

Evolving human resource dimension in Indonesia's digital public relations landscape

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How to Cite This Article: Wachid, I.B., et al. (2024). Digital marketing communication, social media, competency, and marketing team members in Indonesia. *Jurnal Studi Komunikasi*, 8(2). doi: 10.25139/jsk.v8i2.8267
Received: 13-05-2024, Revision: 21-06-2024, Acceptance: 26-06-2024, Published online: 31-07-2024

Abstract The advancement of technology has transformed the field of public relations in Indonesia, requiring a change in the human resources management to effectively implement digital PR strategies. This study investigates the changing skills and abilities that Indonesian PR professionals require by conducting detailed interviews with five prominent Indonesian public relations practitioners. The results emphasise crucial competencies such as strategic planning, media relations, crisis management, and digital proficiencies. The crucial role of PR associations in directing the future of digital PR through diverse tactics and training programs is also highlighted. This study asserts that the ongoing improvement of digital literacy and strategic abilities is essential. Organisations should establish extensive training programs and cultivate collaborations with professional associations to offer important resources and guarantee competitiveness in the digital era. These endeavours are crucial for promoting and enhancing digital public relations strategies and bolstering organisational communication and reputation in Indonesia.

Keywords: artificial intelligence; big data; digital public relations; human resources management

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of information and communication technology (ICT) has revolutionised the field of public relations, enabling professionals to more effectively adjust to the constantly evolving global environment. Consequently, the incorporation of digital media in public relations strategies allows for more interactive and relevant communication, which is essential in the current rapidly evolving information landscape (Whatmough, 2018; Zeffass et al., 2019). Hence, PR practitioners must adapt to new technologies and approaches to be relevant and effective in their communication strategies (Theaker, 2020).

Indonesia's digital public relations strategies are intricately woven into its rapidly growing digital environment. In 2020, the country had more than 175 million internet users and 160 million active social media users, establishing the nation as an important player in Southeast Asia's digital landscape (DataReportal, 2021). The exponential expansion has forced organisations to embrace digital PR strategies to efficiently interact with their target public. Wachid's (2023) study emphasises the crucial significance of digital public relations in augmenting brand engagement and customer interaction through innovative approaches like influencer collaborations, interactive digital marketing, and real-time data.

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In addition, Indonesian PR practitioners are utilising a range of digital tools, including popular social media sites such as Twitter and YouTube, as well as customised applications designed for certain demographic groups. The widespread incorporation of digital tools highlights the significant influence of digitalisation on the public relations sector in Indonesia, compelling professionals to consistently develop innovative concepts and adjust to a digital-focused strategy.

During the digital age, organisations encounter intricate public relations obstacles that necessitate innovative approaches. Conventional public relations techniques, such as print media, have been overshadowed by the extensive coverage of social media and digital influencers (Kent & Li, 2020; Quesenberry, 2020). To effectively engage audiences, it is necessary to develop the human resources management by encouraging the utilisation of modern digital technologies in their operations (Meng & Berger, 2019; Widiastuti, 2021). Hence, organisations must ensure their competitiveness by recruiting talented individuals who possess advanced skills in digital communication, as emphasised.

Several scholars (Strohmeier, 2020; Wachid, 2023; Widiastuti, 2021) have investigated the growth of digital public relations from the dimension of human resources. From an organisational standpoint, it is crucial for public relations practitioners to possess the necessary skills and abilities to effectively manage digital communication initiatives, as well as possess digital analytical skills. In addition, a report published by Accenture (2023) emphasises that the rise of digital media channels has necessitated Public Relations professionals to effectively allocate resources between traditional and modern media. This highlights the need for adaptive management practices within organisations, aligning with the principles of the Excellence Theory in Public Relations proposed by Grunig et al. 1998)

Wachid (2023) has initially analysed the transformations in the human resource dimension of digital public relations in Indonesia. The study emphasises the evolving expectations of organisations about the duties and performance of public relations practitioners, specifically in terms of delivering measurable results based on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). In general, the dimension is classified into two categories: duty and competence. Public relations practitioners have a range of responsibilities, including spreading information through social media, conducting research, analysing data, making decisions, and managing public opinion. The study suggests that the responsibilities are closely linked to the use of digital technology in the execution of digital public relations. For example, the transmission of information through social media platforms and the control of public sentiment necessitates the use of social media platforms.

