



The Opportunities and Challenges of Influencers Collaboration in Modern Public Relations Communication

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of digital media has transformed modern public relations (PR) practices, emphasizing two-way communication, reputation management, and stakeholder engagement. Influencers have emerged as strategic communicators capable of shaping public perceptions and strengthening organizational communication. Previous studies have predominantly focused on marketing aspects, such as brand attitudes or purchase intentions, leaving limited research on the integration of influencers into long-term PR strategies, strategic influencer selection, and reputation risk management. This study aims to explore the role of influencers in modern PR communication strategies in Jakarta, Indonesia, as well as the opportunities and challenges they present. A qualitative approach was employed through semi-structured in-depth interviews with 15 participants, including PR practitioners and influencer marketing specialists. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis through coding, categorization, and theme development. Findings indicate that influencers act as strategic bridges between organizations and segmented audiences, enhancing message personalization, credibility, engagement, and brand positioning. Micro-influencers, in particular, facilitate higher audience interaction due to interpersonal closeness and community trust. The study concludes that careful influencer selection, ethical guidelines, and ongoing monitoring are key to successful influencer-based PR strategies.

Keywords: Digital Public Relations; Influencer; Strategic Communication

ABSTRAK

Pertumbuhan pesat media digital telah mengubah praktik hubungan masyarakat (PR) modern, dengan penekanan pada komunikasi dua arah, manajemen reputasi, dan keterlibatan pemangku kepentingan. Fenomena influencer muncul sebagai komunikator strategis yang mampu membentuk persepsi publik dan memperkuat komunikasi organisasi. Studi terdahulu cenderung fokus pada aspek pemasaran, seperti sikap terhadap merek atau niat beli, sehingga masih sedikit

penelitian yang menelaah integrasi influencer dalam strategi PR jangka panjang, pemilihan influencer yang tepat, serta manajemen risiko reputasi. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi peran influencer dalam strategi komunikasi PR modern di Jakarta, Indonesia, serta peluang dan tantangan yang muncul. Pendekatan kualitatif digunakan melalui wawancara mendalam semi-terstruktur dengan 15 peserta, termasuk praktisi PR dan spesialis pemasaran influencer. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik melalui proses kodifikasi, kategorisasi, dan pembentukan tema. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa influencer berfungsi sebagai jembatan strategis antara organisasi dan audiens tersegmentasi, meningkatkan personalisasi pesan, kredibilitas, keterlibatan, dan posisi merek. Micro-influencer khususnya memfasilitasi interaksi audiens yang lebih tinggi karena kedekatan interpersonal dan kepercayaan komunitas. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa pemilihan influencer yang tepat, pedoman etika, dan pemantauan berkelanjutan menjadi kunci keberhasilan strategi PR berbasis influencer.

Kata Kunci: Hubungan masyarakat digital; influencer; strategi komunikasi

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital media has fundamentally transformed public relations (PR) practices, particularly in the ways organizations build relationships with their publics. Modern PR literature emphasizes the importance of two-way communication, reputation management, and stakeholder engagement (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Hallahan et al., 2007). Amid these shifts, the presence of influencers as new communication actors has gained significant attention from both academics and practitioners. Initially seen merely as social media users with large followings, influencers have evolved into strategic communicators capable of shaping public perceptions, opinions, and behaviors through content perceived as authentic and relatable (Freberg et al., 2011; Jin & Phua, 2014; Wibowo & Nasher, 2023). Indonesia has a substantial number of influencers, totaling approximately 863 individuals, placing the country among the top five nations with the highest number of influencers worldwide in 2025 (Yonatan, 2025).

Various studies define influencers as individuals who gain credibility through their expertise, lifestyle, or social connectedness on digital platforms. Research indicates that influencers may be categorized into several types, ranging from celebrities and macro-influencers to micro- and nano-influencers, who have smaller audiences but significantly higher engagement rates (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019). In contemporary PR practice, micro-influencers have become increasingly strategic due to the interpersonal closeness and trust they establish within their communities, enabling organizational messages to be delivered more naturally compared to formal corporate communication.

