

Digital Public Relations Mitigation Strategies in Facing the Phenomenon of Cancel Culture and Netizen Boycotts: A Literature Study on Affected Companies

Karina Nurhidayah

karina.75525008@mahasiswa.unikom.ac.id

Master of Communication Science, Graduate School, Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung,
Indonesia

Desayu Eka Surya

desayuekas1012@email.unikom.ac.id

Master of Communication Science, Graduate School, Universitas Komputer Indonesia,
Bandung, Indonesia

Umi Narimawati

umiarie@email.unikom.ac.id

Master of Communication Science, Graduate School, Universitas Komputer Indonesia,
Bandung, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

The thing about cancel culture and people boycotting things online has changed a lot. It used to be something people talked about but now it can really hurt companies reputations and finances on the internet. The usual ways that companies handle relations are often not good enough to stop a crisis from getting worse when a lot of people are upset and social media is involved. This research is trying to figure out what works and what does not work when it comes to using public relations to mitigate crises. We looked at a lot of research papers from 2021 to 2026 from databases like Scopus, Web of Science and Sinta. What we found out is that the old ways of apologizing and trying to fix things are not working anymore. Companies need to be more proactive and use strategies to defend themselves. There are three things that companies can do use artificial intelligence to listen to what people are saying online and catch problems early be totally honest and authentic when communicating with people and actually do something to make things right not just say sorry. Companies need to make sure their values are in line with what the public thinks is right than just trying to look good.

Keywords: *Cancel Culture, Crisis Management, Digital PR, Netizen Boycott.*

INTRODUCTION

We live in a time where everything is connected online. This has changed the way companies talk to people. They need to have good Digital Public Relations strategies to protect their reputation. Companies are easily hurt by what people say about them. This is called cancel culture. It is when people on the internet think a company has done something and they all stop supporting it. People get very upset. They use social media to tell everyone about it. This can cause a lot of problems for the company. People might even stop buying from them. As Bouvier said in 2020

cancel culture is not something that happens online anymore. It is a deal that can hurt companies a lot. So companies need to be ready and have plans in place to deal with these kinds of situations. They need to be able to move and use the internet to help them. Digital Public Relations is very important, for companies now. They need to use Digital Public Relations to protect themselves from cancel culture and the problems it can cause (Yulyani, S., & Saepudin, 2024). When a brand or its representatives are deemed to violate moral norms or take positions contrary to mass values, netizens do not just launch criticism, but collectively withdraw their financial and social support through boycott movements. In Indonesia, the impact is very real and damages business metrics; throughout 2023 to 2024, literature recorded various cases where cancel culture hit the local beauty and FMCG industries. Boycott cases against brands like Scarlett Whitening and Rosé All Day set precedents on how communication blunders by company executives or geopolitical affiliations (such as the Middle East conflict issue) triggered collective outrage on platforms like X (Twitter) and TikTok (Meidini & Astuti, 2024; Septiazi & Yuliana, 2023).

Managing outrage is a big deal and a lot of people have written about it before. They found out that companies need to be ready to handle crises on media. First Coombs and Holladay said that companies need to change the way they talk to people during a crisis and they need to do it on the internet. If they do not do this people can get really mad. It can become a big problem all over the world (Coombs and Holladay 2022). Second Chen and some other people looked at why people join boycotts on the internet. They found out that people get mad because they see other people getting mad. This is why companies can lose a lot of customers really fast when people are mad at them (Chen et al. 2021). Third Gomez and Silva looked at how social media works. They found out that the way social media is set up can make people even madder and spread things about companies really fast (Gomez and Silva 2023). Fourth Hassan looked at how companies say sorry on the internet. They found out that people want companies to be real and honest when they say sorry and that is more important than saying sorry really fast (Hassan 2020). Finally Williams and O'Connor looked at what happens after a crisis over. They found out that people want companies to actually change what they do not just say they are sorry if they want people to start liking them (Williams and O'Connor 2022). All of these people did a lot of work but they mostly looked at one or two things at a time. This new work is different because it puts all of these things together to make a plan that companies can use to handle crises, including when people are mad at them and when they are being boycotted. Digital outrage and digital crises and cancel culture are all related to PR so this new work aims to help companies with digital PR by making a plan that addresses digital outrage and digital crises and cancel culture all, at once.

