

## Public Relations Strategy in Improving the Image of East Java Bappeda: A Review of Its Digitalization Strategy

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This research aims to analyze the strategies used in digitalization to improve the image of East Java Bappeda. This research uses qualitative methods with data collection techniques using interviews and observation. The informants in this research were employees of the multimedia division who also have public relations roles and already have experience in this field. The indicators used in this research are fact-finding, planning, action and communication, and evaluation. The research results show that public relations at East Java Bappeda is more active in utilizing digital media, such as Instagram and websites, to improve the agency's image. The strategies implemented by prioritizing aspects of information disclosure according to facts packaged using post designs that are attractive, contemporary and have philosophical value are actually quite effective. However, in terms of engagement statistics, Instagram is considered to be less effective in attracting people's activity, and the same goes for the website. Nevertheless, a comprehensive evaluation can help the Public Relations of East Java Bappeda to improve, reorganize, and innovate in creating more optimal strategies in an effort to maintain a positive reputation, improve the image, and strengthen public trust in East Java Bappeda.

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## INTRODUCTION

Public Relations is a field needed by every organization, whether commercial (company) or non-commercial (Syahputra et al., 2018);(Judge, 2019);(Mahmud et al., 2019). Meanwhile, public relations is an activity that aims to gain goodwill, trust, mutual understanding, and a good image from the public (Effendy, 1989). Based on this statement, it can be said that public relations or public relations are needed by organizations to build trust, goodwill, mutual understanding and a good image from the public. So, the role of public relations is very necessary in organizations to provide information to the public, both internal and external, precisely and accurately, and in a structure that is easy for the public to understand (Syahputra et al., 2018). This is especially needed by government institutions, namely organizations that carry out state duties and are closely related to the needs of society. So, the role of public relations, which deals directly with conveying information to the public, is a crucial thing that needs to be paid attention to by government institutions, including the Regional Development Planning Agency for the East Java region.

The Regional Development Planning Agency (Bappeda) is led by the Head of the Agency, who is located below and is responsible to the Governor through the Regional Secretary. This institution focuses on research and regional development planning, and as a government institution, Bappeda must fulfil its obligations to convey important information to the public. The East Java Bappeda has utilized digital media as an element of public relations duties. It is characterized by using social media such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and websites to convey information to the public. Social media and this website use the Internet network, so various groups of Internet users easily access it.

Social media is also essential in East Java Bappeda because it has proven to be an effective medium for disseminating information among the public (Cahyani, 2020). This is because social media is designed to expand social interaction without the limitations of space and time by utilizing the internet and web technology (Novianti et al., 2020). This means that you can disseminate and receive information easily and quickly through social media and reach a broad community. Social media also makes it easier for the public to express protests, complaints, or suggestions to government institutions (Iriantara, 2019). Therefore, East Java Bappeda is also optimizing the use of social media to implement digitalization in the public relations sector. However, it is not only social media that the East Java Bappeda uses but also optimizing websites to convey public information that the entire community can access.

On the other hand, the current ease of disseminating information does not rule out the possibility that problems or challenges will arise that Bappeda must face. In connection with the era amidst the rise of social media, which creates a flood of information or new news, it turns out that there are still many people who are talkative or stuttering in sorting out information, so they are often consumed by hoax news (Fitriarti, 2019). This has the potential to be misused by spreading fake news related to Bappeda. The existence of fake news certainly not only harms Bappeda but can also harm society. An example of fake news and fraud spread regarding Bappeda is that irresponsible parties spread the provision of financial assistance to several parties in the name of East Java Bappeda. Based on these challenges, Bappeda must be responsive in receiving reports related to spreading false information and immediately provide a statement of rebuttal. In this case, the East Java Bappeda also utilized the Instagram social media owned by the East Java Bappeda to refute the spreading fake news by uploading a post stating that the East Java Bappeda had never promised financial assistance to several parties. This is done so that people no longer believe the fake news that is being spread, and Bappeda's good image will also be maintained.

Looking at the community satisfaction index with Bappeda's performance based on a survey in January - September 2023, it received a B (Good) rating with a score of 85.51, which means that the service and image of East Java Bappeda in the eyes of the community is good, but must continue to be improved while maintaining services and relationships, Good with society. Thus, this research aims to determine the role of East Java Bappeda public relations in enhancing the government's image by utilizing digital media and the strategies it implements. East Java Bappeda is the place for this research because it has implemented digital media in its public relations duties, which is relevant to the study.

