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Epistolary Communication in the Digital Age: Challenges and Opportunities for Press Services in Kazakhstan

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to investigate the transformation of the epistolary genre in the digital age using the example of the press services of Kazakhstan. Employing a qualitative methodology, the research is based on the content and functional analysis of documents issued between 2012 and 2024, including government statements, press releases, communiqués, and open letters from civil and international actors. The study analysed how modern technologies have changed traditional forms of epistolary communication, which continue to play an important role in public interaction and the development of public opinion in Kazakhstan. It was determined that digitalisation, especially through social networks and online platforms, accelerated the process of information dissemination and made the epistolary genre more accessible to a wide audience. However, at the same time, it has created problems related to the loss of the traditional structure and formality of epistolary communication, which requires new approaches from the press services. In the course of research, examples of the use of the epistolary genre in various contexts were analysed, changes in its use were identified, and recommendations were proposed to improve interaction between government agencies and society. In particular, the need to increase attention to the processing of incoming messages was emphasised, and the possibility of using outsourcing to improve the efficiency of press services. The main conclusions showed that digitalisation provides both new opportunities and challenges that require the adaptation of traditional communication methods.

Keywords: *Media, Kazakhstan, open letter, public relations, image improvement, interaction with the public.*

INTRODUCTION

Despite the rapid development of digital technologies, epistolary communication continues to be an important element of interaction between the authorities and society. In the modern digital age, the format of letters, appeals, and statements has undergone significant changes, which has created new challenges and opportunities for press services responsible for public communication. Traditional forms of the epistolary genre are now actively using digital channels, requiring the press services not only to react promptly, but also to be able to work with new media formats and platforms.

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In Kazakhstan, epistolary communication plays a special role, especially given the difficult political and social situation in the country, which was established at the time of mid-2024 due to economic difficulties, increased pressure on civil liberties, frequent protests and public unrest. Direct dialogues with society through open letters, appeals, letters of public importance, and responses to media inquiries remain an important channel of interaction not only with the government, but also with enterprises, public organisations and other institutions; however, their importance increases in conditions of limited access to independent media and frequent Internet outages (Zhivkova et al., 2024). In Kazakhstan, epistolary forms of communication often act as a tool for both expressing civil discontent and a way to draw attention to important social and political issues, which requires an attentive and strategically calibrated reaction from the press services (Chaplinska & Kabanova, 2021; Chyrun et al., 2019).

The novelty and academic significance of this research lies in its integrated methodological approach and its focus on the specific media-political environment of Kazakhstan. First, it offers a comprehensive content-based and functional analysis of both official and civil epistolary texts circulated in digital formats between 2012 and 2024. Second, it systematises criteria for assessing the communicative effectiveness of these messages, including legal, rhetorical, and technological parameters. Third, the study contributes to understanding how epistolary genres are reshaped under authoritarian governance and information constraints, an area insufficiently studied in existing scholarship on post-Soviet public communication. In doing so, the paper provides not only theoretical insights but also practical recommendations for strengthening institutional communication in transitional digital environments.

This study focuses on the transformation of epistolary communication in the context of digitalisation and investigates how these changes affect the strategic activities of press services in Kazakhstan. The central research question is as follows: How do structural and functional transformations of epistolary communication in the digital era influence the effectiveness and responsiveness of Kazakhstani press services, and what challenges and opportunities arise from this process?

The purpose of this study was to identify the key challenges and opportunities associated with the transformation of epistolary communication in the digital age, with an emphasis on their importance for the press services of Kazakhstan. The objective of this study was to develop recommendations for the effective use of the epistolary genre in the digital age, which would help to consolidate trust between government agencies and citizens, and increase transparency and openness in public communications.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The epistolary genre has significantly evolved in recent decades, especially in environments marked by political, cultural, and technological transformation. The integration of digital media into traditional formats, such as letters, appeals, and statements, has redefined institutional communication, particularly in transitional contexts like Kazakhstan, where digitalisation intersects with enduring historical legacies and shifting public expectations.

Traditionally, the epistolary genre served as a rhetorical tool in institutional and public discourse, enabling persuasion, justification, and symbolic assertion of authority. Classical rhetoric recognised its potential to balance ethos, logos, and pathos, a function that continued into Enlightenment-era political treatises and 20th-century manifestos (Palo,

2020). Each iteration reflected the socio-political context, reinforcing authority and shaping public identity. Digitally mediated communication has expanded the genre's reach while fragmenting its stylistic coherence. Though digital platforms tend to diminish the formal tone typical of earlier epistolary forms, the genre retains symbolic weight, especially in open letters disseminated via institutional websites and social media. In state communication, such formats continue to convey legitimacy and gravitas during crises, clarifications, or responses to civic and international appeals.

