

Media Framing Strategy by Public Relations Consultants for Ultra Micro Holding

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Received June 20, 2026; Revised August 1, 2026; Accepted August 4, 2026

Abstract

This study examines the media framing strategies employed by public relations consultants during the formation of Indonesia's Ultra Micro State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) Holding. Focusing on IGICO Public Affairs Advisory, the consultancy engaged by PT Bank Rakyat Indonesia (Persero) Tbk, PT Pegadaian, and PT Permodalan Nasional Madani (PNM), the study adopts a constructivist paradigm and a qualitative case study approach. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with three consultants and document analysis, and analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña interactive model. Drawing on Goffman's framing theory and the 7Cs model, the findings indicate that media framing originated from a pre-framing stage involving audience research, issue mapping, risk identification, and narrative design. The strategy was implemented through seven interrelated communication elements and operated within a competitive communication arena characterized by competing narratives surrounding the holding. Based on these findings, the study proposes the Strategic Narrative Construction Model in Organizational Transformation, consisting of organizational issues, pre-framing, narrative construction, competitive communication arena, integrated 7Cs execution, and relational and reputational outcomes. The model highlights strategic narrative construction as a key mechanism for building public legitimacy during large-scale organizational transformation.

Keywords: 7Cs model, holding company, media relations, media framing, public relations.

INTRODUCTION

Media relations constitute a strategic element of organizational communication that bridges the relationship between a company and the public through mass media. Strong media relationships enable organizations to convey information accurately while simultaneously building reputation and public trust. In an increasingly complex business environment, media relations no longer function merely as an information channel but also as a strategic instrument to ensure that organizational messages are understood in accordance with the company's values and objectives. The core function of media relations is not simply managing relationships with journalists, but also building mutually beneficial strategic partnerships between organizations and the media (Chen and Koo, 2022; Strauß, 2021).

The development of digital media has fundamentally transformed the dynamics of media relations, requiring organizations to adapt to increasingly rapid and competitive information flows. In this context, communication consultants play an important role in helping organizations understand changes in the media ecosystem and develop communication strategies relevant to digital media characteristics (Amelia et al., 2024; Caryarini et al., 2024). Because not all organizations possess sufficient internal resources and expertise, many rely on professional communication consultants to design systematic communication strategies and maintain media relationships (Erlianti et al., 2024). Beyond strategy formulation, consultants also facilitate message dissemination through press releases, press conferences, and media briefings (Firdausi and Dewi, 2021), while strengthening organizational communication capacity through media training for company spokespersons (Andari et al., 2023).

Previous studies have examined media relations and public relations across diverse contexts. Hagelstein et al. (2021) discuss ethical challenges in digital public relations, Perreault et al. (2024) examine the relationship between journalism and public relations, Kuan et al. (2021) analyze framing theory in international public relations, and Afrilia et al. (2023) investigate the digital competencies of government PR officers. Other studies focus on strategic communication (Tam et al., 2022), agenda-setting processes Strauß (2021), online media framing (Nuffus and Rohaningsih, 2021), press release discourse (Liu and Zhang, 2021), and development communication (Yudarwati and Gregory, 2022). Although these studies demonstrate the strategic importance of media relations, research on the implementation of media relations and media framing strategies in supporting holding company formation remains limited, particularly in Indonesian state-owned enterprises.

The establishment of the Ultra Micro-Stated-Owned Enterprise Holding (UMi Holding), comprising PT Bank Rakyat Indonesia (Persero) Tbk, PT Pegadaian, and PT Permodalan Nasional Madani (PNM), represents a strategic initiative to strengthen financial inclusion and support Ultra Micro enterprises in Indonesia. Through Government Regulation No. 73 of 2021, BRI was designated as the parent company by acquiring state-owned shares in Pegadaian and PNM to enhance institutional synergy and broaden access to financial services (Untsa, 2022; Humas, 2021). Such a large-scale transformation involves

economic, political, social, and reputational dimensions, making strategic communication essential for building legitimacy and managing public perceptions (Alkaraan, 2021).

One communication consultancy actively involved in this process was IGICO Public Affairs Advisory, which managed various media relations activities during October 2020–September 2021, including the distribution of 155 press releases, opinion articles, interviews with Key Opinion Leaders (KOL), and media agenda setting. These activities generated more than 11,000 news reports, most of which carried a positive tone regarding the collaboration among BRI, Pegadaian, and PNM (IGICO, 2021). The case indicates that media relations function not merely as a channel for information dissemination but also as a strategic mechanism for constructing legitimacy in the public sphere.

Despite the growing body of literature, previous studies have mainly focused on image management, crisis communication, framing practices, and public relations competencies in relatively stable organizational settings. Media framing studies also tend to position journalists and media organizations as the primary actors, whereas the role of communication consultants in designing framing strategies and managing media narratives has received limited empirical attention, particularly in the context of Indonesian SOEs. Furthermore, studies integrating media relations, media framing, and the 7Cs model within a single analytical framework remain scarce. Specifically, the gap this study addresses is threefold: empirically, no prior study has examined how communication consultants, rather than journalists or in-house public relations units, construct media framing during the formation of an Indonesian SOE holding; theoretically, existing framing research has not systematically located the origin of a frame at the pre-publication, consultant-driven planning stage; and analytically, no study to date has combined Goffman's framing theory with the 7Cs model to examine the same case.

