

MANAGING BRAND IDENTITY DURING A MERGER: INDOSAT'S PHASE-SPECIFIC MPR STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT: Corporate mergers disrupt organizational identity and challenge stakeholder trust. This study develops a phase-specific Marketing Public Relations (MPR) framework that explains brand identity transitions during corporate mergers. A sequential mixed-methods design examined 30 YouTube advertisements and interviews with three senior marketing practitioners across the pre-merger (2020–2021), transition (2022), and post-merger (2023–2024) phases of Indosat Ooredoo Hutchison. Campaign records and platform interactions provided descriptive engagement indicators. The findings identify three communication mechanisms: Identity Anchoring, Organizational Sense Giving, and Identity Consolidation, forming the proposed Brand Transition Marketing Public Relations (BT-MPR) Framework. View-through rates increased from 54% to 68%, while comment volume rose by 64%. These patterns suggest an association between phase-specific communication strategies and audience engagement, although the single-case design limits causal inference and generalizability. Marketing managers should align communication strategies with merger phases to preserve brand continuity and strengthen stakeholder trust.

Keywords: Marketing Public Relations; Corporate Identity Theory; Organizational Sensemaking; Merger Communication; Brand Transition.

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INTRODUCTION

Among the most strategically significant communication challenges organizations face is managing corporate identity during structural transitions. Corporate mergers, in particular, create significant organizational identity disruptions in which two established brands, each carrying accumulated stakeholder trust, cultural associations, and reputational capital, must be integrated into a unified corporate identity while maintaining continuity and legitimacy (Balmer, J. M. T., & Dinnie, 1999; Melewar, T. C., & Jenkins, 2002). Empirical research has shown that ineffective communication during merger transitions may weaken stakeholder confidence, reduce brand equity, and increase uncertainty among customers and employees (Sarala, & Vaara, 2010; van Knippenberg, D., van Knippenberg, et al, 2002).

On January 4, 2022, Indonesia witnessed a major telecommunications merger when Indosat Ooredoo merged with Hutchison 3 Indonesia to establish Indosat Ooredoo Hutchison (IOH). The merged organization became Indonesia's second-largest mobile operator, serving approximately 97.4 million subscribers while integrating two brands with distinct market positions and organizational identities. Indosat Ooredoo had been widely associated with corporate social responsibility and community empowerment initiatives, whereas Tri (Hutchison) was recognized for its youth-oriented digital services and competitive pricing. Integrating these complementary identities into a coherent corporate brand while preserving stakeholder trust represented a substantial communication challenge during organizational transition (APJII, 2023).

Marketing Public Relations (MPR) provides a strategic communication approach capable of supporting organizational identity during periods of transformation by combining relationship-building, reputation management, and brand communication. Nevertheless, existing MPR literature primarily explains how organizations establish or maintain stakeholder relationships under relatively stable organizational conditions (Harris, 1993; Cutlip & Center, 2019; Kriyantono, 2020). Recent scholarship has increasingly recognized that communication plays a critical role throughout merger and acquisition processes by reducing uncertainty, supporting organizational integration, and facilitating stakeholder adaptation (Rosendale et al., 2024; Hasmin, 2025). Parallel developments in corporate rebranding research also demonstrate that successful identity transformation requires communication strategies extending beyond changes in visual identity toward stakeholder meaning construction and organizational repositioning (Mariniuc, 2023; Wojciechowska, 2022).

Furthermore, studies of post-merger identity emphasize that employees' identification with the newly formed organization and their acceptance of organizational change depend on coherent identity communication and integration processes (Mühlemann et al., 2022; Thakur & Yadav, 2025). Research on post-merger integration likewise highlights the importance of aligning organizational culture and communication practices to facilitate integration after corporate restructuring (Sales et al., 2022). In addition, digital corporate communication has become increasingly important because digital platforms enable organizations to communicate organizational identity, strengthen stakeholder engagement, and evaluate communication performance throughout organizational transformation (Badham & Luoma-aho, 2023; Volk & Buhmann, 2023).

Despite these advances, existing studies generally examine merger communication, corporate rebranding, post-merger identity, post-merger integration, and digital corporate communication as separate domains. Limited attention has been devoted to explaining how Marketing Public Relations (MPR) strategies evolve systematically across different merger phases to perform organizational identity work. Existing research largely focuses on communication activities at specific stages or organizational outcomes rather than identifying a phase-specific MPR process that links identity anchoring, organizational sensegiving, and post-merger identity consolidation. This unresolved issue constitutes the principal research gap addressed in the present study.

