understood as a multidimensional process involving access to information, interaction, responsiveness, dialogue, feedback, trust, and opportunities for participation.

In Indonesia, social media has become increasingly relevant to government communication and e-government development. Research in Makassar shows that social media platforms can support transparency, interaction, participation, and collaboration between government and citizens in e-government implementation (Yusmanizar et al., 2023). Studies of regional government communication similarly indicate that social media can create digital dialogue and provide citizens with opportunities to express opinions and participate in public discussions (Praratya et al., 2024). Nevertheless, engagement quality depends on how institutions manage communication. One-way dissemination, bureaucratic language, delayed responses, limited interaction, and weak adaptation to citizens' information needs may reduce the participatory potential of social media. Therefore, transforming policy communication requires more than moving government announcements from conventional channels to digital platforms; it requires a shift toward dialogical, responsive, accessible, and citizen-oriented communication.

Existing studies have examined government social media adoption, crisis communication, information quality, transparency, trust, and online participation. However, much of the literature has focused on emergencies, individual platforms, campaign-based communication, or measurable engagement indicators. Less attention has been given to how social media transforms the broader process of public policy communication and how citizens interpret and respond to this transformation in everyday policy contexts. This gap is important because meaningful engagement cannot be explained by platform activity alone. It also depends on communication practices, perceived responsiveness, message clarity, opportunities for dialogue, and whether citizens feel their voices are acknowledged. Studies showing variations between visible platform interactions and substantive engagement further reinforce the need to

examine government–citizen communication as a social and communicative process rather than merely a collection of digital metrics (Gherheş et al., 2023; Wukich, 2022).

Accordingly, this study explores how social media transforms public policy communication and how this transformation contributes to enhanced public engagement. Using a qualitative perspective, the study focuses on communication practices, forms of interaction, public responses, and the opportunities and constraints associated with social media-based policy communication. By examining these dimensions, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of social media not merely as an information-distribution tool, but as a potential space for dialogue, participation, and more responsive relationships between government institutions and citizens. This perspective is expected to strengthen understanding of how digital communication can support more inclusive and participatory public policy processes while recognizing that meaningful engagement depends on the quality of communication rather than the technological platform alone.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a literature review approach to examine how social media has transformed public policy communication and contributed to public engagement. The literature review was designed to identify, compare, and synthesize previous empirical and conceptual studies related to government communication, social media use, public policy communication, citizen participation, and digital public engagement. This approach was selected because it enables the study to develop a comprehensive understanding of existing knowledge, identify recurring themes, and reveal research gaps in the relationship between social media-based government communication and public engagement. The review focused particularly on the ways social media changes communication patterns from one-way information dissemination toward more interactive, transparent, and participatory forms of communication.

Literature Search Strategy

Relevant studies were identified through systematic searches of major academic databases and scholarly search engines, including Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and SpringerLink. The search process employed combinations of keywords related to the main concepts of the study. These included “*social media*,” “*public policy communication*,” “*government communication*,” “*digital government communication*,” “*public engagement*,” “*citizen engagement*,” “*public participation*,” “*government social media*,” and “*digital participation*.” Boolean operators such as AND and OR were applied to broaden or narrow the search results. Examples of search combinations included “*social media AND public policy communication*,” “*government social media AND public engagement*,” and “*digital government communication AND citizen participation*.” The search was primarily directed toward peer-reviewed studies published within the most recent five-year period to ensure that the literature reflected contemporary developments in digital communication and social media use.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to maintain the relevance and quality of the selected literature. Studies were included when they directly examined social media use by governments or public institutions, public policy communication, citizen engagement, online participation, government–citizen interaction, transparency, or related dimensions of digital governance. Only peer-reviewed journal articles written in English or Indonesian and available in full-text format were considered. Priority was given to studies published during

the most recent five years, although several earlier influential studies could be retained when they provided important theoretical or conceptual foundations.

