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Political Communication Dysfunction: The Impact of Controversial Statements by Public Officials on Public Trust

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Abstract

The increasing prevalence of controversial statements by Indonesian public officials during the 2024–2025 period has generated public criticism and raised concerns regarding declining trust in government institutions. This study aims to analyze the relationship between political communication dysfunction and public trust erosion by examining the characteristics of controversial statements, digital media amplification mechanisms, and their implications for democratic governance. This research employs a qualitative normative library research approach based on documentary analysis of official statements, government documents, public trust reports, academic literature, and credible media sources. The analysis integrates Political Communication Theory, the OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions, Aristotle's Rhetorical Theory, Castells' Communication Power Theory, and Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory. The findings reveal that controversial statements represent systemic communication dysfunction rather than isolated individual failures, affecting public trust dimensions, particularly integrity, responsiveness, and fairness. Digital media accelerates the spread of negative narratives through agenda-setting, framing, and echo chamber mechanisms, while ineffective crisis responses further weaken institutional credibility. The study concludes that strengthening communication accountability, digital literacy, empathetic leadership, and institutional crisis communication mechanisms is essential for restoring public trust and supporting democratic governance in Indonesia's digital era.

Keywords: Crisis Communication, Digital Democracy, Political Communication, Public Trust, Controversial Statements.



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INTRODUCTION

Political communication constitutes a fundamental component of democratic governance because it shapes interactions between governments and citizens while influencing institutional legitimacy and the effectiveness of public policy implementation. In contemporary democratic systems, communication is no longer viewed merely as a channel for delivering governmental information but as a strategic process through which public officials establish credibility, demonstrate responsiveness, and maintain citizens' confidence in public institutions (Sampurna et al., 2024). The rapid expansion of digital communication technologies has fundamentally transformed this relationship by allowing official statements to be disseminated, interpreted, and contested almost instantaneously, thereby increasing both opportunities for public engagement and risks of communication failure (Widodo & Kristiyono, 2025). As political communication becomes increasingly embedded within digital ecosystems, every statement delivered by public officials possesses the potential to influence public perceptions beyond its original context and intention. This condition requires governments to balance persuasive communication with transparency, empathy, and accountability in order to sustain democratic legitimacy amid increasingly critical and participatory societies. Recent governance studies further indicate that public trust is strongly associated with citizens' perceptions of governmental responsiveness, integrity, and openness, suggesting that communication quality has become an essential determinant of institutional trust rather than merely a complementary administrative function (OECD, 2024). Against this background, understanding how communication practices contribute to either strengthening or eroding public trust has become an increasingly important issue for both political communication scholarship and democratic governance.

The Indonesian political landscape during the 2024–2025 period illustrates how communication has increasingly become a determining factor in shaping public perceptions of governmental legitimacy. A series of controversial statements delivered by public officials attracted widespread public attention because they were perceived as insensitive to citizens' socioeconomic conditions and disconnected from the realities experienced by the broader population. Media coverage of statements made by several prominent officials, including Ahmad Sahroni, Bahlil Lahadalia, and members of the House of Representatives concerning public welfare and state policies, generated extensive criticism and became symbols of a widening communication gap between political elites and society (Agustin et al., 2025). Rather than remaining isolated incidents, these controversies accumulated into broader public dissatisfaction that was reflected in intense debates across digital platforms and public demonstrations demanding greater governmental accountability and responsiveness. Such developments indicate that controversial political statements should not merely be interpreted as rhetorical mistakes or individual lapses in judgment, but as manifestations of deeper institutional communication problems involving empathy, strategic message formulation, and political sensitivity. The growing influence of digital media further intensifies these dynamics because online platforms enable official statements to be rapidly disseminated, reframed, and amplified through continuous interactions among users, making communication failures significantly more difficult to contain (Noorikhshan et al., 2023). Consequently, the contemporary Indonesian experience demonstrates that ineffective political communication can quickly evolve from isolated public controversy into a broader challenge that threatens institutional trust, democratic legitimacy, and the relationship between government and citizens (Purwaningsih et al., 2024).

