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Political Communication of Mojokerto City Council Members and Public Accountability

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the political communication styles of members of the Mojokerto City Regional Representative Council (DPRD) and their implications for enhancing public accountability. In an era of information openness and increasing demands for transparency, political communication plays a crucial role in strengthening public trust in legislative institutions. This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach using in-depth interviews and observation. Informants included members of the Mojokerto City DPRD. Findings indicate that political communication styles span a spectrum ranging from dialogic-participatory approaches to formal and closed ones. Open and responsive communication styles positively influence public perceptions of accountability, while one-way communication tends to erode public trust. This study recommends strengthening political communication capacity and optimizing the use of digital media. A key contribution of this research lies in advancing understanding of the relationship between local legislators' political communication styles and public accountability practices at the local level. Furthermore, this study offers a conceptual model suggesting that participatory and transparent political communication can serve as a strategic instrument in strengthening political legitimacy, enhancing citizen engagement, and fostering more accountable and democratic local governanc.

Keywords*: political communication; communication style; regional representative council; public accountability*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis gaya komunikasi politik anggota Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah (DPRD) Kota Mojokerto serta implikasinya terhadap akuntabilitas publik. Di era keterbukaan informasi dan meningkatnya tuntutan akan transparansi, komunikasi politik memegang peranan penting dalam memperkuat kepercayaan publik terhadap lembaga legislatif. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan metode wawancara mendalam dan observasi. Informan meliputi anggota DPRD kota Mojokerto. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa gaya komunikasi politik mencakup spektrum dari pendekatan dialogis-partisipatif hingga formal dan tertutup. Gaya komunikasi yang terbuka dan responsif secara positif memengaruhi persepsi publik terhadap akuntabilitas, sementara komunikasi satu arah cenderung merusak kepercayaan publik. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan penguatan kapasitas komunikasi politik dan optimalisasi penggunaan media digital. Kontribusi penting penelitian terletak pada pengembangan pemahaman mengenai hubungan antara gaya komunikasi politik legislator daerah dan praktik akuntabilitas publik di tingkat lokal. Selain itu, penelitian ini menawarkan model konseptual bahwa komunikasi politik yang partisipatif dan transparan dapat berfungsi sebagai instrumen strategis dalam memperkuat legitimasi politik, meningkatkan keterlibatan warga, serta membangun tata kelola pemerintahan daerah yang lebih akuntabel dan demokratis.

Kata kunci: komunikasi politik; gaya komunikasi; dewan perwakilan rakyat daerah; akuntabilitas publik

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INTRODUCTION

In a representative democratic system, the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) plays a strategic role as a bridge between public interests and the public policy-making process. In addition to performing legislative, budgetary, and oversight functions, DPRD members also serve as political communicators who convey public aspirations while explaining policies to the public. Therefore, the quality of political communication established by DPRD members is a critical factor in achieving public accountability.

From a political communication perspective, actors who perform the functions of conveying, exchanging, and constructing political meaning are referred to as political communicators. Political communicators are individuals or groups capable of producing, disseminating, and influencing political messages in the public sphere, whether through face-to-face communication or mass media and digital media (Kustiawan et al., 2022). The role of political communicators is not limited to conveying information but also encompasses shaping public opinion, mobilizing political support, and building legitimacy for policies and political institutions (Klinger, 2024).

Public accountability is a fundamental principle of democratic governance that requires public officials to explain, justify, and take responsibility for their actions and policy decisions. According to Bovens, Goodin, and Schillemans (2020), accountability is realized through mechanisms of information disclosure and the obligation of public officials to provide explanations and justifications to the public regarding their decisions and performance. Their work positions communication as a normative mechanism through which accountability can be exercised and evaluated. However, their analysis remains largely conceptual and does not specifically address the political communication practices of legislative actors at the local government level. In the context of legislative institutions, accountability is realized not only through formal reporting mechanisms but also through communication practices that enable citizens to access information, express aspirations, and provide feedback on public policies. Thus, political communication serves as a primary mechanism linking political representation with demands for public accountability.

