



Media relations strategy of public relations of the directorate general of higher education, research, and technology in maintaining the image

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ABSTRACT

Keywords

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Several issues could affect the image of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research and Technology. In this case, Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology is implementing a media relations strategy, considering that mass media is the main channel used by Government PR in forming, improving and maintaining image through providing information. This research aims to determine the media relations strategy of Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology in Maintaining the Image, as well as the obstacles in implementing this strategy. This research is qualitative descriptive research using the case study method. The research results show that the media relations activities were dominated by the distribution of press releases to the media. Media relations activities, providing information texts in the form of press releases, collaborating with the media on National Education Day 2023, establishing personal relationships, developing strategies by creating communities with journalists within the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology and developing a network through good relationships with the Education Journalist Forum. Obstacles in media relations activities include the Public Relations position of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology, which is not considered strategic or close to the spokespersons, the lack of intensity or variety regarding press releases, and changes to the media relations budget at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology which has an impact on the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology's budget management policy.

1. Introduction

Organizations frequently use mass media as a communication channel to disseminate information about policies and programs to a large audience, as more than internal media management is required to achieve these objectives. Public Relations (PR) practitioners within government agencies are primarily responsible for carrying out management functions in terms of conveying information persuasively, effectively, and efficiently to create harmonious relationships with their public, both internal and external, through a variety of means and strategies, one of which is managing meetings between agencies and the media (Indonesia, 2011). Establishing relationships with the mass media is a strategy used by PR professionals to establish a positive image, such as being proactive and responsive in providing public services, as this is crucial for government agencies as service providers (Iriantara, 2019). Public Relations practitioners can cultivate favorable connections with the media by strategically implementing media relations. This approach aims to optimize the dissemination of information held by public relations, fostering enhanced general comprehension (Soemirat & Ardianto, 2010) and the development of a favorable organizational image. It is said that an image is

abstract, can be positive or negative, and has something in common with the impression, belief, and opinion a person can form based on information (Widyasari & Lintangdesi, n.d.).

The Directorate General of Higher Education, Research and Technology, which operates under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, is tasked with the development and execution of policies about academic higher education, science, and technology. Its primary objective is to facilitate the fulfilment of the tridhrama of higher education (<https://Dikti.Ristek.kemdikbud.go.id/>, accessed February 10, 2023). Hence, it is imperative to implement a well-structured publicity strategy that involves deliberately transmitting information through both internal and mass media channels. This information should be presented in a compelling textual style and given promptly, taking advantage of opportune moments (Sambo, 2019). The Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology's Public Relations practitioners execute a media relations strategy that involves cultivating positive relationships with the mass media through diverse activities. The objective is to attain optimal visibility, enabling PR practitioners to uphold the agency's reputation by effectively disseminating information.

The Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology uses several channels, including media platforms such as social media, to facilitate its publication endeavors. Additionally, media relations are often carried out by the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology by distributing press releases on their official website. They also utilize a WhatsApp group created explicitly for journalists, managed by the Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology. The purpose of these efforts is to provide journalists with valuable information that can be utilized as a reference, subsequently transformed into news, and ultimately disseminated through various mass media channels. The Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology employs the website as a platform for disseminating press releases, accessible in the designated area titled 'Kabar Dikti Ristek'. Subsequently, the Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology disseminates press releases via the WhatsApp group.

This is accompanied by an official letter and a hyperlink to the press release on the organization's website, thereby providing journalists with a reliable source of information (Muhammad Fajri, PR of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology, March 2, 2023). The Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology's PR engages in the dissemination of press releases. During this process, they carefully monitor each news release, taking into account the tone and media platform of the news publisher. This evaluation is conducted to promptly address any negative news or news that may be perceived as an attack. According to the findings of media surveillance, the Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology concluded that journalists acquired unfavorable news from an additional information provider. In the context of the adverse publicity surrounding the credit score evaluation (PAK) in 2023, it is seen that individuals affiliated with higher education institutions constitute a significant portion of the audience actively engaging with the associated policies. The agency's image will be affected if the escalating negative news in April 2023 is not resolved promptly. In this context, it is essential to comprehend the media relations strategy implemented by the Public Relations (PR) of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology between January and June 2023 to maintain the image of government institutions.

