

Digital Public Relations and Trust Management: Toward an Interactive Model for Strengthening Relationships with Audiences in the Platform Era

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Abstract:

Institutional communication is undergoing a rapid transformation driven by the growing proliferation of digital platforms, which have reshaped the nature of relationships between organizations and their audiences and introduced new patterns of communication based on interaction, dialogue, transparency, and responsiveness.

In this context, digital public relations has emerged as a strategic instrument for managing trust and cultivating sustainable relationships with audiences, extending beyond the conventional functions of information dissemination and organizational image enhancement. This study aims to analyze the role of digital public relations in managing trust and strengthening relationships between organizations and their audiences in the platform era, with particular emphasis on digital interaction, transparency, credibility, responsiveness, participation, and audience listening.

The study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach to examine organizations' communication practices across digital platforms and to identify how these practices contribute to building trust and strengthening relationships with audiences. The findings indicate that effective trust management in digital environments depends largely on organizations' ability to move beyond one-way communication toward an interactive model grounded in dialogue, participation, and sustained responsiveness.

Accordingly, the study proposes an interactive model of digital public relations centered on listening, dialogue, responsiveness, and participation as interconnected mechanisms for building trust and fostering sustainable relationships with audiences.

Keywords : Digital Public Relations ; Trust Management ; Interactive Communication ; Digital Platforms ; Audiences ; Transparency; Digital Participation ; Credibility.

Introduction

The rapid transformations taking place in the digital communication environment have generated a new reality that has fundamentally reshaped the nature of relationships between organizations and their audiences. Public relations is no longer primarily dependent on traditional media and one-way communication patterns; rather, digital platforms have emerged as strategic spaces for performing communication functions and managing dialogue and interaction with diverse audience groups. This transformation has shifted public relations from a predominant focus on message dissemination and control over information flows toward a more interactive communication logic grounded in audience listening, responsiveness to audience needs, and active audience involvement in the communication process, thereby making organization–audience relationships more dynamic, reciprocal, and sustainable.

Against this backdrop, digital public relations has emerged as a strategic extension of the public relations function within the digital environment, capitalizing on the affordances of digital platforms to build and manage relationships, strengthen organizational presence, enhance organizational image and reputation, and facilitate direct communication with audiences. Organizational success is no longer determined solely by the ability to reach audiences and disseminate messages; rather, it increasingly depends on the ability to cultivate relationships based on dialogue, trust, and participation, and to transform digital interaction into sustainable communicative and relational value.

Trust constitutes one of the fundamental pillars of organization–audience relationships, serving as an intangible resource that contributes to organizational acceptance, credibility, and the continuity of relationships with audiences.

However, building trust in digital environments has become increasingly complex due to the rapid circulation of information, the multiplicity of information sources, the proliferation of user-generated content, and the possibility of immediate interaction with, evaluation of, and public scrutiny of organizational performance.

Audiences now have greater capacity to express their attitudes toward organizations, share their experiences, reproduce organizational content, and compare organizational performance with that of other organizations. Consequently, digital trust has become increasingly contingent upon levels of transparency, credibility, responsiveness, and the quality of interaction.

Digital platforms have also provided public relations with extensive opportunities for managing relationships with audiences through the strategic use of digital content, social listening, direct dialogue, responses to comments and inquiries, crisis management, information correction, monitoring audience attitudes, and fostering audience participation. Nevertheless, merely maintaining an active or extensive presence on digital platforms does not necessarily guarantee successful trust building.

The effectiveness of digital public relations depends largely on how these platforms are utilized to establish genuine communication grounded in reciprocal interaction, responsiveness, transparency, and participation, rather than simply broadcasting organizational messages in a one-way direction.

Accordingly, there is a need to reconceptualize digital public relations as a strategic process of relationship management and trust building, rather than merely as the use of digital tools and platforms to perform the traditional functions of public relations.

Effective digital relationships require organizations to listen continuously to their audiences, understand their interests and expectations, engage with them, respond to their concerns, provide information in a transparent and reliable manner, and create meaningful opportunities for participation. Such practices contribute to shifting the organization–audience relationship from episodic communication toward an enduring relationship grounded in trust, reciprocity, and continuity.

In this context, developing an interactive model of digital public relations represents both a scholarly and practical necessity for understanding how the interactive affordances of digital platforms can be transformed into effective mechanisms for trust management and relationship enhancement. This conceptualization views the digital relationship as an ongoing and interconnected communication process that begins with digital listening and audience understanding, proceeds through interaction and dialogue, is followed by responsiveness and transparency, and ultimately

culminates in participation and trust building. Such an approach provides a basis for establishing more sustainable, reciprocal, and effective organizational relationships with audiences.

Accordingly, this study seeks to analyze the role of digital public relations in managing trust and strengthening relationships between organizations and their audiences in the platform era. It also aims to identify the key interactive strategies and mechanisms that can be employed to achieve this purpose, ultimately proposing an interactive model that links digital public relations practices with the foundations of trust building and the sustainability of organization–audience relationships.

Research Problem

Against the backdrop of the transformations imposed by the digital environment on the practice of public relations and on the nature of relationships between organizations and their audiences, the research problem of this study is articulated through the following overarching question:

How does digital public relations contribute to managing trust and strengthening relationships between organizations and their audiences in the platform era, and what are the components of an interactive model capable of fostering more sustainable organization–audience relationships?

Study Axes

To address this research problem, the study examines the following axes:

1. Digital Public Relations in the New Communication Environment: Transformations and Challenges.
2. Organizational Trust in the Platform Era: Concept and Determinants.
3. Digital Interaction and Participation and Their Role in Strengthening Relationships with Audiences.
4. Digital Public Relations Strategies for Building and Managing Trust.
5. Toward an Interactive Model of Digital Public Relations and Trust Management.

