

AN ANALYSIS OF THE SAMARINDA CITY GOVERNMENT'S DIGITAL PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMUNICATION STRATEGY THROUGH INSTAGRAM IN SHAPING THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT IMAGE

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Abstract: The advancement of digital technology has transformed public communication practices, particularly in how governments utilize social media as a public relations tool. This study aims to analyze the digital public relations communication strategy employed by the Samarinda City Government through the Instagram platform in shaping the image of the local government. This research adopts a qualitative approach using a case study method, focusing on the Instagram account “samarinda.beradab” as the primary object of analysis. Data were collected through documentation and non-participatory observation of published content, supported by statistical data from social media analytics platforms. Data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis based on image-building indicators, including transparency, closeness, professionalism, responsiveness, and positive image. The findings reveal that the communication strategy is predominantly characterized by visual content presenting governmental activities accompanied by informative narratives. Such practices contribute to the construction of a transparent image through information disclosure, a sense of closeness through representations of interactions with the public, and a professional image through structured presentations of governmental activities. However, the relatively low to moderate level of audience engagement indicates that two-way interaction has not been fully optimized, suggesting that communication remains more informative than dialogical. This study concludes that social media plays a strategic role in shaping the image of local government; however, its effectiveness depends largely on the ability to implement interactive and participatory communication strategies. Therefore, local governments are encouraged to optimize social media not only as a tool for information dissemination but also as a dialogic space to enhance public engagement and strengthen a positive institutional image.

Keywords: Digital Public Relations, Government Communication, Social Media, Instagram, Local Government Image

INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology has driven fundamental transformations in public communication practices, particularly in the relationship between government and society (Sukmana et al., 2025). The digital era has not only changed how information is produced and disseminated but has also shaped interaction patterns that are more open, participatory, and real-time. In this context, governments are required to adapt to increasingly rapid and complex communication dynamics, where social media has become one of the primary channels for reaching the public widely and effectively. One platform that has a significant influence in contemporary public communication is Instagram, which functions not only as a visual-sharing medium but also as a space for representing institutional identity and image.

From a Public Relations perspective, social media has shifted the communication paradigm from a one-way model to a more dialogical two-way communication model.

Governments are no longer merely information providers but also act as facilitators of interaction with the public (Quraissyin, 2026). This transformation requires communication strategies that are not only informative but also capable of building sustainable relationships with the public. Digital Public Relations emerges as an important concept in explaining how government institutions utilize digital technology to shape perceptions, enhance trust, and build a positive image in the eyes of society. In this context, communication is understood not only as a process of message delivery but also as a process of meaning construction involving public interpretation of symbols, narratives, and visual representations.

The image of local government is one of the aspects highly influenced by consistently implemented public communication practices (Buluamang, 2018). Image is not formed instantly but through a long process involving the accumulation of messages, experiences, and public perceptions of government performance. In the digital era, image formation is increasingly influenced by how governments represent themselves in the virtual public sphere. Content published through social media can shape certain impressions, whether positive or negative, depending on how the message is packaged and received by the audience. Therefore, digital Public Relations communication strategies become an important instrument in managing government image in a systematic and planned manner.

In practice, many local governments in Indonesia have utilized social media as part of their public communication strategies. The use of platforms such as Instagram enables governments to disseminate information related to policies, programs, and governmental activities more quickly and broadly. In addition, social media provides space for the public to respond, criticize, or appreciate government performance. This condition indicates that public communication is no longer top-down but has evolved into a more interactive and participatory process. However, the effectiveness of social media in building government image largely depends on the communication strategies implemented, including content selection, language style, and patterns of interaction with the public.

Nevertheless, not all government communication practices on social media are capable of generating a positive image. In some cases, the use of social media may even create negative perceptions due to a lack of consistency, transparency, or responsiveness in its management. This indicates that the presence of social media as a public communication tool does not automatically guarantee success in building government image. A well-planned communication strategy based on an understanding of audience characteristics and digital media dynamics is required (Helmi, 2026). In other words, the success of digital Public Relations communication is determined not only by presence on social media but also by the quality of messages and interactions established.

