

Authoritarian vs Participatory Leadership in the Digital Era: An Analysis of the Vitality of the Governor of Lampung's Response to Public Criticism

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article history: Received July 18, 2025 Revised July 25, 2025 Received July 27, 2025 Keywords: Leadership Public Criticism Governor of Lampung Social media Government Response	This study aimed to describe the form of the language of power of the Lampung Provincial Government towards the Bima Lampung case and describe the form of the language of knowledge of Instagram netizens towards the Bima Lampung case on Instagram social media @awbimax, @narasinewsroom, and @kuyentertainment. The research method used is a qualitative descriptive method. The data in this study are the language of power of the Lampung Provincial Government and the language of knowledge of Instagram netizens on the Bima Lampung case. Data collection techniques used observation, documentation, reading and note-taking. Data analysis techniques in this study are identification, categorization, and interpretation. The results of this study indicate that the language of power of the Lampung Provincial Government is in the form of statements that influence the way of speaking, influence the formation of knowledge, and can create or suppress certain views and opinions. Meanwhile, the form of the language of knowledge of Instagram netizens towards Bima Lampung is in the form of statements that influence the way they view the real world, and interact with others. <i>This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA license.</i> 

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1. INTRODUCTION

The presence of social media serves not only as a means of conveying information, but also as an interactive space for the public to express aspirations, criticisms, and even demands of leaders. Viral phenomena arising from social media content can now

massively and rapidly influence public perception, directly impacting the legitimacy and credibility of leaders.

Based on (Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 25 of 2009 concerning Public Services in Article 1 paragraph 1), public services are defined as activities or a series of activities in order to fulfill service needs in accordance with statutory regulations for every citizen and resident, goods, services, or administrative services provided by public service providers.

Furthermore, language is related to the analysis of human critical thinking, which is able to uncover the meaning contained in a discourse, whether in the form of words, phrases, or sentences. According to Silaswati (2019), critical discourse analysis aims to develop the ideological opinion behind a word in a text or utterance that contains power. Critical discourse analysis is also used to uncover the relationship between science and power. In the book "The Thoughts of Michel Foucault," by M. Chairul Basrun Umanailo (2019) writes that according to Michel Foucault, knowledge is something that can be expressed by someone in discursive practices and cannot be determined by reality. In other words, knowledge is the point of coordination and subordination of statements whose concepts are actually produced, defined, applied, and transformed. Meanwhile, according to Michel Foucault, power is something that has determined whether something can be said to be true or false. Truth is a manifestation of power and knowledge itself.

According to Listeani (2020), it was also found that language has been influenced by the rapid development of technology and information, which has penetrated various aspects of life. Ariyati (2020) stated that humans can find all kinds of information simply through the internet. The internet has become an integral part of the 4.0 era, connecting people worldwide solely through virtual communication, such as the social media platforms commonly used by the public.

Social media is a modern platform based on communication technology supported by information technology for sending messages (H. Siregar, 2022). According to data from an article by UNCI (2023), WhatsApp ranks first as the most widely used social media platform in Indonesia, with 92.1% of users aged 16-64. Instagram ranks second, with 86.5% of users aged 16-64.

In relation to public service, communication plays a crucial and strategic role, as all forms of public service require communication, whether in the formation of goods or services. Indeed, the image of poor public service remains attached to the existing public service system, and the most easily perceived negative image is the inability or unwillingness of officials to establish effective communication with the public they are supposed to serve.

Aspect	Leadership authoritarian in era digital	Leadership participatory (in era digital)
Response to criticism on line	Tends to be defensive, silencing, intimidating (for example: reporting to the police via the ITE Law, refusing to record journalists)	Acknowledging criticism, opening dialogue, conducting evaluation or clarification, fast and transparent public response
Information openness	Lack of transparency, slow communication, limiting	Transparency through digital public services (p4, e-

