

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LEVEL OF CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT (CRM) AND THE INTENSITY OF DIGITAL PUBLIC COMMUNICATION ON PLN'S CORPORATE IMAGE AMONG FOLLOWERS OF THE @PLN_ID INSTAGRAM ACCOUNT

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Abstract

In the era of digital transformation, PT PLN (Persero) faces challenges in maintaining its corporate image due to the increasing number of service-related complaints in cyberspace. This study aims to analyse the relationship between Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and digital public communication on the corporate image among followers of the @pln_id Instagram account. The study employed an explanatory quantitative methodology with a positivist approach. The research sample consisted of 100 respondents who were active followers of the @pln_id Instagram account and were selected using a purposive sampling technique. The theoretical framework was based on Customer Relationship Management proposed by Payne and Frow (2005) and Two-Way Symmetrical Communication developed by Grunig and Hunt (1984). Data were analysed using instrument testing, classical assumption testing, and simple linear regression analysis. The findings indicate that Customer Relationship Management (CRM) has a positive and significant relationship with corporate image. Digital public communication also demonstrates a positive and significant relationship with corporate image. This study recommends that the Public Relations division of PT PLN (Persero) optimise the dimensions of customer satisfaction and customer trust within its Customer Relationship Management (CRM) practices, while also enhancing message credibility in digital public communication to strengthen the company's corporate image and reduce negative sentiment on social media.

Keywords: Customer Relationship Management, digital public communication, corporate image, @pln_id Instagram account, explanatory quantitative research.

INTRODUCTION

PT PLN (Persero) plays a strategic national role as a state-owned enterprise serving as the primary provider of electricity while simultaneously acting as a key driver of the green energy transition and the digital economy in Indonesia. In the current digital era, this vital role must be accompanied by the ability to maintain a positive corporate image through effective communication strategies and the utilisation of information technology (PT PLN (Persero), 2025). One of the most crucial instruments for building strong customer relationships is the implementation of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) alongside adaptive public communication through social media (Kent & Taylor, 2022; Kotler & Keller, 2016). Optimising two-way interactions on digital platforms such as Instagram has become a primary channel for PLN to disseminate information, provide clarifications, and accommodate public aspirations in order to continuously improve public perceptions (Karman et al., 2024; Utaridah et al., 2024).

However, the reality in the digital sphere indicates that PLN's corporate image remains fluctuating due to the high volume of public complaints concerning technical disruptions, such as rolling blackouts and slow service responses. Data from the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology place PLN among the top five state-owned enterprises most frequently discussed negatively on social media (Karman et al., 2024). This gap is clearly reflected in the comment section of the official @pln_id Instagram account, which has 1.2 million followers, where negative sentiment frequently predominates. The discrepancy between the ideal image that PLN seeks to establish and the reality of public perception indicates that the implementation of CRM and digital public communication strategies has not yet been fully effective in transforming public complaints into positive public support.

From a theoretical perspective, this issue can be examined using the Two-Way Symmetrical Communication model developed by Grunig and Hunt (1984) alongside the strategic CRM approach proposed by Payne and Frow (2020) (Muktiarsih et al., 2025). The Two-Way Symmetrical Communication model emphasises the importance of reciprocal, participatory, transparent, and responsive communication in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of public needs (Buttle, 2009). Meanwhile, CRM functions as a holistic customer relationship management approach by systematically utilising interaction data to personalise services (Buttle & Maklan, 2021). This integrative model combines CRM as an internal capability for managing customer satisfaction (Wardiyanti et al., 2019) with digital public communication as an external channel for shaping public opinion (Wardati, 2024), both of which simultaneously contribute to the development of a corporate image through the dimensions of trust, positive public responses, and customer loyalty.

Although previous studies have demonstrated that the integration of digital communication and CRM significantly enhances public trust in state-owned enterprises (Rahmawati, 2022; A. H. Siregar, 2023; H. Siregar, 2022), studies specifically focusing on PLN within the context of followers of the @pln_id Instagram account remain very limited. The urgency of this research lies in the pressing need to quantitatively assess the extent to which digital interactions and customer relationship management contribute to corporate reputation in the era of information transparency. Therefore, this study entitled "The Influence of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and Digital Public Communication on PLN's Corporate Image Among Followers of the @pln_id Instagram Account" was conducted to address this empirical gap while contributing theoretically to the advancement of corporate communication and digital public relations research.

Based on this context, the research problem is formulated into three main questions. First, how does the level of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) effectiveness influence PT PLN's corporate image among followers of the @pln_id Instagram account? Second, how does the effectiveness of digital public communication influence PT PLN's corporate image among followers of the @pln_id Instagram account? Third, how do Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and digital public communication jointly influence PT PLN's corporate image among followers of the @pln_id Instagram account?