Axis One: Digital Public Relations in the New Communication Environment: Transformations and Challenges

The widespread proliferation of digital platforms has brought about a fundamental transformation in the contemporary communication environment. Organizations no longer operate within a communication space characterized by the transmission of messages to stable and clearly defined audiences; rather, they increasingly engage with a dynamic environment marked by the rapid circulation of information, the multiplicity of its sources, the diversity of communication channels, and the growing involvement of audiences in producing, disseminating, and evaluating content. These transformations have directly affected the public relations function, which has gradually moved away from a traditional communication model centered on information dissemination and image management toward a more interactive practice focused on building, managing, and sustaining relationships within an increasingly dynamic digital environment.

1. Definition of Digital Public Relations

Digital public relations represents one of the most significant transformations in contemporary public relations practice, particularly in the context of the rapid development of communication technologies and the widespread adoption of the Internet and digital platforms. The digital environment has provided organizations with new opportunities to communicate directly with their audiences, manage their reputations, monitor audience attitudes and expectations, respond to their needs, and cultivate relationships grounded in trust and continuous interaction.

Digital public relations can be defined as the strategic use of digital media and online communication tools to engage with audiences, manage organizational reputation, and build mutually trusting relationships between an organization and its internal and external environments. Some scholars describe it as **“technology-enabled communication activities aimed at establishing positive relationships between organizations and their audiences through direct and continuous interaction.”**

It can also be conceptualized as **“the process of planning and implementing communication strategies through digital platforms to influence public opinion and develop a distinctive organizational image.”** (Hunt, 1984, p. 367)

1. From These Definitions to an Operational Definition

Building on the preceding definitions, it becomes clear that digital public relations is not limited to the mere use of modern technologies for disseminating information. Rather, it represents a transformation in the underlying philosophy of public relations practice, whereby digital platforms become spaces for interaction, dialogue, listening, and participation, alongside their traditional functions related to image and reputation management.

Within the framework of this study, digital public relations is operationally defined as **a strategic communication practice that utilizes digital platforms and tools to build and manage a continuous, interactive relationship between an organization and its audiences, based on listening, dialogue, transparency, credibility, responsiveness, and participation, thereby contributing to trust building and strengthening the sustainability of the relationship between the two parties.**

2. Characteristics of Digital Public Relations

Digital public relations is characterized by a set of distinctive features that differentiate it from traditional public relations practice. The most prominent characteristics include the following:

2.1 Interactivity

Digital platforms facilitate two-way communication between organizations and their audiences, enabling audiences to ask questions, post comments, express opinions, and offer suggestions or criticisms, while allowing organizations to respond and engage directly.

2.2 Speed and Immediacy

Digital platforms enable information to be disseminated and responses to events, questions, and complaints to be delivered rapidly. This has increased audience expectations for immediate responsiveness, particularly during crises and other sensitive communication situations.

2.3 Broad Reach

Digital public relations enables organizations to reach large and geographically and socially diverse audiences. It can transcend the traditional boundaries of communication and facilitate access to new audience groups at relatively lower costs.

2.4 Transparency

The digital environment places greater demands on organizations to provide information with clarity and openness. It also enables audiences to compare information and verify it against multiple sources, making transparency and credibility fundamental elements in the construction of trust.

2.5 Measurability

The digital environment provides analytical and measurement tools that enable organizations to monitor levels of reach, interaction, participation, and audience attitudes. These capabilities help

organizations evaluate the outcomes of their communication activities and refine their communication strategies accordingly.

2.6 Continuity

Digital platforms enable continuous communication between organizations and their audiences. Communication is therefore no longer confined to campaigns or specific occasions but becomes an ongoing process based on monitoring, interaction, and responsiveness.

2.7 Participation

Audiences are no longer merely recipients of information; they can produce, redistribute, evaluate, and interact with content. This makes them active participants in shaping an organization's digital image and reputation.

3. From Traditional Public Relations to Digital Public Relations

In its traditional form, public relations has been associated with a range of communication functions aimed at building a positive organizational image, establishing balanced relationships with diverse audiences, and managing the flow of information between organizations and their surrounding environments. For a long time, such practice relied primarily on mass media, journalism, media relations, and direct communication as key means of reaching and influencing audiences.

The emergence of the digital environment, however, has profoundly reshaped this function. The Internet and social platforms have enabled organizations to communicate directly and instantaneously with audiences without necessarily relying on traditional media intermediaries. At the same time, audiences have gained the ability to respond to, comment on, participate in, and reproduce organizational messages, making the communication process more interactive and less constrained by one-way communication.

From this perspective, digital public relations can be understood as a strategic extension of public relations within the digital environment, through which organizations employ digital platforms and technologies to manage communication with their audiences, build relationships, monitor audience attitudes, respond to their needs, and strengthen organizational presence and credibility.

Accordingly, digital transformation should not be reduced to simply transferring public relations activities from traditional media to online platforms. Rather, it represents a transformation in the very nature of public relations practice and in the underlying logic of the relationship between organizations and their audiences.

4. Digital Platforms and the Reshaping of Organization–Audience Relationships

Digital platforms have become essential spaces for the development and management of relationships between organizations and their audiences. They not only facilitate the dissemination of news, information, and services but also provide an environment for interaction, dialogue, participation, and evaluation. Audiences have consequently become active participants in the communication process, with the ability to comment on organizational messages, redistribute them, criticize them, compare them with content produced by other organizations, and even contribute to shaping organizational image and digital reputation.

This development has blurred the traditional boundaries between message producers and recipients. Organizations are no longer the sole actors capable of producing discourse about themselves; audiences, users, influencers, and digital media have also become participants in shaping meaning, image, and reputation.

