

Government Digital Public Relations Practices in a Culture-Based Smart City: A Qualitative Case Study of Denpasar, Indonesia

Irla Yulia*

Program Studi Komunikasi, Universitas Terbuka, 15437,
Tangerang Selatan, Indonesia,
irla@ecampus.ut.ac.id

Nurkhalila Fajrini

Program Studi Komunikasi, Universitas Terbuka, 15437,
Tangerang Selatan, Indonesia
nurkhalila@ecampus.ut.ac.id

Sri Pujiati

Program Studi Sosiologi, Universitas Terbuka, 15437, Tangerang
Selatan, Indonesia
sripujiati@ecampus.ut.ac.id

Abstract

Smart city development is often dominated by technology-driven approaches that emphasize digital infrastructure and technological efficiency, while overlooking socio-cultural communication processes and government-public relationships. This study aims to analyze the government's Digital Public Relations (Digital PR) practices in the context of a culture-based smart city in Denpasar, Indonesia. This study employs an interpretive qualitative case study approach through in-depth interviews, observations of the Denpasar City Government's digital communication platforms, and literature analysis. The findings reveal that the government's Digital PR practices function not only as mechanisms for disseminating public information and services but also as relational and socio-cultural communication processes through which the government represents cultural identity, negotiates public legitimacy, and shapes communication relationships in the digital public sphere. However, government-public communication in the digital space remains predominantly informative, institutionally controlled, and not yet fully dialogic or participatory. Public participation also remains layered and unevenly distributed due to

disparities in digital literacy, socio-cultural communication structures, and unequal participatory capacities among citizens. Furthermore, non-governmental actors such as community intermediaries, tourism stakeholders, alternative digital media, and tourists actively participate in the production, dissemination, and validation of cultural meanings within Denpasar smart city communication ecosystem. Nevertheless, communicative authority and agenda-setting processes remain institutionally centralized, resulting in collaborative yet asymmetrical participation dynamics.

Based on these findings, this study proposes a Culture-Based Digital Public Relations Relationship Model. The model emphasizes that effective communication in culture-based smart cities depends not only on technological readiness and digital infrastructure but also on socio-cultural mediation, participatory communication practices, and the government's ability to accommodate negotiated cultural meanings within hybrid digital public spaces.

***Keywords:** Government Digital Public Relations; Government–Public Communication; Smart City; Culture-Based Communication; Qualitative Case Study*

1. Introduction

Smart city initiatives have evolved significantly over the past two decades, increasingly emphasizing the integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to enhance urban governance and service delivery. However, this dominant technological orientation risks oversimplifying urban transformation by overlooking social dynamics, power relations, and the communicative interactions between governments and citizens.

Although the discourse on smart cities is no longer solely about technology, much of the literature still reflects a strong technocratic orientation, emphasizing the role of digital infrastructure and technological innovation in urban development (Hollands, 2008). This orientation has been widely criticized for neglecting social relationships, citizen participation, and the broader socio-political dimensions of urban transformation. Existing literature on smart cities can be broadly grouped into three strands: (1) technocratic approaches that emphasize infrastructure, efficiency, and data-driven governance; (2) governance and participation-oriented perspectives that highlight citizen engagement and collaborative governance; and (3) emerging studies that examine communication processes,

including digital public relations, in shaping government-public interaction. However, while the first two strands have been extensively studied, the third strands particularly the role of communication as a relational and sociocultural process remains underexplored. Despite these critiques, existing research has not sufficiently explained how communication, particularly Digital Public Relations, serves as a bridge between technology and community engagement.

Building on this gap, communication plays a crucial role in shaping how public policies are interpreted, negotiated, and responded to by the public. Without effective communication processes, technological infrastructure cannot foster public engagement. Therefore, Digital Public Relations can be understood as a strategic communication mechanism that connects governance systems, digital platforms, and public engagement within the smart city ecosystem.

This study adopts two-way symmetrical communication theory (Grunig & Grunig, 2008) and dialogic communication (Kent & Taylor, 2016) as its analytical framework to examine how Digital Public Relations functions as a relational and socio-cultural communication process in smart city governance. Within this perspective, digital public relations is not merely a tool for disseminating information but also for building two-way relationships between the government and the public through interactions that foster mutual understanding and trust. However, current research on digital public relations in the government context still largely focuses on information dissemination and media utilization, while the role of digital public relations as a socio-cultural process that shapes the relationship between the government and the public in smart city governance remains relatively limited.

Furthermore, in the context of a city rooted in cultural values, such as Bali, communication cannot be separated from local cultural values. The concept of culture-based communication in this study refers to the integration of local values, symbols, and social practices into the process of public communication. In this study, culture-based communication is not only understood as the inclusion of cultural symbols, but as a process through which meaning is negotiated within specific socio-cultural contexts. (Nasrullah, 2015) Also noted that communication in digital media is embedded within a cultural context that influences how meaning is constructed and

interpreted. Therefore, the development of a culture-based smart city requires not only technological innovation but also prioritizing communication methods that align with the local community's culture. Despite these developments, significant limitations remain in the existing literature.

Based on the discussion above, it can be said that this study identifies three research gaps. The first gap is the scarcity of research examining government digital public relations practices in the context of culture-based smart cities, particularly in Indonesia. Second, there is a theoretical gap: communication in smart city governance has not been widely understood as a process that builds relationships and is influenced by sociocultural contexts; rather, it is still viewed purely from a technical perspective. The third gap is a contextual one: few studies have examined how local culture influences digital communication between the government and the public.

In the Indonesian context, smart city development has increasingly gained attention, particularly in relation to digital governance readiness and public service transformation. Within this context, Denpasar was selected as the case study due to its unique position as a culture-rooted smart city, demonstrating the integration of technological innovation with strong local cultural values. As an internationally recognized center of tourism and culture, Denpasar has embedded digital technologies within its community-based governance structures, including traditional institutions such as *banjar* and *desa adat*. This makes Denpasar a relevant case study for examining how digital communication functions within a socio-cultural context.