Nevertheless, a study conducted by Wulandari and Wachid (2022) emphasises that Indonesian public relations professionals lack the necessary skills to effectively utilise digital data analysis tools that are now an integral part of contemporary digital public relations. This disparity highlights a critical area where professional development and upskilling programs could significantly improve their expertise in the industry. In addition, Sari and Soegiarto (2021) highlight that the government public relations area in Indonesia faces challenges stemming from the scarcity of proficient public relations professionals. Indonesian government public relations practitioners frequently lack the necessary skills in the digital ecosystem.

To conduct a thorough examination of the human resource dimension of digital public relations in Indonesia, the researcher contends that it is crucial to emphasise the educational and training aspects of it. The rapid growth of digital public relations necessitated a flexible and comprehensive education and training program to adapt to the evolving landscape (Dunan & Mudjiyanto, 2020). Due to these specific requirements and skills, every human resource must have the ability to adapt to their changing responsibilities and obligations in their various industries. The complex tasks involved in digital public relations require more advanced skill sets, especially considering the need to adapt to current technology breakthroughs (Gupta et al., 2022). Although some contend that technology has the potential to replace human labour completely, human intellect possesses enduring qualities such as critical thinking and creativity that are resistant to substitution by robots.

This study aims to examine the influence of digital public relations on the dimension of human resources management, specifically in the field of public relations in Indonesia. Additionally, this study aims to investigate the various ways in which digitalisation has changed the tasks, functions, and strategies of human resources within the public relations department.

Furthermore, this study seeks to provide insights into the challenges, opportunities, and adjustments that PR professionals encounter in reaction to the digital PR revolution using qualitative research methods. The primary goal is to deepen our understanding of the intricate relationship between digitisation and human resources management in public relations practices in Indonesia.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive technique to investigate and describe the present state of human resources management in the context of digital public relations in Indonesia. Qualitative research is a method that involves situating the observer inside a particular context within the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2023). By employing a qualitative research methodology, the researcher has thoroughly examined the interpersonal dynamics inside the realm of digital public relations. The objective was to present an impartial portrayal of the circumstances pertaining to the management of human resources.

This study employs in-depth interviews as the data collection method. The in-depth interview method is widely respected for its strong ability to comprehensively investigate research issues. It allows for in-depth examinations that uncover nuanced and precise observations that may not be readily apparent using less individualised or conventional methods of data collecting (Turner III & Hagstrom-Schmidt, 2022). Five Indonesian public relations practitioners were involved as key informants due to their substantial expertise in public relations industry. Additionally, these individuals hold pivotal roles within their respective organisations, including the position. The individuals identified as key informants in this study are: a) Head of IPRAHUMAS (*Ikatan Pranata Hubungan Masyarakat*) or The Association of Public Relations Officers, Thoriq Ramadani; b) Secretary General of PERHUMAS (*Perhimpunan Hubungan Masyarakat*) or The Indonesian Public Relations Association, Benny Sigabutarbutar; c) Communication Director of Rajawali Foundation, Fardila Astari; d) Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Nexus Risk Mitigation & Strategic Communication, Firsan Nova; e) Assistant Manager of Corporate Communication at PT Pegadaian Indonesia, Wahyu Purnomo Aji.

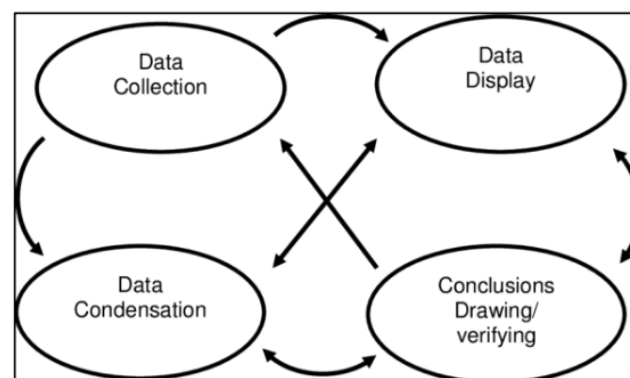


Figure 1. Data Analysis: Interactive Mode
Source: Miles, et al. (2019)

This study employed a descriptive qualitative analytic technique following the collection of data and transcription of interviews. The validity and reliability of the acquired data were assessed by various tests, including credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability), and confirmability (objectivity) tests, as suggested by Sugiyono (2013). The data was subsequently analysed using the Interactive Model approach, as outlined by Miles et al. (2019). Figure 1 illustrates the various elements encompassed in the data analysis process, such as data collection, data summarisation, data visualisation, and drawing conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Essential Digital Communication Competencies

