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The Public Relations Strategy of Salatiga City Secretariat in Managing the Covid 19 Hoax

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Abstract

The development of science and technology today and the amount of information greatly facilitates public access to information anytime and anywhere. However, during the Covid 19 pandemic, not all disseminated information was correct, and its authenticity has also been verified. For public authorities, especially the Public Relations of Salatiga City Secretariat, this is very important to prevent news development. If this fake news is spread widely, it will cause confusion, concern, misunderstanding, and even public distrust of the local government due to not providing essential and accurate information. This study will look at how the Public Relations strategy of the Salatiga City Secretariat in managing the Covid 19 hoax and knowing about the obstacles and solutions made by the Public Relations of Salatiga City Secretariat. This study uses a qualitative approach with interviews as the primary method in collecting the data. This study shows that the most dominant strategies used are searching for data, establishing collaboration, providing socialization, making videos, educating knowledge about Covid 19, conducting online discussions with the community, and conducting monitoring and evaluation. In carrying out its strategy, the Public Relations of the Salatiga City Secretariat also has obstacles that have been overcome by creating a group so that information is conveyed more quickly and always maintain good and effective communication to resolve the Covid 19 hoax.

Keywords: Public Relations, Strategy, Covid 19 Hoax

INTRODUCTION

Today's technological advances make it easier for people to communicate and interact with each other. By using cyber media or online media such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and others, anyone can quickly and easily know information anytime and anywhere without disregarding distance and time.

Public relations can convey government policies, duties, and obligations through mass media and online media. Guided by Salatiga Mayor Regulation No. 53 of 2011 article 50

paragraph 1 mentions that the Public Relations Section has the task of preparing a program approach, particular strategy, and planning for the implementation of regional relations, and doing the nearest government strategy (Muljana, 2017).

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared Covid 19 on March 12, 2020, as the world pandemic for Covid 2019 disease or so-called "Coronavirus Disease" (Covid 19). PHOEC Kemenkes RI (2020) in Putri (2020) explained that the number of cases in Indonesia increased rapidly until June 2020. There were 31,186 positive cases, and 1,851 cases died.

Many media make it easier for the public to collect information about Covid 19, but technology developments can also lead to crime. The spread of false information or hoaxes related to covid 19 news in the digital era is very high. This condition is exacerbated by irresponsible individuals deliberately making and spreading hoaxes for personal gain to lead public opinion to untrue information. It certainly creates anxiety and confusion in the broader community, especially in Salatiga. Sometimes, it can make the scarcity of an item, causing panic buying in some areas.

Katadata.co.id reported that some essential cooking ingredients, including rice, sugar, cooking oil, eggs, and instant noodles in the supermarket, were suddenly sold out. A similar scene also appears on a row of shop shelves containing personal hygiene products and household goods. This panic buying phenomenon can cause scarcity of goods due to a surge in demand in a short time. This condition is undoubtedly aggravated by a massive number of hoaxes that significantly trigger anxiety in the community and encourage panic buying practices.

Chairman of the Indonesian Retail Entrepreneurs Association (Aprindo) Roy N. Mandey appealed to Indonesian people not to do panic buying due to the phobia of the corona outbreak in Indonesia and the circulation of fake news in the community. This extreme action creates panic when all the community's needs cannot be fulfilled (Aria, 2020).

Among the hoaxes circulating through messages and a personal experiment was about the ability of salt (NaCl) to cure coronavirus. The false information suggested people take some salt into the mouth, dissolve it, and swallow it slowly. As the throat gets hurt and dry, the coronavirus is cured. In fact, according to the covid.go.id website, cleaning the nose regularly with saline solution can help recover from common cold, but not to cure respiratory infections such as Covid 19.

Minister of Communication and Informatics (Menkominfo) Johnny G. Plate said that the ministry had found 163 hoaxes related to the coronavirus or Covid 19 phenomenon in the

country. On that basis, Plate called for the irresponsible party to no longer produce hoax that would harm many parties. The distribution of information can change people's perceptions and reduce trust in the government due to hoax information circulating in the community (Julistian, 2020).

