



TRANSFORMING PARLIAMENTARY PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THE DIGITAL ERA: PUBLIC COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES OF HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF MATARAM CITY IN BUILDING PUBLIC TRUST AND PARTICIPATION

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Abstract

The transformation of digital technology has changed the relationship between parliamentary institutions and citizens, creating increasing demands for transparency, accessibility, responsiveness, and meaningful public participation. This study examines how the public relations function of the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) of Mataram City is transforming in the digital era and how its public communication strategies contribute to building public trust and participation. The study addresses the question of how DPRD Mataram City develops public communication strategies that move beyond one-way information dissemination toward dialogic and participatory communication. A qualitative case study was employed using semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis as primary data collection techniques. Data were obtained from DPRD leaders and members, Secretariat and public relations personnel, media practitioners, academics, civil society representatives, and citizens, complemented by institutional documents, digital platforms, social media content, and public-information materials. The findings indicate that parliamentary public relations is undergoing transformation through four interconnected dimensions: digital information dissemination, dialogic communication, institutional responsiveness, and public participation. Digital platforms have expanded access to parliamentary information, but their effectiveness depends on the institution's capacity to facilitate two-way interaction and respond to citizens' aspirations. The study further identifies an emerging communication cycle of information, dialogue, responsiveness, participation, and trust. It concludes that digital transformation should reposition parliamentary public relations from an institutional publicity function toward a strategic, responsive, and participatory communication system capable of strengthening public trust and supporting more inclusive and accountable local parliamentary governance.

Keywords *Public Communication, Parliamentary Public Relations, Digital Transformation, Public Trust, Public Participation*

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has substantially altered the communication environment in which public institutions operate. The development of websites, social media, digital public-information systems, and interactive communication platforms has created new possibilities for institutions to communicate directly with citizens. At the same time, digitalization has changed citizens' expectations. Citizens increasingly expect public institutions to provide information that is accessible, timely, transparent, understandable, and responsive. Consequently, institutional communication can no longer be evaluated solely by the amount of information disseminated but also by the quality of interaction and the extent to which citizens are given meaningful opportunities to participate.

The transformation is particularly important for parliamentary institutions. Parliament is not simply an institution that produces legislation; it is also a representative

institution whose legitimacy depends upon its relationship with citizens. Parliamentary communication therefore has a dual responsibility: communicating institutional activities and creating channels through which citizens can express interests, concerns, and aspirations. The emergence of digital media provides an important opportunity to strengthen this relationship, but it also creates challenges concerning information quality, institutional responsiveness, polarization, misinformation, and the tendency of organizations to use social media primarily as a broadcasting channel.

Research on parliamentary social media has demonstrated that parliamentary institutions have frequently used digital platforms to report parliamentary activities, while genuine interaction with citizens has remained comparatively limited (Leston-Bandeira & Bender, 2013). This distinction is important because the existence of digital communication does not automatically constitute public engagement. Digital transformation becomes meaningful when communication enables interaction, listening, responsiveness, and participation.

From the perspective of public relations, this situation requires a shift from a publicity-oriented approach toward relationship-oriented communication. Grunig's two-way symmetrical perspective emphasizes mutual understanding between organizations and their publics. In the contemporary digital environment, this principle becomes increasingly relevant because citizens can immediately respond to institutional messages, challenge information, express opinions, and circulate alternative narratives. Social media therefore changes the communication environment from a relatively controlled institutional space into an interactive public sphere.

The importance of this transformation is also reinforced by the growing relationship between public communication and institutional trust. Public trust is influenced not only by institutional performance but also by citizens' perceptions of transparency, fairness, responsiveness, and opportunities to have a voice. The OECD emphasizes that meaningful citizen participation can contribute to more transparent, inclusive, legitimate, and accountable policymaking and can strengthen trust in public institutions (OECD, 2022). Similarly, research on ICT-enabled government transformation indicates that transparency and institutional performance can mediate the relationship between digital transformation and citizen trust (Mahmood, Weerakkody, & Chen, 2020).

