

UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC PERCEPTION IN SOCIAL MEDIA: THE UAD FRAMEWORK

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Abstract. The rapid growth of social media has significantly changed the way the public, especially in Malaysia, interacts with law enforcement institutions such as the Royal Malaysian Police (RMP). With increasingly easy access to various digital platforms, public perceptions are now not only formed more quickly but also more easily influenced through open, immediate and interactive communication channels. This new dynamic has caused the digital space to become the main site for the formation of public discourse, including issues related to integrity, professionalism and misconduct of police officers. This situation presents a major challenge to the RMP in managing public perceptions, as negative sentiment, even stemming from a small number of incidents, can spread widely and affect overall trust in the institution. Based on these needs, this study presents a conceptual study through literature analysis with the aim of introducing the Understanding–Adaptation–Diffusion (UAD) Framework as a strategic communication model that can help the RMP navigate public perceptions in today's digital ecosystem. The objectives of this study are: (i) to introduce UAD as a conceptual framework that can explain how public sentiment is formed and changed through social media displays; and (ii) explore more responsive and transparent communication approaches in disseminating information to strengthen the reputation of policing institutions. UAD describes three main stages in public perception management: comprehension, which refers to the way audiences interpret media narratives and frames; adaptation, which is the institutional response to emerging sentiments; and dissemination, which emphasizes the need for clear, accurate and credible strategic communication. This study also incorporates Framing Theory (Goffman; Entman) and McQuail's thinking on mass communication, thus positioning UAD as a relevant contextual framework for the Malaysian environment. It is hoped that the contribution of this study can help public institutions build more effective digital communication strategies, increase transparency, and ultimately strengthen the level of public trust in the fast-moving information age.

Keywords: *public perception, social media, RMP, conceptual framework, media framing*

Introduction

The rapid growth of social media has changed the landscape of public communication, not only in individual interactions, but also in public relations with government institutions and law enforcement (Hamizi, 2023). Digital platforms now function as the main medium for information dissemination, public discourse, and perception formation. Supratman (2018) study shows that positive experiences on social media can increase public confidence, while negative experiences can weaken trust in official institutions. In the Malaysia context, research on public perceptions of the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP) is still limited. Most studies emphasize public feedback, but less examine how social media narratives influence the validity and legitimacy of policing institutions. Issues of information leakage, abuse of power, and decreased integrity are increasingly affecting institutional credibility (Ahmad et al., 2018). Bakar et al. (2025) also emphasized that social media is now a dominant factor that challenges the control of public discourse and changes the dynamics of freedom of expression. In this regard,

this gap demands a new conceptual approach to explain how messages about the police are framed, interpreted, and subsequently influence the level of institutional legitimacy. Framing theory (Entman, 2010) and McQuail (2010) thinking provide an important foundation in understanding the role of media, although the original focus of the theory was more focused on traditional media. In contrast to conventional media, social media features interactive, immediate, and difficult to control nature. To fill this gap, this study introduces the Understand–Adapt–Disseminate (UAD) Framework as a strategic communication model to help RMP manage public perception in the digital era. UAD emphasizes three main elements: understanding public sentiment, adapting messages according to the context of public concerns, and disseminating transparent and consistent communication. This approach is in line with Sapienza (2021) view that integrity, responsiveness, and transparency are fundamental to building institutional trust.

The objectives of this study are to: (1) introduce UAD as a conceptual framework in understanding public perceptions of RMP; and (2) exploring transparent and effective methods of message dissemination to enhance the reputation and legitimacy of policing institutions. Overall, this study not only fills the gap in the literature on public perception of RMP in the context of social media, but also contributes from the theoretical, methodological, and practical aspects through the proposed UAD Framework as a conceptual model relevant to the communication challenges of the digital era.