Previous studies highlight that influencers play a crucial role in enhancing message credibility, expanding communication reach, and generating levels of engagement that are difficult to achieve through traditional mass media (Keller & Fay, 2016; Audrezet et al., 2020). In organizational communication, influencers also function as intermediaries that connect brands with segmented publics, allowing organizations to communicate in a more interpersonal and responsive manner. Freberg et al. (2011) further argue that characteristics such as expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness position influencers as potential “new PR communicators” in the digital era.

Nevertheless, existing research on influencers within PR literature tends to focus predominantly on marketing-related aspects—such as purchase intention, brand attitude, or promotional effectiveness—rather than broader strategic PR perspectives. Abidin (2016), for instance, explores the performative nature and social dynamics of influencers, while other studies highlight ethical concerns, endorsement transparency, and public perceptions of sponsored content (Evans, Phua, Lim, & Jun, 2017). Meanwhile, research that specifically analyzes how influencers are integrated into long-term PR strategies, how they influence reputation management, and how organizations manage communication risks arising from influencer collaborations remains relatively limited.

In the context of public relations practices in the digital era, the peripheral route of persuasion, as conceptualized in the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), plays a central role in shaping audience attitudes within highly saturated and fast-paced digital environments. When publics exhibit low involvement or limited cognitive resources, digital PR strategies increasingly rely on peripheral cues embedded in influencer communication, such as source credibility, social attractiveness, visibility metrics, and parasocial engagement, rather than detailed message arguments. Influencers function as strategic intermediaries in digital PR by leveraging symbolic cues—likes, shares, follower counts, and perceived authenticity—to foster favorable attitudes toward organizations, brands, or issues without requiring extensive cognitive elaboration. Consequently, the effectiveness of influencer-based PR campaigns in the digital era is often contingent upon the alignment between influencer characteristics and audience expectations, reinforcing the importance of heuristic-based persuasion in contemporary relationship-building and reputation management efforts (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Kent & Taylor, 2016; De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017; Hibatullah & Nanda, 2024; Tanjung & Sampurna, 2024).

Based on the literature review, several research gaps emerge. First, although influencers have proven effective as digital communicators, there is still limited research on their role within structured, long-term PR communication strategies. Second, few studies examine how organizations select the most appropriate type of influencer for specific PR objectives, including considerations such as value congruence and message control. Third, there is a lack of research discussing managerial mechanisms—such as

ethical guidelines, contractual arrangements, or monitoring systems—used to minimize reputational risks. Fourth, studies focusing on emerging markets such as Indonesia, where social media penetration is extremely high and digital cultural dynamics are unique, remain scarce.

Given these gaps, this study aims to explore the role of influencers in modern PR communication strategies by highlighting both the opportunities and challenges that arise. This research is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how organizations can strategically leverage influencers while offering practical recommendations for developing ethical, measurable, and effective influencer collaborations in the context of digital public communication.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research chose the issue of influencer involvement in modern public relations (PR) strategies because this phenomenon has become increasingly significant in shaping organizational communication and reputation management. Influencer marketing has grown rapidly alongside high social media penetration, yet research on the strategic integration of influencers within PR frameworks remains limited (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011; Jin & Phua, 2014). Therefore, this study employs a qualitative research design, which emphasizes an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A qualitative approach is considered most suitable as it allows researchers to explore decision-making processes, communication strategies, and authentic perceptions that cannot be fully captured through quantitative measurement. The study focuses on real-world practices in Indonesia, where influencers play a strategic role in building credibility and audience engagement for organizations.

