

Optimising Digital Public Relations in the Transformation of Smart and Sustainable City Communication: A Case Study of Jakarta and Bandung

Irla Yulia¹, Nurkhalila Fajrini², Enggar Mulyajati³

Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia¹²³

Correspondent: irla@ecampus.ut.ac.id¹

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ABSTRACT: The present study analyses the strategic role of digital public relations (PR) in supporting the transformation of public communication towards Smart Sustainable Cities (SSCs) in Jakarta and Bandung. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through interviews, digital media observation, and analysis of official smart city platforms. Thematic analysis was used to identify key patterns. Findings reveal that both cities use super-apps and social media to improve efficiency, transparency, and digital engagement. Challenges include human resource limitations, low digital literacy among certain groups, one-way communication dominance, and suboptimal system integration. Opportunities arise from the strong digital infrastructure and widespread social media. The study concludes that strengthening human capacity, targeted literacy programs, and interactive communication strategies are essential for effective digital PR in SSCs.

Keywords: Digital PR, Smart Sustainable City, Public Communication.



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INTRODUCTION

Urbanisation poses major challenges for large cities in developing countries (Lados & Pongrácz, 2021). In Indonesia, rapid population growth and growing demand for services require adaptive and sustainable management. One response is the concept of the Smart Sustainable City (SSC) which integrates digital technology, sustainable development principles, and community participation to improve the overall quality of life (Caragliu et al., 2011). Urban development in the digital era has undergone a significant transformation through the adoption of the Smart Sustainable City (SSC) paradigm, which combines information technology, environmental sustainability, and community participation (Azambuja et al., 2020; Carro-Suárez et al., 2023).

Within the SSC framework, public communication plays a pivotal role. Governments must establish dynamic, open, and participatory relationships with citizens (Orlov et al., 2021). Digital public relation (PR) has emerged as a crucial strategy, using communication technologies and digital media—such as official websites, smart city applications, social media, and live-streaming

platforms—to convey information, manage public perceptions, and foster interactive dialogue (Aribisala et al., 2023; Gregory, 2010). Digital PR not only disseminates information but also enables dialogue, encouraging public participation in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of SSC programmes. This aligns with findings that digital PR contributes to communicating government policies and programmes (Maulida & Nugraha, 2024) while simultaneously raising public awareness and participation (Wahid & Nurzahara, 2020).

Jakarta and Bandung stand out as leading cities in adopting digital government communication strategies. Both are ranked in the Smart City Index, with Jakarta listed among the top 10 cities in Southeast Asia in 2024 (Putri, 2024) and Bandung receiving the highest national rating for smart city initiatives and its electronic-based government system (SPBE) (Diskominfo Kota Bandung, 2025). Initiatives such as the JAKI (Jakarta Kini) app, Jakarta Smart City, the Bandung Command Centre, and Bandung Sadayana illustrate strategic efforts to improve public service efficiency, enhance government transparency, and foster sustainable urban living.

Previous studies indicate that digital PR strengthens smart city initiatives. In Jakarta, social media and official platforms has improved public understanding and engagement in policy processes (Tasia, 2016). In Bandung, similar strategy enhanced participation and transparency through online platforms (Sudrajat, 2018). These findings highlight the potential of digital PR to build responsive and innovative smart city ecosystems. However, challenges remain, such as low digital literacy among certain groups, unequal access to technology, and limited two-way communication (Mas et al., 2025; Mozin et al., 2025). Thus, SSC success depends not only on technological sophistication but also on meaningful public participation (Alamoudi et al., 2022).

Despite both cities having digital PR initiatives, few studies have systematically examined the implementation of digital communication strategies within the SSC framework, particularly regarding their effectiveness in shaping public awareness, building trust, and fostering participation. Therefore, this study aims to analyse the strategic role of digital PR in supporting the transformation of public communication towards a smart, sustainable city in Jakarta and Bandung. It also seeks to identify obstacles and opportunities in implementing digital PR, focusing on governance, communication content and public response. The findings are expected to enrich academic literature on digital-era government communication and provide practical recommendations for more responsive and engaging public relations strategies in SSC development.