Political accountability implies that elected representatives not only communicate information to the public but also respond to citizens' needs in a timely and appropriate manner. A study conducted by Surana (2025) examined the political responsiveness of Regional People's Representative Councils (DPRD) within the framework of legislative political accountability, highlighting the critical role of DPRDs in addressing public aspirations through their legislative, budgeting, and oversight functions. In this context, DPRD responsiveness is operationalized as a key indicator for assessing the accountability of legislative performance in meeting the needs and expectations of citizens.

Studies in political communication indicate that the communication styles employed by political actors influence the quality of the relationship between elected representatives and the public. Dialogic, open, and participatory communication styles tend to foster public engagement and enhance public trust in political institutions. Conversely, one-way and formalistic communication risks creating a distance between elected representatives and their constituents, thereby diminishing perceptions of legislative accountability. Findings by Kruikemeier and Shehata (2022) indicate that interactive political communication can enhance perceptions of transparency and responsiveness among political actors, ultimately strengthening democratic legitimacy.

Recent studies in political communication further demonstrate that transparency, responsiveness, and interactive communication are crucial determinants of citizens' trust and perceptions of accountability. Research by Kruikemeier et al. (2013) found that interactive political communication strengthens citizens' political involvement by reducing the perceived distance between political actors and constituents. Similarly, studies on digital government communication suggest that transparent and responsive communication practices enhance citizens' perceptions of governmental openness and stimulate political participation (Chen et al., 2020). Moreover, emerging evidence indicates that responsiveness is not merely a symbolic communication practice but a substantive component of democratic representation. Politicians who provide meaningful feedback and communicate policy follow-up actions are more likely to strengthen public trust and perceptions of accountability than those who only maintain visible communication channels (Poljak & Russell, 2025). These findings suggest that political communication should be understood not only as a mechanism for information dissemination but also as an institutional process through which accountability, legitimacy, and citizen engagement are continuously negotiated and reinforced.

Nevertheless, research on political communication remains dominated by studies at the national level, particularly those focusing on political campaigns, elite communication, and the use of digital media in general elections. Research specifically examining the political communication practices of Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) members at the local level, particularly in relation to the establishment of public accountability, remains relatively limited. Yet, the local political context possesses distinct characteristics because the relationship between legislators and the public occurs within a closer social proximity, allowing the political communication established to be observed more concretely in daily life.

The city of Mojokerto presents an intriguing context for study because the geographical and social proximity between DPRD members and their constituents should create opportunities for more dialogic and accountable communication. However, there is currently no in-depth understanding of the political communication styles employed by Mojokerto City DPRD members or how these styles impact the public accountability perceived by the community. This situation highlights an empirical gap that requires further research.

Based on the above, this study aims to answer two main questions: (1) what political communication styles are used by members of the Mojokerto City DPRD when interacting with the public; and (2) how do these communication styles impact the enhancement of public accountability. These questions are important because political communication serves not only as a means of conveying information but also as a mechanism for building trust and political legitimacy.

The novelty of this study lies in its effort to link the analysis of City Council members' political communication styles with dimensions of public accountability within the context of local government. Unlike previous studies that have primarily focused on political communication in electoral contexts or on social media, this study focuses on legislators' political communication practices after being elected and how these practices influence perceptions of public accountability.

Several previous studies have examined political communication within the context of legislative bodies; however, they still demonstrate limitations in explaining the relationship between the political communication styles of local legislators and public accountability. A study by Malik (2021) on the political communication of members of the Tasikmalaya City Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) from the United Development Party (PPP) faction during recess activities found that the political communication conducted tended to be formal and did not fully accommodate the interests of the public. The focus of that study was more directed toward the implementation of the recess function as a means of political communication, thus failing to examine the implications of the communication styles used on perceptions of public accountability.

