Bandung City Communication and Information Service's Media Relations Strategy in Managing Publications in the Mass Media

Brilliant Awal [1*], Susie Perbawasari [2] & Elnovani Lusiana [3]
[123] Universitas Padjadjaran, Bandung
email. Awalb98@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The arrest of Bandung Mayor Yana Mulyana by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) has sparked widespread media attention, which has been intensively reporting on the case. In response to this situation, the Bandung City Communication and Information Agency (Diskominfo) has strengthened its relationship with the mass media to maintain the image of the city government. This study analyzes the Diskominfo media relations strategy in managing publications amidst the crisis. A descriptive qualitative approach was used with data analysis techniques based on the Miles and Huberman model, including data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. The findings show that Diskominfo utilizes various strategies to reduce negative images, such as press releases, press conferences, and cooperation with the media. The relationship between Diskominfo and the mass media is interpreted as mutually beneficial cooperation; the media obtains easier access to information, while Diskominfo can convey positive narratives to the public. However, this relationship raises concerns from the public regarding the potential for reducing media independence. In conclusion, Diskominfo's media relations strategy effectively manages the crisis, although a balance is needed to maintain transparency and independence of the news.

Keywords: Media Relations Strategy, Bandung City Communication and Information Service, Publication Management, Image Crisis, Media Relations.

INTRODUCTION

The Corruption Eradication Commission, on Friday, April 14, 2023, arrested the Mayor of Bandung, Yana Mulyana. Yana Mulyana was arrested on suspicion of accepting bribes related to the Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) procurement program. In addition to Yana Mulyana, the KPK also arrested eight other people at different locations. From the arrest, the KPK confiscated Rp924 million. The confiscated money consisted of Rupiah, US Dollars, Malaysian Ringgit, Singapore Dollars, and Thai Baht. Shortly after the arrest, several news reports about Yana Mulyana's arrest appeared in national media. The national press published the news based on unofficial information. This also made the smartphone of the Head of the Bandung City Communication and Information Service (Diskominfo), Yayan A. Brilyana, full of messages containing questions from journalists in Bandung City. Not only short messages, but his phone rang dozens of times, receiving journalists' calls.

Table 1.
Number of news related to the Yana Mulyana case examination

No	Periode	Jumlah berita
1	16-20 April	125
2	4-17 Mei	157
3	18-23 Mei	82
4	8-10 June	55

Source: Bandung City Communication and Information Service

Since the beginning of Yana Mulyana's arrest, the Head of Bandung City Communication and Information Office, Yayan A. Brilyana, realized that this would affect the image of the Bandung City Government. Therefore, the Bandung City Communication and Information Office must reduce the negative impact of the news of Yana Mulyana's arrest. One of them is re-establishing relations with the mass media.

According to Susanti (2014), public relations not only helps improve the reputation and image of the organization or build credibility but also plays a vital role in building relationships with the public, both with external and internal public organizations. Building and developing positive relationships with the public will help the public recover from the crisis. Problems will always arise in an organization, both on a small scale and a large scale, especially when the organization is well-known and operates in a high-risk and quite dangerous field.

Public Relations (PR) is crucial in crisis communication within an

organization or company. According to Indrayani (2017), Public Relations professionals are expected to act as effective mediators, conceptors, creators, and communicators. They are responsible for maximizing and utilizing the potential that exists and develops in society. The desired outcomes of public relations activities include a positive reputation, mutual understanding, goodwill, mutual admiration, mutual trust, and tolerance.

One of the efforts to maintain the image of the Bandung City Government, the Bandung City Communication and Information Service has established a partnership with the mass media. According to Enggarratri (2017), the media often highlights developing realities so that they become public attention. The press also selects facts related to topics that the general public must know. From a political perspective, the mass media contributes to the democratic process by providing a forum for distributing information about the government and state institutions. This also shows the importance of the media in increasing public awareness and positioning the dynamics of government as a topic that must be discussed openly.

