

PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF PTPN 4 REGIONAL 1 MEDAN DALAM (CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY) IN SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the public relations communication strategy of PTPN IV Regional 1 Medan in implementing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs in the fields of education, social welfare, and religion. The study also examines community responses to CSR communication and the obstacles faced by the Public Relations team in delivering CSR information to beneficiaries. This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving public relations officers, company management, and community members who received CSR program benefits. The findings show that the CSR communication strategy implemented by PTPN IV Regional 1 received positive responses from the community. The messages delivered by the Public Relations team were considered clear, simple, and understandable because they explained the objectives, forms of assistance, target beneficiaries, and benefits of the CSR programs. Face-to-face communication was found to be the most effective channel, supported by social media, online publications, and activity documentation. The strategy also encouraged community participation, increased public trust, and strengthened the company's positive image. However, several obstacles were identified, including uneven information distribution, differences in public understanding, limited digital access, low digital literacy, and internal coordination challenges. Overall, the study confirms that effective CSR communication requires clear messages, appropriate media selection, credible communicators, and participatory engagement with the community.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is one of the important instruments for building sustainable relationships between companies and society. In the context of State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), CSR is more commonly referred to as Social and Environmental Responsibility (Tanggung Jawab Sosial dan Lingkungan/TJSL), which is not merely understood as an administrative obligation, but also as a corporate commitment to contributing to the improvement of the quality of life of communities surrounding the company's operational areas. CSR positions companies as social actors that do not solely pursue economic profit, but are also responsible for social sustainability, environmental protection, and public welfare (Carroll, 1991; Marnelly, 2012). From the perspective of stakeholder theory, corporate success is not only determined by internal business achievements, but also by the

company's ability to build mutually beneficial relationships with its stakeholders, including communities, government institutions, educational institutions, social organizations, and religious groups (Freeman, 1984). Therefore, CSR has become an essential part of corporate strategy in gaining public trust, strengthening social legitimacy, and building a positive corporate image.

PTPN IV Regional 1 Medan, as one of the state-owned plantation enterprises, plays a strategic role in implementing CSR/TJSL programs, particularly in the fields of education, social affairs, and religion. CSR programs in these areas are highly relevant because community needs are not limited to economic assistance, but also include support for human resource development, the strengthening of educational institutions, social care, and the development of religious life. Based on company data and media publications, PTPN IV Regional 1 Medan has consistently implemented various CSR activities, such as providing educational facilities and infrastructure, supporting social foundations and faith-based educational institutions, renovating houses of worship, conducting Ramadan outreach programs, providing assistance to orphanages, and organizing other socio-religious activities (Fauziah & Saraan, 2025). These activities indicate that PTPN IV Regional 1's CSR programs are not merely symbolic, but are directed toward addressing community needs in a more concrete and sustainable manner.

However, the success of CSR programs is not only determined by the amount of assistance provided or the number of activities implemented, but also by the communication strategy used by the company to convey information to the public. In this context, public relations plays a central role as a bridge between the company and its publics. Public relations is not only responsible for publicizing corporate activities, but also for designing messages, selecting communication media, building relationships with stakeholders, managing public perceptions, and ensuring that the community properly understands the objectives and benefits of CSR programs (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Cornelissen, 2020). An effective CSR communication strategy needs to consider message clarity, communicator credibility, media appropriateness, and the involvement of the community as program beneficiaries. CSR communication that is dialogical and participatory can strengthen public trust because communities feel involved, heard, and positioned as partners rather than merely as recipients of assistance (Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Salman & Ishak, 2023).

In practice, CSR communication often faces various obstacles that may affect the effectiveness of information delivery to the community. These obstacles may include unequal distribution of information, differences in the level of public understanding, limited digital access, low digital literacy, lack of community participation, and internal coordination constraints within the company. If these obstacles are not properly managed, CSR programs may not be fully understood, may receive limited community participation, or may even generate misperceptions regarding the company's objectives. This aligns with the view that CSR communication must be able to bridge corporate interests and public needs through messages that are simple, transparent, and relevant to the social conditions of the community (Du et al., 2010; Deni Saputra & Hanutama, 2025). Therefore, the public relations communication strategy becomes an important factor in ensuring that PTPN IV Regional 1 Medan's CSR programs are not only delivered informatively, but are also positively received by beneficiary communities.

