

# THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TOWARD PUBLIC POLICY CHANGES IN BANDAR LAMPUNG CITY

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## Abstract

*This research aims to explain the use of social media and its implication toward policy changes. In specific, this article aims to establish empirical groundwork for further researches in developing models of political interaction between citizens and government through social media in the policy making process. The study employed a qualitative descriptive approach as its research design. Social media users in Bandar Lampung who respond (criticism, support, suggestion, rejection and disagreement) to public policy in Bandar Lampung were used as the instrument of data collection. The subjects of this research were social media users in Bandar Lampung. The results of the research showed that the presence of social media especially among middle class users was used as an instrument to respond to public policies in Bandar Lampung. There was a change in the relation between the public and the government, from conventional models shifting to an internet-based relationship model. The findings of this study also showed that not all criticisms, suggestions or opinions of the public had implications for policy changes, except in the case of traffic engineering management policy. The termination of traffic engineering management policy happened because this policy did not solve traffic jams around the Tugu Pahlawan to the Teuku Umar street, Danrem Garuda Hitam. Social media were used as a means for the public to express their criticism and opinion on the policy and the Bandar Lampung government responded by terminating the traffic engineering management policy and recovering the initial route. In general, when a public policy is criticized or protested by the public, the Bandar Lampung government's response tends to argue against the policy. Therefore, in the perspective of the public-government relationship in the case of formulation and implementation of public policies, local governments still tend to be dominant and only prioritize a limited model of democracy.*

*Keywords: Social media, Changes in Policy, Relationship between Public and Government*

**Contribution/Originality:** The main finding in this research is to find a model of political relation between citizen and government through social media which is very beneficial in the process of policy making

## Introduction

The relationship between the people and policy makers in the current development is carried out not only through direct communication such as dialogue, hearings, or aspiration nets (Oginni and Moitui: 2015), but also through social media (Haro-de-Rosario et al: 2016; Gao and Lee: 2017). As acknowledged by Scott (2001), social media in democratic system is considered free from state control so it is measured as a safe environment for communication. Therefore, it can be positively used to advocate the public through discussion, organization including mobilization (Khan: 2017). Accordingly, social media is perceived to be able to support three stages that need to be improved to strengthen relations with citizens, namely (1) one-way relations by disseminating information related to improvement of government administration quality; (2) limited two-way relation, namely by holding public consultations such as facilitating citizens to express their aspirations in public policy making; (3) advanced two-way relation, by encouraging citizens' active participation by involving them in the decision-making and policy-making processes (OECD: 2001a; OECD: 2001b).

In this perspective, social media are a medium for citizens to articulate and control the process of making public policy. In developed countries, social media applications are used as a means to fulfill the political rights of citizens to obtain information and participate in governance. Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter are the latest media that serve not only as individual communication channels but also are used as an inseparable means to discuss public and state affairs. Take Facebook as an example. It has aided for almost all social, economic, political and cultural endeavour around the world (Lee, Hosanagar, Harikesh: 2017; Sinclair and Greeve: 2017; Cook: 2018; Manzi et al: 2018).

Utilizing the social media, the public can easily respond, criticize, advice, or reject policies issued by the government. In terms of democratic process, the public's critical responses via social media reflect freedom to express opinions, criticisms, suggestions, or rejection to government's action in making public policies or in solving public problems. Accordingly, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) functions in inducing policy changes instead of as an operating tool. In other words, government policies which are not in accordance with the aspirations of the public or are not in line with the principles of the people's agreement can be protested, rejected, or criticized. Consequently, these will lead to policy changes or input for local governments to make improvements or alteration in public policies. So, in the context of democracy, ICT is a tool to articulate people's needs and aspirations (Yusuf, 2013). This phenomenon is known as click activism. It is a new political phenomenon in cyberspace politics. The term is coined to describe ideas, cases, people or groups, movements carried out by clicking on menus available on social media (Nugroho and Shinta: 2012, Adhirianti: 2013, in Awaludin Yusuf: 2013)

The trend of click activism is also seen in Indonesia. One of the most notable junctures in the activity was found during Indonesia's presidential election in early 2019. The existence of social media has greatly changed the winning tactics and strategy of the presidential and vice presidential candidates in 2019. It is proved by the presence of both candidates' team that handles the dissemination of their campaign materials to voters through various available social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and even Whatsapp (Irawanto: 2019; Goretta et al: 2018). However, in the case of Indonesia in general, although citizens' social media have been used as a means to control government administration and access various information, in reality there are still gaps, namely the strength of the state is still stronger than the political

power of social media in the process of public policy making. Therefore, this power gap serves as the basis of this research.

