

Public Relations Innovation in the Digital Era: Building Public Organizations' Reputations Through Social Media

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Abstract:

The development of digital technology has changed the paradigm of public communication, particularly in the public relations practices of public organisations. The main challenge for public relations in the digital era is how to build and maintain an institution's reputation amid the rapid, dynamic flow of information. This study aims to analyse the forms of digital public relations innovation that utilise social media as a strategic space for building public reputation. The research method uses a descriptive qualitative approach, employing library-based research techniques to analyse literature, scientific journals, and digital documents related to public communication and reputation management. The results show that public relations innovation in the digital era encompasses three main aspects: transforming public relations from a communicator to a digital reputation manager, optimising social media for public dialogue, and using data analysis and information transparency to strengthen public trust. These innovations significantly enhance the legitimacy, credibility, and positive image of public institutions. Thus, digital public relations functions not only as a disseminator of information, but also as a participatory and strategic relationship manager in building organisational reputation in the digital era.

Key Words: Public Relations Innovation in the Digital Era, Public Organization Reputation, Social Media

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INTRODUCTION

The digital era has brought significant changes to how society communicates, interacts, and obtains information. Information and communication technology (ICT) has become a key infrastructure influencing nearly every aspect of social, economic, and governmental life (Bilan et al., 2023; Fatmasari et al., 2025). In the context of public organisations, digitalisation presents both opportunities and challenges for effective communication between institutions and the public (Onyango, 2021; George, 2023). On the one hand, social media has become an effective means of rapidly and widely disseminating public information. On the other hand, information disclosure demands greater transparency and accountability (Mansoor, 2021; Farid et al., 2025). Therefore, public relations' ability to manage digital communications is crucial to the

reputations of public organisations. This situation demonstrates the importance of research on public relations innovation in the digital era, as it directly contributes to increasing public trust and the legitimacy of public institutions in the eyes of a critical and dynamic digital public.

Despite the enormous potential of digital media, many public institutions still face gaps in their ability to utilise technology optimally. The inability of public relations to adapt to changing digital communication patterns often results in low effectiveness in conveying information to the public (Lovari, 2020; Ozgen, 2022). Some government agencies still rely on a one-way communication approach, which is less responsive to the public's need for interaction and participation (Hyland et al., 2021). As a result, public trust declines and the institution's image in the digital space is weakened. This problem is further compounded when public issues develop rapidly on social media without proper communication management. When public relations fails to anticipate or clarify issues in real time, the institution's reputation can be jeopardised. Therefore, an innovative and adaptive public relations strategy is needed to ensure public institutions remain abreast of the rapidly evolving dynamics of digital communication.

Field observations demonstrate a significant difference between public institutions that actively manage digital communication and those that do not. Several local government institutions in Indonesia have used social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube to disseminate public information, build engagement, and enhance their positive image. However, many institutions remain passive, even using social media only for ceremonial activities or formal publications. On the other hand, various cases of miscommunication have emerged in the digital space, such as slow responses to public issues, insensitive content to social situations, or inconsistent messaging across platforms. This situation indicates that digital public relations management has not been implemented strategically and professionally. However, the public now judges an institution's credibility by the speed and quality of its interactions on social media. This phenomenon indicates that digital public relations innovation is essential for building a trusted reputation for public organisations.

Various previous studies have highlighted the crucial role of digitalisation in transforming public relations. (Purba et al., 2025) assert that ICT developments have shifted the public relations communication paradigm from a one-way model to interactive, data-driven, two-way communication. (Nugraha et al., 2022) Add that public relations now functions not only as a conveyor of information but also as a manager of an institution's reputation amidst the flow of digital communication.

Meanwhile, Kent (2020) identified that traditional public relations practices remain administrative in nature and have not fully utilised the potential of social media. These studies demonstrate that digital transformation demands

a shift in communication strategies toward a more open and participatory approach. However, most research remains limited to general descriptions, without explaining the concrete innovations public relations has implemented in building reputation through social media.