Existing scholarship consistently acknowledges that political communication plays a decisive role in shaping citizens' trust in government institutions, yet the mechanisms through which controversial statements influence public perceptions remain insufficiently explored, particularly within rapidly evolving digital democracies. Previous studies have predominantly emphasized transparency, responsiveness, and ethical leadership as major determinants of institutional trust, demonstrating that governments perceived as open and accountable are more likely to maintain public confidence during periods of political uncertainty (Judijanto et al., 2024). Parallel studies on political communication further argue that ineffective communication not only weakens government credibility but also contributes to declining democratic legitimacy when official narratives fail to reflect citizens' expectations and social realities (Hermawan, 2025). Although these studies provide valuable insights into the relationship between communication and trust, they generally examine political communication from broad governance or electoral perspectives without specifically investigating how controversial public statements trigger distrust through digital communication dynamics. Likewise, research concerning Indonesia has largely focused on political communication strategies, democratic narratives, or media transformation, while paying limited attention to the cumulative consequences of repeated communication controversies involving public officials (Purwaningsih et al., 2024). This limitation suggests that communication dysfunction should be understood not merely as an isolated rhetorical failure but as a multidimensional phenomenon in which message content, institutional credibility, media amplification, and public interpretation interact to influence perceptions of governmental integrity and legitimacy. Accordingly, this study positions controversial statements by public officials as the central analytical unit for explaining how political communication dysfunction contributes to the erosion of public trust within Indonesia's contemporary democratic environment.

Existing studies have undoubtedly enriched the understanding of political communication, public trust, and digital governance; however, important conceptual and empirical limitations remain unresolved. Most previous research examines political communication as a broad governance practice or focuses on electoral campaigns, media strategies, and institutional transparency, leaving the cumulative impact of controversial statements by public officials on public trust relatively underexplored, particularly within Indonesia's rapidly evolving digital communication environment (Launa et al., 2026). Furthermore, studies investigating communication crises frequently emphasize organizational reputation recovery or corporate crisis management, providing limited explanation of how communication failures committed by public officials interact with media amplification, citizens' interpretations, and institutional trust within democratic governance (Setyaningrum, 2025). These limitations indicate that no single theoretical perspective is sufficient to explain the complexity of political communication dysfunction because the phenomenon simultaneously involves message

construction, digital dissemination, public perception, crisis response, and institutional legitimacy. Accordingly, this study adopts an integrative theoretical perspective by combining Political Communication Theory to explain the strategic role of governmental communication, the OECD Drivers of Trust Framework to interpret changes in citizens' trust, and Agenda-Setting, Framing, and Situational Crisis Communication Theory to understand how controversial statements are amplified, interpreted, and managed throughout the communication process. Such an integrated perspective enables controversial statements to be examined not merely as isolated rhetorical incidents but as interconnected communication events capable of influencing democratic accountability through multiple social and institutional mechanisms (Rohmah, 2025). This theoretical integration therefore provides a more comprehensive analytical foundation for explaining why repeated communication controversies have the potential to evolve into broader political communication dysfunction that ultimately undermines public trust in contemporary Indonesia.

The unresolved issues identified in previous studies highlight the need for a more integrated analytical framework capable of explaining the sequential relationship between controversial political communication and the erosion of public trust. Rather than treating controversial statements as isolated communication failures, this study conceptualizes them as the primary communication stimulus that interacts with the characteristics of the digital information ecosystem, where agenda-setting processes, media framing, and algorithm-driven amplification collectively shape citizens' interpretations of governmental actions and intentions (Widodo & Kristiyono, 2025). These interpretations subsequently influence citizens' evaluations of governmental responsiveness, integrity, transparency, and empathy, which constitute the principal dimensions of institutional trust proposed by the OECD Drivers of Trust Framework (Brezzi et al., 2021). The model further assumes that governmental responses following communication controversies, including clarification, apology, corrective action, or defensive communication, may either mitigate or intensify the negative consequences of controversial statements depending on their consistency with public expectations and the severity of the perceived communication failure (Setyaningrum, 2025). By integrating Political Communication Theory, the OECD Drivers of Trust Framework, Agenda-Setting Theory, Framing Theory, and Situational Crisis Communication Theory into a single analytical perspective, this study explains how communication dysfunction develops through interconnected stages rather than through isolated political events. Such an approach provides a more comprehensive explanation of why repeated communication controversies are capable of producing cumulative effects on democratic legitimacy and institutional trust within Indonesia's contemporary political environment. Based on this theoretical synthesis and the identified research gaps, the proposed conceptual framework of this study is presented in Figure 1.