Literature review

Public sentiment and digital media in policing

High-profile incidents such as the death of Freddie Gray in police custody in the United States have sparked widespread negative reactions and significant public debate (Oglesby-Neal et al., 2019). In the digital era, social media serves as a primary space for society to express views, concerns, and sentiments towards the policing institution. Her previous research has also shown that interactions between police and the public are no longer limited to physical encounters, but rather develop in an open and dynamic virtual space. The phenomenon of viral videos, coverage of high-profile cases, and widespread digital narratives have shaped public perceptions of police integrity, competence, and legitimacy. This makes it easier for issues of police misconduct to be magnified through online sharing, thus eroding public trust in the police institution. Pitts (2022) also emphasizes that social media functions as a mechanism to amplify public sentiment, especially when there are narratives that touch on social justice and institutional injustice. Digital narratives formed from public discussions, user comments, and media coverage are determinants of how society evaluates the role of the police. This phenomenon demonstrates how public perceptions can be formed more quickly than ever before, and are often based on emotions and experiences shared collectively online. In the context of this study, the Understand phase of the UAD Framework emphasizes the need for policing institutions to accurately identify the sentiments, concerns, and needs of the public that arise from digital discourse. This understanding is crucial because it not only allows police to assess the level of public trust, but also helps them develop more effective communication strategies. By understanding how high-profile case coverage and digital narratives shape public perceptions, policing can more

proactively tailor their responses, thereby reducing the negative perception gap between police and the public

Transparency, accountability, and public trust

Transparency and accountability are key to maintaining public trust in policing, especially in the digital era influenced by social media. Pitts (2022) point out that a lack of transparency in public communication has the potential to reinforce negative stereotypes of the police institution. This situation occurs when the mistakes of a few members are perceived in a generalised manner, thereby undermining the level of legitimacy and public trust in the institution as a whole. In the context of the UAD Framework, the Adapt phase requires the police to adapt their communication strategies based on community sensitivities, including explaining investigation procedures and disciplinary measures transparently. This is important to change the negative narrative to an emphasis on the value of organizational accountability. Meanwhile, the Disseminate phase emphasizes the need for consistent dissemination of performance information, such as case resolution rates and disciplinary actions, through official channels. This continuous dissemination not only serves as a confidence-building mechanism, but also as a proactive strategy to maintain public trust. Overall, the combination of the Adapt and Disseminate phases strengthens police–community relations through transparent and consistent communication, thus overcoming the risk of negative stereotypes and strengthening the legitimacy of the policing institution.

Social media as a strategic communication tool

A study by Lu and Cindy Ngai (2024) emphasized that social media functions as an interactive ecosystem that strengthens community engagement. Their analysis showed that organizations that successfully manage digital communications are those that are able to maintain a balance between responsiveness to public sentiment and transparency of the information conveyed. This emphasis is in line with the first phase of the UAD Framework, namely Understand, which emphasizes the need to understand public perceptions, concerns, and sentiments before appropriate communication strategies are formulated. Furthermore, Di Gangi and Wasko (2016) outlines the function of social media as a crisis prevention tool through its ability to monitor online community sentiment patterns. He argues that continuous monitoring of digital discourse allows organizations to identify early signs of a crisis and subsequently adjust communication messages to be more relevant before the issue becomes more serious. This approach is in line with the second phase of UAD, namely Adapt, which demands the adaptation of communication narratives according to the crisis context and audience expectations. Meanwhile, Kershaw (2023) emphasizes the importance of social media in strengthening institutional credibility through the dissemination of authentic, accurate, and consistent official information. According to him, strategic communication based on transparency can not only reduce the spread of false information, but also build public confidence in the policing institution. This is closely related to the third phase of UAD, namely Disseminate, which emphasizes the importance of delivering information that has been understood and adapted effectively so that it is positively received by the community.

In the context of policing in Malaysia, Azis (2022) study further strengthens the argument that social media plays an important role as a strategic communication tool.

He emphasizes that the planned use of social media allows the police to build positive perceptions, increase meaningful interactions with the community, and strengthen the foundation of public trust. This finding emphasizes the suitability of social media with the entire UAD phase: first, as an instrument to understand public perceptions (Understand); second, as a medium for adjusting communication strategies based on public feedback (Adapt); and third, as an information dissemination platform that increases trust, legitimacy, and positive police-community relations (Disseminate). Therefore, this study adds justification that the UAD framework is suitable for use as a conceptual basis to assess the role of social media in building public perceptions and engagement with the policing institution. Overall, these four studies prove that social media should not be seen simply as a communication channel, but as a strategic component that supports the process of understanding public perception (Understand), adapting messages in the context of crisis and social sensitivity (Adapt), and disseminating official information with high credibility (Disseminate). Therefore, social media is a critical element in strategic communication management, especially for policing institutions that face great challenges in building and maintaining public trust in this challenging digital era