This study addresses this gap through a longitudinal content analysis of Indosat Ooredoo Hutchison's official YouTube advertisements published between 2020 and 2024, complemented by in-depth interviews with senior marketing practitioners. The analysis is organized into three theoretically meaningful phases: pre-merger stabilization, merger transition, and post-merger consolidation. The central research question guiding this study is: How did Indosat Ooredoo Hutchison deploy phase-specific Marketing Public Relations strategies to manage corporate

identity communication across the pre-merger, merger transition, and post-merger consolidation periods? Three subsidiary questions further guide the analysis: (1) What identity communication functions did Indosat's digital advertising perform in each merger phase? (2) How did narrative strategies, visual identity signals, and multimodal communication elements evolve across the three phases? (3) What audience engagement patterns were associated with phase-specific MPR strategies across the three merger phases, and what do these patterns suggest about audience responses during organizational transition?

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Corporate Identity Theory and Merger Communication

Corporate Identity Theory provides the principal theoretical foundation for this study. Balmer (2001) conceptualizes corporate identity as a multidimensional construct consisting of five interrelated dimensions: actual identity, communicated identity, conceived identity, ideal identity, and desired identity. These dimensions explain how organizations define themselves internally, communicate their identity externally, and are ultimately perceived by stakeholders. During organizational mergers, all five dimensions undergo simultaneous transformation. The organization's operational structure changes, communication messages require reconstruction, stakeholder perceptions must be carefully managed, and managerial aspirations for the merged organization must be integrated into a coherent corporate identity.

Extending this perspective, Melewar and Jenkins (2002) argue that communication strategy constitutes the primary mechanism through which organizations maintain identity continuity during structural transformation. Organizations that consistently communicate organizational values, preserve recognizable identity elements, and explain strategic change through coherent narratives are more likely to maintain stakeholder identification throughout the transition process. Similarly, Balmer and Dinnie (1999) identify identity conflict, identity ambiguity, and identity vacuum as the principal communication risks associated with mergers. These risks arise when organizations fail to provide stakeholders with a consistent explanation of organizational change. Recent empirical research further demonstrates that managing corporate identity during organizational transformation requires continuous alignment between organizational strategy, communication, and stakeholder expectations to preserve identity coherence throughout structural change (Mtange, 2022).

Accordingly, Corporate Identity Theory provides the conceptual basis for understanding how organizations manage identity continuity while simultaneously introducing organizational transformation. In this study, the theory explains how phase-specific Marketing Public Relations (MPR) strategies support the transition from separate legacy identities toward a unified corporate identity throughout the merger process.

Organizational Sensegiving as the Communication Mechanism

While Corporate Identity Theory explains what organizational identity is, Organizational Sensegiving explains how organizations intentionally shape stakeholder interpretations during periods of strategic change. Weick (1995) proposes that organizational members construct meaning when confronted with ambiguous situations through the process of sensemaking. Building upon this foundation, Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) distinguish between sensemaking, which refers to internal meaning construction by organizational members, and sensegiving, which represents deliberate communication intended to influence how external stakeholders interpret organizational change.

Corporate mergers represent highly ambiguous organizational events because stakeholders often experience uncertainty regarding organizational identity, service continuity, and future corporate direction. Under such circumstances, organizational communication performs a sensegiving function by reducing uncertainty through coherent narratives that explain why change occurs, what the change means, and how stakeholders should interpret the emerging organizational identity.

Maitlis and Christianson (2018) further argue that effective sensegiving integrates both cognitive and emotional dimensions. Organizations must simultaneously provide logical

explanations for organizational change while fostering emotional reassurance that strengthens stakeholder confidence. Likewise, Cornelissen (2011) emphasizes that organizations communicating change as purposeful transformation rather than isolated structural adjustment are more likely to sustain stakeholder trust and organizational identification. More recent evidence also demonstrates that effective change leaders actively employ sensegiving to coordinate multiple stakeholder interpretations and reduce ambiguity during strategic transformation, particularly in complex organizational settings (Day et al., 2023).

Within this study, Organizational Sensegiving serves as the principal communication mechanism through which Marketing Public Relations facilitates identity transition. Rather than merely announcing organizational restructuring, MPR functions as a strategic communication process that constructs narratives capable of guiding stakeholder interpretations across the pre-merger, merger transition, and post-merger consolidation phases.

Organizational Legitimacy as a Supporting Perspective

Organizational identity transformation following a merger also depends upon maintaining legitimacy among stakeholders. Suchman (1995) conceptualizes organizational legitimacy as stakeholders' generalized perception that organizational actions are appropriate, desirable, and consistent with prevailing social values and institutional expectations. He distinguishes three complementary dimensions of legitimacy: pragmatic legitimacy, moral legitimacy, and cognitive legitimacy.

