



## Application of the New Public Relations Paradigm in the Cyberspace Retail Industry

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### Abstract

This research aims to analyze the application of the New Public Relations (NPR) paradigm in the retail industry, by taking a case study of a well-known retail company, Alfamart. The NPR paradigm emphasizes the importance of two-way interaction between organizations and stakeholders, as well as an emphasis on values, transparency, and community involvement. This study uses a qualitative approach with data collection techniques in the form of in-depth interviews with various related parties in Alfamart, such as senior management, PR staff, and consumers. Data analysis was conducted by detailing communication practices that reflect the NPR paradigm. The results of this study reveal that Alfamart has implemented various aspects of the NPR paradigm in its communication strategy. They understand the importance of listening to input and feedback from consumers and strive to provide honest, transparent and relevant information to stakeholders. In addition, Alfamart is also active in involving themselves in social and community activities, reflecting their commitment to corporate social responsibility. This research contributes to the understanding of how retail companies can adopt the NPR paradigm in managing relationships with consumers and society more effectively. This research contributes to the understanding of how retail companies can adopt the NPR paradigm in managing relationships with consumers and society more effectively.

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## INTRODUCTION

The role of Public Relations (PR) has undergone a significant transformation. In the midst of technological advances and the shift towards digital, the emergence of "New Public Relations" (New PR) has become an unavoidable challenge for companies or organizational institutions. New PR includes strategies and approaches that focus on direct public engagement, transparency, and the use of sophisticated technology (Seitel, 2017). Of course, Public Relations must be careful in observing the behavior patterns of various parties, especially the people who are bergua in determining appropriate approach strategies (Wulandari, 2021).

Taking into account what was explained earlier, a paradigm shift in PR is needed due to a shift in the way people interact and access information (Arief & Saputra, 2019). Traditional media, which used to be the main communication channel between organizations and the public, has now been complemented by digital platforms that provide the ability to communicate in real-time and unhindered by geographical boundaries (Seitel, 2017).

New Public Relations recognizes the power and importance of social media and other digital communication tools in building closer relationships with the public (Fitzpatrick et al., 2013). New PR in this case uses a more transparent and honest approach in communicating with the public. Openness and integrity are key in building trust, especially in an era when information can be easily accessed (Susanto & Setyanto, 2020). Organizations that adopt new PR must be able to face criticism, respond quickly to problems, and communicate openly with the public (Arief & Saputra, 2019). In addition, new PR also demands the ability to re-read the public. Given the complexity and diversity of modern society, a deeper understanding of the audience is important (Cheney et al., 2008). Then, looking at the needs, expectations and preferences of the public is an important first step in developing an effective PR strategy (Fitzpatrick et al., 2013). By re-reading the public, organizations can increase engagement, strengthen relationships with stakeholders, and generate greater positive impact on their organization (Grunig, 2009).

Alfamart is one of the leading retail companies in Indonesia, now must understand the importance of maintaining a good brand image and establishing good relationships with consumers and the wider community (Alfamart, 2020). In an effort to continuously increase its influence and presence in the market, Alfamart adopted a new PR paradigm that focuses on building strong relationships with consumers, increasing community involvement, and creating unique shopping experiences (Macnamara, 2012). One important aspect of the new PR approach adopted by Alfamart is the utilization of social media and digital technology. This article discusses the new Public Relations paradigm and the importance of changing the company's paradigm in the face of the changes that are the case. This research aims to see how retail companies, especially in terms of new PR, utilize technology and adapt. In addition, it discusses the importance of openness, understanding, and honesty in communicating with the public.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Public Relations

Competent public relations play a crucial role in overseeing and shaping the reputation of an organization by fostering effective communication and cultivating positive relationships with various stakeholders, particularly the general public. The public forms perceptions of the organization based on its interactions, how well or poorly it engages with them, and the overall impressions derived from the communication exchange. These perceptions significantly influence the decision-making process, determining whether the audience will offer support, maintain collaboration, or show interest in the company's products and services. Additionally, the public can actively contribute input, perspectives, comments, and grievances, further shaping the overall public opinion regarding the company's communication initiatives.