Recent research by Hidayat (2024) shows that digital communication can accelerate the dissemination of public information and increase public trust. Shania et al. (2024) found that active social media interaction strengthens emotional bonds between institutions and the public, while Puspita (2025) highlighted the role of digital creativity in enhancing the image of government institutions. However, a gap remains in integrating innovation and strategy to address digital content, public interaction, and organisational reputation management. Most studies examine the effectiveness of platforms or content, but not strategic PR innovation holistically. Therefore, this study plays a crucial role in filling this gap by examining how digital PR innovation directly builds the reputations of public organisations in Indonesia.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on strategic digital PR innovation as a key instrument for building and maintaining the reputations of public organisations. Unlike previous studies that focus solely on social media or other forms of digital communication, this study emphasises the systematic integration of innovation, public engagement, and reputation management. By combining managerial and digital communication approaches, this study seeks to uncover adaptive strategies that address the complex challenges of the digital era. Another novelty of this research is its emphasis on the context of public institutions in Indonesia, where employee digital literacy, communication infrastructure, and organisational culture remain diverse. Thus, the research findings are expected to enrich the body of digital public relations scholarship relevant to national conditions.

Based on the foregoing description, the main research problem can be formulated as follows: how can public relations innovation be developed in the digital era to build the reputation of public organisations? To answer this, this research focuses on three main questions: what forms of public relations innovation exist in the digital era, what role social media plays in building and maintaining the reputations of public organisations, and what strategies public relations can implement to enhance the credibility of public institutions through digital communication. This research argues that planned, data-driven digital public relations innovation is key to building a positive reputation for public institutions. This strategy must be based on transparency, openness of information, and responsiveness to public issues.

The main objectives of this research are to identify forms of public relations innovation in the digital era, analyse the role of social media in building public reputation, and formulate effective, adaptive digital communication strategies. Theoretically, this research contributes to the growing literature on digital public relations and public-sector reputation management. In practice, the

research findings serve as guidelines for government institutions in designing participatory, technology-based communication strategies. With a holistic approach, public relations can serve as an effective liaison between institutions and the public, building public trust and strengthening organisational legitimacy. Thus, this research not only addresses academic needs but also supports the strengthening of professional public communication governance in the digital era.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for in-depth description and understanding of phenomena within their natural contexts (Sugiyono, 2020). The case study design was used to examine in detail public relations innovation practices for utilising social media to build the reputations of public organisations. In organisational studies, researchers can comprehensively explore the processes, strategies, and dynamics of digital communication used by public relations. This design was chosen based on the research need to understand social phenomena holistically, not only to explain cause-and-effect relationships but also to explore the meaning behind public institutions' digital communication actions and policies.

This research was conducted at public institutions that actively use social media to communicate and provide information to the public. The locations were selected purposively, taking into account the level of digital communication activity, public information transparency, and the consistency of the institution's social media management. The location selection was also based on its relevance to the phenomenon of public relations innovation in the digital era, in which social media has become a primary instrument for building the reputations of public institutions. By studying locations with high levels of digital interaction, researchers observed communication patterns, innovation strategies, and reputation management mechanisms in real-world settings, thereby providing a representative picture of digital public relations practices in the Indonesian public sector.

Research data were obtained through in-depth interviews, non-participatory observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with informants who play strategic roles in digital public relations management, such as heads of public relations, social media administrators, and public communications staff. These techniques were used to explore perceptions, strategies, and challenges faced in digital reputation management. Non-participatory observation was conducted on institutional communication activities on various social media platforms to identify interaction patterns, publication content, and responses to public issues. Meanwhile, documentation studies included analysis of public relations activity reports, public

communications guidelines, and relevant digital posts. All data were collected systematically to support the validity of the analysis.

Data analysis was conducted using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana model, which comprises three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction was performed by selecting, focusing on, and simplifying data from interviews, observations, and documentation to ensure relevance to the research focus: digital public relations innovation and reputation building in public institutions. Data display was performed by grouping information into thematic narratives covering digital communication patterns, innovation strategies, and organisational reputation dynamics. Verification or conclusion drawing was carried out by interpreting the data, connecting it to digital public relations theory, and drawing preliminary conclusions, which were then retested against field findings. This process was carried out interactively and iteratively until valid and meaningful analysis results were obtained.

