

Digital Public Communication in Image Building: A Survey of ASEAN Official Website

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Received: March 8, 2025

Accepted: May 15, 2025

Online Published: May 21, 2025

doi:10.11114/smc.v13i3.7565

URL: <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v13i3.7565>

Abstract

The advent of the digital era—commonly referred to as the Fourth Industrial Revolution—has redefined public communication paradigms, with websites increasingly supplanting the traditional role of mainstream media in information dissemination. Within this context, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) maintains an official digital platform [<https://asean.org>] designed to cultivate a positive institutional image. This study examines the extent to which public engagement with ASEAN's official website influences the perception of its institutional identity. Grounded in the Social Information Processing (SIP) model and Uses and Gratifications theory, this research employs a positivist quantitative methodology, utilizing a survey of 220 respondents in a Jakarta-based office setting. Path analysis was conducted to evaluate the relationships between four independent variables—Communicator, Communicant, Message, and Channel—and the dependent variable, institutional image, operationalized through the dimensions of SENSATION, ATTENTION, INTERPRETATION, and SYMPATHY. The findings reveal that while engagement with ASEAN's official website significantly impacts institutional image, the overall effect remains marginal. Disaggregated analyses indicate that Communicator, Communicant, and Channel exert measurable influence on ASEAN's image, whereas the Message variable does not yield a statistically significant effect. Among these factors, Channel—representing the selection of digital communication media—emerges as the most influential determinant, accounting for 26.4% of the observed effect. Additionally, key attributes such as domain simplicity, user-friendly interface, dynamic design, and consistent content updates enhance audience retention and website revisitation. This study contributes to the broader discourse on digital media's role in institutional perception and underscores the critical importance of strategic media channel selection in public communication efforts.

Keywords: website, ASEAN, social information processing, uses and gratification media

1. Introduction

The promotion of public welfare and collective prosperity constitutes a foundational ambition in nation-building, as exemplified by Indonesia. In accord with the preamble of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, the fourth paragraph explicitly mandates that the Indonesian state must protect its entire populace and territorial integrity while advancing general welfare, fostering national enlightenment, and contributing to the establishment of a global order rooted in independence, eternal peace, and social justice (Undang-Undang Dasar Negara Republik Indonesia 1945, LN 75 tahun 1959). In particular, the clauses concerning the advancement of global order and the sustainment of lasting peace imply that no state can independently achieve these objectives without engaging in cooperative partnerships with other nations or neighbouring states.

In its pursuit of elevating economic development and ensuring the sustenance of its citizens, the state endeavors to deliver optimal services and opportunities. Machiavelli's perspective, as interpreted by Sariarta, I Ketut, and I Nyoman Gede Remaja (2022), suggests that the central purpose of a state is to consolidate power in order to secure the prosperity of its people. In this context, such prosperity is most effectively attained through strategic and mutually reinforcing international cooperation.

The imperative for collective action among Southeast Asian nations first materialized on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok,

Thailand. At that historic juncture, key governmental figures—namely, Indonesia’s Foreign Minister Adam Malik, Malaysia’s Deputy Prime Minister (who concurrently served as Minister of Defense and Minister of National Development, Tun Abdul Razak), the Philippines’ Foreign Minister Narciso Ramos, Singapore’s Foreign Minister S. Rajaratnam, and Thailand’s Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman—acted in concert to substantiate a joint declaration. This collaborative effort culminated in the signing of the ASEAN Declaration, also known as the Bangkok Declaration, thereby laying the groundwork for a comprehensive framework of regional cooperation (ASEAN, 1967).

The establishment of ASEAN is inherently aligned with the overarching aspirations of Southeast Asian states to accelerate economic growth, promote social progress, and nurture cultural development throughout the region. Moreover, this regional alliance is dedicated to maintaining peace and stability by upholding the rule of law and fostering robust inter-state relationships. Over subsequent decades, the cooperative dynamics within ASEAN have evolved and expanded in response to shifting geopolitical landscapes.

ASEAN’s collaborative model has proven instrumental in mitigating conflict, particularly in diffusing arms races and preserving designated zones of peace; however, the resilience of peace remains perennially subject to rigorous tests (Utami, 2022). The potential for external incitement and provocation—aimed at destabilizing ASEAN—has emerged as a critical challenge. Concurrently, the rampant spread of hoaxes and hate speech across digital networks represents a significant threat to the coherence and efficacy of ASEAN’s cooperative framework.

These challenges are exacerbated by a general lack of public understanding regarding the critical role of ASEAN cooperation. This deficiency is compounded by pervasive cynicism toward negative portrayals of ASEAN and narratives framing the region as part of a global confrontation reminiscent of Cold War bipolarity between Western and Eastern blocs (Sudirman, 2017). Misinformation and fake news thus pose some of the most formidable obstacles to shaping accurate public perceptions in the digital era, subsequently hindering ASEAN’s ability to assert its central role in maintaining international order. In effect, the dissemination of false information represents a grave, even criminal, impediment to the mutual understanding among member states (Smith et al., 2021).