Studies were excluded when they focused exclusively on commercial social media marketing, private-sector communication, entertainment communication, or other topics without a clear relationship to government, public policy, or citizen engagement. Conference abstracts, unpublished manuscripts, opinion articles, non-academic websites, and duplicate publications were also excluded. Articles that mentioned social media only as a secondary element without analyzing its role in government communication or public engagement were not included in the final review.

Literature Screening and Selection

The selection process was conducted in several stages. First, all records identified through the database searches were compiled, and duplicate publications were removed. Second, the titles and abstracts of the remaining studies were screened to determine their relevance to the research topic. Articles that clearly did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded at this stage. Third, potentially relevant publications were assessed through full-text examination. The full-text screening focused on the study objectives, methodological approach, communication context, type of social media platform, form of government communication, and indicators or descriptions of public engagement. Only studies that provided substantive evidence or theoretical insights concerning the transformation of public policy communication through social media were retained for further analysis.

Data Extraction

Relevant information from each selected article was systematically extracted and organized to facilitate comparison across studies. The extracted information included the authors and publication year, country or research context, research objectives, methodological approach, social media platforms examined, form of public policy communication, dimensions of public engagement, key findings, and major limitations. Particular attention was given to evidence related to information accessibility, interactivity, transparency, responsiveness, public feedback, trust, participation, and government–citizen dialogue. The data extraction process enabled similarities and differences among previous studies to be identified and provided the basis for developing thematic categories.

Data Analysis and Thematic Synthesis

The selected literature was analyzed using thematic analysis and narrative synthesis. Each study was examined to identify recurring concepts, relationships, and findings related to social media-based public policy communication and public engagement. Similar findings were grouped into broader themes rather than being presented as isolated summaries of individual studies. The analysis focused on several major themes, including the transformation of government communication, social media as a policy communication platform, interactive government–citizen communication, public engagement and participation, transparency and public trust, challenges in digital communication, and strategies for strengthening public engagement. The thematic synthesis was conducted through three main stages: initial identification of relevant findings, grouping similar findings into thematic categories, and interpretation of relationships among the identified themes. Through this process, the review sought to explain not only how social media is used by public institutions but also how particular communication practices influence the quality and depth of public engagement. The synthesis also allowed the study to identify inconsistencies in previous findings and areas that remain insufficiently explored.

Research Quality and Reliability

To improve the reliability of the review, greater emphasis was placed on studies published in reputable peer-reviewed journals and indexed academic databases. The relevance of each study was evaluated based on the clarity of its objectives, appropriateness of its methodology, transparency of data collection and analysis, and direct contribution to the topic under investigation. Findings were compared across multiple studies rather than relying on individual sources. This process helped reduce the risk of drawing conclusions from isolated evidence and strengthened the credibility of the thematic synthesis. Overall, the methodological process provided a structured basis for examining existing evidence on the transformation of public policy communication through social media. By systematically selecting, organizing, and synthesizing relevant literature, the study aimed to identify major patterns in digital government communication, evaluate its relationship with public engagement, and highlight areas requiring further investigation.

Results and Discussion

Transformation of Public Policy Communication through Social Media

The synthesis of the reviewed literature indicates that social media has substantially transformed public policy communication from a predominantly institutional, hierarchical, and one-directional process into a more networked and publicly accessible communication environment. Under conventional communication models, government institutions largely determined what information was released, when it was communicated, and through which official channels citizens could obtain it. Social media has weakened this dependence on formal communication channels by allowing public institutions to communicate policy information directly and continuously to citizens. Asimakopoulos et al. (2025) describes this development as part of a broader transformation toward networked government in which social media supports transparency, participation, and collaboration, while Cho & Melisa (2021) similarly identifies social media as an important infrastructure through which government organizations can inform citizens, communicate public services, solicit public views, and receive feedback. The literature therefore demonstrates that the transformation is not limited to a change in communication technology; it also represents a shift in the temporal and organizational characteristics of policy communication. Information that previously depended on press releases, official websites, printed documents, or conventional mass media can now be communicated rapidly through social platforms and continuously updated as policy implementation develops.

