

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS AT THE OFFICE OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS IN RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS OF SUSTAINABLE MARRIAGE (A CASE STUDY AT THE OFFICE OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS IN PERCUT SEI TUAN SUB-DISTRICT, DELI SERDANG REGENCY)

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Abstract : The low level of public awareness regarding the importance of mental, spiritual, and legal preparedness in building a household presents a challenge to achieving healthy and sustainable marriages. This study aims to analyze the role of public relations at the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) in Percut Sei Tuan Sub-District in enhancing community awareness of quality marriages. Using a descriptive qualitative approach and a case study method, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. The findings reveal that the public relations division of the KUA plays a strategic role as an educational facilitator, value communicator, and social connector through programs such as premarital counseling, sakinah family guidance, and the utilization of both traditional and digital media. The KUA applies the Public Information and Two-Way Symmetrical models to deliver messages in both informative and dialogic ways. These findings indicate that professionally managed public relations, grounded in local values, can effectively increase public understanding of the importance of legitimate, healthy, and sustainable marriages. The implications suggest that the KUA should strengthen the capacity of its public relations functions and expand the reach of its educational efforts through more adaptive communication innovations.

Keywords: *Public Relations, Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), Public Awareness, Sustainable Marriage*

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Introduction

Marriage is a social and religious institution that holds a central role in the life of society. In Indonesia, marriage is not merely perceived as a legal bond between two individuals, but also as a foundational pillar in building a harmonious and prosperous family that contributes to the nation's social stability (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2023). Within this context, individual readiness including mental, spiritual, emotional, and legal aspects becomes a crucial element in creating a healthy and sustainable household (Rahayu & Pratama, 2021).

Nevertheless, social realities indicate that the majority of the public still lacks adequate awareness of the complexities and responsibilities of marriage. This is reflected in the high divorce rate, the prevalence of underage marriage, and the large number of unregistered marriages (Putra & Wijaya, 2020). These phenomena serve as indicators of the public's limited understanding of the importance of comprehensive readiness prior to forming a family, which in turn gives rise to various social problems at both micro and macro levels.

Public relations (PR), known in Indonesian as *kehumasan*, is a strategic communication process carried out by individuals or institutions to build and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with their publics, both internally and externally. PR is not merely a one-way communication activity, but a continuous effort to foster understanding and trust between institutions and the wider community (Rondonuwu, 2016).

Conceptually, PR is seen as an integral part of an organization's managerial functions managing communication, facilitating the exchange of information, and building institutional image. Emerson Reck (Jannah, 2024) describes PR as an extension of policy implementation and organizational services, aligned with public interests in order to gain trust and support from the community. This is reinforced by Frank Jefkin's perspective (Anom, 2024), which defines PR as a strategic approach to garnering public sympathy without the use of coercive methods.

Ruslan emphasizes that PR not only serves as a message conveyer but also as an image builder and a guardian of institutional reputation. In this context, PR plays the role of communicator, relationship builder, management supporter, and positive image creator (Nurhanifah, Aggriany, et al., 2023). A PR practitioner is expected to fulfill these roles professionally in response to communication challenges in the modern era, which is marked by accelerated information flow and the complexity of public opinion (Nurhanifah, Ananda, et al., 2022).

In practice, PR specialists can act as intermediaries in both direct (face-to-face) and indirect (media or press-based) communication within local government contexts. They are also responsible for creating and implementing activities that support public information dissemination. In this sense, publicity functions as a way to promote institutional agendas. Maintaining good relations with both local and national communities helps establish a positive image of the government and earns public trust (Nurhanifah, Ananda, et al., 2023).

Building a corporate image is one of the primary goals of public relations. One effective approach is by clearly articulating and promoting the identity of the institution. The operational model developed by Gray and Balmer (1998) illustrates how public relations and organizational image are interrelated. A company's corporate identity and reputation reflect how it is perceived by the public, and a positive image

can provide strategic advantages. In terms of public relations, corporate communication plays a critical role in this process (Parapat et al., 2023).

