

Intermedia Agenda-Setting on Pansela: A Corpus Linguistics Analysis of Government and Public Agendas (2016 – 2024)

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Abstract

The South Coast Route (Pansela) is one of the government's strategic infrastructure projects promoted through various digital channels, including press releases and social media. Despite ongoing campaigns, the route remains underutilized. This study aims to explore the relationship between government media (press releases) and public responses on Instagram regarding Pansela route, as well as to identify the agenda gaps using the Intermedia Agenda-Setting Theory. The method employed is corpus linguistics, which categorizes words into five key topics, followed by a Spearman correlation test to measure the relationship between the government agenda and the public agenda. The findings reveal no significant correlation between the two agendas. The government agenda emphasizes infrastructure progress, policy, and tourism development, while the public agenda highlights comparisons between Pansela, Pantura, and toll roads, as well as concerns over inadequate road conditions. These findings indicate that the government's persuasive messages were not fully accepted by the public who tend to respond based on their experiences. Theoretically, this study extends the Intermedia Agenda-Setting framework to institutional and public interactions, while practically, it offers insights to the government for improving participatory digital communication strategy to bridge agenda gaps in digital campaigns.

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INTRODUCTION

The South Coast Route (Pansela) of Java spans 1.604 kilometers along the southern coastline from Bayah, Banten Province, to Banyuwangi, East Java (Kementerian Pekerjaan Umum, 2018). By 2023, 1.242 kilometers had been improved from Bayah to Pacitan. Designed to reduce congestion on the Pantura and Trans-Jawa Toll Road during holiday seasons, Pansela also aims to stimulate economic growth in southern Java. Since 2016, the government has promoted Pansela through online and social media, especially during peak travel periods. However, the route remains underused. According to Djoko Setijowarno from the Indonesian Transportation Society (MTI), limited communication and lack of accessible information about connecting routes have hindered its popularity (Mantalean, 2022).

Mass media plays a crucial role in disseminating information, shaping public discourse, and influencing policy agendas (Potter, 2011). McQuail (2010) emphasized that media enables universal access to information, while McLuhan's idea of the global village highlights the interconnectedness brought by digital communication technologies (Jan et al., 2020). The transformation of media systems has therefore expanded not only how information is distributed but also how meaning is negotiated between institutions and the public.

The rise of digital innovation and increasing public expectations have compelled governments to adopt digital communication strategies to enhance efficiency and citizen engagement (Y.-P. Yuan et al., 2023). Social media now functions as a major platform for information exchange, dialogue, and public participation (Wilder-Smith & Freedman, 2020). Governments around the world actively use these platforms to achieve policy objectives (Mansoor, 2021), while citizens use them to discuss and evaluate government performance (Loukis et al., 2017). Consequently, the relationship between government communication and citizen response has become more dynamic and reciprocal.

Furthermore, social media can influence public knowledge. Based on agenda-setting theory and the concept of the knowledge gap, Wan et al. (2023) found that the quality of interaction, especially reading and liking content, had a greater impact on public information-seeking than mere access. Articles that conveyed direct information, such as local news and collective activities, were more effective in encouraging public engagement than technical or irrelevant content. The study emphasized that even with low interaction frequency, social media still serves as an "attention booster" that encourages citizens to seek further knowledge (Wan et al., 2023).

The agenda-setting function plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion by highlighting certain issues, thereby directing public priorities. This concept is crucial for understanding how media coverage influences public discourse and opinion formation. Traditionally, agenda-setting

theory addresses how the importance of an issue is transferred from the media to the public (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The core of this theory is that the more frequently an issue is featured in media coverage, the more likely it is to be perceived as important by the public (Carroll & McCombs, 2003). The agenda-setting hypothesis has attracted widespread attention in communication research, and considerable evidence has been gathered demonstrating the influence of the media agenda on the public agenda (Lopez-Escobar et al., 1998).