To effectively counter the proliferation of anti-misinformation and hoax tactics, it is imperative to implement targeted public outreach initiatives that underscore the significance of ASEAN’s collaborative efforts across economic, social, cultural, and other strategic sectors. There is an urgent need for robust public communication strategies that ensure the dissemination of accurate information and counteract distortions. An integrated and systematically planned socialization program—aligned with ASEAN’s mission and vision—can foster an accurate public understanding that meets societal expectations. Such a program is pivotal in countering misinformation and correcting public misapprehensions regarding ASEAN, particularly in relation to the dissemination of information.

Misinformation extends beyond the mere obstruction of information flow; it also pertains to inaccuracies in public interpretation and understanding, often stemming from the disorganized and haphazard presentation of data. Consequently, institutional efforts at public socialization are frequently undervalued and lack the deliberate, strategic planning required for effectiveness. Historically, socialization strategies were predominantly conventional, relying on direct interpersonal communication, traditional outreach tools, and word-of-mouth transmission. However, the advent and rapid evolution of information technology and mass communication media necessitate a paradigm shift: modern socialization now prioritizes advanced electronic communication media—including newspapers, magazines, and sophisticated broadcasting platforms (encompassing radio, television, and dedicated websites). The deployment of these electronic channels requires specialized strategies and tactics that extend well beyond the confines of traditional interpersonal communications.

In the contemporary era—often characterized as the epoch of 4.0—the convergence of communication media has given rise to digital platforms such as eRadio, eTelevision, and eNewspapers (Prisgunanto, 2017). Additionally, the emergence of official websites has established these platforms as critical instruments for information dissemination. Such websites empower organizations and institutions to distribute information freely, without the sole reliance on mainstream mass media channels to announce their programs (Prisgunanto & Pranawukir, 2020).

Despite the proliferation of social media, it remains essential to acknowledge that dedicated websites continue to serve as reliable and secure communication platforms. Similarly, blogs and zines—which share structural similarities with social media—offer distinctive advantages in preserving confidentiality and mitigating the risk of informational manipulation. The reduced likelihood of external interference is further bolstered by the financial commitment inherent in secure hosting services.

Moreover, dedicated websites benefit from an absence of intrusive advertising, as full editorial control is maintained by their proprietors—a clear contrast to the advertising-saturated environments of social media and blogs. The deliberate and appealing design of these websites further enhances their capacity to attract online audiences, thereby supporting the promotion of products and campaigns. Consequently, the extensive utilization of dedicated websites has established them as the preferred medium for executing a wide range of socialization and campaign activities.

Web platforms can be designed to provide an interactive and user-friendly experience for both visitors and users. As a medium for public outreach, websites serve as an effective tool for disseminating information and promoting institutional programs. They play a pivotal role in enhancing public awareness of an organization, shaping institutional image, and facilitating both tangible and intangible benefits, including promotional and reputational gains. Institutional image-building efforts are a fundamental aspect of organizational communication, where strategic campaign initiatives serve to cultivate public familiarity through repeated exposure.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), established on August 8, 1967, has long been a significant regional organization. However, public understanding of ASEAN's presence and impact remains relatively limited. While ASEAN has successfully implemented various programs, their visibility and recognition among the general public remain subdued.

This underscores the crucial role of digital outreach through ASEAN's official website narratives. Websites are widely acknowledged as a reliable medium for communicating institutional presence and program achievements to the public. The primary objective of website development is the dissemination of information, strategically crafted to shape institutional reputation and public perception. While numerous online sources provide content related to ASEAN, it is important to recognize that the official ASEAN website—[<https://asean.org>]—is the focal point of this study.

A central research inquiry of this study is whether the official ASEAN website's outreach efforts exert an influence on ASEAN's institutional image and public perception. The study aims to examine how the utilization of ASEAN's official website by the public impacts their views regarding ASEAN's identity, reputation, and overall visibility.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Information Processing Theory and Uses and Gratification Theory

This study employs communication science as the foundation for assessing digital public communication and institutional socialization through their webpage utilization. Given its focus on digital new media, the grand theory guiding this research is Social Information Processing (SIP) by Joseph Walther, integrated with the tradition of social psychological communication which categorizes human attitudes into several response dimensions. According to the Uses and Gratifications Theory by Palmgreen and Rosengren, human attitude effects can be classified into three domains: cognitive, affective, and conative. Over time, this classification has evolved into the hierarchy of effects model, which explains how individuals psychologically process incoming information (Hajdarmataj & Paksoy, 2023). The convergence of these two theories enables novel advancements in investigating the utilization and impact of digital media, specifically in relation to content consumption. This research emphasizes the extended utilization of social media platforms as part of digital media development (Musa, A. Salihu et al., 2016).

The SIP framework primarily focuses on human behavior intervention and reduction, demonstrating a conceptual alignment with Uses and Gratifications Theory (Saad, M. A. Eissa & Hassanaen, 2020). This integrative approach represents a new theoretical novelty in SIP studies, paving the way for future breakthroughs in research. Naturally, this study fits within the broader theoretical framework of Uses and Gratifications as developed by Palmgreen and Rosengren (Isnaini et al., 2023).

The evolution of media communication theories has resulted in three distinct paradigms regarding media effects on human attitudes:

1. Macro Approach

This perspective posits that media effects are direct and immediate, influencing human behavior at a societal level. It assumes that media actively shapes attitudes due to its embeddedness in cultural contexts. Debates within this paradigm are heavily influenced by Western and European intellectual traditions (Nasucha & Turpyn, 2024).