2. Method

This study employs descriptive qualitative case study research to determine the media relations strategy implemented by the Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology to maintain the agency's image. The primary data sources for this study are the results of interviews with Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology and journalists in the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology and document collection in the form of a profile of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology (history, vision and mission, organizational structure, duties and functions), along with other supporting data such as photos and documents related to the research.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Media Relations Strategy

The Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research and Technology plays a crucial role in disseminating information and publications of the agency's program and policies to a broader audience. This is achieved through various channels, including the agency's own media platforms, such as social media and website pages, and engagement with mass media outlets, both online and in print. The mass media is widely recognized as an efficient communication tool that can reach a large and diverse audience. Moreover, it has a significant influence in shaping the opinions and perceptions held by individuals and organizations (Darmastuti, 2012). Public relations practitioners need to engage in media relations, which can be defined as a strategic endeavor aimed at fostering comprehension and positive rapport with the mass media (Sambo, 2019). This approach is crucial to optimize the organization's exposure and coverage in various publications. When it comes to the implementation of media relations, Public Relations professionals can employ various strategies aimed at fostering comprehension. These strategies involve disseminating information about the organization's mission, policies, and activities in a positive, consistent, and credible manner to journalists (E. Asemah et al., 2021). The media relations approach is explained (Sambo, 2019) including:

1) Manage Relationship

The Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology's Public Relations implements a range of tactics in the management of relationships (Soleh dan Aridanto in (Sambo, 2019)) as follows:

a) Serve the Media

The Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology is an intermediary between journalists and internal agencies, with the power to verify the progress of a matter while engaging with the media. In the context of the Credit Score Assessment (PAK) 2023, the Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology offers information services to journalists. This is achieved by maintaining accessibility through mobile phones and effectively guiding journalists towards relevant resources, then directing journalists to the substance of resources as the person in charge of related issues (Neni Herlina, PR of Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology, 24 May 2023). It is imperative to carefully consider and assess these findings, as they suggest the possibility for journalists to establish direct communication with spokespersons from the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology. This avenue may provide an alternative means for journalists to seek confirmation on the progress of various matters, bypassing the Directorate General's Public Relations department. The stated perspective contradicts the established function of government Public Relations, which entails acting as a conduit for agency leaders to disseminate information to the public regarding all agency activities, to foster comprehension and garner support, ultimately influencing attitudes and behaviors (Abdurrohman, et al., 2022). Regarding other matters that emerged between January and June 2023, official confirmation was supplied by the Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology through news releases. This decision was made with the understanding that Public Relations practitioners can effectively assist the media by offering written confirmations from spokespersons that are concise and understandable, ensuring that journalists grasp the provided explanations (Sambo, 2019).

b) Build a Reputation

From January to June 2023, the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology's PR did not attempt to develop its reputation through press conferences. In terms of endeavors to establish a positive image from the perspective of the agency, the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology's PR conduct its activities through the distribution of press releases, which are frequently disseminated via the agency's website and a dedicated WhatsApp group comprising journalists, initiated by the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology's PR. The situation is regrettable, as there were unfavorable occurrences during the specified timeframe concerning the 2023 Credit Score Assessment (PAK). These issues could have been addressed through a press conference, allowing the PR of the Directorate General of Higher

Education, Research, and Technology to elucidate the agency's endeavors in resolving these matters to the media. The implementation of press conferences aims as (1) an effort to neutralize news or refute incorrect or negative news related to the agency, (2) as a medium to answer questions from journalists who need confirmation in one sitting, (3) to improve and restore the agency's image, (4) to attract the media so that it wants to cover the agency, and (5) to establish direct relationships with the media (Sari, 2017).

c) Provide Information Scripts

Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology distributes informational scripts to the media through press releases. Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology ensures that press releases tailored to the requirements of the media are "ready to air" as part of creating such releases, as it has been carefully organized and satisfies 5W + 1H (what, where, why, when, who, how), it can be difficult for the media to alter (Dian, Waspada's journalist and member of the journalist group of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology, May 30, 2023). Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology conducts planning by compiling agenda-setting at the beginning of the year to determine which programs and activities should be given priority for publication, beginning with coordinating with the directorate in charge of the program, compiling agenda-setting based on a timeline, writing narratives, and concluding with implementation (publication) (Satya Herlina, PR of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology, May 29, 2023). In implementing this strategy, the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology's Public Relations uses press releases distributed via journalist groups on WhatsApp and websites as a resource for journalists pursuing news content.



