

Systematic Review

Digital Transformation in Institutional Communication: A Systematic Review of Transparency, Trust, and Organizational Culture

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze digital transformation in institutions as a structural shift that reshapes the logic of communication, patterns of power, and mechanisms of trust building within organizations. This study is grounded in the assumption that digitalization is no longer limited to the adoption of technical tools but has evolved into an organizational and governance framework driven by algorithms and recommendation platforms, with direct implications for communication practices, levels of transparency, and organizational culture. This study adopts a descriptive–analytical approach based on a critical review of peer-reviewed academic research published from 2019 until the beginning of 2026. To ensure methodological rigor and transparency, the review process follows the PRISMA guidelines. Relevant studies were identified through comprehensive searches of major academic databases (Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar), and the final sample contained all scholarly publications that address digital transformation in institutional communication within the specified timeframe. The number of studies that met the conditions amounted to 92 studies and reports. The sample draws on several theoretical frameworks, including technological determinism, communication visibility, diffusion of innovations, and uses and gratifications, thereby enabling a comprehensive examination of the relationship between digital transformation and institutional communication from a closed hierarchical model into an interactive networked system increasingly shaped by algorithmic logics and governance mechanisms that redistribute visibility and influence within institutions. The results suggest that the success of digital transformation is more closely associated with organizational culture and transformational digital leadership than with technical infrastructure alone. Moreover, audiences have become active co-producers of meaning and trust through interaction and user-generated content. In conclusion, digital transparency and organizational communication visibility constitute key foundations of institutional trust, highlighting the need for clear frameworks of digital transformation, particularly in the Arab context.

Keywords: digital transformation; institutional communication; organizational culture; transparency; trust; organizational visibility; digital governance



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1. Introduction

The world is undergoing an unprecedented digital revolution that has reshaped the contours of contemporary life in a variety of fields. One of the most impacted areas of

the digital revolution is media and communication. With social media platforms, artificial intelligence applications, and big data analytics being increasingly used in every area of society, organizations have to rethink how they communicate and engage with their audiences. Traditionally, the audience was seen as a passive recipient of information. Today, however, the audience is an active participant and producer of knowledge. Thus, how organizations interact with their audience and the nature of their relationship with their audiences have fundamentally shifted.

This shift from using modern technological tools in institutional communication to adopting a paradigmatic view of using technology to create a transparent, credible, and interactive environment creates opportunities for both organizations and their audiences to engage in dialog and directly interact. With the speed at which information is transmitted accelerating rapidly, organizations cannot control what is said or reported about them using traditional media. Organizations, therefore, need to be open to their audience, listen to their needs, and respond to their desire for greater transparency and accountability.

Consequently, institutional communication has witnessed a profound structural transformation driven by digital technologies and artificial intelligence. It is no longer limited to the transmission of information; rather, it has become a networked communicative system shaped by algorithms and recommendation platforms that reorganize visibility, transparency, and mechanisms of control within institutions (Kellogg et al., 2020). Digital media platforms and collaborative communication tools create an ecosystem in which communication becomes an interactive sphere linking algorithms, institutions, and audiences.

Within the Arab context, recent studies (Tawfic, 2025; Al Lawati, 2025; Ben Moussa et al., 2024) indicate that digital transformation within the Arabic content creation sphere has contributed to a reconfiguration of power structures within institutions. Institutional influence is no longer derived solely by traditional administrative hierarchies but by algorithmic systems that govern dissemination, audience engagement, and the management of institutional reputation.

One study (Zaid et al., 2022) indicated that digital transformation in the Gulf countries drove the restructuring of communication patterns and institutional governance toward an interactive, participation-based model. The study of Zaid adds a complementary dimension by analyzing the restructuring of institutional communication in Gulf digital channels, explaining that digital transformation was not limited to updating tools but included a change in editorial leadership patterns, role distribution, and decision-making pathways.

Despite the growing body of research on digital transformation, transparency, and institutional communication, existing studies have largely examined these themes separately. While some studies have focused on digital transformation and organizational change, others have explored transparency, institutional trust, audience participation, or algorithmic governance as distinct areas of inquiry. Limited attention has been paid to understanding how these dimensions interact within a unified institutional communication framework, particularly across Arab and international contexts. This gap highlights the need for a systematic synthesis capable of integrating digital transformation, algorithmic governance, organizational culture, transparency, audience participation, and institutional trust within a comprehensive analytical framework.

Against this backdrop, the purpose of this study was to analyze how digital and algorithmic transformations reshape the architecture of institutional communication and how these transformations contribute to building transparent and interactive relationships within institutions in the Arab and international context.

This study also addresses the following research questions: How have digital transformation and algorithmic systems reshaped institutional communication? What impact does digital transformation have on the structure of institutional communication within

organizations in the Arab and international contexts? What role do algorithms and recommendation platforms play in redistributing visibility and influence within communicative environments? How do digital transparency and communicative visibility enhance interaction and institutional trust within institutions in the Arab context compared to the international contexts?

To address these questions, this study aimed to achieve the following objectives:

- To analyze the impact of digital and algorithmic transformation on institutional communication in the Arab context compared to the international contexts.
- To examine the relationship between digital transparency and communication visibility and assess their role in strengthening institutional trust.
- To compare Arab and international experiences in managing digital institutional communication.
- To propose a conceptual framework for building transparent and interactive communication practices that reinforce institutional trust and accountability, specifically in the Arab context.

This study draws on several theoretical frameworks to review previous research in digital transformation and its relationship to corporate communication, including technological determinism, communication visibility, innovation diffusion, and uses and gratifications. This study is based on the following premises:

- Technological progress is the primary driver of historical and cultural change, often suggesting that human agency has little control over the direction of innovation (Technological Determinism Theory).
- Key dimensions of communication visibility include information visibility and transparency, leadership and management visibility, and media presence (Communication Visibility Theory).
- The digital ecosystem—comprising networks, algorithmic curation, real-time communication, and user-generated content—has accelerated and shaped traditional diffusion processes, and the rate of adoption has increased exponentially because some digital innovations can be adopted globally in a few months rather than years (Diffusion of Innovations Theory).
- In digital communication environments, audiences seek not only information but also visibility, participation, identity expression, and social validation (Uses and Gratifications Theory).

2. Methodology

A systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted in this study, which is an evidence synthesis structure in which explicit eligibility criteria are established, relevant studies are systematically identified and evaluated, and findings are synthesized using transparent and reproducible procedures that minimize bias (Tranfield et al., 2003; Kitchenham, 2004; Brignardello-Petersen et al., 2024). The review focuses on the Arabic and international scholarly literature addressing digital transformation in institutional communication published from 2019 to early 2026. To achieve the study objectives, an integrative analytical approach combining quantitative mapping and qualitative thematic synthesis was employed.

Quantitatively, the frequency and distribution of the selected literature were analyzed based on the timeframe of publication, geographical setting, research methodologies, and academic journals. Qualitatively, content analysis methods were used to identify, categorize, and synthesize the dominant themes, concepts, and theoretical frameworks underlying the selected studies (Mayring, 2014).

Review Protocol and PRISMA Framework:

To ensure methodological rigor and transparency, the review process follows the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework, which provides a standardized procedure for conducting systematic reviews in four main phases:

- Identification: Relevant studies were identified through comprehensive searches of major academic databases (e.g., Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar). Keyword combinations included “digital transformation”, “Institutional Communication”, “Organizational culture”, “Transparency”, “Trust”, “Organizational visibility”, and “Digital governance”.
- Screening: Duplicate records were removed, and titles and abstracts were screened for relevance to the research topic.
- Eligibility: Full-text articles were assessed against predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to determine their suitability for the analysis.
- Inclusion: The final sample included studies that met all eligibility criteria. The study population comprised Arabic and international scholarly publications that addressed digital transformation in institutional communication in the specified time-frame (2019–2026).

Following the PRISMA procedure, the identified records were screened and evaluated in a sequential manner. After duplicate and irrelevant records were removed, the remaining studies underwent title, abstract, and full-text assessment based on the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. This process resulted in the final sample of 92 studies, which were subsequently coded and analyzed according to the thematic framework developed for this review. The online sources used to retrieve and verify the reviewed materials are listed in Research Data¹. The application of the PRISMA framework ensured transparency, consistency, and methodological rigor throughout the study selection process (see Table 1, Figures 1 and 2).

