

# Trust and posted topic characteristics on governments social media communication success: an empirical study

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**Abstract:** One of the most critical developments in the landscape of information and communication technology in the public sector is social media applications as a tool for disseminating information and increasing the performance in delivering services. We are confident that trust and posted topics can provide predictions to understand compliance with communication success. Thus, this study objective is to examine the influence of trust and posted topic towards communication success of the Department of Information of Sabah official Facebook page. A total of 350 questionnaires have been distributed, and 254 completed questionnaires have been subsequently collected. Partial Least Squared-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 3.3.2 is used to analyse the data. The results showed that trust and posted topics are essential determinants for the Department of Information's communication success. This study's insights prove that the government social media via its Department of Information of Sabah plays a crucial role in disseminating relevant information to the public through the social media platform. Future studies should explore other variables such as transparency and participation to examine their influence on communication success. Researchers may also want to adopt a longitudinal approach or compare communication success based on regions (e.g., West and East Malaysia) using multigroup analysis.

**Keywords:** Trust, posted topic, communication success, PLS-SEM.

## 1. Introduction

The Department of Information of Malaysia (JaPen) is a federal department under the Ministry of Communication and Multimedia Malaysia. The ministry's responsibilities are covering areas such as information, communication, mobile services, multimedia broadcasting, broadband, content, postal, film industry, international broadcasting, and media industry. Apart from that, this ministry also enforces the multimedia act and regulation.

JaPen aims to reinforce the public's trust, support, participation and understanding of the government's programmes and policies. The operational goals of the agency include circulating information about national guidelines, shaping the public mindset towards building the advance nation, and strengthening the people's loyalty to the country.

Communication is the basis for successful human interaction as we are shifting towards an increasingly complex environment (Marques, 2010). Generally, communication is a process of transmitting information from the sender to receiver, and vice versa, in a two-way communication. The success of communication via social media is difficult to define as it is based on the social media objectives and its intangible outcomes (Mishaal & Abu-Shana, 2015; Hofmann et al., 2013; Sanina et al., 2017). Moreover, government social media communication's success is not easy to measure as opposed to the private sector because profits and sales do not reflect government goals. Meanwhile, Hofmann (2013) asserted that social media interaction does not necessarily assure communication success.

Trends in using social media networks rely largely on the number of internet users or followers; for example, the percentage of people using the internet. The higher the number of participants, the larger the target audiences and the information reached. The potential users refer to three social media groups, namely public organisations, businesses, and individuals. Unfortunately, there is a low number of citizens using government social media for posting their opinion compared to the more ordinary use of this platform (Jukić & Merlak, 2017).

In general, trust in social communication is important due to the uncertainty element. Online interactions are characterised as uncertain, unknown, and potential opportunistic (Grabner-Kräuter & Kaluscha, 2003). Furthermore, trust in government is vital for the system legitimacy and the country's stability, ensuring regulations and law compliance (Tolbert, Caroline & Mossberger, 2006). The role of trust in developed and developing countries is vital yet it remains a difficult notion to define. ALotaibi et al. (2016) classified trust in government as relationship trust and institutional trust which it is a complex concept. However, building, online trust is more complicated than usual trust, as asserted by Bhattacharjee (2002). Bhattacharjee developed the scale of trust that consists of ability, integrity, and benevolence dimensions.

A critical element for the success of communication in social media are the posted topics. The posted topics on the government social media could influence the communication between the citizens and the government. Interesting and informative topics posted on the government official page could attract more people to read, increasing public participation and communication with the government (A. Mishaal & Abu-Shana, 2015). Failure in managing the interaction between the public and the government may lead to ineffective information dissemination and cause the public to lose interest in following the government's social media (Jukić & Merlak, 2017; Mergel, 2013).

Previous studies suggested effective postings on government social media, which include replies to public comments, valued messages, simplified messages, protecting the public privacy and government reputation, the validity of information sources, immediate actions on issues occurred; and the most critical element is telling the truth all the time (Abdulaziz et al., 2019).

Several studies have assigned trust as a variable or antecedent in the study of government social media (Caroline J. Tolbert & Karen Mossberger, 2006; Chang & Chuang, 2011; Kwak et al., 2004; Noda, 2017). Trust increases an individual's confidence and ability to believe, and social media posts play a significant role in building trust (Lien & Cao, 2014). Lack of public trust could lead to serious repercussions, such as damaged reputation, monetary loss, and public objection (Storck, 2011).

