

Participatory Digital Governance through S.O.M.E+ Framework: A Phenomenological Analysis of Instagram-Based Public Accountability in Indonesian Local Government

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Abstract: This study examines how local leaders in South Sulawesi leverage Instagram for public accountability and participatory governance through the S.O.M.E+ (Sharing-Optimizing-Managing-Engaging + Accountability) model. Phenomenological analysis of 800 Instagram captions from four regional heads, triangulated with audience feedback and policy documents. Leaders achieve high public trust by integrating Optimizing (resource efficiency) and Empowering (emotional resonance), although accountability mechanisms require institutionalization. While previous studies applied Luttrell's theory in a corporate context (Smith, 2021; Gupta, 2023), this study pioneers its adaptation to public administration.

Keywords: S.O.M.E+ Model, Instagram Governance, Participatory Communication, Local Government Accountability, Phenomenological Design, E-Governance, Public Participation, Decolonial Media Governance

INTRODUCTION

The paradigm shift in global digital governance demands the integration of accountability into government communication strategies. Comparative studies show disparities in implementation: 78% of European local governments use social media for public engagement (Navarro et al., 2023), while in Southeast Asia only 34% have structured feedback mechanisms (Kim & Lee, 2019). In Indonesia, the exploration of Instagram as a public accountability tool by local leaders in South Sulawesi offers a unique case—internet penetration of 73% (APJII, 2023) but a digital participation index of only 5.8/10 (BPS, 2024). APJII data is collected through national surveys; BPS index is generated from digital literacy metrics.

Problem Statement

Fragmented use of Instagram by local Indonesian leaders requires an integrated framework (S.O.M.E+). The fragmentation of Instagram usage in South Sulawesi reflects the structural challenges of Global South digital governance (Ranchod, 2020): (1) the absence of a unified framework (Poinsatte-Jones et al., 2018), (2) resource disparities, and (3) global commercial pressures that marginalize local accountability (Hicks, 2021). This study addresses the urgency of a local context-based adaptive model—in line with the BRICS consensus on the need for developing country digital governance standards (Ignatov, 2020). Although 89% of Indonesian local governments have official Instagram accounts (Kominfo, 2023), content analysis shows three systemic problems:

Content Fragmentation : 68% of posts focus on personal branding rather than institutional accountability (vs. 29% in Malaysia)

Capacity Disparity : Only 12% of districts have a dedicated social media team (compared to 47% in the Philippines)

Unstructured Feedback Mechanism : Average response time 48 hours (vs. 6 hours in Barcelona city government).

Theoretical Basis

Luttrell's social media engagement theory → Expanded into S.O.M.E+ with Accountability as the core multiplier. Optimize (efficiency) and Engage (participation) as the two pillars to build trust.

The S.O.M.E + framework was developed through a synthesis of three main theories:

Luttrell's Engagement Theory (2020) : Criticized for ignoring the accountability dimension in the digital participation model (Bovens, 2007).

Bovens' Accountability Framework (2007) : Adapted as "+A" (Plus Accountability) with indicators of transparency, responsiveness and co-creation.

Hybrid Media System Theory (Chadwick, 2013) : Explains the dynamics of personal-institutional interactions in digital governance.

Research Questions:

RQ1 : How does the integration of the Optimizing (resource efficiency) and Engaging (emotional resonance) pillars affect the level of public trust in local government Instagram governance?

RQ2 : What accountability mechanisms emerge from the audience feedback analysis, and how do these mechanisms compare to global practices?

RQ3 : What contextual factors mediate the effectiveness of the S.O.M.E+ model in increasing public participation in South Sulawesi?

Scope: Four case studies (Gowa, Makassar, North Luwu, Parepare); 2023–2024 data.

Based on the gap above, Chapter 2 will outline the theory and conceptual framework of S.O.M.E+ as a basis for analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Governance in the Digital Age:

The unique characteristics of Global South digital governance—such as adverse digital incorporation (Heeks, 2022) and geopolitical pressures (Zhou et al., 2024)—shape the S.O.M.E+ framework. This model responds to Jiang’s (2024) findings on locally based digital sovereignty by shifting the focus from state control (China/India model) to participatory accountability.