2. Micro Approach

In contrast, the micro paradigm views individuals as unique entities whose media influence is context-dependent. This model prioritizes personal reactions over broader cultural considerations, relying on empirical observations to assess stimulus-response relationships. Here, media effects are perceived independent of socio-cultural structures, with behavioral changes analyzed in real time, detached from memory or prior experiences.

3. Hybrid Approach

This mixed paradigm synthesizes macro and micro perspectives, acknowledging both individual agency and external influences — including culture, family, opinion leaders, and social structures—as intervening variables shaping human attitude formation. This balanced approach enriches Uses and Gratifications Theory, providing a more holistic framework for studying media influence. Recent digital media scholarship has extended this theoretical model by analyzing the triadic interplay among media, individuals, and artificial intelligence (Kim et al., 2023).

To integrate communication and digital electronic media studies, Joseph Walther's SIP model offers a structured framework. Walther contends that computer-mediated communication (CMC) necessitates attention to impersonal dynamics, which can be classified into several essential elements:

- Information Sources: Who is communicating?
- Messages: What is being conveyed?
- Feedback: Also referred to as responsiveness.
- Noise: Disruptions affecting communication.
- Recipients: The intended audience.
- Message Interpretation: How cultural contexts influence meaning construction (Priyaningrum et al., 2020).

Each of these factors plays a crucial role in shaping digital communication as experienced by netizens, particularly in evaluating public communication strategies within ASEAN's digital platforms to determine their efficacy in providing accessible and informative content to the public.

2.2 Public Communication in the Digital Age: Strategic Approaches and Institutional Roles

Public communication is a form of strategic and structured discourse employed by individuals or groups to disseminate and exchange information with a broader audience, facilitating the transmission of specific messages, topics, and issues. The informational content within public communication may originate from private entities, governmental institutions, political parties, academic courses, and other sources. At its core, the concept remains straightforward: the act of sharing information with the public constitutes public communication. A key challenge in this domain arises when there is inconsistency in issue framing or audience engagement, leading to diminished communication efficacy (Mucharam, 2022).

Historically, direct, face-to-face communication has been regarded as the most effective approach for public officials seeking to engage with constituents. Through interpersonal interactions, officials cultivate a sense of familiarity and trust, reinforcing their strategic intent to enhance public information services (Dionty & Lestari, 2022).

The role of official institutional websites has been increasingly recognized as central to public communication, serving as comprehensive information repositories. Government-affiliated websites commonly provide extensive insights into policies, reports, and official publications. In practical terms, public communication has gained significant efficacy through digital platforms, particularly institutional websites. These websites function as core nodes, directing public audiences toward a network of interlinked communication channels to create an integrated and accessible information ecosystem (Susanti et al., 2023).

Despite the proliferation of social media, institutional websites continue to serve as primary sources for authoritative, reliable, and contextually relevant information. In this context, well-managed websites, particularly within multinational organizations such as ASEAN, play a pivotal role in countering misinformation and mitigating the spread of digital hoaxes and fabricated narratives in online spaces.

Public communication is a form of strategic and planned communication which is then used by either a person or a group of people to collect and share information with a group of people in order to convey messages about certain topics and issues. The information contained in this communication can come from private sectors, government, political parties, academic courses, and many more. The point is quite simple, the activity of sharing information with the public can be understood as public communication. The main obstacle to public communication is inconsistency in conveying an issue or introducing it to the target party. Until now, there are many opinions that the best public communication strategy used by officials is more direct communication (face to face) by further establishing good intimate relations with wider community in an effort to improve strategies to improve public information services.

It is widely recognized that official website usually serves as a comprehensive information centre for an institution. A government website usually provides detailed insights and discuss their policies, reports and official publications. In practice, public communication is very effective through this new digital media website. In reality, the website also functions as a central point that can direct the public to various other communication platforms that can create a cohesive information network that is easily accessible to the public (Susanti et al., 2023).

Thus, it is clear that even though digital public communication is widely used on social media, websites still act more as a cornerstone for transmitting official, relevant and trustworthy information from the parent institution, which in this case is ASEAN. This means that a well-managed website can neutralize and minimize the practice of hoaxes and fake information in the existing digital virtual world.

Research Objective and Research Question

One thing recognized by is that a website has become a reliable means of conveying information about the existence of

an institution, as well as the achievements of programs that the institution has implemented and its performance in the eyes of the public. The premise of creating this website is to disseminate information that will lead to the improvement of the image and the reputation of the institution. There is so much content that includes ASEAN information, but it is acknowledged that there is only one official ASEAN website, namely; <https://asean.org> which is the focus of the research.

Therefore, the research problem is whether there is an influence of socialization conducted through ASEAN's official website on its image in the eyes of the public? The aim of the research is to find out the influence of the use of the official ASEAN website by the public on the public's view of the image of ASEAN. What the strongest factor which give powerfull impact to make build image of ASEAN?

2.3 Research Methodology: Micro-Level Public Communication and Digital Media Engagement

This study is grounded in the tradition of social psychological communication, employing a micro-level mass media approach that conceptualizes individuals as autonomous agents in shaping their attitudes and responses to digital content disseminated through institutional websites, such as the ASEAN official website. The public—here represented as netizens—is treated as a research object, exerting only micro-level influence within the broader population, without necessarily serving as a representative sample of the wider public sphere.

