How does a public organization promote their work in social media?

A case study of viral communication in a government

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Abstract

Viral communication method is shown to be useful for spreading messages in social media. However, only few studies have investigated how public organizations use this method successfully to promote their works in social media. To fill this gap, a qualitative analysis on data from observations and interviews has been conducted. The purpose of this study is to answer a research question: how can a government succeed in promoting their works in social media by using viral communication method? The results found several processes and factors that support the fruitfulness from three perspectives: the messenger, the message and the environment. Moreover, it is pointed out that the most important process is creating memorable messages. Therefore, this study proposes essential characteristics of memorable contents.

Keywords: Viral communication, public organization, social media, qualitative study

1. Introduction

Contemporary organizations are increasingly seeking ways to utilize digital technology in general (Henfridsson and Bygstad, 2013; Nylén and Holmström, 2015) and social media in particular (Arvidsson and Holmström, 2013; Leonardi, 2014) for obtaining wider benefits. Two key aspects are particularly important in organizational utilization of social media. First, social media presents an opportunity to enhance individual or groups communication inside an organization (Leonardi, 2014). It shows that people can broadcast and seek specific information in almost no time. Second, social media presents an opportunity to demolish organizational barrier, creating a bridge of relation to volunteers, media and general public that form two ways communication (Waters et al, 2009). These two factors support the creativity of an organization to use social media and foster related field of studies.

The use of social media by organizations also can be related to political intention and action. Today’s politicians use social media in various forms such as an election, social movement or political campaign as their representation of themselves and their parties (Di Fraia and Missaglia, 2014). This is an impact due to the mediatization of politic (Birkner, 2015) that changes the way society picture a government based on the individual act. One of the reasons is because of today’s political life is increasingly person-centered, as evidenced by recent political activities in some countries such as in the USA (Borah, 2014) and Indonesia (Ahmad and Poppa, 2014). In addition, Larsson and Kalsnes (2014) stated that it is entirely possible for politicians to adopt their personal profile and activities into social media.

The related research on the influence of social media in organizations focuses on distinct aspects such as knowledge transfer (Leonardi, 2014) and viral communication (Petrescu and Korgaonkar, 2011). The last aspect is known to be a good marketing strategy for an organization to improve their supplier-customer relationship because the ability to reach wide range of people with relatively low cost and short time (Dobele et al, 2007). However, even though many organizations have been interested in this marketing strategy, there are still few studies that capture the adaptation of the organization for using this strategy.
Welker (2002) defines a viral communication as a “strategy that allows an easier, accelerated and cost reduced transmission of messages by creating environments for self-replicating messages”. Moreover, he states that a successful viral communication is when a message spreads like a virus exponentially, grown numerous and creates a critical mass. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) describe that there are three criteria to create an epidemic, caused by a virus, that have to be met in order to execute viral communication method successfully: the right people need to get the right message in the right circumstances. They use the criteria to measure a successful viral communication, for determining whether the viral method is working or not.

This study is intended to respond the gap of knowledge on viral communication methods, specifically in exploring the research question “How can a government succeed in promoting their works on social media by using viral communication method?”. The effort to answers the research question is executed by analyzing the process of the messages created and the responds towards the message from the citizens. Furthermore, the investigation is using a single case study for analyzing a Facebook account owned by a mayor which represents a local government in Indonesia. This Facebook account is one of the pioneering acts in using social media to promote work by the Indonesian local government. It also symbolizes the willingness of government to maintain the relationship with its citizens through digital communication.

To collect the data, this study implements two approaches. The first approach is observing the activities of this particular account and its interaction with its follower on each post. The purpose of this approach is to capture the process of viral communication from the government’s point of view. The second approach is conducting interviews with the followers as the target of viral communication method in order to get their responses and opinions regarding the account from citizen point of view. Then, I use a framework from previous research (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2011) to analyze the processes. The findings are presented using the components of the framework to develop a distinct comprehension of the viral process. A proposition related to the memorable contents is one of the contributions of this study.

2. Related research

2.1 The influence of social media in organizations

The growth of social media has affected several aspects of organizations. It changes how businesses run and how organizational activities are performed. Social media presents a major challenge for organizations to adapt a new technology environment. It also triggers emerging topics of research. I have investigated two existing research streams related to the influence of social media towards organizations’ aspects. This serves two purposes. First, it presents an insight of the changes to some organizational processes because of the adaptation of social media. Second, the explanation of the last stream, viral communication, builds a gap and an
urgency to conduct this research since it points out that only few studies have investigated the use viral communication strategy by public organizations.

2.1.1 Knowledge transfer
In an organization where many divisions, departments, groups or subunits exist, an individual tends hesitate to seek a complex knowledge from someone they do not know well. In consequence, this condition causes an invisible communication (Leonardi, 2014). This invisible communication brings negative impacts to the organization, such as interpersonal trust issue among workers and less innovative products and processes (Majchrzak et al 2004). However, by the emergence of social media, knowledge sharing becomes faster and more reliable both in general and organizational basis. This leads to the emerging studies regarding how social media helps knowledge transfer among workers to support visible communication (Leonardi, 2014).

Leonardi(2014) suggests that the use of an social networking site in an enterprise enhances the communication visibility used by ordinary observers. Furthermore, the knowledge seekers gather information by simply observing the activities of the knowledge owner in social media. However, visible communication can also backfire. Leonardi argues that if it is not used wisely, visible communication can foster self-preservation behavior among the individuals because they assume that other individuals know what they think and do. Then, the visible communication forms an unproductive organizational behavior such as intentional ambiguity (Gibss et al, 2013). Several research implications within this stream include a promotion to switch communication channel to technology for documenting knowledge and metadata that support visible communication (Leonardi, 2014).