Table 1. Stages of a systematic review.

Phase	Procedures
Planning	– Reformulating and restructuring core knowledge based on the study’s focus and objectives. – Identifying the research gap. – Formulating research questions. – Identifying the study’s theoretical frameworks. – Establishing the Systematic Review Protocol (SLR). – Identifying selection criteria. – Identifying evaluation procedures. – Identifying the data extraction method and sources. – Organizing and formatting the extracted data by year and topic.
Identification	– Research topic: Digital Transformation in Institutional Communication. – Focus: Transparency, Trust, Organizational Culture. – Research period: From 15 September to 15 December 2025. – Source Type: Academic journals. – Databases: • Arabic databases: Dar Almandumah, Al Manhal Database, and E-Marefa Database. • Global databases: Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. • Scientific search engines.

Table 1. Cont.

Phase	Procedures
Screening	– Research keywords (paper title, abstract, keywords): Digital transformation; Institutional Communication; organizational culture; transparency; trust; organizational visibility; digital governance. – Total number of studies obtained: $n = 1880$. – Repeated studies: $n = 994$ – Studies excluded based on title review = 385. – Studies excluded based on abstract review = 256. – Studies excluded after full reading = 153.
Eligibility	– Full-text studies reviewed based on inclusion and exclusion criteria = 92. – Data extraction: Manually coded application. (1) General data table: paper title, author names, year of publication, publisher, study type, and research methodology. (2) Content data table (key findings relevant to our study), including Structural Transformation, Digital Transparency, Institutional Governance, Audience Participation, and Organizational Culture.
Inclusion	Full-text studies reviewed = 92 The final sample included studies that met all eligibility criteria. The study population comprised Arabic and international scholarly publications that addressed digital transformation in institutional communication in the specified timeframe (2019–2026), based on the following inclusion criteria: Inclusion criteria: – Publication in peer-reviewed, accredited academic journals. – Availability of full-text access. – Publication is in either Arabic or English. – An explicit focus on the relationship between digital transformation and institutional transparency and interactivity. Exclusion Criteria: Studies were excluded based on the following: – Non-peer-reviewed publications (e.g., reports, theses, conference abstracts without full papers). – Articles not available in full text. – Studies outside the specified timeframe. – Studies not directly related to institutional communication contexts. – Conceptual duplications or studies lacking sufficient methodological clarity.
Evaluation	– Method of analysis: Thematic analysis. – Conclusion: Comparative analysis.

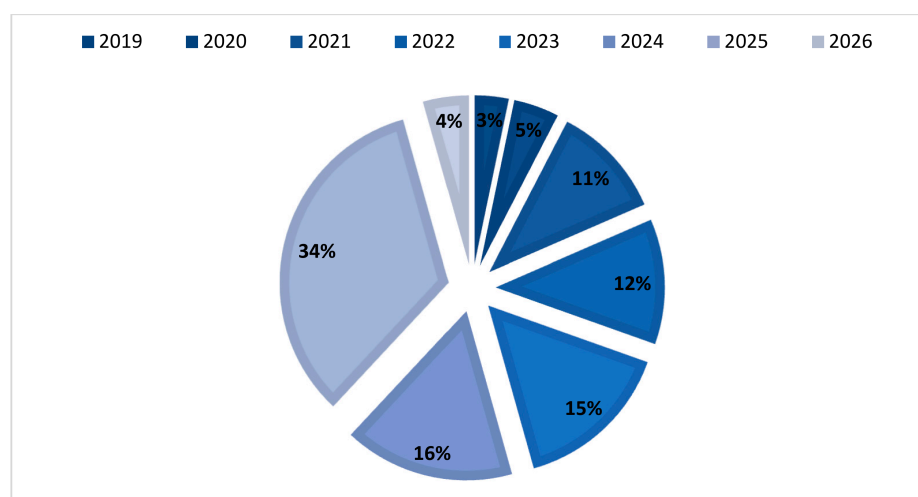


Figure 1. Distribution of reviewed studies by year.

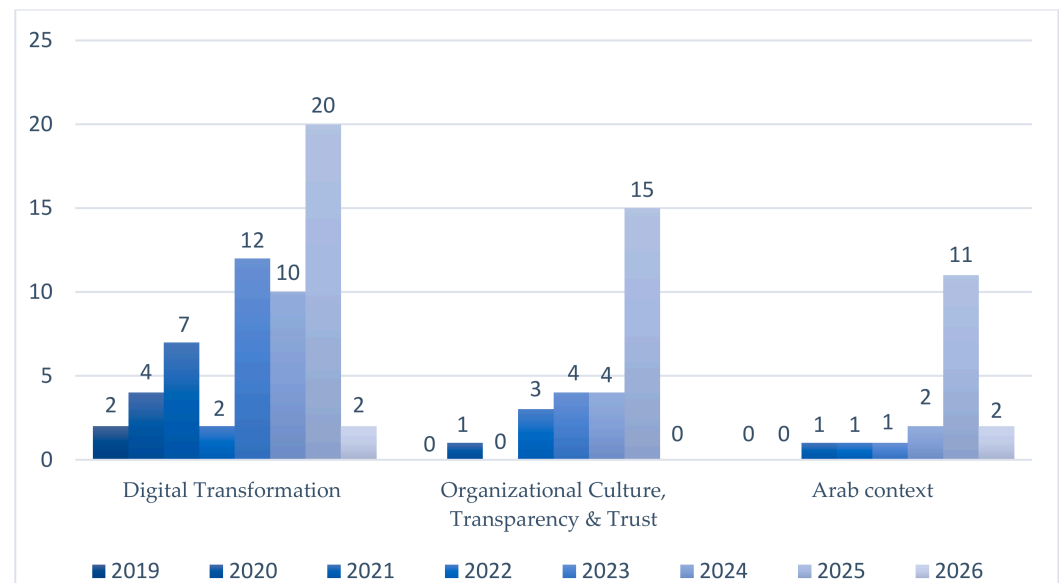


Figure 2. Distribution of reviewed studies by topic.

The SLR process was conducted according to the following search strings:

The data in Figures 1 and 2 show that most of the reviewed studies were published between 2023 and 2025 and primarily focused on digital transformation and its relationship with organizational culture, transparency, trust, and institutional communication.

The following analytical instruments were employed in this study:

- **Content Analysis:** To evaluate the content of each study and categorize studies by major topic.
- **Thematic Analysis:** To identify repetitive patterns and themes in the literature.
- **Comparative Analysis:** Performed on the peer-reviewed, Arabic and international literature published between 2019 and 2026 to assess differences and similarities in the concepts of transparency.

To strengthen the interpretive rigor of the review, the selected studies were not treated as isolated summaries but analyzed comparatively according to their thematic focus, methodological orientation, geographical context, and contribution to the study's core constructs. During the coding process, studies were grouped according to whether they supported, extended, or challenged the dominant patterns identified in the literature. This procedure enabled the review to move beyond descriptive reporting toward a critical synthesis of points of convergence, divergence, and contextual variation between Arab and international studies.

This study covers the following temporal, spatial, and thematic boundaries:

- **Temporal Boundaries:** This study covers the period from 2019 to 2026, a phase that witnessed a rapid acceleration in the applications of artificial intelligence and digital transformation within institutions globally and in the Arab region.
- **Spatial Boundaries:** This study focuses on the Arab context due to the relative scarcity of Arab-context research examining this topic, with comparisons to international experiences to identify convergences and divergences in the implementation of digital governance. For comparative purposes, the reviewed literature was categorized into two broad contextual groups: Arab- and international-based studies. The Arab-context literature refers to research conducted in Arab countries or addressing Arab media and institutional communication environments. International-context studies refer to research conducted in non-Arab contexts, including North America, Europe, Asia, and other geographical regions represented in the reviewed literature. The comparison

does not classify countries as developed or developing; rather, it focuses on differences and similarities in digital transformation, transparency practices, organizational culture, and institutional trust across Arab and non-Arab institutional environments.