### Public Relations Strategy

Various kinds of human activities must practice Public Relations such as humans joining an organization, attending invitations and others which are Public Relations activities that influence people who have various interests from others (Arief & Saputra, 2019). Public Relations can identify problems that arise with communication activities carried out by the company by focusing on identifying the level of consumer awareness, attitudes and perceptions of consumers towards the products and services offered by the company. The identification results are then used as material for the company's consideration to implement the appropriate strategy.

The tasks assigned to Public Relations require high creativity so that a Public Relations can create a strategy in selling services / products to consumers (external) and continue to innovate in order to maintain a good image of the institution or organization in the midst of society. in the current era of globalization.

Furthermore, Ahmad S. Adnan Putra, a public relations expert in a workshop paper entitled, "Public Relations Strategy" says that strategy is an integrated part of a plan (plan), the plan is a product of a planning (planing) which in turn planning is one of the basic functions of management (Avidar, 2017). As explained earlier, Public Relations aims to uphold and develop a favorable image for the organization, company or products and services to interested parties (Stokholder) as related targets, namely internal and external public.

To gain trust, mutual understanding and a good image of the community, Public Relations can implement strategies that have been determined by company management. This rests on Kasali's theory in Soemirat and Elvinardo (Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012) which states that:

"First, Public Relations can contribute to strategic management in two ways, namely performing tasks as part of the overall strategic management of the organization. PR

involvement in this comprehensive process will provide great benefits for the organization and PR itself.

Second, Public Relations can play a role in strategic management in managing its activities strategically “.

To achieve this goal, the strategy of Public Relations activities should be directed at the perceptions of stockholders so that their attitudes and actions are in accordance with the desired. If this strategy is successful, it will obtain favorable attitudes and actions from stockholders which will ultimately create a good opinion and image.

From that, Public Relations must have a mindset and strategy that requires a lot of input and has a high level of dependence on one another so that it can implement, implement and control the most reliable strategy. Public Relations is required to think strategically at a high and complex level and will bring up a need for a more structured and systematic model that will help make satisfaction simpler in analyzing problems and formulating a good strategy that is also able to provide satisfactory results.

### **Company Image**

According to Bill Canton in Sukatendel (1990), says that image is "Image: the impression, the feeling, the conception which the public has of the company; a consciously created impression of an object, person or organization." (Image is the impression, feeling, public self-image of the company; a deliberately created impression of an object, person or organization). Researchers concluded that the company's image is an impression that is deliberately created by an object regarding the image of the company.

### **Relationship Building and Engagement**

In recent years, the concept of engagement has gained prominence in both research and application within public relations. The notion that organizations and the public should interact in genuine conversations represents a logical evolution from the relational approach, which focuses on building and managing organization-public relationships (OPRs) (Botan, 1992; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001). Additionally, the dialogic communication approach, introduced by Botan (1997), Kent and Taylor (1998, 2002), and Pearson (1989), further incorporates the idea of dialogue and 'dialogic communication' into OPRs. According to Taylor and Kent (2014, p. 384), "engagement is part of dialogue, and through engagement, organizations and publics can make decisions that create social capital." They assert that dialogic engagement offers numerous advantages for organizations and stakeholders, including enhanced understanding among participants, facilitating decisions that benefit all involved parties, and

contributing to the development of a well-functioning society grounded in informed decision-making.

As per Devin and Lane (2014), involvement of stakeholders in decision-making processes and dialogue creates a network of shared responsibility and relationships. This, in turn, contributes to the establishment of organizational legitimacy. Described as a multidimensional concept by Johnston (2014), engagement serves as a basis for constructing organizational relationships and serves as a tool to facilitate interactions between individuals and organizations (p. 381). Ariel and Avidar (2015) additionally note that online engagement enables individuals to actively contribute to the creation of meaning.

