

## Building Government Legitimacy: The Role of Public Trust, Transparency, and Social Media Effectiveness in the Dynamics of Public Perception

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### ABSTRACT

*The development of governance in the digital era presents challenges and opportunities for building strong government legitimacy in the eyes of the public. This study aims to identify and analyze the relationship between public trust, government transparency, and social media effectiveness and government legitimacy through a literature review. This research is a descriptive qualitative study with a systematic literature review method conducted through a systematic search of academic publications in international databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. A purposive sampling technique was used to select articles with the inclusion criteria of English-language articles relevant to the research topic and published within the last ten years (2014-2024). This research is not limited to a particular geographical area but includes various developed and developing country contexts as the study population, thus enriching the analysis results. The results showed that public trust is the foundation of government legitimacy, which is strengthened by digital-based transparency and interactive communication through social media. These three variables are individually influential and form synergies in strengthening public legitimacy perceptions. This research emphasize the importance of integrating public trust, transparency, and social media effectiveness as sustainable modern governance strategies, especially in the context of digital transformation.*

**Keywords:** Public Trust, Government Transparency, Social Media Effectiveness, Legitimacy, Literature Review, Governance.

### I. INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology (ICT) has driven fundamental changes in interaction patterns between the government and society. In the digital era, public expectations for transparent, accountable, and responsive governance have increased significantly (Nugroho, 2023). Declining public trust in government institutions has occurred in developed and developing countries, including Indonesia (Rinaldi & Putri, 2022). This shows the urgency to study government legitimacy more deeply. In modern democracy, legitimacy is no longer solely formed through electoral mechanisms but also through public perceptions that are formed dynamically in offline and online interactions (Pratama et al., 2024). The urgency of this research is even more prominent when disinformation rife on social media has the potential to exacerbate the crisis of public trust, thus threatening social and political stability (Wijaya & Hartono, 2024). Therefore, this research aim to comprehensively understand how public trust, government transparency, and social media effectiveness contribute to perceptions of government legitimacy in the evolving digital communication landscape.

The research focuses on three paramount variables: public trust, government transparency, and social media effectiveness, which are motivated by their strategic roles in shaping positive public perceptions of government. Public trust is a social foundation that determines the public acceptance of various public policies (Rahman & Astuti, 2023). Government transparency serves as an instrument for realizing information openness and increasing accountability in governance (Susanti & Pratama, 2023). The effectiveness of social media plays a key role in accelerating the flow of

information and shaping public opinion (Wijaya, 2024). This research differs from previous studies that generally focus only on one of the variables, such as public trust or transparency. This study adopts an integrative approach that examines all three variables simultaneously in one analytical framework, especially in the digitalization era of public communication, which has received relatively little discussion in the academic literature (Putra & Dewi, 2024).

From a conceptual perspective, the three variables have interrelationships that influence each other in forming government legitimacy. Public trust tends to increase if government transparency is adequate and the public has broad access to public information (Astuti et al., 2023). Furthermore, the effectiveness of social media can strengthen or distort public perceptions of trust and transparency, depending on how the government manages public communication in an interactive, fast, and responsive manner (Siregar & Kurniawan, 2023). Thus, substantive policies determine government legitimacy and how these policies are communicated and perceived by the public through social media as a modern discourse space.

Although many studies have examined public trust, transparency, and social media, previous research has generally examined these variables separately. For example, Rachmat et al. (2022) examined only the effect of public trust on legitimacy without involving social media as a mediating factor. Susanti and Pratama's research (2023) examines government transparency in increasing public trust, but does not connect it directly with government legitimacy. While recent research by Wijaya (2024) shows the effect of social media effectiveness on public participation, it does not integrate trust and transparency as part of the legitimacy formation mechanism. This research gap indicates the lack of literature that connects these three variables holistically to explain the dynamics of perceptions of government legitimacy.