A survey methodology was adopted, utilizing structured questionnaires distributed within a private university in Jakarta that hosts a communications department. The selection of communication students as respondents is predicated on the assumption that their academic exposure to media content creation grants them a distinct analytical perspective compared to the general public. Their proficiency in crafting news narratives further informed the decision to include them in the study, as their evaluative tendencies regarding media-based communication were expected to differ from those of lay audiences.

The study employs hypothesis testing through path analysis, leveraging SPSS and Amos software to examine the influence of independent variables on dependent variables. Path analysis has been instrumental in communication research, primarily serving as a theoretical mechanism to elucidate causal relationships within complex systems, where one set of variables—presumed to be influenced by antecedent factors—subsequently impacts additional variables. Foundational communication effect models have been rigorously examined through path analysis, including the classic hierarchy-of-effects model proposed by Lavidge and Steiner (1961), which explicates the layered impact of advertising stimuli (Wooldredge, 2021).

A Likert scale with a positive tendency model was employed to assess responses. The research focused on the official ASEAN website (<https://asean.org/>), which serves as a digital repository of ASEAN-related information, activities, and programs across Southeast Asia. This study is structured as a public opinion survey, gathering responses from 220 individuals who are familiar with and have previously visited the ASEAN website in search of information. A simple random sampling approach ensured equitable representation among respondents, maximizing generalizability within the sample selection process.

The hypothesis test of the research is:

Ho1 = No influence of communicators on ASEAN's image

HA1= Communicators influence ASEAN's image

Ho2 = No influence of message recipient on ASEAN's image

HA2 =Message recipients influence ASEAN' image

Ho3 = No influence of message on ASEAN's image

HA3= Messages influence ASEAN's image

Ho4 = No influence of channel selection on ASEAN's image

HA4= Channel selection influence ASEAN's image

The survey was conducted randomly, targeting netizens who had previously visited the ASEAN website. The research spanned six months, beginning with a rigorous screening and refinement process to exclude invalid questionnaires using statistical techniques such as validity and reliability testing. These procedures ensured the integrity of the data. Following this, descriptive analysis was employed to assess the distribution of responses within the dataset. Mean-value analysis was utilized to identify trends in respondent perspectives.

Findings and Discussions

This study conducted a public opinion survey, distributing questionnaires to a total of 340 respondents. The survey specifically targeted individuals who reported having previously visited and accessed the official ASEAN website at

<https://asean.org/>.

Analysis of the website’s content reveals a primary focus on articulating the association’s mission and vision. Additionally, the platform provides an overview of ASEAN’s planned initiatives and programs for the coming years. Photographs and video snippets of various organizational activities are frequently displayed; however, the visual presentation appears somewhat outdated and lacks dynamism, potentially limiting engagement and interaction.

Table 1. Reliability Test

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.834	12

Table 2. Validity Test

Item-Total Statistics			
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
Communicator1	29.2644	17.116	.407
Communicator2	29.7751	18.638	.445
Communicator3	28.6444	18.059	.524
Communicant1	27.7629	17.639	.456
Communicant2	29.5258	18.262	.513
Communicant3	28.7356	15.354	.622
Message1	28.3647	15.604	.784
Message2	28.1307	15.498	.540
Message3	28.8723	17.343	.771
Channel1	28.9514	15.918	.590
Channel2	29.1733	17.284	.414
Channel3	28.0790	17.000	.515

Source: Processed by author (2024)

The research instrument demonstrated robust internal consistency, evidenced by a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.773, which comfortably exceeds the acceptable threshold of 0.6. Additionally, all items yielded Corrected Item-Total Correlation values above 0.361—surpassing the critical value determined by the r correlation table (df = 28, p < 0.05). These results affirm the instrument’s reliability and validity, indicating that the questionnaire responses were appropriately captured and that the overall research quality is sound.

Moving forward, it might be insightful to explore how these reliability and validity indicators compare with similar instruments within the communications field, potentially shedding light on best practices for survey design. Based on the results of the reliability test, it can be seen that in this research the Cronbach alpha is 0.773. The value is above 0.6 (0.834 > 0.6), thus it can be said that this research has an appropriate constant value and has a good research quality. Likewise, the validity values of this research in the Corrected Item-Total Correlation column are all above 0.361 (> 0.361). The values are taken from the correlation table (df. 28 and 0.05). All r correlation values meet the requirements because they are above the table correlation values, thus it can be said that many of the questionnaire answers have been answered correctly by the respondents in this study.

Table 3. Questions, Mean, Median, Std Deviation

No.	Question	Mean	Median	Std Deviation
1.	Trusted ASEAN information sources	2.1246	2.0000	1.01796
2.	Competent Speakers on the website	1.6140	1.0000	0.86245
3.	Filtered Information sources	2.7447	3.0000	1.10232
4.	Interactive with netizens	3.6261	4.0000	0.97689
5.	Meets ASEAN information needs	1.8632	2.0000	0.94489
6.	User-friendly website	2.6535	2.0000	1.24020
7.	Messages easy to understand	3.0243	3.0000	1.04736
8.	Clearly targeted	3.2584	4.0000	1.04736
9.	Clear Agenda	2.5167	2.0000	1.04204
10.	Well designed website	2.4377	2.0000	1.16736
11.	Interactive and dynamic	2.2158	2.0000	0.93652
12.	Relevant information	3.3100	4.0000	1.03355

The analysis of respondents' answers regarding the communicator, communicant, channel, and message variables indicates that all items meet the established criteria and exhibit a uniform distribution (refer to Table 3). This consistency underscores the robustness of the measurement instrument used in this study.