To ensure data validity, this study employed source and method triangulation techniques. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from various sources, including public relations officers, social media administrators, and institutional public documents. Triangulation was carried out by comparing interview, observation, and documentation results to ensure the consistency and accuracy of the information. Furthermore, the researchers applied the principles of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability to maintain the objectivity of the findings. The validation process involved member checking and discussions with public communication experts to avoid interpretation bias. Thus, the research results are scientifically sound and reflect the reality of digital public relations practices in public institutions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Transforming the Role of Public Relations from Communicator to Digital Reputation Manager

The transformation of the public relations role from communicator to digital reputation manager is a strategic shift in the function of public relations in the digital era. Public relations is no longer merely a one-way information provider but has evolved into a two-way communication manager focused on strengthening public reputation. In the context of public institutions, public relations now plays an active role in building interactive relationships with the public through social media, creating positive narratives, and sustainably managing public perception. This transformation also demands new skills, such as public data analysis, digital crisis management, and the implementation of participatory communication strategies. Thus, digital public relations has become central to managing an institution's image and reputation, ensuring

credibility, transparency, and adaptability to the changing communication environment.

The first informant, the Head of the Public Relations Subdivision at a local government institution, revealed a significant shift in public relations work patterns: "Previously, we only issued press releases or news about activities. Now, the public wants to see the institution's activities on social media and expects to interact with it there. So we have to be responsive and active there." Interviews indicate that public relations is no longer a passive function as a formal messenger but has become a key actor in building two-way relationships with the public. Public engagement in the digital space forces public relations to adopt more responsive, open, and interactive communication practices. This transformation marks a shift from information-oriented to reputation-oriented public relations.

A second informant, a Public Institution Social Media Administrator, reinforced these findings by emphasising the importance of public interaction as a strategy for maintaining the institution's reputation: "We do not just post news, but also read public comments, answer questions, and even adapt content to their responses. That is how we maintain the institution's image, ensuring it remains close and trustworthy." Interview results indicate that digital public relations now serves a dual function: both as an information provider and as a facilitator of public dialogue. This participatory approach demonstrates a shift in public relations values from simply controlling information to building public engagement and a sense of ownership in the institution. This aligns with the theory of symmetrical two-way communication (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), which emphasises the balance between organisational interests and public satisfaction as the basis for building a positive reputation.

Conceptually, these interview results indicate that the public relations function has shifted from an administrative to a strategic orientation focused on relationship management. Thus, public relations serves as a liaison between institutions and the public, maintaining the organisation's credibility, transparency, and legitimacy in the eyes of the digital public.

Observations of public institutions' social media activity support these interview findings. Researchers found that official institutional accounts are no longer limited to publishing news about activities; they also feature interactive visual content, such as educational videos, infographics, and live streams of public activities. Each informative and interactive post garners higher engagement than formal, one-way posts. For example, posts that invite public discussion or directly answer public questions receive positive responses in the form of high comment counts and shares. This indicates that the public values institutions that demonstrate openness and responsiveness in digital communications.

Based on interviews and observations, the transformation of the public relations role from communicator to digital reputation manager reflects a

fundamental shift in modern public relations practice. The emerging pattern demonstrates three main dimensions of transformation: Technology Adaptation and Digital Competence, where public relations professionals master various digital platforms to interact directly with the public; and Two-Way Interaction and Public Participation, which strengthen emotional connections and build public trust in the institution. Digital Reputation and Crisis Management, namely the ability of public relations to maintain an institution's credibility through transparency, responsiveness, and a positive narrative.

This pattern demonstrates that the success of public relations is measured not only by the quantity of information disseminated but also by the quality of interactions with the public. By integrating digital technology and a participatory approach, public relations plays a strategic role in maintaining the reputation of public institutions, ensuring they remain credible, adaptable, and trusted amidst the ever-evolving dynamics of digital communication.

