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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INTENSITY OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND LEVEL OF STUDENT TRUST IN ORGANIZATIONAL PUBLIC RELATIONS INFORMATION

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the relationship between the intensity of social media use and the level of student trust in organizational public relations information. The method used is a quantitative approach with a survey technique, using a Likert scale questionnaire (1–5). Respondents consisted of 30 students from several universities in Indonesia selected using purposive sampling. Data analysis was conducted using Pearson correlation. The results showed a correlation value of $r = 0.586$, indicating a moderately strong positive relationship between the two variables. Social media use intensity contributed 34.4% to student trust levels, while the remaining 65.6% was influenced by other factors not examined in this study. The test results indicate this relationship is statistically significant, so H_1 is accepted. In conclusion, the higher the intensity of students' social media use, the higher their tendency to trust information conveyed by organizational public relations through digital platforms.

1. Introduction

The rapid development of digital technology has transformed the way organizations communicate with the public, including through public relations practices. Social media has now become a primary channel used by organizational public relations to convey information to the public, particularly to college students, the generation most active on digital platforms. According to We Are Social and Meltwater (2024), active social media users in Indonesia have reached over 167 million, with an average usage duration of 3 hours and 18 minutes per day.

The high intensity of social media use among college students opens up opportunities for organizations to establish more effective and interactive communication. Zaxrie et al. (2024) state that social media has shifted public relations communication patterns from a one-way model to a two-way model that is more responsive to public feedback. This makes social media not simply a tool for disseminating information, but a space for dialogue between organizations and their publics.

However, high levels of social media use do not always equate to high levels of trust in the information being circulated. Putri and Astini (2024) found that while information consumption through social media influences public trust, the quality and credibility of the information source remain key determinants. This presents a challenge for public relations practitioners in building and maintaining public trust amidst the rapid flow of digital information.

Research on the relationship between social media use intensity and students' trust in organizational public relations information is still limited, particularly in Indonesia. Therefore, this study aims to empirically examine the relationship between these two variables using a quantitative approach. The research question is: "Is there a relationship between social media use intensity and students' level of trust in organizational public relations information?"

2. Literature Review

A. Public Relations and Digital Social Media

Public relations is a management function tasked with building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its various publics (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006). In the digital era, public relations practices have undergone significant changes with the emergence of social media as a new, faster, broader, and more interactive communication medium. Maulvi, Rizal, and Lusiana (2023) state that social media has now become a strategic tool for government and organizational public relations in building image and managing relationships with the public.

Romadhan, Rinata, and Pradana (2024) explain that digital public relations is the application of public relations strategies that utilize digital platforms, particularly social media, to build an organization's image, increase public engagement, and expand communication reach. Meanwhile, Dipa, Hafiar, and Rahmat (2022) emphasize that public relations practitioners'

understanding of reputation in the digital era is crucial for the effectiveness of communication with the public.

B. Intensity of Social Media Use

The intensity of social media use refers to how often, for how long, and how actively a person interacts with social media platforms. Research conducted on Informatics Engineering students at UNG (Inverted, 2023) found that the majority of students accessed social media via smartphones for more than two hours per day, with their primary activities being searching for the latest information and communicating.

In this study, the intensity of social media use was measured using three main dimensions: (1) frequency of access, namely how often users open social media applications; (2) duration, namely the amount of time spent each day; and (3) active engagement, namely user participation in the form of reactions, comments, and sharing content. The Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974) explains that individuals use media based on specific needs, such as the need for information, entertainment, and social interaction.

C. Public Trust in Organizational Information

Trust is a crucial element in the relationship between an organization and its public. Prayetno (2025) found that accountability and information quality are the most influential factors in fostering public trust in digital communication. This means that trust is not formed automatically, but rather through the

consistency, accuracy, and relevance of information consistently delivered.

Slavina et al. (2025) found that social media use significantly influences public trust in institutions. Putri and Astini (2024) confirmed that the frequency and intensity of information consumption through social media contribute to the formation of trust, noting that source credibility remains a determining factor. In this study, trust was measured through five dimensions: information reliability, source credibility, data accuracy, content relevance, and message consistency.

A. Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory was developed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974). This theory views media users as active and purposeful individuals who choose and use media. Individuals choose specific media to fulfill specific needs, such as information, entertainment, or social interaction.

In the context of this research, this theory is used to explain why college students use social media intensively. Students access social media, including official organizational public relations accounts, because they seek relevant and up-to-date information. The more frequently their information needs are met through accurate and useful public relations content, the greater their trust in that information source.