In addition, attention should be paid to the press services themselves, since a significant part of the information available to the general public comes from the press services of various government agencies, quasi-public and private companies. The institute of press services arose in Kazakhstan after gaining independence, following the example of Western countries, where such services in the form of separate positions or structural divisions in government agencies and companies have existed for a long time. For example, the earliest known examples of press services include the news bureau of the industrial giant Krupp (Germany), founded in 1893, and the Boston advertising agency The Publicity Bureau, founded in 1900 as the first public relations agency in the United States, according to historian Scott Cutlip (Watson, 2012). He also mentions Parker & Lee's 1906 Declaration of Principles, which emphasised the public "right to know" and effectively laid the foundation for the understanding of press office operations used in the global community as of 2024.

Since their inception, Kazakhstani press services have had to adapt to a dual legacy: Soviet centralisation and the exigencies of digital globalisation. Challenges include modernising communication methods, improving digital responsiveness, and preserving the rhetorical force of traditional epistolary forms. This hybrid dynamic, which combines bureaucratic continuity and digital adaptation, makes Kazakhstan a revealing case for studying institutional communication in transformation. The adaptation of the epistolary genre under technological change has been explored by a number of scholars. Toktagazin (2015) analysed the genre's resilience across print, audio, and video platforms, while Zhaxylykbayeva (2019) emphasised its pedagogical and psycholinguistic value in Kazakh journalism.

Taizhanova (2023) investigated state information policy as a framework shaping official communication, and Sadykova et al. (2022) examined public administration's interaction with citizens. Umarova (2021) assessed how media portrayals of civil servants influence public trust, while the Astana Civil Service Hub (2020) provided insights into institutional communication strategies. Smailov (2019) focused on internal ministry press services, and Bekbolatuly and Karaulova (2019) addressed the historical and structural development of public relations in Kazakhstan. Despite this growing body of research, a gap remains concerning the transformation of the epistolary genre in Kazakhstan within the digital ecosystem, especially from 2010 to 2020. Previous studies have largely concentrated on institutional structures or general communicative functions without detailing how digital epistolary strategies are employed in response to public discontent, international critique, or demands for civic engagement.

This study addresses that gap by analysing how Kazakhstan's press services manage incoming epistolary communications and construct official narratives through digital channels. It offers an empirically grounded account of how institutional discourse operates under digital, political, and cultural pressures. By examining the mechanisms of strategic response and communicative adaptation, the research contributes to broader

understandings of post-Soviet public communication and the evolving functions of epistolary discourse in the digital age.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This qualitative study was conducted from January to August 2024 and aimed to investigate the transformation of the epistolary genre in the digital age and its implications for the communication practices of press services in Kazakhstan. The research employed textual analysis, a method widely used for interpreting meaning, communicative structure, and rhetorical strategies in media discourse (Palo, 2020; Hart, 2020).

The textual analysis was guided by a set of interrelated research questions that addressed how digitalisation has altered traditional epistolary forms, how press services construct and disseminate official messages, and how they respond to incoming communications such as open letters, appeals, and petitions. The selected materials were examined in terms of tone, structure, audience adaptation, argumentation, transparency, legal and ethical positioning, and institutional responsiveness.

In total, the study analysed 62 sources published between 2012 and 2024. These included a broad range of material types that reflect the diversity of epistolary practices in Kazakhstan's contemporary media space. Among them were official government communications such as press releases, communiqués, and statements issued by the Official Information Source of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2017, 2018, 2023), open letters addressed to government authorities from international organisations and domestic civic actors including Human Rights Watch (2020), Access Now (2022), and the QazSpirits (2021) Association, as well as appeals and statements disseminated via online media outlets such as Kazakh-Zerno (2013) and TengriNews (Orazbai, 2021). The corpus also comprised legislative and policy texts including the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan № 401-V "On Access to Information" (2015), and peer-reviewed academic publications that provided conceptual framing for the study. These sources addressed topics including the transformation of the epistolary genre in the digital era, the communication strategies of public institutions, press service functions, government transparency, and media language.

The inclusion of both official statements and open letters was purposeful as it enabled the analysis to explore the bidirectional flow of communication between state institutions and the public. Open letters were examined not only as external critiques but as strategic interventions aimed at initiating dialogue or eliciting responses from government press services. Their presence in the corpus allowed the study to interrogate the extent to which institutional actors engage with civil society through epistolary discourse as well as the consequences of their silence or responsiveness.

The analytical process unfolded in several stages, as depicted in Figure 1. First, relevant sources were identified and catalogued with attention to their authorship, date, platform, and intended audience. This was followed by close textual reading using a qualitative coding scheme informed by prior studies in media discourse, governmental communication, and rhetorical analysis. The coding focused on structural elements, argumentation patterns, stylistic choices, tone, and the positioning of the communicative act within its institutional and social context. Particular emphasis was placed on how government press services responded or failed to respond to public letters and how such responses shaped perceptions of openness, credibility, and trust. Finally, the findings were interpreted

to identify prevailing communication strategies, recurring challenges, and emerging opportunities for improving institutional interaction with the public.

