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Configuration of Communication Power in Digital Public Relations: A Review of The Literature on Organizational Relations, Key Opinion Leaders, and Algorithmic Gatekeeping

Aiman Adi Witjaksono* , Rizki Ayu Budipratiwi, Vera Damayanti
LSPR Institute of Communication & Business, Indonesia
Email: 26284060007@lspr.edu*

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Abstract

Digital public relations (PR) research often examines the relationships among organizations, key opinion leaders (KOLs), intermediaries, and platforms in terms of who controls the message. This article argues that such a perspective is overly narrow. Drawing on an integrative literature review of 45 sources (18 core and 27 supporting) and theoretical perspectives from strategic public relations, platformization, and algorithmic gatekeeping, the article compares communication control across three domains: message production, commercial access, and visibility distribution. Forms of control vary across domains, although these variations also intersect with differences among actors. Organizations not only issue direct instructions but also shape the conditions under which choices are made; intermediaries translate platform logics in context-dependent ways; and platforms establish the rules governing monetization and algorithmic content distribution, often through opaque mechanisms. Influence in one domain appears to extend into others through four mechanisms: performance metrics, income dependence, internalized expectations, and intermediary involvement. However, the reviewed literature provides insufficient evidence to establish that organizational influence over message production and commercial relationships translates into direct authority over platform ranking systems. The proposition that KOLs negotiate more effectively over visibility than over commercial terms remains unverified because the available evidence does not permit meaningful comparisons. Visibility is conceptualized as an enabling condition for communication rather than evidence of an established organization–public relationship. Because the evidence is drawn primarily from influencer marketing, creator studies, and platform studies, the findings are interpreted through a digital PR perspective. The article proposes domain-specific configurations of communication control and the cross-domain transfer of influence as conceptual propositions that require further empirical testing.

INTRODUCTION

The involvement of key opinion leaders (KOLs), influencers, and content creators has expanded the ways in which organizations establish and maintain relationships with their publics (Sumandiyar et al., 2023). Organizations increasingly rely on the credibility and audience networks of external actors; however, such collaborations also raise important questions concerning authority, autonomy, and communication control. Although

organizations may determine campaign objectives and contractual conditions, this authority does not necessarily extend to equivalent control over creators' messages or platform distribution mechanisms. Yuan (2025) describes the centralized capture of value within platform business models, while Annabell et al. (2025) document platform-defined monetization rules and limited obligations toward creators. Consequently, the central practical issue extends beyond identifying who communicates a message to understanding how organizational decisions, commercial access, and algorithmic visibility collectively shape communication processes.

Digital public relations (PR) is conceptualized in this study as the strategic management of organizational communication and relationships within digital environments. Luhukay (2026) describes a transition from one-way message transmission toward greater stakeholder engagement. KOLs are defined as individuals whose expertise, credibility, social standing, or interpersonal relationships may influence audience perceptions and judgments. The terms influencer and content creator retain their specific meanings as employed in the reviewed studies and are not assumed to be interchangeable. Communication power encompasses the capacity to influence content production decisions, access to resources, and conditions governing content distribution. This conceptual distinction is essential because organizational authority, creator credibility, intermediary expertise, and platform infrastructure operate through different mechanisms, even when they intersect within the same communication campaign.

The theoretical framework integrates strategic public relations, platformization, and algorithmic gatekeeping. Grunig and Grunig (2000) associate public relations with the strategic management of organizational relationships, whereas Kent and Taylor (1998) emphasize the importance of dialogic communication. Extending these theoretical perspectives to partnerships involving KOLs represents an interpretive application rather than a relationship directly tested in the present study. Helmond (2015) conceptualizes platformization as the expansion of platform infrastructures and their underlying economic logics. Karlsson et al. (2022) and van Dalen (2023) highlight the importance of distinguishing algorithmic selection, ranking, and recommendation processes from organizational message approval, content moderation, monetization policies, and contractual control. Collectively, these perspectives provide a conceptual foundation for examining communication control across three interconnected domains: message production, commercial access, and visibility distribution, without assuming that any single actor exercises comprehensive authority over all three.

Existing research provides insights into different dimensions of these relationships. Borchers (2023) identifies mechanisms through which marketers influence the conduct of influencers, ranging from scripted instructions and content approval procedures to the structuring of available choices. Musiyiwa and Jacobson (2024), drawing on interviews with influencer relations professionals, examine the roles of contractual arrangements, content review processes, and knowledge transfer in managing sponsorship disclosures. Siciliano (2023) and Liang and Ji (2024) investigate multichannel networks (MCNs), identifying context-dependent forms of intermediation. O'Meara (2019) examines collective resistance among creators, while Liang et al. (2025) synthesize the pressures associated with platform-driven visibility mechanisms. Although these studies demonstrate the importance of

organizational, intermediary, platform, and creator perspectives, they do not employ a unified or directly comparable measure of communication control.