Grunig and Hunt developed four principal models of public relations that serve as a reference for many organizations, including governmental and non-profit institutions. The first is the Press Agency/Publicity Model, which emphasizes one-way communication aimed at creating a positive image through publicity, often without regard for informational accuracy or public feedback. The second is the Public Information Model, which focuses on disseminating factual, accurate, and educational information in line with principles of transparency and public accountability. The third is the Two-Way Asymmetrical Model, a two-way communication model that utilizes public feedback primarily to benefit the organization, often through persuasive techniques that do not significantly alter institutional policies. The fourth is the Two-Way Symmetrical Model, which promotes balanced, dialogic communication wherein the institution listens to public aspirations and adjusts its policies accordingly to foster mutual understanding and benefit (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

Wilbur Schramm's theory of effective communication underscores that successful communication depends on a shared field of experience between the communicator and the audience. Communication becomes effective when the experiences and understandings of both parties intersect, allowing messages to be received accurately and avoiding misinterpretation. Key elements of effective communication include message clarity, the appropriateness of media selection to the audience (e.g., using social media for youth or public lectures for the general community), the presence of feedback mechanisms to evaluate and refine messages, and the application of empathy, especially in sensitive contexts such as family or marriage counseling (Schramm, 1954).

In addressing these challenges, the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), under the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, holds a strategic role not only in managing marriage registration but also in performing educational and communicative functions for the community (Susilo & Handayani, 2021). Through its public relations role, KUA is expected to effectively disseminate information, facilitate public dialogue, and instill religious and social values that support the formation of *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah* families (Prasetyo & Dewi, 2019).

One such institution actively fulfilling this role is the KUA of Percut Sei Tuan Sub-District in Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra. This office consistently implements educational programs such as premarital counseling (*Bimbingan Perkawinan*), *sakinah* family outreach, and the utilization of communication media to spread information to the broader public. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of its communication strategies requires ongoing evaluation to ensure that the goal of enhancing public awareness is optimally achieved (Santoso & Kurniawan, 2021).

Based on this background, this study seeks to examine in depth the public relations role of the KUA in increasing public awareness regarding the importance of building sustainable marriages. Furthermore, this study aims to offer strategic recommendations for strengthening institutional communication in the context of public service delivery grounded in religious values and local wisdom.

Research Methodology

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the role of public relations at the Office of Religious Affairs

(KUA) in enhancing public awareness regarding sustainable marriage. This approach is considered appropriate for describing social phenomena in a holistic and contextual manner from the perspective of research subjects (Sugiyono, 2017). The type of research used is a case study, with a specific focus on the KUA of Percut Sei Tuan Sub-District as the single unit of analysis. The case study method enables the researcher to explore in detail the public relations communication strategies implemented and their impact on public perceptions and understanding of sustainable marriage.

The research was conducted at the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) of Percut Sei Tuan Sub-District, located at Jl. Besar Tembung No. 34, Bandar Khalifah, Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra. This site was selected due to the KUA's active role in providing marriage registration services and premarital education to the public. Data collection took place on Monday, March 10, 2025, from 09:00 to 12:00 WIB. The primary subject of this study was H. Isma'il Panjaitan, S.Ag., an Islamic religious counselor who plays a key role in the implementation of public relations communication at the KUA. Information from this key informant served as the main source for illustrating how communication strategies are applied to support sustainable marriage.

Data were collected using three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with informants directly involved in public relations activities, including KUA officials (Kriyantoro, 2012). Participant observation was conducted to directly observe communication and educational activities carried out by the KUA, such as premarital counseling sessions and religious outreach programs (Moleong, 2017). Meanwhile, the documentation technique was used to gather secondary data in the form of counseling modules, brochures, activity reports, and content from the KUA's official social media channels related to sustainable marriage campaigns.

Results and Discussion

Service Programs and Activities at the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) of Percut Sei Tuan Sub-District

The Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) of Percut Sei Tuan Sub-District serves as a crucial entity in community religious administration (Ministry of Religious Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, 2023). As an operational unit under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the KUA primarily focuses on delivering religious services, particularly in the areas of marriage registration, sakinah family counseling, and religious education (Susilo & Handayani, 2021). Preliminary field observations identified several key programs routinely implemented by the KUA of Percut Sei Tuan, including the following:

First, Marriage Registration Services. This is the KUA's primary function, encompassing registration procedures, administrative verification, and validation of marriage contracts in accordance with both religious and state legal regulations. The KUA functions as an official institution responsible for administering legal marriage documentation.