METHOD

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach, focusing on case studies of Jakarta and Bandung. These cities were chosen for their pioneering SSC initiatives, strong digital PR systems, and demographic and governance importance. Jakarta, as the capital city, has the largest urban population in Indonesia and serves as a centre for policy innovation and digital service adoption. Bandung, meanwhile, is recognised as a hub of technological innovation and civic engagement,

with a strong track record in developing digital-based governance initiatives. Their status as leading urban centres makes them ideal cases for examining the role of digital PR in SSC development.

A qualitative case study explores cases in depth with clear boundaries, detailed context, careful selection, data triangulation, and consistent methodology to ensure research reliability and validity (Hyett et al., 2014). Data were gathered through multiple methods: in-depth interviews with key informants, literature review, observation of government digital media, and analysis of programmes such as Jakarta Smart City, JAKI, Bandung Sadayana, and Bandung Command Centre. Content analysis was applied to official social media accounts (Instagram, Twitter/X, YouTube) and digital service application. To enrich and validate the findings, secondary sources such as previous related studies, smart city index reports and official publications from Department of Communication, Information and Statistics of the Jakarta Provincial Government (Diskominfo DKI Jakarta) and Department of Communication and Information of Bandung City (Diskominfo Kota Bandung) were also incorporated.

The data analysis technique used in this study is thematic analysis (Miles & Huberman, 2014), consisting of three main stages:

- 1) data reduction, which involves selecting and simplifying data from interviews, observations, and documentation;
- 2) data presentation, involving the categorisation of findings based on emerging themes;
- 3) drawing conclusions and verification, conducted iteratively to identify deeper patterns of meaning.

To ensure validity and reliability of the findings, source triangulation was used involving comparing data from various collection techniques (interviews, documentation, and observation).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Digital PR Strategy in Public Communication Processes Towards a Smart Sustainable City.

Findings show that both Jakarta and Bandung utilise various digital channels as public communication tools. In Jakarta, the Provincial Government has a dedicated agency for managing the Smart Sustainable City (SSC) programme: Jakarta Smart City (JSC). JSC is one of the Regional Public Service Agencies (BLUD) owned by the Jakarta Provincial Government and operates under Diskominfo. JSC was established in 2024 with the aim of transforming Jakarta into a smart city by optimising technology in government affairs and public services for Jakarta residents. Some of the products and services offered by Jakarta Smart City to facilitate public services through a digital ecosystem are explained as follows.

The JAKI (Jakarta Kini) application

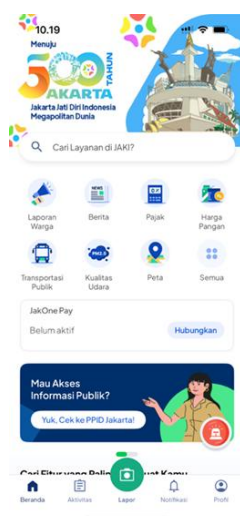
This super-app serves as one-stop service to help residents with their daily lives (City, 2023). Users can access various services and information, as well as report incidents and public services in the Jakarta Special Capital Region. The JAKI app has several main features, including:

- a. JakWarta: An information service about the Jakarta Provincial Government from various channels, including conventional and social media.
- b. JakRespons: A service that monitors the follow-up of all reports from residents regarding public facilities and services.
- c. JakPangan: Service to find out the latest food prices and availability in all Pasar Jaya markets in Jakarta. JakSurvei: Service to measure the performance of and services provided by the Jakarta Provincial Government
- d. JakPenda: A service to find information and make payments related to motor vehicle tax (PKB), land and building tax (PBB), local tax and e-retribution.
- e. JakWIFI: A service to locate free WiFi access points provided by the Jakarta Provincial Government.
- f. Citizen Digital Account: A service that provides personalised social assistance information, such as KJP (Jakarta Smart Card) and KJMU (Jakarta Excellent Student Card), when you verify your NIK number.