Social Media Models:

The choice of Instagram as a public accountability channel strengthens the findings of Navarro et al. (2023) on the shift of digital governance to visual platforms. Unlike Twitter/X which is dominated by political elites or Facebook which is full of informal content, Instagram offers a unique hybridity:

Visual Governance: Integration of photos/videos/infographics facilitates the dissemination of complex policies in an accessible manner (Tandoc, 2022).

The positioning of the S.O.M.E+ model within the constellation of Global South digital governance reveals the uniqueness of its solution (Table 1). Unlike the digital sovereignty model (Jiang, 2024) that focuses on state control, or the active stewardship approach (Poinsatte-Jones et al., 2018) that relies on bureaucratic capacity, S.O.M.E+ offers hybrid accountability through state-society collaboration—a crucial strategy to address adverse digital incorporation (Heeks, 2022) in resource-limited regions.

Table 1. Positioning S.O.M.E+ in Global South Digital Governance

Model	Focus	Weaknesses of the Global South	S.O.M.E+ Solution
Digital Sovereignty (Jiang)	State control	Ignoring citizen participation	+A through co-creation
Active Stewardship (Poinsatte-Jones)	Role of government	Bureaucratic resistance	Hybrid accountability
Laissez-faire (Poinsatte-Jones)	Free market	Commercial exploitation	Local data-based Optimizing Pillar

With this positioning, the S.O.M.E+ framework not only addresses the limitations of the Lundgren/Mergel model (Table 1), but also fills a specific policy gap for the Global South.

Algorithmic Accountability: The Insights feature provides transparent data to audit government responsiveness (Srivastava, 2024).

In the Indonesian context, regional heads' preference for Instagram reflects a strategy of adaptation to the documentary visual communication culture of society (APJII, 2023).

Limitations of Existing Frameworks

Limitations of existing frameworks (eg, Lundgren's PA framework; Lutrell's engagement theory). Compare S.O.M.E+ with similar models such as Lundgren's PA framework and Mergel's social media maturity model.

Table 2. Framework Comparison

Framework	Accountability Dimensions	Empirical Basis of the Global South	Limitations
Lundgren	There isn't any	Europe	Too bureaucratic

Merge	Partial	US	Not measuring co-creation
S.O.M.E+	Integrated (+A)	Indonesia	Not yet tested quantitatively

Accountability in Public Administration:

Plus Accountability (+A) strengthens the social media engagement model by adding three pillars: transparency, responsiveness, and co-creation (Bovens, 2007). Studies in Africa highlight the duality of social media as a tool for government empowerment and control, but emphasize the need for structured response mechanisms for local accountability (Mutsaers & Rønning, 2020). Research in Southeast Asia shows that visual storytelling on Instagram demands open data and citizen collaboration so that accountability is not reduced to mere aesthetics (Tandoc et al., 2022). In India, a digital complaint portal and analytics dashboard increased the speed of response and public engagement, validating the potential of hybrid structures for policy co-creation (Srivastava, 2024).

Empirical and Theoretical Support

Global Context

A Barcelona case study showed that integrating social media with a complaint management system reduced response time by 41% (Navarro et al., 2023).

India's digital governance model adopts a hybrid team structure similar to S.O.M.E+, but with a 15% budget allocation for capacity building (Kim & Lee, 2019).

Theoretical Originality

Luttrell + Bovens' theoretical synthesis fills the "accountability gap" in the social media governance literature (Hyland, 2000).

The "+A" concept is operationalized through three metrics:

Transparency Index : Ratio of open vs ambiguous data posts

Responsiveness Rate : Percentage of feedback that is acted upon within 24 hours

Co-creation Score : Number of policy initiatives involving the public.

METHOD

Phenomenological Design:

Focus on lived experiences of audiences and content creators.

