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DIGITAL COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS

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Abstract: This article examines how digital communication channels and social media are reshaping public relations in school management. As families increasingly expect timely, accessible, and interactive information, schools are shifting from one-way announcements toward continuous, dialogic communication conducted largely through websites, messaging groups, and social-media pages. Using a structured narrative review of scholarship on public relations, stakeholder engagement, and digital leadership, the study compares traditional and digital channels, identifies the governance conditions under which digital communication strengthens rather than erodes trust, addresses risks such as misinformation, privacy, and uneven access, and outlines a staged model for building a school's digital communication capacity. Illustrative tables and figures present a conceptual, explicitly hypothetical framework rather than measured data. The review concludes that digital tools expand reach and responsiveness but deliver value only when embedded in a planned communication strategy with clear roles, verification, two-way feedback, and protection of personal data. The findings are of practical relevance for strengthening school–community relations in Uzbekistan.

Keywords: school management; public relations; digital communication; social media; stakeholder engagement; parental involvement; crisis communication; data privacy; Uzbekistan.

INTRODUCTION

The modern school operates as an open institution whose success depends not only on internal pedagogical processes but also on the relationships it builds with parents, the local community, and wider society. Public relations—the systematic effort to establish trust, mutual understanding, and cooperation between a school and its social environment—has therefore become an important function of school management [1, 2].

The communication environment in which this function is performed has changed rapidly. Websites, messaging applications, and social-media platforms now mediate a large share of contact between schools and families, enabling faster, broader, and more interactive communication than traditional channels alone [3, 4]. For many parents, a school's messaging group or social-media page has become the primary point of daily contact with the institution, displacing the printed notice and the occasional meeting. This shift changes not only the speed of communication but also its character, moving it from periodic and formal toward continuous and conversational.

These tools create new opportunities for engagement, but they also introduce risks—misinformation, reputational exposure, privacy concerns, and unequal access—that must be managed deliberately. A school that adopts digital channels without a strategy may find that rumors spread faster than official information, that sensitive data is exposed, or that families without reliable connectivity are left behind. The question for school management is therefore not whether to use digital communication, which is now unavoidable, but how to use it responsibly and effectively.

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The objective of this article is to clarify how digital communication and social media can be integrated into school public relations and to identify the conditions under which they strengthen trust and cooperation. Three questions guide the review: how digital channels differ from traditional ones; what governance conditions make digital communication effective; and how associated risks can be mitigated in the school context. The article first describes its methodology, then reviews the conceptual foundations of public relations, compares channels, presents governance indicators and a staged capacity model, discusses risks and limitations, and closes with conclusions for Uzbekistan.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employs a structured narrative literature review and conceptual synthesis rather than an empirical survey or an analysis of institutional data. This approach is suited to integrating insights across public-relations theory, the literature on social media and digital leadership, and guidance on crisis communication, in order to build a coherent framework for practice. The evidence base includes foundational work on public relations and stakeholder theory, scholarship on social media and digital leadership in education, and guidance on crisis communication [1–12]. Sources were selected for relevance to school–community relations, communication channels, and national applicability.

The analytical procedure consisted of five steps: (i) distinguishing traditional and digital communication channels; (ii) comparing their strengths and limitations; (iii) identifying governance indicators for responsible digital communication; (iv) outlining a staged model for building digital communication capacity; and (v) synthesizing practical recommendations. Where tables and figures are used, their values are conceptual design examples, clearly labeled as hypothetical, and must not be read as measured reach or engagement statistics. The review draws only on publicly available scholarship and does not include primary data from schools, a limitation noted in the discussion.

RESULTS

The synthesis distinguishes two complementary communication layers. Traditional channels—parent meetings, open-door days, printed notices, and individual conversations—are strong at building direct, relational trust but limited in speed and reach. Digital channels—the school website, messaging groups, and social-media pages—offer immediacy and broad coverage but can weaken relational depth and raise new governance concerns if used carelessly [3, 5].