Therefore, this study aims to examine and formulate the role of government digital public relations as a relationship-building communication process influenced by culture in shaping the relationship between the government and the public in smart cities. To achieve this objective, this study is designed to answer the following research questions:

- (1) How is the role of government digital public relations implemented in the development of culture-based smart cities in Denpasar?
- (2) How do government digital public relations practices shape the relationship between the government and the public within the digital communication space?

- (3) How do cultural values shape the role of non-governmental actors in digital communication and public participation in smart city development?

By answering these research questions, this study not only enriches digital public relations theory by viewing it as relationship- and culture-based communication in smart city development but also provides practical guidance for local governments to formulate more participatory communication strategies aligned with cultural values in the digital age.

2. Method

This study adopts an interpretive qualitative case study approach, which is grounded in a constructivist paradigm. This approach allows the researcher to explore how meaning is constructed through communication practices and social interactions within the context of a culture-based smart city. The present qualitative design was taken to gain a deep understanding of communication practice, social relations, and the process of cultural meaning creation in digital public communication. The study was carried out in Denpasar city, Bali, between July and November of the year 2025. Denpasar was selected as a case study due to its unique position as a culture-based smart city that integrates digital governance with strong local traditional institutions, such as banjars or traditional villages. Unlike smart city models that focus on technological innovation, Denpasar demonstrates how digital technology is integrated into culture-based governance structures. This makes Denpasar a relevant empirical context for examining how digital public relations practices are carried out as relational and socio-cultural communication processes in smart city development. Therefore, this city was chosen to analyze how local cultural values are integrated into smart city development policies and digital public communication practices.

Research informants were recruited through purposive sampling according to the nature, participation, and relevance with respect to digital Public Relations and digital public communication practices. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their respective categories. For the government informant category, two criteria were established: (1) direct involvement in smart city policy; (2) involvement in data management or digital public services. Meanwhile, the informants from the tourism sector are tourism

business operators based in the city of Denpasar. The informants in the “community” category are local residents who actively use digital media, while the “tourist” category includes domestic tourists visiting Bali as a travel destination. The inclusion criteria for informants include individuals who are actively involved in or directly affected by digital public communication practices in Denpasar. The exclusion criteria, meanwhile, include individuals who have no knowledge of digital public communication practices.

This study involved ten informants representing various perspectives, including government officials, tourism stakeholders, and members of the local community. Specifically, the informants consisted of two officials from the Denpasar City Office of Communication, Information Technology, and Statistics (Diskominfo), one representative from the Tourism Office, two tourism stakeholders in Denpasar, three local residents, and two domestic tourists. The uneven distribution of informants across stakeholder groups was intentional, reflecting the structural roles of actors within the digital communication ecosystem. Government actors were prioritized due to their central role in designing and managing digital communication channels, while community members and tourists were included to capture user experiences and reception of digital communication practices. This composition was designed to capture the dynamics of communication relationships between government actors, intermediaries, and the public. The number of informants was determined based on the principle of information richness rather than representativeness. Ten informants were deemed sufficient because the data had reached saturation, meaning no new themes emerged from additional interviews.

Data were collected from multiple sources, including in-depth interviews, observation of digital communication channels, and a comprehensive literature study. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore informants’ perspectives on Digital Public Relations practices and government–public communication. Observations focused on the content and interaction patterns within official digital platforms of the Denpasar City Government. Literature study was used to support and contextualize the empirical findings.

Data analysis followed (Miles & Huberman, 1994), an interactive model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, interview transcripts and observation notes were coded using open coding to identify

initial concepts. The coding process was conducted manually without the use of qualitative data analysis software, allowing the researcher to engage deeply with the data and ensure contextual interpretation. These codes were then grouped into categories through axial coding to develop broader themes related to digital public relations practices, communication patterns, and cultural influences. In the data display stage, the categorized data were organized into thematic matrices and visual representations to facilitate interpretation. In the conclusion drawing stage, the relationships between themes were synthesized to construct the Culture-Based Digital Public Relations Relationship Model.

To ensure the validity of the data, this study employed source triangulation and methodological triangulation by comparing information obtained from informants with various data collection techniques. This study also adhered to standard research ethics, with all participants providing informed consent after receiving an explanation prior to data collection. The confidentiality and anonymity of the informants were also guaranteed.

The overall research process, including research design, data collection, analysis, and model development, is illustrated in Figure 1 to provide a systematic overview of the study.



Figure 1. Research Flow Diagram

3. Results

The findings of this study were derived from an analysis of data from in-depth interviews, observations of digital platforms, and various supporting documents. The analysis identified five main themes related to the implementation of government digital public relations, communication patterns among government entities, the role of non-governmental actors, the dynamics of digital literacy, and the development of a culture-based digital public relations model in the implementation of the smart city initiative in Denpasar.

3.1 Digital Public Relations Practices of the Denpasar City Government

Based on findings from the field, the Denpasar City Government utilizes several digital platforms as part of its digital public relations practices, including the official government website (denpasarkota.go.id), the Instagram account @denpasarkota, and the Denpasar Prama Sewaka (DPS) public service app. These platforms are used to disseminate information on policies, updates on public services, tourism-related content, and cultural activities related to the smart city program in Denpasar.

The government website serves as the central channel for official information and digital public services, containing the vision, mission, history, and current government programs, as well as development achievements carried out by various agencies of the Denpasar City Government. It also serves as the main gateway to various digital services such as complaint services, tourism services, environmental services, population and civil registry services, and more.

