

Communication in the Digital Age: A Systematic Review of the Function of Social Media Adoption in Public Relations Practice

Eko Widiyanto¹, Pawito², Andre Rahmanto³

Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Social and Politics Science,
Sebelas Maret University, Surakarta, INDONESIA^{1,2,3}

ABSTRACT

Keywords:
communication,
digital,
public relations,
social media,
systematic literature review.

The Social media provides many ways to communicate through its features. It is very relevant to public relations, which organizes organizational communication activities. This research aims to explain the function of social media adoption in public relations (PR) practice using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method. A total of 19 literatures were reviewed to answer the research questions. The literatures were retrieved using the help of ScienceDirect, VosViewer, and Mendeley. The results show that adopting social media in public relations serves crisis communication management, building organizational relationships with the public, strengthening public engagement, and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication. From the analysis and synthesis of selected literatures, the researchers conclude that adopting social media in the public relations business process provides benefits. The results of this study are expected to be a study material for future research to explore the other side of social media adoption that has the potential to bring risks that can become problems in public relations practice.

INTRODUCTION

Social media, often called “socmed,” is now a lifestyle that offers visual and textual connectivity and influences behavior (Roth-Cohen & Avidar, 2022). Riyanto said that in Indonesia alone, based on data from 2022, there are around 204.7 million internet users in Indonesia or about 73.7% of the total population (Maulvi et al., 2023). In accessing the internet, the average time used in a day is around 8 (eight) hours 36 (thirty-six) minutes, and 3 (three) hours 26 (twenty-six) minutes in accessing social media (Utomo & Karunianingsih, 2019).

Generally, countries worldwide use almost the same popular social media platforms. Some are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, and some originated in the United States. Twitter, for example, is a popular platform for finding up-to-date information and social contact (Boatwright, 2022). However, not all countries allow these platforms; for example, China prohibits them. Instead, China provides similar domestic platforms that partner with previously popular platforms (Kong & Chen, 2022).

Departing from the popularity of various social media platforms, the number of users, and their influence on society, it becomes an opportunity for organizational PR practices (Wikansari & Setyanto, 2023). In its function as a manager of organizational and public relations and reputation management (Formentin & Spaulding, 2022), PR today has certainly utilized social media to achieve specific organizational goals. In the context of organizations, social media has become a primary source for the public to find information; social media also forces PR organizations to shift their focus to the use of online media in interacting with their public (Cheng & Lee, 2023). Through their PR, both private and government organizations in this era have also utilized social media. PR utilizes social media to transmit information to the broader community (Maulvi et al., 2023).

Several previous studies explore the use of social media to achieve organizational goals. However, most studies only focus on one specific aspect that correlates with the organization itself, so studies need to look at the broader use of social media that can be applied to organizations in general, especially by public relations departments. In this study, the researcher intends to systematically collect and evaluate previous research to provide a clear picture of the development of social media adoption in public relations practice. Using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, various findings from previous research on how social media is adopted in public relations are formulated into a more holistic understanding. The results of this study are expected to be study material for PR practitioners to make better decisions based on empirical information that has been tested, as well as directing new relevant research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public Relations

Public Relations, in general, can be interpreted as a profession that plays an important role in managing communication and relationships with stakeholders, functioning as an instrument of

organizational communication to the public (Widianto et al., 2024). From other sources, public relations, or what is often referred to as PR, is defined as the part that is tasked with identifying, building, and maintaining a mutual relationship between the organization and the public, which then determines the success of the organization in achieving its goals (Broom & Sha, 2013; Wang et al., 2021). In carrying out its very strategic role for organizations, PR does not escape various challenges, one of which is adapting to the use of communication technology, which is developing so quickly in the digital era as it is today.

Social Media

In general, social media is categorized as an internet-based application that allows users to establish communication and share content online (Duong, 2020). From a public relations perspective, social media is defined as an interactive communication channel that provides opportunities for two-way feedback in an interaction (Roth-Cohen & Avidar, 2022). Social media in this era can be used by organizations as a tool to manage crises efficiently and establish effective two-way communication with the public (Chon & Kim, 2022). The presence of social media today also influences public relations practices that develop into an online realm that is not limited by space and time. With the adoption of social media, two-way interactions between organizations and the public or stakeholders are more easily realized in real-time with the support of various features offered by social media platforms that are trending in society.