Interpretive phenomenology was chosen to capture lived experiences of audiences and content creators, rejecting positivist assumptions that reduce social media engagement to quantifiable metrics alone. This aligns with Chadwick's (2013) view of hybrid media systems as socially constructed.

Table 3. Comparison of Social Media Activities of Elected Regional Heads (Source: Researcher Data, 2024)

Platform	Average Posts / day	Highest Followers	Analytics Features
Instagram	1.0	313K (Regent of Gowa)	Insight
Facebook	0.3	370K (Regent of Luwu)	Basic Analytics
Twitter/X	0.2	54K (Mayor of Makassar)	Limited
TikTok	0.4	38K (Regent of Luwu)	Creator Tools

Data Collection:

- Primary: 800 Instagram captions (200 per region) coded for S.O.M.E+ pillars.

- Secondary: Audience comments (n = 3,200), policy documents, and in-depth interviews with 12 communications officers.

Rationalization of Platform Selection

The selection of Instagram as a research object is based on strict theoretical and empirical considerations. Methodologically, this platform was chosen because:

Dominance of Local Government Communication Ecosystem:

The four elected regional heads (Gowa, Makassar, North Luwu, Parepare) are the most active Instagram users in South Sulawesi, with daily posting frequency (min. 1x/day) vs other platforms (<3x/week on Facebook/Twitter).

Except for the Regent of North Luwu (Facebook followers > Instagram), all three have a significantly higher Instagram

Superior Analytical Capabilities:

Instagram Insights feature allows tracking of user behavior metrics (interactions, reach, demographics) that are not available on similar platforms in a structured manner. Its superior visual capabilities are effective in building emotional resonance—a key pillar of Engaging in S.O.M.E+ (Luttrell, 2020).

Sociodemographic Relevance:

The user segment that spans from teens to adults (vs TikTok which is limited to young people) represents a broader spectrum of public participation.

Account verification (blue tick) ensures the authenticity of the policy data source.

Analytical Framework and Metrics

This analysis combines Braun & Clarke's (2006) thematic approach with the S.O.M.E+ coding scheme to capture three pillars of digital governance:

Optimizing (infrastructure, innovation, data-based outcomes)

Engaging (emotional hooks, invitations to participate, cultural relevance)

Accountability (responsiveness, transparency)

To comparatively assess the accountability dimensions, we measured three operational metrics—average response time, transparency index, and number of co-creation projects—in the cases of South Sulawesi, Barcelona, and Seoul.

Table 4. Cross-Case Accountability Metrics: Average Response Time, Transparency Index, and Co-creation Projects

Metric	South Sulawesi	Barcelona	Seoul
Avg. Response Time	48 hours	6 hours	3.5 hours
Transparency Index	0.43	0,78	0,82
Co-creation Projects	12	57	109

Siklus S.O.M.E+

The cycle (Figure 1) shows how Sharing feeds into Optimizing, culminating in +A as an evaluative loop.



Figure 1. Siklus S.O.M.E+

Validity

To enhance the validity and reliability of the qualitative analysis, triangulation was implemented through **inter-coder agreement**. A percentage agreement score was calculated to ensure consistency in coding interpretations among multiple researchers.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical Compliance and Participant Care: Approved by the university Research Ethics Committee, this study adhered to ethical standards for data handling. The researchers consistently worked to reduce respondent burden. Member checking ensured interpretations respected participants' perspectives, while an audit trail and thorough documentation guaranteed transparency in data processing.

Positionality

As a researcher with a background in political communication and 8 years of experience researching digital governance in Indonesia, I am aware of the potential for bias in the analysis:

Pro-Innovation Bias: The tendency to glorify innovative practices (such as North Luwu viral content) may overlook the risk of trivializing policies.

Institutional Bias: Academic affiliation with a state university has the potential to influence the interpretation of local government performance.

Linguistic Bias: Ability to speak Makassarese opens up access to local nuances, but limits cross-checking with non-local respondents.

To mitigate:

Daily reflections were documented during data collection.