2.1.2 Viral Communication
The communication efficiency in social media to reach wide range of people develops a specific method called Viral Communication (Petrescu and Korgaonkar, 2011). Prior studies have identified five different ways of viral communication: “electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM),"word-of-mouse (WOM),"viral marketing", "buzz marketing" and “viral advertising” (Dobele et al, 2005). Each has its own characteristics in terms of objective, platform, orientation and message (Petrescu and Korgaonkar, 2011). One of the rare researches shows that traditional marketing tools become less effective (Hann et al, 2011) because, on one hand, customers are overwhelmed by too much advertising information and most of them are non-relevant (Hinz et al, 2011). On the other hand, the less effectiveness happens because organizations are not able to use website as strategic and interactive stakeholder engagement tools. This is due to the lack of interactive sites with a feedback option and a discussion board (Saxton et al, 2007). Thus, social media rises as organizations’ savior to help online promotion campaigns. The Internet itself helps the growth of virality. There are many ways provided by the Internet to enhance and foster virality of contents.

The effectiveness and the successful of executing viral method can be measured by several methods. First, Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) argue that the reaction of the target audience can be analyzed to measure the effectiveness of the viral method. The reaction might be positive,
negative or neutral. Then, this reaction is connected to the objective of the viral method. Furthermore, the same research reveals another way which is by analyzing the popularity of the message. However, popularity is relative context which means that it depends on the environment where the viral method applied or the perception of the person who use the viral method (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2011). In addition, analyzing how the messages are remembered and stick to the audience is another approach to measure the effectiveness of viral communication method. This is related to memorable messages (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2011) and how it can effectively persuades people to pass on the messages.

However, the information of how this viral method used by public organizations is still very limited. One of the few practical implications (Nah and Saxton, 2012) is creating an understanding of the factors that influence the successful implementation and employment of social media. But, this work does not address how the public organizations use the viral communication in actual practice effectively. Therefore, there is a gap related to this particular field of research.

The findings from related researches regarding the influence of social media in organizations are summarized in Table 1. It shows two main streams which are related to each other. In table 1, the studies about viral communication method still need to be expanded, particularly on how public organizations use technology and viral method as part of their dissemination strategy. Previous research (Larsson and Kalsnes, 2014) also suggested that it is necessary to observe further the activities and contents that are published by public organization to social media, particularly on specific direction of Facebook content. It would benefit other organizations if there is detail information on how to engage stakeholders or general people using social media. Furthermore, viral method study about the adaptation of a commercial method for non-commercial purpose could add another segment of research in this particular field.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Streams</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge Transfer</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Keywords</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Foundation Literature</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Implications</strong></td>
</tr>
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*Table 1 Summarized findings from related research on social media in organizations*
2.2 Framework

Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) have shown three criteria in order to succeed viral communication method. It is based on the idea that the right people get the right message under the right circumstances. Therefore, I use the three conditions as a framework for this study because it helps to investigate how to succeed the viral method and its ability to analyze the viral method from three perspectives: the messenger (the government), the message (the content) and the environment (the social media and its user). Figure 1, taken from Kaplan and Haenlein (2011), shows the summary of the three components of the framework.

2.2.1 The Messengers

Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) state that it is critical to find the right people to spread the message. The criteria describes that the people have to manage the strategy well, create good contents, understand the target audience, have a good communication skill and understand the platform where the strategy is implemented. This people are called the messengers and have to meet these criteria. Moreover, Kaplan and Haenlein also describe that there are three roles of the messenger. The first one is market mavens, which is defined as individuals who have access to a large amount of marketplace information, and proactively engage in discussions with other consumers to diffuse and spread information (Feick & Price, 1987). Market maven is usually the first person who receives the information and broadcasts it to their immediate social network. Sieber (1974) extends the role of market maven by saying that the broadcaster does not mean the first person who has the information, but the broadcaster can get the information from another resource/person. One of the ways to do this is by using an implicit contract which usually involves a payment.

The next role is social hubs. They are defined as the people with an exceptionally large number of social connections (Goldenberg, Han, Lehmann, & Hong, 2009). They have connections to people which can share the information in the early processes. A social hub is useful especially in early phase when the viral method is just taking off. Usually, in the early phase, not many people aware of the existence of the product/campaign/brand in the social media, so social hubs act as a promotion booster.

The last role is sales people who improve the information to be more relevant and persuasive before sending it to social hub for further distribution. Usually, sales people are not used because their services only needed when the market maven unable to create an interesting information. Most of the times, the role of market maven and social hub are enough to create valuable and interesting information and transmit it to social network before finally become epidemic.

2.2.2 The Message

One of the critical elements that support advertising or promotional campaigns is the message. To execute the viral communication method successfully, Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) argue that the messages have to be memorable and interesting because these message most likely will be shared by the consumers and become viral. The definition of memorable and interesting
depends on the target audience, they are the one who decides the contents are memorable and interesting or not. Therefore, analyzing the respond of the audience to the contents is important.