A critical comparison of the literature reveals why the available evidence cannot be synthesized as though all studies examined identical outcomes. Borchers (2023) and Musiyiwa and Jacobson (2024) demonstrate how organizations and intermediaries influence content production and sponsorship disclosure practices, whereas Karlsson et al. (2022) and Kwok (2026) examine how platform mechanisms shape content visibility. Evidence of contractual or editorial influence does not necessarily establish direct authority over algorithmic ranking systems. Similarly, creators' strategies for adapting to platform algorithms should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of bargaining power over compensation or sponsorship agreements. Duffek et al. (2025) further demonstrate that authenticity is assessed differently by brands, influencers, and audiences, suggesting that a single hierarchical interpretation of communication power is insufficient to capture the complexity of these relationships.

The principal research gap lies in the limited synthesis of whether control over message production, commercial access, and visibility distribution represents a unified and transferable form of authority or several unequal, context-dependent forms of influence. Addressing this gap is particularly important for digital PR because organizations remain responsible for managing relationships with their publics, while platforms and intermediaries increasingly shape whether, when, and how organizational communications become visible. The conceptual novelty of this study lies in its systematic comparison of three domains of communication control through four analytical dimensions: sources of influence, control mechanisms, opportunities for negotiation, and reported impacts. This comparison is followed by a conceptual examination of the mechanisms through which influence may extend across domains. Such an approach requires a clear distinction between empirically documented findings, interpretations derived from cross-study comparisons, and conceptual propositions that remain subject to empirical verification, particularly those concerning organizational influence over platform ranking systems.

Accordingly, this study aims to identify and map the sources of influence, mechanisms of control, and opportunities for negotiation within relationships among organizations, KOLs, intermediaries, and digital platforms. It also seeks to explain how these mechanisms interact across the domains of message production, commercial access, and visibility distribution. An integrative literature review is employed to address these interconnected objectives through the systematic interpretation and synthesis of existing research rather than the estimation of causal effects. The study contributes a conceptually bounded framework for understanding communication power that may inform future research on organizational–KOL partnerships, creator autonomy, and algorithmic content distribution. From a practical perspective, the findings may assist digital PR practitioners in distinguishing organizational message approval from commercial bargaining power and platform-mediated reach, while emphasizing that content visibility alone does not constitute sufficient evidence of an established relationship between an organization and its publics.

METHOD

This study employed an integrative literature review to synthesize research on strategic public relations, influencer marketing, digital intermediation, creator studies, and platform governance (Torraco, 2016; Snyder, 2019; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). The analysis focused on published empirical findings and conceptual arguments concerning sources of influence, control mechanisms, negotiation opportunities, and communication outcomes. Relevant literature was identified through searches conducted using Consensus and Google Scholar, focusing on organizational communication, key opinion leaders (KOLs), content creators, intermediaries, and algorithmic gatekeeping. The initial corpus comprised 55 documents, which were subsequently examined for relevance to the research objectives. A supplementary verification search conducted on October 28, 2026, identified additional potentially relevant publications and highlighted limitations in the coverage of the original corpus. Because the initial search records and screening documentation were incomplete, the review did not claim exhaustive coverage or full reproducibility.

Table 1. Example of a Literature Search Formulation Based on the Focus of the Study

Search focus	Example of a search summary
Organizational and KOL relationships	("public relations" OR "strategic communication" OR "influencer marketing") AND ("key opinion leader" OR influencer OR "content creator")
Power and control of communications	("communication power" OR "power relations" OR control) AND (influencer OR creator OR "public relations")
Organizational control of influencers	("influencer relations" OR "influencer marketing") AND (control OR autonomy OR negotiation OR governance)
The role of digital intermediaries	("multi-channel network" OR "creator intermediary" OR "influencer agency") AND (gatekeeping OR intermediation OR monetization)
Platform power and governance	("platform power" OR "platform governance" OR "network gatekeeping") AND (creator OR influencer OR "digital content")
Algorithmic gatekeeping and visibility	("algorithmic gatekeeping" OR "algorithmic visibility" OR "algorithmic power") AND (influencer OR creator OR "content distribution")

Source: Reconstruction of search formulation based on the focus and scope of the research literature, 2026.

