

# Social Media as a Tool in Improving Public Relations in the Digital Marketing Era: Qualitative Insights

*Social Media and  
Digital Marketing*

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The presence of social media in today's society brings enormous benefits, especially in the digital economy. Social networks can indeed be called a popular phenomenon that attracts the attention of many people. In many of his works, experts have given many different definitions of the technologies that society still needs today. Business development in Indonesia is very rapid and continues to progress. Based on the method used, this research is qualitative using library research and descriptive qualitative methods. This research refers to previous research that will be discussed again to find something that has not been known before. Research that is library research and descriptive qualitative Based on the results of the analysis that refers to the results of previous research, it can be said that social media has an important role in supporting overall activities, one of which is being able to establish public relations relationships with customers social media has become a platform that can provide benefits that can facilitate business people to interact, Promote, introduce, and brand products to be sold online media play an important role in almost all levels of society, sharing information to find information. The role of Public Relations is great for every business, not only acting as an image developer but also marketing products to the public. Based on the results of the analysis that refers to the results of the previous research, it can be said that an important role in supporting overall activities is to be able to establish public relations relationships with customers.*

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### **ABSTRAK**

*Kehadiran media sosial di masyarakat saat ini membawa manfaat yang sangat besar khususnya dalam perekonomian digital. Jejaring sosial memang bisa disebut sebagai fenomena populer yang menarik perhatian banyak orang. Dalam banyak karyanya, para ahli telah memberikan banyak definisi berbeda tentang teknologi yang masih dibutuhkan masyarakat saat ini. Perkembangan bisnis di Indonesia sangat pesat dan terus mengalami kemajuan. Berdasarkan metode yang digunakan, penelitian ini bersifat kualitatif yang menggunakan metode study pustaka (library research) dan kualitatif deskriptif. Penelitian ini merujuk pada penelitian sebelumnya yang akan di bahas Kembali guna menemukan suatu hal yang belum sampai diketahui sebelumnya. Penelitian yang bersifat library research dan kualitatif deskriptif Berdasarkan hasil analisis yang merujuk pada hasil jurnal sebelumnya bisa di katakan media sosial memiliki peranan yang penting dalam menunjang aktivitas secara menyeluruh salah satunya adalah dapat menjalin hubungan public relation kepada pelanggan sosial media menjadi flatfom yang dapat memberikan manfaat yang dapat memudahkan para pelaku bisnis dalam berinteraksi, mempromosikan, mengenalkan, dan mem-branding-kan produk yang akan dijual via media online yang memainkan penting di hampir lapisan masyarakat, berbagi informasi hingga mencari informasi. Peran public relation adalah besar bagi setiap bisnis, tidak hanya berperan sebagai pengembang citra namun memasarkan produk kepada publik. Berdasarkan hasil analisis yang merujuk pada hasil jurnal sebelumnya bisa di katakan memiliki peranan yang penting dalam menunjang aktivitas secara menyeluruh adalah dapat menjalin hubungan public relation kepada pelanggan.*

**Kata kunci:** Platform, Online, Media sosial, Pemasaran digital

### **INTRODUCTION**

Nowadays, there is no denying that people's lives are highly connected to social networks, and the role of social media has become very significant in various walks of life. From messaging friends to sharing information to seeking knowledge, social media has become an essential element of daily life. With a world population of 8 billion, the number of internet users reaches 5.16 billion or around 64.4%, and there are 4.76 billion social media users, equivalent to 59.4%. The average online access time reaches 6 hours 37 minutes per day. Therefore, it is not surprising that some people say that social networking is now an essential need for most individuals. The existence of social media in society brings great benefits, especially in the context of the digital economy. Social networking can be considered a popular phenomenon that attracts the attention of many people. In many works, experts have provided various definitions of the technology that is still a necessity for today's society. Today, it cannot be denied that human life is highly connected to social networks, and the role of social media has become very significant in various walks of life. From messaging friends to sharing information to seeking knowledge, social media has become an essential element of everyday life. With a world population of 8 billion, the number of internet users reaches 5.16 billion or around 64.4%, and there are 4.76 billion social media users, equivalent to 59.4%. The average online access time reaches 6 hours 37 minutes per day. Therefore, it is not surprising that some people say that social networking is now an essential need for most individuals. The existence of social media in society brings great benefits, especially in the context of the digital economy. Social networking can be considered a popular phenomenon that attracts the attention of many people. In many works, experts have provided various definitions of the technology that is still a necessity for today's society. Business development in Indonesia is also experiencing rapid growth and continues to advance. There are many sales methods that can be used to sell products, including through social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and so on. Providing knowledge to maximize the use of social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp is an optimal option as a means of promoting products or goods to be sold, with the aim of

