



Government Digital Communication Strategy Of Bengkulu Regional Police Public Relations In Building Public Trust Through Social Media

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze the digital communication strategy implemented by the Public Relations Division of the Bengkulu Regional Police (Polda Bengkulu) in building public trust through social media. The research focuses on the utilization of digital platforms, particularly Instagram, as a medium for public communication and institutional transparency. This study employs a qualitative descriptive method to explore the strategies used in managing digital communication and public interaction. Data were collected through observation of social media activities, in-depth interviews with public relations personnel, and documentation analysis. The findings indicate that the digital communication strategy implemented by the Public Relations Division of Polda Bengkulu is based on several key components of Government Digital Communication Theory, including digital transparency, responsiveness, public participation, and digital information management. Through consistent dissemination of information, interactive communication with the public, and professional content management, the institution is able to strengthen its public image and increase community trust. Social media serves not only as a channel for information dissemination but also as a platform for two-way communication between the police institution and the public. Overall, the implementation of digital communication strategies contributes significantly to strengthening institutional legitimacy and improving public trust in the Bengkulu Regional Police in the social media era.

Keywords: *Digital Communication, Public Relations, Social Media, Public Trust, Government Communication.*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information and communication technology has significantly changed the pattern of interaction between government institutions and society. The presence of digital platforms, especially social media, allows government institutions to disseminate information more quickly, widely, and interactively to the public (Pavlik, 2013). Social media also enables two-way communication between organizations and their audiences, allowing users not only to receive information but also to participate in discussions and provide feedback (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In this context, public relations has an important role in managing communication between institutions and the public in order to maintain institutional reputation and public trust (Cutlip et al., 2009). Effective communication strategies are therefore necessary to ensure that the information delivered by government institutions is transparent, accurate, and accessible to the public.

Within law enforcement institutions such as the Indonesian National Police (Polri), public relations plays a strategic role in conveying information related to law enforcement activities,

public services, and institutional policies. Police institutions frequently face public scrutiny because their activities are closely related to community security and social order. Therefore, the ability of police public relations to manage communication effectively becomes essential in maintaining public trust and institutional legitimacy (Mayer et al., 1995). The use of digital communication by government institutions has been widely encouraged as part of efforts to create transparency, responsiveness, and public participation in governance (Mergel, 2013).

The Bengkulu Regional Police (Polda Bengkulu) has adopted social media, particularly Instagram, as a digital communication platform to disseminate information and interact with the public. Through various digital contents such as photos, videos, and informational graphics, the Public Relations Division of Polda Bengkulu aims to present institutional activities transparently while building a positive image of the police in society. The use of social media also enables the institution to provide updates, respond to public concerns, and strengthen engagement with the community. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the digital communication strategy implemented by the Public Relations Division of Polda Bengkulu in building public trust in the era of social media.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public Relations in Government Institutions

Public relations (PR) is widely recognized as a strategic management function that helps organizations establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with their publics. According to Cutlip, Center, and Broom (2009), public relations involves communication activities that aim to build understanding, trust, and cooperation between organizations and their stakeholders. In government institutions, public relations has an important responsibility in providing public information, communicating policies, and maintaining transparency toward society.

Government public relations differs from private sector public relations because its primary objective is not commercial gain but public service and information dissemination. Government PR is responsible for delivering accurate and credible information while maintaining transparency and accountability in public communication (Fenwick, 2014). Therefore, effective communication strategies are essential for maintaining institutional legitimacy and strengthening public trust in government institutions.

Digital Communication in the Public Sector

The development of digital communication has transformed the way government institutions interact with citizens. Digital communication refers to the exchange of information through internet-based platforms such as websites, social media, and digital applications. Pavlik (2013) explains that digital communication enables faster information distribution, wider audience reach, and interactive communication between organizations and the public.

Social media platforms have become an important tool in government communication strategies because they allow institutions to engage directly with citizens and respond to public issues more quickly. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) describe social media as internet-based applications that allow users to create, share, and exchange user-generated content. In the context of public institutions, social media can function as a platform for information dissemination, public engagement, and institutional image building.

