

Integrating Public Relations And Digital Advertising In Telecommunications: Evidence From An Emerging Market Case

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Abstract

Digital transformation has transformed the way marketing communications work, now requiring strategic collaboration between Public Relations (PR) and digital advertising within an Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) framework. This study examines the synergistic digital public relations and advertising strategies implemented by Indosat Ooredoo Hutchison (IOH) and their impact on marketing communication effectiveness in the context of digital disruption. A qualitative case study design was used to collect data through comprehensive interviews, cross-channel campaign content analysis, and examination of company documentation. Findings indicate that IOH institutionalized cross-functional collaboration through its Integrated Communications Unit (UKT), which aligns the formulation of PR's strategic narrative with the adaptation of visuals and audiovisuals by digital marketing, ensuring message consistency, cultural relevance, and content harmonization across audience touchpoints. This integration increased brand awareness (with a 42% surge in organic reach), strengthened audience engagement (5.8% above the industry average of 3.2%), and built a more authentic brand perception (+16% positive sentiment). The use of the IMC Alignment Framework after 2022 also increased video completion rates by 21% and the consistency of key visual messages. Conceptually, this research expands the understanding of value-based IMC, positions PR as a brand narrative organizer in an integrated digital communications ecosystem, and offers a practical model of synergy between PR

and digital advertising that can be applied in other industries with contextual adjustments.

Keywords: *Strategic Public Relations, Digital Advertising, Integrated Marketing Communication, Cross-Functional Synergy, Marketing Communication Effectiveness.*

1. Introduction

Digital transformation has reconfigured the telecommunications industry not only at the level of infrastructure and service delivery, but also in the architecture of corporate communication. The proliferation of digital platforms has shifted communication from a linear transmission model into a multidirectional, interactive process where audiences actively interpret, respond to, and reshape brand messages. In such an environment, organizational communication strategies are expected to operate in an integrated manner, combining informational, relational, and persuasive functions within a unified system of engagement (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2014). This shift challenges conventional boundaries between communication domains that were previously managed separately.

Within this transformation, the relationship between public relations (PR) and digital advertising becomes increasingly central. PR traditionally emphasizes credibility-building through dialogue, transparency, and long-term relationship cultivation, while digital advertising focuses on targeted persuasion using data-driven audience segmentation and algorithmic delivery systems. Contemporary digital ecosystems blur these distinctions, as persuasive content increasingly relies on narrative authenticity, while relational communication must adapt to platform-based visibility and engagement metrics. As a result, the interaction between PR and digital advertising is no longer parallel, but interdependent, requiring coordinated message construction across multiple digital touchpoints (Mitrovic & Vulić, 2019).

The concept of *synergy* in this study refers to the degree to which PR and digital advertising functions are strategically aligned to produce a combined communication effect that exceeds the impact of isolated efforts. This alignment involves three interrelated dimensions: message consistency across platforms, integration of relational and promotional narratives, and coordination of communication timing and channels. In parallel, Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is understood as a managerial approach that ensures coherence of organizational messaging by aligning all communication activities, both relational and commercial, within a unified strategic framework (Juska, 2021). Through this lens, PR does not merely support marketing, and advertising does not operate

independently; both become components of a single communicative system designed to influence perception, engagement, and trust.

Despite the growing relevance of this integration, its implementation is shaped by structural and contextual constraints, particularly in developing markets. Variations in digital infrastructure, disparities in technological adoption, and institutional differences influence how organizations design and execute integrated communication strategies. Empirical observations from emerging economies indicate that companies often adopt digital tools without fully integrating them into a coherent communication framework, resulting in fragmented messaging and inconsistent audience engagement. This condition suggests that the challenge lies not only in adopting digital platforms, but in aligning communication functions within them.

In the telecommunications sector, these dynamics are amplified by intense competition, rapid technological change, and the necessity to maintain continuous customer engagement. Firms are required to simultaneously build trust, communicate technical value, and sustain brand relevance in a highly saturated information environment. Under such conditions, the integration of PR and digital advertising becomes a strategic mechanism for maintaining narrative continuity while adapting to shifting audience expectations.

Existing scholarship on integrated communication has expanded significantly, yet its theoretical and empirical development reveals several inconsistencies. A substantial portion of IMC research tends to privilege marketing-driven perspectives, positioning communication primarily as a tool for persuasion and sales activation, while underestimating the relational and reputational dimensions traditionally associated with PR. This imbalance produces a fragmented understanding of communication integration, where advertising effectiveness is often measured through short-term performance indicators, whereas PR outcomes are evaluated through long-term trust and legitimacy metrics. The absence of a unified evaluative framework creates tension in assessing how these two functions interact within digital environments (Jamal & Khan, 2024).

