



THE ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS OF THE MINISTRY OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS OF TEBING TINGGI CITY IN IMPROVING PUBLIC SATISFACTION WITH PUBLIC SERVICES

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of Public Relations at the Ministry of Religious Affairs Office of Tebing Tinggi City in improving public satisfaction with public services. The study focuses on how public relations functions as a communication bridge, information provider, institutional image builder, and supporter of transparency in religious public services, particularly marriage administration, hajj services, and religious education. This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with public relations officers, institutional leaders, and service users, supported by field observations and institutional documentation. The data were analysed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that public relations has contributed to improving service accessibility through digital information management, social media use, the Integrated One-Stop Service system, and the SILATU platform. These efforts help simplify procedures, strengthen public trust, and reduce information gaps between the institution and society. However, the effectiveness of public relations remains constrained by limited human resources, budget limitations, inadequate digital infrastructure, and low public digital literacy. The study concludes that strengthening public relations requires more adaptive communication strategies, continuous public education, improved staff capacity, and stronger institutional support. These elements are essential to creating public services that are transparent, responsive, inclusive, and oriented toward public satisfaction.

Keywords: government public relations; public service; public satisfaction; Ministry of Religious Affairs; digital communication strategy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Public service is a key indicator of successful governance because it directly relates to the state's ability to meet the basic needs of the public in a transparent, responsive, and accountable manner. In the context of modern bureaucracy, service quality is determined not only by the accuracy of administrative procedures but also by the effectiveness of communication between government institutions and the public as service users. Law Number 25 of 2009 emphasizes that public services must be implemented based on the principles of legal certainty, openness, participation, accountability, and equal rights. Therefore, government agencies are required not only to provide fast and accurate services but also to build clear, accessible, and reliable public communication. Within this framework, government public relations plays a strategic role as a liaison between institutional policies and the public's information needs.

Government public relations can no longer be understood simply as an institutional information dissemination unit, but rather as a strategic management function that plays a role in building reciprocal relationships between the government and the public. Grunig (1992) explains that the effectiveness of public relations lies in its ability to carry out symmetrical two-way communication, namely communication that not only conveys the organization's message but also listens to the aspirations, complaints, and needs of the public. In public services, this function is becoming increasingly important because unclear information often leads to public dissatisfaction. Effective public relations can reduce information gaps, clarify service procedures, build a positive institutional image, and strengthen public trust in service providers (Ruslan, 2014; Hardiyansyah, 2018).

The Ministry of Religious Affairs, as a government institution, has a high level of service delivery to the public, particularly in matters of marriage administration, Hajj administration, religious education, religious certification, and other community services. At the regional level, including the Tebing Tinggi City Ministry of Religious Affairs Office, the public's need for fast, clear, and accurate information is becoming increasingly urgent. This is due to the complexity of religious service procedures, which often require simultaneous administrative, regulatory, and technical understanding. In such situations, public relations plays a crucial role in translating bureaucratic policies into simpler, more communicative, and easily understood public information. The use of social media, official websites, One-Stop Integrated Services (PTSP), and digital service platforms is part of the government's efforts to expand access to information and improve the quality of interactions with the public (Permatasari et al., 2021; Puspita, 2021).

While digital transformation has opened up significant opportunities for improving the quality of public services, its implementation still faces various challenges. Digitizing services does not automatically increase public satisfaction without the support of competent human resources, adequate budgets, robust technological infrastructure, and sufficient digital literacy. In many cases, the public still faces obstacles in understanding service procedures, accessing digital information channels, or obtaining prompt responses to complaints. This situation demonstrates that the primary challenge for government public relations is not simply providing information, but ensuring that this information is truly received, understood, and utilized by the public. Thus, the success of public relations in public services depends heavily on the ability to integrate

communication strategies, information technology, and educational approaches with the public (Kustiawan et al., 2023; Sari et al., 2024).