The Bandung City Communication and Information Service also routinely issues press releases. The press release news issued by the Bandung City Communication and Information Service is not always about the ceremonial activities of the Bandung City Government leadership but also answers or refutes developing issues. The efforts of the Bandung City Communication and Information Service in dealing with news in the mass media certainly require a shared understanding and attitude. Therefore, an appropriate strategy is needed so that the Bandung City Communication and Information Service can provide services to the mass media with its primary objective, namely maintaining and improving its image.

In academic studies on media relations, most research focuses on private sector organizations such as multinational companies, hotels, or creative industries (Coombs, 2004; Alim, 2016). These studies usually explore communication strategies to strengthen the brand image and increase profits through personal relationship approaches or product promotions (Gifari, 2017; Lestari, 2019). However, the context of government organizations, especially at the regional level, is still minimally explored (Waymer, 2013). In this context, the central gap lies in the lack of attention to how government agencies respond to the crisis of public trust through media relations.

This study bridges the gap by analyzing the media relations strategy of the Bandung City Communication and Information Agency (Diskominfo) in dealing with the image crisis due to the arrest of the Mayor by the KPK. This focus is relevant because public organizations aim to increase transparency and build public trust, unlike the private sector, which is more oriented towards economic

gain (Enggaratri, 2017; Waymer, 2013). Therefore, this study provides a unique contribution to understanding the adaptation of media relations strategies in the public sector. Unlike previous studies on the private sector, this study discusses media relations strategies in local government organizations. This is important because media relations in the public sector aim to build public trust and support transparency (Waymer, 2013). This study explores how the Bandung City Communication and Information Agency utilized media relations to manage the image crisis after the scandal of the arrest of a public official. The focus on crisis management in the government sector is rarely a significant concern in the literature (Coombs, 2007; Indrayani, 2017). This study emphasizes the mutually beneficial relationship between the government and the mass media in presenting a more balanced narrative amidst controversial issues (Sholikah, 2020; Gifari, 2017). This study offers a media relations strategy implementation model that can be adapted by other government agencies, especially when facing the challenges of crisis communication (Creswell, 2016; Herlina, 2015). This research is essential for the development of science in the field of strategic communication, especially to fill the gap in the literature on media relations management in the public sector. In addition, the results of this study are also helpful for public relations practitioners in government in managing effective communication during a crisis. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method to analyze the media relations strategy implemented by the Bandung City Communication and Information Service (Diskominfo) in responding to the image crisis after the arrest of the Mayor of Bandung by the KPK.

The qualitative method was chosen because it explored the meaning, reasons, and strategies organizations use in managing media relations amid a crisis (Creswell, 2016). Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, direct observation, and analysis of relevant documentation. This approach allows researchers to understand the phenomenon being studied, including the perspectives of the various parties involved (Patton, 2006). Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). This study is based on the relationship management theory developed by Ledingham and Bruning. This theory is relevant to understanding how the mutualistic relationship between public organizations and the mass media can influence public opinion during a crisis (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000). This method also emphasizes the importance of a systematic and iterative approach in analyzing communication dynamics in the public sector, including strategies used to control media narratives (Yin, 2018). Data validity is guaranteed through data triangulation, which combines various data sources to ensure the validity and reliability of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The results of this study are expected to provide insight for public relations practitioners in the public sector.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Bandung City Communication and Informatics Agency (Diskominfo) functions as the public relations department of Bandung City. It is precisely under the Information Dissemination Division. When the research was conducted, the Bandung City Diskominfo was led by Yayan A. Brilyana. Meanwhile, the Secretary of Diskominfo was held by Darto AP.

Dra heads the Information Dissemination Division. Susi Darsiti. This division has three sections: Community Information Partnership, Strengthening Public Information Openness, and Information Counseling and Control. Bandung City Public Relations had become a separate and separate section from Diskominfo in 2007. At that time, Bandung City Public Relations was under the Public Relations Section of the Bandung City Regional Secretariat. However, along with regulation changes, in 2022, Public Relations was again included in the Bandung City Diskominfo.

