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Digital News Media and Citizen Trust: An Analysis of Credibility Indicators in Social Media Content

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Abstract

Public trust poses a significant challenge for digital news media amidst the rising tide of information and disinformation on social media. In this context, information credibility is a crucial factor influencing the level of public trust in the media. This study aims to analyze how credibility indicators are constructed within public policy content published on the Detik.com Instagram account-one of Indonesia's leading digital news outlets. The research focuses on public policy content uploaded between August 1 and August 7, 2026. A qualitative approach utilizing qualitative content analysis is employed in this study. The data consists of public policy content posts from the Detik.com Instagram account, selected purposively to align with the research focus. The analysis involves identifying and interpreting credibility indicators present in the content, such as the clarity of information sources, the use of data and facts, information balance, transparency in news presentation, and information verification practices. Through this approach, the study seeks to understand how digital news media construct credible narratives within the social media landscape as part of a communication strategy to gain the trust of social media-consuming audiences. This research is expected to contribute to the fields of digital media studies, digital journalism, and strategic communication, particularly in understanding the relationship between content credibility and efforts to build public trust in the digital era. Furthermore, the findings are intended to provide insights for digital news media managers to develop more credible, transparent, and responsible communication practices on social media in order to maintain public trust.

Keywords: *citizen trust, digital news media, Instagram, media credibility, social media.*

INTRODUCTION

The digital media ecosystem is undergoing a transformation driven by technological advancements—a shift that fundamentally alters how news is produced, distributed, and consumed by the public. News is no longer accessed solely through official media websites or apps; instead, it increasingly circulates via social media platforms, which serve as both distribution channels and intermediaries between media outlets and their audiences. These changes have made social media an integral part of the digital journalism ecosystem, as media organizations are compelled to keep pace with the times and adapt to evolving public news consumption patterns. Consequently, news presentation formats, styles, and strategies must be tailored to the specific characteristics of the platforms used by the public. This landscape presents new challenges for digital news media—particularly regarding the maintenance of information credibility and public trust amidst an information flow that is increasingly rapid, diverse, and difficult to control.

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Social media fosters a highly open and participatory information environment where journalistic content competes directly with a wide array of other information—ranging from personal opinions, user-generated content, commercial material, and entertainment to widespread disinformation. In this environment, the public does not always receive news directly from primary sources; instead, information often reaches them through posts, platform-driven algorithmic recommendations, and interactions with other users. The dynamic blurs the boundaries between journalistic and non-journalistic information. Furthermore, the rapid pace of distribution on social media means the public may receive information before having the opportunity to vet it by verifying sources, context, and accuracy. This situation elevates the issue of credibility to a critical concern in the evolution of digital news media.

Challenges regarding credibility are closely linked to public trust in the media. Information credibility serves as a basis for audiences to judge the trustworthiness of information, while public trust in the media is shaped by experiences in receiving and evaluating information presented by media outlets.[1] explain that the digital communication environment has altered how individuals evaluate information credibility, as the public faces vast and diverse volumes of information. In this context, audiences rely on various cues to assess trustworthiness, including the information source, the quality of news content, and the characteristics of the information's presentation.

The concept of message credibility is relevant to understanding how journalistic content can build trust.[2] define news message credibility through three primary dimensions: accuracy, authenticity, and believability. These dimensions demonstrate that credibility relates not only to the reputation of the media organization but also to the characteristics of the information conveyed within the message. Thus, credibility can be observed through how information is structured, how sources are presented, how facts are utilized, and the extent to which the information provides a convincing basis for the audience.

Credibility is also inextricably linked to the concept of trust in news media. [3] view trust in news media as a multidimensional concept encompassing trust in topic selection, fact selection, the accuracy of reality portrayal, and journalistic judgment. This perspective indicates that public trust is not merely formed by a media outlet's reputation or branding but is also tied to journalistic practices reflected in the processes of information selection and presentation. Therefore, understanding how media builds trust requires attention to the concrete characteristics found within the distributed news content.