An analysis of the Denpasar City Government's official Instagram account (@denpasarkota) shows that the majority of the content posted focuses on ceremonial events, policy announcements, cultural events, and public service information. A government official also explained:

“When it comes to social media, we’re fairly active. In fact, we’re among the most active government social media accounts. Although we don’t have as many followers as private accounts, we’ve reached 176,000 followers. For a government account, that’s pretty decent. The content focuses more on policy updates, public service information, and cultural events. So it might be seen as uninteresting, but we do have to share this information” (Government official)

Meanwhile, based on observations of the Instagram account @denpasarkota, it appears that posts related to Balinese cultural ceremonies and local festivals generate a higher number of likes compared to administrative announcements (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Higher Public Engagement on Cultural and Festival-Related Instagram Posts Compared to Administrative Announcements

Source: Social Media Instagram @denpasarkota

Furthermore, the Denpasar Prama Sewaka (DPS) application functions as an integrated digital public service platform that combines tourism information, emergency communication, complaint services, and administrative access within Denpasar's smart city ecosystem (Figure 3). This was further explained by a government official:

“Now we have a single platform at our fingertips, called DPS. DPS stands for Denpasar. Within DPS, there are three main focuses. First, tourism, since we are a city of culture and tourism. So there we provide various tourism information, including nearby hotels, local cuisine, and more. Second is the emergency feature. This feature includes information on the nearest hospitals, police stations, and public complaint services. Third is Pro Denpasar, which stands for Denpasar City Online Public Service. This feature includes complaint services, ID card (KTP) administration, licensing services, and access to public data. For example, if students or

residents need data, we're required to publish aggregated data openly every year” (Government official)

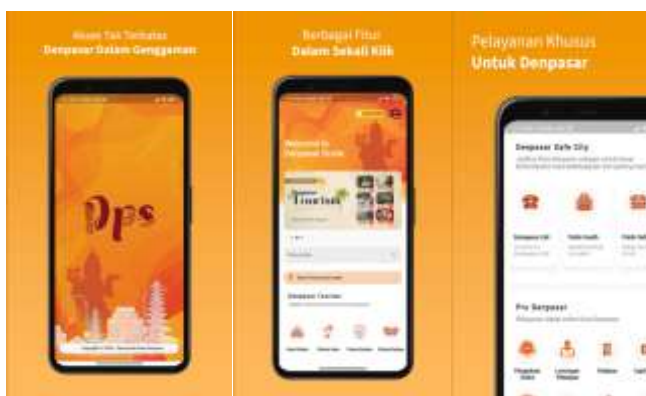


Figure 3. Public Service Application Denpasar Prama Sewaka (DPS)

Source: Google Play Application DPS

In addition to websites, social media, and digital public service apps, the Denpasar City Government also utilizes local government radio, Radio Publik Kota Denpasar (RPKD), and the Dharma Negara Alaya (DNA) creative center as part of its broader public communication ecosystem. These channels are used to disseminate cultural information, support community participation, and expand communication reach to various segments of society, including groups that are less active on digital platforms.

These findings indicate that the Denpasar City Government’s digital public relations (PR) practices serve not only as a mechanism for disseminating information and public services, but also as a communication strategy to represent cultural identity and strengthen community participation in the implementation of a smart city.

3.2 The Role of Digital Public Relations in Shaping Government-Public Relations in the Digital Space

Field findings indicate that the Denpasar City Government utilizes various official digital channels as part of its Digital PR practices to strengthen relationships with the public within the smart city communication ecosystem. Beyond information dissemination, these communication practices are also designed to create cultural proximity, community engagement, and emotional connection with citizens through locally contextualized communication strategies.

The government employs multiple communication platforms, including social media accounts, QR code-based information systems at tourist destinations, local government radio (RPKD), digital public service applications, and the Dharma Negara Alaya (DNA) audiovisual channel. In addition to digital technology, community-based communication approaches are also utilized to expand the reach of public communication and strengthen citizen engagement in smart city programs.

The government also employs several cultural approaches in digital communication. For example, the use of the term “*anak kodya*” in social media posts. This term refers to young people residing in the city of Denpasar. The government’s use of this term on its social media platforms is one way it seeks to connect with Denpasar’s youth. Additionally, the government uses the phrase “*same town*” on its social media to foster a sense of familiarity with its community. The choice of “*same town*” is actually a *play on words* derived from the Balinese term “*semeton*,” meaning “brother” or “sister.” This term is frequently used by Balinese youth who playfully adapt words into English to sound more contemporary. Its use has become a sort of shared identity among Balinese residents in the digital world, thereby strengthening the emotional bond between them. This finding was explained by one government informant:

“We’re adopting the styles that today’s youth use. If you say semeton, it means ‘brother’ or ‘sister,’ but now it’s become semetown, you know? So, the language young people use”

“By the way, we’re in Denpasar City. We call it anak kodya. ‘Where are the anak kodya?’ That’s how we say it. So, the young people of Denpasar City prefer to call themselves anak kodya”

(Government official)

In addition, the Denpasar City Government also produces content on its social media platforms, such as Tembakan Bali (Bali-language riddles) and KODAR (Denpasar Comics) in comic and video formats (Figure 4). In addition, on local government radio (RPKD), community-based cultural programs such as Gita Sancaya are broadcast regularly to preserve local cultural identity. The Gita Sancaya program aims to engage the younger generation, especially those who enjoy singing in the Balinese language. This program revives the culture of *mekawin* (singing traditional songs). Every village

has its own groups, and every Sunday they perform on the radio. It's a sort of sing-along event. For seniors, we also offer activities such as *kekawin* or *nyindèn*, which provide a way for them to pursue their hobbies and stay active and happy.



Figure 4. KODAR (Denpasar Comic)
Source: Social Media Instagram @denpasarkota

Although digital platforms technically enable interaction, observations via the @denpasarkota social media account show that most communication is still dominated by one-way informational content. Public comments and responses are generally limited to brief reactions, while dialogic interaction between government agencies and citizens rarely occurs; even in the example below, questions from the public went unanswered (Figure 5).

