

Instagram as a Social Service Information Media: Analysis of Islamic Digital Communication in the Public Relations of the Medan City Social Service Ministry

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ABSTRACT

The use of social media has transformed public communication by enabling government institutions to disseminate information more quickly, visually, and interactively. This study examines the use of Instagram @bahagia_medan as a social service information medium and analyzes the implementation of Islamic digital communication principles by the Public Relations unit of the Ministry of Social Affairs in Medan. This study employed a qualitative descriptive-interpretive approach. Data were collected through observation of 30 Instagram posts published between September 25, 2025, and March 15, 2026, in-depth interviews with public relations officers, Instagram administrators, and content management staff, as well as documentation. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that Instagram is managed collaboratively and functions as a gateway communication medium for disseminating information on social programs, social assistance, and services for vulnerable groups. Content is predominantly presented as activity documentation and informational posts, while practical information on service procedures, requirements, complaints mechanisms, and access pathways remains limited. The management of content reflects the values of tabayyun, shiddiq, amanah, qaulan sadidan, and qaulan layyinan through verification, factual messages, accountability, and polite language. However, low audience engagement, limited interactive content, human resource constraints, algorithmic changes, and unequal digital access remain major challenges. The study concludes that Instagram should be strengthened as an inclusive, responsive, and ethically grounded supporting medium for social services through more accessible, interactive, and audience-oriented content.

Keywords:: *instagram; social service information; government public relations; Islamic digital communication; public communication.*

ABSTRAK

Perkembangan media sosial telah mengubah komunikasi publik dengan memungkinkan lembaga pemerintah menyebarluaskan informasi secara lebih cepat, visual, dan interaktif. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis pemanfaatan Instagram @bahagia_medan sebagai media informasi pelayanan sosial serta penerapan prinsip komunikasi digital Islam oleh Humas Kementerian Sosial Kota Medan. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain deskriptif-interpretatif. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi terhadap 30 unggahan Instagram pada periode 25 September 2025 hingga 15 Maret 2026, wawancara mendalam dengan pejabat humas, admin Instagram, dan tim pengelola konten, serta dokumentasi. Data dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña melalui tahap kondensasi data, penyajian data, serta penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Instagram dikelola secara kolaboratif dan berfungsi sebagai gateway communication untuk menyebarluaskan informasi program, bantuan sosial, dan layanan bagi kelompok rentan. Konten didominasi dokumentasi kegiatan dan informasi program, sedangkan informasi praktis mengenai prosedur layanan, persyaratan bantuan, mekanisme pengaduan, dan akses layanan masih terbatas. Pengelolaan konten mencerminkan nilai tabayyun, shiddiq, amanah, qaulan sadidan, dan qaulan layyinan melalui verifikasi informasi, penyampaian

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pesan faktual, tanggung jawab, dan penggunaan bahasa santun. Namun, rendahnya interaksi audiens, keterbatasan konten interaktif, sumber daya manusia, perubahan algoritma, serta kesenjangan akses digital menjadi hambatan utama. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa Instagram perlu diperkuat sebagai media pendukung pelayanan sosial yang inklusif, responsif, dan berlandaskan etika komunikasi digital Islam

Kata kunci: instagram; informasi pelayanan sosial; humas pemerintah; komunikasi digital Islam; komunikasi publik.

Introduction

The development of information and communication technology has changed the way the government and society interact. Social media has now become a strategic tool for delivering public service information because it can reach people quickly, visually, and interactively (Bertot et al., 2020: 264; Criado et al., 2021: 319). Instagram, through photo, video, reels, stories, comments, and direct messages, not only works as a publication platform but can also be a space for communication between government institutions and the public.

In social services, having accurate, fast, and easy-to-understand information is really important, especially when it comes to social assistance, protection for vulnerable groups, social rehabilitation, community empowerment, disaster response, and services for the elderly, children, people with disabilities, and the poor (Jaeger & Bertot, 2019: 371). Instagram can help government PR communicate information about programs, procedures, requirements, and service access more engagingly through infographics, educational videos, event documentation, announcements, and information clarifications. Using this media can also support transparency and build an image of an institution that is responsive and close to the community.

The city of Medan has a community that is diverse in terms of culture, religion, education, work, and socio-economic conditions. This situation requires social service communication strategies that are adaptive, inclusive, and easy to reach for different community groups (van Deursen & van Dijk, 2019: 507). The Public Relations of the Medan City Social Affairs Ministry plays an important role in spreading information, building public trust, and bridging communication between the government and social service beneficiaries (Helsper & Reisdorf, 2017: 1253).