Table 2. Literature Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Aspects	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Topic relevance	Discuss power, influence, control, negotiation, or *gatekeeping* in digital communications.	It has no explicable connection to the issue of power or control of communication.
Actors studied	Discuss organizations, KOLs, *influencers*, creators, intermediaries, or platforms relevant to the research question.	Discuss actors or relationships that do not provide a relevant explanation of the focus of the synthesis.
Communication mechanisms	Describe message production, commercial relationships, intermediation, platform governance, or visibility distribution.	It does not provide information about comparable communication mechanisms.
Conceptual contribution	Provide theories, concepts, or arguments that help explain the power relationship of communication.	Not making conceptual contributions that can be used to answer research questions.
Empirical contributions	Present findings regarding control, autonomy, negotiation, access, or visibility practices.	The findings do not have an adequate analytical relationship with the focus of the study.
Source traceability	The identity of the publication and the information used in the synthesis can be checked through the available documents.	Source information is insufficient to confirm the identity of the publication or support the claim to be used.

Source: Formulated based on the research focus and documentation of corpus grouping, 2026.

Table 3. Composition of the Corpus of Literature

Source category	Quantity	Functions in research
Core sources	18	Provide key evidence or explanations about actors, control mechanisms, and communication power relations.
Supporting and comparator sources	27	Reinforcing the conceptual foundation, providing a comparator, or explaining the limits of the application of the findings.
Contextual or backup sources	8	Provides additional information, but is not incorporated into the main synthesis.
Unused resources	2	It is not used because its compatibility with the synthesis focus is considered inadequate.
Total documents	55	The entire corpus of work examined.

Source: Results of the inventory and grouping of the research corpus, 2026.

Source selection was guided by retrospectively established inclusion and exclusion criteria based on thematic relevance, communication mechanisms, empirical or conceptual contributions, and source traceability (Table 2). Of the 55 documents initially identified, 45 were included in the synthesis, comprising 18 core studies and 27 supporting or comparative sources, while eight were retained for contextual reference and two were excluded (Table 3). The selection process prioritized studies addressing organizational, creator, intermediary, and platform relationships across the three domains of communication control. Eligible sources were required to have verifiable bibliographic information and sufficient relevance to the analytical framework. Data extraction focused on research objectives, methodological

approaches, sources of influence, control mechanisms, negotiation opportunities, communication outcomes, and study limitations. A single reviewer conducted the coding and assessed the sources based on methodological reporting, relevance to the research objectives, and empirical scope. Conceptual publications were evaluated for their analytical contributions rather than assigned empirical quality scores.

Table 4. Literature Processing Flow

Stages	Activities	Results
1. Formation of the corpus	Collect and inventory available documents.	The work corpus contains 55 PDFs. The October 28, 2026 verification search is recorded separately.
2. Relevance check	Assess the suitability of objects and the contribution of sources to the focus of the research.	Grouping of synthesized, contextual, and unused sources.
3. Determination of synthesis sources	Groups sources based on their analytical function with retrospective decision rules.	45 synthesis sources: 18 cores and 27 supporters or comparators.
4. Information extraction	Record the design, object, location, actors, influence base, mechanisms, negotiation space, impact, and boundaries of findings, and assess evidence with retrospective rubrics.	Matrix of extraction and assessment of evidence 45 sources.
5. Comparative analysis	Compare findings based on three domains of communication and four analytical dimensions, and test key statements against full text. Identification	similarities, differences, and relationships between mechanisms.
6. Conceptual synthesis	Integrate findings and examine explanations that support or limit interpretation.	Formulation of the configuration of communication power and its explanatory limits.

Source: Methodological processing sequence described in this manuscript (2026).

The synthesis examined message production, commercial access, and visibility distribution across four analytical dimensions: sources of influence, control mechanisms, negotiation opportunities, and implications for actor relationships and information flow. Findings were classified into three levels of evidence: directly reported findings, interpretations derived from cross-source comparisons, and untested conceptual propositions. An actor-based sensitivity analysis was conducted to account for potential overlaps between communication domains and categories of influential actors. The analytical procedures were summarized in Table 4. To strengthen the reliability of the synthesis, 53 key statements were verified against the full texts of 33 sources, resulting in 42 supported statements and 11 revisions. Methodological limitations included incomplete search documentation, reliance on a single reviewer without intercoder reliability assessment, uneven access to full-text publications, and the predominance of qualitative or perception-based evidence. Additional limitations included the scarcity of research on organization–KOL relationships in Indonesia and the absence of direct empirical evidence linking organizational contractual arrangements to platform ranking

mechanisms. Because historical screening records were incomplete, the review process was not presented as a PRISMA flow diagram.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Subsections 4.1 to 4.4 answer RQ1 by mapping the influence base, control mechanisms, and negotiation space in the three domains of communication, while subsections 4.5 and 4.6 answer RQ2. Given that most of the evidence comes from influencer marketing and creator studies and platforms, the results are read from the perspective of digital PR, not as direct evidence of PR practices as a whole.