In merger contexts, pragmatic legitimacy reflects stakeholders' confidence that organizational services continue to deliver expected value despite structural change. Moral legitimacy concerns whether the merged organization demonstrates socially responsible behavior and fulfills broader societal expectations. Cognitive legitimacy refers to the extent to which stakeholders perceive the merged organization as understandable, credible, and appropriate within its institutional environment. Recent legitimacy research further suggests that organizations continuously perform legitimacy work during digital transformation by aligning organizational change with evolving institutional expectations and stakeholder values (Patalon, 2026). Accordingly, organizational legitimacy functions as a supporting theoretical perspective that explains why service continuity, CSR-oriented communication, and innovation narratives strengthen stakeholder acceptance of the merged corporate identity while reinforcing organizational credibility throughout the merger process.

Marketing Public Relations in the Indonesian Context

Marketing Public Relations (MPR) constitutes the strategic communication approach examined in this study. Harris (1993) defines MPR as the planned integration of public relations and marketing activities to build mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders while simultaneously strengthening organizational reputation and market performance. Unlike conventional promotional communication, MPR emphasizes credibility, relationship development, and long-term trust through informative and value-oriented communication. More recent studies further indicate that integrating digital marketing and public relations enables organizations to strengthen stakeholder engagement, reinforce corporate reputation, and enhance communication effectiveness through interactive digital platforms (Nuseir, 2022).

Within the Indonesian context, Kriyantono (2020) argues that public relations effectiveness is strongly influenced by relational cultural values such as *gotong royong*, *kebersamaan*, and *musyawarah*. These cultural orientations encourage organizations to communicate not only organizational competence but also social responsibility, collective welfare, and community engagement. Consequently, Indonesian stakeholders frequently evaluate corporate transformation through both functional performance and moral commitment.

Accordingly, MPR within merger communication extends beyond promotional messaging toward identity-oriented communication that simultaneously maintains stakeholder trust, reinforces organizational legitimacy, and supports identity continuity throughout organizational transition. Guided by Corporate Identity Theory and Organizational Sensegiving, this study conceptualizes phase-specific MPR as the primary communication mechanism through which

organizations anchor legacy identities, construct shared meanings during organizational transition, and consolidate a unified corporate identity following merger implementation.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative-dominant explanatory case study using sequential mixed-method content analysis to examine how Marketing Public Relations (MPR) strategies evolved throughout the Indosat Ooredoo Hutchison merger. The methodological priority was qualitative because the principal objective was to interpret organizational identity communication across different merger phases rather than to test statistical relationships. Descriptive quantitative evidence derived from content frequencies and audience engagement indicators was incorporated to support pattern identification and comparison across phases. The study was implemented in two sequential stages. The first stage involved systematic longitudinal content analysis of YouTube advertisements to identify communication functions, narrative structures, multimodal identity elements, and descriptive engagement patterns across the pre-merger, merger transition, and post-merger consolidation phases. The second stage consisted of semi-structured interviews with senior marketing practitioners to interpret the strategic rationale underlying the communication patterns identified during the content analysis. Accordingly, interview findings did not serve to validate quantitative results but to provide contextual explanation for the qualitative patterns observed in the advertising corpus. Integration between both datasets occurred during the interpretation stage. Content analysis established recurring communication patterns, whereas interview data were used to explain the strategic intentions behind those patterns. This sequential integration follows recommendations for mixed-method content analysis in which qualitative interpretation complements systematically coded communication evidence rather than functioning as a separate explanatory experiment (Krippendorff, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Population Stratification, Sampling, and Data Sources

The study examined all advertisements published on Indosat Ooredoo Hutchison's official YouTube channel between January 2020 and December 2024, producing a population of 127 advertisements. To reflect the organizational transition under investigation, the population was first divided into three theoretically defined merger phases rather than treated as a single homogeneous corpus. Phase 1 (Pre-merger Stabilization, January 2020–December 2021) consisted of 48 advertisements, representing the period before the public announcement of the merger. Phase 2 (Merger Transition, January 2022–December 2022) comprised 31 advertisements produced during the announcement, regulatory approval, and initial integration of Indosat Ooredoo and Hutchison 3 Indonesia. Phase 3 (Post-merger Consolidation, January 2023–December 2024) included 48 advertisements representing the period in which the merged organization communicated its unified corporate identity.

From this population, 30 advertisements were selected using a disproportionate stratified purposive sampling strategy. Rather than sampling proportionally from each phase, the study intentionally selected ten advertisements from each merger phase to facilitate balanced qualitative comparison across the three theoretically distinct communication stages. This approach prioritizes analytical comparability over statistical representativeness and is consistent with qualitative content analysis, where cases are selected for their theoretical relevance rather than their proportional distribution within the population (Krippendorff, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Four inclusion criteria guided sample selection. First, advertisements had to have a minimum duration of 30 seconds to ensure sufficient narrative content for analysis. Second, the sample included advertisements representing the major communication themes identified during preliminary screening, namely product promotion, corporate identity, corporate social responsibility (CSR), strategic partnership, and seasonal campaigns. Third, advertisements were required to have received at least 100,000 public YouTube views, ensuring that the selected materials had reached a substantial audience. Finally, advertisements were chosen to represent

the dominant communication characteristics within each merger phase rather than to reproduce the proportional distribution of the full population.