Table 1. Comparison of traditional and digital school communication channels

Dimension	**Traditional channels**	**Digital channels**
Primary strength	Relational trust, nuance	Speed, reach, interactivity
Typical forms	Meetings, notices, visits	Website, messaging, social media
Main limitation	Slow, limited coverage	Shallow depth, misinformation risk
Feedback	Direct but infrequent	Frequent but harder to moderate

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Best use	Sensitive or complex matters	Timely updates, broad awareness

Effective digital public relations is not merely one-way broadcasting. In the contemporary view, public relations is a two-way, dialogic process in which the school both informs its public and listens to it, taking concerns and feedback into account [1, 6]. Digital channels make such dialogue technically easier—through comments, polls, and direct messages—but they also require active moderation, timely response, and clear rules of engagement. A page on which questions go unanswered, or on which critical comments are deleted rather than addressed, can damage trust more than no page at all.

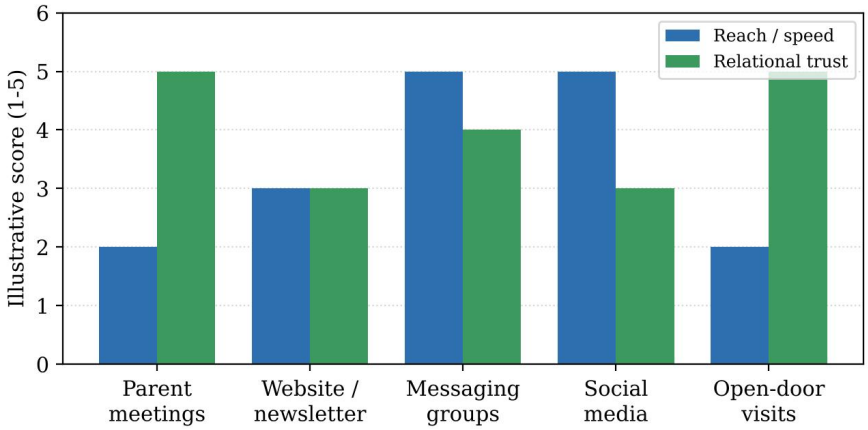

Figure 1. Illustrative trade-off between reach and relational trust across channels (conceptual framework, not measured data).

Figure 1 expresses a design trade-off rather than empirical magnitudes: messaging groups and social media score high on reach and speed but lower on relational trust, while parent meetings and open-door visits show the reverse. The implication is that channels are complementary and should be combined, with the medium matched to the message. Routine updates and broad announcements suit digital channels; sensitive, complex, or emotional matters are better handled through direct contact. The ordinal values are teaching aids only.

Responsible digital communication can be assessed against a set of governance indicators. These indicators translate the abstract goal of "trust" into observable practices that a school can plan for, monitor, and improve. They span the accuracy of information, the responsiveness of the school to inquiries, the protection of personal data, the consistency of the message across channels, and the inclusiveness of access.

Table 2. Governance indicators for responsible digital communication

Indicator	**Interpretation**	**Practical implication**
Accuracy	Verified before posting	Prevents misinformation
Responsiveness	Timely reply to queries	Sustains trust and dialogue

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Privacy	Protection of personal data	Legal and ethical compliance
Consistency	Aligned message across channels	Coherent institutional voice
Inclusion	Access for all families	Avoids a digital divide

Building a school's digital communication capacity can be understood as a staged process rather than a single decision to "go online." In the first stage, the school defines its communication goals, audiences, and responsible personnel, and sets simple rules for tone, accuracy, and privacy. In the second stage, it establishes channels and produces regular, reliable content. In the third stage, it develops genuine two-way engagement—inviting questions, running polls, and responding promptly. In the fourth stage, it monitors, moderates, and evaluates its communication, adjusting practice in light of feedback and incidents. Each stage depends on the one before it: engagement without clear rules invites inconsistency, and channels without monitoring invite misinformation.