Public Trust in Government Institutions

Public trust is a fundamental element for the effectiveness of government institutions, particularly in law enforcement agencies such as the police. Public trust can be defined as the belief that an institution is capable, honest, and committed to serving the public interest. Mayer,

Davis, and Schoorman (1995) identify three key components that influence trust: ability, integrity, and benevolence. Ability refers to the competence of an institution in performing its duties, integrity relates to adherence to moral and ethical principles, and benevolence reflects the institution's concern for the well-being of the public.

In the context of policing, public trust plays a critical role in maintaining social order and encouraging cooperation between the police and the community. When public trust is high, citizens are more likely to comply with laws, support law enforcement activities, and cooperate with police institutions in maintaining security and public order (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003).

Government Digital Communication Theory

Government Digital Communication Theory, proposed by Mergel (2013), provides a framework for understanding how government institutions utilize digital platforms to communicate with the public. According to this theory, effective digital communication in government institutions should be based on several key principles, including transparency, responsiveness, public participation, digital information management, and trust building.

Transparency refers to the openness of government institutions in providing accurate and accessible information to the public through digital platforms. Responsiveness relates to the ability of institutions to respond to public inquiries, feedback, and concerns in a timely and appropriate manner. Public participation emphasizes the importance of involving citizens in communication processes through interactive digital platforms. Digital information management focuses on how institutions organize, verify, and distribute information in a structured and reliable way. Ultimately, these communication practices aim to strengthen public trust in government institutions.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to examine the digital communication strategy implemented by the Public Relations Division of the Bengkulu Regional Police (Polda Bengkulu) in building public trust through social media. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand social phenomena and communication practices in their natural context, particularly how institutions manage communication and interact with the public in digital environments (Moleong, 2017). This approach enables an in-depth exploration of communication strategies, organizational practices, and the meaning behind digital interactions between the police institution and society.

The research was conducted in the Public Relations Division of Polda Bengkulu, which serves as the official communication unit responsible for managing public information and digital communication. The target population of this study consisted of personnel working within the Public Relations Division who are directly involved in managing institutional communication and social media platforms. The unit of analysis in this research is the digital communication strategy used by the institution, particularly through its official Instagram account. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, a technique that allows researchers to select participants based on their relevance to the research topic and their ability to provide rich and accurate information (Sugiyono, 2019). Based on these criteria, three key informants were selected, including the Head of the Public Relations Division, the Head of the Multimedia Subdivision responsible for digital content management, and a staff member involved in the management of social media operations. These informants were chosen because they are directly involved in planning, producing, and managing digital communication content within the institution.

Data were collected through several qualitative data collection techniques, including observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to examine

the digital communication activities of the Public Relations Division, particularly the management of content on the official Instagram account of Polda Bengkulu. The observation focused on the types of content published, the frequency of posts, the visual presentation of information, and the interaction patterns between the institution and the public through comments and messages. In addition to observation, in-depth interviews were conducted with the selected informants to obtain detailed explanations regarding the strategies, policies, and processes involved in managing digital communication within the institution. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format to allow flexibility in exploring the experiences and perspectives of the informants while maintaining focus on the research objectives. Documentation was also used as a supporting method to strengthen the research findings. The documentation included screenshots of Instagram posts, photos, videos, institutional reports, and other official documents related to public relations activities and digital communication practices.

The analysis of this study was guided by the Government Digital Communication framework proposed by Mergel (2013), which explains how government institutions utilize digital platforms to communicate with the public. This framework includes several key dimensions, namely digital transparency, digital responsiveness, public participation, digital information management, and public trust building. These dimensions were used as analytical indicators to examine how the Public Relations Division of Polda Bengkulu manages its digital communication through social media. The collected data were analyzed through a qualitative data analysis process that includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Through this analytical framework, the study aims to understand how digital communication strategies are implemented by the institution and how these strategies contribute to strengthening public trust in the era of social media.

RESULTS

Relations Division of the Bengkulu Regional Police (Polda Bengkulu) in building public trust through social media. The findings are based on data collected through in-depth interviews with three key informants, observations of the official Instagram account managed by the Public Relations Division, and supporting documentation related to public relations activities. The results are presented according to the analytical framework of Government Digital Communication proposed by Mergel (2013), which includes digital transparency, digital responsiveness, public participation, digital information management, and public trust building. The analysis shows that the Public Relations Division of Polda Bengkulu actively utilizes digital media, particularly Instagram, as a primary communication platform to disseminate information about institutional activities, public services, and social programs. Through the consistent use of digital platforms, the institution aims to strengthen communication with the public while promoting transparency and institutional credibility. The results indicate that digital communication practices within the institution are implemented through structured communication strategies that involve content planning, internal verification processes, and monitoring of public interaction.