In the realm of social media, this issue becomes increasingly complex as journalistic content must adapt to the specific characteristics of these platforms. Media outlets that originally produced news in long-form article formats have adapted to create short headlines, captions, carousels, infographics, photos, and short videos. While this adaptation makes information easier to consume, it also carries the risk of diminishing context and depth if sound journalistic practices are not applied. Consequently, media outlets must uphold their credibility throughout the production and distribution of social media content, ensuring that the drive for engaging content does not compromise principles such as accuracy, transparency, balance, and verification.

These challenges are particularly critical when social media serves as a channel for disseminating information about public policy. Public policy information is directly

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linked to government decisions, programs, regulations, and other activities that impact the lives of the public. Errors or incomplete presentations regarding public policy issues can foster negative perceptions of implemented policies. Therefore, it is essential that public policy content be supported by clear sources, adequate data and facts, relevant context, and balanced information, while also being subject to rigorous verification.

Previous studies have addressed the relationship between credibility, trust, and news in the digital environment. Research indicates that message characteristics play a crucial role in determining how audiences evaluate information[2] . Meanwhile, studies by [3] demonstrate that trust in media is linked to various dimensions of journalistic practice, including the selection and presentation of facts. Other research on information credibility in the digital realm shows that audiences employ various indicators to assess the quality and trustworthiness of information when faced with the multitude of sources available online [1] . These earlier studies establish credibility as a vital aspect of the relationship between media, information, and the audience.

However, much of the existing research treats credibility as something measured by audience perceptions, user trust levels, or evaluations of source and message characteristics. While such approaches are important for understanding how audiences assess information, they do not fully explain how credibility itself is constructed through journalistic elements within social media content. Consequently, there is a research gap regarding studies that specifically identify credibility indicators based on the actual characteristics of news content produced by digital media—particularly content focusing on public policy issues.

Addressing this research gap, the study's contribution lies in linking the concepts of message credibility and trust in media with an analysis of journalistic content construction practices on social media platforms. Rather than focusing on measuring public perceptions of news credibility, this study analyzes how credibility can be identified through elements tangibly present within the news content itself. This approach allows credibility to be understood as part of the journalistic construction process—one that can be observed and interpreted through the content of the message.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on five specific indicators of credibility within social media content regarding public policy: the clarity of information sources, the use of data and facts, information balance, transparency in news presentation, and information verification practices. These five indicators are used to analyze how digital media organizations establish characteristics of credible information within a social media format. Thus, this study offers a content-centered perspective on credibility, viewing it not merely as an audience perception formed upon receiving news, but as a quality constructed through journalistic elements and practices within the content itself.

The selection of Detik.com's Instagram account as the object of this study is based on its position as a digital news outlet that actively utilizes social media as a news distribution channel. Instagram's communication characteristics—prioritizing visuals, brevity, speed, and interactivity—require media outlets to adapt their news presentation without compromising journalistic principles. In this context, public policy content uploaded to Instagram offers a relevant space to examine how digital media maintain credibility indicators when journalistic information is packaged in a format tailored to the platform's characteristics.

The urgency of this research is underscored by the public's growing reliance on social

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media as a source of information. Credibility is no longer merely a matter of a media organization's internal quality; it has become integral to the strategy of sustaining a media outlet's presence and legitimacy within the digital ecosystem. As the public struggles to distinguish journalistic information from other content circulating on social media, factors such as source clarity, factual accuracy, transparency, balance, and verification become crucial indicators of journalistic responsibility.

Against this backdrop, this study aims to analyze how credibility indicators are constructed within public policy-themed content published on Detik.com's Instagram account between August 1 and August 7, 2026. Employing a qualitative approach and qualitative content analysis, the study seeks to identify and interpret the presence of five credibility indicators within content selected through purposive sampling. The findings are expected to contribute to the fields of digital media, journalism, and strategic communication studies—specifically by enhancing the understanding of how credibility is constructed in social media content and how such practices help maintain public trust.

