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MEDIA RELATIONS AND DIGITAL VISIBILITY: STRENGTHENING UNIVERSITY REPUTATION THROUGH WEBOMETRICS STRATEGY

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Abstract

The increasing importance of digital visibility has reshaped how universities build and maintain their institutional reputation in the global academic environment. This study aims to examine how media relations strategies contribute to strengthening university digital visibility within the Webometrics framework. A qualitative case study approach was employed to explore communication practices within a university context. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with communication officers, IT staff, and Webometrics managers, as well as focus group discussions with journalists. The findings reveal that digital visibility is influenced not only by content production but also by the integration of media relations practices, website performance, and journalistic content value. Technical aspects of the website, including accessibility, stability, and mobile responsiveness, function as prerequisites for media referencing. In addition, content characteristics such as timeliness, storytelling, and relevance determine whether institutional information is reproduced by media. Although internal actors demonstrate a strong understanding of Webometrics indicators and the importance of backlinks, media relations practices remain focused on information dissemination rather than strategic digital connectivity. Structural constraints, including editorial policies and limited formal partnerships with media institutions, further restrict the generation of active backlinks. This study concludes that media relations must be repositioned as a strategic mechanism for producing external digital references that enhance visibility indicators and institutional reputation. The study contributes to communication research by linking media relations practices with digital visibility outcomes in higher education.

Keywords: *Media Relations, Digital Visibility, Webometrics, University Reputation, Digital Communication*

Introduction

The rapid development of digital technology has significantly transformed the communication landscape of higher education institutions, particularly in the way universities present their institutional identity and academic performance to the public. In the contemporary digital environment, universities are no longer evaluated solely based on their academic achievements or internal institutional performance. Instead, they are increasingly assessed through their digital presence and the visibility of their academic outputs within the global information ecosystem. As a result, universities are required to actively manage their digital communication platforms to ensure that institutional achievements, research activities, and community engagement initiatives are effectively disseminated to wider audiences.

Within this context, the official university website has evolved into a central platform for institutional communication. The website functions not only as an information repository but also as a strategic instrument for communicating institutional identity, academic productivity, and research contributions to the global academic community. Through the website, universities can present various academic activities, including research outputs, scholarly publications, academic collaborations, and community service programs. Consequently, the quality and visibility of a university website have become important indicators that influence how an institution is perceived in the global academic environment (Sugiharso & Setianingrum, 2021).

The importance of digital visibility in higher education is also reflected in the increasing influence of global university ranking systems that incorporate web-based indicators. One of

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the most widely recognized systems is the Webometrics Ranking of World Universities developed by the Cybermetrics Lab of the Spanish National Research Council. This ranking system evaluates universities based on several indicators, including web presence, openness, research excellence, and visibility. Among these indicators, web visibility plays a dominant role because it reflects the level of connectivity between a university's website and other digital platforms across the internet. The visibility indicator is primarily measured through the number of external backlinks that direct users to the university's website, indicating how frequently the institution is referenced in external digital environments (Cybermetrics Lab, 2025).

The increasing importance of digital visibility has encouraged universities around the world to adopt strategic communication practices aimed at strengthening their online presence. In many universities, communication offices actively collaborate with online media platforms to disseminate institutional news, research findings, and academic achievements. These media publications often include hyperlinks that direct readers to the university website, thereby increasing the number of external references connected to the institution's digital domain. In addition to strengthening web connectivity, such media exposure also contributes to improving the credibility of institutional information because it is disseminated through independent media platforms.

Several universities in North America and Europe have integrated media relations strategies with digital communication management to enhance institutional visibility. University communication offices frequently maintain long-term partnerships with journalists, online news portals, and academic media networks to ensure that research outputs and institutional achievements receive broad coverage in digital media spaces. Through these practices, universities not only strengthen public awareness of their academic contributions but also generate external digital references that contribute to their online visibility within global ranking systems. These developments demonstrate that digital visibility in higher education is closely related to communication strategies, particularly those involving media engagement and digital content dissemination.

