Strategic Communication Challenges in Jordanian Ministries

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Abstract: Objective: This study examines the reality of strategic communication within the media departments of Jordanian government ministries, highlighting the obstacles that limit the effectiveness of this form of communication in an administrative environment where demands for transparency are increasing. The study is based on the premise that media units play an important role in linking the government with citizens. It also draws on organizational communication theory, which examines the flow of information within an organization or institution and the factors affecting its efficiency. **Method**: The study adopted a qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection tool. It was based on in-depth interviews with nine media officials from different ministries, selected through purposive sampling. The interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns. **Results**: The findings revealed three main challenges that hinder the achievement of strategic communication: the absence of a clear strategic vision for digital communication, weak investment in interactive media tools, and limited public participation in communication processes. **Conclusion**: The study recommends, in addition to training and certifying media staff and strengthening the role of strategic communication within ministries, integrating media departments into decision-making processes and developing institutional communication strategies that keep pace with the digital revolution.

Keywords: Strategic Communication, Government Media, Organizational Communication Theory, Ministries in Jordan, challenges.

تحديات الاتصال الاستراتيجي في الوزارات الأردنية

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الملخص: الهدف: تُركز هذه الدراسة على واقع الاتصال الاستراتيجي داخل إدارات الإعلام في الوزارات الحكومية الأردنية، مُسلّطةً الضوء على المعوقات التي تُحدّ من فعالية هذا النوع من الاتصال في بيئة إدارية تتزايد فيها متطلبات الشفافية. تنطلق الدراسة من فرضية أن للوحدات الإعلامية وظيفةً مهمةً في محاولة ربط الحكومة بالمواطنين، كما تستند إلى نظرية الاتصال التنظيمي التي تدرس تدفق المعلومات داخل المنظمة أو المؤسسة وتأثيراتها على كفاءتها. **الطريقة:** اعتمدت الدراسة على تصميم نوعي، واعتمدت على المقابلات شبه المنظمة كطريقة رئيسية لجمع البيانات. واستندت إلى مقابلات مُعمّقة مع تسعة مسؤولين إعلاميين من وزارات مُختلفة، والذين تم اختيارهم من خلال عينة قصدية. خُللت المقابلات باستخدام التحليل الموضوعي لتحديد المواضيع أو الأنماط المُتكررة. **النتائج:** كشفت النتائج عن ثلاث تحديات رئيسية تُعيق تحقيق الاتصال الاستراتيجي: غياب رؤية استراتيجية واضحة للاتصال الرقمي، وضعف الاستثمار في أدوات الإعلام التفاعلي، ومحدودية مشاركة الجمهور في عمليات الاتصال. **الاستنتاج:** أوصت الدراسة بأنه بالإضافة إلى تدريب وتأهيل الكوادر الإعلامية وتعزيز وظيفة الاتصال الاستراتيجي داخل الوزارات، فإنه من الضروري دمج إدارات الإعلام في عمليات صنع القرار وإنشاء استراتيجيات اتصال مؤسسية تواكب الثورة الرقمية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاتصال الاستراتيجي، الإعلام الحكومي، نظرية الاتصال التنظيمي، الوزارات في الأردن، التحديات.

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Introduction

Strategic communication provides a way for organizations to align their objectives with the way they communicate in order to achieve them (Volk & Zerfass, 2020). The concept of corporate communication involves planning, coordinating, and monitoring internal and external communication activities that support the organization's goals, enhance its reputation, and ensure message consistency across multiple target groups (Hallahan *et al*., 2007). In the governmental context, strategic communication takes on additional dimensions such as information dissemination, policy communication, building public trust, media relations, and managing rumors or crises (Cornish *et al*., 2011).

Strategic communication is one of the key components of modern institutions (Falkheimer, 2022). It has ended up a basic apparatus for upgrading organization execution, especially in government substances that center on communicating with citizens, defining open approaches, and advancing national plans. In light of the fast mechanical changes, key government communication has gotten to be a squeezing require for all administrative education and a imperative implies to guarantee the stream of precise data and improve positive interaction between the state and society. Amid the quick changes within the worldwide media scene, challenges have expanded for government teach with respect to how to utilize communication to realize their destinations and lock in emphatically with the open and the media (Eom & Lee, 2022; Panjaitan *et al*., 2023).