However, using Instagram isn't just about technology; it also needs to be based on Islamic digital communication values. Principles like shiddiq, amanah, tabayyun, hikmah, qaulan sadidan, and qaulan layyinan are important to apply so that social service information is delivered accurately, verified, politely, responsibly, and with the community's wellbeing in mind (Noor, 2018: 33; Parhan et al., 2021: 59). The challenges faced include limited two-way interaction, low response to public questions, digital literacy gaps, and the potential spread of inaccurate information (Maylaffayza & Wanastri, 2022: 59; Nur Haliza et al., 2022: 101). Therefore, this research is important to carry out in order to analyze the use of Instagram as a social service information medium, PR communication strategies, audience interaction patterns, as well as the application of Islamic digital communication values at the Public Relations of the Medan City Social Service Ministry.

The use of Instagram in government public communication is increasingly growing along with the rise of people's consumption of information in the digital space. Instagram allows government institutions to share information visually, quickly, and interactively through images, videos, reels, stories, and direct messages. In government public relations practice, social media not only serves as a publication channel, but also supports transparency, builds relationships with citizens, and opens up a space for interaction between the government and the public (Aji et al., 2023: 12; Karakiza, 2018: 384). The government's use of social media is also related to citizens' perceptions of openness, satisfaction, and trust in the government (Porumbescu, 2021: 291; Song & Lee, 2021: 430). Research on public communication at BPKP RI shows that Instagram is used to share information, build relationships, and encourage participation through content and interactions with followers (Wulandary & Rahmawati, 2025: 280).

However, previous research generally still focuses on Instagram as a public communication medium in general, institutional image building, government public relations strategies, and audience engagement levels. Jamil & Eriyanto, (2021: 746) studying dialogic communication on the Indonesian House of Representatives' Instagram account, while Aji et al., (2023: 12) discussing the interactivity of government social media in public services. The study shows that government social media communication still tends to be one-way and hasn't fully established a dialogue with the public. Challenges in building two-way communication include organizational capacity, response management, and the ability to turn social media from an information channel into a conversation space with citizens Falco & Kleinhans, (2018: 32). In fact, a dialogic digital relationship requires easy interaction, providing useful information, and efforts to maintain public engagement. Kent & Taylor, (1998: 321). Therefore, there are still limitations in studies on the quality of Instagram as an information medium for social services, especially in delivering information about social assistance, protection for vulnerable groups, social rehabilitation, community empowerment, and access to services for people in need.

Research gaps are also seen in the objects and contexts of studies. Most previous studies have looked at national ministry accounts, local governments, legislative bodies, oversight institutions, or communication and informatics offices. Government social media communication can take the form of sharing information, symbolic actions, institutional representation, as well as communication aimed at democratic goals DePaula et al., (2018: 98). On the other hand, a citizen-oriented digital communication approach requires institutions to be able to listen to the public's voice and manage engagement continuously Lovari & Parisi, (2020: 205). Research on digital communication practices in public relations at social service institutions at the city level, especially in Medan, is still limited. In fact, social services have a unique character because they deal with the poor, the elderly, children, people with disabilities, disaster victims, and other vulnerable groups. The information shared not only has to be engaging, but also accurate, easy to understand, inclusive, and respectful of the beneficiaries.

Besides that, most previous studies have used perspectives from public communication, digital public relations, dialogical communication, and social media usage. The perspective of Islamic digital communication is still relatively rare in analyzing how government public relations manage Instagram. In fact, the values of *qaulan sadidan*, *qaulan layyinan*, *amanah*, *tabayyun*, and *hikmah* are relevant to making sure social service information is delivered correctly, politely, responsibly, verified, and oriented toward the welfare of the community. The principle of *qaulan sadidan* relates to the factuality and objectivity of public information (Kriyantono, 2020: 279). Meanwhile, Islamic communication is also relevant for dealing with issues of honesty, politeness, and preventing unverified information in the digital space (Ependi & Adenan, 2025: 259).

Based on this gap, the novelty of this study lies in integrating the study of Instagram, social service communication, government public relations, and Islamic digital communication in the context of the Public Relations of the Medan City Social Service. This research not only analyzes Instagram as a publication medium but also examines the clarity of information, message accuracy, verification processes, use of polite language, responsiveness to the public, protection of beneficiaries' privacy, content accessibility, and social welfare orientation. Measuring social media communication in the public sector also needs to consider procedures, outputs, impacts, and interaction quality, not just content exposure numbers (Mergel, 2018: 327). So, Instagram's success isn't just measured by the number of followers, likes, or comments, but also by its ability to provide social service information that is accurate, trustworthy, inclusive, humane, and useful for the community.

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-interpretative design to understand the use of Instagram as a medium for social service information and the implementation of Islamic digital communication by the Public Relations of the Medan City Social Ministry. This approach is

used to explore the planning, production, distribution, and response processes of social service information on Instagram in depth within a natural context (Creswell & Poth, 2018: 49).