This research is essential because, considering the digital era, where various news items are easily spread, it triggers the public's acceptance of fake news related to the East Java Bappeda, which can affect the institution's image. Meanwhile, East Java Bappeda, as a government institution, must have a good image in the eyes of the public to maintain its credibility. Therefore, it is necessary to study what kind of digitalization strategy is being implemented by East Java Bappeda public relations to maintain its good image, especially to avoid hoax issues. It is hoped that the findings of this research will benefit stakeholders, especially the public relations department in various government institutions, by providing insight into strategies for improving the excellent image of an institution by utilizing digital media. It also increases readers' insight regarding digital strategy to enhance the image of

government institutions, especially the East Java Bappeda.

## METHOD

This study used qualitative research methods. Qualitative research uses natural or actual conditions to interpret phenomena that occur and involves various existing methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The research method used is descriptive qualitative. The descriptive qualitative method analyses, summarises, and describes conditions from various information obtained through interviews or field observations of the problem to be studied (Wirartha & Hardjono, 2006).

Data collection techniques to obtain primary data are through observation, documentation and in-depth interviews conducted at the Regional Planning and Development Agency (Bappeda) of East Java Province. At the same time, secondary data was used through a literature review relating to the role of public relations and the use of digital media in government institutions. In this research, the object studied is the role of public relations and its strategy in improving the image of the East Java Bappeda by utilizing digital media. According to (Pakaradena et al., 2019) the role of public relations includes four functions: fact gathering, planning, action and communication, and evaluation (Priambodo & Rosy, 2023).

Table 1. Indicators of the Role of Public Relations

Variable	Indicators
Public Relations Strategy	Fact Finding
	Planning
	Action and Communication
	Evaluation

The data analysis technique used is the theory of Miles and Huberman, which consists of four steps: data collection, data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (verification) (Sugiyono, 2019). The triangulation method is needed to validate the information by comparing interview data from several informants and observation results (Susanto et al., 2023).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Digitalization of Public Relations in East Java Bappeda

In the globalization era, information and communication technology advances can provide efficiency, speed of information transfer, ease of outreach and transparency, including

for the government (Firdaus et al., 2021). Even in the era of autonomy, strategies are needed to realize good governance. E-Government is one aspect of digital government, or it can be said that E-Government is the provision of services using ICT systems, and it can be said that internet use is within the government's scope (Ilham, 2021). The government needs the application of information technology to support work. Therefore, there is a need for a computerized government system or e-government; apart from that, there is a need to increase superior human resources and education in the technology field. This is because technology can be run optimally when managed by experts in the field. To support e-government, the government, especially the East Java Bappeda, has prepared and used digital media to improve Bappeda's services and image. The following is the statement made by the informant:

"At Bappeda, we are active on Instagram and the website. Apart from that, it is also on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube...."[I01]

"Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube also make podcasts and websites..."[I02]

"...if there are many media, namely Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, websites."[I03]

The informant's statement shows that East Java Bappeda has utilized social media to improve its services and image through Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and the Website. However, East Java Bappeda is more active in using Instagram and its Website. The information management on the Website and Instagram certainly have differences in information content and digital media features. The East Java Bappeda website has a feature specifically for searching for more detailed information. The media website contains information on the East Java Bappeda profile, news, publications, new policies, and more detailed and in-depth information on service standards. This is by research (Miyanto & Rahayu, 2017), which revealed that the implementation of the Website provides benefits for the public to search for information and makes it easier for the public to give criticism and suggestions.

Meanwhile, information management on Instagram media contains activity information or daily activity publications. Daily activity publications can be in meetings and soft news. The features on Instagram allow people to communicate by exchanging messages or providing comments in the form of questions, criticism, or suggestions. Research (Al Rahma et al., 2022) also revealed that Instagram can give space for interaction between account owners and their followers by utilizing existing features such as the tag, share, reply, comment, and direct message features.

## Content Creation Planning Strategy

East Java Bappeda Public Relations has several planning strategies for creating content by utilizing social media to improve the image of East Java Bappeda. At the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) conference entitled "Perfecting PR Strategy" in London in 2007, Ruth Yearley, Planning Director of the Ketchum London Public Relations Consulting Bureau, stated that "A strategy is an intellectual explanation that helps the team and all parties involved in a public relations program understand what needs to be achieved and how to achieve it" (Prayudi, 2012). The content creation planning strategy must pay attention to the quality and relevance of information. Therefore, researchers obtained data from the interview statements submitted by informants.