The internet, particularly through social media and mobile platforms, provides novel opportunities for establishing and nurturing organization-public relationships (OPR). Sweetser (2014) suggests that social media is rapidly transforming into a tool for organizations to present a more human image and cultivate relationships with stakeholders (p. 205). Social media facilitates not only interactions between organizations and the public but also engagement among online community members who consume, produce, and share information, actively participating in the creation of meaning (Ariel & Avidar, 2015). However, Yang and Kent (2014) emphasize the enduring significance of "traditional" media and mainstream coverage in enhancing an organization's visibility on social media. In recent years, one prominent theme for constructing and fostering OPR involves an organization's commitment to community and environmental concerns (Dhanesh, 2013; Du-Plessis & Grobler, 2014). The subsequent section will delve into community and environmental engagement.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This research aims to investigate the application of the New Public Relations paradigm in the online retail industry (Alfamart), focusing on communication and public relations strategies centered on the concepts of interaction, dialogue and active participation with stakeholders in cyberspace. Qualitative methods will be used to explore an in-depth understanding of how online retail companies apply the concept of New Public Relations in practice.

This research will use a case study approach to understand the implementation of New Public Relations in several Alfamart retail companies that have successfully utilized this concept. The selection of case studies will be made based on specific criteria, such as company reputation, innovative communication strategies, and significant positive impact in the industry.

This research will then analyze the content of selected Alfamart online publications, such as websites, social media, and other related content. Content analysis will be used to track how companies interact with stakeholders, create dialog, and facilitate active participation in cyberspace.

Plus This research will involve participatory observation in some communication activities conducted by Alfamart. The researcher will try to experience the customer experience and observe how the company responds directly to customer requests, questions, or complaints. This research method will provide an in-depth understanding of the application of the New Public Relations paradigm in the online retail industry. The results of this research are expected to provide valuable insights into how online retail companies can utilize new approaches in managing relationships with their stakeholders in cyberspace. This research will contribute to the theoretical and practical understanding of the role of New Public Relations in the context of the evolving online retail industry.

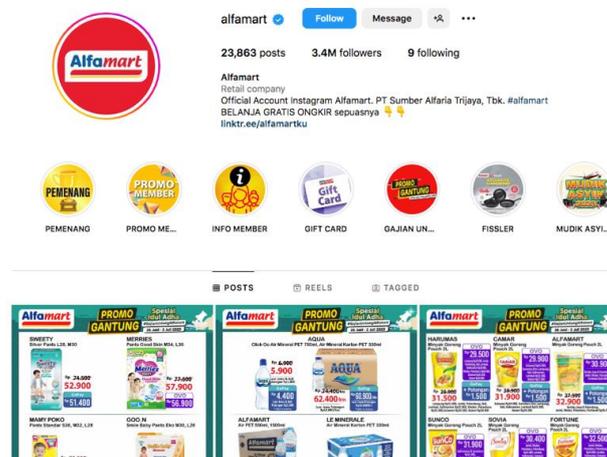
## RESULTS

### Mapping of Students' Answers

#### *Alfamart Retail Company in Implementing the New PR Paradigm Adaptive and Creative*

Alfamart initially relied on pre-existing communication methods such as television advertising, print, and other traditional media. However, it has now moved towards an adaptive and creative PR paradigm by utilizing modern technology that is a trend in the digital era (Pramono Putra, 2021). One concrete example is Alfamart's use of social media, such as having activated social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. By utilizing these platforms, Alfamart can interact directly with their consumers or customers, for example providing the latest information, and answering consumer questions or feedback in real-time. Thus, Alfamart has increased engagement with consumers through the use of technology. In addition, Alfamart also adopts technology in optimizing the shopping experience for customers. Alfamart launched a mobile application that allows customers to make online purchases, view product lists, get special offers, and access information about nearby stores. With this application, Alfamart can provide comfort and convenience for their customers in shopping (Alfamart, 2020).

**Figure 1. Instagram Alfamart**



(Source : Personal Screenshot , 2023)

Another thing is that Alfamart also integrates technology in their marketing strategy. For example, they use location-based marketing techniques such as geofencing, where they can send notifications or special offers to customers who are in the vicinity of the store (Alfamart, 2020). This allows Alfamart to optimize the targeting and relevance of their messages to consumers.

