

ANALYSIS OF NETIZENS' INTERACTIONS ON GOVERNOR SHERLY TJOANDA'S TIKTOK ACCOUNT IN REFLECTING PUBLIC TRUST

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ABSTRACT

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Development of digital technology has changed the way of government communicates with public, especially through social media platforms. TikTok has become one of the media widely used by public officials to convey information, build closeness, and engage in direct interaction with the community. This study aims to analyze netizens' interactions on Governor Sherly Tjoanda's TikTok account in reflecting public trust in local government communication. This study uses a qualitative approach with content analysis methods in responses from netizens on comments section post from Governor Sherly Tjoanda's TikTok account. The observation period was set for 31 days in May 2026 because it is the latest period available at the time the study was conducted, so the data produced can represent the most current condition. Results of research indicate that public trust is reflected through various forms of interaction, such as support for government programs, appreciation of the governor's performance, positive responses to public service information, as well as active participation in discussions. These findings suggest that TikTok not only functions as a medium for information dissemination but also as a digital communication space that allows the public to express their views and level of trust in local government. Therefore, the use of interactive and responsive social media can be one of the supporting factors in strengthening the relationship between the government and the public in the digital era.

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of communication technology has driven changes in the way the government interacts with the public. Whereas previously public communication mostly took place through conventional media that tended to be one-way, today the government has various digital channel options that allow for more open and interactive communication. According to (Mergel, 2019; Naibaho & Sihombing, 2025), digital transformation in the public sector is not only related to the use of technology, but also to changes in the pattern of relationships between the government and citizens through more participatory communication spaces. In this context, social media has become one of the tools widely used by the government to convey information while also reaching the public more quickly and broadly. One social media platform that is growing rapidly is TikTok. The main characteristic of TikTok is short video content, which is considered capable of driving high user engagement and rapid information dissemination (Kaye, Chen, & Zeng, 2021). This situation opens opportunities for government agencies to utilize TikTok as a medium for public communication that is closer, more interactive, and easily accessible to the public (Supriyanto et al., 2024).

The relationship between government communication and public trust has been a concern in various public administration studies. According to Ambarita & Thamrin, 2025, citing Porumbescu, 2021, transparency of

information and responsive communication can contribute to increased public trust in government institutions. The phenomenon of local leaders in Indonesia using TikTok shows that social media has become part of government communication strategies. One local leader who actively uses the platform is Sherly Tjoanda. Through her TikTok account, she shares various information about government activities, public services, work visits, and activities involving the community in short video formats. These posts not only get a high number of viewers but also generate various responses from netizens, as seen in the comments section. Comments left by social media users can be understood as a way of expressing attitudes toward the messages they receive. According to (Thelwall, 2018; Hasanah, Juwita, & Arielyan, 2025), comments on social media can be used to identify public responses because they contain opinions, evaluations, expectations, or criticisms voluntarily shared by users. So, the comments on a local leader's TikTok account can give an idea of how people react to communication through that platform.

Although research on government communication on social media continues to grow, most studies still focus on the general use of government social media or on platforms like Facebook, X (Twitter), and Instagram. Studies that specifically examine citizen interactions on local leaders' TikTok accounts as a reflection of public trust are still relatively limited. Unlike previous research that generally measures public trust through surveys or by reviewing government institution social media accounts, this study uses

organic comments from citizens on the personal accounts of local leaders as the main source of data. This approach allows for the identification of forms of public trust that emerge spontaneously in digital communication spaces. Thus, this study provides an empirical contribution to understanding how personal leadership communication on TikTok shapes public perceptions of trust in local government. On the other hand, research on public trust in the government is generally conducted through surveys, interviews, or studies of digital communication at the broader governmental institutional level. To date, studies that utilize comments from citizens on local government TikTok accounts as the primary data source to understand how public responses reflect trust in governmental communication remain limited. In fact, voluntarily expressed comments on social media can provide a more natural depiction of public support, appreciation, criticism, and expectations of the government. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing interactions from netizens on Sherly Tjoanda's TikTok account as a reflection of public trust.

Data analysis was conducted through several stages. The first stage was data reduction by selecting comments relevant to the research objectives. The second stage was the coding process to identify response patterns that emerged in the comments. The third stage was grouping comments into thematic categories representing forms of public trust, such as support for government performance, appreciation for public services, expectations of the government, or constructive criticism. The final stage was data interpretation to understand the meaning contained in netizens' interactions and its relation to the concept of public trust.