In recent years, it is noted that the usage of social media has been particularly high among millennial and middle class generations in Bandar Lampung. Their usage ranges from sharing pictures to posting daily activities status, including responding to local government policies. Various of public policies were issued during 2010 to 2019 including flyover construction, community development (Bina Lingkungan/Biling) programs, free health service programs, free public service programs, traffic engineering management program, etc. Most of these programs are perceived to be driven by political interests of the city mayor because they acted as execution of his political commitment during the election campaign. The reason behind this perception was basically due to unstandardized mechanism of the programs' making process. For example, some of the programs' dispositions were not involving related stakeholders to discuss pro-contra of the programs.

In such a perspective, social media take the place to reflect the public's reactions such as approval, support, criticism or even protests against the policies. It is then interesting to examine the way the Government of Bandar Lampung City responded to the critical attitude of the public via social media and its implications for policy changes as it is signalled the public's sensitivity to policy as well as interaction between the public and local government, and the government's attitude in responding to the public's criticisms.

The use of social media by citizens in fulfilling their political rights to obtain information and participation in governance is respected as a new tradition. This is particularly a novel communication array in Bandar Lampung City, because the political interaction of citizens and the government is mostly carried out by conventional means such as demonstrations, dialogues, or hearings, submissions of open letters to the government, installation of banners, and open complaint boxes. Thus this article is aimed to convey Bandar Lampung citizen interaction with the government in the policy making process including citizens' critical attitude towards policies made by Bandar Lampung City Government as well as to explain its implications to the policy. It is expected that the article will able to convey the phenomenon of social media involvement in the city administration, especially in the process of policy making by Bandar Lampung City Government. The article is also intended to postulate empirical groundwork for further researches in developing models of political relation between citizens and the government through social media in the policy making process.

## **Literature Review**

Theoretically, running a government always involves an active process which is known as dynamic governance. The dynamic governance is "to how these chosen paths, policies, institutions, and structures adapt to uncertain and fast changing environment so that they remain relevant and effective in achieving the long-term desirable outcomes of society" (Boon and Geraldine: 2007). Therefore, the essence of governance dynamics is how various policies, institutions and structures collaborate effectively so that they can adapt to uncertain conditions and rapid changes in the environment. As a result, policies, institutions and structures remain relevant and effective in achieving long-term public interests. Janssen and Voort (2016) even supported this opinion by stating that the society always experiences continuous changes and the governmental style should adjust appropriately.

Over a decade, dimension of communication between governments and citizens has changed because of the emergence of social media. Kahn (2017) even purposed that social media are a form of “participatory channel to increase citizens’ awareness and engagement”. It is hoped that by utilizing the channel, the government could derive information related to “citizens’ needs and expectations”. According to Leavey (2013) social media are a social structure made by individuals or organizations which bound by one or more specific types of interdependencies, preference values, ideas, financial exchange, friendship, kinship, conflict, or trade. Generally, there are four social media applications. First, social networks, such as Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn, Myspace and Twitter. Second, online publications or media sharing such as Youtube, Flickr, RSS, Slideshare and Twitter. Third, online collaborative such as Wikis (Media Wiki, Intellipedia, and Scholarpedia) and blogs (Wordpress, Blogger, etc.). Fourth, online feedback system that facilitates comments, voting, rating, as well as surveys and polls to find out trends in public opinion (Ceron and Negri: 2016; Beauchamp: 2018; Pasek et al: 2019). The utilization of social media in the process of administering government is highly related to openness, transparency, even anti-corruption (Panagiotis, Julie, Laurence: 2013). The concept of transparency basically addresses citizens’ opportunity in obtaining information in the administration of government, such as budgets, regional regulations, programs and projects (Dwiyanto: 2006). Belver and Kufmann (2005) supported this by stating that social media sites, including Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, etc. facilitate submission of social aspirations. In addition, social media have opened ways for a more participatory government, new social dynamic, and a more inclusive civil society (Stewart and Wilson: 2016; Oliveira et al: 2017).

It is claimed that the use of social media will have implications for policy changes. According to Parson (2001) changes in policy may induce in several ways. First, policy innovation which stands for the adoption of solutions for the society’s problems into the government’s policy. Second, policy succession that aims to replace existing policies with new and better policies. Third, policy maintenance is a new policy adjustment to keep the policy on track. Last, policy termination, where the policy is considered no longer appropriate and it is stopped. In the case of changes in public policy in Indonesia, especially in the current era (post the New Order), public access to the process of making and implementing policies has deliberately high political dose (Fernandes and Fresly: 2017; Putra et al: 2018). Every public policy that is not in line with the public interest such as contrary to value, waste of budget, deviation of authority / power, and incompatibility with alternative policies suggested by the public is usually responded negatively by the public through social media.