The significance of Strategic communication is expanding considering rising citizen desires with respect to straightforwardness, responsibility, and responsiveness (Hyland-Wood *et al*., 2021). Government services in creating nations confront different challenges in creating and enacting a Strategic communication framework due to the exchange of regulatory, specialized, and human components, as well as the nonattendance of a comprehensive communication vision. It has ended up fundamental for these teach to move past the conventional concept of communication as simply an apparatus for transmitting data, to seeing it as an integrated key work that contributes to decision-making, emergency administration, and forming the open discernment of the institution (Samsor, 2021; Saifi *et al*., 2023; Tasrif & Haeril, 2024).

Jordan's government has seen major changes in its media institutions and ministries over the past twenty years. It involves launching media teams in ministries and government agencies, using digital networks and naming officials who explain what each ministry plans to do. Although these reforms have taken place, there is still a noticeable difference between the targets and how ministries currently use media for communication (Okour & Alhammad, 2024). Looking at many news reports and observing the field, we find coordination is not always clear, the government is confused about what it wants to say, there are lags in its responses to media queries and it lacks a strong overall strategy in communication (Nofal *et al*., 2021).

This study aims to highlight the actual situation of strategic communication in Jordanian government ministries by pointing out the challenges that block its effectiveness in their media departments. The main purpose is to improve communication abilities in the public sector, which helps with governance and better interaction with the community.

Problem Statement

Strategic communication has become one of the main components in governmental work, as it aims to achieve integration between the

institution's objectives and its communication policy, while enhancing public trust in governmental performance. However, the media departments in Jordanian ministries still face multiple challenges that limit their ability to establish effective and balanced communication with citizens (Al-Zoubi *et al*., 2024; Okour & Alhammad, 2024).

This study is based on a set of theoretical frameworks that help explain this phenomenon, foremost among them being Organizational Communication Theory, which analyzes how the flow of information within institutional structures affects organizational efficiency and interaction, whether internal or external. Additionally, the study relies on the Excellence Theory in Public Relations, which focuses on the concept of two-way symmetrical communication, based on balanced interaction between the institution and its audience to achieve mutual understanding, rather than merely transmitting information (Grunig & Grunig, 2008).

Considering the previous literature in the field of governmental and administrative communication, it is evident that many studies have focused on the government's external media communication or on the public institutions' image in the media. However, only a few studies have addressed the internal organizational and strategic challenges that limit the effectiveness of communication within the media departments of ministries, especially in the Jordanian context characterized by a formal bureaucratic structure and challenges related to human resources and administrative organization (Al-Asal & Al-nawafah, 2021; Nasereddin, 2025).

This study aims to fill this research gap by interpreting the factors that hinder the achievement of strategic communication in Jordanian ministries, relying on qualitative data collected from media officials in nine ministries selected based on their experience and job positions. The study also focused on ministries due to the pivotal role these institutions play in implementing government policies and communicating with citizens.

Accordingly, the study seeks to identify the reasons that prevent the application of strategic communication practices in the Jordanian governmental environment.

Conceptual Framework

Strategic communication is considered one of the fundamental pillars in the management of modern institutions, especially in the public sector, where there is an increasing need for effective communication tools that enhance transparency and support interaction between the government and citizens. Strategic communication is defined as the organized process that enables institutions to formulate their messages, identify their audiences, and select appropriate communication channels to ensure the achievement of their long-term institutional goals (Holtzhausen *et al*., 2021; Jordiladze & Moulodini, 2021). This type of communication combines communicative vision with managerial dimensions, as it goes beyond the scope of traditional public relations to include the planning of communication policies and aligning them with the institution's overall objectives (Enke&Burschers,2021). In the Jordanian context, the effectiveness of strategic communication requires updating the concepts and methods through which the government practices communication, integrating communication as an essential part of ministry management, and providing qualified human resources to ensure the efficient and consistent implementation of plans in line with public policies (Al-Qudah & Muradkhanli, 2021). To enhance the impact of this communication, reliance on interactive digital media tools can establish clear and effective channels, especially with younger

groups who represent a large segment of the digital audience (Asimakopoulos *et al*., 2025). Establishing clear performance indicators and precise evaluation processes contributes to improving the quality of government messages and the effectiveness of strategic communication.

