



The Theoretical Foundations of Public Relations in the Digital Environment - From Classical Theories “Excellence and Dialogic Theory” to the Contemporary Model of “Digital Coexistence”-

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Abstract:

In light of the ongoing digital transformations characterizing the contemporary era, digital public relations has become central to organizational success and differentiation within a highly dynamic and competitive environment. Despite the foundational principles established by classical theories in this field, particularly Excellence Theory and Dialogic Theory, their limitations have become increasingly evident in explaining the nature of relationships that organizations currently build with their publics, including their underlying foundations, guiding principles, objectives, and the ways in which they respond to challenges imposed by the contemporary environment shaped by profound digital transformations and evolving user experiences.

Accordingly, this paper seeks to re-examine the principal classical models underpinning digital public relations through a critical and deconstructive lens, and subsequently reconstruct them within the digital environment. The aim is to propose a model that moves beyond “dialogic communication” toward “digital coexistence,” thereby reconfiguring the evolving concept of digital public relations, including its principles, dimensions, and defining conditions.

Keywords: Digital public relations; digital environment; excellence theory; dialogic communication; digital coexistence.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Public relations has long been a vital function within organizations of all types and sectors. It represents a conscious and planned effort aimed at establishing and strengthening relational ties between the organization and its internal and external publics, fostering trust, and building a positive mental image while preserving institutional reputation within its operational environment. Accordingly, public relations activities are fundamentally grounded in reciprocal, continuous, and organized communication, relying on principles of honesty, openness, transparency, mutual understanding, and cooperation.

The achievement of effective public relations depends on the strategic management of communication, and consequently on the existence of efficient communicative processes. In this context, technological developments in the field of communication have significantly influenced public relations (Dongul, 2022). Public relations has benefited from successive generations of communication media, ranging from the telegraph to contemporary social media platforms and diverse digital environments. These platforms have become essential spaces for practicing public relations with high levels of effectiveness and quality, owing to their defining characteristics, including interactivity, participation, ubiquity, asynchronicity, and the rapid dissemination of digital content across multiple and diverse channels.

The rapid and continuous evolution of information and communication technologies has resulted in a broad digital transformation affecting various domains of life. Brian Solis defines this transformation as “an evolving pursuit of innovative and agile business and operational models driven by technologies, processes, and analytics to create new value-driven experiences for customers, employees, and stakeholders” (Solis, 2019).

This digital transformation has compelled both individuals and organizations to adapt often immersively to the environments shaped by these changes, through the adoption of emerging principles and concepts such as Web 2.0, Marketing 3.0, online reputation management, social media marketing, networked interactions, and digital or online public relations.

Although digital public relations and traditional public relations share common objectives primarily centered on building brand awareness, shaping public perception, and fostering loyalty they differ significantly in their approaches, methods, and evaluation metrics.

The profound transformations that have reshaped the communication environment have fundamentally altered how digital public relations influences brand image, reputation, and positioning, as well as the formation and management of business relationships. Moreover, the distinctive features of communication tools within the digital environment such as websites, social media platforms, and blogs enable digital public relations to function as a powerful strategic mechanism. These tools facilitate dialogic, interactive, and continuous communication with audiences. Beyond this, they create a context for what may be described as “digital coexistence,” wherein users perceive themselves as active partners in the co-creation of value and meaning



rather than mere passive recipients. This, in turn, contributes to achieving high-quality performance and fostering sustainable and ethical excellence.

However, operating effectively within this digital environment, achieving distinction, and ensuring the quality of planned public relations programs require a thorough understanding of user experience and its continuous development. This includes ensuring access to global audiences, building trust, and making timely decisions to mitigate the risks associated with the rapid pace of change that characterizes the digital landscape. It also involves identifying optimal strategies and appropriate methods for producing and managing high-quality digital content, as well as measuring performance effectiveness to enhance the design of user experiences.

The success of organizations in achieving high-quality performance in digital public relations, and in attaining distinction within a highly competitive and rapidly evolving digital environment, cannot be realized through technical proficiency alone. Rather, it requires robust theoretical foundations capable of explaining the diverse practices of digital public relations, their underlying contexts, and their multidimensional implications, as well as anticipating factors that may diminish the effectiveness of public relations activities or pose risks to the organization.

Although the existing body of literature and current studies may be sufficient to address and explain the technical dimensions of digital public relations, a clear gap remains when it comes to establishing a solid theoretical grounding capable of interpreting the nature of the relationship that should be constructed between organizations and their publics in today's digital environment its foundations, guiding principles, and objectives. This is particularly relevant in light of the emerging concept of "digital coexistence." Accordingly, this paper seeks to propose a model that moves beyond "dialogic communication" toward "digital coexistence" as a framework for interpreting this relationship. In doing so, it aims, on the one hand, to contribute to enriching the Arabic scholarly literature in this emerging field, and, on the other hand, to provide public relations practitioners with scientifically grounded principles that support the development of high-quality and effective strategies across diverse contexts, regardless improvisational practices.

To achieve this objective, the study undertakes a critical and in-depth re-examination of the principal classical models namely "Excellence Theory" and "Dialogic Theory" through a process of analytical deconstruction, followed by their reinterpretation and reconstruction within the digital environment.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. Digital Public Relations

The concept of public relations has undergone continuous evolution, largely because the profession itself is inherently dynamic and responsive to changing conditions such as shifting audiences and evolving media systems. This evolution is further shaped by the multiplicity of perspectives that have contributed to its emergence and continue to influence it to this day.



Academic disciplines such as sociology, management theories, and more recently, intercultural communication theory and digital media theories, have exerted varying degrees of influence on the conceptualization of public relations across different historical periods (Eryn Travis, 2023, p. 23).

The profound transformation of public relations from the traditional era to the digital age has significantly affected its roles, functions, and practices, particularly across the transition from Web 1.0 to Web 4.0. Public Relations 1.0 represents the era of traditional public relations, in which print media constituted the primary channel for information dissemination. This stage was characterized by one-way (vertical) communication, flowing from a single source to multiple target audiences, rendering public relations activities akin to broadcast programs.

Public Relations 2.0 corresponds to the emergence of electronic media, where communication became horizontal or networked (from many-to-many). During this phase, public relations assumed an intermediary role, and traditional news media transitioned into digital platforms.

Public Relations 3.0 marks the rise of social media, which has become the most widely used, preferred, and trusted form of media among audiences. This phase significantly enhanced interactivity and audience engagement.

Finally, Public Relations 4.0 is associated with the era of artificial intelligence and big data. In this stage, competition in public relations extends beyond organizations and states to include automated systems capable of generating press releases, scheduling content dissemination, and even predicting the strategic actions required for organizations to address specific issues or phenomena (Alfelia Nugky Permatasari, 2021, p. 375).

