

MEDIA RELATIONS IN MAINTAINING INSTITUTIONAL REPUTATION OF THE WEST SUMATERA REGIONAL POLICE

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Abstract

Media relations is a central function of public relations aimed at building productive relationships with mass media to support accurate and timely information dissemination. The West Sumatra Regional Police (Polda Sumbar) has faced negative news coverage that influenced its institutional reputation, prompting its Public Relations Division to strengthen media relations practices. This study examines how Polda Sumbar implements media relations as a reputation management strategy in the context of increasingly dynamic digital media. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed within a post-positivist paradigm. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis, and were analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana model. J.E. Grunig's Excellence Theory in Public Relations was used to understand the type of communication and relationship developed between Polda Sumbar and the media. The findings show that Polda Sumbar applies several media relations strategies, including organizing press conferences, utilizing digital communication groups, providing information verification services, and conducting informal interactions with journalists to strengthen interpersonal rapport. These practices reflect two-way symmetrical communication characterized by openness, responsiveness, trust-building, and collaboration. The institution also performs continuous media monitoring and evaluation to anticipate emerging issues that may threaten its reputation. The study concludes that media relations serve as a strategic tool for sustaining institutional reputation, enhancing public trust, and supporting organizational accountability. It recommends strengthening public relations competencies and optimizing digital communication to ensure more effective and sustainable media relations practices in the future.

Key words: *Communication, Maintaining, Media Relations, Polda Sumbar, Reputation*

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INTRODUCTION

It is undeniable that media relations now play an important role in determining steps to shape and maintain an agency's reputation in the public eye. Media relations itself is one of the activities carried out by public relations in establishing relationships with the mass media to provide positive feedback for agencies, such as facilitating the process of disseminating information about agencies to the public (Darmastuti, 2012, p. 40). This is also done by the West Sumatra Regional Police (Polda Sumbar), which is managed by the Sub-division of Public Relations of the West Sumatra Regional Police, in order to provide information related to the West Sumatra Regional Police that is intended to foster and develop community participation.

The West Sumatra Regional Police is a government institution that has recently been in the public spotlight, especially in the Minang area. This is due to reports of several police officers committing unlawful acts or cases handled by Polda that have received special attention from the public. This situation could certainly become a major problem. One of the news stories in June 2024 that attracted public attention was the case of AM, a 13-year-old child who was found dead under the Kuranji Bridge, Padang City, on June 9, 2024. This case gained traction after a report in the daily newspaper Tempo speculated about the suspicious circumstances surrounding AM's death and stated that AM died as a result of abuse by members of the West Sumatra Regional Police who were controlling a brawl at the time (Rahima Sari, 2024).

This case has received widespread public attention, both locally and nationally. This makes it a relevant case study for analyzing how institutions such as the West Sumatra Regional Police respond to events that have a major impact on their public image. This case occurred relatively recently, allowing researchers to observe the West Sumatra Regional Police's response in real time. This provides an opportunity to identify best practices as well as areas for improvement. In addition, the aspect of public information

disclosure is also important to examine, given that information transparency is one of the main principles in building and maintaining public trust in government institutions. Therefore, researchers want to know the media relations practices carried out by the West Sumatra Regional Police, including the extent to which public information disclosure is applied in handling the AM case.

The response to one case alone is not enough to describe the complexity of the reputation faced. News reports continue to circulate with numerous cases of law violations by police officers in various media channels, which certainly pose a threat to the reputation of the West Sumatra Regional Police and affect public trust. As reported in the online news article www.tvrisumbar.co.id on January 2, 2025, entitled "West Sumatra Police Chief Mentions 34 Members Disciplined Throughout 2024," in 2024, a total of 292 police officers committed violations throughout the year (Furqan, 2025). This number increased compared to 2023, when 8 members were dismissed without honor (PTDH). The cases committed by members of the West Sumatra Regional Police varied, ranging from drugs, domestic violence, shootings, to involvement in LGBT cases.