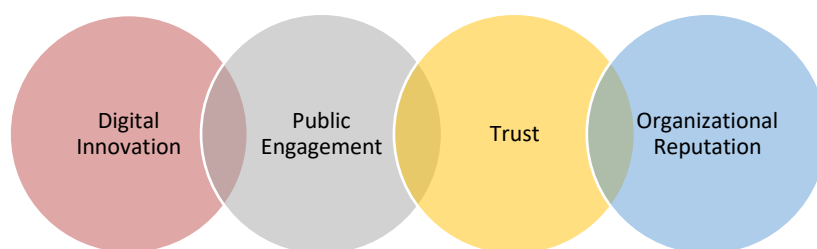


Figure 1. Transforming the Role of Public Relations from Communicator to Digital Reputation Manager

Social Media as a Strategic Space for Building Public Reputation

In this research, social media is operationalised as a strategic public communication space used by institutions to build, maintain, and strengthen their digital organisational reputation. Social media is no longer merely a one-way information channel but has evolved into a transparent, participatory, and real-time arena for public interaction. In this digital space, the reputation of public institutions is shaped by public perceptions of how they communicate, respond to issues, and display their institutional values. Thus, social media has become a key instrument in building emotional bonds and trust between public institutions and the public, while also reflecting the organisation's image in the eyes of a modern, critical and responsive public.

The first informant, the Head of the Public Relations Subdivision of a Regional Government Institution, emphasised that social media now plays a central role in shaping public perception: "The public now judges an institution's performance more from its activity on social media. If we are slow to respond to issues or inactive in providing information, the public may perceive the institution as lacking transparency." Interview results indicate that social media has become a digital space for reputation where the consistency and speed of

communication determine institutional legitimacy. When public institutions provide information openly and promptly, it increases public trust. Conversely, delays in responding to public issues can undermine an institution's credibility in the eyes of the public, who rely on instant information from social media.

A second informant, a Public Institution Social Media Administrator, stated that social media also serves as a platform for building emotional closeness between the institution and the public: "We try to present content that is not rigid, such as holiday greetings, videos of social activities, or live Q&A sessions. The public has more trust in institutions that feel 'human' and open." Interview results indicate that this strategy emphasises the humanising role of public institutions in the digital space. By presenting empathy, public engagement increases because people feel recognised and involved. This reinforces relationship management theory (Ledingham, 2003), which states that public reputation grows from the quality of emotional relationships and ongoing two-way communication between an organisation and its publics.

Table 1. Interview Results and Social Media Indicators as a Public Reputation Space

Informant Position	Interview Excerpt	Digital Reputation Indicators
Head of Public Relations Subdivision	"People now judge an institution's performance more from its social media activity."	An institution's reputation is shaped by the speed, openness, and consistency of digital communications.
Social Media Administrator for Public Institutions	"We strive to present content that isn't rigid, so the public feels the institution is more humane and open."	Humanizing the institution and increasing emotional closeness through digital interaction and participation.

The results in the Table above demonstrate that social media is not simply a tool for disseminating information but also a strategic arena for building public perception of an institution's credibility. Both informants emphasised that public reputation is now built on continual digital interactions. Public relations is required not only to disseminate information actively but also to be responsive to the dynamics of public opinion. Speed and transparency in response are important indicators in building public trust.

Furthermore, social media allows public institutions to display a humanistic and adaptive side to the social context. Through interactive content, public dialogue, and empathetic narratives, institutions can foster a sense of emotional closeness, thereby strengthening their reputation. This means that the success of digital public relations is measured not only by how frequently an institution posts content, but also by how well it creates meaningful communication experiences for the digital public.

Based on the interview results, the researchers describe the process of building public reputation on social media as follows: Digital exposure, through an institution's active presence on various digital platforms, is the first step in

shaping public perception. Public interaction and response, through community involvement in comments, responses, or participation in digital campaigns, serve as mechanisms for strengthening reputation. Digital credibility and trust, in the form of reputation, are built when an institution demonstrates message consistency, transparency, and responsiveness in addressing public issues. These results confirm that digital reputation is dynamic and participatory. Reputation cannot be managed unilaterally; instead, it results from reciprocal relationships built between institutions and the public in an open digital space.