- **Thematic Boundaries:** This study was confined to analyzing the impact of digital and algorithmic transformations on institutional communication and public relations, without engaging with the purely technical or economic dimensions of digital transformation.

Validity and Reliability:

All studies under consideration underwent quality assessment to improve internal and external validity and eliminate bias. However, to avoid a lack of intrinsic validity, internal and external validity were investigated further by reviewing the studies' discussion and conclusion. Following the eligibility check, two coauthors independently reviewed the papers and evaluated their quality using a number of criteria, including the study's design and methodology, sample size, and representativeness and the quality of result interpretation.

Although we strictly followed the comprehensive search strategy to ensure a thorough selection of our studies, there is still a chance that certain papers were not included in our data collection. This could be due to their inaccessibility or non-existence on electronic platforms that we are unaware of, or because we did not target different digital libraries and instead focused solely on Google Scholar and Scopus.

Internal Validity:

Our systematic literature review includes primary studies published within the last six years, up until the first quarter of 2026. To maintain internal validity, we established clear inclusion and exclusion criteria, addressed potential biases by focusing on primary studies, and planned for future updates to include newer studies. These measures ensure that our findings are robust, reliable, and traceable back to the primary studies reviewed, thereby improving the internal validity of our SLR.

External Validity:

This SLR's findings provide a comprehensive summary of current analyses of digital transformation in institutions as a structural shift that reshapes organizational communication logic, power patterns, and trust-building mechanisms. However, the scope of the selected studies limits the generalizability of these findings, as they may not capture the full range of digital transformation practices in institutions across diverse contexts. To address this challenge, we attempted to include a wide range of studies from the Arab and international contexts.

3. Results

The reviewed studies are unanimous in indicating that digital transformation does not emerge in a vacuum; rather, it is driven by interrelated external forces. These encompass three principal drivers: the accelerated advancement of digital technologies—such as AI, the Internet of Things, and blockchain technology; the intensification of global digital competition; and fundamental shifts in consumer behavior toward the digitization of consumption and communication patterns. Digital transformation is thus conceptualized as a shift in how institutions deploy digital technologies to develop new business models that enhance value creation and capture. Within this context, prevailing frameworks distinguish among three sequential stages: digitization, digitalization, and digital transformation, emphasizing that the first two stages constitute necessary preconditions for achieving the third, more comprehensive and impactful stage (Koska et al., 2025; Orzeață, 2024; Ji & Li, 2022; Serpa et al., 2022; Istrate et al., 2022; Verhoef et al., 2021).

The studies converge on the view that digital transformation is a highly complex, multidimensional phenomenon that extends beyond a narrow technical scope to encompass profound strategic, organizational, and cultural dimensions. They further agree that the success of digital transformation is contingent upon leadership that is cognizant of the nature of ongoing transformations, genuine organizational agility, and advanced analytical capabilities (Fatchurrohman et al., 2025; Ndaba & Naidoo, 2024; Ji & Li, 2022; Surjawan et al., 2025; Yildirim et al., 2025). In addition, these studies underscore the pressing need for further research into mechanisms for measuring the impact of digital transformation on institutional performance, as well as strategies for managing the tension between legacy operational systems and emerging digital requirements. Postma's (2024) study provides empirical evidence of the challenges institutions face in integrating digital competencies within entrenched organizational cultures and structures.

The study by Hanelt et al. (2021) concludes that digital transformation, conceptualized as a form of organizational change initiated and shaped by the widespread diffusion of digital technologies, drives institutions toward flexible and continuously adaptive organizational designs. This transformation is embedded within, and propelled by, digital business ecosystems. It is not merely a technical shift but a comprehensive process of organizational reconfiguration encompassing operating models and dynamic capabilities, thereby enhancing the integration of technology and organizational structure in the production of communicative value. Accordingly, this study proposes a multidimensional framework comprising three principal dimensions: contextual conditions, mechanisms, and outcomes.

3.1. Digital Transformation: Structural Transformation in the Logic of Institutional Communication

Digital transformation refers to a “process that aims to improve an entity by triggering significant changes to its properties through combinations of information, computing, communication, and technologies” (Vial, 2019). Digitalization and digital transformation are often used interchangeably. Digital transformation entails the adoption and use of new technologies across the organization's products, processes, and strategies. It focuses on increased efficiency and greater agility, with the ultimate goal of creating new value for employees, users, and shareholders (Accenture, 2023), including the use of new technologies such as artificial intelligence and cloud computing to drive growth, streamline operations, and increase competitive edge (Marr, 2023).

The studies under review, in this context, emphasize the following:

- Digital transformation has reshaped institutional communication from a traditional hierarchical model based on control and closure into an interactive, networked system grounded in data and digital platforms. Communication has thus become more horizontal, visible, and closely linked to transparency and trust. This transformation is not limited to the adoption of technological tools; it extends to the reconfiguration of communication processes, decision-making patterns, and organizational relationships within the institution (Fatchurrohman et al., 2025; Carvalho et al., 2025; Koska et al., 2025; Baojing et al., 2025; Deep, 2023; Fernández et al., 2023; Kumari, 2023; Hanelt et al., 2021; Vial, 2019).
- Digital platforms have enhanced organizational visibility and expanded transparency within institutions. This has, in turn, improved internal coordination, knowledge exchange, and levels of institutional engagement. This transformation is also associated with a shift in communicative authority from centralized structures to distributed interactive networks, within digital transformation models that integrate technology, organizational processes, and institutional strategy (Fatchurrohman et al., 2025; Koska et al., 2025; Baojing et al., 2025; Plekhanov et al., 2023; Verhoef et al., 2021; Castro Benavides et al., 2020; Trushkina et al., 2020).

- Accordingly, institutional communication is no longer a linear process flowing from management to the public but rather a multi-level, networked system in which platforms, algorithms, employees, and audiences interact within a continuous communicative ecosystem. Evidence further indicates that this transformation is inseparable from organizational culture, as institutional values and leadership styles are key determinants in shaping the adoption of digital communication. This reflects the interdependence of technological, organizational, and cultural dimensions in shaping contemporary institutional communication.
- This transformation involves a structural shift in the logic of power and knowledge within institutions, where communicative authority is no longer exercised through traditional administrative hierarchies, but through mechanisms of organizational transparency and visibility that enable stakeholders to access processes, decisions, and interactions in real time (Pitafi et al., 2023; Deep, 2023; Mahraz et al., 2019).
- Institutional communication has also become a governance instrument that regulates the relationships among the institution, employees, and the public based on transparency, accountability, and trust (Verčič & Verčič, 2025; Fatchurrohman et al., 2025; Papagiannidis et al., 2025; Deep, 2023).

At a comparative level, the findings indicate that this structural transformation is more deeply embedded in international contexts, where digital infrastructure is integrated with organizational culture and governance mechanisms (Koska et al., 2025; Plekhanov et al., 2023; Mahraz et al., 2019). However, in the Arab context, digital transformation is characterized by varying degrees of adoption linked to factors such as digital readiness, leadership styles, and levels of institutional openness. These findings suggest that digital transformation is not confined to a technical dimension, but is instead closely intertwined with overlapping organizational and cultural transformations (Hasan et al., 2025; Elbolok et al., 2025; Karawya, 2024).

Studies by Chadi et al. (2025), Elbolok et al. (2025), Mountasser and Abdellatif (2023), and Ouldali (2025) also indicate that digital transformation within institutions is no longer merely a technical option within the administrative organization; rather, it has become a strategic entry point that has reshaped the nature of institutional communication in terms of its tools, patterns, and functions within the organization. The adoption of digital technologies has contributed to a shift from linear, unidirectional communication toward interactive, multi-channel communication characterized by speed, transparency, and the inclusion of diverse stakeholders.