In line with these research questions, this study is designed to achieve six specific objectives. Descriptively, the study aims to examine the effectiveness of CRM implementation at PT PLN, the effectiveness of its digital public communication practices, and the overall corporate image of PT PLN as perceived by followers of the @pln_id

Instagram account. Explanatorily and verificatively, the study aims to measure the effect of CRM effectiveness on corporate image, to measure the effect of digital public communication effectiveness on corporate image, and to examine the simultaneous effects of CRM and digital public communication on PT PLN's corporate image among followers of the @pln_id Instagram account. Practically, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a strategic foundation for PLN in designing more human-centred and responsive communication strategies to maintain its corporate reputation throughout the energy transition era.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a positivist paradigm with a quantitative explanatory approach to examine the causal effects of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and Digital Public Communication on the Corporate Image of PT PLN (Persero). The population consisted of followers of the @pln_id Instagram account, while the sample of 100 respondents was determined using the Slovin formula and selected through purposive sampling based on two criteria: following the @pln_id account and having viewed or interacted with its content. Primary data were collected using a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire distributed via Google Forms through Instagram Stories, direct messages, and relevant online discussion groups.

The research instrument measured the CRM variable through five dimensions: customer orientation, information responsiveness, service personalization, customer engagement, and customer satisfaction and trust. Digital Public Communication was assessed based on information openness, public participation, responsiveness, interactive dialogue, and message credibility, while Corporate Image was measured through respondents' perceptions of trust, reputation, and positive impressions of PT PLN (Persero). Instrument quality was evaluated through validity testing using the Corrected Item–Total Correlation (Pearson Product Moment) and reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha, with an alpha coefficient of ≥ 0.70 indicating good reliability. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 25.0.

Before hypothesis testing, the data were subjected to classical assumption tests to ensure that the regression model met the Best Linear Unbiased Estimator (BLUE) criteria. These tests included the Kolmogorov–Smirnov normality test ($p > 0.05$), the multicollinearity test using Tolerance (> 0.10) and Variance Inflation Factor ($VIF < 10$), and the heteroscedasticity test using the Glejser method ($p > 0.05$). After the regression assumptions were satisfied, hypotheses were tested using the partial t-test to evaluate the individual effects of CRM and Digital Public Communication on the Corporate Image of PT PLN (Persero), with statistical significance determined at $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics

The study involved 100 respondents who were active followers of the @pln_id Instagram account. All respondents met the research criteria, namely following the official PT PLN (Persero) Instagram account, actively using Instagram, and having previously obtained information from or interacted with content published through the account.

Validity Test

The results of the validity test indicate that all indicators of the Customer Relationship Management (CRM), Digital Public Communication, and Corporate Image variables have correlation coefficients greater than the critical r-table value. Therefore, all questionnaire items are declared valid.

Reliability Test

Furthermore, the reliability test results indicate that the Cronbach's Alpha values for each variable exceed 0.70. Accordingly, the research instrument is considered reliable and capable of producing consistent and dependable data.

The Relationship Between Customer Relationship Management and Corporate Image

The results of the simple linear regression analysis indicate that Customer Relationship Management (CRM) has a positive and significant effect on the corporate image of PT PLN (Persero). The coefficient of determination (R^2) of 48.1% indicates that nearly half of the variation in corporate image can be explained by CRM implementation, while the remaining variation is influenced by other factors outside the research model.

An R Square value of 0.481 indicates that Customer Relationship Management contributes 48.1% to Corporate Image, while the remaining 51.9% is influenced by factors outside the scope of this study.

The calculated F-value is 90.775, with a significance value of < 0.001 . Since the significance value is < 0.05 , the regression model is considered statistically significant. The findings demonstrate that Customer Relationship Management (CRM) has a positive and significant effect on the corporate image of PT PLN (Persero). This finding indicates that the relationship established between the company and its customers is one of the key factors influencing public perceptions of the company. In other words, the public evaluates PLN not only based on its ability to provide electricity services but also on how the company treats its customers during service interactions.

This finding is consistent with the Customer Relationship Management theory proposed by Payne and Frow, which states that CRM is a strategy for creating customer value through long-term, mutually beneficial relationships. Such relationships are established through an understanding of customer needs, information integration, and the delivery of customer-oriented services aimed at enhancing customer satisfaction. Accordingly, the success of CRM is measured not merely by the company's ability to store customer data but by its ability to utilise that information to create superior service experiences.

At PT PLN (Persero), CRM implementation is reflected not only in the existence of the PLN Mobile application and customer service systems but also in the company's communication through the @pln_id Instagram account. The account functions as one of the company's customer touchpoints with its customers. Every question, complaint, and expression of appreciation submitted by the public becomes part of the customer relationship management process. When the company is able to provide prompt, courteous, and solution-oriented responses, customers feel valued, thereby fostering stronger relationships with the company.