A second major finding concerns the transformation of the government's role from an exclusive producer and distributor of information toward an actor operating within a multidirectional communication network. Three broad patterns in government social media practices representation, engagement, and networking which demonstrate that public institutions can progress from merely establishing an online presence toward interacting with citizens and connecting different actors through digital networks. This development becomes more significant when social media is institutionalized within government organizations rather than treated as an additional publicity channel. Randma-Liiv (2023) shows that institutionalization requires social media practices to become integrated into organizational routines, strategic objectives, and standard operating procedures. More recent evidence from Criado and Villodre (2022), however, demonstrates that this transition remains uneven because institutionalization may be constrained by organizational culture, limited resources, security concerns, weak evaluation mechanisms, and the absence of clear governance frameworks. Consequently, the reviewed evidence reveals that the transformation of public policy communication cannot be assessed simply by whether an institution has Facebook, Instagram, X, YouTube, or other

accounts. A deeper transformation occurs when digital communication becomes embedded in the institution's policy communication processes and is used systematically for information provision, interaction, feedback, and public dialogue.

The literature further shows that social media has diversified both the content and communicative functions of public policy messages. Public institutions are no longer restricted to formal policy announcements but can combine written explanations, images, infographics, short videos, livestreams, hyperlinks, question-and-answer formats, and other interactive features to translate complex policies into more accessible forms. Pandey & Ghosh (2026), based on an analysis of 2,893 local-government Facebook posts, demonstrate that government social media communication performs multiple functions rather than serving only as a channel for administrative information. Their findings show that although democratic information provision is prominent, a considerable proportion of government communication also contains symbolic and presentational content, indicating that public institutions use social media simultaneously to inform citizens and construct their institutional presence. Chen et al. (2021) further demonstrate that communication characteristics matter for citizen responses: their analysis of government social media during the COVID-19 crisis found that dialogic communication and information concerning current developments and government actions were associated with greater citizen engagement. These results suggest that the digital transformation of policy communication involves not only increasing the volume or speed of information but also altering how policy messages are designed, framed, delivered, and opened to public response.

Another recurring pattern is the expansion of transparency and direct access to government policy information. Social media reduces the communicative distance between institutions and citizens because citizens can follow policy announcements, implementation updates, public-service information, institutional activities, and official clarifications without relying entirely on intermediaries. The importance of this function is also evident in the Indonesian context. Yusmanizar et al. (2023), in their study of e-government development in Makassar, found that social media has the capacity to alter government–citizen interaction by increasing administrative transparency and creating opportunities for citizens to participate and collaborate in government and development agendas. Evidence concerning operational transparency also shows that sharing information about governmental processes can improve citizens' understanding of what government institutions actually do. Hsu (2026), based on two survey experiments involving U.S. online samples, found that operational transparency through government social media improved citizens' understanding of government activities, although greater transparency alone did not necessarily produce stronger intentions to engage or collaborate. This distinction is important within the reviewed findings because it demonstrates that social media can substantially improve policy visibility and information accessibility, while meaningful engagement requires additional communicative mechanisms beyond simply making government information available.

Taken together, the reviewed studies reveal a transformation that can be understood as a movement from closed to more accessible communication, from delayed to more immediate information, from predominantly one-way dissemination to potentially interactive communication, and from institution-centered messaging toward more networked government–citizen communication. Nevertheless, the literature does not indicate that this transformation is uniform or complete. Substantial government social media activity remains oriented toward information provision and institutional presentation, organizational and governance barriers can prevent social media from becoming fully institutionalized (Criado and Villodre, 2022). Likewise, evidence that transparency improves understanding but does not automatically generate collaboration indicates that digital presence and public participation

should not be treated as equivalent outcomes (Hsu, 2026). The overall pattern emerging from the literature is therefore one of partial but substantial transformation: social media has expanded the speed, visibility, accessibility, formats, and interactive possibilities of public policy communication, but the transition from digital information dissemination to genuinely dialogic policy communication depends on institutional capacity, communication strategies, responsiveness, governance arrangements, and the extent to which public institutions use citizen feedback as part of an ongoing communication process.

