

The Effectiveness of Public Relations Communication in the Public Service Acceleration Programme related to Digitalisation at Bank Sumut

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ABSTRACT

This research is motivated by the phenomenon of risk associated with the use of Sumut Mobile Banking, particularly debit transactions caused by human error, system disruptions, and potential account breaches resulting from malware infiltrating mobile devices and attacking various applications, including the Sumut Mobile application. These risks have become one of the main considerations for customers in deciding whether to use Sumut Mobile. The research employed a descriptive method with qualitative analysis. Data were collected through interviews with four employees of Bank Sumut. The findings indicate that the role of public relations has proven highly effective in advancing public service acceleration programs related to digitalization at Bank Sumut. The public relations team plays a crucial role in designing and implementing communication strategies that successfully promote the bank's digitalization initiatives to the public. Through creative marketing campaigns and transparent communication, public relations have succeeded in raising public awareness and acceptance of the digital services offered by Bank Sumut. Therefore, the role of public relations has been demonstrated as one of the key pillars in the success of public service acceleration programs related to digitalization at Bank Sumut.

Keyword : Communication, public relations, public service



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1. INTRODUCTION

The development of science and technology has had a significant impact on increasing competition in the business world, including the banking sector. As financial institutions, banks play a crucial role in providing financial services such as savings, loans, and other facilities, making customer trust a key factor for their sustainability and growth. This trust can be built through excellent service delivery, continuous service innovation, and a well-managed positive image. In this context, the role of public relations (PR) becomes highly essential, particularly in enhancing reputation and maintaining strong relationships with customers. Bank Sumut, as one of the regional financial institutions with an important role in the economy of North Sumatra, is expected to adapt to the dynamics of the digital era. Digital transformation drives the acceleration of public services, one of which is the launch of the Sumut Mobile Banking application, enabling customers to perform various transactions quickly, easily, and securely.

Nevertheless, the use of this application is not without challenges. Some customers continue to experience difficulties due to complex menu navigation, limited digital literacy, as well as technical risks such as system errors or data security threats. Despite these obstacles, the existence of Sumut Mobile Banking is still appreciated for offering flexible access through internet, SMS, and USSD services.

Based on these considerations, an effective PR communication strategy is required to strengthen Bank Sumut's image while simultaneously improving customer understanding and comfort in utilizing digital services. Therefore, this study is entitled "The Effectiveness of Public Relations Communication in Accelerating Public Services Related to Digitalization at Bank Sumut."

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Planning

Planning is a fundamental element in every organizational activity. According to Karyoto (2016), planning serves as a guideline, framework, or directive that must be followed to achieve desirable outcomes. In practice, planning involves setting both short-term and long-term objectives, as well as determining the tools to achieve them. In other words, planning is not merely about writing down ideas but also about formulating concrete steps to reach specific goals.

Darodjat (2015:29) adds that planning is a process that begins with establishing organizational objectives, followed by determining strategies, and finally formulating a comprehensive system to ensure that all parts of the organization are coordinated. This definition highlights that planning is the starting point of all managerial functions, since before organizing, directing, or supervising, managers must first develop a plan.

According to Ivancevich (2007:19), planning is the process of selecting and linking facts while making and using assumptions about the future. This allows managers to outline the activities necessary to achieve desired results. This view underscores that planning is always tied to predictions about future conditions.

Siswanto (2015:47) explains that planning derives from the word *plan*, which refers to a design or framework of something to be executed. He emphasizes that planning always involves three components: objectives, activities, and time. Planning is not a mere wishful thought, but rather a response to the future. In this context, Louis A. Allen, as cited by Siswanto, stresses that planning is a managerial activity that involves forward thinking, decision-making, and preparing to face future challenges. Handoko (2000) identifies four stages of planning: setting objectives, assessing the current situation, identifying opportunities and constraints, and developing action plans. This perspective shows that planning is both systematic and logical. Fahmi (2016) asserts that the purpose of planning is to anticipate change, provide direction, reduce waste, and establish standards for supervision. With effective planning, organizations can adapt to environmental changes, maintain focus on objectives, save time and costs, and improve oversight effectiveness.

In general, planning functions as a work guideline for organizations to ensure that activities are more focused, coordinated, and efficient. Without planning, organizational activities tend to be ineffective and struggle to achieve their intended goals.