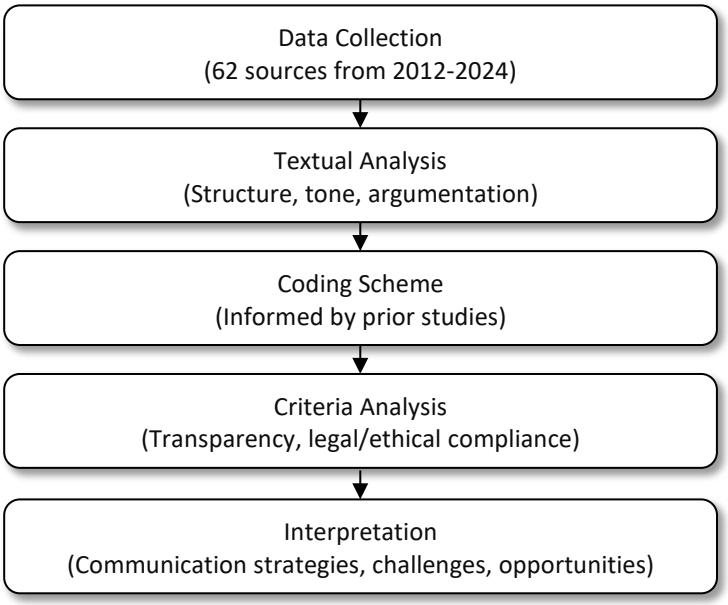


Figure 1: Data collection and interpretation process

RESULTS

The epistolary genre with deep historical roots is facing the challenges of digitalisation and transformation of the media space. In Kazakhstan, it has long played an important role in cultural and public life, where open letters, appeals, and press publications have served as the main tools for expressing public opinion and shaping debate. However, since the mid-2010s, the epistolary genre has undergone significant changes (Taizhanova, 2023). Traditional letters began to be replaced by electronic messages, social media posts, and online petitions, which accelerated the transfer of information and expanded the audience, but led to the loss of the traditional formalised style and a decrease in the level of argumentation in the digital space (Ronzhes, 2023; Ruban, 2022). Open letters published as posts on Facebook or Instagram have spread more quickly and attracted the attention of a wider audience, although their lack of formal status sometimes reduces the seriousness of their perception by the authorities. Despite the challenges, the epistolary genre has remained relevant in Kazakhstan, especially among activists and non-governmental organisations, and its revival has been observed from the end of 2010 to the middle of 2020. Press services and government agencies have also begun to use elements of the epistolary genre, adapting them to the digital age for more effective interaction with society. Thus, epistolary communication remains an important element of interaction between government agencies and society, despite the changes caused by digitalisation (Zhaxylykbayeva, 2019).

Online petitions have become one of the most popular forms of epistolary communication in the context of digital transformation in Kazakhstan (Tyukhtenko et al., 2019; Sopivnyk et al., 2024). Platforms such as Change.org allow collecting signatures and sending petitions, which allows the press services to respond promptly to social problems by publishing official comments or statements, maintaining the reputation of the authorities as open to dialogue. Social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and messengers like Telegram and WhatsApp have also become key channels for epistolary communication, used to publish

and discuss open letters, organise public campaigns, engage directly with the public, and analyse public sentiment (Oldenburg & Miethlich, 2020; Zaki et al., 2023). In addition, the epistolary genre is manifested in the work of press services through publications such as press releases, which, despite their formality, contain elements of the epistolary genre, including targeting, official style and time fixation (Palo, 2020; Cai, 2020). Official statements, appeals, letters of public interest, responses to media inquiries and press statements also contain features of the epistolary genre and are aimed at interacting with the public and the media. Some researchers also refer communiques to epistolary genres in the activities of press services, emphasising their importance in official communication (Watson, 2012; Hart, 2020).

The historical and cultural reality of Kazakhstan influences the specific features of the epistolary genre and its use (Shyngyssova et al., 2024). In Soviet times, the media received information through assistants to officials, and when creating press services, they appointed the same people, which preserved the features of their work in Kazakhstan and other post-Soviet countries (Zlenko & Dudar, 2024; Zelenin et al., 2024). In countries with more developed democracies, press services are more focused on determining the mood of the audience and helping to choose an information strategy, while in Kazakhstan their role is often limited to writing reports, letters, and press releases. Shortcomings in the work of the press services are associated with narrow tasks, which causes distrust among journalists and the audience. Press releases are compiled in such a way as to avoid unwanted questions, which leads to the publication of similar materials that do not contribute to in-depth coverage of the topic. There is also a problem of insufficient implementation of the Kazakh language in Kazakhstan, since information is initially prepared in Russian and then translated into Kazakh, which causes difficulties in translating technical and scientific terms (Bekbolatuly & Karaulova, 2019).