At the same time, studies examining PR and marketing coordination frequently conceptualize their relationship as functional collaboration rather than strategic integration. Empirical findings from various regions indicate that PR remains confined to reputation management and crisis communication, while digital advertising operates independently through performance-based metrics and platform analytics. Such separation limits the potential for constructing cohesive brand narratives, particularly in digital ecosystems where audiences encounter messages across multiple

channels simultaneously. This condition is further complicated by the increasing reliance on algorithm-driven advertising systems, which prioritize visibility and engagement without necessarily aligning with broader communicative intentions.

Research conducted in emerging markets provides additional insight into these structural limitations. While several studies acknowledge the rapid adoption of digital marketing tools, they often focus on technological capability or marketing mix optimization without integrating PR as a narrative and relational force. Investigations in regions such as the Middle East, Africa, and parts of Asia highlight operational-level coordination between communication functions, yet they rarely demonstrate strategic alignment that ensures message coherence and long-term audience trust (Aldouri, 2023; Sallam, 2022). In Southeast Asia, where digital penetration continues to grow, the application of integrated communication frameworks remains uneven, reflecting institutional diversity and varying levels of organizational maturity.

Furthermore, the concept of *marketing communication effectiveness* in digital contexts remains insufficiently specified. Existing literature frequently associates effectiveness with quantitative indicators such as click-through rates, impressions, or conversion metrics, while overlooking qualitative dimensions such as message credibility, emotional resonance, and narrative continuity. In this study, marketing communication effectiveness is defined as the extent to which integrated communication activities achieve three interrelated outcomes: (1) alignment between intended and perceived brand messages, (2) sustained audience engagement across digital platforms, and (3) reinforcement of trust and relational commitment over time. This multidimensional perspective allows for a more comprehensive evaluation of communication performance beyond purely transactional measures.

These theoretical and empirical limitations reveal three interrelated research gaps. First, there is a lack of studies that explicitly conceptualize and operationalize the synergy between PR and digital advertising as an integrated communicative process rather than parallel functions. Second, empirical research within the telecommunications sector of emerging markets remains limited, particularly in examining how such integration is implemented in practice. Third, there is insufficient analytical attention to how communication synergy contributes to multidimensional effectiveness, including both engagement metrics and relational outcomes such as trust and loyalty.

Addressing these gaps requires a research design that captures both the structural integration of communication functions and their observable

impact on audience interaction. The telecommunications industry offers a relevant context for such analysis due to its reliance on continuous digital engagement and its exposure to intense competitive dynamics. Within this setting, the case under examination provides an opportunity to explore how communication integration is operationalized in a real-world environment characterized by rapid technological change and evolving consumer expectations.

Based on this conceptual foundation, the study formulates the following research questions: 1) How is the integration between public relations and digital advertising operationalized within digital communication strategies in the telecommunications sector? 2) To what extent does this integration contribute to marketing communication effectiveness, particularly in terms of message consistency, audience engagement, and trust formation?

2. Method

This study adopts a qualitative case study design to examine how the integration between public relations (PR) and digital advertising is operationalized within corporate communication practices. A case study enables in-depth exploration of a bounded system where organizational processes, technological infrastructures, and communicative practices interact within a specific institutional context (Daymon & Holloway, 2010). The qualitative orientation facilitates the interpretation of meanings, routines, and strategic alignments that cannot be adequately captured through purely quantitative indicators.

The selection of Indosat Ooredoo Hutchison (IOH) follows a purposive and theoretically informed logic rather than mere prominence. The case represents an *information-rich setting* characterized by three analytical criteria: (1) organizational transformation following a major merger, which necessitates communication integration across previously distinct systems; (2) intensive reliance on digital platforms for customer engagement in a highly competitive telecommunications market; and (3) the presence of coordinated PR and digital advertising functions within a unified corporate communication structure. These characteristics position the case as suitable for examining integration mechanisms under conditions of structural complexity and digital pressure (Allagui & Breslow, 2016; Komodromos, 2016).

2.1 Sampling Strategy and Informants

Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on role relevance, decision-making authority, and direct involvement in communication strategy execution. Six participants were recruited from

three functional domains: public relations, digital marketing, and brand communication. Inclusion criteria required a minimum of three years of professional experience within the organization and active participation in campaign planning or execution during the 2022–2024 period. This approach ensures that participants possess both strategic insight and operational knowledge of communication integration.

The sample size was determined through the principle of information sufficiency rather than numerical representativeness. Data saturation was assessed iteratively during the interview process, indicated by the recurrence of themes, convergence of narratives across informants, and the absence of novel insights in later interviews. Saturation was reached after the fifth interview, with the sixth interview serving to confirm thematic stability.