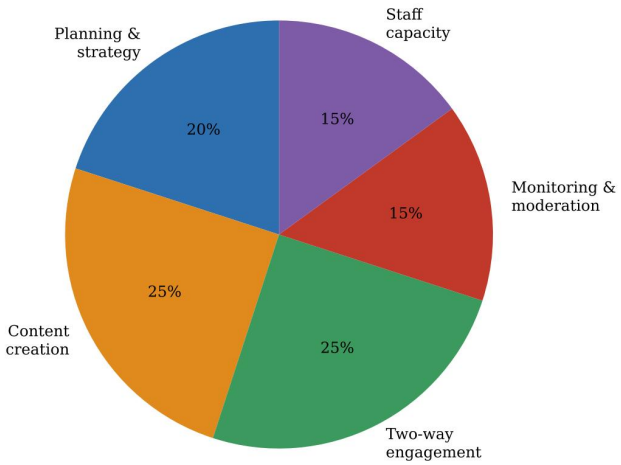

Figure 2. Illustrative distribution of effort across components of a school digital-communication program (conceptual framework, not measured data).

Figure 2 emphasizes that content creation is only one part of a functioning program. Planning, two-way engagement, monitoring and moderation, and staff capacity together determine whether digital communication builds trust or merely adds noise. The proposed proportions are a conceptual planning aid, not expenditure or staffing statistics from any institution.

DISCUSSION

The review supports treating digital communication as an amplifier of a school's public-relations strategy rather than a replacement for relational contact. A school with a weak communication culture will not fix it merely by opening a social-media page; conversely, a planned strategy with clear goals, defined audiences, and designated responsibilities can use digital tools to extend reach and responsiveness substantially [2, 7].

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Three risks deserve particular attention. First, misinformation and rumor spread quickly online, so timely, honest, and verified communication—especially during a crisis—is essential to protect institutional reputation [8, 9]. A school that communicates openly and quickly during a difficult event is far better placed than one that stays silent and allows speculation to fill the vacuum. Second, the handling of children's and families' data on digital platforms raises privacy obligations that schools must respect, collecting only necessary information, controlling access, and being cautious about publishing images or details of minors. Third, reliance on digital channels can exclude families with limited connectivity or digital skills, so traditional channels must be retained to ensure equitable access.

A further consideration concerns the professional capacity of staff. Effective digital communication requires skills in writing for different audiences, basic design, moderation, and crisis response that many educators have not been formally trained in. Where responsibility for communication is left informal—added to the duties of whoever is willing—quality tends to be uneven. Treating communication as a defined role with appropriate training and support is therefore an important condition for success.

The argument should not be overstated. Digital engagement metrics such as followers or likes are not the same as genuine trust or involvement, and visible activity can mask shallow relationships. The value of digital public relations lies in whether it supports real two-way communication and authentic school–community partnership, not in the volume of posts [6, 10]. As a conceptual review, this article cannot quantify the effect of digital communication on trust or engagement; its contribution is a framework to guide practice and future empirical study.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

Several practical implications follow for school leaders. First, each school should develop an annual communication plan that sets goals, identifies audiences, assigns responsibilities, and specifies which channels carry which kinds of message. Second, clear internal rules—on accuracy, tone, privacy, and response times—should govern the use of digital channels, so that communication does not depend on the judgment of individuals in the moment. Third, schools should invest in the communicative competencies of leaders and staff through targeted training.

Fourth, two-way engagement should be built in deliberately, through mechanisms such as question-and-answer sessions, surveys, and prompt replies to messages, so that families experience the school as listening rather than merely broadcasting. Fifth, a simple crisis-communication protocol—specifying who speaks, through which channels, and how quickly—prepares the school to respond calmly and credibly when difficult events occur. Taken together, these measures turn digital tools from a source of risk into an instrument of trust.

CONCLUSION

Digital communication and social media have become integral to school public relations, expanding the speed, reach, and interactivity of contact with families and the community. Yet their benefits are conditional: they are realized only when digital tools are embedded in a planned communication strategy with clear roles, verification of information, genuine two-way feedback, protection of personal data, and continued attention to equitable access.

For schools in Uzbekistan, where the mahalla community and strong parental engagement provide a favorable foundation, the thoughtful integration of digital channels offers a promising way to deepen openness and cooperation. Recommended measures include an annual

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communication plan, clear internal rules, systematic but responsible use of digital channels, two-way engagement with parents, a crisis-communication protocol, and the development of leaders' and teachers' communicative competencies. Future research should develop indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of digital public relations in school settings and examine how it relates to parental involvement and institutional trust.

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