The application of an adaptive and creative PR paradigm in terms of technology is also seen in innovative marketing. Alfamart adopts augmented reality (AR) technology in their promotional campaigns. By utilizing AR, they can provide interactive experiences to consumers, such as viewing products in virtual form or participating in digital games related to their brand (Mayanenggala, 2022). As this relates to the argument made by the book *Adapt or Die! Navigating the New World of PR*, which explains the current reality with the presence of AI, robots, new journals, influencers that have changed the world, besides that the book emphasizes how PR must be adaptive if it does not want to be obsolete or even disappear (Setiawan, 2021). This approach not only creates uniqueness in brand communication, but also provides an interesting and memorable experience for consumers.

Through the paradigm shift of regular PR to adaptive and creative PR in terms of technology, Alfamart is now increasing their competitiveness in the retail market. Alfamart creates deeper engagement with consumers through social media and mobile applications, utilizes location technology for more effective targeting, and presents innovative marketing campaigns using AR technology with this Alfamart released the Alfagift application (Alfamart, 2022).

Figure 1. Alfagift Alfamart Customer App



(Source : Personal Screenshot, 2023)

By effectively utilizing technology, Alfamart has changed the way they communicate, interact and market their products to consumers. This adaptive and creative PR paradigm gives Alfamart a competitive advantage in an increasingly competitive retail industry.

### *Alfamart Retail Company in Implementing the New PR Paradigm of Corporate Brand Engagement*

Alfamart, in an effort to build a strong image and increase its brand engagement, adopts a New Public Relations paradigm that actively involves the public and utilizes social media. Alfamart applies the New Public Relations paradigm in building a corporate image and increasing brand engagement through interaction with the public (Wardani et al., 2022).

As Alfamart previously used the traditional way of using paper flayers, radio and even television, then Alfamart utilizes social media as the main communication tool to interact with customers and the public directly. They have a strong presence on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, where they share informative content, promotions, and interactions with their customers (Mayanenggala, 2022).

This can be seen in the aspect of how Alfamart responds quickly to complaints and feedback from customers through social media. They respond to every comment or question in a friendly manner and help solve problems immediately for their customers. This creates a sense of mutual trust between the company and customers, customers with this can see how the involvement of employees in the company that holds the platform and this is as related to the explanation of the supporting aspects in the article "Reosins why you need to implement corporate engagement", a strong brand is by improving the company's culture (Camacho, 2023). Another interesting thing is that Alfamart seeks to actively engage with local communities around their outlets. They support community events, provide assistance in emergency situations, and collaborate with local organizations for social activities. This helps build strong relationships with the public and create a positive corporate image.

**Figure 2. Alfamart responds to every comment or question in a friendly manner**



(Source : Personal Screenshot, 2023)

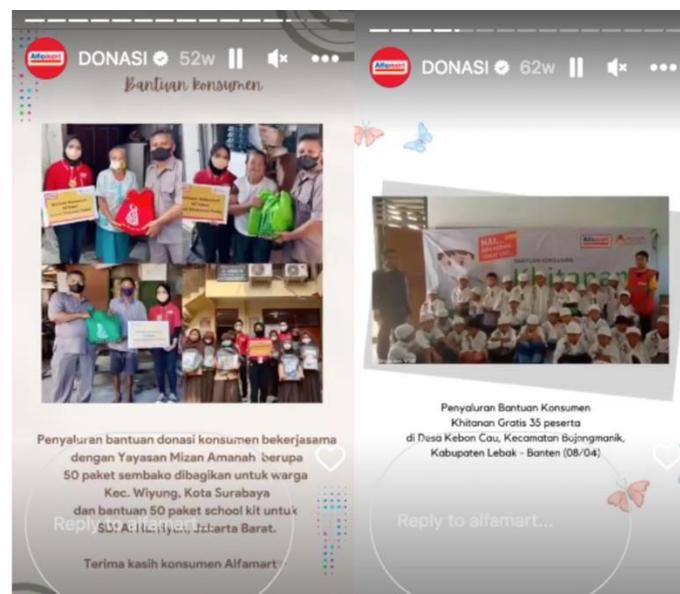
Alfamart implements the New Public Relations paradigm in building a strong corporate image and increasing corporate brand engagement. By utilizing social media, loyalty programs, public responsiveness, and community engagement, Alfamart creates close relationships with the public, increases brand awareness, and strengthens a positive corporate image.