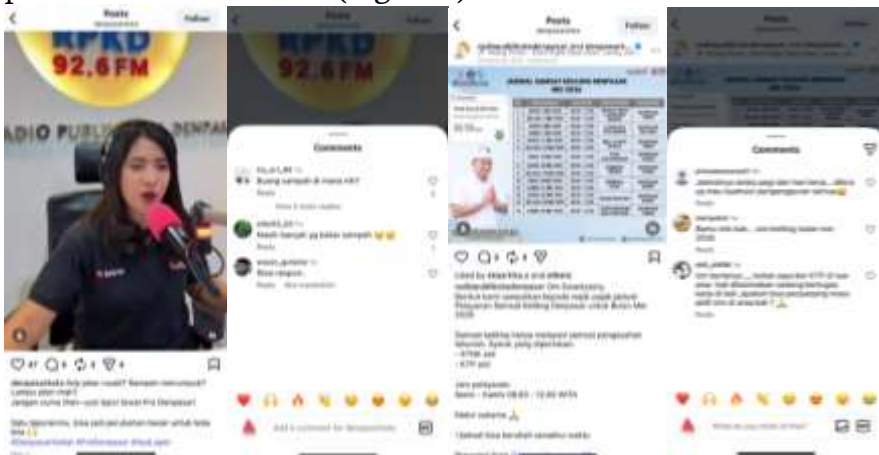


Figure 5. Limited Dialogic Interaction on the @denpasarkota Instagram Account
Source: Social Media Instagram @denpasarkota

Based on these findings, it can be seen that the Denpasar City Government's digital PR practices function not only to disseminate public information but also as relational communication strategies aimed at fostering cultural familiarity and emotional connection with citizens. The use of local expressions such as “anak kodya” and “same town” demonstrates the government's effort to adapt its communication style to the digital culture of Denpasar's youth and create more culturally resonant forms of public communication in the digital space.

However, even though interactive digital platforms are already available, communication patterns remain predominantly informative in nature and government-controlled. Public interaction is generally limited to brief responses and reactions, indicating that communication between the government and the public in the digital space has not yet fully evolved into a dialogic and participatory relationship.

3.3 The Role of Non-Governmental Actors in Digital Public Relations

Based on the findings of field research, it is known that the practice of Digital Public Relations in the Denpasar City Government does not only involve the government as a single actor, but also involves various non-governmental actors who play an active role in the digital public communication ecosystem. This digital PR practice remains under the command of the government's communication department. The presence of the Community Information Community (KIM) primarily functions as a community-based intermediary that helps disseminate government communication at the local level. Social participation occurs when digital messages are disseminated to the banjar (neighborhood association) level. This is, as stated by a government official:

“We also have several communities, one of which is the Community Information Community (KIM). KIM consists of community members; we provide them with training and information, which they then pass on to the community down to the banjar level in their area.” (Government Official)

In addition, on the tourism activist side, it is known that these tourism activists act as producers of digital content that is published independently through social media platforms. The involvement of

tourism activists shows that the image of Denpasar City is not only built exclusively by the Denpasar City Government, but also by tourism activists who are active in promoting tourism in Denpasar City. This was explained by one of the tourism activists interviewed below :

“The Tourism Office has previously organized digital marketing training sessions focused on content creation and promotion on social media. However, communication still feels relatively one-sided because small-scale tourism operators like us aren’t always involved from the outset of government programs. In practice, we often create and upload tourism content on our own, even without a dedicated content team.” (Tourism Activists)

Furthermore, the existence of alternative social media accounts followed by informants, such as the Instagram accounts @denpasarviralcom and @infodenpasar (Figure 6), indicates that the information on these two accounts is conveyed more quickly and the content feels closer to the community than the Instagram account provided by the government itself. As stated by one of the community informants:

“I usually get information about Denpasar through Instagram. I also follow accounts like Denpasar Viral and Denpasar Now. Since these Instagram accounts are always up to date, any news is posted quickly, and they have a large followers” (Community Informant)

Meanwhile, domestic tourists in this study serve as experience validators, who will confirm the level of consistency between the content and cultural narratives presented in the digital space and the cultural experiences felt directly. One of the tourist informants also said that:

“The Balinese culture I saw online was indeed captivating, colorful, spiritual, and rich with unique traditional ceremonies. However, when I experienced it firsthand, the impression felt far deeper and more authentic. I could feel the warmth of the community, the sincerity in every ritual, and the harmony between people and nature, things that a camera can’t fully capture. Digital content offers an engaging visual representation, but the firsthand experience brings emotions, scents, and an atmosphere that allows

me to truly understand the true meaning of Balinese culture.” (Domestic Tourist)

Overall, these findings indicate that digital public communication in the city of Denpasar is becoming increasingly collaborative and multi-centered. Non-governmental actors such as KIM, tourism activists, alternative social media accounts, and tourists play a crucial role in disseminating information, shaping cultural narratives, and validating public communication within the digital space. Although government institutions continue to dominate the design of communication infrastructure and official narratives, public participation is increasingly shaping the interpretation of cultural meaning within Denpasar’s smart city communication ecosystem.



Figure 6. Alternative Instagram Accounts Followed by Informants
Source: Instagram Accounts @denpasarviralcom and @infodenpasar

3.4 Digital Literacy and the Dynamics of Public Participation

The research findings indicate that there are differences in digital literacy levels among the public. Groups with higher digital literacy tend to be more active in accessing information, interacting, and responding to government communications. Conversely, groups with lower digital literacy still rely on social networks and local community groups to obtain information.

Younger, digitally active informants tend to access government information through alternative social media accounts. As one Balinese informant stated:

“Yes, I get information about Denpasar-like road closures or government activities- through Instagram, following accounts like Denpasar Viral and Denpasar Now.” (Community Informant)

Conversely, older residents more frequently rely on person-to-person communication through the Banjar or local traditional community leaders to obtain information related to public services and government programs. This was stated by one Balinese informant, who said:

“I still handle everything manually; nothing’s online. Because all village issues are handled by the Banjar. So if there’s a problem, you go straight to the neighborhood head. If it’s not resolved, the Banjar will facilitate it-the community leader will come around to help, even though we’re the ones taking action, but everything is supported that way.” (Community Informant)

These findings indicate that the level of digital participation among residents in Denpasar remains socially stratified, not evenly distributed. Public participation also tends to be more active on unofficial digital channels managed by the community compared to official government-owned digital channels. This situation indicates that access to digital platforms does not automatically guarantee equal public participation, as communication practices are fundamentally still influenced by sociocultural communication structures, levels of digital literacy, and differences in the community’s ability to utilize digital technology.

