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**ETHICS AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF PUBLIC
RELATIONS VISUAL COMMUNICATION AS A MEDIA OF
PUBLIC EDUCATION IN ENCOURAGING SUSTAINABLE
GLOBAL ECONOMIC RECOVERY IN THE ERA OF
DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION**

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Abstract:

Digital transformation has encouraged the intensification of the use of visual communication in Public Relations practice as a strategic instrument to convey public information and support the public education process, especially related to the sustainable global economic recovery agenda. However, the expansion of the digital visual space also presents significant normative challenges, especially with regard to communication ethics and compliance with the legal framework of public and digital communication. This research aims to examine conceptually and normatively the role of ethics and the legal framework of visual communication in the practice of Public Relations as a public education medium that contributes to the formation of understanding and strengthening public trust in the era of digital transformation. This research uses a qualitative approach with a normative conceptual design based on the analysis of scientific literature, professional ethics documents, and public and digital communication regulations. Data were obtained through document analysis of *the IPRA Code of Conduct*, *PRSA Code of Ethics*, *Digital Services Act* of the European

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Commission, and World Economic Forum reports, which were complemented by a reflective analysis of digital visual communication practices as a public education medium. The data were analyzed thematically-normatively to identify key ethical principles, legal limitations of visual communication, and the relationship between normative compliance and strengthening public trust. The results of the study show that the integration of professional ethical principles such as honesty, accuracy, transparency, and social responsibility with adherence to the legal framework of digital communication is the main foundation for credible public relations visual communication practices. Ethical and law-abiding visual communication has proven to play a strategic role as a public education medium that is able to increase social trust, which in turn supports sustainable global economic recovery efforts amid the dynamics of digital transformation.

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Keyword:

Public Relations Ethics; Visual Communication; The Legal Framework Of Communication; Digital Public Education; Sustainable Economic Recovery.



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Introduction

The acceleration of digital transformation has fundamentally changed the pattern of organizational communication with the public, especially in Public Relations practices which increasingly rely on digital-based visual communication. The dominance of digital platforms that emphasize the visual aspect makes images, infographics, and multimedia content the main medium in conveying public messages, forming perceptions, and educating the public. In this context, visual communication no longer functions as a mere supporting element but develops into a strategic instrument that has a direct effect on the effectiveness of communication and the formation of public trust (Macnamara, 2020; Kent & Lane, 2021).

In the framework of a sustainable global economic recovery, the role of accurate and easy-to-understand public communication is becoming increasingly important. Information on economic policies, recovery programs, and sustainable development agendas is widely disseminated through digital visual media to reach the community at large. However, the increase in intensitas The use of visual communication in the digital space also poses ethical challenges, such as potential message distortion, misleading visual representations, and disregard for the public interest. A number of studies show that the weak application of ethical principles in digital communication can have an impact on decreasing the level of public trust in institutions and organizations (Bowen, 2020; Valentini, Romenti, & Kruckeberg, 2021).

In addition to the ethical aspect, compliance with the legal framework of public communication is an important foundation in the practice of visual communication of Public Relations in the era of digital transformation. Regulations governing digital communication, data protection, and the dissemination of public information require legal responsibility in every production and distribution process of visual messages. The integration between professional ethical values and legal compliance is seen as a key prerequisite for maintaining message credibility and protecting the public interest in the digital space (Fitzpatrick & Rubin, 2022; Karatzas & Zhao, 2023). Although studies on digital communication and public relations continue to develop, research specifically linking the ethics and legal framework of visual communication as a medium of public education in supporting a sustainable global economic recovery is still relatively limited. Most studies emphasize more on the technical and strategic aspects of digital communication, while the normative and regulatory dimensions have not been studied in depth. Therefore, this study aims to examine normatively and exploratively the role of ethics and the legal framework of visual communication in the practice of Public Relations, especially in shaping understanding and strengthening public trust in the era of digital transformation.

