

Ethics of Government Public Communication in Social Media for COVID-19 Management in Makassar City

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Abstract

Communication Ethics play a crucial role in shaping public behavior and responses to government efforts in handling the COVID-19 pandemic in Makassar City. This study employs a qualitative descriptive research method, utilizing in-depth interviews with key informants from election organizers in Indonesia and data analysis techniques with NVivo 12 Plus software. The research explores the application of Communication Ethics principles, including the Principles of Beauty, Equality, Kindness, Justice, Freedom, and Truth, in the Instagram account @dpramadhanpomanto's posts related to COVID-19 management in Makassar City. The findings reveal that the Principles of Beauty, Equality, Kindness, Justice, Freedom, and Truth have been applied in the delivery of information regarding COVID-19 handling in Makassar City. However, public understanding and satisfaction with the application of these principles vary. Despite the government's efforts to employ these Communication Ethics principles, some community members remain unsatisfied or do not fully comprehend the principles' application. This study provides valuable insights into the importance of Communication Ethics in government-public interactions during the COVID-19 pandemic. By analyzing the case of the @dpramadhanpomanto Instagram account, the research contributes to a better understanding of how the application of Communication Ethics principles influences public perception and response. The findings offer valuable information for policymakers and practitioners to improve communication strategies and foster public trust and collaboration in addressing the ongoing pandemic.

Keywords

Communication Ethics; COVID-19; Makassar City; Instagram; public perception; government communication

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted societies worldwide, forcing governments to adapt and develop new strategies to manage and communicate information effectively (Cai et al., 2020; de las Heras-Pedrosa, Sánchez-Núñez, & Peláez, 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2020; Madani & Hartaman, 2022; Man et al., 2020; Mustari et al., 2021; Panneer et al., 2022). Government communication plays a crucial role in providing timely, accurate, and transparent information to the public, fostering trust, and ensuring a well-informed and united response to the crisis (Hyland-Wood, Gardner, Leask, & Ecker, 2021; D. K. D. Kim & Kreps, 2020; Sanders, 2020). Effective communication during a pandemic presents unique challenges, especially with the increasing reliance on social media and technology-based platforms (Ataguba & Ataguba, 2020; Reddy & Gupta, 2017).

The Makassar City Government launched a website portal, www.infocorona.makassar.go.id, as the official source of information on COVID-19 management in Makassar City. In addition to the website, the Makassar City government utilizes Instagram, the most popular and widely-known social media platform, to disseminate information about COVID-19 management. Instagram is highly interactive, allowing the government to implement Open Government Indonesia (OGI) with data disclosure and extensive access to

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information related to Indonesia's COVID-19 response ([Bast, 2021](#); [Maryani, Triwardhani, Pratama, & Mustafa, 2022](#); [Purba & Irwansyah, 2022](#); [Watajdid, Lathifah, Andini, & Fitroh, 2021](#)). As a form of information disclosure, Law No. 14/2008 on Public Information Disclosure was enacted as a breakthrough by the government to protect and guarantee public access to various public information ([Febriananingsih, 2012](#); [Hasyim, Laraswati, Purwanto, Pratama, & Maryudi, 2020](#); [Kamaliah, 2015](#); [Riyanto, 2012](#)). This law obligates the government to fulfill the public's right to public information.

Furthermore, the government can directly listen to community aspirations and establish relationships with the community to support each other in tackling the ongoing pandemic. Through Instagram, the public and the government can interact via the comments section or privately through the Direct Message (DM) feature ([Gruzd, Lannigan, & Quigley, 2018](#); [Mulasari, Sahrir, & Hartaman, 2022](#)). Instagram is a highly popular platform; in Indonesia alone, there are 63 million active users, ranking as the 4th most active user base in the world ([Hootsuite We Are Social, 2020](#)).

During the pandemic, the @dpramdhanpomanto Instagram account has become a vital information center for COVID-19 management in Makassar City, boasting 62.6 thousand followers. This account actively posts COVID-19 related information, especially since the government plays a significant role in policymaking to reduce transmission risks and maintain public health. Based on posts related to COVID-19 management in Makassar City on the @dpramdhanpomanto Instagram account, public sentiment can be observed through the comments section. Public sentiment is divided into negative and positive sentiments. Each post related to COVID-19 management features various public comments, some supporting and others opposing government programs. For instance, in the Makassar Recover program, a COVID-19 management initiative in Makassar City, some people support the program by offering positive comments in the form of praise. However, there are also numerous negative sentiments from the community, with many people criticizing the government program as ineffective and a waste of budget (source: Instagram @dpramdhanpomanto, 2021).