By expanding the original focus of agenda-setting, researchers developed the concept of Intermedia Agenda-Setting (IAS). The concept focuses on the influence of issue salience within the media arena. West & Turner (2021) argue that both the public and policymakers also have the potential to influence media agendas. The IAS concept specifically refers to the process by which different news media influence each other in determining which issues are considered newsworthy. In other words, the content or issues highlighted by one media outlet may increase the likelihood that other outlets will also emphasize those issues. The focus is on how media agenda is shaped by other media, rather than solely how the media shapes the public agenda (McCombs, 2014).

Prior studies have demonstrated that one media outlet's agenda can follow the agenda of another. Some research has examined reciprocal influence within the same type of media, such as newspapers (Breen, 1997), while other studies have explored agenda-setting effects across different types of media, such as the mutual influence between newspapers and television (Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2008). For example, a study identifying intermedia agenda-setting (IAS) relationships among newspapers in Hong Kong, the United States, and Mainland China during coverage of the Hong Kong extradition bill protests found that Chinese media exerted greater influence on U.S. media than vice versa, indicating a "contra-flow" in the global media agenda (Fan & Wong, 2024).

A study using the Intermedia Agenda-Setting (IAS) approach analyzed how official and semi-private commercial media in China influenced each other in their coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Weibo platform. The findings revealed a strong reciprocal relationship between official and semi-private media during the pandemic. Both contributed to predicting trends in COVID-19 cases, highlighting the crucial role of the media in shaping public perception and behavior (Wang & Shi, 2022). Further exploration of the mutual influence between government and commercial media in determining news coverage focus was also conducted in China. The results showed that no single type of media held dominant agenda-setting power. The reciprocal IAS findings demonstrated that even government media responded to content from commercial media, especially on popular issues such as housing and corruption (Guo, 2019).

Subsequent research examining differences in media influence on the representation of violence during the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests was conducted using an inductive

computational content analysis method, identifying words or phrases that appeared in media coverage. The results showed that right-leaning media portrayed the protesters as rioters inciting violence, while left-leaning and centrist media emphasized police violence and racial injustice. This demonstrates how variations in word choice and narrative framing can significantly shape public opinion (Smith & Haenschen, 2024).

A study using the corpus-assisted discourse studies approach investigated the social media communication strategies of Local Government Organizations (LGOs) in the UK during the COVID-19 lockdown. The research aimed to understand how LGOs engaged the public through social media during the crisis and the linguistic patterns used to foster public engagement. The findings revealed that LGOs tended to employ supportive linguistic strategies rather than direct commands, to maintain public trust and avoid resistance. Pronouns such as "we" and "you" were used to create a sense of togetherness while also encouraging personal responsibility (Love et al., 2023).

The development of digital technology, especially social media, has significantly transformed the media landscape. Harder et al. (2017) identified the role of various media platforms (print media, television, radio, news websites, and Twitter) in setting the news agenda during the 2014 Belgian election campaign using the intermedia agenda-setting theory. The results showed that online media (particularly news websites) and Twitter had a strong influence on agenda-setting due to their rapid publishing capabilities (without fixed schedules). With the rise of social media, most intermedia agenda-setting studies have focused on the relationship between traditional news media and social media conversations (Sayre et al., 2010). However, study by Su & Xiao (2021) suggests that elite traditional media are no longer the sole intermedia agenda-setters.

Providing relevant information to citizens is a fundamental step in digital campaigns (Molina & Soler, 2013). Governments use various tools such as internet banners, mass media, brochures, and social media to raise awareness about government services (J. Lee & Shi, 2020). For example, press releases help disseminate information about government actions and policies, which can influence public demand for policy change. Media coverage of policy areas strengthens the relationship between policy outcomes and public demand (Williams & Schoonvelde, 2018). Press releases can then increase government visibility and positively influence public perception (Hong, 2016).