In addition to the main features of the JAKI app, there are several integrated features with other digital services, such as:

- 1) JakLinko: a service to help residents easily find routes for various modes of public transport available in Jakarta. Departure schedules are also provided.
- 2) Jak Sehat: assists residents in booking healthcare facilities online, calling an ambulance, finding the nearest PMI location for blood donation, mental health consultations, screening for non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and accessing integrated HIV/AIDS services.

Figure 1. JAKI Application Display



Source : JAKI Application

The JAKI app enables the public to report issues and serves as a platform for disseminating information about programmes, thematic campaigns and calls for participation. Finally, technology makes it easier for citizens to report urban issues and facilitates the government in conducting campaigns, disseminating information, and monitoring developments.

CRM (Fast Community Response)

This app integrates all the official complaint channels of the Jakarta Provincial Government, ensuring that reports are dealt with in a responsive, efficient and transparent manner. DKI Jakarta residents can use the four official complaint channels of the Jakarta Provincial Government to report various issues occurring in the Jakarta area (Jakarta Smart City, 2021). The four categories are:

a) Face-to-face channel

This channel is for residents who wish to meet officials face-to-face to resolve issues they are experiencing. Meetings can be arranged at city hall, the mayor's office, the inspectorate office, the sub-district office and the village office.

b) JAKI Application Channel

Designed by Jakarta Smart City, the JAKI application channel has many attractive features to facilitate the needs of Jakarta residents.

c) Social Media Channel

This channel enables residents to report issues easily from anywhere and at any time, particularly appealing to young people who are active and up to date. The official social media channels that have been set up for residents to report issues are:

Table 1. Official Social Media Accounts as Public Complaint Channels for Jakarta

Type of Social Media	Social Media Account Address
X (Twitter)	@DKIJakarta
Facebook	Pemprov DKI Jakarta
Instagram (Gubernur/ Wakil Gubernur DKI Jakarta)	@pramonoanungw @si.rano

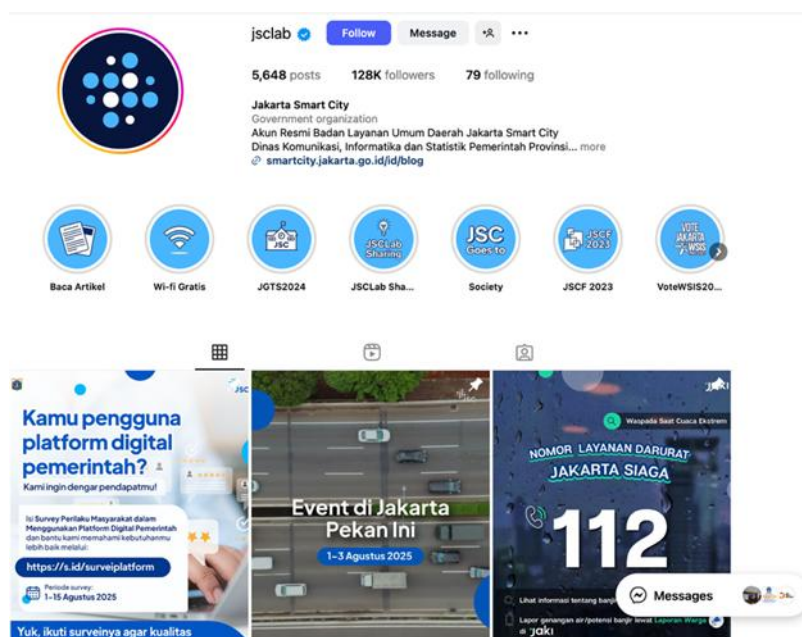
Source: Jakarta Smart City Website

d) Electronic mail channel

This channel allows residents to submit reports via email or message, for example through @dki.jakarta.go.id, SMS/WhatsApp on 08111-2722-06, LAPOR1708, or via the media.