reaching a wider consumer audience quickly and efficiently. In addition, for the sake of business sustainability and marketing strategies through digital marketing, this approach has also proven to be more effective and efficient in managing budgets for marketing or advertising purposes. Promotional activities are designed to stimulate awareness and interest and ultimately encourage product purchases.

The role of Public Relations (PR) has a significant impact on every business, not only as an image builder but also able to package products effectively to the public. Customer Relationship Marketing (CRM) is a communication strategy that aims to strengthen marketing through the concepts of relationship management, sales calls, documentation, and integration. Relationship marketing is a step to develop, maintain, improve, and commercialize relationships with customers, with the aim of achieving the success of all parties involved (Grönroos, 2011). Digital marketing summarizes all marketing efforts that utilize electronic devices or the internet. Companies use digital channels such as search engines, social media, email, and their websites to communicate with existing and potential customers. Other terms often used for this concept include 'online marketing', 'internet marketing', or 'web marketing'. The definition of digital marketing includes the use of various digital tactics and channels to interact with customers through online platforms, including websites, online branding assets, digital advertising, email marketing, online brochures, and other elements. In other words, it covers a wide range of activities within the scope of "digital marketing".

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Social Media**

Social media is a form of online media where users can easily engage, share, and create content, including blogs, social networks, wikis, forums, and virtual world social networking platforms. Blogs, social networks, and wikis are the most commonly used variants of social media globally. Another definition states that social media is online media that supports social interaction, utilizing web-based technology to transform the communication process into an interactive dialog. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), in their attempt to classify different types of social media, created a relevant classification scheme (Kaplan & Haenlin, 2010).

In the article "Business Horizons" in 2010, Kaplan and Haenlein recognized six types of social media. First, website collaboration projects allow users to change, add, or delete content on the website, as happens in Wikipedia. Second, blogs and microblogs provide greater freedom for users to express opinions, such as through Twitter. Third, content-sharing platforms allow users to share various types of media content, such as videos, ebooks, and images, with YouTube as an example. Fourth, social networking sites such as Facebook allow users to connect and share personal information. Fifth, virtual gaming worlds replicate 3D environments where users can interact through avatars, such as in online games. Finally, virtual social worlds such as Second Life create virtual environments where users experience everyday life freely (Kaplan & Haenlin, 2010).

Social media, as explained by Puntodi (2011), provides a number of significant benefits. First, social media has become a Personal Branding platform that is open to everyone. Various platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube provide opportunities for individuals, not only public figures, to communicate, discuss, and even gain popularity in the world of social media. Secondly, Puntodi noted that social media has become an extraordinary marketing channel, replacing the role of television due to changes in people's lifestyles that rely more on smartphones. Third, social media opens up opportunities for closer interaction with consumers. The more personal, one-on-one, and two-way nature of communication allows marketers to understand consumer habits, interact personally, and build deeper relationships. Finally, Puntodi noted the viral nature of social media that allows information to spread quickly. With users tending to share information quickly, certain products or content can easily go viral, providing the potential for wide and quick exposure.

### **Public Relations**

The role of public relations has great significance in a corporate context, not only as an image shaper but also as a tool to market products to the public. Customer Relationship Marketing (CRM) is a communication strategy that improves marketing aspects through relationship management, sales calls, documentation, and integration. Hopefully, this CRM index can overcome the obstacles that may arise in the current journey. According to Kotler (2001), marketing activities in this era show characteristics that are in line with relational marketing, especially in the aspect of two-way communication between companies and customers. Thus, communication research confirms the importance of two-way communication in forming and maintaining relationships between companies and customers.