In addition, social media can promote policies and engage the public to express opinions, voice concerns, and participate in decision-making processes (Desmal et al., 2023). Such interaction is essential for fostering a sense of engagement and ownership among citizens (Wan et al., 2023). Analyzing public reactions on social media can provide scientific evidence for policy formulation. For example, positive information released by official media on social platforms such

as Sina Weibo was found to be more easily disseminated and accepted by the public, thereby influencing policy perception (Z. Li et al., 2024).

Government media can persuade the public to participate in government policies by setting the policy agenda, framing issues, and prioritizing them (Irwin & Kiereini, 2021). This influence can shape public perception and encourage participation in policy discussions (Joly, 2016). Furthermore, the quality and relevance of information shared through government social media accounts are crucial for encouraging public engagement. Direct and relevant information has a greater positive impact on public participation (Wan et al., 2023).

Furthermore, persuasive features such as the severity or urgency of an issue, personal relevance, and the effectiveness of proposed solutions can influence the public's motivation to participate. Lee et al. (2017) explain that persuasive elements like urgency and personal relevance have been shown to increase public participation motivation. The urgency and severity of an issue enhance the perception that the issue needs to be addressed immediately. Meanwhile, personal relevance has a strong impact on triggering participation intentions, even when the urgency or effectiveness of the solution is low (H. Lee et al., 2017).

Research Questions

Building upon the existing research, this study explores the reciprocal relationship between government communication and public responses in the context of infrastructure campaign for the Pansela route. Specifically, it examines how the government, through press releases, constructs its media agenda, and how the public, through comments on Instagram, interprets or responds to that agenda. Drawing on the Intermedia Agenda-Setting Theory and a corpus linguistics approach, this study analyses linguistic patterns and thematic prominence in both sources to assess whether the government's agenda aligns with public discourse.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions: 1) what are the similarities and differences between the government's press releases agenda and the public's responses on Instagram regarding the Pansela route? and 2) to what extent does the government's media agenda influence or correspond with the public agenda on Instagram?

METHODS

To address the research objectives mentioned above, quantitative content analysis is considered the most appropriate method, as it helps author identify distinctive patterns in media texts and determine the relationship between government and public agendas (Riff, 2014). In addition, the digital corpus linguistics research approach is used to study language use through large collections of texts (referred to as a corpus) with the aid of computers (McEnery & Hardie,

2012). Corpus linguistics employs computer software to analyze data sets (texts), either quantitatively or qualitatively, to interpret and explain patterns (Pollach, 2012).

The objects of this study are press releases published on the websites of the Directorate General of Highways and the Ministry of Public Works from 2016 to 2024, consisting of 62 news articles discussing the Pansela route. The next research object comprises 416 public comments on two Instagram posts by @kementerianpu account dated April 14 and 16, 2024, which also discuss the Pansela route.

The selection of the two Instagram posts analyzed in this study was based on a combination of relevance and representativeness criteria. Among all posts published by @kementerianpu discussing the Pansela route, these two posts (dated April 14 and 16, 2024) generated the highest levels of audience engagement, as indicated by the number of comments. Therefore, they represent the most active instances of public discourse on the topic within the observed period. In addition, due to Instagram's data access limitations and platform API restrictions, only these posts allowed reliable scraping and comment retrieval. Earlier Pansela related posts existed but were excluded because they had limited accessibility and insufficient comment data for meaningful analysis.

In this article, the author examines word frequency appearing in both the press releases and public comments. These word frequencies are defined as the agenda of the Ministry of Public Works and the public agenda, respectively, and are then analyzed using Spearman's correlation. Spearman's correlation analysis is used to measure the strength of the relationship between two variables (the government agenda and the public agenda) (Hauke & Kossowski, 2011). The calculation involves ranking the data points and then assessing the correlation between these ranks (Sazonets et al., 2024).