Consequently, relationship management in the digital environment requires organizations to develop a greater capacity to monitor what is being said about them, understand audience attitudes, and engage with audience interests and concerns in a timely manner.

This is where **digital listening** becomes a fundamental component of digital public relations. It enables organizations to monitor discussions, comments, and trends associated with them, understand audience expectations and concerns, and identify potential crises before they escalate. Direct interaction can likewise transform audiences from mere recipients of information into active partners in the communication process.

5. From One-Way Communication to Interactive Communication

Interactivity represents one of the most significant transformations that the digital environment has introduced into public relations. In the traditional model, organizations exercised considerable control over the production of messages, their timing, and their distribution channels, while audiences largely assumed the role of recipients.

In the digital environment, however, communication has become more open and reciprocal. Audiences can respond to messages immediately, ask questions, provide suggestions, express opinions, and share their experiences.

Accordingly, the value of a digital platform for an organization can no longer be measured solely by its capacity to reach large numbers of users; it must also be assessed in terms of its ability to establish meaningful communication with them. An organization's presence on a digital platform does not, in itself, guarantee effective public relations. Digital presence may remain merely symbolic if it is limited to publishing news and announcements without monitoring audience responses, answering inquiries, or addressing criticism.

Interactivity, therefore, becomes a strategic component of digital public relations because it facilitates relationships based on dialogue and reciprocal responsiveness rather than merely on information dissemination. The quality, speed, and credibility of interaction can also influence how audiences perceive an organization and the level of trust they place in it.

6. From Image Management to Relationship Management

Digital transformation has also prompted a reconsideration of the fundamental objective of public relations. While traditional practice placed considerable emphasis on managing the organization's image, the digital environment has generated a greater need to manage ongoing relationships with audiences.

Organizational image is no longer an outcome that organizations can fully control or construct on their own; rather, it has become the product of multiple interactions taking place across the digital environment. A single negative experience with an organization can be transformed into widely circulated content, just as a positive experience can spread rapidly and reinforce its reputation.

Relationship management with audiences therefore requires continuity in communication, the capacity for active listening, rapid responsiveness, transparency in providing information, and the willingness to acknowledge and address problems when they arise.

In this context, digital public relations increasingly resembles a strategic practice of relationship management rather than a purely informational function focused on message dissemination. Organizations are required not merely to speak to their audiences but also to listen to them, engage with them, respond to their concerns, and provide meaningful opportunities for participation.

7. Challenges Facing Digital Public Relations in the New Environment

Despite the opportunities provided by the digital environment, digital public relations faces a range of challenges that make audience relationship management increasingly complex. Among the most prominent are the rapid dissemination of information, the difficulty of controlling circulating content, the multiplicity of information sources, the proliferation of misleading information, the intensification of public criticism, and growing audience expectations for immediate responses.

Credibility and transparency have consequently become among the most important conditions for successful digital communication. Audiences can compare organizational information with multiple sources, identify inconsistencies rapidly, and recirculate them on a broad scale.

Therefore, attempts to improve organizational image through promotional messages alone may be less effective than cultivating relationships based on accurate information, clarity, responsiveness, and the willingness to acknowledge mistakes when they occur.

Digital crisis management has also emerged as a critical concern. A relatively limited event can rapidly develop into a widely disseminated crisis through extensive sharing, commenting, and online circulation. Digital public relations must therefore develop mechanisms for early monitoring, rapid response, the provision of reliable information, and sustained dialogue with audiences during and after crises.

8. Digital Public Relations as an Approach to Trust Management

Building on the foregoing discussion, it can be argued that digital transformation has not merely changed the tools of public relations; it has also redefined the nature of the relationship that organizations seek to establish with their audiences. In digital environments, trust is not formed solely through official organizational messages but also through the cumulative interactions and experiences audiences have with organizations across different platforms.

Accordingly, trust management is closely associated with the capacity of digital public relations to create a communication environment characterized by transparency, credibility, effective listening, rapid responsiveness, and audience participation in dialogue.

The more organizations move beyond mere digital presence toward sustained and interactive communication, the greater their capacity to develop more stable and sustainable relationships with their audiences.

Axis Two: Determinants of Building Organizational Trust in the Digital Environment and Public Relations Objectives Related to Trust Management

An organization's ability to build and maintain trust is closely linked to the extent to which public relations successfully achieves a set of communicative and relational objectives that respond to the evolving needs and expectations of its audiences. As audience needs become more diverse, their interests expand, and their expectations of the organization increase, the functions and objectives of public relations likewise become broader and more diversified, extending beyond the mere dissemination of information to building relationships based on continuous communication, mutual understanding, and reciprocal trust. (Bruning, 1998, pp. 55–65)

1. Building a Positive Reputation and Strengthening the Organization's Image

Public relations contributes to building a positive organizational reputation and strengthening the organization's image among its audiences through effective communication, the provision of information about its activities and achievements, and the highlighting of its contributions to the social and economic environment in which it operates. Public relations also plays an important role

in crisis management and the management of communication risks, thereby helping the organization preserve its reputation, particularly in circumstances where its image is subjected to doubt, criticism, or public scrutiny. (Broom, 2012, p. 45)

In the digital environment, organizational reputation has gained even greater importance due to the rapid dissemination of information, comments, and evaluations concerning organizations. Organizations are no longer able to exercise complete control over how they are perceived by their audiences, as audiences have become active participants in shaping and recirculating organizational images through comments, shares, ratings, and user-generated content. Consequently, digital reputation has become the outcome of continuous interaction between an organization's official discourse and the experiences communicated by its audiences.

The organizational landscape across different societies also reflects a growing emphasis on building strong relationships with customers and audiences in ways that help establish a positive organizational image and strengthen the organization's position. However, a positive image cannot be sustained independently of trust; the sustainability of organizational reputation requires the organization's communication discourse to remain consistent with its actual practices.