The research was carried out at the Public Relations unit of the Social Affairs Ministry in Medan City, focusing on managing their Instagram account, which shares information about social assistance, social protection, social rehabilitation, community empowerment, social education, and service activities. The analysis includes posts, captions, infographics, reels, stories, comments, admin responses, and digital communication activities related to social services.

Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, namely officials or public relations staff, Instagram admins, social service officers, and content creation teams who are directly involved in managing the account. Supporting informants can come from the community or account followers who have accessed social service information. The number of informants is determined based on the principle of data saturation, which is when additional data no longer produces new or relevant information or theme (Islam & Aldaihani, 2022: 5).

Data was collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the purposes of using Instagram, content strategies, information verification mechanisms, interaction patterns with the public, account management challenges, and the application of Islamic communication values. Observations focused on content types, language use, message visualization, comments, and admin responses. Documentation included screenshots of posts, content archives, activity reports, and other supporting documents.

Content analysis is used to identify and interpret messages in texts, images, videos, captions, and digital interactions. Analysis indicators include clarity of service information, message accuracy, completeness of information, verification of information (*tabayyun*), polite language use, admin responsiveness, protection of beneficiary privacy, and social welfare orientation (Krippendorff, 2018: 78). The perspective of Islamic digital communication is used through the values of shiddiq, amanah, tabayyun, hikmah, qaulan sadidan, and qaulan layyinan to assess ethical aspects in content management (Ependi & Adenan, 2025: 259; Kriyantono, 2020: 275).

The data is analyzed using an interactive model Miles et al., (2019: 12-15), through the stages of data condensation, data presentation, as well as drawing and verifying conclusions. Data validity is maintained through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking. The research also pays attention to research ethics through informant consent, confidentiality of identities, protection of personal data, and responsible use of digital documentation, especially concerning vulnerable groups.

Results and Discussion

Managing Instagram as a Social Service Information Platform

Based on the observations, the Instagram account @bahagia_medan is managed collaboratively by the admins, the design team, the documentation team, and the public relations section. The content uploaded includes information about activities, social service programs, and documentation of services for vulnerable groups. Publications are done regularly, around four to five times a week, adjusting to the activity schedule, the public's information needs, and certain moments. Before being published, each piece of content is coordinated with public relations to ensure the accuracy of the information. These findings show that Instagram has been used as a public communication tool to spread information about social services to the community.

To strengthen the observation results, the researcher conducted interviews with the Head of the Public Relations Bureau of the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Instagram admin @bahagia_medan, and the public relations team involved in managing content and digital communication. The interview results showed that the Instagram account is managed collaboratively and aimed at supporting the dissemination of social service information to the public.

The Head of the Public Relations Bureau of the Ministry of Social Affairs explained that Instagram is used as one of the public communication media to broaden the reach of information about social programs and services. He said:

“We use Instagram to share information about activities, service programs, and social assistance with the public. Because people now use social media a lot, we try to make sure the information can be received faster and more easily. However, the information shared still has to match the actual data and activities being carried out”.

That statement shows that the use of Instagram is aimed at being a means to quickly and openly spread information about social services while still being based on accurate data. The Instagram admin of @bahagia_medan also explained that the content management process is done through dividing tasks among several parties. The admin is responsible for writing captions and scheduling posts, while visual design, videos, and documentation are supported by another team. The admin said:

“When managing Instagram, we work as a team. I usually write the captions and schedule the posts, while the design, photos, and videos are handled by the documentation and design team. Before the content is uploaded, we coordinate with PR first to make sure the information matches the activities and there are no mistakes”.

That statement shows that managing Instagram isn't done individually, but through teamwork to maintain visual quality and the accuracy of the information being posted.

Next, the admin explained that posting is done regularly, taking into account the schedule of activities and the needs of the community. He stated:

“In a week, we usually upload around four to five pieces of content. The content depends on the ongoing activities, like distributing aid, social activities, training, or commemorating a certain day. We also consider what information people need to know at that time”.

This information aligns with the observations showing consistent content publication about four to five times a week. The content presented not only includes documentation of activities but also information related to programs and social services for the community.

The public relations team also emphasized that coordination is necessary to ensure the information shared on Instagram can be accounted for. The informant said:

“Every piece of information that's going to be posted must first have its source verified. We can't just upload information without coordination, especially when it's related to social aid or community service activities. We need to make sure the data, event location, and beneficiary information are accurate”.

That statement shows an attention to the accuracy of information before content is published. This process reflects the efforts of PR in keeping social service information factual, clear, and not misleading to the public.