Mitigation crisis reputation	social media (stuttering public response) Response through legal reporting, based on assumptions, minimal media response (often represented by secondary officials such as regional secretaries)	government), multi - channel official interactions transparency , forgiving public relations, explaining corrective steps openly
Speed response digital	Slow, stuttering in defending issues, tends to be reactive after going viral	Fast and proactive, for example the launch of P4 (July 2025) to accelerate digital services and responses
Accountability And transparency	Low: does not explain usage agaran , fear of being recorded, avoiding the media	open publication of digital services , investment realization reports, open cross-agency collaboration

Table 1. Authoritarian leadership and participative leadership

One case that attracted public attention was Lampung Governor Arinal Djunaidi's response to criticism from a Lampung resident living abroad named Bima Yudho. In a video that has gone viral on TikTok , Bima harshly criticized the severely deteriorated condition of Lampung's road infrastructure. Instead of publicly responding to the criticism, the Governor issued a defensive and repressive statement, even considering legal action against the critic. This action drew widespread condemnation from the public, the media, and various civil society groups, who deemed the Lampung Governor unprepared to accept criticism and shunned transparency.

This case was carried out by a TikTok user. Awbimax Reborn, also known as Bima, with a TikTok video titled "The Reason Lampung Isn't "Developing," instead of pushing the Lampung government to make improvements, resulted in Bima and his family being intimidated by the Lampung government itself due to the criticism. His mother was visited by the Lampung Regional Police while at work, and his father, a civil servant (ASN), received a call from the Regent of East Lampung. Bima also shared this story on his Instagram account, garnering numerous responses from netizens . The support from Indonesian netizens has led to numerous public policymakers, including the central government, responding to the case.

Based on the above case, the researcher's observations indicate that the Bima Lampung case is related to Michel Foucault's theory of power relations, which focuses on the concepts of power and knowledge. In this case, the researcher focused on the use of language, thus connecting it to the Bima Lampung case. The researcher desired to examine the linguistic manifestations of power exerted by the Lampung government toward Bima's family and the linguistic knowledge of Instagram netizens about the content Bima created on his personal Instagram account.

These symptoms indicate that in the social media era, a leader's communication style not only conveys a message but also reflects their character, credibility, and commitment to public service. Leaders who fail to foster open and responsive communication risk quickly losing public trust. Conversely, leaders who manage criticism gracefully can strengthen their political legitimacy.

In this context, it is important to understand the communication strategies employed by regional leaders when facing criticism in the digital sphere, and how these strategies impact their legitimacy and public perception. The case study of the Governor of Lampung provides a concrete example of how images and responses to criticism on social media can shape political narratives and challenge a leader's authority.

This study aims to discover the manifestation of power relations in the viral Bima Lampung case. The researcher intends to conduct this research by examining the case using Michel Foucault's critical thinking analysis on the Instagram social media accounts @awbimax, @narasinewsroom, and @kuyentertainment. This study will analyze and discover the language of power expressed by the Lampung government and the language of knowledge expressed by Instagram netizens in response to the Bima Lampung case on Instagram.



Figure 1. A. Bima Yudho's criticism

2. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative case study approach to explore the phenomenon of leadership communication in the digital era, specifically the viral public criticism of the Governor of Lampung. This approach was chosen because it provides an in-depth understanding of the context, social dynamics, and meanings embedded in interactions between leaders and the public through digital media.

The data in this study consists of statements from the Lampung Provincial Government and comments from Instagram users regarding the Bima case in Lampung. The data sources in this study are the language of power expressed by the Lampung Provincial Government and the language of knowledge expressed by Instagram users on the social media platforms @awbimax, @narasinewsroom, and @kuyentertainment.

In this study, the analysis techniques used are content analysis and sentiment analysis to understand the leadership communication of the Governor of Lampung and public reactions in the context of social media virality.

Content analysis was used to systematically examine the contents of statements by the governor, legal advisors, and official local government responses to public criticism. This analysis included:

- a. Identify key themes in the statements, such as communication style (authoritarian, participatory), advocacy strategies, and narratives used.
- b. Examining the symbolic and substantive messages in the governor's responses, including whether the communications open up space for dialogue or shut down criticism.
- c. Analysis of media framing of this issue based on news articles and opinions collected as secondary data.
- d. Content analysis allows researchers to interpret the meaning and strategies of communication in depth, while comparing official messages with public responses.