On December 29, 2020, the Protocol and Communication Section of the Salatiga City government conducted a simple online survey to find out more about the information needed by Salatiga citizens related to Covid 19 information. Based on the study, there are four pieces of information most needed by most respondents (which are presented sequentially according to the number of voters). Of 64 respondents, 41 people (64,1%) chose a type of information related to what should be done if they experience the symptoms of Covid 19. Thirty-seven people (57.8%) asked for information related to places of health service which handle the Covid 19, 24 people (37.5%) chose information about the symptoms of Covid 19, and 24 people (37.5%) chose information about the new health protocol. The data obtained from the survey was processed and presented on the Instagram account of the Protocol and Communication Section of the Salatiga City Secretariat.

Salatiga Police Chief Adj. Sr. Comr. Rahmad Hidayat said that the police were hunting for the perpetrator who circulated the hoax related to a Salatiga citizen who was tested positive for coronavirus and died. The perpetrator spread the hoax to groups and other social networks to instill fear in the community during the coronavirus pandemic. Rahmad expected the public not to fall quickly to coronavirus-related hoaxes (Permana, 2020).

Based on previous information, this study will see how the Public Relations of Salatiga City Secretariat manages the hoax Covid 19 appeared on online or mass media. It is expected that the people of Salatiga City would not easily believe and be critical of hoax. This study also aims to find out the obstacles and solutions that have been applied by the Public Relations of Salatiga City Secretariat to overcome the spread of the Covid 19 hoax.

Public Relations Strategy

At first, a strategy is a different approach to achieving goals. This conventional idea is mainly keeping with the early advancements of fundamental concepts used in strategy. Systems in the world of strategy are various ways used by warlords to overcome enemies in a conflict (war). While Solihin (2012) said in, the way the troops used to win (the fight) is also called the strategy.

According to Rosady Ruslan (2002) in Saraswati (2017), there are three essential strategies that Public Relations can do: problem identification, planning and programs, actions and communication, and evaluation program.

- a. Identifying problem. In this development, Public Relations improves issues about the association by leading examinations and collecting realities continuously and incorporating themselves directly in every problem related to the organization. Public Relations improves the problems by examining, reading, and paying attention to the activities and perspectives of the general public in making opinions against the organization.
- b. Planning and creating programs. After knowing the problems and the cause of the issues, Public Relations prepares a plan to overcome the problems by creating programs that contain projects and programs that will be completed up to the financial plan.
- c. Action and Communication. Taking action and communication steps are carried out after compiling the needs that have been established through the program in handling problems. The move is an acknowledgment of the plans and programs that have been created. It includes all individuals in the organization by communicating to the general public.

According to Savitri (2017) the term Public Relations (PR) is also called provincial. The term PR or Public Relations was only known in the 20th century, but its manifestations had been seen hundreds of years earlier. The critical component of Public Relations is to provide information, convince, and integrate audiences into people's lives. Public Relations has a significant position in an organization, primarily if the organization often interacts with the broader community. It is because Public Relations is the essential front line of an organization in communicating with the public in general. Public Relations determines the positive impression of an association according to the general population. The relationship with the local area will choose how the organization socializes in the community (Utami, 2016).

Hoax

Rahadi (2017) said that hoaxes aim to create public opinion and to herd audiences' perception who can test intelligence and accuracy for social media users. There are many reasons behind the spread of counterfeiting news, including making jokes, bringing down someone's dignity, changing policies, entertaining oneself, and so on.

Rahadi (2017) divided hoaxes into several types, they are:

- a. Fake news is news that tries to replace real news. This news aims to distort or remember the misrepresentation of a news story. Fake news writers mostly add

falsehoods and fear-inspired ideas. The weirder news, the better. Fake news is not a funny comment on the information.

- b. Clickbait or Trap links are deliberately posted within a single site to attract individuals to different destinations. The substance, in this case, can be verified, but the title is misinterpreted or has an exciting image added to attract readers.
- c. Confirmation bias is the tendency to decipher information with previous beliefs.
- d. Misinformation is false or incorrect data, especially those aimed at cheating.
- e. Satire is an article that uses humor, irony, exaggeration to comment on current events.
- f. Post-truth is the opportunity where feelings take more of a share of reality to shape public opinion.
- g. Propaganda is the act of spreading data, reality, bickering, complaining, misleading statements, or even deceiving, impacting public opinion.