The novelty of this study lies in its integrative analysis of media relations strategies, media framing practices, and the 7Cs model proposed by Cutlip, Center, and Broom (Broom and Sha, 2013; Dipraja and Kussusanti, 2024) in the context of Ultra Micro Holding formation. More specifically, this study positions public relations consultants as strategic actors in constructing public legitimacy through media narrative management during organizational transformation. Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following research question: how do public relations consultants implement media framing in the formation of the Ultra-Micro-State-Owned Enterprise Holding (UMi Holding) in Indonesia from the perspective of the 7Cs model?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizational communication is a process of information exchange that takes place within and outside an organization to achieve shared objectives. More than a coordination mechanism, organizational communication enables decision-making and the formation of relationships with various stakeholders (Irwanti, 2022). Latifah et al. (2020)

defines it as a system that enables all organizational elements to remain interconnected through structured information flows.

In its development, the study of organizational communication has shifted from a focus on internal communication toward the integration of internal and external communication. Cutlip, Center, and Broom (Broom and Sha, 2013) define external communication as the process by which an organization communicates with external publics to build positive relationships and maintain organizational image. Nauli and Wardasari (2022) adds that external communication is conducted through various communication media; publications, press releases, mass media, and digital media, to create harmonious relationships between the organization and its publics. In practice, external communication encompasses relations with customers, business partners, mass media, government, and regulators (Budianto, 2023; Poell et al., 2023; Shao, 2023).

A holding company is a parent company that owns and controls the majority of shares in one or more other companies referred to as subsidiaries (Andari et al., 2023). Its primary objective is to create organizational efficiency through centralized strategic management, while simultaneously providing operational flexibility to each subsidiary. Syofia (2023) classify holding companies into three types: operational holdings that perform both managerial and operational functions, investment holdings that focus on share management without direct involvement in subsidiary activities, and mixed holdings that combine both.

In the context of Indonesian SOEs, holding formation is not merely a business restructuring exercise but also a public policy measure with broad social implications. The formation of the Ultra Micro Holding, for example, was directed at strengthening financial inclusion and Ultra Micro enterprise empowerment through the integration of financing, savings, and business mentoring services. This distinguishes it from corporate holdings in general: the process involves high public expectations, intensive media scrutiny, and a need for social legitimacy that cannot be separated from its communication strategy.

Media relations is a component of organizational communication strategy that focuses on building and maintaining relationships between an organization and mass media, with the aim of building a positive image and ensuring that organizational information is effectively communicated to the public (Maryam et al., 2024; Rizqiyah et al., 2021). Three core principles of effective media relations: transparency through the delivery of accurate and open information; a proactive approach by providing information before issues develop into controversies; and the personalization of journalist relationships to build long-term trust (Kushariyadi et al., 2025).

Instrumentally, organizations utilize press releases and press conferences as the two primary tools of media relations. A press release is a written document for communicating information to the media regarding particular events, policies, or achievements. An effective press release must have news value, be current, employ an inverted pyramid structure, and fulfill the 5W+1H elements (Firdausi and Dewi, 2021).

Meanwhile, a press conference is a meeting deliberately organized to deliver important information to journalists, while also providing space for direct clarification that enhances organizational credibility and reduces information misunderstandings (Amelia et al., 2024; Khusu et al., 2023).

Public relations consultants play a strategic role in helping organizations manage communication with the public, particularly in situations of organizational change. Public relations is an activity of managing relationships between organizations and their publics to build a positive organizational image. Grunig and Hunt identify four communication models: press agency/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetric communication, and two-way symmetric communication (Lackovic et al., 2021). In practice, these models are not necessarily applied separately, and organizations may combine them according to communication objectives and issue characteristics.

Doorley and Garcia (2025) identify the core competencies of effective PR consultants, including communication skills, situational analysis, crisis management, branding, and an understanding of the digital media ecosystem. These competencies enable consultants to support organizations in managing communication processes and maintaining relationships with various stakeholders during periods of organizational change.

The concept of framing was introduced by Erving Goffman (1974) to explain how individuals and media construct meaning toward an event. Framing is a process of selecting and emphasizing certain aspects of reality so as to shape how audiences understand an issue. Goffman conceptualizes primary framework as the basic framework for understanding social situations, which can undergo transformation through a process of keying. That is, the attribution of new meaning to an event according to a particular social context (Zerubavel, 2024; Jacobsen and Smith, 2022).

In the context of mass media, framing functions to shape public perception through the selection of perspectives, the highlighting of particular issues, and the use of specific symbols and narratives in coverage. Through framing, media representations influence how audiences interpret events and assign meaning to social realities.

The 7Cs model was introduced by Cutlip, Center, and Broom as the basic principle of effective communication in public relations (Broom and Sha, 2013). The model holds that the success of communication is determined by seven elements: credibility, context, content, clarity, continuity and consistency, channels, and capability of the audience.

