



University students' attitudes towards digital public relations

(A Field Study)

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Abstract ;

This study aimed to identify university students' attitudes towards digital public relations. The study adopted the analytical descriptive approach, using a questionnaire tool for data collection. The study was applied to a sample of 29 students from the Social Sciences department at the University of Tizi Ouzou. The study concluded that students have moderate attitudes towards the university's digital public relations, along with their awareness of the importance of using modern technologies in the educational process. The results revealed no statistically significant differences in student attitudes attributable to gender or economic status, while statistically significant differences were found attributable to internet speed.

Article info

*Received April 01.2026
Accepted May 19.2026*

Keyword:

- ✓ *Attitudes*
- ✓ *University Students,*
- ✓ *Digital Public Relations,*

1. Introduction

Societies have undergone profound shifts, transitioning from power rooted in tangible resources to power driven by knowledge and technology. This revolution has permeated all aspects of life, with modern technologies reshaping individuals' cognitive frameworks and propelling societies toward global interconnectedness. These developments have, in turn, led to significant changes in social and cultural structures. In the face of such transformations, higher education institutions find themselves at a pivotal juncture. Universities are now expected to enhance student performance, equip them with the skills to utilize modern tools and intelligently leverage knowledge, and reach them through the fastest and most accessible means possible. This has become increasingly necessary given the overwhelming volume of available information and the effectiveness of emerging digital media across various domains. Consequently, this study seeks to examine university students' perspectives toward digital public relations and assess whether these practices meet their expectations by addressing the following questions:

2. Research Questions:

- What are university students' attitudes toward digital public relations?
- Are there differences in students' attitudes based on gender?
- Are there differences in students' attitudes based on economic status?
- Are there differences in students' attitudes based on internet connection strength?

3. Research Hypotheses:

- University students hold positive attitudes toward digital public relations.

- There are differences in students' attitudes based on gender.

- There are differences in students' attitudes based on economic status.

- There are differences in students' attitudes based on internet connection strength.

4. Digital Public Relations

As a managerial and communication discipline, public relations cannot remain isolated from the evolving innovations in communication technology without risking obsolescence and losing relevance to its surrounding environment. In a natural progression aligned with modern communication advancements, the operational mechanisms of public relations have evolved, giving rise to what is termed Digital Public Relations. This serves as an extension of traditional public relations practices, driven by several factors. These include adapting to societal changes prompted by communication technology developments and optimally leveraging these tools to achieve the objectives of public relations departments.

Amidst the significant evolution in the digital technology landscape, the role of public relations has become increasingly prominent in resolving various crises faced by institutions and companies. Consequently, organizations themselves have come to rely heavily on digital PR to enhance their operations and facilitate more robust engagement with the public

compared to traditional methods. The role of a Public Relations Manager within institutions has gained considerable importance recently. This role involves adapting to modern communication tools, including various social media networks. Among its key responsibilities is accelerating communication between the public and the organization, as well as building and shaping a positive reputation and public perception.

Also referred to as Online Public Relations or Electronic Public Relations, this represents a modern term compared to its traditional counterpart. It typically involves the strategic planning and use of new media tools and technologies, which are based on modern communication technologies, to establish and maintain two-way communication between an organization and the general public. Digital public relations plays a substantial role in managing crises via the internet, particularly when an organization's online reputation and media presence are affected.

It is defined as "the practice of public relations departments employing modern communication technologies to execute their activities and contribute to achieving their goals."

5. Characteristics of Digital Management

Digital management is distinguished by the following characteristics:

- **Speed and Clarity:** Digital management offers the most efficient and effective method for facilitating administrative work, capable of achieving the highest levels of performance speed. This is evident in providing services and

information anytime, anywhere, and seamlessly within the organization.

- **Flexibility:** Digital management is characterized by high flexibility. This flexibility is maximized when work systems are built on a network foundation reliant on digital communications and computer devices, allowing for a high degree of coordination, interaction, and information exchange within the organization.

- **Remote Work Capability:** Digital management possesses the ability to accomplish tasks remotely. Employees can access and exit the organization's system without spatial or temporal restrictions, thereby enhancing communication and integration among individuals.