Another study was conducted by Nurannafi (2018), who examined the political communication of female legislators in the budget policy formulation process at the Majalengka Regency DPRD. The results indicate that political communication is influenced by political culture and party strategies in the policy-making process. While providing insights into legislators' communication practices, this study focuses primarily on communication within the internal legislative policy arena and has not linked it to the dimensions of public accountability perceived by the community.

Furthermore, Wahid et al. (2024) examined the use of social media as a means of political communication by legislative candidates for the Central Sulawesi Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) in the 2024 General Election. The study indicates that social media serves as a crucial tool for fostering political interaction and reaching voters. However, the research remains centered on the context of electoral communication and political campaigns, thus failing to explain how political communication is conducted by elected legislators after their election and how such communication contributes to the establishment of public accountability.

While Yusnaini and Ginting (2023) emphasize the importance of political communication in strengthening representative relationships between legislative actors and citizens, their study primarily focuses on the electoral and representational dimensions of politics. Consequently, it does not specifically examine how communication practices of elected legislators contribute to public accountability after they assume office. This limitation reinforces the need for further research exploring the relationship between legislators' communication styles and accountability practices within local governance institutions.

Based on these studies, it is evident that research on legislators' political communication remains dominated by studies on electoral communication, recess activities, and internal policy-making processes within legislative bodies. There remains a lack of research specifically examining the political communication styles of DPRD members after being elected as representatives of the people and linking them to the formation of public accountability at the local government level. This gap serves as a crucial foundation for this study to analyze how the political communication styles of members of the Mojokerto City DPRD impact the enhancement of public accountability. Thus, this study not only enriches the field of local political communication research but also offers an empirical understanding of the role of political communication as an instrument for strengthening democratic accountability at the local level.

Academically, this study contributes to the development of research on political communication and local democratic governance by positioning political communication as a key variable in the establishment of public accountability. Practically, the findings are expected to serve as a foundation for developing more open, responsive, and participatory political communication strategies for members of the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) in carrying out their representative functions

METHODS

Research Type and Approach

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive design. The qualitative approach aims to understand and interpret social phenomena from the participants' perspectives within their natural context. According to Kriyantono (2020), qualitative research in communication studies seeks to uncover the meanings, experiences, and social processes underlying a communication phenomenon, enabling researchers to gain a deep understanding of the reality under study. Meanwhile, the descriptive nature is used to systematically describe the characteristics, patterns, and dynamics of the phenomenon that is the focus of the research without manipulating the research variables.

The qualitative approach was chosen because the study aims to deeply understand the political communication practices carried out by members of the Mojokerto City DPRD and their implications for public accountability. This approach allows the researcher to explore the experiences, perspectives, and communication practices of legislators within the socio-political context they directly face. A descriptive approach is used to systematically describe the patterns of political communication that emerge in the interactions between City Council members and the public without manipulating the phenomena under study.

Research Location and Informants

The research was conducted at the Mojokerto City DPRD. Research informants were selected using purposive sampling, taking into account their direct involvement in political communication activities, their representative functions, and their experience in carrying out legislative duties, oversight, and the absorption of public aspirations.

The research informants consisted of four members of the Mojokerto City DPRD from different political parties who served on committees with high levels of interaction with the public. The relatively limited number of informants was deemed sufficient for qualitative research because the study's objective was not to make statistical generalizations but to achieve data depth (information richness). The selection of the four informants was based on the principle of information adequacy, wherein the data collected demonstrated recurring patterns, and no new substantive information was found during the final stage of data collection. Thus, the data collection process had reached the point of data saturation.