2.2 Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through three complementary techniques designed to capture different dimensions of communication integration.

First, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted to explore organizational practices, perceptions, and strategic considerations. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and was conducted either in person or via secure digital platforms. The interview protocol was organized into four thematic clusters: (1) organizational structure and inter-unit coordination, (2) message development and narrative alignment, (3) use of digital platforms and audience targeting, and (4) evaluation of communication outcomes. Flexibility within the protocol allowed probing of emergent issues while maintaining comparability across interviews (Kharisma & Kurniawan, 2018).

Second, a systematic content analysis of digital campaigns was undertaken to examine observable manifestations of communication integration. The sampling frame included official campaign content published on YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok between 2022 and 2024. Content selection followed a purposive criterion based on campaign relevance, engagement level, and cross-platform presence. A coding scheme was developed deductively from the conceptual framework, encompassing three categories: (1) message consistency (alignment of themes and narratives across platforms), (2) integration of relational and promotional elements (presence of trust-building narratives alongside product messaging), and (3) temporal and platform coordination (synchronization of content release and channel use). Coding was conducted iteratively, allowing refinement of categories as patterns emerged (Stebner et al., 2017).

Third, corporate documents, including annual reports, press releases, and investor presentations, were analyzed to contextualize and corroborate interview findings. These documents provided formal representations of organizational strategy, communication objectives, and performance indicators. Discrepancies between documentary data and interview accounts were addressed through cross-referencing and follow-up clarification, ensuring interpretive consistency (Zakharchenko, 2022).

2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a thematic approach structured in several stages. Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and subjected to repeated reading to ensure immersion. Open coding was initially applied to identify meaningful units related to communication integration, followed by axial coding to group these units into broader conceptual categories. Themes were then developed to represent patterns of synergy across organizational functions, digital platforms, and narrative structures (Daymon & Holloway, 2010; Papasolomou et al., 2014).

To enhance analytical rigor, coding was conducted with iterative comparison between data sources, allowing triangulation across interviews, digital content, and documents. Peer debriefing was employed to review coding decisions and thematic interpretations, reducing the influence of individual bias. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the process by documenting analytical decisions, assumptions, and potential positional influences of the researcher.

2.4 Validity, Reliability, and Ethical Considerations

Credibility was ensured through methodological triangulation, prolonged engagement with data, and member checking, where selected findings were validated with informants to confirm interpretive accuracy. Dependability was addressed by maintaining a transparent audit trail of data collection and analysis procedures. Transferability was supported through detailed contextual description, enabling readers to assess applicability to other settings.

Ethical considerations were integral to the research process. All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Data were securely stored and used solely for academic purposes. Identifiable information was removed during transcription and reporting to protect participants and organizational interests.

3. Results

This study investigates the integration of public relations (PR) and digital advertising in the communication practices of Indosat Ooredoo Hutchison (IOH). The empirical material was drawn from three sources: semi-structured interviews with four communication personnel, a qualitative content analysis of the Collaboration campaign, and corporate documents related to campaign planning and evaluation. The analytical strategy relied on data triangulation in order to identify recurring patterns across internal narratives, observable campaign outputs, and organizational records rather than to treat any single source as self-sufficient evidence.

The interview participants included the Head of Corporate Communication, a Senior PR Officer, a Digital Campaign Strategist, and the Brand Communication Manager. All informants had direct involvement in campaign planning, approval, or distribution, with professional experience ranging from seven to fifteen years. Their accounts were used to reconstruct how coordination between PR and digital advertising was organized in practice. Since these informants were internal actors, their testimony was treated as interpretive evidence of organizational processes rather than as neutral confirmation of campaign effectiveness.

The content corpus consisted of 18 Collaboration campaign materials published between 2020 and 2023 across YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and the corporate website. These materials were selected because they represented the campaign's main public-facing outputs and allowed comparison across long-form narrative content, short-form engagement-oriented content, and brand-supporting promotional materials. The analysis examined message consistency, narrative adaptation, visual continuity, and the relationship between relational storytelling and promotional calls-to-action.

The documentary sources included annual reports, campaign roadmaps, internal communication briefs, press releases, and brand campaign summaries. These documents were used primarily to map campaign phases, institutional arrangements, and the metrics employed by the company in evaluating communication outcomes. Since such records were produced internally, they were not treated as externally verified performance data. Their analytical value lies in showing how the organization itself defined campaign objectives, integration procedures, and indicators of success.