The first dimension identified in this research is digital transparency. Transparency is reflected through the publication of various institutional activities on the official Instagram account. The Public Relations Division regularly publishes content related to police operations, community service activities, social programs, and educational messages regarding public safety. The use of visual content such as photographs, short videos, and informational graphics allows the institution to communicate information in a clear and engaging manner. This transparency enables the public to access information about police activities more easily and helps reduce misinformation circulating in the digital environment. However, transparency within the institution remains selective and controlled because not all information can be publicly

disclosed due to institutional regulations and security considerations. The second dimension is digital responsiveness. The findings indicate that the Public Relations Division monitors public responses through comments and direct messages on the Instagram platform. The social media administrator is responsible for observing public interactions and responding to questions related to general information and public services. However, responses to more sensitive issues or institutional criticism must go through an internal coordination process before an official response is provided. This procedure ensures that information delivered to the public remains accurate and aligned with institutional policies. Although responsiveness is present, the study found that responses are sometimes selective and may require additional time due to the internal verification process.

The third dimension observed in this study is public participation. Social media platforms provide opportunities for the public to actively participate in communication processes with the police institution. Public participation is reflected through comments, suggestions, and feedback submitted by users in response to published content. The study found that many social media users express appreciation for police activities, ask questions about public services, and share concerns regarding community safety. The Public Relations Division collects and documents these responses as part of internal evaluation processes. Although the participation is mainly reactive and occurs after content publication, it demonstrates that social media has enabled a two-way communication channel between the police institution and the public.

Another important finding of this research is related to digital information management. The Public Relations Division of Polda Bengkulu implements structured procedures in managing digital information. Each piece of content that will be published on the Instagram platform undergoes several stages, including content planning, media production, message verification, and approval from institutional leadership. This process ensures that the information presented to the public is accurate, consistent, and aligned with institutional values. In addition, monitoring and evaluation activities are conducted after the publication of content to assess public responses and improve future communication strategies.

The final dimension examined in this study is the development of public trust. The results indicate that the digital communication strategy implemented by the Public Relations Division has contributed positively to strengthening public trust in the police institution. This is evident from the predominance of positive responses from social media users in the comment sections of posts published by the institution. Content related to social programs, community service initiatives, and public safety campaigns tends to receive significant public appreciation. These responses indicate that digital communication has played an important role in shaping a positive institutional image and strengthening the relationship between the police and the community. To provide a clearer overview of the implementation of digital communication strategies, the findings of this study are summarized in the following table.

Table 1. Implementation of Government Digital Communication in Polda Bengkulu

Dimension	Implementation	Description
Digital Transparency	Publication of institutional activities	Information about police operations, social programs, and public services is regularly published through Instagram posts.
Digital Responsiveness	Monitoring and responding to public comments	Public relations administrators monitor comments and messages and provide responses according to institutional procedures.
Public Participation	Interaction through comments and feedback	The public participates by submitting comments, suggestions, and questions related to police activities and public services.
Digital Information Management	Implementation of SOP in content management	All digital content goes through stages of planning, verification, and leadership approval before publication.
Public Trust Building	Positive public responses to social media content	Social programs and public service activities receive positive responses that contribute to strengthening public trust.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the digital communication strategy implemented by the Public Relations Division of Polda Bengkulu has played a significant role in strengthening institutional transparency, improving communication with the public, and supporting the development of public trust. Although certain aspects such as responsiveness and participatory engagement still require improvement, the current practices have shown that digital communication platforms can serve as effective tools for government institutions in managing public relations and maintaining positive relationships with society.

DISCUSSION

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the digital communication strategy implemented by the Public Relations Division of the Bengkulu Regional Police (Polda Bengkulu) has played a significant role in strengthening institutional transparency, improving communication with the public, and supporting the development of public trust. Through the utilization of social media platforms, particularly Instagram, the institution has been able to disseminate information about its activities, public services, and community programs in a more accessible and timely manner. This approach has allowed the public to obtain information directly from official institutional sources, thereby reducing the potential spread of misinformation and increasing the visibility of police activities within the community. The consistent publication of digital content related to operational activities, public service programs, and community engagement initiatives reflects the institution's commitment to maintaining transparency and accountability in the digital communication environment.