Table 1. Operational Definitions of Coding Categories

Categories	Definition	Example
Appreciation	Comments that praise the governor's competence, communication skills, or performance	"That's really cool, ma'am"
Support	Comments that express political or moral support	"Ready to support you"
Hope	Comments that contain aspirations or expectations	"Hopefully the area will become more developed"
Criticism	Comments that contain evaluations or dissatisfaction	"There are still many damaged roads"

Source: Data processed by the researcher (2026)

Table 2. Data Selection Process

Stages	Total
Total posts in May 2026	22
Selected posts	1
Total comments	10.500
Comments analyzed	100

Source: Data processed by the researcher from Sherly Tjoanda's TikTok account (2026)

To enhance the credibility of the research, theoretical triangulation was conducted by comparing the findings with the concepts of digital government

communication and public trust used in the study. In addition, during the preparation of this article, the author made limited use of a generative artificial intelligence tool (ChatGPT) to assist in translating and understanding foreign language references as well as in creating a more systematic research framework. The entire process of data collection, analysis, result interpretation, discussion, and drawing conclusions was carried out independently by the author. The author bears full responsibility for the content and accuracy of this article.

2. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with content analysis methods. Content analysis was chosen because it allows researchers to identify, categorize, and interpret the meanings contained in netizens' comments on social media in a systematic way. According to Klaus Krippendorff (2018), content analysis is a research technique used to produce replicable and valid inferences based on data within a specific context. Through this approach, the study aims to understand how the types of interactions that appear in the comment section of Sherly Tjoanda's TikTok account can reflect public trust in government communication through social media. The research object is Sherly Tjoanda's TikTok account. The selection of this account is based on the high level of public communication activity conducted through the TikTok platform as well as the high level of user engagement shown through the number of comments on the posts published. The account was also selected because it consistently posts content related to government activities, public services, and interactions with the community, making it relevant for discussion with the purpose of research.

The research data consists of comments from netizens on posts from Sherly Tjoanda's TikTok account during the period of May 1–31, 2026. This period was chosen because it was the most recent observation timeframe at the time the study was conducted, so it could provide an insight into the most current public responses to government communication shared on TikTok. During this period, there were 22 posts published on Sherly Tjoanda's TikTok account, and this study focuses its analysis on the post with the highest engagement, shown through the number of views, likes, and comments. The posts with the highest engagement were selected based on the idea that the high level of interaction in the comments section can provide a richer picture of public response to the communication shared. Since the number of comments reached over 10,500, this study used purposive sampling to determine the data sample for analysis. A total of 300 comments were chosen as the research sample because they were considered able to represent the variety of responses in the posts. The comments analyzed were relevant to the content of the post and did not include spam, promotional, or off-topic comments.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Description of the Research Object

This study analyzes a TikTok post on Sherly Tjoanda's account published on May 5, 2026, with the caption "First flag ceremony of May 2026 – Sofifi May 4."

The post was chosen because it had the highest engagement compared to other posts during the observation period from May 1–31, 2026. The video received:

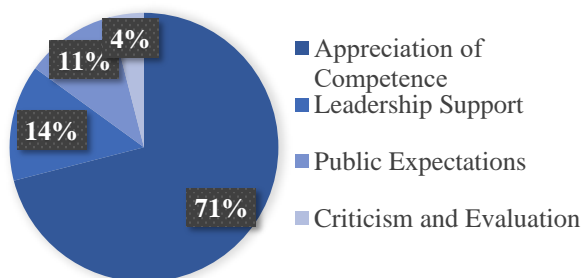
Indicator	Amount
Views	9.9 million
Likes	622.4 thousand
Comments	10.5 thousand
Shares	10.3 thousand
Saved	19.5 thousand

Source: Data processed by the researcher (2026)

In the video, the Governor shared guidance regarding work discipline, regional financial management, and targets for improving government performance. Some of the main points mentioned included clarifying issues about delayed salary payments due to late data entry by the relevant officials, evaluating regional revenue which is still at around Rp1.2 trillion with a target to increase it to Rp1.5 trillion the following year, and encouraging efforts to raise the region's performance ranking from 31st to the top 10 nationally. The message conveyed shows a firm, results-oriented communication style, emphasizing the importance of accountability and the responsibility of officials in carrying out government duties. Characteristics of this communication generate various responses from the public, which are then reflected in the comments section. For this reason, this video was chosen as a research object because it is considered capable of generating public interactions relevant for analyzing society's perception of local government communication through the TikTok social media platform. The video is also interesting to study because it showcases leadership communication that directly touches on issues of government management, civil service discipline, and regional financial management. These issues are aspects that often attract public attention when assessing government credibility. Therefore, the responses in the comments section can provide an idea of the level of public acceptance and trust in the messages delivered by the government through social media platforms.