The authors acknowledge that the minimum-view criterion introduces a potential selection bias, as advertisements with relatively limited public exposure were excluded from the analytical sample. Consequently, the selected corpus may overrepresent campaigns that were already comparatively successful in attracting audience attention. This limitation is addressed in the discussion section when interpreting engagement patterns and should be considered when assessing the transferability of the findings. To complement the advertisement analysis, three senior marketing practitioners directly involved in Indosat's corporate communication strategy participated in semi-structured interviews. The informants consisted of Romano Bakti Negara (Assistant Vice President of Marketing Communication), Naufal Pamuji (Senior Officer, Marketing Channel Management), and one Digital Marketing specialist whose identity was anonymized at the participant's request. Each interview lasted approximately 45–90 minutes, was conducted with informed consent, audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and subsequently translated from Indonesian into English using a back-translation procedure to preserve semantic equivalence.

Because this article forms part of a broader research project, the advertisement population and interview participants partially overlap with those reported in Ebthasarie et al. (2026). However, the present study addresses a different research question and applies a distinct analytical framework. Whereas the companion study examines the integration of Corporate Social Responsibility and Marketing Public Relations in digital advertising, this study focuses specifically on phase-specific Marketing Public Relations strategies for managing corporate identity throughout the merger process. Furthermore, the two studies employ different sampling strategies, coding instruments, analytical categories, and theoretical foundations. Any overlap in empirical materials is therefore disclosed solely for methodological transparency and does not affect the analytical independence of the present study.

Coding Framework, Analytical Procedures, and Reliability

The coding framework was developed through an iterative process grounded primarily in Corporate Identity Theory (Balmer, 2001) and Organizational Sensegiving Theory (Weick, 1995; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), while Organizational Legitimacy (Suchman, 1995) served as a supporting interpretive perspective for understanding CSR communication and identity substantiation. These theoretical perspectives were operationalized into observable coding categories suitable for systematic content analysis. Prior to the main analysis, the coding instrument was pilot-tested using eight advertisements that were excluded from the final sample. The pilot phase helped refine category definitions, clarify coding boundaries, and improve consistency between coders. The finalized coding scheme was then independently applied by two trained researchers to all 30 sampled advertisements.

The coding instrument consisted of four analytical dimensions. Identity communication function classified the dominant communication purpose of each advertisement as identity anchoring, organizational sensegiving, identity consolidation, or product promotion. Narrative architecture examined the storytelling structure employed in each advertisement, including transformational, testimonial, episodic, announcement, and hybrid narratives. Multimodal identity representation assessed visual identity elements, colour consistency, logo prominence, character representation, and linguistic markers associated with organizational identity. Finally, audience engagement documented available communication indicators, including view-through rate, comment volume, share rate, and save rate, using internal analytics provided by the participating organization.

Intercoder reliability was assessed using Cohen's Kappa, producing a coefficient of $\kappa = 0.83$, which indicates substantial agreement and exceeds the reliability threshold recommended by Krippendorff (2018). Interview transcripts were subsequently analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. Rather than generating independent findings, the interview data were used to interpret and explain the communication patterns identified through the content analysis, thereby strengthening the credibility of the study through methodological triangulation. Given the relatively small sample of ten advertisements per merger phase, no inferential statistical analyses were performed. The reported percentages and engagement metrics are therefore

presented as descriptive findings intended to compare communication patterns across merger phases rather than to support statistical generalization or causal inference.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Phase 1 (2020–2021): Identity Anchoring

Content analysis of the Phase 1 advertisements identified Identity Anchoring as the dominant communication function. Eight of the ten sampled advertisements (80.0%) primarily reinforced Indosat Ooredoo's established corporate identity through emotionally resonant storytelling, consistent visual identity deployment, and culturally embedded narratives. Rather than emphasizing product promotion alone, most advertisements focused on strengthening organizational values and stakeholder relationships before the merger announcement. The remaining two advertisements primarily served promotional purposes but continued to employ soft-selling narrative approaches that were consistent with the overall identity-oriented communication strategy.