.2 Improving Communication with Audiences and Building Their Trust

Public relations performs a fundamental role as a link between the organization and its various audiences. It facilitates communication with employees, customers, investors, partners, media organizations, government entities, and other relevant stakeholders. It also helps identify audience needs, expectations, and attitudes, thereby enabling the organization to develop its practices and services in ways that are aligned with these expectations.

This role becomes increasingly important in the digital environment, where digital platforms enable organizations to communicate directly and continuously with their audiences, while also allowing them to monitor audience interests, complaints, and suggestions more rapidly and accurately. Through monitoring and digital listening tools, public relations practitioners can identify audience trends and analyze their interactions, making communication not merely a means of conveying information but also a mechanism for understanding audiences and building trust-based relationships.

.3 Enhancing Trust and Credibility

Trust and credibility are among the central objectives of public relations, as a stable relationship between an organization and its audiences cannot be based on communication alone. It also requires audiences to perceive the organization as honest, transparent, and trustworthy.

Public relations contributes to achieving this objective by providing accurate information, maintaining clarity in communication, responding to audience inquiries, addressing rather than disregarding criticism, and ensuring consistency between what the organization communicates and what it actually does. As the level of trust in an organization increases, audiences become more willing to interact with it, accept its information, and maintain their relationship with it.

In the digital environment, credibility has become particularly sensitive because audiences are increasingly able to verify information and compare it across multiple sources. Digital public relations is therefore required to adopt more transparent and responsive communication practices, as any inconsistency or misleading information can spread rapidly and undermine organizational trust and digital reputation.

.4 Attracting Audiences and Maintaining Relationship Continuity

Public relations is not limited to reaching new audiences; it also seeks to retain existing audiences and develop sustainable relationships with them. This can be achieved by understanding their needs, improving their experiences in dealing with the organization, and responding to their complaints and problems rapidly and effectively.

In the digital environment, relationships with audiences have become more continuous, as organizations can communicate with them on an ongoing basis through digital platforms and respond directly to their questions and feedback. Effective complaint handling should therefore not be viewed merely as a service function, but also as a communication opportunity through which organizations can demonstrate their concern for their audiences and strengthen trust in the organization.

.5 Fostering Innovation and Creativity through Audience Interaction

Public relations can contribute to fostering innovation and creativity within organizations by providing channels that facilitate the exchange of ideas, suggestions, and experiences. This function is not limited to internal communication but can also extend to external audiences, who have gained greater opportunities through digital platforms to provide suggestions and feedback and to evaluate products and services.

From this perspective, audiences should not be viewed merely as consumers of organizational messages, but also as sources of information and ideas that can help organizations improve their performance. This dimension makes digital participation an important mechanism for developing a more interactive relationship between organizations and their audiences.

.6 Supporting Social Responsibility and Strengthening Organizational Legitimacy

Public relations plays a role in highlighting an organization's commitment to social responsibility by communicating its social, environmental, and humanitarian initiatives and activities. Digital platforms can broaden the reach of such practices by enabling organizations to present their initiatives, facilitate interaction around them, and involve audiences in their evaluation.

However, communication about social responsibility does not generate trust merely through the promotion of initiatives; its impact depends on the credibility of these practices and their consistency with the organization's actual behavior. Excessive attempts to present an idealized organizational image that does not correspond to reality may therefore produce the opposite effect, resulting in a loss of credibility.

.7 Strengthening Competitive Advantage through Relationships

Amid increasing competition among organizations, the relationships they establish with their audiences have become a strategic resource that can support their ability to differentiate themselves. Such differentiation is not determined solely by the product or service offered, but is also associated with the quality of the communication experience provided by the organization and the level of trust it enjoys among its audiences.

From this perspective, digital public relations can contribute to strengthening competitive advantage by establishing a credible digital presence, developing continuous dialogue with audiences, responding rapidly to their needs, and providing valuable content. These practices can help transform situational communication into a more sustainable and enduring relationship.

8. Applications of Digital Public Relations in Building Trust

Digital public relations takes different forms depending on the nature of the organization and its target audiences. In the **commercial sector**, organizations use digital platforms to promote products

and services, communicate with customers, respond to their inquiries and complaints, and build a positive image and reputation in the marketplace.

In the **government sector**, digital public relations focuses on strengthening communication with citizens, providing information and services, explaining decisions and policies, and responding to inquiries. These practices support transparency and contribute to building trust in government institutions and digital public services.

In the **nonprofit sector**, digital public relations can be employed to raise awareness of social issues, mobilize support, attract volunteers, communicate with donors and audiences, and highlight the impact of implemented initiatives and programs. The success of these practices ultimately depends on the level of transparency and credibility and on the organization's ability to demonstrate tangible outcomes.

9. The Relationship between Public Relations Objectives and Trust Management

The foregoing discussion demonstrates that the various objectives of public relations intersect directly with the process of managing organizational trust. Building a positive reputation supports favorable perceptions of the organization, while improving communication enables organizations to understand their audiences and respond to their needs. Credibility and transparency reinforce trust, while effective responses to complaints strengthen audiences' perceptions that the organization values and cares about them. At the same time, participation and interaction contribute to developing more continuous and sustainable relationships between organizations and their audiences.

Axis Three: Digital Interaction and Participation and Their Role in Strengthening Relationships with Audiences

Digital platforms have increasingly compelled organizations to move from one-way communication toward interactive communication based on dialogue, listening, participation, and responsiveness. Audiences are no longer merely recipients of organizational messages; rather, they have become active participants in producing, circulating, and evaluating content as well as assessing organizational performance. Consequently, interaction and participation have become among the most important mechanisms for building relationships and strengthening trust.