Literature Review

This literature review discusses five main points, namely: (1) digital transformation and the development of Public Relations communication, (2) visual communication as a strategic instrument in Public Relations, (3) ethical principles in visual and digital communication Public Relations, (4) the legal framework that governs digital and visual public communication, and (5) the role of ethical and law-abiding public relations visual communication in public education and global economic recovery that sustainable.

Digital Transformation and the Development of Public Relations Communication

Digital transformation has brought about fundamental changes in Public Relations practices by shifting communication patterns from conventional models to two-way and sustainable digital interactions. The use of digital platforms requires public relations practitioners to adapt not only technologically, but also strategically in managing relationships with the public. Recent literature shows that digitalization strengthens the role of Public Relations in building trust, reputation, and organizational legitimacy in an increasingly complex and dynamic communication environment (Macnamara, 2020; Kent & Lane, 2021).

Visual Communication as a Strategic Instrument in Public Relations

Visual communication is the dominant form of communication in digital Public Relations practice because of its ability to convey messages quickly, concisely, and easily understand. The use of infographics, videos, and narrative visuals has been proven to be effective in increasing audience attention and strengthening public understanding of the information conveyed. Research shows that visual-based messages have higher levels of appeal and recall than text-based communication alone, making them a strategic instrument in shaping public perceptions and attitudes (Valentini, Romenti, & Kruckeberg, 2021).

Ethical Principles in Visual and Digital Communication of Public Relations

The increasing use of visual communication in the digital space has also magnified ethical challenges in the practice of Public Relations. Ethical principles such as honesty, information

accuracy, transparency, and social responsibility are important foundations in maintaining the credibility of public communication. Bowen (2020) emphasized that unethical communication practices, especially in the use of digital visuals, have the potential to cause misinformation and damage public trust. Therefore, the application of professional ethics is a crucial aspect in ensuring that visual communication functions responsibly.

Legal Framework in Digital and Visual Public Communication

In addition to ethics, the legal framework plays an important role in regulating the practice of digital and visual public communication. Regulations relating to data protection, information dissemination and public responsibility require organizations to comply with legal standards in every form of visual communication produced and disseminated. Recent studies show that non-compliance with digital communications regulations can have legal consequences while damaging the reputation of institutions (Karatzas & Zhao, 2023). As such, legal compliance is an integral part of a professional, public interest-oriented Public Relations practice.

Visual Communication Public Relations, Public Education, and Sustainable Economic Recovery

Visual communication in Public Relations practice also has a significant social function as a media of public education, especially in supporting the sustainable global economic recovery agenda. Delivering information on economic policies, development programs, and sustainability initiatives through ethical and law-abiding digital visuals can increase public understanding and participation. The literature confirms that public communication that integrates ethical principles and legal frameworks contributes to the strengthening of social trust, which is an important factor in supporting the success of sustainable economic recovery (Macnamara, 2020; Valentini et al., 2021). This study uses a qualitative approach with a conceptual-normative design. This approach was chosen to critically examine the ethical principles and legal framework of visual communication in the practice of Public Relations without conducting empirical field measurements. This study analyzes the scientific literature and normative documents, including the IPRA Code of Conduct, the PRSA Code of Ethics, the Digital Services Act (European Commission), and the World Economic Forum report.

The research data was obtained through document analysis, which includes the Public Relations code of ethics, public and digital communication regulations, and relevant visual communication guidelines. In addition, this study also utilizes digital visual content analysis as a reflective material to examine visual communication patterns used in public education, focusing on aspects of information honesty, message transparency, and visual responsibility. The data were analyzed thematically-normatively with an emphasis on the identification of key ethical principles, legal limitations of visual communication, and the relationship between normative compliance and the strengthening of public trust. This method allows researchers to compile a comprehensive conceptual synthesis of the role of visual communication of Public Relations in supporting a sustainable global economic recovery in the era of digital transformation.

