# Implementation of the Roles and Functions of Public Relations in Government Organizations

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**Abstract :**

This This study investigates the roles, organizational positioning, and media utilization of government public relations (PR) divisions in six Indonesian institutions within the context of digital public communication. Employing a qualitative design with in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the study reveals that PR practitioners primarily perform communication facilitator and communication technician roles, focusing on information dissemination, media liaison, and operational communication tasks. The adoption of social media platforms such as Instagram, X, and YouTube has created opportunities for two-way interaction between government and citizens. However, findings indicate that such interactions remain largely transactional and rarely influence decision-making or policy formulation processes. Conceptually, this study enriches the literature on PR roles and functions, strategic communication, and public sector communication in the digital era. Practically, it recommends institutional reforms, professional capacity-building, and the integration of digital feedback into public communication planning to foster more participatory, transparent, and accountable government communication practices.

**Keywords:** *PR roles and functions, digital PR, government PR, digital communications, social media*

**Abstrak:**

*Penelitian ini menganalisis peran, posisi organisasi, dan pemanfaatan media oleh humas pemerintah di enam institusi pemerintahan Indonesia dalam konteks digitalisasi komunikasi publik. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan wawancara mendalam dan analisis tematik, studi ini mengungkap bahwa peran humas didominasi oleh communication facilitator dan communication technician, berfokus pada diseminasi informasi, hubungan media, serta aktivitas komunikasi teknis. Adopsi media sosial seperti Instagram, X, dan YouTube membuka ruang interaksi dua arah antara pemerintah dan masyarakat, namun temuan menunjukkan bahwa keterlibatan ini masih bersifat transaksional dan jarang memengaruhi proses pengambilan keputusan atau perumusan kebijakan. Secara konseptual, studi ini memperkaya literatur tentang peran dan fungsi humas, komunikasi strategis, dan komunikasi pemerintahan di era digital. Secara praktis, penelitian ini merekomendasikan reformasi kelembagaan, peningkatan kapasitas profesional, dan integrasi umpan balik digital ke dalam perencanaan komunikasi publik untuk mewujudkan komunikasi pemerintah yang lebih partisipatif, transparan, dan akuntabel.*

**Kata Kunci:** *peran dan fungsi humas, humas digital, humas pemerintah, komunikasi digital, media sosial*

# Introduction

Awareness of the importance of the role and function of public relations (PR) is shown by, among others, the increasing number of institutions adopting public relations functions in the organizational structure (Fatimah et al., 2024), to manage important communications between the organization and public, as well as the flow of information within the respective institution. In the recent era, these functions can be manifested into various tasks and responsibilities. PR becomes the source of information (Fatimah et al., 2023), representative of the organization (Abbas et al., 2021; Bruce et al., 2023), crisis manager (Faustyna, 2023; Siljanovska, 2022), event preparation (Chukwu, 2023; Fajar Saputra et al., 2024), media relations (Luttrell & Capizzo, 2025), and organizational reputation management (Hardian et al., 2024). PR practitioners are demanded to convey accurate and clear information about institutional programs and policies, as well as establishing good relations with the mass media and the wider community (Gora, 2019) to build trust, image, achieve purposes, and solve problems.

In carrying their day to day activities, PR practitioners have specific roles and functions (Broom & Sha, 2021). The roles are consist of communication technician, communication facilitator, expert consultant, and problem solver. While the functions are detailed as internal relations management, publicity, advertising, press agentry, handling public affairs, lobbying, issue management, investor relations management, and development. However, in real life, the implementations of these roles and functions may vary according to the need of the organizations, PR significance in organizations, and other institutional dynamics (Fatimah et al., 2024). Previous literatures show big interest in uncovering the practice of PR especially in the government sector, such as the roles portrayed by PR division in informing the recent updates to people during natural disaster (Mangun, 2020), how PR maintains government image (Syahputra et al., 2018), the efforts of PR practitioners in providing transparent information to the public (Anggraini & Maulida, 2023), the implementation of PR ethics in government organizations (Soegiarto et al., 2024), and how PR manage to resolve crisis between local government and nearby community (Rahmadanty et al., 2019).