Studies by Chadi et al. (2025), Albu and Christensen (2024), and Mabotha and Ngcamu (2026) converge in emphasizing that the absence of a clear communication governance framework constitutes one of the most significant cultural obstacles to digital transformation. One study by Chadi et al. (2025) asserts that digital tools are often adopted in isolation from a clear communication governance framework, thereby leading to functional fragmentation in institutional communication. Albu and Christensen's (2024) study goes further, revealing that the absence of clear governance creates a vacuum exploited by practices such as "transparency laundering," violations of privacy, and distortions in power relations. From an organizational culture perspective, communication governance is not merely a procedural framework but an embodiment of cultural values. Organizations that embrace participation and transparency develop governance frameworks that reflect these values, whereas those that adopt digital transformation in a merely formalistic manner fail to produce effective governance due to the absence of a corresponding value foundation.

The studies of Saeed and Taher (2026); Balqadi (2024); Hasan et al. (2025); Karawya (2024); Demir (2023); Latifah et al. (2022); and Alenezi (2021) conclude that digital transformation processes within institutions face numerous financial, institutional, and human

challenges that hinder their success. These include the high cost of providing digital transformation tools and technologies, the shortage of adequately trained people with sufficient information and communication technology skills, rigid internal communication systems, and organizational process challenges. Digital transformation requires fundamental changes in infrastructure, organizational structure, and the organization's philosophical orientation, as well as continuous updating to align with evolving developments.

In this context, Zaid et al.'s (2022) study confirms that digital transformation in media institutions is closely linked to what is known as the "platformization of media," whereby digital platforms influence the structure of media production, content quality, and governance patterns, and the relationship between platforms and news publishers (Iosifidis, 2025).

Overall, the reviewed literature indicates that digital transformation should be understood as a structural and cultural reconfiguration of institutional communication rather than as a purely technological process. International studies tend to emphasize the integration of digital infrastructure with governance systems, organizational agility, and strategic innovation, whereas the Arab-context literature highlights uneven digital readiness, leadership-related challenges, organizational resistance, and the absence of clear communication governance frameworks. This comparison suggests that the main difference between Arab and international contexts lies not in the availability of digital tools alone but in the institutional capacity to integrate these tools into communication culture, governance practices, and trust-building mechanisms.

3.2. Digital Transparency and Flexible Institutional Governance

Digital transparency in institutional communication constitutes a multidimensional phenomenon situated at the intersection of communication management, organizational studies, platform governance, and the sociology of technology. Within the context of digital transformation, transparency can no longer be reduced to the mere disclosure of information; it has evolved into a complex communicative practice that reshapes power relations, institutional identities, and governance mechanisms.

The reviewed studies—albeit to varying degrees—converge on the view that the traditional conception of transparency as information availability is no longer sufficient to capture the transformations introduced by digitization. Albu and Christensen (2024) distinguish between two divergent strands in the literature: An informational approach, which assumes that transparency consists of full disclosure to an audience capable of decoding information as encoded, and a performative approach, which recognizes that both disclosed and withheld information, in the pursuit of transparency, generate new realities and influence behaviors in unpredictable ways. The authors introduce the concept of "digitally driven transparency" to denote practices that harness digital data extracted from multiple sources and technologies to enhance institutional openness.

van Zoonen et al. (2025) advance an intermediate concept—"communication visibility"—which encompasses two distinct dimensions: message transparency, referring to the visibility of the content of exchanges, and network translucence, about the visibility of social ties among actors. This distinction represents a significant conceptual contribution that moves beyond a unidimensional understanding of transparency.

Organizational visibility refers to a company's public presence; stakeholder awareness; and the extent to which its operations, goals, and information are accessible to the public, employees, and investors. It influences organizational trust, brand loyalty, and corporate responsiveness. Academic PDFs analyzing this concept generally explore three key dimensions: information visibility and transparency, leadership and management visibility and media presence, and corporate philanthropy (Ter Hoeven et al., 2021).

Doshi and Schmidt (2024) introduce the concept of “identity transparency” as a metric for the ease with which the identity of actors responsible for content or transactions in the digital environment can be determined. This constitutes an operationalizable concept that can be embedded within machine learning algorithms. By contrast, Alsharairi et al. (2025) maintain a functional understanding of transparency as a characteristic of leadership communication style, alongside authenticity and support. This conceptual choice reflects an applied orientation aimed at measuring the impact of transparency rather than deconstructing its underlying structure.

Based on these conceptualizations, the reviewed studies converge on the following:

- Digital transparency is not power-neutral; rather, it reconfigures power relations in complex ways. Albu and Christensen (2024) provide one of the most in-depth analyses of this dimension, demonstrating that digital technologies have transformed the conditions of the traditional Benthamite panopticon—where the “few” observe the “many”—into what Thomas Mathiesen terms the “synopticon,” which enables the “many” to observe the “few.” However, this apparent inversion does not eliminate power asymmetries, as actors who control digital infrastructures retain a privileged position. The findings of van Zoonen et al. (2025) substantiate this argument empirically, demonstrating that organizations possess an asymmetrical advantage in the digital space, enabling them to attain enhanced visibility into employees’ activities through a new model of organizational control grounded in visibility.
- Transparency has evolved into a governance structure that regulates institutional communication both internally and externally. Leonardi’s (2014) study shows that visibility in digital work environments enhances trust and organizational learning by making shared knowledge accessible to employees. Pitafi et al.’s (2023) study further indicates that such institutional visibility fosters innovation and improves knowledge exchange when managed with a balanced approach between openness and privacy. Conversely, van Zoonen et al.’s (2025) study cautions that the absence of clear “visibility governance” policies may transform transparency into excessive digital surveillance, thereby undermining a culture of trust within organizations. At the level of external communication, Albu and Christensen (2024) demonstrate that institutional transparency transforms trust from an intangible value into a form of long-term symbolic capital, as it enables audiences to assess organizational credibility based on observable practices. Verčič and Verčič (2025) further confirm that transparency is no longer merely an ethical obligation, but a strategic instrument for managing relationships and structuring accountability between institutions and their public.
- Digital transparency and organizational visibility constitute two foundational pillars in the construction of institutional trust within digital environments. Transparency extends beyond information disclosure to encompass process clarity, consistency of practices, and the traceability of decision-making processes within organizations, which strengthens accountability and institutional openness (Albu & Christensen, 2024). Evidence further indicates that organizational visibility enhances collaboration and knowledge exchange by making communicative interactions and practices accessible to employees through digital platforms, thereby supporting collective learning and institutional innovation (Leonardi, 2014; Pitafi et al., 2023). Transparency and visibility are not discrete endpoints; rather, they intersect with all other dimensions of digital transformation: technology restructures communicative infrastructures, algorithms reorganize power and visibility (Saurwein & Spencer-Smith, 2021; Kellogg et al., 2020), leadership culture determines the pace of institutional adoption (Rogers, 2003; Postma, 2024; Holman & Perreault, 2022), audiences exercise participatory agency in meaning-making (Pew Research Center, 2024; Deloitte, 2025), and influencers, along-

side algorithms, comprise a dual-influence system (Abidin, 2021; Lazarsfeld & Katz, 1955; Alsalloum & Gainous, 2025). Platform governance also shapes content creators' experiences of algorithmic visibility and invisibility, as platforms increasingly regulate the reach of user-generated content through algorithmic and regulatory forms of visibility moderation (Duffy & Meisner, 2023; Zeng & Kaye, 2022). These levels ultimately converge in the architecture of institutional trust, which is continuously reconstituted through transparency and organizational visibility as the most critical components in managing communication within contemporary digital media environments.

This reflects a shift in internal communication from a closed system to a visible, open, and participatory configuration. Conversely, the studies indicate that the expansion of transparency and visibility, in the absence of clear safeguards, may lead to forms of excessive digital surveillance that could undermine rather than reinforce trust within the institution (Donovan & Martin, 2022; van Zoonen et al., 2025). In the literature on measuring trust in institutions, trust is often described as a three-place relation involving a trustor (A), a trustee (B), and a task (X)—where A trusts B to do X (Hardin, 2004; OECD, 2017; Robbins, 2016). Institutional trust is a person's belief that organizations will act consistently with expectations of positive behavior (OECD, 2017).