From a theoretical perspective, media relations constitute an important component of public relations practice in organizational communication. Media relations refer to the strategic efforts undertaken by organizations to establish and maintain productive relationships with journalists and media institutions in order to facilitate the dissemination of information to broader audiences. Through effective media relations, organizations can obtain media coverage that enhances their credibility and public visibility. Media coverage is often perceived by audiences as more credible than organizational self-promotion because the information is delivered through independent third-party channels (Sitinjak, 2013). In the digital environment, this relationship between organizations and media institutions also contributes to the formation of digital networks that link various information platforms across the internet.

In addition to media relations, the concept of reputation management also provides an important theoretical foundation for understanding digital communication strategies in higher education institutions. Reputation management emphasizes the role of communication processes in shaping public perceptions and maintaining long-term institutional credibility. According to this perspective, reputation is not formed solely by organizational performance but also by how effectively information about that performance is communicated to relevant stakeholders. Effective communication strategies enable institutions to ensure that their achievements are recognized and appreciated by broader audiences, thereby strengthening their overall reputation (Pramungkas, 2020).

Within the context of digital communication, the integration between media relations and website management becomes increasingly important. Media coverage of institutional activities often directs audiences to official digital platforms where more comprehensive information can be accessed. As a result, media publications frequently generate hyperlinks and digital references that connect external media platforms with institutional websites. These digital connections contribute directly to the visibility indicators used in global web-based ranking systems. Therefore, communication strategies that involve collaboration with media organizations can play a crucial role in strengthening the digital visibility of universities.

Despite the growing importance of digital communication strategies, many higher education institutions still face challenges in optimizing the integration between media relations and digital visibility management. In many cases, communication units focus primarily on producing institutional news without strategically linking these publications to broader digital visibility objectives. As a result, academic achievements and research outputs may receive limited exposure in external digital environments. Technical challenges related to website management, such as search engine optimization, website performance, and digital infrastructure, also influence the ability of institutions to enhance their online visibility (Hafidz, 2018).

In addition to technical challenges, organizational coordination represents another important factor affecting digital communication strategies in universities. Academic outputs produced by faculties, research centers, and administrative units are often distributed across multiple internal platforms and are not always integrated into a centralized digital publication system. Consequently, institutional websites may not fully represent the diversity and richness of academic activities occurring within the university. Strengthening coordination between communication units, academic departments, and digital infrastructure managers is therefore essential for improving the overall visibility of institutional websites and ensuring that

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academic achievements are effectively communicated to external audiences (Purbayanto & Nugraha, 2021).

Previous studies have explored various aspects of digital communication and institutional reputation within higher education contexts. Several studies highlight the importance of digital platforms in shaping institutional image and strengthening public trust in universities. Other studies emphasize the role of public relations strategies in managing organizational reputation through communication with external stakeholders. However, limited research has specifically examined how media relations strategies contribute to digital visibility indicators such as those used in Webometrics rankings. In particular, the relationship between media engagement practices and the generation of external digital references remains relatively underexplored in existing literature.

This research therefore seeks to examine how media relations strategies can support the management of university websites and contribute to improving digital visibility within the Webometrics framework. By exploring communication practices related to media engagement, digital publication, and website management, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how strategic communication can strengthen institutional reputation in the increasingly competitive global higher education environment.

While previous studies have discussed digital public relations, institutional reputation, and website management separately, no study has explicitly examined how media relations practices produce external digital references in the form of backlinks that directly contribute to Webometrics visibility indicators. This study addresses this gap by conceptualizing media relations not merely as a communication function, but as a strategic mechanism for generating digital connectivity that strengthens university visibility within global web-based ranking systems.

Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore how media relations strategies contribute to the management of university websites and the improvement of digital visibility within the Webometrics framework. Qualitative research is considered appropriate for this study because it enables the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of communication practices, organizational processes, and strategic interactions between institutional communication units and external media actors. Through qualitative inquiry, the researcher is able to examine how communication strategies are designed, implemented, and perceived by actors involved in media relations activities.