Several studies have explored the importance of communication ethics in government-public interactions. For instance, [Berg \(2017\)](#) emphasized the need for transparency, accountability, and public engagement in government communication, while [Kim and Liu \(2012\)](#) investigated the role of trust in shaping public perception during a crisis. Additionally, research by [Islm et al., \(2021\)](#) focused on the impact of social media on government communication strategies and public responsiveness. Despite the growing body of literature, there remains a lack of research examining the application of communication ethics principles in the government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. The present study aims to address this gap by analyzing the government's communication efforts through the @dpramdhanpomanto Instagram account as a case study.

This study aims to address the gap in the existing literature by providing a comprehensive assessment of the government's communication efforts in Makassar City during the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of the application of communication ethics principles, such as beauty, equality, kindness, freedom, justice, and truth. The present study is unique as it examines the case of the @dpramdhanpomanto Instagram account, which has not been previously investigated. By analyzing this specific case, the study seeks to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the government's communication strategies and offer recommendations for improvement, ultimately fostering better public perception, trust, and collaboration between the government and the public.

Methods

This study employs a descriptive research design with a qualitative approach, aiming to provide a clear description of the object under investigation, which is the Government's Public Communication Ethics in the Social Media Space in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The study seeks to explore the phenomena that occur during this period. The research was conducted from March 10 to April 20, 2022. Primary data sources were obtained through interviews with five informants who have experience and expertise in the subject matter. Secondary data were collected from documents and literature relevant to the research topic. Data collection techniques employed in this study include observation, interviews, and

documentation ([Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014](#)).

The data analysis technique utilized in this research is a qualitative data analysis using NVivo 12 Plus software. NVivo 12 Plus is a qualitative data analysis tool that allows researchers to manage, analyze, and visualize complex data sets from various sources, such as interviews, observations, and documents. The data coding process with NVivo 12 Plus involves several steps. First, the researcher imports the collected data (interview transcripts, observational notes, and relevant documents) into the software. Next, the researcher reads through the data to familiarize themselves with the content and identify emerging themes and patterns. Once the initial themes are identified, the researcher creates a coding framework, also known as a "node structure," to categorize the data. Nodes represent themes, ideas, or concepts that emerge from the data. They are used to organize and classify the data systematically.

Table 1. Steps in the Research Process

Step	Description
1	Define research objectives and design the study
2	Identify primary and secondary data sources
3	Develop data collection techniques (observation, interviews, documentation)
4	Conduct data collection (interview informants, gather documents, and conduct observations)
5	Import collected data (interview transcripts, observational notes, and documents) into NVivo 12 Plus software
6	Familiarize with the data and identify initial themes and patterns
7	Create a coding framework (node structure) based on identified themes
8	Code the data by assigning relevant text segments to appropriate nodes
9	Refine and revise node structure as necessary during the coding process
10	Use NVivo 12 Plus features (queries, visualizations) to explore relationships between nodes and identify patterns within the data
11	Analyze coded data to draw conclusions and provide recommendations

The researcher then proceeds to code the data by assigning relevant text segments to the appropriate nodes. NVivo 12 Plus allows for both deductive (predefined themes based on the research questions) and inductive (emerging themes from the data) coding, enabling a comprehensive analysis of the data. During the coding process, the researcher continuously refines and revises the node structure to ensure it accurately represents the data. This process may involve merging, splitting, or renaming nodes as necessary. The researcher also uses the software's features, such as queries and visualizations, to explore relationships between nodes and identify patterns within the data. Upon completing the coding process, the researcher analyzes the coded data to draw conclusions and provide recommendations for improving government communication ethics in the social media space during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Result and Discussion

Government Public Communication Ethics in Social Media Space towards Handling COVID-19 in Makassar City

The government is encouraged to make various innovations related to information technology-based public services, especially during this pandemic in order to break the chain of virus spread, some activities and interactions are carried out virtually or remotely. In the case of handling COVID-19, the government's efforts to reduce the rate of spread of COVID-19 were also conveyed virtually through social media. As part of the new paradigm of government communication, government communicators are now