- Organizational visibility in digital environments may be associated with increased levels of organizational monitoring, as transparency is sometimes transformed into a mechanism of control and surveillance rather than a tool for building trust. This necessitates a delicate balance of transparency and privacy (van Zoonen et al., 2025). Transparency has become a governance mechanism for external communication between institutions and their public (Verčič & Verčič, 2025; Albu & Christensen, 2024). In open-government environments, however, the usefulness of digital transparency depends not only on the disclosure of information but also on the functionality and efficiency of the digital portals and applications through which that information is provided (Matheus et al., 2023). Digital governance defines accountability, roles, and decision-making authority for an organization's digital presence, including websites, mobile sites, social channels, and other Internet- and Web-enabled platforms (Grigalashvili, 2023). In public-sector contexts, the governance of algorithmic decision-making also requires clear institutional procedures and effective communication regarding how automated decisions are designed, implemented, and explained to relevant stakeholders (Jonk & Iren, 2021). Allowing audiences to evaluate organizational credibility using observable practices. The findings further demonstrate that transparency in digital environments does not merely function as a tool for enhancing trust but may also evolve into a complex governance instrument with inherently paradoxical dimensions. It may strengthen accountability on the one hand, while generating organizational pressures and symbolic compliance practices on the other (Van den Bulck, 2025). The results also indicate that transparency and visibility do not operate in isolation; rather, they are interconnected with multiple dimensions of digital transformation in institutional communication, including the regulation of information flows, the distribution of visibility, and patterns of internal and external interaction. In this context, transparency and organizational visibility form the central architecture through which institutional trust is reconfigured in the digital environment.

At a comparative level, the findings indicate that practices of transparency and organizational visibility are more firmly institutionalized in international contexts characterized by clearer digital governance frameworks. In contrast, within the Arab context, these practices are shaped by organizational culture and levels of digital maturity, resulting in variations in the degrees of transparency and in the construction of institutional trust (Zaid et al., 2022). These findings highlight that transparency in institutional communication

is no longer merely an ethical value; it has become a strategic practice and a governance mechanism for managing trust (Verčič & Verčič, 2025). The success of institutions in digital environments depends on their capacity to strike a balance between openness and control and between visibility and accountability in ways that reinforce institutional trust both internally and externally.

An integrated reading of the studies reveals that digital transparency in institutional communication is neither a simple concept nor a panacea but rather a complex phenomenon marked by inherent tensions and paradoxes. Transparency, which was expected to enhance trust, accountability, and democratic engagement, has, in the era of digitization, generated new forms of surveillance, privacy violations, and power asymmetries (Albu & Christensen, 2024). The studies emphasize that responding to these challenges requires moving beyond a narrow informational understanding of transparency toward a constitutive communicative perspective that recognizes its performative, power-laden, and technological dimensions. It also necessitates the development of multi-level governance mechanisms integrating platforms, governments (Churkin et al., 2024), and independent regulatory bodies, as well as the cultivation of leadership capacities capable of harnessing transparency as a tool for fostering constructive participatory engagement in digital environments, particularly in times of crisis.

Taken together, the reviewed studies demonstrate that digital transparency has evolved from a normative communication value into a governance mechanism that shapes organizational visibility, accountability, and trust. The international literature tends to examine transparency through the lenses of visibility governance, privacy, surveillance, and organizational control, while the Arab-context literature more often emphasizes transparency as a pathway for strengthening institutional credibility and public trust. This contrast shows that transparency is not a uniform practice across contexts; rather, it is shaped by institutional maturity, governance capacity, cultural expectations, and the balance between openness and control.

3.3. Audience Participation: Audience as an Active Partner in Constructing Meaning and Trust

The scholarly literature reveals a fundamental transformation like the communicative relationship between institutions and their public in the context of digital transformation. The audience is no longer a passive recipient of messages; rather, it has evolved into an active participant in the production of meaning and the shaping of institutional discourse, as well as in the construction of institutional trust through interaction, participation, and the creation of user-generated content (UGC) (Istrate et al., 2022; Churkin et al., 2024).

Concurrently, digitization, along with the growing reliance on algorithms and artificial intelligence tools in the design, production, and dissemination of communicative content, has enabled institutions to deliver more personalized and contextually tailored content. This enhances engagement with citizens and improves service quality (Pūraitė et al., 2020). This shift reflects a transition from a hierarchical, unidirectional model to an interactive, networked system in which the roles of institutions and audiences are intertwined within a continuous communicative process (Istrate et al., 2022; Churkin et al., 2024).

Patterns of interaction—such as commenting, sharing, reposting, and content creation—are closely associated with levels of credibility and trust. Evidence indicates that trust in digital environments is increasingly shaped through interaction and audience engagement rather than solely through traditional institutional messaging (Ouldhali, 2025; Pew Research Center, 2024). Users are no longer confined to content consumption; they actively contribute to the formation of media discourse itself, which redefines the relationship between institutions and their public in digital environments (Deloitte, 2025; DataReportal, 2025; Orzeată, 2024; Istrate et al., 2022).

Some previous studies have proposed a five-dimensional analytical framework—commercial, professional, technological, content-related, and audience engagement—that illustrates how the audience dimension permeates all levels of institutional practice. At the commercial level, institutions restructure their models to accommodate audience metrics; at the professional level, journalists acquire new skills to engage with their audiences; at the technological level, platforms are re-engineered to enhance interaction; and at the content level, materials are designed based on an improved understanding of audience preferences (Chua & Westlund, 2019).

Based on these insights, the reviewed studies distinguish among three key dimensions of digital audience agency: The expansion of global reach, the reduction in barriers to access through personalization, and the prominence of audience-generated content. They emphasize that “the [creative] work emerges on the viewer’s screen,” indicating that meaning itself has become a “negotiated, participatory process” between institutions and their public (Pöllmann, 2021; Holst, 2021).

Moreover, three prototypical cases illustrate this transformation: the governance of speed (hierarchical model), the governance of misinformation (self-regulatory model), and the governance of the sharing economy (participatory model). The latter case demonstrates how “algorithmic trust” has supplanted interpersonal trust in social exchange relations, as platforms such as Uber and Airbnb act as intermediaries that manage “distrust” through automated rating and verification systems (Gritsenko & Wood, 2022). Peeters and Schuilenburg refer to these systems as “automated agents,” noting that the public increasingly interacts not with human employees but with chatbots in information and licensing services, drones in security surveillance, and robots in healthcare provision. The authors warn that this transformation constructs the “other” as a statistical “anomaly,” particularly in contexts such as predictive policing, where the “future criminal”—rather than the actual offender—becomes the subject of analysis and intervention (Peeters & Schuilenburg, 2023).

This analysis reveals that the digital audience has shifted from a passive recipient to an active partner in the production of meaning and the shaping of institutional discourse. The construction of trust in digital environments now requires multidimensional strategies that combine “platform balancing” (Chua & Westlund, 2019), deliberate strategic positioning (Pöllmann, 2021), addressing structural gaps (Nirman, 2025), and strengthening digital media literacy (Echaranini, 2025). Collectively, the studies indicate that the future of institutional communication depends on the ability of institutions to redefine themselves as open, participatory spaces rather than unidirectional channels, as well as on their recognition that trust is no longer a given condition but an ongoing, negotiated construct that is continuously renewed through each interaction with the public (Orzeșă, 2024; Istrate et al., 2022).

Studies in the Arab context support this trajectory, demonstrating that audience engagement with digital news is directly associated with perceived levels of trust and that active participation contributes to enhancing the credibility of both content and media institutions (Al-Mshashaqbeh, 2025; Ouldali, 2025). At the same time, the literature indicates that such engagement is not without challenges. Algorithmic systems may generate “information bubbles,” which constrain content diversity and shape audience perceptions of information, with potential adverse effects on trust in the absence of deliberate governance of this interactive environment (Cinelli et al., 2021). Social media environments may also facilitate the circulation of false or misleading news, with potential implications for audience perceptions and trust in digital information (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

The findings further demonstrate that transparency in institutional communication plays a decisive role in strengthening this participatory relationship. Transparency is no longer merely an ethical obligation; it has evolved into a communicative practice grounded

in audience inclusion in dialog and in the co-construction of institutional discourse. This dynamic fosters what may be described as “interactive trust,” emerging from participation and engagement rather than unidirectional communication (Verčič & Verčič, 2025; Ouldhali, 2025).