In the local context, the Samarinda City Government is one of the regions that actively utilizes social media as a public communication tool. One of the accounts used as a medium of governmental representation is the Instagram account “samarinda.beradab.” This account functions as both an information channel and a communication space that presents various governmental activities, development programs, and interactions with the public. Through the visual content and narratives published, this account indirectly contributes to shaping the image of the Samarinda City Government in the digital public sphere. Therefore, it is important to examine how communication strategies are implemented through this account and how these strategies contribute to the process of forming the local government’s image (Buluamang, 2018).

Research on government communication through social media has been widely conducted; however, most studies still focus on aspects such as media usage, levels of public participation, or the effectiveness of information dissemination (Purba et al., 2025). Studies that specifically link digital Public Relations communication strategies with the formation of local government image, particularly in the context of visual-based social media such as

Instagram, remain relatively limited. Furthermore, research focusing on local contexts, such as the Samarinda City Government, is still scarce, thus providing an opportunity for this study to contribute more contextually and academically.

Based on the above explanation, this study aims to analyze the digital Public Relations communication strategies employed by the Samarinda City Government through the Instagram account “samarinda.beradab” in shaping the local government’s image. The analysis is conducted by examining the published content, communication patterns, and image representations conveyed in each message. Therefore, this study is expected not only to provide an overview of government digital communication practices but also to offer a deeper understanding of how government image is constructed through social media.

More broadly, this study has significance in enriching the field of public communication, particularly in digital Public Relations and government communication. In addition, the findings are expected to serve as a reference for local governments in designing more effective and adaptive communication strategies in response to the development of digital media. In an era where public perception can be rapidly formed through interactions in digital spaces, the ability of governments to manage communication and image becomes a crucial factor in building public trust.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The development of public communication studies (Adnan, 2015) over the past few decades has shown a significant shift, particularly with the emergence of digital technology that has transformed the patterns of interaction between institutions and the public. In this context, Public Relations (PR) is no longer understood merely as a function of information dissemination, but rather as a strategic process in building sustainable relationships between organizations and their publics. Within the classical theoretical framework, Public Relations as proposed by James E. Grunig emphasizes the importance of two-way symmetrical communication as an ideal model for creating mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics. This model places dialogue, feedback, and adaptation as key elements in effective communication practices (Asriadi, 2020).

Along with the advancement of digital technology, the concept of Public Relations has evolved into what is known as digital Public Relations. Digital PR refers to the use of internet-based media in designing, delivering, and evaluating organizational communication messages. In this context, social media has become a primary instrument that enables more interactive, flexible, and real-time communication (Purba et al., 2025). Platforms such as Instagram provide space for organizations, including governments, not only to disseminate information but also to construct narratives, identity, and image both visually and textually. With its visual-based characteristics, Instagram enables more persuasive message delivery through the integration of images, videos, and captions.

In the context of government communication, the use of social media cannot be separated from the concept of public communication oriented toward transparency, participation, and accountability. As a public institution, the government has the responsibility to deliver accurate and relevant information to the public while also opening space for constructive dialogue. Social media allows governments to reach a wider audience, including younger generations who are more active on digital platforms. However, the effectiveness of government communication on social media is not solely determined by the frequency of use, but also by the quality of the communication strategy implemented, including message packaging, content selection, and the management of public interaction.

One of the important aspects in Public Relations practice is image building (Purba et al., 2025). Image can be understood as the perception or impression formed in the public’s

mind regarding an organization based on the information received and experiences encountered. From a communication perspective, image is not objective in nature but rather a result of social construction influenced by ongoing communication processes. Therefore, image building becomes one of the main objectives in Public Relations activities, including in the governmental context. A positive government image can enhance public trust, strengthen legitimacy, and support the successful implementation of policies.

In the digital era, image formation becomes increasingly complex due to the dynamic, fast, and open nature of social media. Content published by governments on social media not only functions as a source of information but also as a representation of institutional identity (Peranginangin et al., 2025). Each element within the content, including visuals, narratives, and communication styles, has the potential to shape public perception. For instance, the use of visuals depicting governmental officials' activities can build an image of professionalism, while a more casual language style can create a sense of closeness with the community (Saidah, 2023). Therefore, communication strategies implemented on social media must be able to integrate these elements consistently to produce the desired image.