There are several approaches to create memorable messages. One of the approaches is to package the message with real life stories and real people because this type of stories are more connected to the consumers, thus it creates sympathy. Another study (Dobele et al, 2007) shows that the message is more effective if it triggers emotional response. Emotional response has higher chance to be remembered longer and higher potential to be shared by the consumers. One example of emotional messages is humor messages. Humor messages are considered to be lighthearted that secure consumers’ attention, increase memorability, overcome sales resistance and improve message persuasiveness (Duncan, 1979). Furthermore, Scott et al (1990) emphasizes the importance of two elements for creating effective humor messages. First, the humor should be directly related to and well integrated with the purpose of the message. Second, the products or the services should be appropriate for the use of levity. The result of this study also shows that humor messages have greater admirer among the consumers especially for social events or messages.

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 1 Three criteria to execute viral communication method successfully*

### 2.2.3 The Environment

Another important aspect is the environment of the social network. The success of viral communication method depends on how the surrounding supports the method, therefore it is important for the messenger to understand the environment first. Thus, the messenger should choose a social media that is inhabited by their target of campaign and has easy mechanisms to pass on the message. Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) state about two environmental conditions that determine the success or failure of viral method. The first condition shows that the
messages would likely to be passed on if they are not something that everybody already knows. Second condition is related to luck. Social media is an ever changing environment that is inhabited by various people that come and go. This creates an ambiguity that hard to be understood and affects the viral strategy of the company. Furthermore, it is also context related: one successful viral strategy of a company might be ineffective for another case. However, it is still beneficial to analyze how and why a specific process can be successful or not because it can help a further viral strategy development of companies.

3. Research Methodology

This research focuses on one of the local governments in Indonesia who has been using social media, in this case Facebook, to promote their work. The scope of this study is about the viral communication which is used by a local government. The method for this research is qualitative method which fits for capturing a phenomenon in certain period. The data is gathered by observing the social media account of the local government and conducting interviews with open ended questions.

3.1 Case Description

The case of this study is a Facebook account owned by a mayor that leads West Java province’s capital city, Bandung. The account has 1.8 million followers. Even though the account is named after the mayor, it represents the government of Bandung city. This can be proven by several evidences. First, his activities on the Facebook account are the same governmental activities that he does in real life. For instance when he did a live press conference in television (Karto, 2014) about a governmental program, he position himself as the mayor and the capacity of him to talk about a governmental program proves that he was representing the government. Then, he did the same thing by publishing the same program, but in different platform which is in the social media. In addition, the fact that the mayor sometimes still publishes few contents that are not related to his works is part of the viral communication strategy. It is because most of the contents in his Facebook page are about his government’s works, achievements, policies, laws and many more. Moreover, it is common to find today’s politicians who use social media as their representation of themselves, their parties or a particular organization (Di Fraia and Missaglia, 2014). This is the result of mediatization (Birkner, 2015) which influences the way society views government based on individual politician, therefore more politicians come to spotlight. In short, I argue this account can represents a public organization as a case of this study.

The mayor has been leading the city from 2013 and will end his service on 2018. The mayor also has other social media accounts such as Twitter and Instagram, however most of information related to his works are published through Facebook. Based on this reason, I limit the scope to only analyze his Facebook account.

To gather the data, I conduct 7 days observations toward the activities of the mayor in his Facebook page. I define the term “followers’ respond” in this study as a direct respond from the
followers to a content/posts' like, share and comment. Not only publishes information related with his work, but he also often interacts with his followers who give comments and ask about a particular information. This interaction is important to be analyzed as part of viral communication which supports two ways communication. Furthermore, through the interaction, the data about the respond and opinion of the citizen about the government work can be obtained. However, to get more reliable data on the opinion of the follower, I also conduct some interviews to 7 followers. The respondents that I choose are the followers of the account and citizens who have lived in Bandung for more than 5 years. The purpose of this requirement is to get the difference between the work of the current mayor and the previous mayor who did not use any social media. The following is the table of the respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Length of living in Bandung</th>
<th>Length of following the account</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>26 years</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>3 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2 List of respondent*

### 3.2 Research Approach

I use a qualitative method and a design of single case study in a public organization. The purpose of this design is to gather information for the investigator to acquire insights within the organization life (Berg, 2001). The single case study allows the researchers to investigate several areas with a deeper understanding on viral communication in social media. Furthermore, by using qualitative method in a single case emphasizes the important elements which surround the phenomenon. These elements could reflect the subject of study's behavioral routines, experiences and other various conditions (Berg, 2001). In addition, the objective of the study is to provide valuable information of potential work of viral communication used by public organization. Mainly, this research is conducted to answer the “how” premise and it is closer to explanatory case studies (Berg, 2001).

### 3.3 Data Collection

There are two approaches that I choose to collect the data. By doing multiple approaches for collecting the data, it adds various sources of evidence that contain miscellaneous opinions, that are essential to take into consideration when doing the case study analysis to avoid possible biases (Yin, 2003). The first approach is by observing the post in the Facebook account and other online news media which show some interviews with the mayor related to the use of social media in his government. There are three main aspects on each post to be observed: the content of the post, the respond from the followers in terms of number of likes, shares and comments and the respond from the mayor to the follower's respond. This data is useful for
analyzing the reaction of the actors who are involved in the page, in this case the mayor and the citizens. Furthermore, it is useful for measuring the effectiveness of the viral method. The second approach to gather the data is using interview with semi structured open questions. This interview method is chosen to get more direct answers and possibilities to ask several respond questions. The list of questions can be seen in the Appendix A. The questions are related to certain information in the mayor's Facebook account and how it affects the life of the citizens. The observation is focusing on contents of the account in a length of 7 days continuously.