The first data analysis technique employed was keyword tracking to identify word frequency (Wood, 1984). Prior to that, the researcher performed data crawling using OpenRefine and the IG Exporter Scraper, followed by data cleansing and stemming using Google Colab. Next, AntConc software was used to obtain word frequencies and generate a word cloud, which was then followed by topic categorization based on the most frequently occurring words from both variables (press releases and Instagram comments). Each topic from both variables was then ranked to proceed with Spearman's correlation test using SPSS.

To enhance validity, the corpus was built exclusively from official sources and verified Instagram accounts to ensure data authenticity. Data cleaning and stemming were conducted systematically using automated scripts in Google Colab to eliminate duplicates and linguistic noise. Reliability was strengthened through transparent coding procedures in AntConc, allowing replication of keyword frequency and topic categorization results.

All social media data analyzed were publicly available comments on verified institutional accounts. There are no personal identifiers that were collected or disclosed, and data use complied with ethical standards for digital research involving publicly accessible online content. The study adheres to the principles of respect for privacy, transparency, and non-intrusion in analyzing user-generated content.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The author processed the cleaned data from the two units of analysis using the AntConc application. From this software, the author identified the most frequently occurring words in both government press releases and public Instagram comments. There were 1,927 words in the press releases, with the ten most frequent words being “jalan”, “jawa”, “km,” “pansela,” “bangun”, “ruas”, “jalur”, “jembatan”, “lintas”, and “menteri”. Meanwhile, there were 573 words in the Instagram comments, with the ten most frequent being “pansela,” “pantura,” “jalur”, “jalan”, “tengah”, “tol”, “jls,” “lewat”, “jawa”, and “selatan”.



Figure 1. Word Cloud of Press Release

Source: Processed with AntConc



Figure 2. Word Cloud of Comments in Instagram

Source: Processed with AntConc

After obtaining the words and their frequencies from the press releases and comments, the author grouped the words into topics. Five topics were identified from each of the two units of analysis, with each topic consisting of ten relevant words. The topics from the press releases included development progress, regions, policy, tourism, and budget. Meanwhile, the topics from public comments consisted of types of routes, regions, tourism, infrastructure readiness, and road conditions. These topics are illustrated in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. Topics on Press Release

Topics	Words	Frequency	Topics	Words	Frequency
Development Progress	jalan	740	Tourism	dukung	41
	km	371		target	40
	pansela	352		perintah	39
	bangun	263		development	35
	jembatan	206		lanjut	35
	jalur	224		pantai	189
	ruas	243		mudik	127
	underpass	84		wisata	69
	tangan	104		lebaran	63
	lintas	197		kendara	52
Regions	jawa	467		pulau	47
	provinsi	188		pandang	41
	selatan	173		indah	36
	kabupaten	137		mantap	35
	timur	122		bentang	34
	yogyakarta	115	Budget	rp	101
	batas	106		miliar	65
	diy	91		total	52
	jateng	83		paket	45
	banten	65		anggar	45
Policy	menteri	189		ekonomi	41
	pupr	129		idb	36
	nasional	126		dana	35
	basuki	73		biaya	34
	ditjen	60		pinjam	32

The Topics of Government Agenda and Public Agenda

Based on the word cloud and topic categorization above, it is evident that the government's agenda through press releases places more emphasis on road development, particularly the Pansela route. Road construction is the main responsibility of the Ministry of Public Works, with one of its policies being the development of the Pansela route. Policy is a key topic highlighted in the press releases to inform the public of the government's role in building the Pansela route. Conversely, the public agenda, as reflected in Instagram comments, focuses more on comparisons between different road types developed by the government, such as Pansela, Pantura, the southern cross route (Jalur Lintas Selatan), central routes, and toll roads.