In addition, the use of social media has facilitated interactive communication between the institution and the public. Although the responsiveness of the Public Relations Division remains selective and sometimes constrained by internal coordination procedures, the presence of communication channels such as comment sections and direct messaging still enables the institution to monitor public opinion and respond to community concerns. This interaction allows the institution to better understand public expectations and adapt its communication strategies accordingly. Furthermore, the presence of positive feedback and supportive comments from social media users indicates that digital communication efforts have contributed to shaping a favorable public perception of the institution.

Despite these positive developments, the findings also suggest that certain aspects of digital communication practices require further improvement. In particular, the level of responsiveness to public inquiries and the development of more structured participatory communication strategies could be enhanced to strengthen engagement with the community. Increasing the speed and consistency of responses, as well as developing more interactive digital programs, may help the institution build stronger relationships with the public and encourage more meaningful public participation in institutional communication processes.

Nevertheless, the current practices demonstrate that digital communication platforms have become essential tools for government institutions in managing public relations and maintaining positive relationships with society. The integration of transparency, information management, and public interaction through digital platforms has enabled the Public Relations Division of Polda Bengkulu to strengthen institutional credibility and maintain public trust in the era of digital communication.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the digital communication strategy implemented by the Public Relations Division of the Bengkulu Regional Police (Polda Bengkulu) in building public trust through social media. The findings indicate that digital communication practices within the institution have been implemented through several key elements of Government Digital Communication, including transparency, responsiveness, public participation, and digital information management. The use of Instagram as an official communication platform has

enabled the institution to disseminate information about its activities, public services, and social programs more effectively. Through consistent publication of digital content and interaction with the public, the Public Relations Division has contributed to improving institutional transparency and strengthening communication between the police and the community.

The study also shows that digital communication plays an important role in shaping public perceptions toward government institutions. Positive responses from the public toward social programs and community service activities demonstrate that the use of social media can strengthen institutional credibility and foster public trust. However, the findings also reveal that some aspects of digital communication practices still require improvement, particularly in terms of responsiveness and the development of more structured participatory communication strategies. Increasing the speed and consistency of responses to public inquiries and encouraging more interactive engagement with the community could further enhance the effectiveness of institutional communication in the digital environment.

Despite these findings, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The research was conducted within a specific institutional context and involved a limited number of informants from the Public Relations Division of Polda Bengkulu. As a result, the findings may not fully represent digital communication practices in other regional police institutions or government organizations. In addition, the study focused primarily on the internal perspective of institutional communication, which may limit the understanding of broader public perceptions toward digital communication strategies.

Future research is therefore recommended to involve a wider range of participants, including members of the public or social media users, in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of how digital communication strategies influence public trust. Comparative studies between different government institutions or regional police departments may also provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of digital communication strategies in various institutional contexts. By expanding the scope of research, future studies can contribute to the development of more effective digital communication strategies for government institutions in the era of social media.

LIMITATION

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. First, the research was conducted within a specific institutional context, namely the Public Relations Division of the Bengkulu Regional Police (Polda Bengkulu). As a result, the findings reflect the digital communication practices of a single regional police institution and may not fully represent the communication strategies implemented by other police departments or government institutions in different regions. Second, the number of research informants involved in this study was limited to several personnel within the Public Relations Division who are directly responsible for managing digital communication and social media activities. While these informants provided valuable insights into institutional communication practices, the perspectives presented in this research mainly represent the internal viewpoint of the organization. The study did not include perspectives from members of the public or social media audiences who interact with the institution's digital platforms.

Third, this study focused primarily on the analysis of communication strategies through the institution's official Instagram account. Other digital communication channels such as Facebook, Twitter, websites, or other digital platforms were not examined in depth. Therefore, the findings may not fully capture the overall scope of digital communication practices conducted by the institution. Finally, as a qualitative study, the results are based on descriptive analysis and interpretation of interview data, observations, and documentation. While this approach provides an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, it does not provide quantitative measurements

of the level of public trust or the statistical effectiveness of digital communication strategies. Future research may consider combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between digital communication and public trust in government institutions.

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