



Transformation of Public Relations Strategies in the Digital Age: Analysis of Public Communication Adaptation in Educational Institutions

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Abstract

Digital transformation has brought fundamental changes to public relations practices in Indonesia. The role of public relations is no longer merely as a conveyor of information, but has evolved into a reputation manager and guardian of public trust in the dynamic era of digital communication. This study aims to analyze the transformation of public relations strategies in facing the challenges and opportunities of digital communication, as well as how these innovations contribute to the formation of a credible and adaptive institutional image. This study uses a literature review method, examining various research results and scientific publications from 2019 to 2024 that are relevant to the themes of digital public relations strategies, public communication, and reputation management. The results of the study show that the transformation of public relations strategies includes changes in the aspects of role, technology, and ethical orientation. Public relations practitioners are required to master digital literacy, public data analysis, and the ability to manage issues and crises in the online space. In addition, the use of artificial intelligence (AI), chatbots, and social listened strengthens the effectiveness of communication, although it needs to be balanced with the principles of transparency and social responsibility. The conclusion of this study confirms that the success of public relations in the digital era depends on the ability to integrate technology, creativity, and human values to build a sustainable institutional reputation.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has brought about major changes in public communication patterns, including in the field of public relations (Alivia et al., 2024; Nurhidayah et al., 2025). The shift from conventional media to digital media has transformed the role of public relations from merely conveying messages to managing the reputation and image of institutions. In this era of information openness, the public can quickly access data and opinions through the internet and social media, requiring institutions to be more careful in managing their public communications. These changes require public relations professionals to have strong strategic thinking, data analysis, and digital media literacy skills. Public relations

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professionals are required to be able to read public opinion trends, respond to issues quickly, and maintain public trust in the institution. Without these skills, public relations professionals may lose their relevance amid increasingly fierce competition for information (Adityawarman & Prasetyo, 2023).

The role of public relations in the digital age has become increasingly complex because it no longer focuses solely on disseminating information, but also on managing two-way public interactions. Social media has become a new arena for public relations to build relationships with audiences directly and in real time. Through platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and X (Twitter), public relations can build an institution's image in a more personal and creative way. However, on the other hand, the openness of the digital space also carries the risk of negative comments, hoaxes, and sensitive issues that can threaten the reputation of the institution. Therefore, an adaptive and flexible communication strategy is needed so that institutions are able to deal with the rapidly changing dynamics of public opinion (Juhaidi, 2024; Ridwan et al., 2025).

In addition to these challenges, digital transformation also provides great opportunities for innovation in public relations practices. Through digital storytelling, content marketing, and social media data analysis, public relations can convey messages that are more interesting, effective, and measurable. Modern communication technology also makes it easier for institutions to monitor public perception in real time, enabling faster and evidence-based decision making. However, the challenge that arises is how to maintain the authenticity of the message so that it remains consistent with the values and identity of the institution. In this context, the speed of information dissemination must be balanced with accuracy and public communication ethics (Astuti & Nugraha, 2021).

Amidst the rapid flow of information, the ability of public relations to manage communication crises has become a very important factor. When misinformation or negative issues go viral on social media, public relations must respond immediately with transparent and solution-oriented measures. Slow crisis management can worsen the image of an institution and erode public trust. Therefore, modern public relations must master crisis management techniques, conduct regular media monitoring, and build good relationships with the media and influencers. In situations like this, the role of public relations is not only as a spokesperson, but also as a mediator between the institution and the public to restore damaged reputations (Citrawijaya, 2024; Putri & Rahman, 2024).

Given these dynamics, public relations strategies in the digital age need to be directed towards a more dialogical, innovative, and technology-based approach. Public relations must be able to combine elements of strategic communication, digital technology, and a humanistic approach so that the image of the institution remains positive amid rapid social change. This research is important to understand how public relations adjusts its communication strategies in facing digital challenges while taking advantage of existing opportunities. This study is also expected to contribute theoretically to the development of communication science and provide practical benefits for institutions in formulating effective and relevant public relations strategies in the era of digital transformation (Wulandari, 2023).

METHODS

This study uses a literature review method as its main approach. This method aims to review, analyze, and synthesize the results of previous studies relevant to the topic of public relations strategy transformation in the digital age. The literature review approach was chosen because this study does not focus on collecting field data, but on conceptual analysis and scientific findings from various previous studies (Engkizar et al., 2022, 2023; 2025; Grunig et al., 2013; Nurhidayah et al., 2025).

Through a literature review, researchers can identify patterns, trends, and research gaps in the field of strategic communication and digital reputation management (Engkizar et al., 2025; Snyder, 2019).