Designing effective strategies to achieve goals, especially in the utilization of media relations, is an important step. The views of Smith (2020) highlight several public relations strategies related to the media. First, it is necessary to design a strategy of service to the media needed to ensure optimal collaboration. Second, trust-building strategies are key to establishing good relationships with the media. Furthermore, the distribution of information in accordance with the needs and characteristics of the media is an inevitable strategy. The establishment of positive cooperation in information exchange, preparation of facilities, and fostering personal relationships with the media are also integral parts of an effective public relations strategy. By implementing these steps, organizations can build strong relationships with the media to achieve their desired goals. Public relations has a good impact on changing people's attitudes and actions, both directly and indirectly, due to the existence of a product.

Public relations (PR) has a variety of significant benefits for an organization. First, PR helps build a positive image by using effective communication and good PR strategies so that the organization's reputation can be enhanced and public trust can be gained. Second, PR aims to increase public understanding and support by creating a shared understanding between the organization and the public. Through open and transparent communication, PR helps organizations explain their goals, values, and activities to the public, thus gaining support and acceptance. Furthermore, PR has a role in addressing problems and issues that may arise. By understanding the concerns and needs of the public, PR designs appropriate communication strategies to manage the problem or issue, which in turn maintains the organization's reputation. In addition, PR supports building positive relationships with stakeholders such as employees, customers, business partners, and the general public. By maintaining good relationships, organizations can gain the support and cooperation needed to achieve their goals. Lastly, PR also plays a role in improving organizational sustainability. By communicating social responsibility programs and sustainability efforts to the public, PR can gain support, trust, and build the organization's reputation as a socially and environmentally responsible entity. As a whole, PR not only focuses on the communication aspect but also becomes a strategic tool in shaping and maintaining a positive image and relationship for an organization (Gregory, 2020).

### **Digital Marketing**

Digital marketing refers to marketing activities that involve the application of technology and digital media on the internet. This includes marketing strategies through social media, online advertising, email marketing, and collaboration with other websites to increase the number of target consumers to achieve marketing goals (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). The indicators that make up this variable involve elements of entertainment, involvement, trends (on-trend or up-to-date), personalization, and risk perception. According to Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2019), digital marketing is a form of marketing that utilizes digital media via the internet, such as websites, social media, email, databases, mobile/wireless, and digital television. The main goal is to improve

consumer targeting and discovery by understanding the profile, behavior, and value of the product and building target customer or consumer loyalty to achieve marketing goals.

According to Istiqomah et al. (2022), digital marketing indicators involve several key elements. First, the website is identified as the most important element in the digital realm because it has the potential to lead directly to potential customers. Through websites, businesses can present interesting and up-to-date information, creating opportunities to attract attention and increase consumer engagement. Furthermore, social media is considered a highly instrumental online platform in informing or promoting a company's products, allowing direct interaction with the audience.

The third element is an application platform that enables companies to optimally deliver services through digital communication. Finally, attractive programs are an important indicator where the success of a program can be judged by its appeal to consumers. The existence of various unique and different programs can increase the competitiveness of promotions, thus providing added value to the business. These attractive programs have the potential to encourage consumers to make purchases, establish consumers in the business community, and increase customer retention. By understanding and utilizing these indicators, companies can design digital marketing strategies that are more effective and relevant in the context of an evolving market. Another benefit of digital marketing involves the ability to connect with consumers on the internet effectively. Today, consumers tend to search for product and service information over the internet rather than through traditional classified ad sites. Through the various tools and channels available in digital marketing, business owners have the opportunity to reach target consumers who are actively seeking information on the internet. With the right digital strategy, such as the use of websites, social media, and online search tools, companies can more easily build connections with potential consumers, provide relevant information, and increase the chances of conversion. Thus, digital marketing not only provides an advantage in reaching a wider audience but also capitalizes on the behavior of consumers who are increasingly dependent on the internet in searching for and considering products or services (Kurdi et al., 2022).