.1 Digital Interaction and Participation

Digital interaction refers to the reciprocal communication process between an organization and its audiences through digital platforms, involving dialogue, responses to inquiries and comments, and the handling of complaints and feedback. Digital participation, by contrast, extends beyond direct interaction to include audience involvement in expressing opinions, providing suggestions, participating in surveys and initiatives, and contributing to digital content.

These practices contribute to strengthening audiences' sense of being valued and involved, while also helping organizations understand their needs and expectations and improve their communication practices and services.

.2 Digital Listening and Responsiveness

Digital listening represents a fundamental entry point to interaction, as it enables organizations to monitor audience opinions, attitudes, complaints, and criticisms across digital platforms. However, effective listening cannot be achieved without an appropriate and timely response, particularly in an environment characterized by the rapid dissemination of information, crises, and rumors.

Accordingly, listening and responsiveness strengthen audiences' perception that the organization values and cares about them, while reinforcing its image as an organization capable of engaging in dialogue and assuming responsibility.

.3 Interaction and Participation in Building Trust

Trust is closely associated with audiences' experiences with an organization and with the nature of the communication it provides. The more open an organization is to dialogue, responsiveness, and participation, the greater the likelihood of developing positive perceptions toward it. Accordingly, interaction should not be measured solely by the number of likes and comments, but rather by its capacity to foster a relationship grounded in dialogue and trust.

.4 The Interactive Relationship between Organizational Image and Audience Trust

The relationship between organizational image and audience trust constitutes a central dimension of public relations, particularly in the digital environment, where organizational image is continuously shaped by organizational messages, audience experiences, and the content circulated by users across digital platforms. Accordingly, managing organizational image is closely intertwined with managing and maintaining trust. (Belkhiri, 2017, p. 55)

A positive organizational image grounded in credibility, transparency, and service quality can contribute to strengthening trust, whereas negative practices, crises, or misleading information may lead to its decline. Conversely, high levels of trust can reinforce the organization's image, as audiences who have greater trust in an organization are more likely to engage positively with it, recommend it to others, and share their experiences.

Accordingly, the relationship between organizational image and trust takes on a circular and interactive nature:

Positive Image → Audience Trust → Positive Interaction and Participation → Enhanced Digital Reputation → Stronger Image → More Sustainable Trust.

Therefore, digital public relations should not be limited to managing the organization's image; rather, it should move toward **relationship and trust management** by ensuring consistency between organizational communication and actual organizational practices.

This dimension can be incorporated into the proposed model as follows:

Organizational Practices → Organizational Image → Trust → Interaction and Participation → Digital Reputation → Image Reinforcement → Sustainable Organization–Audience Relationship.

Axis Four: Digital Public Relations Strategies for Building and Managing Trust

Digital public relations strategies encompass a set of planned communication practices employed by organizations across digital platforms to build positive and sustainable relationships with their audiences, enhance trust and credibility, and respond effectively to audience expectations and interactions. The shift toward the digital environment has expanded the functions of public relations, which are no longer limited to disseminating communication messages but have increasingly come to involve digital listening, dialogue, interaction, participation, reputation management, and crisis management on an ongoing basis. Accordingly, the success of digital public relations in building trust depends largely on its ability to move beyond one-way communication toward an interactive communication model grounded in participation and reciprocal responsiveness. (Tong, 2022, p. 23)

Within this context, the key strategies that organizations can adopt to enhance trust among their audiences can be identified as follows:

.1 Digital Transparency Strategy

Digital transparency is one of the most important strategies associated with trust building in the digital environment. It involves providing audiences with clear, accurate, and timely information through official websites and the organization's digital platforms. Transparency is not limited to communicating positive information; it also involves addressing mistakes openly, acknowledging them when they occur, and explaining the measures taken to remedy them.

This strategy is particularly important in the digital environment given the rapid circulation of information and audiences' ability to compare an organization's official communication with information and experiences circulating about it. Therefore, adopting clear and consistent communication and providing verifiable information can help reduce uncertainty and strengthen audiences' perceptions of the organization's credibility.

.2 Digital Interaction and Participation Strategy

This strategy seeks to transform audiences from mere recipients of communication messages into active participants in the communication process. This can be achieved by responding promptly to audience inquiries and comments, creating spaces for dialogue and discussion, and involving followers in opinion polls, surveys, competitions, and various digital activities.

Participation contributes to strengthening audiences' sense that the organization listens to their views and takes their needs into consideration. Consequently, digital interaction becomes a fundamental mechanism for developing a closer and more sustainable relationship between the organization and its audiences. From this perspective, the success of interaction should not be measured solely by the number of comments or likes, but rather by the organization's ability to translate audience interactions into actual responses and practices.

.3 Engaging and Purposeful Digital Content Strategy

Digital public relations also relies on producing diverse and engaging content that reflects the organization's identity, values, and mission through various formats, including articles, videos, infographics, images, digital stories, live broadcasts, and other forms of digital content.

The effectiveness of content is not determined solely by its visual appeal, but also by its ability to provide audiences with valuable information and respond to their interests and needs. Accordingly, tailoring content to the characteristics of different audience groups can enhance their perception of the relevance of communication messages and support credibility and trust in the organization.

Continuous digital content also enables the organization to demonstrate its values and practices in concrete ways, thereby contributing to greater consistency between what the organization communicates and what it actually does.

.4 Digital Reputation Building and Management Strategy

Digital reputation represents an important intangible asset for an organization, as it is shaped to a considerable extent by what audiences and users communicate about the organization across digital platforms. Accordingly, a digital reputation building strategy involves continuously monitoring what is being published about the organization, tracking audience trends, and identifying issues and content that may affect its image and reputation.