At a comparative level, the results indicate that patterns of interaction and trust building vary across international and Arab contexts. In the Arab context, these patterns are shaped by social, cultural, and institutional factors—including audience characteristics, baseline levels of trust in institutions, and modes of digital platform use. This produces variations in the levels of participation, engagement, and institutional trust relative to international contexts (Istrate et al., 2022). These findings suggest that the digital audience has become an organizational partner in institutional communication, and that institutional success in digital environments depends on the ability to manage this partnership through interactive practices grounded in transparency, governance, and a nuanced understanding of the platform and algorithmic dynamics (Ouldhali, 2025).

This transformation reflects a shift from a closed, hierarchical model of communication to an interactive, networked system in which the roles of institutions and audiences are intertwined. The audience becomes a co-producer of institutional narratives and of media brand identity through diverse forms of participation across digital platforms. This phenomenon can be interpreted through Uses and Gratifications Theory, which posits that individuals engage with media to satisfy cognitive, social, and psychological needs rather than passively receiving messages. With the evolution of algorithmic platforms, this framework has expanded to encompass additional motivations, including digital identity formation, the pursuit of visibility, and participation in institutional discourse.

In this study, Uses and Gratifications Theory is employed to explain why audiences engage with institutional digital communication beyond passive exposure. In algorithmically mediated environments, audiences seek not only information but also visibility, participation, identity expression, and social validation. This theoretical lens helps researchers interpret audience practices such as commenting, sharing, reposting, and content generation as active communicative behaviors that contribute to meaning-making and trust formation. Accordingly, the theory complements the study’s broader framework by linking audience motivations with institutional transparency, engagement, and the co-construction of trust in digital communication environments.

Consequently, audiences play an active role in the reproduction of meaning through interaction, reposting, and the creation of parallel content. This also enables trust in institutions to be assessed based on engagement and participation levels. These findings are reinforced by reports from Pew Research Center (2024), DataReportal (2025), and Deloitte (2025), which indicate that global audiences—particularly younger cohorts—are increasingly oriented toward short-form, interactive content and that the rise of the “citizen creator” has redefined the relationship between institutions and their public. Users are no longer limited to consumption but actively contribute to shaping media messages, transforming the relationship into a collaborative and participatory one rather than a unidirectional, marketing-driven exchange (Churkin et al., 2024).

Conversely, the study by Cinelli et al. (2021) cautions that this interactive environment may produce “information bubbles”—a tendency toward informational enclosure within homogeneous cognitive spheres that limit diversity. Accordingly, institutional awareness of platform algorithms becomes a critical factor in ensuring healthy interaction grounded in transparency, diversity, and fairness in visibility, rather than reinforcing digital biases or constraining the scope of public discourse (see Table 2).

Table 2. Institutional trust in the digital communication environment.

Dimension	Finding	Communication Impact
Audience role	Audiences act as active partners in meaning-making	Emergence of interactive trust instead of one-way communication
Media influence	Dual influence (human–algorithmic)	Redefinition of media influence in platform-based environments

The findings further indicate that audience participation increasingly occurs within platform environments shaped jointly by human actors and algorithmic systems, creating a dual influence structure that affects visibility, interaction, and trust in digital communication environments.

Taken together, the reviewed literature indicates that audience participation has become a central mechanism in the construction of institutional trust within digital communication environments. International studies tend to emphasize co-creation, user-generated content, platform interaction, and participatory communication as indicators of institutional legitimacy, whereas the Arab-context literature more strongly associates audience engagement with credibility, transparency, and public confidence. Across both contexts, trust is increasingly shaped through continuous interaction rather than one-way institutional communication, reflecting a broader shift from message control toward collaborative, networked, and audience-centered communication relationships.

3.4. Organizational Culture: Variations in Institutional Adoption Linked to Culture and Leadership

The intersection between organizational culture and digital transformation constitutes a central axis in contemporary research within institutional communication and management. Digital transformation is no longer understood as the mere adoption of new technological tools; rather, it is conceptualized as a profound reconfiguration of values, practices, and relationships within organizations, inextricably linked to the maturity of organizational culture and the effectiveness of leadership in managing change (Koska et al., 2025; Fatchurrohman et al., 2025; Baojing et al., 2025; Ashwini & Joshi, 2025; Praveen Raja, 2025; Akman et al., 2024; Spyridon, 2023; Serpa et al., 2022). Although the studies reviewed approach this relationship from different analytical angles, they converge on the premise that the success of digital transformation is contingent upon the prevailing organizational culture (Cao et al., 2025; Hasan et al., 2025; Adam & Siladjaja, 2025).

- Institutions characterized by participatory cultures and openness to learning and experimentation demonstrate greater capacity for absorbing innovation than those with closed bureaucratic structures (Adam & Siladjaja, 2025; Cao et al., 2025; Baojing et al., 2025; Bozkus, 2023; Holman & Perreault, 2022; Kocak & Pawlowski, 2022). Leadership communication in digital environments increasingly relies on transparency and interactive responsiveness, as open communication between leadership and employees contributes to building trust and reducing resistance to change (Nweke, 2025; Alsharairi et al., 2025; El Din, 2025; Baojing et al., 2025).
- Leadership plays a pivotal role in steering digital transformation by fostering innovation, empowering employees, and aligning organizational strategies with digital objectives. Evidence indicates that digital leadership is a decisive factor in successful transformation, as change-oriented leaders reframe transformation from a technical initiative into a shared institutional vision (Alasqah & Noureldin, 2025; Karawya, 2024; Postma, 2024; Holman & Perreault, 2022). The findings further suggest that organizational transparency accelerates the adoption of digital transformation by mitigating

resistance and strengthening internal trust between employees and management. Higher levels of disclosure and process clarity are associated with increased institutional readiness for adoption and participation (Verčič & Verčič, 2025; Fatchurrohman et al., 2025; Nweke, 2025; Baojing et al., 2025).

- The study of Verčič and Verčič (2025) introduces what may be termed the “cultural paradox of digital transformation.” Based on a digital diary methodology applied to a sample of 104 employees in a Slovenian telecommunications company, the study found that the frequency of face-to-face interaction at the individual level was the only variable that predicted communication satisfaction effectively ($\beta = 0.426$, $p = 0.034$), whereas the frequency of digital communication across various channels showed no statistically significant effect. This finding holds deeper cultural significance when interpreted in light of Media Richness Theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986), suggesting that a healthy organizational culture requires a degree of relational richness that digital tools alone cannot fully replicate, regardless of their efficiency. Notably, positive attitudes toward digital technologies did not moderate the relationship between digital communication frequency and communication satisfaction, indicating that cultural acceptance of technology does not necessarily imply its capacity to fulfill deeper relational needs among employees.
- This finding aligns with that in (Albu & Christensen, 2024), which argues that “complete transparency is unattainable.” Organizations that adopt absolute digital transparency policies—such as Buffer, which made all internal emails visible to employees—often encounter adaptive counter-strategies by employees seeking to preserve a degree of cultural privacy. This dynamic may ultimately erode trust and collaboration rather than strengthen them.

Organizational culture and leadership thus constitute the invisible infrastructure of digital transformation. The mere availability of technology does not ensure successful transformation in the presence of a closed organizational culture or unsupportive leadership. Conversely, evidence shows that institutions adopting an enabling culture, supported by informed leadership, achieve deeper and more sustainable transformation by fostering collaboration, delegating authority, and restructuring internal communication in ways that reinforce innovation and organizational trust (Spyridon, 2023; Karawya, 2024; Adam & Siladjaja, 2025).

At a comparative level, the findings indicate that institutions in international contexts demonstrate a higher degree of alignment between organizational culture and digital strategies. In contrast, Arab institutions face additional challenges—including cultural resistance, managerial hesitation, and uneven levels of digital readiness—leading to asymmetrical adoption of digital transformation (Zaid et al., 2022). Evidence from the Arab context further suggests that many institutions continue to approach digitization as a limited technical or administrative undertaking, without achieving substantive transformation in organizational culture or leadership patterns. Studies show that the adoption of technology does not necessarily translate into meaningful institutional change in structures and cultural frameworks (Zaid et al., 2022; El Din, 2025; Wang et al., 2023.; Spyridon, 2023).