- **Transparency:** Transparency in organizations implementing digital management is an inevitable outcome of direct electronic oversight, which supports the periodic accountability of services provided and tasks completed.

- **Direct Oversight:** A prominent feature of digital management is its empowerment of the organization to monitor various work sites remotely through the use of digital screens and cameras. This surpasses the traditional monitoring approach based on physical visits and paper reports.

- **Information Security:** A fundamental characteristic of digital management is its capacity to protect sensitive information and data using specialized software, ensuring access is granted only to authorized individuals with specific permissions.

6. Challenges of E-Management:

The implementation of e-management encounters diverse challenges that vary from one society to another, depending on the specific environment in which each initiative operates. In general, the most significant obstacles to the adoption of e-management programs can be outlined as follows:

6.1 Administrative Obstacles:

Research commonly identifies and attempts to categorize the administrative hurdles in implementing e-management, attributing them to the following causes:

Inadequate planning and coordination at the senior management level regarding e-management initiatives.

Failure to make necessary organizational adjustments for integrating e-management, such as adding or merging departments, redefining authorities and inter-departmental relationships, and redesigning workflow processes.

Absence of a clear strategic vision for leveraging information and communication technologies to facilitate the transition toward future-oriented digital organizations.

Adherence by managerial and organizational tiers to traditional methods and principles of conventional management.

Resistance to change within governmental organizations and institutions, where employees may oppose adopting modern technologies due to concerns about their positions and career prospects.

6.2 Political and Legal Obstacles These obstacles encompass:

Lack of effective political will and support to drive a qualitative shift toward digital transformation and alignment with the digital era.

Absence of high-level governmental bodies responsible for political consultation and coordination in assessing reports from committees tasked with evaluating e-transition programs, which are needed to make decisions for improving and advancing electronic services.

Insufficient legal frameworks and protective regulations that define the terms of electronic interaction. This includes a lack of legislation prohibiting the hacking or sabotage of e-management systems and prescribing deterrent penalties for offenders.

Additional complications arising from the transition to electronic signatures, the legal validity of electronic correspondence, and difficulties in verifying the identities of parties transacting online due to the absence of legal provisions ensuring client authentication and safeguarding privacy and confidentiality in electronic dealings.

6.3 The State of Digital Public Relations Practice in Algerian Institutions:

It can be argued that the reliance on public relations as a managerial function within Algerian institutions began only in the 1990s, coinciding with Algeria's entry into the market economy era, the privatization of enterprises, and the shift from a public sector-dependent economic model to one open to private enterprises and foreign

investment. With the advent of globalization and the tremendous advancements in information and communication technologies integrated into organizational activities, institutions that previously relied on traditional management began incorporating modern scientific developments, both in technical and social sciences.

Similar to other developing nations, particularly those formerly aligned with the Eastern Bloc, Algeria lagged behind developed countries in utilizing technical sciences and applying humanities in management. Until recently, internet access was limited even within educational and research institutions, with some universities still lacking connectivity. Public relations emerged as a relatively new discipline in Algeria, introduced as a subject in information and communication sciences departments in the early 1970s. Only two institutes dedicated to information and communication sciences were established in the early 1990s, one in Algiers and the other at the University of Annaba. Consequently, there is a notable shortage of specialized experts in this field capable of providing professional, intellectually rigorous, and creatively stimulating training. This has often resulted in academic curricula that are substantively lacking and far from achieving their intended objectives, leading to the frequent assignment of student instruction in this specialization to non-specialists.

Despite these challenges, several academic studies examining the practice of public relations across various Algerian institutions have concluded that these organizations demonstrate considerable

interest in their public relations apparatus. This interest persists despite the administrative and communicative difficulties they face, many of which could potentially be mitigated or alleviated through the effective functioning of a dedicated public relations department.

7. Study Limitations:

The scope of this study was defined by the following parameters:

- **Thematic Scope:** The investigation was confined to exploring university students' attitudes toward digital public relations.