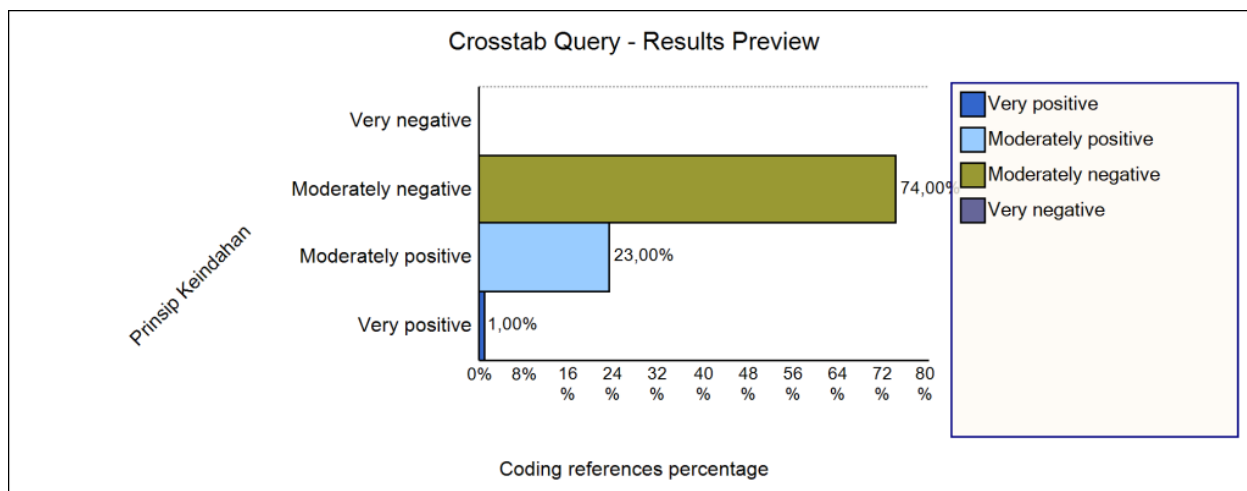
participating in realizing a transparent, accountable government, and providing channels for the public to participate and collaborate, especially in handling COVID-19.

In carrying out communication, the government as a communicator of public information, in using ethics must be careful because it is not impossible that our understanding of ethics is different from other people. Lack of understanding between the government and the community can lead to miss communication or even cause a problem in handling COVID-19 and lead to a variety of different perceptions that can affect the government in handling COVID-19 in Makassar City. In these differences, we must be able to adapt quickly. The values that make up ethics must be understood correctly because in fact there is no communication that does not use ethical values in it, every form of communication always uses ethics although at their respective levels according to the context, purpose and situation. Therefore, communication ethics is very important. The principles of communication ethics that must be considered according to [Johannesen \(1996\)](#), which are operationalized in this study, are the Principle of Beauty, the Principle of Equality, the Principle of Kindness, the Principle of Freedom, the Principle of Justice, and the Principle of Truth.

Principle of Beauty

The Principle of Beauty serves as the foundation for government behavior in conveying information, taking into account the aesthetic appeal of their communication. Based on this principle, the government considers the values of beauty and aims to display beautiful and appealing content in its communication. The application of the Principle of Beauty can be observed in the @dpramdhanpomanto Instagram account through posts related to COVID-19 management. These posts feature well-designed flyers and engaging video content using clear and easily understood language, making the information accessible to the public.