Mapping Communication Power Configurations

A reading of the 18 core sources shows that the power of communication does not lie in one actor, but is spread according to the influence base and control mechanism in three domains. Wadipalapa (2013) becomes the conceptual foundation that power circulates in a network of relationships. The core sources are mostly in the form of qualitative research with a data scale from seven influencers in Bhatia et al. (2025) to 185 interviews in Duffek et al. (2025).

An organization's influence base is sourced from its position as an employer and funder of campaigns, which is run through control techniques from scripting and approval to setting up the option space (Borchers, 2023; Arsel et al., 2025; Duffek et al., 2025). Supporting sources suggest that organizations generally manage visibility and leverage technology for efficiency and reach (Demetrious, 2024; Luhukay, 2026; Simon, 2026), and in news organizations promotional pressure correlates with the number of pageviews (Lamot & Paulussen, 2025). Intermediaries do not perform a uniform role: PR intermediaries regulate sponsorship disclosures through contracts and content review (Musiyiwa & Jacobson, 2024), MCNs in China determine who becomes influencers (Liang & Ji, 2024), MCNs in the United States pass on platform conventions and metrics (Siciliano, 2023), and algorithm experts and influencer management tools sell or assess visibility (Bishop, 2020, 2021). Zabel and Duckwitz (2025) and Yuan (2025) challenge the notion that AI or platforms eliminate intermediaries.

The platform's influence base lies in ownership of infrastructure, rules, and monetization paths; platforms set terms for influencers, shift disclosure responsibilities to them, and make its own obligations vague (Annabell et al., 2024, 2025). The distribution mechanism is seen more directly in Meng (2026), O'Meara (2019), and Pandey and Dwivedi (2026). KOLs and creators are not passive parties. They negotiate the imaginary Instagram as a social space, workplace, and marketplace (Richter & Ye, 2024), conduct templatization and cultural brokering (Bhatia et al., 2025), or choose invisibility (Stegeman et al., 2024). In relation to brands, their bargaining position is weakened by emotional contracts (Fan, 2025) and the precarity of regional monetization (Salamon, 2026). A similar pattern is seen in artists (Bishop, 2025), reviewers (Hallinan, 2023), independent news creators (Salamon et al., 2026), and marginalized creators (Are, 2024; Liang et al., 2025).

The comparison of negotiation space in the visibility and commercial domains is not comparable because the context, population, and measurement are different, and no sources examined the two in the same group. Sensitivity checks lead the same direction (motion space

was reported in 12 of 25 empirical sources on visibility distributions and 4 on commercial access), but the difference was not statistically significant (Fisher's exact test, p = 0.32 for domain and p = 0.23 for actors), so it is only maintained as a conceptual conjecture. A summary of the map is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Map of actors, influence bases, mechanisms, and negotiation space in core sources

Actors	Influence base	Control mechanism	Negotiation room	Main domain	Core sources
Organization and brand	Position of employer and financier	Eleven control techniques; metrics and matching; content scripts	Varied; more refined in choice-based techniques	Message production; commercial access	Borchers (2023); Arsel et al. (2025); Duffek et al. (2025)
Intermediary	Social, cultural, technical capital; data and networks	Content contracts and reviews; incubation, optimization, monetization; brand risk scoring; platform convention deployment	Depending on the context; can be reinforcing (Chinese MCN) or derivative (US MCN)	Commercial access	Musiyiwa and Jacobson (2024); Liang and Ji (2024); Siciliano (2023); Bishop (2020, 2021)
Platform	Infrastructure ownership, rules, monetization	Documentation and terminology; disclosure tools; algorithmic preferences	Narrow for users; the obligations of the platform are made vague	Visibility distribution; commercial access	Annabell et al. (2024, 2025); Siciliano (2023); Meng (2026)
KOLs and creators	Audience, credibility, tactical knowledge	Internalization of expectations and metrics; emotional obligations	Hypothesis: more pronounced on visibility tactics than on commercial bargaining; evidence not yet comparable	Visibility distribution; message production	Richter and Ye (2024); Bhatia et al. (2025); Meng (2026); O'Meara (2019); Stegeman et al. (2024); Fan (2025); Salamon (2026); Pandey and Dwivedi (2026)

Source: Author's synthesis of the 18 core sources of the corpus, 2026.

Table 5 shows three interpretive patterns. First, the types of control mechanisms differ according to the actors: contractual and bureaucratic in the organization, evaluative and intermediative in the intermediary, infrastructural in the platform, and affective and internalized in the creator. Second, one actor can work in more than one domain. Third, the negotiation space is unbalanced in each domain. As a starting proposition, the ability to

influence one domain does not automatically extend to another. The supporting sources in Table 6 do not reverse these three patterns.