Theoretically, this framework can be linked to the concepts of the Excellence Theory in public relations, which emphasizes that effective communication requires strategic planning, improving relationships with the public, and delivering a consistent message that enhances institutional reputation and achieves credibility (Grunig & Grunig, 2008). Strategic communication is also connected to the Van Ruler model of persuasion, which explains that an effective message depends on careful design, selecting the appropriate channel, and understanding the behavior of the target audience, thereby increasing the likelihood of its acceptance and impact. This model allows for the analysis of different persuasion strategies (Mahdieh,2023).

Two-way symmetrical communication is considered a fundamental concept for achieving the effectiveness of strategic communication, as it enables the government not only to deliver its messages but also to listen to public feedback and reactions, contributing to building mutual trust and enhancing community engagement (Kent & Lane, 2021). This communication is linked to the philosophical hypothesis of the study, which asserts that the effectiveness of strategic communication depends on balancing the institution's objectives with the needs of the audience, and that involving citizens in the communication process raises the level of transparency.

Through this theoretical framework, the research can analyze the challenges related to strategic communication in Jordanian ministries, such as weak message coordination, insufficient interaction with citizens, and underutilization of digital technologies, while proposing practical strategies to address them. This framework also provides the ability to assess the impact of various communication tools and compare their outcomes with the best global practices in the field of strategic communication and public relations.

Methodology

The study utilized a qualitative approach that methodically gathers information (Cheron *et al*., 2022). In-depth interviews were conducted with 9 media officials from 9 different ministries in Jordan. The in-depth interviews aimed to explore the challenges to strategic communication in Jordanian government ministries. The interviews given the media officials with a space to share their perspectives on the challenges they face. The study protocol was at first arranged in Arabic to coordinate the local language of the informants and was afterward translated into English by a bilingual translator with a PhD in translation from Cairo University. To refine the interview questions, a pilot study was conducted with two media officials. Subsequently, interviews were conducted with 9 media officials chosen through purposive sampling, a strategy commonly utilized in qualitative research to identify information-rich cases (Meyer & Meyerhofer, 2022; Nymbili & Nymbili, 2024). Purposive sampling may be a strategy for selecting a littler, representative subset of the population for perception or experimentation (Sharma, 2017). It includes selecting individuals who have information of a specific topic, in this manner developing the understanding of the study area (Beam & Thaba, 2015). The researcher chosen the sample based on particular criteria for this study. These criteria included having at least 3 years of encounter working within the media office of the ministry and a great understanding

of the study topic. A list of media officials who met these criteria was compiled, and those willing to take part within the study were chosen. The following table presents the demographic information of the media officials participating in the study.

Table (1): Demographic and Professional Backgrounds of Study Participants.

Participants	Ministry	Position	Experience
1	Ministry of Health	Head of Media Department	10 years
2	Ministry of Finance	Media Spokesperson	7 years
3	Ministry of Higher Education	Media Spokesperson	17 years
4	Ministry of Water	Media Spokesperson	20 years
5	Ministry of Environment	Media Officer	10 years
6	Ministry of Industry and Trade	Media Advisor	14 years
7	Ministry of Energy	Media Spokesperson	8 years
8	Ministry of Local Administration	Media Officer	9 years
9	Media Officer	Ministry of Transport	7 years

Findings and Discussions

To find out whether this type of communication exists in Jordanian ministries, in-depth interviews were held with nine media officials from several ministries. The qualitative approach made it possible to understand the views of individuals from the work environment and to find patterns in the challenges and obstacles faced by these departments. The qualitative data obtained from the in-depth interviews were analyzed using NVivo, which is one of the leading research tools for qualitative data analysis. NVivo assisted in organizing, coding, and categorizing the data into main themes and topics in alignment with the study's questions and objectives. It also enabled the identification of recurring patterns and conceptual relationships among the participants' responses (Alam, 2021). The findings of the thematic analysis of the participants' responses revealed three main themes that represent the most significant challenges limiting the effectiveness of strategic communication in these ministries: lack of a strategic vision for digital communication, weak use of interactive media, and limited public participation.