Credibility refers to the level of public trust in the message source. Context emphasizes the suitability of messages to the surrounding social environment. Content concerns the relevance of message content to audience needs. Clarity requires messages to be simple and understandable. Continuity and consistency relate to message sustainability and coherence across communication channels. Channels emphasize the

selection of appropriate communication media, while capability of the audience highlights the importance of adapting messages to the audience's ability to receive and process information (Hartiana, 2024).

The literature reviewed above points to three unresolved gaps rather than simply a body of prior findings to be summarized. First, studies of organizational and external communication (Irwanti, 2022; Latifah et al., 2020; Nauli and Wardasari, 2022) describe what external communication and media relations are meant to achieve, but not how the underlying interpretive frame is constructed before those activities begin. Second, framing scholarship (Kuan et al., 2021; Nuffus and Rohaningsih, 2021; Afrilia et al., 2023) has examined how media organizations and journalists frame issues once coverage is produced, leaving the pre-publication role of communication consultants largely unexamined. Third, the 7Cs model (Broom and Sha, 2013; Hartiana, 2024) has been discussed conceptually as a standard of communication quality, but has rarely been applied empirically to a single, large-scale organizational transformation case where its seven elements might be shown to operate together rather than as isolated principles. It is this combination of gaps; the pre-publication origin of frames, the consultant as framing actor, and the empirical, integrated application of the 7Cs model that the present study is designed to address.

This study integrates Goffman's framing theory and the 7Cs model proposed by Cutlip, Center, and Broom as its analytical framework. Framing theory provides a perspective for understanding how meanings are constructed and negotiated in communication processes, while the 7Cs model offers a framework for examining how communication strategies are implemented through various dimensions of effective communication. The combination of these two perspectives enables a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between media framing and communication strategy in the context of organizational transformation.

The pre-framing stage discussed in this study should be distinguished from agenda-setting and conventional issue management, with which it shares a concern for influencing what publics attend to and how. Agenda-setting theory is primarily concerned with the transfer of salience. It explains why certain issues, rather than others, come to be perceived as important, largely through the frequency and prominence of media coverage, and it treats the media agenda as the mechanism of influence. Issue management, in turn, is oriented toward monitoring and responding to issues that have already surfaced in the public or policy environment, so that an organization can act before an issue escalates into controversy. Pre-framing, as used here, refers to something that precedes both processes: the internal, pre-publication work of selecting a primary framework, mapping stakeholder risk, and designing keying strategies before any message is disseminated or any issue has entered public circulation. Where agenda-setting explains the salience of an already-circulating issue and issue management explains an organization's response to it, pre-framing explains how the interpretive frame later applied to that issue was constructed in advance, at a stage when no public agenda yet exists for the issue to be set upon. This

conceptual boundary is what allows the present study to treat framing as beginning in the planning room rather than in the newsroom.

The 7Cs model was selected over alternative public relations frameworks, such as the Excellence Theory of public relations or Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), because its seven communication-quality dimensions map directly onto the operational, message-level decisions that consultants described in interviews; word choice, channel selection, audience calibration, rather than onto organizational structure (as in Excellence Theory) or reputational threat response (as in SCCT), neither of which was the primary concern of this non-crisis, transformation-communication case. The 7Cs model further offered the analytical granularity needed to code interview and document data at the level of specific communication tactics, which the broader strategic frameworks do not provide, while still allowing integration with Goffman's framing theory at the level of meaning construction.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a constructivism paradigm that views social reality as the result of meaning construction through social interaction and individual subjective interpretation. This paradigm was selected because the study seeks to understand how the communication strategies of public relations consultants are constructed, interpreted, and perceived by communication actors in the process of forming the Ultra Micro-Stated-Owned Enterprise Holding (UMi Holding). Within the constructivist paradigm, reality is not singular and objective but is formed through the social experiences, interactions, and interpretations of the actors involved (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Denzin et al., 2023), an ontological assumption that aligns with the study's focus on the media framing process as a negotiative construction of meaning between PR consultants and journalists.

Based on this paradigm, the study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method. The case study method was selected because the research focuses on an organizational communication phenomenon within a real context with clear boundaries, namely the communication strategy of PR consultant IGICO Public Affairs Advisory during the period October 2020 to September 2021 in the formation process of the Ultra Micro-Stated-Owned Enterprise Holding (UMi Holding), involving PT Bank Rakyat Indonesia (Persero) Tbk, PT Pegadaian, and PT Permodalan Nasional Madani (PNM). Case study methodology is appropriate when the research question is of a "how" nature and the researcher has no control over the events being studied, as is the case in this research.

This study is qualitative-interpretive in nature, aimed at understanding organizational communication phenomena through the exploration of informants' subjective experiences, perceptions, and meanings (Harahap and Sazali, 2020). In this study, the researcher acts as the primary instrument who actively interprets field data (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Moleong, 2021), with full awareness that such interpretation is not value-free but is influenced by the researcher's theoretical background and

epistemological position. The selection of paradigm, approach, and method is aligned with the theoretical framework of the research. Goffman's framing theory requires an interpretive approach to understand how meaning is constructed, while the 7Cs model requires in-depth contextual analysis of communication strategies that cannot be captured through quantitative measurement instruments.

The subjects of this study are PR consultants from IGICO Public Affairs Advisory who were directly involved in formulating and implementing the communication strategy during the formation of the Ultra Micro-States-Owned Enterprise Holding (UMi Holding). The research focus, and object of study, is the communication strategy these consultants used to build media relations and manage news framing during that formation process, including how the strategies were applied to shape public perception and maintain organizational legitimacy through mass media.