3.4 Data Analysis
The processes of data analysis are divided into two steps. The first process is the open coding. Based on the observation result and transcript of the interview collected, I got information which needs to be reviewed. I create brackets to sort the data and investigate it by categorizing and rearranging the data that are useful. Furthermore, the data can construct a better understanding of the problems and for identifying relevant themes and pattern which help the analytical processes. Then, the next step is to look each of the brackets and interprets the result. This step is the core part of analysis to investigate the phenomenon of the subject and essential to be analyzed in several different perspectives as it would generates a critical judgment.

3.5 Limitation
The Facebook posts which are observed only limited to several posts due to the time constraint, however I argue it would not affects the critical analysis and the result because the posts are carefully selected that describes the work of the government and as a representation of the viral communication processes.

4. Results
From the data collected, I have found important information regarding how the mayor runs the social media account to promote his government work. I found that even some contents that are not related with the government works support the promotion and the account in more implicit ways. In addition, some external factors outside the social media environment play important role for smoothing the processes of viral communication. The data are gathered by focusing three different aspects that follows the components of the framework. Therefore, the results are presented in three points to explain each aspect.

4.1 The messenger
By creating a Facebook account, the mayor has exposed most of his government works to public. It is vital to choose the person to run this account and manage the contents. Managing the contents is not only the processes to publish but also the processes to gather them. The mayor said that he runs the page by himself as he stated in one of the earliest contents published in his page after he won the election and officially became a mayor on 2013. This statement also repeated in one of his interviews with the media related to the use of social
media in his government (Karto, 2014) and I quote it as a result of the observation on online news media.

“I create this account in order to communicate with Bandung citizen. However, I welcome to everyone who wishes to know more about Bandung. I run this account by myself so feel free to ask me anything and I will respond to your answers personally. I hope we can maintain our relationship well by using social media”

- The mayor

By making himself the only administrator of the account is an important decision in order to create a good relationship with society. This decision is well known among the followers. Furthermore, this decision distinguishes the account from other politicians’ account because the person who runs the page affects the content and the language style. Furthermore, the decision also presents an image that he wants to be seen: a regular person who tries to be close with people. This unique aspect is pointed out by one of the respondents.

“I follow the president of Indonesia on Facebook. The differences are the language and the content that they use. The mayor is trying to be as close as possible to his citizen so he uses common language, this is the big difference I think. The president uses formal language like giving a speech which obviously he does not use that kind of style often in the real life. Maybe because he is the president and he wants the people see him as a president, not like the mayor who wants the people see him as an ordinary man.” - Respondent D

Managing the account alone also affects the image of the account which is influenced heavily by the real life personality of the mayor. The mayor is able to reflect his personalities in his account. The respondent said that the sense of humor and humbleness can be easily seen in each of the content which makes it more popular on the social media.

” Not only post about “being friendly”, but also sometimes his posts are about him giving punishments to certain people who don’t obey the law. His posts are also shows his humorous side. So I think his real personality is reflected in his page.”

- Respondent D

Furthermore, the figure of the mayor in the real life influences the habit of several followers. There are people who put so much attention into the mayor’s personality, work and career, they become the mayor’s fans. The behavior of these fans to express their affection and support to the mayor can be seen in the contents of the page. They can give a good respond by liking, sharing or commenting any posts given by the mayor to the point that they do not care about the content anymore. They are able to do this because this type of follower is so influenced by the figure of the mayor in the real world. Therefore, it can be considered that the figure of a person in real life is the external factor that affects the viral process in this account. One of the respondents confirms this behavior.

“I have been following his career before he became a mayor. His personalities that are so down to earth, kind, humorist and hard worker make me falls in love with him. So after I knew he created a Facebook account, I followed the account and
even joined a community of his fans. I got to know other fans that did beyond what I did. It is like a mandatory for them to like all post, give comments or basically help the mayor promote his contents. They even debated the mayor’s hater in the comment section.”

- Respondent C

In terms of managing the account, all the respondents agree that the account should not be operated by someone else. The reason is it reduces the quality of the account, especially the direct respond from the mayor. It also allows the mayor to publish and respond to follower’s respond directly. One of the followers feels more connected to the mayor when she knows that the mayor himself answered her question directly in the comment section. She also gains more sympathy to the government who gives big efforts to always listen and care the citizens even only from social media.

"I think it is better to let him alone run his page because usually the interaction become less good if someone else runs it and because the style of the language is different. Also, sometimes there are followers who report something urgent in the comment section. If someone else runs the page, the respond time to answer the report might be slower. I feel safer and secure if thinking someone from the government available to talk and listen to even only on social media”

- Respondent D

"I don’t think letting someone handle his Facebook page is a great idea because personally, I will give less sympathy and might be less interactive too. Also, his charm in that page might be gone.”

- Respondent A

However, the decision to run the page alone creates some consequences. The respondents notice that there are some programs, activities or policies which already announced before in the mayor’s page but have not published any further update later. It is easily noticeable since in the real life, the programs have implemented already. So there is a quite long delay or missing connection between what the government has done in real life and what has been posted in the Facebook page. The respondents blame the mayor’s busy schedule that makes him forget to update the program on social media.