In the rapidly developing realm of digital public relations in Indonesia, practitioners must possess a diverse range of abilities to adeptly navigate digital trends and tools. This study argues that these skills are essential for successfully attracting the attention of audiences, effectively

handling crises, and ensuring the success of digital public relations initiatives on various platforms. Acquiring proficiency in these skills is crucial for public relations professionals to succeed in the ever-changing digital environment and achieve their business objectives. Benny Siga Butarbutar, Secretary General of PERHUMAS or The Indonesian Public Relations Association, outlines critical competencies:

"From the perspective of PERHUMAS, there are five main competencies that PR professionals should possess. First, strategic planning skills are crucial, influenced by experience and education. Second, understanding strategy campaigns is important as campaigns often intersect with ethics. Third, strategic media understanding is necessary as media should not be viewed merely as a publication tool but as a strategic partner. Fourth, crisis management skills are essential as handling crises effectively is a key part of PR. Lastly, the ability to understand digitalisation in PR is important as many ethical issues arise in this area" (Benny Siga Butarbutar, personal interview, 7 February 2024)

The comprehensive findings above highlight the intricate and diverse aspects of public relations positions in the present day, necessitating a combination of strategic thinking and moral comprehension. Public relations practitioners must navigate a complex environment where strategic planning is closely connected to ethical considerations, ensuring that campaigns are not only successful but also morally sound (Gregory, 2020; Smith, 2020). These competences extend beyond digital technical skills and incorporate a profound comprehension of ethical elements and partnerships. They are crucial for effective both conventional and digital public relations campaigns, since they cultivate trust and credibility with the audience.

Furthermore, Thoriq Ramadani, The Head of IPRAHUMAS (Ikatan Pranata Hubungan Masyarakat) or The Association of Public Relations Officers expressed a specific viewpoint on digital public relations practices within the scope of government public relations:

"Human resources, especially in government as IPRAHUMAS members, need to have several key digital communication skills. These include the ability to plan and strategic communications, conduct media coverage, and create content for websites and social media. Additionally, skills in using software for information processing and AI tools to assist with tasks like transcription and content scheduling are becoming increasingly important" (Thoriq Ramadani, personal interview, 12 February 2024).

Thoriq's insights emphasises the notable use of digital communication technology into government public relations practices, suggesting an increasing dependence on digital tools to improve efficiency and expand outreach. This highlights a more extensive trend in which proficiency in digital communication technology is crucial at every level of public relations.

In conjunction to the digital public relations practices within the government public relations realm, Wahyu Purnomo Aji, Assistant Manager of Corporate Communication at PT Pegadaian Indonesia, discussed the practical skills needed:

"Negotiation and communication skills are very important because we often deal directly with the media, investors, and stakeholders. In addition, other skills such as graphic design and editing are also very necessary. For example, when there is an event, we must be able to quickly prepare the backdrop or merchandise design. So multifunctional capabilities in various digital aspects are essential in digital PR" (Wahyu Purnomo Aji, personal interview, 2 February 2024).

A study conducted by Macnamara (2016) provides further evidence to support these findings, emphasising the increasing importance of digital literacy and proficiency in artificial intelligence (AI) in contemporary public relations practices. This is particularly relevant in government sectors, where transparency and effective communication are of utmost importance. In addition, Kim (2019) emphasises the importance of public relations practitioners having strong negotiation and multimedia skills in order to effectively negotiate the intricacies of digital platforms and sustain stakeholder involvement. These studies validate the essential requirement for a varied range of abilities in digital communication to guarantee effective and efficient public relations operations in the contemporary digital landscape.

On the other hand, Fardila Astari, Communication Director for the Rajawali Foundation shared a distinctive insight from a non-governmental organisation (NGO) perspective, highlighting a strategic business perspective:

"Digital communication skills must align with the company's business goals and target audience. Essential skills include strategic thinking, strong research and analysis capabilities, and the ability to develop and implement communication strategies. Professionals should master paid, earned, shared, and owned media (PESO model) ensuring effective engagement and communication with the target audience through digital platforms" (Fardila Astari, personal interview, 13 February 2024).

The research findings above focus on integrating digital communication skills with corporate objectives and target demographics. This highlights the intricate strategic nature of NGO communications, which require a delicate balance between mission-oriented goals and engaging the target audience which is also highlighted by Ngondo (2019). Significantly, this study argues that there needs to be more digital public relations education, which frequently prioritises technical abilities above the incorporation of these abilities within a strategic framework.