METHOD

Research Paradigm and Approach

The paradigm employed in this study is constructivism, which views communication reality as something constructed through the processes of message production, presentation, and interpretation. This paradigm was chosen because the study does not aim to measure credibility levels based on audience perception, but rather to understand how credibility is constructed through journalistic characteristics and practices found in social media content. From a constructivist perspective, news content is understood as a communication product comprising specific choices regarding sources, facts, viewpoints, presentation formats, and information delivery strategies.

The study employs a qualitative approach with descriptive-interpretative characteristics. A qualitative approach is used to gain an in-depth understanding of how credibility indicators are manifested in public policy content on social media. The descriptive-interpretative nature of the study allows for not only describing the presence of credibility indicators but also interpreting how these indicators are constructed within the presentation of journalistic information.

Research Method and Unit of Analysis

The method used is qualitative content analysis. This method was selected because the object of study consists of communication content published via social media. The analysis focuses on message content—encompassing both verbal and visual elements—found in Detik.com's Instagram posts.

The unit of analysis consists of every Detik.com Instagram post containing information on public policy published between August 1 and August 7, 2026. The posts analyzed include any format of Instagram post containing journalistic information regarding public policy. Captions, headlines, text within visuals, cited sources, data or facts used, and supporting details within the posts constitute part of the unit of analysis, provided they are relevant to the construction of credibility.

Research data were obtained by documenting posts from Detik.com's official Instagram account during the study period. Data selection was conducted using purposive

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sampling based on established criteria. Inclusion criteria include: (1) the post was published via Detik.com's official Instagram account; (2) posts uploaded between August 1 and August 7, 2026; (3) content with substance related to public policy; (4) content constituting a journalistic information product; and (5) posts containing information that allows for the identification of credibility indicators. Meanwhile, promotional content, advertisements, entertainment, or posts unrelated to public policy are excluded from the research data.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted systematically through several stages. The first stage involved identifying and collecting all posts that met the research criteria. Each post was then documented and coded based on the publication date, public policy topic, content format, and the characteristics of the information presented.

The second stage was data reduction, involving the selection of content segments relevant to credibility indicators. Analysis was performed on the verbal and visual elements within the posts, including headlines, captions, visual text, source citations, data, expert quotes, and other supporting information.

The third stage was the coding process based on five credibility indicators used in the study: (1) clarity of information sources, (2) use of data and facts, (3) balance of information, (4) transparency of news presentation, and (5) information verification practices. Each indicator was used to identify the forms of credibility construction appearing in the content.

The fourth stage involved categorization and interpretation. The coded data were grouped based on shared characteristics to identify patterns of credibility presentation within public policy content. At this stage, the research did not merely record the presence or absence of an indicator but also analyzed how that indicator was manifested through source selection, the use of facts, the presentation of viewpoints, the provision of context, and forms of information verification.

The fifth stage was drawing conclusions based on patterns identified across the entire dataset. The interpretation of the analysis results was then linked to concepts of message credibility and trust in news media to explain how journalistic practices in social media content can potentially build credibility and foster public trust.

Analytical Indicators

This study employs five key indicators as analytical categories. These indicators were formulated based on the concept of message credibility and journalistic practice principles relevant to news presentation on social media.

Table 1. Content Credibility Analysis Indicators

No.	Indicator	Focus of Analysis
1	Clarity of information sources	Identify the news source, identity of the source, institution or party on which the information is based

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2	Use of data and facts	The presence of figures, statistics, documents, facts, quotes, or evidence supporting the information.
3	Balance of information	The presentation of more than one perspective, involved party, or viewpoint regarding the issue being reported.
4	Transparency in news presentation	Clarity of context, origin of information, time/event, and supporting information that allows the audience to understand the news
5	Information verification practices	Indications for examination, confirmation, clarification, cross-checking, or the use of verifiable sources.