Informant selection was carried out using purposive sampling, a technique that selects participants based on their relevance to the research focus and the depth of knowledge they possess regarding the phenomenon under study. Informant criteria include: (1) holding a strategic position in the IGICO Public Affairs Advisory communication consulting organization; (2) actively involved in the formulation and implementation of the communication strategy during the Ultra Micro-States-Owned Enterprise Holding (UMi Holding); (3) possessing experience and competence in the fields of corporate communication, media relations, or crisis management; and (4) willing to provide in-depth information concerning communication strategy and media management.

Based on these criteria, the research informants consist of three individuals: Neneng Herbawati as President Director of IGICO Public Affairs Advisory, Siti Munawaroh as Communication Consultant at IGICO, and Algooth Putranto as IGICO Advisor. These three informants represent different levels within the organization; strategic decision-maker, technical implementer, and advisor, thereby enabling triangulation of internal perspectives in a vertical manner (Denzin et al., 2023).

This design reflects a methodological choice with an inherent source of bias rather than merely a limitation. All three informants are affiliated with IGICO Public Affairs Advisory, so the study reconstructs the media framing process solely from the consultancy's own vantage point. Perspectives from journalists, editors, and client representatives at PT BRI, PT Pegadaian, and PT PNM, who were equally central to the media relations process, are not represented in the primary data and are not claimed to be. The findings reported below should therefore be read as an account of how IGICO constructed and interpreted its own communication strategy, not as a triangulated or externally verified reconstruction of the framing process as a whole.

This study employs two data collection techniques: in-depth interviews and documentation study, drawing from two types of data: primary and secondary data (Harahap and Sazali, 2020). In-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2018) with all three informants to obtain data on communication strategy, the media framing process, media relationship management, and

perceptions of the coverage of the Ultra Micro-Stated-Owned Enterprise Holding (UMi Holding) formation. The interview guide was developed based on the dimensions of the 7Cs model and framing theory, so that questions were systematically linked to the analytical framework employed. The semi-structured interview technique was selected to allow the researcher to explore informants' experiences and perspectives in depth, while also providing flexibility to explore themes that emerge unexpectedly during the interview process.

Documentation study was conducted on various documents related to the communication process of the Ultra Micro-Stated-Owned Enterprise Holding (UMi Holding), encompassing press releases, media coverage reports, company publications, and other communication documents produced during the period October 2020 to September 2021. Documentation was used to understand the construction of communication messages delivered by the organization to the media and the public, while also serving as a verification basis for information obtained through interviews. The use of documents as a secondary data source also strengthens the study's ability to trace framing practices in concrete terms through textual analysis of press releases and media reports. Data analysis employs the Miles et al. (2014) interactive analysis model, consisting of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, with the integration of coding procedures to ensure the linkage of analysis to the theoretical framework.

The media monitoring data referenced in this study, comprising 11,206 news items collected between October 2020 and September 2021, with a tone distribution of 52% positive, 44% neutral, and 4% negative, were derived from IGICO Public Affairs Advisory's internal monitoring reports compiled throughout the project period. The monitoring process covered national, regional, and international media outlets across print, online, and broadcast platforms, using keyword-based tracking aligned with the key issues and entities involved in the Ultra Micro-Stated-Owned Enterprise Holding (UMi Holding) formation. As this data was produced by the consulting firm itself rather than by an independent third party, it serves in this study primarily as documentary evidence of the scale and tone of media coverage as perceived and recorded by the strategic communication actor under examination, rather than as an independently verified measure of media output. This positioning is consistent with the constructivist paradigm adopted in this research, in which the consultant's own records and interpretations constitute a legitimate and analytically meaningful source of data (Denzin et al., 2023). Nonetheless, future studies are encouraged to complement such internal monitoring data with independent media content analysis to enable a more rigorous assessment of the relationship between framing strategies and actual coverage outcomes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that media relations in the context of organizational transformation extend beyond the function of information distribution and operate as a process of strategic narrative construction. In the case of the formation of the Ultra Micro-

Stated-Owned Enterprise Holding (UMi Holding), media relations activities conducted by IGICO Public Affairs Advisory were designed not only to disseminate information but also to establish legitimacy and shape public understanding regarding the integration of BRI, Pegadaian, and PNM. Rather than functioning solely as intermediaries between organizations and journalists, PR consultants actively participated in constructing narratives, designing key messages, and managing relationships with journalists on behalf of their clients (Doorley and Garcia, 2025). This role was confirmed directly by NH, President Director of IGICO.

As documented in IGICO's internal media monitoring reports for the period October 2020 to September 2021, 52% of the 11,206 news items related to the formation of the Ultra Micro-Stated-Owned Enterprise Holding (UMi Holding) were classified as positive, 44% as neutral, and only 4% as negative (IGICO, 2021). Consistent with the constructivist paradigm adopted in this study, these figures are treated here not as independently verified proof of communication outcomes, but as the consultancy's own documentary record of the media environment it sought to shape, one that is analytically meaningful precisely because it reflects how the strategic communication actor under study interpreted and reported its own work. Read together with the interview data, this record is consistent with a pattern of systematic communication effort aimed at constructing and maintaining narratives regarding the collaboration among BRI, Pegadaian, and PNM, rather than evidence that any particular effect was thereby proven. The following sections discuss these findings based on the seven dimensions of the 7Cs model and their implications for media framing during organizational transformation.