METHOD

Researchers used the guidelines for Systematic Literature Review research steps proposed by Francis & Baldesari in previous research (Watajdid et al., 2021) with a qualitative descriptive approach. The steps are sequenced as follows:

Identifying and Determining Keywords

Based on the research objectives, namely to examine the function of social media adoption in public relations practice, the researchers set limitations before conducting a literature search, namely 1) Topics about social media, 2) Topics about public relations, 3) Determining keywords for the literature search with the words social media and public relations.

Conducting a Literature Search

The literature search in this research was conducted by utilizing the website www.sciencedirect.com and predetermined keywords, namely social media and public relations. The initial search obtained 67,848 kinds of literature related to the topic. The results were then

filtered again by selecting several filters on the site, including 1) Subscribed journal, 2) Years: 2022, 2023, 2024, 3) Article type: Research articles, 4) Publication title: Public Relations Review, 5) Subject areas: Social Sciences. From the results of this second search, 169 kinds of literature were found that are closely related to the topic of social media and public relations.

Conducting Selection by Specifying Standards

From the literature search results, the selection is done by determining the standard using VosViewer to find interconnections formed from the keywords used, as depicted in Figure 1.

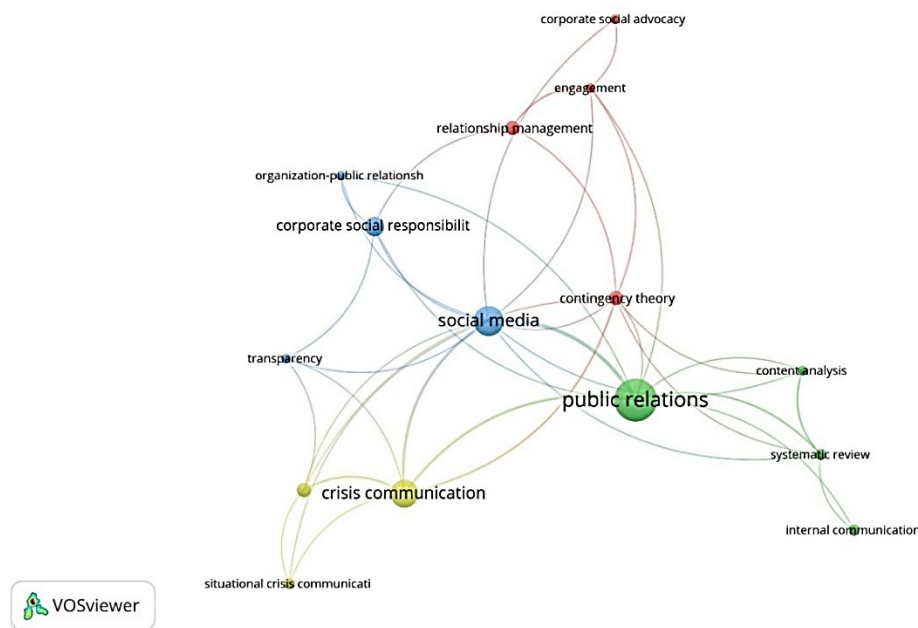


Figure 1. Keyword interconnection

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion standard

Inclusion Standard	Journals that include data usage on both large and small scales Journals that examine topics within the scope of social media and public relations Scopus indexed journals that have a percentile of 75%-99% (Q1), 50%-74% (Q2), 25%-49% (Q3), and 0%-24% (Q4)
Exclusion Standard	Journals that have no relevance to the topic of social media and public relations Journals that only discuss one topic, only social media, or only public relations

From the results of the selection through VosViewer, the relationship between the keywords *social media* and *public relations* resulted in links with *crisis communication*, *contingency theory*, *COVID-19*, *systematic review*, *engagement*, *content analysis*, *corporate social responsibility*, *relationship management*, *transparency*, *organization-public relationships*, *situational crisis communication theory*, *corporate social advocacy*, *internal communication*. The

next step was to examine the summary ideas of each literature through its abstract and based on the standard inclusion and exclusion restrictions described in Table 1. The process resulted in 19 Scopus-indexed literature. The literature was used as the primary data in this study, supported by other literature relevant to the topic of discussion.

Analyzing and Synthesizing

The literature that meets the specified criteria is then analyzed for its substance and synthesized by the research topic until a description of the function of social media adoption in public relations practice is obtained.