Research results show that the Instagram account @bahagia_medan has been used as a public communication tool to share information about activities, social assistance, service programs, and activities for vulnerable groups. The account is managed collaboratively by the admin, design team, documentation team, and public relations team, with coordination processes before posting. These findings are in line with research Aji et al., (2023: 15) which explains that government social media can function as a public communication channel to expand access to service information, increase transparency, and build relationships between government agencies and the public.

Collaborative content management shows that government digital communication needs a clear division of roles so that the messages shared are not only visually appealing but also accurate in substance. In the context of social services, accurate information is important because the content relates to social assistance, vulnerable groups, service requirements, and community needs. Therefore, coordination between admins and public relations before publication is a form of information control that can strengthen public trust in government institutions.

This finding is also in line with research Wulandary & Rahmawati, (2025: 280) It states that Instagram of government institutions functions as a means of delivering information, publishing activities, and shaping the institution's image. However, this study shows that Instagram's role in social services has a more specific character. Instagram is not only used to build the institution's image, but also to help people learn about programs, activities, and services that can be accessed by vulnerable groups.

Characteristics of Instagram Content @bahagia_medan

Based on observations of 30 posts on the Instagram account @bahagia_medan from September 25, 2025, to March 15, 2026, most of the content is in the form of feed posts that document activities, social aid distribution, institutional activities, and social service information. The content features events like Ramadan bazaars, sign language training, psychosocial support services, International Day of Persons with Disabilities commemorations, as well as assistance for the elderly, children, people with disabilities, and disaster victims. The content is informative, visual, and contextual because it uses photos, graphic designs, and videos tailored to social service activity agendas. However, practical information on service procedures, aid requirements, complaint mechanisms, and access to services is still limited. The use of reels, stories, and interactive features is also not yet optimal, so communication still tends to be one-way from the government to the public.

To strengthen the observation results, the researcher conducted interviews with the Head of the Public Relations Bureau of the Ministry of Social Affairs, the admin of the Instagram account @bahagia_medan, and the public relations team involved in managing content and digital communication. The interview results showed that Instagram content is dominated by documentation of activities, social assistance distribution, and the publication of social service programs.

The Instagram admin @bahagia_medan explained that most of the content is arranged based on activities being carried out by the organization. The informant stated:

“The content we upload usually comes from ongoing activities, like distributing aid, social activities, training, or commemorating certain days. So, we document these activities in the form of photos, videos, and captions so people know about the programs we run”.

The statement shows that Instagram content mostly serves as a way to document and share information about social service activities. The uploaded content showcases service activities for vulnerable groups, including the elderly, children, people with disabilities, and communities affected by disasters.

The Head of Public Relations also explained that all content must go through a vetting process before publication. He said:

“The information we publish has to be accurate and match what's happening on the ground. So before we upload anything, we make sure the data, documentation, and explanations are correct. We don't want the information the public gets to cause mistakes or confusion”.

This information aligns with the observation results showing that the content is factual. Coordination and information checking are done to make sure the posts reflect activities and social services that are actually carried out.

Next, the public relations team explained that using visuals is an important part of conveying information on Instagram. The informant said:

“Instagram is easier to grab attention if you use photos or videos. Because of that, we try to show clear documentation of activities and designs that are easy to see so people can quickly understand the information being shared”.

The statement shows that Instagram content has a visual character through the use of photos, graphic design, and videos. Visualizations of social service activities are used to clarify information and increase the appeal of messages to the public. However, the interview results also show that educational and interactive content is still not optimal. The Instagram admin said:

“For content that explains aid procedures, requirements, or service Q&A, there really isn’t that much yet. We still post activity documentation more often. Besides that, using reels and interactive features like polls or question boxes hasn’t been done regularly either”.

That statement reinforces the observation that the Instagram account @bahagia_medan is still dominated by one-way communication. The content mostly delivers information from the organization to the public, while the space for dialogue through reels, stories, polls, question boxes, and active responses to the audience hasn’t been used optimally.

The research shows that most of the content on @bahagia_medan is in the form of feeds that document activities, distribute social aid, organizational activities, and provide information about social service programs. The content is informative, factual, visual, and contextual, as it uses photos, videos, graphic designs, and is tailored to specific activities and events. Previous studies indicate that visual formats and types of content affect audience engagement, both on government accounts and on organization accounts sharing service information and public issues. (Bonsón et al., 2019: 52; Guidry et al., 2017: 477).

However, this study found that procedural content, such as assistance requirements, service flows, complaint mechanisms, and service access steps, is still limited. This condition shows that Instagram is used more as a medium for documentation and publication of activities than as a medium for practical service guidance. This is in line with Jamil & Eriyanto, (2021: 746) who found that public institution Instagram accounts still frequently use one-way communication patterns. Information is conveyed from the institution to the public, but the space for dialogue and audience participation has not yet developed optimally.