B. Analysis Results of Netizens' Comments

After coding 100 comments chosen as the research sample, four main categories of netizen comments were found.



Source: Data processed by the researcher (2026)

Based on the analysis of user comments on the TikTok video studied, the predominance of the competence appreciation category indicates that the audience positively assesses the communication skills displayed. According to

Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995), competence (ability) is one of the main dimensions that shapes trust. Ability refers to the capacity of an individual or institution to perform tasks and meet public expectations. The high appreciation for speaking skills and information delivery in the video indicates that the audience views the communicator as a competent figure, which has the potential to increase public trust in the institution they represent.

The second most frequently found category is leadership support, accounting for 14%. The emergence of comments that indicate support for leadership suggests that effective communication can influence the public's perception of a leader figure. According to Reinikainen et al., (2020), when audiences feel an emotional closeness with the figure they follow, they tend to perceive the figure as more credible and are more likely to accept the recommendations given. In addition, positive comments from other users play a role in reinforcing perceptions of trust and positive attitudes toward influencers. These findings indicate that positive perceptions of communication skills in videos can develop into support for the leadership represented by the figure.

Next, the category of public expectations received a percentage of 11%. The presence of comments containing public expectations shows that social media functions not only as a means of information dissemination, but also as a space for public participation. This is in line with Mergel's (2016) opinion which states that social media encourages the government to shift from one-way communication to more interactive two-way communication. The World Bank report (2021) also emphasizes that digital platforms can enhance transparency, efficiency, and public engagement.

Meanwhile, the category of criticism and evaluation is the category with the lowest percentage, which is 4%. Although the number is relatively small, comments in this category remain important because they provide input, evaluation, and critical views on aspects that are considered still in need of improvement. The presence of critical comments shows that government social media not only functions as a means of disseminating information but also as a mechanism of public accountability that allows the community to convey evaluations and demands regarding government services (A.M. Alalwan, 2020).

C. Discussion

- 1) Competency Appreciation as a Reflection of Public Trust
 - a) Data Findings: As many as 71% of the analyzed comments showed appreciation for the competence of the Governor of North Maluku. This appreciation is mainly related to public communication skills, mastery of data and regulations, as well as understanding of bureaucratic and governmental issues.
 - b) Comment Excerpts:
 - "Cool, no reading, no notes, even though the speech content is diverse and includes numbers as well as laws. Hats off to the Governor."
 - "Speaking in public. Organized, sequential, and the direction is clear. This is a Governor with the feel of a CEO, thinking fast and comprehensively."
 - "This is what a real leader looks like. Mastering all issues of bureaucratic rights and duties. Fully mastering and serving all the needs of the people and understanding all the ins and outs of

infrastructure/facilities and economy. Respect, Mrs. Sherly."

- c) Discussion: The comment 'Cool, didn't read, didn't bring notes, even though the speech content was diverse and included numbers and laws' shows that people see the ability to convey information without a script as an indicator of mastery of the substance. Netizens think that the ability to remember data, regulations, and government information directly reflects a person's intellectual capacity and readiness to carry out their duties as a leader. A similar view is seen in the comment 'Speaking in public in an organized, sequential way with a clear direction. This is like a CEO-style Governor who thinks quickly and comprehensively.' This comment shows that people don't just judge the content of the speech, but also the way it's delivered. Being able to communicate systematically is perceived as a representation of effective managerial and leadership skills. Meanwhile, the comment "This is what a real leader looks like. Mastering all the issues of rights and bureaucratic duties..." shows that people link communication skills with government competence more broadly. From the netizens' perspective, mastering bureaucratic information is seen as proof that a leader understands the problems faced by both the community and the institutions they lead. This finding aligns with the OECD (2024) report, which states that competence, reliability, and the government's ability to make the right decisions are important factors in building public trust in government institutions. When people see direct evidence of competence, their trust in both the leader and the institutions they represent tends to increase.

2. Leadership Support

- a) Data Findings: As many as 14% of comments showed support for the leadership of the Governor of North Maluku. This support was expressed through prayers, expressions of hope for the leader to remain healthy, and aspirations for the figure to be able to lead at a higher level.
- b) Comment Excerpts:
"Hopefully my prayers and those of so many others are answered by Allah SWT so that you stay healthy, live a long life, and are protected from envious and jealous people. Amen."
"Ready to support Mrs. Sherly to become the President."
"Become president, ma'am, please fix the bureaucracy system in Indonesia."
- c) Discussion: The comment 'I hope my prayers and those of many others are answered by Allah SWT so that you stay healthy and live long...' shows an emotional connection between the community and the leader. The support given is no longer just about evaluating performance, but has developed into concern for the continuity of that person's leadership. Meanwhile, comments like 'Ready to support Mrs. Sherly to become President' and 'Rise to be president, ma'am, please fix the bureaucratic system in Indonesia' show that people see successful leadership at the local level as a stepping stone to lead on a larger scale. This support indicates a belief that the capabilities shown now can deliver good performance at a higher level of government. Findings regarding comments that support the government are in

line with the research of Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2024), which shows that citizens' interactions with public officials on social media can increase positive evaluations of government performance and strengthen public trust.