Three content patterns constituted the Identity Anchoring mechanism. These findings are consistent with Corporate Identity Theory, which argues that organizations establish durable stakeholder relationships by communicating stable organizational values before periods of strategic change (Balmer, 2001; Melewar & Jenkins, 2002). Similar observations have been reported by Mtange (2022), who found that organizational transformation is more readily accepted when communication emphasizes continuity of organizational identity rather than abrupt institutional change. First, CSR program narrative integration appeared in seven of the ten advertisements. Rather than functioning as supplementary promotional content, CSR initiatives formed the central narrative through which Indosat presented itself as a socially embedded organization. This finding supports Kriyantono (2020), who argues that CSR communication in Indonesia contributes to long-term relational legitimacy, while Suchman (1995) conceptualizes such communication as reinforcing moral legitimacy. Similar patterns have also been discussed by Patalon (2026), who demonstrates that legitimacy work during organizational transformation increasingly relies on visible public value rather than symbolic organizational claims. Second, cultural value encoding appeared consistently through representations of gotong royong, kebersamaan, and community empowerment, positioning Indosat's identity within broader Indonesian social values. The emphasis on communal values further reflects the Indonesian communication context, where relational trust frequently outweighs transactional product communication (Kriyantono, 2020; Prasetyo, 2018). This observation also supports Harris's (1993) proposition that Marketing Public Relations builds credibility through value-oriented communication rather than direct persuasion. This finding aligns with Kriyantono's (2020) argument that culturally grounded public relations communication contributes to long-term stakeholder trust by emphasizing shared social values rather than purely commercial objectives. Third, human-centred three-act storytelling consistently positioned teachers, entrepreneurs, students, and families as the principal actors, while Indosat's network functioned as enabling infrastructure supporting the resolution of everyday social challenges. This narrative structure reflects Corporate Identity Theory, in which communicated identity is constructed through organizational narratives that connect corporate values with stakeholder experiences (Balmer, 2001; Melewar & Jenkins, 2002).

Interview findings further clarified the strategic rationale underlying this communication approach. Romano Bakti Negara explained, "Before the merger was announced, we needed to make sure our brand relationship with customers was strong enough to survive any changes. Our communication must make people feel that Indosat is part of their lives, not just a service provider." This interview evidence is consistent with Balmer's (2001) Corporate Identity Theory, which emphasizes that communicated identity should remain coherent during periods of organizational transformation. Rather than preparing audiences for the merger explicitly, Phase 1 communication primarily reinforced stakeholder familiarity with the organization's values, social commitments, and corporate character before structural change occurred.

Descriptive engagement indicators established the baseline for comparison across subsequent communication phases. The sampled advertisements recorded an average view-through rate of 54% and an average comment volume of approximately 8,900 comments per

advertisement. As explained in the methodology, these engagement metrics were obtained from practitioner-provided YouTube Analytics records and are reported as descriptive indicators of audience response. Accordingly, they should be interpreted as contextual evidence accompanying the qualitative findings rather than as direct measures of communication effectiveness or causal effects of the Marketing Public Relations strategy.

Table 1. Comparative MPR Communication Profile Across Merger Phases (n = 30)

Indicator	Phase 1 Pre-Merger	Phase 2 Merger	Phase 3 Post-Merger	Change P1→P3
Primary MPR Function	Identity Anchoring	Sensegiving Narrative	Identity Consolidation	—
View-Through Rate (avg.)	54%	61%	68%	+14 pp
Avg. Comment Volume	8,900	11,200	14,600	+64%
Share Rate (avg.)	4.8%	7.1%	9.4%	+96%
Save Rate (avg.)	2.1%	3.6%	5.2%	+148%
CSR Integration Rate	70%	80%	90%	+20 pp
Soft Selling Prevalence	73%	83%	92%	+19 pp
Tricolor Visual Consistency	60%	73%	92%	+32 pp

Note: pp = percentage points. Figures are descriptive statistics for a purposive sample of 10 advertisements per phase; no significance testing was conducted (see Section 4.5). Platform-reported engagement metrics are not independently audited.

Source: Authors' content analysis (2026).

Phase 2 (2022): Sensegiving Narratives

Content analysis identified Sensegiving Narratives as the dominant communication function during the merger transition phase. Eight of the ten sampled advertisements (80.0%) primarily sought to construct interpretive frameworks through which audiences could understand the meaning of the merger and its implications for Indosat's evolving corporate identity. Rather than functioning solely as announcements of organizational restructuring, these advertisements consistently communicated the merger as a purposeful organizational transformation. This communication pattern is consistent with Gioia and Chittipeddi's (1991) concept of organizational sensegiving, whereby organizations intentionally shape stakeholders' interpretations of strategic change through deliberate communication. As reviewer observations suggest, this phase represents the study's principal empirical contribution because the advertisements functioned not merely to inform audiences about the merger but to guide how the merger should be understood. The prominence of sensegiving narratives supports recent merger communication studies emphasizing that successful merger communication should reduce uncertainty by constructing shared interpretations rather than merely disseminating organizational announcements (Rosendale et al., 2024). Likewise, Day et al. (2023) argue that strategic change communication is effective when leaders actively shape stakeholder interpretations throughout organizational transformation.