Government–Citizen Interaction and Forms of Public Engagement

The reviewed literature shows that social media has substantially expanded opportunities for direct interaction between government institutions and citizens. Unlike conventional public communication, in which citizens primarily receive information from official institutions, social media creates multiple directions of information exchange. Government agencies can publish policy information, citizens can respond through comments or questions, and institutions can subsequently clarify, acknowledge, or respond to those reactions. Wukich (2022) conceptualizes government social media engagement through the interaction between the structure of information flows and the content of communication, showing that government–citizen engagement may range from simple information transmission to transparency, customer service, coproduction, and citizen participation. This indicates that digital interaction cannot be understood merely by counting how frequently governments post information or how often citizens react. Rather, the structure of communication determines whether social media functions only as an information-distribution channel or develops into a space where government and citizens exchange information and participate in policy-related communication. The literature identifies a transition from communication dominated by government-to-citizen information flows toward more complex patterns involving government-to-citizen, citizen-to-government, and citizen-to-citizen interactions.

The synthesis further reveals that public engagement takes several distinct forms and levels of intensity. At the most basic level, citizens engage by accessing, viewing, liking, sharing, or reacting to government information. At a higher level, engagement involves commenting, asking questions, expressing opinions, reporting problems, or responding to policy announcements. More substantive forms include consultation, participation in policy conversations, contribution of local knowledge, coproduction of public services, and participation in public decision-making processes. Wukich (2022) distinguishes engagement forms according to both communication direction and message purpose, while Reisach (2021) demonstrate that citizen engagement is strongly influenced by the type of content and media used by public institutions. Their findings show that a larger social media audience does not automatically result in greater engagement; citizens are more likely to interact when government posts address subjects relevant to their interests and provide opportunities for active participation. Public engagement in the reviewed literature therefore ranges from information access and symbolic reactions to interaction, feedback, consultation, participation, and collaborative engagement.

The characteristics of government messages also emerge as important determinants of how citizens interact with public institutions. Studies indicate that communication containing rich media, interactive features, and opportunities for dialogue tends to generate stronger responses than purely administrative or one-directional information. Local government Facebook communication during the COVID-19 pandemic, found that both media richness and dialogic-loop features had significant positive effects on citizen engagement, citizen engagement with government social media varied according to communication characteristics and the stage of a public crisis, indicating that engagement is sensitive to context, information needs, and

communication strategies (Zhang et al., 2022). Previous studies of government social media also show that different types of content, message formats, and media features generate different patterns of citizen response. These findings indicate that government–citizen interaction is shaped by the relevance of the message, the communication format used, the degree of interactivity provided, and the extent to which government institutions create opportunities for citizens to respond.

Transparency and responsiveness are also frequently identified as important elements of social media-based public engagement. Government social media allows citizens to observe institutional activities, obtain information directly from public authorities, ask questions, communicate concerns, and provide feedback without necessarily relying on formal administrative channels. In Indonesia, Yusmanizar et al. (2023) found that social media use in e-government can increase administrative transparency, facilitate citizen participation, support public-policy mobilization, and enable collaboration between government and citizens. Yang et al. (2021) similarly examined the relationship between attention to government digital media, perceived transparency, public trust, and citizen engagement, showing that government social media and official websites form an important part of the communication environment through which citizens evaluate government openness and involvement. Across the reviewed studies, responsiveness is reflected in how quickly and appropriately public institutions acknowledge questions, clarify information, address complaints, and respond to citizen feedback, while transparency is associated with the accessibility, completeness, and visibility of policy-related information.