Several previous studies have discussed the role of public relations at the Ministry of Religious Affairs in information management, public transparency, social media, and institutional image building. Permatasari et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of public relations in managing e-government information services at the Ministry of Religious Affairs Office. Puspita (2021) shows that public relations plays a crucial role in managing information to the public through digital media. Meanwhile, Armansyah (2023) and Sari et al. (2024) highlight public relations strategies in building the image of the Ministry of Religious Affairs through social media and websites. However, these studies tend to focus on information management and the general institutional image. There is limited research specifically linking the role of local government public relations to public satisfaction with public services, particularly through analysis of communication functions, digital services, transparency, accountability, and structural and cultural barriers faced at the local level.

Based on these gaps, this study is crucial to analyze the role of the Public Relations of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Tebing Tinggi City in improving public satisfaction with public services. The focus of this study is on how public relations functions as a communication bridge, information provider, institutional image builder, and service transparency and accountability enhancer. Furthermore, this study also identifies various inhibiting factors that influence the optimization of the role of public relations, both internally within the institution and from the perspective of the public as service users. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this study is expected to provide academic contributions to the development of government public relations and public services studies, while also providing practical input for the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Tebing Tinggi City in designing more adaptive, inclusive, and public satisfaction-oriented communication strategies.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen because the research aims to deeply understand the role of Public Relations at the Tebing Tinggi City Ministry of Religious Affairs in increasing public satisfaction with public services, rather than to statistically measure relationships between variables. Qualitative research allows researchers to explore the experiences, perceptions, communication practices, and obstacles faced by public relations within the context of public services in a natural and contextual manner. The case study design was used because the research focus is directed at a specific institutional location, namely the Tebing Tinggi City Ministry of Religious Affairs Office, allowing researchers to analyze phenomena in greater detail based on real-world situations. As explained by Creswell (2016), case studies are appropriate for examining a case in depth through multiple data sources to generate a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study.

The location of this research is the Tebing Tinggi City Ministry of Religious Affairs Office, a government institution that provides religious services to the public, particularly in the areas of marriage administration, Hajj services, religious education, and other public information services. Research informants were selected using a purposive

sampling technique, selecting informants based on their knowledge, experience, and direct involvement with the issues being studied. Research informants included officials or staff handling public relations functions, leaders or officials related to public services, and service users who had interacted with the information and administrative services of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Tebing Tinggi City. Purposive sampling is considered relevant in qualitative research because researchers require rich, in-depth data that aligns with the research focus, rather than a large number of respondents as in quantitative research (Moleong, 2017; Sugiyono, 2019).

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation studies. In-depth interviews were used to obtain information on public relations communication strategies, service information management, digital media utilization, responses to public complaints, and obstacles faced in increasing public satisfaction. Observations were conducted to directly observe service practices, officer communication patterns, and the use of information media within the office environment. Meanwhile, documentation studies were conducted by reviewing institutional documents, archives of public relations activities, social media publications, websites, and documents related to public services. The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes data condensation, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions. To maintain the validity of the data, this study uses source triangulation and technical triangulation, namely comparing data from various informants and matching interview results with observations and documentation so that the resulting findings are more valid, credible, and can be scientifically accounted for (Miles et al., 2014; Creswell, 2016).

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Implementation of Public Relations Function as a Provider of Information and Digital Services

Government Public Relations (PPR) is a strategic and communicative management function aimed at building and maintaining harmonious relationships between government institutions and the wider public. Within the ecosystem of state institutions such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs, PR carries a significant responsibility as public communicators, capable of disseminating policies, work programs, and institutional achievements transparently and accurately. As Grunig points out in his Excellence Theory, organizational effectiveness depends heavily on PR's ability to conduct symmetrical two-way communication, where public aspirations are heard and taken into account in policy-making, fostering mutually beneficial understanding (Grunig, 1992).