Definition of Visual Communication in Public Relations

The legal framework of digital visual communication in the practice of Public Relations serves as a regulatory foundation that regulates the production, distribution, and consumption of visual

messages in digital public spaces. The existence of this regulation aims to ensure that visual communication is not only communicatively effective, but also compliant with legal norms that protect the public interest. In the context of public communication, the legal framework is an important instrument to prevent the dissemination of information that is misleading, violates the rights of individuals, or harms social interests at large. Digital visual communication regulations cover various aspects, such as information disclosure, personal data protection, intellectual property rights, and legal responsibility for content disseminated through digital platforms. In the practice of Public Relations, compliance with these legal provisions requires caution in the use of visuals, especially related to the validity of data, the use of images or symbols, and the presentation of information that can affect public perception. The literature shows that non-compliance with digital communication regulations not only has the potential to lead to legal sanctions, but also negatively impacts the reputation and credibility of organizations (Karatzas & Zhao, 2023).

In addition, the legal framework of digital visual communication also plays a role in strengthening the accountability of Public Relations practices. With clear rules, organizations are encouraged to apply professional standards in every form of visual communication addressed to the public. Legal compliance is not only understood as a formal obligation, but also as part of the organization's social responsibility in maintaining the quality of informative and fair digital public spaces. Fitzpatrick and Rubin (2022) affirm that the integration between legal compliance and professional ethics is an important foundation for sustainable public communication practices. Thus, the legal framework of digital visual communication has a strategic role in supporting the function of public education and the development of social trust. When Public Relations visual communications are structured based on consistent ethical principles and legal compliance, the message conveyed not only has normative legitimacy but is also able to contribute positively to sustainable global economic recovery efforts in the era of digital transformation.

Visual Communication Ethics in Public Relations Practice

Visual communication ethics in Public Relations practice refers to a set of normative principles that govern how visual messages are designed, produced, and disseminated to the public in a responsible manner. In the context of digital public communication, ethics serve as a guideline to prevent the abuse of visual power that has the potential to shape public perception in a manipulative or misleading manner. This is important because visuals have a high ability to influence the audience's emotions, interpretation, and assessment of public issues (Kretschmer & Winkler, 2024). One of the key principles in visual communication ethics is honesty and accuracy of information. The visual message conveyed must reflect facts that can be accounted for and not be distorted through image selection, graphic processing, or excessive simplification of data. Recent research shows that inaccurate visual representations can undermine an organization's credibility and trigger a decline in public trust, especially in the context of fast-paced digital communications (Fitzpatrick & Rubin, 2022; Hou, 2024).

In addition, transparency and social responsibility are important elements in Public Relations' visual communication ethics. Transparency demands openness about the source of the data, the purpose of the communication, and the visual context presented, so that the public can critically assess the validity of the message. However, transparency must also be managed wisely so as not to conflict with data protection and the public interest. Wamprechtsamer (2024) emphasizes

that transparency in digital communication must be understood as an ethical practice oriented towards dialogue and accountability, not just symbolic openness.

In the era of digital transformation, the ethical challenges of visual communication are increasingly complex along with the increasing use of visual persuasion, digital advocacy campaigns, and artificial intelligence-based visual technology. Therefore, the ethics of visual communication needs to be positioned as a reflective and sustainable process that puts the public interest as a top priority. An ethical approach oriented towards social concern is considered to be able to strengthen the function of visual communication as a credible public education media and berkontribusi pada pembentukan kepercayaan sosial dalam mendukung pemulihan ekonomi global yang berkelanjutan (Valentini, Romenti, & Kruckeberg, 2021; Dong, 2024). In other words, the application of visual communication ethics should be seen as a proactive process that includes (1) fact-checking before visuals are published, (2) transparency of sources and purposes, (3) consideration of the social impact of visual representations, and (4) internal and external accountability mechanisms. These measures not only maintain the credibility of the organization but also strengthen the function of visual communication as a public education medium that can support sustainable economic recovery in the era of digital transformation (Dong, 2024).