Second, Premarital Counseling (Bimbingan Perkawinan/Bimwin). This program provides comprehensive education for prospective brides and grooms, emphasizing the importance of mental, spiritual, psychological, and legal preparedness in building a household. Bimwin sessions are conducted both offline and, when

necessary, online, as part of the KUA's initiative to promote the government's premarital education agenda.

Third, Religious Outreach and Sakinah Family Counseling. Through its religious counselors, the KUA conducts lectures, discussions, and community guidance sessions aimed at educating the public on spousal rights and responsibilities, household ethics, Islamic marital values, and strategies to prevent early marriage (Setiawan & Fauzi, 2021). The KUA also holds responsibility for policy dissemination, premarital education, and promotion of Islamic family values. Specifically, these outreach activities address themes such as marital duties, domestic ethics, and the role of the family in shaping an Islamic generation.

Fourth, Institutional Collaboration. The KUA of Percut Sei Tuan actively engages in collaboration with external institutions, including educational establishments and community organizations. These partnerships facilitate the organization of seminars, workshops, and awareness campaigns on sustainable marriage. Premarital counseling is delivered both at the KUA office and through collaborative outreach initiatives.

Public Relations Strategies of the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) in Disseminating Information to the Public

Public relations strategies within the context of the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) are essential not only as a medium for disseminating information but also as a communication facilitator between the KUA and the local community (Ruslan, 2018). The public relations strategy adopted by the KUA of Percut Sei Tuan Sub-District emphasizes an informative and educational approach, implemented through several key methods:

First, direct communication (face-to-face). This strategy involves direct engagement with the public through programs such as premarital counseling (Bimbingan Perkawinan/Bimwin), outreach activities at the village level, and individual consultations at the KUA office. The KUA proactively provides premarital education and facilitates in-person counseling sessions to ensure prospective couples are well-informed.

Second, the use of traditional information media. The KUA utilizes conventional media such as bulletin boards, brochures, and educational modules, which are distributed both within the office and in public spaces. The availability of brochures and premarital guidance modules as secondary data in this study indicates the effectiveness of these tools in communicating key messages.

Third, the use of social media. Although still in its early stages, the KUA has begun adopting digital platforms such as WhatsApp groups and Facebook to disseminate up-to-date information. This initiative aligns with public awareness campaigns that leverage social media and adapt communication channels to suit the demographic characteristics of the target audience (Maulaan & Saputra, 2022).

Fourth, information transparency. The KUA promotes transparency by publicly displaying its vision, mission, the Ministry of Religious Affairs' employee code of ethics, and service flow procedures within the office environment. This practice reflects the Public Information Model, which emphasizes the dissemination of factual and accurate information to the public.

The Role of Public Relations at the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) in Raising Public Awareness on Sustainable Marriage

The public relations (PR) function of the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) plays a pivotal role in fostering public awareness regarding the urgency of establishing lawful, healthy, and sustainable family institutions. As an extension of institutional communication, KUA's public relations serves as a bridge between state policies and the community, particularly in the context of premarital education and counseling (Ruslan, 2018).

KUA's PR role encompasses three essential aspects.

First, as an educational facilitator, PR is responsible for organizing premarital counseling programs that emphasize the importance of emotional, spiritual, and legal readiness in building a household. These programs not only provide normative information but also create dialogic spaces for prospective couples to understand their roles and responsibilities within marriage.

Second, the PR unit serves as a communicator of values by conveying and instilling religious and social norms that support the development of *sakinah* families. Through religious outreach, informational media, and the active promotion of marriage grounded in commitment, ethics, and legal-religious harmony, the KUA fulfills its mission of value-based education (Susilo & Handayani, 2021).

Third, KUA's PR acts as a social connector through participatory two-way communication. Rather than merely delivering policies, it also gathers public aspirations and needs, which inform future strategies for communication and public services.

Overall, the PR function within KUA demonstrates significant potential as a social transformation agent capable of improving public literacy on sustainable marriage. Adaptive communication strategies, professionally managed and rooted in local values, enable KUA to contribute meaningfully in reducing early marriage rates, young-age divorce, and unregistered marriages (Ardianto & Soemirat, 2019). Thus, strengthening PR capacity becomes a strategic necessity in advancing family development programs in Indonesia.