- **Human/Participant Scope:** The study was limited to a randomized sample representative of social sciences students from the University of Tizi Ouzou. This sample consisted of 29 students who responded to the electronic questionnaire.

- **Geographical Scope:** The research instrument was administered at

Mouloud Mammeri University in Tizi Ouzou.

- **Temporal Scope:** The data collection phase of the study was conducted during September 2025.

8. Study Methodology:

This research adopted the analytical descriptive method. According to Lamoureux (1995), this approach enables the researcher to "accurately depict the studied phenomenon as it exists in reality and establish relationships between its various elements. It does not merely involve collecting information related to the phenomenon but also entails analyzing

it, uncovering its various relationships to explain them, and reaching conclusions that contribute, in one way or another, to improving and developing the existing situation."

9. Study Sample:

This study included a sample comprising.. students from the University of Tizi Ouzou who responded to the electronic questionnaire.

10. Sample Characteristics Description:

10.1 Sample Distribution by Gender:

Table 1. illustrates the distribution of the study sample by gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	3	%11.53
Female	26	%89.65
Total	29	100%

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS outputs.

As shown in Table (1)

, the majority of respondents are female, accounting for 89.66% of the sample, while males constitute 10.34%.

10.2 Sample Distribution by Economic Status:

Table 2. illustrates the distribution of the study sample by perceived economic status.

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Weak	1	% 03.44
Moderate	19	% 65.51
Good	9	% 31.03
Total	29	% 100

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS outputs

11. Study Instrument:

For this study, a questionnaire originally developed by Marouch (2020) was utilized. The original instrument was designed to measure students' attitudes towards administrative digitalization at the University of Mohammed Boudiaf in M'sila and comprised 17 items, the validity and reliability of which had been verified. Each item offered three response levels on a Likert-type scale: Agree, Neutral, and

Disagree, with a scoring range of 1 to 3 points.

The items of this scale were adapted and modified to align with the specific objectives of the current research. The following scoring system was adopted: Disagree (1 point), Neutral (2 points), and Agree (3 points). Consequently, the total score for each student on the scale ranges from a minimum of 17 to a maximum of 51 points. A score of 34 (calculated as 17

items $\times$ 2 points, the neutral score) was established as the midpoint or neutral threshold for interpreting student attitudes.

12. Statistical Methods Used:

To address the research questions and test the hypotheses, both descriptive and analytical statistical methods were employed. Data were coded and processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25, to achieve the following objectives:

Descriptive Statistics: These methods, including the arithmetic mean and standard deviations, were used to describe the study sample and highlight its characteristics in relation to the research questions.

Inferential Statistics: An independent samples t-test was used to examine the statistical significance of differences between the means of two independent groups. This test was applied to determine if there were significant differences in student attitudes based on the variables of gender, economic status, and internet connection strength.

13. Presentation and Analysis of Study Results:

-Determining Score Ranges:

Given the three response alternatives (Agree, Neutral, Disagree),

the categories were defined by calculating the range width: $2 / 3 = 0.66$,

then adjusting the threshold method as follows. For interpreting overall scale scores, the ranges per item were used to derive total score intervals:

Negative Attitude: Range from [1 , 1.66 [.

Moderate/Neutral Attitude: Range from [1.66 , 2.32 [.

Positive Attitude: Range from [2.32 , 3].

13.1 Presentation, Interpretation, and Discussion of the First Partial Hypothesis

The first partial hypothesis stated that: University students' attitudes toward digital public relations are positive.

The scale comprises 17 items. Consequently, the total score ranges were calculated as follows:

Negative Attitude: 17 (1×17) to below 28.22 (1.66×17) = [17 , 28.22 [

Moderate/Neutral Attitude: 28.22 to below 39.44 (2.32×17) = [28.22 , 39.44[

Positive Attitude: 39.44 to 51 (3×17) = [39.44 , 51]

Table 4. Arithmetic Mean and Standard Deviation for Attitudes

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Attitudes	39.17	9.06

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS outputs.