(source…)

These five indicators serve as analytical categories to identify how credibility is constructed within the content. The indicators are not positioned as quantitative measures of the level of credibility, but rather as analytical tools to understand the journalistic characteristics present in each post related to the designated theme (public policy).

Data Validity

Data validity was established through source triangulation and theory triangulation. Source triangulation involved comparing information found in Instagram posts with the sources referenced or cited within the content, where available. This step ensured that the interpretation of credibility indicators was grounded in the information contained within the research data.

Theory triangulation involved linking the interpretations to concepts such as message credibility, digital information credibility, and trust in news media. This process served to minimize subjective interpretation and ensure that the research findings aligned with the conceptual framework and prior research.

Thus, the entire research process was designed to generate a systematic understanding of how digital news media construct credibility regarding public policy content on social media, rather than to directly measure audience perceptions or levels of trust.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study analyzes Instagram posts from the @detik.com account between August 1 and August 7, 2026. During this period, nine pieces of content centered on public policy themes were identified. The selection of analysis units was based on the criterion that the content addressed government regulations, decisions, programs, interventions, or actions relevant to the public interest. These nine items covered issues such as housing, local government finance, taxation, public services, the state civil service, the Free Nutritious Meal (*MBG*) program, MSME financing, and the environment.

Table 2. Analysis Units of Detik.com Instagram Public Policy Content

No.	Content Topics	Public Policy Issues	Information Focus

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1	Home renovation program	Housing area	Rules and recipient criteria
2	IDR 20.5 trillion in aid for 490 local governments	Regional finance	Government intervention in the regions
3	Online store tax deferral	Taxation	Digital taxation policy
4	*BPJS* Health as a passport requirement	Public service	Integration of administrative requirements
5	Extension of WFH for Civil Servants	State apparatus	Policy on the *ASN* work system
6	Constitutional Court ruling regarding the *MBG* and education budgets	Public budget	Budgetary policy and government programs
7	*KUR* under IDR 100 million without collateral	Economy	Community financing policy
8	Enforcement actions against tree felling	Environment	Enforcement of environmental policies
9	Removal of 137 SPPG kitchen supervisors	*MBG* Program	Program oversight and governance

(source…)

An analysis of the nine content items reveals that the public policy issues presented by Detik.com are not limited to a single theme; rather, the Instagram posts cover a relatively diverse range of topics. This diversity demonstrates that public policy is represented not only through formal policies—such as regulations—but also through government programs, administrative decisions, economic policies, budget management, and regulatory enforcement actions. Based on the nine content items mentioned above, the following is an analysis using five indicators of content credibility.

1. Clarity of Information Source

The first indicator is the clarity of the information source. Based on the characteristics of the nine analyzed content items, the source of information is a crucial element in the presentation of public policy issues, as most of the information relates to decisions or statements made by government institutions. Citing actors or institutions—such as the government, ministries, officials, or state agencies—provides attribution for the information conveyed.

For instance, regarding content on the new rules for the "home renovation" program, information on recipient criteria conceptually requires citing the regulatory source or the institution that established the rules. Similarly, content concerning Work-From-Home (WFH) arrangements for civil servants (*ASN*), People's Business Credit (*KUR*), the requirement of *BPJS* coverage for passport applications, and the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) budget requires attribution to the institutions with authority over those policies.

Source clarity is vital because message credibility is determined not only by the substance of the information but also by the audience's ability to identify the information's origin. This aligns with the views of [1] , who state that the source is one of the cues audiences use when evaluating information credibility in the digital environment.

In the context of Instagram, citing sources is crucial because the space available for

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presenting information in captions is relatively limited. When sources are clearly identifiable, the medium provides a basis for the audience to assess the authority of the information being conveyed.

2. Use of Data and Facts

The second indicator concerns the use of data and facts. Across the nine pieces of content, several headlines explicitly incorporated numerical information—such as IDR 20.5 trillion, 490 local governments, and 137 SPPG kitchen heads. The use of figures lends a stronger factual character to the content, as the information is not merely presented as a general statement but includes details that are identifiable and, in principle, verifiable.