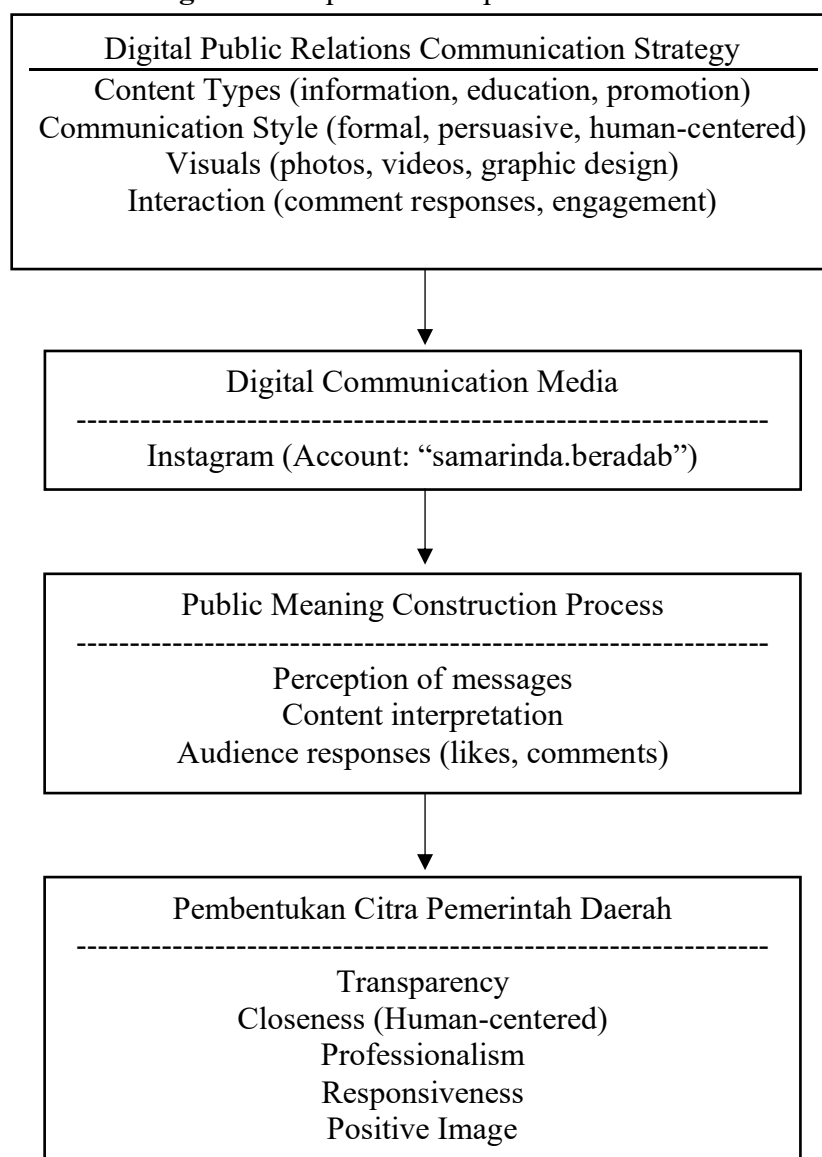
A number of previous studies indicate that social media plays a significant role in shaping organizational image, including that of government institutions. These studies generally emphasize that the success of digital communication is determined by an organization's ability to create content that is relevant, engaging, and responsive to public needs. In addition, interactions occurring on social media, such as comments and responses from administrators, also contribute to shaping public perception of the organization. In this context, dialogical and participatory communication tends to be more effective in building a positive image compared to one-way communication.

However, some findings also indicate that the use of social media by governments does not always produce positive outcomes. Several studies reveal that inconsistency in message delivery, lack of interaction with the public, and the dominance of ceremonial content may reduce communication effectiveness and even lead to negative perceptions. This suggests that the success of digital Public Relations does not solely depend on presence on social media, but also on how communication strategies are designed and implemented effectively.

In the context of this study, focusing on the analysis of the digital Public Relations communication strategy of the Samarinda City Government through the Instagram account "samarinda.beradab" is relevant to examine how such communication practices contribute to the formation of the local government's image. This approach allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of how messages delivered through social media are constructed and interpreted by the public. Furthermore, this study contributes to enriching the discourse on government communication at the local level, which remains relatively limited compared to studies at national or international levels.