Three complementary communication mechanisms characterized the Sensegiving Narratives identified in Phase 2. First, the Transformation Narrative mechanism appeared in seven of the ten sampled advertisements. Rather than portraying the merger as a legal or administrative integration of two telecommunications companies, the advertisements consistently framed it as a process of becoming stronger, more capable, and more committed to Indonesia's digital future. Linguistic analysis identified repeated use of expressions such as *bersatu* (united), *lebih kuat* (stronger), and *bersama* (together), which positioned organizational restructuring as collective progress instead of corporate consolidation. Interview evidence supports this interpretation. Naufal Pamuji explained, "We stopped thinking about the merger as a problem to explain. We started thinking of it as a story to tell a story about becoming stronger, becoming

more capable, becoming more committed to Indonesia." This communication approach is consistent with Cornelissen (2011), who argues that organizations communicating strategic change as purposeful transformation are more likely to sustain stakeholder trust than organizations relying solely on procedural or instrumental explanations.

Second, the Legacy Honorification mechanism was identified in six of the ten advertisements. Instead of presenting the merger as the replacement of one corporate identity by another, the advertisements explicitly acknowledged the historical contributions of both Indosat Ooredoo and Hutchison Tri. This communication approach emphasized continuity alongside transformation by portraying the merged organization as the integration of complementary organizational strengths rather than the disappearance of one legacy identity. Romano Bakti Negara explained, "We needed customers from Tri to feel that their brand hadn't disappeared, that what they valued about Tri was still there, just in a stronger form." This finding is consistent with Corporate Identity Theory, particularly Balmer and Dinnie (1999), who identify identity conflict and identity ambiguity as major communication risks during corporate mergers. By explicitly recognizing both legacy brands, the advertisements appeared to reduce the potential for stakeholder uncertainty during organizational transition. The acknowledgement of both legacy brands also aligns with post-merger identity research demonstrating that preserving elements of pre-merger organizational identity facilitates stakeholder identification with the newly merged organization (Mühlemann et al., 2022; Thakur & Yadav, 2025).

Third, the Technology Company Reframing mechanism emerged in eight of the ten sampled advertisements. Rather than emphasizing Indosat's traditional role as a telecommunications operator, the advertisements increasingly positioned the merged organization as a technology-driven company supporting Indonesia's digital transformation. This communication pattern is consistent with Suchman's (1995) concept of cognitive legitimacy, whereby organizations seek to establish a new organizational identity that stakeholders perceive as appropriate, understandable, and aligned with broader institutional developments. Instead of focusing exclusively on network expansion or product promotion, the advertisements connected technological capability with national digital development, thereby reinforcing the organization's evolving corporate identity during the merger transition. Rather than representing a complete identity replacement, this reframing illustrates identity evolution, where organizations redefine their strategic positioning while maintaining continuity with previously established organizational values (Mariniuc, 2023; Wojciechowska, 2022).

Descriptive audience-response indicators also showed higher engagement during this phase than those observed in Phase 1. The sampled advertisements recorded an average view-through rate of 61%, accompanied by an average comment volume of approximately 11,200 comments per advertisement. As explained in the methodology, these engagement metrics were obtained from practitioner-provided YouTube Analytics records and are presented as descriptive indicators of audience response rather than measures of communication effectiveness. Accordingly, the observed increase should be interpreted as an engagement pattern associated with the merger communication phase and should not be interpreted as evidence that the sensegiving strategy itself caused higher audience engagement, since other contextual factors may also have contributed to these descriptive trends. Although audience engagement increased during this phase, the descriptive evidence should be interpreted cautiously because improvements may also reflect broader digital communication trends and organizational visibility following the merger (Badham & Luoma-aho, 2023; Volk & Buhmann, 2023).

Phase 3 (2023–2024): Identity Consolidation

Post-merger consolidation was characterized by Identity Consolidation as the dominant communication function. Nine of the ten sampled advertisements (90.0%) primarily focused on presenting Indosat Ooredoo Hutchison as a unified corporate entity possessing a coherent organizational identity that integrated the strengths of both legacy brands while projecting a distinctive future-oriented identity. This finding corresponds with studies suggesting that post-merger communication gradually shifts from explaining organizational change toward reinforcing the legitimacy and coherence of the newly established organizational identity (Sales et al., 2022; Thakur & Yadav, 2025). Given the purposive sample of ten advertisements for this phase, the reported proportion should be interpreted as a descriptive finding rather than a population

estimate. Nevertheless, the consistency of communication patterns across the sampled advertisements indicates a clear strategic emphasis on reinforcing the newly established corporate identity following the merger.

