Cyber Public Relations Strategies by the South Tangerang Government in Developing Its Image

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Abstract

Background: One of the cities that has been developing quite rapidly from the expansion of regions in Indonesia is South Tangerang.

Objectives: This research aimed: 1) to identify what cyber public relations strategies were used by the Public Relations Officer of the South Tangerang government to gain its image, 2) to determine how the cyber public relations strategies were implemented, and 3) to assess whether the strategies taken by the government were able to improve the image of South Tangerang.

Method: This was a qualitative approach by using the new media theory and political communication theory. Four informants for this research were chosen by purposive sampling. Data was collected by conducting deep and direct interviews with the Head of Public Relations, a social media account manager from the South Tangerang government, and active followers of the Twitter account @humastangsel.

Results: This research indicated that the cyber public relations strategies implemented by the South Tangerang government were used for promoting publications and community involvement. The efforts of the cyber public relations in improving the image of the city showed that they have a very important role in cooperating with various OPD (*Organisasi Perangkat Daerah/*Organization Local Device) -related organizations and in promoting positive and good relations with the public through publications.

Keywords: Cyber public relations, Strategy, Twitter, Government image

Introduction

As a buffer zone of DKI Jakarta, South Tangerang has received various impacts, one of which is the significant increase of migration and sub-urbanization from year to year. South Tangerang is one of the cities that has been developing quite rapidly as a result of the expansion of regions in Indonesia.

Because of high population growth, South Tangerang needed good quality in public service. In accordance with the Legislation Regulation on Public Information Disclosure that has been endorsed by the government, Act Number 14 in Year 2008 of the Public Information

Disclosure Act stated that information is a basic need of every person in developing their personality as well as their social environment, and it is a significant part of national security in that the right to obtain information is a human right (South Tangerang Government, 2018). Furthermore, the transparency of public information is a significant characteristic of a democratic state that holds the sovereignty of the people in high esteem in order to materialize good state management. Transparency of public information is a facility to optimize public supervision in the organizing of the state and other public agencies, and everything that affects the interest of the public. Therefore, this provides the consequences of the legal provisions that protect the right to information for citizens of Indonesia.

Wherein this case, the government has an obligation to provide open access information efficiently to the public in the context of transparency, accountability, and governance. Using new technology and internet can facilitate this public relations work and provide various benefits to both local governments and the citizens. The government of Indonesia encourages the utilization of new media through e-Government Policy and Strategy, which obliges every state institution to develop e-government in an effort to organize an electronic-based government in order to improve public service quality effectively and efficiently.

The Law on Public Information Disclosure (KIP), which has been endorsed by the government, allows the public to directly complain, criticize, question, or reply with messages on activities and services provided by agencies through new media(s). This instills hope in the public that the government has a part in gaining people's trust to manage the country more transparently through providing information. This is where the role of public relations practitioners is in need of existence.

This initiative is also in line with the development of communication technology where various innovations involving the internet make public relations jobs easier because they are able to address communication problems such as distance and time. If previous activities of public relations utilized conventional media (e.g. television and newspaper) as a channel for information, then widespread globalization which requires us to follow the development of the times must redirect the activities of public relations toward the internet world. This form of public relations is called cyber public relations. With the innovation of the internet that continues to grow and change, the activities of cyber public relations become a practical choice in building image and maintaining the image of the organization because it is widely used by companies and agencies in establishing good relations with the public. Cyber public relations is also a popular activity that is widely used by companies and organizations in "engagement" with the public (Aprinta, 2014). Through cyber public relations, public relations is able to build strong relationships between governments and society and provide more personal interaction between these two sides.

Based on the above description, the public relations of the South Tangerang government is aware of the importance of community trust. Therefore, they have developed strategies in disseminating information through social media (especially through Twitter), where public service is the most important factor in improving the image of the South Tangerang government in order to direct and form a positive public opinion.