Observations of official public institution accounts indicate that social media activity is now more focused on generating measurable public engagement. Researchers found that interactive posts, such as public education videos, digital quizzes, and live Q&As, received higher participation rates than formal posts, such as activity reports. Institutions also appeared to respond actively to public comments in a relaxed, conversational style. This pattern demonstrates that digital reputation is formed from a combination of informative communication and emotional closeness. Thus, social media has become a strategic tool for fostering public trust while strengthening an institution's professional image.

Based on interviews and observations, the formation of public reputation through social media follows a three-dimensional pattern: Transparency and Consistency of Communication, where speed and openness are the foundation of public trust. Participation and Emotional Interaction, where closeness and human responsiveness strengthen the relationship between the institution and the public. Digital Credibility and Legitimacy, where reputation is built through positive perceptions born of two-way communication and public engagement.

This pattern demonstrates that the reputation of public institutions in the digital era results from a combination of information transparency and the quality of social interactions in the digital space. Public relations plays a role not only as a messenger but also as a guardian of the narrative and a manager of trust, maintaining alignment between the institution's values and public expectations. By optimising the role of social media as a space for public dialogue, public institutions can strengthen their credibility, participation, and sustainability in the eyes of the public.

Digital Public Relations Innovation Through Analytical Approaches and Information Transparency

Digital public relations innovation, operationalised through an analytical approach and information transparency in this study, is a renewed communication strategy for public institutions, utilising data technology and public information disclosure to strengthen the organisation's reputation. This approach positions public relations as a strategic actor that not only delivers messages but also analyses public behaviour and opinion through social media analytics, big data, and social listening tools. Furthermore, the principle of

transparency serves as the moral and professional foundation of public relations, helping maintain public trust. Through data transparency, published performance reports, and evidence-based communication, public institutions strive to create a credible, accountable, and participatory image in the eyes of the digital public.

Based on interviews, digital public relations innovation, when approached analytically, demonstrates a shift in the role of public relations from conventional communicators to data-driven communicators. The first informant emphasised that analysing public data on social media helps institutions gauge public opinion and anticipate potential communication crises. This demonstrates that digital analytics forms the basis for strategic, evidence-based communication decisions. By understanding public sentiment patterns, public relations can adjust communication narratives to be more adaptive, factual, and empathetic to public needs. This data analysis-based innovation demonstrates that public relations has integrated technology, strategy, and social psychology to build a credible digital reputation.

The second informant highlighted information transparency as a fundamental element in building public trust. This principle emphasises the importance of an institution's openness to the public regarding data, activity reports, and policy outcomes. Transparency creates positive perceptions and fosters trust in the institution because the public can verify information directly through official digital channels. These results demonstrate that openness is not only an ethical aspect of communication but also a reputational strategy. By establishing a transparent communication system, public institutions not only enhance credibility but also strengthen their social legitimacy in the eyes of the digital community.

Observations of public institutions' social media activity indicate that content that provides transparent information —such as financial reports, activity results, or responses to public issues —generates higher engagement than purely promotional posts. Researchers also found that institutions that use public interaction data analysis tend to respond more quickly to issues and to determine digital campaign strategies more accurately. This practice confirms that combining data analysis with transparency fosters a strong, sustainable reputation. An institution's reputation is no longer simply a product of image building, but rather a consequence of accurate, transparent, and data-driven public communication.

Based on the overall research findings, an analytical approach and transparency of information are two key pillars of digital public relations innovation. Public data analysis enables public relations to gauge public perception in real time, while transparency builds long-term trust through information transparency and institutional accountability.

The patterns emerging from this research data illustrate that the success of digital public relations innovation is shaped by three main dimensions: Data-

Driven Communication: Public relations utilises analytical technology to understand public opinion and respond to strategic issues. Digital Transparency and Accountability: Institutions open access to public information as a form of social responsibility. Public Trust and Legitimacy: The combination of analysis and transparency creates a credible and trusted institutional image.

Thus, public relations innovation in the digital era lies not only in technical skills in managing social media, but also in a mature communication strategy that combines data, openness, and public trust. This transformation marks the evolution of public relations as a digital reputation manager oriented toward values, evidence, and transparency.