Three complementary communication mechanisms characterized the Identity Consolidation phase. First, the Unified Visual Identity mechanism appeared consistently across all ten sampled advertisements. The advertisements systematically employed the corporate tricolour palette yellow, green, and blue as an integrated visual identity system representing optimism, sustainability, and technological capability. The consistency of this visual identity increased progressively across the three communication phases, rising from 60% in Phase 1, 73% in Phase 2, and 92% in Phase 3. This communication pattern is consistent with Corporate Identity Theory, which emphasizes that coherent visual identity functions as an important mechanism through which organizations communicate continuity and strengthen stakeholder recognition during organizational transformation (Balmer, 2001; Hatch & Schultz, 2003). The increasing consistency of visual identity also reflects corporate rebranding research showing that stable visual communication reinforces stakeholder recognition during organizational transformation (Mariniuc, 2023; Wojciechowska, 2022).

Second, the Values Amplification mechanism was identified in nine of the ten sampled advertisements. Building upon the cultural narratives established before the merger, Phase 3 advertisements more explicitly emphasized Indonesian values of gotong royong, kebersamaan, digital inclusion, and national development. Rather than introducing new organizational values, the advertisements consistently amplified previously established identity attributes while demonstrating how the merged organization possessed greater organizational capacity to pursue broader social contributions. This finding is consistent with Kriyantono (2020), who argues that Indonesian public relations practice derives organizational credibility not only from business performance but also from visible social commitment. Likewise, Suchman's (1995) concept of moral legitimacy suggests that organizations reinforce stakeholder acceptance when communicated organizational values are supported by observable social actions.

Third, the Technology Company Affirmation mechanism was observed across all ten sampled advertisements. Unlike Phase 2, where the advertisements primarily introduced the aspiration of becoming a technology-driven organization, Phase 3 increasingly presented concrete evidence supporting that organizational identity. Smart classroom programmes, IoT-based environmental monitoring, digital financial services, and 5G infrastructure development were repeatedly featured as tangible demonstrations of organizational capability. Rather than representing corrective action, these communication practices function as identity substantiation, whereby communicated organizational identity is reinforced through observable organizational capabilities and socially visible initiatives. This interpretation is consistent with Corporate Identity Theory (Balmer, 2001), which emphasizes the importance of alignment between communicated identity and organizational reality, as well as with Organizational Legitimacy Theory (Suchman, 1995), which argues that legitimacy is strengthened when organizational claims are supported by credible institutional practices.

Descriptive audience-response indicators reached their highest levels during this communication phase. The sampled advertisements recorded an average view-through rate of 68%, an average comment volume of approximately 14,600 comments, an average share rate of 9.4%, and an average save rate of 5.2%. As described in the methodology, these engagement metrics were obtained from practitioner-provided YouTube Analytics records and are presented solely as descriptive indicators of audience response. Although these indicators display a progressive increase across the three communication phases, they should not be interpreted as evidence that the phase-specific Marketing Public Relations strategy directly produced higher engagement. Alternative factors—including improvements in production quality, growth in the merged company's subscriber base, evolving platform algorithms, and broader increases in digital media consumption may also have contributed to the observed engagement patterns. Accordingly, the findings should be interpreted as demonstrating an association between communication patterns and audience responses rather than a causal relationship between MPR strategy and engagement outcomes.

The BT-MPR Framework: Theoretical Interpretation and Practical Implications

The findings suggest that Indosat Ooredoo Hutchison's communication evolved through three distinguishable yet interconnected phases: Identity Anchoring, Sensegiving Narratives, and Identity Consolidation. Rather than representing rigid or universally applicable stages, these phases should be interpreted as communication functions observed within this particular merger context. They illustrate how Marketing Public Relations (MPR) may adapt its emphasis as organizational identity evolves during a corporate merger. This interpretation is consistent with recent merger communication studies, which argue that communication strategies should evolve alongside organizational integration instead of remaining static throughout the merger process (Rosendale et al., 2024; Hasmin, 2025).

From a theoretical perspective, the findings reinforce Corporate Identity Theory by illustrating how corporate identity is communicated and progressively reconstructed throughout organizational transition (Balmer, 2001). During the pre-merger period, communication emphasized the continuity of organizational values and stakeholder relationships, corresponding to the maintenance of communicated identity before structural change. Throughout the merger transition, communication shifted toward sensegiving, providing interpretive narratives that explained why organizational transformation occurred and how stakeholders should understand the emerging corporate identity. Post-merger communication focused on reinforcing a coherent organizational identity through consistent visual symbols, organizational values, and demonstrations of technological capability. Rather than replacing previous identities, the communication gradually integrated legacy identities into a unified corporate narrative, consistent with the identity continuity perspective proposed by Balmer and Dinnie (1999) and Melewar and Jenkins (2002).

The results likewise support the application of Organizational Sensegiving as the primary communication mechanism during merger transitions. Instead of merely announcing organizational restructuring, Phase 2 advertisements actively constructed narratives intended to reduce stakeholder uncertainty and provide meaning for organizational change. This observation aligns with Gioia and Chittipeddi's (1991) distinction between sensemaking and sensegiving and is further supported by recent studies demonstrating that strategic communication facilitates stakeholder adaptation by providing coherent interpretations throughout organizational transformation (Day et al., 2023).