The research was conducted in Jakarta, the center of Indonesia's communication and digital marketing industry, with 15 participants comprising PR practitioners, agency strategists, and influencer marketing specialists who have hands-on experience collaborating with influencers for organizational communication purposes (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that all respondents had direct experience and relevant knowledge regarding

influencer collaboration. Influencers themselves are defined as individuals who exert significant influence over audiences through credibility, expertise, or social connectedness on digital platforms (Freberg et al., 2011; Lou & Yuan, 2019). The research was conducted over a four-month period, with primary data collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, allowing participants to openly share their experiences and insights while remaining focused on the research themes. Supporting documents, such as campaign guidelines and organizational communication strategies, were also reviewed to enrich and validate the data.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the stages of data familiarization, coding, categorization, and theme development (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Interview transcripts were repeatedly reviewed to identify recurring patterns, which were then coded using a combination of inductive and deductive approaches to ensure systematic and comprehensive analysis. Themes were constructed by grouping related codes and interpreting their relevance to the opportunities, challenges, and strategic considerations of using influencers in PR. Validity was maintained through member checking, by sharing preliminary findings with selected participants for confirmation and feedback (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reliability was strengthened through data triangulation, comparing interview insights with secondary documents and existing literature. Through this systematic analytical procedure, the study aims to produce credible, trustworthy, and contextually grounded findings that accurately represent the perspectives of PR practitioners in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

The Role of Influencers in PR Strategy

The findings indicate that influencers play a highly central role in modern public relations (PR) strategies. Based on in-depth interviews with 10 PR practitioners and 5 influencer marketing specialists in Jakarta, most participants (13 out of 15) emphasized that influencers function as strategic bridges between organizations and segmented audiences. This function goes beyond merely delivering messages; influencers are able

to tailor content to different audience characteristics, making communication feel more personal and authentic. One PR practitioner stated:

“Audiences are more receptive to messages delivered by influencers they know and trust compared to official organizational communication. Influencers make messages feel more personal, relevant, and authentic.”

These findings align with previous literature suggesting that influencers serve as “strategic communicators” due to their credibility, expertise, and personal appeal (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Research participants reaffirmed that influencer characteristics such as online reputation, communication style, and community relationships shape message acceptance. Influencers are not merely supplementary media; they are strategic tools that enable organizations to build closer relationships with their publics.

In addition, influencers contribute to enhancing the visibility of organizational messages. The majority of participants (12 out of 15) reported that collaborations with influencers help expand communication reach, particularly among younger or more digitally savvy audiences. One participant highlighted:

“Micro-influencers are highly strategic because they maintain close-knit communities. Our organizational messages are received in a more natural way, and audiences tend to actively comment on or share the content within their networks.”

This phenomenon reinforces the vital role of micro-influencers in contemporary PR, as their interpersonal closeness and trust foster higher engagement compared to traditional media (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). Field findings also show that influencers enable organizations to personalize messages, tailor content to audience interests and preferences, and facilitate effective two-way communication.

Furthermore, several participants emphasized the role of influencers in organizational strategic positioning. Influencers whose values and lifestyles align with the brand help organizations deliver consistent messages, maintain a positive image, and enhance content relevance for target audiences. As one PR practitioner stated:

“We carefully select influencers whose values and image align with the brand. This makes it easier to deliver authentic messages and maintain the organization’s positive reputation in the public eye.”

Overall, the field findings demonstrate that influencers serve multiple functions: message conveyors, audience connectors, credibility enhancers, and engagement drivers—each contributing to the success of modern PR strategies.

Opportunities Created by Influencer Collaboration

The interviews also highlight several strategic opportunities that arise from influencer collaborations. First, such collaborations significantly enhance brand credibility. Participants reported that audiences tend to trust messages delivered by influencers they like more than formal organizational communication. One practitioner explained:

“Influencers can provide a more humanized perspective of the brand. Audiences find the message more sincere, which increases trust in the organization.”

This credibility becomes a strategic asset, especially when organizations aim to introduce new programs, products, or social initiatives. These findings support Freberg et al. (2011) and Lou & Yuan (2019), who assert that influencers can strengthen audience trust through credibility and personal relationships with their followers.

Second, influencer collaborations enable organizations to reach target audiences more effectively. Participants noted that influencers allow organizations to access specific audience segments, including digital-savvy groups or niche communities that are difficult to reach through traditional media. An influencer marketing specialist stated:

“With micro- and nano-influencers, we can reach specific communities with relevant messages. Even though the audience is smaller, interaction and engagement are far higher than in broadcast-style campaigns.”