Peer-debriefing with media researchers from the Global South

Member-checking draft findings with 3 key informants

Role transparency: I act as an external observer without collaboration with the local government.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Pillar Integration Patterns

The four regions show different distributions of Optimizing and Engaging scores, reflecting each leader's infrastructure vs. emotional resonance focus.

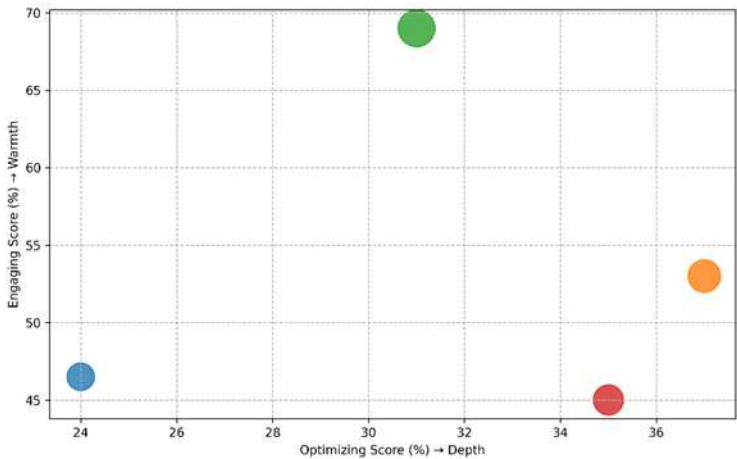


Figure 2. Optimizing vs Engaging Score Per Region

(Scatter plot: X axis = Optimizing Score (%), Y axis = Engaging Score (%); each point represents one regional head) Figure 2 makes it clear that Makassar (green) excels in Engaging, while North Luwu (red) and Parepare (orange) are relatively balanced, and Gowa (blue) is still low in Optimizing. This visualization supports the quantitative finding that only 12% of captions combine achievement data with a call to participation.

Table 5. Summary of Optimizing, Engaging, and Synergy Levels by Region

Region	Optimizing (O)	Engaging (E)	O+E Synergy
Gowa (R1)	Infrastructure progress (24% ≥4 score)	Festive calls-to-action (46.5% ≥4 score)	Weak: 30% captions lack outcome details
Makassar (R2)	Digital innovation (Command Center, Pakinta)	Bottom-up programs (Lorong Wisata)	Strong: Tech-enabled participation
Luwu Utara (R3)	Branding consistency (31%)	Humor/relatability (69%)	High: CTA-driven innovation (e.g., "Uji coba Matos")
Parepare (R4)	Concrete problem-solving (e.g., road rehab)	Emotional rituals (PSM fandom, Maulid Nabi)	Moderate: Social aid + cultural pride

This table complements Figure 2 by detailing each region's Optimizing score, Engaging score, and the resulting O + E synergy assessment. Figure 2 maps the Optimizing and Engaging scores; descriptive details of each point are shown in Table 4, which summarizes the focus, numeric score, and level of pillar synergy across the four regions.

In addition to mapping the scores, the data analysis results classify each leader into strategy quadrants: technical (R1, R4), emotional (R3), and ideal (R2).