Table 6. Comparators of supporting sources by actor

Actors	Supporting resources	What's Added	Deployment limits
Organization and brand	Demetrious (2024); Luhukay (2026); Lamot and Paulussen (2025); Simon (2026); Røsok-Dahl and Olsen (2025)	Data discourse and AI disguise persuasive functions; organizations manage visibility and leverage AI for efficiency	PR and news domain; not the brand–KOL relationship
Intermediary	Zabel and Duckwitz (2025); Yuan (2025)	Agencies use AI for operational improvement; intermediation still plays a role	Agencies in Germany; *virtual celebrity* sector in China
Platform	van Dalen (2023); Karlsson et al. (2022); Dvir-Gvirsman and Ivan (2026); Reynolds and Hallinan (2024); Etter and Albu (2021); Xin et al. (2026); Wright (2022); Zhao and Zhang (2026)	Algorithms as non-transparent gates; context-dependent influence; moderation differs from ranking	news, activism, and community; some discuss moderation, not ranking; no direct audit of the rules of the system
KOLs and creators	Bishop (2025); Hallinan (2023); Salamon et al. (2026); Are (2024); Liang et al. (2025)	Algorithmic optimization, message adjustment, precariousness, *gaze platform*, algorithmic dominance over creators	Art, YouTube commentary, and journalism; an autoethnography
Conceptual framework	Wadipalapa (2013); Jarrahi et al. (2021); Reviglio and Agosti (2020); Gandini et al. (2026); Bruns (2026); Elishar and Ariel (2026); Kwok (2026)	Power as a relation; algorithmic management and sovereignty; determinism	conceptual; not empirical evidence

Source: Author's synthesis of 27 supporting sources of the corpus, 2026.

Message Production Control

In the realm of message production, the core source shows a change in the form of control, not a loss of control. Borchers (2023), through a secondary analysis of 48 interviews and ethnographic records, found that marketers who followed the "letting go" paradigm actually developed eleven techniques, from scripts and approval processes to limited choices, nudging, and long-term relationships. In subtle techniques, control works through internalized expectations (concertive control), so influencers appear to be self-selecting and tend to hide that controllable trait from followers. Duffek et al. (2025), through 185 interviews and surveys of 270 participants, found that consumers, influencers, brand managers, and agencies rate authenticity to different sizes, and content scripts and transparency guidelines are used to bridge that difference.

Message control also runs through two formal channels. Musiyiwa and Jacobson (2024) found that intermediaries use contracts, statements of work, content review, and knowledge

transfer to support sponsorship disclosure, while Annabell et al. (2024) found that commercial content disclosure tools differ on Instagram, TikTok, Snap, and YouTube and compliance responsibilities are shifted to influencers. Brand orchestral work tends to prioritize brand criteria in content coproduction (Arsel et al., 2025). Platform logic also enters into content: Hallinan (2023), through 200 YouTube review videos, found creators withheld harsh judgments to align with algorithmic recommendations (value optimization); Pandey and Dwivedi (2026) found in 23 micro-influencers that algorithmic demands drive curated authenticity; Bishop (2025) reported the extension of influencer norms to artists' work; and Røsok-Dahl and Olsen (2025) noted editorial decisions tailored to Snapchat metrics.

Read together, organizational control over messages is not only in the form of commands, but also in the design of choices that demand the management of authenticity; some of the rules of the message, such as sponsorship disclosure, are also determined by the platform; and pressure from organizations and algorithms can result in the same self-adjustment in creators. Demetrious (2024) reminds that data discourse and AI can disguise the persuasive function of PR, and Luhukay (2026) states that PR shifts to stakeholder engagement. For RQ1, the realm of message production is characterized by the position of the employer, control instruments from firm instructions to subtle settings, as well as real but pre-designed creator negotiation spaces.

Commercial Access Arrangements and Intermediary Roles

Commercial access concerns who is chosen, on what terms, and for what price. Arsel et al. (2025) refer to sponsored content as an epistemic market object and, from a study of 62 platforms, shows that the value of content is judged through metrics such as views, comments, and impressions that often do not capture the value generated by creators, resulting in an asymmetry of value and power in the brand-creator partnership. Bishop (2021), through the ethnography of the influencer marketing industry in the UK, shows that brand safety and brand risk scores help brands choose influencers and risk reinforcing inequality; the "algorithm" here is a selection tool owned by brands and agencies, not a platform ranking system.