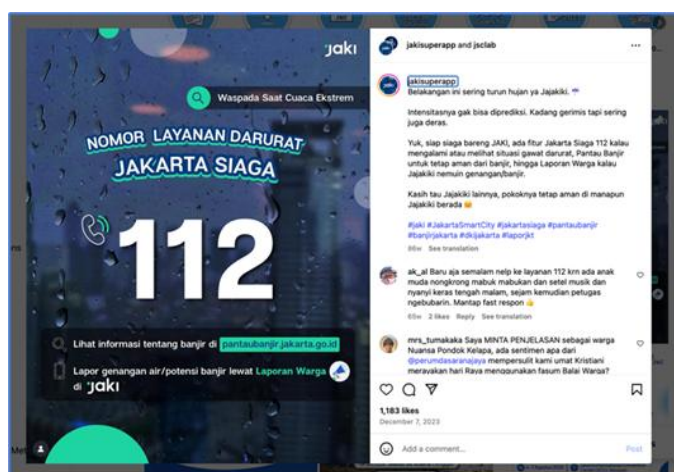
In addition to opening four categories of public complaint channel, Jakarta Smart City also manages an Instagram account named @jsclab, which uses a visual style and language tailored to the digitally literate urban population. This Instagram account facilitates interaction between the administrators and the public. For example, one follower commented that they had tried calling the Jakarta Siaga emergency service number posted on the @jsclab Instagram account to report intoxicated individuals in their area. They were very pleased that their report was followed up, as officials arrived and dispersed the intoxicated individuals within an hour (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Jakarta Smart City Instagram Account Display



Source. Jakarta Smart City Instagram Account

Figure 3. Instagram Post and Comment Display for Followers of Jakarta Smart City



Source : Jakarta Smart City Instagram Account

Meanwhile, Bandung is developing the Bandung Sadayana platform. 'Sadayana' is an acronym for 'Semua Digital Layanan Kota', meaning 'All Digital City Services'. Designed by the Bandung City

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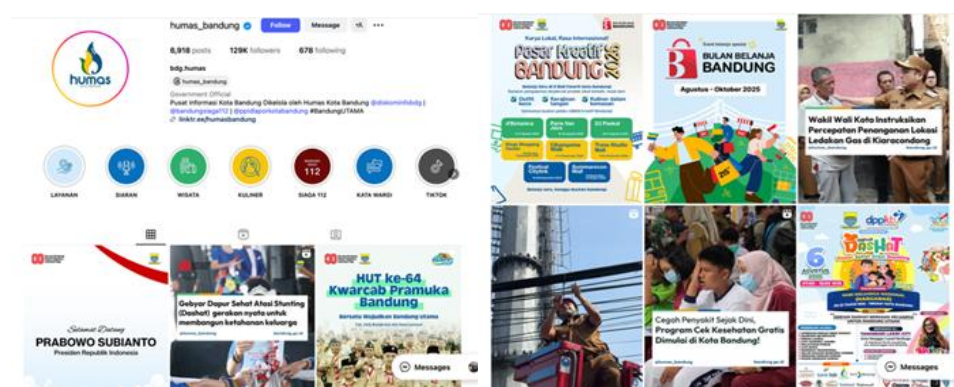
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Government, this application integrates all public services into one, so the public no longer has to deal with the confusion of having multiple apps for each government agency. The app has five main features: (City, 2021)

- 1) Citizen journalism (Bandung Smart City Forum)
- 2) A WhatsApp bot at 0811-2591-810
- 3) Smart Event, which helps Bandung residents share information about upcoming events
- 4) Smart Food, which provides culinary information in the Bandung city area
- 5) Smart Form, a digital form for registering for ongoing events in Bandung. In addition to these, there are supporting features integrated with various government digital services, such as population services, permits, taxation, CCTV, PMI blood stock, PD Pasar food prices, JDIH, BPOM, LAPOR! and Call Center 112.