Figure 1. Results of Crosstab Query Principle of Beauty



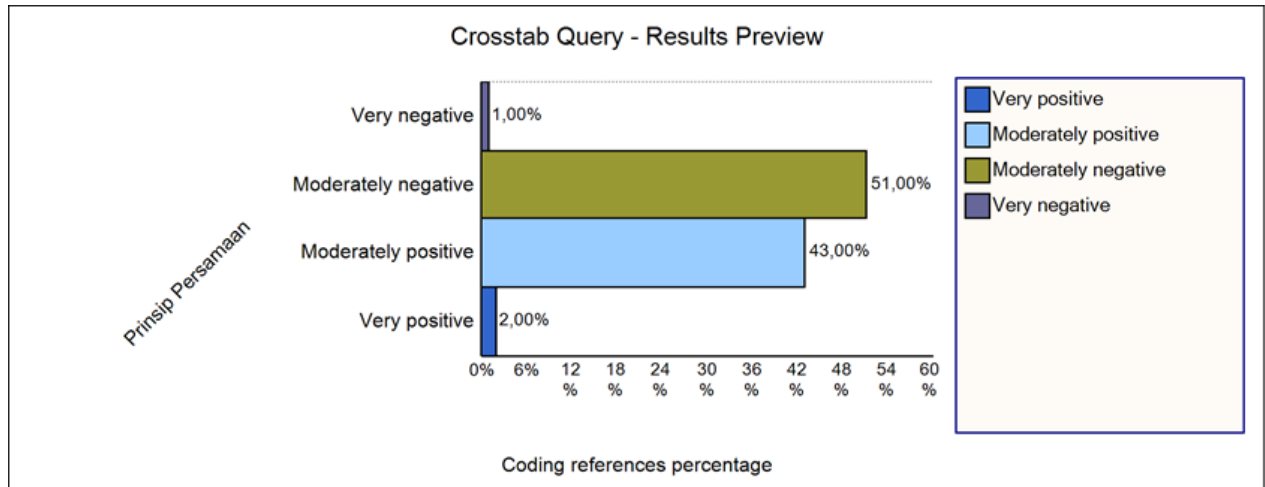
Although the government's efforts to apply the Principle of Beauty are evident in the @dpramdhanpomanto Instagram account, the data from the NVIVO analysis of public comments on these posts reveals a different perspective. The NVIVO query crosstab results for the Beauty Principle Indicator show that the @dpramdhanpomanto Instagram account receives more moderately negative comments (74% coding reference percentage) than moderately positive comments (23% coding reference percentage) regarding the communication of COVID-19 management information in Makassar City. The Principle of Beauty in the @dpramdhanpomanto Instagram account does not receive very negative comments but does receive very positive comments, albeit with a coding reference percentage of only 1%.

These findings suggest that while the government has made efforts to present aesthetically pleasing content, public satisfaction with the communication may not be entirely aligned with the government's intentions. It is essential for the government to continue refining its communication strategies to effectively address public concerns and improve overall satisfaction with the information provided.

Principle of Equality

The Principle of Equality serves as the foundation for government behavior in ensuring that no discrimination takes place, as every individual inherently possesses the same rights and responsibilities. This principle underlies non-discriminatory behavior, so when the government provides public information related to COVID-19 management in Makassar City, it should do so without regard to ethnicity, nation, race, culture, or religion. The implementation of the Principle of Equality in the @dpramadhanpomanto Instagram account can be seen in posts related to COVID-19 management that avoid using language that could create divisions within society during the pandemic.

Figure 2. Results of Crosstab Query Principle of Equality



While the government's application of the Principle of Equality is evident in the @dpramadhanpomanto Instagram account, the data from the NVIVO analysis of public comments on these posts tells a different story. The NVIVO query crosstab results show that the @dpramadhanpomanto Instagram account receives more moderately negative comments (51% coding reference percentage) than moderately positive comments (43% coding reference percentage) regarding the communication of COVID-19 management information in Makassar City. The Principle of Equality in the @dpramadhanpomanto Instagram account also receives very negative comments (1% coding reference percentage) and very positive comments (2% coding reference percentage).

These results suggest that although the government has made efforts to adhere to the Principle of Equality in its communication, public satisfaction with the information may not entirely align with the government's intentions. It is crucial for the government to continually refine its communication strategies to effectively address public concerns and enhance overall satisfaction with the provided information while upholding the Principle of Equality.