Digitalisation brings new challenges for the press services, such as crisis management caused by epistolary documents on the Internet and the need for rapid fact-checking (Atamanyuk & Kondratenko, 2015; Destek et al., 2024). However, the digital age also opens up opportunities for direct interaction with citizens, expanding the audience and strengthening the influence of epistolary documents. Digital tools help to collect and analyse data on public reactions, which improves understanding of citizens' moods and needs. For a more complete analysis of epistolary communication, using the example of the press services of Kazakhstan, it made sense to take two forms of interaction with society. The first concerned the use of epistolary forms by the press services (how the press services of Kazakhstan use the epistolary genre to form public opinion and manage crisis situations), the second – the use of these forms (using the example of open letters) on the part of the society, to whose appeal the press services are obliged to respond (Shynkar & Levchenko, 2024).

Table 1 presents a set of criteria for analysing examples of the epistolary genre with authorship from press services (governmental and non-governmental). These criteria helped to evaluate the effectiveness, content and strategic use of epistolary communication by press services in various contexts.

Table 1: Criteria for the analysis of samples of the epistolary genre by the authorship of the press services

Criterion	Condensed Decoding
Purpose and objectives	Clear aim (inform, explain, call to action, justify) aligned with institutional goals.
Tone and style	Tone matches context and audience; language is accessible, avoiding unnecessary jargon.
Argumentation	Coherent, evidence-based reasoning with relevant facts and structure.
Audience adaptation	Content tailored to recipients' needs, expectations, and context.
Structure and content	Logical layout; content relevant to the current socio-political situation.
Transparency	Openness to dialogue, admission of institutional responsibility where needed.
Legal and ethical compliance	Conforms to legal standards and respects rights and dignity.
Effectiveness	Achievement of communicative goals (trust-building, conflict resolution, etc.).
Digital adaptation	Appropriate use of media platforms; content optimised for digital dissemination.
Long-term impact	Contribution to institutional reputation and strategic communication aims.

The use of these criteria for the analysis of letters created by the press services help to identify both possible challenges and potential opportunities that each letter opens (Table 2). This helps the press services not only to avoid mistakes and negative consequences, but also effectively use the epistolary genre to achieve their goals and strengthen ties with society.

Table 2: Challenges and opportunities that open up for press services using various forms of the epistolary genre

Criterion of analysis	Challenges	Opportunities
Purpose and objectives	Unclear or contradictory goals may cause misunderstanding and reduce communication effectiveness.	Clear objectives help convey messages effectively and build audience trust.
Tone and style	Inappropriate tone may provoke negative reactions or damage reputation.	Appropriate tone fosters engagement and strengthens reputation.
Argumentation	Weak arguments can undermine credibility and provoke criticism.	Strong, evidence-based arguments support organisational positions.
Audience adaptation	Ignoring audience expectations may lead to rejection or miscommunication.	Tailored messages enhance engagement and foster positive relationships.
Content and structure	Vague structure complicates understanding and weakens impact.	Logical structure improves clarity and strengthens messaging.
Transparency and openness	Lack of transparency raises suspicion and harms reputation.	Openness signals accountability and builds public trust.
Legal and ethical compliance	Violations may lead to legal issues or public backlash.	Compliance reinforces credibility and institutional responsibility.
Interaction effectiveness	Failure to achieve results suggests weak strategy.	Effective responses can resolve conflicts and improve image.
Media and digital adaptation	Poor digital adaptation limits reach and engagement.	Digital tools expand audience and communication efficiency.
Long-term effects	Poorly received letters may damage long-term reputation.	Strategic communication contributes to lasting public support.

These criteria helped to analyse more deeply the examples of the epistolary genre created by the press services and evaluate them in terms of effectiveness, strategy and compliance with the tasks set. Various forms of the epistolary genre were selected for analysis. The first was the press release for the press conference on the completion of negotiations with ArcelorMittal (Official Information Source of the Prime Minister of the

Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023). The purpose of the press release was to inform the public and the media about the details of the transaction between the Government of Kazakhstan and ArcelorMittal Corporation, and to clarify the key points and consequences of this transaction. The letter clearly stated the tasks, which include informing about the essence of the deal, emphasising the importance of this agreement for the country, and demonstrating the transparency of the process. The clarity of the wording of the goals and objectives allowed the press service to effectively convey its message and strengthen the audience's trust in the government. However, if the information was presented indistinctly or inconsistently, it could cause misunderstandings or a negative reaction from the public.

The press release was compiled using an official and business-like tone, which allowed effective interaction with a wide audience. The information was clearly structured, the facts and arguments presented justified the need for action, which helped to strengthen the trust and reputation of the organisation. The press service demonstrated a high level of transparency and compliance with legal and ethical standards, which also had a positive impact on the perception of the material. Thus, the press release achieved its goals and was well received by the public and the media. The press release satisfied all the criteria of the analysis, meeting the objectives and goals, and demonstrating a high level of transparency, argumentation, and adaptation to the target audience. Its only drawback is its representation only in Russian.

