Strategic Public Relations for Strengthening Public Trust in Government

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines the role of public relations in building public trust in Indonesia's public sector. Using the PRISMA-based Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, the findings indicate that strategic communication and transparency play a crucial role in shaping a positive governmental image. Digital innovations, such as online complaint platforms, enhance transparency and public engagement. Theoretically, this study reinforces the concept of public relations as a strategic tool for strengthening government legitimacy. Moreover, the findings have managerial implications, recommending a more transparent and participatory communication strategy to foster public trust and improve the effectiveness of government policies.

SARI PATI

Studi ini mengkaji peran hubungan masyarakat dalam membangun kepercayaan publik di sektor publik Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan metode Tinjauan Literatur Sistematis (SLR) berbasis PRISMA, temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa komunikasi strategis dan transparansi memainkan peran penting dalam membentuk citra pemerintah yang positif. Inovasi digital, seperti platform pengaduan daring, meningkatkan transparansi dan keterlibatan publik. Secara teoritis, penelitian ini memperkuat konsep hubungan masyarakat sebagai alat strategis untuk memperkuat legitimasi pemerintah. Selain itu, temuan penelitian ini memiliki implikasi manajerial yaitu, merekomendasikan strategi komunikasi yang lebih transparan dan partisipatif untuk menumbuhkan kepercayaan publik dan meningkatkan efektivitas kebijakan pemerintah.

INTRODUCTION

Public relations play a crucial role in government institutions, managing both negative publicity and fostering positive engagement with the public (Valentini, 2021). It serves to disseminate information and maintain a positive image of organizations while strengthening relationships with stakeholders (Fadillah & Huniquan, 2024; Apriliani & Purworini, 2023). A strong public relations strategy enhances reputation, public loyalty, and civic engagement, ultimately building public trust (Halma & Guetzkow, 2023). Without trust, public acceptance of government policies and initiatives diminishes (Yang & Lim, 2009).

Literature highlights the significance of public relations in managing stakeholder relations and fostering trust (Tong, 2022). The relationship management theory suggests that public relations functions as a balancing mechanism, ensuring transparency, responsibility, and ethical decision-making (Ledingham, 2003). Public trust, as defined by Brunk (2006), represents the confidence that individuals have in institutions authorized to act in the public's best interest. Effective public governance relies on trust, as higher levels of trust lead to increased public participation and policy support (Chanley & Rudolph, 2000; Fage-Butler & Ledderer, 2022).

Maintaining high public trust is essential for successful public relations. When trust is upheld, it strengthens relationships between organizations and stakeholders, fostering a more just and equitable society (Gozgor, 2022; Tong, 2022). Conversely, corruption, dishonesty, incompetence, and lack of transparency erode public trust, making it difficult to rebuild confidence in government institutions (Aoki, 2020). Thus, both public and private institutions must prioritize transparency and accountability to maintain strong community relations.

Existing research on public relations and public trust remains fragmented, with limited studies on systematic trust-building strategies within the public sector (Almuqrin & Mutambik, 2022; Rifaid & Rachman, 2023). This study aims to systematically analyze how public relations practices in Indonesia's Prosecutor's Office contribute to enhancing public trust. The institution has introduced several transparency initiatives, including the Public Complaint Portal, Spam Lapor, the National Public Service Complaint System (SP4N), and the Online Public Complaint and Aspiration Service (LAPOR). Further research is needed to explore the integration of public relations strategies with public trust growth in government institutions. A systematic approach to examining frameworks and trends in empirical studies will provide valuable insights for future researchers in this field.