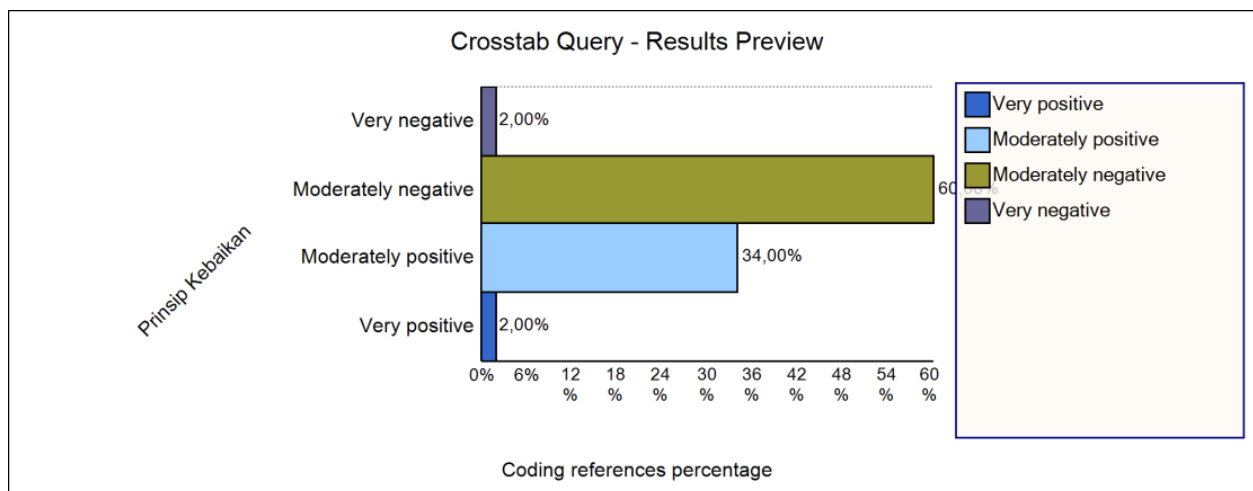
Principle of Kindness

The Principle of Kindness serves as the foundation for conveying information about all government actions, ranging from policy-making and socializing COVID-19 management programs to implementing initiatives that aim to benefit the community during the pandemic. The application of this principle fosters a sense of security and comfort within the community regarding the government's actions. In essence, the purpose of organizing government, development, and public services is to create goodness and improvement for the community or its citizens.

Although the government's application of the Principle of Kindness is evident in the posts on the @dpramadhanpomanto Instagram account, the data analysis conducted using NVIVO through public comments reveals some interesting findings. The analysis of the interview results using the Crosstab Query feature through NVIVO 12 Plus shows that the Government's Public Communication Ethics in Social Media Space has the highest percentage (28%) for the Kindness Principle indicator. This result indicates that the government, in conveying public information through the @dpramadhanpomanto Instagram account as one

of the information centers related to COVID-19 management in Makassar City, prioritizes the application of the Principle of Kindness.

Figure 3. Results of Crosstab Query Principle of Kindness

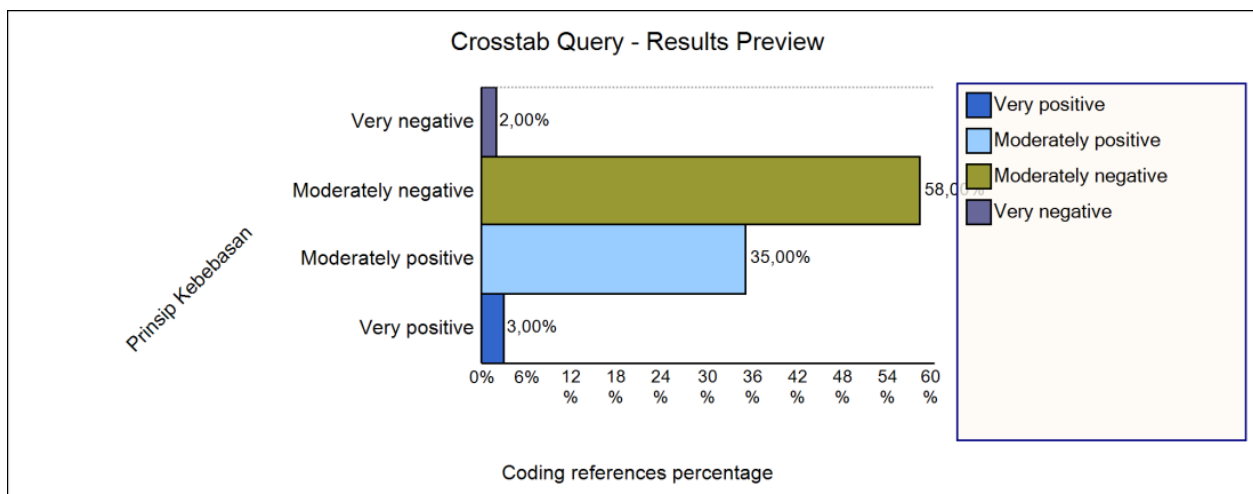


This focus on kindness demonstrates the government's commitment to ensuring that its communication and actions are centered around the well-being of the community, fostering a sense of trust and support for the measures being implemented to address the pandemic.