Recent research conducted by Demetrious (2022) further emphasises the need for strategic alignment in digital public relations practices. The study highlights that technical skills need to be placed within a larger strategy framework in order to achieve meaningful effectiveness. Moreover, according to Smith (2020) using the PESO model is crucial for digital public relations campaigns since it offers a holistic strategy that improves audience engagement and contributes to organisational success. These observations emphasise the importance of further educating the public relations practitioners to ensure that they possess not only technical expertise but also the strategic acumen required to negotiate the intricacies of the contemporary digital environment.

Finally, Firsan Nova, the CEO of Nexus Risk Mitigation & Strategic Communication, emphasises the critical role of writing in managing public opinion in a digital realm:

"When it comes to balancing narratives, especially during crises, Nexus focuses on ICC: Issues, Conflicts, and Crises. The battlefield has two parts: the real crisis and public opinion. We often use social media and online media for public opinion management. We need writers; copywriters are essential. At Nexus, everyone must be able to write. Issue handling isn't just about talking; it's about writing. If someone is a spokesperson, they may speak, but otherwise, they must write" (Firsan Nova, personal interview, 19 February 2024).

Firsan Nova's prioritisation of writing skills at Nexus brings attention to a significant deficiency in digital PR training, where the intricate skills of creating written narratives is sometimes overlooked by an emphasis on verbal communication. The finding is particularly significant in the era of digital technology, where the management of public opinion through social media and online platforms is of utmost importance. The results of this study resonate with Meng & Berger's (2019) study which highlights that in the digital era, it is crucial for organisations to engage in strategic planning and crisis management in order to develop resilience and uphold trust among stakeholders. Furthermore, several studies highlight the importance of written material in addressing problems, disputes, and emergencies and highlights the necessity for public relations practitioners to possess advanced proficiency in digital writing ((Johnston, 2020; Lee-Geiller & Lee, 2022; Mitroff, 2018).

The comprehensive research findings examined in this study emphasise that the range of essential digital communication skills goes beyond basic technological expertise to include strategic, ethical, and adaptive abilities. Hence, public relations practitioners must navigate an intricate environment, carefully managing strategic goals while also taking into account ethical considerations and engaging with the target audience in a digital realm. The study emphasises the necessity for more comprehensive and integrated methods that equip the public relations practitioners to address the varied and ever-changing requirements of the digital age.

Challenges in Advancing Digital Communication Skills

This study goes beyond the identification of essential digital communication skills to further investigate the challenges encountered by Indonesian public relations practitioners in advancing these skills within their respective organisational domains. The investigation revealed a diverse range of challenges, encompassing both individual obstacles and broader organisational challenges. These findings provide a thorough comprehension of the challenges that hinder the advancement of digital communication skills in the public relations industry in Indonesia.

Firstly, Wahyu Purnomo Aji identifies self-learning as a significant challenge:

"There are some skills that have to be learned autodidactically because not everything is taught formally. For instance, graphic design, photography, and editing skills. This requires us to learn on our own to meet urgent needs in daily work. Besides that, the company also provides an annual budget for courses that help us continuously update our digital skills" (Wahyu Purnomo Aji, personal interview, 2 February 2024).

The research findings above emphasise the disparity between formal education and the practical demands of the digital public relations field, revealing a disconnection that the practitioners must independently overcome. While organisations frequently allocate training budgets to facilitate skill enhancement, these resources may only sometimes be adequate to keep up with the rapid pace of technological development. Hence, the need for self-learning remains to be a substantial obstacle for employees who must rapidly adjust to novel techniques and technology in order to maintain their effectiveness, as highlighted by (Mian et al., 2020)

Furthermore, Fardila Astari shared her personal challenges in balancing workloads and digital communication advancement:

"Time management is crucial in balancing the demands of my role with continuous learning. Despite heavy workloads, I invest in courses and certifications, often working late into the night or on weekends. AI supports my tasks, but human oversight and critical thinking are necessary to utilise AI tools effectively" (Fardila Astari, personal interview, 13 February 2024).

Fardila's insights highlight the need for efficient time management and the personal dedication needed for ongoing learning in the digital public relations industry. Although AI tools can offer substantial assistance, human supervision is essential to guarantee precision and pertinence. This emphasises the necessity of adopting a comprehensive strategy for skills advancement and managing jobs, which involves striking a balance between leveraging technical support and cultivating crucial human skills and judgement.

