

Implementation of Public Relations Ethics in Government Institutions

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Abstract: This article delves into the pivotal significance of ethical paradigms within the realm of public relations endeavors situated within governmental establishments. The cogent contemplation of ethical imperatives assumes a paramount role in upholding the tenets of lucidity, answerability, and the engendering of public confidence vis-à-vis the edicts and information promulgated by governmental entities. Employing a conceptual synthesis and a case study dissection, this manuscript elucidates the manner in which the integration of ethical precepts in public relations can enhance the caliber of governmental communication and fortify the interconnection between the administrative machinery and the population. Public relations ethics entails the steadfast adherence to ethical principles and professional benchmarks in the sphere of communication. The bedrock of ethical public relations practices is anchored in the principles of veracity, probity, and answerability. Within the context of governmental establishments, these principles assume an exacerbated significance, as they underpin the credibility of public policies and undertakings. Moreover, ethical commitment ensures that public relations agents operating within the governmental framework act consonant with the welfare of the public, thus fostering an environment of unreserved dialogue and an enlightened citizenry.

Keywords: Public Relations Ethics, Government Institutions, Public Communication, Transparency, Accountability.

Introduction

In the current era of globalization and digitalization, communication plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between government institutions and society. Government agencies are faced with demands to not only convey accurate information, but also to build strong relationships with the public. Effective government communication practices are becoming increasingly vital in maintaining transparency, building trust, and generating active citizen participation in public policy processes.

However, in the midst of the complexity of this task, public relations ethics is often a sidelined aspect. Many government agencies tend to focus more on the message they want to convey than on the way the message is communicated and how it impacts society. As a result, disagreements, doubts,

and even public distrust of the information submitted by the government arose.

As stated by Cutlip, Center, and Broom in their book entitled "Effective Public Relations," public relations ethics is "fundamental for the survival of democracy and the success of public relations." In the context of government communication, ethics is not only about following a professional code of ethics, but also about making moral values a guide in conveying information and establishing interactions with society (Cutlip et al., 2006).

Furthermore, the Allen H. Center in his article entitled "The Ethical Responsibilities of Public Relations Practitioners," states that public relations practitioners have a moral responsibility to ensure that the information conveyed is accurate and can be trusted by the public (Center, 2004). However, in practical reality, research by Botan and Taylor in "Public Relations: State of the Field" reveals that government communications often tend not to be

transparent and do not provide space for community participation (Botan & Taylor, 2004).

The purpose of writing this article is to understand and address the gap between the ethical ideals of public relations and existing governmental communication practices. Through conceptual explanations and case analysis, this article aims to provide a comprehensive view of the positive impact that can be generated through the application of public relations ethics in the context of government. By referring to various concepts of public relations ethics and relevant real cases, this article will help inform government communication practitioners and government agencies about the importance of prioritizing ethics in every step of their communication.

Public relations ethics includes a set of principles and values that govern the behavior of communication practitioners in interacting with various stakeholders. In practice, public relations ethics involve awareness of the moral responsibility to convey information honestly, transparently and accurately, and to ensure that the messages conveyed have a positive impact on society. Public relations ethics is not just following the guidelines of a professional code of ethics, but also involves deep reflection on the moral implications of every act of communication.

In his book entitled "Public Relations Ethics: Senior PR Practitioners' Conceptions of Ethics," L'Etang describes public relations ethics as "the continuous process of reflection on the moral dimensions of PR decision making" (L'Etang, 2004). This statement emphasizes the importance of constant reflection in communication decision-making to ensure compliance with moral values.

In addition, Baskin and Aronoff in their article entitled "Ethical Dilemmas in the Practice of Public Relations" stated that public relations practitioners need to apply public relations ethics in order to build trust and maintain organizational reputation (Baskin & Aronoff, 2016). This shows that public relations ethics is not only about complying with formal rules, but also about achieving the larger goal of building positive relationships with stakeholders.

As stated by Baskin and Aronoff, "Public relations ethics encompasses values and principles

that should guide the actions of practitioners as they facilitate communication between organizations and the public" (Baskin & Aronoff, 2016). In practice, public relations ethics invites practitioners to consider the social and moral consequences of every message conveyed, and to prioritize integrity and honesty in all forms of communication.