This strategy includes the use of digital monitoring and analytics tools, engagement with content related to the organization, and the development of positive partnerships with influencers, organizations, and credible stakeholders. Such practices can contribute to strengthening the

organization's digital presence and image and enhancing its reputation within the digital environment. (Neché, 2026, pp. 3405–3417)

However, digital reputation management should not become an attempt to control audience opinions. Rather, it should be grounded in listening, interaction, and responsiveness, as well as in addressing the underlying causes of the criticisms or concerns raised by audiences.

.5 Social Responsibility through Digital Platforms Strategy

Digital platforms contribute to demonstrating an organization's commitment to social responsibility by highlighting its community, humanitarian, and environmental initiatives and presenting them to audiences in ways that clarify their objectives, outcomes, and social impact.

The effectiveness of this strategy increases when social responsibility is reflected in the organization's actual practices rather than treated merely as a communication or promotional activity. Digital content related to community initiatives can enhance credibility when it reflects a genuine commitment to societal issues and contributes to building a positive organizational image grounded in responsibility and transparency.

.6 Digital Crisis Management Strategy

Crisis management has become one of the core functions of digital public relations, given the rapid dissemination of news, rumors, and inaccurate information across digital platforms. This strategy is based on preparing in advance for potential negative situations, establishing response mechanisms, and providing official communication channels that audiences can rely on during a crisis.

Digital crisis management also requires the rapid dissemination of accurate information, clarification of the organization's position, responses to misleading information, and avoidance of delays in communication. The absence of an organization from digital dialogue during a crisis may leave room for other sources to shape audience perceptions of the event.

Accordingly, digital crisis management is not aimed solely at minimizing potential damage to the organization's reputation; it also represents an opportunity to demonstrate the organization's ability to assume responsibility and communicate transparently. This, in turn, can support trust in the organization over the long term.

.7 Analytics and Measurement Strategy

Digital public relations requires a shift from communication decisions based primarily on intuition toward decisions grounded in data. Accordingly, organizations rely on digital analytics tools to monitor audience interactions and measure levels of reach, engagement, responsiveness, and satisfaction, as well as to analyze audience attitudes toward the organization and its communication campaigns.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) can be used to assess the effectiveness of digital activities, including engagement, responsiveness, reach, participation, sentiment and attitude analysis, as well as indicators of trust and satisfaction whenever these can be measured systematically.

The results of such analysis enable organizations to continuously refine their communication campaigns and content in accordance with audience needs, making measurement an integral part of an ongoing process of performance improvement and relationship building.

.8 Digital Sustainability Strategy

Digital sustainability is based on maintaining a continuous and organized communication presence across digital platforms rather than limiting communication to particular occasions or crises. Frequent

interruptions in communication with audiences may weaken their perception of the organization's continuity and communicative presence.

This strategy includes maintaining regular content publication, consistency in visual identity, and stability in the organization's core messages and values, while simultaneously retaining the ability to adapt content to changes in audience interests and developments in digital platforms.

Accordingly, digital sustainability contributes to developing a cumulative relationship with audiences, ensuring that trust does not become the outcome of a temporary communication campaign but rather the result of a continuous communication experience characterized by consistency, transparency, and responsiveness.

. Integration of Digital Public Relations Strategies and Trust Management

The analysis of the foregoing strategies demonstrates that trust building in the digital environment does not result from any single strategy, but rather from the integration of a set of communication practices. Transparency provides information and reduces uncertainty; interaction and participation give audiences an active role in the communication process; high-quality content contributes to strengthening credibility; reputation and crisis management help protect the relationship when it is threatened; analytics and measurement provide a basis for improving performance; and digital sustainability ensures the continuity of the relationship.

The following table illustrates the relationship between digital public relations strategies and their expected outcomes:

Number	Strategy	Expected Outcomes
01	Digital Transparency	Enhancing honesty and credibility through accurate information disclosure, increasing trust, and reducing rumors.
02	Digital Interaction and Participation	Involving audiences in the communication process, building stronger interactive relationships, and enhancing audience loyalty.
03	Engaging Digital Content	Providing diverse and innovative content tailored to audience needs, increasing engagement, and building a positive organizational image.
04	Digital Reputation Building and Management	Managing the organization's reputation and monitoring what is published about it, improving overall perceptions, and protecting the organization's reputation.
05	Social Responsibility through Digital Platforms	Highlighting the organization's role and contribution to society and strengthening its image as a socially responsible actor.

06	Digital Crisis Management	Addressing rumors and challenges rapidly and effectively, containing crises, and reducing their negative impacts.
07	Analytics and Measurement	Monitoring digital performance indicators and evaluating campaigns, thereby enabling strategies to be developed on the basis of accurate data.
08	Digital Sustainability	Ensuring continuity of the organization's digital presence and consolidating a consistent and trustworthy organizational

Source: Prepared by the Researcher

The table demonstrates that digital public relations strategies are interconnected in building trust and strengthening relationships with audiences. While **digital transparency** contributes to enhancing credibility and reducing rumors, **digital interaction and participation** engage audiences and foster stronger relationships. **Engaging digital content** helps develop a positive organizational image, whereas **reputation and crisis management** contribute to protecting and maintaining trust. **Social responsibility through digital platforms** reinforces the organization's image as a responsible actor, while **analytics and measurement** support the improvement of communication performance based on data. Finally, **digital sustainability** ensures continuity of communication and contributes to establishing long-term relationships grounded in trust, transparency, and responsiveness.

Axis Five: Toward an Interactive Model of Digital Public Relations and Trust Management

.1 From Digital Communication Management to Relationship and Trust Management

The transition from the traditional communication environment to the digital platform environment has brought about a fundamental transformation in the public relations function. Organizations no longer exercise complete control over message production or over the formation of their image among audiences. Instead, audiences have become partners in producing, circulating, and evaluating meaning. Digital platforms have provided extensive opportunities for dialogue, commenting, participation, content sharing, and the exchange of experiences, making organization–audience relationships more interactive and less dependent on one-way communication.