Accordingly, digital public relations has transcended its traditional conceptual boundaries, effectively removing the barriers that once hindered proximity and interaction between organizations and their publics. It has introduced tangible advantages, and understanding digital public relations requires a comprehensive examination of the digital process itself (Ebru Özgen, 2023, p. 255).

Digital public relations can be defined as a set of strategic marketing initiatives designed to enhance brand awareness and strengthen an organization's online presence. It differs substantially from traditional public relations, which primarily aims to influence public perceptions of brands and organizations (Carter, 2023).

The term "digital public relations" emerged in the late 1990s and was first popularized by the American researcher Brian Solis, who introduced the concept under the label PR 2.0 (Brian Solis, 2009). He argued that digital public relations would increasingly replace traditional public relations, which were becoming less effective due to the growing distance between practitioners and their audiences, as well as the reliance on intermediaries to transmit messages (Yenoun, 2023, p. 361).

Public relations remains a fundamental component of the integrated marketing



communications mix, utilized by organizations to manage their reputation, shape their image, and address crises. It plays a critical role in facilitating communication with publics and safeguarding organizational interests (Necmiye Irem Gulerman, 2017, p. 260).

Given that many individuals today prefer online shopping and engage extensively in digital interactions, organizations must devote careful and strategic attention to digital communication. In this regard, digital public relations offers significant potential to perform public relations functions with greater efficiency and effectiveness.

With a single click—and sometimes even without direct user action—brands and organizations can reach millions of individuals simultaneously with minimal effort and cost. This capacity positions digital public relations as a vital marketing communication tool, providing alternative mechanisms that are widely leveraged by contemporary marketers.

The American Digital Marketing Institute defines digital public relations (PR) as “a strategy used to increase brand awareness and visibility through online channels. While it resembles traditional public relations, digital PR enables organizations to reach a larger and more precisely targeted audience” (Institute, 2024).

Digital public relations can be understood as an extension of traditional public relations into the digital sphere. It is manifested through media visibility, brand storytelling, reputation building, and thought leadership, with a particular emphasis on digital platforms. This includes targeting online publications, podcasts, blogs, influencers, and content creators. It also encompasses backlinks, visibility in Google search results, and the ways in which a brand is discussed across the internet (Agence99PR, 2025). The overarching objective is to enhance brand visibility, credibility, and authority through high-quality content (The Pure SEO, 2024).

To achieve maximum impact, digital public relations relies on a range of digital marketing strategies, including search engine optimization (SEO), content marketing, influencer marketing, and social media engagement (Institute, 2024).

These practices contribute directly to improving a website’s ranking in search engine results. Accordingly, public relations teams should function as an extension of SEO strategy, enabling a mutually beneficial relationship in which search engine optimization and public relations reinforce one another.

In recent years, the scope of the term “digital public relations” has expanded to encompass all forms of digital communication practices that connect public relations practitioners within organizations to their stakeholders. This occurs within the framework of a broader organizational communication strategy, which involves selecting appropriate persuasive promotional approaches, identifying suitable digital communication tools, and adopting models of online dialogue alongside the cultivation of attentive listening as a core communicative competence in engaging with target audiences.

2.2. Digital Public Relations and Digital Marketing



Digital marketing refers to the management of interaction between an organization and its consumers within the digital environment in order to achieve mutual benefits. It extends beyond the mere sale of products and services to include the management of relationships between the organization, on the one hand, and consumers, as well as elements of both the internal and external environments, on the other.

Typically, digital marketing emphasizes sales-oriented activities, including paid advertising on platforms such as Google and Meta, email marketing, search engine marketing, pay-per-click strategies, and other performance-based approaches. It is largely driven by conversion metrics such as clicks, sign-ups, and return on investment and often relies on short-term tactics to achieve highly specific outcomes (Agence99PR, 2025).

In contrast, while public relations prioritizes credibility and trust, digital marketing focuses on transactions and traffic. Both are essential, yet they are not interchangeable. Digital public relations strategies are generally oriented toward long-term brand value rather than immediate gains, whereas digital marketing concentrates on short-term key performance indicators. One seeks to earn visibility through newsworthiness and informational value, while the other often secures visibility through paid means.

Accordingly, brands require both approaches, but should not conflate their roles. It is not sustainable to rely solely on advertising without a strong foundation of credibility, nor is it sufficient to depend exclusively on slower, earned media coverage when rapid growth is necessary. The most effective organizations strategically invest in both, recognizing that each serves a distinct and complementary function rather than substituting for the other (Agence99PR, 2025).

2.3. Characteristics of Digital Public Relations

Digital public relations leverages the full range of channels and electronic platforms available within the digital environment to enhance corporate reputation, strengthen online presence, and increase brand awareness. It also enables organizations to achieve extensive reach by accessing global audiences and maintaining continuous engagement with them.

Operating within the digital environment and capitalizing on its inherent features such as interactivity, participation, asynchronicity, ubiquity, and multimedia integration has transformed communication in digital public relations into a two-way process. This stands in contrast to traditional public relations, which is predominantly characterized by one-way communication. Digital public relations facilitates immediate feedback and genuine dialogue (Rus, 2026), within which communicative messages, opinions, and ideas are exchanged regarding content disseminated through public relations activities and programs. These interactions are addressed in real time, without delay, and are further utilized in the creation of new digital content or the refinement of existing material. In this sense, digital public relations has effectively dismantled the barriers that once separated organizations from their publics, becoming a central driver of



organizational success, effectiveness, and differentiation.

Fundamentally, digital public relations differs from traditional public relations in terms of interactivity and reach. While traditional public relations relies primarily on print media, television, and radio, digital public relations incorporates, in addition to these, websites, social media platforms, blogs, and other digital channels (Rus, 2026).

Moreover, although both traditional and digital public relations aim to build relationships with audiences, they do so through distinct approaches. Traditional public relations focuses on cultivating strong relationships with journalists and editors, who can highlight or reference a brand within media content. These relationships often involve personal communication and, in some cases, face-to-face interaction. In contrast, digital public relations—through online platforms, social media, and blogs—enables instantaneous interactions and rapid feedback with a broader, more diverse, and more informed audience, without the necessity of personal acquaintance with individual members of that audience (Rdvesich, 2026).

In traditional public relations, the organization speaks while the audience listens, yet it remains largely unaware of what is being said about it. By contrast, the digital environment enables greater interaction and communication, allowing users to like, comment, share, and respond in real time.