Beside using the Bandung Sadayana super-app, the Bandung City Government uses Instagram to connect with its citizens. The official Instagram account of the Bandung City Government is managed by the Communication and Information Technology Department under the username @humas_bandung. This account is used to promote the activities of the Bandung City Government and provide information of events for Bandung residents (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Instagram Account Display of the Bandung City Government



Source : Instagram @humas_bandung

The Bandung City Government has created a dedicated Instagram account for public complaints, managed in collaboration with the Communication and Information Agency of the Bandung City Government. The account is intended for Bandung residents who wish to report incidents within the city that require immediate attention. The account is named @bandungsiaga112. As shown in Figure 5, the account received a report about a fallen tree, followed up on it, and documented the progress in the post's caption.

Figure 5. Instagram Account for Public Complaints in Bandung Siaga



Source: Instagram account @bandungsiaga112

Bandung people are only aware of the beautification of the city's parks, but they are unaware that this is part of the Bandung Smart City programme. The Bandung City Government acknowledges that its focus to date in publicising the Bandung Smart City programmes has been on community involvement, for example by inviting residents to participate in public hearings and focus group discussions, and by organising Smart City Road to Campus events (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Activities the Bandung Communication and Information Technology Agency Related to The Bandung Smart City Program



Source : Instagram Bandung Smart City

Obstacles and Opportunities in The Implementation of Digital PR

Despite having advanced digital infrastructure, Jakarta and Bandung continue to encounter challenges, involving human resources, digital literacy, and two-way interaction. However these issues also present opportunities to strengthen capacity to promote more inclusive digital engagement.

a. Human Resources

In Jakarta, the presence of a dedicated unit has helped organise smart city programmes, but outreach and public socialisation remain limited. In Bandung, constraints are more visible, as limited staff capacity and skills within the managing office reduce the effectiveness of programme implementation.

b. Digital Literacy

Although many citizens are familiar with basic digital platforms, gaps remain among vulnerable groups such as the elderly and low-educated communities. These groups often struggle to access or operate government applications, which creates digital exclusion and reduces the inclusiveness of SSC communication.

c. Two-Way Interaction

Both cities still rely heavily on one-way information delivery. Citizens have channels to provide feedback, but responses are not always consistent or timely. As a result, the interaction between government and citizens tends to be limited, and opportunities for dialogue and co-creation remain underdeveloped.

Alongside the challenges, several opportunities were identified that could strengthen the role of digital PR in SSC communication.

a. Robust Digital Infrastructure

Both cities already operate integrated digital platforms such as JAKI and Sadayana, as well as command centres and complaint management systems. These infrastructures provide a solid foundation to support more responsive and transparent communication practices. In addition, most of Jakarta and Bandung people have acknowledged and accessed those apps in regular basis.

b. High Social Media Penetration

Citizens in Jakarta and Bandung are highly active on social media, offering a cost-effective channel for governments to reach large audiences quickly. The widespread use of these platforms creates opportunities for more direct engagement and real-time communication.

c. Community Engagement Potential

Features such as citizen journalism in Sadayana and the complaint-tracking function in JAKI demonstrate untapped potential to involve citizens more actively. If optimised, these tools can become effective spaces for civic participation and collaborative problem-solving.

Table 2. Comparative Analysis of Digital PR Implementation in Jakarta and Bandung within the SSC Framework

Aspects	Jakarta	Bandung
Main Digital PR Tools	JAKI super-app, CRM system, Social media (Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp)	Sadayana super-app, Bandung Command Centre, Social media (Instagram and WhatsApp)
Supporting Infrastructure	Jakarta Smart City (JSC) as a specialised unit	Diskominfo Kota Bandung as managing unit
Obstacles	HR limitations despite JSC, uneven digital literacy among vulnerable groups, limited dialogue in CRM/social media	HR capacity gaps in Diskominfo, low adoption of Sadayana, uneven digital literacy, limited feedback mechanisms
Opportunities	Advanced integrated apps (JAKI, CRM), top smart city ranking, strong social media penetration	Innovative features (citizen journalism in Sadayana), high smart city rating, strong community engagement potential, high social media use

Digital PR Strategy in Public Communication Processes Towards a Smart Sustainable City

The communication strategy implemented by the Bandung City Government is also part of a digital PR strategy. Digital PR is not just about adopting the latest technology, but also about adapting approaches and mindsets for the digital age (Satira & Hidriani, 2021). When it comes to reporting public complaints, informants prefer to use Instagram, specifically the account of Ridwan Kamil, who was mayor of Bandung at the time. This aligns with the concept of a digital PR strategy, which is increasingly being adopted by public officials to foster two-way communication with the public (Satira & Hidriani, 2021).