Qualitative research focuses on understanding social phenomena from the perspective of the participants involved in a particular context. Rather than measuring variables quantitatively, qualitative approaches emphasize the interpretation of meanings, experiences, and practices that shape organizational behavior and communication strategies. This approach allows the researcher to examine the complex relationship between media engagement, digital publication practices, and institutional visibility in a natural setting (Moleong, 2019).

This study adopts a case study design to analyze communication practices related to media relations and digital visibility within a university context. The case study approach allows researchers to investigate contemporary phenomena within their real-life context and to obtain detailed insights into organizational practices that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative methods. By focusing on a specific institutional case, the research is able to provide a comprehensive understanding of how media relations strategies are implemented and how these strategies influence digital visibility in the context of higher education institutions.

Data for this research were collected through two primary techniques: in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGD). In-depth interviews were conducted with individuals who are directly involved in managing institutional communication and digital publication activities. These participants include members of the university communication office, website administrators, and staff responsible for managing institutional media relations. In addition, interviews were also conducted with journalists and media practitioners who frequently collaborate with the institution in disseminating news and academic information. The inclusion of media practitioners as informants provides an external perspective on how institutional communication is perceived and how media collaboration contributes to digital visibility.

A total of ten participants were selected as key informants in this study. The participants were chosen through purposive sampling, which is a sampling technique commonly used in qualitative research to identify individuals who possess relevant knowledge and experience related to the research topic. The selected participants include communication officers, digital media managers, website administrators, and journalists who have direct involvement in the dissemination of institutional information. This sampling approach allows the researcher to obtain detailed insights from individuals who are actively engaged in the communication processes being studied.

In addition to individual interviews, a focus group discussion was conducted to explore collective perspectives regarding the implementation of media relations strategies and their role in strengthening digital visibility. The focus group discussion involved several participants representing communication staff and media partners. The FGD method allows participants to interact with each other, exchange perspectives, and collectively reflect on the challenges and opportunities related to media collaboration and digital publication practices. According to Morgan (1997), focus group discussions are particularly useful in qualitative research because they facilitate interactive discussions that reveal shared experiences and collective interpretations of social phenomena.

The data collection process was conducted over several stages. First, the researcher conducted preliminary observations to understand the institutional communication

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structure and the processes involved in managing digital publication and media relations. Following this stage, in-depth interviews were conducted using semi-structured interview guidelines. This format allows the researcher to maintain a consistent structure across interviews while also providing flexibility to explore emerging topics and participant perspectives in greater depth. Each interview session lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was recorded with the consent of the participants to ensure the accuracy of data documentation.

All interview and discussion recordings were subsequently transcribed to facilitate systematic analysis. The data analysis process in this study follows the qualitative data analysis framework proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). This analytical framework involves three interconnected stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data condensation refers to the process of selecting, focusing, and simplifying the raw data obtained from interviews and discussions. During this stage, the researcher identifies key themes related to media relations practices, digital communication strategies, and factors influencing digital visibility.

The second stage, data display, involves organizing the condensed data into structured formats such as thematic matrices, narrative summaries, and conceptual categories. This process enables the researcher to identify patterns and relationships among different aspects of media relations and digital communication practices. Through systematic data display, the researcher can compare perspectives across participants and examine how different actors interpret the role of media collaboration in strengthening institutional digital visibility.

The final stage of analysis involves drawing conclusions and verifying findings. During this stage, the researcher interprets the patterns identified in the data and connects them to relevant theoretical perspectives in communication and reputation management. The conclusions are continuously verified by revisiting the data and ensuring that interpretations remain grounded in empirical evidence obtained during the research process.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings, several validation strategies were employed. These include data triangulation through multiple data sources, participant verification of interview summaries, and careful documentation of the research process. By combining interviews, focus group discussions, and systematic data analysis, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how media relations strategies contribute to strengthening digital visibility and institutional reputation in the context of higher education communication.