3.5 Culture-Based Digital Public Relations Relationship Model

The Culture-Based Digital PR Relationship Model was developed through thematic analysis based on field findings. This model emerged from recurring interaction patterns identified across five categories, with the main themes including: (1) government-controlled digital communication platforms, (2) culturally contextualized communication strategies, (3) public participation in digital spaces at various levels, (4) non-governmental actors as communication intermediaries and cultural co-producers, (5) tourists as experiential validators of cultural narratives.

The synthesis of the field findings reveals that, structurally, this model positions the Denpasar City Government as the primary communication hub responsible for designing and managing official digital communication infrastructure. These communication links are then relayed through various parties, including KIMs down to the banjar level as community-based intermediaries. Meanwhile, tourism

activists function as producers in creating digital cultural narratives. Additionally, alternative digital media serve as informal public communication spaces, while tourists act as validators of experiences that either reinforce or challenge digitally constructed cultural representations.

This model illustrates that digital public communication within Denpasar's smart city ecosystem is shaped through collaborative relationships, even if these are not yet fully equal. The government continues to occupy a dominant position as the primary manager of communication infrastructure and the driver of the public communication agenda. However, the process of constructing cultural meaning in the digital space is not a one-sided endeavor; rather, it is continuously shaped through the involvement of the public, local communities, tourism stakeholders, alternative digital media, and the direct experiences of tourists.

Therefore, this model emphasizes that the success of the government's Digital Public Relations within the context of a culture-based smart city is determined not only by technological readiness and the availability of digital platforms but also by the government's ability to foster participatory, culturally contextual communication that is open to the involvement of non-governmental actors in the production, distribution, and validation of public messages in the digital space, as illustrated in Figure 7.

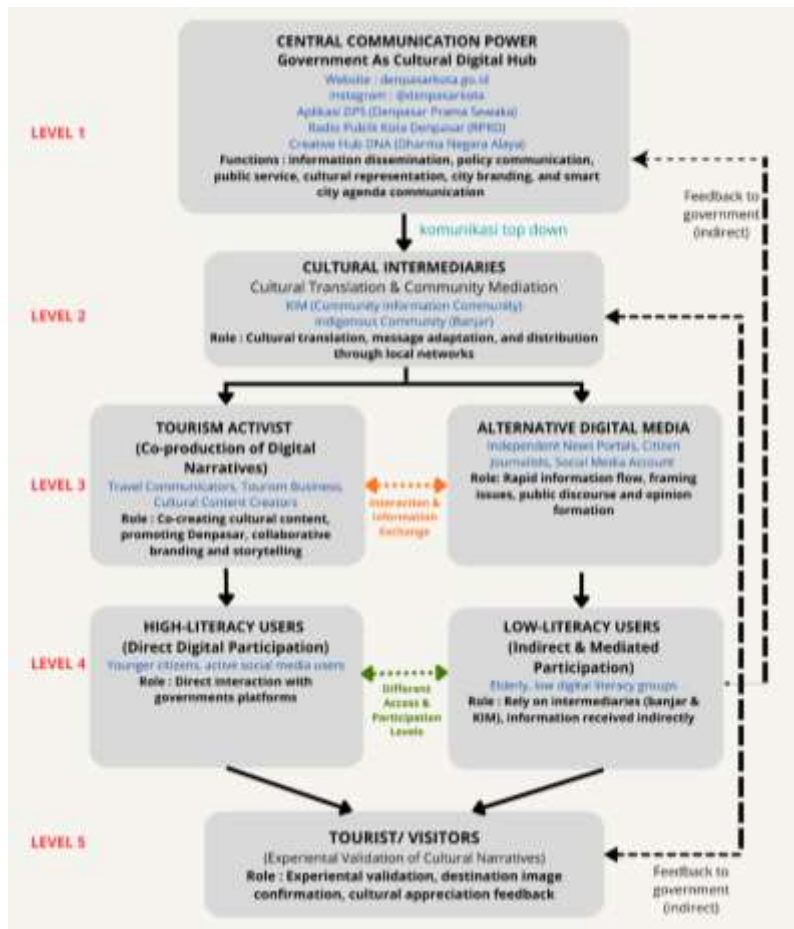


Figure 7. Culture-Based Digital PR Relationship Model
 Source: Research Data (2025)

4. Discussion

4.1 Digital Public Relations Practices of the Denpasar City Government

The findings indicate that the Denpasar City Government’s digital public relations (Digital PR) practices serve not only as a mechanism for disseminating information and public services but also as an instrument for representing cultural identity within the smart city communication ecosystem. Through official platforms such as the government website, Instagram, the DPS app, the city government radio station, and the Dharma Negara Alaya (DNA) creativity center, the government actively builds the image of Denpasar as a culture-

based smart city that integrates technological development with local cultural values.

In this context, Digital PR is viewed as a symbolic form of communication that the government employs to shape how the city's image, public trust, and citizen participation are formed, presented, and represented in the digital sphere. This finding aligns with the views of Kavaratzis & Ashworth (2006), who argue that city communication is not merely about disseminating information but also serves as a mechanism to shape public perception and build the city's symbolic identity. The integration of Balinese cultural symbols and cultural content into government communication reflects efforts to strengthen emotional bonds and cultural affinity between the government and the public.

Furthermore, these findings also indicate that digital communication in smart city governance is closely intertwined with city branding and symbolic governance. As noted by Eshuis & Klijn (2012), who view branding within government as a strategy for shaping meaning, managing public perception, connecting stakeholders, and maintaining authority within a media-shaped governmental environment. Therefore, in Denpasar, digital communication platforms serve not only administrative purposes but also strategic functions related to cultural representation, public image construction, and the communication of governance identity within smart city programs.

These findings also indicate that Digital Public Relations in a culture-based smart city cannot be understood merely as a neutral technological communication tool. On the contrary, digital communication is part of a broader socio-cultural and political communication process, in which the government negotiates legitimacy, represents local identity, and maintains institutional visibility in the digital public sphere.