The role of intermediaries is not uniform. In Musiyiwa and Jacobson (2024), intermediaries rely on social, cultural, and technical capital. Liang and Ji (2024), from the trade press and list of China's 598 largest MCNs, show an MCN that determines who becomes an influencer and its compensation scheme through incubation, optimization, and monetization. Siciliano (2023), through ethnography and 46 interviews on one YouTube MCN in the United States in 2015, found that MCNs only pass on YouTube conventions and metrics and are no longer autonomous gatekeepers . Bishop (2020) adds algorithmic experts who sell knowledge about visibility. On the creator side, Annabell et al. (2025), out of 85 TikTok policy documents, found that the platform unilaterally set monetization rules; Fan (2025) found emotional contracts that made influencers willing to create additional content without pay; Salamon (2026) reported on the inequality of access to brand deals; Richter and Ye (2024) described precarious interdependencies; and Salamon et al. (2026) reported low wages on independent news creators. Zabel and Duckwitz (2025) found that agencies in Germany use AI primarily to improve operations, and Yuan (2025) showed that organizational intermediation still plays a role.

Commercial access is thus controlled through metric- and score-based assessments, contracts and compliance, and revenue dependence. The distinction between Siciliano (2023) and Liang and Ji (2024) is maintained and explained through three untested hypotheses: intermediaries are more influential when creators still need them for market access; intermediaries are more autonomous when their revenue is not entirely dependent on platform rules, for example when e-commerce goes beyond advertising (Liang & Ji, 2024); and intermediaries who hold relationships with brands and sales channels have a basis for determining who becomes an influencer. For RQ1, this realm is characterized by budget, data, and networks as an influence base, as well as a narrow space for creator negotiations.

Algorithmic Gatekeeping and Visibility Distribution

Kwok (2026) formulates visibility as an institutionally generated opportunity that an act of communication reaches an audience. Karlsson et al. (2022), with Swedish news data from 2015, show that Facebook's algorithm changes the composition of the news that users see. van Dalen (2023), through 96 online articles, found that influencers' perceptions of algorithms ranged from total dependence to autonomy, and Dvir-Gvirsman and Ivan (2026), from 39 English-language media, found that the previous month's engagement predicted the next amount of news contextually. Creator responses were mixed: Meng (2026) found cross-platform adaptations with agencies that remained dependent on the platform's structural strength; O'Meara (2019) described engagement pods as resistance that protects revenue; Reynolds and Hallinan (2024), of 250 YouTube videos, found that large creators are perceived to be more heard by platforms; and Liang et al. (2025) concluded that the fantasy of autonomy underpins algorithms' dominance over creators.

The sources in this section cover different types of controls. Wright (2022) and Zhao and Zhang (2026) discuss automated moderation, Etter and Albu (2021) find that algorithmic infrastructure can inhibit collective action, and Xin et al. (2026) find discourse patterns consistent with visibility restrictions but call their interpretations diagnostic. The evidence on ranking is also inconsistent: Karlsson et al. (2022) use reverse engineering, Dvir-Gvirsman and Ivan (2026) show organizational responses to metrics, and Xin et al. (2026) do not directly observe screening mechanisms. Table 7 summarizes these differences.

Table 7. Forms of control that need to be differentiated in the discussion of algorithmic gatekeeping

Forms of control	What is regulated	Main actors	Sources that discuss	Limits of evidence
Ranking and recommendations (*algorithmic gatekeeping* in the narrow sense)	Content opportunities appear in front of the audience	Platform	Karlsson et al. (2022); van Dalen (2023); Dvir-Gvirsman and Ivan (2026); Xin et al. (2026); Kwok (2026)	There was no direct audit of the rules of the system; Karlsson et al. deduced from the output (Facebook, 2015), Dvir-Gvirsman and Ivan examined the response of news production, Xin et al. interpreted discourse patterns; many were perception-based
Content moderation	Whether or not content is allowed and limits	Platform, moderator	Wright (2022); Zhao and Zhang (2026); Stegeman et al. (2024); Are (2024)	Not the same as ranking; Reddit context and Chinese platforms
Monetization governance and policies	Conditions of participation, income, disclosure	Platform	Annabell et al. (2024, 2025)	Analysis of policy documents; does not explain how algorithms work
Brand selection and assessment	Who is chosen for cooperation	Brands, agencies, influencer managem ent tools	Bishop (2021); Arsel et al. (2025)	Tools belong to brands and agencies, not platform ranking systems
Contractual and editorial control	Message content and compliance	Organizati on, intermedi ary	Borchers (2023); Musiyiwa and Jacobson (2024); Duffek et al. (2025)	Not researching distribution

Source: Author's synthesis of core and supporting sources, 2026.

Note: this table separates the five forms of control that are often mixed. Only the first row concerns algorithmic gatekeeping. The other rows may affect visibility or access, but the evidence is not read as evidence of ranking.