Based on the SPSS results, the arithmetic mean is $\bar{X} = 39.17$ and the standard deviation is $S = 9.06$. It is observed that the mean score (39.17) falls within the range of [28.22, 39.44[, which corresponds to a moderate or neutral level. Therefore, the first partial hypothesis is not supported. The findings indicate that university students' attitudes toward digital public relations are moderate.

13.1.1 Analysis and Discussion of the First Partial Hypothesis:

This result can be interpreted to suggest that while students recognize the importance of using modern technology in the educational process, this awareness has not yet solidified into a firm conviction or a clearly positive stance regarding the university's actual digital practices. This moderation may be attributed to perceived shortcomings in the implementation of these digital services, whether in terms of quality, consistency, or their practical ability to meet student needs effectively. Furthermore, the study's finding of statistically significant differences linked

to internet connection strength reinforces the notion that technical factors may contribute to shaping these moderate attitudes.

Consequently, this outcome underscores the necessity for the university to enhance its digital presence and improve the student experience when interacting with its digital channels. Such efforts are crucial for transforming these currently moderate attitudes into positive ones in the future.

13.2 Presentation, Interpretation, and Discussion of the Second Partial Hypothesis:

The second hypothesis proposed that: There are statistically significant differences in university students' attitudes toward digital public relations attributable to the gender variable.

To test this hypothesis and verify its validity, the statistical significance of the differences in attitudes between male and female students was calculated using an independent samples t-test. The results are as follows.

Table 5. Arithmetic Means and Standard Deviations of Student Attitudes by Gender

Gender	Sample Size (n)	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Standard Deviation (S)
Male	3	41	8.71
Female	26	38.96	9.24

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS outputs.

Table (5) shows that the arithmetic mean for males is $\bar{X} = 41.00$, while for females it is $\bar{X} = 38.96$. The question arises: Are these mean differences statistically significant?

The results of the t-test for significance of differences between the means provide the answer:

Table 6. Significance of Differences (t) in Student Attitudes by Gender

t-value	Degrees of Freedom (df)	Sample Mean		Significance Level (Sig.)
		Mean (1)	Mean (2)	
0.36	27	41	38.96	0.71

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS outputs.

From Table (6) and the test results, the significance value (sig. = 0.71), or 71%, is greater than the standard significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$), or 5%. Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis, which states that there are no statistically significant differences in student attitudes based on gender. Consequently, the alternative hypothesis, which posits the existence of such differences between genders, is rejected. Thus, the second hypothesis is not supported.

13.2.1 Analysis and Discussion of the Second Partial Hypothesis

This outcome can be interpreted to indicate that students' awareness and acceptance of digital public relations are shaped by common factors that influence both genders equally. These factors may include the nature of the digital era they inhabit, similar experiences in using technology within the university environment, and the level of exposure to digital activities offered by the educational institution.

The result further suggests that the gender variable alone is not a determining factor in shaping students' attitudes toward this modern aspect of communication. This reinforces the notion that the influential factors in this domain are environmental, technical, and institutional elements shared by all students, irrespective of their gender. This finding is consistent with the inherent nature of digital services, which are typically designed to be inclusive and equally accessible to all.

13.3 Presentation, Interpretation, and Discussion of the Third Partial Hypothesis:

The third hypothesis proposed that: There are differences in university students' attitudes attributable to the variable of economic status.

To verify the validity of this hypothesis, a one-way ANOVA test was employed. The results are presented below.

Table 7. Arithmetic Means and Standard Deviations of Student Attitudes by Economic Status

Economic Status Arithmetic		Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Standard Deviation (S)
	Weak	41	/
	Moderate	38.47	9.60
	Good	40.44	8.73

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS outputs.

Table (7) shows apparent differences in arithmetic means across economic status categories. The mean for the 'Weak' category is 41.00, for the 'Good' category is

40.44, and for the 'Moderate' category is 38.47. However, the key question remains: Are these differences statistically significant?

Table 8. One-Way ANOVA for Student Attitudes by Economic Status

	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F-value	Significance (Sig.)
Between Groups	27.17	2	13.58	0.15	0.85
Within Groups	2270.95	26	87.34		
Total	2298.13	28			

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS outputs.