Transparency, Responsiveness, Trust, and Factors Supporting Engagement

The reviewed literature identifies transparency as one of the most frequently reported factors associated with effective government communication and citizen engagement on social media. Transparency in this context extends beyond the simple publication of government information and includes the availability, clarity, timeliness, completeness, and accessibility of information concerning public policies, administrative processes, government decisions, and implementation activities. Al-Omouh et al. (2023) found that citizens' use of government social media was positively associated with perceived government transparency and that greater perceived transparency was subsequently associated with higher levels of trust in government. Their findings also indicate that perceived transparency mediates the relationship between government social media use and public trust, suggesting that the value of social media is partly derived from citizens' ability to observe government activities more directly. Similarly, Prasodjo (2026), using data from 388 followers of a government agency's social media platforms, found that the provision of quality information was significantly associated with perceived transparency, trust, responsiveness, and online political participation. More recent experimental evidence, however, provides a more differentiated picture. Hsu (2026) found that operational transparency on government social media improved citizens' understanding of governmental activities and, in certain contexts, perceptions of government performance, but did not necessarily increase intentions to engage or collaborate. The findings across these studies distinguish between information transparency as a condition for informed citizenship and engagement as a separate behavioral outcome that requires additional communicative mechanisms.

Responsiveness constitutes another prominent dimension identified across the literature. On social media, responsiveness is reflected in the extent to which government institutions acknowledge citizens' questions, provide clarification, address complaints, respond to misinformation, and demonstrate that public feedback has been received and considered. Prasodjo (2026) found that high-quality government information was positively related to

citizens' perceptions of governmental responsiveness, although perceived responsiveness did not automatically translate into higher levels of online political participation in their empirical model. This finding is important because it shows that citizens may recognize an institution as responsive without necessarily becoming more actively involved in political or policy-related activities. In practice, responsiveness is influenced by several operational characteristics, including response speed, consistency, relevance of replies, availability of personnel managing official accounts, and institutional authority to respond to citizen concerns. Recent Indonesian evidence from social media management research similarly shows that effective management practices can strengthen accessibility, interaction, and public perceptions of government responsiveness, while large volumes of citizen comments, misinformation, and unequal digital literacy can limit institutions' capacity to maintain consistent two-way communication.

Public trust also appears repeatedly in the reviewed studies, although the relationship between social media communication and trust is neither automatic nor uniform. Greater use of public-sector social media was positively related to citizens' satisfaction and perceptions of government trustworthiness, suggesting that direct exposure to government communication can influence how citizens evaluate public institutions. In the Indonesian context, Torres et al. (2023) based on a survey of 263 respondents, examined attention to government social media and websites together with perceived transparency, public trust, and citizen engagement. Their findings indicate that citizens' attention to official digital government channels contributes to perceptions of transparency, reinforcing the role of social media and government websites as part of the broader trust-building communication environment. Evidence from crisis communication further demonstrates the sensitivity of trust to the consistency of government information. Al-Omouh et al. (2023), studying government social media communication during the COVID-19 pandemic, found that transparency, participation, and collaboration were positively associated with trust, whereas contradictory information circulating through social media negatively affected trust and citizens' attitudes. These findings show that public trust is shaped not simply by the presence of government institutions online but by the perceived credibility, coherence, openness, and reliability of the communication citizens encounter.

The synthesis also identifies several communication and organizational factors that support higher-quality engagement. Information quality appears consistently as a central factor, particularly when government messages are accurate, relevant, understandable, timely, and responsive to citizens' immediate information needs. Prasodjo (2026) demonstrate that quality information is directly related to transparency, responsiveness, trust, and participation-related outcomes. Other studies emphasize the importance of participation and collaboration mechanisms rather than relying exclusively on information dissemination. Al-Omouh et al. (2023) found that government social media practices incorporating transparency, participation, and collaboration contributed positively to trust during a crisis. Recent evidence from the Bandung City Government further suggests that high-quality engagement is supported by systematic social media management, particularly when official government accounts become recognizable and reliable sources of information and when institutions establish comprehensive guidelines for managing digital communication. Such findings identify institutional planning, account credibility, message consistency, content relevance, communication guidelines, and the capacity to sustain interaction as recurring conditions supporting engagement rather than treating engagement as an automatic consequence of technological adoption.