Furthermore, the role of government PR encompasses education and advocacy functions to foster a correct public understanding of various religious service procedures, often considered complex. PR acts as an image-building agent, tasked with managing an agency's reputation to maintain a positive public image, particularly in handling sensitive issues or information crises that have the potential to trigger controversy. This aligns with Ruslan's (2014) opinion, which states that public relations has a managerial role in fostering internal and external relationships and carrying out community service functions to create favorable public opinion for the organization.

Amidst the rapid development of information technology, government public relations at the regional level is required to be more adaptive in managing digital media and various other modern communication platforms. The transformation into the digital era requires public relations to actively manage social media and official websites to ensure that public service information is accessible in real time. According to Puspita (2021), the role of public relations in digital information management is crucial for facilitating public access to services without bureaucratic barriers. Public relations functions as a communication facilitator, bridging the gap between government and citizens through the appropriate use of information technology.

In addition to conveying information, government public relations also plays a role in formulating internal policies, representing the public's voice within the organization. Public relations is tasked with monitoring public opinion and developing trends in society, which are then analyzed as strategic input for institutional leaders. According to Sari et al. (2024), an effective public relations strategy for building an image focuses not only on what an institution conveys, but also on how it responds to public needs and complaints professionally. Thus, public relations ensures that every public service policy issued remains responsive and accountable for the benefit of the wider community. Based on research conducted through participant observation and in-depth interviews, the Public Relations Department of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Tebing Tinggi City has positioned itself as a key pillar in providing information services to the public. This role is no longer traditionally viewed as a one-way messenger, but has transformed into a strategic management function that ensures information is accurate, up-to-date, and highly accessible. The primary focus of this function is to minimize information gaps between government agencies and the public, particularly regarding religious service procedures such as Hajj registration, marriage administration, and Islamic education services, which are often perceived as complex and opaque.

A concrete step, a key finding of this research, is the acceleration of information digitalization through the use of inclusive technology platforms. A leading innovation intensively implemented is the SILATU (Integrated Service Information System) application. The presence of this platform represents a turning point in public services at the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Tebing Tinggi City, allowing the public to monitor registration requirements, track file status, and even obtain guidance schedule information independently through their mobile devices. The implementation of SILATU demonstrates the public relations sector's real adaptation to the shifting communication paradigm in the Industrial Revolution 4.0 era, where time efficiency, data transparency, and speed of access are key variables in measuring public satisfaction with bureaucratic performance.

In addition to digital channels, the optimization of the public relations role is also highly visible in the operational management of the One-Stop Integrated Service (PTSP). In this context, public relations officers act as message managers, synchronizing the flow of information between cyber media and physical services in the field. Public relations officers ensure that every information instrument available in the PTSP space—from standing banners and educational brochures to digital signage—presents data that is consistent and aligned with the content posted on the office's official social media. This synchronization is crucial to prevent information discrepancies that could trigger

confusion or dissatisfaction among the public who visit the office in person. Public relations officers ensure that every public inquiry at the service desk is answered with the same information standards as stipulated in the latest regulations.

Furthermore, the implementation of this information provider function reflects the agency's commitment to upholding the principles of open government. By providing transparent and directly monitorable information, public relations automatically cuts through lengthy bureaucratic chains and eliminates the practice of intermediaries or extortion. The public now has legal and procedural certainty without having to go through a tedious "door-to-door" process. Theoretically, the success of public relations in providing solution-oriented information services contributes linearly to increasing public trust. This is because one of the public's basic needs in public services is to receive certainty and fair treatment through clear information.

In conclusion, the communication strategy implemented by the Public Relations of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Tebing Tinggi City has successfully integrated digital technology into conventional service values. Public relations functions not merely as a "government mouthpiece" but has evolved into a "solution facilitator" responsive to the needs of the digital community. This transformation demonstrates that the agency is not merely following technological trends but is truly utilizing them to create ease, convenience, and open access, which are the main foundations for increasing public satisfaction with public services in Tebing Tinggi City.