There were 4 key informants in this study. These four informants are council members from 3 parties currently active in Commissions 2 and 3. The following is data regarding the informants:

Table 1. Informant Data

No	Informant	Personal Data					Personal Data
		Place/Date of Birth	***Address***	***Committee***	***Political Party***	***Length of Term***	
1	Deny Novianto, B.Eng.	Mojokerto, November 28, 1974	Suratan Ngaglik, Jalan AMD III No. 09, Suratan Village, Kranggan Subdistrict	2	Democrat	20 years	2009–2014; 2014–2019; 2019–2024; 2024–2029
2	Makhfud Kurniawan Hidayat	Mojokerto, June 27, 1967	Jl. Bhayangkara 91, Jagalan Village, Kranggan District	2	PKS	5 years	2024–2029
3	Indro Tjahjono,	Mojokerto, April 10,	Penanggungan G-40, Wates	3	National Democrati	10 years	2019–2024; 2024–2029

No	Informant	Personal Data					Personal Data
		Place/Date of Birth	***Address***	***Committee***	***Political Party***	***Length of Term***	
	B.A.	1960	Village, Magersari Subdistrict		c		
4	Suyono	Mojokerto, November 7, 1964	Jl. Kedungsari RT 02 RW 03, Gunung Gedangan Village, Magersari District	3	PAN	15 years	2014–2019; 2019–2024; 2024–2029

Data Collection Techniques

Research data were collected through in-depth interviews and observation.

1. In-depth Interviews

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach, guided by an interview framework based on the dimensions of public accountability: information transparency, responsiveness, public participation, documentation of public aspirations, service standards, and internal oversight mechanisms. This technique allowed the researcher to obtain rich data regarding the experiences and political communication practices of DPRD members. The semi-structured interview technique is useful for giving informants the freedom to express their views openly (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014). Interview questions were based on a structured framework, with topic guides consisting of open-ended questions that defined the areas to be explored.

Table 2. Interview Questions

No	Question
1	Performance reports on implemented programs are available and well-documented
2	The public can access information regarding program implementation and budgets
3	Information channels are available for the public to provide feedback to the Mojokerto City Council
4	Public feedback is documented and acted upon, and the results are accessible to the public
5	There are SOPs containing procedures and Service Time Standards (STS) for responding to public feedback
6	There is an internal oversight mechanism within the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) carried out by a specific unit (e.g., performance audit)

2. Observation

Observations were conducted on the political communication activities of DPRD members, both in formal forums and during interactions with the public. Observations were used to supplement and verify information obtained through interviews so that the researcher could understand political communication practices in their actual context.

The entire data collection process was conducted in accordance with research ethics principles, including informant consent, confidentiality of identity, and the use of data solely for academic purposes.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis employs the Reflexive Thematic Analysis approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2019). Analysis is conducted simultaneously throughout the data collection process, enabling the researcher to further explore emerging findings.

The analysis process consists of six stages. First, the researcher transcribes the interview results and reads the data repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding. Second, open coding is performed, which involves assigning codes to units of meaning relevant to the research focus. Examples of initial codes that emerged included information transparency, public access to the budget, response to public aspirations, dialogic communication, formal communication, follow-up on public aspirations, and oversight mechanisms. Third, codes with conceptual connections were grouped into broader categories. Fourth, these categories were developed into main themes representing the patterns of political communication among DPRD members. Fifth, the formed themes were reviewed through a process of cross-data comparison to ensure their consistency and relevance to the research questions. Sixth, the themes were given conceptual definitions and interpreted to explain the relationship between political communication styles and public accountability. In addition to thematic analysis, this study also applied the interactive analysis model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes data condensation, data presentation, and the drawing and verification of conclusions.

Data Validity

Data validity is ensured through methodological triangulation and source triangulation. According to Moleong (2021), triangulation is the process of verifying data by comparing information from various sources and methods. Source triangulation is conducted by comparing interview results from several members of the Regional People's Representative Council with the researcher's observational findings. Meanwhile, methodological triangulation is carried out by integrating interview results, observations, and secondary data in the form of public documents and media reports.