Applying Control

The researchers apply control to the quality of the selected literature based on the previous criteria by reviewing it based on the Scopus quartile levels, namely Q1, Q2, Q3, and Q4 by searching the literature in Scopus based on the title of the literature and then looking at the quartile level. The search found that there were 9 Q1 journals, 6 Q2 journals, 4 Q3 journals, and 0 Q4 journals as shown in Figure 2.

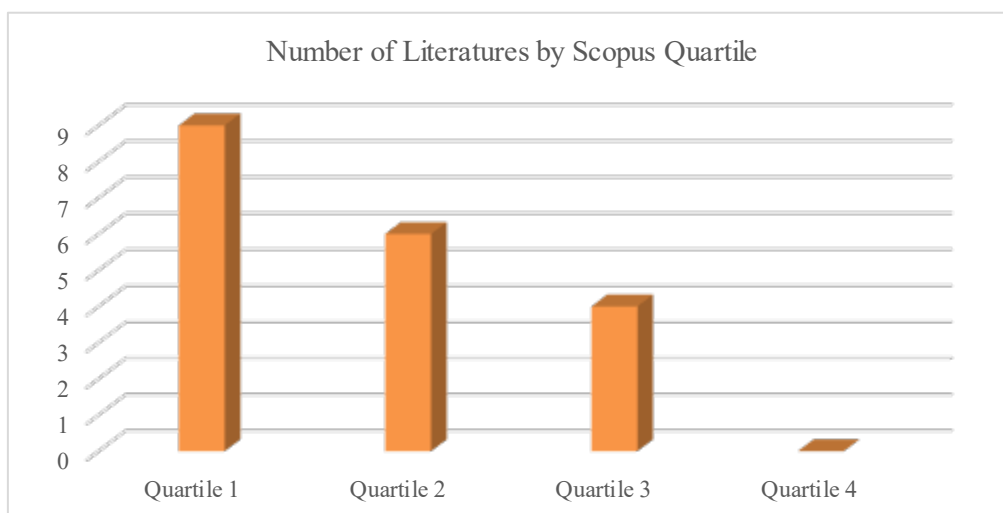


Figure 2. Chart of selected literature based on Scopus quartile

Presenting the Final Report

An integral description of the results of the analysis and synthesis process of the 19 journals or literature that fall under the inclusion standard is presented in the final report. The presentation of the final report includes a description of the function of social media adoption in public relations practice, which is placed in the results and discussion section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This Systematic Literature Review research selected 19 publications published in 2022 and 2023 for analysis. Literature that discusses the topic of social media and public relations is analyzed in depth to formulate the function of social media adoption in public relations practice. From the results of the analysis, it was found that there are at least four main functions that public relations actors can use from the use of social media, namely for crisis communication management, building organizational relationships with the public, strengthening public engagement, and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication.

Crisis Communication Management

Huang stated that a crisis is a condition of the organization's loss of face, prestige, reputation, and honor (Kong & Chen, 2022). An organizational crisis directs public perception in a negative direction, creating doubts about the organization's capabilities and threatening the organization's reputation for a long time (Diddi & Wei, 2022). In general, it can be said that a crisis is a condition that harms an organization for a long time if not appropriately managed.

Social media has increased and transformed into the primary platform for dealing with crises and communicating with the public. Unlike conventional media, such as newspapers or TV, which are one-way media, social media provides space for organizations to have two-way communication with the public (Chon & Kim, 2022). Eriksson argues that social media allows people to communicate with each other in the digital area; PR must absorb the community's aspirations to prevent a problem from becoming a crisis (Chon & Kim, 2022). Haigh and Wigley added that popular social media platforms allow organizations to communicate directly with potential stakeholders when experiencing a crisis (Diddi & Wei, 2022).

Previous research conducted in China found that various features in social media platforms affect the interaction process between organizations and their public so that they can be used in handling crisis management (Kong & Chen, 2022). Organizations can use social media to distribute crisis-related communications to the public to manage their relationships (Kong & Chen, 2022). Effective communication through social media allows organizations to manage crises and maintain good relations with the public.

Coombs stated that social media platforms have become a driving engine for PR in crisis communication (Chon & Kim, 2022). The utilization of social media will increase its level as a crisis communication tool if it functions as a public monitoring tool (Chon & Kim, 2022). By monitoring issues, PR can carry out crisis management efficiently. The issue management is to take preventive steps by monitoring issues developing in the community and potentially disrupting the organization's reputation. Hadi and Fleshler explained that in dealing with crises,

monitoring social media is a continuous and systematic process to get updated information about news or events that are happening (Chon & Kim, 2022). That way, negative issues can be managed and anticipated so they do not develop into crises.