The Role of Public Relations in Building Institutional Image (Image Building)

In terms of image building, research conducted through in-depth interviews, field observations, and digital content analysis indicates that the Public Relations Department of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Tebing Tinggi City has played a highly active, planned, and strategic role. In this context, the institution's image is no longer viewed as a static entity that forms spontaneously, but rather as a consciously managed public perception through a series of ongoing publications of activities and policies. Public Relations fully understands that the Ministry's credibility in the eyes of the Tebing Tinggi City community depends heavily on the institution's ability to demonstrate its existence, performance, and integrity visually and narratively through various communication channels, including conventional mass media and the office's official social media platforms.

This image-building strategy is implemented through creative content management that is not only informative but also emphasizes the humanistic side, bureaucratic professionalism, and religious values of each program. Consistent publications through platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, as well as news portals on the official website, aim to create a cumulative positive impression in the public mind. By routinely demonstrating transparency in the implementation of Hajj guidance, the successful and accountable completion of marriage administration, and activities fostering interfaith harmony, public relations systematically cultivates the seeds of public trust. This effort is crucial, given that government institutions are often plagued by rigid bureaucracy; public relations exists to deconstruct this perception by presenting a more modern, friendly, and solution-oriented service.

Theoretically, a strong, credible, and authoritative organizational image can only be constructed through open, honest communication patterns that consistently prioritize the

public interest. In this context, public relations acts as the frontline of communication, demonstrating the institution's accountability to the wider public in a transparent manner. Every news product, press release, or audiovisual content produced is not merely a routine administrative report, but rather a strategic instrument to address public doubts, clarify misunderstandings, and counter potential negative sentiment or misinformation that may develop within the community. Public relations serves as a reputation manager, tasked with aligning the organization's identity (what the agency seeks to achieve) with its image (what the public perceives and perceives).

Furthermore, the success of this image-building function is linearly correlated with the overall effectiveness of public services. When the public has a positive perception and high trust in the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Tebing Tinggi City, they tend to be more cooperative, participatory, and compliant in following established procedures and policies. Thus, the role of public relations has transcended mere administrative support; it has evolved into a driving force in building the institution's moral and social legitimacy amidst the heterogeneity of Tebing Tinggi City's society.

The synergy between the actual performance in the field by all levels of staff and the professional, aesthetic, and educational packaging of information by the public relations team is key to ensuring that the Ministry of Religious Affairs remains perceived as a trustworthy, responsive institution capable of providing the best possible service to the community. This positive image-building ultimately serves as invaluable social capital for the agency in realizing its vision and mission, while also providing a sense of pride and satisfaction to the public who receive its services. Through honestly published narratives of success, public relations ensures that the state's presence in the religious sector is truly felt and appreciated by the public.

Realizing Transparency and Accountability for Public Satisfaction

Public satisfaction is conceptually the result of a post-purchase or post-service evaluation, reflecting a comparison between public expectations and the reality they receive from a government agency. In the context of public services, this satisfaction is the most fundamental indicator of success because it demonstrates the extent to which the state effectively meets the needs of its citizens. As explained by Tjiptono (2014), customer satisfaction, or in this context, public satisfaction, is influenced by the quality of service products, including the reliability, responsiveness, and empathy of service providers in addressing diverse needs.

The importance of measuring public satisfaction is also legally emphasized through national regulations requiring every public service provider unit to conduct a Public Satisfaction Survey (SKM). Based on Regulation of the Minister of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform Number 14 of 2017, public satisfaction is measured through various elements, ranging from requirements, procedures, service times, to complaint handling. This aligns with Kotler's (2012) view that satisfaction-oriented organizations tend to have a stronger image, as satisfied citizens become positive promoters of the institution's reputation through word-of-mouth communication.

Furthermore, the strategic role of public relations (PR) in creating this satisfaction lies in managing public expectations through accurate information flow. PR is tasked with ensuring that information regarding standard operating procedures (SOPs) is conveyed

clearly so that the public does not harbor misplaced expectations. According to Hardiyansyah (2018), dissatisfaction often arises not solely due to poor technical quality, but rather due to an information gap between what the institution promises and what the public experiences on the ground.