In addition to interviews and focus group discussions, this study also examines digital traces in the form of online media publications that contain hyperlinks directing to the university website. These digital references are analyzed to understand how media coverage contributes to the formation of external backlink networks associated with Webometrics visibility indicators.

Result

Website Technical Performance as a Prerequisite for Media Reference

The FG D data indicate that journalists approach the university website not merely as an official communication channel but as an operational resource that supports the daily routines of news production. Before evaluating the substantive value of institutional information, media practitioners first assess whether the website is technically accessible, stable, and easy to navigate. This initial assessment determines whether the site can function as a credible reference point in journalistic workflows. Participants emphasized that accessibility is a practical prerequisite for citation, particularly under tight editorial deadlines. When the website fails to load efficiently or presents navigational obstacles, journalists tend to seek alternative sources that offer quicker access to relevant information. In this way, technical performance precedes editorial judgment in determining the likelihood of media reference. The website's functionality thus becomes an integral part of the media relations ecosystem rather than a separate technological concern. These observations reveal that digital infrastructure conditions shape the possibility of external media engagement with institutional content. Consequently, website performance directly influences whether media actors consider the university domain worthy of reference.

Participants also reported recurring server instability, particularly during weekends, when journalists commonly prepare material for early-week publication cycles. This temporal mismatch between journalistic routines and website reliability significantly reduces the chances of institutional information being utilized as a news source. Journalists noted that when the site becomes inaccessible during these critical preparation periods, they often abandon it and rely on other institutions with more reliable digital access. Such patterns demonstrate how server uptime becomes a determining factor in media visibility. The technical timing of website availability therefore intersects with the temporal logic of newsroom production. This relationship illustrates that digital reliability has a direct bearing on editorial decisions regarding source selection. In practice, a website that frequently experiences downtime loses its position as a habitual reference for media actors. The consequence is a diminished probability of institutional mention or citation in news coverage. These dynamics show how technical reliability shapes the formation of potential digital references.

Mobile responsiveness emerged as another significant concern among participants, reflecting the changing work patterns of journalists who frequently operate in mobile environments. Many journalists access institutional information through smartphones while covering events or working outside traditional office settings. However, participants described issues such as hidden navigation menus, unclear dropdown indicators, and layouts that are not optimized for smaller

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screens. These usability limitations slow down the process of locating relevant information and increase cognitive effort during time-sensitive reporting. As a result, journalists are less inclined to rely on the website as an immediate source of reference. Mobile usability thus directly affects the practical likelihood of media actors engaging with institutional content. This finding highlights how user experience design influences the probability of external referencing. Inadequate mobile interfaces effectively reduce the website's role in journalistic information-gathering practices. Consequently, the technical dimension of mobile design becomes a factor in digital visibility outcomes.

Beyond accessibility and navigation, journalists interpreted technical weaknesses as indicators of broader institutional digital maturity. Participants noted that a rigid layout, excessive empty space, and outdated visual presentation create the impression that the institution is not adaptive to contemporary digital standards. This perception affects journalists' confidence in the website as a reliable and authoritative source, even before assessing the content itself. The aesthetic and structural aspects of the site thus contribute to institutional credibility in the digital environment. Technical design becomes intertwined with symbolic representations of professionalism and modernity. Journalists reported that visually outdated websites are less likely to be considered trustworthy references in their reporting. This illustrates how design elements influence perceptions of legitimacy within media practice. In effect, technical presentation shapes the reputational standing of the institution among media professionals. These perceptions ultimately affect the likelihood of the site being cited or referenced.

The implications of these technical barriers extend directly to the formation of digital references that are relevant to Webometrics visibility indicators. Journalists are unlikely to insert hyperlinks or cite sources that are difficult to access or potentially frustrating for readers. When the website presents technical obstacles, media actors avoid directing audiences toward it, thereby reducing opportunities for external linking. This avoidance behavior demonstrates how website performance indirectly influences the creation of backlink networks. Technical inefficiencies thus translate into reduced digital connectivity between media platforms and the university domain. From the perspective of Webometrics, this diminishes the potential contribution of media coverage to visibility metrics. The findings show that digital infrastructure limitations can suppress the effectiveness of otherwise active media relations efforts. Consequently, website performance becomes a structural factor in digital reputation formation.