Therefore, this paper seeks to examine the relationship between posted topics and trust in communication success in the context of government social media. This research is considered to have significant implications both in theoretical development and practical applications. Specifically, the findings of this study contribute further to the existing body of knowledge, provide implications for theoretical development, fill in the gaps of inconclusive findings on government social media literature and assists the government to strategize their communication platforms effectively.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. The importance of trust in communication success**

In general, public trust in government is largely affected by their experience with service delivery of government departments. Public trust towards the government is vital to improve public administration's performance; the public will be more likely to support the current government if they trust the government (Kim & Lee, 2012; Ma & Christensen, 2019).

A definition of trust by Morgan and Hung (1994) is broadly accepted, seeing trust as integrity, confidence, and reliability. There are three types of trust: interpersonal trust, intra-organisational trust, and organisational trust (Lien & Cao, 2014). This study's interest is in government-related social media; the study also explores JaPen Facebook followers' perceptions of trust in the posted topic. Trust was found to have a significant positive effect on the intention to use social media (Lien & Cao, 2014).

Results from 214 citizen survey using SEM as a data analysis tool indicate that trust has a positive effect on trust in the internet and trust in the government, which in turn, affects the intention to use e-government (Bélanger & Carter, 2008). This result is supported by Shin (2010), who reveals that trust plays a vital role in determining individuals' intention to use government social media (Shin, 2010).

Providing internet services to the public increases trust as it improves interactions and communication with the public and the perception of responsiveness (Tolbert, Caroline & Mossberger, 2006). Other studies have found that although it increases citizen confidence when using the e-Government service, it does not necessarily lead to greater trust in government operation in general (Morgeson et al., 2011).

Past researchers suggested trust as a crucial element in increasing the public's intention to use any government services (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Mayer et al., 1995). Trust in government is positively related to trust in e-government websites (Alzahrani et al., 2018; Lien & Cao, 2014; Shin, 2010; Teo et al., 2009). Hence, based on the above literature review, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Trust positively influences communication success

## **2.2. Effects of posted topic on communication success**

The content of topics posted on social media may have a significant impact on the communication direction, either positive or negative. The government posting on social media should be more cautious; all information accuracy and reliability must be ensured before they are shared to the public (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Previous studies specified that the credibility of posted topics changes the public's beliefs and attitudes based on competent, believable, and trustworthy sources (Wang & Mark, 2013). Information credibility is more imperative than the written message, influencing the public's attitude (Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006). The results of the online survey of 384 respondents from tourism social media show that social media users are willing to spend time on quality messages from credible sources and will continue using social media (Hur et al., 2017).

Another study on the success of government communication behaviour on Facebook found that the initial posts' polarity does not influence its success. According to Hofmann (2013), the evaluation on the government's Facebook posting on pictures and videos increased the number of comments; posts on leisure activities are more successful than government-related topics, such as government activities or political situation (Hofmann et al., 2013).

However, a study on 15 member countries of the European Union via local governments examined the impact of media and types of content on Western European local governments' Facebook pages found different results. The study reveals that citizens do not like interacting with marketing content so much. The most engaging topics are related to municipal management, which directly affect citizens' lives. The result suggests that the government social media should identify relevant topics to post to fulfil citizens' demands, gather views on sensitive topics, and deliver information (Bonsón et al., 2015).

Other research found that word-of-mouth communication is positively influenced by trust (de Matos & Rossi, 2008). Chu and Kim (2011), in their study on the determinants impacting the electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) via social media, found trust positively related to users' eWOM behaviour in social media. Thus, the current study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: Posted topic positively influences communication success.

### 3. Methodology and data analysis

To ensure that this study's respondents truly reflect the sampling, we use a quantitative method of the non-probability sampling strategies or, more specifically, purposeful techniques in performing the study involving public sector support groups in Malaysia. We used a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7) to analyse all exogenous and endogenous variables, including this study's moderator. To approximate the sample size, we use G\*power 3.0 software (Faul et al., 2007) by adding the impact size of  $f^2$  0.15,  $\alpha$  error pro 0.05, and  $G_f$  0.95 for one predictor evaluated. For this analysis, 89 respondents are required as the minimum sample size. We circulated 350 questionnaires and gathered 294 completed questionnaires for the study. The research process comprises three variables under review. Data were then evaluated using SmartPLS 3.3.2 (Ringle et al., 2020) to analyse the research hypotheses.