Research objectives

This research aimed to identify what cyber public relations strategies were used by the Public Relations Officer of the South Tangerang government to gain its image, to determine how the cyber public relations strategies were implemented by the government, and to assess whether the strategies taken by the government were able to improve the image of South Tangerang.

Literature review

Public relations strategy is inseparable from the elements of planning, which include organization, structure, supervision (or staff), direction, and control. These elements can be achieved well and not deviate from what is already planned (Ruslan, 2008).

The use of internet to support public relations activities presents the concept of Public Relations on the Net or Electronic Public Relations (e-PR) or Public Relations Online (PR Online). Through the internet, it is possible to establish good relationships to maintain public support. In each of its activities, e-PR has the main goal of conveying corporate messages, especially through online media, to the persons engaged. In addition, agencies always mention their products and services through online media so as to increase awareness in society. Social media is the most powerful form of digital persuasion. From a distance, some people view it as mindless scrolling, but engaged consumers use platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter to inform their purchasing decisions, qualify brands' trustworthiness, and form tight connections with those whom they regard as a community (Kriyantono, 2008).

To facilitate public relations in conducting its activities through the internet, agencies are now choosing practical ways, one of which is to use social media. The most common purposes of using social media are as follows (Gunelius, 2011):

1. Building relationships: The main benefit of improving their image is so that public relations can build relationships with the public.
2. Publicity: Cyber public relations strategies on social media provide a place where agencies can share important information and modify negative perceptions.

Twitter has a fairly high accessibility. Users can access it easily through various mediums such as computers or mobile phones and through instant messaging services or emails (Mayfield, 2008). Corporate image is the perception that develops in the public mind about the reality (seen) of the company (Ardianto, 2009). In order to publish and improve the image of the government in South Tangerang, the Public Relations Office of Communications and Information South Tangerang made an effort to build a positive image by building relationships with South Tangerang communities and other institutions and to improve performance by prioritizing services to urban communities in South Tangerang.

This research used the new media theory (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009) which was developed by Pierre Levy, who argued that new media is a theory that discusses the development of media from the conventional to the digital era.

New media or online media is defined as the product of technology-mediated communication that comes with digital computers (Creeber & Martin, 2009). It also agrees with Flew's theory (Junaedi, 2011) that embraces both the development of the unique form of

digital media and the remaking of traditional media forms to adopt and adapt to new media technologies.

Political communication theory explains the purposeful processes in which elected and appointed leaders, the media, and public citizens use messages to construct meaning about political practices. When people exercise power in support of public interest, their messages and interactions are a strategic means for influencing public policies. Conceptualizations of who has power and how they exercise it are prevalent in political communication theory. Power consists of political actors' abilities to acquire, maintain, and exercise authority in governmental affairs and to influence relationships and policies (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009).