“Some of the programs that he has announced suddenly lost in the middle, no further update. For example that panic button program that he created but until now I don’t see any update about that. So I want to see more updates about his programs that he has announced or under development. I know he is busy but it does not mean he can let the information dangling like that”

- Respondent A

Even though the mayor runs the account by himself, there are several people that help him to gather the content. For example, most of the photos when he does governmental activities, interacting with the citizen and giving speech are taken by people around him. He also often shares some articles related to Bandung from online media and give his opinion. In addition, He posts several contents which are created originally by his followers. Usually the contents are related with the participation of the followers to a specific program or event that the mayor had announced before. It serves two purposes by doing this. First, it advertises the program or
event. Second, it serves as an acknowledgement and gratitude to the citizen who are willing to support the mayor’s work. However, the mayor still adds some personal contents like his opinions or jokes to these materials. It improves the contents to be more human and interesting that attract the followers.

In summary, there are two roles that manage the mayor’s account. First is the one who publishes all the content. The mayor has given a clear statement that only him who has the access and manage the account. This decision triggers various benefits. It is also identified that external factors such as personality and works of the mayor has a connection to the popularity of the account. A consequence is occurred regarding this decision: there is a delay or missing connection between what the government has done in real life and what has been posted on the Facebook page. Second role is the one that gathers the materials to be published in the page. There are some people who help the mayor to collect the content from various resources. The mayor is able to combine his personal taste with the materials and transforms them into interesting contents.

4.2 The message
The contents in the mayor’s page are the main products that he tries to promote. Most of the contents have similar messages: to inform about the work progresses of Bandung government and a medium of communication for maintaining relationship and for obtaining aspirations from the citizens. The respondent F stated that the information, such as new policies, event announcements and programs, about Bandung is so important that the followers like to share them and become popular on Facebook. Furthermore he said that the mayor’s account is a good resource to get information about new policies in Bandung because the validity of the resource is trustable since it is published by the mayor himself. The latest information from the Bandung government is one of the reasons why people follow the account.

“I followed him because at that time there was a new policy about driving in Bandung. Therefore I tried to find more about this policy in his Facebook page. At that time, His Facebook page was quite popular among the citizens because not only the information is important but also people know that the mayor himself runs the page.”

- Respondent G

However, the contents need a booster in order to be shared and attract more Facebook users. The contents are packaged with unique and interesting characteristics. There are two main characteristics in each of the content. First, most of the contents use a semi-formal language style that is flexible and easy to understand. Second, the contents are inserted with humor materials. People can grab the humor easily since the mayor’s sense of humor is common and well-known among the Bandung citizens. Then, the two characteristics present memorable messages that are popular and become a sells point. Moreover, it fits with the environment of Facebook since the most of the people access their account to get some pleasures and fun while updating their information. The following respondent confirms this.
"I like how he keeps his sense of humor in almost every post, even the serious one like an announcement of new policy. He has a joke trademark which is so popular and he uses it very well. He also uses ordinary semi-formal words which are easy to understand and not too serious. Sometimes he uses West Java traditional language and it really works well since I am from West Java. I don't like reading serious stuff on Facebook because I use Facebook for fun.” – Respondent F

The jokes trademark needs to be highlighted since this is a signature action of the mayor that distinguishes his content from other politicians’ page. Based on my observation, the messages which contain humor materials are relatively have higher responds than the one without humor material. The diagram in figure 2 shows six posts which have the highest number of like that categorized based on the contents which have humor materials and not. The contents’ topic is relatively similar, about announcement upcoming governmental program.

However, there are more factors that determine whether the content has more responds or not. The two ways discussion between the mayor and followers also one of critical aspects and often can be found in the comment section. His direct interactions with his followers present a good influence and image to the profile of the account. Moreover, it is one of the account strength points, gaining a lot of responds and easily spread among the followers’ friends as part of the promotion strategy. This point is stated by one of the respondents.

“I began to follow him from 2-3 years ago. I know the account exist because back then there were many people who shared his status and/or articles. I like the account because the mayor often replied some of the followers respond, often in unique funny way. The fact that only few politicians do this makes the mayor even more favorable to me” – Respondent C

When the respondents were asked about their other resources to get information about Bandung government’s work, the answers are varied. Respondent A said that she gets the information from other social media such as Twitter. Respondent B said that Radio and television are her other resources. While Respondent G said that he catches up by accessing news website however he still prefers social media since the news from mouth to mouth spread faster than in news media.

In addition, in order to make the contents get more likes and shares, the respondents suggest that the mayor should publish more contents and improves the variation of the contents. Being more interactive is necessary, it could be done by improving the two ways communication. Respondent C said that sometimes to get more comments, doing a simple way such as publish a simple question can generate a lot of responds and shares.

“Some of the posts are not related with his work and often not important for me. His posts such as “How are you Bandung? Do not forget to pray” or “Who is missing someone? Who is that person?” are less important than other posts. However, I was surprise by so many people answered that question. I even got more surprise that the mayor responds to the people’s answer” – Respondent C
The unique messages created by the mayor boost the popularity of the page and the contents. On the last day of the observation, all the contents that have published during the observation period have gained more than ten thousand likes in average, it can be seen from the chart in figure 2 that shows the contents with and without humor materials still deliver more than 10,000 responds.

Appendix B shows a statistic about the respond of the followers taken from the mayor’s Facebook page. It is almost one million people talk about the page which can be considered as popular since the people who talk about it almost half of the total followers of the page. There is an increase of likes from last week. However the number of new page likes is decreasing from last week. I assume because several new contents are less important than last week’s contents that related to his important decision to cancel his participation for the next governor’s election in Jakarta. Thus, the topic of the contents is an important aspect for affecting the popularity of the contents.