Table 1: Ethical Principles and Legal Aspects in Public Relations Visual Communication

Principles / Aspects	Description
Honesty of Information	Presentation of visual messages based on accountable facts
Visual Accuracy	Alignment between data and visual representation
Transparency	Openness of goals and sources of communication
Protection of Public Interest	Prevention of misleading or manipulative visual content
Legal Compliance	Compliance with digital communications regulations

Source: Literature synthesis results

Legal Framework of Digital Visual Communication in Public Relations Practice

The legal framework of digital visual communication in the practice of Public Relations serves as a regulatory foundation that regulates the process of production, distribution, and consumption of visual messages in digital public spaces. The existence of this regulation is aimed at ensuring that visual communication is not only strategically effective but also aligned with legal norms that protect the public interest. In the context of digital public communication, the legal framework plays an important role in limiting the potential for the spread of misleading information, violations of individual rights, and the use of visuals that are manipulative and can have adverse social and economic impacts (Karatzas & Zhao, 2023; Tambuscio & Di Domenico, 2022).

Legal aspects in digital visual communication include personal data protection, public information disclosure, intellectual property rights, and legal responsibility for content disseminated through digital platforms. For Public Relations practitioners, compliance with the provisions of the law requires caution in the use of visual data, symbols, and visual narratives that have the potential to shape public perception at large. A number of studies show that non-compliance with digital communication regulations not only has implications for legal sanctions but also contributes to a decline in the level of public credibility and trust in the institution or organization concerned (Fitzpatrick & Rubin, 2022; Kent & Lane, 2021).

Furthermore, the integration between legal frameworks and ethical principles of visual communication is the main foundation for responsible Public Relations practices in the era of digital transformation. Legal compliance is not solely understood as an administrative obligation, but rather as part of the organization's social responsibility in maintaining the quality of a fair, transparent, and accountable digital public space. Thus, visual communication designed based on legal and ethical principles can consistently function as a medium credible public education and contribute to strengthening social trust and support for sustainable global economic recovery efforts (European Commission, 2022; Valentini, Romenti, & Kruckeberg, 2021).

The Role of Public Relations Visual Communication as a Public Education Media

Visual communication in Public Relations practice has a strategic role as a public education medium, especially in conveying complex and far-reaching information, such as public policies, development programs, and sustainable economic recovery agendas. Through data visualization, infographics, and digital visual narratives, policy messages can be presented in a more concise, clear, and easy-to-understand manner by people with diverse backgrounds. Recent research shows that visual communication increases public engagement and helps strengthen audiences' understanding of abstract social and economic issues (Dong, 2024; Macnamara, 2020). In the context of digital transformation, visual communication serves as a bridge between institutions and the public by strengthening transparency and information disclosure. Ethically designed and law-abiding visual messaging allows the public to access information quickly and critically, thereby reducing information gaps and potential misinformation. Valentini, Romenti, and Kruckeberg (2021) affirm that transparent and visually based public communication contributes significantly to the formation of social trust, which is an important prerequisite for the success of public education programs. Furthermore, the educational role of visual communication in Public Relations is not only related to the delivery of information, but also to the formation of public attitudes and participation. Responsibly crafted visuals can encourage community engagement in supporting development policies and initiatives, including sustainable global economic recovery efforts. In this case, visual communication serves as a strategic instrument that connects ethical principles and legal compliance with broader social goals, namely increasing public literacy and strengthening trust in institutions (Fitzpatrick & Rubin, 2022).





**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Visual Communication
Public Relations as a Public Education Media.**

Source: Results of a literature review

Figure 1 presents a conceptual framework that illustrates that the ethics of visual communication and the legal framework of digital visual communication serve as the normative foundation in the practice of visual communication of Public Relations. Both foundations influence how visual messages are responsibly designed and disseminated in digital public spaces. Ethical and law-abiding visual communication then plays a role as a public education medium that is able to increase public understanding and public trust. This increase in social trust is an important prerequisite in supporting a sustainable global economic recovery in the era of digital transformation.

Figure 1 presents a conceptual framework that illustrates the relationship between ethical principles and legal frameworks as the foundation of Public Relations visual communication practices. This framework shows how ethical and law-abiding visual communication functions as a public education medium that contributes to the formation of social trust and supports a sustainable global economic recovery in the era of digital transformation.