Principle of Freedom

The Principle of Freedom serves as the foundation for the government to make policies and take actions in accordance with its duties and functions. The application of this principle does not imply that the government can act arbitrarily; rather, it must be accountable for its actions. This means that even though government intervention in the lives of citizens is necessary to address societal issues, the government must take responsibility for these actions.

Figure 4. Results of Crosstab Query Principle of Freedom



While the government's application of the Principle of Freedom is evident in the posts on the @dpramdhanpomanto Instagram account, the data analysis conducted using NVIVO through public comments suggests that public sentiment is mixed. The @dpramdhanpomanto Instagram account receives more moderately negative comments (58% coding reference percentage) than moderately positive comments (35%) when conveying public information related to COVID-19 management in Makassar City. Additionally, the Principle of Freedom in the @dpramdhanpomanto Instagram account receives very

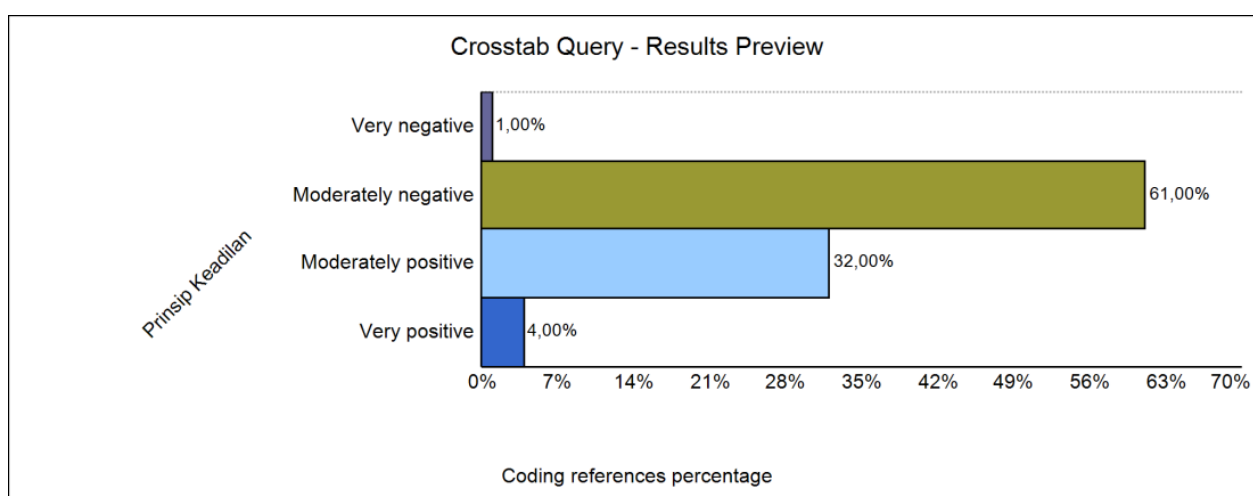
negative comments (2% coding reference percentage) and very positive comments (3% coding reference percentage).

These findings indicate that although the government has made efforts to adhere to the Principle of Freedom in its communication, public satisfaction with the information provided may not entirely align with the government's intentions. To enhance public trust and support, the government should continually refine its communication strategies while ensuring transparency and accountability in its actions related to COVID-19 management.

Principle of Justice

The Principle of Justice serves as the foundation for government behavior to provide what the community rightfully deserves. The application of this principle implies that the government must offer what the community is entitled to. In handling COVID-19 in Makassar City, the community must receive transparent information and effective solutions for managing the pandemic. The Principle of Justice is evident in the @dpramdhanpomanto Instagram account through posts that disclose information related to COVID-19 handling programs and the implementation of these activities in Makassar City.