On the other hand, Benny Siga Butarbutar emphasised uneven development of digital skills in Indonesia:

"One of the challenges is that digital communication skills are not uniformly developed across all PR practitioners in Indonesia. In many cases, practitioners need to be proactive in learning these skills. For example, understanding and using big data, AI, and digital platforms require continuous learning and adaptation which can be challenging without the right resources and training" (Benny Siga Butarbutar, personal interview, 7 February 2024).

The findings have uncovered a significant discrepancy in the acquisition of digital communication skills among Indonesian public relations practitioners. Strengthening this study, Pedro et al., (2019) demonstrate that the uneven distribution of skills emphasises the difficulty of keeping up with technological advancements such as big data, AI, and other digital platforms, which necessitate continuous education and adaptation. This study argues that the absence of consistent development worsens this problem, indicating a notable deficiency in the existing public relations education that must be resolved to ensure that both current and future public relations practitioners can proficiently navigate the digital environment.

Furthermore, Thoriq Ramadani shared an interrelated insights regarding the issues faced by Indonesian public relations practitioners, particularly within the government sectors:

"One of the challenges is ensuring that all members both at the central and regional levels have equal access to training and software. There are gaps in access to information and tools between those in central government and those in rural areas. To address this, IPRAHUMAS has implemented national programs like Kelas Belajar (learning class) to provide continuous training and development opportunities for all members. We have made these programs flexible and often conducted online to accommodate different schedules and locations" (Thoriq Ramadani, personal interview, 12 February 2024).

The research findings obtained from Benny Siga Butarbutar and Thoriq Ramadani demonstrate an unequal distribution of opportunities for advancing digital communication skills among public relations practitioners in Indonesia. Despite this disparity, IPRAHUMAS or The Association of Public Relations Officers, plays a vital role in bridging the gap by facilitating the enhancement of skills through its programs and resources. This highlights the significance of professional associations in guaranteeing that all professionals have the resources and education required to succeed in the digital era (Pettersson, 2018).

The research findings in this discussion demonstrate notable obstacles in enhancing digital communication abilities among Indonesian public relations practitioners, emphasising discrepancies in opportunities for training and the importance of self-learning. Although there have been efforts made by organisations and the assistance of professional associations like IPRAHUMAS or The Association of Public Relations Officers, there remains a critical need for more extensive and easily available training programs to fill these gaps. This study emphasises the significance of a comprehensive approach to public relations education that incorporates ongoing learning, effective time management, and deliberate skill enhancement to guarantee that the practitioners are prepared to handle the fast-changing digital environment.

Training and Development Opportunities

The final aspect explored in this study within the human resource dimension is the availability of training and development opportunities. The study found that various organisations in Indonesia acknowledge the significance of ongoing training and development to improve their digital public communication skills. Hence, several initiatives emerge to promote skill development and ensure that public relations practitioners stay up to date on the latest digital tools and techniques.

As the development of technology in digital public relations practices continues to emerge, there has been a growing urgency in the advancement of technical skills, as stated by Firsan Nova below:

"At Nexus, we continually provide relevant training for current needs. For example, we use IMA (Intelligent Media Analytics) and ISA (Intelligent Social Analytics) to capture all online and social media conversations. Indeed, commitment to continual training is critical for our team's proficiency and our organisation's success. We constantly develop our team's skills with the latest training related to these tools" (Firsan Nova, personal interview, 19 February 2024).

Nevertheless, Fardila Astari highlighted that achieving success in the field of digital public relations necessitates not just technical proficiency but also an adequate capability for strategic planning, as stated below:

"Our organisation provides strategic training that emphasises analytical thinking and strategic planning. Employees are encouraged to engage in continuous learning and development to keep pace with the evolving digital landscape. We focus on enhancing strategic skills rather than merely technical implementation, often outsourcing technical tasks to specialised consultants" (Fardila Astari, personal interview, 13 February 2024).

The research findings by Firsan Nova and Fardila Astari emphasise the crucial importance of organisational support in providing training and development for public relations practitioners, which includes both technical and strategic planning skills. Firsan Nova's organisation emphasises the significance of improving technical skills through ongoing training on tools such as Intelligence Media Analytics (IMA) and Intelligence Socio Analytics (ISA),

whereas Fardila Astari's organisation focuses on developing analytical and strategic planning skills. These findings emphasise the variety of organisational strategies employed for human resource management and development. Specifically, they demonstrate how non-governmental organisations prioritise strategic planning in their digital public relations practices, which aligns with their mission-driven emphasis and the goal of creating long-term impact.