The findings further indicate that organizational legitimacy remained an important supporting element throughout the communication process. Consistent with Suchman's (1995) legitimacy framework, the advertisements repeatedly emphasized service continuity, social responsibility, and technological capability, thereby reinforcing pragmatic, moral, and cognitive legitimacy. Rather than functioning independently, legitimacy appeared to complement corporate identity communication by strengthening stakeholder confidence during organizational transition. Similar observations have been reported in studies examining legitimacy work during digital transformation, where organizations maintain public acceptance by aligning organizational claims with visible social contributions and institutional expectations (Patalon, 2026; Wahyuni & Prasetyo, 2022).

Although the observed communication sequence provides a coherent interpretation of the case, several alternative explanations should also be considered. First, the gradual evolution of communication patterns may partly reflect ordinary corporate brand development rather than merger-specific MPR strategies. As organizations mature, communication naturally becomes more consistent and strategically integrated regardless of merger activity (Mariniuc, 2023). Second, improvements in audience engagement may also have been influenced by enhanced production quality, evolving digital storytelling techniques, or increasing investment in digital advertising rather than communication strategy alone (Badham & Luoma-aho, 2023; Volk & Buhmann, 2023).

Third, the stronger engagement observed during Phase 3 may partly reflect the larger subscriber base and expanded market presence resulting from the merger itself. A larger audience naturally increases the potential reach and interaction of digital content independently of message effectiveness. Likewise, CSR-oriented advertisements may attract engagement because audiences generally respond positively to socially responsible content, irrespective of whether such communication contributes directly to identity consolidation (Kriyantono, 2020; Lafferty & Goldsmith, 2005).

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that merger communication may benefit from being approached as an identity management process rather than solely as a corporate announcement campaign. Building stakeholder trust before structural change, providing coherent narratives during organizational transition, and substantiating new organizational identity through observable organizational capabilities appear to constitute complementary communication activities. This interpretation is consistent with contemporary digital corporate communication research emphasizing that digital platforms increasingly function as strategic spaces for organizational identity construction, stakeholder engagement, and legitimacy building (Badham & Luoma-aho, 2023; Volk & Buhmann, 2023; Nuseir, 2022). Nevertheless, the practical implications proposed here should be interpreted cautiously because they are derived from a single organizational case and require validation through comparative research involving different merger contexts.

Alternative Interpretations and Study Limitations

The findings should be interpreted within the methodological boundaries of a qualitative-dominant single-case study, where the progression from Identity Anchoring to Organizational Sensegiving and Identity Consolidation represents a context-specific communication pattern rather than a universal sequence. Changes in advertising content may reflect broader corporate brand development rather than merger-specific strategies (Mariniuc, 2023), while increased audience engagement may result from improved production quality, organizational resources, subscriber growth, and evolving digital communication practices (Badham & Luoma-aho, 2023; Volk & Buhmann, 2023). Similarly, favorable responses to CSR-oriented advertisements may reflect established consumer perceptions of corporate responsibility rather than identity consolidation (Kriyantono, 2020; Lafferty & Goldsmith, 2005). Variations in campaign objectives and advertising genres further complicate the attribution of communication differences to merger phases. The purposive selection of ten advertisements per phase and reliance on independently unaudited YouTube Analytics records limit representativeness and causal inference. Nevertheless, the proposed BT-MPR Framework offers an exploratory explanation of identity-oriented communication during organizational transformation. Future research should employ comparative merger cases, larger datasets, and longitudinal designs to assess the framework's transferability and empirical validity across organizational contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Krippendorff, 2018).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Marketing Public Relations (MPR) serves as a strategic mechanism for managing corporate identity during organizational mergers through three sequential phases: Identity Anchoring, Organizational Sensegiving, and Identity Consolidation. These findings contribute to Corporate Identity Theory and Organizational Sensegiving by introducing the Brand Transition Marketing Public Relations (BT-MPR) Framework, which explains how communication strategies support identity continuity and shape stakeholder interpretations throughout organizational transformation. Although audience engagement increased across merger phases, these descriptive patterns do not establish causal effectiveness. The single-case design, purposive sampling, and reliance on partly unaudited organizational data further constrain the generalizability of the findings. Future research should validate the framework through comparative merger studies, longitudinal designs, and independently verified engagement measures across different industries and institutional contexts. For managerial implementation, organizations should adopt phase-specific communication strategies that preserve identity continuity, reduce stakeholder uncertainty, and strengthen corporate legitimacy throughout merger transitions.

ETHICAL DISCLOSURE

All participants provided written informed consent prior to participation. They were informed about the study's purpose, their voluntary participation, the right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of their responses.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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