The scope of the West Sumatra Regional Police is not limited to the police headquarters, but also includes police forces in 19 districts/cities in West Sumatra. Thus, news reports related to the police in these 19 districts/cities also affect the reputation of the West Sumatra Regional Police. One of the cases that often emerges from the researchers' initial observations is the prevalence of illegal fees charged by police officers during roadside checks. This issue of illegal fees is complex and has long been a public concern. Often, people who are stopped during traffic raids are unaware of their offense, and traffic police officers claim to be helping them, but instead ask for money. This case went viral in 2023 in relation to illegal fees charged by the Bukittinggi Traffic Police, as quoted from the online news site harianhaluan.com on August 13, 2023, entitled "Causing Unrest! Kombes

Yessi Kurniati Apologizes for Bukittinggi Traffic Police Charging Illegal Fees" (Darmawan, 2023).

This series of events indirectly worsened the reputation of the police in the eyes of the public. Reputation itself is an accumulation of perceptions, assessments, or evaluations from the public as stakeholders regarding the organization's capabilities based on their experiences (Sahman, Susanta, & Fauzi, 2018, p. 16). This is evidenced by the Kompas.id Research and Development Survey in July 2024, quoted from Kompas.com, regarding the trend of positive images of state institutions, where the image of the Indonesian National Police was 73.1 percent (Erika, 2024). Then, it dropped to 65.1 percent in September 2024 and rose 0.6 percent to 65.7 percent in January 2025 (Wiryono, 2025). It can be said that one of the factors affecting the decline in the police's reputation in the public eye is the violation of the law by the police themselves, whether it be the Sambo case, the Teddy Minahasa case, the AM case, or the shooting of fellow police officers due to illegal business protection. In reality, not all media coverage is in line with the wishes of public relations. On the other hand, the media has a principle of "bad news is good news," meaning that bad news is actually considered good news for the media because it attracts public attention and increases the selling value of the news. This principle makes negative issues from an institution spread more quickly and gain more space in the media compared to positive news coverage. Often, journalists are more interested in exploring the controversial aspects or failures of an institution than its achievements. This puts public institutions, including the police, in a vulnerable position, as a single mistake can become a major focus and damage a reputation that has been built over a long period of time.

The media itself has great power in many aspects because it can do things that can have a negative impact on institutions, such as bringing down governments. The potential for bad news to emerge must be taken seriously by public relations officers. This does not mean

that public relations officers should cover up information, but rather ensure that all information circulating is contextualized correctly and impartially. In this context, the role of public relations is not only to convey information, but also to manage narratives that ensure the public understands events based on facts, not merely on framing that is detrimental to the institution (Darmastuti, 2012, p. 40). Therefore, in carrying out media relations, public relations needs to have a deep understanding of the characteristics, needs, and workings of each type of media. A well-established relationship between public relations and the media will facilitate the process of clarification, verification, and more transparent information delivery, so that the institution's reputation can be maintained amid the flood of negative news (Syahputra, 2019, p. 6).

In this context, reputation is a valuable asset for an institution that affects all aspects of its sustainability. Based on previous research by Fatih Haydar Muqarabin (2023) entitled "Media Relations Activities in Building the Image and Reputation of the Government (A Study of the Public Relations of the Solok Regency Government)", it is known that improving reputation is not an easy task. It requires various methods that sometimes require large costs and support from many parties to achieve it. The relationship between media relations and reputation is very significant. Media relations, which include various activities such as dissemination, serve as the main bridge between the West Sumatra Regional Police and the community. Through strategic interactions with the media, the Regional Police can manage public perception and strengthen the institution's image in the eyes of the community. The media plays an important role as an intermediary in disseminating information that can build or maintain the reputation of the West Sumatra Regional Police. This relationship is very close because the reputation of an institution is not only shaped by the actions of the West Sumatra Regional Police, but also by how the information is

received, perceived, and reported by the media. If media relations are managed well, the information conveyed through the media will strengthen a positive image, demonstrate transparency, and increase the accountability of the Regional Police in the eyes of the public. Conversely, a lack of transparency or failure to establish good relations with the media can lead to misunderstandings, reinforce negative reporting, and ultimately damage the institution's reputation.