Perceptions of policing technology and issues of public sensitivity

The development of policing technology such as body cameras, facial recognition, and smart surveillance systems has raised debates about issues of authority, power, and privacy. Przeszlowski and Guerette (2025) study shows that while technology increases operational effectiveness, it also raises concerns about fairness, ethics, and the potential for abuse of power. In this context, society often questions the balance between security and fundamental rights, especially when there is a case of misuse or leakage of personal data. Therefore, within the UAD framework, the Understand phase is very important for the police to identify public sensitivities before adapting their communication messages. Without this understanding, gaps in perception and distrust have the potential to undermine the legitimacy of policing in the digital age. Pitts (2022) found that media coverage focused on crime and police misconduct, coupled with technological advances such as cell phone cameras, increased public scrutiny and exposure to the issue. This overexposure has the potential to create inaccurate perceptions of police brutality, while video analysis shows that minority victims are more frequently depicted and the use of force is often unnecessary. This situation serves to perpetuate negative stereotypes of police and increases the likelihood of the use of force in police/community interactions. These findings are relevant to the UAD Framework, where understanding public perceptions (Understanding phase) and adapting communication messages (Adapting phase) are essential to strategically disseminate information (Dissemination phase) to build or restore confidence in policing institutions.

The role of mass media and new media in shaping perception

Mass media and new media function not only as communication channels, but also as social agents that play a role in shaping culture, stereotypes, and social narratives accepted in society. According to Ghanta (2021), the media acts as a catalyst in building cultural frameworks and social views, which in turn influence how society evaluates an institution, including the policing institution. In this context, the portrayal conveyed by the media can create a positive or negative image, thus determining the level of trust and

legitimacy given by society to the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP). Furthermore, Puplampu (2023) emphasizes that media framing plays an important role in shaping discourses about police brutality and issues of social inequality, especially when involving minorities. Interestingly, activist narratives that highlight certain cases, even without video evidence, show how the media can broaden public debate and reinforce negative perceptions of the police. This proves that the media does not simply report facts, but actively frames meaning through the selection of issues, symbols, and visual representations that ultimately shape the collective perception of society (Puplampu, 2023; Ghanta, 2021).

In the Understand–Adapt–Disseminate (UAD) framework, the role of the media is closely related to two main phases: Adapt and Disseminate. The Adapt phase requires the police to adapt their communication strategies to address the negative perceptions created by the media narrative, whether through immediate response, highlighting institutional reform efforts, or strengthening a positive image based on data and evidence. Meanwhile, the Disseminate phase emphasizes the importance of accurate, consistent, and continuous dissemination of information through new media, especially digital platforms. Through this approach, the RMP can counteract the effects of negative stereotypes, build a more balanced alternative narrative, and strengthen legitimacy among society. Therefore, mass media and new media are not only a medium for disseminating information, but also a field of discourse that defines social reality. The ability of the Royal Malaysian Police to interact strategically with the media will be the determining factor in whether they are seen as an institution with integrity and authority, or alternatively as an institution that fails to meet the expectations of society in the context of accountability and social justice

Previous studies and relevance to the UAD framework

Table 1 summarises past studies that have highlighted the significant role of social media and digital media in shaping public perceptions of the policing institution. The findings consistently reinforce the relevance of the UAD Framework as a conceptual framework that serves to assess how RMP can understand public sentiment, adapt communication strategies, and strategically disseminate information to strengthen trust and increase public engagement

Table 1. Summary of previous studies and relevance to the UAD framework.

Author (s) / year	Title	Issues relevance to UAD Framework study	Finding(s)
Przeszlowski and Guerette (2025)	Public perceptions on police use of information technologies: Findings from a randomized vignette experiment	Supports the need for a positive communication strategy by RMP.	Public perceptions of police technology are mixed, with dominant concerns about facial recognition, authority and power.
Lu and Cindy Ngai (2024)	Social media communication and public engagement in different health crisis stages: The framing of COVID-19 in Chinese official media	Suitable as a conceptual basis for evaluating the role of social media in building public perception and engagement.	Social media is important for early prevention, public engagement, and accurate government updates.
	Trust in the police	Emphasizes transparency, strategy adaptation, and dissemination of information as the basis of trust (Understand, Adapt, Spread).	Trust in the police is influenced by performance, fairness, experience, and transparency.