This study employs the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework to understand the relationship between public relations communication strategies and community responses to CSR programs. Within the S-O-R framework, the stimulus refers to the communication strategies implemented by public relations, such as message construction, media selection, communication intensity, communicator credibility, and the involvement of community figures. The organism refers to the community as the recipient of messages, which interprets information based on its experiences, needs, level of understanding, and social conditions. The response refers to forms of community acceptance, such as understanding of the program, participation, trust, support, and positive perceptions of the company (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). This framework is relevant because CSR communication does not end with the delivery of messages, but also includes how the community processes these messages and responds to them through attitudes and actions. Thus, the effectiveness of CSR communication can be analyzed through the relationship between public relations messages, community understanding, and the formation of a positive corporate image.

Several previous studies have examined CSR as a corporate communication strategy, the implementation of CSR programs, and the role of public relations in building corporate image (Azzahra & Saleh, 2025; Rizqie et al., 2025; Wahyu Triono, 2023). However, studies that specifically analyze the public relations communication strategy of PTPN IV Regional 1 Medan in CSR programs in the fields of education, social affairs, and religion remain limited. Most previous studies have emphasized the

implementation of CSR programs or the general impact of CSR, while discussions on how CSR messages are constructed, what media are used, how community responses are formed, and what communication barriers are encountered by public relations have not been explored in depth. Based on this gap, the novelty of this study lies in its analysis of public relations communication strategies in communicating PTPN IV Regional 1 Medan's CSR programs by positioning the community as both message recipients and evaluators of corporate communication effectiveness. This study aims to analyze the public relations communication strategy of PTPN IV Regional 1 Medan in implementing CSR programs in the fields of education, social affairs, and religion, to identify community responses to CSR communication, and to explain the barriers and efforts of public relations in optimizing CSR communication to make it more participatory, inclusive, and sustainable.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. The qualitative approach was selected because this study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the public relations communication strategy of PTPN IV Regional 1 Medan in implementing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs in the fields of education, social affairs, and religion, including how the community understands, accepts, and responds to CSR messages conveyed by the company. Qualitative research is relevant for examining organizational communication phenomena and company-public relations because it emphasizes an understanding of meaning, processes, experiences, and the social contexts underlying a phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). The descriptive method was used to systematically describe the forms of public relations communication strategies, CSR message construction, communication media employed, responses of beneficiary communities, and communication barriers that emerged in the implementation of CSR. This research was conducted at PTPN IV Regional 1 Medan, located at Jl. Sei Batanghari No. 2, Medan, North Sumatra, with the consideration that the company actively implements CSR/TJSL programs in the fields of education, social affairs, and religion.

The research informants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement, knowledge, and ability to provide data relevant to the research focus. Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research because the selection of informants is not based on population size, but on the depth of information that research subjects can provide (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). The informants consisted of public relations personnel of PTPN IV Regional 1 Medan, company management involved in CSR policy, and communities or institutions benefiting from CSR programs in the fields of education, social affairs, and religion. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were used to explore public relations communication strategies, the process of delivering CSR messages, community responses, and the obstacles encountered in communicating the programs. Observation was conducted to examine CSR communication activities, patterns of interaction between the company and the community, and the use of communication media in program implementation. Documentation was used to review activity archives, media publications, CSR reports, activity photographs, and other supporting documents related to the implementation of CSR by PTPN IV Regional 1 Medan.

Data analysis was conducted interactively through the stages of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification, as developed in the qualitative data analysis model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). Data condensation was carried out by selecting and categorizing data relevant to the research focus, such as forms of CSR messages, communication media, communicator credibility, community responses, communication barriers, and public relations efforts to overcome these obstacles. Data display was presented in the form of narrative descriptions to enable a systematic analysis of the relationship between public relations communication strategies and community responses. Furthermore, conclusions were drawn by interpreting the findings based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, in which public relations communication strategies function as the stimulus, beneficiary communities as the organism, and community responses in the form of understanding, participation, trust, and a positive corporate image as the response. The trustworthiness of the data was ensured through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from public relations personnel, company management, and beneficiary communities, while technique triangulation was carried out by cross-checking interview, observation, and documentation data. Member checking was

conducted by reconfirming interview results and preliminary findings with informants to ensure that data interpretation was consistent with field conditions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles et al., 2014).