Public relations ethics has a deep significance in government communication practices. Ethical principles form the basis for ensuring that government communications are transparent, accountable, and can be trusted by the public. When government agencies apply public relations ethics consistently, they send a message to the public that the government has good intentions and prioritizes the public interest.

As Grunig and Hunt explain in "Excellence Theory," ethical principles of public relations help create a mutually beneficial communication environment between government and society. Public relations ethics can encourage transparency in the delivery of information, so that people can understand the reasons behind government decisions and feel treated with respect (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

Materials and Methods

The method employed in this study is qualitative research with a descriptive approach. Qualitative research method was chosen because the researcher aimed to obtain in-depth results regarding the issues under investigation. By using qualitative methods, the data obtained will be more comprehensive and profound, allowing the research objectives to be achieved.

In this study, the researcher employed a qualitative descriptive method, which aims to describe what is observed, heard, felt, and questioned. Descriptive research is focused on actual issues as they exist in the field during the research (Arikunto, 2013).

This research focuses on various Public Relations offices within different Ministries of the Indonesian Government. The research locations include the Public Relations Office of the Ministry

of Transportation, the Public Relations Office of the Ministry of Social Affairs, and the Public Relations Office of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. From March to August 2023, this research will be conducted at these Public Relations offices. The research aims to gain deeper insights into the roles and functions of Public Relations within each Ministry and to analyze various aspects of government communication, information management, and communication strategies employed by each agency. The data obtained during this research is expected to provide valuable insights for efforts to enhance the effectiveness and transparency of government communication at the national level.

This research using the Qualitative Data Analysis Model by Milles & Hubberman to explore complex and nuanced aspects of a research topic, generate insights, and gain a deep understanding of human behaviors and experiences. This model is valued for its flexibility and adaptability in uncovering hidden factors and is applied in a wide range of fields where human-centered research is critical.

Qualitative data analysis allows researchers to gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena, as it goes beyond numerical data to explore the nuances of human behavior, perceptions, and experiences.

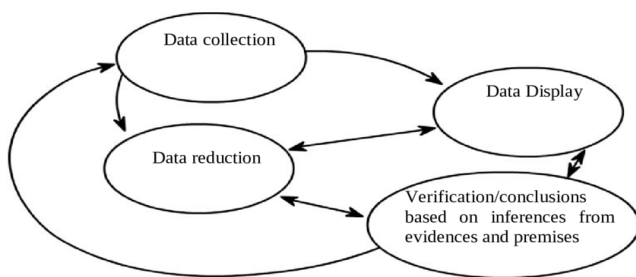


Image. Qualitative Data Analysis Model by Milles & Hubberman (Suharsimi, 2008)

Results and Discussion

Analysis of the Application of Public Relations Ethics in the Ministry of Transportation: Transparency in Submission of Public Information

The Indonesian Ministry of Transportation has demonstrated a commitment to the application of public relations ethics by increasing transparency in the delivery of public information. In recent years, the Ministry has openly provided data and information related to transportation infrastructure, project budgets and project developments to the public through its official website and social media platforms. By ensuring the openness and accessibility of information to the public, the Ministry has created a more transparent and trustworthy communication environment.

As revealed by Mulyana (2019), Director General of Land Transportation, this effort also focuses on providing direct answers to community questions regarding projects and policies. This approach helps overcome the uncertainty and speculation that may result from limited information. This openness in communication also supports efforts to build public trust in the steps taken by the Ministry of Transportation.

Analysis of the Application of Public Relations Ethics in the Ministry of Education and Culture: Responsibility in Delivering Accurate Information

The Indonesian Ministry of Education has demonstrated a commitment to public relations ethics by upholding the responsibility of conveying accurate information to the public. This case study from the Ministry illustrates how timely and accurate communication of education policies, learning programs, and academic information takes precedence. Through this approach, the Ministry of Education ensures that the public gets clear and not misleading information.