In this context, digital public relations is increasingly required to shift its focus from **message and image management** toward **relationship and trust management**. This perspective is consistent with the relational approach to public relations, which views public relations as a process aimed at building mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their audiences, rather than merely disseminating information or enhancing organizational image. Dialogic communication theory likewise emphasizes the importance of dialogue as a foundation for developing more sustainable relationships between organizations and their audiences.

Accordingly, an organization's digital presence does not, in itself, constitute evidence of successful digital public relations. An organization's presence on social platforms may simply become another broadcasting channel if it is not accompanied by genuine audience listening, continuous dialogue, and effective responsiveness to audience feedback and needs.

.2 The Theoretical Foundations of the Proposed Interactive Model

The proposed model in this study is based on the integration of several theoretical approaches that help explain how digital public relations can move beyond communication toward trust building and sustainable relationship development.

The first is the **dialogic communication approach**, which emphasizes two-way communication, listening, and providing audiences with opportunities to express their views and participate. Kent and Taylor demonstrated that dialogue provides an important basis for understanding how public relations can use communication spaces to build relationships with audiences.

The second is the **organization–public relationship management approach**, which views relationships as cumulative constructs influenced by trust, commitment, satisfaction, and the quality of interaction. Studies examining digital websites and platforms support the view that the dialogic features of digital communication can contribute to enhancing trust, satisfaction, and openness, provided that interaction is sustained rather than limited to occasional communication.

The third is the **transparency and credibility approach**. Effective organizational communication requires more than high communication frequency; it must also be based on useful, understandable, and verifiable information. Public relations research has demonstrated that transparency in social media communication is associated with efforts to build trust and improve relationships with audiences.

The fourth is the **digital organizational listening approach**, which makes monitoring, analyzing, and responding to audience views an integral part of the public relations process. Recent studies indicate that the use of digital conversational technologies and artificial intelligence can enhance audiences' perceptions of an organization's listening capabilities, which in turn are associated with perceived transparency and the quality of organization–audience relationships.

.3 Components of the Proposed Interactive Model

Based on the preceding axes, this study proposes an interactive model consisting of five interconnected levels:

First: Communication Inputs

These include:

- Reliable information.
- Digital transparency.
- Valuable content.
- A consistent presence across digital platforms.
- A clear organizational identity.
- Social responsibility.
- Commitment to credibility and communication ethics.

These elements constitute the foundation from which the organization develops a digital presence capable of generating trust.

Second: Digital Interaction Mechanisms

These include:

- Digital listening.
- Dialogue.
- Responding to inquiries.
- Responsiveness.
- Receiving complaints and suggestions.

- Audience opinion polling.
- Audience participation in content creation or communication-related decision-making.
- Managing digital discussions.

At this stage, audiences move from the position of recipients to that of **partners in the communication process**.

Third: Trust-Building Mechanisms

Digital interaction generates a set of audience perceptions, most importantly:

- Credibility.
- Transparency.
- Competence.
- Integrity.
- Reliability.
- Responsibility.
- Consistency between words and actions.

Trust is not formed through a single message; rather, it develops cumulatively through the experiences and interactions audiences have with the organization.

Fourth: Relational Outcomes

As positive experiences accumulate, the relationship moves toward a more sustainable level, reflected in:

- Satisfaction with the organization.
- Commitment to the relationship with the organization.
- Positive interaction.
- Willingness to recommend the organization.
- Advocacy for its reputation.
- Continued participation.
- Enhanced digital reputation.

Fifth: Feedback

The process does not end with trust building. Audience interactions, experiences, and opinions become new inputs that the organization can use to develop its communication discourse, practices, and digital strategies.

Accordingly, the model is **circular and interactive** rather than linear.

.4 The Proposed Model of Digital Public Relations and Trust Management

The model proposed by this study can be represented through the following sequence:

Digital Organizational Practices

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Transparency + Credibility + Content Quality

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Digital Listening

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Dialogue and Interaction

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Responsiveness and Participation

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Positive Perceptions of the Organization



Trust Building



Satisfaction, Commitment, and Positive Interaction



Strengthening Reputation and Sustainable Relationships



Feedback and Further Development of Digital Practices

The distinctive feature of this model is that **trust is not a fixed endpoint**, but rather a component within an ongoing relational cycle. Trust leads to greater positive interaction, while such interaction provides the organization with new information that helps improve its communication performance, thereby reinforcing trust once again.

Table 5. Proposed Analytical Table of the Interactive Model

Level	Core Components	Digital Practice	Expected Impact on Audiences	Indicator/Outcome
1. Institutional Foundation	Values, responsibility, service quality, consistency	Translating organizational values into digital practices and content	Formation of positive expectations	Initial perception
2. Transparency and Credibility	Accuracy, clarity, disclosure, consistency	Publishing reliable information and explaining decisions	Reducing ambiguity and uncertainty	Perceived credibility
3. Digital Listening	Monitoring, tracking, and audience analysis	Monitoring comments, complaints, and audience trends	Audiences' sense of being heard	Perceived organizational concern
4. Dialogue and Interaction	Dialogue, response, discussion	Commenting, responding, and direct conversation	Strengthening mutual proximity	Level of interaction
5. Responsiveness	Speed, relevance, solutions	Addressing complaints, inquiries, and crises	Perceived competence and concern	Satisfaction with responsiveness

6. Participation	Audience engagement	Opinion polls, suggestions, and initiatives	Sense of partnership	Digital participation
7. Trust Building	Credibility, integrity, reliability, competence	Consistency between communication and practice	Increased trust	Level of trust
8. Sustainable Relationship	Satisfaction, commitment, loyalty, advocacy	Sustaining dialogue and communication	Long-term relationship	Relationship sustainability
9. Feedback	Measurement, learning, improvement	Data analysis and performance indicators	Improving the communication experience	Strategy development

6. Why Is This Model Stronger Than the Traditional Communication Model?

The strength of the proposed model lies in the fact that it does not conceptualize digital public relations as a series of separate activities, but rather as an **integrated relational system**. Transparency alone is insufficient to build trust, just as digital interaction does not necessarily lead to a positive relationship unless it is accompanied by responsiveness, credibility, and the organization's ability to address audience concerns and problems.