![Figure 2](image_url)

**Figure 2 Number of followers’ responds related to content based on the humor aspect**

In summary, the contents that the mayor has published contain two main messages: to inform the work progresses of Bandung government and a medium of communication for maintaining relationship. The contents are packaged with semi-formal language style and sense of humor. Another strength point of the content is two ways communication between the mayor and the followers. In order to get more responds and followers, the respondents suggest the contents should be more interactive and have more variations. In addition, keeping a positive image is also important.
4.3 The environment
Facebook is a promising place to promote the mayor’s work. It is crowded by a lot of people who wants to get the latest information. People often refer this social media as their source of information and fun place for hanging around. They can spend hours to explore their timeline, interact with others or publish certain information. Bandung citizens also part of this people that are represented by the respondents.

“Usually I can access Facebook 10-15 times in a day, especially using mobile Facebook. Generally, I am curious about the news feed especially the news which is shared by my friends on Facebook. I also would like to know their ideas for example the trending topic in Indonesia such as the recent terrorist attack and LGBT. It is more interesting for me to open Facebook and read the comments from the shared news, because I can obtain lots of information from other people in the comment column”
- Respondent C

However, people said that they do not easily share or comment the content that they see and interested to. There are two factors as part of their consideration to share a specific content. First, they observe their timelines first to see whether the content is already spread by people or not. Second, they consider the topic of the content. A sensitive topic which creates public opinions or judgements especially in their inner circle friends usually is avoided. The two factors are external factors that beyond the messenger’s control and context related.

“I always give like to his posts but I seldom to comment or share it. The reason is I think there are already many people who share and give comment on it, I don’t need to do it again. It would be annoying if many people share the same thing in my timeline”
- Respondent F

"I usually don’t give any respond because I think that if I give like or share a specific issue, I feel like I support that issue fully and my friends on Facebook might think so. Even though most of the times I agree with issue, I still want to look neutral.”
- Respondent G

The interaction between the users and contents on Facebook can be seen by the users’ friends. This transparency relatively affects the behavior of the users, they are cautious to interact to a certain post, groups, page or any other contents. Especially when responding to specific post since the transparency policy of Facebook cannot be changed by the users. The users are fully aware and still give their support by responding the mayor’s content. They also aware that some of the responds can be seen temporary and the rest are permanent. For instance, when a user give a like or comment, it will be appeared in the news feed, then it will be stacked and disappear because of newer updates. But if someone shares something, it always can be seen in the profile page of the user.

"Yes I am aware of the transparency policy on Facebook. Of course it affects me, but it does not affect that much. I still give likes or comment or shared to the mayor’s content occasionally. But I only share the content that I think very important so people can see every time they open my profile”
- Respondent D
The data from the observation show that the feature of the Facebook itself supports the spread of the contents and the interactivity between the users. The previous paragraph explained the transparency policy which supports the promotion of the content and page. Other features such as creating album photo which support description of each photo or responding to a specific comment in comment section help the mayor to create good contents. Broadcasting live events also possible with the help of Facebook mention and the respond of the followers are good. Figure 3 shows a screenshot when the mayor did a live press conference that broadcasted through Facebook. The video then recorded and saved automatically to the timeline so the followers can view it again. It was attracted a lot of people and shared by more than ten thousand people; a huge number considering the amount of shares in other contents.

![Figure 3](image)

*Figure 3 A screenshot of one of the contents that show the mayor did a live press conference*

In conclusion, it depends on how the messenger utilizes the characteristics and features of the social media. Some social media might not be fit to fulfill the intention of the user. There are also several external factors on the environment that cannot be controlled by the messenger such as the social media’s policies. Furthermore, the behavior of people in a particular environment can be different in another environment which affects the promotion method of the contents. Therefore, a good strategy for promoting the contents is important.

5. Discussion

The increase of literature on the influence of social media in organizations is rapid (Leonardi, 2014; Petrescu and Korgaonkar, 2011). However, there is a gap of research on how public organizations succeed in using viral communication to promote their works. Drawing from this background, this study has examined a social media account owned by a mayor who represents
the government that has been using viral communication strategy. A theoretical framework is used to investigate the viral processes in three different perspectives. As a result, this study has contributed to the related knowledge by providing detailed processes on the utilization of viral communication strategy by a public organization and the creation of memorable content. Both of the contributions also present implication for research and practice. Table 3 presents the summary of the findings and table 4 presents the propositions to create memorable contents.

5.1 Processes of viral communication by public organization

The first contribution is related to the factors that contribute the success of viral communication. The three components of Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) act as a framework that helps to understand the activities of government’s social media account to promote governmental works. The framework underlines the processes from how the messages are created, how the messenger manages the account and publishes the messages and how the messenger exploits the environment of the social media to gain benefits. Overall, the findings show that the government has been using the viral communication method successfully because it meets the criteria that described by Kaplan and Haelein (2011).

The analysis reveals that the messenger played a major role in the processes of promoting the contents and the account. Then, the analysis identifies two roles of the messenger. The first one is the market maven which was played by the mayor. The influence of the market maven is significant for spreading and promoting the contents. The analysis also demonstrates how the figure and the personality of the market maven in real life are exploited and injected into the social media account. The market maven also has done a good job to communicate with the citizens and gain their sympathy and trust. This happened because the market maven has full control of the account. The results are that the consumers actively engaged in the interaction between them, the contents and the market maven. Furthermore, each of the interaction spread the contents to the consumers’ inner circle in an exponentially growing way. The analysis also shows that the market maven is helped by another role which is social hubs. Social hubs are the materials collectors for the contents, work in the early phase of viral communication. This means that even though the mayor claims that he manages the account by himself, he still got helps from other people for gathering the materials. The analysis also reveals that both market maven and social hubs are responsible to create memorable messages. This findings support the work of Sieber(1974) which points out that market maven does not have to be the first person who has the information since the market maven gets helps from social hubs. In summary, the findings have shown that the messenger is able to communicate with their target audience, able to gather material for creating good contents and manage the account. These are the criteria that Kaplan and Haelein (2011) said that the messengers have to possess.