Kershaw (2023)	Police and Social Media: The Need for Presence and the Challenges This Poses	Demonstrates the suitability of UAD for evaluating the role of social media in building public trust and engagement.	Strategic presence on social media increases legitimacy & public trust.
Puplampu (2023).	Police brutality in Canada: a framing analysis	Supports UAD for evaluating media in the context of sensitive issues and social inequalities.	emphasizes the role of media framing in addressing police brutality and the inequity of violence against minorities.
Pitts (2022)	Justice or Just Us: Media Portrayals and the Context of Police Violence	Emphasizes the need for RMP to adapt communication strategies in digital surveillance.	Negative coverage + viral video footage increases public scrutiny & damages police reputation
Azis (2022)	Law Enforcement Through Social Media Pressure	Emphasizes that UAD is appropriate for evaluating social media in building public perception and engagement.	Social media is important for building positive perceptions and strengthening police-community relations.
Ghanta (2021)	The Influence of Mass Media in the Public Sphere	Supports the role of digital media in shaping public perceptions of the police.	Mass and new media shape culture, behavior, and public perception and influence public opinion in the digital environment.
Oglesby-Neal et al. (2019)	Public Perceptions of Police on Social Media a Big-Data Approach to Understanding Public Sentiment toward the Police	Demonstrates how social media narratives influence public sentiment towards the police.	Public sentiment towards the police declined after the death of Freddie Gray, and studies have found that social media, particularly Twitter, has the potential to be used to measure police-community relations.
Di Gangi and Wasko (2016)	Social media engagement theory	Strengthens the Understand, Adapt, and Spread phases through understanding user engagement.	User engagement and behavior are influenced by social, technical, age, and attitude factors.

Materials and Methods

The Understand–Adapt–Disseminate (UAD) framework was developed based on the Framing Theory proposed by Entman (2010). This theory emphasizes that social reality is shaped through the selection, emphasis, and framing of information, which in turn influences the way audiences interpret an issue. In the context of social media, the framing of messages by institutions or societal actors not only functions as a means of conveying information, but also shapes public discourse that can reinforce or challenge the legitimacy of policing institutions. McQuail (2010) also emphasizes that the media plays a role in conveying information, providing entertainment, offering education, and shaping societal attitudes and values. At the same time, audiences do not passively receive messages; instead, they actively interpret, evaluate, and negotiate meaning based on their personal experiences and social contexts. This principle is important because it shows that public perceptions of the police are not shaped unilaterally by the media, but through a dynamic interaction between institutional messages and societal interpretations. Based on this theoretical foundation, the UAD framework is offered as a conceptual model to explain how the image, legitimacy, and public trust of the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP) are formed. Through the Understand phase, the police can identify public sentiments, concerns, and perceptions. The Adapt phase explains the

need to adapt communication messages to address negative perceptions, stereotypes, or sensitive issues that are often framed by the media. Finally, the Disseminate phase emphasizes the dissemination of accurate, consistent, and strategic information to strengthen credibility and police-community relations. Therefore, this conceptual methodology provides a solid foundation for assessing the role of social media in shaping public perceptions of the RMP, in addition to offering a systematic conceptual approach based on sound communication theory

Three main phases of UAD

Understanding: The first phase of the UAD framework emphasizes the importance of understanding public perceptions comprehensively before a communication strategy is formulated. In the digital age, this understanding not only involves collecting quantitative data on public opinion, but also requires qualitative analysis of sentiment, dominant narratives, and patterns of interaction that are prevalent in the social media ecosystem. Entman (2010) emphasized that message framing is a critical process in assessing how audiences interpret issues raised in public discourse. For the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP), a comprehensive understanding allows them to identify the risk of misinterpretation, assess the level of social legitimacy, and determine the most effective communication medium. Without this foundation of understanding, any communication initiative risks failing to reach the target audience or provoking unwanted negative reactions. **Adapting:** The second phase involves adapting the message to align with the social context and needs of the target audience. Paidi and Hassan (2021) emphasize the need for flexible communication strategies given that today's society is heterogeneous in terms of culture, social background, and media consumption patterns. Adaptation encompasses aspects of language, tone, format, and communication channels. For example, the Twitter (X) platform is more suitable for quick and formal messages, while Instagram allows for creative visual delivery such as infographics or short videos. For RMP, adaptation also means being sensitive to community sensitivities, including the use of inclusive terminology, non-offensive depictions, and narratives that reflect institutional realities. This process emphasizes that communication is not a one-way process, but an interactive and dynamic strategy that requires continuous adaptation to the current social context.