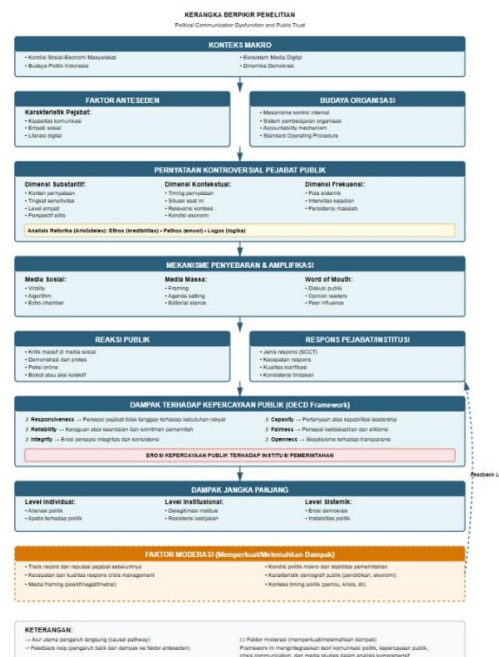


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Against this background, this study aims to comprehensively examine how controversial statements made by Indonesian public officials influence public trust during the 2024–2025 period by analyzing the interaction between political communication practices, digital media amplification, and citizens' perceptions of government institutions. Unlike previous studies that predominantly investigate political communication from electoral, governance, or media perspectives, this research places controversial public statements as the primary unit of analysis to explain the emergence of communication dysfunction and its implications for institutional trust within Indonesia's contemporary democratic context. The novelty of this study lies in the integration of multiple theoretical perspectives into a unified analytical framework capable of explaining the communication process from the production of official statements, their amplification through digital media, public interpretation, governmental responses, and their eventual consequences for democratic legitimacy. This integrated perspective is expected to enrich the literature on political communication by extending existing discussions beyond communication effectiveness toward a more comprehensive understanding of communication dysfunction in democratic governance. Furthermore, the findings are anticipated to provide practical recommendations for strengthening communication capacity among public officials, improving institutional crisis communication strategies, and supporting the development of evidence-based policies that foster transparency, accountability, and public trust. Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to both academic discourse and public governance by offering a systematic explanation of why communication has become a strategic determinant of democratic resilience in Indonesia's increasingly digital and participatory political environment.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a non-empirical qualitative design using a normative library research approach to examine the relationship between political communication dysfunction and public trust through systematic analysis of documentary sources. The research relied on primary materials consisting of official statements by Indonesian public officials issued during the 2024–2025 period, government documents, public trust reports, survey publications, and news coverage from credible national media documenting controversial political statements and governmental responses. Secondary materials comprised peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, policy papers, reports published by international organizations, and other academic publications addressing political communication, public trust, digital governance, crisis communication, and democratic accountability (OECD, 2024). Documentary data were collected through a systematic literature search using academic databases, institutional repositories, and reputable online sources by applying predefined inclusion criteria based on relevance, credibility, publication quality, and thematic consistency. The collected materials were subsequently organized into a literature matrix to facilitate the identification of theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and recurring patterns across different sources. This procedure enabled the study to synthesize multidisciplinary evidence while ensuring that the selected literature directly addressed the dynamics of controversial political communication and institutional trust. Such an approach provides a comprehensive documentary basis for examining communication dysfunction within Indonesia's contemporary democratic context (Launa et al., 2026).

The analytical process adopted an interpretative qualitative framework by integrating qualitative content analysis with critical discourse analysis to examine the meanings, narratives, and ideological dimensions embedded in controversial statements delivered by public officials. Qualitative content analysis was employed to classify documentary evidence into thematic categories, identify recurring communication patterns, and interpret how official statements were represented across different documentary sources. Critical discourse analysis was subsequently applied to reveal how language, power relations, political interests, and institutional narratives contributed to the construction of public perceptions regarding governmental legitimacy and trust (Fairclough, 2013). The interpretation of findings was guided by Political Communication Theory, the OECD Drivers of Trust Framework, Agenda-Setting Theory, Framing Theory, and Situational Crisis Communication Theory as complementary analytical perspectives for explaining the interaction between communication practices, digital media amplification, and public trust. To enhance analytical rigor, source triangulation was conducted by comparing official documents, media reports, survey findings, and scholarly literature discussing the same political events and communication phenomena. The consistency of

interpretations was further evaluated through theoretical triangulation by comparing the findings with established concepts and previous studies in political communication and governance (Brezzi et al., 2021). This analytical strategy ensured that the conclusions were grounded in credible documentary evidence while providing a coherent explanation of the mechanisms through which controversial political statements influence public trust in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Political Communication Dysfunction in Indonesia's Digital Democracy

Political communication conducted by public officials constitutes a form of exercise of public authority because statements delivered by state actors influence the relationship between governmental institutions and citizens within a democratic constitutional system. The authority attached to public officials creates a responsibility that extends beyond personal expression because political statements may shape perceptions regarding governmental legitimacy, accountability, and institutional integrity. The emergence of controversial statements by Indonesian public officials during the 2024–2025 period indicates a dysfunction in political communication because messages intended to represent governmental positions frequently produced public rejection and distrust. The phenomenon demonstrates that communication failures within democratic governance are not limited to rhetorical weaknesses but may represent broader institutional problems concerning the management of public authority. Political communication functions as a strategic process through which political actors construct legitimacy, obtain public support, and maintain relationships with citizens (McNair, 2011). The inability of officials to produce communicative practices that reflect democratic values creates tension between formal governmental authority and societal expectations regarding responsive governance.