#### 3.1. Framework and hypothesis development

Following a thorough literature review on issues of communication success, we discovered that trust and posted topics are among the main factors affecting communication success. We recommend a conceptual model, as seen in Figure 1. Two hypotheses were formulated for the study's objectives.

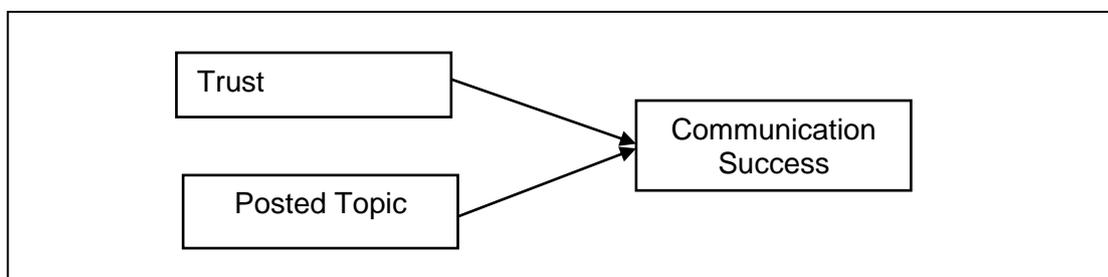


Figure 1. Research framework

H1: Trust positively influences communication success

H2: Posted topic positively influences communication success

### 4. Findings

The demographic data of the online survey respondents are presented in Table 1. Most survey respondents belong to the 31–45 years age group (52.8%), followed by the 46 – 59 years age group (28.2%). The data also shows that the female respondents (61.7%) were higher than the male respondents (38.3%). As for the education level, the largest cohort held a bachelor's degree (38%), followed by Diploma/STPM holders (28.2%). In terms of race, the highest percentage of ethnicity is Sabah Natives (68.7 %), followed by Malay respondents (17.8%).

Table 1. Respondents' Demographic Profile

Variable		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	201	61.7
	Male	125	38.3
Race	Malay	58	17.8
	Chinese	18	5.5
	Indian	4	1.2
	Sabah Natives	224	68.7
	Sarawak Natives	11	3.4
	Others	11	3.4
Age	18 - 30 years old	53	16.3
	31 - 45 years old	172	52.8

	46 - 59 years old	92	28.2
	Below 17 years old	1	0.3
	Over 60 years old	8	2.5
Education Background	High School or Less	77	23.6
	Diploma /, STPM	79	24.2
	Bachelor	124	38
	Master's/PhD	46	14.1

#### 4.1. Assessment of measurement model

We begin by examining the construct reliability (CR) and convergent validity, as exhibited in Table 2. The findings disclose that the research's constructs possess high internal consistency (Roldán & Sánchez-Franco, 2012) and satisfactory average variance extracted (AVE) to validate the convergent validity (Hair et al., 2017). The majority of the loadings show satisfactory loadings' values that are consistent with the threshold value of 0.708, as suggested by Hair et al. (2017). This means the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct was more than 0.5. Thus, we concluded that all constructs have satisfactory convergent validity as the loadings could explain more than 50% of the constructs' variance. The values of the Cronbach's Alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (CR) for all constructs show high internal consistency; whereby, posted topic was 0.839 (CA) and 0.865 (CR), communication success was 0.954 (CA) and 0.964 (CR), and trust was 0.955 (CA) and 0.963 (CR), respectively.

**Table 2.** Measurement model assessment

Construct	Item	Loadings	CA	CR	AVE	CV (Ave > 0.5)
Posted Topic	POST1	0.468	0.839	0.865	0.529	Yes
	POST2	0.880				
	POST3	0.888				
	POST4	0.724				
	POST5	0.522				
	POST6	0.772				
Success	INT1	0.919	0.954	0.964	0.816	Yes
	INT2	0.932				
	INT3	0.930				
	INT4	0.917				
	INT5	0.927				
	INT6	0.784				
Trust	TRUS1	0.935	0.955	0.963	0.749	Yes
	TRUS2	0.907				
	TRUS3	0.866				
	TRUS4	0.878				
	TRUS5	0.865				
	TRUS6	0.941				
	TRUS7	0.934				
	TRUS8	0.454				
	TRUS9	0.901				

\*No item was deleted as loading Composite Reliability > .708 (Hair et al., 2017)

Figure 2 exhibits a graphical assessment of the measurement model.