The study by Alsharairi et al. (2025) offers a major contribution toward understanding the relationship between organizational culture and digital transformation by highlighting the role of communicative leadership as a cultural mediator. Findings from a field study conducted in Jordanian universities reveal that the leadership communication style exerts a direct effect on employee engagement ($\beta = 0.41$), which in turn serves as a driver of positive communicative behaviors on social media, particularly during times of crisis. The significance of this finding from an organizational culture perspective lies in the identification of a specific cultural feature within the Jordanian context: employees tend

to perceive their workplace as a “second family,” which reduces their propensity to adopt negative communicative behaviors in digital environments.

This observation highlights a critical dimension often overlooked in the literature—that organizational culture does not develop in isolation but is embedded within and shaped by the broader societal culture. In this regard, Social Exchange Theory yields differentiated implications across cultural contexts, as values such as reciprocity and organizational loyalty tend to manifest more strongly in collectivist cultures than in individualistic ones (Lukito et al., 2025; Cropanzano et al., 2017).

Conversely, studies in the Arab context—albeit to varying degrees—converge on the view that resistance to cultural change is one of the most complex challenges facing digital transformation within Arab institutions. This resistance is driven by limited digital preparedness and concerns over losing control of information flows. Employees tend to adhere to traditional channels when the prevailing organizational culture is bureaucratic and centralized (Chadi et al., 2025; Hasan et al., 2025; Nweke, 2025; Karawya, 2024; Spyridon, 2023). Such attitudes manifest in negative communicative behaviors—including the spread of rumors and public complaints, which decline significantly when employee engagement is high ($\beta = -0.27$). This constitutes a clear indicator that a positive organizational culture functions as a form of resilience against destructive digital behaviors—an outcome that cannot be achieved solely through the adoption of advanced digital tools (Alsharairi et al., 2025; Adam & Siladjaja, 2025).

This finding aligns with the study of Albu and Christensen (2024), which suggests that resistance may assume more complex forms, materializing in employees’ development of “personal obfuscation” strategies in response to imposed transparency cultures, through techniques such as encryption, concealment, and distortion. Accordingly, digital transparency is not a neutral technical feature; rather, it is a performative practice that shapes subjectivities, relationships, and emerging cultural patterns within the organization (Akman et al., 2024; Cao et al., 2025). Introducing digital transparency tools into an organizational environment that lacks the corresponding value framework may produce counterproductive outcomes, including the proliferation of surveillance cultures at the expense of trust or the escalation of counter-obfuscation practices rather than the intended openness (Nweke, 2025).

These findings indicate that digital transformation in institutional communication is as much a cultural–leadership process as it is a technological one. Its success depends on the ability of institutions to reconfigure their organizational cultures toward openness, accountability, and empowerment, as well as on the adoption of digital leadership models capable of balancing technological innovation with institutional responsibility. Within this framework, organizational transparency emerges as a critical factor in building institutional trust and accelerating transformation by shifting internal communication from a purely administrative function to an interactive mechanism grounded in participation and engagement (Spyridon, 2023; Karawya, 2024; Adam & Siladjaja, 2025).

The studies further converge in emphasizing that successful digital transformation necessitates a parallel cultural transformation (Spyridon, 2023; Akman et al., 2024; Cao et al., 2025), reflected in the redefinition of relationships between leadership and employees (Carvalho et al., 2025; Alsharairi et al., 2025; Elbolok et al., 2025; Lukito et al., 2025; Deep, 2023), the preservation of the depth of human interaction despite digital efficiency, the establishment of clear communicative governance frameworks (Verčič & Verčič, 2025; Spyridon, 2023), and the cultivation of critical awareness of the performative dimensions of digital transparency (Albu & Christensen, 2024; Farias-Gaytan et al., 2023).

In light of the above, contemporary organizations can be considered as facing a dual cultural challenge: on the one hand, they are required to cultivate a digital culture that

embraces the tools and affordances of the contemporary era; on the other, they must preserve the relational human dimension that constitutes the core of effective institutional communication. In the balance between these two dimensions lies the critical determinant that ascertains an organization's capacity for resilience and differentiation in the age of digital transformation.

Within this complex and rapidly evolving digital landscape, there is a pressing need to move beyond traditional conceptions of leadership toward a model of “transformational digital leadership,” grounded in the re-engineering of the relationship between institutions and their public in accordance with the principles of ethical disclosure. Institutional presence in digital spaces is no longer sufficient; they must assume a leading role in shaping a new digital consciousness based on proactive transparency. In this model, disclosure extends beyond legal compliance to become an explicit organizational culture that recognizes the public's right to full awareness of content policies, funding sources, and the boundaries of influence (Nweke, 2025; Adam & Siladjaja, 2025; Albu & Christensen, 2024). This leadership paradigm is further anchored in the principle of “digital accountability,” conceived not as a mechanism of control but as an instrument for building trust through open dialog structures that move beyond reactive crisis management toward anticipatory engagement, enabled by active listening and ethical data analysis (Albu & Christensen, 2024).

A practical roadmap for this transformational leadership in institutional communication—particularly within the Arab context—requires a shift from a unidirectional “broadcast” logic to a model of “co-construction of meaning” with the public, structured around three core pillars (Cao et al., 2025; Adam & Siladjaja, 2025; Nweke, 2025; Albu & Christensen, 2024):

- Empowering teams through sustained investment in critical digital competencies, ensuring that content creators function not merely as executors but as active custodians of professional ethics.
- Establishing binding, codified ethical standards governing the use of generative AI in content generation, alongside explicit disclosure of any content generated or modified through AI technologies to safeguard informational integrity.
- Reconfiguring the role of the audience from passive recipient to governance partner, through digital platforms that enable interactive credibility assessment and incorporate public feedback systematically into decision-making processes (see Table 3).

Table 3. Determinants of successful digital transformation in institutional organizations.

Factor	Finding	Analytical Interpretation
Organizational culture	A decisive factor in digital transformation success	Openness and trust accelerate digital adoption
Digital leadership	Transformational leadership outweighs technical infrastructure	Leadership vision shapes how technology is deployed
Institutional variation	Uneven levels of digital maturity across organizations	The gap is primarily cultural and managerial rather than technical

According to this viewpoint, transformational digital leadership in the Arab world, such as through closed narratives, can aid in the restoration of trust. Furthermore, becoming ethically open transforms transparency from a calculated risk to a real opportunity for leadership.

The comparative evidence indicates that organizational culture and leadership constitute the most influential determinants of successful digital transformation. Although technological infrastructure provides the foundation for digital change, the reviewed studies

consistently show that institutions with participatory cultures, transparent communication practices, and digitally oriented leadership achieve more sustainable transformation outcomes. The contrast between Arab and international contexts further suggests that cultural readiness and leadership commitment remain more decisive than technological availability in shaping the effectiveness of institutional communication in digital environments.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, digital transformation in contemporary institutions does not merely entail the introduction of modern technologies into organizational operations; rather, it constitutes a profound structural transformation that reshapes the logic of communication, configurations of power, and modes of relationship management both within the organization and beyond it. This study demonstrates that algorithms and AI are no longer neutral technical tools; they have evolved into organizational actors that direct visibility and redistribute influence within institutions through “algorithmic power.” This development necessitates the establishment of robust digital governance frameworks grounded in transparency, accountability, and informational justice. The findings further indicate that organizational culture and transformational leadership represent the decisive factors in ensuring the success of digital transformation. Technology alone cannot generate meaningful change without being accompanied by a deliberate process of change management and a coherent system of institutional values that promotes collaboration, openness, and trust. This study further underscores the growing significance of the digital audience as an active partner in the construction of institutional discourse rather than as a passive recipient. This shift requires institutions to adopt participatory communication strategies that engage users in the co-creation of meaning and content, in line with an interactive public relations paradigm. Moreover, transparency and organizational visibility have become foundational pillars in the construction of institutional trust. The relationship between institutions and their public is no longer based on unidirectional transmission but on reciprocal dialog and continuous accountability. This transformation redefines public relations as an interactive governance system rather than a mere communication function. Accordingly, this study affirms that digital transformation in institutional communication represents a simultaneous cultural, epistemic, and organizational shift. It calls upon Arab institutions in particular to reconfigure their communicative structures in alignment with the principles of transparency, responsibility, and trust within the contemporary algorithmic environment. Institutions that recognize and effectively integrate the interplay between human and algorithmic dimensions will be better positioned to cultivate sustainable trust in an evolving media landscape.