Within this context, DPRD Kota Mataram represents an important case for examining the transformation of parliamentary public relations at the local level. As a representative institution, DPRD Kota Mataram interacts with diverse citizens, political actors, civil society organizations, media, academics, business communities, and other stakeholders. The institution therefore operates within a complex communication environment in which public information and citizen aspirations must be managed through both conventional and digital channels.

The central problem addressed by this study is the potential gap between digital information dissemination and meaningful public participation. An institution may possess social-media accounts, websites, and digital information systems, but these channels do not necessarily guarantee dialogue or responsiveness. The research therefore asks: How does DPRD Kota Mataram transform its parliamentary public-relations strategy in the

digital era, and how can public communication contribute to strengthening public trust and participation?

This study aims to analyze the transformation of parliamentary public relations at DPRD Kota Mataram and identify the communication strategies that support transparency, dialogue, responsiveness, public participation, and trust. The study argues that effective parliamentary public relations should move from communication designed primarily for institutional visibility toward communication designed to establish reciprocal relationships with citizens.

Theoretically, this research combines public-relations theory, two-way symmetrical communication, stakeholder theory, digital transformation, and inclusive governance. Practically, it seeks to provide a communication framework that can assist local parliamentary institutions in developing more participatory and citizen-oriented public-relations practices.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case-study approach to investigate the transformation of parliamentary public relations at DPRD Kota Mataram. A qualitative design was selected because the research focused on communication practices, institutional strategies, stakeholder experiences, meanings, and relationships rather than numerical measurement. The research site was DPRD Kota Mataram and its Secretariat, with particular attention to institutional public relations, public-information management, digital communication, media relations, citizen engagement, public consultations, and communication activities associated with parliamentary functions.

Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders. The informants included DPRD leaders and members, Secretariat personnel responsible for public relations and communication, media practitioners, academics, civil-society representatives, and citizens who frequently interact with DPRD Kota Mataram. Informants were selected purposively based on their knowledge, experience, and involvement in parliamentary communication.

Observation was conducted to identify how communication operates in practice. The observation focused on parliamentary activities, public hearings, recess activities, public consultations, press activities, digital communication, social-media interaction, and mechanisms through which public aspirations are received and responded to. Document analysis complemented interview and observation data. Documents included institutional websites, social-media content, press releases, public-information materials, parliamentary publications, legislative documents, meeting documentation, and materials related to public participation.

Data analysis followed an iterative thematic process consisting of data organization, coding, categorization, interpretation, and verification. The analysis identified recurring themes concerning information dissemination, dialogue, responsiveness, participation, stakeholder relations, digital communication, and trust. To strengthen credibility, triangulation was conducted by comparing interview statements with observations and documentary evidence.

The analytical framework was developed from five interconnected dimensions:

1. Information – accessibility, accuracy, timeliness, and transparency of parliamentary information;
2. Dialogue – opportunities for two-way interaction and public feedback;
3. Responsiveness – institutional capacity to acknowledge and follow up citizens' concerns;
4. Participation – opportunities for citizens and stakeholders to contribute to parliamentary processes; and
5. Trust – citizens' perceptions of institutional credibility, openness, accountability, and responsiveness.

RESULTS

Digital Transformation of Parliamentary Information The first analytical finding concerns the transformation of parliamentary information dissemination. Digital platforms have expanded the ability of DPRD Kota Mataram to communicate parliamentary activities beyond conventional media. Observation of the institution's official digital channels, primarily social media networks and the official website, revealed that digital tools are actively utilized to distribute information concerning parliamentary agendas, legislative processes, and institutional programs. During the observation period, the majority of the digital content was dedicated to broadcasting institutional activities.

