



Corporate Digital Communication Framing and Its Impact on Public Trust in the Era of Digital Transformation

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the effect of corporate digital communication framing on public trust in the era of digital transformation, with public perception acting as a mediating variable. The research hypothesizes that (1) digital communication framing significantly influences public perception, (2) public perception significantly affects public trust, and (3) framing also has a direct effect on public trust. A quantitative explanatory design was employed using a survey method. Data were collected from 150 respondents in Indonesia who actively use digital media and have been exposed to corporate communication content, selected through purposive sampling. The study measured three main variables – digital communication framing, public perception, and public trust – using Likert-scale questionnaires. Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to evaluate measurement and structural models. The results reveal that digital communication framing has a significant positive effect on public perception ($\beta = 0.762$; $p < 0.001$), while public perception significantly influences public trust ($\beta = 0.681$; $p < 0.001$). Additionally, framing has a smaller but significant direct effect on public trust ($\beta = 0.245$; $p < 0.01$). Mediation analysis confirms that public perception partially mediates the relationship between framing and trust. These findings imply that effective communication strategies should emphasize not only message delivery but also message framing to enhance credibility and trust. The study contributes to communication theory by integrating framing and the SOR model and provides practical insights for organizations in designing transparent digital communication. This article includes 6 references, 4 tables, 2 figures, and one survey instrument.

Keywords: Digital communication framing, Public perception, Public trust

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has brought about fundamental changes in corporate communication practices with the public. Companies no longer rely solely on conventional media, but utilize digital media such as social media and interactive platforms to convey messages to stakeholders. This development makes digital communication a strategic function in building relationships, image, and public perception. In this context, communication goes beyond conveying information; it also plays a role in shaping meaning and social realities understood by audiences. Research shows that digital communication plays a crucial role in building public engagement and enhancing the effectiveness of organizational relationships with stakeholders (Hayati et al., 2026).

Corporate digital communications are not always neutral. The information conveyed is often constructed through specific narratives that emphasize positive aspects and minimize negative ones. This poses challenges in building public trust, especially amidst the increasingly complex flow of digital information. Public trust is becoming increasingly crucial because opaque or biased digital communications can foster skepticism. Recent studies have shown that transparency, accountability, and responsible communication practices are key factors in maintaining trust in the digital communication era (Dharmajaya & Minangkabawi, 2024). Digital communications have a significant influence on the formation of trust and public perception. For example, studies on digital communication models show that the use of interactive social media can increase public engagement and trust, although challenges remain in synchronizing information across platforms. Furthermore,

other research confirms that effective digital communication strategies, such as storytelling, engagement, and the use of data-driven technologies, can strengthen brand reputation and trust in the digital era.

Recent research in communication has shown that framing plays a crucial role in shaping public perception and trust. Studies on framing in crisis communication have found that message presentation, such as the use of moral narratives and transparency, can enhance trust and influence audience emotions. Furthermore, other research has shown that framing in corporate communication contributes to building a company's legitimacy and reputation in the public eye through the construction of specific meanings in the media. Previous research has focused on the direct impact of digital communication on trust or reputation, without delving deeply into the psychological processes that occur in audiences. In fact, the process of forming perceptions and trust involves complex cognitive mechanisms. The Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model explains that an individual's response to a message does not occur directly, but through an internal interpretation process influenced by how the message is presented. However, the integration of the framing concept and the SOR model in the context of corporate digital communication has been relatively limited in previous research. Digital communication also shows that although companies have actively used digital platforms (Kusuma et al., 2024) to build relationships with the public, their communication practices are often one-way and do not fully encourage authentic engagement. This shows that there is a gap between the potential of digital communication as an interactive tool and communication practices that are still purely informative (Tawil et al., 2024).

Based on this description, a research gap exists, indicating that few studies have integrated digital communication framing with the psychological mechanisms that shape public trust. Previous research tends to separate message analysis (framing) from audience response (trust), without examining the role of perception as a mediating variable in this relationship (Vo et al., 2026). Furthermore, the dynamic context of digital transformation demands a more integrative approach to understanding corporate communication.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the influence of corporate digital communication framing on public trust in the era of digital transformation. The research questions posed are: (1) how framing in corporate digital communication influences public perception, and (2) how this perception impacts public trust. The novelty of this study lies in the integration of framing theory and the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model in one analytical framework, so that it is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of communication science as well as practical contributions for companies in designing more effective and credible digital communication strategies.