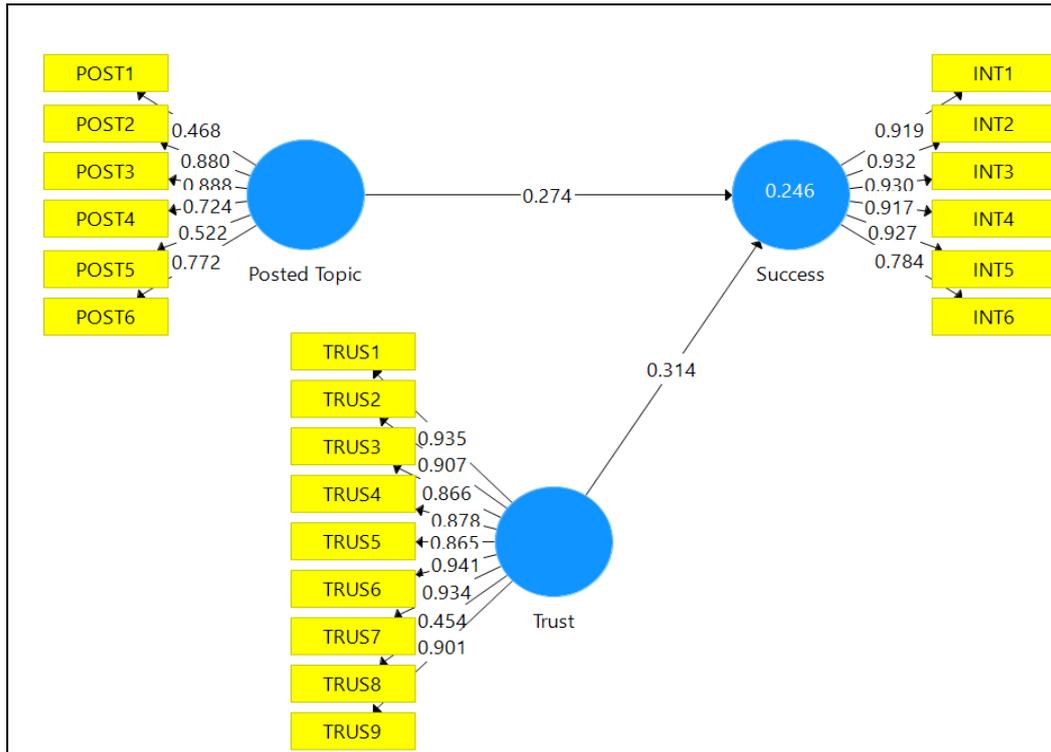


Figure 2. Measurement model assessment

The HTMT criterion was evaluated to examine discriminant validity, as presented in Table 3 (Ringle et al., 2020). The current study applies Henseler’s (2015) heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations criterion, and the results indicate that the discriminant validity was well-specified at HTMT0.85 (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2006). Thus, the issue of discriminant validity is not a concern as the findings propose that the correlation values corresponding to the respective constructs follow the most conservative criterion (HTMT.85). Therefore, the structural model assessment was then conducted to scrutinise the study’s hypotheses as multicollinearity between items loaded on different constructs in the outer model is not a concern.

Table 3. HTMT criterion

	Posted Topic	Success	Trust
Posted Topic			
Success	0.3434		
Trust	0.4792	0.4118	

*Discriminant validity is established at HTMT0.85 (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2006)*