However, digital availability should not automatically be interpreted as transparency. Transparency requires information to be understandable and contextualized. As noted by public relations personnel during the interviews, a primary challenge lies in translating complex legal drafts and legislative procedures into visual formats or infographics that the public can easily digest. The internal communication team recognizes the need to move from merely posting photo documentation of meetings to explicitly explaining the substance and public impact of those meetings.

This finding indicates a shift from information availability toward information accessibility. The strategic role of public relations is transitioning from merely publishing information to interpreting institutional processes so citizens understand how they can engage.

From One-Way Dissemination to Dialogic Communication The second finding concerns the emergence of dialogic communication. Digital platforms theoretically enable citizens to respond directly to institutional content. However, data from social media observations indicate a lingering reliance on one-way dissemination. For instance, while citizens frequently utilized the comment sections to inquire about local public issues, municipal policies, and infrastructure, the institutional reply rate was observed to be relatively limited, demonstrating that the transition to a two-way symmetrical communication model is still ongoing.

Civil society representatives highlighted this gap during interviews, stating that while they often tag official DPRD accounts to voice their concerns regarding municipal policies, the interaction rarely moves beyond automated-sounding replies or basic

acknowledgment. The absence of sustained digital dialogue indicates a structural limitation in current practices.

The strategic challenge for DPRD Kota Mataram is to transform social media from a broadcasting channel into a listening and engagement channel. The communication process requires continuous monitoring of public responses to identify emerging concerns and feed them into institutional processes.

Responsiveness as a Foundation of Public Trust The third finding indicates that responsiveness is a critical bridge between communication and trust. Citizens may have access to extensive parliamentary information but remain skeptical if communication does not result in visible institutional action. The study found that public trust heavily depends on the perceived consistency between digital communication and legislative follow-up.

Interviews revealed a structural challenge in integrating digital public relations with substantive parliamentary work. Members of DPRD Kota Mataram acknowledged this complexity, noting that while the public relations team receives various complaints and aspirations via social media, the institution still lacks a standardized operating procedure (SOP) to formally bring those digital complaints directly into commission meetings. This disconnect can occasionally make the institution appear unresponsive, despite active social media management.

This emphasizes that public-relations units cannot operate separately from substantive institutional processes. Without an internal mechanism for coordinating public feedback with relevant parliamentary structures, external communication risks becoming disconnected from institutional action, thereby threatening public trust.

Integrating Digital and Direct Public Participation The fourth finding concerns the relationship between digital communication and direct participation. Digital platforms provide accessibility and speed, but face-to-face mechanisms remain important for deliberation, negotiation, and interpersonal interaction. The study found an emerging hybrid model at DPRD Kota Mataram where digital and physical channels complement each other.

This hybrid approach was particularly evident during the legislative recess periods. Document analysis and observations showed that digital communication tools, such as messaging applications and social media announcements, were utilized to prepare citizens before offline meetings took place. Citizens who participated in public hearings shared that being able to review agendas and submit preliminary questions digitally made the actual physical meetings much more focused and effective.

Rather than replacing conventional participation, digital communication at DPRD Kota Mataram functions optimally when it complements these mechanisms by documenting discussions, distributing follow-up information, and maintaining communication after formal activities conclude.

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that parliamentary public relations should be understood as a strategic component of democratic governance rather than simply an institutional publicity function. This interpretation is consistent with the broader development of

public-sector communication toward collaborative and relationship-oriented communication.

The distinction between publicity and engagement is particularly important. Earlier parliamentary social-media research found that many parliaments primarily used social media to report parliamentary business, with interaction occurring only at the margins (Leston-Bandeira & Bender, 2013). The empirical data from DPRD Kota Mataram supports this premise but also extends the framework by revealing that the effectiveness of parliamentary digital communication must be assessed through the entire communication relationship, internal SOPs, and structural responsiveness, rather than through content production alone.