3) Public Expectations of Local Government

- a) Data Findings: As many as 11% of comments contain public expectations regarding the quality of leadership and government governance. These expectations reflect the public's desire for competent, transparent leaders who are oriented towards public interest.
- b) Comment Excerpts:
"Her leadership authority is extraordinary. Ten leaders like this in Indonesia in the next five years could compete to become a developed country."
"Hopefully Indonesia in the future will be blessed with many leaders like you, wise, firm, fair, and truly transparent in their work."
"If only the governor in my area were like you, I even know more about the government situation in North Maluku than in my own area."
- c) Discussion: The comment "10 leaders like this in Indonesia in the next 5 years could compete to become a developed country" shows that people not only evaluate individual leaders, but also connect it to national development progress. Leaders are seen as an important factor determining the quality of government and the direction of development. In the comment "Hopefully Indonesia in the future will be blessed with many leaders like you, wise, firm, fair, and transparent in real action," it is clear that people have expectations for the ideal characteristics of a leader. Values like transparency, fairness, and firmness become the standards people use to judge leadership quality. Meanwhile, the comment "If only the Governor in my area was like you..." shows that there is a process of social comparison between local governments. People use their experiences observing leadership in other areas as a benchmark to evaluate the quality of governance in their own region. According to the OECD (2024), public trust is closely linked to people's expectations of the government's ability to respond to citizens' needs and provide quality services. The expectations expressed in comments show that people see leaders as a representation of the potential for better governance.

4) Public Criticism and Evaluation

- a) Data Findings: As many as 4% of comments contained criticism and evaluation regarding aspects of bureaucracy and government administration. The criticisms that emerged were related to the discipline of officials, the quality of bureaucratic work, and compliance with regulations.
- b) Comment Excerpts:
"I don't know how the civil servants perform, but somehow their reports are always late. If they worked in a private company, they'd get a warning immediately."
"Many of the roll call participants are just goofing around. Not paying attention."
"Sorry, I want to ask, what are the ethics or rules about uniforms in the civil servant environment? Back in

school, we had to wear black shoes on Mondays. If shoes are free, is that allowed?"

- c) Discussion: The comment "I don't know how the civil servants are performing, but somehow the data reports we need are late" shows that the public is paying attention to the effectiveness of the bureaucracy. Even though the video features a speech by a local leader, some people are actually focusing on the performance quality of the officials who support government operations. The comment "Many of the participants in the flag ceremony were goofing around, not paying attention" shows that people are also monitoring the behavior of government officials. This indicates that the public evaluates not only the leaders but also all parts of the bureaucracy that are visible in public spaces. Meanwhile, the comment about uniform rules shows that people are interested in administrative governance and adherence within the government bureaucracy. According to the OECD (2024), accountability and transparency are important factors that influence the level of public trust in government institutions. Criticism expressed by the public can be seen as a form of citizen participation in the government oversight process. Thus, the presence of criticism does not necessarily indicate low public trust. On the contrary, criticism can serve as an indicator of public involvement in monitoring government performance and promoting the creation of more accountable governance.

D. Reflection of Public Trust in Netizen Interactions

Research results show that public trust is clearly reflected in the interaction patterns of netizens on the TikTok posts of the Governor of North Maluku. From all the comments analyzed, the category of competence appreciation is the most dominant theme (71%), followed by support for leadership (14%), public expectations of local government (11%), and criticism and public evaluation (4%). This distribution indicates that the majority of public responses are positive and oriented toward assessing the quality of leadership. The dominance of appreciation for competence shows that the public places the leader's ability as the main foundation in building trust. These findings are in line with Zheng et al. (2025), who assert that competence is an important factor in the formation of trust because it reflects a person's capacity to carry out tasks and deliver expected performance.

Support for leadership indicates that public trust has developed from merely recognizing competence to legitimizing leadership. According to Barends and Andrews (2023), leaders who are perceived to have ability and a good track record tend to gain voluntary support from the public, including expectations that the leader will occupy higher positions. Thus, comments containing prayers and hopes for higher leadership positions can be understood as a manifestation of public trust that has evolved into social legitimacy toward the leader figure.