Overall, the data demonstrate that website stability, responsiveness, and usability function as foundational prerequisites in the chain linking media relations practices to digital visibility outcomes. Journalists' willingness to reference institutional content is strongly conditioned by the technical quality of the site they interact with. Without a reliable and user-friendly digital platform, media relations efforts struggle to translate into external digital references. This finding reframes website management from a purely technical responsibility into a strategic component of communication management. The website operates as the digital interface through which media actors engage with institutional information. Its performance therefore shapes the probability of citation, reference, and hyperlink inclusion in news articles. In this sense, technical performance becomes an enabling condition for the generation of digital traces that contribute to Webometrics visibility. The results illustrate how communication strategy, digital infrastructure, and media practice converge in the production of institutional digital reputation.

Journalistic Content Value as a Determinant of Media Reproduction

FGD findings show that journalists evaluate university press releases primarily through the lens of newsworthiness rather than institutional importance. Participants repeatedly emphasized that content originating from the university will only be reproduced if it meets journalistic criteria such as actuality, relevance, and human interest. One participant noted that press releases often begin with ceremonial details and lists of officials, which *"hide the real substance of the story."* This structure reduces the attractiveness of the content for media adoption. Journalists prefer narratives that foreground research findings, expert insights, or societal impact rather than formal institutional protocol. This indicates that writing style and content framing are decisive factors in whether institutional information enters media circulation. The likelihood of media reproduction is therefore shaped by editorial value rather than communicative intent. Content that resembles journalism is more easily transformed into news coverage.

Participants also stressed the importance of timeliness in determining whether website content can function as a media reference. News items that are several days old were described as unusable for reporting purposes. Journalists operate within tight editorial cycles, and outdated information quickly loses its relevance. As one participant explained, *"if the news is four days old, we will not use it."* This observation demonstrates how update frequency directly influences the probability of media uptake. Institutional delays in publishing content therefore reduce opportunities for media reproduction and referencing. Timeliness becomes a structural condition for digital visibility through media channels.

Storytelling emerged as a recurring recommendation from journalists, who suggested shifting from a *tell it* approach to a *show it* approach. They encouraged the university to present stories about student struggles, innovative research, and practical expertise in ways that resonate emotionally with audiences. Human-interest angles were considered far more appealing to media readers than formal reports of events. This narrative approach increases the chance that journalists will adopt and adapt institutional content into their reporting. The finding suggests that emotional and narrative elements enhance the transferability of institutional information into media formats. Consequently, storytelling functions as a bridge between institutional communication and journalistic reproduction.

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Another key issue concerns the accessibility of expert sources. Journalists acknowledged the abundance of experts at the university but reported difficulty in identifying the right person quickly due to the absence of a clear expertise database. In time-sensitive reporting on national issues, delays in locating appropriate experts reduce the opportunity for media collaboration. This difficulty limits the frequency of institutional mentions in news coverage. A searchable and well-structured expert directory would increase the speed of interaction between journalists and the university. This, in turn, would increase the probability of institutional references appearing in media publications.

Visual presentation was also identified as a determinant of media appeal. Journalists emphasized that websites should function as digital showcases with strong photos, thumbnails, and videos that immediately capture attention. Visual content increases the perceived news value and encourages journalists to explore stories further. Text-heavy pages without visual support were described as less attractive for reference. This finding highlights how visual communication contributes indirectly to media reproduction. Attractive visual elements make institutional stories more adaptable for media use.

These findings demonstrate that media reproduction of institutional content is determined by journalistic logic rather than institutional priorities. Writing style, timeliness, storytelling, expert accessibility, and visual presentation collectively determine whether media actors adopt university information. When these elements are present, the probability of media referencing increases significantly. As media publications often include institutional mentions or references, journalistic content value becomes a strategic pathway toward the creation of external digital references relevant to Webometrics visibility indicators.