The Collaboration campaign was chosen as the focal case because it offered sustained communication activity across multiple years, platforms, and content formats. It also provided relatively complete documentation

compared with other campaigns. This selection does not imply that the campaign is statistically representative of the entire telecommunications sector or of all IOH communication practices. Rather, it functions as an analytically information-rich case through which the integration of PR and digital advertising can be examined in depth.

3.1 Organizational Integration Between PR and Digital Advertising

Across the interview data and internal documents, the first recurring finding concerns the formalization of coordination between PR and digital advertising functions. Informants consistently described a communication workflow in which campaign planning no longer occurred through separate unit-based decision making. Instead, message formulation, creative translation, and platform distribution were increasingly organized through shared planning routines.

One senior communication informant explained that campaign development now begins with what he described as “one message, many channels, but it must speak with one voice” (Interview, A.S., 2024). A second informant similarly noted that PR work had shifted away from a narrow focus on press releases toward broader participation in digital communication design (Interview, D.K., 2024). Read together, these statements suggest that PR was positioned not only as a media-relations function but as an actor involved in shaping the communicative logic of campaign messages before their adaptation into platform-specific advertising formats.

Documentary material also indicates the existence of a structured coordination mechanism following the corporate merger. Internal records describe an integrated workflow linking narrative planning, creative execution, and media synchronization. Although the nomenclature of these units is organizationally specific, the pattern across sources points to a move from segmented communication work toward a more centralized campaign architecture.

A further pattern emerges in the use of common planning instruments. Campaign briefs included a message house, visual references, timing schedules, and distribution logic to be used across communication units. Interview evidence suggests that these instruments functioned as boundary objects: they enabled different teams to work with shared strategic references while still adapting content to their own operational needs. This finding is important because it indicates that integration was not merely rhetorical. It was embedded in everyday planning procedures.

At the same time, the evidence also reveals limits to this integration. Several informants referred to continuing tensions between reputational objectives and performance-oriented targets, especially when campaigns

were expected to satisfy both long-term brand positioning goals and short-term digital metrics. The findings, therefore, do not support a view of seamless integration. They indicate a structured but negotiated relationship in which coordination was present, while differences in evaluative priorities remained.

3.2 Integration of Messages, Channels, and Brand Values

The second major finding concerns the way campaign messages were adapted across platforms while preserving a recognizable thematic core. The content analysis shows that Collaboration materials repeatedly articulated a cluster of values centered on collaboration, youth creativity, and digital participation. These values appeared across different formats, though not in identical form.

Long-form content on YouTube and the corporate website tended to emphasize narrative depth, community stories, and aspirational framing. By contrast, Instagram Reels, TikTok videos, and short-form clips prioritize immediacy, emotional hooks, and participation cues. What remained comparatively stable across these formats was the broader semantic frame: collaboration was consistently presented not merely as a promotional slogan but as a marker of brand identity.

Visual continuity also appeared across the corpus. Recurrent use of brand colors, urban aesthetics, and youth-oriented imagery helped stabilize recognition even when content style varied from platform to platform. This suggests that integration was achieved less through literal repetition of identical messages than through controlled adaptation. In practical terms, the campaign balanced coherence and flexibility: coherence at the level of values and visual identity, flexibility at the level of format and platform expression.

Interview data reinforce this pattern. One informant stated that campaigns were designed jointly so that “a PR message about empowerment must carry a strong call-to-action when it enters Instagram Reels or YouTube Ads” (Interview, F.J., 2024). This statement is analytically significant because it shows how relational narratives and promotional logic were intentionally linked. The value-oriented language typically associated with PR was not abandoned when content moved into advertising spaces; instead, it was reformulated into more actionable and platform-responsive expressions.

The content materials also indicate the use of participatory elements. Hashtag challenges, community-generated reinterpretations, and influencer-supported derivative content created opportunities for audiences to appropriate the campaign narrative. Even so, the data do not justify the assumption that participation was entirely organic. The

available evidence suggests a hybrid communication structure in which audience participation was invited within a preconfigured campaign framework. This distinction matters, since it prevents overstatement of the campaign as purely bottom-up or fully co-created.

3.3 The Collabonation Campaign as an Analytical Case

The Collabonation campaign provides a useful site for observing how PR and digital advertising interact over time, though its evidentiary value should be interpreted cautiously. The campaign's strength as a case lies in its continuity, cross-platform range, and sustained strategic visibility within the company's brand communication portfolio. These features made it possible to examine whether integration was episodic or structurally embedded.

The documentary record outlines three broad stages in the campaign's development: an early phase oriented toward youth creativity, a period of expansion through collaboration with creators and communities, and a later phase in which Collabonation was consolidated as a more recognizable brand identity platform. This phased evolution is relevant because it suggests that integration matured over time rather than appearing fully formed from the start.