On the other hand, the category of public expectations indicates that public trust also contains elements of anticipation regarding the future of governance. Netizens not only assess the current situation but also envision how the quality of leadership displayed can result in broader changes. The expectation for the emergence of more transparent, firm,

and responsive leaders demonstrates that the public associates the quality of individual leaders with the overall quality of government governance. This finding aligns with Van der Meer's (2018) view, which explains that public trust not only reflects an evaluation of current performance but also the public's expectations for the government's actions and performance in the future.

Although their number is relatively small, the presence of criticism and public evaluation provides an indication that trust does not equate to uncritical acceptance. Criticisms that arise regarding the discipline of officials, the quality of bureaucracy, and compliance with regulations show that society continues to carry out its oversight function over the government. This finding aligns with the concept of Critical Citizens put forward by Norris (1999) and further developed in studies of contemporary political trust. This perspective explains that citizens who have trust in public institutions do not necessarily accept all policies passively, but rather continue to conduct evaluations and oversight as part of democratic participation. Thus, public trust reflected in this study is critical in nature, allowing space for both appreciation and criticism of governmental administration.

The findings of this study are in line with the OECD (2024) report, which states that trust in public institutions is influenced by the public's perception of competence, reliability, transparency, and the government's ability to respond to citizens' needs. In the context of this study, these four aspects are reflected in the interactions of netizens, most of whom express appreciation for leadership capacity, support for leadership figures, and hopes for improvements in government governance. Thus, social media not only functions as a means of disseminating government information but also becomes a space for the formation, reinforcement, and reflection of public trust.

Even though a high level of interaction shows that people are paying attention to the content uploaded, the results of this study should be understood carefully. TikTok uses an algorithmic mechanism that determines the distribution and visibility of content through the For You Page (FYP) feature. So, a high number of views, likes, or comments can't always be directly interpreted as a high level of public trust. Factors like virality, algorithm recommendations, and user characteristics on the platform can also influence the interaction patterns that appear. Therefore, engagement indicators in this study are better understood as a reflection of public attention and involvement, which then need to be further analyzed through the content of user comments.

Based on these results, it can be understood that public trust in digital interactions is not just reflected through explicit support for the government. Trust also shows itself through appreciation of competence, expectations for future government performance, and community involvement in providing evaluations. Therefore, netizens' interactions on TikTok can be seen as an indicator of how people interpret, assess, and build trust in local government in the era of digital communication.

From a digital governance perspective, the interactions on Governor Sherly Tjoanda's TikTok account show a shift in how government communicates, moving from a one-way model to a more participatory one. Social media allows the government not just to share information with the public, but also to receive direct feedback through comments, replies, and public discussions. This aligns with the idea of

digital governance, which uses technology as a tool to boost transparency, participation, and citizen engagement in government processes. So, TikTok can be seen not just as a communication platform, but also as a digital governance tool that strengthens the connection between the government and the people.

4. CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze the interactions of netizens on Governor Sherly Tjoanda's TikTok account as a reflection of public trust in local government communication. The results of the study show that the majority of the comments analyzed are positive and are dominated by appreciation for the governor's competence and leadership. In addition, comments were also found that contain public hopes for the quality of government administration, as well as a small number of comments that include criticism and evaluation.

The findings indicate that public trust in the digital space is reflected not only through direct support for the government, but also through appreciation of leaders' competence, expectations regarding governmental performance, and public participation in providing feedback and oversight. Thus, the interactions of netizens on the TikTok platform can be seen as one of the indicators that depict how society evaluates and builds trust in local government.

This study also shows that social media plays a role not only as a means of disseminating information but also as a two-way communication space that allows interaction between the government and the public. However, this study has limitations because it focuses only on a single video post and uses TikTok comments as the primary data source. Therefore, future research needs to expand the study objects by comparing more content, local government accounts, and other social media platforms to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between government digital communication and public trust.

SUGGESTION

Based on the research findings, local governments need to keep optimizing the use of social media as a means of public communication that is transparent, responsive, and participatory. Content that showcases leadership competence, performance accountability, and public problem-solving should be maintained because it has been proven to get positive responses from the community. In addition, online comments should be used as a source of feedback for evaluating government services and policies.

For future researchers, it is recommended to expand the scope of research by analyzing multiple posts, comparing different local government accounts, or using other social media platforms. Using a mixed methods approach through a combination of content analysis, surveys, and interviews can also be done to get a deeper understanding of how public trust is built in government digital communication.

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