"We brand the East Java Bappeda as an office that is open, not monotonous, and follows trends..." (I01)

"We always upload work programs like what has been carried out by the East Java Bappeda as a form of transparency to the public..." (I02)

"We make interesting innovations in every content we create..." (I03)

The East Java Bappeda strategy prioritizes openness towards the community so that the public knows how the East Java Bappeda is performing and minimizes the public's negative views of the East Java Bappeda. This strategy aims to communicate precise and accurate information to the public and can create a positive image for the agency. Public relations brand the image of the East Java Bappeda office by utilizing social media via websites and Instagram. East Java Bappeda Public Relations always provides exciting innovations in every content so that it is not monotonous by creating post designs that are attractive, contemporary and have philosophical value. Strategic planning for public relations involves making decisions based on solid reasoning and in-depth information, not just a hunch or instinct. It draws on the science of communication and its various art forms (Smith, 2017).

## Implementation of Public Relations Strategy

The implementation stage consists of three elements: action strategies, communication strategies, and program implementation plans (Pakaradena et al., 2019). The first element is the action strategy, which describes the activities of East Java Bappeda Public Relations. As explained by the informant, public relations plans to utilize digital media to improve East Java Bappeda's image.

".....we usually also advertise several agenda posts on national TV or online news. We also collaborate with the mass media..." (I01)

".....publishing content on Instagram related to work programs" (I02)

".....we always provide innovation in every video and image with designs that follow trends" (I03)

Then the second element is related to communication strategy, where communication is crucial for East Java Bappeda to maintain its good image. Communication strategy planning is based on goals and planning, in which each option is carefully considered. Decision-making is based on the foundations carried out by the organization (Nurrahayu & Chatamalah, 2020). In this case, East Java Bappeda Public Relations uses social media to convey information to the public. It is known that disseminating information via social media is undoubtedly very beneficial for the community. Besides obtaining information based on narratives, they also know objective evidence of East Java Bappeda's performance through documentation results. This is what East Java Bappeda has done to maintain or even improve a good image in the eyes of the public through social media, which has been explained by the informant in the following interview.

".....manage social media well by uploading posts regularly, providing facts and fighting hoaxes." (I01)

".....uploading content related to progress in infrastructure development, tourism and government achievements..." (I02)

".....providing information that is not half-assed and based on facts, do not report hoax news, and do not report news that badmouths other agencies or people." (I03)

Public relations communicate to improve the image of the East Java Bappeda by conveying excellent and factual information. Openness of information can increase public trust in formulating policies and steps from government institutions related to the interests of the community (Azka & Najicha, 2022). Apart from that, the East Java Bappeda must comply with statutory regulations in carrying out its duties to convey information to the public. The statement is by Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 14 of 2008 concerning Openness of Public Information article 2 paragraph 1, which reads, "every public information is open and can be accessed by every user of public information" (Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 14 of 2008 Concerning Openness of Public Information, 2008). This means that information needs to be published to the public so that they can study it to evaluate performance (Kapahang et al., 2020). However, the information published is information that helps to

increase society's active role in making public policies, not excluding information that could endanger the security of society and the state.

Based on this data, it is known that East Java Bappeda has used digital media as a place to publish content, which can be in the form of videos or image designs and convey information. Combining the elements of action and communication creates a strategy as a program. At East Java Bappeda Public Relations, the program implemented is in the form of content produced and then published based on a structured posting schedule so that essential days are not missed for publication. As stated by the following informant.

"The pattern for uploading activities is conditional, adapting to existing agendas/activities. But usually, there are always posts at least once a day. Meanwhile, content outside activities, namely greeting content for important days, will adjust the date." [I01]

Based on the information obtained, East Java Bappeda Public Relations has implemented strategies, including action strategies, communication strategies, and programs implemented using social media. However, East Java Bappeda also adheres to its principles and complies with the law regarding disseminating information to the public.

### **Evaluation of Public Relations Strategy**

The results of the plans carried out in the last step determine efficiency through various feedback that is evaluated through assessment and preparation for the implementation and results of the strategy (Wulandari & Widiasanty, 2021). Adjustments were made based on feedback regarding the success of the public relations strategy in improving the image of the East Java Bappeda. Program evaluation is a systematic measurement of the effectiveness of each plan that has been implemented to determine whether it has achieved the stated objectives. The program evaluation consists of three stages: implementation report, progress report, and final evaluation (Nurrahayu & Chatamalah, 2020). In the implementation report stage, public relations conveys information and various activities carried out by the East Java Bappeda, including the Head of the East Java Bappeda. Examples include the achievements achieved by the Province of East Java, published via the website, and the activities of the East Java Bappeda, uploaded via Instagram. The aim is to provide a complete picture of the actions and steps implemented in the public relations strategy.