Table 1. Summary of Key Findings

Dimension / Theme	Key Finding	Illustrative Source
Pre-framing	Framing began before publication, through audience research, issue mapping, risk identification, and narrative design conducted by the consultant.	Interview, NH
Keying	Terms such as “acquisition” and “takeover” were deliberately replaced with “collaboration” and “synergy”.	Interview, NH; IGICO, 2021
Competitive communication arena	Media coverage was contested by counter-narratives from labor unions, described by informants as “consultant against consultant”.	Interview, NH
Credibility (7Cs)	Built through anchor-media selection and use of Key Opinion Leaders (KOL) to increase message acceptance.	Interview, NH; AP
Content & Clarity (7Cs)	Messages were tailored to each medium’s audience and filtered before publication when information was uncertain.	Interview, SM; AP

Continuity & Consistency (7Cs)	Three to four pieces of content were produced weekly across nearly one year to sustain narrative dominance.	Interview, NH
Channels & Capability of Audience (7Cs)	155 press releases were distributed through segmented, multi-channel management with audience-appropriate language.	Document analysis; IGICO, 2021
Media environment (documentary record)	Of 11,206 monitored news items, 52% were recorded as positive, 44% neutral, 4% negative in the consultancy's internal reports.	IGICO, 2021 (unverified by third party)

Framing as a Pre-Communication Practice: Extending Goffman's Theory

Framing theory as introduced by Goffman (1974) and developed in communication studies as a process of selecting and emphasizing certain aspects of reality to shape how audiences understand an issue has long been dominantly applied to analyze how media and journalists frame coverage. Previous studies, including Kuan et al. (2021) on framing theory in international public relations, Nuffus and Rohaningsih (2021) on online media framing, and Afrilia et al. (2023) on the digital competencies of government public relations officers, generally position media organizations and journalists as the primary actors in frame construction. The findings of this study suggest a broader analytical perspective by showing that framing processes may begin before media production takes place.

At Goffman's conceptual level, the primary framework is the basic framework that enables individuals to construct meaning toward social situations (Zerubavel, 2024; Jacobsen and Smith, 2022). In the case of IGICO, the primary framework consisting of narratives of "collaboration", "synergy", and "financial inclusion" did not emerge from journalistic processes but was systematically constructed by PR consultants well before the issue entered the editorial room. NH described the intensity of this design:

*"When we make a communication strategy proposal, it can run to 100 pages. We truly reset a program plan that we had already carried out at the beginning."
(Interview with NH, June 2025)*

The keying process, the transformation of meaning toward an event according to a particular social context (Zerubavel, 2024; Jacobsen and Smith, 2022), hinged on highly calculated word selection. Terms such as "acquisition", "takeover", and "domination" were replaced by "collaboration", "synergy", and "integration", while the narrative of "people's economy" was used as a symbol that already carried strong legitimacy in Indonesian public discourse. This keying strategy is consistent with the finding that the theme of "BRI, Pegadaian, PNM collaboration" dominated 56% of all coverage recorded in the consultancy's monitoring data (IGICO, 2021), although, as noted above, this association cannot be read as independently verified proof of the strategy's causal effect on coverage.

At the media level, the findings also confirm the dynamic nature of framing processes. As discussed earlier, journalists do not always passively receive organizational messages. Media retain their independence in constructing reality and determining the framing of coverage. This is evident in the emergence of counter-narratives highlighting threats to people's cooperatives, economic neo-colonialism, and corporate domination. The relationship between communication consultants and the media is therefore dynamic and negotiative, rather than unidirectional (Prager and Hameleers, 2021), requiring continuous media monitoring and narrative adjustment. This situation is reflected in the following statement by NH:

"Consultant against consultant. The Pegadaian Union was quite active in hiring consultants, holding press conferences, distributing releases, and so on." (interview with NH, June 2025)

The phenomenon of "consultant against consultant" points to a dimension that has received limited attention in previous studies, including Hagelstein et al. (2021) on the moral challenges of digital public relations, Perreault et al. (2024) on the boundaries between journalism and public relations, and Tam et al. (2022) on public relations in strategic management. These findings suggest that the media relations arena should not be understood merely as a space of interaction between organizations and journalists, but also as a field of contestation involving communication consultants representing different interests.

Integrative Validation of the 7Cs Model in SOE Organizational Transformation

The findings demonstrate that the seven elements of the 7Cs model proposed by Cutlip, Center, and Broom (Broom and Sha, 2013) operate in an integrated and mutually reinforcing manner in managing communication during organizational transformation. Although the model has been widely discussed in studies of effective communication (Hartiana, 2024), the present findings provide empirical evidence of its applicability in the context of SOE holding formation. Rather than functioning independently, the seven dimensions collectively formed a communication system that enabled IGICO Public Affairs Advisory to construct and maintain favorable narratives regarding the Ultra Micro-States-Owned Enterprise Holding (UMi Holding).