Third, influencers foster engagement and two-way interaction. Field data show that influencer-promoted content such as challenges, polls, or live streams encourages audiences to participate, comment, and share content. This not only broadens reach but

also boosts active audience participation, strengthens loyalty, and builds emotional connections with the brand (Keller & Fay, 2016; De Veirman et al., 2017).

Fourth, influencer collaboration helps reinforce brand positioning. By selecting influencers who align with organizational values, messages become more consistent, relevant, and authentic. Participants emphasized that value alignment is crucial for ensuring that PR communication is not only effective but also capable of maintaining a positive organizational reputation in the long term. Overall, the research demonstrates that influencer collaboration offers tangible opportunities for organizations to enhance credibility, reach segmented audiences, increase engagement, and strengthen brand positioning in the digital era.

Challenges in Influencer Collaboration

Although influencer collaborations present numerous opportunities, this study also identified significant challenges organizations must confront. The first challenge concerns influencer authenticity. Some participants reported experiences where influencers promoted content solely due to endorsement contracts, rather than genuinely understanding or believing in the organization's message. One PR practitioner emphasized:

“If influencers are not sincere or are merely following trends, audiences will doubt the message. Authenticity is key to the success of PR campaigns.”

The second challenge relates to risk and reputation management. Participants noted that controversial behavior from influencers whether on social media or offline—can negatively impact an organization's image. Therefore, organizations need strong risk mitigation strategies, including careful influencer selection, ethical guidelines, contractual agreements, and routine monitoring and evaluation of influencer activities (Audrezet, de Kerviler, & Moulard, 2020; Balaji, Raghavan, & Jha, 2022).

Additionally, several participants stressed the importance of value congruence between the organization and the influencer. Misalignment can lead to inconsistent messaging, reduced credibility, and negative audience perceptions. Organizations must therefore ensure a good fit between influencer characteristics, brand identity, and audience expectations. Overall, while influencer collaborations bring extensive strategic

opportunities, organizations must navigate challenges related to authenticity, risk management, and value alignment requiring strategic planning, careful influencer selection, and ongoing monitoring to ensure the success of PR strategies.

Table 1. Summary of opportunities and challenges in Influencer collaboration

Opportunities	Challenges
enhancing brand credibility	influencer authenticity
reaching targeted audience	risk and reputation management
strengthen consumer's loyalty	value congruence between the organization and the influencer
building emotional connection	maintaining genuine engagement and avoiding audience fatigue
brand positioning	message consistency and brand misalignment

Source: Research result

Discussion

Interpretation of Results and Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study indicate that influencers play a central role as a strategic element in modern PR communication. This aligns with the theory of strategic communicators proposed by Freberg et al. (2011) and Lou & Yuan (2019), in which influencers not only deliver messages but also build strong interpersonal relationships with their audiences. Influencer credibility, online reputation, and closeness to their follower communities significantly affect message reception and audience trust toward the organization. The role of micro-influencers is particularly prominent, as noted by De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders (2017), because their interpersonal closeness allows for more personal and authentic interactions. Micro-influencers can facilitate active two-way communication between organizations and audiences, enhancing engagement and encouraging audience participation through comments, polls, or content sharing. This reflects a shift from traditional one-way communication models toward a more dynamic, participatory, and relationship-based PR approach.

Moreover, the findings reinforce the understanding that influencers enable message personalization and the delivery of content that aligns with audience interests and characteristics. In other words, influencers function as message tailoring agents, making messages feel more authentic and contextually relevant. This supports Keller & Fay's (2016) view that high audience engagement and emotional closeness with influencers can enhance the effectiveness of PR messaging. Therefore, influencers are not merely an additional communication channel but a strategic tool that allows organizations to build closer, authentic, and sustainable relationships with audiences. The multifaceted role of influencers as message conveyors, audience connectors, credibility enhancers, and engagement drivers highlights the importance of integrating influencer strategies into modern PR frameworks.