The Effectiveness of KUA's Public Relations Communication in Message Delivery

Based on observations and interviews with religious counselors, the public relations communication practiced by the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) of Percut Sei Tuan Sub-District demonstrates a high level of effectiveness in delivering its messages. This effectiveness can be identified through several key indicators.

First, the messages delivered are clear and easily understood, especially in the context of premarital counseling (Bimwin). Key messages regarding premarital education, prevention of early marriage, and the formation of *sakinah* families are presented in a direct and relevant manner, minimizing ambiguity for the audience.

Second, the choice of communication media is tailored to the characteristics of the target audience. The KUA employs sermons for general public audiences, while visual materials are used to engage younger generations. This media adaptation contributes significantly to message effectiveness.

Third, the availability of Q&A sessions during premarital counseling allows community members to participate actively. This two-way communication facilitates message evaluation and adjustment based on participant responses.

Fourth, positive participant responses are reflected in increased interest in Bimwin and a rise in questions related to sustainable marriage concepts. Nevertheless, some challenges persist, such as limited public understanding of the importance of mental, emotional, and legal preparedness for marriage (Ardianto & Soemirat, 2019). Therefore, a deeper assessment of PR communication effectiveness is necessary to address these limitations.

Analysis of KUA's Public Relations Role Based on Effective Communication and Public Relations Theory

The PR role carried out by the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) of Percut Sei Tuan Sub-District can be analyzed through the lens of communication theory and modern public relations concepts. In this context, the public relations models developed by Grunig and Hunt serve as a relevant theoretical framework for examining PR practices in public institutions like the KUA.

Observations of KUA's PR activities indicate that the most frequently used model is the Public Information Model, which focuses on disseminating factual, accurate, and educational information without expecting direct feedback from the audience (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2013). This is evident in the KUA's dissemination of information related to marriage registration, spousal rights and responsibilities, and alignment with both religious and state laws. These messages are delivered through printed media, religious counseling, and regularly scheduled premarital sessions.

Additionally, the KUA has begun integrating elements of the Two-Way Symmetrical Model, which emphasizes balanced two-way communication. This model enables interaction between the institution and the public through open dialogue, consultation, and idea exchange (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). This approach is evident in premarital counseling (Bimwin) and family consultations, where participants are encouraged to express questions, opinions, and concerns that later inform service improvement.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of KUA's communication strategy can also be analyzed using Wilbur Schramm's theory of effective communication. In this framework, KUA PR efforts aim to create a shared field of experience between communicator and audience (Schramm, 1954). This is achieved by tailoring communication messages to the local cultural context, educational level, and specific needs of prospective couples. Key elements of effective communication such as message clarity, appropriate media selection, feedback opportunities, and empathetic delivery are integral components of KUA's strategy to reach its audience effectively.

In conclusion, based on these two theoretical frameworks, it can be asserted that KUA's public relations do not merely serve a one-way informational function, but also act as a mediator that fosters constructive dialogue with the public. This approach reflects the PR function as a social change agent, capable of educating the public, enhancing legal and religious awareness, and supporting the realization of sustainable marriages.

Conclusion

This study affirms that the public relations (PR) function of the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) in Percut Sei Tuan Sub-District plays an optimal and strategic role in increasing public awareness of the importance of sustainable marriage. Through programs such as Premarital Counseling (Bimbingan Perkawinan/Bimwin)

and Sakinah Family Outreach, as well as the use of both traditional and digital communication media, the KUA's PR unit has successfully fulfilled its roles as an educational facilitator, a communicator of values, and a social connector. The application of the Public Information Model and Two-Way Symmetrical Model reflects the effectiveness of informative and dialogic communication in enhancing public understanding.

These findings demonstrate that professionally managed public relations grounded in local values can play a significant role in shaping societal awareness of lawful, healthy, and sustainable marriage. Based on these results, it is recommended that the KUA of Percut Sei Tuan continue to strengthen its public relations capacity, including the development of human resources, supporting facilities, and the expansion of educational outreach through more adaptive and creative communication innovations, such as the use of interactive digital platforms and collaboration with local community organizations.

However, this study is limited in scope as it focuses solely on a single KUA office in a specific region. Therefore, future research is encouraged to conduct comparative studies involving other KUA offices across different regions or to include a broader sample of community members in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the national effectiveness of KUA's public relations functions.

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