Brian Solis emphasizes the importance of participation in digital public relations, stating: “We are merely nodes in a broader network of life and business, and all we need is participation to earn the attention of our customers and peers.” For Solis, participation itself constitutes marketing, brand building, and influence. The sharing of content, advice, and information contributes to the construction of a digital knowledge profile that enhances and reinforces brand reputation, elevates organizational standing, and fosters customer loyalty and trust (Brian Solis, 2009).

Unlike traditional public relations, where messages tend to be brief and highly controlled, digital public relations can build upon content already accessible to audiences. This enables brands and organizations to engage in ongoing dialogue and reach broader and more diverse publics through social media, blogs, and search engine optimization strategies. It also allows organizations to interact with and capitalize on trending news topics, where audience responses can become part of the narrative itself. Such dynamics support the creation of high-quality content that increases engagement, generates backlinks, and improves search engine visibility (Rdvesich, 2026).

A key characteristic of online public relations is its close integration with search engine optimization (SEO). Through strategically embedded backlinks in high-quality content, digital public relations not only enhances brand image but also improves search engine rankings (Rus, 2026).

In addition, digital public relations is distinguished by its measurability. The effectiveness of campaigns and activities can be accurately tracked using digital metrics, unlike traditional public relations, where it is often difficult to determine how many individuals have been reached through



print, audio, or audiovisual media. Moreover, traditional public relations typically requires a longer time to produce observable results. This has led organizations to increasingly adopt digital transformation strategies to disseminate content and achieve their objectives through carefully planned digital public relations programs based on precise data (Institute, 2024).

Through these tools, brands and organizations can identify the exact number of individuals who have viewed, shared, or interacted with content, thereby providing a data-driven roadmap for marketing decisions and facilitating the identification of prevailing trends (Rdvesich, 2026).

Digital public relations also seeks to advance thought leadership. In today's highly competitive landscape marked by the continual emergence of new firms across all sectors consumers increasingly look for credible signals that justify their trust in the organizations from which they purchase.

Producing distinctive, high-quality content that showcases an organization's expertise, and promoting or sharing such content through credible third parties (such as experts, researchers, public figures, and influencers), significantly enhances its legitimacy. This effect is further strengthened when content is published on reputable digital outlets, resulting in high-quality backlinks that signal to search engines that the promoted brand or content is trustworthy and valuable.

Consistently acquiring backlinks from authoritative websites improves a brand's or organization's domain authority, which constitutes a key factor in search engine ranking. Higher domain authority, in turn, leads to improved visibility in search results (The Pure SEO, 2024).

These processes contribute to building trust between the brand and its audience, while also strengthening its media and commercial image. Moreover, increased media coverage across reputable digital platforms enhances the likelihood that the brand will be perceived as a reliable source of information by consumers. Simultaneously, such visibility contributes to improved search engine rankings (Carter, 2023).

Contemporary public relations encourages collaborative communication, enabling audiences to access, enjoy, and share useful information without excessive promotion or the indiscriminate dissemination of press releases.

In this sense, public relations is the art and science of "marketing without overt marketing." The rise and widespread adoption of the internet, supported by social media, has fostered a dialogic environment in which organizations are increasingly responsible for understanding what they represent and how relevant they are to those they seek to engage (Brian Solis, 2009, p. 46).

Within this dialogic digital environment, all actors in the communication process coexist and interact with one another, striving to deliver optimal performance that serves collective and shared interests, transcending purely individual or organizational agendas.

3. Literature Review

Among the most influential foundational and theoretical contributions to digital public



relations is the study by Michael Kent and Maureen Taylor (1998), titled “Building Dialogic Relationships through the World Wide Web.” In this work, the authors articulate the principles and foundations of dialogic communication theory, as well as practical approaches for its implementation on the Internet to achieve effective public relations.

Dialogue, in this context, is not merely about agreement; rather, it involves an open and negotiated process of discussion. Moreover, dialogic communication is grounded in intersubjectivity rather than objective truth or individual subjectivity, given its emphasis on a negotiated communicative process. As such, dialogic communication represents an ethical approach to conducting public dialogue and public relations (Michael I.Kent, 1998, p. 325).

Dialogic communication, enabled through the strategic use of the World Wide Web (WWW), constitutes a key method by which organizations build relationships with their publics. The web offers substantial potential as a dialogic communication medium (Michael I.Kent, 1998, p. 331). This study particularly emphasized the set of skills and practices that public relations professionals must master to achieve dialogic communication online, including website development, content structuring, information organization, and audience engagement.

In a subsequent study by the same authors, “Toward a Dialogic Theory of Public Relations” (2002), Kent and Taylor further argue that dialogue differs from Grunig’s symmetrical model. While the symmetrical model is often treated as a functional or instrumental approach, dialogic theory emphasizes the ethical dimension and regards the human relationship as an end in itself.

Brian Solis reinforces this perspective by asserting that “the ideal public relations practitioner of the twenty-first century is not merely a market expert, but also an informed and socially adept communicator; good listeners are the best conversationalists” (Brian Solis, 2009, p. 27). Public relations, therefore, is fundamentally grounded in two-way communication and the continuous exchange of messages and content, guided by mutual respect and ethical interaction among participants.

Solis further emphasizes that in the age of social media, dialogue is foundational, and that effective engagement and attentive listening are essential for building meaningful relationships. With widespread access to communication tools and platforms, individuals can position themselves as influential actors. The concept of PR 2.0 is thus based on accessible content, driven by enthusiasm and market understanding, and activated through dialogue (Brian Solis, 2009, p. 67).

Another significant contribution is James E. Grunig’s study, “Paradigms of Global Public Relations in an Age of Digitalisation” (2009), which outlines the foundations of a global theory of public relations in the digital era. Grunig emphasizes that this global theory is not descriptive; it does not assume a single, uniform model of public relations practice worldwide. Instead, it recognizes diverse practices shaped by cultural differences (Grunig, 2009, p. 02).

The global theory of digital public relations calls on practitioners to reduce reliance on the “symbolic-interpretive model,” which focuses on impression management and tends to frame



public relations as a tactical function aimed at shaping perceptions. This model is based on the illusion of controlling messages and audiences an assumption that has proven untenable in the digital environment.

Instead, Grunig advocates for positioning public relations as a strategic, managerial, and behavioral function, wherein practitioners actively participate in organizational decision-making processes. Within this framework, public relations is conceptualized as a bridging function, dedicated to building authentic relationships with customers and stakeholders based on trust and mutual respect (Grunig, 2009, p. 15).

This study emphasizes that digital media provide tools that facilitate this paradigmatic shift, and that modern technologies enable the practical implementation of such a model through dialogue and interaction. However, it also underscores that technology alone is insufficient; rather, a cognitive and paradigmatic transformation in the thinking of both practitioners and researchers is required.