However, suppose the crisis cannot be avoided and has already occurred. In that case, the steps that must be taken are to create effective communication with the public by using social media as a source of information (Zheng, 2023). From the organization's side, information from social media becomes material for PR to analyze and understand public attitudes and reactions to the organization (Chon & Kim, 2022). From the public side, substantial information provided by PR and interaction through social media will reduce public anger and restore trust in the organization (Zheng, 2023). Thus, social media helps to find the triggers and causes of the crisis and is an effective strategy for resolving communication crises.

Social media also acts as professional crisis management to deal with negative comments from the social media user community (Diddi & Wei, 2022). In today's digital era, the public tends to pour out their dissatisfaction or complaints about an organization's performance through comments on social media. One way to avoid confrontation with the public is to delete and hide offensive comments. Not all are deleted or hidden; PR must be able to sort and select rational complaints to be displayed and responded to with helpful solutions (Kong & Chen, 2022). Providing solutions to what the public complains about changes the public's perception of the organization so that it does not cause negative opinions.

In short, social media serves to hear and absorb the community's aspirations. Everything related to public perception and opinion helps prevent issues from developing into crises, find the cause and resolution of crises, and rebuild the organization's reputation after the crisis.

Building Organizational Relationships with the Public

Many say building relationships is using social media correctly (Smith et al., 2023). In PR science, building good relationships with the public is the ultimate goal of public relations practice (Cheng & Lee, 2023). Briones et al. defines organizational interactivity through social media as providing a two-way dialogue between organizations and the public to build relationships (Diddi & Wei, 2022). Previous research shows that social media, with all its communication features, has much potential as a tool for interaction and building relationships with the public. Communication strategies utilizing social media by forming ethical perceptions between organizations and the public will improve the relationship between the two based on feelings of mutual trust (Cheng & Lee, 2023). Public response is a successful outcome of effective social media communication (Ihm, 2022).

Features in social media platforms offer dialogic options that PRs can utilize. Organizations can effectively build dialogic relationships with the public by choosing features relevant to their

needs and environment. A dialogic approach is an open attitude of the organization to adapt to the needs of its public, which can be done through social media (Zimand-Sheiner & Lahav, 2022). This reasoning benefits organizations because dialogic practices in social media are cheaper than in the real space. With ethical communication in the online world, PR will be able to maintain a strong relationship with the public on an ongoing basis (Cheng & Lee, 2023). Simply put the absence of time and space constraints and the responsiveness that social media provides make it easier for organizations to build and maintain public trust.

Nowadays, it can be said that all organizations have used social media to transmit information (Chen et al., 2023). Each social media platform has its features and sophistication. PR must consider the relevance to the organization's needs before adopting a social media platform to build relationships with the public (Roth-Cohen & Avidar, 2022). Kim et al. explained that with various options such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, which are increasingly popular, organizations can shape their face, stay connected with stakeholders, and build profitable relationships through communication features on social media (Zhou & Xu, 2022).

Building relationships between organizations and the public can only happen through proper communication. Communication in intense social media interactions will create a sense of connection with the organization, and the public will get a social presence from the organization. Theoretically, social presence will be felt physically face-to-face, but nowadays, it can be replaced by dialogic through social media (Zhou & Xu, 2022). For this reason, PR needs to integrate emotional strategies and social aspects when using features in social media (Mazid, 2022).

To trigger interaction with the public, PR must be able to translate public interests and needs and package them into something that attracts attention—for example, using visual communication molded into content so that public engagement can be generated and positive relationships begin to build for a specific purpose (Dhanesh et al., 2022). PR can measure communication effectiveness by testing public reactions through likes, shares, and comments on social media (Lai & Yu, 2022). These indicators can evaluate strategies in social media management in building interactional and dialogic relationships with the public.

Strengthening Public Engagement

Botan and Taylor define engagement as a communication process of meaning production between organizations and stakeholders (Choi & McKeever, 2022). Public engagement is becoming a common term in the PR field, which refers to public engagement through social media (Dhanesh et al., 2022). People today believe that engagement on social media can contribute to better social change. In public relations, public engagement is conceptualized in the context of improving organizational and public relations (You & Hon, 2022).