Covid 19

In December 2019, a significant case of strange pneumonia was recorded in Wuhan, Hubei Province. From December 18 to December 29, 2019, five patients were treated with Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS). The samples studied showed a new coronavirus etiology. At first, this disease is referred to as novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV). Then WHO announced another name on February 11, 2020, Coronavirus Disease (Covid 19), caused by coronavirus or severe respiratory disorder disease Covid 2 (SARS-CoV-2). On March 12, 2020, WHO declared Covid 19 a pandemic (Adityo S, et al., 2020).

Lia A, et al., (2020) explained that the coronavirus is familiar in the world of animal health. Several kinds can contaminate humans, so that it becomes pneumonia. The symptoms are almost the same as the common cold, but Covid 19 develops faster, so it can cause more severe infections and can affect organ damage. Ramadhan (2020) explains that Covid 19 contamination varies, from mild influenza to pneumonia. Complaints can appear during the incubation period of 5-6 days, with the most prolonged incubation period being 14 days of exposure to the virus. Complaints may improve quickly in certain patients, but some may experience rapid indications.

METHOD

Since this is qualitative research, the data is collected through interviews and observations. This study intends to understand the phenomena experienced by Public Relations of Salatiga City Secretariat such as behavior, perception, motivation, action, and others holistically and by way of description in the form of words and language in a particular natural context utilizing various scientific methods.

The data were collected from interview, as it could effectively dig into the depth of information that sources can provide. The source interviewed for this study is the public relations of Salatiga City Secretariat. The issue is selected because it is directly related to managing media and information in Salatiga city.

The observation was carried out in the office of the secretariat of Salatiga City, located at Jl. Letjen Sukowati No. 51, Kel. Kalicacing, Kec. Sidomukti, Salatiga City, Central Java. This discussion focuses on how the Public Relations strategy of Salatiga City's administration and the obstacles and solutions carried out in overcoming the Covid 19 hoax.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The rapid development of information technology makes the information widely delivered. This is the reason for the Public Relations of the Salatiga City Secretariat to create a strategy in anticipating the fast flow of the data. The strategy is expected to prevent the public from receiving any hoaxes. As the spokesperson of the Salatiga city government, Public Relations, under the Communication Protocol and Leadership Division, needs to understand the public from the government's perspective, which has proven valid. It was done to achieve a common understanding between the government and the people in overcoming hoax attacks or fake news sent through social media or other news media. The Public Relations of the Salatiga City Secretariat must carry out strategies to overcome problems in the community, online media, and mass media to not develop further and can significantly influence public opinion.

There are several strategies carried out by the Public Relations of the Salatiga City Secretariat to ward off hoax information. Kristri Priyantara Wibowo, staff of the Public Relations Department of Communication Protocol and Leadership, at an interview on May 25, 2021, conveyed that the Salatiga city government had several strategies as follows:

1. Identify problems

a. Search for Data

Based on the searches that have been done, the process of finding data to the City Health Agency (DKK) must be done so that the facts can be reprocessed immediately and sent to the public. Wibowo, the staff of the Public Relations Department of the Communication Protocol and Leadership, said:

"We immediately send hoaxes to DKK for data search. After that, we immediately inform the public. We must be able to position ourselves as communication facilitators that are really expected by the community."

In carrying out its duties, the DKK was very helpful, especially in collecting data and facts related to the Covid 19 hoax, so that The Public Relations of the Salatiga City Secretariat as the communication facilitator can be as a public space to get access to the information needed (Aditrianto, 2017). Not only monitoring the growing issues, but the Public Relations of the Salatiga City Secretariat also monitor the development of the hoax issue of Covid 19. It was done to confirm no follow-up hoax with the same content. This process is also an important part and an input of significant information to make accurate information as feedback on the circulating information or hoax news (Aziz, 2020).