Thus, it is interesting to study policy changes in order to describe the attitude of public criticism and government response and to see whether the attitude of public criticism has an impact on policy changes. Furthermore, no studies to date explore how public responses posted by social media users affect the local government’s public policy change as well as determine types of policy that may get affected by them. Therefore, this article fills this gap by investigating whether and how online opinion posted by Bandar Lampung’s social media users influences public policy agendas of the government at the local level in Bandar Lampung City.

## **Methodology**

This research used qualitative descriptive approach as its research design. It is done by focusing on social media usage, government's responses and policy changes. The users of social media are residents of Bandar Lampung who use their smart gadgets to access social media. The government's responses will be seen through the reactions made by the Bandar Lampung government in responding to aspirations (criticisms, suggestions, protests or opinions) on government policies. The government's policies as intended are policies issued by the Bandar Lampung government, especially those that have stimulated debates between the people of Bandar Lampung, namely: the *Bina lingkungan* Program, the construction of a flyover, free health service programs, free public service programs (population cards, birth certificates, etc.), and traffic engineering management program. Meanwhile policy changes will be studied through analyzing whether public aspirations or pressure through social media can bring about any changes in terms of policy innovation, policy succession, policy maintenance or termination.

The article data were collected from interviews with the Information and Communication Service (Infokom) of Bandar Lampung City, Bandar Lampung City Secretary, and related stakeholders (256 social media users in Bandar Lampung). In-depth interviews, documentation and observations of internet use in the Bandar Lampung City Government are also used as technical methods of data collection. Data analysis was carried out in this research in stages by breaking down data into smaller components based on certain elements and structures- as well as through data reduction, data presentation or display and conclusion or verification.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **A. Public Policy in Bandar Lampung City**

In the era of regional head elections which are directly done by voters, regional heads are required to arrange strategies that consist of visions, missions and programs for the society. In the future, those strategies will be part of the government's short term plans and programs. The vision, mission and program of regional heads have outcomes to be put into reality because they are part of the commitment and political contracts of regional heads with their stakeholders.

The formulation of vision, mission and program of regional heads does not involve a political engagement from various parties (stakeholders) nor is carried out openly by involving public participation. Instead, it is made by political elites within candidates' inner circles, even tending to be predominantly perceived by the interests of candidates.

Some public policies that tend to be part of the perception of interests of Bandar Lampung' mayor are:

#### *1. Bina Lingkungan Policy*

The program is designed for the sake of elementary, secondary and high school students and run by the Bandar Lampung Government. It is intended to reduce poverty, by providing opportunities for poor citizens to get better futures. The Community Development path is carried out by the Bandar Lampung Government, expected to be a solution to problems in the realm of education. Many schools have run admission for new students by Community Development Program (PPDB) pathway since the 2011/2012. Candidates that apply for the program should prepare necessary documents and meet certain requirements including displaying files related to their family condition and identity. The program itself provides

free school for selected candidates. All school fees and tuitions have been paid by the government of Bandar Lampung.

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that the program provides opportunities for prospective students with background of underprivileged families to enter public schools which are close to their neighborhoods. This community development pathway is also a form of the Bandar Lampung City government's steps to eliminate discrimination and prevent injustice in the field of education.

The Billing Program, which is one of the main programs of the Bandar Lampung Government as stated in The Mayor's Regulation No. 49 of 2013 Chapter IV Article 10 about the new student admission path, declares if the applicant are determined to exceed the 50 percent quota, there is a need for academic selection and verification through a home visit.

## 2. The Flyover Policy

Traffic congestion is a major problem in most cities in Indonesia including in Bandar Lampung. Therefore, to meet public satisfaction, public criticisms and public complaints over traffic congestion, solutions must be sought, including widening roads, traffic engineering management, making toll roads in the middle of the city, making underpasses, building flyovers, prioritizing public transportation, building skytrain, etc.