Table 4. Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	187	85.0	85.0	85.0
	Female	33	15.0	15.0	100.0
	Total	220	100.0	100.0	

Source: Processed by author (2024)

Further examination of demographic data (see Table 4) reveals a significant gender disparity: 85% of respondents are male (n = 187) while only 15% are female (n = 33). This suggests that male users are more actively engaged in accessing internet networks and conducting online searches, including visits to the official ASEAN website. Such gender differences in digital behavior warrant careful consideration when designing and implementing user strategies for internet-based platforms.

Exploring strategies to address these differences could provide a fruitful avenue for future research, particularly in tailoring communication objectives to effectively target diverse user groups and enhance engagement across genders.

Table 5. Respondents' Education

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Postgraduate (S2-S3)	29	13.2	13.2	13.2
	Undergraduate (S1)	78	35.5	35.5	48.6
	Diploma (D1 s/d D4)	29	13.2	13.2	61.8
	Senior/Junior High Schools	83	37.7	37.7	99.5
	Others	1	.5	.5	100.0
	Total	220	100.0	100.0	

Source: Processed by author (2024)

Table 5 shows that 37.7% of respondents (n = 83) accessing the ASEAN website possess a junior/senior high school education, while only 0.5% (n = 1) report other educational backgrounds. This clearly indicates that the primary user group is comprised of individuals with secondary education. Consequently, the website's content is designed in popular language to match this audience's comprehension level, effectively meeting their informational needs.

Furthermore, given the well-documented association between educational attainment and the active pursuit of information online, maintaining a content style that is accessible and familiar is critical. The data not only affirm that the current language remains engaging and appropriate for the target demographic, but also suggest that such an approach can support educational practices, such as classroom learning, as noted in previous studies (Majdi, Ishfaq, & Lakshmi, 2020).

Needless to say, these findings emphasize the importance of aligning digital communication strategies with the educational profiles of intended users, ensuring that content remains both appealing and relevant. Beyond this, future investigations might explore how sustained use of popular language influences user engagement over time or how minor adjustments in language could further optimize learning outcomes for the site's primary audience.

Table 6. Social Media Ownership

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	One	145	65.9	65.9	65.9
	Two	43	19.5	19.5	85.5
	Three	21	9.5	9.5	95.0
	Four	5	2.3	2.3	97.3
	> Four	6	2.7	2.7	100.0
	Total	220	100.0	100.0	

Source: Processed by author (2024)

The study’s results indicate that the majority of ASEAN website visitors are moderate social media users. Specifically, 65.9% of respondents reported having only one social media account, while 19.5% maintained two accounts, and a mere 2.3% reported having four accounts. This pattern suggests that the website primarily attracts individuals who integrate internet use as a routine part of daily life rather than digital enthusiasts who actively construct and display multiple online identities.

Table 7. Social Information Processing Factors

		Statistics			
		Communicator	Communicant	Messages	Channel
N	Valid	220	220	220	220
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		6.3864	8.1045	8.8591	8.0636

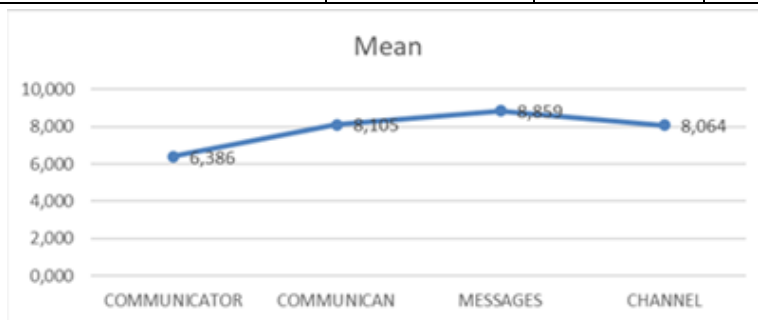


Figure 1. Social Information Processing Factors on ASEAN Websites

Source: Processed by author (2024)

From a Social Information Processing (SIP) perspective, analysis of website interactions revealed that the "Messages" component—representing the quality and quantity of content—registered the highest engagement (8,859 instances), underscoring the centrality of message content in digital communication strategies. Conversely, the "Communicator" variable, which reflects the perceived credibility and efficacy of resource persons, recorded the lowest engagement (6,386 instances). These findings imply that while the informational content on the ASEAN website is regarded as high quality and valuable by its users, there remains a notable concern regarding the appropriateness and selection of the information sources. This divergence indicates that although users are largely satisfied with the message content, they perceive a mismatch between the content and its sources, warranting further investigation into source credibility within new media environments.