The reputation built through media relations not only has an impact on short-term image, but also affects long-term legitimacy and the level of public trust in the police institution. In the digital age, which is characterized by the speed of information flow and the prevalence of disinformation, media relations have become increasingly important as a mechanism for control and clarification so that the information circulating remains accurate and balanced. The West Sumatra Regional Police, as a public institution, is required not only to be reactive when facing a crisis, but also to be proactive in establishing ongoing communication with the media as a strategic partner. Therefore, media relations is not just a communication tool, but a key strategy in shaping, maintaining, and restoring an institution's reputation in the public eye. Effective relations with the media enable two-way dialogue, in which the Regional Police not only convey information but also receive input, criticism, and public expectations voiced through the media. In the context of the West Sumatra Regional Police, successfully establishing healthy and professional relations with the media plays an important role in building public trust, strengthening institutional legitimacy, and ensuring the sustainability of a positive image amid various reputational challenges.

The steps taken by the West Sumatra Regional Police's Public Relations Division to maintain its reputation were conveyed by a member of the division, Aiptu Sahman Nasution, SH, M.I.Kom. In addition to improving internal performance, the Public Relations Division works together with local mass media

through media relations to provide accurate information openly to the public. Moreover, in carrying out their duty to provide information, public relations officers will encounter difficulties if they do not build good relationships with the media because, undeniably, the mass media is part of the daily consumption of the community. Thus, the rapid flow of information in the mass media has encouraged public relations practitioners to realize the importance of the media's role in shaping the positive image of an institution.

This fact forms the basis for researchers to further analyze the media relations practices carried out by the West Sumatra Regional Police in maintaining their reputation through media relations, as highlighted in the study titled "Media Relations in Maintaining Institutional Reputation (Case Study on the Public Relations Division of the West Sumatra Regional Police)."

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a post-positivism paradigm that emphasizes understanding social reality through the perspectives of the actors involved. The method chosen is a descriptive qualitative focusing on media relations practices carried out by the West Sumatra Regional Police Public Relations Division. The subject of the study is the West Sumatra Regional Police Public Relations Division, while the object of the study includes media relations strategies and implementation in maintaining the institution's reputation. Informants were selected using purposive techniques, so that the selected sources were truly relevant and had in-depth experience and knowledge related to the research topic.

The researcher used several techniques to collect data, namely semi-structured interviews, observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to explore information flexibly, while still adhering to the prepared question guidelines. Observation was used to gain a direct understanding of the media relations practices carried out, while document analysis

was conducted to supplement the data through a review of archives, reports, and media coverage related to the activities of the West Sumatra Regional Police. The combination of these techniques ensured that the data obtained was richer and more in-depth.

Data analysis in this study refers to the model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which includes four main stages: data collection, data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data condensation is carried out to filter and summarize information so that it is more structured, while data presentation helps to reveal important patterns in a clearer form. From this process, conclusions are then drawn through the synthesis of data from various sources to produce a comprehensive understanding. This approach allows researchers to explore in depth the West Sumatra Regional Police's media relations practices in maintaining its reputation, while identifying supporting factors and challenges faced.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Implementation of Media Relations in Maintaining Reputation

The West Sumatra Regional Police conducts various media relations activities to maintain its reputation amid often sensitive news coverage. Partnership programs with the media are the main foundation for maintaining fast, accurate, and accountable information flow. Through the Public Relations Subdivision, the Regional Police builds intensive communication with hundreds of local media outlets so that every issue concerning the institution can be confirmed and conveyed back to the public appropriately. In practice, the implementation of media relations is not rigid. Instead, all measures are tailored to the communication needs of each issue, especially when there are major cases such as the AM case, which triggered a high volume of news coverage. In situations like this, the mechanisms for clarification, confirmation, and delivery of official information are strengthened so that the

public does not only receive speculative news. In addition to formal efforts, the Regional Police also builds interpersonal approaches through daily communication, face-to-face meetings, and quick interactions on WhatsApp groups. This closeness facilitates the verification process and reduces the risk of misunderstanding.

The implementation of media relations is clearly evident in the informants' statements. One informant explained, "The goal of public relations, especially public information in partnership with the media, is to align ideas. So when there is an incident related to the West Sumatra Regional Police, it is hoped that the news reporting the facts will be quickly confirmed and communicated to the public" (Idha Gusmara, July 15, 2024). From this statement, it appears that the main focus of the Regional Police is not merely to disseminate information, but to align perceptions with the media so that any news reports that appear are unbiased and still refer to the facts. This alignment of ideas and perceptions is necessary to reduce the confusion that often arises when news has not been verified. In addition, field data shows that the Regional Police partners with more than 120 mass media outlets, including print, online, and electronic media. This number indicates that the intensity of communication that must be managed is very high, so that the implementation of media relations cannot be done sporadically. Consistency in maintaining relationships with these many media outlets strengthens the Police's legitimacy as a reliable source of information.