B. Source Credibility Theory

Source Credibility Theory was developed by Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953). This theory states that the extent to which a message

influences the recipient depends largely on the recipient's perception of the source's credibility. Source credibility encompasses two main elements: expertise and trustworthiness.

In this study, this theory is used to explain that students' trust in public relations information is not only a matter of how often they are exposed to it, but also how they assess the credibility of an organization's official public relations account. Students who regularly access public relations accounts and find the information accurate and consistent will form a judgment that the source is credible and worthy of trust.

C. Symmetrical Two-Way Communication Model (Grunig & Hunt)

Grunig and Hunt (1984) developed four public relations models. The most ideal model is the symmetrical two-way communication model, where communication between the organization and the public is dialogic and mutually beneficial. In this model, the organization not only conveys information but also listens to and responds to public feedback.

This model is relevant in today's social media era, as platforms like Instagram and Twitter naturally support two-way communication through comments, direct messages, and polls. Zaxrie et al. (2024) assert that social media enables organizational public relations to be more responsive to public feedback while building more personal relationships. Students, as active social media users, tend to trust public relations personnel who are open and responsive in their communication.

D. Framework of thinking

Based on the three theories above, the conceptual framework of this study can be explained as follows. The Uses and Gratifications Theory explains that students use social media intensively to meet their information needs. Each time they interact with organizational public relations content, they indirectly evaluate the credibility of the source in accordance with the principles of Source Credibility Theory. This iterative evaluation process, coupled with dialogic two-way communication as explained by the Grunig & Hunt Model, gradually forms trust in public relations information. Thus, the intensity of social media use is suspected to have a positive relationship with the level of student trust in organizational public relations information.

3. Methodology

A. Types and Approaches of Research

This study employed a quantitative approach with a survey method. This approach was chosen because the study aimed to measure the relationship between two variables numerically and to test it statistically (Sugiyono, 2019). The data collection instrument used was a closed-ended questionnaire with a Likert scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means "Strongly Disagree" and 5 means "Strongly Agree."

B. Population and Sample

The population in this study were active students from various universities in Indonesia who actively use at least one social media platform. Sampling was conducted using a

purposive sampling technique, which selects samples based on specific criteria established by the researcher. The sample size was 30 respondents, from Makassar State University (UNM), Hasanuddin University (UNHAS), Tadulako University (UNTAD), Udayana University, and several other universities. The researchers acknowledge that this sample size is relatively small, so the results cannot be widely generalized and are more of a preliminary finding that needs to be developed in further research.

C. Operational Definition of Variables

This study consists of two variables:

Variable X (Independent) Social Media Usage Intensity, measured through eight indicators: frequency of access, dependence on social media, duration of use per day, forgetfulness while using social media, number of platforms actively used, active following of the organization's official accounts, intensity of interaction with organizational content, and content sharing behavior.

Variable Y (Dependent) Student Trust in Organizational Public Relations Information, measured through eight indicators: reliability of information from official accounts, comparison with unofficial accounts, accuracy of information conveyed, trust in data and facts from public relations, relevance of information to students, relevance to current issues, consistency of messages across platforms, and consistency between posts.

D. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in this study includes three stages: (1) descriptive analysis to describe the characteristics of respondents' answers to each variable; (2) Pearson correlation test to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between the intensity of social media use and student trust; and (3) significance test to ensure that the relationship found is statistically significant and does not occur by chance, with a 95% confidence level.

4. Results and Discussion

A. Respondent Characteristics

This study involved 30 student respondents from several universities in Indonesia. The majority of respondents came from Makassar State University (UNM), followed by Tadulako University (UNTAD), Hasanuddin University (UNHAS), and other universities. Most respondents were in their fourth semester, indicating they already had considerable experience using social media and interacting with organizations' digital content.

B. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 below presents descriptive statistics for both research variables..

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min – Max
Intensity of Social Media Use (X)	30	29,37	5,44	11 – 38
Trust in Public Relations Information (Y)	30	29,10	5,53	15 – 40

Source: Primary Data, 2024

Based on Table 1, the average intensity score for social media use was 29.37 out of a maximum score of 40, while the average trust score was 29.10 out of a maximum score of 40. These two figures indicate that students generally have a fairly high level of social media use and trust in public relations information. These findings align with data from We Are Social and Meltwater (2024), which indicates that Indonesian students are among the most active social media users.

C. Distribution of Variable Categorization

Table 2 and Table 3 below present the distribution of the categorization of each variable..