In relation to this, this study will present a literature review related to the following research questions:
RQ1. What is the role of professional public relations practices in order to increase public trust in the Indonesian public sector?
RQ2. What is the contribution of this study at the organizational level related to the study of professional public relations practices and public trust in the public sector?
Next, the theoretical study that will be used for writing this study will be discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study utilizes trust as the grand theory for public trust and public relations. Trust is a fundamental element essential for building relationships and managing an organization's image and reputation (Valentini, 2021). It is defined as an individual's expectation that others will act in good faith (Majid et al., 2021) and is considered a positive belief that individuals, groups, or institutions will act in ways that promote collective well-being (Valentini, 2021). In the public context, trust refers to the level of confidence society has in authorities, governments, or organizations (Majid et al., 2021). Valentini (2021) highlights that, in public relations, trust is often perceived as an interpersonal concept, where individuals' willingness to trust others influences their openness to communication. However, trust

should also be understood from broader social and systemic perspectives, as it is shaped by complex interactions between organizations and society.

Furthermore, Valentini & Kruckeberg (2011) emphasize that public relations plays a crucial role in establishing and maintaining trust within a complex social system, involving interactions between the public, institutions, and organizations.

Public Relations

Existing research considers public relations as an organizational practice formed and implemented through interactions between organizations and their environments. Gone (2024) defines public relations as managing relationships between organizations, stakeholders, and the public through strategic and goal-oriented communication. It provides organizations with insights into stakeholder interests, expectations, social issues, and public concerns (Gole, 2024).

Similarly, Aghazadeh (2024) emphasizes that organizations rely on public relations to build stakeholder relationships that influence their ability to achieve goals. Effective public relations involve planned actions that benefit both the organization and society (Yue & Thelen, 2024). Additionally, communication plays a crucial role in corporate governance by fostering shared understanding and social meaning within organizations (Yue & Thelen, 2024).

Alkahthiri & Alharbi (2024) identify key dimensions of public relations governance, including stakeholder management, collaboration, participation, inclusivity, responsiveness, social responsibility, transparency, sustainability, ethical norms, managerial accountability, and trust. These dimensions are essential for understanding complex relationships between organizations and stakeholders and serve as a foundation for further research in public relations (Preciado-Hoyos, 2013). This study adopts Gone's (2024) definition of public relations as a structured approach to managing relationships between organizations, stakeholders, and the public through strategic communication. This perspective aligns with the study's focus on public relations in the public sector, where the primary goal is to maintain public trust. A detailed discussion on public trust will follow in the next section.

Public Trust

The concept of public trust has been widely discussed in the literature. Majid & Wasim (2021) define trust as an individual's expectation that others will act in good faith, specifically referring to public trust as the level of confidence people have in authorities, administrations, or organizations. Public trust in government, healthcare, and media significantly influences public acceptance of recommendations (Virnandes & Shen, 2024).

Conversely, distrust in reputable information sources can hinder public acceptance and negatively impact public sector services in the long term (Skarlatidou & Haklay, 2024). A holistic approach combining technology, marketing, and adaptive governance can enhance public trust by improving communication efficiency and organizational adaptability (Umpain, Herachwati, & Faruq, 2024). Studies in Singapore show that public trust in government affects confidence in technology adoption, reinforcing the need for institutions to adapt to social changes (Hartley & Aldag, 2024).

Thus, public trust influences political satisfaction, leadership credibility, and governance effectiveness in the public sector. This study adopts Majid & Wasim's (2021) definition of public trust as the level of confidence people have in public authorities, administrations, or organizations. The following section will discuss effective public service delivery based on the development of public relations strategies oriented toward building public trust.

Public Sector Service

The concept of public sector service has received

limited attention in the literature, with most studies focusing on its implementation in the public sector (Bazarah & Pujiastuti, 2022). According to Bazarah & Pujiastuti (2022), public sector service involves assisting the community through interpersonal sensitivity to ensure satisfaction and success. In accordance with Law No. 25 of 2009, public sector service is defined as a series of activities aimed at fulfilling public service needs based on legal regulations.

Zhu & Zhang (2024) emphasize that public sector services should meet diverse societal needs, requiring service providers to understand social demands (Wang & Huang, 2024). Effective service provision is guided by key principles (Kinder & Stenvall, 2023), including: (a) legal equality, ensuring equal access to services, (b) government bureaucracy neutrality, prohibiting civil servants from political affiliations, and (c) a bureaucratic code of ethics, enforcing strict measures against discrimination.