Administratively, Public Relations activities at the Bandung City Diskominfo are under three sections. There are several tasks and functions in the Public Information Partnership section, the Strengthening of Public Information Transparency section, and the Information Counseling and Control section.

Describes the media relations strategy and approach by the Bandung City Communication and Information Service (Diskominfo), especially after the incident of the arrest of Mayor Yana Mulyana by the KPK. Field data was collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, covering the responses of various parties in managing the image crisis faced by the city government. Diskominfo utilizes channels such as press releases, press conferences, and formal and informal cooperation with the mass media to direct public opinion and maintain the institution's reputation.

Reasons for Media Relations: Diskominfo makes the mass media an important intermediary in reducing negative images and restoring public trust. This is realized through social media and news releases that promote government programs and positive achievements. The Meaning of Media Relations: Various parties understand this media relationship as a mutually beneficial strategy. On the one hand, Diskominfo strengthens the positive image of the government; on the other hand, the media gets more straightforward access to government information, which is crucial in presenting balanced news.

Media Relations Management The Communication and Information Office maintains closeness with the media through press conferences, visits to media offices, editor-in-chief forums, and press tours. These efforts are considered effective in fostering positive relations between the government and the media while maintaining balanced control in reporting. The results of this

study describe the media relations strategy and approach of the Bandung City Communication and Information Office (Diskominfo), especially after the incident of the arrest of Mayor Yana Mulyana by the KPK.

Field data was collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, covering the responses of various parties in managing the image crisis faced by the city government. The Communication and Information Office utilizes channels such as press releases, press conferences, and formal and informal cooperation with the mass media to direct public opinion and maintain the institution's reputation. The Communication and Information Office makes the mass media an important intermediary in reducing negative images and restoring public trust. This is realized through social media and news releases that promote government programs and positive achievements.

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Bandung City Communication and Information Office Establishes Relations with the Mass Media

The relationship between Bandung City Communication, the Information Office, and the mass media is an important part of the government's communication strategy in responding to crises and building a positive image. After the arrest of the Mayor of Bandung, Yana Mulyana, by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), the Communication and Information Office realized the importance of maintaining the stability of public trust. In this situation, the mass media became a strategic intermediary to convey official information and control the narrative that developed in society (Coombs, 2007). The Communication and Information Office utilized the media as the primary channel to balance negative news with positive content related to government programs, such as the "Kang Pisman" initiative in waste management and "Buruan Sae" for food security.

The Communication and Information Office implemented various approaches to building relations with the mass media, including press conferences, press releases, visits to media offices, and editor-in-chief forums. Press conferences were used as an official forum to clarify sensitive issues, especially in responding to the many speculations in the media (Seeger, 2019). In

addition, press releases were an important instrument for providing accurate and structured information to the media. According to Ledingham and Bruning (2000), open and systematic communication through the media can help improve the public's positive perception of the organization.

The Communication and Information Service also visits media offices to strengthen personal relationships with journalists and editors-in-chief. This activity aims to build cooperative relationships and provides space for the media to convey their information needs. This informal relationship is important in creating a constructive two-way dialogue between the government and the media (Vos & Heinderyckx, 2015). For example, these visits allow the Communication and Information Service to provide an in-depth overview of government programs that may not be covered in regular news reports.

In addition to visits, the Communication and Information Service also holds editors-in-chief forums to discuss the direction of news reporting and provide insight into priority government programs. According to the agenda-setting theory by McCombs and Shaw (1972), the media has an important role in determining which issues are considered important by the public. In this context, editors-in-chief forums are a means for the Communication and Information Service to ensure that strategic government issues receive the attention they deserve in the media.

The Bandung City Communication and Information Service also uses a proactive approach by involving the media in a press tour program, which allows journalists to observe government programs' implementation directly. Coombs' (2007) study shows that direct media involvement in organizational activities can improve their understanding of the organization's goals, thereby helping to reduce biased or speculative reporting. In addition to being a promotional event, this press tour is also an effort to build closeness between the government and the media, which can ultimately strengthen long-term cooperative relationships.