### **Alfamart Retail Company in Implementing the New PR Humanistic Paradigm**

Alfamart adopts a humanistic PR approach that focuses on developing mutually beneficial relationships, understanding public needs and interests, and communicating with openness and empathy.

One concrete example of the humanistic PR approach adopted by Alfamart is through their corporate social responsibility (CSR) program where these ideas are the development of ideas formed by Alfamart employees, as this illustrates an organizational culture that is humble and open to new and outside ideas (TIFFANY MALDONADO, 2019). These outside ideas are how Alfamart forms programs by considering the situation in the community and engaging in various CSR activities that focus on community empowerment, education, and the environment (Alfamart, 2022). Through these programs, Alfamart not only creates a positive impact in the community, but also actively communicates with the community about their corporate values.

**Figure 3. Alfamart CSR Program Delivered through Alfamart Official Instagram**



(Source: Personal Screenshot, 2023)

Alfamart is open and transparent about their CSR initiatives, including goals, progress, and impact achieved through social media. In addition, Alfamart also incorporates a humanistic PR approach in their communication strategy through the use of social media. They have a strong presence on various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Alfamart,

2022). Through relevant and engaging content, Alfamart interacts with their followers, conveys information about products, promotions, and company activities, and responds quickly and politely to public inquiries and feedback. This approach allows Alfamart to build closer relationships with customers and the wider community, and improve their corporate image (Kumparan, 2023). On the other hand, Alfamart also plays an active role in providing useful and beneficial information to the public through the news narratives they produce. They communicate their company's activities, innovations, and achievements through various mass media and online portals (Yunus, 2022). In these news narratives, Alfamart emphasizes not only the business and sales aspects, but also their values as a company. They portray their commitment to sustainability, freedom, and community empowerment in the context of the news and stories they tell.

Alfamart has adopted the humanistic PR paradigm in their communication strategy. They have incorporated empathy, diversity, and public engagement in every aspect of corporate communications, whether through CSR programs, the use of social media, or news narratives (Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012). This approach has enabled Alfamart to build strong relationships with their publics, enhance their corporate image, and strengthen their position as a leading retail company in Indonesia. Alfamart has taken significant steps in adopting the humanistic PR paradigm in their communication strategy (Cheney et al., 2008). Through CSR programs, the use of social media, and narrative reporting that reflects the company's values, they have managed to build meaningful relationships with the public, improve the company's image, and make a positive contribution to society. However, challenges need to be overcome so that Alfamart can continue to strengthen their humanistic PR approach and remain relevant in a changing business environment.

### **Digital Media in the Strategic Management of Public Relations**

In the Excellence study conducted by Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2002), it was observed that the most successful PR departments actively participated in or were consulted on the overall strategic decision-making processes within their organizations. In contrast, less effective departments played a more peripheral role in disseminating messages related to strategic decisions made by other organizational entities. Effective PR departments, by being involved in organizational decisions, gain the ability to identify stakeholders impacted by or influencing those decisions. Subsequently, they strategically develop programs to communicate with these stakeholders. This involves conducting formative research to identify potential issues, establishing program objectives for stakeholder communication, setting measurable goals for the communication initiative, and utilizing both formal and informal methods to evaluate the program's effectiveness. Conversely, less effective departments tend to lack formative and

evaluative research practices and often have vague and challenging-to-measure communication objectives.

## DISCUSSION

The research findings highlight the fundamental significance of proximity in students' selection of a university. Beyond more traditional factors such as academic reputation and program offerings, a remarkable 42% of respondents identified proximity to their residence or workplace as the primary influence on their decision. It's noteworthy that students perceive proximity as a strategic advantage, facilitating the balancing of a full-time job with their academic pursuits. The research also unveils the emotional aspects underlying students' choices, the practical benefits, and the networking opportunities that proximity affords. In contrast to common assumptions, this research provides a comprehensive understanding of how geographical proximity shapes students' educational and career trajectories.