By referring to the theoretical frameworks of Public Relations, digital communication, and image theory, this study attempts to integrate various perspectives in analyzing the phenomenon of government communication on social media. This integration is essential to produce a comprehensive understanding of how communication strategies can be utilized as instruments in building the image of local government. In this context, social media is not only viewed as a communication tool but also as a symbolic space where meanings and public perceptions are dynamically constructed.

Figure 1: Proposed conceptual framework



METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach (Saputri et al., 2025) using a case study method to analyze the digital Public Relations communication strategies implemented by the Samarinda City Government through social media, particularly the Instagram platform. A qualitative approach is chosen because this study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of digital communication phenomena in the context of local government image formation, which cannot be measured quantitatively but instead requires interpretation of the meanings embedded in communication messages.

The object of this study is the Instagram account "samarinda.beradab," which serves as one of the official communication channels of the Samarinda City Government in disseminating public information. The selection of this account is based on the consideration that it represents governmental communication activities in the digital space and plays a role in building institutional image through various published content. Thus, this account serves as

the primary data source for examining how digital Public Relations communication strategies are implemented.

Data collection techniques in this study were conducted through documentation and non-participatory observation methods (Fadli, 2024). Documentation was carried out by collecting various types of content published on the “samarinda.beradab” Instagram account, including posts in the form of photos, videos, reels, and their accompanying captions. In addition, other elements such as hashtag usage, posting frequency, and forms of interaction appearing in the comment section were also included as part of the analyzed data. The collected data were limited to a specific time period to maintain focus and depth of analysis, for instance within the last three to six months, enabling the researcher to identify consistent communication patterns.

Non-participatory observation was conducted by observing communication activities on the account without directly engaging in interactions. Through this approach, the researcher was able to understand how content is presented, how messages are constructed, and how the public responds to the published content. This method allows for a comprehensive understanding of government digital communication practices in their natural context.

The data analysis technique used in this study is qualitative content analysis (Sarosa, 2021). Content analysis was conducted by categorizing and interpreting data based on themes relevant to the research focus. The analysis process began with data reduction, which involved selecting and simplifying data relevant to the research objectives. Subsequently, the data were classified into categories reflecting digital Public Relations communication strategies, such as content types, message delivery styles, use of visuals, and patterns of interaction with the public.

Following the categorization process (Leroy Holman Siahaan, 2026), the next stage involved data interpretation, which aimed to understand the meanings contained within each category in order to examine how communication strategies contribute to the formation of the local government’s image. In this stage, the researcher referred to image-building indicators, including transparency, closeness (human-centered), professionalism, responsiveness, and positive image. Using these indicators, the researcher identified how each published content represents the government’s efforts to construct specific perceptions among the public.

To ensure data validity (Ansorullah et al., 2025), this study employed source triangulation by comparing various types of data obtained from content, captions, and interactions occurring on the Instagram account. In addition, repeated readings of the data were conducted to ensure consistency in interpretation. This approach was undertaken to ensure that the findings are academically reliable. By applying this method, the study is expected to provide an in-depth understanding of the digital Public Relations communication strategies of the Samarinda City Government through Instagram, as well as how these strategies contribute to the process of local government image formation in the digital public sphere.

FINDINGS

This study presents findings based on a content analysis of the Instagram account “samarinda.beradab” as a digital communication medium of the Samarinda City Government. Data were obtained through observation of a number of posts within a specific time period, including content in the form of photos, videos, reels, and accompanying captions. In addition, interaction elements such as the number of likes and comments were also examined as part of the communication activities.

General Characteristics of Content and Message Presentation Patterns

Based on the data collected, the content published on the “samarinda.beradab” account shows variations in both form and type of presentation. In general, the content consists of documentation of governmental activities, dissemination of public information, and visual content featuring the activities of local leaders. The format of posts is dominated by photos and short videos accompanied by informative captions.

In terms of frequency, the account consistently publishes content throughout the observation period. Posts are uploaded regularly at certain intervals, indicating a structured content management pattern. In addition, the use of reels and stories was also identified as part of the variation in message delivery. The analysis further shows that the published content can be classified into several main categories as follows:

Table 1: Classification of Content Types on the “samarinda.beradab” Account

Content Type	Brief Description
Activity Information	Documentation of government and local officials’ activities
Policy Information	Dissemination of government programs and policies
Public Education	Educational information for the community
Regional Promotion	Content showcasing regional potential and image

From this classification, the most dominant content type is activity information, which presents official activities and work agendas of local leaders on various occasions.