As indicated in Table (8), the ANOVA test results show an F-value of 0.15 and a significance level (sig.) of 0.85 (85%). Since this value is greater than the standard alpha level of 0.05 (5%), we fail to reject the null hypothesis, which states that there are no statistically significant differences in student attitudes based on economic status. Therefore, the third hypothesis is not supported.

13.3.1- Analysis and Discussion of the Third Partial Hypothesis:

This finding suggests that students' evaluation and acceptance of digital public relations are not significantly influenced by their economic standing. A potential explanation is that the digital services offered by the university are largely free and equally accessible to all students, thereby minimizing disparities between those from different economic backgrounds. Furthermore, the widespread

use of smartphones and internet services has become commonplace among all student demographics regardless of financial status, leading to largely similar digital experiences. This indicates that the factors shaping these attitudes are shared cultural, educational, or technical influences rather than material or class-based factors. It reflects the nature of digital services in promoting the principle of equal opportunity in accessing university information and services.

- Presentation and Discussion of the Fourth Hypothesis Results

The fourth hypothesis proposed that: There are differences in university students' attitudes attributable to the variable of internet connection strength.

To verify the validity of this hypothesis, a one-way ANOVA test was employed. The results are as follows.

Table 9. Arithmetic Means and Standard Deviations of Student Attitudes by Internet Connection Strength

Internet Connection Strength		Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Standard Deviation (S)
	Weak	40.44	7.45
	Moderate	43.00	5.50
	Good	30.43	11.17

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS outputs.

Table (9) reveals apparent differences in arithmetic means across internet connection strength categories. The mean is 43.00 for 'Moderate', 40.44 for 'Weak', and 30.43 for 'Strong'. The question again is whether these differences are statistically significant.

Table 10. One-Way ANOVA for Student Attitudes by Internet Connection Strength

	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F-value	Significance (Sig.)
Between Groups	740.20	2	370.10	6.17	0.00
Within Groups	1557.93	26	59.92		
Total	2295.13	28			

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS outputs.

From Table (10), the ANOVA test results show an F-value of 6.17 and a significance level (sig.) of 0.00 (0%). Since this value is less than 0.05 (5%), we reject the null hypothesis, which states there are no significant differences, and accept the alternative hypothesis confirming the existence of statistically significant differences in student attitudes based on internet connection strength. Thus, the fourth hypothesis is supported.

- Discussion of the Fourth Hypothesis Results:

This outcome can be interpreted as follows: Students with a moderate connection may have more realistic expectations regarding the university's digital services and a greater understanding of technical challenges, leading to a more positive evaluation. Conversely, students with a strong connection might have higher expectations and less tolerance for any shortcomings in the provided digital

services, resulting in a more critical assessment. While a weak connection poses real challenges that negatively impact the digital experience, it does not appear to lower attitudes as drastically as seen among students with strong connections. This confirms that the quality of communication infrastructure is not the sole factor influencing the success of digital public relations. User expectations and the design of services to accommodate varying conditions play a pivotal role in shaping their attitudes.

14. CONCLUSION:

This study aimed to investigate university students' attitudes toward digital public relations. The findings generally concluded that student attitudes are moderate, indicating room for improvement in how students perceive and interact with the university's digital initiatives.

The results also revealed that these attitudes are formed independently of factors such as gender or the student's economic status, as no statistically significant differences were attributed to these two variables. This confirms that the experience of digital public relations is a shared one among all students, regardless of their personal backgrounds.

However, the most prominent finding was the clear influence of internet connection strength. The results proved the existence of statistically significant differences based on this variable. Paradoxically, the arithmetic means revealed that the most positive attitudes were found among the group of students with moderate-strength internet, not strong. This highlights that the quality of digital service is not measured solely by the strength of the infrastructure but also by how well it meets user expectations and adapts to different real-world conditions.

Consequently, this study underscores the importance of the university's digital public relations strategy being based on a deeper understanding of students' diverse needs and expectations, rather than merely relying on the availability of advanced technology. It also opens the door for future research to delve into other psychological and organizational factors that may influence the formation of these attitudes, striving toward more effective and relevant digital communication with the student body.

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