For the last five years, since Herman HN occupied the position of Mayor of Bandar Lampung, traffic jam in Bandar Lampung has been reduced by building flyover roads (flyovers), widening most of protocol roads, structuring sidewalks and developing public transport (BRT). Especially for flyovers, the construction was conducted since 2015 up to 2017 along several main streets of Bandar Lampung. The flyovers program as one of the ways to overcome traffic jam serves as Mayor Herman HN's priority program. The flyover development program is also one of Herman HN's political contracts with Bandarlampung citizen as a manifestation of the government's responsibility to reduce traffic congestion.

## 3. Traffic engineering management policy

As an effort to solve traffic jam, the Bandar Lampung government carried out traffic engineering management at several main junctions of the city. However, the efforts of the Government of Bandar Lampung turned out to stimulate protests from the public and ironically increased the traffic jam itself. The program induced more traffic jams in several major streets, especially at some intersections of those streets. In August 2016, the traffic engineering management policy was stopped.

## **B. Participation of Social Media Users in Public Policy of Bandar Lampung City Government**

According to the results of Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) 2016, Indonesia was connected to the global internet since 1994 and since then, internet users in Indonesia have continuously grown. It is claimed that the total number of Indonesian internet users currently reaches 132.7 million. The survey findings also show that most Indonesian

internet users use the internet for social media, followed by search for entertainment, news reading, education, commercial, and public services. The most common forms of social media used by people throughout the world are blogs, social networks and Wiki.

Similar trends also appear in Bandar Lampung. Social media users in Bandar Lampung also tend to be high. In the context of this study, we want to know the implications of using social media for changes in public policy in Bandar Lampung (see Table data 1)

Among 256 social media users in Bandar Lampung, most of them use Instagram (80%) and around 20% use Facebook and Twitter, as tools to provide criticisms, advices, support and rejection of three public policies as case studies mentioned above Data related to the public response to the three policies can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1. Description of Public Criticism on Bandar Lampung Mayor’s Policy**

No	Policy	Description of Public Criticism through Social Media
1	Flyover construction at MBK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Bandar Lampung government is less serious in making policies regarding the construction of Flyover Boemi Kedaton Mall which is characterized by a lack of handling traffic jam due to the construction of the Flyover</li> <li>• Not solve problems in overcoming traffic jam</li> <li>• The public offers an alternative priority for the construction of flyovers in other places</li> </ul>
2	Traffic engineering management around Tugu Juang	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not solve problems and even further increasing traffic jams instead</li> <li>• Not offer other alternatives</li> <li>• Not involve experts</li> <li>• Public responses are not accommodated</li> </ul>
3	<i>Bina Lingkungan</i> Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Private schools do not get new students</li> <li>• Implementation of public development programs is not transparent</li> <li>• The <i>bina lingkungan</i> program tends to be forced by the Bandar Lampung government</li> <li>• Some economically capable (rich) people can enter the public development program</li> </ul>

Source: Result of Research Analysis, 2018

The data in Table 1 shows the public responses to the three cases of policies. It shows that there were public disapproval of the policies made by the Bandar Lampung government. They were expressed in the form of opinions, suggestions, rejections and alternative policy offers. Public expressions in social media are a new phenomenon in establishing relations between the public and the government. For the public, social media are used as a tool for aspiration, creating an open virtual space between the government and the public. Thus, the utilization of social media by citizens can strengthen democratic capacity. In the opinion of

Beetham (1999) democracy is not only limited to the electoral process but public control over public affairs. So, the public's attitude through social media is part of public awareness in correcting government policies.

Table 2 shows the quality of public aspirations seen from the aspect of its policy argument structure.

**Table 2. Structure of Policy Arguments Category**

No	Policy	Rejection	Support	Policy Argument
1	Traffic engineering management	It is rejected by the public because it does not solve the problem	Lack of public support	Lack of alternatives, do not involve stakeholders and do not solve problems
2	Flyover construction	Refusal because its implementation tends to be uncoordinated, disrupting traffic	Policy rationality is more profitable	Can answer the problem of traffic jam problems and not less people are harmed
3	<i>Bina Lingkungan</i> Policy	Rejection because the implementation is less transparent and is detrimental to various parties, including private schools and superior high schools	Participation of school access for the poor	The dominance of regional heads is very strong in the public development program

Source: Result of Research Analysis, 2018

The policy argument in Table 2 shows that the power of social media does not end the political action movement to reject policies massively but is only limited to providing a critique of the implementation of policies. As shown in Table 2, there were two policies that Bandar Lampung social media users' were subtly rejected, namely flyover construction and *Bina Lingkungan* Policy. These two were condemned not because of their failure to solve problems of Bandar Lampung City but mainly due to the policy implementation that was supposedly "uncoordinated and less transparent". While the traffic engineering management policy was the only policy that prompt the social media users in Bandar Lampung in just a click of time.