Practical Implications for PR Professionals

The study provides several practical implications for PR practitioners and organizations seeking to leverage influencers as part of their communication strategies:

1. Strategic influencer selection: Organizations should ensure that influencers' values, image, and lifestyle align with the brand identity. This alignment not only enhances message consistency but also helps maintain the organization's reputation. Selecting appropriate influencers ensures that PR messages are delivered authentically and are well received by audiences.
2. Enhancing credibility and audience trust: Messages conveyed by trusted influencers are more likely to be accepted. This credibility becomes a strategic asset when launching new programs, social campaigns, or products. Audience trust fostered through personal influencer relationships can support positive brand image formation and long-term loyalty.
3. Maximizing reach to segmented audiences: Micro- and nano-influencers enable organizations to reach digital-savvy or niche communities that are difficult to access through traditional media. Despite smaller audience sizes, interaction and participation rates are higher, resulting in more effective communication.
4. Risk management and authenticity: Organizations must manage potential risks arising from influencer behavior, both online and offline. This can be addressed through ethical guidelines, clear contractual agreements, activity monitoring, and periodic evaluation. Influencer authenticity is key to successful PR campaigns; influencers who merely follow contracts without emotional engagement may undermine audience trust.
5. Strengthening

brand positioning and consistency: Influencers whose values and lifestyle align with the organization can reinforce messaging, maintain a positive image, and increase content relevance for the audience. Thus, influencer collaboration is not just about promotion but also a long-term strategy to strengthen brand identity.

These findings support and extend previous literature on the role of influencers in PR communication strategies. Freberg et al. (2011) and Lou & Yuan (2019) assert that influencers can enhance brand credibility through personal relationships with followers. This study confirms that view while highlighting the critical role of micro-influencers in fostering engagement and two-way interaction. Furthermore, the results align with Keller & Fay (2016) and De Veirman et al. (2017), emphasizing the impact of interpersonal closeness and community engagement on audience participation. This study adds new insights by providing a local context in Jakarta, illustrating specific influencer marketing practices, challenges, and strategic opportunities for organizations in Indonesia's urban digital market. The findings expand understanding of how influencers not only disseminate messages but also build emotional connections, strengthen organizational image, and significantly increase audience engagement.

Despite offering valuable insights, this study has several limitations: Limited sample size: With only 15 participants, generalizing the findings to a wider population is constrained. Studies with larger or multi-city samples could improve external validity. Geographical focus on Jakarta: The urban Jakarta context may differ from other cities or regions in Indonesia, affecting influencer practices and audience responses. Research in other regions or cross-cultural contexts could provide more comprehensive perspectives. Qualitative approach: This study relied on in-depth interviews, making the findings interpretative. Quantitative or longitudinal studies are needed to measure influencer impact on PR message effectiveness more objectively. Variation in influencer types: The study does not differentiate in detail between macro-, micro-, and nano-influencers across all campaign contexts. More specific analysis of each influencer type could enhance strategic understanding. Nonetheless, this research provides significant contributions to understanding the multifaceted role of influencers as a strategic tool in modern PR, including the opportunities, challenges, and practical implications for PR professionals in the digital era.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the strategic importance of influencers in contemporary public relations, particularly in strengthening organizational credibility, humanizing institutional messages, and enabling interactive communication with increasingly segmented digital publics. To translate these insights into practice, organizations are encouraged to prioritize collaborations with micro-influencers whose strong relational ties and community-based engagement can enhance trust and message resonance. Practically, this entails conducting systematic audience mapping, selecting influencers whose values and communication styles align with organizational identity, and integrating influencer activities into broader PR planning rather than treating them as ad hoc promotional tools.

Moreover, organizations should establish clear ethical standards and contractual frameworks to safeguard authenticity and mitigate reputational risks, including transparent disclosure practices and predefined crisis-response protocols. Continuous performance monitoring using engagement metrics, sentiment analysis, and qualitative feedback is also essential to ensure alignment between influencer narratives and organizational objectives. While this study contributes to the literature by contextualizing influencer-based PR strategies within Indonesia's digital environment, its limited scope suggests the need for future research employing larger samples and mixed-method designs. Nevertheless, the findings provide actionable guidance for organizations seeking to strategically embed influencers as long-term communication partners, reinforcing their role as key agents shaping public relations practices in the evolving digital landscape.

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