Figure 5. Results of Crosstab Query Principle of Justice



However, despite the government's efforts to apply the Principle of Justice in its communication, the data analysis conducted using NVIVO through public comments indicates mixed public sentiment. The @dpramdhanpomanto Instagram account receives more moderately negative comments (61% coding reference percentage) than moderately positive comments (32%) when conveying public information related to COVID-19 management in Makassar City. The Principle of Justice in the @dpramdhanpomanto Instagram account also receives very negative comments (1% coding reference percentage) and very positive comments (4% coding reference percentage).

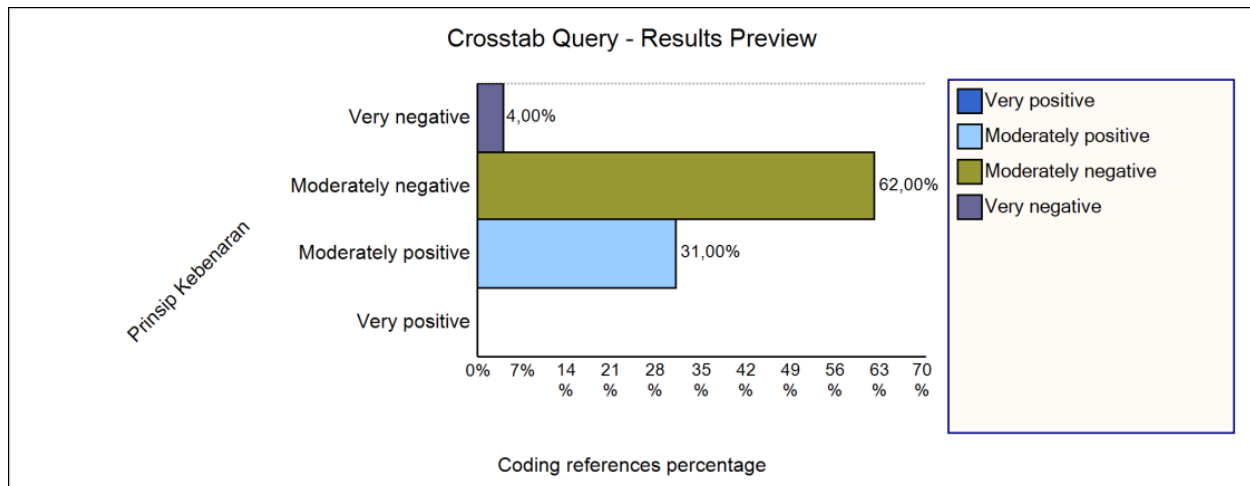
These findings suggest that although the government has made efforts to adhere to the Principle of Justice in its communication, public satisfaction with the information provided may not fully align with the government's intentions. To foster greater public trust and support, the government should continue to refine its communication strategies while ensuring transparency, fairness, and effectiveness in its actions related to COVID-19 management.

Principle of Truth

The Principle of Truth forms the basis for government behavior in providing public information, particularly on Instagram, related to COVID-19 management in Makassar City. The application of this principle signifies that the government must present clear and verifiable information. In managing COVID-19 in Makassar City, the government must demonstrate concrete actions to implement its pandemic response program so that the public can trust the information's accuracy. The Principle of Truth is evident in the @dpramdhanpomanto Instagram account through posts showcasing the implementation of COVID-

19 management programs that were initially socialized and later executed.

Figure 6. Results of Crosstab Query Principle of Truth



However, even though the government seems to apply the Principle of Truth in its communication, the data analysis using NVIVO through public comments reveals a mixed response. The @dpramadhanpomanto Instagram account receives more moderately negative comments (62% coding reference percentage) than moderately positive comments (31%) when conveying public information related to COVID-19 management in Makassar City. Furthermore, the Principle of Truth in the @dpramadhanpomanto Instagram account receives very negative comments (4% coding reference percentage) and no very positive comments (0% coding reference percentage).

These findings indicate that although the government has made efforts to adhere to the Principle of Truth in its communication, public satisfaction with the provided information may not fully align with the government's intentions. To foster greater public trust and support, the government should continue refining its communication strategies while ensuring accuracy, transparency, and effectiveness in its actions related to COVID-19 management.