Figure 1. Hoax information that has been clarified



From the Covid 19 hoax news that had been clarified, it could be seen that information in the form of news through Facebook social media has gone through the validation stage, namely the process to prove the truth of the news (Artianasari, 2020). Here, the message convinces the public about the news of the Covid 19 hoax by giving a stamp or watermark to the news hoax on social media and a logo of the Salatiga City government.

b. Monitoring and Evaluating

Monitoring and evaluation is an essential part of the communication management of the Public Relations of Salatiga City Secretariat in conveying the information to the public. They are factors or indicators of success as an evaluation material, as Wibowo says in his interview:

"So, one of the success indicators is compliance with health protocols, such as the use of masks, which can be checked on the BPS web (Central Statistics Agency). So we see this as a benchmark that people understand if this covid is not only the responsibility of the government but also our shared responsibility. Some things need to be improved in the evaluation, one of which is the role on all fronts. In the sense that we are in the field of information means that the information must be active... we have to improve the evaluation on how we can encourage the community to move."

In carrying out its strategy, the Salatiga City Public Relations broadcasts and disseminates content and performs monitoring and evaluation. The purpose of monitoring is to check whether the activities were carried out well and were productive (Kurniati et al., 2020). The assessment can be seen from the community's response to the strategy of the Public Relations of Salatiga City in handling the Covid 19 hoax that shows an increase in public awareness. In 2020, citizens were confused and prone to the danger of unclear information.

Figure 2. Mask Use survey



Source: BPS (Central Statistics Agency)

The above health protocols will not be maximally applied if they are not supported by community participation, so an effort is needed to improve community compliance in supporting the running of existing health protocols (Afrianti, 2021). From online surveys through the BPS (Central Bureau of Statistics). Page of Salatiga City government has 87% of respondents who always wear masks.

2. Planning and Program

a. Cooperation

Wibowo added that establishing cooperation with many parties became one of the Public Relations strategies of the Salatiga City Secretariat in running the local government, especially in fostering internal and external relations such as the city Health Agency and Transportation Agency, MSMEs, and anyone who wants to cooperate. He said:

"As facilitators, we must establish a network of relationships with this in the Government. For example, talking about covid, we have to contact the Health Service. We have to work in one team and have a strong network to immediately anticipate hoax information. Not only Dinkes, there is also Dishub, MSMEs, and whoever wants to establish the cooperation."

From the above statement, it is seen that good relations between The Public Relations of the Salatiga City Secretariat and many parties are needed. One of them is establishing cooperation because developing negative issues can certainly be minimized (Soyusiawaty, 2016). Due to this condition, The Public Relations of the Salatiga City Secretariat and related parties can achieve common goals and interests, addressing the issue of the Covid 19 hoax.

Fig. 3 Cooperation with the Public Order Agency (Satpol PP)



The picture shows that the Communication protocol and leadership, known locally as Prokompin, of the Public Relations of Salatiga City Secretariat, collaborated with the Public Order Agency (Satpol PP) to check health protocol and distributed masks to the community. This activity is one of the efforts to reduce the number of Covid 19 cases in Salatiga City, which lately has been increasing. The purpose is to have reciprocal relations between local governments, the general public, and other community organizations and clarify government policies and activities by conducting cooperation units in the government environment (Lubis, 2012).

b. Online Discussions with the Community

During this pandemic, the Public Relations of the Salatiga City Secretariat also utilized existing technology by inviting people to discuss online by using applications. Wibowo explained in his interview:

"Then, information dissemination is carried out by inviting the community in the neighborhood unit as information can spread quickly."

His statement indicates that gathering people during the pandemic is not advised. Therefore, effective communication will significantly determine the success of an interaction (Wijaya, 2013). So, the public relations of Salatiga City has other ways to communicate with the community effectively, by creating groups and inviting the neighborhood units to inform and discuss digitally.

3. Action and Communication

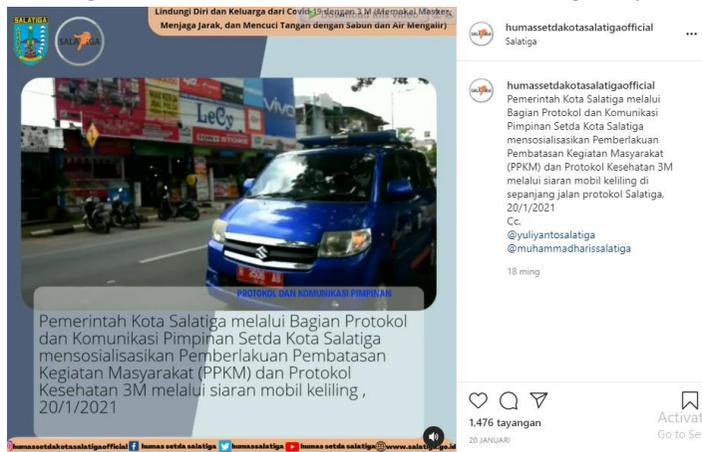
a. Providing Information Dissemination

In carrying out his strategy, Public Relations of the Salatiga City Secretariat provides digital information dissemination around Salatiga. It aptly follows what Wibowo says:

"We always disseminate information to the public that does not believe hoaxes. If there are any hoaxes, we directly stamp "hoax" and a logo of the Salatiga City government to avoid the spread of the hoax news widely. We maximize the information dissemination through social media, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter. Then, we broadcast (the information) around Salatiga by using a car to reach all circles. We use Javanese language when we communicate to Mbah-mbah (senior people) in the village, and we do that every day".

The public relations of Salatiga City Government disseminate the information to the community through social media such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and Youtube, targeting young people and those who understand social media and technology. As for those who do not have social media or understand technology, they provide daily mobile information through villages to educate and present the information needed by the community (Perdana, 2020). The community would no longer worry about getting information that is not based on facts and truths.

Figure 4. Mobile information around Salatiga city



The image shows the way public relations of Salatiga City communicate to the local communities using local language, spreading the information from a car. They choose simple sentences instead of standard forms, such as release (Saifulloh, 2021). By providing the information needed by the community, public relations can build a good community relationship because of the openness between them in dealing with the Covid 19 hoax.

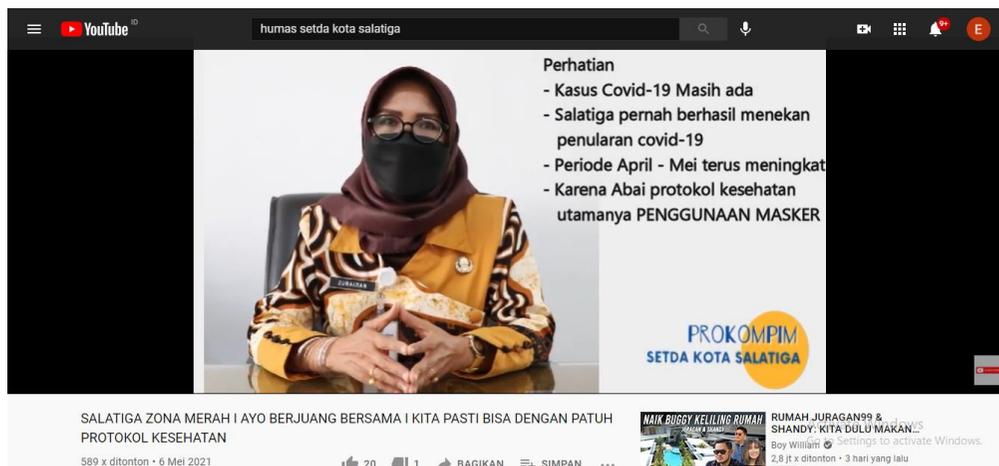
b. Creating Video

Wibowo says the public relations produces content every day:

"We also make videos every day, featuring spokesperson from the City's health agency (DKK). The video is made to inform the community, and it can be seen on our Youtube Humas Setda Salatiga channel. We must be able to put ourselves as communication facilitators that are really expected by the community. In making a covid 19 video for Videotron, there is always a deaf translator to anticipate the ones who may be deaf but can see".)

Based on the interview above, public relations of the city secretariate is responsible for providing information, educating, convincing, gaining sympathy, and arousing public interest to understand and acknowledge a situation (Simarmata, 2020). In this case, creating not only content containing infographics but also visuals, and the government prepares translators for disabled people, especially the deaf.

Figure 5. Public Relations Youtube Channel Setda Kota Salatiga



The picture above shows that the public relations must work with the techniques and operating equipment owned as carefully as possible. So that the video made can serve as a helpful visual communication tool (Yusuf, 2017). The message is expected to be conveyed to the right target.

c. Educating the Covid 19 Information

Wibowo also said that in addition to clarifying the Covid 19 hoax, his division also made content containing the Covid 19 information. He said:

"We must convey to the public the information related to Covid 19. It is conveyed to the public to anticipate the hoaxes that appear. (The kind of information about) what is Covid 19, why we get the disease".