Internal Understanding of Webometrics and the Production–Distribution Logic of Media Content

Interviews with Dian Bestari (Head of the Webometrics Team) and Firdaus (IT Team) reveal that, internally, Webometrics is understood not merely as a ranking system but as an operational instrument for managing institutional digital reputation. Dian explicitly framed Webometrics as *"a tool to boost organizational reputation through visibility indicators that are closely related to public relations work."* This perspective indicates that media publication, website management, and digital visibility are conceptually linked within institutional strategy. Webometrics is therefore not treated as an external assessment, but as a guide for internal communication practices. The interviews show that visibility is interpreted as a direct outcome of content production and external digital references. This internal awareness forms the basis for how media relations are expected to contribute to digital performance. The understanding of visibility, however, is still constrained by practical limitations in content quality and media collaboration. These constraints limit the translation of conceptual understanding into measurable digital outcomes. The findings suggest a gap between strategic awareness and operational execution.

Dian emphasized the strong relationship between content production and visibility scores, stating that *"the quantity and quality of content uploaded to the university website directly affect Webometrics visibility points."* This statement confirms that website content is viewed as a primary driver of digital visibility. However, she also acknowledged that the current management of digital platforms, although integrated, *"has not been maximized."* This admission highlights that institutional digital infrastructure exists but has not been strategically optimized for visibility outcomes. The issue is not the absence of content channels, but the absence of systematic content strategy aligned with Webometrics indicators. Consequently, media relations outputs do not consistently transform into digital references that strengthen visibility metrics. This reflects an internal recognition that content management requires alignment with digital ranking logic. The interviews demonstrate that Webometrics awareness exists at the conceptual level but is still evolving at the technical level of execution.

A crucial insight from Dian concerns the role of external media backlinks, which she described as having *"far greater influence than social media traffic because links from outside are better recorded by Google and reach broader stakeholders."* This statement directly links media relations activities to the core logic of Webometrics visibility indicators. She further noted that current cooperation with media partners is still limited and has not yet required consistent backlink inclusion in news publications. This reveals that although the importance of backlinks is well understood internally, formal mechanisms to ensure their presence are not yet institutionalized. The findings show that media relations practices are still oriented toward information dissemination rather than structured digital connectivity. As a result, the potential contribution of media coverage to backlink networks remains underutilized. This gap highlights the need for strategic agreements with media institutions to operationalize backlink practices.

From the operational side, Firdaus explained the structured workflow of press release production, beginning with field coverage, data collection, interviews, and writing based on journalistic standards such as 5W+1H and direct quotations. He stated that *"each press release is validated by the head of the public relations team before publication to ensure factual accuracy."* This indicates that institutional news production follows a formal and professional process. Distribution is carried out through internal platforms (website and social media) and externally via a WhatsApp group consisting of approximately 35 journalists. This mechanism demonstrates an active media relations network that facilitates rapid dissemination of institutional information. However, the workflow is primarily designed for information distribution rather than ensuring digital traceability through hyperlinks. The process ensures news accuracy but does not yet prioritize backlink generation as part of its success criteria.

Firdaus also acknowledged an understanding of the relationship between media publication and impact indicators, noting that *"publication is not merely about spreading*

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information, but about maintaining institutional image and impact." He explicitly identified visibility (backlinks), transparency (Google Scholar citations), and excellence (reputable journal publications) as the three critical Webometrics components. This demonstrates that technical and communication teams share an understanding of how digital ranking systems operate. Nevertheless, he admitted that not all faculties or units have standardized schedules for updating content, and many updates are still incidental. This inconsistency weakens the continuity of digital content production that is necessary for sustained visibility. The interviews show that awareness of Webometrics indicators exists, but coordination across institutional units remains uneven.