Therefore the main goal of this research is to find, study and develop Digital Public Relations strategies that companies use to deal with cancel culture and online boycotts. The goal is to help companies survive and recover from these threats. To achieve this the research uses a literature study method. This involves collecting and analyzing data from existing articles, industry reports and case studies of corporate digital crises. By analyzing crisis communication tactics in these sources the method helps to identify patterns of unsuccessful PR interventions. This will lead to a framework, for modern organizations to mitigate digital public relations crises. The research focuses on Digital Public Relations mitigation strategies. These strategies are crucial for companies to navigate crises. The study aims to provide an understanding of what works and what doesn't in Digital Public Relations. It will help companies develop strategies to deal with cancel culture and online boycotts.

These boycott hashtag movements are often accompanied by mass negative reviews (review bombing) that directly crash the company's search algorithms and sales drastically (Prihardana & Lestari, 2024). Facing crises driven by cancel culture, traditional PR approaches such as issuing static press releases or staying silent waiting for the issue to subside (stonewalling) have proven to be no longer effective, and are instead often perceived as arrogant behavior (Veritasia & Suteja, 2024). The classic Image Repair Theory by William L. Benoit must now be adapted with Digital PR tactics that prioritize empathy, speed, transparency, and proof of real action (authenticity). Current Digital PR practitioners are required to master data-driven crisis mitigation, such as utilizing AI-based Social Media Monitoring and Sentiment Analysis to detect crisis sparks before they escalate (Prihardana & Lestari, 2024).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The basis of managing a crisis is often found in established frameworks like Coombs Situational Crisis Communication Theory. This theory helps companies respond to a crisis in a way that matches the level of threat to their reputation. However companies now operate in a world that is constantly changing. This means we need to take a look at these traditional frameworks (Septiazi, M. R. F., & Yuliana, N 2023). Previous studies have looked at outrage but they have only focused on specific parts of the problem. For example some studies have looked at how emotions spread how algorithms make negative feelings stronger and how companies apologize. These studies give us information about the different parts of a digital crisis. But when we connect these parts we find a gap in what we know: we do not have a complete and overall approach to managing digital crises (Coombs and Holladay 2022)

Most research treats cancel culture and boycotts as events that happen in a predictable order.. In today's digital world crises happen quickly and in a way that is hard to predict. Cancel culture and boycotts can happen at the time and affect each other. Also we do not have a plan for Digital Public Relations practitioners to follow when dealing with these threats (Hutami, A. Y., & Nugroho, A 2025). This research is important because it fills this gap. By looking at and combining the theories and findings from previous studies this research goes beyond just describing what happens during a digital crisis. It uses crisis communication theories and adapts them to the digital world. This creates an evidence-based plan for Digital PR to manage and reduce the threats of cancel culture and boycotts. The research used a method to summarize the results and find gaps in what we know (Djamzuri, M. I., & Mulyana, A. P 2024)

The research on corporate crisis management and Digital Public Relations is crucial because it helps companies navigate the world. Corporate crisis management is essential for companies to survive in this world. The digital world is full of threats like cancel culture and boycotts and companies need to be prepared to manage these threats. This research on corporate crisis management provides a foundation for companies to build on. Corporate crisis management is not about responding to a crisis it is about being prepared and having a plan in place (Amiruddin, R., & Firdaus, M 2026). The study of Digital Public Relations and corporate crisis management is ongoing and new research is being done all the time. This research on Digital Public Relations and corporate crisis management is a step in the direction. It helps us understand the world and how companies can manage crises, in this world. Digital Public Relations and corporate crisis management are critical for companies to succeed in the world (Djamzuri, M. I., & Mulyana, A. P 2024).