Holding press conferences is also one of the most visible forms of implementation. Press conferences are used to announce cases, clarify issues, and provide official explanations regarding events that could potentially affect the institution's reputation. The information provided in this forum serves as a means of aligning narratives so that the media can obtain a clear and direct picture from the main source. Furthermore, the use of WhatsApp groups as a fast communication channel enables the

Regional Police to provide clarification within minutes when issues develop through social media or online news. This informal channel is very helpful for journalists in gaining quick access to verify the accuracy of information before it is published. In addition, the Regional Police also emphasized the importance of verification. This is in line with the informant's statement that the Regional Police always gives the media the opportunity to confirm the information received before it is published as news. This approach shows that the implementation of media relations is not only oriented towards conveying messages, but also strengthening credibility through honesty and transparency.

Based on these findings, the implementation of media relations by the West Sumatra Regional Police can be seen as a strategic communication process that combines formal and informal mechanisms to maintain the stability of the institution's reputation. Practices such as press conferences, communication via WhatsApp, verification facilities, and face-to-face interactions show that relationships with the media are built in layers: fast, responsive, and based on closeness. With these steps, the Regional Police can anticipate potential media crises while ensuring that the public receives accurate and reliable information. These activities show that media relations are not merely a routine, but an important element that supports how institutions maintain public trust in the face of constantly evolving issues.

2. Media Relations Strategies for Maintaining Reputation

The media relations strategy implemented by the West Sumatra Regional Police Public Relations Division plays an important role in maintaining the institution's reputation amid the rapid flow of public information. In this case, media relations not only functions as a channel for disseminating information, but also as a strategic instrument for managing public perception. These steps enable them to remain relevant amid the

demands of modern society.

"Our media strategy changes depending on the situation and what we want to achieve. When we want to explore our activities, the strategy is certainly different from when we are facing negative publicity. It depends on the objective." (Dwi Sulistyawan, July 12, 2024).

Based on the informant's statement, the West Sumatra Regional Police determine their strategy based on what they are facing and what is needed. There is no fixed schedule for implementing media relations. This sometimes makes it difficult for the Public Relations Subdivision to plan media relations activities strategically. For the West Sumatra Regional Police itself, issues that arise in the police environment tend to be very dynamic and unpredictable. Sudden events such as natural disasters, riots, or major crimes often require a quick and flexible media relations response. If the schedule is too rigid, the West Sumatra Regional Police will find it difficult to adapt to rapidly changing situations. However, amid these dynamics, the West Sumatra Regional Police maintains several basic strategies that are consistent in its relationship with the media. These strategies are implemented with discipline, ensuring that a positive and trustworthy reputation is maintained. Grunig & Hunt (1984), through Excellence in Public Relations Theory, explain that communication strategies must be oriented towards symmetrical relationships with the public in order to create mutual understanding. In practice, the West Sumatra Regional Police's Public Relations Division strives to address negative issues transparently and prioritizes openness of information to the mass media. This strategy proves that reputation is not only determined by institutional performance, but also by how the media constructs issues through reporting (Syahputra, 2019). Media relations strategies are key to maintaining public trust amid complex communication challenges.

One of the main strategies implemented is providing excellent service to the mass media. Excellent service is realized by providing fast,

accurate, and verifiable information, whether through press releases, press conferences, or digital channels. Darmastuti (2012) explains that the success of public relations in maintaining reputation is highly dependent on the ability to provide reliable information. In the case of the West Sumatra Regional Police, the presence of public relations as a communication facilitator helps journalists obtain relevant data, thereby reducing the potential for news speculation. This excellent service also includes a cooperative and open attitude from public relations officials in answering questions from the media. With a closer relationship, journalists tend to present more balanced reporting. This is in line with what Iriantara (2015) stated, emphasizing the importance of the quality of the relationship between public relations and the media as a factor in the success of communication strategies.

Different cases require different approaches. When negative news coverage arises, the Public Relations Subdivision mitigates the situation by issuing press releases to the media to avoid misleading information and communicating directly through their channels. In fact, with media relations, the media is expected to be balanced in its reporting, without being biased or cornering anyone. For the West Sumatra Regional Police, the news will not always be positive about this agency, but if the news is true, the Regional Police will confirm it to the media. The Regional Police gives the media space to confirm a news story before releasing it to the media.