These theories are associated with the theoretical conceptual framework because this research discusses the online media and political dimension as part of the public relations strategies employed by the South Tangerang government in order to promote a positive image.
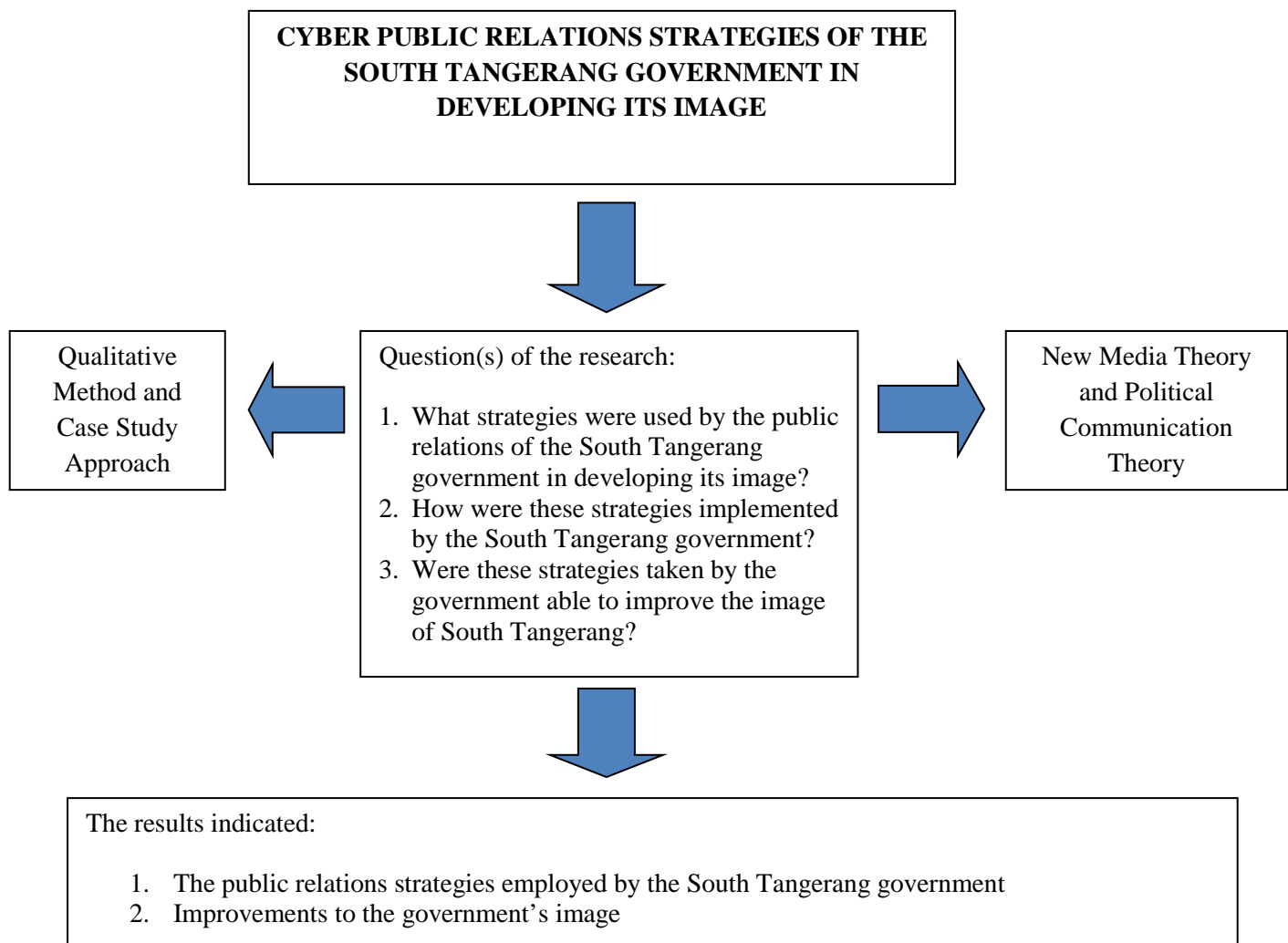
Theoretical conceptual framework

CYBER PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES OF THE SOUTH TANGERANG GOVERNMENT IN DEVELOPING ITS IMAGE

Qualitative Method and Case Study Approach

New Media Theory and Political Communication Theory

Question(s) of the research:

1. What strategies were used by the public relations of the South Tangerang government in developing its image?
2. How were these strategies implemented by the South Tangerang government?
3. Were these strategies taken by the government able to improve the image of South Tangerang?

The results indicated:

1. The public relations strategies employed by the South Tangerang government
2. Improvements to the government's image

Figure 1 Theoretical conceptual framework

Research methodology

The research method was qualitative by using a case study, where the research strategy included the careful investigation of a program, event, activity, process, or group of individuals. Cases were limited based on the time and activity, and the authors' collected complete information using various data collection procedures based on the time (Creswell, 2008).

The concept that became the big umbrella in this research was cyber public relations. This research performed a series of public relations roles and functions through the realm of cyber media. With maximum utilization of all the potential possessed by cyber media, it can be very helpful in conducting public relations roles and functions.