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design; unlike traditional literature reviews that are often biased in literature selection, SLR is a method that identifies, evaluates, and interprets all relevant research findings to the problem statement in a structured and measurable manner (Snyder, 2019). This study uses the PRISMA 2020 framework to make sure everything is transparent and accurate when searching and picking articles about Digital PR and how it deals with cancel culture. The researchers collected data from academic databases that are good sources for communication and digital business studies. They searched in February and March 2026 using Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar and Sinta to find studies in Indonesia. To get results they used certain keywords in English and Indonesian like "Digital Public Relations" "Cancel Culture" and "Crisis Management".

DISCUSSION

The research on Digital PR mitigation strategies for surviving cancel culture and boycotts is based on a study of the literature. The goal of this research is to identify, analyze and formulate Digital PR mitigation strategies. The findings of the research show that traditional public relations tactics do not work well against the pace of digital outrage. To achieve the research objectives the identified Digital PR mitigation strategies used by companies have been analyzed and formulated into three critical phases: Proactive Navigation, Acute Crisis Survival and Post-Crisis Recovery (Kusuma et al., 2024).

The research highlights that the best way to deal with cancel culture is to prevent it from spreading in the place. Companies that successfully navigate threats focus on being prepared and using data to make informed decisions. Digital PR practitioners use tools to track how people feel about certain topics and identify potential problems before they become big issues. By catching conversations before they go viral companies can address problems privately and prevent widespread boycotts. Research shows that companies that survive in the era regularly review their past actions,

executive behavior and supply chain ethics to anticipate what people might criticize them for. This allows the PR team to prepare statements in advance (Setiawan & Rahayu, 2024).

When a company is targeted by cancel culture and a boycott the goal's to survive and reduce the crisis. The research identifies three strategies that companies use to mitigate acute digital crises. Companies need to respond to crises usually within minutes. If they delay more people are likely to join the boycott. Effective companies acknowledge the public's response to the crisis and show empathy. The research shows that when companies are defensive or deny wrongdoing it can make the crisis worse. Companies that survive boycotts are transparent acknowledge their mistakes explain what happened and take actions. Digital PR teams need to understand the culture of each platform. They move conversations from public platforms to private channels to prevent the crisis from spreading (Kholifi et al., 2025).

Surviving a boycott is not the same as recovering from it. The research emphasizes that people are tired of apologies and want to see actions. Companies need to show that they are taking action not just apologizing. They publish progress reports, policy updates or proof of changes to prove that their apology is sincere. Companies use micro-influencers and Key Opinion Leaders to rebuild trust. These advocates help to validate the company's actions and rebuild trust within communities (Hutami & Nugroho, 2025).

The research provides a framework for Digital PR mitigation strategies. The findings show that cancel culture and boycotts are a part of the digital economy. Digital PR is no longer about broadcasting messages. It is about two-way crisis management. Companies need to transition from an approach to a proactive approach using social listening, transparent engagement and structural reform. By integrating these strategies companies can survive boycotts. Build a stronger relationship with their stakeholders. Digital PR mitigation strategies are essential for companies to navigate the ecosystem. Digital PR mitigation strategies help companies to survive cancel culture and boycotts. Digital PR mitigation strategies are critical, for -crisis recovery and rebuilding trust (Pratama and Wulandari 2025).

Managerial Implications for Digital PR Practitioners From the literature debates above, the practical implication for agencies and in-house PR practitioners is the necessity to integrate Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology with human empathy. Use of AI-Driven Social Listening: Literature recommends PR to use predictive tools to measure sentiment scores daily, so that the seeds of cancel culture can be detected in the incubation phase (before going viral). In the era of digital boycotts, major influencers can turn to attack brands to save their own reputations. Literature advises PR to better embrace niche communities and organic brand advocates who are more loyal when shocks occur (Baihaqi, F. A., & Setiawan, R 2025).