In the dynamic service delivery at the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Tebing Tinggi City, public satisfaction is highly dependent on the agency's responsiveness to administrative and consultative needs, such as Hajj and wedding matters. Transparency of information managed by PR through digital media is key to minimizing public uncertainty. Puspita (2021) emphasizes that transparency in every service process will automatically increase public respect, a crucial psychological component in generating high satisfaction scores with bureaucratic performance.

In conclusion, public satisfaction is not a static end goal, but rather an ongoing process that demands continuous innovation from the agency. The synergy between excellent technical services and empathetic public relations communication strategies will create a harmonious relationship between the government and its citizens. As Sari et al. (2024) noted, well-maintained public satisfaction will ultimately lead to increased public trust in the government, which is the primary social capital in implementing every national development policy and program in the religious sector. Within the framework of modern public services, the role of the Tebing Tinggi City Ministry of Religious Affairs Public Relations in supporting the principles of good governance is clearly evident through its commitment to maintaining comprehensive information transparency. Public Relations positions itself as a bridge of openness, ensuring that all policies, workflows, and service financing aspects are accessible to the public without any concealment. Transparency in this context extends beyond simply providing data; it also presents this information in a format that is easy to understand, relevant, and readily available to those who need it.

The information transparency managed by Public Relations includes explicit communication of service procedures, detailed costs in accordance with laws and regulations (particularly to ensure the principle of zero extortion), and the dissemination of the latest policies directly relevant to the interests of the community. For example, in the case of Hajj registration or marriage services, Public Relations openly publishes administrative requirements and estimated completion times through various information channels. This strategy is a key indicator of increasing public satisfaction; when the public has full access to information about their rights and obligations, they feel involved as subjects of service, not simply objects of bureaucracy. This empowers the public to exercise social control over the quality of services they receive.

Furthermore, transparent and accountable information management serves as a defense mechanism against potential misinformation and hoaxes that often circulate within the community regarding religious services. With credible and easily accessible official information sources, any public doubts can be promptly addressed through valid data. Public relations plays an active role in providing clarification and ongoing education to minimize communication barriers stemming from procedural misunderstandings. This consistent transparency ultimately creates a sense of security and legal certainty for the public, which are the primary foundations of customer satisfaction in the public sector.

Sociologically, a harmonious relationship between government institutions and citizens can only be fostered if there is mutual trust based on honest information. Through its accountability function, the Public Relations Department of the Ministry of Religious

Affairs of Tebing Tinggi City strives to demonstrate that every rupiah of the budget and every second of service time spent is morally and administratively accountable. By presenting performance reports and program achievements to the public, public relations builds a narrative that the institution is professional and imbued with integrity.

In conclusion, this implementation of transparency and accountability represents a strategic investment by public relations to build positive long-term relationships with the public. Through an integrated information disclosure system between digital media and physical office services, public relations has successfully established a clean, responsive, and humane service standard. This transformation not only quantitatively improves public satisfaction scores but also enhances the reputation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs as the vanguard of accountable and public-interest religious affairs services in Tebing Tinggi City.

Analysis of Obstacles in Optimizing the Role of Public Relations

Optimizing the role of Public Relations at the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Tebing Tinggi City in increasing public satisfaction still faces quite complex obstacles, particularly in structural and institutional aspects. Based on research findings, public relations has attempted to fulfill its strategic functions as an information provider, public communications manager, institutional image builder, and liaison between the institution and the public. However, these functions have not been fully implemented due to limited human resources specifically competent in public communications, digital media management, content design, and public response management. This situation indicates that government public relations cannot simply be positioned as an administrative complement but must be positioned as a strategic management function that requires the support of professional personnel and an adequate work structure. From an organizational communications perspective, public relations effectiveness depends heavily on the institution's ability to establish systematic two-way communication between the organization and its public (Grunig, 1992). Therefore, limited public relations personnel directly impact the institution's weak capacity to understand aspirations, address information needs, and respond promptly to public complaints.