Fig. 1. Dissemination of press releases through a group of journalists on WhatsApp

Source: PR of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology



Fig. 2. Press Release on Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology's Website

Source: <https://dikti.kemdikbud.go.id/> accessed July 9, 2023

After distributing the press release, the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology's PR will conduct media monitoring, which is defined as an evaluation stage of media

relations activities by paying attention to the output produced by the mass media (Gunawan, 2020), such as paying attention to the tone of the news and the media and journalists who publish the news, which can then be used as a reference for the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology's PR to organize future activities and as a benchmark for evaluating the performance of journalists and the media. In general, the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology's PR efforts to provide information manuscripts are consistent with the responsibilities of PR practitioners in planning, running, and providing information, beginning with identifying organizational policies and procedures, planning and implementing programs, and implementing monitoring mechanisms to obtain evaluation (E. S. Asemah, 2022).

d) Establish Cooperation

Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology conducts advertorials to increase awareness of an issue or program, such as Kampus Merdeka, by communicating program accomplishments as National Education Day approaches (Satya Herlina, PR of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology, May 29, 2023). The advertorial process begins with the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology's Public Relations producing content related to program accomplishments, such as the Matching Fund, Kedaireka, and MBKM, which is then communicated directly to the Media Account Executive (Muhammad Fajri, PR of Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology, June 28, 2023). Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology placed National Education Day advertisements exclusively on Tempo. Co from April 28, 2023, to May 8, 2023. The selection of media in conducting advertorials refers to the budget, reach, and performance of the media and journalists, which can then be attributed to the efforts of Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology in increasing exposure to achievements while balancing the needs by paying attention to the frequency of audience exposure to the message, which aims to avoid excessive exposure and can irritate the audience, thereby opening up the possibility of audience apathy (Heath, 2013).

e) Provide Facilities

The absence of press conferences between January and June of 2023 precludes the provision of adequate lodgings, meals, and accommodations for journalists. During the relevant period, Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology only provided information scripts and photos as supporting material that can be accessed in the News of Higher Education photo gallery.

f) Establish Interpersonal Connections

Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology has made efforts to develop personal relationships with the media through professional small talk, collaboration in producing annual publications, and providing groceries on Eid al-Fitr day to journalists (Indriani, LKBN Antara's journalist and member of the journalist group of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology, August 3, 2023). This seeks to attain a stable and long-lasting relationship with various groups based on mutual trust and respect (Darmadi, 2021) through interpersonal communication, which is communication between two parties in person. It can be effective because this relationship has the feeling of affinity and can be used to get to know the journalist's character (Sawaliana, 2010).

2) Develop a Strategy

Developing a media relations strategy seeks to increase public awareness, alter public attitudes, and inspire public action through the following actions:

a) Engagement in Internal Media Initiatives through Active Involvement

The Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology has not formulated and implemented plans by actively engaging in internal media activities. Public Relations practitioners can take advantage of internal mass media activities to be present and establish good relations to foster mutual respect between practitioners and the media (Sambo, 2019), so the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology's Public Relations can begin to consider implementing this strategy.

b) Establish a Communal Environment

Establishing a community by the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology is driven by the need to get comprehensive information regarding policies and activities within the organization. The aforementioned community is operated through a WhatsApp group initiated by the Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology, with various journalists from various media outlets as members. The Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology has established guidelines for selecting members of the WhatsApp group, which include granting access only to journalists who are members of the Education Journalists Forum (Fortadik) and journalists with a recommendation letter from their affiliated media organization (Muhammad Fajri, PR of Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology, March 2, 2023). The determination of characteristics seeks to prevent the presence of unprofessional journalists within the group, as characterised by publications (Suprawoto, 2018) as journalists without a media company who rarely produce journalistic content. This is also an effort by the Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology to consider mass media segmentation, which is deemed necessary for the organisation to become a strategic partner due to its alignment with the institution's objectives, thereby impacting publicity effectiveness (Sambo, 2019).

3) Construct a network

Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology to develop networks, establish relationships with journalists from the Education Journalists Forum (Fortadik) as a forum established and developed by education journalists on the selection and recruitment mechanism, with written and unwritten rules (Dian, Waspada journalist and member of the journalist group of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology, May 30, 2023). Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology is unquestionably aided by developing a network that has been established for a very long time and does not have this time limit. Similarly, when the Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education and Research wishes to determine the credibility of journalists from new media, the Public Relations of Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology requires information about the Press Council's media list. The relationship demonstrates that the Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology has attempted to develop a network by establishing and engaging in relationships with professional organizations (Sawaliana, 2010).