The second example of the epistolary genre was the Statement of the Press Service of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan, published on the website of the Press Service of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Official Information Source of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2017). The statement was made in an official tone, available in three languages: Kazakh, Russian, and English, which helped to reach a wide audience. The main purpose of the statement was to eliminate misunderstandings and refute incorrect information, contributing to building trust in the government. The tone and structure of the statement corresponded to the situation, ensuring ease of perception. Strong argumentation based on facts and willingness to engage in dialogue with various media outlets have increased trust in the press service and improved interaction with the public. Thus, the statement of the Press Service of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan met the criteria for the analysis of the epistolary genre, effectively coped with the challenges and used the opportunities for the press service.

The next example of the epistolary genre was the Communique of the Fifth Caspian Summit, published on the website of the Press Service of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Official Information Source of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2018). The Communique was aimed at informing about the key decisions of the Fifth Caspian Summit. The tone was formal and official, emphasising the diplomatic nature and friendly relations between the states. The argument was supported by references to international treaties, which strengthened the credibility. The structure is logical and consistent; the text is transparent and complies with international standards. The communique helped to strengthen trust between the countries and emphasised the strategic importance of the signed agreements, effectively improving the image of the Caspian littoral states. This analysis helped to understand how this communique responded to challenges and used opportunities for effective interaction of the press service with society and international partners.

In addition to the press services of government agencies and institutions, it made sense to consider other examples. Thus, it is worth mentioning the existence of the Kazakh Press Club, whose list of services also includes creating and publishing appeals, letters of public interest, press releases and other messages that correspond to the parameters of the epistolary genre. For example, the Press Club published a statement by the Tatishev family in connection with the reports on the parole of M. Tokmadi ("Should have come out..., 2024). The statement of the Tatishev family was intended to express outrage at the court's decision on the parole of M. Tokmadi, convicted of the murder of Yerzhan Tatishev, and to draw the attention of the public and authorities to alleged violations in the trial. The emotional tone of the statement, supported by facts and legal norms, highlights the unfairness of both the verdict and the parole process. The family drew attention to the lack of notification of the hearing, which violated their right to participate in the process. The statement was addressed not only to the legal and correctional authorities, but also to the general public, to generate support and create pressure on the authorities. The clear structure and logic of the presentation helped to increase the impact, and the use of mass media and social networks expanded the reach of the audience, contributing to an increase in public response and possible revisions of decisions related to this case. If the application receives a wide public response, this may lead to a review of court decisions and a change in the procedures for notifying victims of court proceedings.

The statement of the Tatishev family became a powerful example of the use of the epistolary genre to protect the interests of the family and express outrage at injustice. It effectively highlighted the main problems in the judicial process, such as the lack of notification to the injured party and the unfairness of the decision. The statement used emotional and logically sound reasoning, which helped to draw the attention of the public and authorities to this issue and influence the revision of the decision and the improvement of legal practice in the future. Thus, it can be argued that press services create high-quality messages built in accordance with all the principles of effective communication. But at the same time, it is quite important to consider exactly how the press services respond to the challenges and opportunities that they receive from the people, which they have to respond to promptly. Since the most common example of such feedback in Kazakhstan is an open letter, it was worth analysing it in this context.

The analysis of the open letter as a representative of the epistolary genre, with the author as a representative of the society of Kazakhstan, was carried out according to the points that allow focusing on the challenges and opportunities for the press services (Table 3).

Table 3: Criteria for analysing an open letter

Criterion	Decoding	Challenges	Opportunities
Author and addressee	Who wrote the letter? To whom is it addressed? What is its aim?	Influential authors raise pressure for a timely, informed response.	May initiate dialogue and foster trust.
Content	What are the main arguments, tone, and factual basis?	Strong arguments require a solid rebuttal or acknowledgment.	Weak arguments enable confident refutation and reputational strengthening.
Expectations and demands	What is requested? Are deadlines or threats specified?	Unrealistic demands can trigger public backlash if unmet.	Reasonable requests can enhance credibility and trust.

Potential impact	What is the current or likely public/media reaction?	High attention intensifies the need for quick, strategic response.	Can serve as a platform to reinforce positive institutional image.
Media and distribution	Where and how was the letter published and disseminated?	Viral distribution requires crisis communication and media monitoring.	Same platforms can be used for counter-narratives and official responses.
Press service strategy	What communication strategy should be adopted in response?	Poorly chosen tactics can escalate tensions.	A professional strategy can reinforce government credibility and transparency.
Legal considerations	Does the letter violate any laws? Are legal responses needed?	Legal risks may demand expert review and cautious handling.	Legal grounds can reinforce the state's position and counter misinformation.

This approach allowed for a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities that open letters present to press services and how to respond effectively to them. The first example of such a letter was an "Open Letter to the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Internet service providers requesting free, open and secure Internet access in Kazakhstan" (Access Now, 2022) (Table 4).