This research presents a novelty in the form of a literature review that integrates public trust, government transparency, and social media effectiveness into a conceptual model to comprehensively understand government legitimacy. Theoretically, this study contributes to expanding the academic understanding of the dynamics of government legitimacy in the context of the digitalization of public communication. Practically, the results of this research are a reference for governments in formulating strategies to strengthen legitimacy by optimizing public trust, increasing transparency, and managing social media more effectively. The main objective of this research is to develop a conceptual map of the relationship between the three variables of government legitimacy to enrich the treasures of public administration science and contribute to better governance practices.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Public Trust

Public trust is the primary foundation of building sustainable government legitimacy. Public trust is formed when people feel that the government has integrity, competence, and concern for their needs (Lee & Kwak, 2022). Public trust plays a role in shaping the public acceptance of government policies and is a determining factor for active participation in the democratic process. According to Norris and Inglehart (2019), public trust is a key indicator of political stability; the higher the public trust, the stronger the social cohesion formed in society. Putnam (2020) asserts that public trust is integral to social capital, facilitating interactions between the government and the people, and strengthening social solidarity in facing various governance challenges. Conversely, when public trust decreases, various studies show that people tend to experience resistance to government programs, even increasing the risk of social fragmentation and polarization (Christensen & Lægheid, 2020). Therefore, understanding the role of public trust is crucial in the context of building government legitimacy in response to public needs.

### Government Transparency

Government transparency is a strategic instrument for increasing government legitimacy, primarily by ensuring public information disclosure. Cucciniello et al. (2017) defined transparency as the government's efforts to deliver accurate, comprehensive, and timely information to the public. With the increasing complexity of public demand for accountability, transparency is an effective social

control mechanism in which information disclosure can narrow the space for abuse of power (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2021). Transparency International (2023) confirms that the level of transparency of a government is positively correlated with its citizens' political legitimacy. In addition to strengthening public trust, transparency improves public service efficiency and prevents corrupt practices (Meijer et al., 2018). In digital transformation, Zavattaro et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of e-government implementation as a strategic channel in realizing technology-based transparency, where public information services can be accessed more quickly, easily, and inclusively. Therefore, transparency is a demand for modern government ethics, and a vital instrument for maintaining stability and public trust in the state.

### **The Effectiveness of Social Media**

Social media development has revolutionized how governments interact with the public. The effectiveness of social media is not only seen from the frequency of use, but more importantly, from the quality of two-way communication and how much influence it has in shaping positive public perceptions. Mergel (2019) stated that the effectiveness of government social media lies in its ability to quickly reach a wider community, build open dialogue, and provide relevant information in real time. Bonsón et al. (2022) showed that an effective communication strategy on social media contributes significantly to increasing public participation, while strengthening the perception of government legitimacy. Furthermore, Linders (2017) highlighted the role of social media as a co-production governance platform, where people not only receive information but also play an active role in providing input and overseeing public policies. Criado et al. (2023) found that the effectiveness of social media is primarily determined by the level of consistency, responsiveness, and transparency of messages delivered by the government. Thus, social media is not just an additional communication tool, but also a strategic instrument for expanding the space for public participation and strengthening public trust in government legitimacy.

### **Hypothesis Development**

#### **The Relationship between Public Trust and Government Legitimacy**

Public trust is a fundamental element in the building of government legitimacy. Public trust in the government's integrity, competence, and commitment is believed to increase positive perceptions of state institutions (Park & Kim, 2021). Referring to the legitimacy theory proposed by Suchman (1995), legitimacy is formed when an entity is considered fair, trustworthy, and in line with social values. In the context of governance, public trust is seen as a source of social capital that strengthens the public acceptance of policies and decisions taken by the government (Grimmelikhuijsen & Knies, 2017). Empirical research also shows a positive relationship between public trust and government stability in democratic and non-democratic systems (Van de Walle & Bouckaert, 2020). Based on the theory and research results, the first hypothesis of this study was formulated as follows:

**H1:** Public trust has a positive influence on government legitimacy.

#### **Relationship between Government Transparency and Government Legitimacy**

Government transparency is understood as the government's openness to providing public information that is accurate, complete, and easily accessible to the public (Meijer, 2014). Based on the principal agent theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976), transparency reduces information asymmetry between the government as an agent and the public as a principal, thereby minimizing the potential for public distrust. Furthermore, open government theory (OECD, 2016) asserts that transparency is one of the main pillars of building accountability, while increasing the legitimacy of government institutions. The results of empirical studies also support the idea that high transparency provides more control space for the public over the decision-making process, thus contributing positively to government legitimacy (Bauhr & Grimes, 2014). Thus, the second hypothesis is formulated as follows:

**H2:** There is a positive effect of government transparency on government legitimacy.

### **Relationship between Social Media Effectiveness and Government Legitimacy**

Social media has become a strategic communication channel in modern governance. The effectiveness of social media is measured by the frequency of its use and the quality of interactions between the government and the public (Mergel, 2019). Based on the two-way communication theory (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), the effectiveness of public communication is reflected through massive information dissemination accompanied by active involvement from the community. In the digital governance framework, social media's effectiveness has been proven to increase public participation, accelerate information dissemination, and encourage real-time transparency (Criado & Rojas-Martín, 2022). Previous research has also shown that the effectiveness of government communication through social media positively correlates with strengthening public trust and government legitimacy, especially in building a responsive and adaptive government image (Bonsón et al., 2021). Therefore, the third hypothesis of this study is formulated as follows:

**H3:** Social media effectiveness has a positive influence on government legitimacy.

### **Simultaneous Relationship between Public Trust, Government Transparency, and Social Media Effectiveness on Government Legitimacy**

The three variables in this study, namely, public trust, government transparency, and social media effectiveness, conceptually complement each other in forming government legitimacy. Various contemporary studies have shown that legitimacy is not only influenced by a single factor but is the result of complex interactions between various supporting elements (Van Ryzin, 2011). The synergy between public trust and government transparency creates a perception of fairness in public-policy management. Simultaneously, the effectiveness of social media strengthens public access to information and real-time two-way communication (Mabillard & Zumofen, 2020). Combining these three variables is believed to strengthen perceptions of government legitimacy, especially in a digital society, which is becoming increasingly critical of government performance. Thus, the fourth hypothesis is formulated as follows:

**H4:** Public trust, government transparency, and social media effectiveness will positively affect government legitimacy.

## **III. METHODOLOGY**

This study uses a systematic literature review method to identify, classify, and thoroughly analyze the relationship between public trust, government transparency, social media effectiveness, and government legitimacy. A systematic literature review method was chosen because it has the advantage of summarizing and synthesizing published scientific findings. This allows researchers to examine the development of theory and practice within an academically tested analytical framework (Snyder, 2019). In addition, this approach is relevant for uncovering the remaining research gaps and proposing evidence-based recommendations that can support strengthening governance in the digital era.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The literature search was structured and systematic, using several leading international scientific databases, namely Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. These databases were chosen for their credibility in providing reputable academic literature. The researcher applied a combination of specific and relevant keywords, namely "public trust," "government trust," "government legitimacy," "transparency in government," "government transparency," "social media effectiveness," "digital governance," and "public sector legitimacy." Boolean operators (AND, OR, and NOT) were strategically applied to broaden or narrow the scope of the search according to the focus of the study. The researcher also used filter features, such as publication year and document type, to ensure the suitability of the retrieved literature with the research objectives.



### Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Articles were selected strictly using pre-formulated inclusion and exclusion criteria to maintain the quality and relevance of the literature analyzed.

Inclusion criteria included:

1. Articles published in indexed and reputable international journals within the last ten years (2014-2024);
2. This article explicitly addresses the topics of public trust, government transparency, social media effectiveness, and government legitimacy.
3. Studies contain empirical research or systematic reviews based on primary or secondary data;
4. Articles are written in English to ensure linguistic uniformity and academic understanding.