This triangulation approach ensures the validity, credibility, and transferability of the research results in accordance with the principles of qualitative research outlined by Lincoln & Guba (2020). Methodological triangulation is conducted by comparing the results of interviews and observations. Meanwhile, source triangulation was conducted by comparing information among informants and cross-referencing it with supporting documents such as activity reports, recess documents, and public documents from the Mojokerto City Regional People's

Representative Council (DPRD). In addition to triangulation, the researcher also performed member checking by reconfirming the interpretation results with several informants to ensure consistency of meaning between the researcher and the participants. This step was taken to enhance the credibility and reliability of the research findings.

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RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A thematic analysis of the interview and observation results yielded four main themes that describe the political communication styles of Mojokerto City DPRD members in carrying out their functions of representation and public accountability, namely: (1) dialogic communication as a practice of political representation; (2) transparent communication as a strategy for building legitimacy; (3) communicative responsiveness in managing public aspirations; and (4) institutional communication and procedural accountability.

Dialogic Communication as a Practice of Political Representation

The research findings indicate that members of the Mojokerto City DPRD actively utilize various communication forums, such as recess sessions, constituent visits, public hearing forums, and direct communication with the public. These practices demonstrate a tendency toward the use of a dialogic communication style that positions the public not merely as recipients of information, but as partners in the political communication process.

From a political communication perspective, dialogic communication is a two-way form of communication that enables the exchange of meaning between elected representatives and constituents. Informants stated that public aspirations are not only received through formal forums but also through ongoing informal communication. These findings suggest that political representation is built through relatively close interactions between City Council members and the public.

These findings align with Waisbord's (2020) perspective, which positions political communication as an arena for the formation of democratic legitimacy. Legitimacy is not built solely through the formal authority held by legislative members but through their ability to create spaces for dialogue that allow the public to feel heard and represented. Thus, dialogic communication functions as a mechanism of substantive representation that strengthens the relationship between elected representatives and constituents.

Transparent Communication as a Strategy for Building Public Legitimacy

The second theme that emerged is the practice of transparent communication through the provision of information regarding work programs, legislative activities, and the use of the regional budget. Informants explained that various public information is already available through official forums as well as communication channels managed by

the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD). However, the research findings indicate that transparency is not determined solely by the availability of information, but also by the accessibility and comprehensibility of that information to the public. Some informants acknowledged that some of the published information remains administrative in nature and has not yet been fully presented in a format easily understood by the public.

In the study of political communication, transparency is a communication process that enables the public to access relevant information to evaluate the actions of political actors. Kruikemeier and Shehata (2022) explain that perceptions of public accountability are more easily formed when political information is communicated consistently, is easily accessible, and is verifiable. Therefore, transparency is not merely a matter of disclosing information, but also how that information is effectively communicated to the public.

These findings indicate that transparent communication functions as a strategy for building legitimacy. The easier it is for the public to obtain and understand information regarding the performance of the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), the greater the likelihood of public trust in the legislative body.

Responsiveness of Communication in Managing Public Aspirations

The third theme pertains to the responsiveness of political communication. Research findings indicate that Regional Legislative Council (DPRD) members have established various communication channels to receive public aspirations. However, the primary challenge lies not in the availability of communication channels, but in the consistency of follow-up actions regarding the aspirations conveyed.

Some informants emphasized the importance of documenting and forwarding aspirations to the relevant committees or local government agencies. However, the mechanism for providing feedback to the public has not always been systematic. This situation indicates a distinction between symbolic responsiveness and substantive responsiveness.

From a political communication perspective, symbolic responsiveness occurs when political actors actively communicate with the public but do not always produce observable actions. Conversely, substantive responsiveness is demonstrated through the ability to provide information regarding the progress, follow-up, and final outcomes of the public's expressed concerns.

Research findings indicate that public accountability is determined not only by the ability to receive public aspirations but also by the ability to communicate the process and outcomes of follow-up actions on an ongoing basis. In other words, the quality of political communication is measured not merely by the intensity of communication but by the success in establishing a complete communication cycle between the public and the legislative body.