The normative assessment of political communication dysfunction can be examined through the principles of Indonesian administrative law that regulate the responsible exercise of governmental authority. Article 10 paragraph (1) of Law Number 30 of 2014 concerning Government Administration establishes the General Principles of Good Governance (AUPB), including legal certainty, benefit, impartiality, openness, and accountability as fundamental principles in governmental administration. These principles provide a legal framework for evaluating whether actions and conduct of public officials correspond with the objectives of accountable governance. Although Law Number 30 of 2014 does not explicitly regulate the content of political statements, the principles contained within the regulation may be interpreted as requiring officials to maintain communication practices consistent with public responsibility. A systematic interpretation of administrative law demonstrates that governmental authority includes not only decision-making power but also the obligation to maintain public confidence through responsible conduct. The relationship between ethical communication and institutional credibility reflects the importance of integrity-based governance in strengthening public trust (Eryanto et al., 2022). The legal significance of communication responsibility becomes increasingly relevant when statements made by officials influence citizens' perception of whether government institutions operate according to democratic principles.

The documentary analysis of controversial statements during the 2024–2025 period identifies three major patterns of political communication dysfunction, namely social insensitivity, policy communication inconsistency, and communication reflecting perceived distance between officials and public conditions. These patterns demonstrate that controversy emerges from the interaction between the substance of statements, the surrounding political context, and the interpretation constructed by society through digital platforms. The statement made by Ahmad Sahroni regarding criticism from citizens represents a communication problem because democratic representatives are expected to recognize criticism as part of constitutional participation. The controversy regarding the proposed 10% bioethanol mixture policy illustrates difficulties in communicating public policy when explanations are considered insufficient in addressing economic and infrastructural realities (Perdana, 2025). The issue concerning increased parliamentary allowances demonstrates that communication regarding institutional benefits requires careful consideration of fairness perceptions because public acceptance depends on the relationship between official justification and social conditions. The classification of these communication patterns is presented in Table 1 to provide a normative mapping between controversial statements and their implications for governance legitimacy.

Table 1. Classification of Controversial Statements by Indonesian Public Officials (2024–2025)

Communication Category	Illustrative Case	Identified Dysfunction	Relevant Legal-Governance Principle	Potential Impact on Public Trust
Social Insensitivity	Statement describing public critics negatively	Failure to respect democratic participation	Accountability and ethical governance	Declining institutional credibility
Policy Communication	Explanation regarding 10% bioethanol implementation	Limited contextual explanation of policy consequences	Openness and responsiveness	Reduced policy acceptance
Inconsistency	Defense of increased parliamentary benefits	Weak sensitivity toward public economic conditions	Fairness and public interest	Legitimacy challenges
Elite-Oriented Communication				

Table 1 demonstrates that controversial political statements possess governance implications because citizens evaluate governmental authority through both formal policies and communicative behavior. The classification indicates that communication dysfunction is connected with fundamental administrative principles, particularly accountability, openness, and public-oriented governance. The controversy surrounding Ahmad Sahroni’s statement reflects tension between political representation and democratic communication ethics because public criticism forms part of citizens’ constitutional participation. The bioethanol communication issue demonstrates that policy legitimacy requires transparent explanation regarding objectives, consequences, and implementation capacity rather than merely announcing governmental intentions. The controversy concerning parliamentary benefits illustrates how communication may generate perceptions of inequality when official explanations are considered disconnected from public economic circumstances. Political communication therefore operates as an important dimension of governance because failures in communication may weaken institutional acceptance even when governmental actions remain within formal legal authority (OECD, 2024).

The repeated emergence of controversial statements indicates that political communication dysfunction should be understood as a structural governance issue rather than an isolated individual mistake. Public officials possess institutional obligations because their statements represent governmental narratives and influence public interpretation of state legitimacy. The principle of accountability under Article 10 paragraph (1) of Law Number 30 of 2014 may be interpreted through a teleological approach as requiring officials to consider the broader consequences of their conduct toward citizens and democratic stability. This interpretation corresponds with the concept of good governance, where administrative legitimacy depends on transparency, responsiveness, and ethical responsibility in exercising authority. The development of Indonesian digital democracy has increased the complexity of political communication because social media enables immediate public evaluation and widespread circulation of official statements. Digital transformation has altered political interaction by allowing citizens to actively participate in interpreting, criticizing, and disseminating political messages beyond traditional communication structures (Widodo & Kristiyono, 2025). The institutional inability to adapt communication practices to digital democratic conditions may contribute to accumulated distrust toward governmental institutions.