In social services, limited practical information can affect people's ability to access services. People not only need to know that a program or aid has been carried out, but also need explanations about who is eligible for the services, how to apply, what documents are needed, the service hours, and complaint channels. Therefore, Instagram content needs to evolve from just documenting activities to content that is more focused on the needs of service users.

The Application of Islamic Digital Communication in Content Management

Based on the observations, the management of Instagram content @bahagia_medan has reflected the application of Islamic digital communication values, especially tabayyun, shiddiq, and amanah. This is seen from the process of checking and coordinating information before content is published, so that the social service information delivered matches the activities and available data. The captions used also tend to be formal, polite, and free of misleading information, reflecting the principles of qaulan sadidan and qaulan layyinan. However, the presentation of information still needs improvement through the use of simpler, more empathetic language that is easy to

understand by people with varying levels of education and digital literacy. Therefore, the application of hikmah values needs to be strengthened so that social service information is not only accurate but also more accessible and beneficial for the target groups.

To strengthen the observation results, the researcher conducted interviews with the Head of the Public Relations Bureau of the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Instagram admin @bahagia_medan, and the public relations team involved in managing content and digital communication. The interview results showed that content management is carried out by paying attention to the accuracy of information, the responsibility in delivering messages, and the use of polite language.

The Head of the Public Relations Bureau explained that every piece of social service information must be checked first before being published. He said:

“Information related to social services shouldn't be uploaded directly without checking. We need to make sure the activities, data, location, and content are accurate. This is important so that people don't get wrong information or misunderstand the programs we're sharing”.

That statement shows the practice of the value of tabayyun, which is the effort to check and confirm the truth of information before spreading it to the public through digital media.

The Instagram admin @bahagia_medan also explained that writing captions is done based on available data and documentation of activities. The informant stated:

“Before writing a caption, I usually first look at the activity report, documentation, and information from the team. After that, we coordinate the caption again with the public relations team. We try to make sure the caption content matches the activities that were actually done and isn't exaggerated”.

The statement reflects the value of shiddiq in content management, which is delivering information according to the facts of social service activities and programs. In addition, the coordination process before publication shows a sense of responsibility in maintaining the accuracy of information.

The public relations team added that the information published must be accountable because it relates to the needs of the community, especially the groups benefiting from social services. The informant said:

“We have to be careful because the information we upload is related to people who need services or assistance. If the information is incorrect, people might misunderstand or come with the wrong requirements. So, we have to make sure all the information is clear and reliable”.

That statement shows the application of the value of trustworthiness, which is being responsible in delivering public information accurately, clearly, and without misleading.

Besides the accuracy of the information, the use of language is also a concern in content creation. The Instagram admin explained:

“We try to use polite and formal language because this account belongs to an institution. We avoid words that might offend people and try to share information in a good way”.

This explanation aligns with the principles of qaulan sadidan and qaulan layyinan, which mean delivering the message truthfully, accurately, and in polite language. Formal language is used to maintain the institution's credibility, while politeness in language is needed so that people can comfortably receive the information.

However, the interview results also showed that the way language is presented in the content still needs to be adjusted to the characteristics of the target community. One of the PR team members said:

“Sometimes social service information does use fairly formal terms. Moving forward, we need to create simpler language, especially for people who aren't used to digital information. If the language is too long or too formal, not everyone will understand it right away”.

That statement shows that the value of wisdom needs to be strengthened by delivering information in a simpler, more empathetic, concise, and easy-to-understand way. This way, Islamic digital communication on Instagram management not only emphasizes the truth and responsibility of information but also needs to ensure that messages are accessible and understandable to people from various backgrounds.

Research findings show the application of Islamic digital communication values in content management, especially *tabayyun*, *shiddiq*, *amanah*, *qaulan sadidan*, and *qaulan layyinan*. The process of fact-checking information, coordinating with public relations, and using formal and polite language shows that account managers are trying to maintain the truth and responsibility of messages. These findings are relevant to Kriyantono, (2020: 275) which places the principle of *qaulan sadidan* as an important basis in delivering information that is factual, correct, and accountable.

The application of *tabayyun* in this study is seen through verifying data on activities, locations, and beneficiary information before content is published. This principle is important because mistakes in social assistance information can cause confusion, incorrect access to services, and a drop in public trust. Furthermore, the value of trustworthiness is reflected in how careful public relations is in ensuring accurate information and avoiding the spread of data that hasn't been confirmed yet.

The finding also supports the study Ependi & Adenan, (2025: 259) which emphasizes that the principles of Islamic communication remain relevant in the digital space, especially to prevent the spread of unverified information and maintain communication ethics. However, this study found that the application of the value of wisdom still needs to be strengthened. The language used in social service information that is too formal or lengthy can be difficult for people with varying levels of education and digital literacy to understand. Therefore, the value of wisdom needs to be applied through the use of simple language, clear visuals, short messages, and an empathetic approach toward vulnerable groups.