Sentiment analysis is used to group public comments taken from social media such as Twitter, Reddit, and YouTube into categories:

- a. Positive: Comments that support or praise government actions or constructive criticism.
- b. Neutral: Comments that are informative or do not show a particular attitude.
- c. Negative: Comments that criticize, condemn, or show dissatisfaction with the government's response or the conditions being criticized.
- d. This sentiment analysis helps understand public reaction patterns and the level of public acceptance of a given leadership style. Using this technique, researchers can gauge the intensity and direction of public opinion that emerged during the period of virality of the issue.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Governor Communication Style

An analysis of the Governor of Lampung's response to public criticism, particularly regarding Bima Yudho's viral TikTok video, shows that his communication style tends to close off space for criticism. The governor's legal action, which involved reporting Bima Yudho for allegedly spreading harmful content, reflects a defensive and authoritarian attitude. These actions not only limit the public's freedom of expression but also demonstrate an inability or unwillingness to open dialogue with the public. Furthermore, the governor, through his legal advisors and assistants, such as Deputy Governor Fahrizal, often uses defensive narratives that directly reject criticism, calling it baseless assumptions. This communication strategy is symbolic and tends to ignore the substance of the criticism expressed by the public. This approach demonstrates an unpreparedness to deal with diverse public opinions and a lack of responsiveness to the need for transparency and community engagement. This closed and authoritarian communication style has the potential to generate public resistance and tarnish the governor's leadership image. Instead of pacifying criticism, repressive responses actually trigger an escalation of criticism and negative virality on social media, thus undermining the legitimacy and public trust in local government.

3.2 Public Reaction

The general public's response to the Governor of Lampung's communication style, which tends toward closed-off criticism, has proven significant and is dominated by a wave of sharp criticism on social media. Based on sentiment analysis of comments on platforms such as Twitter, Reddit, and YouTube, it was found that public opinion is largely negative, with phrases such as "Shame on you" and "Governor anti-criticism" frequently appearing as expressions of disappointment and protest against the local government's stance.

Public criticism not only targeted the issue of damaged roads raised by Bima Yudho, but also touched on the governor's authoritarian response to this criticism. The public viewed legal action against Bima as a form of silencing the voices of the people, which should be part of the democratic process and social oversight. This has given rise to the perception that the local government lacks respect for freedom of expression and transparency.

This wave of criticism then spread rapidly through various social media channels, sparking a broader public discussion about the quality of leadership and governance in the Lampung Regional Government. Many netizens have taken advantage of the viral momentum to voice their dissatisfaction with the governor's policies and communication style, which they deemed less than open and responsive. In addition, this harsh criticism also sparked solidarity among community groups and digital activists who support freedom of expression and desire improvements in government communication management. Overall, this widespread negative public reaction indicates the failure of the government's communication strategy to effectively manage criticism in the digital age.

3.3 Virality & Legitimacy

The virality of criticism of the Lampung Governor in the Bima Yudho TikTok video case triggered dynamics that transcended regional borders and attracted national attention, particularly through the direct intervention of President Joko Widodo. The central government's takeover of the road repair project has given rise to the perception that the Lampung Regional Government has failed to effectively manage infrastructure and public communication problems. This centralized intervention by the president indirectly reinforced the impression that local authorities are incapable of carrying out their functions and responsibilities and therefore require "help" from the central government. This negatively impacted the legitimacy of the governor's leadership in the eyes of the Lampung public, as it was seen as a sign of weakness and inability to resolve the problems faced. Furthermore, virality on social media increased the scope of criticism and reinforced negative narratives, leading to a decline in public trust in the local government. The more widespread and intense the discourse in the digital space, particularly with critical and condemning comments and content, the more it weakens any positive image the former governor may have had.