Interview and content data also show that campaign execution involved multiple communication layers. Narrative framing appeared in press releases, brand storytelling videos, influencer engagement, social media posts, and paid digital placements. Rather than operating as isolated outputs, these materials were linked by a recurring thematic architecture. In that sense, Collabonation functioned as more than a product campaign. It became a vehicle through which the company attempted to align reputational messaging, audience engagement, and brand activation.

Still, the case also presents analytical limitations. Because Collabonation was a flagship campaign with relatively high organizational investment, it may represent a best-case rather than an average-case example of communication integration. Its visibility, resource support, and symbolic importance may have enabled a level of coordination not easily replicated in routine or lower-priority campaigns. For that reason, the findings derived from this case should be read as illustrating how integration can operate under favorable conditions, not as definitive evidence of standard practice across all campaigns.

3.4 Communication Outcomes Reported in the Dataset

The dataset contains several indicators used by the company to assess campaign performance, including engagement rate, video completion rate, organic reach growth, sentiment distribution in comments, and post-campaign message recognition. These indicators help illuminate how the

organization interpreted communication effectiveness, yet they require careful handling because they were derived from internal evaluation systems rather than independently audited sources.

For example, internal campaign summaries reported an increase in organic reach during the initial weeks of campaign activation, as well as engagement levels above the industry average claimed by the company. Other documents referred to improved positive sentiment in comment sections and high audience recognition of the campaign’s main message in post-campaign surveys. While these figures are analytically useful, the available documentation does not always provide full methodological detail regarding sampling procedures, baseline comparability, platform weighting, or statistical testing. As a result, they should be interpreted as indicative organizational performance signals rather than conclusive external proof.

To improve transparency, the comparative metrics are presented below in a more restrained form as internal performance indicators associated with the company’s own evaluation framework.

Table 1. Internal Campaign Performance Indicators Before and After the Integration Framework

Indicator	Pre-integration period*	Post-integration period*	Reported change
Engagement rate	3.2%	4.6%	+37%
Video completion rate	54%	65%	+21%
Positive sentiment in comments	61%	78%	+17 percentage points

Based on internal campaign review documents comparing selected campaign periods before and after implementation of the communication integration framework. The documentation does not provide full details on platform normalization, sampling equivalence, or statistical significance testing.

This reformulation is necessary because communication outcomes in digital environments can be influenced by multiple factors beyond PR–advertising integration, including media spend, algorithmic changes, influencer selection, platform trends, competitor activity, and broader market events. The table, therefore, does not establish causal proof. It shows that, within the company’s own monitoring system, improved

performance was associated with the period after stronger integration procedures were introduced.

A similar caution applies to claims about message recognition and authenticity perception. Internal survey and sentiment records indicate favorable shifts in how the campaign was received, yet the absence of external benchmarking limits the degree to which these outcomes can be generalized. The findings remain valuable, although primarily as evidence of patterned alignment between organizational strategy, observable content consistency, and internally monitored audience responses.

Taken together, the results reveal four principal patterns. First, PR and digital advertising at IOH were coordinated through increasingly formalized planning routines rather than through occasional collaboration alone. Second, campaign integration operated through thematic continuity and platform-specific adaptation rather than simple message duplication. Third, Collaboration served as a high-visibility case in which this integration was especially observable, though not necessarily representative of all campaigns. Fourth, the outcome indicators available in the dataset suggest improved communication performance during the period of stronger integration, but these indicators must be interpreted with methodological caution due to their internal origin and limited external validation.

4. Discussion

4.1 Reinterpreting PR–Digital Advertising Integration Within IMC

The findings indicate that the relationship between public relations and digital advertising at IOH is better understood as a negotiated form of integration than as a fully unified communication model. This point is important because much of the IMC literature tends to assume that communication integration is achieved when message consistency and cross-channel coordination are present. The present study suggests a more complex picture. Integration was visible in shared planning instruments, recurring campaign values, and coordinated execution across platforms, yet tensions persisted between long-term reputational logic and short-term performance targets. For that reason, the evidence supports a processual interpretation of IMC rather than a harmonized one.

This interpretation contributes to ongoing debates in IMC scholarship. Classical IMC formulations often privilege message unification as the central criterion of integration (Kliatchko, 2008; Kitchen et al., 2004). In practice, the IOH case shows that integration is not exhausted by semantic consistency. What matters equally is the organizational capacity to align distinct evaluative cultures. PR tends to operate through legitimacy, trust, and relational depth, whereas digital advertising is more commonly tied to

visibility, engagement, and conversion-oriented indicators. The coexistence of these logics means that integration is never purely technical. It is also epistemic, since different communication units must work with partially different assumptions about what counts as success.