The constitutional dimension of political communication dysfunction can be analyzed through Article 28F of the 1945 Constitution, which guarantees citizens’ rights to obtain, process, and communicate information as part of democratic participation. This constitutional provision establishes a relationship between governmental transparency and citizens’ ability to evaluate public authority through access to information and political discourse. Communication practices that dismiss criticism or fail to provide adequate explanations may create tension with the democratic objective of facilitating meaningful participation. Law Number 14 of 2008 concerning Public Information Disclosure further strengthens the normative expectation that public institutions must develop transparent relationships with society. The obligation of openness within public governance requires more than disclosure of

information because it also involves the ability of institutions to communicate policies in a manner that can be understood and evaluated by citizens. Transparency in political communication has become a significant factor influencing public perception of governmental accountability (Hermawan, 2025). The interaction between constitutional rights, administrative principles, and communication practices demonstrates that political communication dysfunction represents a socio-legal issue involving both institutional behavior and democratic legitimacy.

The final analysis of this section confirms that controversial statements by Indonesian public officials reflect a broader dysfunction in the relationship between political authority and democratic communication requirements. The problem does not primarily concern the existence of political disagreement because disagreement represents a normal element of democratic governance, but concerns the inability of communication practices to maintain respect, accountability, and institutional credibility. The principles contained in Law Number 30 of 2014 concerning Government Administration and Law Number 14 of 2008 concerning Public Information Disclosure provide normative foundations for evaluating whether governmental communication aligns with responsible governance. The interpretation of these legal principles through a socio-legal perspective demonstrates that public trust is influenced by the manner in which authority is communicated and justified before citizens. Political communication dysfunction may therefore be understood as a governance challenge because communication failures affect not only individual reputation but also perceptions regarding institutional legitimacy. Previous studies indicate that declining quality of governmental communication may contribute to democratic weakening when citizens perceive political institutions as distant from public aspirations (Purwaningsih et al., 2024). The analysis establishes that political communication requires integration between legal accountability, democratic ethics, and institutional communication capacity to sustain public trust in Indonesia's digital democracy.

Digital Media Amplification and the Erosion of Public Trust

The development of digital media has transformed the structure of political communication because governmental messages are no longer transmitted through a linear relationship between state institutions and citizens. In the context of Indonesia's digital democracy, statements delivered by public officials may experience rapid reproduction, reinterpretation, and circulation through various online platforms, creating consequences beyond the original communicative intention. This phenomenon demonstrates that political communication has legal and institutional implications because public perceptions of governmental legitimacy are increasingly shaped through digital interactions. From a socio-legal perspective, digital platforms function as spaces of public participation where citizens exercise oversight over governmental conduct through information exchange and political discussion. Article 28F of the 1945 Constitution provides a constitutional foundation for citizens' rights to obtain, process, and communicate information within a democratic society. The transformation of political communication through digital technology requires public institutions to develop accountable communication practices because institutional legitimacy is increasingly influenced by the quality of interaction between government and society (Hafel, 2023).

The amplification mechanism of controversial statements through digital platforms can be examined through agenda-setting theory, which explains that public attention toward political issues is influenced by the intensity and visibility of information circulation. In digital environments, agenda formation is no longer determined exclusively by conventional media institutions because social media users actively participate in selecting, reproducing, and emphasizing political narratives. Statements made by public officials that receive extensive online attention may transform into national political issues because repeated exposure creates collective perceptions regarding their significance. This condition demonstrates that digital media possesses the capacity to expand the consequences of political communication beyond the initial intention of the speaker. Agenda-setting theory explains that media influence public priorities by determining which issues receive continuous attention and become subjects of collective discussion (Shabira, 2021). From a legal governance perspective, this mechanism requires public officials to consider the broader consequences of their communication because governmental statements may influence citizens' assessment of institutional responsibility. The relationship between digital visibility and political legitimacy indicates that communication competence has become an important component of accountable governance.

Digital amplification is also closely connected with framing mechanisms because the meaning of political statements is constructed through processes of selection, interpretation, and contextualization within online networks. Controversial statements made by public officials frequently undergo transformation when they are shortened, quoted separately, or combined with particular narratives created by social media users. This process demonstrates that the meaning of political communication is not solely determined by the speaker's intention but also by the interpretation developed within society. Within administrative law analysis, this condition reflects the importance of prudence in exercising public authority because communicative actions may influence citizens' trust toward governmental institutions. Media framing analysis demonstrates that the presentation of political messages affects public evaluations regarding responsibility, credibility, and legitimacy of political actors (Agustin et al., 2025). Negative framing surrounding controversial statements may strengthen perceptions that public officials lack sensitivity toward citizens' conditions and democratic expectations. The interaction between digital communication and public interpretation therefore requires officials to consider legal, ethical, and social consequences when delivering statements related to public authority.