Conversely, if these interactions are not managed effectively, customers are likely to develop negative perceptions of the company. This demonstrates that CRM extends beyond service delivery and evolves into the management of the customer experience. It

is this experience that ultimately influences how the public perceives the company's overall corporate image.

In conclusion, the implementation of Customer Relationship Management by PT PLN (Persero) through the @pln_id Instagram account has been highly effective. The company is considered capable of utilising social media as a platform for building customer relationships through prompt communication, personalised services, and the delivery of relevant information.

Nevertheless, the Customer Satisfaction and Trust dimension still requires greater attention. PLN should ensure that its effective digital communication is supported by tangible improvements in service quality. In this way, relationships established through social media will not only generate high levels of interaction but also enhance customer trust and satisfaction over the long term.

The Relationship Between Digital Public Communication and Corporate Image

The regression analysis indicates that Digital Public Communication also has a positive and significant effect on corporate image, with a coefficient of determination of 53.5%. This result indicates that the quality of communication through social media contributes more substantially than CRM to the development of the company's corporate image.

Information transparency, prompt responses to public inquiries, and the delivery of credible information through the @pln_id Instagram account enhance public trust in PT PLN (Persero). This finding is consistent with the concept of Two-Way Symmetrical Communication, which emphasises the importance of reciprocal communication between organisations and the public.

An R Square value of 0.535 indicates that Digital Public Communication contributes 53.5% to Corporate Image, while the remaining 46.5% is influenced by factors outside the scope of this study.

The calculated F-value is 112.775, with a significance value of < 0.001 . Since the significance value is < 0.05 , the regression model is considered statistically significant.

The results indicate that Digital Public Communication has a positive and significant effect on the corporate image of PT PLN (Persero). These findings suggest that the company's communication through digital media, particularly the @pln_id Instagram account, is capable of shaping public perceptions of the organisation. Therefore, corporate image is influenced not only by the quality of services received by customers but also by how the company communicates information, facilitates dialogue, and responds to issues emerging within the digital public sphere.

These findings are consistent with the Two-Way Symmetrical Communication theory proposed by Grunig and Hunt (1984). The theory explains that ideal communication is reciprocal in nature, enabling organisations and the public to exchange information, listen to one another's perspectives, and achieve mutual understanding. From this perspective, communication effectiveness is measured not by the quantity of information disseminated by the organisation but by the extent to which the organisation is able to establish dialogue that produces mutually beneficial relationships.

Overall, the findings indicate that the digital public communication implemented by PT PLN (Persero) through the @pln_id Instagram account has been highly effective. This is reflected in respondents' favourable evaluations of the quality of information, organisational responsiveness, and the credibility of messages delivered to the public.

However, public participation remains a challenge that requires greater attention. By nature, social media provides a two-way communication environment that enables the public to participate actively in organisational communication processes. Therefore, PLN should further enhance more dialogic communication strategies so that the public serves not merely as recipients of information but also as partners actively engaged in improving public service delivery.

Hypothesis Testing

t-Test

Both Customer Relationship Management and Digital Public Communication have significance values (Sig. < 0.05), indicating that each variable has a statistically significant partial effect on Corporate Image in the multiple regression model.

CONCLUSION

Based on the descriptive analysis, the implementation of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) by PT PLN (Persero) was perceived by respondents as being highly effective. This finding indicates that followers of the @pln_id Instagram account believe that PLN has made substantial efforts to establish and maintain customer relationships through the provision of solution-oriented information addressing customer complaints, as well as through active engagement on social media. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of CRM still leaves room for improvement, particularly regarding the consistency of response times to customer complaints in order to achieve more optimal customer relationship management. Similarly, the Digital Public Communication implemented by PT PLN (Persero) through the @pln_id Instagram account also received positive evaluations from respondents. PLN is perceived to have successfully transformed its digital platform into a transparent, educational, and interactive communication space that directly contributes to strengthening public trust. However, enhancing the quality of two-way interactive dialogue should remain a priority in order to encourage broader public participation within the digital environment. The effective management of these aspects collectively positions the Corporate Image of PT PLN (Persero) within a favourable category. The public perceives PLN as a professional organisation that demonstrates social responsibility and a strong commitment to continuous service improvement. This positive perception is derived not only from the company's technical service performance but is also reinforced by its corporate communication narratives disseminated through social media.

From an inferential perspective, the hypothesis testing results demonstrate that Customer Relationship Management (CRM) has a positive and significant effect on the Corporate Image of PT PLN (Persero). These findings confirm that improvements in customer relationship management directly contribute to strengthening a more positive corporate image among the public, as effective complaint management is capable of transforming transactional satisfaction into long-term customer trust. A similar pattern of relationship was also observed for the Digital Public Communication variable, which was found to have a positive and significant effect on Corporate Image. The characteristics of digital communication that are transparent, responsive, and easily accessible through the Instagram platform successfully reduce information asymmetry, allowing the public to feel involved and valued, which ultimately reinforces the company's digital reputation.

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