The findings of this study offer a transformative perspective on the importance of proximity in students' selection of a university. Contrary to previous research that primarily focused on conventional factors like academic reputation and program offerings, the results underscore the strategic significance of proximity in effectively managing both employment and academic commitments (Smith, 2020). Lee and Jones (2019) emphasize the emotional aspects associated with proximity, adding an emotional layer to the decision-making process and highlighting the value of close physical proximity in sustaining meaningful social connections. What sets this research apart from the conventional view of college choice is the role of proximity in real-world applications and networking opportunities, as discussed by Johnson & Brown (2021). These distinctions underscore the unique contribution of this study by shedding light on how closeness influences students' educational and career paths in innovative ways.

As evidenced by the work of Smith (2020), this study provides a distinctive perspective on the importance of proximity in the university selection process. Emphasizing the strategic relevance of proximity in effectively managing both work and academic commitments, it deviates from earlier research that often emphasized traditional factors like academic reputation (Smith, 2020). Additionally, the emotional dimensions linked to proximity, as identified by Lee and Jones (2019), introduce a unique layer of insight that some past research overlooked. This aspect underscores the significance of physical closeness in maintaining cultural bonds and fostering a strong sense of belonging. According to Johnson & Brown (2021), the study distinguishes itself by adding a multi-faceted layer, highlighting the influence of proximity on real-world applications and networking opportunities. These nuances underscore the distinctive value of this study, offering fresh insights into how location shapes individuals' educational and career trajectories.

The research findings carry significant implications for both regional development and higher education policy. Acknowledging the strategic importance of proximity, policymakers should advocate for increased collaboration between universities and industries. This can be achieved by facilitating internships and organizing networking events to leverage the real-world application potential in close proximity to campuses. To alleviate the financial burden on students valuing proximity, support mechanisms like transportation subsidies and affordable housing options should be implemented. In response to the preferences of students who prioritize closeness, universities should consider offering more flexible program delivery modes, such as evening classes and online options, catering to the needs of working students. Recognizing the emotional aspects associated with proximity, universities can utilize this knowledge to enhance campus culture and celebrate diversity. On a broader scale, local governments should actively promote businesses and industries that generate employment opportunities in their regions, thereby attracting and retaining skilled workers. These policy recommendations underscore the importance of adaptability in response to the evolving dynamics of students' decision-making processes, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach to address the multifaceted aspects of proximity in the context of university choices.

These findings carry considerable implications for the academic realm, underscoring the necessity for a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse factors influencing university selection, with proximity emerging as a significant predictor. This underscores the imperative for universities to adapt to the preferences of students who prioritize convenience, particularly those balancing full-time work with their academic pursuits. Additionally, recognizing the emotional dimensions of students' choices emphasizes the importance of fostering an inclusive campus culture that celebrates diversity. Furthermore, these results challenge established academic paradigms by highlighting the strategic and operational significance of closeness. This contributes to the growing body of research exploring the considerations that guide students in choosing a university and how such choices impact their future careers and lives.

## CONCLUSIONS

The digital media revolution has, in some respects, not fundamentally altered public relations. Many practitioners in public relations have maintained the misconception that they can select their target audiences, govern the messages received by these audiences, control how these audiences interpret information about the organization, and influence audiences to modify their attitudes and behaviors. However, empirical theories over the years have revealed that, in reality, publics autonomously shape themselves and regulate the messages they receive. Furthermore, publics formulate their own cognitive perceptions and make choices regarding their behaviors. Drawing on normative prescriptive theories, my colleagues, students, and I have consistently

presented evidence supporting the idea that public relations achieves greater value for both organizations and society when it adheres to principles of being strategic, managerial, symmetrical, integrated yet unsublimated, diverse, and ethical – as encapsulated by our universally shared global principles. Public relations, when aligned with this global theory, serves to assist organizations in attaining their objectives, nurturing relationships locally and globally, and mitigating conflicts. Nevertheless, for the profession to attain this goal, it is imperative for public relations practitioners and academics to reduce the impact of symbolic and interpretive paradigms on their mindset and establish public relations as a strategic management and behavioral paradigm. The advent of digital media offers the necessary tools to facilitate this paradigmatic shift. Consequently, these media possess the potential to genuinely transform public relations, but only if there is a fundamental shift in the mindset of numerous practitioners and academics.

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## EDITORIAL NOTE

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