Dissemination: The final phase of UAD emphasizes the need to disseminate messages interactively, consistently, and responsively to public feedback. In contrast to the traditional top-down approach, dissemination in the digital era requires transparent and open two-way interactions. Mohammad and Hassim (2021) show that rapid, accurate, and audience-oriented message dissemination not only increases awareness, but also strengthens public trust in the institution. For the RMP, the effectiveness of this phase depends on the ability to continuously monitor public reactions and tailor follow-up messages according to the situation. For example, in high-profile cases involving the police, rapid and transparent dissemination of information can curb negative speculation and prevent the spread of fake news. Therefore, dissemination is not just a notification process, but a long-term strategy to build relationships based on openness, accountability, and mutual trust. Overall, the three phases of UAD—understanding, adaptation, and dissemination—function as a complementary framework. It provides the RMP with a solid conceptual foundation in designing strategic communications that are responsive to the changing digital landscape. More importantly, this framework allows

the RMP to strengthen credibility, maintain legitimacy, and rebuild public trust through a more systematic, transparent, and inclusive communication approach (*Figure 1*).

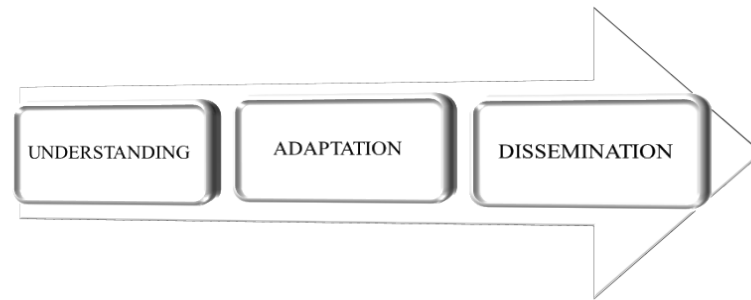


Figure 1. UAD conceptual framework.

Comparison of theoretical frameworks and their relationship to UAD

To strengthen the understanding of the application of the Understand-Adapt-Disseminate (UAD) Framework as a whole, this study examines previous literature that emphasizes the role of the media in shaping public perception. The two studies that are the main references are Puplambu (2023) and Ghanta (2021). Ghanta (2021) emphasizes the general relationship between the media and social perceptions of institutions, while Puplambu (2023) focuses specifically on the issue of public distrust of the police in the digital age. By assessing the similarities and differences between these two studies, the table below is provided as a visual summary to facilitate understanding of the conceptual relationship of the previous studies with the UAD Framework. The triangulation approach in this study is used as a conceptual mechanism to strengthen the accuracy of interpretation through the integration of various secondary sources. The comparative table between Puplambu (2023) and Ghanta (2021) forms the basis of the triangulation, where Ghanta emphasizes the general media–institution relationship while Puplambu highlights the specific issue of distrust in the police in the digital age. Therefore, triangulation is not just a technical instrument, but an epistemological foundation that strengthens the UAD (Understand–Adapt–Disseminate) framework in explaining the dynamics of societal perceptions in a more comprehensive and authentic way (*Table 2*).

Table 2. Comparison table of UAD 3-phase linkage display.

Study Aspects	Ghanta (2021)	Puplambu (2023)	Implications of this study
Focus	Media relations and public perception of institutions	The issue of public distrust of the police in the digital age	Social media as the main medium for shaping public perception
Theoretical Perspectives	Communication theory & social perception	Public trust and police legitimacy	Linking media framing with RMP legitimacy
Context	General (media & society)	Specific (police & public)	Relevant to RMP analysis on social media
Relevance	Explaining the mechanisms of perception through the media	Emphasising the challenge of the police rebuilding trust	Providing the basis for a framework for analyzing RMP perceptions

Eye symbol in UAD

This *Table 3* uses the eye symbol to visualize the three phases of UAD-Understand, Adapt, and Disseminate-to show how public perception visual metaphor, message adaptation, and information dissemination interact to form strategic communications

that are responsive, transparent, and inclusive, thus strengthening public trust in RMP (Figure 2).