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that the role of public relations in the digital era has undergone a fundamental transformation, from being merely a communicator delivering messages to a strategic digital reputation manager. This finding aligns with Grunig & Hunt's theory of two-way symmetrical communication, which emphasises the importance of a dialogic relationship between organisations and their publics (Grunig, 2021). However, unlike the classical context that focused on direct interaction, this study's results indicate that the transformation of the public relations role is now heavily influenced by the dynamics of the digital space, which demand speed, interactivity, and transparency (Agarwal, 2024). This shift confirms that public relations no longer works solely on the level of information dissemination but has become a reputation manager, playing a role in building public trust sustainably through social media and digital technology.

In the context of social media as a strategic space for building public reputation, this study supports Kent & Taylor's view that digital media provides organisations with opportunities to create participatory, authentic relationships with their publics (Vural et al., 2022). The research findings show that platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube serve not only as tools for disseminating messages but also as arenas for emotional interaction that shape public perceptions of an institution's credibility. However, these findings also indicate a difference from previous literature. While previous research focused more on the effectiveness of digital communication, this study emphasises the strategic role of social media in building long-term legitimacy and trust. Thus, a public organisation's reputation is no longer solely a result of communication construction, but instead of the public's digital experience with the institution's consistent and transparent communicative behaviour.

Furthermore, research findings on digital public relations innovation, grounded in an analytical, information-transparency approach, demonstrate that public communication strategies are increasingly data-driven. This reinforces the findings of studies (Pinto, 2024; Mohamed, 2022; Hidayat et al., 2024) that public relations' ability to analyse public sentiment and utilise social media analytics is

crucial for shaping adaptive communication policies. However, this research finding makes a new contribution: information transparency directly affects public legitimacy. Data transparency and the publication of an institution's work results shape positive perceptions and public trust (Abas, 2025). Thus, public reputation is no longer solely the result of image strategies, but rather the accumulation of an institution's openness, responsiveness, and credibility in managing digital communications ethically and evidence-based.

In terms of theoretical implications, this research expands the theoretical framework of symmetrical communication by adding analytical dimensions and digital transparency as new indicators in building organisation-public relations. This approach enriches modern public relations theory by demonstrating that public reputation is formed through the integration of data analysis skills and communication honesty (Westermann, 2021; Fawaid et al., 2025). Meanwhile, in practical terms, these findings guide public institutions in reorganising their public relations functions to be more adaptive to digital developments. Public relations officers are required not only to master technical communication skills but also data literacy, digital ethics, and the ability to manage public issues in real-time on social media. A data-driven, transparent approach has been proven to improve communication effectiveness and strengthen the institution's position as a credible actor in the digital public sphere. Overall, this discussion demonstrates that the success of public relations in the digital era is measured not only by the ability to create compelling messages but also by the extent to which an institution maintains integrity, transparency, and participation in digital communications. Social media has become a strategic space where public reputation is built through authentic and responsive engagement (Moses, 2024). Meanwhile, analytics-based innovation strengthens public relations' ability to read public opinion trends, while information transparency fosters sustainable trust. These findings confirm that public relations that combine communication strategies, digital technology, and integrity values will be a key pillar in strengthening organisational legitimacy in the competitive, participatory digital era.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the transformative role of digital public relations in building and maintaining the reputations of public organisations. Social media has evolved from a mere information dissemination tool to a strategic platform for public dialogue, participation, and trust-building. The key takeaway is that a public organisation's reputation is shaped through transparent, authentic, and responsive interactions, rather than one-way communication. Public relations that adapt to technological changes, analyse data, and maintain ethical, open communication will foster greater trust and respect from the public.

The strength of this study lies in its contribution to expanding the concept of two-way symmetrical communication into the digital realm, introducing data-

driven communication and digital transparency as essential factors in reputation management. This research also reinforces participatory communication theory in the digital era, offering a strategic model for public institutions to optimise social media, sentiment analysis, and transparency. However, the study's limitations include its qualitative approach and lack of empirical field research. Future research should adopt a mixed-methods approach and explore digital ethics, social media algorithms, and AI's impact on public organisations' reputation management.

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