This commitment to public relations ethics within the Indonesian Ministry of Education aligns with the core principles of effective communication in crisis management and public relations. By prioritizing timely and accurate communication of educational policies and information, the Ministry not only fosters transparency but also builds trust with the public. This trust is a cornerstone of maintaining a positive customer-relationship, particularly in the educational sector, where clarity and reliability are of utmost importance. Moreover, the Ministry's dedication to providing clear and

non-misleading information underscores the significance of ethical communication practices in promoting not only program loyalty but also long-term stakeholder engagement and support.

As stated by Fitri (2020), Secretary General of the Ministry of Education and Culture, this approach is part of the Ministry's commitment to provide trusted information services to the public. Accurate and targeted communication helps avoid confusion and misunderstandings that may arise from ambiguous or incomplete information. Furthermore, this commitment to providing trusted information services aligns with the Ministry's goal of enhancing the overall public perception of the educational system, thereby strengthening the bonds of trust and confidence between the Ministry and its stakeholders.

Analysis of the Application of Public Relations Ethics in the Ministry of Social Affairs: Responsiveness to Crisis and Community Needs

The Indonesian Ministry of Social Affairs has illustrated the application of public relations ethics through its responsiveness to crises and community needs. In various emergency situations, such as natural disasters or pandemics, this Ministry has shown a moral responsibility in providing the information needed by the public. Prompt, accurate and humanitarian communication has helped reduce anxiety and coordinate relief efforts.

Despite being in a crisis or emergency situation, it is imperative to maintain customer-relationship to sustain loyalty to existing programs (Kholik, 2022). In emergency situations such as natural disasters or pandemics, the Ministry has demonstrated moral responsibility and responsive actions in providing the necessary information to the public. Swift, accurate, and humanitarian communication has aided in alleviating anxiety and coordinating relief efforts. This underscores the importance of preserving customer-relationship, even in crisis scenarios, to uphold program loyalty.

As told by Sudarto (2021), Head of the Communications and Community Services Bureau of the Ministry of Social Affairs, this approach is a reflection of the Ministry's commitment to function

as a responsive partner for the community. When a government agency such as the Ministry of Social Affairs shows concern and responsibility in communications, it not only builds a strong relationship with the community but also strengthens the positive image of the institution.

Discussion

Public relations ethics in Indonesian government institutions includes moral and professional principles that must be adhered to by communication practitioners at every stage of communication. As confirmed by Anugerah et al. (2019), public relations ethics in government is not only limited to adherence to the professional code of ethics, but also involves openness, accountability, and consideration of the social impact of communications made. Government public relations practitioners must prioritize integrity and uphold the public interest in every act of communication.

The application of public relations ethics has a significant positive impact in the context of the Indonesian government. In a study by Riyadi et al. (2020), it was found that transparent and ethical government communication can increase public trust in government institutions. When the government can convey information accurately and honestly, the public tends to support policies more and feel valued as an integral part of the decision-making process.

As revealed by Prasetyo (2018), the application of public relations ethics can also help government agencies overcome communication crises better. In a crisis situation, communication based on integrity and transparency can help build trust and reduce the negative impact that may arise.

Although the importance of implementing public relations ethics is recognized, there are several challenges encountered in practice. One of them is political pressure that can affect government communication. As identified by Hapsari et al. (2017), in some cases, government communications can be politicized or adapted to certain political interests. This can threaten the integrity of communications and undermine public trust.

To overcome this challenge, efforts are needed to improve the application of public relations ethics in Indonesian government institutions. Public relations practitioners need to actively champion integrity in communications, even in challenging situations. This is in line with Liliwari's view (2018), which emphasizes that government public relations practitioners must make public interest the main guide in every act of communication.

Conclusions

The application of public relations ethics in Indonesian government institutions has a significant impact on the relationship between government and society. By prioritizing transparency, integrity and accountability in communications, governments can build strong trust and create a healthy communication environment. While challenges remain, steps to strengthen public relations ethics in government can have long-term benefits in building a nation of integrity and trust-based.

Case studies on the application of public relations ethics from the Indonesian Ministry of Transportation, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Social Affairs illustrate how the application of public relations ethics in government institutions has a positive impact on government communication practices. Through transparency, accuracy and responsiveness. These three ministries have built stronger relationships with the public and ensured that the information conveyed had moral integrity. This effort is an important example of how ethical public relations practices can mitigate challenges and build trust in a complex government environment.

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