Table 2. Topics on IG's Comments

Topics	Words	Frequency	Topics	Words	Frequency
Types of Routes	pansela	172		eksotis	5
	jalur	110		gunung	5
	jalan	67		adem	4
	jls	33		biru	4
	pantura	127		lebaran	4
	tengah	54	Infrastructure Readiness	penerangan	12
	tol	46		kurang	9
	jawa	28		nyambung	9
	selatan	27		tersambung	9
	utara	6		minim	8
Regions	malang	17		lama	6
	banyuwangi	12		waktu	6
	cilacap	12		jam	5
	blitar	10		jauh	5
	kudus	10		bensin	3
	kebumen	9	Road Conditions	macet	14
	bandung	8		mulus	11
	jember	7		rusak	8
	jogja	7		bergelombang	7
	banyumas	6		parah	7
Tourism	mudik	19		lancar	5
	pantai	13		sempit	5
	bagus	11		kecil	4
	pemandangan	9		besar	4
	indah	7		gelap	4

These comparisons highlight topics of infrastructure readiness and road conditions as assessed by the public. It can be said that the public draws attention to issues with the Pansela route such as lack of lighting, connecting regions, length of travel time, few gas stations, traffic congestion, bumpy roads, and narrow roads.

On the other hand, both the press releases and public comments raise two common topics: regional areas and tourism. The regional aspect refers to areas connected by the Pansela route, while the tourism aspect highlights the scenic coastal views along the Pansela route.

Spearman Correlation Test

Based on the two topic tables above, the author ranked the topics by summing the word frequencies. Next, the data in Table 3 above were processed using SPSS to conduct a Spearman correlation test. The following are the results of the Spearman correlation test (Table 4).

Table 3. Ranking of Topics

No.	Topic	Frequencies of Press Release	Press Release Ranking	Frequencies of Comments	Comments Ranking
1	Development Progress	2784	1	0	0
2	Regions	1547	2	98	2
3	Policy	767	3	0	0
4	Tourism	693	4	81	3
5	Budget	486	5	0	0
6	Types of Routes	0	0	670	1
7	Infrastructure Readiness	0	0	72	4
8	Road Conditions	0	0	69	5

The data in Table 4 shows a correlation coefficient value of $\rho = -0.525$, indicating a negative correlation between the ranking of topics highlighted in the government's press releases and the topics prioritized by the public in Instagram comments. The correlation is inverse, meaning that the higher a topic is prioritized by the government, the less likely it is to be a top priority for the public, and vice versa. Furthermore, the significance value is 0.182 ($p > 0.05$), which means the result is not statistically significant. Therefore, there is insufficient evidence to state that a consistent relationship exists between the government's agenda and public perception regarding the Pansela route.

Table 4. Spearman Correlation Test

			Press Release Ranking	Comments Ranking
Spearman's rho	Press Release Ranking	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-0.525
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0.182
		N	8	8
	Comments Ranking	Correlation Coefficient	-0.525	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.182	.
		N	8	8

Source: SPSS Calculation

The Discrepancy of Government Agenda and Public Agenda

The research findings indicate that there is no significant correlation between the agenda conveyed by the government through press releases about the South Coast route (Pansela) and the agenda prioritized by the public on Instagram. This finding suggests a misalignment or "agenda gap" between what the government considers important and what the public perceives as a priority. In other words, issues deemed important and strategic by the government, such as development progress and specific policies, do not automatically become the public's primary concern.

This finding is relevant to the intermedia agenda-setting study conducted by Li et al. (2024), which states that agenda relationships across media in digital environments are not always linear or unidirectional. Although official or institutional media have the capacity to set agendas, digital audiences may develop their own interpretations or agendas independently (Q. Li et al., 2024). This is particularly evident when audiences have direct experiences that differ from the narratives presented by official institutions, as seen in the case of the Pansela route. Audiences with firsthand experience of the route tend to raise experiential topics such as road conditions, safety, and comfort, issues that may not be reflected in the government's official narrative.

Furthermore, research by Fan and Wong (2024) on intermedia agenda-setting in the context of the Hong Kong protests also shows that misalignment of agendas between media can arise due to differences in perception and interests between message senders (official or government media) and message recipients (digital audiences). Thus, the results of this study strengthen the argument that the public agenda on social media possesses a certain degree of autonomy that is not entirely dependent on the agenda of institutional media.