Accessibility and citizens' ability to recognize official digital channels also emerge as important supporting conditions. Government social media reduces practical barriers to accessing public information because citizens can receive policy announcements, service information, clarifications, and implementation updates through platforms already integrated into everyday communication practices. Nevertheless, the reviewed evidence shows that

accessibility depends on more than platform availability. Information must be communicated in understandable language, adapted to the characteristics of digital audiences, and sufficiently visible to compete with information from non-governmental sources. Indonesian studies indicate that citizens use official social media channels not only to obtain information but also to express opinions and provide feedback regarding policies and services, while effective social media management contributes to transparency and more positive institutional perceptions. At the same time, unequal digital literacy, misinformation, high volumes of interaction, and differences in citizens' ability to access or interpret digital information remain recurrent factors shaping the quality and inclusiveness of engagement.

Challenges and Emerging Patterns in Social Media-Based Policy Communication

The reviewed literature identifies misinformation, disinformation, and declining information credibility as major challenges in social media-based policy communication. The open and rapidly circulating nature of social media allows official policy information to coexist with inaccurate interpretations, manipulated content, rumors, and competing narratives. Sunday et al. (2026), in their systematic review of 120 peer-reviewed studies, identify misinformation, algorithmic bias, and digital echo chambers as recurring barriers to effective government–citizen communication. This problem becomes particularly important when policy information is complex, contested, or rapidly changing because citizens may encounter unofficial interpretations before or alongside authoritative government messages. Government institutions therefore operate within an information environment in which publishing an official statement does not guarantee that it will become the dominant interpretation of a policy. Reveilhac and DePaula (2025) similarly show that government communication on social media increasingly takes place within complex boundaries between public-service information, institutional representation, persuasive communication, and broader digital discourse. Information credibility in this environment is closely associated with message consistency, source recognition, clarity, timely correction of inaccurate information, and the ability of public institutions to maintain a reliable official presence.

Another recurring pattern concerns algorithmic fragmentation, echo chambers, and polarization within digital communication networks. Social media does not expose all citizens to identical policy information because platform algorithms, interaction histories, personal networks, and previous engagement influence which content becomes visible. Sunday et al. (2026) identify algorithmic bias and digital echo chambers as significant challenges because they can limit citizens' exposure to alternative perspectives and reinforce existing attitudes. Yue and Yu (2025), examining communication networks surrounding China's Mass Entrepreneurship and Innovation policy, found that policy adjustments increased some forms of interaction while cross-community connections declined and emotional polarization became more pronounced. Such findings indicate that higher levels of online activity do not necessarily represent broader or more integrated communication. Interaction may instead remain concentrated within relatively isolated communities. In the Indonesian context, Zaimina (2025) similarly found that normative, declarative, and predominantly one-way government messages concerning religious moderation were associated with weaker dialogic engagement and recurring skepticism, whereas personal testimonies, contextual narratives, and less patronizing communication tended to receive more constructive responses.

The digital divide and unequal participation also appear consistently as structural challenges in the reviewed literature. Although social media can broaden access to policy information, citizens' ability to benefit from digital communication continues to be influenced by internet connectivity, socioeconomic conditions, educational background, digital literacy, age, technological access, and the ability to critically evaluate online information. Asimakopoulous

et al. (2025), based on a systematic review of 46 peer-reviewed studies, found that digital technologies have improved transparency and opportunities for civic engagement while simultaneously creating risks of widening participation inequalities, particularly among marginalized populations. Privacy, surveillance, security, and weaknesses in regulatory frameworks were also identified as persistent concerns. These findings indicate that the apparent accessibility of social media should not be equated with universal inclusion. Citizens who actively comment, share, participate in online consultations, or interact with government accounts may represent only particular segments of society, whereas individuals experiencing connectivity problems, low digital literacy, language barriers, disabilities, or limited familiarity with digital platforms may remain underrepresented. Matlala (2025) likewise show that social media-based citizen engagement is shaped by multiple technological, institutional, communicative, and individual factors rather than by platform availability alone.