Audience Interaction Level with Instagram Content

Based on the observations, audience interaction on the Instagram account @bahagia_medan is still relatively low. Most posts only get a moderate number of likes, while the comments are relatively few, and some content doesn't receive any comments at all. This shows that the audience mostly consumes information passively and hasn't actively engaged with the public relations account. However, one reel post received high engagement, with 1,693 likes and 127 comments. This finding indicates that short video content attracts more audience attention compared to regular feed posts. The low interaction on most content is influenced by the dominance of activity documentation, limited format variety, as well as suboptimal use of interactive features and admin responses to the audience.

To strengthen the observation results, the researcher conducted interviews with the Head of the Public Relations Bureau at the Ministry of Social Affairs, the admin of the Instagram account @bahagia_medan, and the public relations team involved in content management and digital communication. The interviews showed that audience engagement with most posts is still relatively low, especially in terms of comments and direct interaction with the public.

The Instagram admin @bahagia_medan explained that most posts get likes, but it's not always followed by comments or questions from the public. The informant said:

“As for likes, they usually still happen, but comments are indeed still few. A lot of content is just viewed or liked, but people haven't really been giving feedback or asking questions in the comment section”.

That statement shows that the audience tends to be passive recipients of information. The interaction that happens is still limited to likes, while two-way communication through comments hasn't really taken off yet.

The Head of the Public Relations Bureau explained that the type of content affects public response. He said:

“Documenting activities is important to show the programs that have been carried out, but it usually doesn't get much feedback. People are more interested when the content is short, visual, and directly related to their needs or experiences.”

The statement reinforces the observation that documentation content tends to get lower interaction compared to more visual and engaging content.

The Instagram admin also explained that reels content has a greater potential to boost audience engagement. The informant stated:

“We once uploaded a reel that got a pretty high response, with lots of likes and comments. From that, it seems that short videos are easier to catch attention because people can immediately understand the message without having to read a long caption”.

That information aligns with the observation that found one reel getting 1,693 likes and 127 comments. The findings show that short videos can be a more effective format for grabbing audience attention and response.

The public relations team added that the limited use of interactive features also affects low engagement. The informant said:

“So far, we've mostly been creating informational and documentation content. Features like polls, question boxes, or Q&A haven't been done regularly. Whereas, those features could make it easier for people to ask questions or share their opinions”.

That statement shows that low interaction is not only influenced by the audience's interest, but also by the suboptimal participatory content strategy. Using interactive features can open up a more dialogical communication space between public relations and the community.

In addition, the Instagram admin mentioned that responding to comments and direct messages is still facing challenges due to limited time and resources of the managers. The informant explained:

“We try to respond to comments and messages that come in, but sometimes we can't do it immediately because we need to verify the information first. The team managing it also has other tasks, so the responses aren't always fast”

That statement shows that the limitations of human resources and the information verification process also affect how quickly the admin can respond. Based on the interview results, it can be concluded that increasing audience interaction requires more engaging content variations, consistent use of reels and interactive features, and stronger admin responses to comments and messages from the public.

The research results show that the audience engagement level on most posts is still low. The number of comments is relatively small, and some posts don't get any responses, even though

there are a moderate number of likes. This condition indicates that people are still mostly passive information receivers. These findings support the results of previous studies. Jamil & Eriyanto, (2021: 746) which states that government institutions' Instagram communication hasn't always formed a dialogic relationship because social media is still mainly used as a one-way information dissemination tool.

However, one reels post got 1,693 likes and 127 comments. This finding shows that the short video format has a greater potential to grab the audience's attention compared to regular feed posts. Studies on organizational communication on Instagram suggest that the platform's visual nature can be used to boost attention and engagement with service messages or public issues. (Guidry et al., 2017: 479). In the context of this research, reels can be used to explain social assistance procedures, service requirements, service schedules, information clarification, and brief education about the rights of vulnerable groups.

Low engagement is also related to the limited use of interactive features, like polls, question boxes, Q&A sessions, and live streams. In fact, social media can be used not just to share information, but also to build a community and encourage audience action. (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2017: 340). Interactive features can expand the space for public participation and help PR understand the audience's information needs. Therefore, increasing engagement doesn't just depend on posting frequency, but also on message relevance, format variety, admin responsiveness, and the institution's ability to build two-way communication.

Instagram as a Gateway for Social Service Communication

Based on the observations, the Instagram account @bahagia_medan serves as an initial connection (gateway communication) in spreading information about social services. Through photo, video, and activity posts, people can learn about programs, social assistance, and available services before contacting staff or accessing services directly. However, Instagram hasn't fully become the main public service platform because not all target groups have access to digital devices, actively use social media, or have adequate digital literacy. Therefore, Instagram is used as a supporting medium that complements direct communication between staff and the public.