Lack of a Strategic Vision for Digital Communication

Most of the participants agreed that a strategic vision for digital communication was not being followed effectively. According to the responses, the media departments publish randomly and act in reaction to events, rather than depending on defined strategies.

Most participants expressed that the ministries rely on traditional means of communication or on unorganized individual initiatives in managing social media pages and official websites. Most participants indicated that digital media work in their ministries often occurs in a daily responsive manner, without a monthly or annual plan that defines messages, platforms, and interaction patterns. For example, Participant 3 stated:

We publish on the ministry's Facebook page almost daily, but there are no written plan or specific goals; it often just reacts to events or posts news about activities (Participant No. 3).

This testimony clearly reflects the absence of strategic planning that is supposed to define media goals according to the ministry's priorities and measure its impact through specific mechanisms, such as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Participant 1 pointed out the lack of guidance from senior management in the ministry:

When there is a clear strategic plan adopted by senior management in the first place, and then implemented by the media department, we can say that there are clear objectives for using digital platforms and how results can be measured. However, the problem lies in the fact that these guidelines, in general, are

considered weak and do not delve into the depths of true strategic communication (Participant No. 1).

Many participants indicated that most activities of the digital platforms belonging to the ministries are limited to conveying official news, without anticipating events, guiding public opinion, or enhancing community partnership. Additionally, six participants noted a lack of coordination between the various departments within the ministry and the media unit, which leads to confusion in messages or their repetition without effectiveness.

Furthermore, seven participants pointed out the absence of digital performance indicators to evaluate the impact of strategic communication, such as the number of interactions, the quality of comments, reach percentage, or shifts in public opinion. Participant 5 stated:

There are no monthly or quarterly evaluation reports on whether we are achieving our media objectives. Everything we do is publish and respond to some comments (Participant No. 5).

The theory of organizational communication concerns how information flows within institutions and between them and their external audiences. It emphasizes that effective communication does not occur randomly; rather, it is the result of a conscious and strategic organization of messages, channels, and roles (Lammers & Barbour, 2006). From this perspective, the absence of a strategic vision for digital communication in Jordanian ministries is an indicator of weakness in the organizational communication structure within the institution. According to Abdullah and Siam (2014), institutions that do not integrate communication as part of their organizational structure suffer from communication gaps that negatively affect their overall performance, especially in environments that require transparency and public accountability.

Weak Use of Interactive Media

The findings revealed a clear deficiency in the use of interactive media within government communication strategies, which is considered one of the main obstacles to achieving effective strategic communication with the public. Participants unanimously agreed that the prevailing use of digital media in ministries remains largely one-way, limited to the traditional dissemination of information and news, without activating digital interaction tools that allow for the incorporation of public opinions and the generation of constructive dialogues that contribute to building bridges of trust and participation.

Furthermore, most participants indicated that efforts to activate digital platforms are limited to Facebook as it is the most followed platform by Jordanians. Although there are accounts for these ministries on platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram, the rate of posting and interaction is very minimal. Participant 9 stated the following:

Our Facebook page often turns into a platform where we publish data or photos from the ministry's activities, but we do not always allocate time or a plan to respond to citizens' comments or to open dialogues about public policies (Participant No. 9).

This reflection confirms the extent to which interactive communication is confined to a reporting news dimension, which contradicts the essence of strategic communication that requires interactivity, responsiveness, and relationship management with the audience. Most participants indicated the absence of trained human resources to manage interactive platforms and continuous communication as a central reason for this weakness. In this context, Participant 7 said:

We are only three employees in the media unit, and we have many traditional tasks such as organizing conferences and writing press releases, while the issue of digital interaction is secondary and not given much time (Participant No. 7).

In the same context, it was noted that some participants expressed administrative concerns about opening the door for interaction with citizens, especially in an environment that can sometimes be characterized by sharp criticism or negative comments. Some mentioned that there is hesitation from management regarding enabling the comment feature, particularly related to sensitive decisions.

On the other hand, the results showed that some participants lack sufficient understanding of the potential of interactive media, as they reduce its use to simple aspects, without viewing it as a strategic means to build long-term relationships and communication. For example, Participant 2 stated:

Sometimes we use Instagram to post beautiful pictures of the ministry's activities, but we do not see the necessity to interact with followers. We are an official entity and not a marketing institution (Participant No. 2).