The data used in this study is secondary, obtained from scientific sources such as journal articles, academic books, proceedings, and research reports discussing the themes of public relations, digital communication, and institutional image management. The literature sources were taken from various reputable databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). The selection of literature was based on three main criteria: i) relevance to the topic of public relations strategy transformation, ii) recency of publication within the 2019-2024 time frame, and iii) credibility of scientific sources that have undergone a peer review process (MacDonald, 2014; Kassymova et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2025).

The literature collection process was carried out systematically through four main steps. First, the researchers identified the focus of the study, namely public relations strategies in the digital age and their implications for institutional image building. Second, a literature search was conducted using keywords such as “digital public relations strategy,” “communication management in social media,” and “organizational reputation in the digital era.” Third, the researcher screened the literature by reading the abstracts to ensure topic relevance and eliminate irrelevant sources. Fourth, the researcher grouped the selected literature based on major themes such as digital public relations innovation, crisis communication, and reputation management strategies. This procedure followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) model to ensure systematicity and transparency in the selection of literature (Engkizar et al., 2025; Moher et al., 2009).

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis approach, which involved grouping the results of the literature review based on the main themes that emerged. Each selected article was read in depth, then coded to identify patterns of thought, similarities in concepts, and differences in approach. From the coding results, the researchers compiled thematic categories such as the transformation of the role of public relations, digital communication strategies, and challenges and innovations in building institutional image. Furthermore, the synthesis results were presented descriptively and analytically, emphasizing the relationship between public relations theory and practice in the digital era (Hasani, 2025; Nugraha et al., 2022; Webster & Watson, 2002; Markhmadova et al., 2025).

To ensure the validity of the research results, source triangulation was conducted by comparing findings from various different literature sources. Content validity was maintained by only using academic sources that have scientific reputations and have undergone peer review. In addition, the researchers also ensured that all data used was up-to-date and relevant to the context of digital communication development in Indonesia. This approach ensures that the research results have a high level of credibility and reliability (Fink, 2020; Razal & Wijayanti, 2024; Saputri et al., 2025). With this procedure, the literature review method in this study not only serves as a secondary data collection technique, but also as an analytical framework to comprehensively understand the transformation of public relations strategies in the digital era, the challenges faced, and the innovations made by institutions in building a positive image in the digital public sphere.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on a review of relevant scientific literature from 2019 to 2024, seven main themes were identified that reflect the transformation of public relations strategies in the digital age. These seven themes form a framework for synthesizing

the research results, which describe the paradigm shifts, strategies, and challenges faced by institutions in managing their reputation and image in the digital space.

The Transformation of the Role of Public Relations from Informant to Reputation Manager

The results of the study show that the role of public relations has shifted from merely conveying messages (informant) to a strategic position as reputation manager and organizational communication policy advisor. Public relations is now required to have the ability to analyze public data, manage online opinions, and collaborate across fields to shape positive perceptions of the institution. This change in role is in line with the views of (Astuti & Nugraha, 2021; Rahastine, 2025), who emphasize that in the digital era, public relations no longer just disseminates information, but also builds trust and credibility for the organization through interactive and transparent communication.

Digital Communication Strategy: Storytelling, Engagement, and Audience Segmentation

The reviewed literature shows that effective public relations strategies in the digital era generally focus on digital storytelling and continuous engagement with the public. The use of emotional narratives and strong content visualization has been proven to increase public empathy and strengthen the image of institutions (Dharmajaya & Minangkabawi, 2024; Hidayati, 2022; Muetya et al., 2022). In addition, audience segmentation strategies through the use of different platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and X (Twitter) are key in tailoring messages to the characteristics of social media users. According to (Wulandari, 2023), successful public relations professionals are those who are able to integrate technology, creativity, and media analytics to create meaningful interactions.

Crisis Management and Disinformation in the Digital Space

One of the dominant themes emerging from the literature is the increasing complexity of crisis communication management due to the rapid and uncontrolled flow of information on social media. (Putri & Rahman, 2024) emphasize the importance of real-time monitoring strategies to detect negative issues early on, accompanied by a quick and transparent response to maintain the institution's reputation. (Permatasari et al., 2024; Yusuf & Mustapha, 2024) add that in dealing with disinformation, institutions need to prioritize data verification and consistent factual communication so that the public can distinguish between truth and hoaxes.

Measuring Effectiveness: From Quantitative Metrics to Reputation Indicators

A review of the literature also shows a paradigm shift in measuring the effectiveness of public relations strategies. Whereas previously success was measured by reach or number of impressions, the focus has now shifted to reputation-based indicators and public trust, such as sentiment score, engagement quality, and trust index (Adityawarman & Prasetyo, 2023). This approach allows institutions to measure the extent to which digital communication contributes to increasing institutional credibility and public satisfaction.