To strengthen the observation results, the researcher conducted interviews with the Head of the Public Relations Bureau at the Ministry of Social Affairs, the admin of the Instagram account @bahagia_medan, and the public relations team involved in content management and digital communication. The interviews showed that Instagram is used as a way to provide initial information about programs, activities, social assistance, and services available to the public.

The Head of the Public Relations Bureau explained that Instagram is useful for making it easier for people to get initial information before coming to the office or contacting the staff. He mentioned:

“We use our Instagram as an initial gateway for information. People can see activities, programs, and services available through our account. If they need more detailed explanations, they can contact the staff or come directly to the related service”.

That statement shows that Instagram acts as an initial connecting medium between the public and government social services. The information shared on Instagram helps people get to know programs and services before engaging in further communication.

The Instagram admin @bahagia_medan also explained that social media can't replace in-person service. The informant stated:

“Instagram helps us share information quickly, especially for specific activities or announcements. However, for more detailed services, like explaining requirements or assisting the community, it usually still has to go through staff because every community's needs can be different”.

This description shows that Instagram functions more as a supporting media in social services. This platform can expand the reach of information, but service processes that require data verification, guidance, and special explanations are still carried out through official channels or direct communication.

The public relations team added that not all target communities can access information through Instagram. The informant said:

“Not everyone who needs help actively uses Instagram. There are elderly people, low-income communities, or residents who don't have a smartphone or internet access. That's why we still go directly to the field or coordinate with the local village authorities and community so the information really reaches them”.

This statement aligns with observations that limited access to digital devices and digital literacy are obstacles in using Instagram as a social service medium. Therefore, digital communication needs to be complemented with face-to-face communication so that information can reach vulnerable groups more evenly.

Research findings show that Instagram @bahagia_medan is better understood as a gateway communication, meaning an initial connecting medium that helps people get information before accessing official services or directly communicating with staff. Instagram can quickly expand the reach of information, but it cannot yet replace in-person social services. These findings are in line with Aji et al., (2023: 12-15) which explains that government social media can strengthen public information and communication access, but still needs to be integrated with formal service mechanisms.

In the context of social services, Instagram plays an important role as a supporting media because some target groups, such as the elderly, low-income communities, people with disabilities, and residents with low digital literacy, don't always have access to digital devices or the internet. Because of that, research shows that social service communication strategies can't rely solely on social media. Digital communication needs to be combined with face-to-face interaction, staff assistance, coordination with local authorities, and spreading information through local community networks.

Barriers in Managing Digital Communication

Based on the observation results, the management of the Instagram account @bahagia_medan faces several challenges, particularly related to limited human resources, lack of content diversity, and restricted post reach. The social media management team is responsible for various duties, resulting in content planning, production, evaluation, and responses to public comments and direct messages not being carried out optimally. The content is still largely dominated by activity documentation, while the use of Instagram features such as Reels, Stories, live broadcasts, polls, and other interactive tools remains limited. In addition, changes in Instagram's algorithm affect the reach of published information, preventing all posts from being distributed evenly to followers. Another challenge is the limited access to technology and the low level of digital literacy among certain target groups, including low-income communities, older adults, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable populations. Therefore, the Public Relations team continues to conduct direct community outreach to ensure that information regarding social services is disseminated more equitably.

To strengthen the observation findings, the researcher conducted interviews with the Head of the Public Relations Bureau of the Ministry of Social Affairs, the administrator of the @bahagia_medan Instagram account, and members of the Public Relations team involved in content management and digital communication. The interview results indicate that the use of

Instagram as a medium for disseminating social service information continues to face challenges related to human resources, content diversity, information reach, and public access to digital media.

The administrator of the @bahagia_medan Instagram account explained that the limited number of personnel is one of the primary obstacles in managing the account. The informant stated:

“The team managing Instagram is quite small, while we also have responsibilities beyond social media. As a result, content planning, graphic design, and responding to comments cannot always be completed as quickly as expected”.

This statement indicates that the team's workload affects both the consistency of content management and the speed of responses to public interactions. The shortage of human resources also limits the team's ability to conduct comprehensive evaluations of content effectiveness.

The Head of the Public Relations Bureau explained that most of the available content is still derived from documentation of institutional activities. The informant stated:

“So far, the easiest materials to obtain are documentation of activities, such as social assistance distribution or community service events. Producing educational content, short videos, or question-and-answer content requires more extensive planning and supporting materials”.