#### 4.2. Assessment of structural model

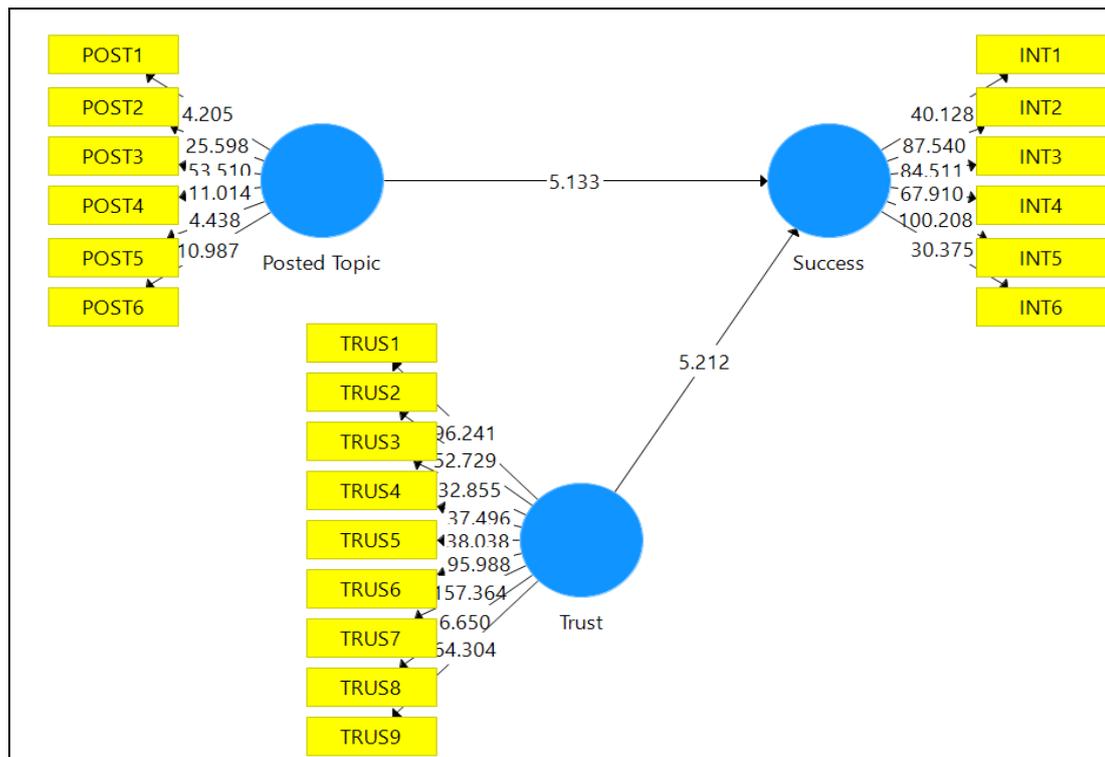
Next, we conducted a structural model assessment by doing a 5000-bootstrap data resampling to examine the hypotheses (Hair et al., 2017). As shown in Table 4 and Figure 3, the Beta value for the path coefficient H1 reveals that trust positively influences communication success. Explicitly, the study found support for H<sub>1</sub> (Trust → Communication Success,  $\beta = 0.315$ ,  $p < 0.000$ , LLCI = 0.201, ULCI = 0.434). Meanwhile, the Beta value for the path coefficient H2 validates that posted topic positively influences communication success. Overtly, the study found support for H<sub>2</sub> (Posted Topic → Communication Success,  $\beta = 0.274$ ,  $p < 0.000$ , LLCI = 0.154, ULCI = 0.369).

**Table 4.** Path coefficients

Direct Effect	Beta	S.E.	t-value	p-value	LLCI	ULCI	Decision
H1: Trust -> Success	0.315	0.059	5.212	0.000	0.201	0.434	Supported
H2: Posted Topic -> Success	0.274	0.054	5.133	0.000	0.154	0.369	Supported

Path Coefficient 0.01, 0.05 (Hair et al., 2017)

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , Bias Corrected, LL=Lower Limit, UL=Upper Limit



**Figure 3.** Structural model assessment

Table 5 displays the model quality assessment. We evaluated the effect size ( $f^2$ ), the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), and the predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ) of exogenous variables on the endogenous variable of the current study. Trust and posted topic is found to have small effect sizes  $f^2$  on communication success (Cohen, 1988), as shown by  $f^2=0.108$  and  $f^2=0.082$ , respectively. Hence, implying that trust and posted topic were significant constructs to influence communication success. The coefficient of determination represented by  $R^2$  that explains whether Trust and posted topic could divulge communication success shows a moderate effect (Chin, 1998). The  $R^2$  value for employee performance was 0.246, signifying that trust and posted topic explain communication success moderately.

Multicollinearity between indicators was measured as well. The indicators satisfied the VIF value, and they were consistently below the threshold value of 3.3 (Diamantopoulos & Sigauw, 2006). Thus, it is safe to conclude that both variables' collinearity issues did not exceed the critical level; therefore, they are not an issue for the estimation of the PLS path model. The values of predictive relevance for the dependent variable are moderate, as indicated by the value of 0.190, suggesting both variables of trust and posted topic have moderate predictive power at predicting communication success between the government and the public in Sabah, as presented by  $Q^2$  using the blindfolding procedure (Hair et al., 2017).