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

The research findings were obtained through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving informants from the Public Relations Division of PTPN IV Regional 1, company management, and community members who benefited from the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs. This study focused on community responses to the public relations communication strategy in implementing CSR programs in the fields of education, social welfare, and religion, as well as the obstacles encountered by the public relations team in communicating these programs to the community.

Community Responses and Acceptance of PTPN IV Regional 1's CSR Communication Strategy

The findings show that, in general, the community responded positively to the CSR communication strategy implemented by the Public Relations Division of PTPN IV Regional 1 Medan. This positive response was reflected in the community's acceptance of CSR programs in the fields of education, social welfare, and religion as a concrete manifestation of the company's concern for local needs. The community did not perceive CSR programs merely as ceremonial activities or formal corporate obligations, but as social interventions that provided direct benefits to schools, religious institutions, social foundations, and beneficiary groups. This finding indicates that CSR communication successfully connected the company's institutional agenda with community expectations. From the perspective of stakeholder theory, community acceptance demonstrates that the company was able to position the community not merely as passive recipients of assistance, but as stakeholders whose needs, perceptions, and trust must be managed through continuous communication (Freeman, 1984). Therefore, the positive response of the community can be interpreted as an initial indicator of the success of CSR communication in building social legitimacy and strengthening the relationship between the company and its surrounding environment.

The clarity of CSR messages emerged as an important factor in shaping community acceptance. The Public Relations Division of PTPN IV Regional 1 conveyed information regarding program objectives, forms of assistance, target beneficiaries, and expected benefits using simple language that was easily understood by the community. This finding is important because CSR communication often becomes ineffective when companies merely emphasize corporate achievements without explaining the social relevance of the program for beneficiaries. In this study, the message strategy used by PTPN IV Regional 1 helped the community understand that CSR was not simply an act of providing assistance, but part of the company's responsibility to contribute to education, social welfare, and religious life. Du et al. (2010) emphasize that effective CSR communication must be able to reduce public skepticism through messages that are clear, relevant, credible, and aligned with stakeholder expectations. Thus, the construction of simple and concrete CSR messages functioned as a communicative bridge between the company's social responsibility agenda and the practical needs of the community.

Face-to-face communication was found to be the most effective communication channel for delivering CSR information to the community. Direct communication enabled beneficiaries to obtain more detailed explanations, ask questions, clarify program mechanisms, and provide immediate feedback to the company. This finding shows that interpersonal and dialogical communication remains highly relevant in CSR implementation, particularly when program targets have diverse levels of understanding, media access, and digital literacy. Although social media, online publications, and activity documentation also supported the dissemination of CSR information, these channels could not fully replace the effectiveness of direct interaction. From the perspective of two-way symmetrical communication, face-to-face communication allows for the formation of a more balanced relationship because it provides space for dialogue, listening processes, and mutual adjustment between the organization and its publics (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Thus, the effectiveness of PTPN IV Regional 1's CSR communication did not merely lie in the use of various media, but also in the ability of public relations to create direct, participatory communication that fostered community trust.

Community participation in CSR activities also reflected acceptance of the communication strategy implemented by PTPN IV Regional 1. Community involvement in the distribution of assistance, social programs, religious activities, and other CSR initiatives showed that the messages delivered by public relations were able to encourage public engagement. Within the Stimulus–Organism–Response framework, the public relations communication strategy functions as the stimulus received and interpreted by the community as the organism, while participation, trust, and positive perceptions

represent the responses that emerge after the community processes the message (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). This finding indicates that the clearer and more relevant the CSR message delivered, the greater the tendency of the community to provide support and participate in the program. Therefore, CSR communication cannot be understood merely as the dissemination of information, but also as a process of meaning construction, emotional closeness, and social engagement between the company and the community.

The positive response of the community contributed to strengthening public trust and the corporate image of PTPN IV Regional 1. This trust was formed because the community observed consistency in program implementation, openness of information, and the company's concern for local needs. This finding confirms that CSR communication has strategic value for corporate reputation because social programs that are communicated effectively can shape public perceptions of the company as a responsible, caring, and responsive institution. Morsing and Schultz (2006) explain that CSR communication becomes more effective when it does not stop at one-way information delivery, but develops into stakeholder engagement. In this study, community involvement, direct communication, and the support of digital media collectively strengthened the credibility of PTPN IV Regional 1's CSR programs. Thus, community acceptance of CSR communication can be understood as the result of a communication strategy that combines message clarity, communicator credibility, appropriate media selection, and participatory engagement with beneficiaries.