Spicker (2009) differentiates between public service and public sector service, defining public service as the provision of services to the public, either by government entities or non-governmental organizations. This study adopts Spicker's (2009) definition, aligning with its focus on public service in the Prosecutor's Office.

METHODS
Research Design
In this study, the approach used is the Systematic Literature Review (SLR). The SLR approach is recognized as a research method that treats the literature review process as a scientific process and applies empirical research concepts to enhance transparency, replicability, and reduce the likelihood of bias (Lame, 2019). The primary purpose of using the SLR approach is to minimize bias and improve transparency at every stage of the review process by relying on explicit and systematic methods for literature selection and inclusion, quality
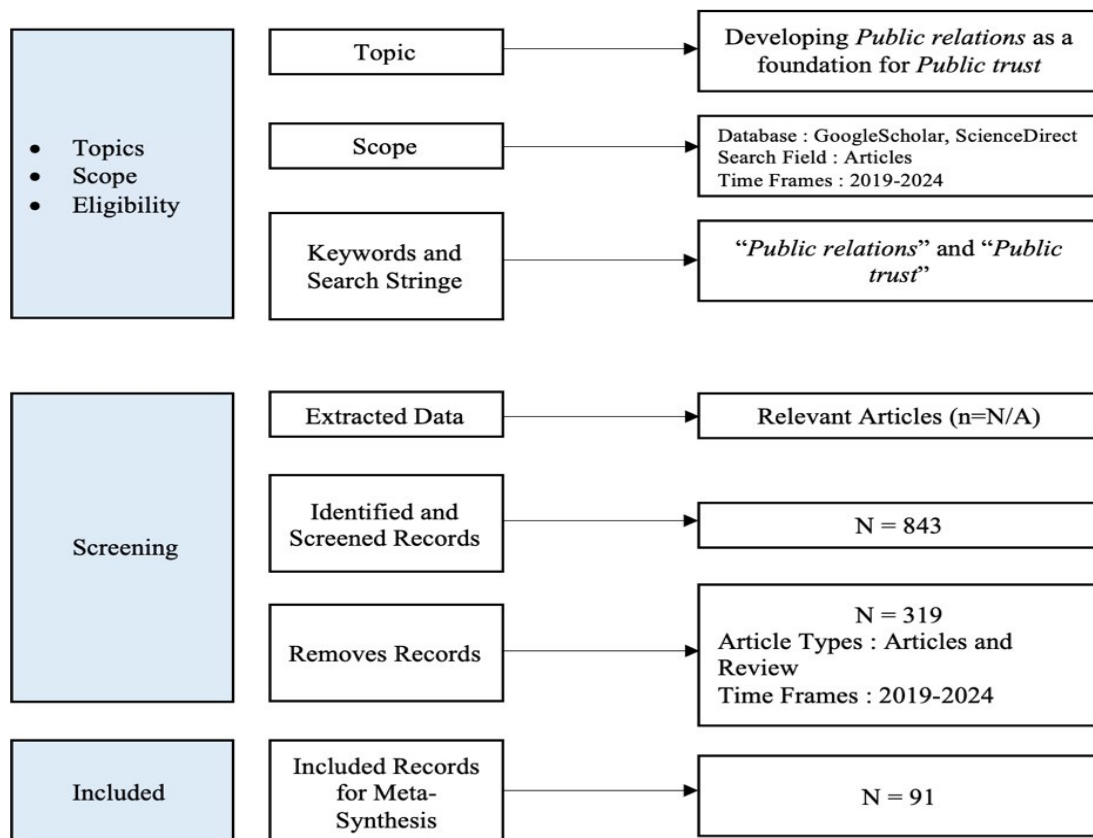

Figure 1. PRISMA Diagram
Source: Fadillah & Huiquan (2024)

assessment, and objective summarization (Liberati et al., 2019; Lame, 2019).

In this research context, the SLR approach, utilizing the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA), is applied to illustrate the development of professional public relations practices in the public sector with a focus on public trust. The data and literature search process for this study is outlined in Figure 1.