Table 4: Analysis of the open letter of the #KeepItOn coalition to the government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Internet service providers

Criterion of analysis	Decoding
Addressee and author	The letter is authored by the #KeepItOn coalition, a global network of over 250 organisations, and addressed to President Tokayev, key officials, and ISP heads. Its aim is to demand uninterrupted, secure Internet access in Kazakhstan.
Content	Emphasises the link between Internet access and human rights, public safety, and economic functioning. Cites international norms and specific shutdown cases in Kazakhstan to underscore legal and ethical concerns.
Expectations	Urges immediate restoration of access, repeal of restrictive laws, and prevention of future outages, though without specific deadlines.
Potential impact	International attention may rise. Ignoring the letter risks reputational harm; a positive response could enhance Kazakhstan's global image.
Media and digital circulation	Disseminated via Human Rights Watch, social media, and human rights networks, significantly amplifying its reach.
Press service recommendations	Assess reputational risks; consider a timely, formal response or a strategic dialogue with authors.
Legal considerations	Highlights violations of international and national law, necessitating legal review and possible legislative amendments.

Separately, it is worth considering the challenges and opportunities that have arisen due to the publication of this letter (Table 5).

Table 5: Challenges and opportunities for press services in response to the #KeepItOn open letter

Criterion of analysis	Challenges	Opportunities
Addressee and author	International origin increases pressure on government and ISPs.	Can serve as a platform for constructive international engagement.
Content of the letter	Requires a detailed, evidence-based response to specific claims.	May prompt policy review and foster institutional trust.
Expectations and demands	Overly stringent demands risk governmental resistance.	Feasible demands could ease tensions and improve global standing.
Public impact	High public interest necessitates a swift and well-calibrated reply.	A chance to demonstrate transparency and gain reputational capital.

Media circulation	Viral dissemination needs active crisis monitoring and response.	Digital platforms offer space for counter-narratives and clarifications.
Strategic recommendations	Poor response strategy risks exacerbating criticism.	Strategic engagement can boost credibility and domestic/international trust.
Legal considerations	Potential legal ramifications require expert handling.	Legal scrutiny could drive normative reforms and enhance regulatory legitimacy.

As of August 2024, no publicly available sources confirmed an official response from the Government of Kazakhstan to the open letter by Access Now (2022) and similar appeals demanding free and secure Internet access during the January 2022 protests. Despite international criticism, Kazakhstan continued to impose Internet blackouts as a control mechanism, causing economic losses and eroding public trust, thereby contributing to further instability (Woollacott, 2022; Putz, 2023). No government measures or responses were recorded in open sources.

This absence of reaction signals a disregard for international appeals, damaging Kazakhstan's global reputation and weakening domestic trust, with long-term risks for political and economic stability. Nonetheless, the situation remains reversible. Constructive dialogue with international organisations and citizens, alongside a formal response and policy shift toward open Internet access, could improve Kazakhstan's image and restore trust. Press services may use this precedent to design faster and more strategic responses to similar appeals, strengthening the state's international standing. The following case concerns an open letter on the draft law "On Peaceful Assemblies" (Human Rights Watch, 2020) (Table 6).

Table 6: Analysis of an open letter to President Tokayev on the draft law "On Peaceful Assemblies"

Criterion	Decoding
Addressee and author	Issued by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and others; addressed to President Tokayev, MFA, Senate, and Mazhilis. Expresses concerns over the draft law.
Content	Critiques the draft law for violating international norms—particularly regarding burdensome procedures and discrimination. Supports claims with legal references and expert commentary.
Expectations	Urges renewed public consultation and expert involvement; emphasizes revision prior to law's adoption.
Potential impact	Likely to attract international and domestic scrutiny. Ignoring it may damage Kazakhstan's reputation; a constructive response could enhance it.
Media presence	Likely circulated via NGOs' websites and social media, increasing its visibility and influence.
Recommendations for press service	Assess reputational risks of inaction. Develop an official response strategy, possibly including a press conference or direct engagement.
Legal aspect	Highlights inconsistencies with international law; necessitates legal review and potential legislative adjustment.

Table 7 shows the challenges and opportunities presented to the press service of the President of Kazakhstan as a result of receiving an open letter on the draft law "On Peaceful Assemblies".

Table 7: Analysis of the challenges and opportunities for the press services that arose due to the Open letter to President Tokayev regarding the draft law "On Peaceful Assemblies"

Criterion of analysis	Challenges	Opportunities
Addressee and the author of the letter	The letter originates from influential international human rights organisations, increasing external pressure and requiring a carefully calibrated response.	Enables constructive engagement with global actors and demonstrates Kazakhstan's alignment with international standards.
Content of the letter	Strong arguments necessitate a well-prepared reply with either substantiated counterpoints or legislative amendments.	Acknowledging valid concerns can support legal reform and enhance international credibility.
Expectations and requirements	Calls for revising the draft law may conflict with prior governmental decisions, provoking internal resistance.	A positive response shows openness to expert input and enhances diplomatic relationships.
Potential impact	Heightened public interest demands a swift and well-reasoned communication strategy.	Can be used to showcase transparency and foster a reformist image domestically and abroad.
Media and digital platforms	Broad online dissemination requires active monitoring and rapid crisis response.	Provides a channel to clarify the government's stance and mitigate reputational risks.
Recommendations for the press service	Poor strategic choices risk exacerbating criticism and undermining public trust.	A thoughtful response plan strengthens governmental credibility and public confidence.
Legal aspect	Legal implications may necessitate complex assessments and resource allocation.	Opens a path to review legal inconsistencies and align national law with global norms.