Social media has developed its function as a communication tool. In organizations, social media is used not only to inform services or programs, promote products, and manage issues but, more often, to attract public engagement (Zheng, 2023). They stated that popular communication features can be adopted by PR for strategies to increase public engagement. The sophistication of information and communication technology of social media platforms allows users to participate in digital activities (You & Hon, 2022).

One of the purposes of public engagement is information mobilization, which is to get the public to take part in disseminating information or amplifying issues sourced from PR. In today's social media, PR can use hashtags to influence people's involvement in framing specific issues. Social media users exposed to information with hashtags tend to consider it partisan and controversial, so they will consider sharing the information on their social media (Choi & McKeever, 2022). In crisis management, using hashtags is an excellent method to involve many people in the organization's advocacy efforts (Choi & McKeever, 2022).

Taylor explained that public involvement in addressing current issues can be considered in organizational decision-making (Lai & Yu, 2022). PR can analyze public perceptions of developing matters through the comments they convey. PR can also measure public response to policy plans implemented through the number of likes and share activities or responses given.

For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the hashtag #stayathome appeared. The hashtag is a government policy campaign inviting people to do home activities. The strategy succeeded in mobilizing the public to campaign for the policy, so the hashtag #stayathome became trending on Twitter and Instagram.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Communication

Society has certain expectations of an organization or company, so CSR becomes an element that connects the organization with stakeholders. Ji & Yang argued that as an effective means of communication, social media allows organizations to communicate their good intentions to stakeholders to foster relationships (Jiang & Park, 2022).

Morsing & Schultz explained that in the context of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication, organizations try to achieve a goal through stakeholder engagement with mutual benefit (Jiang & Park, 2022). Social ties in communication between companies and stakeholders or between stakeholders are common. CSR communication activities on social media are a form of legitimization of stakeholders (Jiang & Park, 2022).

An organization's CSR can aim at a variety of social objectives. Some common goals include environmental protection, human rights, welfare, educational attention, and local community support. Golob and Podnar said that PR organizations communicate this CSR concept

to different stakeholders through social media communication according to specific goals (Jiang & Park, 2022).

In the practice of determining CSR targets, PR conducts an assessment of the suitability, trustworthiness, expertise, and uniqueness of potential targets. Then, it utilizes social media platforms to attract targets by creating inspiring content. For this reason, organizations must be able to make the best possible CSR communication content (Chen et al., 2023). Here, PR is required to recognize stakeholders' characteristics as potential CSR targets to produce persuasive information to build target candidate engagement through social media.

Thus, organizational social media can be used by organizations to distribute CSR information to stakeholders and form an active communication network with the public about CSR. Ultimately, with effective CSR communication, organizations can garner more support from the public and stakeholders.

CONCLUSION

This study has systematically reviewed 19 pieces of literature related to social media and public relations using the search results of www.sciencedirect.com and Scopus sites. The literature was selected based on bibliometric analysis with the VosViewer application and limiting inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The selected literature on social media and public relations has been analyzed and synthesized, and the researchers concluded several functions of social media adoption in public relations practice. First, social media serves to communicate crisis management in organizations. PR can utilize social media to hear and absorb public aspirations. All kinds of information about public perceptions and opinions of the organization from social media can be used as material for crisis prevention analysis, finding causes and solutions to crisis resolution, and rebuilding the organization's reputation after a crisis.

Second, social media helps organizations build relationships with the public. Various features in social media platforms open up new spaces for PR to carry out dialogical strategies. Effective dialogic communication can create trust based on sustainable emotional relationships.

Third, social media strengthens public engagement. In the digital world, public involvement in organizational activities also determines success. By involving the public using social media, PR can distribute information effectively and strengthen the issues that PR broadcasts. In crisis management, public involvement is a consideration for decision-making.

Finally, social media has become a corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication tool. With social media products, content, and communication features, PR has an effective alternative for explaining CSR programs. The end goal is for the organization to gain support

from the public.

The studies in the literature reviewed are generally minimal in providing an overview of the other side of social media adoption in public relations. For example, the risks accompanying social media use have the potential to become specific problems. The researchers propose that future studies can explore areas that evaluate social media adoption so that it can become a theoretical study for PR practitioners in managing social media.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The researchers thank the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology Scholarship for funding this research.

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