Based on Figure 3.1, the data search process requires several phases, including the identification phase, source screening, and adherence to the PRISMA model guidelines (Moher, 2009; Fadhillah & Huniquan, 2024). The selection of analysis using the PRISMA diagram aims to identify prevailing trends, recognize recurring patterns, and visualize metadata representation in the selected research field.

Data search identification

The data search for this study was conducted using electronic databases such as Google Scholar and ScienceDirect, focusing on studies examining the relationship between public relations, public trust, and the public sector over the last five years (2019–2024). Research highlights the critical role of trust in institutions and individuals as a key factor in socio-economic progress and democratic stability (Alessandro et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic significantly reduced public trust, particularly in government institutions, as studies by Guo et al. (2022) and Liu et al. (2023) confirm.

Google Scholar is a reliable tool for finding known literature, but it has limited overlap with databases like Web of Science, covering only 10–67% of its articles (Haddaway et al., 2015). ScienceDirect, a leading platform from Elsevier, is one of the largest journal publishers globally (Saputra, 2018). Therefore, this study utilizes Google Scholar and ScienceDirect for data collection.

The selected keywords for this research include "public relations," "public trust," and "public sector," as they align with the study's focus on professional public relations practices in the public sector aimed at enhancing public trust. To refine the search results, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. Inclusion criteria ensure that selected literature is relevant, while exclusion criteria filter out non-relevant studies (Simpson, 2010). The detailed criteria are presented in Table 1.

Based on Table 3.1, this study applies only two inclusion criteria for data searches in the database. The researcher will identify studies focusing on topics related to public relations and public trust in the public sector. The purpose of using inclusion and exclusion criteria in this study is to narrow the research results to the most relevant findings, ensuring the achievement of the systematic review objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
The Role of Public Relations in Increasing Public Trust

Public relations (PR) is essential for organizations to communicate effectively with the public and stakeholders, playing a crucial role in building trust (Valentine & Kruckeberg, 2011). PR aims to create and maintain a positive organizational

Tabel 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

No.	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
1.	Key topics involving public relations and public trust in the public sector.	Articles with themes outside public relations and public trust.
2.	Article written in English	Article written not in English
3.	Peer-reviewed journal articles, reviewed articles, research article	ConferenceProceedings, Book Preview, Book Chapter

Source: Processed by Researchers

image (Apriliani & Purworini, 2023) and significantly impacts loyalty, public engagement, and overall success (Halma & Guetzkow, 2023). The digital era has amplified the role of PR, particularly in shaping public opinion, managing social media to engage audiences, and developing strategic publications to enhance organizational reputation (Septyani, 2024). In the public sector, PR works alongside protocol management to ensure professional and structured communication, as seen in local governments (Irawanto et al., 2022). PR also acts as a strategic advisor, helping institutions formulate policies based on public feedback and facilitating communication between organizations and society (Nismawaty et al., 2023). The growing use of digital platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok has enabled more direct engagement with the public, improving transparency and responsiveness (Derivanti, 2022). Public trust, defined as the confidence citizens have in authorities, administration, or organizations (Majid & Wasim, 2021), is crucial for government legitimacy. It relies on factors such as transparency, accountability, responsiveness, and ethical behavior (Larson, 2007). Effective e-government initiatives, digital public services, and social engagement strategies have been shown to enhance public trust (Taufiqurokhman et al., 2024). However, challenges such as corruption, dishonesty, incompetence, and lack of transparency undermine public confidence (Aoki, 2020).

To strengthen public trust, government institutions must focus on improving public sector services, ensuring accessibility, responsiveness, and satisfaction (Bazarah & Pujiastuti, 2022; Zhu & Zang, 2024). The Prosecutor's Office in Indonesia has introduced initiatives such as public complaint portals, LAPOR, and digital transparency systems to address these challenges. However, PR professionals must actively manage and communicate these efforts to the public effectively. Strategies include enhancing transparency in reporting corruption cases, encouraging public-government interaction through digital forums, and maintaining consistent communication that aligns with government

objectives (Irawanto, 2022).