While the study adopts an optimistic perspective, highlighting that the technologies and tools offered by the digital environment can support the establishment of ethical relationships with publics and enable timely decision-making, it overlooks the fact that the digital environment can also serve as a source of misinformation and a space for unethical communication. In such an environment, communicative interactions are not always governed by clear social or ethical standards.

Drawing on Grunig's principle of the strategic management of public relations, the digital environment is conceptualized as a medium for achieving two-way symmetrical communication. Within this environment, information exchange aims to balance the interests of the organization and its publics, thereby reducing organizational conflict. Grunig argues that the core issue lies not in digital tools themselves, but in the mindset of practitioners, emphasizing the importance of environmental scanning, audience monitoring, and precise audience segmentation to support strategic decision-making.

In the study titled "Digital Public Relations in the Context of Knowledge Gap Theory" (2023), Ebru Özgen characterizes digital public relations as undergoing a critical phase due to accelerated digital transformations. This is particularly significant as target audiences have assumed a more active role on digital platforms and have become increasingly adept in using modern technological tools. Accordingly, public relations practitioners must ensure that they do not contribute to information inequality within society that is, they must work to reduce the knowledge gap by adopting strategies grounded in innovation, continuous renewal, and adaptation to ongoing digital and social transformations (Ebru Özgen, 2023).

This study frames the active role of audiences in the digital environment as a potential threat to the effectiveness of digital public relations. It suggests that practitioners must enhance their competencies and keep pace with rapid developments while ensuring the provision of sufficient and accurate information to prevent audiences from turning to alternative sources and losing trust



or loyalty. However, this perspective may be reconsidered: rather than viewing audience activity as a threat, it can be understood as a valuable component of the communication process one that, if effectively integrated, can enhance the overall effectiveness of public relations activities.

In the study titled “Is Using Social Media ‘Good’ for the Public Relations Profession? A Critical Reflection” (2015), the author challenges the prevailing assumption that social media is inherently beneficial for public relations. While social media platforms enable direct communication with audiences without traditional media gatekeeping thus potentially facilitating two-way symmetrical relationships the mere act of digital publishing does not necessarily result in genuine dialogue. In practice, organizations and public relations practitioners often use these platforms as additional channels for disseminating content, rather than embracing them as collaborative and participatory spaces.

The study further argues that increased reliance on digital technologies contributes to what is described as “networked individualism,” whereby physical interaction is increasingly replaced by virtual communication. Paradoxically, this shift may lead to forms of social isolation despite continuous connectivity (Valentini, 2015).

Moreover, the author warns that information overload and unethical communication practices can result in what may be termed “web pollution,” ultimately eroding public trust in organizations. Accordingly, practitioners are urged to adopt a critical perspective in understanding how digital technologies function and how they shape human behavior prior to their adoption, while maintaining strong ethical responsibility across all communicative practices in the digital environment.

Additionally, the study highlights the declining relevance of traditional tools in successful public relations campaigns. The sharing of content via social media platforms increasingly reduces the need for costly and labor-intensive events designed to secure media coverage. In this context, excellence in public relations lies not merely in marketing to audiences, but in engaging with them to build a shared community. This requires adapting to contemporary technological developments particularly by enhancing and tailoring user experience to meet the expectations of newer generations, such as Generation Z rather than limiting efforts to the mere provision and dissemination of information via social media platforms (Ilhem Allagui, 2016, p. 21).

All of the aforementioned studies highlight the significance of technological transformations and the necessity for organizations to adopt digital transformation strategies, leveraging the affordances of the digital environment to enable effective dialogic communication with a vast, diverse, informed, active, and constantly evolving digital public. However, contemporary digital public relations must move beyond viewing the web merely as a tool for expanding reach or as a more efficient medium for disseminating information and influencing audiences to secure their loyalty. Rather, it should recognize the imperative of coexistence among all actors within this environment, grounded in the acceptance of the “other” as an equal and integral participant in the relationship not as a passive target to be influenced or whose attitudes must be altered. This



perspective calls for ethical engagement and mutual respect in communication. Such an approach constitutes the central focus of this theoretical paper, which seeks through a critical and deconstructive reading of foundational classical theories to extract and articulate the key principles of a “Digital Coexistence” model.

4. The Classical Theoretical Extension in the Digital Environment

This section examines the principal classical theories of public relations and explores their resilience and adaptability within the digital context, with particular emphasis on the following:

4.1. Excellence Theory (Grunig)

Excellence Theory was developed by a team of researchers led by James E. Grunig at the University of Maryland, later known as the “Excellence Team.” Within this framework, excellence in public relations is defined as “a set of characteristics and practices that enable an organization to build long-term, high-quality relationships with its strategic publics; these characteristics and practices are positively correlated with organizational effectiveness” (James E. Grunig, 2008, p. 328).

The research team identified what they termed the “excellence factor,” which encompasses a range of organizational attributes, including organizational size, type, structure, environment, history, and culture, along with other contextual influences. These characteristics form the foundational pillars of Excellence Theory, offering both normative and practical guidance on how public relations can achieve its maximum contribution to organizational effectiveness.

4.1.1. Principles of the Excellence Factor

These principles have been articulated in nine key dimensions of excellence (Heath, 2007) among which the following are particularly significant:

The Value of Communication: This refers to the importance attributed to communication by top management and serves as an indicator of the quality of public relations within the organization. Organizations whose chief executive officers place greater emphasis on communication tend to exhibit more effective public relations functions. In such contexts, public relations practitioners are more likely to be actively involved in the organization’s overall strategic management.

Contribution to Strategic Organizational Functions: This dimension is a key indicator of excellence in public relations and is closely linked to the degree of importance that top management assigns to communication. Public relations frequently contributes to organizational responses to social issues and routine operations; however, its involvement in strategic planning tends to be less consistent. This changes in organizations where senior leadership highly values public relations, thereby facilitating the integration of public perspectives into organizational planning processes.

Managerial Role Performance: The performance of a managerial role is essential for



integrating public relations into strategic management. Public relations roles can be broadly categorized into two types: technical and managerial. The technical role focuses on specific skills, such as news writing and content production, whereas the managerial role requires competencies in business management, including research, planning, budgeting, and personnel management. Senior practitioners who primarily perform managerial roles rather than purely technical ones contribute more significantly to organizational effectiveness and excellence in communication functions.