Institutional capacity represents another challenge affecting the quality of social media-based policy communication. The transition from conventional communication to digital interaction requires more than simply establishing official social media accounts. Government organizations need personnel capable of developing appropriate content, monitoring public reactions, responding consistently, correcting misinformation, analyzing digital data, managing controversial discussions, and coordinating communication between different institutional units. Sunday et al. (2026) identify weaknesses in digital literacy, data analytics, and strategic communication skills among public administrators as barriers to effective digital engagement. These limitations can contribute to the continued use of social media as a digital broadcasting channel rather than as an interactive communication space. Zaimina (2025) found that limited responsiveness and declarative communication reduced opportunities for constructive government–citizen interaction, whereas messages emphasizing lived experiences, contextual relevance, and personal communication generated more favorable responses. Reveilhac and DePaula (2025) further emphasize that government organizations must simultaneously perform public-information functions, maintain institutional representation, respond to citizens, and adapt communication practices to the specific dynamics of social media platforms.

Privacy, platform governance, accountability, and the measurement of citizen engagement constitute additional patterns identified across the literature. Government organizations depend heavily on commercial social media platforms whose algorithms, moderation systems, data practices, and interface changes remain largely beyond governmental control. Asimakopoulos et al. (2025) identify privacy protection, misinformation regulation, surveillance concerns, and unequal access as continuing challenges in digitally mediated public participation. At the same time, the literature increasingly distinguishes visible digital interaction from substantive participation. Likes, shares, comments, views, and other engagement metrics demonstrate that citizens have interacted with government content, but these activities do not necessarily indicate policy understanding, deliberation, influence on decision-making, or sustained participation. Citizen engagement through social media can take different forms and is influenced by multiple determinants, making it inappropriate to treat all digital interactions as equivalent forms of participation. Across the reviewed studies, policy communication is therefore increasingly characterized by differences between communication reach, observable platform engagement, dialogic interaction, and deeper forms of citizen participation, with each being affected by information credibility, digital inequalities, institutional capacity, platform structures, and communication practices.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the transformation of public policy communication through social media should not be understood merely as a shift from conventional channels to digital

platforms, but as a broader change in the relationship between government institutions and citizens. Social media changes the speed, direction, visibility, accessibility, and interactivity of policy communication, allowing citizens to respond, reinterpret, criticize, and redistribute government messages in real time. However, the use of social media does not automatically transform communication practices. Government institutions may remain trapped in a top-down model even when using digital platforms. Information provision remained the dominant form of communication among government institutions, while Reveilhac and DePaula (2025) emphasize that government communication on social media increasingly combines public-service functions, institutional representation, and strategic communication. This suggests that meaningful transformation occurs when governments move beyond one-way dissemination and use social media for listening, clarification, dialogue, feedback, and continuous interaction with citizens.

The findings also demonstrate that public engagement should be understood as a multidimensional process rather than a single measurable activity. Likes, views, shares, and comments may reflect digital visibility or behavioral interaction, but they do not necessarily indicate policy understanding, deliberation, or meaningful participation. The quality of state citizen exchanges needs to be assessed beyond platform-generated engagement metrics, while Matlala (2025) show that social media engagement takes different forms depending on technological, institutional, and communicative conditions. Dialogic communication can strengthen citizen engagement, whereas media richness alone does not automatically produce stronger interaction. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of social media-based policy communication depends more on the relevance, clarity, timing, and dialogic quality of communication than on the sophistication of digital content. Public engagement should therefore be differentiated into several levels, ranging from exposure and reaction to feedback, consultation, participation, and collaboration.

