



Marketing Communication, Branding, and Public Relations: The Impact of Communication Strategies on Startup Growth and Success

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of marketing communication, branding, and public relations in supporting the growth and sustainability of startups and technology-based businesses. The research aimed to identify how strategic communication efforts influenced brand development, customer engagement, and stakeholder trust in early-stage ventures. A qualitative research design was employed, utilizing semi-structured interviews and content analysis as the primary data collection methods. The findings showed that integrated communication practices significantly contributed to brand visibility, market positioning, and credibility, especially in highly competitive and innovation-driven environments. Branding was found to be crucial in differentiating products and creating emotional connections with target audiences, while public relations efforts helped establish legitimacy and media presence. The study concluded that effective communication strategies are essential for entrepreneurs to build strong brand identities, gain market traction, and foster long-term growth.



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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the rapid development of technology-based startups has become a key driver of innovation and economic growth across various sectors. These entrepreneurial ventures often face significant challenges related to visibility, customer trust, and market differentiation, especially in their early stages. In addition to these common challenges, technology-based startups encounter unique hurdles, such as the need to educate customers about new or complex technologies, the difficulty of establishing credibility in emerging markets, and the challenge of maintaining consistent communication across rapidly evolving digital platforms. In such a dynamic and competitive environment, strategic marketing communication, branding, and public relations are critical components that contribute to shaping perceptions, building brand identity, and establishing stakeholder relationships. Despite their importance, many startups lack structured communication strategies, often due to limited resources or prioritization of product development over market positioning.

The role of marketing communication and branding in entrepreneurial settings has been discussed in several studies. For instance, a study by Merrilees (2016) emphasized the importance of brand orientation in startups as a source of competitive advantage, particularly when integrated with marketing communications (Mukhlis, 2025a; Mukhlis & Saidah, 2025). Moreover, public relations have been identified as a means for startups to gain legitimacy and media attention in new markets (Fischer & Reuber, 2014). However, most existing studies focus on large-scale companies or general SMEs, creating a gap in understanding how these communication tools are specifically applied in technology-based startups operating under high uncertainty and rapid growth conditions.

This research seeks to explore how integrated marketing communication, branding, and public relations are formulated and executed within technology-based startups. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the intersection of strategic communication and entrepreneurship in a tech-driven context, which remains underexplored in recent academic literature (Mukhlis, Janwari, et al., 2023; Mukhlis & Abdullah, 2025). The objective of this study is to analyze how communication strategies influence

brand building, customer engagement, and organizational growth in startups, thereby providing insights for entrepreneurs, communication practitioners, and policymakers seeking to enhance startup competitiveness through effective communication approaches.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research methods to explore the influence of marketing communication, branding, and public relations on consumer perceptions. Although the study involved open-ended responses, a quantitative lens was applied by categorizing and quantifying the qualitative data through thematic coding, which allowed for measurable analysis of participant responses. Thematic coding was applied by first identifying recurring themes in the responses, then assigning numerical values to these themes to measure their frequency and significance within the dataset. These coded themes were subsequently analyzed within a quantitative framework to assess patterns and trends.

The research population included individuals familiar with brand communication practices, including students, professionals, and active consumers. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants with relevant exposure to marketing content, yielding a total of 40 respondents from diverse demographic and professional backgrounds.

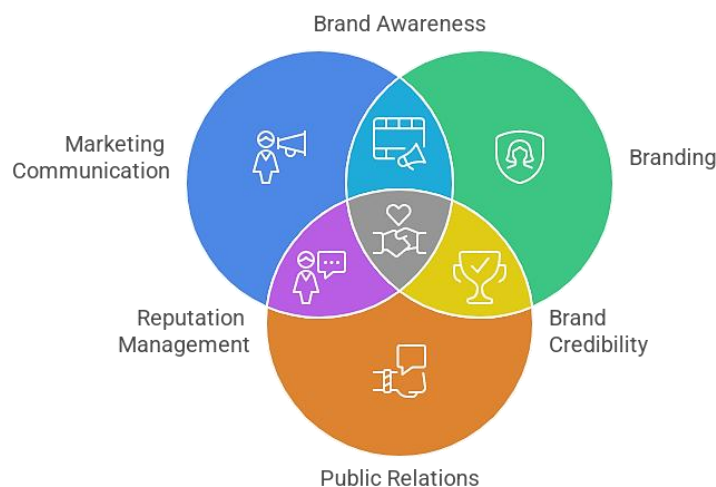
Data collection was conducted through structured interviews consisting of three main questions: (1) In your opinion, how important is the role of marketing communications in shaping consumer perception of a brand? (2) Have you ever felt more confident or interested in a product just because of the way the brand builds its image through social media or advertising? (3) In your opinion, how can public relations help a brand recover from a reputation crisis?