The Public Relations Model Adopted by the Organization: This element constitutes a central component of Excellence Theory. Four principal models of public relations have been identified (James E. Grunig L. A., 1992, p. 288):

- **Publicity Model (Press Agency):** This is a one-way communication model focused on publicity and information dissemination, with limited concern for accuracy or ethical considerations. It emerged in the mid-nineteenth century.
- **Public Information Model:** Developed in the early twentieth century, this model also operates through one-way communication. It aims to provide accurate and truthful information to the public, albeit from the organization's perspective alone.
- **Asymmetrical Two-Way Communication Model (Scientific Persuasion):** This model emerged from the integration of social and behavioral sciences, introducing a two-way communication process. It relies on research to understand audience attitudes and motivations in order to craft persuasive messages that influence public behavior in favor of the organization, without necessitating changes within the organization itself.
- **Symmetrical Two-Way Communication Model (Mutual Understanding):** This is a balanced, interactive model that seeks to achieve mutual understanding rather than mere persuasion. Research is employed to facilitate dialogue and regulate the relationship between the organization and its publics in a manner that promotes shared interests and mutual adaptation.

The two one-way models are situated within the symbolic-interpretive paradigm, whereas the two two-way models fall within the strategic, managerial, and behavioral paradigm.

Although both asymmetrical and symmetrical two-way models are present and effective within excellent organizations, the symmetrical two-way model is regarded as a key indicator of excellence. This is because it enables genuine dialogue with publics, and such dialogue embedded within the symmetrical model supports the development and maintenance of long-term relationships. Furthermore, incorporating public perspectives into organizational decision-making processes is inherently ethical.

The relationship between two-way symmetrical communication and dialogic communication can be understood as one of process and outcome. Two-way symmetrical communication provides the procedural mechanism through which organizations engage interactively with their publics, whereas dialogic communication refers to a specific form of relational communication. In this



sense, dialogue is considered an outcome rather than a process (Michael I.Kent, 1998, p. 323).

The Capacity of the Communication Department to Implement the Excellence Model:

This represents another key determinant of excellence. Excellence Theory posits that effective public relations requires the integration of both the symmetrical two-way communication model and a managerial role orientation within the communication function.

Activist Pressure (Pressure Groups): Excellence Theory incorporates activist pressure as a means of assessing the influence of the external environment on the effectiveness of public relations. Activism often serves as a catalyst for positive organizational change, encouraging organizations to adopt proactive approaches to issue management rather than reactive responses. Such pressure compels public relations to address critical policy-related issues, engage in proactive issue management, and contribute to higher levels of strategic planning within the organization.

Organizational Culture, Structure, and Employee-Related Variables: These factors are also central to achieving excellence. Organizations characterized by participatory (rather than authoritarian) cultures and organic (rather than mechanistic or hierarchical) structures are more likely to realize effective public relations. Furthermore, balanced and dialogic internal communication systems, along with high levels of job satisfaction, contribute significantly to excellence in public relations practice.

Diversity Representation: Particularly with regard to gender dynamics in a profession largely dominated by women, researchers have suggested that diverse public relations departments are better equipped to understand and represent diverse publics within the organizational environment. The findings indicate that equitable and supportive treatment of female employees constitutes an important dimension of excellence.

Ethics and Integrity: This constitutes the final principle of excellent public relations. Researchers emphasize that an organization's commitment to ethical decision-making is a decisive factor in achieving excellence in public relations (Heath, 2007).

Grunig argues that digital media possesses immense potential to advance the public relations profession toward greater global reach, interactivity, and social responsibility. However, public relations practitioners and scholars have largely continued to approach digital media in the same manner as traditional media primarily as a tool for one-way message dissemination to mass audiences rather than as a strategic medium for engaging diverse publics and leveraging digital information in organizational decision-making processes (Grunig, 2009, p. 02).

Accordingly, for public relations to fully benefit from digital media, practitioners and researchers must reconceptualize it as a strategic, managerial, and behavioral function rather than a symbolic-interpretive one. This requires a paradigmatic shift from a focus on messages and symbols to an emphasis on behaviors and strategic relationships.

To achieve excellence in the digital environment, organizations must adopt symmetrical two-way communication and engage in digital dialogic communication that enables them to respond



effectively to the characteristics of this environment. Such an approach also supports the realization of social responsibility within an ethical framework. In this sense, public relations becomes a “bridge of dialogue and mutual understanding,” fostering authentic relationships with both internal and external publics and generating shared value for the organization and society alike. It thus moves beyond a defensive role conceived merely as a protective shield aimed at safeguarding the organization’s image toward a more substantive and relational function.

4.2. Dialogic Theory

During the 1990s, organizations across various sectors tended to treat the web merely as a platform for repeatedly disseminating electronic publications, without fully exploiting its unique potential for relationship building.

In response, Michael L. Kent and Maureen Taylor, in their study “Building Dialogic Relationships through the World Wide Web,” introduced dialogic communication as a strategic theoretical framework for explaining and guiding the development of relationships between organizations and their publics in the digital environment.

The intellectual origins of the concept of dialogue can be traced back to the philosopher Martin Buber, whose philosophy is grounded in the distinction between two types of relationships (Michael I. Kent, 1998, p. 323):

- **I–It Relationship:** This is a one-way relationship in which the other is treated as an object or instrument for achieving self-serving goals, such as persuasion or behavioral manipulation.
- **I–You Relationship:** This represents a genuine dialogic relationship grounded in the recognition of the other as an autonomous and equal entity, possessing dignity, expectations, and legitimate interests.

For effective public relations practice, the second type of relationship is more appropriate, as it aligns closely with Grunig’s two-way symmetrical communication model.

Accordingly, Michael L. Kent defines dialogue as “reciprocal communicative efforts aimed at achieving mutual understanding and adaptation between an organization and its publics, rather than relying solely on one-way persuasive messaging.”

From a Habermasian perspective, dialogue is realized through ethical communication in which no party dominates the other; instead, it fosters a cooperative communicative relationship (Michael I. Kent, 1998, p. 324).

Dialogue is thus considered “more ethical” because it is grounded in principles of honesty, trust, and positive regard for others, rather than reducing publics to mere means for achieving organizational objectives. For dialogue to be effective, it requires institutional commitment and a genuine recognition of the importance of relationship-building. Organizations should not conceptualize the public as an “other”; rather, public relations should be audience-centered (Michael L. Kent, 2002).



This orientation is increasingly necessitated by the contemporary digital environment. Organizations seeking excellence and effectiveness within a highly competitive and rapidly evolving context can no longer overlook the active, visible, and influential presence of their publics. Audiences today are no longer satisfied with merely receiving information that answers their questions, persuades them, or shapes their attitudes and loyalty toward a brand or organization. Instead, they seek meaningful user experiences that position them as central actors within a healthy and mutually beneficial relational process—one in which they can assert their identity, preserve their dignity, and maintain their autonomy, free from misinformation, commercial exploitation, and psychological pressure.