The content regarding the IDR 20.5 trillion aid package for 490 local governments exemplifies how figures are used to construct information about a policy. Similarly, the mention of 137 dismissed SPPG kitchen heads provides quantitative insight into the scale of actions taken in managing the MBG program.

However, the mere use of figures is insufficient to establish credibility. Figures must be accompanied by context, sources, and an explanation of how the data was obtained. Consequently, an analysis of credibility must focus not only on the presence of numerical data but also on data attribution and context.

These findings reinforce the perspective of [2], who identify accuracy as a key dimension of message credibility. In the social media landscape, data and facts can serve as credibility cues, helping the audience distinguish journalistic information from statements lacking a clear factual basis.

3. Informational Balance

The third indicator is informational balance. Regarding public policy issues, balance is crucial because policies generally involve multiple interests. Policies concerning online marketplace taxes, People's Business Credit (*KUR*), the Social Security Agency (*BPJS*), Work-From-Home (WFH) arrangements for civil servants, or the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) budget, for instance, have implications for various segments of society.

In this context, balance does not merely mean presenting two opposing sides; it also entails providing adequate context regarding the policy, the affected parties, and the rationale or basis for the policy's implementation. Thus, media can help the audience gain a more comprehensive understanding of a policy.

For public policy content on social media, the challenge of maintaining balance is heightened because visual formats and Instagram captions are inherently brief and cannot accommodate lengthy text. Space constraints can lead to the complexity of a policy being reduced to a single main statement. This situation risks stripping information of its context if not supported by additional explanations.

Therefore, balance serves as a key indicator in assessing the quality of how content credibility is constructed. This finding aligns with the concept of media trust proposed by [3] , which posits that trust in media is linked to the processes of selecting and presenting facts, as well as journalistic judgment.

4. Transparency in News Presentation

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The fourth indicator is transparency. In this study, transparency refers to the extent to which content provides information enabling the audience to understand the context of a policy—including who formulated the policy, its substance, who is affected, and the circumstances under which it is implemented.

Content regarding regulations for home renovation programs and *KUR*, for example, requires an explanation of applicable terms and criteria. Similarly, content concerning the requirement of *BPJS* membership for passport applications necessitates context regarding the link between *BPJS* participation and public administrative services.

Transparency is particularly important on social media because the nature of these platforms tends to encourage the presentation of information in a concise and engaging manner. If the simplification of information lacks sufficient context, the audience may form only a partial understanding of the policy. Therefore, transparency relates not only to the disclosure of sources but also to the adequacy of the context provided to the audience. This broadens the understanding of message credibility, as credible information is not merely that which appears factual, but also information that enables the audience to grasp the issue in proper proportion.

5. Information Verification Practices

The fifth indicator concerns information verification practices. Verification is a crucial aspect of journalism; ideally, information conveyed to the public must undergo a verification process—specifically, the examination of sources, facts, and the veracity of the information.

Regarding public policy content, the need for verification is particularly critical because the information relates to government decisions and can shape public understanding of those policies. For instance, content concerning *BPJS* requirements for passport applications, the deferral of online shop taxes, unsecured People's Business Credit (*KUR*) loans, and changes to Work-From-Home (WFH) policies for civil servants involves information that could lead to practical consequences if misunderstood.

Verification practices face challenges because content often needs to be presented concisely and rapidly. Consequently, the inclusion of source attributions, official quotes, policy documents, data, and institutional statements is vital, as these elements indicate that a verification process took place prior to publication.

Verification is linked to the concepts of accuracy and believability within the realm of message credibility. Information that has undergone a verification process and is backed by clear sources is more likely to be perceived as trustworthy.

The research results indicate that the credibility of public policy content on Instagram is not shaped by a single element but rather through a combination of various journalistic indicators. Source clarity, data and facts, balance, transparency, and verification are interconnected in establishing the characteristics of highly credible information.