Table 8. ASEAN Image

		Statistics			
		Sensation	Attention	Interpretation	Sympathetic
N	Valid	220	220	220	220
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		1.9591	2.9985	2.3258	2.6841

Source: Processed by author (2024)

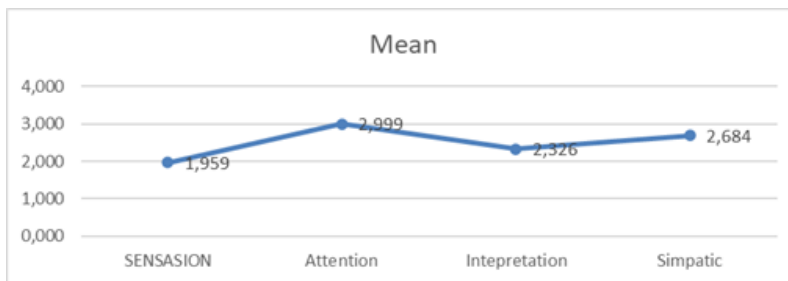


Figure 2. ASEAN’s Website Image Assessment Levels

Table 8 reveals that ASEAN's website users exhibit the highest engagement at the ATTENTION stage (M = 2.999) and the lowest at the SENSATION stage (M = 1.959). These results indicate that users are primarily aware of the website’s existence—demonstrating cognitive recognition without progressing into the deeper emotional response or behavioral action typical of the SENSATION stage. In essence, while users acknowledge the website, their engagement remains superficial and indicative of limited trust in the information provided. Consequently, it is imperative for ASEAN website managers to enhance content quality and interactivity in order to foster stronger emotional connections and drive more substantive user action.

Path Analysis Hypothesis Testing

In this study, we rigorously test a series of pre-formulated hypotheses aimed at understanding the influence of the ASEAN website on the public image of ASEAN institutions. Here, a hypothesis is defined as a tentative assumption that underpins scientific inquiry, requiring empirical validation. By employing path analysis, our approach systematically dissects the direct and indirect effects of the website on institutional image, thereby affirming that an institution’s public portrayal is shaped by a constellation of interacting factors rather than emerging in isolation.

Moving forward, our analysis will further explore these interdependencies, offering deeper insights into how digital communication channels contribute to the construction and maintenance of institutional reputations.

Therefore, the hypothesis of this research is:

- H01 = No influence of communicators on ASEAN's image
- HA1= Communicators influence on ASEAN's image
- H02 = No influence of message recipients on ASEAN's image
- HA2= Message recipients of influence ASEAN’s image
- H03 = No influence of message on ASEAN's image
- HA3= Message influence ASEAN’s image
- H04 = No influence of channel selection on ASEAN's image
- HA4= Channel selection influences ASEAN's image

Table 9. Path Analysis Testing

		Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
Organization-Image	<--- COMMUNICATOR	,265	,133	1,993	,046	par_1
Organization-Image	<--- COMMUNICANT	,406	,125	3,247	,001	par_2
Organization-Image	<--- MESSAGES	-,026	,127	-,204	,838	par_3
Organization-Image	<--- CHANNEL	,685	,143	4,798	***	par_4

Source: Processed by author (2024)

Table 9 presents the results of a path analysis investigating the influence of four variables—Communicator, Communicant, Messages, and Channels—on the public image of ASEAN. The findings are as follows:

1. Communicator: The path coefficient is 0.265 (SE = 0.133, CR = 1.993) with a p-value of 0.046. As the p-value is less than the 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis is rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis. This result indicates that the communicator variable significantly influences ASEAN’s image.
2. Communicant: With an estimate of 0.406 (SE = 0.125, CR = 3.247) and a p-value of 0.001, this variable also meets the criteria for statistical significance. Thus, the communicant factor is confirmed to have a meaningful impact on how ASEAN is perceived.

3. Messages: In contrast, the messages variable yielded an estimate of -0.026 (SE = 0.127, CR = -0.204) with a p-value of 0.838, far exceeding the significance threshold. As a result, the null hypothesis is maintained, indicating that the message content does not appreciably affect ASEAN’s image.
4. Channels: Finally, the channels variable recorded an estimate of 0.685 (SE = 0.143, CR = 4.798) with a highly significant p-value (p < 0.001). This finding corroborates that the channels used (e.g., media platforms) play a significant role in shaping public perceptions of ASEAN.

In summary, the analysis reveals that while communicator, communicant, and channel-related factors are pivotal in influencing ASEAN’s public image, the messages presented on its official website do not significantly alter netizens’ perceptions. This suggests that viewers place greater emphasis on the source credibility, the intended audience, and the medium of communication rather than on the detailed written content itself.

This nuanced understanding underscores the importance of strategizing communication assets by focusing on the elements that resonate most with the audience, thereby potentially guiding future efforts in public diplomacy and image management.

Strength of Variable Influence

This study examines three pivotal factors shaping the public image of ASEAN: the attributes of the communicator, the characteristics of the communicant, and the selected communication channels.

Table 10. Influence of Variables on ASEAN’s Image: Standardized Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate
Organization image	<---	COMMUNICATOR	.104
Organization image	<---	COMMUNICAN	.172
Organization-image	<---	MESSAGES	-.011
Organizarion-image	<---	CHANNEL	.264

Source: Processed by author (2024)

Employing path analysis, the estimated coefficients were 0.104 (10.4%) for the communicator, 0.172 (17.2%) for the communicant, and 0.264 (26.4%) for the communication channels, each falling within a modest effect range. Notably, the channels—comprising the website’s design, selection, and domain name—demonstrated the highest level of influence, suggesting that structural digital communication choices substantially outweigh the impact of the quality or prominence of the information sources presented.