Obstacles Faced by Public Relations in Implementing CSR Communication Strategies

Although the CSR communication strategy of PTPN IV Regional 1 Medan generally received positive responses from the community, the research findings indicate that its implementation still faced obstacles in terms of information equity and differences in the level of community understanding. Not all community members received CSR information equally due to uneven communication outreach, the limited attention of some community members to corporate information, and the suboptimal dissemination of information among certain beneficiary groups. This condition shows that CSR communication does not depend solely on the availability of messages, but also on the company's ability to ensure that these messages reach all stakeholders appropriately. From the perspective of organizational communication, barriers in message distribution may create gaps in understanding between the company and its publics, so that the message intended by the communicator is not always received with the same meaning by the audience (Cornelissen, 2020). This is also relevant to the view of Du et al. (2010), who argue that CSR communication must be delivered clearly, consistently, and relevantly in order to avoid confusion, skepticism, or misperceptions among the community. Thus, obstacles related to information equity in the context of PTPN IV Regional 1's CSR can be understood as a strategic issue because they may affect public acceptance, participation, and trust in the company's programs.

The next obstacle concerns limited access to digital media, low digital literacy, and differences in media use patterns among beneficiary communities. Although public relations has utilized social media, online publications, and activity documentation to expand the reach of CSR information, not all community members have the same capacity and habits in accessing digital information. Some community members find it easier to understand information through face-to-face communication or through local figures rather than through digital media. This condition indicates that the transformation of CSR communication into the digital sphere has not fully reached community groups with limited internet access, technological devices, and digital literacy skills. From the perspective of the digital divide, differences in access and digital competence may cause certain community groups to be left behind in receiving information and participating in corporate social programs (van Dijk, 2020). Therefore, the use of digital media in CSR communication should be understood as a supporting channel rather than the sole communication strategy. Public relations still needs to combine digital communication with interpersonal communication, face-to-face interaction, and the involvement of community figures so that CSR messages can reach a broader and more diverse public.

In addition to external obstacles, this study also found internal barriers, including limited communication resources, interdivisional coordination that has not yet been fully optimized, and limited time for conducting CSR program socialization. These internal barriers are important to consider because the effectiveness of CSR communication is not only determined by the quality of messages delivered to the community, but also by the organization's readiness to design, coordinate, and evaluate communication on an ongoing basis. From the perspective of two-way symmetrical communication, public relations should ideally not only act as an information disseminator, but also as a manager of dialogue between the organization and its publics through processes of listening, responding, and

adjusting communication policies based on community needs (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). If internal coordination is not optimal, CSR messages may not be delivered consistently, and community responses may not be followed up effectively. This shows that the communication barriers faced by PTPN IV Regional 1's CSR programs are not merely technical, but also structural and relational. Therefore, the strengthening of CSR communication strategies should be directed toward improving internal coordination, enhancing public relations capacity, mapping the characteristics of beneficiaries, and conducting periodic communication evaluations so that CSR programs can truly be communicated in an inclusive, participatory, and public trust-oriented manner.

Public Relations Efforts to Overcome CSR Communication Barriers

The efforts of the Public Relations Division of PTPN IV Regional 1 Medan to overcome CSR communication barriers indicate that corporate communication is not merely understood as an activity of information dissemination, but also as a process of building understanding, trust, and community engagement. The research findings show that communication barriers emerged in the form of uneven information distribution, differences in the level of community understanding, limited digital access, low media literacy, and internal coordination constraints. To address these issues, public relations undertook several strategic measures, such as increasing the intensity of direct communication, involving community and religious leaders, optimizing social media and online publications, and evaluating communication strategies after program implementation. From the perspective of the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework, these measures can be understood as efforts to strengthen communication stimuli so that CSR messages can be more easily received, processed, and responded to by the community as beneficiaries (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Thus, public relations efforts are not only technical in nature, but also strategic because they are directed toward improving the quality of the relationship between the company and the community.