The analysis also demonstrates the ability of messages for persuading people to promote the government’s works further and maintaining the relationship between government and the citizens. Furthermore, the finding reveals that the messages are the main reason why the followers follow the account, why it gains many responds and why it persuades the followers to
pass on the messages. The persuasion efforts are reflected by the contents, they are wrapped in interesting packages. The combination of real data, human’s stories, emotional materials, variety of contents and interactive discussions creates powerful products that spread fast and gain popularity among the consumers. The results also show that all the respondents give a credit to the interesting and memorable contents which is one way to measure the success of doing the viral communication method (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2011). Thus, it can be argued that the viral method is working well in terms of publishing memorable contents. The number of respond and the amount of people who talk about the account and the content can be considered that the account is relatively popular since almost half of the total followers talk about the account. The consideration of popularity is context related, which is following the concept popularity in previous research (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2011). The results also propose an approach to create a memorable message that is presented in the next section as a second contribution. Furthermore, the messages also successfully distinguish the products and the account from others government’s social account.

Then, the analysis shows that the marketing strategy takes environmental aspect seriously because there are several factors in the environment that cannot be changed or controlled. The environment influences the messenger’s strategy to publish the contents in several different ways depend on what the environment offers. The behavior of the consumers is also affected by the environment. Most of their activities and behavior are influenced by the policies, rules and features of the environment. The government addresses this by avoiding sensitive topic that might hurt the effort to persuade followers to pass on the contents. This presents an evidence of how several factors in an environment are influencing the viral communication. The findings also show that the messengers take into the consideration the request of followers by increasing the variety of the contents and respond to citizens’ aspiration. The results are positive which can be seen by the increase of sympathy and support to the account in particular and the government works in general. It is also context related which means the same circumstances might not exist in other environments. It opens further research opportunities since implementing the same strategy in another different environment might not works well, it needs to be investigated with different cases and more data. In summary, the government has addressed several issues related to the policies and rule of the environment and behavior of the user. The government also is able to take advantage the features of the environment to create more variation of the contents.

5.2 Creation of memorable content in social media

The analysis reveals that the contents are the most important aspect that supports the success of the viral communication method. The contents are the main products that the government tries to promote and the reason why most of the followers follow the account. Therefore, as a second contribution, this study proposes essential characteristics to create memorable content. This contribution acts as a proposition that is extended from the idea of Kaplan and Haenlein (2011). This contribution is also a practice implication for other organizations that need a
guidance to create memorable contents. There are three key factors that enhance a message. The factors are related to not only the material of the contents but also several external factors such as the personalities and the works of the messenger in real life. These findings also can be linked to other related researches which focus on viral content. The summary of this contribution can be seen in table 4.

The first factor is to create a message that reflects the owner’s/messenger’s personality. The idea is to humanize the message and insert a soul into it. The decision to name the account after the mayor’s name instead of the government is supporting this factor. This study has analyzed that this approach successfully transmitted the image and personality of the person to the account and the contents. The analysis confirms that the positive ambience from personality of figure in real life influenced the popularity of the social media account. The followers felt more connected since they were interacting with a real person instead of a form of organization. Then, the analysis demonstrates that the two ways communication between the mayor and the followers fosters the creation of positive image of the account and even the image of the government in real life. This finding is similar with the finding of two ways discussion in previous research (Waters et al, 2009). Now people think that the government is always available to listen, care and gain the citizens’ aspiration through social media. This point confirms the activities in digital world influence the image of the person or organization in real world.

The analysis also reveals another factor to create messages that are interesting and easy to understand. One of the important aspects is the choice of language style. The findings have shown three important considerations for choosing the style of a language: topic of the message, purpose of the message and target of audience. By taking the three points into consideration, the messenger used a semi-formal language style in all of the contents. Sometimes, the messenger also used traditional language to communicate with the citizens. The purpose of this choice is to present a message that is easy to be grasped and familiar among the audience. The use of common language that is popularly used among the society reduces the gap between the public figure and the audience. The use of pictures, videos and links are also supporting the description of the contents.