However, although this strategy is considered effective in strengthening relations with the media, there are challenges in ensuring the independence of reporting. Shoemaker and Reese (2014) note that a relationship between the government and the media that is too close can affect the neutrality of reporting, especially on sensitive issues. In the case of the Communication and Information Service, although the media gained more straightforward access to official information, the public tended to criticize the fact that media reporting became less critical of the government. This highlights the importance of maintaining a balance between a close cooperative relationship with the media and the responsibility to ensure transparency and objectivity in reporting (Waymer, 2013).

The relationship between the Communication and Information Service

and the mass media reflects a strategic and adaptive approach to managing public communication amid a crisis. By providing better access to information, the Communication and Information Service influences public opinion and builds a more positive perception of the Bandung City government. This approach is based on the principles of crisis communication, which emphasize the importance of providing relevant and reliable information during critical times (Seeger, 2019). However, to maintain the sustainability of this relationship, the Communication and Information Service needs to set clear boundaries in its interactions with the media so that the independence and accountability of the news are maintained.

The Meaning of Media Relations by Various Parties

The relationship between the Bandung City Communication and Information Office and the mass media has various meanings, depending on the parties' perspectives. From the perspective of the Communication and Information Office, this relationship is a form of strategic partnership needed to build a positive image of the government, especially amid the crisis caused by the arrest of the Mayor of Bandung.

This relationship is interpreted as mutualistic cooperation, where the Communication and Information Office can convey factual and positive information to the public through the media. In contrast, the media gets faster and easier access to official information. In relationship management theory, this relationship reflects the importance of interdependence between organizations and the media in creating effective communication (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000).

For the mass media, the relationship with the Communication and Information Office is considered beneficial because it makes it easier for them to access the information needed to compile accurate and comprehensive news. The media often rely on good relationships with government agencies to obtain official data that is difficult to access through other channels. This relationship also allows the media to increase their credibility as a provider of reliable information (Coombs, 2007). However, although this relationship supports more structured reporting, there are concerns that this closeness can reduce media independence, especially in issues directly involving the government (Waymer, 2013).

On the other hand, the public, especially anti-corruption activist groups, have a critical view of this relationship. They are concerned that the closeness between the Communication and Information Service and the mass media can create bias in reporting, thereby reducing the depth of analysis or criticism of cases involving public officials. This is relevant to the view of Shoemaker and Reese (2014), who emphasize that the relationship structure between news

sources and the media can influence the news content, especially if the relationship is too close. In this context, the public views the relationship between the Communication and Information Service and the media as an effort to direct public opinion by prioritizing narratives that benefit the government, while more critical or investigative information is ignored.

Criticism of this potential bias is also relevant to the concept of agenda-setting put forward by McCombs and Shaw (1972). In this theory, the media can determine which issues are considered important by the public based on the frequency and intensity of news coverage. Suppose the relationship between the government and the media is too dominant. In that case, there is a risk that issues less favorable to the government will not get the attention they deserve in the public sphere. A study by Vos and Heinderyckx (2015) also showed that a too-close relationship between information sources and the media could create challenges in maintaining neutrality in reporting.

However, it is important to note that this relationship is not entirely negative. The Communication and Information Service, through a good relationship with the media, can control the public narrative and convey relevant and factual information, which is very important during a crisis (Seeger, 2019). This relationship provides an opportunity for the government to explain the various recovery steps that have been taken while simultaneously balancing negative news related to specific issues. This approach aligns with the crisis communication practices suggested by Coombs (2007), where providing fast and transparent information to the media can help calm speculation and reduce the negative impact on the organization's reputation.