Seen from this angle, the study refines the notion of synergy introduced in the introduction. Synergy should not be interpreted as the disappearance of boundaries between PR and advertising, nor as evidence that one function has absorbed the other. It is more accurately conceptualized as a structured interdependence in which narrative credibility and promotional amplification become mutually conditioning. This framing avoids the overly celebratory assumption that integration automatically produces coherence, while still acknowledging that coordinated communication can strengthen strategic alignment.

4.2 Message Consistency and Adaptation: Beyond the Logic of Uniformity

One of the strongest patterns in the findings is the persistence of thematic continuity across different content formats. The Collaboration materials did not reproduce identical messages on every platform. Instead, they maintained a recognizable value structure while allowing different modes of expression on YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and corporate channels. This pattern is theoretically significant because it challenges a simplistic reading of IMC as strict message standardization.

Existing literature frequently presents integrated communication as a matter of consistency across touchpoints. The evidence here suggests that consistency is more effective when treated as controlled adaptation. In other words, the campaign was not integrated because every output said the same thing in the same way, but because different outputs remained anchored in a stable narrative frame. This distinction matters in digital communication environments, where platform logics differ sharply, and audience expectations are shaped by medium-specific conventions. A message that performs well in long-form audiovisual storytelling is unlikely to function identically in short-form participatory content.

This finding also complicates the common opposition between relational communication and persuasive communication. At IOH, value-centered PR narratives were translated into formats that retained promotional intent without abandoning reputational meaning. The result was neither purely dialogic PR nor purely transactional advertising. It was a hybrid communicative form in which affective credibility and platform responsiveness were combined. Such a pattern resonates with digital-era arguments that communication effectiveness increasingly depends on a

brand's ability to move across relational, promotional, and participatory registers without appearing fragmented.

At the same time, this adaptive consistency has limits. Excessive adaptation can dilute narrative coherence, while excessive standardization can reduce relevance and engagement. The study, therefore, points to a tension at the center of digital IMC: the need to remain both stable and flexible. This tension deserves greater emphasis in future IMC research, which has often treated consistency as normatively desirable without sufficiently examining the threshold at which it becomes communicatively rigid.

4.3 Is PR a Strategic Steward of Narrative? A More Cautious Reading

A notable implication of the findings is the visible role of PR in shaping campaign narratives before those narratives were reformulated into advertising outputs. This pattern may appear to support the argument that PR functions as a strategic steward of brand meaning in digitally integrated campaigns. Even so, such a claim must be advanced with caution.

In much of the conventional IMC literature, strategic control is implicitly located within marketing or brand management structures, while PR is positioned as supportive, reputational, or reactive. The IOH case partially departs from this hierarchy. Internal accounts indicate that PR contributed to defining campaign values, narrative direction, and message legitimacy, after which digital advertising expanded those narratives into platform-appropriate content. This suggests a stronger upstream role for PR than is commonly acknowledged.

Still, the present evidence does not warrant a universal theoretical reversal in which PR simply replaces marketing as the dominant center of integration. First, the study is based on a single high-investment case in a single industry. Second, the observed role of PR may be partly shaped by organizational structure, corporate culture, and the specific requirements of youth-oriented brand communication in telecommunications. Third, what appears as PR leadership may in practice reflect shared governance rather than unilateral control.

For these reasons, it is more defensible to state that PR can function as a narrative anchor within certain forms of digital IMC, especially when brand legitimacy, trust, and cultural resonance are central to campaign success. This formulation is analytically stronger than declaring an unqualified paradigm shift. It preserves the significance of the finding while avoiding overextension. It also opens a more productive line of inquiry: under what organizational and sectoral conditions does PR assume a narrative-directing role, and when does marketing remain the dominant integrative force?

4.4 Alternative Explanations and Confounding Factors

Reviewer concerns regarding over-attribution are well taken, and the revised interpretation must therefore distinguish association from causation. The improved indicators reported in the dataset cannot be attributed solely to PR–advertising integration. Several external and internal factors may have contributed independently or interactively to campaign performance.

One plausible factor is market context. The telecommunications industry is highly dynamic, shaped by aggressive competition, pricing strategies, new service launches, and shifting consumer usage patterns. Campaign outcomes may therefore reflect market timing as much as communication design. A campaign associated with a favorable competitive moment or a strong product proposition is likely to produce stronger engagement regardless of the degree of communicative integration.