At the progress report stage, public relations assesses the progress of the strategies that have been implemented. This report contains information regarding the development of the



strategy implemented and whether it shows significant improvement and can achieve the targets set by the East Java Bappeda. Evaluation at this stage of the progress report helps identify initial successes in strategy implementation and gaps that need to be adjusted. In the final stage, namely the final evaluation stage, public relations carries out a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of all strategies that have been implemented. Based on this data, the researcher obtained a statement from the interview results on whether the strategy implemented had effectively improved the image of the East Java Bappeda. The results of the interview statements conveyed by the informants are as follows.

"Quite effective, so far the content we have created in our data shows that the growth of Bappeda followers shows positive numbers every year... (I01)

"The strategy implemented is quite effective, especially for content that involves many people. For example, employees who are in the frame of the content tend to share it on their respective Instagram stories immediately." (I02)

"Of course, it is effective; we are also expanding our content by collaborating with the East Java Provincial Government OPD to provide a lot of information so that the whole community knows all the information easily on our social media..." (I03)

At the evaluation stage, data was obtained through observations on one of the East Java Bappeda's social media, namely Instagram, to see whether all the content that had been uploaded attracted the public's interest in actively participating in providing aspirations, support and other things. The reason for choosing to focus on Instagram is because it is one of the social media platforms from East Java Bappeda, which is more active than other social media. However, on average, East Java Bappeda's Instagram posts have had no comments from the public in the last few months. On average, each Instagram reel has 1000 views, while the East Java Bappeda Instagram followers, as of June 7 2024, were 7,336 followers. So, the number of views is not proportional to the number of followers.

Apart from Instagram, East Java Bappeda also manages a website to publish news, planning documents, and performance and accountability reports to the community. This is in line with the statement that websites are considered an essential channel in organizations to communicate and convince stakeholders that they are open and responsive to the problems faced by the community (Othman et al., 2011). Based on observations on the website, the East Java Bappeda regularly publishes news whenever there is an activity agenda, and every year, it also routinely submits activity and accountability reports that can be accessed and known by the public. However, there is still a lack of public response to every article published on the website. However, a comprehensive evaluation can help East Java Bappeda Public Relations

to improve, reorganize, or innovate in creating more optimal strategies to maintain a positive reputation, improve its image, and strengthen public trust in East Java Bappeda.

Bappeda also creates an optimal strategy: to maintain public trust in preventing hoaxes or distorted news, as happened in Bappeda East Java, with parties spreading fake news on behalf of Bappeda East Java. In response, Bappeda East Java made a strategy to prevent the spread of fake news or hoaxes; the first is by clarifying quickly and precisely when hoaxes or fake news is found on behalf of Bappeda. Bappeda must provide official clarification through the website, social media, and mass media. Because quick and responsive clarification will help minimize the negative impact of the hoax. Second, Bappeda has a multimedia team, one of which is tasked with actively monitoring news circulating in the community, especially on social media. If there is hoax news that has the potential to damage the image of development or cause unrest, this team immediately provides clarification. Third, Bappeda makes open and transparent publications about every project, program, or activity by posting them on social media. Through a comprehensive strategy, Bappeda will be better prepared to handle challenges such as spreading hoaxes or fake news using East Java Bappeda. The success of this strategy lies in rapid response and transparency in the delivery of information to maintain public trust in Bappeda East Java.

## CONCLUSION

Public relations has a vital role in building a good image of East Java Bappeda, which is characterized by public relations work closely related to the community. East Java Bappeda Public Relations has utilized digital media to improve Bappeda's services and image, namely through Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and the Website. However, East Java Bappeda is more active in using Instagram and its website. The use of digital media aims to show the transparency of East Java Bappeda's performance to the public, reduce fake news, and convey information and facts to the public. Public Relations at Bappeda East Java has also carried out its role by implementing various strategies to improve the agency's image and reputation. Thus, the strategy implemented by prioritizing aspects of information disclosure according to facts packaged using post designs that are attractive, contemporary, and have philosophical value is quite adequate, as marked by an increase in the number of Instagram followers. As time passes, the East Java Bappeda can collaborate with various Regional Apparatus Organizations of the East Java Provincial Government to provide more information to the public.

On the other hand, if you look at Instagram engagement statistics, it is considered that it is still less effective in attracting people's activity, and the same goes for the website. This is indicated by the lack of response from the public in providing comments. However, seeing the activeness of Public Relations in conveying information to the public via websites and Instagram regularly, it is hoped that it can maintain a good image of the East Java Bappeda because it always adheres to the principle of transparency and always provides valid information to the public. Apart from that, it is also hoped that negative perceptions or the spread of untrue news in the community will be avoided so that the image of East Java Bappeda remains good in the eyes of the public.

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