Organizational Readiness and Public Relations Human Resource Capacity

Several studies highlight that digital transformation in public relations cannot run optimally without the support of adequate human resource capacity. (MacDonald, 2014) explain that many institutions, especially in the public sector, still face limitations in terms of experts in the fields of digital communication and data analytics. Therefore, continuous training and learning programs are needed to improve the ability of public relations practitioners to use digital tools and deeply understand the behavior of online audiences.

Technological Innovation: AI, Chatbots, and Social Listening

The review results show that the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) technology and social listening tools has become a prominent trend in digital

reputation management. The use of chatbots for rapid interaction with the public, as well as big data analysis to understand opinion trends, has helped institutions improve communication efficiency (Wulandari, 2023). However, (Yusuf & Mustapha, 2024) emphasizes the importance of ethical use of technology so that the resulting communication does not lose its human touch and remains in line with organizational values.

Socio-Cultural Context and Challenges in Indonesia

Literature reviews in the Indonesian context highlight the influence of socio-cultural and regulatory factors on the effectiveness of digital public relations strategies. Differences in digital literacy levels, internet access gaps, and diverse communication cultures mean that strategies that are successful in one region may not necessarily be effective in another (Astuti & Nugraha, 2021). In addition, regulations related to public information disclosure and personal data protection also affect the limitations of public relations practices in managing information in the digital space (Putri & Rahman, 2024).

A review of the literature generally shows that the transformation of public relations strategies in the digital age is not merely a change in communication media, but a paradigm shift that touches on the structure, values, and culture of organizations. This shift reflects the need for institutions to adapt to increasingly digital, fast-paced, and participatory patterns of social interaction. From various scientific sources reviewed, a pattern emerges that the success of modern public relations is largely determined by an institution's ability to integrate communication technology with strategies for building public trust (Adityawarman & Prasetyo, 2023; Wulandari, 2023).

First, the main findings show that the role of public relations has evolved from merely being the spokesperson for the organization to becoming a strategic advisor who is directly involved in decision-making. This means that public relations now plays an important role in maintaining message consistency, managing digital reputation, and serving as a liaison between the organization and the public in a more dialogical context (Astuti & Nugraha, 2021).

Second, the synthesis results show that public relations digital communication strategies now widely adopt a digital storytelling approach that emphasizes emotional, visual, and narrative aspects in conveying messages. The success of a digital public relations campaign is no longer measured solely by its reach, but by how deeply the message is able to create emotional resonance and public participation (Hidayati, 2022). This strategy is effective because today's public is more responsive to messages that are authentic and relevant to their social identity.

Third, the literature review also highlights the importance of organizational readiness and human resources (HR) as key factors for successful digital transformation in public relations. Many institutions, especially public and educational agencies, still face challenges in terms of limited digital competence among public relations practitioners. Therefore, media analysis, data literacy, and digital crisis management skills have become new skills that every public relations practitioner must possess (MacDonald, 2014). These skills support the shift of public relations from an administrative function to a strategic function.

Fourth, from a technological perspective, the study results show an increase in the use of artificial intelligence (AI), chatbots, and social listening tools to detect public opinion and handle reputation issues in real time. However, the literature also emphasizes that the use of advanced technology without ethical foundations and human sensitivity has the potential to erode public trust (Yusuf & Mustapha, 2024). Thus, technology adoption must be balanced with clear ethical policies and institutional oversight to remain in line with the principles of transparency and social responsibility.

Fifth, the local context in Indonesia shows that social, cultural, and regulatory factors remain major challenges in the implementation of digital public relations strategies. Variable levels of digital literacy, gaps in internet access, and a communication culture rooted in collectivist values make a one-size-fits-all approach unworkable (Putri & Rahman, 2024). Therefore, public relations practitioners need to adapt their communication strategies based on the characteristics of their target audience, in terms of language, cultural symbols, and social norms.

Finally, findings from all reviewed literature show that the essence of digital public relations transformation is the integration of technological innovation, social sensitivity, and professional ethics. Public relations professionals who are able to combine these three elements will become important agents in building a credible, adaptive, and sustainable institutional image. In this context, public relations plays a role not only as a messenger, but also as a guardian of trust who ensures that all forms of digital communication are based on truth, transparency, and social responsibility (Astuti & Nugraha, 2021).