Exclusion criteria include:

1. Opinion, editorial, commentary, or non-peer-reviewed articles;
2. Studies that focus outside the context of trust relationships, transparency, social media, and government legitimacy.
3. Duplicate articles or studies that did not include empirical data or findings that could be analysed systematically.

### Literature Screening and Selection Procedure

The literature screening process was conducted in four stages, referring to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) model.

1. First stage (identification): An initial keyword search and publication year filter was conducted to collect relevant studies.
2. Second stage (screening): Screening was conducted by reviewing the titles and abstracts to eliminate irrelevant articles.
3. Third stage (eligibility): The researcher read the full-text review of the articles to ensure that the content was relevant to the research focus.
4. Fourth stage (inclusive): Articles that met the inclusion criteria were included in the final analysis stage.

From the initial search results that identified 426 articles, 42 articles suitable for in-depth analysis were finally obtained through a rigorous screening process.

### Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was conducted using a descriptive qualitative approach and the content analysis method. Each article was systematically analyzed to evaluate how each study supports, extends, or provides a critical view of the relationship between public trust, government transparency, social media effectiveness, and government legitimacy. Data were analyzed thematically by grouping articles according to research variables, identifying research trends and patterns of relationships between variables, and revealing conceptual and empirical gaps (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007). To facilitate the visualization of the results, an analysis matrix was used to map the relationships between variables while documenting the contribution of each study to the development of legitimacy theory.

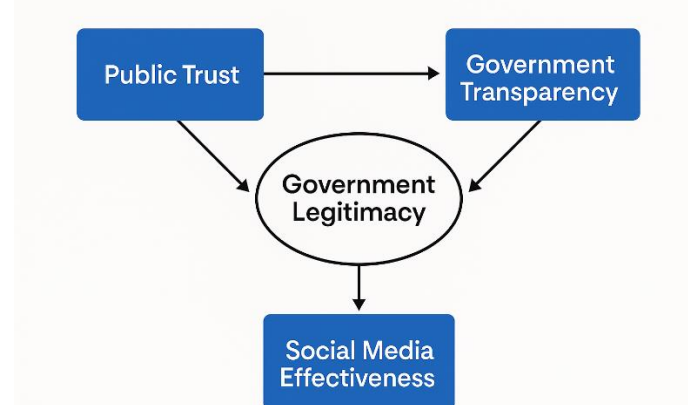
### Validity and Reliability of the Study

The validity of the study was maintained by applying the principle of transparency at every research stage, starting from the formulation of keywords, article selection process, and data analysis. External validity was strengthened by triangulating the literature sources from various credible databases. The reliability of the results was obtained by applying the inter-coder reliability technique, which involved two independent researchers in the literature screening process. This aimed to minimize the primary researcher's subjectivity bias and improve the consistency of the research findings.

## IV. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This literature review reveals a strong and consistent pattern of conceptual relationships between

public trust, government transparency, social media effectiveness, and government legitimacy in the context of modern governance. Extensive research has been conducted in various countries with different governance systems, both established democracies and developing countries, there by providing a holistic picture of the dynamics of public legitimacy in the digital era.



**Figure 1 Conceptual Framework**

### **Public Trust as the Main Support of Legitimacy**

The literature review confirms that public trust is the primary determinant of the legitimacy of the government in various political systems. Christensen and Læg Reid's (2020) study in the context of Nordic countries showed that public trust is positively correlated with adherence to government policies, even in crisis conditions. Similar results were found by Devine et al. (2023), who showed that during the COVID-19 pandemic, countries with high levels of public trust such as Finland and Denmark could implement social restriction policies without significant social turmoil.

A real example of the success of public trust-based policies can be found in Norway, where the government actively builds open dialogue with the public through mass media and digital platforms, thus strengthening the legitimacy of policies despite facing strict social restrictions (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2020).

### **Government Transparency in Enhancing Legitimacy**

Research has shown that public information disclosure is closely related to increasing perceptions of legitimacy. Meijer et al. (2018) explain that open government is an important catalyst in building legitimacy through increased public accountability. A study by Bauhr and Grimes (2014) also confirmed that transparency can reduce perceptions of corruption and increase trust, especially in the context of local governments.