While these qualitative studies are conducted in different regions, time, and cases, the findings are quite similar stressing the implementation of PR role as communication facilitator. On the other hand, some other researchers mentioned different findings on how PR practitioners contribute in their organizational activities. These studies found that the role of PR is not solely restricted in facilitating communication. Government PR also participates in designing and executing problem solving functions (Nada et al., 2018), actively provides strategic advice (Novianti et al., 2020), and performing technical duties such as video editing, public speaking, journalistic writing (Lani & Handayani, 2021). These findings show a variation of PR practices in government organizations and different scopes of work which depends on how the organizations posit the PR in their institutions. The previous studies mentioned are mostly conducted with a qualitative single case study which concentrates only on a particular context, like uncovering the roles without putting much concentration into discussing PR functions. It is hard to see the pattern of how major PR roles and functions are implemented by different institutions, especially in central government offices. This research is conducted to fill this gap.

By applying multiple case-study methods, this research aims to describe the most dominant PR roles and functions, PR position in organization structure, and their tendency in choosing media to reach the public in six different government institutions namely the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources (*KESDM*), the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (*KKP*), the Ministry of Law and Human Rights (*Kemenkumham*), the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Indonesia Directorate General of Plantations (*Kementan*), the National Agency for Border Management of the Republic of Indonesia (BNPP RI), and the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Indonesia (*PTRI*)  ASEAN. Multiple case study allows the researchers to compare similarity and difference practices carried by PR practitioners in more than one institution. Thus, the findings are expected to answer these questions: How do the roles and functions of PR in six government agencies compared?, How do the government posit PR in their organisational structure?, How do the government PR use media to reach their public?

## Method

This study aims to uncover the practice of PR in government institution. It uses a qualitative approach to obtain in-depth data from (Patton, 2023) related to the dominant roles and functions, PR position in organization, and the media preference of government PR practitioners. Qualitative research methods are used by researchers when facing natural object conditions, such as human perspective and experience (Sugiyono, 2019; Yusriani, 2022). It is the most relevant approach that can be used in this research, due to the flexibility and the depth of analysis it offers to understand human perspectives. Considering the purpose of the research and the wealth of data generated from the context raised, this study applies the multiple case study method to explore and understand the complexity of social phenomena (Yin, 2018). It investigates in detail, intensively and deeply a program, event, and activity involving individuals, groups, institutions, or organizations to gain in-depth knowledge about that event (Rahardjo, 2017). Thus, it is suitable to answer the research questions and provide a relevant guidance in gathering and interpreting data of the study.

In case study research, an individual can be the primary unit of analysis to reveal the significance of the case (Yin, 2018). Thus, individual PR practitioners from six government institutions becomes unit of analysis (Babbie, 2021), due to relevancy to the focus of research and the components to be researched. The term "PR practitioner" is limited to members of divisions, departments, or units in which PR tasks are carried on, such as communication/PR officers, social media administrators, customer care, or other terms that share the same job description due to variation in name or title in the organizational structure. The sample selection of institutions is carried out purposively among the government institutions in Indonesia, by applying snowball techniques to find the right access to the informants. Sample of the study is defined under three inclusion criteria relevant to the research objectives (Lenaini, 2021) consist of 1) the legal recognition for the institution, 2) the presence of clear organizational structure, and 3) the active execution of PR roles and functions in the observed institution.

Semi structured interviews are conducted offline to collect the data (Babbie, 2021) from a total of 20 practitioners from six government institutions, consists of 4 informants from The Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources (*KESDM*), 2 informants from The Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (*KKP*), 10 informants

from The Coordinating Ministry for Legal, Human Rights, Immigration, and Correction (*Kemenkumham*), 2 informants from The Ministry of Agriculture (*Kementan*), 1 informant from The National Border Management Agency (*BNPP*), and 1 informant from The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Indonesia for ASEAN (*PTRI Jakarta*). Nine of the informants are males, while the other 11 are females. Semi structured interview allows the researchers to set a specific topic and derived several major questions from it, while providing flexibility to expand the questions on the field. The collected data then are codified into themes and further analyzed thematically (Clarke & Braun, 2017). To increase the validity of the findings, this study utilized a source triangulation strategy which carried out by involving bigger number of informants from six government institutions as sources of data collection (Creswell & Creswell, J. W., & Clark, 2018).

## Results And Discussion
### Result
This study explored PR practices in six Indonesian government institutions, focusing on three major dimensions: the roles and functions of PR practitioners, their organizational positioning, and the media platforms utilized in government communication. The findings are presented thematically to provide a clearer understanding of similarities and differences across institutions. Direct quotes from informants and simplified tables of findings are included to preserve the authenticity of perspectives during fieldworks, as well as to maintain the readability of the data in the easier manner.