**Table 5.** Assessment of model quality

Direct Effect	$f^2$	$R^2$	VIF	$Q^2$
H1: Trust -> Success	0.108	0.246	1.212	0.190
H2: Posted Topic -> Success	0.082		1.212	

$f^2 \geq 0.35$  consider Substantial (Cohen, 1988)

$R^2 \geq 0.26$  consider Substantial (Cohen, 1989)

Lateral Collinearity:  $VIF \leq 3.3$  (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2006)

$Q^2 > 0.00$  consider large (Hair, 2017)

$0.02 \leq Q^2 < 0.15$ : weak predictive power

$0.15 \leq Q^2 < 0.35$ : moderate predictive power

$Q^2 \geq 0.35$ : strong predictive power

### 4.3. Discussion

The current study's objective is to investigate the relationship between trust and posted topic in communication success by using government social media. Accordingly, we developed a research framework to examine trust and posted topic influence on communication success by applying the partial least square-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) technique to analyse data collected through Google form survey. The sample of this study are followers of the official Facebook page of JaPen Sabah.

In the investigation of the overall trust in government social media use, this study revealed that trust has an influence on communication success. The result also suggests that trust is affected by the type and nature of the information users willingly share with other social media users (Shin, 2010). The users or followers of JaPen Sabah represent the public acceptance of social media as a new way to be self-informed, escape from reality, and communicate with the government. In order to provide a trusted platform for their followers, JaPen official Facebook page might evolve into an effective application. The positive effect of trust on the JaPen official Facebook page indicates that the public is turning to the platform to gratify their reliable information needs.

The most challenging part in government social media such as JaPen is to provide fast and effective means of disseminating information. The success of the information dissemination is supported by the existing reputation of the institution (Department of Information) and the infographic and content quality. This study finds that posted topic affects communication success; posted topics could trigger followers' intention to continue using JaPen official Facebook page. Free and fast access to high-quality information from credible sources is a valuable feature that could optimise government social media use, specifically during global crises, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic (Chan et al., 2020). Despite the uncertainty of information, the study shows that JaPen is the main reference for reliable information. Proactive communication is the key to the fast dissemination of information to the public, hence, positively affecting communication success (Fu & Zhu, 2020).

Even though our findings support the notion that trust and posted topic positively influence communication success through the dissemination of information via JaPen's social media, the predictive power of both constructs seem to be moderate in predicting communication success; as supported by other studies (Morgeson et al., 2011; Tolbert, Caroline, & Mossberger, 2006). Our findings indicate that government social media communication success can be described as still in the progress stage. These findings might reflect users' confidence at present. However, this relationship could change by the users' experience; they might not be as satisfied now as they might be in the future. JaPen's initiative in providing the platform to disseminate information from the government must be further improved to increase public trust in the future.

Improving communication between the government and the public should be the primary objective of building a positive relationship. As the policymaker and as the information technology managers, the government can do more on the posted topic and build trust among its followers to ensure successful communication between the government and the public.

## 5. Conclusion

The study's findings are not only consistent with previous studies; they are also supported by the empirical studies, despite the limited number of similar studies in the current literature (Hur et al., 2017; Jukić & Merlak, 2017). Users of government social media agree that the information provided by JaPen is accurate, comprehensive, up-to-date, and genuine. This is in line with the study by Mergel (2013), who asserted that government social media needs to understand the distribution of information for each update, how it is perceived and escalated, as well as public response on the information. This study's insights imply that the Federal government, via its Department of Information (JaPen), plays a crucial role in disseminating relevant information to the public through the social media platform. Future studies should explore other variables, such as transparency and participation, to examine their influence on communication success. Researchers may also want to adopt a longitudinal approach or compare communication success based on regions (e.g., West vs. East Malaysia) using multigroup analysis. Conducting a qualitative approach is another option to understand communication success in disseminating important information.

Overall, these findings suggest that JaPen must provide high-quality postings to their followers and build a strong sense of trust among its followers to ensure that the information can reach and benefit the public. Improving these two areas will maximise the positive relationship between the two predictors (trust and posted topic) and communication success.

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