South Korea is a clear example of how the digitization of transparency through the Open Data Portal encourages public engagement and strengthens government legitimacy, especially after a political scandal that eroded public trust (Kim & Lee, 2020). Increased public access to government spending data and digitally based public services has created a social control mechanism that strengthens the legitimacy of public institutions.

### **The Effectiveness of Social Media as a New Legitimacy Channel**

The effectiveness of social media has been proven to play a vital role as a modern communication channel for strengthening government legitimacy. Bonsón et al. (2021) showed that European municipalities that actively manage social media interactively have higher levels of public trust. Criado and Villodre (2023) support these findings by emphasizing that digital participation through social media strengthens public perceptions of the transparency and fairness of government policies. Best practices can be observed in the Barcelona government, which utilizes social media to educate the public, provide quick complaint channels, and involve the public in the policy planning process, thus strengthening the city government's social legitimacy (Criado & Villodre, 2023).

### **Synergistic Interaction of Three Variables in Strengthening Legitimacy**

This study also confirmed that the legitimacy of modern governance is not built on a single dimension. However, this results from synergistic interactions between public trust, government transparency, and social media effectiveness. Grimmeliikhuijsen et al. (2021) showed that increasing public trust could be accelerated through transparent and participatory public communication. The findings of Zavattaro et al. (2021) strengthen the empirical evidence that combining these three variables increases perceptions of legitimacy, especially among local governments facing a crisis of trust.

### **Discussion**

#### **Public Trust as the Foundation of Government Legitimacy, Resilience**

The results of this study show that public trust is the most fundamental variable for strengthening government legitimacy. This finding aligns with Park and Kim (2021), who reveal that public trust not only increases public acceptance of the government, but can also reduce the risk of policy rejection and social conflict, especially in crises. This is reinforced by Christensen and Lægneid (2020), who found that, in Norway, high public trust allowed the government to implement social restriction policies without major protests during the COVID-19 pandemic. A similar example was also found in New Zealand, which managed to stabilize political legitimacy through trust-based communication (Wilson, 2020).

However, these findings differ from the results of recent research by Papageorgiou et al. (2023) in Greece, which show that high public trust is not always directly proportional to government legitimacy, especially in a bad economic context. This study revealed that economic crises can significantly reduce public trust despite transparency efforts, suggesting that macroeconomic factors can also intervene in the relationship between trust and legitimacy. This difference shows that our research examines public trust in the framework of communication and public services, not in the context of an economic crisis, thus providing room for a more specific understanding of the socio political dimension.

This research differs from previous studies in that it incorporates public trust as part of an integrative model with transparency and social media rather than as a single variable, thus providing a more comprehensive picture of building government legitimacy in the digital era.

#### **Government Transparency as a Pillar of Governance Responsiveness**

The findings confirm that government transparency plays a strategic role in strengthening government legitimacy, primarily through open government mechanisms. This finding is supported by Cucciniello et al. (2017), who state that information disclosure systematically increases government accountability and legitimacy, especially when accompanied by public participation. A study by Meijer et al. (2018) in the context of open government cities in Europe also found that digital transparency increases the positive public perceptions of local governments.

However, there are different results from the study by Kim et al. (2022) conducted in several Asian metropolitan cities, where the government's digital transparency did not increase public trust or legitimacy. The study explains that transparency that is only formalistic without active community involvement can lead to skepticism and even distrust, because people consider information disclosure only as fulfilling obligations without real commitment. This difference reinforces the findings of this study that transparency must be combined with real public participation, primarily through digital channels and social media, to effectively strengthen legitimacy.

In contrast to previous research that generally examined transparency in isolation, this study offers a new contribution by examining transparency directly related to public trust and social media effectiveness in a holistic model.