## **METHODS**

This research adopts a qualitative method using a library research approach and a qualitative descriptive approach. This approach refers to previous research that will be discussed again to identify previously unknown aspects. Research that is library research and descriptive qualitative aims to gain a deeper understanding. This method does not focus on finding relationships, testing hypotheses, or making predictions, but rather on describing direct observations, explaining symptoms based on existing facts and describing how they occur. The main purpose of this research is to detail and understand the phenomena experienced by the research subject, including behavior, perceptions, motivations, actions, and other aspects. This understanding is conveyed through descriptions using words and language related to certain natural contexts by applying various scientific methods. This research method harmonizes the approach between social media and public relations, which directly impacts the growth of digital marketing, which is experiencing rapid growth in Indonesia.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the analysis of previous results (Koay et al., 2020; Rim et al., 2020; Pelletier et al., 2020; Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021; Tarsakoo & Charoensukmongkol, 2020), it can be concluded that the role of social media is very significant in supporting overall activities, including its ability to establish public relations relationships with customers. In January 2023, the estimated number of active social media users in Indonesia was 167 million, which is equivalent to 60.4% of the country's total population. There was a significant decline of approximately 12.57% in the number of active social network users in the same month when compared to the previous year, which reached 191 million. This decline marks the first time such an event has occurred in the past decade.

It can be said that social media is a new medium and presents challenges that are different from the characteristics of traditional media. There are various advantages of using social media in various aspects of life, such as time efficiency, cost savings, and flexibility in communication and information dissemination, without being limited by time and place. Public relations (PR) is important for businesses to maintain their existence and sustainability in the long run.

Based on the research that has been conducted (Akter & Sultana, 2020; Alaimo et al., 2020; Yunus et al., 2019), it can be concluded that social media has a very significant role in the implementation of digital marketing business activities that are currently rife. Social media is a platform that provides great benefits, making it easier for business people to interact, promote, introduce, and compare products to be sold. Another advantage is its wide reach, accessible to various age groups and all economic layers. In 2020, the value of the digital economy in Indonesia reached 44 billion USD, an increase of 11% compared to 2019, and contributed 9.5% to Indonesia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Social media currently plays a key role in the growth of the digital economy, being one of the communication tools used by almost everyone who uses the internet, including creative business people in Indonesia. Over the past decade, the digital economy has continued to grow rapidly.

The projected e-commerce sector in Indonesia is estimated to reach USD 62 billion by 2023, and this achievement contributes 75.6% to the Gross Merchandise Value (GMV) of Indonesia's digital economy, which reached USD 82 billion that year. However, Indonesia's e-commerce GMV growth is experiencing a relatively slow increase, only around 7% Year over Year (YoY). Compared to 2022, the growth rate of e-commerce GMV in the country is expected to reach 20% on an annual basis (YoY). The digital economy has great potential to become one of the important pillars of Indonesia's economy in the future. Digital marketing allows buyers to get complete information about products and make transactions online. It also requires sellers to monitor and fulfill the needs and wants of potential buyers without being limited by time and location. In this context, digital marketing also acts as a two-way communication tool that can increase public awareness and engagement with certain products and brands. Overall, utilizing social media can maximize the effectiveness of product digital marketing.

The results are in consistent with previous research. Social media can be an effective tool for managing issues in an organization because it allows companies to make policy decisions by monitoring and evaluating crucial factors through observing interactions with the community. Since their inception, social networks have been designed as platforms for users to participate, share, and exchange information and ideas within virtual communities and networks. The important role of social media is seen in the dissemination of information to the wider public in various sectors such as business, travel, education, and religion. In a business context, social media can function as an online advertising tool, allowing people to access links containing information about products and more (Mason et al., 2021). There are many advantages of social media in various aspects of life, for example, saving time and costs, and it can be done anytime and anywhere without time constraints to disseminate information and communication. The important role of social media in supporting digital marketing business strategies has been proven through research. Social media is a crucial element in today's rapidly growing digital marketing activities. Social media platforms provide significant benefits for businesses in interacting, promoting, introducing, and building the brand image of the products offered. Not only that, the reach of social media is also very broad, covering various age groups and economic segments. In 2020, the value of the digital economy in Indonesia reached 44 billion USD, which contributed 11% more than in 2019 and 9.5% to Indonesia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Today, the role of social media has become very significant in the advancement of the digital economy. Customer Relationship Marketing (CRM) is a communication strategy that aims to strengthen marketing through relationship management, sales calls, documentation, and integration. Digital marketing, basically, includes any marketing effort that uses electronic devices or

the internet. Social media is an online platform where users can create content, participate in blogs, social networks, wikis, and forums, and interact in various global social networks.