In the case study research method, there are two types of data including primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected in three ways, namely:

First, in-depth interviews were conducted with four informants which included: 1) the Head of Public Relations Section of Communications and Information Service and the Social Media Account Manager belonging to the public relations of the South Tangerang government as the decision-maker and creator of what content information would be shared and how relationships with the public would be managed through social media to improve the image of their government, and 2) active followers including academics and employees who were selected on the grounds that they understood and followed any updates through the Twitter account of the South Tangerang government and who had an interest for various purposes.

Second, documentation is a technique used in qualitative research. Documentation is the collection of data in the form of images, photos, articles, and videos, where the results can be used as attachment material or additional data required in the research.

Third, the observation method was executed directly to observe the workings of the public relations in disseminating information and establishing relationships with the community to improve the image of the South Tangerang government through social media (Twitter). The technique used to analyze tweets in this research was conversation analysis. In conversation analysis, discourse or conversation is considered as a product and process of interaction. A social reality does not exist objectively beyond the influence of social elements, but is constructed through conversations that tend to be face-to-face among the parties involved in the interaction process (Pawito, 2009).

The data validity technique used was validity and triangulation. There are four types of criteria for determining the validity of data, namely, the competence of research subjects, trustworthiness, inter-subjectivity agreement, and conscientiousness (Kriyantono, 2008). The process of collecting data in this research using trustworthiness involves testing the truth and honesty of the subjects in what is expressed according to what has been experienced, felt, or imagined. On the other hand, triangulation of data used triangulation of sources to analyze data, where the source was the Head of Public Relations with the public relations being responsible for publication media (Twitter).

Research results and discussion

South Tangerang is a newly formed autonomous region based on Law No. 51/2008 on the Establishment of South Tangerang in Banten on November 26, 2008. South Tangerang is an expansion of its parent regency, Tangerang District. Expansion of regions into new

autonomous regions (DOB) is certainly done with the aim of: (1) improvement of services to the community, (2) acceleration of democratic growth, (3) accelerated implementation of regional economic development, (4) acceleration of regional potential management, and (5) improvement of a harmonious relationship between central and district (PP No. 129/2000 on Requirements for Establishment and Criteria for Expansion, Removal and Merger of Regions) (Yandri et al., 2018). The ethical-normative objectives of regional expansion and the repositioning of urban village institutions appear not to have had a satisfactory impact on the performance of local government services, especially in subdistricts (Yandri et al., 2018). According to the said objectives, the authors would like to identify the public relations strategies used by the South Tangerang government and to examine whether the strategies can improve the image of the government.

1. Conversation analysis

The results of the data analysis found the existence of several categories that can be inferred based on the results of the conversations between the @humastangsel Twitter account managers with the public. The city, which is now led by Mayor Airin Rachmi Diany, is said to be promoting Smart City in accordance with the vision of "The Realization of Smart, Quality and Competitive Cities based on Technology and Innovation." They provide updates on a daily basis. There are two major categories of conversations that can be concluded from the analysis, namely, conversations based on the types of questions and conversations based on the types of complaints. In regard to the types of questions, there are several types such as questions about services, infrastructure, and programs. Through the process of conversations on these types of questions, good relations between the government and the public can be established so that a positive image for the South Tangerang government can be created. While in regard to the types of complaints, there is only one type of complaint focused on infrastructure.

Figure 2 Public Relations of South Tangerang's Twitter Account
Source Humas_Tangsel (2018)

Figure 3 shows examples of some complaints and questions on the @humastangsel's Twitter account.