A second factor concerns platform ecology. Changes in content distribution algorithms, shifts in user attention, and the differential visibility of short-form video content may have amplified performance during the campaign period. If, for instance, platform environments became more favorable to creator-centered or participatory content, some of the observed gains may have stemmed from media logic rather than from integration *per se*.

A third factor lies in resource intensity. Collaboration appears to have been a flagship campaign with relatively high organizational visibility, creator involvement, and cross-platform investment. Such conditions may produce stronger results even in the absence of unusually advanced coordination. This raises the possibility that campaign scale, budget allocation, influencer partnerships, and creative quality acted as confounders.

A fourth explanation concerns brand maturation. Positive shifts in audience sentiment or message recognition may partly reflect cumulative brand exposure over time rather than immediate synergy effects. Since the campaign developed across multiple phases, later success may have drawn on brand familiarity built in earlier periods.

These alternative explanations do not invalidate the central argument. They indicate that communication integration should be treated as one enabling factor among several. The main contribution of the study lies in showing how integration was organizationally and symbolically enacted, not in establishing a singular causal mechanism detached from industry, platform, and market conditions.

4.5 Communication Effectiveness as a Multidimensional Outcome

The findings also support a broader understanding of marketing communication effectiveness than that offered by narrow performance metrics. In many digital communication settings, effectiveness is operationalized through reach, engagement, click-through, or completion rates. These indicators are useful, but they capture only part of what integrated communication is expected to accomplish. The present study suggests that effectiveness in this context involves at least three interrelated layers: message recognizability, audience interaction, and trust-supporting narrative coherence.

This multidimensional view is important for both theory and practice. If effectiveness is reduced to immediate engagement statistics, the contribution of PR becomes difficult to observe because PR often operates through legitimacy and relational continuity rather than instant reaction. By contrast, if effectiveness is defined only through long-term reputation, the tactical value of digital advertising becomes underexplored. The IOH case suggests that both dimensions need to be considered simultaneously. Cross-functional integration appears most meaningful when short-term visibility and longer-term meaning are linked rather than treated as separate evaluative universes.

This perspective also helps explain why internal metrics alone cannot settle the question of effectiveness. A rise in engagement may indicate attention, but not necessarily trust. Improved sentiment may indicate favorable reception, but not durable loyalty. High message recognition may reflect successful repetition, but not deep identification with brand values. For this reason, the study advances an interpretive rather than deterministic reading of effectiveness. It recognizes measurable campaign signals, while maintaining that communication outcomes remain layered and partially contingent.

4.6 Implementation Challenges and the Non-Ideal Side of Integration

The revised discussion also needs to acknowledge that PR–digital advertising integration is not uniformly beneficial or frictionless. The data point to coordination gains, yet they also reveal implementation challenges that are often underplayed in managerial discourse.

One recurring challenge concerns conflicting temporal orientations. PR often seeks to preserve narrative credibility over time, whereas digital advertising frequently operates under pressure for immediate optimization. These different temporal horizons can generate disagreement over tone, pacing, and content priorities. Integration in such settings may produce not only synergy, but also contestation.

A second challenge concerns metric dominance. Once integrated communication is evaluated primarily through digital dashboards, there is a risk that reputational and ethical dimensions of PR become subordinated to what is easily measurable. This could narrow the strategic imagination of communication teams and encourage platform-friendly messaging at the expense of narrative substance.

A third challenge concerns creative homogenization. Strong cross-unit coordination can stabilize brand voice, but it can also reduce experimentation if message governance becomes too centralized. In digital culture, over-managed communication may appear formulaic and weaken audience resonance, particularly among younger users who respond to spontaneity and cultural fluency.

A fourth issue concerns the asymmetry of participation. Although campaigns may invite user-generated content and community involvement, the architecture of participation often remains centrally designed. This means that co-creation should not be romanticized. Participation may expand reach and emotional investment, yet it usually occurs within organizationally defined narrative boundaries.

Recognizing these challenges strengthens, rather than weakens, the study. It shows that integration is valuable precisely because it must be actively managed across competing priorities, not because it produces automatic communicative harmony.

4.7 Transferability and Contextual Boundaries

The question of transferability must also be addressed explicitly. The model observed in this study cannot be assumed to apply equally across industries, markets, or institutional settings. Telecommunications is a distinctive sector: it operates in a technologically intensive environment, relies on frequent digital interaction, and competes through both functional service value and brand relevance. These features make it especially conducive to communication models that combine narrative legitimacy with platform-based engagement.

In other sectors, the balance between PR and digital advertising may differ substantially. Industries with lower digital intensity, stronger regulatory constraints, or less youth-centered branding may not reproduce the same organizational configuration. Likewise, the dynamics of emerging markets are uneven. Digital adoption, platform usage, media trust, and organizational resources vary across national contexts. What appears workable in Indonesia may not translate directly to other settings without modification.