The relationship between digital media amplification and public trust can be analyzed through the OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions, which identifies responsiveness, reliability, competence, integrity, openness, and fairness as important dimensions of institutional trust. Controversial statements by public officials may affect multiple dimensions of trust simultaneously because citizens interpret communication practices as indicators of governmental values and administrative quality. Statements perceived as dismissive toward public concerns may weaken responsiveness because citizens consider that their voices are not adequately recognized within decision-making processes. Communication failures regarding public policies may reduce reliability because society questions whether governmental decisions are based on sufficient understanding of social conditions. The relationship between digital communication processes and trust erosion is presented in Table 2, which maps the stages through which controversial statements develop into broader institutional consequences.

Table 2. Mechanisms Linking Political Communication Dysfunction and Public Trust Decline

Communication Stage	Digital Media Process	Public Interpretation	Trust Dimension Affected	Governance Consequence
Official Statement	Rapid dissemination through digital platforms	Initial evaluation of governmental attitude	Responsiveness and integrity	Public criticism toward officials
Media Framing	Selective emphasis and contextual modification	Construction of positive or negative meanings	Fairness and reliability	Changes in institutional perception
Social Media Amplification	Viral circulation and emotional interaction	Collective judgment and polarization	Openness and competence	Declining public confidence
Government Response	Clarification, apology, or defensive reaction	Assessment of institutional accountability	Integrity and responsiveness	Trust recovery or further erosion

Table 2 illustrates that public trust decline does not occur through a single communicative event but through interconnected digital processes that shape citizens' perceptions of government institutions. The initial circulation of statements influences public attention, while framing and amplification mechanisms determine how citizens interpret governmental intentions and responsibilities. The integrity and responsiveness dimensions become particularly vulnerable because citizens associate official communication with institutional commitment to public interests. The OECD emphasizes that trust in public institutions is strongly influenced by citizens' evaluation of governmental behavior, openness, and responsiveness in addressing societal concerns (OECD, 2024). This condition demonstrates that political communication functions as part of governance performance because

ineffective communication may weaken institutional legitimacy even when formal administrative procedures remain valid. The digital environment therefore requires public institutions to understand communication practices as an element of democratic accountability rather than merely a public relations activity.

The amplification of controversial political statements is further strengthened by echo chamber mechanisms that reinforce particular interpretations within digital communities. Social media users often engage with information that corresponds with their existing political preferences, causing certain narratives to become increasingly dominant within specific communication networks. This condition creates challenges for governmental institutions because delayed responses or defensive explanations may strengthen negative perceptions rather than restore public confidence. From a democratic legal perspective, digital criticism represents a legitimate form of citizen participation, while public institutions remain responsible for maintaining communication practices that support constructive dialogue. The theory of echo chambers explains that selective exposure within digital networks may intensify polarization by limiting interaction with alternative perspectives and reinforcing collective assumptions (Sunstein, 2001). The existence of digital polarization demonstrates that public officials require communication strategies capable of addressing criticism through transparency, accountability, and institutional responsibility. Effective governance in the digital era therefore depends on the ability of state institutions to manage communication risks while respecting constitutional principles of participation and expression.

The failure to manage communication crises resulting from controversial statements can be analyzed through Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which emphasizes the importance of selecting appropriate responses based on the level of responsibility attributed to the actor involved. When a crisis originates from statements delivered by public officials themselves, defensive strategies such as denial or blame shifting may intensify public dissatisfaction because they are perceived as avoiding institutional responsibility. Article 10 paragraph (1) of Law Number 30 of 2014 concerning Government Administration provides a normative basis that governmental authority must be exercised according to the principles of accountability and good governance. A teleological interpretation of this provision indicates that administrative responsibility includes maintaining public confidence through actions and communication consistent with democratic values. Effective crisis communication requires acknowledgment of problems, proportional apology, and corrective measures demonstrating institutional commitment to improvement (Setyaningrum, 2025). The digital amplification of political controversies therefore represents not only a communication challenge but also a governance issue related to accountability, legitimacy, and public trust. The relationship between digital media processes and institutional confidence confirms that political communication competence has become an essential component of democratic governance in Indonesia.