"So far, the Regional Police have strived to be transparent and have carried out their duties in accordance with their performance and the code of ethics that they must uphold. When journalists need confirmation about a case or something else, the Regional Police try to provide answers and be transparent about it." (Sally Della Putri, July 22, 2024)

In addition, the West Sumatra Regional Police's Public Relations Division prioritizes a strategy of building proactive relationships with the media. These relationships are

fostered through media gatherings, informal meetings, and the use of digital communication groups. This WhatsApp group also makes it easier for media colleagues to get feedback on the news they write. Although communication takes place in social media groups, there is still the possibility of communication outside of these groups, such as conversations in the field, during coffee breaks, and so on.

"So far, communication has always been two-way. When we call, they answer. When we need an interview, they can help facilitate it, or if we are in the field and don't have any visuals, we ask the public relations officer." (Tua Saman, July 17, 2024)

The establishment of this two-way communication will facilitate the communication process so that the Regional Police and the mass media can provide each other with feedback. The moments that bring the media and the West Sumatra Regional Police together are when the Public Relations Subdivision releases information about the activities of the West Sumatra Regional Police, invites the media to attend an event or press conference, covers a story, or responds to a case. The Regional Police will confirm the news or respond to requests for confirmation from the media about a particular issue. The communication is more two-way in nature, with interaction between the two parties.

This effort is in line with Jefkins' (2014) view that media relations must be built on honesty, openness, and trust. Proactive relationships enable healthier two-way communication between public relations and journalists, thereby minimizing misunderstandings. Through regular interaction, the media gains a better understanding of institutional policies, while the West Sumatra Regional Police can hear feedback directly from journalists. With an adaptive communication pattern, the institution's reputation can be strengthened not only through clarification during crises but also through constructive long-term relationships. This strategy proves that preventive communication is more effective than purely

reactive communication.

"In general, it is quite good and there is openness of public information, especially in the AM case. To date, we have given our appreciation to the Regional Police, who have tried to provide information and openness as widely as possible." (Deri Oktazulmi, July 20, 2024)

Based on the statement by Deri Oktazulmi, a reporter for Harian Singgalang, from the perspective of journalists who have been covering the AM case handled by the West Sumatra Regional Police, it can be assessed that, in general, the West Sumatra Regional Police has demonstrated fairly good public information disclosure. This is evident in the fact that the Regional Police has made efforts to be transparent in conveying information to the public. Transparency here refers to the Police being willing to provide clear, accurate, and accountable information to the public, especially to the media. This shows that the West Sumatra Regional Police are not only pursuing quantitative targets, such as speed in resolving cases or the number of cases successfully uncovered, but are also committed to maintaining integrity and public trust through ethical and professional communication, followed by the West Sumatra Regional Police's treatment of the media, such as through informal meetings to foster closer emotional and more personal relationships.

The next strategy is the implementation of the Monitor, Review, and Adjust (MRA) cycle as a continuous evaluation mechanism. The West Sumatra Regional Police actively monitors coverage in print, electronic, and online media. Each news item is then reviewed to determine its impact on public perception. Next, public relations adjusts communication through additional releases, clarifications, or changes in information delivery strategies. This evaluation model is in line with what Iriantara (2015) stated, that ideal media relations activities include planning, implementation, and evaluation. With continuous evaluation, public relations can maintain message consistency and improve previous communication weaknesses. This is crucial because reputation is dynamic

and influenced by developments in the public sphere. Through the PUP cycle, public relations has the opportunity to manage reputation more systematically and sustainably.

This step is related to the planning stage because the monitoring process is also carried out during that stage. The Public Relations Division will monitor relations with the media in the form of monitoring the mass media, such as clipping news articles from print media every day and monitoring online media using Google Analytics. By conducting effective monitoring, the West Sumatra Regional Police can increase transparency, build public trust, and improve institutional performance.