Consequently, organizations must commit to the principles of ethical dialogic communication, grounded in a genuine understanding of and alignment with the aspirations of their publics, in order to build secure, sustainable, and long-term relationships.

4.2.1. Characteristics of Dialogic Practice

Dialogue does not merely entail the exchange of speech; rather, it requires the presence of five fundamental characteristics that organizations must adopt (Michael L Kent, 2002, pp. 25-27):

Mutuality: This refers to the recognition of the interdependent relationship between organizations and their publics, grounded in cooperation rather than negotiation framed by gain–loss logic. It implies equality within the relationship, as ethical dialogue requires acknowledging the other while avoiding dominance or a sense of superiority.

Propinquity: Dialogic relational communication is characterized by immediacy and emotional engagement. For organizations, this is reflected in consulting publics and discussing issues of concern to them prior to decision-making. For publics, it involves both the willingness and the capacity to articulate their expectations and demands. Propinquity emerges through three features: immediacy of presence, temporal flow (understanding the past, engaging the present, and anticipating the future), and engagement (participants’ full commitment to dialogue rather than treating it as a peripheral or incidental activity).

Empathy/Sympathy: This involves valuing publics and recognizing their significance by supporting their interests and objectives.

Risk: All relationships whether organizational or interpersonal inherently involve risk, and dialogue requires a willingness to embrace it in pursuit of mutual understanding. In dialogic exchanges, risk may manifest in several forms: vulnerability (which should not be viewed negatively, as openness and self-disclosure create opportunities for change, renewal, and growth); the emergence of unforeseen consequences (since dialogue is spontaneous and not fully pre-scripted, it necessitates avoiding manipulative, pre-engineered interactions aimed at controlling outcomes); and the acknowledgment of difference (entailing unconditional acceptance of the other’s distinctiveness and intrinsic value).

While public relations traditionally seeks to minimize risk and ensure stability, “dialogic



risk” can strengthen relationships between organizations and their publics by fostering shared understanding and reducing ambiguity.

Commitment: This is reflected through three interrelated dimensions: honesty prioritizing the relationship over self-interest; commitment to dialogue maintaining continuous communication within shared frames of meaning; and commitment to interpretation ensuring mutual understanding by making deliberate efforts to comprehend others’ perspectives, beliefs, and values prior to evaluating their positions (Michael L.Kent, 2002, p. 29).

Genuine dialogue thus transcends mere relational commitment and goes beyond the notion of agreement. It is better understood as an intersubjective process in which sustained engagement is pursued not for the purpose of influencing the other, but as a means of understanding and arriving at mutually satisfactory positions. Importantly, these principles are not novel to public relations; rather, they represent core strengths of ethical public relations practice.

4.2.2. Principles of Building Public Relations in the Digital Environment

The digital environment today enables the effective establishment, development, and continuous transformation of dialogic relationships between organizations and their publics, through the tools and technologies it provides for content creation and engagement. Effective presence in the digital environment capable of attracting public attention, sustaining ongoing dialogic communication, enhancing audience awareness and knowledge, and fostering loyalty requires public relations practitioners to understand and continuously optimize user experience on the web. This optimization must align both with audience characteristics and expectations, and with ongoing technological advancements.

Kent and Taylor proposed five key principles for dialogic public relations in the digital environment (Michael I.Kent, 1998, pp. 327-328):

The Dialogic Loop: This principle enables publics to pose questions to organizations, which in turn must respond to audience inquiries, concerns, and issues. Its effective implementation requires organizational commitment to timely and continuous responsiveness. It also necessitates specialized training for public relations practitioners to ensure that dialogic loops are fully realized on websites, as “presence” is considered more critical than mere access, service provision, or content availability.

The Usefulness of Information: Website design should prioritize content over visual appeal or superficial attractiveness. The information provided must be valuable, relevant, and accessible to all publics, rather than tailored exclusively to specific groups such as journalists or investors. Furthermore, information should be well-structured and easily navigable, enabling users to locate relevant content efficiently. The availability and clarity of information constitute the first step toward building genuine dialogue and positive impressions.

The Generation of Return Visits: Organizational websites should incorporate interactive features that encourage repeated visits, such as regularly updated information, dynamic topics,



dedicated forums, online discussion sessions, and access to experts who can respond to user inquiries. Dialogic relationships require sustained interaction rather than one-time engagement.

The Intuitiveness of the Interface: Users should be able to navigate websites with ease, whether they are seeking specific information or browsing out of curiosity. An intuitive interface enhances user experience and supports continued engagement.

The Conservation of Visitors: Web designers must carefully manage external links to avoid disorienting or discouraging users, which could prevent them from returning to the primary website. Necessary links should be included, but with clear pathways that guide users back to the organization's site. The primary objective is to build and sustain effective dialogic relationships with publics, rather than merely entertaining users or redirecting them to other platforms (Michael I.Kent, 1998, p. 329).

The dialogic principles advanced by Kent and Taylor were developed during the Web 1.0 era, a period characterized by a primary focus on website design and management. At that stage, the objective was to facilitate a transition from a model of "information dissemination" to one of "partnership and mutual understanding" between organizations and their publics, thereby strengthening organizational and social responsibility within the digital environment.

In the contemporary context, however, these principles have become foundational assumptions for effective presence in an interactive digital environment, where the boundaries of the communication process have largely dissolved. The tools and techniques for creating, optimizing, and managing digital content have multiplied, and ethical dialogic communication is no longer merely a strategic option adopted by organizations in response to audience feedback. Rather, it has evolved into an ethical digital practice embraced by all actors, aimed at building authentic relationships characterized by stability, continuity, and loyalty within a rapidly changing environment, ultimately serving the shared interests of both organizations and society.

This evolution necessitates moving beyond the concept of "dialogue" as a process limited to linguistic exchange toward a deeper paradigmnamely, digital coexistence.

5. The necessity of moving beyond dialogic communication as a process to digital coexistence as a state of mind

5.1- Fundamental Principles of the Digital Coexistence Model:

Grunig, on the one hand, and Kent and Taylor, on the other, laid the foundational theoretical bases for digital public relations through Excellence Theory and Dialogic Theory, respectively. While the theoretical necessity of two-way symmetrical communication lies in explaining the procedural mechanisms that enable effective interaction between organizations and their publics along with emphasizing the need for structured systems, processes, and guidelines to ensure balanced public relations dialogic communication represents a specific form of relational interaction. Accordingly, two-way symmetrical communication may be understood as a process,



whereas dialogic communication constitutes an outcome.