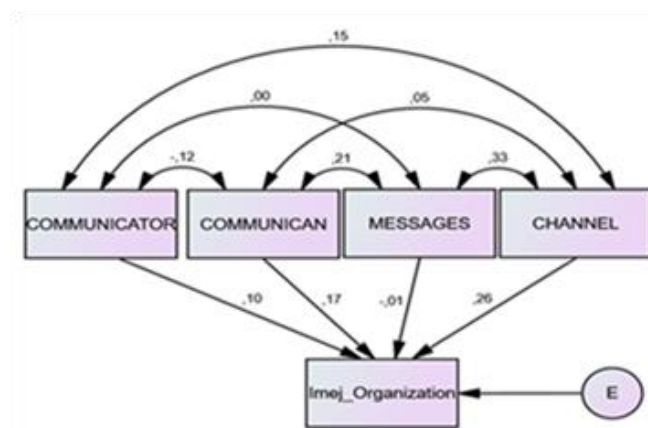


Figure 3. Test Path Analysis of Website Influence on ASEAN Image

Source: Processed by author (2024)

The implications for strategic communications are profound. Rather than prioritizing the elevation of reputable news sources alone, organizations should optimize their digital content delivery mechanisms to align more closely with user preferences and consumption patterns. This research highlights a critical divergence between content orientation on official websites and reporting in mainstream media, underscoring the need for communication strategies that are specifically tailored to digital environments. Future inquiries might extend this framework by integrating audience reception and interactive engagement metrics to further elucidate the dynamics of digital influence on organizational image.

3. Discussions

Based on the findings of this research, it is clear that from descriptive analysis the message factor is always the main thing seen by the public when viewing a website, as well as for the official ASEAN website. Messages created on the website have certainly undergone the same editing process as mainstream media. In this way, the level of truth and trustworthiness of the message content can be accounted for.

Influence of Information sources in Online Media on organizational image

This study examines the pivotal role of information sources—herein referred to as communicators—in shaping the image of organizations through online media. Findings indicate that communicators are instrumental in framing public perceptions and effectively directing what audiences come to believe about an organization. This view aligns with prior research underscoring that the authority and credibility of the information source determine how messages are received and internalized (Ducci et al., 2022).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, official websites emerged as critical platforms for the dissemination of relevant and valid health information. Given that health information is both personal and sensitive, these websites provided a secure channel for communication that contrasted with the more diffuse nature of social media. In doing so, they played a crucial role in mitigating the confusion that characterized the early stages of the pandemic.

Furthermore, the documented proliferation of misinformation by state actors, officials, and affiliated agents illustrates that one of the primary challenges in contemporary communication is the ambiguity surrounding the main sources of information. The spread of “fake news” is partly attributable to the unclear attribution of these information sources, emphasizing the need for clarity and accountability in the communication process (Smith et al., 2021).

In conclusion, website managers and communication professionals must give careful consideration to the selection and presentation of information sources. Relying on ad-hoc quotations or unverified search results, rather than engaging in thorough investigative efforts, can erode institutional credibility and tarnish organizational image. An intentional and rigorous approach to source selection is therefore essential in enhancing the overall efficacy and reliability of cyber communication (Majid, Ishfaq, & Lakshmi, 2020).

Exploring further, it would be insightful to examine the evolving role of digital literacy among audiences. How might increased sophistication in information consumption affect the impact of communicator credibility? Additionally, future research could compare cross-cultural differences in the perceived reliability of online communicators, providing a broader context for these findings.

The Influence of online Audiences (Communicants) on Organizational Image

Hierarchical effects in digital environments suggest that the public’s response to an official website—such as that of ASEAN—is initially manifested at the level of mere awareness. Although visitors recognize and routinely access the site, this “attention” stage does not necessarily translate into deeper behavioral alignment with the content presented. Notably, high-quality website design can influence not only behavioral intentions but also consumer actions (Saleem et al., 2022).

This ATTENTION stage serves as a foundational reference for the public. The simple act of recognizing a website and engaging with it forms the basis upon which further public opinion and behavioral outcomes are constructed.

Path analyses indicate that among the factors influencing ASEAN’s organizational image, the roles of communicators, communicants, and communication channels are predominant, whereas the intrinsic content of the messages themselves appears to exert minimal direct impact. Empirical evidence supports the notion that websites must offer dynamic, periodically updated design elements to avoid generating a monotonous user experience. In contrast, websites with weak or static content tend to show only a weak correlation with user interaction and overall institutional reputation—a finding consistent with earlier investigations (Adar et al., 2009; Prisgunanto & Pranawukir, 2020; Hasley & Gregg, 2010).

From a communications strategy perspective, the manner in which information is packaged for visitors plays a critical role. Strategic choices in language, writing style, and presentation are tailored to resonate with predetermined audience segments. This targeted communication underscores the importance of understanding the nuanced interactions between website managers and their netizens—a dynamic central to the process of social information processing (Catherina et al., 2020). The official ASEAN website, for example, appears to endeavor to comprehend and fulfill the evolving information needs of its audience, a necessity in today’s new media landscape (Prisgunanto, 2020).