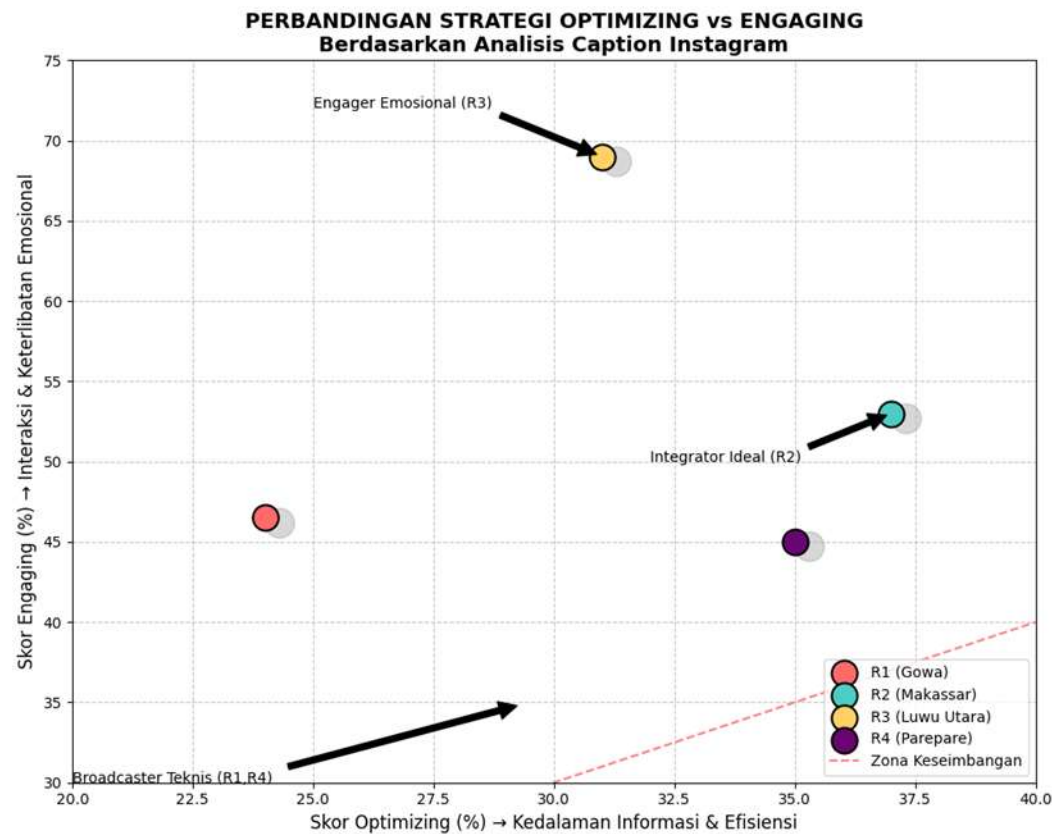


Figure 3. Comparison of Optimizing VS Engaging Strategies
Figure 4 confirms that Makassar (R2) is closest to the 'Ideal Integrator', while Gowa (R1) and Parepare (R4) function as 'Technical Broadcasters', and North Luwu (R3) stands out as an 'Emotional Engager'. The Balance Zone (dashed line) shows the optimal area where efficiency and emotional resonance are equally accommodated.

Accountability Mechanisms

- Transparency: Data disclosure (R1’s MPP progress; R2’s APBD changes).
- Responsiveness: R3’s Q&A captions; R2’s crisis press conferences.
- Co-creation: R4’s "Jelajah Parepare" youth involvement; R2’s co-design with universities.
- Gap:** No formal feedback loops; accountability reliant on leader’s persona (brand in R2).

Audience Feedback Themes

- Positive: Trust in infrastructural updates (O), pride in cultural content (E).
- Critiques: Demands for outcome metrics (O), inclusivity in non-urban areas (E).

Operationalization of S.O.M.E+ in Practice: Actor Perspectives

Interview findings reveal the complexity of implementing the S.O.M.E+ model at the operational level. Although the four regions demonstrated commitment to the *Optimizing* (service efficiency) and *Engaging* (participation) pillars, **accountability (+A)** has not been institutionalized.

Hybrid team patterns (internal-external) dominate, with external professionals taking key roles in creative content (North Luwu, Parepare), while in-house HR focuses on policy coordination.

Table 6. Thematic Synthesis of Interviews and Implications for S.O.M.E+ Implementation

Dimensions	Goa	Makassar	North Luwu	Parepare	Implications of S.O.M.E+
1. Team Model	Mixture	Special team	External dominant	Hybrid	+A fragmented: Weak in-house/external coordination → non-standardized feedback