Further obstacles relate to budget limitations and information technology facilities that do not fully support public relations work. In the context of digital public services, public relations is not only required to convey information but also to be able to consistently manage various communication channels such as social media, websites, PTSP (One-Stop Integrated Service Providers), and digital service platforms. Research findings indicate that the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Tebing Tinggi City has developed digital-based services through social media, PTSP, and SILATU (Special Service Providers for the Public Service), but its effectiveness is still limited by disproportionate infrastructure support and funding. This is a critical issue because digitalizing public services requires technological devices, stable information systems, continuous content production, and technically competent management personnel. Puspita (2021) emphasized that digital information management in government institutions requires technological readiness and resources to ensure fast, accurate, and equitable access to public information. Therefore, budget constraints are not merely an administrative issue but also impact the

quality of public communication and public perception of the institution's professionalism.

In addition to internal factors, external barriers also arise from low digital literacy and information literacy among some members of the public. Although digital channels are available, not everyone has the same skills, habits, or beliefs in utilizing technology-based services. Some still prefer to obtain information directly at the office, ask staff, or rely on information from their immediate social circle. This situation means that official information disseminated through digital media has not yet fully reached all levels of society. As a result, information gaps persist, especially among groups unfamiliar with digital technology to access public services. In this context, public relations needs to fulfill an educational, not merely informative, function. Service information must be conveyed in simple language, with easy-to-understand visuals, and repeated outreach through various communication channels. Hardiyansyah (2018) explains that public satisfaction with public services is greatly influenced by procedural clarity, ease of access, and the certainty of information received by service users.

Another significant obstacle is bureaucratic communication patterns, which still tend to be formal and technical. In public service practice, information conveyed in administrative language is often difficult for the general public to understand. This can lead to misunderstandings, delays in fulfilling requirements, and even dissatisfaction with services that are already available. Public relations has the crucial task of translating policy language into a more communicative public language. Ruslan (2014) emphasizes that public relations plays a role in fostering harmonious relationships between institutions and the public through clear, open, and public-interest-oriented communication. Therefore, optimizing public relations is not only about increasing the volume of information, but also about improving the way it's delivered. Service content needs to be packaged in a more concise, visual, interactive format, and tailored to the characteristics of the local community. In this way, public relations can reduce the communication gap between government institutions and the public using their services.

Overall, the obstacles to optimizing the role of public relations indicate that increasing public satisfaction cannot be achieved solely through the provision of digital information channels. Public satisfaction requires synergy between quality technical services, clear communication, human resource readiness, budget support, digital infrastructure, and ongoing public education. This finding aligns with the view of Sari et al. (2024) that an effective public relations strategy in government institutions must be able to build an image, respond to public needs, and manage communications professionally. Therefore, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Tebing Tinggi City needs to strengthen the position of public relations as a strategic unit by increasing the capacity of its apparatus, providing an adequate communication budget, strengthening digital channels, and expanding service outreach to the public. With these steps, public relations can play a more optimal role in building public services that are transparent, responsive, inclusive, and oriented towards public satisfaction.

4. CONCLUSION

This study comprehensively concludes that the role of Public Relations of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Tebing Tinggi City in increasing public satisfaction is realized

through the integration of strategic management functions as a provider of accurate digital information through the SILATU platform and PTSP services, building a professional institutional image through consistent creative publications, and guarding public transparency and accountability in order to foster public trust in a sustainable manner, although its operational effectiveness is still hampered by internal structural obstacles in the form of limited numbers and competencies of communication personnel, minimal budget allocation, and inadequate technological facilities, as well as external obstacles in the form of low public digital literacy which demands a revitalization of communication strategies that are more educational, responsive, and inclusive for all levels of society

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