"For print media, we will clip news from newspapers that come in every day. So, this can be one of our preventive measures to ensure that a case does not occur elsewhere, or help us in developing future strategies." (Rahmat Fauzi, July 15, 2024)

The activity of creating news clippings helps provide insight to the Public Relations Division to analyze issues and adjust strategies to be implemented. The clippings that have been created will serve as a reference in determining strategies or preventative measures so that a case does not occur in other areas. Similarly, on social media or other platforms, only social media monitoring is conducted by members of the Public Relations Subdivision. If there is anything that may threaten the reputation and image, the Public Relations Subdivision will discuss with the Head of the Public Relations Division to address future steps and strategies.

An example of the application of Bidhumas Polda Sumbar's clipping analysis is when it was discovered that motorcycle theft cases in certain areas had increased significantly. In addition, the clippings also showed that the public was dissatisfied with the speed of case handling and the lack of information provided by the police. Strategies that can be formulated include increasing motorized patrols, socializing vehicle theft prevention, providing a special hotline for reporting motorcycle theft, increasing

monitoring through CCTV, and improving coordination with motorcycle repair shops and dealers to prevent the sale of stolen motorcycles.

"So we can see from the media's viewership. We can see from Google Analytics. We can see how many people are interested in reading that media, which we consider to be mainstream media." (Rahmat Fauzi, July 15, 2024)

Based on the informant's statement, after conducting media relations, the Public Relations Subdivision will monitor and review both the news coverage and the strategy. The use of Google Analytics helps in viewing the audience of each news item from online media, followed by a review process. Google Analytics is a very useful tool for monitoring and analyzing the performance of news sites. With this feature, news media can track the number of visitors, traffic sources, and reader demographics. This information helps in understanding audience interests and determining the most interesting topics. In addition, Google Analytics allows the media to identify popular content so that they can develop more effective content strategies.

Google Analytics also allows monitoring of visitor behavior on the site, including pages visited and time spent. This feature provides insight into the user experience and helps in optimizing the site to increase engagement. With the ability to set goals and perform A/B testing, news media can assess the effectiveness of their content and marketing strategies, thereby attracting more readers and increasing conversions.

The challenge faced by Bidhuma in reporting is that many media outlets tend to wait for news or information from the Regional Police for reports that are less interesting to them. So, they will only wait for releases sent to WhatsApp groups along with the documentation and will immediately process the release without having to go to the field. By reviewing regularly and making the necessary adjustments, the West Sumatra Regional Police can ensure that communication is effective and relevant to current needs.

"When I am at the office, I am required to follow journalistic principles. Not everything that is sexy to the public is interesting to the media. There are considerations for social reporting, such as whether it is in the public interest, who is announcing the information, and whether it provides educational value. So, sensationalism does not exist in the context of reporting, only in practice." (Fathul Abdi Paul, July 17, 2024)

Based on the informant's statement, sometimes the term "bad news is good news" is used in the journalism industry to attract public attention. Not all media outlets implement this type of sensationalist reporting. Many media outlets still consider that social reporting must fulfill aspects of public interest, provide information, and facilitate education. Overall, this statement highlights the importance of adhering to high journalistic standards, despite the temptation or pressure to prioritize sensational or controversial news in order to attract public or media attention. Ultimately, it comes back to the ideals and objectives of each media outlet. This is why the Police Public Relations Division conducts media relations to achieve common goals and ideas in reporting.

Based on the results of the interviews conducted by the researchers, there are times when the media has its own ideals in reporting that may be perceived as threatening to the reputation of the Police through biased reporting of an institution. Moreover, with the acceleration of information through current technology, it is very possible for an institution's reputation to collapse in an instant. *"Because the public is getting smarter, whether it is the media community or any community that receives news, this is the biggest challenge for us, especially for those of us in public relations. How to use proper language, even if it's just casual conversation during coffee breaks or during official department activities. We pay more attention to the language used, ensuring it is proper and well-received, so that everyone is satisfied."* (Idha Gusmara, July 15, 2024)

Referring to challenges and media relations reviews. The Public Relations Subdivision will make adjustments, which are

actions to change or modify something based on the results of the review. The goal is to improve effectiveness and efficiency, such as adjustments in the use of proper grammar. In the context of media relations, reviews and improvements are very important to ensure that all communication efforts are effective in achieving the desired goals. The West Sumatra Regional Police analyzes the impact of communication on the institution's image and the achievement of objectives. The West Sumatra Regional Police identifies new opportunities and challenges that arise in the communication environment. The West Sumatra Regional Police makes adjustments to its communication strategy if necessary, based on the results of the review.