This statement reinforces the finding that Instagram content remains largely focused on documenting institutional activities. Limited content resources and insufficient planning have prevented the regular production of Reels, Stories, live broadcasts, polls, and interactive question-based content.

The Instagram administrator also explained that changes in Instagram's algorithm influence the reach of published information. The informant stated:

“Sometimes the content we upload does not immediately appear to or reach all of our followers. Some posts achieve high reach, while others receive much lower visibility, even when the information is important. We have observed that changes in Instagram's algorithm significantly affect the number of people who receive our information”.

This finding indicates that the reach of social service information cannot always be controlled by the account administrators. Consequently, some members of the public may not receive important information disseminated through Instagram.

Members of the Public Relations team further explained that the characteristics of the target audience also present challenges for digital communication. One informant stated:

“Not everyone who needs social services actively uses Instagram. Some people do not own smartphones, some have limited internet access, and others are not accustomed to obtaining information through social media, especially older adults and economically disadvantaged communities”.

This statement demonstrates that limited access to technology and low levels of digital literacy hinder the dissemination of information among vulnerable groups. Relying solely on Instagram as a communication channel may prevent essential social service information from reaching those who need it the most.

Furthermore, the Public Relations team emphasized that direct communication remains necessary to complement digital information dissemination. The informant explained:

“We continue to conduct field visits and coordinate with local village offices and community leaders. Instagram helps us distribute information, but to ensure that it

actually reaches residents who need social services, face-to-face communication is still essential”.

Based on the interview findings, it can be concluded that the challenges of digital communication management extend beyond the use of technology itself. They also involve limitations in team capacity, the availability of diverse content materials, changes in Instagram's algorithm, audience segmentation, and disparities in technological access and digital literacy among the public. Therefore, the management of Instagram should be strengthened by expanding the capacity of the social media team, developing more diverse and interactive content, and integrating digital communication with direct community engagement to ensure that social service information is distributed more effectively and inclusively.

Research results show that the obstacles in managing the Instagram @bahagia_medan are not only related to technical aspects, but also to organizational capacity and the conditions of the target community. Limited human resources make the process of planning, producing, evaluating content, as well as responding to community comments and messages, not run optimally. These findings are in line with Aji et al., (2023: 13-15) which emphasizes that the interactivity of government social media is greatly influenced by the organization's readiness in managing digital communication consistently and responsively.

The dominance of activity documentation content also makes communication tend to be one-way and doesn't really encourage audience participation. Jamil & Eriyanto, (2021: 747) explaining that public institution social media accounts often serve as a channel for spreading information, but haven't fully become a space for dialogue with the community. This is evident on the @bahagia_medan account, where the use of reels, stories, polls, and Q&A sessions is still limited. In fact, visual content and short videos can boost audience attention and engagement with government information (Siregar et al., 2023: 1047).

Besides that, changes in Instagram's algorithm and the gap in access to technology mean that social service information hasn't reached all target groups evenly. Older adults, low-income communities, people with disabilities, and residents with low digital literacy might not get information through social media. Therefore, Instagram should be used as a supporting platform integrated with direct communication, staff assistance, and coordination with local communities. From an Islamic digital communication perspective, strengthening the values of *tabayyun* (verification), *shiddiq* (truthfulness), *amanah* (trustworthiness), and *hikmah* (wisdom) is necessary so that social service information remains accurate, easy to understand, inclusive, and focused on community benefit.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the @bahagia_medan Instagram account has been effectively utilized by the Public Relations Office of the Ministry of Social Affairs in Medan as a medium for disseminating social service information and as a gateway communication platform that enables the public to obtain preliminary information about programs, social assistance, and public services before contacting officers directly. The account is managed collaboratively and reflects the principles of Islamic digital communication, particularly *tabayyun* (information verification), *shiddiq* (truthfulness), *amanah* (trustworthiness), *qaulan sadidan* (truthful and accurate speech), and *qaulan layyinan* (gentle and respectful communication), through the verification of information, the delivery of factual messages, and the use of polite and respectful language. Nevertheless, its implementation continues to face several challenges, including limited human resources, the predominance of activity documentation content, low audience engagement, changes in Instagram's algorithm, and disparities in digital access and digital literacy among vulnerable groups. Therefore, the Public Relations Office should strengthen the capacity of its social media management team, develop more educational, interactive, and user-friendly content, and integrate

digital communication with direct community outreach to improve the effectiveness of social service delivery.

This study is limited to the observation of 30 Instagram posts and interviews with internal informants. Therefore, future research should involve social service beneficiaries as participants and incorporate Instagram analytics data to evaluate communication effectiveness more comprehensively. By further strengthening the value of *hikmah* (wisdom) in digital communication, Instagram has the potential to evolve into a more inclusive, responsive, and community-oriented platform for delivering social services and promoting public welfare.

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