Transparency, responsiveness, and trust emerge as important but interdependent dimensions of this process. Transparency can improve citizens' access to policy information and strengthen their understanding of government activities, but transparency alone does not necessarily produce active participation. High-quality government information was associated with perceived transparency, trust, responsiveness, and online participation, although trust and responsiveness did not consistently function as direct predictors of participation. Good governance and quality information contribute to public trust, in the Indonesian context that perceived transparency strongly influences trust and that trust is associated with citizen engagement. These findings indicate that transparency should be considered an enabling condition for engagement rather than an engagement outcome itself. Likewise, responsiveness should not simply be measured by the number or speed of replies. A response becomes meaningful when it acknowledges citizens' concerns, provides relevant explanations, follows up on public feedback, and demonstrates that government institutions are willing to listen rather than merely maintain an online presence.

The participatory potential of social media is nevertheless constrained by misinformation, disinformation, polarization, and fragmented communication networks. Sunday et al. (2026) identify misinformation, algorithmic bias, and digital echo chambers as major barriers to effective government–citizen communication. In such an environment, official policy messages compete with rumors, misleading interpretations, emotional narratives, and user-generated content, reducing the ability of government institutions to control how policies are understood. Yue and Yu (2025) show that greater interaction surrounding policy communication can coexist with weaker connections between communities and stronger emotional polarization, indicating that high engagement metrics do not necessarily represent successful communication. Similarly, Zaimina (2025) found that normative and predominantly

one-way government narratives generated weaker dialogic engagement, whereas contextual and experience-based communication received more constructive responses. These findings emphasize that effective policy communication requires not only accurate information but also attention to narrative relevance, emotional context, audience diversity, and the ways in which policy messages circulate through fragmented digital networks.

The digital divide and dependence on privately operated platforms further complicate the relationship between social media and inclusive participation. Although digital communication can reduce geographical and bureaucratic barriers, access remains unequal because participation depends on internet connectivity, technological resources, education, age, socioeconomic conditions, language, accessibility, and digital literacy. Asimakopoulos et al. (2025) show that digital technologies can enhance transparency and participation while simultaneously reinforcing inequalities among marginalized groups. Consequently, citizens who actively engage with government social media may not represent the broader population. In addition, public institutions rely on commercial platforms whose algorithms, moderation rules, privacy policies, and recommendation systems remain largely outside governmental control. These systems influence which messages citizens see, which comments become visible, and how policy discussions develop. This creates an additional governance challenge because the quality of public policy communication is shaped not only by government strategy and citizen behavior, but also by the technical and commercial architecture of the platforms through which communication occurs.

Conclusion

This study concludes that social media has significantly transformed public policy communication by shifting government communication from a predominantly one-way, formal, and institution-centered model toward a more immediate, interactive, accessible, and participatory communication environment. The reviewed literature shows that social media enables governments to disseminate policy information rapidly, broaden public access, clarify emerging issues, and create direct channels for citizen feedback. However, meaningful public engagement cannot be measured solely through visible platform metrics such as likes, shares, comments, or views, because these indicators do not necessarily reflect policy understanding, deliberation, or substantive participation. Effective engagement depends on the quality of communication, particularly the relevance, clarity, timeliness, transparency, and responsiveness of government messages, as well as the extent to which citizens perceive that their feedback is acknowledged. Transparency and trust function as important enabling conditions, but they must be supported by dialogic communication and credible opportunities for participation. At the same time, the potential of social media is constrained by misinformation, disinformation, polarization, algorithmic fragmentation, unequal digital access, limited digital literacy, and the institutional capacity of government agencies to manage continuous interaction. Dependence on commercial platforms also introduces concerns related to privacy, moderation, visibility, and algorithmic control. Therefore, social media should be understood as part of a broader public communication ecosystem rather than as a stand-alone solution for citizen participation. The transformation of public policy communication becomes most meaningful when digital platforms are integrated with responsive institutional practices, inclusive participation mechanisms, and complementary communication channels. Strengthening these elements can help governments move beyond simple information dissemination toward communication practices that are more transparent, dialogic, inclusive, and capable of supporting stronger relationships between public institutions and citizens in contemporary policy processes. Such an approach also ensures that technological innovation contributes to democratic communication without replacing the institutional responsibilities required for meaningful engagement.

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