There was no direct official response from the Government of Kazakhstan to a request from Human Rights Watch regarding the draft law "On Peaceful Assemblies" in Kazakhstan. However, President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev signed several important documents and initiated reforms aimed at improving human rights in the country. This included the approval of the Human Rights Action Plan, which aims to strengthen democratic institutions and cooperate with international organisations such as the UN and OSCE to implement the proposed measures (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2023). Despite these efforts to improve the human rights situation, no specific response to HRW's open letter with proposals to revise the law "On Peaceful Assemblies" has been recorded in public sources (Access Now, 2022; Kazakhstan President signs..., 2023)

In the context of the analysis of the open letter to President Tokayev on the draft law "On Peaceful Assemblies", several key challenges and opportunities were highlighted. The lack of a direct official response to the letter has increased international pressure on the government of Kazakhstan, especially from human rights organisations and international observers, which has led to some deterioration in the country's international image. Ignoring the suggestions and recommendations set out in the letter has also led to criticism and undermined trust from the international community. This is especially relevant given the current human rights situation in Kazakhstan. The lack of transparency and clear actions on the part of the government in relation to such requests continues to intensify criticism of Kazakhstan for its lack of transparency and insufficient compliance with international standards (Doszhan, 2023).

But at the same time, it is worth considering that the open letter provides an opportunity for a constructive dialogue with international organisations and a demonstration of Kazakhstan's readiness to revise legislation in accordance with international standards. An adequate and positive response to such letters can help to improve Kazakhstan's international image and strengthen the country's position in the international arena. The revision of the draft law, considering the proposals from the letter, can increase confidence in the government within the country, which will strengthen the legitimacy of the ongoing reforms. That is, it can be unequivocally stated that such appeals deserve both attention from the government, and a well-formulated response from the press services of a particular department, and with the right approach provide quite a lot of positive opportunities that can affect both the image of an organisation (state institution) and the image of the country as a whole.

An open letter from the QazSpirits Association (2021) addressed to the Deputy Prime Minister of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, written in response to another open letter from the coalition "Coalition for a Smoke-free Kazakhstan" addressed to the same Deputy Prime Minister of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Table 8), was also quite an interesting sample for analysis.

Table 8: Analysis of an open letter to the Vice Prime Minister of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan from the Association of QazSpirits

Criterion of analysis	Decoding	Challenges and opportunities
Addressee and the author of the letter	Letter to Deputy PM Sklyar from QazSpirits (2021), representing nicotine product manufacturers.	Challenges: Seen as promoting industry interests over public health; risk of negative public and NGO response. Opportunities: Platform to present evidence-based arguments and economic implications.
Content of the letter	Criticises "Smoke-Free Kazakhstan" coalition; calls for open discussion.	Challenges: May appear as defending commercial interests; risk of reputational backlash. Opportunities: May prompt dialogue on balanced policy solutions.
Expectations and requirements	Requests government to resist coalition pressure and ensure transparent decision-making.	Challenges: Could be viewed as undue pressure. Opportunities: Constructive demands can enhance state-industry cooperation.
Potential impact	May shape public and policy opinion on nicotine regulation.	Challenges: Negative perception may erode influence. Opportunities: Can spark wider public debate on harm reduction and regulation.
Media and digital platforms	Widely circulated via media and social platforms.	Challenges: Media may frame it as self-serving. Opportunities: Can mobilise industry actors and shape narrative.
Recommendations for the press service	Must prepare for criticism and shape public narrative.	Challenges: Missteps may worsen image. Opportunities: Opportunity to show transparency and responsiveness.
Legal aspect	Cites legal norms and calls for open procedures.	Challenges: Risk of legal scrutiny over tone/content. Opportunities: Legally sound framing may strengthen legitimacy.

The QazSpirits (2021) letter, addressed to Deputy Prime Minister Roman Sklyar, aimed to protect the interests of manufacturers of nicotine-containing products in Kazakhstan. Despite the risk of being perceived as prioritising commercial interests over public health, the letter signalled a readiness for dialogue with government institutions. By August 2024, no

official response from the government or civil society had been documented. Nevertheless, related discussions persisted through international conferences and platforms where alternative tobacco harm reduction strategies and regulatory measures were examined. The letter highlighted QazSpirits' openness to dialogue, but the absence of public response reflected either limited public engagement or weak communication strategies. Strengthening media relations could increase the visibility of such appeals and foster public trust. The government's lack of reaction risks alienating industry stakeholders and public organisations, while active participation in dialogue could enhance institutional transparency and public confidence.