3.2. Obstacles to Media Relations Strategy

The Directorate General of Higher Education and Research faces challenges in conducting media relations activities, mainly serving the media. In terms of servicing the media, Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research and Technology functions as a liaison between journalists and internal agencies but does not substantiate issues. This is because confirmation can only be issued by the spokesperson described in the Constitution, namely echelons 1 and 2, namely the leaders of each related unit, so in this case, the Directorate General of Higher Education's Public Relations can only direct journalists to the unit responsible for an issue, which creates another condition where journalists often contact the directors directly, bypassing the PR of Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology. The present obstacle in the endeavor to cater to the media lies in the lack of a strategic position for the Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research and Technology, which hinders efficient communication with top-level management. As a result, the process of guiding spokespersons is protracted (Satya Herlina, Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology, May 29, 2023). This indicates that the Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology functions as Technical Public Relations, as it primarily focuses on executing tasks related to technical communication skills, such as drafting press releases, and Its role does not extend to participating in organizational decision-making or policy formulation (Kriyantono, 2018). These findings are anticipated to be considered for future assessment of the strategic placement of Public Relations within the Directorate General of Higher Education and Research. In general, Government Public Relations at the Ministry level are typically organized within the Secretariat General. Consequently, Public Relations personnel are expected to coordinate their efforts in accordance with the instructions provided by the Secretary-General. Additionally, Public Relations

should strategically position itself to enhance its interactions with government officials (Suprawoto, 2018)

In the effort to build a reputation based on the agency's perspective through the implementation of press conferences, there are also obstacles in the form of a decrease in the intensity of the implementation of press conferences due to changes in the management of the media relations budget at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, Technology, which have an impact on budget management policies at echelon 1 level, in this case, the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology (Neni Herlina, PR of Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology, 8 June 2023). Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology certainly considers the implementation of media relations important and hopes for a change in priorities, particularly in the implementation of press conferences, as a meeting where public relations professionals have an interest in making publications and journalists have an interest in obtaining information as news material (Lasmana *et al.*, 2021).

The last challenge arises in information dissemination, whereby the Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology attempts to present 'ready-to-publish' informational texts. However, this approach inadvertently gives rise to additional circumstances wherein journalists regard the press releases as too bureaucratic (Ester Lince Napitulu, Kompas journalist and member of the journalist group of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology, June 25, 2023). Bureaucracy is essential for carrying out government tasks to be carried out efficiently, effectively, and economically (Sawir, 2020). Still, it can be adjusted so that the press release is not overly formalized and the public can easily comprehend the information. Another challenge in disseminating manuscript material is the volume of written press releases. Presently, the written content of press releases is limited to ceremonial events or events attended by Plt. Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology Satya Herlina, PR of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology, May 29, 2023). The selection of press releases by the media is determined by the news value they include, which makes it challenging for information linked to ceremonies to receive coverage (Indriani, LKBN Antara's journalist and member of the journalist group of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology, May 27, 2023). In order to address this challenge, the Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology should increase the intensity of writing press releases by not only focusing on ceremonial activities but also publishing programs from the substance under the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology that are packaged with other perspectives, to make press releases more appealing to journalists.

4. Conclusion

Based on the empirical evidence and thorough examination, the resultant deduction regarding the media relations approach can be summarized as follows:

The Directorate General of Higher Education, Research and Technology's Public Relations department has implemented a media relations strategy to uphold the agency's public image. This strategy encompasses several approaches, including: (1) managing relationships with the media by actively engaging with them, offering information resources, fostering collaborations, providing necessary resources, and cultivating personal connections, (2) devising strategies to foster a sense of community among stakeholders, and (3) expanding networks by establishing positive relationships with Fortadik, a reputable professional organization.

There are several obstacles in the implementation of media relations strategies, namely: (1) the position held by the Public Relations of the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research and Technology is not strategic or close to the agency's leadership, (2) changes in the management of media relations budget which subsequently resulted in a decrease in the frequency of press conferences, (3) press releases that journalists perceive as overly bureaucratic, and (4) a lack of intensity and variety in the composition of press releases.

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