## B. The Click Activism and Public Policy Changes

The findings show that the traffic engineering management policy is the only policy which was stopped. It is claimed that the discontinuation of the policy was not due to the strength of social media but the result of public reaction that was felt directly because the policy did not solve the problem. The traffic engineering management policy's evaluation, carried out by the Ministry of Transportation, has become the basis for stopping the policy.

**Table 3. Social Media and Policy Changes**

No	Policy	Policy Changes	Description of Policy Change Arguments
1	Traffic engineering management	Termination	Public criticism is in line with the the fact that the policy does not solve problems
2	Public development policy	No changes	The <i>Bina lingkungan</i> program continues despite the fact that it received tips and suggestions from the public through social media. The government responds to public suggestions only by improving and supervising implementation procedures
3	Flyover construction	No changes	Construction of the flyover in the area of Boemi Kedaton Mall continues to run. The Government's response to public criticisms is insignificant because public support is stronger and other alternative policies to address the problem of traffic jam are considered unworthy

Source: Result of Research Analysis, 2018

From the data in Table 3, it appears that only the traffic engineering management policy is discontinued by the government. It happened because the government responded to public reactions. The policies of public development (*biling*) and flyover development policy (flyover) faced public reaction, but not strong enough for the Bandar Lampung government to accommodate the public's aspirations, even though the City Government gave a positive response because some public criticisms were followed up in the implementation of the policies.

It can be said that social media such as Facebook, Instagram or Twitter did not cause policy changes out of thin air, but what it did at least was an avenue for visibility and a place to spread the word. As Zeitsoff (2017) noted, there must first be some underlying causes such as “a source of new data on conflict” only then new social media become helpful to induce the public policy change. First, the findings from interviews indicate that social media had allowed Bandar Lampung communities new strategies to object the Mayor's improper policies. In other words,

not only they can conduct a physical rejection, but also an electronic one. As mentioned by Shirky (2011) that “these tools alter the dynamics of the public sphere”, the click activism serves as another dimension for the public to actively involve with the government administration.

The second is that new social media create awareness of public policy issues. It is also found that the click activism that took place in the termination of the traffic engineering management policy was vastly social media-based. Facebook and Instagram updates and comments paved the way to Bandar Lampung social media user’s opinions voiced on rejecting the traffic management. On the same vein, quick dissemination and low cost had also allowed the policy rejection to be successful.

The third highlight is the transformation of social media has allowed more flexibility for massive attention and a greater sense of responsibility. Reuter and Kaufhold (2018) asserted that this current information revolution is less about technology and more about how people react to events through social media. In the past, when multiple riots happened in Jakarta, all what most of Bandar Lampung citizens did was just to hear news from the radio or watch on television. Now, thanks to the exposure of social media, Bandar Lampung citizens turn to be more empathetic than they were in the past. As the communication arena such as social media gets denser, more complex and interactive, the Bandar Lampung population gains greater access to information and more opportunities to engage in public speech. Apart from obtaining information of the traffic management through social media, they can also share pictures, videos, comments and ‘like’ the comments and updates related to the rejection of the policy on Facebook. In other context, Bandar Lampung citizens have taken a more active role thanks to influences of social media as highlighted by the “Active Audience Theory” of Croteau and Hoynes. At this level, the traffic management policy is a topic that Bandar Lampung social media users are *actively* involved, in understanding the policy within their personal and social contexts in rejecting it.

Fourthly, new social media provide a platform that the local government can yet successfully fully prevent or censor. One may argue that increasing efforts have been attempted to make censorship more extensive as found in China, but with the Internet as a porous vessel, information has its own way to diffuse through to avid audiences. As news, testimonials, status updates on social media related to the traffic management policy were dispersed, the instant rejection, objection, and complains were rapidly found in most accounts of Bandar Lampung social media users.

## **Conclusion**

In a political perspective, the role of social media in the process of formulating and implementing public policies is something new in the realm of governance. Public expressions in responding to policies made by government can be done without having to go through demonstrative actions, but personally through social media.

In this study which surveyed the policies of the Mayor of Bandar Lampung on environmental development, traffic engineering management, and flyovers construction, public sensitivity is very high in responding to these policies in the form of criticism, suggestion, support and rejection. Nevertheless, the attitude of the Bandar Lampung Government to the public's responses is considered to be mostly dominant. However, social media may facilitate the public's voice to the government and induce discontinuation of some policies as what happened o the traffic engineering management policy.

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