4.2 The Role of Digital Public Relations in Shaping Government-Public Relations in the Digital Space

The research findings indicate that although the Denpasar City Government has adopted various digital communication platforms that facilitate public interaction and participation, in reality, communication patterns within these platforms are predominantly informative in nature and institutionally controlled. Public interaction through government social media channels is generally limited to brief comments and reactive responses, while sustained dialogic

engagement between government agencies and citizens is rare. This indicates that the adoption of digital communication technology alone does not automatically transform government-citizen relations into a participatory communication process.

Based on the two-way symmetrical communication model introduced by Grunig & Grunig, (2008) It is evident that the principles of dialogic communication are only partially applied in Digital PR practices in Denpasar City. Although digital media offers opportunities for two-way interaction, institutional communication structures and bureaucratic governance culture continue to shape communication practices dominated by a top-down approach. Government digital communication still prioritizes message dissemination, institutional legitimacy, and agenda control over deliberative public engagement.

However, the dominance of this informative communication pattern should not be interpreted solely as a failure in participatory communication. Several structural factors may also contribute to this condition, including bureaucratic communication traditions, limited organizational resources for managing social media to facilitate interactive engagement, and the need to maintain message consistency within the formal government communication system. In this context, digital communication platforms function as spaces for public communication and as tools for administrative coordination and governance control.

These findings also reflect a broader tension in smart city communication practices between participatory idealism and institutional governance control. As explained by Johansson & Johansson (2025) Government communication on social media now takes place within an increasingly institutionalized hybrid media environment, where social media has become part of government communication routines while remaining within the framework of organizational coordination and control. In line with this, Wukich (2021) demonstrates that government social media communication tends to emphasize information dissemination and service-oriented interaction, while more substantive citizen participation in the decision-making process remains relatively limited.

The case in Denpasar also illustrates the emergence of a hybrid public communication space where official government communication coexists with alternative digital social media. Digital public communication in Denpasar is shaped by uneven digital

literacy, the presence of institutional authority, and control over pre-designed communication agendas. Consequently, public participation in digital communication tends to be procedural and reactive rather than deliberative.

These findings also challenge the assumption that the presence of digital technology in smart city programs will strengthen public participation. In Denpasar, digital communication platforms have successfully expanded the reach of communication and cultural visibility, but they do not always distribute communicative power equitably among actors. Communication authority remains controlled by the government, while public participation occurs through symbolic interactions and reactive engagement patterns.

These results also support the view of Meijer & Bolívar (2016) that smart governance cannot be understood solely as a technological issue, as the implementation of digital technology often reinforces existing institutional structures and power relations rather than transforming them. In this context, public participation requires not only the availability of digital infrastructure but also institutional readiness and governance processes that consciously facilitate openness, collaboration, and citizen engagement in communication practices. Therefore, this study sharpens existing perspectives on Digital PR and governance by demonstrating that government-citizen communication in culture-based smart city programs is shaped not only by technological capabilities but also by socio-cultural mediation and the uneven capacity for participation among citizens.

4.3 The Role of Non-Governmental Actors in Digital Public Relations

These findings indicate that digital public relations practices within Denpasar's smart city communication ecosystem are not only carried out by government agencies but also by non-governmental actors participating in public communication in the digital sphere. Community Information Groups (KIM), tourism advocates, alternative social media accounts, and tourists all contribute to shaping Denpasar's culture-based smart city communication ecosystem.

The role of KIM as a community-based intermediary reflects a form of government-to-citizen co-production, in which local communities help disseminate government communications through social networks embedded in the culture, such as the banjar structure. This finding supports Linders' argument that many forms of digital participation in e-government take place within frameworks designed

and facilitated by the government, where citizens participate through platforms and collaborative mechanisms institutionally established by the state.

However, the involvement of non-governmental actors in Denpasar's digital communication ecosystem does not always signify fully equal participation. Although tourism activists, community groups, and alternative digital media actively contribute to the circulation of public information and cultural narratives, the communication infrastructure and agenda-setting processes remain largely controlled by the government. This indicates that participation in Denpasar's digital public sphere is collaborative, yet remains asymmetrical in terms of communicative power and institutional authority.

The involvement of tourism activists in producing and distributing digital content related to tourism also demonstrates that Denpasar's image as a culture-based smart city is not built exclusively through official government communication. Instead, city branding increasingly emerges through collaborative interactions between government agencies and community-based actors who independently produce cultural narratives in the digital space. These findings also expand Kavaratzis (2004) Perspective on city branding by demonstrating that, in the context of smart cities, the construction of a city's digital image is no longer shaped solely through institutional communication but also through participatory communication practices and more decentralized communication networks.

Furthermore, the presence of community-managed alternative digital media such as @denpasarviralcom and @infodenpasar signals the emergence of a hybrid public communication space in Denpasar. Unlike official government channels, these platforms are often perceived by community members as more responsive, easier to connect with, and faster in disseminating information relevant to daily social life. In this context, public communication is no longer entirely dominated by formal government institutions but is increasingly shaped through interactions among political actors, the media, citizens, and digital communication networks within a hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2013).

The emergence of these alternative communication spaces also reflects the transformation of the digital public sphere. Communication within Denpasar's digital public sphere remains shaped by digital literacy inequalities, institutional authority, and

platform-based visibility dynamics. Consequently, hybrid digital communication spaces can simultaneously expand opportunities for participation and reproduce new forms of digital communication inequality, as explained by Dijk (2005) in his analysis of the digital divide in the information society

Furthermore, the role of tourists as validators of experience demonstrates that the construction of cultural meaning does not stop at digital representations alone but continues through direct experiences manifested within Denpasar's socio-cultural environment. Therefore, tourists do not merely function as passive audiences but as participants who validate, reinterpret, and reproduce cultural narratives through their digital experiences and interactions. These findings reinforce the concept of participatory culture described by Jenkins (2006), who views media audiences no longer as passive recipients of messages, but as active participants involved in the collective production, circulation, and construction of media meaning.