#### **Social Media as a Catalyst for Digital Government Legitimacy**

Studies have shown that social media effectiveness is a significant lever of legitimacy in the digital era. Research by Bonsón et al. (2021) corroborates this finding, as city governments' use of interactive

social media in Europe can increase citizen engagement and improve perceptions of legitimacy. A real-life example is Barcelona (Criado & Villodre, 2023), which adopted an active citizen participation approach through social media as part of more transparent and responsive governance. By contrast, a study by Skoric et al. (2023) in Southeast Asia showed that high government social media activity does not automatically increase public legitimacy. Social media without interactive management tends to become a propaganda channel, even fuelling distrust when people find discrepancies between digital narratives and real conditions. This study recognizes this phenomenon and asserts that social media's effectiveness should be understood not only from the intensity of use but also the quality of interaction and the transparency of content delivered by the government. Unlike previous studies, this research not only sees social media as a one-way communication tool but also as part of a public interaction ecosystem that connects trust, transparency, and legitimacy simultaneously.

### **The Synergy of Trust, Transparency, and Social Media in Strengthening Legitimacy**

The results of this study reinforce the integrative approach to understanding government legitimacy in the digital era. Criado et al. 's(2023) findings align with this study, which states that government legitimacy models should include interpersonal trust, institutional transparency, and participatory digital communication. However, some previous studies, such as that of Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer (2022), have mostly tested the effect of two variables, transparency and trust, without including social media in the legitimacy framework.

The fundamental difference in this study is that it brings together all three pillars in a mutually reinforcing and complementary conceptual model. Thus, the main contribution of this research is to offer a perspective on digital-based government legitimacy that is adaptive to changes in public expectations in the era of information disclosure and accelerated public interaction through social media.

## **V. CONCLUSIONS, PROPOSALS, RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study concludes that public trust, government transparency, and social media effectiveness are three key components that simultaneously strengthen government legitimacy in the digital era. Public trust is the primary foundation that sustains the legitimacy of government institutions, where it can increase the acceptance of policies and social stability. Government transparency is crucial in building perceptions of fairness and accountability, primarily through digital-technology-based information disclosure. Social media has emerged as a modern instrument in public communication management that can accelerate information dissemination, expand public participation, and strengthen perceptions of legitimacy in real-time. This research successfully answers these objectives by presenting a holistic conceptual model that integrates the three variables in building government legitimacy, especially in increasingly digitalized governance changes.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of a conceptual framework of government legitimacy that combines the perspectives of public trust, government transparency, and social media effectiveness in one integrated model. The findings expand the academic understanding of the dynamics of legitimacy, which has been studied more partially by emphasizing that legitimacy is multidimensional and influenced by interactions between factors. Practically, the results of this study provide recommendations for governments to strategically manage legitimacy by strengthening public trust, implementing digital-based transparency, and optimizing public communication through social media. The findings can also serve as a reference for policymakers to develop public communication strategies that are more open, responsive, and increase active community involvement in public decision-making.

This study had several limitations that must be considered before interpreting the results. First, this research is a literature review, so all findings were obtained by collecting and analyzing secondary sources without directly verifying primary data. Second, the literature used in this research is focused on international English-language publications therefore there is a possibility of overlooking relevant studies published in local languages or specific domestic contexts, particularly in developing



countries. Third, the results do not empirically test the causal relationship between variables but build a descriptive conceptual understanding. Therefore, generalization of the findings must be done cautiously, especially when applied in different political and cultural contexts.

Based on the findings and limitations of the study, the researcher recommends that future research empirically test the conceptual model developed in this study using primary data through a quantitative or mixed methods approach. Future research should explore the dynamics of government legitimacy in developing countries by expanding the use of local literature to provide a more comprehensive contextual picture. In addition, future research can further explore the influence of interaction factors, such as the influence of local political culture, the level of digital literacy of the community, and the role of leadership in managing public communication on government legitimacy. Another recommendation is the need for longitudinal studies to understand how the three variables of public trust, transparency, and social media can affect government legitimacy in the long term, especially in the face of crises or regime changes.

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