Overall, these interviews reveal that the institution possesses a strong conceptual understanding of how Webometrics, media publication, and digital visibility are interconnected. However, practical limitations—such as limited media agreements, inconsistent content updates, and the absence of backlink-oriented evaluation—prevent media relations from fully contributing to visibility indicators. The findings demonstrate that the issue is not a lack of awareness, but a lack of systematic integration between content production, media collaboration, and digital trace outcomes. This internal perspective complements the journalists' views presented earlier, showing that both sides recognize the importance of digital connectivity but face structural and procedural barriers in realizing it. These insights clarify how internal communication workflows must evolve to align with the digital logic of Webometrics visibility.

Structural Constraints and Opportunities in Hyperlink (Backlink) Practices

A critical finding from the FGD concerns the practical limitations surrounding the inclusion of active hyperlinks in media articles. Journalists explained that many media organizations impose editorial and technical restrictions on the use of clickable external links. These restrictions are often related to page loading speed, advertising structures, and internal editorial policies. As a result, institutional references frequently appear as plain text mentions rather than active hyperlinks. This distinction is significant because Webometrics visibility indicators primarily count active backlinks rather than textual mentions.

Participants noted that inserting active backlinks often requires formal agreements between institutions and media companies. Without such agreements, journalists may avoid adding links even when they use university information as a reference. One participant stated that hyperlink inclusion is "difficult without official cooperation because of strict company rules." This reveals that backlink creation is not solely dependent on journalistic willingness but also on organizational policy at the media level. Consequently, media relations must extend beyond interpersonal communication to institutional collaboration.

At the same time, journalists acknowledged that backlinks are more feasible in certain types of content, particularly in reports about collaborations, research partnerships, or international activities. Such stories often justify the inclusion of external links as part of informational completeness. This suggests that specific categories of institutional news have greater potential to generate backlinks than others. Media relations strategies can therefore be designed to prioritize content types that naturally accommodate hyperlink inclusion.

The interviews with Dian and Firdaus reinforce this finding from an internal perspective. Dian emphasized that "backlinks from external media have a far greater impact than social media traffic because they are better recorded by Google." Firdaus also confirmed that visibility is understood internally as the presence of backlinks from credible external sites. These statements demonstrate that both communication and technical teams recognize the strategic importance of hyperlink practices for Webometrics performance.

Despite this awareness, current evaluation practices still focus on the number of published news items rather than the presence of backlinks within those publications. Media monitoring is conducted, but backlink inclusion is not yet used as a primary performance indicator. This gap indicates that media relations evaluation has not fully aligned with Webometrics logic. The absence of backlink-oriented metrics reduces the strategic use of media publications for digital visibility.

Overall, the findings reveal that backlink generation is shaped by structural constraints, editorial policies, and institutional agreements rather than communication efforts alone. Effective media relations for digital visibility therefore require formal partnerships, strategic content selection, and evaluation metrics that prioritize hyperlink outcomes. These elements collectively determine whether media coverage translates into digital connectivity that contributes to Webometrics visibility indicators and institutional digital reputation.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that media relations practices at Universitas Jenderal Soedirman remain predominantly operational rather than strategic, limiting their contribution to digital visibility and institutional reputation. The findings indicate that communication activities are largely focused on internal information dissemination, with content that lacks news value and relevance to external media needs. As a result, external publications and backlink generation remain low, weakening the institution's performance in Webometrics, particularly in the visibility (impact) indicator.

Furthermore, the study identifies a lack of integration between media relations, content production, and website management. Communication functions operate in a fragmented manner, preventing the formation of a cohesive digital communication system. From the perspective of Relationship Management Theory, this condition reflects weak trust, limited commitment, and an absence of mutual engagement between the institution and media.

This study contributes by proposing a media relations strategy based on digital visibility, emphasizing the integration of

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news-oriented content, strategic media partnerships, and website optimization. The findings highlight that effective media relations should be repositioned as a strategic mechanism to enhance external connectivity, strengthen digital presence, and build sustainable institutional reputation.

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