Table 2: Summary Statistics of the “samarinda.beradab” Instagram Account (Blade, 2026)

Indicator	Value/Description
Total Followers	± 90,000 accounts
Total Following	± 528 accounts
Total Posts	± 3,600 contents
Engagement Rate	± 1.4%
Average Likes	± 1,100 per post
Average Comments	± 80–90 comments

These data indicate that the account has a relatively large audience base with a low to moderate level of engagement.

Table 3: Content Publication Activity (Media Count)

Date	Additional Posts	Total Posts
Jan 22, 2026	+3	3,599
Jan 23, 2026	+6	3,605
Jan 24, 2026	+2	3,607
Jan 25, 2026	+3	3,610
Jan 26, 2026	+4	3,614
Jan 27, 2026	+4	3,618
Jan 28, 2026	+3	3,621

The data show that the account consistently produces content on a daily basis, with an average of 2–6 posts per day.

Table 4: Account Performance Indicators (Engagement) (Blade, 2026)

Indicator	Value	Description
Engagement Rate	$\pm 1.4\%$	Low-moderate
Average Likes	$\pm 1,100$	Relatively high interaction
Average Comments	$\pm 80-90$	Active interaction
Interaction Pattern	Fluctuating	Depends on content type

This table indicates that user interaction occurs actively, although it is not evenly distributed across all content.

In terms of message presentation, the content on the Instagram account “samarinda.beradab” demonstrates the use of informative captions with narrative structures that explain the context of the visuals presented. The language used tends to be formal, with some variations that are more communicative in certain contexts.

The visuals used in the posts generally depict field activities, interactions with the community, and documentation of official events. In addition, graphic elements are incorporated in some content to enhance the clarity of the information conveyed.

Use of Features and Public Interaction

The Instagram account “samarinda.beradab” utilizes various features available on the platform, including:

1. Feed (main posts in the form of photos and videos)
2. Reels (short-form video content)
3. Stories (temporary posts)

The use of these features indicates variation in the way messages are delivered to the public. Reels are used to present more dynamic content, while the feed is used for more permanent documentation. Based on observations, each post on the “samarinda.beradab” account receives responses from users in the form of likes and comments. The level of interaction varies depending on the type of content published. Content that displays direct engagement with the community tends to generate higher interaction compared to purely informational content.

Furthermore, there are indications of interaction between account managers and users through the comment section, although this is not consistently observed across all posts. These interactions typically take the form of responses to questions or feedback from users.

Overall, the findings indicate that the “samarinda.beradab” account, as a digital communication medium of the Samarinda City Government, presents diverse content with a dominance of documentation of governmental activities. Message delivery is carried out through a combination of visuals and informative captions, supported by the use of various features available on the social media platform. The communication activities also include interactions between the account and the public, as reflected in responses to published posts.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the Instagram account “samarinda.beradab” is utilized as one of the digital communication channels by the Samarinda City Government to disseminate public information and represent governmental activities. This finding reflects a shift in public communication practices from conventional patterns toward more open and distributed digital communication. From a public relations perspective, this practice can be understood as part of a communication strategy aimed at building relationships with the public while simultaneously shaping the institutional image through social media.

In general, the dominance of content in the form of documentation of governmental activities indicates that the communication strategy employed is oriented toward activity-based information dissemination. Content featuring the activities of local leaders, interactions with the community, and governmental agendas serves as a visual representation of institutional performance. Within the framework of public relations theory proposed by (Grunig & Grunig, 2013) this practice can be associated with a two-way communication model that begins to accommodate openness of information to the public. However, the predominance of informational content suggests that the communication practice has not yet fully achieved a symmetrical communication model, but rather remains in a transitional stage between one-way and two-way communication.

In the context of image formation, the findings reveal that the content published through the account contributes to the development of several dimensions of the local government's image. First, the image of transparency is reflected in the government's efforts to openly publish various activities and work programs. The consistent presentation of information through social media enables the public to gain insights into governmental performance, thereby reinforcing perceptions of openness. This finding aligns with public communication studies emphasizing transparency as a key element in building public trust in government institutions.