By adopting strategic PR practices, public institutions can foster greater trust, improve public engagement, and enhance their reputation, ultimately strengthening governance and democratic participation.

The Contribution at The Organizational Level to The Professional Practices of Public Relations and Public Trust in The Public Sector

This study provides a significant contribution in mapping the strategic role of public relations (PR) in building public trust in the public sector. Specifically, it highlights the importance of PR as a bridge between organizations and society. By formulating effective communication strategies, PR can facilitate two-way dialogues that enable organizations to better understand public expectations and needs. This allows organizations to align their policies and programs with public interests, thereby enhancing their relevance and legitimacy in the eyes of society. Additionally, this study emphasizes the crucial role of PR in managing organizational reputation. Through proactive and transparent communication, PR can prevent communication crises and minimize negative impacts on an organization's image. Thus, PR plays a vital role in maintaining public trust and ensuring the organization's long-term sustainability. Furthermore, this study provides practical contributions to public organizations in designing effective PR programs. It presents a comprehensive framework for measuring public trust levels, identifying factors that influence trust, and formulating strategies to enhance trust. Consequently, organizations can conduct regular evaluations of their PR program effectiveness and make necessary adjustments. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of collaboration between PR and various organizational units. Strong collaboration ensures that all public communications remain consistent and aligned with the organization's objectives. This approach can maximize the role of PR in crisis management. A well-prepared crisis communication plan,

supported by close collaboration between PR and other organizational units, enables organizations to respond more effectively to unforeseen situations and mitigate negative impacts on their reputation. Overall, this study provides a strong theoretical and practical foundation for public organizations in developing effective PR programs. By implementing these research findings, public organizations can build stronger relationships with the public, enhance public trust, and achieve their organizational goals more effectively.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATION

This study presents several managerial implications that can be applied by public institutions to enhance public trust through effective public relations strategies. First, increasing transparency and accountability is essential in building public trust in the government. Public institutions must adopt more open communication practices by providing accurate and easily accessible information to the public. The utilization of digital platforms, such as online complaint systems, can serve as an effective tool to enhance government transparency (Valentini, 2021).

Second, implementing participatory communication strategies is crucial to strengthening the relationship between the government and the public. Two-way interactions, such as public discussion forums, satisfaction surveys, and the use of social media, allow citizens to be more involved in decision-making processes, thereby increasing the legitimacy of public policies (Apriliani & Purworini, 2023).

Third, leveraging digital technology in public service delivery can significantly improve transparency and public trust. Digital innovations, such as technology-based information services and online reporting systems, enable citizens to access government services more efficiently while enhancing service effectiveness (Irawanto et al., 2022).

Fourth, effective crisis management is essential for building and maintaining public trust. The government must implement responsive public relations strategies to address sensitive issues and trust crises. A proactive approach in disseminating information and clarifying various concerns can prevent the spread of misinformation that could damage the reputation of public institutions (Aoki, 2020).

Finally, regular evaluation and measurement of public trust are necessary to understand citizens' perceptions of government institutions. The use of surveys and public sentiment analysis can provide insights into the effectiveness of communication strategies that have been implemented and serve as a foundation for formulating more effective communication policies in the future (Majid & Wasim, 2021). By adopting these measures, public institutions can build stronger relationships with the community, increase public participation in governance, and enhance trust in government policies and public services.

CONCLUSION

The professional practice of public relations plays a crucial role in building public trust in the Prosecutor's Office. Public trust serves as a bridge between organizations and society, aiming to establish effective, transparent, and accurate communication. This can be achieved through key strategies such as managing public opinion on the reputation of the public sector, utilizing and managing social media to gather public feedback, and ensuring that public sector communication remains consistent and aligned with organizational actions, thereby fostering public confidence in the institution.

This research not only contributes theoretically but also has highly relevant practical implications for public organizations. The findings can serve as a foundation for developing training programs for public relations practitioners. Additionally, they can be used as a reference to demonstrate that professional public relations practices help the public sector strengthen its positive image, enhance

public loyalty, and increase community engagement. Transparent and accountable information management fosters greater public trust in institutional performance. ∎

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