Figure 3 Public relations of south Tangerang's Twitter account
Source Humas_Tangsel (2018)

2. **Cyber public relations activity by the @Humastangsel Twitter account**

Basically, the main task of the Public Relations Office of Information and Communication is to disseminate information, whereas cyber public relations involves disseminating information through social media with the aim of informing the audience about what is being done by the South Tangerang government, what has been achieved by the South Tangerang government, and what will be carried out by the South Tangerang government in the future in terms of public information disclosure. Therefore, in this case, the strategies are expected to solve problems and improve existing deficiencies so that a positive image can be created for the South Tangerang government. This is all accomplished with communication through various media, both conventional media and social media such as Twitter.

In this research, the public relations of the South Tangerang government through their Twitter account (@humastangsel) is a government institution approach with the public to improve the image of the South Tangerang government. Based on the observations made, it can be concluded that the Twitter account (@humastangsel) is used by agencies to provide information to directly reach the community so that the public is aware of the information related to the South Tangerang government.

3. **Cyber public relations strategies as conducted by the @Humastangsel Twitter account**

In implementing cyber public relations, there are a number of important factors to underline in order to improve the image of the South Tangerang government. These factors

include the constant monitoring of growing information in social media related to the South Tangerang government, the realization of maximum public service, the announcement of awards received by the South Tangerang government, the provision of infographics about city development, the establishment of cooperative relationships with online media in assisting with the dissemination of information related to the South Tangerang government, and the provision of responses with seriousness and responsibility.

In this case, the public relations of the South Tangerang government has the following general purposes in the use of social media (Gunelius, 2011):

a. Building Relationships. The main benefit of improving their image is the ability of public relations in building relationships with the public. This is in accordance with the strategies of the public relations of the South Tangerang government, where they record only doing some things from the concept of monitoring information that develops in social media as related to the South Tangerang government, provide information about the awards received by the South Tangerang government, and establish cooperative relationships with online media in assisting with the dissemination of information related to the South Tangerang government.
b. Publicity. Cyber public relations strategies on social media provide a place where agencies can share important information and modify negative perceptions.

The strategy concepts owned by the public relations of the South Tangerang government consist of: 1) monitoring information that develops in social media related to the South Tangerang government by way of publicizing that information so that it can assist the public relations in discovering information that will be disseminated again to the public, 2) providing information on the awards received by the South Tangerang government so that the public can be aware of their achievements and know how far the government has performed in developing the city, 3) establishing cooperative relationships with online media in assisting with the dissemination of information related to the South Tangerang government with the aim of promoting a positive image of the South Tangerang government, and 4) responding seriously and responsibly.

4. Image of the south Tangerang government

At the beginning of the active social media public relations of the South Tangerang government in 2013-2014, it was a transitional period where the public relations initially joined with protocols; currently, the public relations is no longer united with protocols and stand-alone under the Communication and Information Department of the South Tangerang government, which is not an easy task. Many problems have emerged that must be faced by the public relations of the South Tangerang government. The job of the public relations of the South Tangerang government is to ensure that the image of the organization is always positive in the eyes of stakeholders and the outside public and to maintain that image. In addition, the public relations also responds to the needs of public service information that can be delivered through social media (Figure 4).
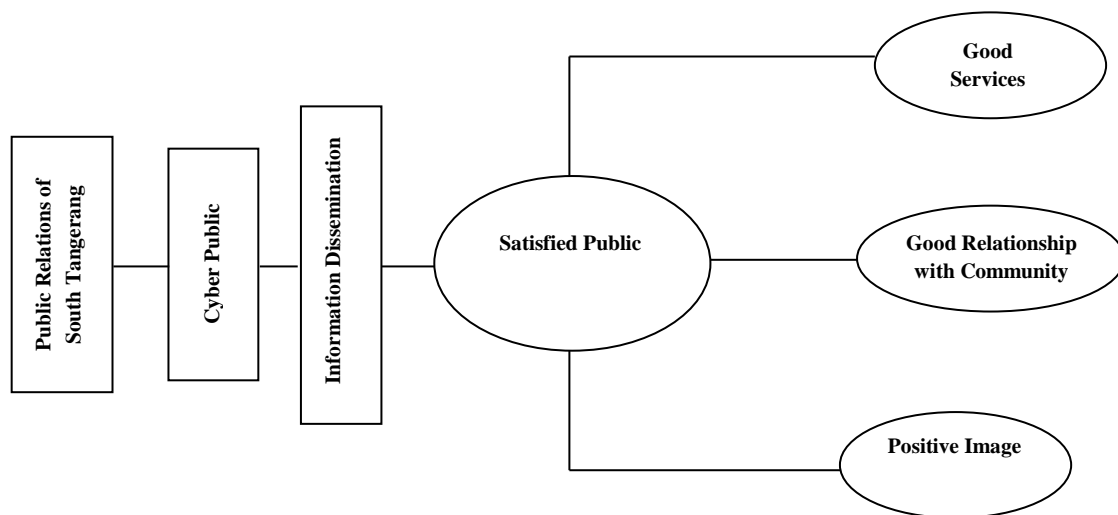
Figure 4 Conclusion of the cyber public relations strategies of the south Tangerang government in developing its image