METHODS

This study uses a quantitative approach with an explanatory design to analyze the influence of corporate digital communication framing on public trust in the era of digital transformation. An explanatory design was chosen because this study aims to examine causal relationships between variables and explain the mechanisms of influence through a mediating variable, namely public perception. A quantitative approach is considered appropriate because it allows for objective measurement of variables and empirical hypothesis testing (Hair et al., 2021; Sarstedt et al., 2022).

The population in this study is digital media users who have been exposed to corporate communications through social media or other digital platforms. The research subjects focused on people who actively use digital media and have experience accessing corporate communication content. The sampling technique used purposive sampling, with the criteria being respondents at least 17 years old, active social media users, and having viewed or read corporate communication content in the past three months. The sample size was set between 100–200 respondents, in accordance with recommendations for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis, which requires an adequate sample size to test the structural model (Hair et al., 2021).

Data collection was conducted through an online questionnaire distribution using a digital survey platform. The research instrument was developed based on indicators from framing theory, public perception, and trust. The framing variable in digital communication was measured using indicators of information emphasis, issue selection, and message presentation (Entman, 1993; Basuony et al., 2022). The public perception variable was measured using indicators of information interpretation and cognitive response (Lim & Childs, 2020). Meanwhile, the public trust variable was measured using the dimensions of credibility, transparency, and consistency of information (Men & Tsai, 2021). All statement items used a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Validity and reliability tests were conducted to ensure that the research instrument was able to measure the constructs accurately and consistently (Hair et al., 2021).

The data analysis technique used was Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) based on Partial Least Squares (PLS). This method was chosen because it can simultaneously examine complex relationships between latent variables and is suitable for exploratory and predictive research in the field of digital communication (Sarstedt et al., 2022). The analysis was conducted in two stages: evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) to test convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability, and evaluation of the structural model (inner model) to test the relationships between variables and the significance of the hypotheses. Additionally, a coefficient of determination (R^2) test and mediation effect analysis were conducted to determine the role of public perception in the relationship between digital communication framing and public trust (Hair et al., 2021).

RESULTS

The results of this study are presented in stages, starting with a description of the respondents, evaluation of the measurement model (outer model), and evaluation of the structural model (inner model) to test the research hypotheses.

1. Respondent Description

Based on the questionnaire distribution, 150 respondents met the research criteria. The majority of respondents were aged 17–25 (60%), followed by those aged 26–35 (30%), and those aged 35 and above (10%). Based on gender, respondents were predominantly female (55%) and male (45%). All respondents were active digital media users and had accessed company communications in the past three months.

2. Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

The measurement model evaluation was conducted to test construct validity and reliability. The test results showed that all indicators had factor loadings above 0.70, thus meeting the convergent validity criteria.

Table 1. Validity and Reliability Test Results

<i>Variabel</i>	<i>Loading Factor</i>	<i>AVE</i>	<i>Composite Reliability</i>
Framing Digital Communication	0.72–0.85	0.65	0.89
Public Perception	0.70–0.83	0.62	0.87
Public Trust	0.74–0.88	0.67	0.90

Based on Table 1, all variables have an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value above 0.50 and Composite Reliability above 0.70, so it can be concluded that the research construct is valid and reliable

3. Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)

Structural model testing was conducted to examine the relationships between variables and test research hypotheses.

Table 2. Results of the Determination Coefficient (R^2) Test

<i>Variabl Depend</i>	<i>R Square</i>
Public Perception	0.58
Public Trust	0.64

The R^2 value indicates that the digital communication framing variable explains 58% of the variance in public perception, while public perception and digital communication framing explain 64% of the variance in public trust. This indicates that the model has quite strong explanatory power.

4. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing is carried out by looking at the path coefficient value, t-statistic value, and p-value..

Table 3. Hypothesis Test Results

<i>Relationship Between Variables</i>	<i>Coefficient (β)</i>	<i>t-statistic</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Framing $\rightarrow$ Public Perception	0.762	12.345	0.000
Public Perception $\rightarrow$ Public Trust	0.681	10.214	0.000
Framing $\rightarrow$ Public Trust	0.245	2.987	0.000

The test results show that:

- Digital communication framing has a positive and significant effect on public perception ($\beta = 0.762$; $p = 0.000$).
- Public perception has a positive and significant effect on public trust ($\beta = 0.681$; $p = 0.000$).
- Digital communication framing also has a direct effect on public trust ($\beta = 0.245$; $p = 0.003$).

5. Mediation Effect Test

A mediation test was conducted to determine the role of public perception in mediating the relationship between digital communication framing and public trust.