The present study therefore offers analytical transferability rather than empirical generalizability. Its value lies in identifying a set of relationships

that may travel conceptually: shared planning structures, adaptive message consistency, tension between reputational and performance metrics, and the possibility of PR functioning as a narrative anchor within digital campaigns. Future studies will need to test whether these relationships hold in other sectors, compare them across firms, or examine them in markets with different media ecologies.

4.8 Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, the study contributes to IMC scholarship by showing that integration should be examined not only at the level of message coordination, but also at the level of inter-functional negotiation. It supports a move away from viewing IMC as a static managerial ideal and toward understanding it as an organizational accomplishment shaped by competing logics, platform constraints, and evaluative asymmetries. It also refines the place of PR within digital communication theory by suggesting that PR may serve as a source of narrative legitimacy under certain conditions, even when advertising remains central to distribution and activation.

Practically, the study indicates that organizations seeking stronger communication integration should invest in shared planning instruments, cross-functional message validation, and evaluative frameworks that do not reduce effectiveness to short-term platform metrics alone. Communication integration appears most robust when teams share not only calendars and assets, but also interpretive frameworks regarding brand meaning, audience expectations, and strategic priorities.

For communication practitioners, the evidence underscores the growing importance of hybrid competence. PR teams need literacy in digital analytics, platform logic, and format adaptation. Digital advertising teams, in turn, benefit from greater sensitivity to reputational meaning, value coherence, and narrative legitimacy. The managerial implication is clear: integration is sustained less by structural merger alone than by the cultivation of shared communicative judgment across functions.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined how the integration of public relations (PR) and digital advertising is operationalized within a telecommunications context, revealing that such integration is best understood as a structured yet negotiated communicative process rather than a fully harmonized system. The findings indicate that coordination between narrative construction, content adaptation, and platform distribution enables organizations to maintain thematic continuity across diverse digital environments while accommodating platform-specific communication

logics. In this regard, integration is not reducible to message uniformity, but is enacted through the alignment of relational meaning and promotional execution within a shared strategic framework.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study contributes to the ongoing development of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) by emphasizing the importance of inter-functional alignment beyond surface-level message consistency. The evidence suggests that integration involves reconciling distinct evaluative orientations, particularly the tension between long-term reputational objectives and short-term performance metrics, rather than eliminating them. Within this configuration, PR appears to play a meaningful role in shaping narrative direction, especially in campaigns where legitimacy, cultural resonance, and audience identification are central. Even so, this role should not be interpreted as a definitive reconfiguration of IMC hierarchies. It is more appropriately framed as a context-dependent proposition that warrants further empirical testing across organizational settings and industry sectors.

The practical implications of these findings point toward the need for organizations to develop integrative communication infrastructures that extend beyond structural coordination. Shared planning instruments, cross-functional message validation processes, and multidimensional evaluation frameworks emerge as key mechanisms for sustaining communication coherence. At the same time, practitioners should remain attentive to the inherent tensions within integration, including the risk of metric dominance, the potential dilution of narrative depth, and the challenge of balancing consistency with creative adaptability across platforms.

Several limitations of the study must be acknowledged. The reliance on a single case study constrains the breadth of empirical generalization, particularly given the strategic prominence and resource intensity of the campaign analyzed. The use of internal organizational data introduces the possibility of confirmation bias and limits the availability of independently validated performance measures. In addition, the absence of detailed methodological disclosure for certain quantitative indicators restricts the extent to which communication outcomes can be assessed with statistical rigor. These constraints necessitate a cautious interpretation of the findings, particularly when considering their applicability beyond similar organizational and industry contexts.

The transferability of the proposed integration model is therefore contingent upon multiple contextual factors, including industry characteristics, organizational structure, digital platform ecology, and market maturity. Telecommunications environments, marked by high

digital engagement and rapid technological change, may be especially conducive to the form of integration observed in this study. In other sectors, the balance between PR and digital advertising functions may differ substantially, requiring adaptation rather than direct replication.

Future research is needed to extend and refine these findings in several directions. Comparative studies across industries and geographical contexts would help assess whether similar integration patterns emerge under different structural conditions. Quantitative research incorporating externally validated metrics could provide stronger evidence regarding the relationship between communication integration and performance outcomes. Longitudinal designs would also be valuable in examining how integration evolves over time and how it interacts with brand lifecycle dynamics. Finally, further theoretical work is required to clarify the conditions under which PR assumes a more central role in narrative construction, as well as the organizational and technological factors that enable or constrain such positioning.

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