Strengthening face-to-face communication emerged as one of the most important efforts to overcome barriers in community understanding of CSR programs. Direct communication enables public relations personnel to explain the objectives of the program, forms of assistance, target beneficiaries, implementation mechanisms, and expected social benefits in a more detailed and contextual manner. Within the S-O-R framework, face-to-face communication strengthens the stimulus because the message is not only delivered verbally, but is also accompanied by expressions, direct clarification, and feedback from the community. This allows the community, as the organism, to interpret the message more accurately before providing responses in the form of acceptance, participation, or trust. This strategy is also in line with the two-way symmetrical communication model, which emphasizes the importance of dialogue, mutual listening, and adjustment between organizations and their publics in building a more balanced relationship (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Therefore, face-to-face communication becomes an important means of reducing misunderstanding, clarifying information, and strengthening the social legitimacy of CSR programs.

The involvement of community and religious leaders as communication partners indicates that public relations recognizes the importance of source credibility in CSR communication. In communities that have strong social and cultural ties with local figures, messages delivered through trusted figures are often more easily accepted than messages delivered solely through official corporate channels. From the perspective of stakeholder theory, the involvement of local figures demonstrates that the company does not position the community merely as an object of communication, but as stakeholders who possess their own social structures, values, and channels of trust (Freeman, 1984). This strategy also strengthens the participatory approach because community and religious leaders can serve as bridges between corporate interests and community needs. Thus, the involvement of local actors not only expands the reach of information, but also enhances the credibility of CSR messages, reduces the social distance between the company and the public, and strengthens community trust in the programs being implemented.

In addition to strengthening direct communication, public relations also optimized the use of social media, visual documentation, and online publications to broaden the dissemination of CSR information. The use of digital media plays an important role in increasing the visibility of corporate activities, demonstrating transparency in program implementation, and strengthening the company's image as an institution concerned with education, social welfare, and religion. However, the research findings also show that digital media cannot be used as the sole communication channel because not all community members have adequate digital access and literacy. From the perspective of the digital divide, differences in access, skills, and habits in using technology may cause certain groups of society to

be left behind in receiving information (van Dijk, 2020). Therefore, the public relations strategy that combines digital media with face-to-face communication is an appropriate choice. This combination indicates that effective CSR communication needs to be multichannel, adaptive, and sensitive to the characteristics of beneficiary communities (Cornelissen, 2020).

Communication evaluation after program implementation is an important step to ensure that CSR strategies do not stop at the stage of message delivery, but continue to be improved based on community responses. Evaluation was carried out through community feedback, field observation, and activity documentation, enabling public relations to assess whether CSR messages had been properly understood, whether the media used were appropriate, and whether the community felt involved in the program process. Within the S-O-R framework, evaluation functions to read community responses after receiving communication stimuli, allowing the company to improve subsequent strategies so that they become more relevant to the conditions of the organism, namely the beneficiary community. Morsing and Schultz (2006) emphasize that effective CSR communication should not be limited to one-way communication, but should move toward stakeholder engagement so that the company can understand public expectations, criticisms, and needs. Thus, the efforts of PTPN IV Regional 1's public relations in overcoming communication barriers can be understood as a process of strengthening participatory, inclusive, and sustainable CSR communication, because it positions the community not only as recipients of information, but also as partners in building the success of CSR programs.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the public relations communication strategy of PTPN IV Regional 1 Medan in implementing Corporate Social Responsibility programs in the fields of education, social welfare, and religion has been fairly effective in building community understanding, acceptance, participation, and trust. This effectiveness is reflected in the ability of public relations to deliver CSR messages clearly, simply, and relevantly according to community needs, particularly through face-to-face communication supported by social media, online publications, activity documentation, and the involvement of community and religious leaders. Within the Stimulus–Organism–Response framework, the public relations communication strategy serves as the stimulus that is received and processed by the community as the organism, subsequently generating responses in the form of positive acceptance, involvement in CSR activities, increased trust, and the formation of a corporate image as an institution that cares about its social environment. Nevertheless, the implementation of CSR communication still faces several obstacles, including uneven information distribution, differences in the level of community understanding, limited digital access, low media literacy, and internal coordination constraints within the company. To overcome these obstacles, public relations has strengthened direct communication, optimized the use of digital media, involved trusted local actors, and evaluated the communication strategies that have been implemented. Thus, the success of PTPN IV Regional 1's CSR programs is not only determined by the forms of assistance provided, but also by the ability of public relations to build participatory, inclusive, credible, and sustainable communication with beneficiary communities.

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