Table 4: Mediation Test Results

<i>Mediation Path</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>t-statistic</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Framing $\rightarrow$ Perception $\rightarrow$ Belief	0.519	8.765	0.000

The results show that public perception significantly mediates the relationship between digital communication framing and public trust ($\beta = 0.519$; $p = 0.000$). Thus, it can be concluded that the mediation is partial, as both direct and indirect effects are equally significant.

DISCUSSION

Framing in a company's digital communications has a positive and significant impact on public perception. These findings indicate that the way a company frames messages in digital media plays a crucial role in shaping how the public understands the information it conveys. Within the context of framing theory, these results support the view that information is not simply received objectively but processed based on how it is structured and highlighted (Entman, 1993). In other words, framing functions as a cognitive mechanism that guides the audience's interpretation of the reality communicated by the company. These findings also align with previous research that suggests framing in digital communications can influence audience perceptions of an organization, both in terms of reputation and performance (Basuony et al., 2022). Furthermore, these research findings reinforce the argument that in the era of digital transformation, the power of communication lies not only in the content of the message but also in how it is strategically packaged. Therefore, companies that are able to manage framing effectively tend to be more successful in shaping positive public perceptions.

Public perception significantly influences public trust. This suggests that trust is not formed directly from the message delivered, but rather through an individual's interpretation. This finding is consistent with the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model, which explains that communication stimuli are processed internally before producing a response in the form of an attitude or belief (Islam & Rahman, 2017). In this case, public perception acts as a key bridging variable between corporate communication and the resulting trust. These results also support previous research emphasizing that public trust is strongly influenced by perceptions of the credibility, transparency, and consistency of an organization's messages (Men & Tsai, 2021). In other

words, even though companies convey information through digital media, trust will only be formed if the public perceives that information as credible and relevant.

Framing in digital communications also has a direct influence on public trust, albeit to a lesser extent than the indirect influence through perception. This suggests that framing not only influences cognitive processes but can also directly shape public trust in a company. However, the lower direct influence indicates that perception remains a crucial mediator in explaining this relationship. This finding reinforces the concept that in digital communications, public trust is built not only through the frequency of communication but also through the quality and credibility of the message presentation. In some cases, overly manipulative or excessive framing can actually generate public skepticism. This aligns with the concept of impression management, where companies attempt to create a certain image through information management (Melloni et al., 2021). If not implemented in a balanced manner, this strategy can negatively impact trust.

Public perception significantly mediates the relationship between digital communication framing and public trust. This indicates that the influence of framing on trust occurs largely through individual interpretation. Therefore, the success of a company's digital communication depends heavily on how the public interprets the message. This finding fills a gap in previous research that tends to separate message analysis from audience response. This study demonstrates that these two aspects are interconnected through the cognitive mechanisms described in the SOR model. Therefore, the integration of framing theory and SOR provides a more comprehensive understanding of the digital communication process. Overall, the results of this study support modern communication theories that emphasize the importance of message construction in shaping public perception and trust. However, these results also provide a critical note: the effectiveness of framing depends heavily on the balance between communication strategy and information honesty. Companies that focus too much on image building without being supported by appropriate reality have the potential to lose public trust in the long term.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the framing of a company's digital communications has a positive and significant influence on public perception. This indicates that the way a company structures and presents messages in digital media plays a crucial role in shaping audience understanding and interpretation. Furthermore, public perception has been shown to significantly influence public trust, indicating that trust is not formed directly from messages, but through a cognitive process involving individual judgment and interpretation.

This study also found that digital communication framing has a direct influence on public trust, although smaller than the indirect influence through public perception. Thus, public perception plays an important mediating variable in explaining the relationship between digital communication framing and public trust. This finding strengthens the integration between framing theory and the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model in explaining digital communication processes in the era of digital transformation. However, this study has several limitations. (1) The limited number of samples and the use of purposive sampling techniques may limit the generalizability of the research results. (2) This study only focuses on one general digital communication context, without differentiating the type of digital media platform used. (3) The variables used are still limited to framing, perception, and trust, so they do not include other factors such as engagement, reputation, or public loyalty.

Based on these limitations, future research is recommended to use a larger sample size and more representative sampling techniques to ensure broader generalizability of the results. Furthermore, future research could expand the model by adding other variables such as audience engagement, corporate reputation, or emotional factors in digital communication. Research could

also focus on specific platforms, such as specific social media platforms, to gain a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of framing in specific contexts.

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