Legal and Democratic Implications of Political Communication Dysfunction

Political communication dysfunction generates broader legal and democratic implications because communication practices of public officials are closely connected with the legitimacy of governmental authority. In a constitutional democracy, the exercise of public power cannot be evaluated solely through formal administrative decisions but must also consider how authority is represented and communicated to citizens. The controversial statements made by Indonesian public officials during the 2024–2025 period demonstrate that communication failures may create institutional consequences by weakening perceptions of accountability, integrity, and responsiveness. From a socio-legal perspective, political communication constitutes an extension of administrative responsibility because public officials communicate within the framework of authority granted by law. The principles of good governance require public institutions to maintain relationships with citizens based on transparency, fairness, and responsibility (OECD, 2024). The legal significance of communication dysfunction therefore lies in its capacity to influence public trust, democratic participation, and the effectiveness of governmental institutions.

The normative foundation for evaluating political communication responsibility can be identified through Indonesian administrative law and constitutional principles governing public authority. Article 10 paragraph (1) of Law Number 30 of 2014 concerning Government Administration establishes the General Principles of Good Governance (AUPB), including openness, accountability, impartiality, and benefit as standards for the exercise of governmental authority. These principles

provide an interpretative framework for assessing whether public officials' communication practices correspond with the objectives of responsible administration. Although political statements are not administrative decisions in a narrow procedural sense, communication by officials may produce administrative consequences because such statements influence public perception regarding governmental legitimacy. A systematic interpretation of administrative law demonstrates that accountability extends beyond institutional procedures and includes the obligation to maintain responsible relationships between government and citizens. The relationship between ethical leadership and public institutional credibility demonstrates that governmental legitimacy depends on both regulatory compliance and perceived integrity of public actors (Eryanto et al., 2022). The legal analysis of political communication dysfunction therefore requires understanding communication as part of broader governance responsibility.

Table 3. Normative Framework for Political Communication Accountability of Public Officials

Legal and Democratic Principle	Relevant Legal Basis	Normative Requirement	Implication for Political Communication
Accountability	Article 10 paragraph (1) Law Number 30 of 2014 concerning Government Administration	Officials must exercise authority responsibly	Public statements must demonstrate institutional responsibility
Openness	Law Number 14 of 2008 concerning Public Information Disclosure	Government institutions must provide accessible information	Communication must support transparency and public understanding
Public Participation	Article 28F of the 1945 Constitution	Citizens have rights to obtain and communicate information	Officials must respect criticism as democratic participation
Good Governance	AUPB principles under Law Number 30 of 2014	Government actions must reflect fairness and integrity	Communication must maintain public confidence

Table 3 demonstrates that communication responsibility of public officials is connected with established legal principles rather than functioning merely as an ethical expectation. The principle of accountability requires officials to consider the institutional consequences of their statements because communication may influence citizens' evaluation of governmental performance. The principle of openness under Law Number 14 of 2008 concerning Public Information Disclosure indicates that governmental communication should facilitate public understanding rather than create uncertainty regarding policies and institutional actions. Article 28F of the 1945 Constitution strengthens this interpretation because democratic participation requires citizens to access information and express responses toward governmental conduct. The normative framework demonstrates that political communication dysfunction may create tension between formal authority and democratic expectations regarding responsible governance. The application of these principles confirms that maintaining public trust is part of the broader obligation of public institutions to operate according to constitutional and administrative values.

The democratic implication of political communication dysfunction can be analyzed through the concept of legitimacy, where public acceptance represents an essential foundation for effective governance. Government institutions may possess formal authority based on constitutional arrangements, but sustainable legitimacy requires continuous recognition from citizens through processes of participation and trust. Statements perceived as dismissive, insensitive, or inconsistent with public conditions may weaken the symbolic relationship between citizens and political institutions. This condition creates the possibility of democratic alienation because citizens may perceive governmental actors as disconnected from societal concerns. Political communication failures may therefore affect democratic quality because trust influences willingness of citizens to participate in political processes and support public policies. Research on democratic communication demonstrates that declining quality

of governmental narratives may contribute to perceptions of democratic decline by weakening the relationship between institutions and citizens (Purwaningsih et al., 2024). The legal consequence of this phenomenon is not the automatic invalidity of governmental actions but the emergence of legitimacy challenges affecting institutional effectiveness.