Second, the image of closeness (human-centered approach) is evident in content that displays direct interactions between the government and the community. The visualization of activities involving the public, along with the use of a more communicative tone in certain posts, reflects an effort to reduce the distance between the government and its citizens. From a digital communication perspective, this approach is essential for fostering more personal relationships and enhancing audience engagement. Previous studies also suggest that human-centered content tends to be more effective in building emotional connections between organizations and their publics.

Third, the image of professionalism is constructed through content that highlights formal activities, official agendas, and structured documentation of governmental work. The use of well-organized visuals and informative narratives reflects an effort to portray the government as a systematic and organized institution. This indicates that social media is not only used as a communication tool but also as a representational space for institutional identity, reflecting the credibility and competence of the government.

Fourth, the image of responsiveness is indicated by the presence of interaction between account managers and users, although it is not consistently observed across all posts. Responses to public comments demonstrate efforts to establish two-way communication, albeit still limited in intensity. Within the framework of digital public relations, responsiveness is a crucial indicator in assessing the quality of relationships between organizations and their publics. Higher levels of responsiveness are generally associated with increased public trust and satisfaction.

In addition, statistical data from SocialBlade indicate that the "samarinda.beradab" account exhibits a steadily increasing number of followers along with consistent content publication activity. This reflects the continuity of digital communication practices being implemented. However, the relatively low to moderate engagement rate suggests that interaction between the account and its audience has not yet been fully optimized. This finding is consistent with previous studies indicating that the success of social media communication is not solely determined by the frequency of content but also by the relevance and attractiveness of the messages delivered.

When compared with existing literature, these findings reinforce the argument that social media plays a strategic role in shaping organizational image, including that of government institutions. However, its effectiveness largely depends on the communication

strategies employed. Previous studies indicate that dialogical and participatory communication tends to be more effective in building a positive image than one-way communication. In this context, the communication practices observed in the “samarinda.beradab” account demonstrate the potential for developing more interactive strategies to enhance public engagement.

The implications of these findings suggest that local governments need to optimize the use of social media not only as a means of information dissemination but also as a dialogic space that enables more intensive two-way communication. Strengthening communication strategies oriented toward interaction and public participation can enhance the effectiveness of government image formation in the digital sphere. Furthermore, integrating informative content with a more human-centered communication approach can strengthen the emotional relationship between the government and the community. Thus, this discussion confirms that digital public relations communication strategies through social media play a crucial role in the process of shaping the image of local government. Social media functions not only as a communication tool but also as a medium for meaning construction that influences public perceptions of government institutions as a whole.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the utilization of social media, particularly Instagram, by the Samarinda City Government through the “samarinda.beradab” account has become an integral part of its digital public relations communication strategy in disseminating public information while simultaneously shaping the image of the local government. The implemented communication strategy is reflected in the consistency of content publication, the dominance of visual representations of governmental activities, and the use of informative narratives that support message delivery to the public.

The findings reveal that the published content functions not only as a means of information dissemination but also as a representational medium contributing to the construction of the government’s image. The image of transparency is reflected through the openness of information regarding governmental activities and programs, while the image of closeness is built through representations of interaction with the community. Furthermore, the image of professionalism is conveyed through structured and formal content presentation, and the image of responsiveness is indicated by the presence of interaction—although still limited—between account managers and the public. However, the relatively low to moderate level of audience engagement suggests that the implemented communication strategy has not yet been fully optimized in fostering dialogical and participatory communication. This indicates that the practice of digital public relations remains more oriented toward information dissemination rather than strengthening two-way interaction as emphasized in modern public relations communication theory.

Theoretically, these findings reinforce the view that social media serves as a strategic instrument in public communication practices and institutional image building. Nevertheless, its effectiveness largely depends on the organization’s ability to manage communication strategies in an integrated, interactive, and audience-oriented manner. In this context, digital government communication is not only required to be informative but also to foster engagement and closer relationships with the public. The implications of this study suggest that local governments need to develop more adaptive digital public relations communication strategies by emphasizing improved interaction quality, content diversification, and a more human-centered communication approach. Thus, social media should not merely function as a tool for information dissemination but also as an effective dialogic space in building a positive and sustainable government image in the digital era.

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