Thus, the results of this literature synthesis reinforce the understanding that digital public relations strategies are not merely technical strategies, but multidimensional approaches that encompass technological, human, cultural, and ethical aspects. This transformation requires organizational awareness that digital reputation is built not by how often an institution speaks, but by how honest, consistent, and relevant it is in responding to the needs of its audience.

The Transformation of the Role of Public Relations from Informant to Reputation Manager

Digital transformation has changed the position of public relations from merely a technical implementer to a strategic actor in managing organizational reputation. In the context of modern communication, public relations no longer functions solely as a messenger, but as a reputation manager and strategic advisor who plays a role in institutional decision-making. This change is in line with the two-way symmetrical communication paradigm that emphasizes the importance of dialogue and mutual understanding between organizations and the public.

In the digital age, an organization's reputation is shaped not only by the messages it conveys, but also by how it interacts with the public in the online space. Public relations plays a role in ensuring that communication remains consistent with the values, identity, and objectives of the institution. Therefore, public relations practitioners are required to have analytical skills regarding public opinion, understand digital trends, and be able to formulate communication measures that can build long-term trust and credibility (Ibrahim et al., 2025; Wulandari, 2023).

In practice, many institutions are now beginning to integrate public relations functions with other fields such as marketing, information technology, and risk management. This cross-disciplinary collaboration strengthens the position of public relations as a strategic coordination center in managing digital reputation. Thus, the transformation of the role of public relations shows that the success of institutional communication is highly dependent on the adaptability and strategic thinking of public relations practitioners themselves.

Digital Communication Strategy: Storytelling, Engagement, and Audience Segmentation

The development of social media has encouraged public relations practitioners to develop more personalized, interactive, and creative communication strategies. The most widely used approach is digital storytelling, which is the delivery of messages through authentic and emotional narratives so that the public can connect psychologically with the organization (Hidayati, 2022). This strategy is effective because humans tend to remember and trust stories more easily than mere information.

In addition, the success of digital public relations is not only determined by how widely the message is spread, but also by the quality of engagement it generates. Public relations must be able to create a space for two-way dialogue, where the public feels involved in the communication process. This approach requires skills in content creation, social media data analysis, and understanding of platform algorithms so that the message conveyed reaches the right audience.

Digital communication strategies also require sharp audience segmentation, as each platform has different user characteristics. For example, Instagram and TikTok are effective for visual-based campaigns and short narratives, while X (Twitter) is more suitable for public issue discussions and opinion reinforcement. This adaptive communication approach to user behavior makes digital public relations more flexible and responsive to changes in the communication environment (Adityawarman & Prasetyo, 2023).

Crisis Management and Disinformation in the Digital Space

The digital era brings great opportunities in public communication, but also presents new challenges in the form of the spread of false information (disinformation) and rapidly developing reputation crises. In this context, public relations plays a crucial role as issue manager and guardian of institutional credibility. A study by (Putri & Rahman, 2024) shows that institutions with social listening systems and rapid responses to public issues tend to be more successful in maintaining their reputation than those that take a passive approach. Digital crisis management requires both speed and accuracy. A slow response can exacerbate a crisis, while a hasty response without verification can undermine an organization's credibility (Yusuf & Mustapha, 2024). Therefore, public relations officers need to establish clear crisis communication protocols, including data verification mechanisms, cross-unit coordination, and public communication guidelines.

A crisis mapping approach is also necessary to map potential risks that may arise on social media. With big data analytics technology, institutions can monitor public sentiment, predict issue trends, and determine communication intervention points before problems escalate. Thus, the role of digital public relations is increasingly strategic, not only in responding to crises but also in preventing and managing reputation risks early on

Measuring Effectiveness: From Quantitative Metrics to Reputation Indicators

One important change found in the study results is a paradigm shift in measuring the effectiveness of public relations communication. Previously, success was measured through media coverage or the number of views, but now measurement is focused on indicators of reputation and public trust (Adityawarman & Prasetyo, 2023). This shows a shift in orientation from quantity to quality in the relationship between organizations and the public. Reputation-based measurement involves analyzing sentiment scores, engagement quality, and public perceptions of an institution's values and integrity. This approach allows public relations to demonstrate its tangible contribution to the achievement of an organization's strategic goals. (Firdaus, 2024; Wulandari, 2023) explain that reputation indicators can be used to evaluate the extent to which digital communication strategies support an organization's vision and strengthen long-term trust. The implication is that public relations is no longer measured solely by the number of media publications, but by the extent to which communication is able to create a sustainable reputational impact. Thus, public relations has become an important part of data-driven and evidence-based communication in institutional strategic management.