From the perspective of strategic management, Grunig conceptualizes the primary objective of public relations as bridging that is, reducing environmental risks that organizations may encounter. In contrast, Kent and Taylor frame risk as an opportunity for achieving effectiveness and excellence, whereby organizations acknowledge and embrace a degree of vulnerability in their interactions with publics. This openness manifested through transparency and self-disclosure serves as a foundation for building trustworthy and enduring relationships.

Moreover, Kent and Taylor extend beyond a purely managerial and functional perspective, emphasizing dialogue as an ethical and humanistic orientation aimed at fostering relationships grounded in the acceptance of the other. They highlight the capacity of the web to create propinquity (relational closeness), enabling organizations to engage in meaningful dialogue with their publics and to consult them on relevant issues prior to decision-making. In this sense, the digital environment has evolved from a mere channel for content dissemination into a space of coexistence.

If digital coexistence is understood as a paradigm that extends beyond ethical dialogic communication and mere linguistic exchange, then organizations must move beyond treating dialogue as an obligation toward their publics manifested in message exchange, continuous responsiveness, adherence to dialogic ethics, audience-centeredness, and an emphasis on mutual benefit over self-interest. In the context of the rapidly evolving networked environment, such measures are no longer sufficient.

Instead, organizations are required to integrate more fully into the social and cultural digital networks to which their diverse publics belong. This entails embracing the principle of digital coexistence, recognizing that the role of digital public relations is no longer confined to managing dialogue, but rather to fostering a shared, balanced, and coherent digital environment. Within this environment, both the organization and its publics function as equal digital citizens. Neither party seeks to manipulate or unduly influence the other's thoughts or emotions; rather, coexistence is grounded in mutual presence, trust, and respect.

In this shared space, all actors contribute to reinforcing collectively agreed-upon values, particularly those associated with digital citizenship such as honesty, respect, equality, freedom of expression, cooperation, solidarity, and a shared sense of responsibility toward oneself, others, and the broader digital environment. The ultimate objective is to achieve what may be termed value sustainability.

Achieving digital coexistence requires the institutionalization of several key factors by organizations and digital public relations practitioners. Among the most critical are: stability in an environment defined by constant change; trust in a context often characterized by skepticism (particularly in the era of Web 4.0); truthfulness as a countermeasure to misinformation and manipulation; and continuity to address the risks associated with instantaneous, click-driven interactions.

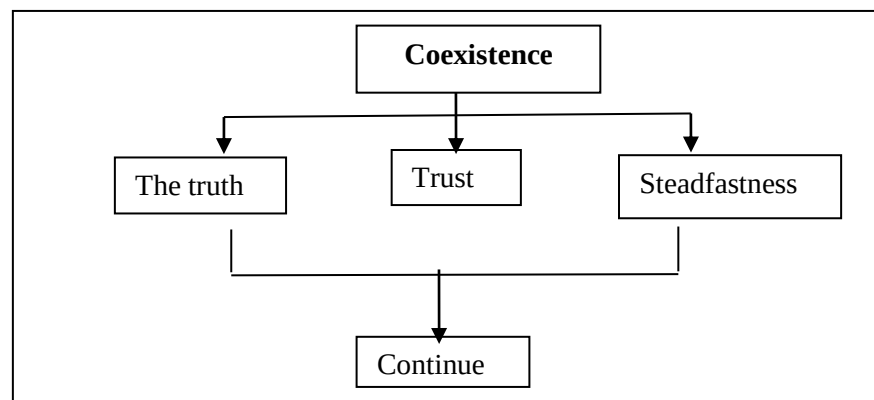


Drawing on the two foundational classical theories of digital public relations Excellence Theory and Dialogic Theory the core principles underpinning digital coexistence can be articulated as follows:

- Digital coexistence represents an advanced stage beyond dialogue: the former emphasizes value sustainability, whereas the latter focuses primarily on the communicative process.
- Digital coexistence seeks to achieve balance between the organization and its publics, a goal aligned with Grunig’s “bridging” approach within the framework of two-way symmetrical communication.
- Digital coexistence requires organizations to recognize and accept publics as equal partners within the shared digital space; in this context, embracing risk becomes a foundational condition of coexistence.
- Grunig’s strategic conception of digital public relations emphasizes that effectiveness is achieved through the availability of technical and managerial mechanisms, whereas dialogic theory highlights the ethical foundations necessary for realizing effective digital coexistence.

The factors that enable the realization of digital coexistence lie in the following:

- **Stability and steadiness:** Maintaining a solid and clearly defined value-based identity that guides the organization’s conduct in the face of changes in the digital environment, algorithms, and the rapid succession of online trends.
- **Trust:** Building a robust moral capital that protects the institution within the contemporary web environment, which is characterized by virtual skepticism, by prioritizing actions over words.
- **Truth:** Adopting absolute honesty as a primary line of defense against fabrication, rumors, and organized misinformation.
- **Continuity:** Committing to a long-term, positive, and responsible presence with the public, transcending the impulsive, instantaneous reactions associated with the “click of a button.”