Public Relations (PR) brings a number of other far-reaching benefits to an organization. First, PR helps to enhance the image and reputation of the organization through positive and effective communication activities. Second, PR plays a key role in building public trust by providing transparent, honest, and credible communications. Third, PR helps build and maintain good relationships with the public through open, responsive, and continuous communication. Furthermore, PR also contributes to improving the public's understanding of the organization, the products or services offered, and the values and goals of the organization. PR can shape better perceptions through targeted and informative communication. In addition, PR can help increase public loyalty to the organization by maintaining continuous communication, providing added value, and strengthening relationships with the public. In the face of a crisis, PR plays an important role by helping organizations overcome difficult situations, managing communication with the public, providing accurate information, and rebuilding trust. PR also focuses on media relations, helping to build and maintain good relationships with the media so that the organization can gain positive coverage and expand the reach of communications. Finally, PR has an impact on organizational sustainability by helping to build and maintain ongoing public support. By utilizing effective communication, PR can help organizations not only survive but also thrive in the long run. As such, the role of PR goes beyond the mere communication aspect and becomes an integral part of an organization's overall strategy (Gregory & Willis, 2022).

The goal is to build and maintain a positive relationship between the organization and its public. The intent is to create a culture shock of mutual understanding, acceptance, and collaboration between the organization and the public. In addition, PR also has the goal of assisting management in overseeing change and optimizing the effective use of change. In its efforts, Public Relations (PR) uses research and sound, ethical communication as its main instruments. An additional goal of the Public Relations (PR) field is to establish and maintain a positive balance in the relationship between the organization and its public. This includes a range of aspects such as building a positive image, increasing public understanding of the organization, building trust, shaping public opinion, increasing public loyalty, overcoming crises through effective communication management, and enhancing good relations with the media. By focusing on these objectives, PR plays a role in creating and maintaining sustainable positive relationships, ensuring that the public's perception of the organization reflects the positive values and goals desired by the organization (Anani-Bossman, 2021).

Digital marketing brings substantial benefits in generating leads and increasing conversions and sales. One of the key advantages is cost efficiency, with 40% of small businesses reporting cost efficiencies in their limited businesses through digital marketing. In addition, the real-time customer service gained from digital marketing provides instant consumer response, contributing to increased revenue, customer retention, and consumer satisfaction. The ability to reach mobile users, especially smartphone users, is a highly effective strategy, with 34% of organic traffic coming from mobile devices. Digital marketing also opens up opportunities for high revenues from online transactions, with profits increasing up to 2.8 times compared to traditional marketing. Higher ROI, the ability to maintain a position among competitors, and the challenge to large companies are also important aspects of the benefits of digital marketing. As we prepare for the Internet of Things era, where there are an estimated 26 billion connected devices globally by 2020, digital marketing becomes a strategic move to compete and adapt to the changing times (Güven, 2020).

The ultimate goal of marketing is to expand market coverage and ultimately target new potential consumers. If consumers show interest in the products offered, this can lead to increased sales and revenue for the company. While conventional marketing strategies may be able to achieve some of the market share, the use of digital marketing, including

through company websites, social media platforms, and email campaigns, is considered a more effective approach. The main advantage of adopting digital marketing is that it makes it easier to communicate with consumers. Responsive and efficient service to consumer needs can increase appreciation for the company (Setiawati et al., 2019). In addition, through digital marketing, companies can directly promote new products to consumers. The use of this strategy also provides the advantage of tracking consumer behavior, allowing companies to understand emerging trends and the needs that are most relevant to consumers.

## CONCLUSION

Social media, as a form of online media, has a significant role in various walks of life, facilitating information exchange and data search. Learning how to maximize the use of social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp is the right option to promote goods or products with the aim of reaching target consumers quickly and precisely. The use of digital marketing also has a positive impact in terms of the effectiveness and efficiency of spending funds for marketing or advertising purposes. The role of Public Relations (PR) is very important for every business, not only as an image developer but also in efforts to market products to the public. Social media improves public relations. Based on the results of the analysis referring to the results of previous findings, it can be said that social media has an important role in supporting overall activities, one of which is establishing public relations with customers.

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