Organizational Readiness and Human Resource Capacity in Public Relations

The transformation of public relations strategies will not be successful without the support of competent human resources and an adaptive organizational structure. (MacDonald, 2014) emphasize that the success of digital communication is

determined by the organization's readiness to invest in training, technology, and a collaborative work culture. Many institutions, especially in the public sector, still face obstacles in digital literacy, data analysis capabilities, and decision-making speed. Public relations in the digital era must have multidisciplinary skills ranging from strategic communication, media research, to data-based public behavior analysis. Therefore, continuous efforts are needed to improve the capacity of public relations human resources through training, workshops, and collaboration with industry practitioners. This training not only improves technical competence but also shapes an adaptive mindset towards change.

In addition, organizations need to restructure so that public relations functions are no longer administrative in nature, but become an integral part of strategic management. With a flexible structure, public relations can respond more quickly to public issues and innovate effective communication in a dynamic digital ecosystem. Technological developments have expanded the role of public relations in managing public communication. The use of artificial intelligence (AI), chatbots, and social listening tools is now an integral part of digital public relations practices (Nurhidayah et al., 2025; Wulandari, 2023). AI technology enables public relations to analyze public sentiment in real-time, identify potential issues, and personalize messages according to audience needs.

However, the use of technology also presents ethical dilemmas. (Yusuf & Mustapha, 2024) asserts that the use of AI without ethical oversight can lead to manipulation of information and a loss of authenticity in communication. Therefore, public relations practitioners need to apply the principles of transparency, accuracy, and accountability in every use of digital tools. Ethical oversight is necessary so that technology functions as a tool, not a substitute for human values in communication. Technological innovation should be accompanied by strong digital literacy, so that public relations professionals can utilize technology intelligently and responsibly. The combination of human analytical skills and artificial intelligence is the ideal model for building a sustainable and credible digital reputation.

Socio-Cultural Context and Challenges in Indonesia

The literature review confirms that public relations practices in Indonesia cannot be separated from the complex socio-cultural context. The communication culture of Indonesian society, which tends to be collectivist, oriented towards social harmony, and upholds politeness, influences the form and style of public relations communication (Astuti & Nugraha, 2021). Therefore, digital communication strategies adopted from abroad need to be adapted to local values so that messages are well received by the public.

In addition, the level of digital literacy and the gap in access between regions remain real challenges in the implementation of digital public relations strategies in Indonesia. In these circumstances, public relations needs to perform an educational function, helping the public to understand digital information critically and responsibly. Regulations also play an important role in governing the ethics and boundaries of digital communication. Policies such as the Personal Data Protection Law and regulations on public information disclosure serve as guidelines for institutions to ensure that their communication activities remain legally and ethically sound. By understanding this social, cultural, and regulatory context, public relations can implement communication strategies that are more effective, ethical, and in line with the character of Indonesian society.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the transformation of public relations strategies in the digital age is a complex phenomenon involving changes in communication paradigms, institutional roles, and the use of technology in building an organization's

image and reputation. Based on the results of a literature review, it was identified that the role of public relations has shifted significantly from the function of conveying information to managing reputation and public trust. This change requires public relations to think strategically, be data-oriented, and be able to bridge the interests of the organization with the needs of the community through participatory two-way communication. Conceptually, the results of the study show that an effective digital public relations strategy must be based on three main dimensions: narrative creativity, technological intelligence, and communication ethics. PR professionals must not only be proficient in utilizing technologies such as AI, chatbots, and social listening tools, but also be sensitive to human values and local culture so that the communication they build remains authentic and rooted in trust. In addition, the ability to manage digital crises, analyze public sentiment, and measure the effectiveness of reputation-based communication are important competencies for modern public relations professionals.

The practical implications of these findings confirm that institutions in Indonesia need to strengthen their human resource capacity in the field of digital communication. Continuous training, improving media literacy, and organizational restructuring are important steps to ensure that public relations functions can play a role as strategic decision makers, rather than merely technical implementers. In addition, institutions need to develop transparent and ethical digital communication policies to ensure that the use of technology does not undermine public trust. By strengthening institutional and public relations professionalism, organizations can be better prepared to face the challenges of disinformation, reputation crises, and the increasingly rapid dynamics of public communication.

Finally, this study concludes that the success of public relations in the digital age is largely determined by an institution's ability to integrate technology, strategy, and human values. Public relations is not merely a tool for disseminating messages, but also serves as the moral guardian of public communication, ensuring that information is conveyed accurately, transparently, and ethically. For further research, it is recommended that empirical studies be conducted on the effectiveness of implementing digital public relations strategies in various institutional sectors in Indonesia, so that the conceptual model produced from this literature review can be tested and further developed in the context of real-world practice.

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