This perception highlights the conceptual gap between government media and modern media, as treating digital platforms merely as a visual interface undermines their importance. The findings revealed a number of organizational and cultural challenges that hinder the effectiveness of institutional communication. Interviews also showed that the absence of an organizational culture supportive of interactive communication, along with the fear of criticism or public controversy, drives many departments to limit interaction, which contradicts the foundations of organizational communication theory that emphasizes the necessity of openness, the diversity of communication channels, and the

flow of information in multiple directions both within and outside the organization (Baker, 2008).

Limited Public Participation

The findings revealed a weakness in the information flow mechanism within the ministries, as internal communication lacks coordination and integration between the departments of the same ministry. Participants in the study indicated that the weak internal coordination between the media unit and other units within the ministry creates numerous obstacles that lead to ineffective strategic communication.

Participant 6 stated

On many occasions, we receive information about events or ministerial decisions only after they have been implemented, and not from the directly concerned departments. This situation disrupts the horizontal and vertical communication system, leading to partial isolation of the media units within the administrative structures and affecting communication performance at a time when it requires the highest levels of integration and speed (Participant No. 6).

Moreover, the findings uncovered a lack of empowerment for media officials within the ministries, as six participants noted that their role is mostly limited to execution without their involvement in shaping communication strategies or policies. Participant 4 illustrated this with an example:

We are called upon when we are asked to publish a statement or refute a rumor related to the ministry, but when it comes to planning and communication policies, we are excluded (Participant No. 4).

The findings confirm that the continued traditional understanding of the communication function keeps media departments in a subordinate position, rather than being a strategic player in shaping the institution's

image and crafting its messages. This contrasts with the modern understanding of organizational communication, which views communication as a central element in decision-making and building institutional culture.

One of the obstacles that has clearly emerged is the dominance of administrative centralization and bureaucracy, which leads to delays in making communication decisions. Eight participants indicated that the media unit lacks independence in making decisions about what is published or withheld, necessitating approval from higher management, which takes more time and creates a gap between the media unit's vision and that of the ministry.

Participant 8 highlighted this dilemma by saying,

Sometimes we need an urgent statement, but the lengthy procedures cause us to miss the right moment for communication (Participant No. 8).

Perhaps one of the most significant challenges revealed by the results is the weak institutional relationship with the media. Despite the existence of official communication channels, they are often limited to issuing press releases on specific occasions, without building lasting collaborative relationships with journalists and media outlets. Participant 2 expressed this shortcoming by stating,

We do not have ongoing meetings with journalists and the media to build trust or clarify policies; communication only happens when necessary (Participant No. 2).

The findings of this study agree with the findings of Al-Qaisi (2025), which confirmed that strategic planning suffers from a lack of dissemination of planning culture, weak coordination, and poor information exchange between different administrative levels. When discussing these results considering organizational communication theory, it becomes clear that the obstacles do not only reflect external or temporary challenge but are also related to the internal environment of the ministries. The theory emphasizes that the effectiveness of communication is linked to three main components: organizational structure, institutional culture, and internal interaction dynamics (Abdullah & Siam, 2014). In the case studied, it appears that there is a disruption in each of these areas.

Recommendations

The study recommends restructuring the media departments in Jordanian ministries to become a more effective part of the decision-making system, rather than merely executive tools. This support requires the establishment of institutional media within the upper administrative structure, enabling participation in shaping communication policies and directing public messages in alignment with the needs and aspirations of citizens. The study also suggests the development of integrated, long-term communication strategies that consider ongoing technological transformations. Furthermore, it recommends allocating sufficient financial and human resources to develop these departments through continuous training for media personnel in digital communication skills, crisis management, and public engagement, as well as empowering them with access to advanced technological tools that support performance efficiency.

In the research context, the study advises future researchers to expand the scope of research to include a larger number of ministries and government institutions, thereby allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the state of strategic communication in the public sector. It also recommends conducting comparative studies between Jordanian ministries and their

counterparts in Arab or developed countries to understand the differences in communication structures and their impact on the effectiveness of strategic communication.

Disclosure Statement

The author declares that this research has not been previously published and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere.

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