Conceptual sources help limit interpretation: Jarrahi et al. (2021) treat algorithmic management as a sociotechnical concept, Reviglio and Agosti (2020) use algorithmic sovereignty, Gandini et al. (2026) propose algorithmic public opinion, Bruns (2026) reminds that users remain active as gatewatchers, and Elishar and Ariel (2026) emphasize that influence in the hybrid media ecosystem is multidirectional. For RQ1, the distribution of visibility is held by the platform through non-transparent rankings, with the creator's negotiation room in the form of adaptation, indirect resistance, or withdrawal. The public generally appears as a distribution target or engagement figure, and there is no source that makes the public response to an organization–KOL campaign the primary focus. Visibility is therefore read as a condition that allows communication, rather than evidence that an organization's relationship with the public has been established.

Relationship Between Mechanisms and Evidence Gaps in Ranking

Cross-source readings show that influence on one domain can be attributed to another through four paths (level two). The first path is metric: the value of sponsored content is judged through the measure generated by the platform's affordance (Arsel et al., 2025), and expertise over distribution is converted into commercial access (Bishop, 2020). The second path is revenue dependence: when income depends on sponsorship, bargaining positions shrink and responsibility for visibility is internalized (Fan, 2025; Annabell et al., 2025; Richter & Ye, 2024; Salamon et al., 2026). The third path is internalization: concertive control (Borchers, 2023) and algorithmic internalization (Pandey & Dwivedi, 2026) both make creators adjust the message before there are instructions (Hallinan, 2023; Bishop, 2025). The fourth path is intermediary, which can bring together incubation, optimization, and monetization (Liang & Ji, 2024) or pass on platform conventions (Siciliano, 2023; Musiyiwa & Jacobson, 2024; Yuan, 2025).

Table 8. Influence transfer pathways between domains and their evidence gaps

Pathway	Direction of displacement	How it works by source	Main source	Limits of evidence
Metrics	Commercial visibility → access distribution	The value of cooperation is assessed through views, comments, impressions; knowledge about visibility is sold to creators	Arsel et al. (2025); Bishop (2020)	Metrics are studied in the context of marketing and YouTube
Income dependency	Commercial access → message production and visibility load	Bargaining positions shrink; additional work without pay; internalized visibility responsibilities	Fan (2025); Annabell et al. (2025); Richter and Ye (2024); Salamon et al. (2026)	Small samples, genres and platforms specific
Internalization of expectations	Organizations and platforms → creative decisions of creators	Control becomes self-discipline; messages are adjusted before there are instructions	Borchers (2023); Pandey and Dwivedi (2026); Hallinan (2023); Bishop (2025)	Sources of influence are difficult to separate
Intermediary	Between the three realms, two directions	Incubation and monetization (China MCN); platform convention successor (US MCN); contracts and content review	Liang and Ji (2024); Siciliano (2023); Musiyiwa and Jacobson (2024); Yuan (2025)	Direction is context-dependent and unexplainable
Evidence gaps	Organizations and intermediaries → platform rankings	No source tested whether contracts, scripts, or content review changed ranking rules	Borchers (2023); Musiyiwa and Jacobson (2024); Meng (2026); Siciliano (2023)	The absence of evidence does not prove the existence of limits; it needs to be tested

Source: Author's synthesis of core and supporting sources, 2026.

Note: the four paths are the author's interpretation of the source comparison (level two), and the last column contains the limits of the evidence. The gap lines of evidence are not paths, but rather regions that cannot be assessed because the corpus does not provide evidence.

There are no core sources that test whether contracts, scripts, or content review by organizations change the way platforms rank content. Existing sources describe platforms as rule-setting (Meng, 2026; Siciliano, 2023), the influence of non-uniform platform signals (Dvir-Gvirsman & Ivan, 2026; Bruns, 2026; Elishar & Ariel, 2026), and the infrequent resistance of creators to change systems (O'Meara, 2019; Liang et al., 2025), even though creators do not always pursue visibility (Stegeman et al., 2024). The conceptual proposition (level three) formulated is that influence on one domain can relate to another domain through four paths unevenly, whereas the corpus is not yet adequate to infer an organization's direct authority over ranking. This region is called the evidence gap in ranking and can be tested by tracking a single campaign from its contract to its distribution performance or auditing the behavior of the ranking algorithm.

Conceptual Synthesis and Implications for Digital PR

This synthesis results in the main idea of differences in forms of communication control: the ability to control communication differs according to domain, influence holders, instruments, and negotiation spaces, and the interconnectedness between domains is uneven (Table 9).