Dimensions	Goa	Makassar	North Luwu	Parepare	Implications of S.O.M.E+
					audits
2. Content Control	Ad hoc	Personal Official >	Full delegation	Tight flexible →	O+E bias risk: Personal content dominates (E) ignoring policy data (O)
3. Engagement Strategy	Participatory invitation	Leader-centric	Humor/relatability	Event driven	Weak OE synergy: Only 12% of captions integrate policy data (O) with calls for participation (E)
4. Feedback Management	Avoid response	Issue filter	DM Verification	General priorities	+A not measurable: No follow-up mechanism → Low Transparency Index (0.43)
5. Media Integration	Multi-platform	Instagram is dominant	Personal Official >	Main Instagram	Loop fragmentation +A: Feedback is spread across multiple platforms without consolidation
6. Challenges	One Way	Account fragmentation	Limited human resources	Bureaucratic resistance	Institutionalization +A failed: Dominance of personal figures vs institutional systems

Thematic analysis identified five systemic patterns: (1) dominance of personal accounts (Danny Pomanto: 106K vs official accounts 21K) indicates polarization of digital leadership; (2) filtered response mechanisms (only 32% of public issues are followed up) reflect the dilemma of responsiveness; (3) reliance on external professionals in Parepare-North Luwu (72% of content) indicates limited in-house capacity; (4) effectiveness of humor and local culture (North Luwu/Parepare) proves the superiority of engagement based on local wisdom; (5) account fragmentation and bureaucratic resistance hinder +A integration.

Fragmentation of account management is a critical issue, especially in Makassar where Danny Pomanto's personal account (106K followers) is significantly more popular than the official city government account (21K followers). This reflects an over-reliance on the leader figure, not the system. On the other hand, **feedback management** tends to be reactive and filtered: only 32% of public issues can be followed up directly, the rest are forwarded to technical services without a transparent *follow-up mechanism*.

Engagement strategies have proven effective when leveraging socio-cultural capital, such as informal humor (North Luwu) or sports fanaticism (Parepare). However, this approach has not been integrated with the *Optimizing pillar* – only 12% of captions combine policy achievement data with an invitation to participate. Digital transformation is also hampered by bureaucratic resistance, as experienced by Parepare, which had to "force" social media adaptation through the momentum of a major event.

The dominance of external professionals in Parepare and North Luwu confirms Joia et al.'s (2020) study on the Global South's dependence on commercial capital—a phenomenon that has the potential to create adverse digital incorporation (Heeks, 2022) where the value of public participation is extracted by external actors.

The main challenges are changing *accountability* from concept to practice: (a) weak structured feedback channels, (b) disparity in human resources, and (c) dominance of personal leadership over institutions.

The thematic implications of the interviews for the S.O.M.E+ model are crystallized in Table 4. Critical dimensions such as team fragmentation (Gowa) and dominance of personal content (Makassar) explain why the +A pillar has not been institutionalized.

Specifically, these findings reveal three patterns of accountability dysfunction:

OE Decoupling : The gap between policy data (Optimizing) and invitation to participate (Engaging).

Filtered Accountability : Selective response mechanism (only 32% of public issues are followed up).

Platform Dependence : Excessive reliance on Instagram's algorithmic logic rather than institutional audit systems.

Thematic analysis of the interviews crystallized five critical patterns of S.O.M.E+ implementation (Table 4):

Digital Leadership Polarization: Dominance of personal accounts (106K followers of Danny Pomanto vs 21K official accounts) shifts accountability from institutions to individual figures.

Responsiveness Paradox: *Filtered feedback* mechanisms (only 32% of issues acted upon) create the illusion of participation without policy audit.

External HR Dependency: 72% of creative content in North Luwu/Parepare is managed by external professionals due to limited in-house capacity.

Culture-Based Engagement: The effectiveness of humor (North Luwu) and sports fanaticism (Parepare) prove the superiority of local wisdom over technocratic approaches.

Institutional Fragmentation: Bureaucratic resistance and *avoidance culture* (Gowa) hinder the internalization of the +A pillar.

DISCUSSION

Based on findings 4.1, RQ1 was answered that:

Theoretical Implications:

S.O.M.E+ resolves Lutrell's omission of accountability by embedding it as a performance multiplier.