Table 2. Distribution of Categorization of Social Media Usage Intensity Variable (X)

Category	Score	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Low	8 – 20	2	6,7%
Medium	21 – 30	14	46,7%
High	31 – 40	14	46,7%
Total	–	30	100%

Source: Primary Data, 2024

Table 3. Distribution of Categorization of Trust Variables in Public Relations Information (Y)

Category	Score	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Low	8 – 20	3	10,0%
Medium	21 – 30	12	40,0%
High	31 – 40	15	50,0%
Total	–	30	100%

Source: Primary Data, 2024

Based on Table 2, 14 respondents (46.7%) had a high level of social media usage intensity, 14 respondents (46.7%) had a moderate level of social media usage intensity, and 2 respondents (6.7%) had a low level of social media usage intensity. This high level of social media usage aligns with Inverted's (2023) findings that college students are the most intensive social media users.

Based on Table 3, 15 respondents (50.0%) had a high level of trust in public relations information, 12 respondents (40.0%) had a moderate level of trust, and 3 respondents (10.0%) had a low level of trust. This distribution indicates that the majority of college students have moderate to high levels of trust in information disseminated by organizational public relations through social media.

D. Correlation Test Results

Table 4 below presents the results of the Pearson correlation test between the two variables.

Table 4. Pearson Correlation Test Results (n = 30, 95% confidence level)

Description	r (Correlation)	R ² (%)	t-value	Conclusion
Social Media Intensity → Public Relations Trust	0,586	34,4%	3,828	There is a Real Connection

Source: Primary Data, 2024

Based on Table 4, the Pearson correlation value of $r = 0.586$ indicates a fairly strong positive relationship between the intensity of social media use and students' trust in public relations information. This means that as a student's social media usage intensity increases, their trust in

information conveyed by organizational public relations through social media also tends to increase.

From this correlation value, it can also be calculated that the intensity of social media use contributes 34.4% ($R^2 = 0.344$) to changes in students' trust levels. The remaining 65.6% is influenced by other factors not examined, such as the quality of the uploaded content, the organization's public relations track record, or students' critical thinking skills in evaluating information.

The t-test result of 3.828 indicates that this relationship is statistically significant and not a coincidence. Thus, H_1 is accepted: there is a significant relationship between the intensity of social media use and students' trust in organizational public relations information. This conclusion applies to a student population with characteristics similar to the respondents in this study.

The findings of this study confirm that the intensity of social media use is positively and significantly related to students' trust in organizational public relations information. These results align with Putri and Astini (2024), who found that exposure to information through social media influences public trust. More frequent and intensive information consumption tends to build familiarity and trust in the information source.

From the perspective of Uses and Gratifications Theory, students who use social media intensively engage more actively with the

content they consume, including content from official organizational public relations accounts. This active engagement, through reacting, commenting, and sharing, contributes to building trust in the information disseminated. This finding is reinforced by Zaxrie et al. (2024), who found that social media enables interactive two-way communication between public relations and the public.

These findings also align with Prayetno (2025), who concluded that information quality is a crucial factor in public trust in an organization's digital communications. Students who are frequently exposed to accurate and relevant public relations content tend to perceive the source as more reliable, thus gradually increasing their trust.

However, it's important to note that this positive relationship isn't absolute. Some respondents with high usage intensity actually reported low or moderate trust. This suggests that usage intensity alone isn't enough; content quality and source credibility remain important factors for PR practitioners to consider when designing their digital communications strategies.

5. Conclusion

Based on the data analysis and discussion, it can be concluded that there is a positive and significant relationship between the intensity of social media use and students' level of trust in organizational public relations information. A Pearson correlation value of $r = 0.586$ indicates a fairly strong relationship between the two variables, contributing 34.4% to the change in

trust levels. The majority of respondents fell into the high intensity category of social media use, which was accompanied by a tendency to also have high trust in public relations information.

It should be emphasized that this study is preliminary with a limited sample size (30 respondents), so the results cannot be broadly generalized. This study serves more as an initial step in examining the relationship between these two variables in the context of digital public relations.

Based on the findings of this study, organizational public relations practitioners are advised to optimally utilize social media platforms as the primary communication channel for students, ensuring the consistency, accuracy, and relevance of published content to build and maintain public trust.

For future research, it is recommended to expand the sample size to obtain more representative results. Furthermore, the addition of variables such as student digital literacy, the quality of public relations content, or the frequency of two-way interactions could be considered to strengthen understanding of the factors influencing student trust in digital public relations information.

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