The interpretation of media relations by various parties illustrates the complexity of the relationship between government, media, and society. While the government and media may view this relationship as mutually beneficial, the public often believes that media transparency and independence must be maintained to ensure government accountability. In this case, the media relations managed by the Bandung City Communication and Information Service can maintain effective communication with the media. However, there needs to be a mechanism to ensure that the relationship does not reduce the quality of independent and critical reporting. This study emphasizes that the relationship between the government and the media is not just a matter of one-way communication but a complex interaction with long-term impacts on public trust. The Communication and Information Service can build a more balanced and informative narrative by utilizing the media as a strategic partner. However, it is important to maintain this balance not to create a public perception that the media has lost its independence. As suggested by Vos and Heinderyckx (2015), the government needs to maintain boundaries in its relationship with the media

to maintain the principle of press freedom.

Media Relations Management by Bandung City Communication and Information Service

Media relations management by the Bandung City Communication and Information Agency (Diskominfo) is a strategic component in responding to the crisis of public trust due to the arrest of the Mayor of Bandung, Yana Mulyana, by the KPK. This step is important to maintain the stability of the government's image amidst harmful media exposure. Diskominfo utilizes a media relations strategy to manage public perception through formal and informal methods, such as press conferences, press releases, media visits, and editor-in-chief forums. This approach reflects the principle of two-way communication, which is symbiotic mutualism, where the government and the media benefit together (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000).

One of the main strategies used is a press conference designed to provide official information to the media quickly and accurately. This conference was held immediately after the Mayor's arrest, aiming to calm public speculation and provide structured clarification. Seeger's study (2019) emphasizes the importance of press conferences in crises to control the media narrative and mitigate potential reputational damage. Through this conference, Diskominfo not only provides factual data but also seeks to demonstrate the government's commitment to maintaining transparency.

In addition to press conferences, the Communication and Information Service routinely issues press releases to disseminate positive information related to government programs. These press releases complement media coverage that often focuses more on controversial aspects. In a crisis, press releases become an important instrument to ensure a balance of information received by the public (Coombs, 2007) by prioritizing narratives that support government programs such as "Buruan Sae" and "Kang Pisman," the Communication and Information Service successfully balanced negative news by strengthening the positive image of the government.

The Communication and Information Service also establishes personal relationships with the media through visits to media offices and editor-in-chief forums. This activity allows for a deeper two-way dialogue between the Communication and Information Service and the media. Vos and Heinderyckx (2015) emphasize that this kind of interaction helps strengthen trust between the two parties and creates a better collaborative framework. In the editor-in-chief forum, the Communication and Information Service can directly identify issues of concern to the media while promoting government policies that require public support.

Press tours are another approach the Communication and Information

Service uses to strengthen relations with the media. Through this activity, journalists are invited to visit specific locations relevant to government programs to see firsthand the impact of the implemented initiatives. According to Coombs (2007), direct media involvement in organizational activities can increase their understanding of the organization's goals and reduce biased or hostile reporting. In the context of the Communication and Information Service, press tours also demonstrate the success of government programs, which are often not exposed in the mainstream media.

However, managing media relations is not without challenges, especially in maintaining the independence of reporting. Shoemaker and Reese (2014) noted that a relationship between the government and the media that is too close can affect the objectivity of reporting. In the case of the Communication and Information Service, although this relationship helps control the public narrative, there is a risk that the media will become less critical of issues involving the government. This is relevant to the gatekeeping theory, which states that dominant sources of information can influence the media's news agenda (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

In facing this challenge, the Communication and Information Service seeks to maintain transparency by providing broad access to information to the media. Data triangulation through interviews, official documents, and field observations is the primary approach to ensure that the information conveyed is accurate and reliable. Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasized that data validity in public communication is crucial to building trust. By providing comprehensive data, Diskominfo helps the media in the coverage process and strengthens the government's legitimacy.

The management of media relations by the Communication and Information Service also reflects adaptation to changes in the public's information consumption patterns. In the digital era, the Communication and Information Service utilizes social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and official government websites to expand communication reach. This step aligns with Enggarratri's study (2017), which shows that social media can effectively increase transparency and engage the public in interactive dialogue. In this context, social media is a communication channel and a tool to monitor public responses to government policies.