2.2 Communication

Communication is an essential part of both social life and organizational activities. Cangara (2014) states that etymologically, the term communication derives from *communis*, meaning “shared” or “common.” This implies that communication occurs only when there is a shared meaning between interacting parties. Effendy (2013) further emphasizes that the word originates from the Latin *communicatus*, which means “to share” or “to make common.” This definition highlights communication as a process of exchanging information that creates mutual understanding. According to DeVito (2007:34), communication is the act of sending and receiving messages within a specific context, influenced by noise, and producing feedback. He identifies three dimensions of communication: physical, socio-psychological, and temporal. Similarly, Wiryanto (2004:15) explains that communication is an interrelated process in which the communicator and the recipient interact as a unified whole. Faustyna (2023) reinforces this perspective by noting that communication studies focus on how humans convey messages effectively and efficiently. Kabu, Rudianto, and Priadi (2020) highlight the importance of open communication in enhancing collaboration and job satisfaction within organizations. Likewise, Panuju (2018) views communication as an exchange of information that fosters mutual understanding. Mulyana (2014) adds that communication is also driven by human needs to reduce uncertainty, maintain self-concept, and act effectively. This aligns with Weaver’s perspective that communication is the procedure through which one person’s thoughts can influence another’s. Ais (2020) describes communication as the art of developing shared understanding among people. Thariq and Anshori (2017) also define communication as a social process involving interaction, symbols, and meaning. From these perspectives, it can be concluded that communication is not merely the transmission of messages, but rather a complex, dynamic, and continuous social process.

2.3 Communication Strategy

Cangara (2014) defines communication strategy as the art of utilizing resources to achieve communication objectives. A communication strategy involves planning, management, and adaptation to prevailing conditions. Aw (2010) asserts that strategy is a critical factor in organizational success, and it must be formulated based on the organization’s goals, circumstances, and environment. Effendy (2013) adds that strategy constitutes conditional decisions regarding actions to be taken in accordance with specific situations. DeVito (2007) identifies three primary objectives of communication strategy: to secure understanding, to establish acceptance, and to motivate action. Similarly, Panuju (2018) outlines five purposes of communication strategy, namely announcing, motivating, educating, disseminating information, and supporting decision-making. Thus, a communication strategy serves as a crucial guideline to ensure that messages are conveyed effectively, received appropriately, and capable of influencing the audience in line with predetermined objectives.

2.4 Public Relation

Public Relations (PR) is a management function aimed at fostering mutual understanding between an organization and its publics. Ardianto (2004), citing Cutlip, Center, and Brown, defines PR as a management function that supports the establishment of communication, understanding, acceptance, and cooperation between an organization and its stakeholders. DeVito (2007) further emphasizes that PR is closely related to shaping and maintaining the image of an organization. Kasali, as cited in Arni (2009), underscores that PR represents a strategic approach that utilizes communication to build harmonious relationships with the public. Similarly, Soemirat and Ardianto (2022) explain that PR aims to generate understanding, support, and favorable public opinion toward the organization. Arni (2009) also notes that the functions of PR include supporting management activities, creating two-way communication, serving the public, and fostering harmonious relationships.

In other words, PR plays a vital role in building a positive organizational image through planned, continuous, and strategic communication.

2.5 Brand Image

Brand image refers to consumers' perceptions of a product. Pratminingsih (2016) states that brand image has a significant influence on consumers' purchasing decisions. Kotler and Armstrong (2008) emphasize that brand image can shape consumer attitudes and behaviors toward a product. Dewi (2010) further explains that brand image is formed through consumers' experiences with the products offered. According to Keller and Kotler (2011), brand image is the process of organizing information that creates a specific impression in the minds of consumers. Tjiptono (2013) categorizes brand image into four dimensions: user benefits, purchase situations, personality and values, as well as history and experience. Abdullah and Tantri (2018) highlight that a positive brand image can enhance consumer loyalty. Similarly, Laksana (2008) notes that brand image is built upon a brand's superiority, strength, and uniqueness.