These findings also indicate that Digital Public Relations in culture-based smart cities operates through multi-centric and culturally mediated communication relationships. However, although collaboration between government and non-government actors is increasing, communicative authority remains unevenly distributed. This situation indicates that the transformation toward dialogic digital public communication depends not only on the presence of technology and participatory actors but also on the institutional capacity and willingness to adopt more open, collaborative, and participatory communication approaches in digital governance (Lovari & Valentini, 2020).

Therefore, this study sharpens the existing perspectives on Digital Public Relations and smart governance by demonstrating that government-citizen communication in a culture-based smart city is increasingly shaped through culturally negotiated and mediated relationships among government agencies, communities, tourism stakeholders, alternative digital media, and digitally active citizens. Digital public communication in Denpasar increasingly involves broader interactions among multiple actors, so that cultural meanings, public narratives, and the legitimacy of communication are shaped through interactions in digital spaces.

.4 Digital Literacy and the Dynamics of Public Participation

The findings indicate that public participation in the digital communication ecosystem in Denpasar remains socially stratified and

unevenly distributed. Although digitally active groups tend to access information and engage with government communications, other groups continue to rely on interpersonal communication networks and local community structures such as banjars to obtain information regarding public services and government programs. These findings suggest that access to digital platforms alone does not automatically foster equitable participation in a smart city communication system.

From a digital citizenship perspective, meaningful participation in digital public communication requires not only access to technology but also information literacy and the ability to effectively search for, understand, evaluate, and use digital information (Mossberger et al., 2008). In this context, the findings indicate that uneven levels of digital literacy affect citizens' ability to participate in smart city communication processes.

Previous research has shown that digital literacy and the clarity of digital public communication are key factors in strengthening community readiness, citizen participation, and digital resilience within the smart city ecosystem (Isabella & Agustian, 2023; Meisari et al., 2025). However, in the case of Denpasar, the research findings indicate that inequalities in participation are not solely determined by technological capabilities but are also shaped by socio-cultural communication structures and the various forms of digital access available within the community.

These findings also support Rogers (2007) theory of the Diffusion of Innovations, particularly regarding differences in technology adoption between digitally active young people and older members of the community. However, in the case of Denpasar, there are limitations to applying the theory of linear diffusion in a digital communication environment that is deeply embedded in the culture. Rogers' framework tends to emphasize the adoption process at the individual level, whereas digital participation in Denpasar is heavily mediated through collective socio-cultural institutions such as banjar networks and community-based communication structures. This implies that participation in a culture-based smart city cannot be understood solely through the lens of technology adoption but must also account for the mediating role of local culture.

The emergence of alternative digital media as the primary information source for the public also reflects the formation of a hybrid public communication space. In reality, communication within Denpasar's digital public sphere remains influenced by uneven digital

literacy, institutional communication authority, and platform-based visibility dynamics. Consequently, digital communication spaces can simultaneously expand access to information and public participation, yet also reproduce new forms of communicative inequality and uneven digital participation (Dijk, 2005; Chadwick, 2013).

These findings also challenge the common assumption that, in smart city programs, the availability of digital technology will enhance community engagement. In practice, digital communication infrastructure may succeed in expanding the reach of communication and information accessibility, but it does not always redistribute communicative power equitably among actors. Instead, patterns of participation remain shaped by socio-cultural hierarchies, institutional communication structures, and unequal digital competencies within society.

This situation also supports the view expressed by Meijer & Bolívar (2016) that digital technology does not automatically create smart governance, as the implementation of technology often reinforces existing institutional structures and power relations rather than transforming them. In this context, public participation requires not only the availability of digital infrastructure but also institutional readiness and governance processes that consciously facilitate openness, collaboration, and citizen engagement in communication practices and decision-making.

4.5 Culture-Based Digital Public Relations Relationship Model

Unlike smart city communication models, which primarily emphasize technological infrastructure, efficiency, and the integration of digital services, the Culture-Based Digital Public Relations Model highlights the importance of sociocultural mediation, participatory communication, and the negotiation of cultural meanings in the process of digital governance. In this model, communication is not understood merely as supporting infrastructure for smart city governance, but as a relational and cultural process that shapes public legitimacy, participation, and collective identity in the digital space.

Most existing smart city governance models tend to be state-centric, conceptualizing the public primarily as users of digital services or recipients of information within technology-based governance systems. In contrast, the model proposed in this study views citizens, communities, tourism stakeholders, and alternative digital media as active participants engaged in the processes of

exchange, negotiation, and validation of cultural meanings within the digital communication ecosystem.

This model also refines existing perspectives on Digital Public Relations (Digital PR) by demonstrating that government-citizen communication in culturally-based smart cities cannot be fully understood solely through technological capabilities or institutional communication strategies. Instead, communicative relationships are continually shaped through socio-cultural mediation, unequal participatory capacities, and interactions between government and non-government actors within hybrid digital public spaces.

Normatively, this model raises important questions regarding the democratic quality of digital public communication in smart city governance. Although digital communication technologies expand opportunities for visibility and participation, communicative authority remains unevenly distributed, indicating that participation in digital public spaces may remain collaborative yet structurally asymmetrical.

4.6 Limitations of The Study

This study certainly has several limitations. First, it focuses on a case study in the city of Denpasar, which may limit the applicability of its findings to smart city contexts in other regions with different sociocultural characteristics and governance structures. Second, this study involved a relatively small number of informants selected through purposive sampling, which may not fully represent the diversity of perspectives within Denpasar's digital communication ecosystem. Third, this study used data collection methods involving in-depth interviews and qualitative observation without utilizing comparative platform data. Future research is recommended to conduct comparative studies across various smart cities and integrate quantitative digital communication metrics to further examine the relationship between digital governance, participation, and cultural communication practices on social media.

5. Conclusion

This study successfully examined how Government Digital Public Relations (Digital PR) practices shape government-public communication within the context of a culture-based smart city in Denpasar. The findings demonstrate that Digital PR in culture-based smart cities cannot be understood solely as a technological communication mechanism for disseminating information and

public services. In the context of the smart city program in Denpasar, digital public relations functions as a relational and socio-cultural communication process through which government institutions negotiate public legitimacy, represent cultural identity, and establish communication relationships within the digital public sphere. Although digital communication platforms expand information accessibility and cultural visibility, government-public communication remains characterized by unequal participation, institutionally controlled communication agendas, and asymmetrical participation dynamics.