The element of credibility was built through a combination of authoritative figures, authoritative media, and a message validation process that takes into account legal, communicative, and political sensitivity aspects. The selection of anchor media and the use of key opinion leaders (KOL) became the primary strategy for building public trust. As explained by NH:

"Why did we channel the question to Bisnis Indonesia? Because if Bisnis asks, all media will publish it." (interview with NH, June 2025)

This was reinforced by AP, who stated:

"We involve KOLs. They have credibility in the eyes of the audience, so messages can be more readily accepted." (interview with AP, June 2025)

These findings indicate that credibility in practice also encompasses communication risk management that is not explicitly described in the theoretical formulation of the 7Cs model. Meanwhile, context was shaped by a reading of the social, economic, political, and geographical conditions surrounding the Ultra Micro-States-Owned Enterprise Holding (UMi Holding) formation, including mapping of sensitive regions, leveraging the momentum of post-pandemic economic recovery, and anticipating the various political interests involved (Budianto, 2023; Poell et al., 2023; Shao, 2023).

The content element demonstrates the transformation of the communication consultant's role from mere information provider to manager of narrative architecture through press releases, press conferences, and media briefings (Firdausi and Dewi, 2021). Content production was based on audience research and tailored to media characteristics so that messages became more relevant and targeted. SM affirmed:

"We also adjust to the characteristics of the media that will publish it. Because each media outlet has a different target, they don't treat everything the same way." (interview with SM, June 2025)

AP also added:

"We start with audience research, including their values and needs. So the message can be on target." (interview with AP, June 2025)

Meanwhile, clarity was realized through the use of simple language, analogies close to the audience's daily life, and strict word selection to avoid ambiguity, in line with the press release effectiveness principles articulated by (Firdausi and Dewi, 2021). In practice, information that is not yet clear is filtered before publication, as explained by SM:

"If we're already doubtful, we skip it. But if it's already clear, we're also fair with them." (interview with SM, June 2025)

The element of continuity and consistency became an important factor in establishing narrative dominance through sustained content production across mass media and social media. NH explained:

"If information is fed to people every day, they will believe it. So we have our own theory in our company." (interview with NH, June 2025)

This practice reflects the concepts of the familiarity effect and agenda setting while also supporting Strauß's (2021) findings regarding the importance of communication consistency in shaping public perception. The strategy of producing three to four pieces of content per week over nearly one year, together with the integration of social media and mass media, suggests that cross-channel consistency creates a cumulative effect on audience perception.

The channels element depended on the selection of media based on audience segmentation and multi-channel management supported by consultant specialization for each institution and communication platform. In practice, press releases and press conferences as media relations instruments (Amelia et al., 2024; Khusu et al., 2023) were used intensively, as evidenced by the production of 155 press releases in less than one year. These findings indicate that the modern press release functions not only as an information vehicle but also as a coordinated agenda-setting instrument, consistent with the findings of Liu and Zhang (2021). The capability of the audience element rested on the linguistic and conceptual simplification of messages to match the audience's comprehension capacity, including in the selection of influencers with no political affiliations to maintain source credibility.

Overall, the findings indicate that the seven elements of the 7Cs model do not operate separately but form an integrated communication system in managing organizational transformation. In addition to demonstrating the applicability of the model in the context of SOE transformation, the findings also reveal several operational dimensions that received limited attention in previous discussions of the model, namely communication risk management, geographic sensitivity mapping, and communication resource specialization. These dimensions illustrate how the principles of the 7Cs model are implemented and adapted in the context of large-scale public policy transformation.

Strategic Communication in Organizational Transformation: Beyond Conventional Media Relations

The typology of public relations communication models proposed by Grunig and Hunt (1984) and discussed by Lackovic et al. (2021) finds strong empirical illustration in the case of the Ultra Micro Holding. The findings indicate that IGICO did not rely on a single communication model, but pragmatically combined press agency/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetric, and two-way symmetric communication according to communication objectives and issue dynamics. The press agency/publicity model was reflected in intensive content production aimed at reinforcing positive narratives, while the public information model was evident in the preparation of 155 press releases that adhered to journalistic standards Firdausi and Dewi (2021).

At the same time, media monitoring and narrative adjustment based on public opinion dynamics demonstrated the practice of two-way asymmetric communication, whereas focus group discussions, media training for company spokespersons (Andari et al.,

2023), and engagement with affected groups represented elements of two-way symmetric communication.

The findings also support the relevance of the competencies identified by Doorley and Garcia (2025), including communication skills, situational analysis, crisis management, branding, and digital media literacy. These competencies were reflected in the management of counter-narratives from labor unions, the use of digital media to enhance message visibility, and the deployment of symbols such as "people's economy" and "micro enterprises moving up" as strategic branding instruments. Taken together, these findings suggest that contemporary communication consultancy requires the ability to integrate multiple communication models and strategic competencies simultaneously.