Moreover, human–machine interaction on internet-based platforms reveals consistent behavioral patterns: visitors tend to favor websites that blend stability with dynamic content over those that are rigid and unchanging. In an era increasingly influenced by artificial intelligence, algorithm-driven insights into user habits further illuminate how netizens navigate and engage with digital content to satisfy their information needs.

This discussion not only highlights the significance of dynamic online communication strategies in fostering

organizational image but also invites further exploration into how adaptive website design and interactive content can reinforce sustained user engagement and loyalty.

The Influence of Online Media Channel Selection on Organizational Image

Website administrators strategically modify rhetorical content by combining audience analysis with evolving public interest trends (Krimsvik, 2010). Findings suggest that selecting online media—particularly websites—as the primary communication channel is a highly effective strategy for reinforcing ASEAN’s institutional image. Previous studies affirm that media selection significantly influences public trust in health communication and epidemic control strategies (Liu & Li, 2021).

Among various media types—including news outlets, social media platforms, hybrid media, medical sources, and governmental agencies—news media continue to exhibit the highest levels of professionalism, timeliness, audience proximity, and social support. Websites emerge as an optimal medium for engaging digital audiences in contemporary cyber environments.

Channel selection is pivotal in website administration, influencing domain naming and hosting choices. Website usability—including accessibility, navigation efficiency, and diversified content—determines visitor engagement. A well-managed and user-friendly platform fosters sustained interaction with ASEAN’s official website. Research affirms the critical role of user experience design in optimizing website accessibility (Garett et al., 2017). ASEAN’s online presence differs substantially from mainstream media models, reflecting independent digital communication structures.

Among various influencing factors, channel selection exerts the strongest impact on ASEAN’s public image. A well-designed, accessible, and intuitive website fosters engagement, ensuring seamless navigation and content interaction. Additionally, contemporary content updates and well-curated narratives enhance information credibility. Studies emphasize usability and relevance as key determinants in visitor retention (Allison et al., 2019).

Extensive research affirms that websites hold significant capacity for brand development and organizational image formation. While social media platforms influence consumer attitudes, website branding remains central to reinforcing institutional credibility. Findings from Vietnamese studies suggest that website branding directly affects e-loyalty and e-satisfaction (Quan et al., 2020). Accordingly, this study reinforces the perspective that websites function as effective communication channels in strengthening institutional legitimacy. In this context, ASEAN’s official website serves as both a digital branding tool and an institutional representation within global governance frameworks.

4. Conclusions

1. Public engagement with ASEAN's official website exerts an influence on perceptions of ASEAN’s institutional image. However, this impact remains relatively marginal, suggesting the need for strategic improvements in digital communication and outreach.
2. Among the various factors shaping public perceptions, the communication channel itself holds the most significant influence. Elements such as accessibility speed, domain name recallability, and an intuitive yet aesthetically compelling website design play a crucial role in fostering engagement. The public favors a digital interface that balances simplicity with contemporary relevance, ensuring that content remains both innovative and accessible.
3. The ASEAN official website predominantly occupies the ATTENTION phase within the public’s cognitive hierarchy—meaning users are aware of its existence and have demonstrated some level of understanding. However, the website has not yet progressed into deeper engagement phases, such as sustained optimal utilization or direct behavioral integration. The platform remains underutilized as a referential source for decision-making and interactive discourse.

Recommendations

1. ASEAN’s digital communication strategists must prioritize the enhancement of website content, as current iterations do not sufficiently elevate the organization’s institutional image in the public domain. A dedicated editorial and research team should be established to curate relevant discussions on ASEAN-related issues and broader regional developments. Additionally, consistent updates and rigorous editorial standards must be upheld to ensure credibility and informational relevance.
2. Website optimization should be approached holistically, encompassing both technical and narrative improvements. Enhancing accessibility through faster load times and comprehensive yet concise content narratives is essential for engagement. Furthermore, domain name selection should prioritize simplicity and memorability to facilitate public access, while the website’s design must strike a balance between minimalism and functionality to sustain long-term user retention.
3. A strategic and continuous outreach campaign is imperative to advance public awareness beyond mere recognition toward active engagement and adoption. As public familiarity with the ASEAN website remains in an initial phase,

targeted promotional efforts are required to establish the platform as a credible reference for decision-making and behavioral influence. Improved website utilization will not only strengthen public trust in ASEAN but also reinforce the organization's overarching institutional legitimacy.

Acknowledgments

We extend our sincere gratitude to the National Police Science College (PTIK) and IBIK 1957 Kosgoro Institute of Business and Informatics in Jakarta for their invaluable support in facilitating this research. We also wish to express our appreciation to our personal assistant, Iskandar Nugraha, for his instrumental role in preparing this manuscript for publication.

Authors contributions

Dr. Ilham Prisgunanto was responsible for the conceptualization and design of the study. Iswahyu Pranawukir oversaw the data collection process. Dr. Ilham Prisgunanto and Dr. Teddy Rusmawan contributed to the drafting of the report and undertook the critical revision of the manuscript to ensure its readiness for publication. All authors read and approved the final manuscript and contributed equally to the study.

Funding

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Redfame Publishing.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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