Table 9. Differences in the form of communication control in three domains

Domain	Key influencers	Influence base	Forms of operation (main and related)	Negotiation space for KOLs and creators	Reported impacts
Message production	Organizations and brands; intermediaries; indirect platforms	Employer position; ownership of interface formats and rules	Main: scripting, approval, limited choices, nudging; contracts and review. Related: platform format norms.	Real but designed; authenticity becomes the object of negotiation	Customization; hidden controls; disclosure compliance
Commercial access	Organizations and brands; intermediaries; platforms (monetization)	Budget, data, and networking; monetization rules	Main: metric- and score-based scoring; matching; contracts. Related: platform monetization governance.	narrow; weakening when income depends on a single source	Inequality of access; precariousness; value captured by intermediaries
Visibility distribution	Platform	Ownership of ranking and recommendation infrastructure	Main: non-transparent ratings and recommendations. Related: content moderation.	Adaptation, collective resistance, strategic invisibility; uncertain outcome	dependence; internalization; great creators are seen as more heard platforms

Source: Author's synthesis from subsections 4.1 to 4.5, 2026.

Note: the primary mechanism is the form of control that the source says directly regulates the subject matter of the domain. Related mechanisms can influence outcomes in that domain,

but work through different instruments and evidence. Comparisons of negotiation spaces between domains are conceptual conjectures (subsection 4.1).

From the point of view of Strategic PR, organizational authority is most evident in message production and access to cooperation (Borchers, 2023; Musiyiwa & Jacobson, 2024), while responsibility for relationships with the public remains inherent even if the reach is determined by other parties. From the standpoint of platformization, inequality is seen in centralized value capture (Yuan, 2025) and platform monetization rules (Annabell et al., 2025), and from an algorithmic gatekeeping perspective, distribution is held to non-transparent mechanisms (Karlsson et al., 2022; Kwok, 2026). The combination shows a misalignment: an organization's responsibility for relationships with the public is not offset by the comparable authority over the infrastructure that determines whether messages reach the public. The implications for PR practice are conditional: PR planners need to separate the target message from the target reach; the KOL selection metric needs to be read as an artificial measure of the platform that can be asymmetrical and biased (Arsel et al., 2025; Bishop, 2021); the involvement of the KOL in designing the message accompanied by clear disclosure (Annabell et al., 2024) can be considered as an alternative to hidden controls; the dependency of KOL revenue (Fan, 2025) needs to be taken into account; the role of agencies needs to be examined on a case-by-case basis (Duffek et al., 2025; Liang & Ji, 2024; Siciliano, 2023); and reach needs to be distinguished from evidence of the formation of relationships with the public (Duffek et al., 2025; Luhukay, 2026).

CONCLUSION

This integrative literature review synthesized 45 sources to examine the configuration of communication power among organizations, key opinion leaders (KOLs), intermediaries, and digital platforms. Addressing the first research question, the findings revealed distinct forms of control across three domains: message production, commercial access, and visibility distribution. Organizations influenced content production through scripted instructions, approval procedures, and the structuring of available choices, while commercial participation was shaped by performance metrics, contractual arrangements, and revenue dependence. Digital platforms primarily governed algorithmic content distribution, whereas intermediaries reinforced or mediated these mechanisms. Content creators responded through adaptation, negotiation, resistance, or strategic invisibility. Regarding the second research question, four mechanisms—performance metrics, income dependence, internalized expectations, and intermediation—were identified as potential pathways through which influence extended across communication domains. However, the reviewed evidence did not establish that organizational control over contractual arrangements or message production translated into direct authority over platform ranking algorithms.

The findings highlighted the importance of distinguishing organizational message approval, access to commercial partnerships, and platform-mediated content visibility in digital public relations (PR) strategies. Visibility metrics alone were insufficient to demonstrate the establishment of sustainable organization–public relationships. Nevertheless, the conclusions

were constrained by methodological heterogeneity, incomplete search documentation, reliance on a single reviewer, the predominance of creator and platform studies, and limited empirical evidence from Indonesia. Future research should longitudinally examine organization–KOL collaborations from contractual negotiations through content distribution to audience responses, investigate the roles of intermediaries across different organizational and platform contexts, and empirically test cross-domain influence through direct platform audits or comparable observational methods. These approaches could strengthen understanding of how communication power was distributed, negotiated, and transferred within digital PR ecosystems.

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AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

Aiman Adi Witjaksono: conceptualization of research, design of methodology, implementation of experiments, data collection, data analysis, preparation of manuscripts, and revision of manuscripts. Rizki Ayu Budipratiwi and Vera Damayanti: supervision of research, validation of research results, provision of scientific input, and review and revision of manuscripts. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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The author states that generative artificial intelligence (AI) is used in the preparation of this manuscript to help improve language clarity, improve grammar, and refine the structure of writing. Generative AI is not used to generate, manipulate, or analyze research data. The entire content of the manuscript has been reviewed and verified by the author. The author is solely responsible for the accuracy, integrity, and final content of the manuscript.

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