Table 3. *The eye symbol to visualize the three phases of UAD.*

UAD Phase	Functions & Brief Explanation
Understand	The eyes symbolize public perception – how people “see” RMP through digital media and evaluate messages based on content and context. Emphasising the importance of narrative analysis and public sentiment (Dewar, 2023).
Adapt	The eye functions as a metaphor for surveillance and sensitivity – RMP adapts messages according to community sensitivities, detects changes in perceptions, and ensures that communication is relevant and inclusive (Sapienza et al., 2015).
Disseminate	The eyes reflect openness, credibility and two-way interaction – RMP disseminates information transparently, builds trust and strengthens legitimacy through consistent message delivery (Kershaw, 2023).



Figure 2. *A Reflection of the UAD Framework; the eye symbol in the UAD is not just an actual eye, but represents perception, surveillance, and sensitivity towards how the public views and evaluates the RMP.*

The importance of relevance in the UAD framework

In the context of the UAD Framework, the element of relevance in the dissemination of messages is a critical factor in ensuring the effectiveness of strategic communication. Mustafa (2013) emphasized that meaningful interactions on social media can only be achieved when messages are targeted to the right audience, while Di Gangi and Wasko (2016) emphasized that relevant and timely messages are able to increase user engagement on a more personal level. In line with this, Kershaw (2023) emphasized that the legitimacy of the police institution can be strengthened when the narrative formed on social media reflects the reality of the organization and is delivered consistently. For the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP), the ability to deliver relevant messages is very important, especially when dealing with sensitive issues such as allegations of police misconduct. Effective message delivery not only has implications for the institution itself, but also for various other parties. From the government's perspective, clear and strategic communication can maintain public confidence in law enforcement agencies, thus supporting political stability. At the national level, the effectiveness of the message can strengthen the image and reputation of the Malaysian justice system in international eyes. For the public, the right message increases active engagement, promotes security literacy, and reduces the risk of spreading misinformation. From a research perspective, this opens up an opportunity to empirically assess the effectiveness of public security institution communication strategies. Finally, for the RMP itself, consistent and reality-based messages can maintain credibility, strengthen public trust, and strengthen legitimacy in today's digital communication ecosystem.

In this regard, the dissemination of relevant and consistent messages through social media has broad implications. From the government's perspective, effective strategic communication can strengthen public confidence in security institutions, thus contributing to the country's social and political stability. This is important because the level of public trust in security agencies directly affects the government's legitimacy in

implementing security-related policies. At the national level, delivering transparent and integrity-based messages can enhance Malaysia's image and credibility in the international arena, especially in addressing security and law enforcement issues. A positive reputation not only has an impact on diplomacy, but is also able to influence the perception of investors and strategic partners on the country's stability. For society, clear messages open up space for more constructive two-way interactions, increase information literacy, and reduce the risk of misinterpretation and the spread of fake news that can undermine social harmony. In the context of a fast-paced digital communication ecosystem, message clarity is the basis for society to make more rational assessments of security issues. For security institutions such as the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP), delivering accurate and reality-based messages can strengthen the legitimacy of the organization. This effectiveness not only improves the implementation of enforcement tasks, but also improves relations with the community. Public support for the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP) is an important element in the success of crime prevention and efforts to maintain national peace. Finally, from a research perspective, relevant messages in security communication become a solid empirical foundation for further study. It opens up space for researchers to more deeply evaluate the effectiveness of public security institutions' communication strategies in the social media ecosystem, in addition to understanding the relationship between public perception, institutional credibility, and the effectiveness of law enforcement.

Results and Discussion

This study introduces the Understand–Adapt–Disseminate (UAD) Framework as a new conceptual model that explains how public perceptions of the Royal Malaysian Police (RMP) are formed, processed, and can be strategically managed in the social media ecosystem. The main findings show that public perceptions are not simply the result of exposure to media information, but are also influenced by social interactions, moral interpretations, and institutional responses to digital narratives. Through a conceptual analysis centered on Framing theory (Entman, 2010) and strategic communication principles, UAD emerged as a foundation for understanding the dynamic processes of perception in the digital communication era