The model also distinguishes between **interaction** and **trust**. A high number of comments or likes does not necessarily indicate a high level of trust. Trust requires the accumulation of positive experiences and consistency between organizational messages and actual practices. Previous research supports this perspective, indicating that dialogic communication and transparency can contribute to strengthening relationships and trust, whereas inauthentic communication and misleading communication practices may undermine organization–audience relationships.

Furthermore, the proposed model does not assume that transparency is a simple value or an automatic mechanism for producing trust. Recent scholarship emphasizes that digital transparency has multiple dimensions and may range from normative and instrumental to expressive forms. This requires transparency to be practiced responsibly and ethically rather than being reduced to the mere disclosure of information.

7. The Applied Dimension of the Proposed Model

The proposed model can be transformed into a practical tool for analyzing digital public relations performance within organizations by developing a set of indicators that enables the assessment of each stage of the relationship.

At the **digital listening** stage, the organization's ability to monitor audience interactions can be assessed. At the **dialogue** stage, the nature of responses and the level of reciprocal interaction can be analyzed. At the **responsiveness** stage, the speed and effectiveness of addressing inquiries and complaints can be measured. **Trust** can be assessed through indicators such as perceived credibility, reliability, transparency, and competence.

A sustainable relationship, in turn, can be assessed through indicators such as continuity of interaction, audience satisfaction, willingness to recommend the organization, positive participation, engagement with its content, and, in certain circumstances, audience advocacy on behalf of the organization.

Accordingly, an applied study can employ **content analysis of an organization's pages across digital platforms** using analytical categories derived from the proposed model, including:

Transparency – Credibility – Digital Listening – Dialogue – Responsiveness – Participation – Crisis Management – Social Responsibility – Reputation Building – Trust Indicators.

In this way, the proposed model does not remain merely a theoretical construct; rather, it becomes an **analytical framework that can be applied and empirically tested** on a sample of organizations or digital pages.

8. The Final Model Proposed by the Study

Based on the preceding discussion, this study proposes the following interactive model:

Digital Organizational Practices

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Transparency + Credibility + Content Quality + Responsibility

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Digital Listening

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Dialogue and Interaction

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Responsiveness + Empowerment + Participation

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Positive Perceptions of the Organization

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Organizational Trust

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Satisfaction + Commitment + Positive Interaction + Recommendation

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Digital Reputation and Sustainable Relationship

↻ **Digital Feedback → Listening → Analysis → Practice Improvement → Trust Reinforcement**

Accordingly, the central idea of the model can be expressed through the following conceptual equation:

Effective Digital Public Relations = Transparency + Listening + Dialogue + Responsiveness + Participation + Consistency between Communication and Practice → Trust → Sustainable Relationship.

This formulation emphasizes that trust is not generated merely through a strong or frequent digital presence, but rather through the **quality of the relationship established between the organization and its audiences within the digital environment.**

Conclusion

The transformations brought about by digital platforms have fundamentally reshaped the practice of public relations and the nature of relationships between organizations and their audiences. In this environment, digital public relations can no longer be reduced to the dissemination of organizational

messages or the management of digital presence and image. Rather, it has increasingly become a strategic relational function concerned with listening to audiences, engaging in dialogue with them, responding to their needs, fostering participation, and building trust through continuous and responsible communication.

The analysis presented in this study demonstrates that organizational trust in the digital environment is not generated by the intensity of digital presence alone, nor by the frequency of communication or the volume of audience engagement. Instead, trust develops cumulatively through a set of interconnected practices, particularly transparency, credibility, digital listening, dialogue, responsiveness, participation, consistency between communication and organizational practices, and the responsible management of digital reputation and crises.

Accordingly, the study proposed an interactive model of digital public relations and trust management that moves beyond the traditional linear communication model toward a **circular and relational process**. The model begins with digital organizational practices and reliable communication inputs, proceeds through digital listening, dialogue, interaction, responsiveness, and participation, and leads to positive perceptions, organizational trust, satisfaction, commitment, and sustainable relationships. Feedback then returns to the organization as a new source of information for analyzing audience expectations and improving digital communication practices.

The main contribution of the proposed model lies in its distinction between **digital interaction and trust**. High levels of likes, comments, or engagement cannot, by themselves, be regarded as evidence of trust. What matters is the quality of interaction and the organization's ability to transform audience feedback into meaningful responses and practices. Thus, the model conceptualizes trust not as a final and fixed outcome, but as a continuously renewed component of an ongoing relational cycle. From an applied perspective, the proposed model provides an analytical framework that can be used to examine the performance of digital public relations through content analysis and other empirical approaches. Its dimensions—transparency, credibility, digital listening, dialogue, responsiveness, participation, crisis management, social responsibility, reputation, and trust—can be operationalized through observable indicators and applied to organizational digital platforms.

Ultimately, effective digital public relations is not determined merely by the organization's ability to **be present** on digital platforms, but by its ability to **listen, engage, respond, participate, and remain consistent between what it communicates and what it actually does**. Therefore, trust should be understood as the cumulative outcome of a high-quality organizational relationship with audiences, while the sustainability of that relationship depends on continuous interaction, mutual responsiveness, and ongoing adaptation to the changing dynamics of the digital environment.

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