Based on an intermedia agenda-setting perspective, these findings underscore the importance for governments to focus not only on information dissemination but also on understanding the context, lived experiences, and audience perceptions when designing public communications. Government communication strategies should be more adaptive, empathetic, and responsive to what the public considers important to enhance the effectiveness of digital communication and reduce the gap between governmental and public agendas (Y. Li & Liu, 2025; Panjaitan et al., 2023).

The following discussion shows that there is a significant discrepancy between the persuasive messages delivered by the government in its digital campaign about the development of the Pansela route, related policies, and tourism potential, and the public's responses through comments on Instagram. While the government attempted to highlight positive aspects such as development progress and tourism benefits, the public instead emphasized other aspects, such as comparisons between route types (Pansela, Pantura, and toll roads), and inadequate road conditions, including poor lighting, a lack of gas stations, and roads that are smooth but narrow.

This discrepancy can be explained by the concepts of persuasion and audience reception theory. According to Yuan and Lou (2020), the effectiveness of persuasive messages largely depends on the personal relevance and perceived urgency of the issue by the audience. In this case, the public has firsthand experiences that differ from the government's narrative, leading them to perceive the urgency of road conditions differently than the government's emphasis on development policies. This aligns with the study by Gibson et al. (2024), which found that government digital campaigns that overlook the needs, realities, or priorities of their audiences

tend to be less effective, as audiences are more likely to interpret the messages differently or even reject them altogether.

Furthermore, Chen et al. (2020) found that audiences are more likely to engage positively when government messages reflect the realities, they experience firsthand, rather than merely presenting idealized conditions. Stuart Hall's audience reception theory emphasizes that audiences actively interpret messages based on their own experiences and social contexts (Dixon, 2024). In this context, the public adopts a negotiated or even oppositional reading (Espiritu, 2011) of government messages. While the public agrees with the government's narrative about the tourism potential and natural beauty of the Pansela route, they also criticize the physical conditions of the route, which differ from the government's idealized portrayal.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals a significant agenda gap between the government and the public in the digital narrative surrounding the Pansela route. The government, through press releases, emphasizes infrastructure development, policy, and tourism as the main messages in its digital campaign. However, the public on social media, particularly Instagram, responds differently, focusing more on concrete issues such as comparisons between Pansela, Pantura, and toll roads, as well as the inadequate physical condition and infrastructure of the Pansela route. Using the intermedia agenda-setting theory alongside concepts of persuasion and audience reception, the study finds that the institutional agenda promoted by the government was not effectively transferred to the public, as evidenced by the Spearman correlation results.

This study emphasizes the importance of a more empathetic, experience-based, and participatory approach to digital public communication. The government needs to adopt communication strategies that not only highlight the ideal aspects of policies but also acknowledge and respond to concerns arising from the public's perceptions and experiences.

Implications and Limitations

This study contributes both theoretically and practically to the field of digital public communication and intermedia agenda-setting. Theoretically, it extends the IAS framework beyond interactions among media organizations to include the relationship between government institutions and the public on social media platforms. By integrating IAS with persuasion and audience reception perspectives, the study highlights how agenda transfer and interpretation occur asymmetrically between institutional communicators and active digital audiences. Practically, the findings provide actionable insights for government communication strategies. Two-way engagement and data-driven monitoring of social media responses can enhance

message resonance, strengthen public trust, and reduce the agenda gap between government narratives and public perceptions.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the corpus of Instagram comments was limited to two posts with the highest engagement due to platform accessibility and data scraping constraints. As such, the findings may not fully represent the broader spectrum of public discourse on the Pansela route. Second, the analysis focused primarily on textual data, excluding visual or multimodal elements that may also shape meaning and engagement. Future research could employ a longitudinal or multimodal approach, expanding the dataset across multiple platforms (e.g., X/Twitter, YouTube, or TikTok) to provide a more comprehensive view of intermedia and public agenda interactions.

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