Advanced conceptual description

Conceptually, the UAD Framework explains that public perceptions of police institutions are formed through three overlapping cognitive and social processes. The Comprehension Phase focuses on how audiences interpret messages and form initial meanings based on media frames and their social experiences. This process suggests that audience interpretations are not homogeneous; they are influenced by values, social backgrounds and pre-existing beliefs that form their own mental framing. In the context of media reports on police misconduct, for example, audiences may judge an incident not only based on facts, but also through moral and emotional interpretations. The Adapt Phase describes the stage at which perceptions develop as a result of social interaction on digital platforms. This process highlights that meanings are not static, but can change as users interact with a variety of other perspectives. Social media, therefore, function as a space for negotiating meaning where narratives can be reinforced, challenged or reworked. This is consistent with view that social frames are constantly negotiated, not implicitly accepted. The Dissemination Phase, on the other

hand, describes the stage at which dominant interpretations and views begin to be widely shared in the form of comments, reposts, or new public narratives. This process symbolizes the social legitimacy formed through digital consensus. When a particular message or interpretation gains majority acceptance, it becomes a framework of public perception that is difficult to challenge. In the context of the RMP, this phase is particularly important because it determines whether a positive or negative narrative will become dominant in the public sphere. These three phases function cyclically- Understand forms the basis of audience understanding, Adapt strengthens social interaction and the reconstruction of meaning, while Dissemination determines the strength and sustainability of the institutional narrative in the digital ecosystem. This relationship makes UAD a holistic conceptual model in explaining how perceptions of the RMP are formed, adapted, and disseminated through social media.

Theoretical contributions of UAD

From a theoretical perspective, UAD extends Framing Theory by introducing a new dimension that emphasizes audience responses in the interactive space of social media. While traditional framing theory focuses on how media construct meaning, UAD adds the element of “active audience response”, which acts as a co-framer in reconstructing meaning through comments, discussions and re-sharing of messages. In addition, this framework also strengthens the discourse of police legitimacy, by showing that public trust in institutions depends not only on performance or operational integrity, but also on how effectively the institution adapts its messages and disseminates information. The ability of institutions to strategically control the frame of digital communication is the basis for the social acceptance and moral legitimacy that shape public trust. Therefore, UAD is not only relevant to security institutional communication research, but also offers a conceptual foundation that can be widely applied in the study of crisis communication, reputation management, and public sector digital communication strategies.

Synthesis of conceptual findings

The overall findings suggest that UAD is a dynamic and integrated framework that explains the relationship between social understanding, strategic adaptation, and information dissemination. It not only helps to explain how institutional images are formed, but also offers practical guidance for building legitimacy through responsive and meaning-based strategic communication. Theoretically, UAD extends Framing Theory by introducing adaptive and interactive dimensions that emphasize the active role of audiences as co-framers of institutional narratives (*Table 4*).

Table 4. Summary table of findings and practical implications.

UAD Phase	Conceptual Findings	Practical Implications for RMP
Understand	Public perceptions are shaped by narrative framing and digital sentiment; public interpretations are emotional and moral; audiences act as co-framers.	Use AI/NLP to identify dominant sentiment patterns and narratives; social media monitoring systems to continuously assess public perception.
Adapt	Institutions need to tailor messages to social context, digital norms, and institutional values; empathetic, evidence-based communication reduces the risk of reputational conflict.	Adapt communication strategies flexibly according to public feedback; develop messages that are consistent with values of professionalism and integrity; evidence-based and empathetic communication
Disseminate	Message dissemination builds social legitimacy; transparent, consistent, and accountable messages have the potential to increase public trust.	Deliver messages strategically and interactively; collaborate with social media influencers and public figures; establish a

Conclusion

This study introduces the Understand–Adapt–Disseminate (UAD) Framework as a conceptual model to help RMP understand and manage public perceptions in the fast-paced and interactive social media ecosystem. UAD encompasses three main phases: understanding public sentiment and narrative; adapting communication strategies to match social context and digital feedback; and strategically and consistently disseminating messages to build credibility and increase public trust. From a practical perspective, UAD offers systematic guidance to strengthen RMP's digital communications approach through more transparent, responsive and evidence-based actions, particularly in addressing misconduct issues that trigger reputational crises. The framework also opens up opportunities for further research including empirical evaluation of its effectiveness across social media platforms. Overall, UAD provides a solid foundation for developing more relevant and effective institutional communications strategies, thus supporting RMP's efforts in restoring and maintaining legitimacy and public trust in Malaysia's complex digital era.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involved with any parties in this research study.

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