As presented in the findings, the Digital PR strategy in Jakarta and Bandung has been implemented mainly through super-apps and social media platforms connected to local government. This supports the stated aim of Digital PR to build and manage relationships with the public across digital channels (Alim, 2024). In both cities, the focus is shifting from one-way dissemination to two-way, interactive communication.

JAKI (Jakarta Kini) Application

The JAKI super-app consolidates services such as JakWarta (government information), JakRespons (complaint monitoring), and JakLingko (public transport integration) (Jakarta Smart City, 2023). More than a digital catalogue, JAKI strengthens participation by enabling citizens to report urban issues and track responses. It enhances transparency because government follow-ups are visible within the app, creating accountability. It also promotes efficiency by integrating multiple services in one platform, reducing bureaucratic complexity and improving access (Qamar et al., 2018).

CRM (Fast Community Response)

Jakarta's CRM unifies four complaint channels—face-to-face, JAKI, social media, and email—ensuring responsiveness (Jakarta Smart City, 2021). This system supports efficiency by accelerating the handling of public complaints through a single management framework. It fosters transparency by providing an audit trail of reports and responses. Furthermore, it enhances participation, as citizens feel empowered to voice issues and witness government accountability in real time.

Bandung Sadayana Super-App

Bandung's Sadayana app integrates diverse services such as citizen journalism, event information, permits, taxation, and public complaints (Gallant & Ulina, 2024). Its citizen journalism feature fosters participation, as residents directly contribute content and engage in civic discussions. By offering access to taxation, permits, and demographic services, the app promotes transparency in government processes. Efficiency is achieved by merging fragmented services into a unified platform, making access faster and reducing redundancy.

Social Media Platforms (Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp)

Both Jakarta and Bandung use social media extensively to communicate with citizens. Official accounts share policy updates, respond to complaints, and showcase government programmes (Satira & Hidriani, 2021). These platforms increase transparency by publishing information in real time. They strengthen participation by enabling citizens to comment, share, and interact directly with officials. Social media also enhances efficiency as it allows governments to reach wide audiences at low cost, optimising resource use in communication efforts.

Despite these initiatives, the adoption and impact of tools vary. Informants in Jakarta are more familiar with JAKI, while in Bandung, usage of Sadayana remains limited compared to findings by Gallant & Ulina (2024). This indicates that digital literacy and awareness remain critical factors influencing effectiveness.

Obstacles and Opportunities in The Implementation of Digital PR

The implementation of digital PR does not always run smoothly, and it requires strategic planning (Huang et al., 2016). Despite their advanced digital infrastructure, Jakarta and Bandung face obstacles such as human resource limitations, digital literacy gaps, and limited two-way interaction. These are consistent with the findings of Tirwyn Hassan et al., (2023), who highlight human resource (HR) issues, resource issues, low digital literacy, and suboptimal system integration as key barriers in digital governance.

Human Resources

The effectiveness of SSC programmes depends on qualified personnel (Avdeeva et al., 2019). Jakarta has a specialised agency (JSC) to focus on smart city development, ensuring more structured management, but socialisation remains limited. Bandung relies on its Communication and Information Agency, where skill gaps persist (Alimin, 2019; Wahyudi et al., 2022). This undermines efficiency in service delivery, weakens transparency in communication, and limits participation due to less effective outreach.

Digital Literacy

Despite high community literacy index scores (Bandung, 2025; Dispusip, 2023), digital literacy remains uneven. Vulnerable groups such as the elderly and less educated are excluded from government apps like JAKI and Sadayana. This weakens participation since these groups cannot fully engage in SSC initiatives, and it affects transparency as digital information flows remain inaccessible to them. Bridging this gap through targeted digital literacy programmes is essential to achieve efficiency in policy outreach group.