In general, brand image is not limited to a name or logo but also encompasses how consumers perceive the quality, uniqueness, and overall experience associated with a product.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Research Type

This study applies a descriptive qualitative method, which emphasizes an in-depth understanding of social phenomena by analyzing data collected directly from the field. According to Sugiyono (2009:2), qualitative research aims to obtain valid data that can be used to discover, develop, and verify specific knowledge. Bungin (2014) further asserts that this approach adopts an inductive reasoning process to balance the deductive pattern.

Accordingly, this research seeks to explore the phenomenon of public relations planning in maintaining brand image through a comprehensive understanding of the research subjects.

3.2 Conceptual Framework

According to Notoatmodjo (2010), a conceptual framework is a formulation derived from theories that support the research. In this study, the conceptual framework focuses on the planning of public relations in maintaining the brand image of Bank Sumut.

3.3 Research Informants

The informants in this study were selected based on their involvement in public relations and marketing activities at Bank Sumut. The informants include:

1. Marketing Public Relation
2. Customer Service
3. Manager Pemasaran
4. Supervisor

3.4 Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was carried out using three main techniques, namely:

1. Observation: Conducting direct observation of public relations activities, communication strategies, and the working atmosphere at Bank Sumut.
2. Interviews: Conducting in-depth interviews with informants deemed competent.
3. Documentation: Collecting relevant documents, such as activity archives, reports, and Bank Sumut publication data.

3.5 Data Analysis Techniques

The data was analysed using domain analysis (Bungin in Krisyantono, 2010), which aims to describe the research object as a whole. The analysis process was carried out in four stages: Data Collecting – mengumpulkan data melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi.

1. Data Reduction – filtering relevant data with a focus on research.
2. Data Display – presenting data in narrative and table form so that it is easy to understand.
3. Conclusion – draw conclusions based on research findings.

3.6 Research Location and Time

This research was conducted at Bank Sumut Store Medan, located at Jl. Imam Bonjol No.18, Medan Polonia, Medan City, North Sumatra. The research period was from February 2024 to May 2024.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of Public Relations communication in the public service acceleration program related to digitalization at Bank Sumut. A qualitative approach was employed using in-depth interviews with four informants: the marketing manager, public relations officer, supervisor, and customer service representative. Primary data were obtained through direct communication, while secondary data were utilized to reinforce the analysis.

Speaker Profile

Tabel 1. Distribution of Resource Persons Based on Gender, Position, and Education

No.	Name	Position	Gender	Age	Study
1	Imran	Marketing Manager	Pria	33	S1
2	Irma	Marketing Public Relation	Wanita	28	S1
3	Hidayat	Sipervisor	Pria	30	S1
4	Widya	Customer Service	Wanita	27	S1

All informants hold a bachelor's degree and are between 27 and 33 years of age. This indicates that they are in their productive years with an adequate educational background to understand the dynamics of marketing and public communication in the banking sector.

Planning: Identifying Target Markets

The interview findings reveal that the process of identifying target markets at Bank Sumut is carried out collaboratively by the marketing team, public relations officers, customer service representatives, and supervisors.

1. The identification criteria include demographics, psychographics, consumer behavior, specific needs of market segments, and competitor analysis.
2. The data sources are derived from customer surveys, industry reports, external research, and direct interactions with customers.
3. Updates are usually conducted annually, quarterly, or when significant changes occur in market trends.

This process demonstrates that market target identification is not solely the responsibility of the marketing division but rather the result of cross-departmental synergy. Customer service plays a crucial role by collecting daily feedback, while supervisors ensure that field implementation aligns with central strategies. Consequently, Bank Sumut's target market is defined dynamically to remain consistently relevant to community needs.

Marketing Communication Programme

The marketing communication programme is designed to support the acceleration of digital-based public services. Some forms of implementation are:

1. Marketing Public Relation: social media campaigns, webinars, digital advertising, sponsorship, and electronic promotions.
2. Customer Service: customer education via telephone/chat, dissemination of information via SMS/email, and customer satisfaction surveys.
3. Marketing Manager: event sponsorship, collaborations with influencers, and integrated digital media campaigns.
4. Supervisor: internal staff training to enable them to provide excellent digital services.

Programme evaluations are conducted in stages: quarterly at head office, monthly at service units, and daily monitoring at branches. Evaluations include ROI analysis, satisfaction surveys, and customer feedback. This demonstrates that Bank Sumut's communication strategy is implemented using a multi-channel approach based on evaluative data.