The last factor is the messages should trigger emotional responds of the followers. This study has shown the effective used of humor contents in relatively serious materials. The signature jokes that can be found in almost all contents trigger emotional reactions among the followers. The reactions are reflected by the followers’ responds. The high number of followers’ responds presents concrete evidence that the humor contents are favorable and easily spread. This evidence is supporting the previous research about humor messages (Duncan, 1979). However, the finding does not support one of the elements to create humor messages (Scott et al, 1990) since some of the humor materials are not related to the purpose of the messages and still deliver well. Furthermore, the study shows that the humor content also can be considered as a neutralizer in sensitive or serious contents, it fits with the environment of social media where people open it to have fun. However, the amount of humor in a post should be
controlled because it is not advisable having a big humor material since it might overshadows the original content.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical Framework</th>
<th>Government Challenge</th>
<th>Government Responses</th>
<th>Government Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Messenger</td>
<td>How to manage the Facebook page? How to gather the materials to be published?</td>
<td>Create a single administrator, all contents and responds are done by the mayor. The materials for the contents are from various resources (Mayor’s staff, followers/citizens, and online media)</td>
<td>Full control of the account by the mayor Personality reflection of the mayor in the page Positive image improvement of the page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Message</td>
<td>How to inform the work of the Bandung government to the society? How to promote the page and publish epidemic memorable contents?</td>
<td>Publish contents related to the work of government: policies, event announcements, live press conferences, new programs Publish non-related work contents: saying hi, asking for opinion and giving advices Wrap the contents with semi-formal language style and signature of jokes/humor content, More variation of the content and avoid sensitive topic/content</td>
<td>A popular Facebook page with epidemic memorable contents Strong and unique contents that differ from other politicians’ Facebook page Gain more than 10,000 follower’s responds in each content and 50,000 new followers daily in average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Environment</td>
<td>How to adapt the environment of Facebook to support the marketing strategy? How to maintain relationship between the government and the citizens/followers?</td>
<td>Understanding the policies (e.g. transparency of users’ interaction) and features of Facebook to support interactive content (e.g. Facebook mention, group page, photo album etc.) Understanding the factors of consideration to share a content: the popularity and the topic of the content Engage in two ways communication/discussion Listen and respond to citizens’ aspiration that are posted in the page or in the comment section</td>
<td>The followers’ responds are increasing because of the improvement of the contents interactive aspect Faster direct respond to followers Gain sympathy, affection and support from the followers</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 3 Summary of government’s challenges, responses and outcomes in doing the viral communication strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposition</th>
<th>Approaches</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create a message that reflects the owner’s/messenger’s personality</td>
<td>Name the account after a person name instead of an organization. The person should have popularity and positive image in real world.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Create a single administrator, preferably the owner of the account or the person whose name is used in the account.
Let the person publish the contents and interact with the users alone in order to successfully transmit the image and personality to the messages and account

Create messages that are interesting and easy to understand
Choose a language style that is suitable with the target of audience
Use personal words that are familiar among the audience
Avoid sensitive topic that might provoke the audience
Use the features of social media to support the description of the messages

Create messages that trigger emotional responds of the followers
Use humor contents, preferably a signature jokes to reflect the personality of the account owner.
Use real life stories with real life people that has similar condition with the target of audience
Avoid inserting too much humor content as it might overshadow the real contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4 Proposition to create memorable messages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create a single administrator, preferably the owner of the account or the person whose name is used in the account. Let the person publish the contents and interact with the users alone in order to successfully transmit the image and personality to the messages and account.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create messages that are interesting and easy to understand. Choose a language style that is suitable with the target of audience. Use personal words that are familiar among the audience. Avoid sensitive topic that might provoke the audience. Use the features of social media to support the description of the messages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create messages that trigger emotional responds of the followers. Use humor contents, preferably a signature jokes to reflect the personality of the account owner. Use real life stories with real life people that has similar condition with the target of audience. Avoid inserting too much humor content as it might overshadow the real contents.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion**

This study presents in-detail processes about the use of viral communication by a public organization in social media. The investigation and the findings are drawn by using a theoretical framework that analyzes the case on three different perspectives. The data are collected using two approaches. The first one is conducting several observations in the government’s social media account for seven days. The second approach is conducting interviews to several respondents who represent the followers of the account and the citizens. The purpose of this study is to answer a research question “How can a government succeed in promoting their works in social media by using viral communication method?”

The results present two main contributions related to the research question. The first one is detail information about the actual processes of how the public organization succeeds doing viral communication. This is a direct answer to the research question. A research implication is presented at this point: since the case is context related, the same strategy cannot be generalized to all situations. Therefore, it opens research opportunities by investigating it further with different cases and more data. The second contribution is about the creation of memorable message which can be used by other organizations who needs guidance to create one. Final words, I argue that this study has presented good results to answer the research question and has added a piece of knowledge to the field of research.
References


Appendix A

List of question

1. How long you have been using Facebook? In a day, how many times you access Facebook on average?

2. What do you usually do on Facebook? (chatting, update status, post photos, comment or just look around)

3. How long you have been following the mayor’s account? How do you know that the account exists? Why do you follow it?

4. What makes you interested with the profile of the mayor in real life?

5. In your opinion, do you think that real life profile of the mayor is reflected on his Facebook account? Why?

6. What kind of post do you like from the account? Is there any type of post that you don’t like? (Achievement announcement, photos of daily activity, information regarding new policy/law, event announcement, discussion with followers, jokes etc)

7. When you saw the post that you like, did you give any respond to it? (like, share or comment) why did you do it?

8. In your opinion, what kind of post that should be shared by the followers so more people knows about it?

9. Do you also follow others government account on Facebook? If so, what is the difference between both of the account, in terms of the type of the information posted, how the follower responds, how the owner responds to the followers?

10. Besides Facebook, the local government also publishes the same information and even more detail using their official website, do you know anything about this? Have you ever open the website? How often you open it? Why?

11. Which other channels are you using to get informed about government information?

12. What kind of information are you missing and would like to see more of?

13. Are you familiar with the previous mayor? Do you know how the previous mayor communicated with the citizen? if compare to previous mayor who did not use any social media for his work, which one is better for communicating with the citizen? Why?

14. What should be changed or improved from the account so more people want to follow and willing to share the post?
Appendix B

841,612 People Talking About This

1,792,444 Total Page Likes
▲ 1.8% from last week

31,803 New Page Likes
▼ 69.1%

Figure 4 Weekly numbers of followers' respond taken from the mayor's Facebook account