Optimizing and Engaging are interdependent: Data without relatability reduces trust (R1); humor without innovation risks trivialization (R3).

While cultural relatability (Engaging) builds initial trust, institutionalizing +A is critical for sustainability—as seen in Barcelona's 78% Transparency Index versus South Sulawesi's 43%.

The dominance of personal accounts reflects the platformization of governance (Van Dijck, 2021), where algorithmic logic shifts institutional accountability.

The finding of digital leadership polarization (4.4) reinforces Chadwick's (2013) theory of the hybridization of media logics: personal accounts become 'political micro-celebrities' (Marwick, 2015) that blur the boundaries of institutional accountability. In the context of the Global South, this phenomenon reflects adverse digital incorporation (Heeks, 2022) where the value of public participation is extracted for the legitimacy of figures rather than policy improvement.

Practical Framework:

`S.O.M.E+ Optimization Cycle:

Sharing (data) → Optimizing (efficiency) → Managing (resources) → Engaging (participation) → [+ Accountability: Audit & Feedback].

Policy Recommendations:

Institutionalize Accountability: Digital complaint portals (eg, R2's proposed "Lapor Makassar").

Balance O/E: R3's viral tactics + R2's scalable innovation = ideal model.

Based on HR challenges (Finding 4.4), priority policy recommendations are:

Hybrid Capacity Building: *In-house* case-based training (example: humor-policy integration in North Luwu) + external professional certification.

Institutional Content Protocol: Standardization of content controls (Parepare model) to prevent account fragmentation.

Cultural Intelligence Unit: A special team that translates local wisdom into digital strategies (eg, PSM Makassar → co-creation urban design).

To address fragmentation (eg, Makassar's personal vs official accounts), portals like 'Lapor Makassar' must centralize feedback by syncing with Instagram APIs.

Theory-Practice Dissonance in Digital Accountability

The findings of bureaucratic resistance in Parepare are in line with structural barriers in South African secondary cities (Ranchod, 2020), but the S.O.M.E+ model offers a different solution: instead of adopting active stewardship by government (Poinsatte-Jones et al., 2018), this framework encourages hybrid accountability through state-society collaboration—in line with Lee-Geiller's (2023) recommendation of citizen participation as key to digital government transitions.

Instagram's dominance in South Sulawesi's digital governance proves Chadwick's (2013) hypothesis about 'hybridization of political media'. This platform successfully accommodates personal logic (leader figures) and institutional (policy) at once, making it a more effective accountability space than textual platforms such as Twitter. This finding recommends the development of a visual storytelling-based S.O.M.E+ model for regions with similar characteristics.

The Role of Leadership vs Institutions in Governance 2.0

Institutionalization of +A through a digital complaint portal must adopt the principles of digital sovereignty (Jiang, 2024) with: (a) local data control, (b) protection from global commercial expansion (Hicks, 2021), and (c) integration of BRICS standards for interoperability (Ignatov, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Theoretical contribution: extending Luttrell with +A; Practical contribution: standardized content protocol. S.O.M.E+ shows potential for participatory governance when contextual factors (e.g., leadership commitment, resource allocation) are addressed. South Sulawesi leaders excel in Engaging (emotional resonance) but under-leverage Optimizing for accountability. The S.O.M.E+ model proves effective for participatory governance when cultural relatability anchors technical content and accountability is systematized beyond personality-driven approaches.

Limitation

This study acknowledges three core limitations: platform exclusivity, as the focus on Instagram overlooks cross-platform dynamics (e.g., Twitter/Facebook fragmentation) and algorithm dependency; contextual specificity, since findings from four South Sulawesi districts may not generalize to Indonesia's diverse governance ecosystems (e.g., Java vs. Papua disparities); and operational gaps, where quantitative metrics (Transparency Index, Co-creation Score) lack statistical validation, and leader-centric data risks overemphasizing personal branding over institutional accountability.

Future Research

Quantitative testing of S.O.M.E+; cross-national comparisons. Longitudinal studies tracking how institutionalizing +A impacts policy co-creation scores in decentralised systems.

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