Critical discourse analysis is an approach to the study of language and communication that highlights the relationship between language, power, and ideology in specific texts. Hidayat & Tjahjono (2022) explain that Foucault's critical discourse analysis is significantly influenced by Nietzsche's thinking, particularly regarding his views on knowledge. Nietzsche stated that it is important for individuals to critically examine their ways of thinking, reviewing the tools and sources they rely on to attain knowledge—truth (which is perceived, processed, and stored in the mind). The human desire to know has implications for the dynamics of power—truth. It is undeniable that

various schools of thought and problems in the world of knowledge cannot be separated from the role of the mind.

Language of Power in the Lampung Government

The language of power in the Lampung regional government, as seen in the Bima Lampung case, takes over the shaping of statements, the influence of speech, the influence of the formation of knowledge, and can create or suppress certain views and opinions. This statement was made by the Governor of Lampung, the Deputy Governor of Lampung, the Regional Secretary of Lampung Province, members of the Indonesian People's Representative Council (DPR RI) for the Lampung district election, and the Head of Public Relations for the Lampung Regional Police. The Lampung government's language of power is supported by research by Siregar (2021), which states that power is the general ability to influence others, including satisfying or thwarting their desires. Michel Foucault's book "The Archaeology of Knowledge," also explains that power can influence the formation of knowledge, and that the knowledge produced and received can reinforce existing power structures (Nugroho, 2024). Furthermore, according to Michel Foucault, power relationships considered oppressive can result in victims. Every individual action can trigger a reaction in others, but always within the context of freedom and mutual acceptance. Power is present in action and can be exercised by one person against the actions of another (Kemtong, 2017). Therefore, the Lampung Provincial government's language of power indicates a form of power that can control narratives in digital space.

Language of Knowledge from Instagram Netizens

The language of knowledge expressed by Instagram netizens in the case of Bima Lampung takes the form of statements that influence how they see the real world and interact with others. This statement was conveyed by Instagram netizens through comments on the Instagram accounts @awbimax, @narasinewsroom, and @kuyentertainment to show support for Bima. Foucault explained that knowledge encompasses the unity of the whole, which controls how we see and understand reality without our awareness (Hidayah et al., 2023). Research by Mukhtar & Jatmiko (2024) explains that knowledge is not completely neutral but has political aspects. Knowledge is used to measure social life through established rules. In addition, knowledge functions as a tool to control society. Through the construction of knowledge, society can direct the behavior of its citizens and limit certain actions.

4. CONCLUSION

In the digital era, characterized by open information and public participation through social media, a leader's communication style is a crucial factor in shaping public image, legitimacy, and trust. Based on an analysis of the Governor of Lampung's response to public criticism from Bima Yudho that went viral on TikTok, it can be concluded that an anti-criticism, symbolic, and authoritarian communication style actually backfired on regional leadership. The Governor of Lampung demonstrated a preference for an autocratic approach in dealing with criticism, one of which was by legally reporting Bima for his criticism of the condition of road infrastructure. This action reflected an inability to open a space for dialogue, as well as a failure to utilize the momentum of criticism as a means of reflection and policy improvement. Symbolic, insubstantial responses—such as delegating tasks to the deputy governor or denying the facts of the criticism—further emphasized that the communication constructed was defensive and unresponsive to public reality.

On the other hand, the viral nature of social media actually amplified the impact of these repressive measures. Rather than mitigating the problem, legal action against critics actually expanded the negative public discourse surrounding the Governor's leadership. Criticism, initially limited to the condition of road infrastructure, evolved into broader criticism of the regional government's overall performance, including budget transparency, responsiveness to citizen aspirations, and even the lifestyles of government elites. The intervention of the central government, particularly President Joko Widodo, who directly took over infrastructure improvements in Lampung, reinforced the narrative of failed regional leadership. The public interpreted this move as a correction to the provincial government's inefficiency, further weakening the Governor's political and social standing in the public eye. Overall, this authoritarian communication style, which is not adaptive to digital communication patterns, has proven not only ineffective but also counterproductive. It has triggered a crisis of public trust, weakened the legitimacy of the regional government, and created space for digital resistance that could threaten socio-political stability. Therefore, in the context of modern leadership, responses to criticism must be managed openly, communicatively, and based on data, rather than through repression or silencing.

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