Programme Evaluation

The effectiveness of marketing communication programmes is evaluated systematically:

1. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) include the number of new users, customer retention rates, customer satisfaction, ROI, and digital engagement.
2. Evaluation Level :
 - Headquarters: public relations team, public relations, and senior management.
 - Branch: supervisor, customer service, frontline staff.
3. Evaluation Period: quarterly, monthly, and post-major campaign.

The results of the study show that evaluation not only assesses the success of a campaign, but also identifies weaknesses for improvement. Customer feedback is a key instrument in assessing the effectiveness of communication, so that strategies can be immediately adjusted to the real needs in the field.

Marketing and Public Relations Strategy

Bank Sumut's marketing and public relations (PR) strategies are implemented to enhance its positive image and closeness to the community:

1. Key strategies: social media campaigns, CSR initiatives, event sponsorship, public education, and collaboration with local and national media.
2. The role of customer service: supporting strategy through service education, complaint handling, and loyalty programmes.

3. Role of supervisors: implementing local strategies that are tailored to the needs of the branch and the characteristics of the regional market.
4. Evaluation of success: through customer satisfaction surveys, branch performance reports, and media monitoring.

With this strategy, Bank Sumut strives to maintain its image as a regional bank that is adaptive to digitalisation while remaining close to the community.

Maintaining Image

Research shows that maintaining a positive image of banks is achieved through concrete steps:

1. Service transparency through educational campaigns and information disclosure.
2. Improved service quality through staff training and rapid response to complaints.
3. Consistent communication strategy across various channels, including social media, websites, and direct interaction with customers.
4. Social engagement through CSR programmes and collaboration with communities.

The marketing manager emphasises the importance of continuously monitoring online reputation, while supervisors ensure that service quality at branches does not deviate from head office standards. This confirms that the bank's positive image is determined not only by major campaigns, but also by the quality of its day-to-day services.

Brand Reputation

Brand reputation is considered a strategic asset for Bank Sumut. Efforts to strengthen reputation are carried out through:

1. Integrated media campaigns to expand brand awareness.
2. CSR initiatives as a manifestation of the bank's social concern.
3. Improved customer service as a determining factor in loyalty.
4. Collaboration with media and influencers to strengthen brand exposure.

Reputation evaluation is conducted through satisfaction surveys, media analysis, branch performance reports, and reputation KPI measurements. The results of the study show that Bank Sumut's positive reputation stems from consistent service, transparent communication, and active involvement in community activities.

Synthesis of Research Results

Overall, this study found that the effectiveness of Public Relations communication in the digitalisation of Bank Sumut's services is determined by three main aspects:

1. Identify Dynamic Target Markets
Involves demographic analysis, consumer behaviour, market trends, and customer feedback to ensure product/service relevance.
2. Implement Multi-Channel Marketing Communication Programmes
Through social media, customer education, event sponsorship, and internal staff training that supports digital transformation.
3. Continuous and Responsive Evaluation
Utilising KPIs, customer surveys, and performance reports to ensure each programme aligns with objectives and reinforces the bank's positive image.

In addition, Bank Sumut's public relations and marketing strategies have proven to contribute to maintaining its image and strengthening its brand reputation. Bank Sumut has been able to maintain a balance between digital transformation and humanistic service, thereby maintaining its reputation amid increasingly fierce competition in the banking sector.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, the role of public relations has proven to be very effective in improving public service acceleration programmes related to digitalisation at Bank Sumut. The public relations team plays an important role in designing and implementing communication strategies that successfully promote the bank's digitalisation initiatives to the public. Through creative marketing campaigns and transparent communication, public relations has succeeded in increasing public awareness and acceptance of the digital services offered by Bank Sumut. They are also responsible for responding quickly to any issues or challenges that arise throughout the digitisation process, ensuring that the messages conveyed to the public are always in line with the bank's strategic objectives. With a proactive and responsive approach to the needs of the community, the public relations team has helped Bank Sumut achieve its targets in accelerating the adoption of digital services and enhancing the bank's presence and image in the market. Thus, the role of public relations has proven to be one of the main pillars in the success of the public service acceleration programme related to digitalisation at Bank Sumut.

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