Public Perception of Government Communication Ethics

The findings from this study raise several important points for discussion regarding the government's public communication ethics in the context of COVID-19 management in Makassar City, as seen through the @dpramadhanpomanto Instagram account. The government has made efforts to apply ethical principles in their communication, such as the Principle of Beauty, Equality, Kindness, Freedom, Justice, and Truth. However, the analysis of public comments reveals a predominantly moderately negative perception of the government's communication ethics.

In light of these findings, it is crucial to understand the reasons behind the negative public perception. One possible explanation is the difference in understanding and interpretation of ethical values between the government and the community, leading to miscommunication or misunderstanding. Additionally, the public might perceive the government's communication as lacking in transparency or credibility, causing them to question the effectiveness of their COVID-19 handling programs.

The table above presents six identified weaknesses in the government's communication efforts and corresponding recommended policy actions to address these issues. By implementing these recommendations, the government can improve its communication strategies and foster better public perception and trust during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. To address these concerns, the government should consider providing clearer, more accurate, and more transparent information. Moreover, they should ensure that their communication is inclusive and non-discriminatory, taking into account the diverse backgrounds of the community. By doing so, the government can build trust and demonstrate their commitment to serving the public's best interests.

Strengthening Communication Ethics and Encouraging Public Participation

The study highlights the importance of strengthening communication ethics in government-public interactions and encouraging public participation in decision-making processes. To improve public perception, the government should pay attention to the aesthetics and design of their messages to engage the public better. This includes creating visually appealing and well-designed content, which can help to capture the public's attention and convey important information more effectively.

Furthermore, the government should prioritize the application of ethical principles in their communication strategies. This includes being transparent about their decision-making processes, providing accurate and timely information, and ensuring that their messages are culturally sensitive and appropriate for the target audience. By doing so, the government can foster a more positive public perception and facilitate better communication.

Table 2. Government Weaknesses and Recommended Policy Actions

No.	Government Weaknesses	Recommended Policy Actions
1	Inadequate aesthetics and design of messages	Invest in improving the visual appeal and design of communication materials to better engage the public
2	Limited transparency in decision-making	Enhance transparency by sharing decision-making processes, data, and rationale behind policy choices
3	Insufficient accuracy and timeliness of information	Ensure information is accurate, up-to-date, and provided in a timely manner to maintain public trust
4	Lack of cultural sensitivity in communication	Develop culturally sensitive and inclusive communication strategies to reach diverse audiences effectively
5	Inadequate public participation and collaboration	Establish channels for public input and feedback, actively involving the community in decision-making processes
6	Inconsistent application of communication ethics	Conduct regular training and capacity building for government communicators on communication ethics and best practices

In order to foster a more positive public perception and facilitate better communication, the government should encourage public participation and collaboration in their decision-making processes. This can be achieved by providing channels for the public to voice their opinions, concerns, and suggestions, such as through comments or direct messages on social media. By involving the community in COVID-19 management, the government can build trust and demonstrate their commitment to serving the public's best interests. Additionally, public participation can provide valuable insights and perspectives that can inform the government's decision-making and contribute to more effective and inclusive policies and programs.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the application of ethical principles in government communication strategies and public perception in the context of handling COVID-19 in Makassar City. The research results revealed that the government has implemented the principles of Beauty, Equality, Kindness, Freedom, Justice, and Truth in their communication strategies on the @dpramadhanpomanto Instagram account. However, public perception varies, with a higher percentage of moderately negative comments compared to positive ones, indicating room for improvement in the government's communication efforts.

In summary, the government's application of ethical principles in their communication strategies is essential in shaping public perception and fostering trust during the COVID-19 pandemic. To enhance public perception and communication effectiveness, the government should focus on improving the aesthetics and design of their messages, prioritizing transparency, accuracy, and cultural sensitivity in their communication, and actively encouraging public participation and collaboration in decision-making

processes.

Based on the findings of this study, several suggestions can be made for future research and practice. First, the government should invest in training and capacity building for government communicators to ensure that they are well-versed in communication ethics and able to apply them effectively. Second, future research should explore the impact of other communication platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, on public perception and trust during the pandemic. Lastly, it would be valuable to study the potential long-term effects of improved communication ethics on public trust and the overall effectiveness of government policies and programs. By addressing these issues, we can contribute to the development of more effective and ethical government communication strategies, ultimately benefiting the public during times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

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