Regarding their image, the South Tangerang government often received a negative image. The public relations of the Communication and Information Department of the South Tangerang government has a hard task in dealing with the ineffective communication between the OPD (*Organisasi Perangkat Daerah/*Organization Local Device) and with the lack of openness or transparency of the OPD in providing information. As a result, the public relations of the South Tangerang government is unable to convey the maximum information and to respond quickly to questions or complaints by the public in regard to the OPD.

To improve the image of negative publicity, the public relations must monitor media sources by cooperating with local and national media and monitoring social media. Besides monitoring the information that develops in social media related to the South Tangerang government, the public relations must also be active in reading the news circulating in national and local newspapers as a reference and material in making content related to South Tangerang to provide information to the public. Next is to provide infographics about the development of the city. Hence, the cyber public relations strategies made by the public relations of the South Tangerang government can promote a positive image.

The South Tangerang government has executed the maximum strategies, both with an internal and external scope. This is evident from the several awards that have been received by the South Tangerang government up to the present. This has not only been the effort of the public relations of the South Tangerang government but also entails all the elements that have been a part of the public relations scope of the Office of Communication and Informatics including stakeholders.

The South Tangerang government's image consists of a prevailing image (current image) and an expected image (wish image). The prevailing image or current image is concerned with the views held by outsiders against an organization, which will not be valid forever. Now, the Public Relations Office of Communications and Informatics South Tangerang is facing the problem of often receiving negative news based on the experience and

knowledge encountered by outsiders, especially in terms of service. Therefore, this causes misunderstandings and presents a negative image of the South Tangerang government.

However, the public relations of the South Tangerang government continues over time to improve efforts in shaping positive public opinion and strives to be accepted well by the community so that it can change its image towards the expected image, or called the wish image. This image is very desirable by the internal party because it makes the institution more well-known (good awareness), fun, and accepted with a positive impression that is given (take and give) by the public. This image is owned by the public relations of the South Tangerang government because now it is better known by the public, which has been proven by the awards received by the South Tangerang government.

Conclusions

The cyber public relations strategies of the South Tangerang government provide an effective way to disseminate information related to the government of South Tangerang through social media (Twitter). In addition, the cyber public relations strategies made by the South Tangerang government include community involvement (relationship with audience), where a relationship with the community is established. Finally, the cyber public relations strategies made by the South Tangerang government can promote a positive image by establishing good relationships with the media in assisting with the dissemination of information and by establishing an obligation for government agencies in publishing information in terms of public service.

Suggestions

Suggestions for applying research results

It is hoped that the research results can promote more activity in conveying information related to the events to be held in South Tangerang so that the public may be more aware of the activities in South Tangerang. In addition, improving communication in coordination with the OPD can allow the public relations of the South Tangerang government to directly submit the report to the public.

Suggestion for further research

It is hoped that this research can provide input for further researchers who would like to discuss about cyber public relations.

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