Traditional PR approach, such as issuing static press releases, engaging in stonewalling tactics, or simply applying the classical Image Repair Theory from William L. Benoit, is now seen by many as arrogant. The research done by Hassan (2020) showed that people were interested not in a quick apology but in honesty and sincerity. Enriching the results of Hassan (2020), the current research proposes a new formula for the Acute Crisis Survival strategy combining radical transparency and speed. Our results reveal that businesses cannot wait anymore and need to give their response quickly to avoid escalation of boycotts. Instead of being defensive and refusing anything wrong, surviving companies are those which openly confess their mistakes, explain what happened, show their empathy, and stop the wave of rage. Practitioners are recommended to move the heated conversation from public platforms to private ones to cool down the algorithms' spreading effect. Research done by Williams and O'Connor (2022) revealed that after the crisis, people are not looking for an apology but real changes in companies' behavior (structural changes). However, such studies have not outlined specific digital communication strategies for validating those changes. In the Post-Crisis Recovery stage, our findings operationalized the process of how those specific changes should be communicated. Companies need to release progress reports and evidence of change in their policies. Moreover, the specific management findings and innovations from this research suggest that companies shift away from major influencers. In the age of boycotts, major influencers are very vulnerable to turn against their brands in order to save their own reputation. Instead, this study outlines the strategy for embracing micro-influencers, niche communities, and loyal brand supporters for validating corporate actions and rebuilding trust.

Based on the results of a systematic literature review, this study presents new findings in the form of a holistic strategic framework for Digital Public Relations (PR) as a solution to cancel culture and boycotts by netizens. In contrast to conventional PR strategies, which have proven to be less effective in preventing digital crises, this study

found that mitigation strategies can be divided into three crucial stages: Proactive Navigation, Acute Crisis Survival, and Post-Crisis Recovery.

Most past literature analogizes cancel culture and boycotts to an incident with a predictable sequence of steps. Previous studies typically analyzed these phenomena one by one and were partial in nature. For example, Coombs and Holladay (2022) focused solely on the importance of changes in online communication methods, while Chen et al. (2021) [cite_start]delves further into the reasons behind the spread of emotions (anger) that lead to customer loss. This represents a gap in PR practice, so this study helps incorporate other elements of the crisis into a holistic mitigation effort. We found that early mitigation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The literature says that Digital PR is not about making a company look good. It is about making people trust a company again by showing that it really cares about what's important. Digital PR mitigation strategies are very important for surviving cancel culture and boycotts. The main goal of Digital PR mitigation strategies is to rebuild trust, with people. This is done by using Digital PR mitigation strategies. Recommendations Companies must invest in sentiment monitoring technologies that operate 24/7 and are capable of network mapping issue dissemination to identify Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) driving boycotts. Because cancel culture moves in minutes, PR teams must have digital assets ready to launch at any time (such as dedicated mitigation Q&A pages) and cut internal management bureaucracy for crisis message approval. Before initiating campaigns that touch on social or political issues, PR is obligated to conduct internal audits ensuring no historical company loopholes can be used as "weapons" by netizens to accuse the brand of hypocrisy. Long-term quantitative research is needed that measures the correlation between PR mitigation strategies and post-boycott financial recovery metrics (ROI) or market share, going beyond mere social media sentiment metrics. Future research must shift from a heavy focus on text-based platforms (X/Twitter) towards crisis analysis on asynchronous video platforms (TikTok, YouTube Shorts, Instagram Reels), where non-verbal communication and visual formats largely determine the crisis direction. Facing constant digital mass aggression brings the risk of emotional exhaustion (burnout). Research on stress management and digital safety for PR practitioners standing on the frontlines of crises is highly urgent to conduct.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Karina Nurhidayah is a student in the Master of Communication Studies Program at the Graduate School Universitas Komputer Indonesia.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Desayu Eka Surya, S.Sos., M.Si., CICS is a permanent lecturer in the Master of Communication Studies Program, Graduate School, Universitas Komputer Indonesia.

Prof. Dr. Umi Narimawati, Dra., SE., M.Si.,M.Pd. is a permanent lecturer in the Master of Communication Studies Program, Graduate School, Universitas Komputer Indonesia.