Previous studies have predominantly focused on image management, crisis communication, framing practices, and public relations competencies in relatively stable organizational settings (Hagelstein et al., 2021; Perreault et al., 2024; Kuan et al., 2021; Afrilia et al., 2023; Tam et al., 2022; Strauß, 2021; Nuffus and Rohaningsih, 2021; Liu and Zhang, 2021; Yudarawati and Gregory, 2022). The present findings indicate that communication in the formation of an SOE holding company involves more complex interactions among organizations, government institutions, parliament, media, labor unions, and Ultra Micro communities. In this context, organizational communication functions not only as an internal coordination mechanism (Irwanti, 2022; Latifah, 2020), but also as a strategic instrument for managing legitimacy and public acceptance.

The findings further confirm the importance of external communication in building relationships, reputation, and public trust (Nauli and Wardasari, 2022). They also demonstrate that communication channel diversity and a proactive approach constitute strategic requirements in the context of organizational transformation (Maryam et al., 2024; Rizqiyah, 2021).

The case of the Ultra Micro-States-Owned Enterprise Holding (UMi Holding) illustrates the importance of integrating the elements of the 7Cs model in building stakeholder support and advancing the national financial inclusion agenda (Alkaraan, 2021; Untsa, 2022). Consistent with previous studies emphasizing the role of media relations in shaping public perceptions (Chen and Koo, 2022; Strauß, 2021), the findings also indicate that the complexity of large-scale organizational transformation cannot be optimally managed solely by internal public relations units (Amelia et al., 2024; Caryarini et al., 2024). Consequently, the involvement of professional communication consultants becomes an important factor in managing institutional transformation on a broader scale (Erlianti et al., 2024).

Strategic Narrative Construction Model in Organizational Transformation

Based on the synthesis of the findings, this study proposes a conceptual model termed the *Strategic Narrative Construction Model in Organizational Transformation*

(Figure 1). The model suggests that successful communication during organizational transformation depends not only on media relations activities but also on the ability to construct, manage, and sustain narratives strategically before issues enter the public sphere. The findings indicate that the process of building public legitimacy unfolds through several interconnected stages involving multiple actors, interests, and communication dynamics.

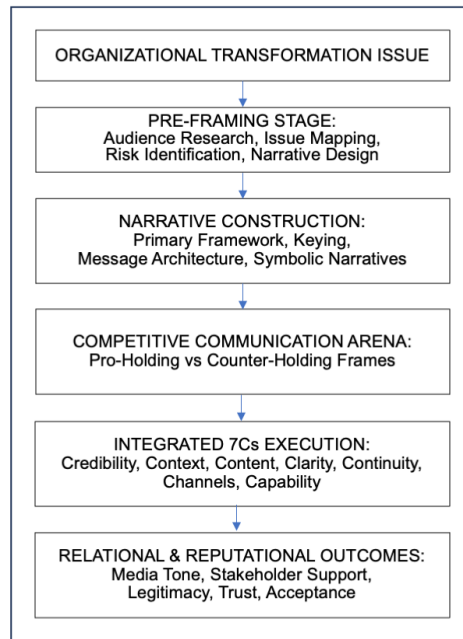


Figure 1. Strategic Narrative Construction Model for Organizational Transformation Communication

The model begins with the emergence of an *organizational transformation issue*, namely policies or organizational changes that may generate uncertainty, resistance, and competing interpretations among stakeholders. In the case of the Ultra Micro Holding, the transformation process involved not only organizational integration but also broader economic, political, and social dimensions that required systematic communication management.

Before issues were communicated to the public, communication consultants conducted issue mapping, communication risk identification, stakeholder analysis, and key message formulation. These findings suggest that framing processes may begin during communication planning rather than only when media organizations produce news content. Consequently, the pre-framing stage serves as an important foundation for organizational narrative formation, since the initial interpretive framework is established before messages enter the public sphere.

The interpretive framework was subsequently translated into *narrative construction* through the development of a primary framework, the keying process, message architecture, and the use of symbols and narratives emphasizing collaboration, synergy, integration, people's economy, and micro enterprises moving up. However, these narratives did not evolve in a neutral environment. Various actors representing different interests simultaneously shaped and contested the meaning of the policy. This condition created a competitive communication arena, a space where narratives supporting organizational transformation (pro-holding frames) interacted with counter-narratives (counter-holding frames) emerging across media and the broader public sphere.

To manage such contestation, communication strategies were implemented through an integrated 7Cs execution encompassing credibility, context, content, clarity, continuity and consistency, channels, and capability of audience. These elements operated in an interconnected manner to strengthen message legitimacy, adapt communication to audience characteristics, and maintain narrative consistency across communication channels.

Ultimately, these processes produced relational and reputational outcomes, reflected in the predominance of positive news coverage, growing stakeholder support, strengthened organizational legitimacy, increasing public trust, and broader acceptance of the transformation process. Taken together, the findings suggest that communication during organizational transformation proceeds through a series of interconnected stages, beginning with the development of an initial interpretive framework, followed by narrative construction, the management of meaning contestation, and the implementation of integrated communication practices that contribute to sustained legitimacy and organizational reputation.

Because the Strategic Narrative Construction Model is derived from a single case and a single set of internal informants, its validity at this stage should be understood as explanatory and heuristic rather than confirmatory. The model offers a plausible account of how narrative construction unfolded in this particular instance of SOE holding formation, not a tested causal sequence that has been shown to generalize across settings. Its transferability is most plausible for other cases sharing similar scope conditions: large-scale, state-linked organizational transformations that are politically visible, involve multiple institutional actors, and unfold over an extended communication timeline. It is least established for crisis-driven, small-scale, or purely commercial rebranding contexts, which were not examined here. Establishing the model's validity beyond this single case would require future comparative or multi-case research, ideally incorporating the external perspectives (journalists, client organizations, regulators) that the present design does not capture.