The Communication and Information Service also prioritizes the principle of inclusivity in managing media relations by involving various types of media, from mainstream media to local media. This approach aims to ensure that government information reaches all levels of society, including groups that may be less accessible to major media. Waymer's study (2013) shows that collaboration with local media can increase the effectiveness of government

communication at the community level. In this case, the Communication and Information Service is a liaison between the government and the public through the mass media.

The results of this media relations management show that the strategy implemented by the Communication and Information Service is quite effective in reducing the impact of the crisis and maintaining the government's image. However, this success also raises questions about how this relationship can be maintained without sacrificing media independence. Criticism from the public, especially anti-corruption activists, suggests a need to strengthen accountability mechanisms in the relationship between the government and the media. This is important to ensure that the media continues to carry out the watchdog function needed to maintain government transparency (Vos & Heinderyckx, 2015). Overall, the management of media relations by the Bandung City Communication and Information Office reflects a strategic and adaptive approach to dealing with the crisis. By combining traditional and digital methods, the Communication and Information Office has successfully built effective communication with the media and the public. However, to maintain the sustainability of this relationship, the Communication and Information Office must continue to improve transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness in all its public communication activities. Thus, the Communication and Information Office can be a model for other government agencies in managing media relations professionally and responsibly.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the Bandung City Communication and Informatics Agency (Diskominfo) plays a strategic role in managing media relations in response to the image crisis caused by the arrest of Bandung Mayor Yana Mulyana by the KPK. Diskominfo utilizes various strategies, including press conferences, press releases, media visits, editor-in-chief forums, and social media, to control the public narrative and ensure that government messages are conveyed effectively. The mutualistic relationship between Diskominfo and the mass media is the key to maintaining the stability of public communication. However, it continues to face criticism regarding media transparency and independence.

Diskominfo has reduced the negative impact of news coverage by prioritizing positive government programs such as "Kang Pisman" and "Buruan Sae." This strategy improves the government's image and provides relevant information to the public. However, close relations with the media also raise concerns about the potential for a decline in the independence of news reporting, especially on sensitive issues. Therefore, the balance between managing media relations and maintaining the principle of press freedom is a

challenge that must continue to be overcome.

This study also emphasizes the importance of Diskominfo's adaptation to changes in people's information consumption patterns, primarily through digital platforms. Social media is actively used to reach various levels of society and convey information quickly and widely. This approach increases public engagement and provides a channel for the government to monitor public responses to implemented policies.

The public communication strategy implemented by the Bandung City Communication and Information Service during the crisis reflects best practices in media relations management by government agencies. However, the success of this strategy must be accompanied by strengthening transparency and accountability to ensure that relations with the media do not sacrifice the independence of reporting that the public needs.

The Communication and Information Service is advised to increase transparency in all its public communication activities. This can be done by introducing a regular reporting mechanism related to media relations, including press conferences, press releases, and cooperation with the mass media. This step aims to address public criticism about potential bias in reporting. Greater transparency will help increase public trust in the government and strengthen the policies' legitimacy.

With the increasing use of social media as the primary communication channel, the Communication and Information Service must continue developing its digital capacity. Regular training on digital communication strategies, social media data analysis, and technology-based crisis management will help the Communication and Information Service remain relevant in the digital era. This approach will broaden communication reach and provide new ways to engage the community more effectively.

In addition to focusing on mainstream media, the Communication and Informatics Office is also advised to strengthen partnerships with local media and communities. Local media can reach a more specific audience and understand the local community's needs. Collaboration with local communities can also help the Communication and Informatics Office create a more relevant and inclusive narrative, increasing community participation in supporting government programs.

The Communication and Informatics Office needs to adopt a continuous evaluation system to measure the effectiveness of communication strategies. This assessment can include media satisfaction surveys, analysis of the impact of news coverage on public opinion, and case studies on the success or failure of communication in specific crises. By conducting regular evaluations, the Communication and Informatics Office can continue to improve its approach

and ensure that the strategies implemented remain relevant to evolving social and political dynamics.

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