These findings demonstrate that credibility on social media can be understood as a construct inherent in the presentation of messages displayed on the platform. Beyond merely conveying correct information, the media must also demonstrate accuracy by revealing the basis of the information, providing context, and presenting details in a manner that enables the audience to evaluate the content.

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This perspective reinforces the concept of "message credibility" developed by [2]. Message credibility resides not only in the media's identity as an institution but also in message characteristics observable by the audience. In the context of this study, indicators such as source, facts, transparency, balance, and verification serve as elements that strengthen the credibility of messages within social media content.

Furthermore, the research findings reveal a relationship between content credibility and trust in the media. [3] explain that trust in the media is linked to processes such as topic selection, fact selection, accuracy of portrayal, and journalistic judgment. This implies that public trust in the media is not formed solely through the identity or popularity of media organizations, but also through the public's experience in receiving content perceived as accurate, transparent, and accountable.

In the context of Instagram, the construction of credibility faces challenges distinct from those associated with conventional news formats. Content on Instagram must be concise, visual, and attention-grabbing, whereas public policy issues are often complex and require lengthy explanations. This situation creates a need to strike a balance between information accessibility and information completeness.

From this perspective, the study demonstrates that social media should not be viewed merely as a news distribution channel, but rather as a new arena for journalistic practices in constructing credibility. Every decision regarding the sources displayed, facts selected, context provided, and information verified forms part of the process of constructing meaning and credibility.

These findings also highlight the current state of research in the field. Previous studies on credibility have largely focused on how audiences assess information credibility or how trust in media can be measured. This research offers a different perspective by positioning journalistic content as the primary object of analysis. Consequently, credibility is examined not merely as an audience perception, but as a quality constructed through the practices of information presentation.

This contribution is particularly significant regarding public policy issues. Information concerning policy has direct consequences for people's lives; thus, the quality of its presentation carries broader implications than mere user engagement. When media outlets provide clear sources, adequate data, transparent context, balanced perspectives, and verified information, the content rests on a stronger foundation for fostering public trust in the media.

Ultimately, this research affirms that public trust within the social media landscape must be understood through the process of credibility construction at the content level. Credibility is not simply an attribute inherent to media institutions; it is also built through journalistic practices observable in every piece of published information.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the credibility of public policy content on social media can be understood through various journalistic elements constructed during information presentation. Based on an analysis of nine Instagram posts by @detik.com between August 1 and August 7, 2026, credibility was assessed using five key indicators: source clarity, the use of data and facts, information balance, transparency in news presentation,

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and information verification practices. These indicators reveal that credibility is not solely tied to a media organization's reputation but is also shaped by the characteristics of the information conveyed to the public.

In the context of social media, establishing credibility presents challenges because public policy information must be adapted—presented concisely, visually, and accessibly—even though the policy substance is often highly complex. Consequently, source clarity, supporting data and facts, contextualization, balanced perspectives, and verification processes become crucial elements for upholding journalistic quality amidst the fast-paced and competitive nature of social media.

This research contributes to the field of digital journalism studies by offering a content-centered perspective on media credibility. Credibility is viewed not merely as an audience perception but as something that can be traced through the way journalistic information is constructed within social media content. This perspective highlights the vital role of journalistic practices on digital platforms in building a foundation of public trust in the media.

From a practical standpoint, the findings imply that digital news organizations should maintain credibility indicators during the social media content production process. Adapting to Instagram's characteristics should not compromise source clarity, factual accuracy, context, balance, transparency, or information verification. Thus, news distribution strategies on social media should prioritize not only reach and engagement but also the preservation of credibility and public trust.

This study has limitations regarding the number of units of analysis and the relatively short observation period—comprising nine posts from August 1 to August 7, 2026—as well as its focus on a single media organization and platform. Future research could extend the study period, compare multiple digital media organizations and social media platforms, and combine content analysis with interviews or audience surveys to examine the relationship between the construction of content credibility and public trust more comprehensively.

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