Two-way interaction

Although multiple platforms exist, much communication remains one-way, with content focused on information dissemination rather than dialogue. This reduces participation, as citizens are less able to shape agendas or co-create solutions. Transparency also suffers, since feedback mechanisms are inconsistent. In terms of efficiency, unstructured dialogue limits the government's ability to capture insights that could improve services (Ramadhani, 2022).

Although Smart City Programmes are still facing a number of obstacles in various cities, including Jakarta and Bandung, there are several opportunities for implementing digital PR.

Strong Digital Infrastructure

Both cities already possess advanced infrastructure such as JAKI and the Bandung Command Centre, providing opportunities for more efficient services and measurable communication strategies (Caragliu et al., 2011). This infrastructure strengthens efficiency, and when optimised, it can also enhance participation and transparency (Nam & Pardo, n.d.).

High social media penetration

With internet penetration in Java reaching 84,69% in 2025 (Muhamad, 2025), both cities have a strong foundation for digital engagement. This supports participation by enabling broader citizen involvement, enhances transparency through open, real-time communication, and improves efficiency governments can use cost-effective strategies to reach wide audiences.

Community Engagement Potential

Features such as citizen journalism in Sadayana and the complaint-tracking function in JAKI reflect significant potential for enhancing civic involvement. These tools can strengthen participation by giving citizens active roles in reporting urban issues and engaging in content creation; improve transparency through visible tracking of government response; and yield efficiency via collaborative problem-solving and quicker feedback loops. However, their effectiveness depends on widespread citizen adoption and consistent, responsive government action.

This aligns with findings from systematic studies of participatory reporting, which show that digital tools allowing citizens to report issues and receive updates (e.g., via feedback or status tracking) tend to increase trust and public engagement (Bastos et al., 2022). Also, platforms built on co-creation principles have been shown to enable citizens not merely to submit reports but to engage in decision-making and policy refinement, thereby boosting democratic participation and service legitimacy (Leclercq & Rijshouwer, 2022).

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. Its focus on Jakarta and Bandung provides valuable insights but may not fully represent the diversity of digital PR practices in other Indonesian cities. Data collection also relied primarily on government-managed platforms, with limited exploration of community-led or private-sector initiatives. Furthermore, the number of informants was restricted, which may have constrained the depth of citizen perspectives.

Future research could extend the scope to include comparative studies across different regions in Indonesia or Southeast Asia, employ mixed methods such as surveys and big data analytics, and explore the role of private-sector and grassroots digital initiatives. Such approaches would enrich the understanding of how digital PR can be optimised to foster participatory, transparent, and efficient SSC development.

CONCLUSION

Digital public relations (PR) has become a vital element in SSC communication strategies in Jakarta and Bandung. The implementation of super-apps (JAKI and Bandung Sadayana) and social media platforms demonstrates how digital tools can advance participation, transparency, and efficiency. JAKI, for example, facilitates direct citizen involvement and provides accountability through complaint tracking, while Bandung Sadayana integrates diverse services into a single access point to streamline interactions. Social media in both cities has proven effective in disseminating real-time information and fostering interactive dialogue.

However, persistent challenges remain. Human resource limitations hinder the capacity to manage programmes effectively, digital literacy gaps exclude certain community groups from participation,

and the dominance of one-way communication reduces opportunities for dialogue. These factors weaken the ability of digital PR to fully support SSC goals. Conversely, the presence of robust digital infrastructure and high social media penetration offers significant opportunities to enhance communication practices.

For SSC development to succeed, digital PR must move beyond information delivery toward fostering inclusive, transparent, and efficient communication ecosystems. This requires strengthening human resource capacity, implementing segmented digital literacy programmes, and creating innovative, interactive content strategies. By doing so, city governments can build public trust, increase citizen participation, and optimise service efficiency, ultimately ensuring that SSC initiatives contribute to sustainable urban governance.

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