A look back at the coverage of the AM case, which forms the background to this study. The West Sumatra Regional Police itself tried to take steps that showed their commitment to public information disclosure regarding this case. The West Sumatra Regional Police held a press conference on the case and was willing to conduct doorstop interviews, which are unplanned interviews. They even went so far as to open a complaint center for members of the public who might know something important about this case.

"Moreover, yesterday they opened a complaint center, which is a plus. So, what I understand is that they have let go of some of their ego and arrogance. That is why I think they are doing quite well." (Deri Oktazulmi, July 20, 2024)

In an effort to uncover the AM case thoroughly and transparently, the West Sumatra Regional Police opened themselves up to the public who had relevant information. This step shows the institution's commitment to involving all elements of society in the law enforcement process. The West Sumatra Regional Police is committed to uncovering the truth in the AM case. Thus, it is hoped that this case can be resolved thoroughly and fairly. This is especially important given the conflicting reports circulating outside and the many who have questioned the credibility of the West Sumatra Regional Police due to this case.

"So, when there is sufficient evidence and reports, it will be investigated by Itwasda and Paminal. If Propam is proven wrong, they can take disciplinary action." (Rahmat Fauzi, July 15, 2024)

This demonstrates a commitment to integrity and compliance with the law. They also show that they are prepared to find replacements if necessary, emphasizing the importance of maintaining integrity and standards within the institution. It also illustrates the importance of oversight and accountability mechanisms within the police force. A transparent and fair investigation and sanctioning process is expected to increase public trust in the police institution.

This statement reflects a firm stance on law enforcement and internal discipline, especially within an institution like the police or an organization with legal authority. From the West Sumatra Police's perspective, they are not hesitant or reluctant to impose sanctions on their members who violate the law, ranging from mere penalties to dismissal without honor. The results of the study show that these strategies are effective in mitigating potential reputation crises. Media outlets that receive excellent service are more cautious in writing news related to the police. Proactive relationships with journalists also provide space for healthy dialogue, thereby minimizing negative reporting. Continuous evaluation through PUP makes public relations communication more responsive and adaptive to situations. This is in line with Muqarabin's (2023) findings, which state that successful reputation management depends not only on communication strategies but also on consistency and sustainability in relationships with the media. Thus, the media relations strategy of the West Sumatra Regional Police can be considered a practice that integrates transparency, responsiveness, and adaptability to maintain legitimacy in the eyes of the public. The media relations strategy implemented by the West Sumatra Regional Police Public Relations Division can be understood as an integrated strategic communication process.

Through excellent service, proactive relationships, and continuous evaluation, public relations has succeeded in making media relations not just a communication activity, but an instrument of reputation management. A good reputation can only be achieved if institutional communication is based on openness, trust, and collaboration with the media. This is in line with the basic principles of Excellence in Public Relations Theory, which emphasizes symmetrical communication to achieve mutually beneficial relationships (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). Therefore, the media relations practices of the West Sumatra Regional Police can serve as a reference for other government agencies in building a strong reputation amid increasingly complex public communication challenges.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that media relations carried out by the Public Relations Division of Polda Sumbar play an essential role in maintaining the institution's reputation, especially when facing sensitive or negative news. The findings indicate that Polda Sumbar applies several key media relations practices such as press conferences, rapid digital communication, information verification, and routine coordination with journalists to ensure that the information circulated to the public remains accurate and accountable. These efforts demonstrate that maintaining reputation requires a combination of timely clarification, consistent information flow, and proactive engagement with the media.

The study also shows that media relations strategies at Polda Sumbar are situational and adaptive. When dealing with routine activities, communication focuses on promoting programs and providing general updates. However, when a reputational issue arises, the institution shifts toward strengthening clarification, coordinating intensively with journalists, and monitoring media coverage to prevent misinformation. This adaptability reflects the importance of maintaining constructive and cooperative

relationships with media partners.

The novelty of this research lies in its empirical insight that reputation management within a regional police institution is sustained not only through formal media relations strategies but also through continuous informal interactions and interpersonal communication with journalists. The study provides original evidence of how real-time narrative control, open verification practices, and two-way symmetrical communication are implemented daily in a policing context an aspect that has received limited attention in previous studies on government or law-enforcement communication.

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