The findings also indicate that digital public communication in culture-based smart cities occurs through collaborative yet structurally unequal relationships involving government agencies, community intermediaries, tourism stakeholders, alternative digital media, and the digitally active public. These conditions indicate that the effectiveness of smart city communication is influenced not only by technological infrastructure but also by socio-cultural mediation, disparities in digital literacy, participatory communication practices, and institutional openness to public engagement.

Theoretically, this study sharpens existing perspectives on Digital PR and smart governance by demonstrating that government-public communication within a smart city ecosystem should not be understood solely through technological capabilities, administrative efficiency, or institutional communication strategies. Instead, communication in culture-based smart cities is continuously shaped through negotiated cultural meanings, hybrid public communication spaces, and interactions between government and non-government actors. Through the proposed Culture-Based Digital PR Relationship Model, this research offers an alternative perspective to bureaucratic, government-centered smart city communication models. It emphasizes the importance of relational communication, cultural mediation, and participatory meaning-making processes.

Practically, the findings of this study suggest that local governments adopt an informative digital communication approach and develop communication strategies that are more dialogic, culturally contextual, and participatory. In the context of Denpasar, local governments must strengthen collaboration with community-based communication actors, improve digital literacy, and facilitate more inclusive communication spaces to help reduce communication inequalities in the smart city governance process.

Nevertheless, this research is limited to a single qualitative case study conducted in the city of Denpasar and involving a relatively small number of informants selected through purposive sampling. Therefore, these findings should be understood within the specific socio-cultural and governance context of Denpasar and should not be generalized to the broader context of smart cities.

Future research is encouraged to conduct comparative studies across various smart city contexts and integrate a broader analysis of digital engagement to further examine how communication, culture, digital literacy, and participatory governance interact within the evolving smart city ecosystem. Further studies are also needed to examine the application of the proposed Culture-Based Digital Public Relations Relationship Model in different smart city contexts with varying socio-cultural characteristics and governance structures.

Reference

- Chadwick, A. (2013). *The hybrid media system: Politics and power*. Oxford University Press.
- Dijk, J. A. G. M. van. (2005). *The Deepening Divide: Inequality in the Information Society*. SAGE Publications.
- Eshuis, J., & Klijn, E. H. (2012). *Branding in Governance and Public Management* (0 ed.). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203145159>
- Grunig, J. E., & Grunig, L. A. (2008). Excellent Theory in Public Relations: Past, Present, Future. In *Public Relations Research* (1st ed., pp. 327–347). VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/226935895_Excellence_Theory_in_Public_Relations_Past_Present_and_Future
- Hollands, R. G. (2008). Will the real smart city please stand up?: Intelligent, progressive, or entrepreneurial? *City*, 12(3), 303–320. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13604810802479126>
- Isabella, I., & Agustian, E. (2023). Implementing Digital Literacy Policies and the Challenges of Towards a Smart City in Palembang City. *Journal of Governance and Local Politics (JGLP)*, 5(2), 122–132.
<https://doi.org/10.47650/jglp.v5i2.936>
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York University Press.

- Johansson, E., & Johansson, K. M. (2025). *Normalizing Government Social Media Communication: A Swedish Case Analysis*. 13. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.10457>
- Kavaratzis, M. (2004). From city marketing to city branding: Towards a theoretical framework for developing city brands. *Place Branding*, 1(1), 58–73. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.pb.5990005>
- Kavaratzis, M., & Ashworth, G. J. (2006). City Branding: An effective assertion of identity or a transitory marketing trick? *Place Branding*, 2(3), 183–194. <https://doi.org/doi:10.1057/palgrave.pb.5990056>
- Kent, M. L., & Taylor, M. (2016). From Homo Economicus to Homo dialogicus: Rethinking social media use in CSR communication. *Public Relations Review*, 42(1), 60–67. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2015.11.003>
- Linders, D. (2012). From e-government to we-government: Defining a typology for citizen coproduction in the age of social media. *Government Information Quarterly*, 29(4), 446–454. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2012.06.003>
- Lovari, A., & Valentini, C. (2020). Public Sector Communication and Social Media: Opportunities and Limits of Current Policies, Activities, and Practices. In V. Luoma-aho & M. Canel (Eds.), *The Handbook of Public Sector Communication* (1st ed., pp. 315–328). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119263203.ch21>
- Meijer, A., & Bolívar, M. P. R. (2016). Governing the smart city: A review of the literature on smart urban governance. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 82(2), 392–408. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852314564308>
- Meisari, W. C., Muliawati, & Fatimah, S. (2025). GOVERNMENT INFORMATION CLARITY AND DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT AS DRIVING FORCES BEHIND DIGITAL RESILIENCE ON THE JEPIN SMART CITY PLATFORM. *Jurnal Vokasi Indonesia*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.7454/jvi.v13i1.1247>
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A., Michael. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publication. <https://vivauniversity.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/milesandhuberman1994.pdf>

- Mossberger, K., Tolbert, C. J., & McNeal, R. S. (2008). *Digital citizenship: The internet, society, and participation*. MIT Press.
- Nasrullah, R. (2015). *Media Sosial: Perspektif Komunikasi, Budaya, dan Siosioteknologi*. Simbiosis Rekatama Media.
- Rogers, E. M. (2007). Diffusion of Innovations. In *Knowledge and Innovation Management* (pp. 37–50). Universitat Hohenheim. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Anja_Christinck/publication/225616414_Farmers_and_researchers_How_can_collaborative_advantages_be_created_in_participatory_research_and_technology_development/links/00b4953a92931a6fae000000/Farmers-and-researchers-How-can-collaborative-advantages-be-created-in-participatory-research-and-technology-development.pdf#page=37
- Wukich, C. (2021). Government Social Media Engagement Strategies and Public Roles. *Public Performance & Management Review*, 44(1), 187–215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15309576.2020.1851266>