The first dimension, information, corresponds to the transparency requirements of contemporary democratic governance. The OECD (2022) emphasizes that citizen participation requires appropriate access to information. As seen in the efforts to translate technical legislative language into accessible digital content, information is an enabling condition for participation.

The second dimension, dialogue, reflects the relational orientation of contemporary public relations. The observed gaps in social media interaction emphasize that digital platforms must be designed and managed around relationships (Namisango & Kang, 2019) rather than solely around institutional messages.

The third dimension, responsiveness, provides an important connection between communication and institutional legitimacy. The lack of formal mechanisms to channel digital feedback into commission meetings highlights that public communication can weaken trust if citizens perceive institutional messages as disconnected from institutional behavior. Communication should therefore be supported by internal processes that enable public feedback to reach decision-making structures.

The fourth dimension, participation, represents the democratic purpose of parliamentary communication. As demonstrated by the hybrid approach during recess periods, participation includes citizens' access to information, interaction with representatives, involvement in consultations, and opportunities to provide feedback both online and offline.

The fifth dimension, trust, is the cumulative outcome of consistent communication and institutional behavior. Trust cannot be manufactured through communication campaigns alone. It develops through repeated experiences of transparency, responsiveness, accountability, and meaningful interaction.

These five dimensions produce a communication cycle: Information → Dialogue → Responsiveness → Participation → Trust

This cycle provides the core conceptual contribution of the study. Information creates the basis for informed citizenship. Dialogue opens reciprocal communication. Responsiveness demonstrates institutional commitment. Participation strengthens citizens' involvement. When these processes are sustained and consistent, they contribute directly to public trust.

The model also demonstrates that digital transformation is not primarily a technological phenomenon. Technology functions as an enabling infrastructure, while

institutional culture, communication competence, leadership, responsiveness, and stakeholder orientation determine whether technology produces meaningful democratic engagement. This argument is consistent with the United Nations E-Government Survey (2024), which highlights that digital transformation must be accompanied by institutional capacity and citizen-oriented governance, especially at the local level where citizens directly experience government.

The implications for DPRD Kota Mataram are therefore strategic. First, parliamentary public relations should develop an integrated content strategy that prioritizes public understanding rather than merely institutional visibility. Second, digital channels should include systematic mechanisms for receiving and managing citizen feedback. Third, public-relations personnel must establish stronger coordination with DPRD leadership, commissions, and the Secretariat so that public questions can receive accurate, substantive responses. Fourth, digital communication should be seamlessly connected with face-to-face participation mechanisms. Finally, communication performance should be evaluated through indicators of accessibility, interaction, responsiveness, participation, and trust.

CONCLUSION

The transformation of parliamentary public relations in the digital era requires a fundamental shift from one-way institutional publicity toward strategic, dialogic, responsive, and participatory communication. The case of DPRD Kota Mataram demonstrates the importance of integrating digital communication with the broader democratic relationship between parliament and citizens.

The study identifies five interconnected dimensions of effective parliamentary communication: information, dialogue, responsiveness, participation, and trust. These dimensions form a communication cycle in which accessible information creates the foundation for dialogue, dialogue enables responsiveness, responsiveness encourages participation, and sustained participation contributes to public trust.

The principal implication is that digital transformation should not be measured merely by the availability of websites, social-media accounts, or digital information platforms. Its democratic value depends on whether digital communication enables citizens to understand parliamentary processes, communicate their aspirations, receive institutional responses, and participate meaningfully in representative governance.

Accordingly, parliamentary public relations should be repositioned as a strategic democratic communication function. For DPRD Kota Mataram, strengthening this function requires internal structural integration between digital platforms, public-information management, media relations, stakeholder engagement, citizen feedback, and face-to-face participation mechanisms.

The study concludes that the future of parliamentary public relations lies not simply in communicating more information, but in creating better relationships between parliament and citizens. Digital transformation becomes meaningful when communication contributes to a parliament that is more open, responsive, participatory, accountable, and trusted by the public.

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