Theoretical Implications

This study makes theoretical contributions to the study of strategic communication, media relations, and framing by demonstrating that the framing process does not only occur at the media level as described by Goffman (1974) and previous research (Kuan et al., 2021; Nuffus and Rohaningsih, 2021), but has begun from the communication planning stage through audience research, issue mapping, risk identification, and narrative design before messages enter the public sphere. These findings indicate that meaning construction in organizational communication is a process that unfolds in stages and involves the active role of communication consultants in building an initial interpretive framework for a policy.

Furthermore, this study validates the application of the 7Cs model (Broom and Sha, 2013; Hartiana, 2024) in the context of organizational transformation. Research findings demonstrate that the elements of credibility, context, content, clarity, continuity and consistency, channels, and capability of audience do not operate separately but form an integrated communication system in supporting the formation of public legitimacy and the management of media relations.

The totality of research findings is synthesized into the Strategic Narrative Construction Model in Organizational Transformation. This model shows that organizational transformation communication unfolds through a series of interrelated stages, beginning from the emergence of an organizational transformation issue, the formation of an initial interpretive framework (pre-framing), narrative construction, contestation of meaning in the public sphere (competitive communication arena), integrated communication implementation through the 7Cs model, through to the formation of organizational legitimacy and reputation. This study thereby enriches the literature on public relations–media relations and strategic communication (Hagelstein et al., 2021; Perreault et al., 2024; Tam et al., 2022) by showing that communication in large-scale organizational transformation processes does not proceed in a linear fashion but constitutes a dynamic process of meaning negotiation among various actors and narratives competing in the public sphere.

Practical Implications

In practical terms, this study demonstrates that large-scale organizational transformation, including the formation of SOE holding companies, requires communication strategies designed well before the policy is announced to the public. Systematic communication planning, issue mapping, and ongoing narrative management are prerequisites for building stakeholder acceptance and maintaining organizational legitimacy (Alkaraan, 2021). These findings also affirm the importance of sensitivity to term selection and message construction, as semantic aspects can influence how the public interprets a policy. For PR consultants and communication practitioners, the research results confirm the importance of cross-disciplinary competencies encompassing communication skills, situational analysis, crisis management, branding, and digital media

literacy (Doorley and Garcia, 2025), which need to be complemented by social listening and real-time media monitoring capabilities to detect and respond quickly to counter-narratives.

For regulators and policymakers, findings regarding narrative contestation demonstrate that a well-organized communication strategy can significantly shape public narrative dominance. Accordingly, strengthening investigative journalism capacity, enhancing the digital competencies of government PR officers (Afrilia et al., 2023), and developing public media literacy become important balancing mechanisms. Furthermore, an approach that integrates public relations and development communication (Yudarwati and Gregory, 2022) warrants consideration in the management of institutional transformation communication, so that the communication process is not only oriented toward message dissemination but also promotes public participation and engagement in the organizational change process.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that media relations in the context of organizational transformation can no longer be understood merely as information distribution activity, but as a process of strategic narrative construction. The case of Ultra Micro Holding formation shows that public relations consultants play an active role in designing public interpretive frameworks through narrative formulation, symbol management, media relations, and communication agendas before issues enter the public sphere. These findings extend framing theory by showing that framing begins at the pre-framing stage, when the organization conducts audience research, issue mapping, communication risk identification, and key narrative design. This study also identifies the existence of a competitive communication arena, a space of contestation between competing narratives vying to influence public opinion and legitimacy.

From the perspective of strategic communication, this study validates the application of the 7Cs model in the context of SOE organizational transformation and demonstrates that its seven elements operate in an integrated manner in building organizational legitimacy and public acceptance. Furthermore, this study proposes the Strategic Narrative Construction Model in Organizational Transformation. The model explains transformation communication as a staged process: an organizational transformation issue triggers a pre-framing stage, which feeds into narrative construction and a competitive communication arena, and is then carried out through integrated 7Cs execution to produce relational and reputational outcomes. This model suggests that the legitimacy of organizational transformation, as constructed and perceived within the public sphere, is shaped not only by policy substance but also by the organization's ability to construct, sustain, and negotiate narratives on an ongoing basis.

This study acknowledges that its single-case design, with all informants drawn exclusively from within IGICO Public Affairs Advisory, limits the scope of perspectives

captured, particularly those of journalists, editors, and client representatives from PT BRI, PT Pegadaian, and PT PNM, who were equally central to the media relations process. Furthermore, the media monitoring data cited were sourced from IGICO's own internal reporting, and the absence of independent verification means these figures should be treated as indicative rather than conclusive evidence of communication outcomes. These limitations notwithstanding, the single-case approach was deliberately chosen to achieve analytical depth in an empirically underexplored phenomenon, and the Strategic Narrative Construction Model proposed here is best understood as a conceptual starting point whose applicability across different organizational contexts remains an important avenue for future research.

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