As discussed before, it is found that organisation plays a crucial role in facilitating training and development opportunities. Wahyu Purnomo Aji explains the dual approach to training:

"We are facilitated with two types of training: personal and group. Each year there is a budget allocated directly to employees for individual courses as well as a budget for group training in the department. For example, I can choose a course on digital PR according to work needs" (Wahyu Purnomo Aji, personal interview, 2 February 2024).

The findings highlight PT Pegadaian Indonesia's commitment as a state-owned corporation to human resources development. Their employees can increase their skills through a variety of training options that are adjustable to their specific work objectives and personal preferences, thus promoting personalised professional development. These points demonstrate the Indonesian government's strategic approach to enhancing the quality of human resources within its companies, by developing skilled and adaptable workforce.

In relations to the development of Indonesian public relations practitioners within the government public relations domain, Thoriq Ramadani shared IPRAHUMAS or The Association of Public Relations Officers' collaborative efforts:

"We offer various training and development opportunities, including the Kelas Belajar or learning classes program which focuses on skill enhancement and knowledge acquisition" (Thoriq Ramadani, personal interview, 12 February 2024).

"We also collaborate with other organisations to provide certifications such as the Certified Public Relations (CPR) certification. This helps members improve their competencies and stay updated with the latest digital PR practices. Additionally, we organise national competitions and awards to incentivise excellence and continuous improvement in PR practices" (Thoriq Ramadani, personal interview, 12 February 2024).

Thoriq Ramadani emphasises the important function of IPRAHUMAS or The Association of Public Relations Officers in improving the digital communication competencies of PR practitioners working for the Indonesian government organisations. This study asserts that the collaboration between different stakeholders in the government sector provides a solid basis for sustained enhancements in public relations methods in Indonesia. Hence, coordinated measures are crucial for enhancing the effectiveness and professionalism of governmental public relations in the digital age.

Lastly, Benny Siga Butarbutar demonstrated PERHUMAS or The Indonesian Public Relations Association's comprehensive training initiatives, such as:

"PERHUMAS organises various conferences, meetings, and training sessions to help members develop their skills. These events cover a wide range of topics, including strategic planning, media relations, crisis management, and digitalisation in PR. Additionally, we emphasise ethical practices in all our training programs to ensure that our members are well-rounded professionals" (Benny Siga Butarbutar, personal interview, 7 February 2024).

The results presented in this sub-chapter demonstrate an in-depth approach to training and development opportunities in the field of digital public relations in Indonesia. These findings emphasise the significance of improving both technical and strategic competencies. Nexus, Rajawali Foundation, PT Pegadaian Indonesia, IPRAHUMAS or The Association of Public Relations Officers, and PERHUMAS or The Indonesian Public Relations Association are crucial organisations that offer a wide range of training programs specifically designed to meet the changing needs of the digital public relations landscape. These endeavours are crucial for cultivating a skilled, flexible, and morally grounded workforce, guaranteeing the progress of digital public relations practices throughout diverse industries in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the evolving human resources dimension in Indonesia's digital public relations landscape, specifically focusing on the essential digital competencies and challenges encountered by Indonesian PR professionals. The research identified a requirement for various digital communication competencies, such as strategy planning, media relations, crisis management, and proficiency in using digital tools and platforms. Strategic planning and ethical concerns are of utmost importance in both government and business public relations activities. Additionally, there is an increasing dependence on digital tools such as big data and artificial intelligence. The findings emphasise the crucial requirement for ongoing education and flexibility in response to swift technological progress.

The findings of this research indicate that Indonesian PR practitioners need to improve their proficiency in digital technology and strategic competencies to conduct digital public relations practices efficiently. Hence, organisations should prioritize implementing comprehensive training programs that cover both technical and strategic competencies to adequately equip their workers for the challenges of digital PR. Practical suggestions involve incorporating ongoing professional development programs, such as workshops on digital skills and seminars on strategic planning, into HR management plans. In addition, cultivating collaborations with professional associations can provide public relations practitioners access to valuable resources and training prospects, guaranteeing their competitiveness and efficacy in the digital era. These endeavours are crucial for the progress of digital public relations methodologies and the overall improvement of organisational reputes and communication efficacy in Indonesia.

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