The statement shows that the content creation is done in a way so it could be absorbed by the community applied to themselves, their families, and communities. Even the wider community and the public need to continue to be educated so they can deliberately distinguish fake news or hoaxes that are still rife on the internet (Pakpahan, 2017).

Figure 6. Digital Educational Content



Social media provides a variety of facilities that are very useful for its users. By having social media, we can easily communicate and find information regardless of distance and time.

From the data obtained, there are some obstacles in managing the Covid 19 hoax are as follows:

1. There are still some glitches in the cooperation, such as getting clarified data quickly from the City's Health Agency to develop a solution. Creating a working group can convey the information faster with a better coordination. Wibowo said:

"We, in the Public Relations division, sometimes were hampered in cooperation. We asked the City's Health Agency, but it took too long to respond, and of course, that's an obstacle for us. To overcome the problem, we have a group together so that this information can be answered; hoaxes can be quickly handled".

It shows that reaching a solid and compact team is not easy because many people have different opinions and thoughts. It's a dynamic thing that can't be denied and makes it difficult for the team to achieve effective work. But something difficult does not mean that it cannot be done. The City's Public Relations and other coworkers can overcome these obstacles well by creating a group so that the messages can get a fast response. Each team member understands the importance

of cooperation. This way, the unit will work, and the relationship would be established better to carry out the program as planned. (Setiyanti, 2012).

2. Wibowo also revealed that sometimes there would be miscommunication between officers because of worries about the news. The solution to these obstacles is always to maintain good and effective communication.

"Sometimes we also have our fears, sometimes we, as officers, also have fears. Why is it like this, why is it like that, what will it be like this, well such thing like that can sometimes create miscommunication between us. But to anticipate it, we always communicate, Because effective communication is the solution and the way out."

In his explanation, it is seen that the spreading of many Covid 19 hoaxes can cause fear in the team and miscommunication. Because of that, intensive communication between colleagues must be built both through meetings and different meetings among the work team members so that people will understand their tasks and objectives. Communication between coworkers does not always need to be done face to face. Because there are currently many communication applications that can be utilized, intensive communication that prioritizes quantity and quality should be balanced. It will make a solid interpersonal relationship between superiors and subordinates. Transparency and trust gained from communication interactions can help decide changes in mentality and behavior in organizations. (Wijaya, 2013). There must be openness, honesty, trust, and empathy in communication.

CONCLUSION

As a public authority engaged in communication, the community's trust becomes essential, especially in a pandemic. The community expects the City's public relations can quickly overcome Covid-19 hoaxes widely circulating on social and mass media.

As for the strategy to overcome the hoax, the Public Relations of the Salatiga City take some steps, from searching data to city health agency and confirming to the community. Furthermore, the PR also needs to cooperate with many parties in local government to foster good internal and external relations. To reach people who do not understand technology, the Salatiga city government provides digital socialization through social media and mobile socialization around every area in Salatiga. In addition, the PR also made a video with a spokesperson from the City's health agency which will be uploaded on the Youtube channel and Videotron. The Public Relations of the City also provides other content about Covid 19.

On the other hand, it also aims to educate people by giving information around Covid 19 and eliminating hoax discussions. The Public Relations of the Salatiga City Secretariat also invites the public to discuss online using applications, then monitor and evaluate them. The PR division aims to see how the community responds to the City's strategy in dealing with Covid-19 hoaxes. From the evaluation results, it can be seen how public awareness of the dangers of unclear information compared to 2020.

The Covid 19 pandemic brought a significant impact to the City's public relations in carrying out its duties. During the pandemic, the staff is required to adapt to technological developments and be able to provide accurate information. In carrying out its duties, the PR division of the City met some obstacles that could be overcome by creating a working group. This strategy helps to get information and to coordinate faster. Obstructed communication can be solved by actively maintaining communication between staff. This strategy could reduce miscommunication often occurring between colleagues due to the high number of Covid-19 related hoaxes.

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