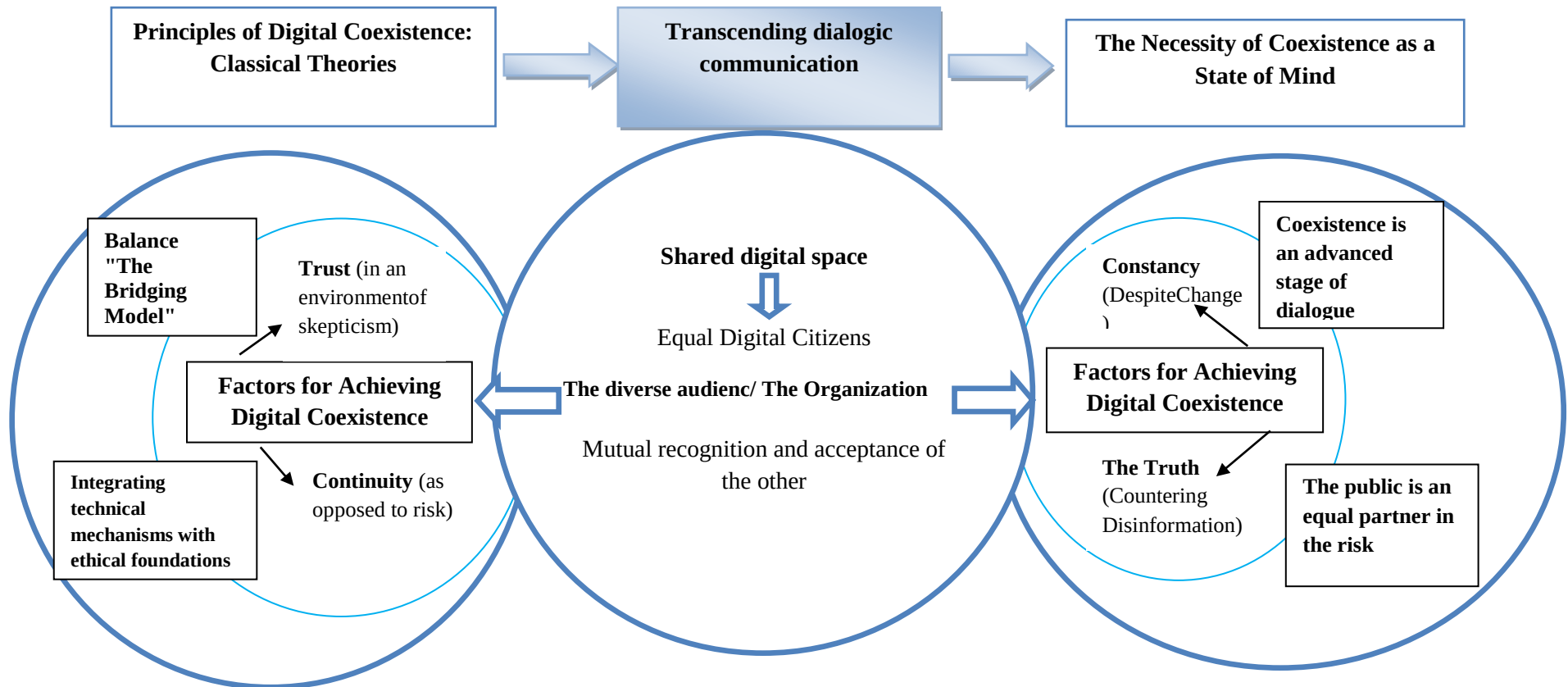
Factors for Achieving Digital Coexistence Diagram



(Produced by the author)



5.2 - Conceptual Framework for Transitioning from “Dialogic Communication as a Process” to “Digital Coexistence as a Mindset and Existential State”



(Produced by the author)



5.3- Operational Mechanisms of the Digital Coexistence Model

Practicing digital coexistence within organizations necessitates a redesign of the roles and functions of digital public relations. This is achieved by embodying the principles of this model (as previously outlined) and translating them into digital behaviors to which both the organization and the public commit. This process must not overlook the necessity of relying on the foundational factors for achieving such coexistence: stability, honesty, trust, and continuity. The following are the key fieldwork mechanisms of the digital coexistence model:

- **Mechanisms of Integration and Digital Citizenship: which are realized through:**
 - Transitioning from the principle of “influence” to “horizontal dialogue” (Michael L Kent, 2002, p. 22): Organizations and public relations officials must relinquish formal institutional authority and engage with the public as equal partners within the digital space. This requires moving away from drafting dry press releases written in artificial language, and instead adopting a simple, fluid language that resonates with the discourse commonly used among members of the digital community.
 - **Co-production of content:** Content creation and the design of communication campaigns are fundamentally based on public contributions, drawing on their ideas, suggestions, and reactions (Hamza Kaka Abdul Wahab, 2022, p. 2) .This transforms the digital environment from a mere space for disseminating messages into an ecosystem for interaction and coexistence.
- **Mechanisms of Transparency and Risk Management:**
 - **Transparency and readiness for exposure:** This also entails trust in the public (Rawlins 2008, 3) It involves abandoning policies of justification and denial in favor of an “open-door” policy (digitally), relying on clarity and precision in information dissemination, and directly acknowledging the errors and risks confronting the institution rather than concealing them, thereby enhancing credibility. However, when institutions lack the readiness and strength to engage in self-disclosure or to prepare for the possibility of exposure, transparency becomes a source of anxiety.
 - **Ethical commitment:** This is achieved by respecting user privacy and adopting an ethical charter to which public relations officials adhere (Bowen 2013, 123). This charter enshrines the values of honesty, equality, respect, and solidarity, regulating and guiding the process of information and data exchange while guaranteeing freedom of expression.
- **Mechanisms of Stability and Ethical Sustainability**
 - **Continuity and steadfastness:** Building and maintaining a stable value-based identity to confront changes in the digital environment and the rapid decisions resulting from “click-based engagement”) Valentini 2015(171 ‘.This is accomplished by designing a permanent



and continuous digital presence schedule that is not limited to promotional seasons or crises, ensuring the cultivation of strong relationships with the public and coexisting with them at all times to preserve trust.

- **Ethical digital listening:** This is crucial for building sustainable relationships with the public based on trust, social justice, and equality (Macnamara 2016, 150). Listening is the essence of coexistence and ethical dialogic communication. It involves transforming online monitoring tools from mere brand-reputation trackers into instruments for deeply understanding the social and value-based shifts of the digital public, as well as comprehending their aspirations and concerns.

6. CONCLUSION

The digital environment can no longer be understood as a space that individuals merely visit, nor as a set of attractive interfaces designed to capture attention or provide answers to specific inquiries. It is no longer simply an escape from physical reality or a channel for transmitting and exchanging messages. Rather, it has evolved into a lived environment in which users experience the full spectrum of their daily activities. It has become an integral part of everyday routines a space where attitudes and orientations are formed, and within which users coexist.

Within this environment, users have developed a distinct cognitive orientation characterized by expectations of immediacy, simultaneous presence across multiple contexts, and transparency. Moreover, perceptions of time and space, modes of relationship-building, and even patterns of thinking have evolved in accordance with the defining features of the digital world.

Accordingly, organizations and public relations practitioners must embrace the principle of digital coexistence not as an optional skill or a discretionary practice, nor as a temporary process that concludes with the end of a dialogic exchange or the disengagement of one party. Instead, it should be recognized as an enduring cognitive and existential condition in which communicative distances dissolve, along with the boundaries between users and screens, and among users themselves. This orientation is essential for adapting to and mitigating the risks associated with diversity, rapid change, and the limitless flow of information within a digital environment that has transcended its function as a mere communication channel to become a formative space in which awareness is shaped and complex social and cultural networks are continuously reconstructed.

At the same time, both organizations and publics must remain attentive to the ethical dimension of digital engagement, as digital ethics constitutes the foundation of digital coexistence and the cornerstone of achieving the common good. Digital ethics may be viewed as an evolving component within the broader ethical framework; however, evaluating actions within this domain is inherently complex. Unlike traditional ethical systems, digital ethics is not confined to a specific society or governed by a singular cultural framework. Rather, it is largely shaped by individual moral responsibility and the values and norms internalized by users themselves, often more so than by formal regulations or rigid legal structures.



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