The scholarly value of this study stems from its capacity to reconceptualize digital transformation in the field of institutional communication as a structural phenomenon that extends beyond technical modernization toward the construction of new patterns of governance, transparency, and interaction within media organizations. At the theoretical level, this study contributes to both Arab and international scholarship by integrating five major explanatory frameworks into a unified model—comprising Technological Determinism, Diffusion of Innovations Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, the Two-Step Flow Model, and Networked Communication Theory—that links technological infrastructure, institutional culture, and communicative behavior. This integration enables the development of a comprehensive and non-conventional analytical approach that explains how human actors, algorithms, institutions, and audiences interact within a unified communicative ecosystem.

At the applied level, this study offers a practical framework for advancing transparent algorithmic governance within Arab media institutions through the adoption of clearly defined regulatory mechanisms governing the use of AI. It further emphasizes the activation

of institutional transparency and organizational visibility as instruments for building trust and accountability. In addition, this study highlights its practical significance in transforming public relations practices toward a participatory model grounded in interaction and credibility, rather than control and unidirectional messaging.

From an epistemological perspective, this study introduces a novel analytical concept—“algorithmic–interactive public relations”—which elucidates how algorithms have evolved into both a communicative intermediary and an active agent participating in meaning-making and in shaping the relationship between the organization and its public. In doing so, this study redraws the boundaries between human communication and automated communication and opens new avenues for research into issues of trust and digital accountability in Arab media. It also offers an original local and regional contribution by comparing its findings with recent Gulf and Arab experiences (Tawfic, 2025; Alsalloum & Gainous, 2025; Zaid et al., 2022), which enhances the alignment of global concepts with the specificities of the Arab media environment undergoing accelerated digital transformation, and contributes to expanding research horizons on the dynamics of digital media as governance environments that regulate interaction, trust, and decision-making within contemporary media institutions.

The findings of this study are broadly consistent with the recent Arab and international literature addressing digital transformation in institutional communication from the perspectives of governance and organizational transparency, while also providing distinctive qualitative contributions through the integration of structural analysis with governance and communicative interpretations. The findings confirm, in line with Kellogg et al. (2020), that algorithms have become a new organizational actor redistributing visibility and power within media institutions. This aligns with the work of Saurwein and Spencer-Smith (2021), which argues that recommendation systems and AI now exercise a governing role in structuring communication and accountability in digital environments. These findings also intersect with Castells’ conception of the “network society,” in which power is exercised through flows of information, reinforcing this study’s conclusion that digital transformation brings a structural shift in the logic of institutional communication rather than a mere technical tool upgrade. Furthermore, the findings are consistent with those of Leonardi (2014), Albu and Christensen (2024), Pitafi et al. (2023), and Verčič and Verčič (2025), linking organizational transparency and visibility to levels of institutional trust. This is reflected in the sixth finding, which establishes that transparency and visibility have become the ethical and operational foundation of public relations in the digital age. This also aligns with the findings of Verčič and Verčič (2025), which contends that transparency is no longer a promotional value but a governance practice that regulates the relationship between the organization and its public, redefining public relations as the management of trust and accountability rather than merely reputation management.

Regarding institutional leadership and the adoption of innovation, the findings are consistent with Rogers (2003), as well as with more recent applications such as those of Holman and Perreault (2022) and Postma (2024), emphasizing that the success of digital transformation depends more on organizational culture and transformational leadership than on technical infrastructure. This is confirmed by the third finding of the study. The results also converge with recent behavioral trends highlighted by the Pew Research Center (2024) and Deloitte (2025), indicating that audiences are no longer passive recipients but active participants in producing institutional discourse and shaping its meanings, in alignment with the fourth finding concerning the role of the audience as a partner in meaning-making and trust building.

Accordingly, the findings reaffirm modern trends that conceptualize digital transformation as a restructuring of institutional communication, while adding a novel dimension

that frames public relations as transparent governance that integrates technology with organizational culture, the audience with platforms, and algorithms with institutional trust. Thus, this study offers a scholarly and epistemic contribution that expands both the theoretical and applied horizons for understanding institutional communication within contemporary digital environments.

In summary, this paper concludes with the following key findings:

- (1) Digital transformation as a comprehensive structural shift: It is not limited to updating tools but reconstructs institutional communication from a closed hierarchical model into an interactive network based on openness and participation.
- (2) Organizational culture and digital leadership as decisive factors: The success of digital transformation depends more on transformational leadership and a culture of trust and openness than on technical infrastructure.
- (3) The audience as a partner in producing institutional discourse: Audiences have become integral to the communication process through interaction and UGC, requiring participatory communication strategies that enhance trust and credibility.
- (4) Media influence as dual (human–algorithmic): Influencers and algorithms operate as interdependent agents of influence, requiring institutions to manage public relations through integrated analysis of platforms and content.
- (5) Transparency and organizational visibility as the foundation of trust: Digital transparency and organizational visibility constitute the governance structure of modern public relations, underpinning trust, accountability, and positive engagement.
- (6) The Arab context moving toward emerging digital governance models: Arab media institutions are gradually transitioning toward more transparent and interactive models, yet still require clearer digital governance frameworks that account for cultural and organizational specifics.

The following recommendations are derived directly from the recurring patterns, areas of consensus, and key findings identified across the reviewed literature. They reflect the dominant themes that emerged from the systematic analysis of digital transformation, institutional trust, organizational culture, transparency, and algorithmic governance.

Recommendations:

Based on the preceding findings, the following are recommended courses of action:

- (1) Establish transparent algorithmic governance frameworks within Arab institutions, clearly defining decision-making mechanisms, recommendation criteria, and algorithmic monitoring systems to ensure informational fairness and digital accountability.
- (2) Promote transformational digital leadership that integrates technical vision with cultural awareness, through specialized training programs for communication and public relations managers on digital transformation and its ethics.
- (3) Develop “visibility governance” policies to balance openness and privacy within collaborative work environments (such as Slack and Microsoft Teams), enhancing trust while mitigating excessive surveillance.
- (4) Redesign institutional communication strategies to prioritize participation and dialog rather than one-way broadcasting, while employing algorithmic analytics to understand interaction dynamics and audience meaning-making.
- (5) Conduct quantitative and qualitative field studies in the future to measure the impact of digital transparency on institutional trust in Arab media institutions and compare findings with international experiences.
- (6) Establish digital governance units within institutions to oversee AI ethics and assess the impact of algorithms on communication and professional policies.
- (7) Integrate “algorithmic–interactive” concepts into academic curricula in institutional communication faculties across the Arab world, to prepare a generation of practition-

ers with critical awareness of the role and impact of algorithms in shaping institutional communication.

5. Study Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the review is limited to the literature published between 2019 and early 2026, so earlier foundational contributions are included only when theoretically necessary. Second, the comparative analysis is constrained by the uneven availability of Arab and international studies, as Arab scholarship on digital transformation, algorithmic governance, and institutional communication remains relatively limited. Third, the findings depend on the conceptual and methodological quality of the reviewed studies; therefore, the conclusions should be interpreted as a synthesis of existing research rather than as direct empirical evidence. Future research should conduct empirical, longitudinal studies to examine how digital transparency, organizational visibility, and algorithmic governance affect institutional trust across diverse cultural and organizational contexts.

6. Future Research Directions

Future research could extend the conceptual insights developed in this study by examining the empirical dynamics of digital transformation, algorithmic governance, and institutional communication within specific media organizations. In particular, future studies may employ qualitative or mixed-methods approaches—such as case studies, interviews with communication managers, or comparative content analyses—to explore how digital transformation is implemented across different institutional contexts. Furthermore, comparative research across various Arab media systems may provide deeper insights into the organizational, cultural, and regulatory factors shaping the adoption of algorithmic communication practices.

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Note

¹ Research Data:

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