Responses were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, where qualitative answers were first coded into quantifiable categories. These categories were then subjected to analysis to identify dominant patterns and trends. This technique followed the coding methodology for open-ended responses as described by Creswell & Creswell (2018), ensuring a structured interpretation of qualitative data within a quantitative framework.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to explore the perceived impact of marketing communication, branding, and public relations on consumer perception and trust. Data were collected through structured interviews with three selected respondents who had prior exposure to marketing messages and brand interactions, allowing for insight into how communication strategies shape consumer sentiment. Although the sample was limited in number, the qualitative richness of their responses provided meaningful patterns for interpretation.

Synergy of Marketing Strategies in Shaping Consumer Trust



Based on the interview responses, all three participants agreed that marketing communication plays a critical role in shaping how consumers perceive a brand (Mukhlis, 2025b; Mukhlis, Suradi, et

al., 2023). One respondent noted that clear, consistent, and relatable messages in advertising made them feel more connected to the brand, particularly when the message addressed values or lifestyle aspirations. This aligns with existing literature that views integrated marketing communication as a key tool for establishing a coherent brand narrative across platforms (Keller, 2016).

response to the second question, participants shared that they had indeed felt more confident and interested in a product based on how it was portrayed through branding efforts, particularly on social media. One respondent emphasized the impact of visual storytelling and influencer endorsements, which made the brand feel more trustworthy and modern. This finding supports prior studies suggesting that digital branding significantly influences purchasing behavior by enhancing perceived authenticity and social proof (Iglesias et al., 2020). These responses affirm that branding is no longer about visual identity alone, but also about creating emotional engagement and trust through ongoing interaction with the audience.

Regarding the role of public relations, two respondents believed that PR could help brands recover from crises, provided that communication was transparent and empathetic. One participant mentioned the importance of a brand's ability to "own their mistakes" and communicate steps for improvement, citing personal trust in brands that issued public apologies or community-based recovery campaigns. This is consistent with Men and Bowen (2017), who emphasized that strategic public relations in times of crisis can re-establish stakeholder trust and protect long-term brand equity.

The results of this study highlight that marketing communication, branding, and public relations are not isolated activities, but interdependent functions that influence how consumers interpret and respond to a brand (Mukhlis, Arifin, Ridwan, & Zulbaidah, 2025; Mukhlis, Arifin, Ridwan, Zulbaidah, et al., 2025). While marketing communication initiates consumer engagement, branding sustains emotional connection, and public relations safeguards reputation and trust, especially during moments of public scrutiny.

The main limitation of this study lies in its small sample size, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. However, the depth of responses provides valuable preliminary insights that can inform larger-scale studies. Future research is recommended to expand the sample and incorporate quantitative scales to further measure the strength of consumer perceptions in different market segments (Mukhlis et al., 2024; Mukhlis, Maryam, et al., 2023). Additionally, comparing consumer responses across industries could provide a clearer picture of how communication strategies perform in varying contexts.

Overall, the findings suggest that a strategic, integrated approach to marketing communication, branding, and public relations can significantly enhance brand equity and consumer trust, particularly in a digital era where public perception is formed rapidly and can change instantly.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of marketing communication, branding, and public relations in shaping consumer perceptions and supporting brand development, particularly within startup and technology-based business contexts. The findings indicate that marketing communication plays a vital role in forming initial consumer awareness and engagement by delivering clear, consistent, and value-driven messages. Effective communication strategies help consumers better understand brand identity and establish early trust, which is crucial in competitive and fast-changing markets.

Branding was found to be a key factor in strengthening emotional connections between brands and consumers. Through visual storytelling, consistent messaging, and digital presence—especially on social media—branding enhances perceived credibility and authenticity. The study shows that consumers are more likely to feel confident and interested in products when branding efforts align with their values, lifestyles, and expectations.

Public relations emerged as an essential function in maintaining and restoring brand reputation, particularly during periods of crisis. Transparent, empathetic, and responsible communication was perceived as effective in rebuilding consumer trust and protecting long-term brand equity. These findings confirm that marketing communication, branding, and public relations are interdependent components that collectively influence consumer trust and brand sustainability.

Despite the limitation of a small sample size and a lack of diversity in the respondent pool, this study provides valuable insights into the importance of integrated communication strategies. Future research is recommended to address these limitations by involving larger, more diverse samples,

applying quantitative measurement scales to improve reliability, and exploring communication strategies across different industries and sectors to enhance generalizability. Overall, the study concludes that a strategic and integrated approach to marketing communication, branding, and public relations is essential for building strong brand identity, consumer trust, and sustainable growth in the digital era.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest associated with the publication of this article. This study was conducted independently and was not influenced by any financial, institutional, or personal interests that could have affected the objectivity or integrity of the research.

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