Broader issues with communication strategies in Kazakhstan's public institutions compound this problem. Although press services can issue official statements effectively, they often fail to initiate meaningful dialogue with society or international partners, relying instead on template communications. This pattern contributes to declining trust and credibility. Strengthening press offices through outsourcing – especially with experienced journalists and media experts – could improve their capacity to respond promptly and accurately to public inquiries. For instance, a miscommunicated statement in 2013 by Agriculture Minister Asylzhan Mamytbekov, who claimed that "a cow should give, in the worst case, 5 thousand tonnes of milk per year" (Kazakh-Zerno, 2013), became a public relations failure due to insufficient oversight. Similar missteps, such as criticism of Kazhydromet (Orazbai, 2021), highlight the necessity of qualified press staff. In the digital age, cooperation with professional media teams can uphold transparency and protect institutional credibility, as mandated by Law No. 401-V "On Access to Information" (2015).

DISCUSSION

This study confirms that the epistolary genre remains relevant in Kazakhstan's public and political life despite the challenges of digitalisation. While press services are capable of issuing official statements, they often neglect reciprocal communication with the public and international stakeholders. This contributes to the erosion of trust and legitimacy. Strengthening responsiveness and professionalising communication, potentially through outsourcing, could significantly enhance institutional effectiveness.

These findings align with Gregory (2020), who stresses the need for reciprocal communication instead of unidirectional messaging. Hyland-Wood et al. (2021) similarly note that insufficient responsiveness from press services can damage institutional credibility. This trend is evident in Kazakhstan's non-response to open letters, such as that concerning the draft law "On Peaceful Assemblies" (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Although Kazakhstani press services display formal proficiency in crafting communications, trust deficits persist. Contributing factors include outdated institutional practices, insufficient feedback mechanisms and a lack of specialised personnel. Arshad and Khurram (2020) found that active governmental engagement on social media fosters citizen trust and political participation. Sauer et al. (2021) highlight the value of transparent communication during crises. Liu et al. (2024) further argues that overly formal or impersonal language creates communicative distance, which is particularly problematic in epistolary formats that demand clarity and resonance.

Empirical studies support these insights. Al-Omoush et al. (2023) and Yuan et al. (2023) demonstrate that mere online presence is insufficient. Inconsistent messaging and the absence of response to public feedback can erode credibility. Rodríguez-Breijo et al. (2021)

and de Medeiros Brandão (2023) add that press service outputs influence public sentiment, especially when they serve as instruments of political messaging or manipulation. The professional press centre "Kazakhstan Press Club" offers a valuable counterexample. Unlike state-affiliated services, it functions independently and fosters credibility through impartiality and adaptability. D'arma et al. (2024) underscore the qualitative differences between independent and state press services. They note that the former are more attuned to audience needs and external pressures.

Language choice also plays a critical role. The dominance of Russian in official communications limits inclusivity. Tréguer-Felten (2013) identifies linguistic uniformity as a barrier in multilingual contexts. Antioco et al. (2023) demonstrate that language-specific stylistic norms shape audience trust and message reception. This is particularly pertinent for epistolary texts, which must resonate across linguistic and cultural boundaries. A broader body of scholarship reinforces the importance of responsive and well-constructed institutional communication. Gu et al. (2023) link public satisfaction to government transparency. Cipers et al. (2023) examine state reactions to digital disinformation and public criticism and stress the need for consistent feedback. Meijer et al. (2012) highlight the relationship between press service professionalism and institutional openness. Liu (2022) shows that effective epistolary exchanges during the COVID-19 crisis significantly bolstered social cohesion and government trust. The study also reflects systemic challenges in Kazakhstan's press services. These include limited professional training and blurred role boundaries. Comparable issues have been observed in Poland by Duralski (2019) and Cichecka et al. (2024), where communication specialists frequently operate beyond their qualifications. This hampers institutional performance and leads to missed communication opportunities.

In sum, the Kazakhstani case illustrates both the challenges and the untapped potential of epistolary communication in the digital age. While institutional inertia and communication gaps persist, the presence of exemplary practices and international frameworks offers a pathway for reform and enhanced public trust.

CONCLUSIONS

The paper examines the transformation of epistolary communication in the digital era, with a specific focus on Kazakhstan's media landscape. Digital technologies have fundamentally reshaped traditional epistolary forms, particularly in a context of limited independent media access. The research reveals significant shifts in epistolary communication, notably the emergence of digital platforms like social networks as new interaction spaces. These channels facilitate faster, broader information dissemination, presenting both challenges and opportunities for press services. Digital transformation has altered the genre's traditional structure while maintaining its critical role in societal communication. Key findings indicate that digitalisation enables more dynamic and responsive interactions between press services and the public. Social networks and online platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for publishing open letters and petitions, expanding audience reach and influencing public discourse. Press services can now more effectively analyse public sentiment and respond promptly to societal concerns. The study proposed practical recommendations for Kazakhstan's press services, emphasizing improved incoming message processing, potential information management through outsourcing, and strategic digital communication approaches. These suggestions aim to enhance public interaction efficiency in the digital age.

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