The ethical dimension of political communication also represents an important aspect of democratic accountability because public officials occupy positions that require higher standards of responsibility than ordinary private actors. Political authority provides officials with greater influence over public discourse, meaning that inappropriate communication may generate broader social consequences. The rhetorical failure of controversial statements can be analyzed through Aristotle's concepts of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, where credibility, emotional consideration, and rational argumentation determine the effectiveness of political messages. Statements that undermine citizens' dignity may damage institutional credibility because officials are expected to represent democratic values and public interests. The relationship between communication ethics and political legitimacy demonstrates that legal compliance alone is insufficient when public authority is exercised without consideration of social responsibility. Political communication studies emphasize that democratic governance requires communication strategies capable of building dialogue, trust, and mutual recognition between political actors and society (Rohmah, 2025). The ethical responsibility of public officials therefore complements legal obligations by ensuring that governmental authority is exercised within democratic norms.

The findings regarding political communication dysfunction indicate the need for systemic reform in governmental communication governance to strengthen accountability and public trust. Reform efforts should not be limited to individual apologies after controversies emerge but should include institutional mechanisms for communication evaluation, ethical guidelines, and capacity development for public officials. The principles contained in Law Number 30 of 2014 concerning Government Administration provide a normative basis for strengthening accountable governance practices through responsible exercise of authority. The principles of transparency under Law Number 14 of 2008 concerning Public Information Disclosure also require public institutions to develop communication systems that support citizens' understanding of governmental policies. From a comparative governance perspective, institutions in democratic states increasingly recognize communication competence as part of public sector professionalism because trust depends on consistent interaction between authorities and society. The OECD emphasizes that institutional trust is strengthened when governments demonstrate reliability, openness, integrity, and responsiveness in their relationship with citizens (Brezzi et al., 2021). The reform of political communication practices therefore represents an important component of democratic consolidation because effective governance requires not only lawful authority but also legitimate communication with the public.

The final implication of political communication dysfunction is that democratic governance requires integration between legal accountability, institutional ethics, and communication capacity. The Indonesian legal framework provides sufficient normative principles to evaluate governmental responsibility through accountability, openness, and good governance standards. The challenge lies in transforming these principles into institutional practices that guide how public officials communicate within an increasingly complex digital environment. Political communication failures demonstrate that legitimacy may decline even when governmental authority remains formally valid because citizens evaluate institutions through everyday interactions and public narratives. The socio-legal analysis confirms that communication practices have become part of the broader governance ecosystem connecting law, politics, and public trust. Strengthening communication accountability among public officials contributes to democratic resilience by ensuring that political authority remains aligned with constitutional values and citizens' expectations. The development of responsible political communication therefore represents a necessary institutional reform for maintaining public trust in Indonesia's contemporary digital democracy.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that controversial statements delivered by Indonesian public officials during the 2024–2025 period represent a systemic dysfunction in government political communication rather than isolated individual communication failures. The analysis demonstrates that political communication, which should function as an instrument for building legitimacy, accountability, and

public support, has frequently produced the opposite effect by weakening citizens' confidence in governmental institutions. The findings based on McNair's political communication perspective indicate that ineffective message construction, insufficient contextual awareness, and weak sensitivity toward public concerns contribute to communication practices that undermine democratic relationships between officials and citizens. The application of socio-legal analysis further confirms that communication responsibility forms part of broader principles of accountable governance established through constitutional values and administrative law principles. Political communication dysfunction therefore reflects a governance challenge because the legitimacy of public authority depends not only on formal legality but also on the ability of institutions to communicate responsibly with society. \

The study further confirms that the erosion of public trust occurs through multidimensional mechanisms involving institutional integrity, responsiveness, fairness, openness, reliability, and competence as identified within the OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust. Digital media amplification intensifies these effects by transforming controversial statements into widely circulated narratives through agenda-setting, framing processes, and networked communication mechanisms that influence public interpretation. The failure of officials to manage rhetoric through credible, empathetic, and rational communication also demonstrates weaknesses in ethos, pathos, and logos dimensions, resulting in perceptions of reduced legitimacy and institutional credibility. The analysis of crisis communication responses reveals that delayed clarification, defensive reactions, and limited corrective actions remain significant barriers to restoring public confidence. These findings emphasize that rebuilding trust requires communication strategies based on accountability, transparency, and genuine institutional commitment to addressing public concerns.

The research recommends systemic reform in government communication governance through the development of communication ethics standards, continuous digital literacy training, and institutional mechanisms for evaluating public messages before dissemination. Strengthening communication capacity among public officials should be integrated with the principles of good governance, particularly accountability, openness, and public-oriented administration. The establishment of early warning mechanisms and structured crisis communication procedures is necessary to prevent individual statements from developing into broader legitimacy crises within digital democratic environments. The improvement of political communication practices represents an essential strategy for strengthening democratic resilience because public trust functions as a fundamental foundation of effective governance. Future studies may expand this research by examining comparative political communication practices across democratic systems or by integrating empirical approaches to evaluate institutional communication reforms in Indonesia.

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