Thus, public education-oriented Public Relations visual communication demands consistent integration between message effectiveness, ethical responsibility, and legal compliance. When these three aspects are carried out in harmony, visual communication not only becomes a means of conveying information but also contributes to the formation of a digital public space that is informative, participatory, and supports sustainable global economic recovery in the era of digital transformation.

The results of the study show that the practice of visual communication of Public Relations as a public education medium needs to be based on clear normative references, both from the aspect of professional ethics and compliance with the legal framework of digital communication. The ethical principles contained in *the IPRA Code of Conduct* and *the PRSA Code of Ethics* emphasize the importance of honesty, accuracy of messages, and social responsibility in every form of public communication. The application of this principle is crucial in visual communication because visual has a high influence on public perception and understanding, so the potential for message distortion must be minimized through ethical and professional communication practices (International Public Relations Association, 2011; Public Relations Society of America, 2020).

In addition to professional ethics, compliance with digital communication regulations is also a fundamental aspect in the use of visual communication as a means of public education. *The Digital Services Act* issued by the European Commission affirms the obligations of institutions and organizations to ensure accountability, transparency, and protection of the public interest in the production and distribution of digital content (European Commission, 2022). This regulation provides clear normative boundaries so that visual communication is not only communicatively effective, but also legally valid and does not harm the wider community.

Furthermore, the *World Economic Forum* report emphasizes that responsible digital communication governance contributes directly to the formation of public trust, which is an important prerequisite for the success of sustainable global economic recovery and education programs (World Economic Forum, 2021). In this context, visual communication Public Relations that integrates the principles of professional ethics and legal compliance not only serves as a medium for delivering information, but also as a strategic instrument to strengthen institutional legitimacy and encourage public participation in the era of digital transformation.

Conclusion and Implications

This study emphasizes that visual communication in Public Relations practice cannot be understood solely as a technical tool for message delivery, but rather as a normative practice that has significant ethical and legal implications in the era of digital transformation. Through a conceptual-normative approach, this study shows that the success of visual communication as a public education medium is highly determined by the consistency of the application of professional ethical principles and compliance with the legal framework of digital communication. These two aspects are the main foundations in maintaining the credibility of visual messages and protecting the public interest. The results of the literature synthesis show that ethically structured and legally regulated public relations visual communication plays an important role in building public trust and increasing public understanding of strategic issues, including sustainable global economic recovery policies and initiatives. In a digital public space loaded with visual content and the rapid flow of information, communication responsibilities are becoming increasingly crucial to prevent misinformation, oversimplification, and manipulation of public perception.

From the theoretical side, this research contributes to the strengthening of a conceptual framework that integrates visual communication, public relations professional ethics, and legal frameworks as interrelated elements. This approach places visual communication as a public communication practice that has moral, social, and regulatory dimensions, not just a tool of persuasion or imagery. Thus, this study enriches the academic discourse on the strategic role of visual communication in an increasingly complex digital context. The practical implications of this study emphasize the importance for Public Relations practitioners to systematically include ethical and legal compliance considerations in every stage of designing and distributing digital visual messages, especially when visual communication is used as a means of public education. Based on these conceptual findings, it is recommended that public organizations and institutions develop internal guidelines for visual communication that emphasize the principles of honesty, accuracy, transparency, and protection of the public interest. In addition, strengthening ethical literacy and visual communication laws for Public Relations practitioners needs to be a priority to ensure that the use of digital platforms is not only communicatively effective, but also socially responsible and contributes to support for a sustainable global economic recovery. As a limitation, this research is conceptual-normative so that it has not yet

described the empirical dynamics in the field. Therefore, further research is recommended to develop this study through empirical approaches, such as case studies, policy analysis, or cross-institutional comparative research, in order to deepen understanding of the implementation of visual communication ethics and legal frameworks in Public Relations practice in various contexts.

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