These findings support the argument that accountability is achieved not only through transparency but also through demonstrable responsiveness. The ability of

legislators to communicate policy follow-up and tangible outcomes appears to be a critical mechanism linking political communication with democratic accountability.

Institutional Communication and Procedural Accountability

The final theme concerns institutional communication, which is implemented through standard operating procedures (SOPs), internal oversight mechanisms, and various organizational accountability instruments. Research findings indicate that the Mojokerto City Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) has established institutional frameworks governing the processes of public grievance handling, performance reporting, and internal oversight. However, some informants highlighted that service response time standards and follow-up indicators still require strengthening to ensure accountability can be measured more clearly. This situation suggests that the existence of formal procedures does not automatically result in a strong perception of accountability in the eyes of the public.

From a political communication perspective, institutional procedures function as symbolic messages regarding the organization's commitment to transparency and accountability. However, public legitimacy is not built solely through the existence of rules, but through the institution's ability to consistently and verifiably communicate the implementation of those rules.

Research findings indicate that the Mojokerto City Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) has established various internal oversight mechanisms through council committees, operational procedures, and institutional evaluation forums. Nevertheless, the existence of these mechanisms does not automatically guarantee the realization of strong public accountability. Accountability literature distinguishes between answerability (the obligation to explain and account for actions) and enforcement (the ability to impose consequences, corrections, and follow-up on oversight findings). In this context, the various internal oversight mechanisms of the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) primarily represent the dimension of answerability, while the effectiveness of public accountability depends heavily on the extent to which oversight findings are followed by corrective actions that are observable by the public.

This finding aligns with the research by Kumalasari et al., which indicates that transparency in communication and public engagement will only strengthen trust and the effectiveness of communication when accompanied by tangible, consistent, and verifiable responses by the public (Kumalasari et al., 2024). Informative transparency without clear follow-up tends to result in symbolic public engagement, while communication accompanied by institutional responses can strengthen perceptions of accountability and the legitimacy of public institutions. In line with this, Pérez-Durán et al. (2024) emphasize that enforcement is the key distinction between symbolic accountability and substantive accountability. Thus, the primary challenge is not merely ensuring the availability of oversight mechanisms, but also communicating the follow-up actions and outcomes of such oversight to the public.

Implications of Political Communication Styles on Public Accountability

These four themes indicate that the political communication styles of Mojokerto City DPRD members fall within a spectrum of dialogic-participatory communication combined with formal institutional communication. The research findings show that open, responsive, and dialogue-oriented communication tends to strengthen perceptions of public accountability because it allows the public to obtain information, convey their aspirations, and monitor policy follow-up.

Conversely, when communication emphasizes procedural aspects without clear feedback to the public, accountability tends to be perceived as mere administrative compliance. Therefore, enhancing public accountability requires not only strengthening institutional systems but also improving the quality of political communication capable of sustaining the relationship between the City Council and the public.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the political communication of Mojokerto City DPRD members plays a crucial role in shaping public accountability. The thematic analysis identified four main patterns of political communication: dialogic communication, transparent communication, responsiveness to public aspirations, and institutional communication oriented toward procedural accountability. The findings indicate that communication that is open, participatory, and responsive tends to strengthen perceptions of public accountability because it allows the public to access information, express their aspirations, and monitor the follow-up on policies implemented by City Council members.

Theoretically, this study expands the body of research on local political communication by demonstrating that public accountability is determined not only by formal institutional mechanisms but also by the quality of political communication established between legislators and constituents. These findings reinforce the view that political communication is a crucial instrument in building democratic legitimacy, public trust, and substantive political representation at the local government level. Nevertheless, this study has limitations. The research data was obtained from a limited number of informants and focused on a single local legislative body, so the findings are not intended to be generalized to all Regional People's Representative Councils (DPRDs) in Indonesia. Additionally, this study primarily explores the perspectives of DPRD members rather than those of the public as recipients of political communication.

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