### Comparison of PR roles and functions in six government institutions
Across all institutions, the roles of communication facilitator and technician communication technician emerged as dominant, while strategic functions such as expert advisory and problem-solving remained minimal or absent. The facilitation role involved tasks such as disseminating institutional programs, building relationships with media, accommodating public inquiries, and managing ceremonial protocols. As informant from *Kementan* explained,

> "*We are responsible for informing the public about the ministry programs, as well as responding to questions and complaints through official channels*. (AA, 32)."

It also serves as the source of information to encourage public participation that contributes to the success of various government programs. Meanwhile, communication technician role emphasizes operational responsibilities including conducting media monitoring, producing newsworthy material such as press releases and social media contents, as well as documenting institutional activities. Despite their concentration in day-to-day communication, PR practitioners reported limited participation in organizational decision-making. Even during crises events, they tend to follow the instructions from senior officials rather than shaping strategic responses, underscoring a hierarchical communication model in government bureaucracy. In terms of functional variations, data of the study shows that publicity is the most dominant function executed by government PR practitioners, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**
*Variations on PR functions in six government institutions*

| Function / Institution | Kementan | BNPP RI | KKP | Kemenkumham | KESDM | PTRI ASEAN |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Internal relations** | v | - | - | - | v | - |
| **Publicity** | v | v | v | v | v | v |
| **Advertising** | - | - | - | v | - | - |
| **Press Agentry** | - | v | - | v | - | - |
| **Public Affairs** | v | - | - | v | - | v |
| **Lobbying** | - | - | - | - | - | v |
| **Issue Management** | - | - | v | v | - | - |
| **Investor Relations** | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| **Development** | - | - | - | - | - | - |

*Note.* The most dominant public relations function across all six government institutions is publicity, while other functions, such as investor relations and development, were not found

**Figure 1**

*Dominant Public Relations Functions Across Six Government Institutions*
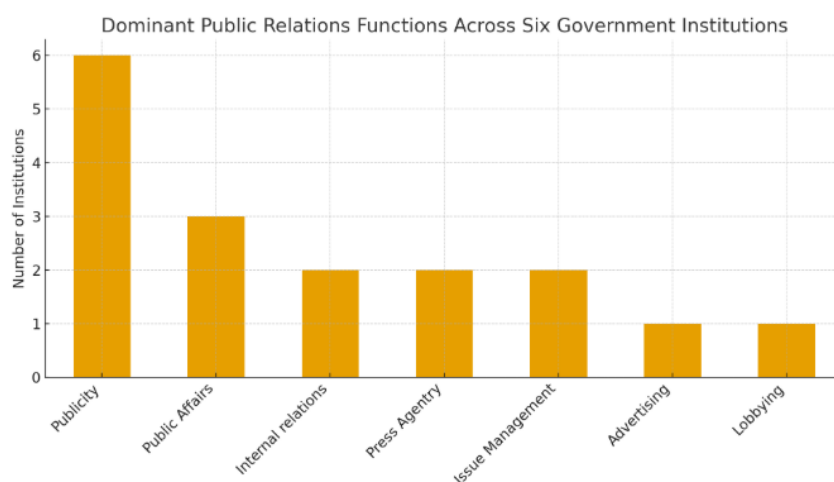


*Note.* Publicity is the most dominant PR function across all institutions, while other functions vary depending on resources, scale, and priorities.

Other functions such as public affairs, press agentry, and issues management are found to be varied depending on the scale of institution (whether it is the headquarter ministry or the branch unit), resources, policy priorities, or the institutional program planning which can be short-term or long-term, weekly/monthly/annually or incidentally, depending on the needs of the organization (Fatimah et al., 2024). In this context, the dominance of publicity reflects the tendency to maintain a clear narration of government programs and plans (Grunig, 2013; Smith, 2020) and provide a reliable source of information (Mansoor, 2021). It also reflects the nature of government sector to serve the public, instead of to gain profit or financial aids that commonly activates the advertising, investor relations, and development functions (Kelly, 2020; Leydesdorff, 2020).

**Organizational positioning of PR**

Despite functional limitations, PR units have gained formal recognition within organizational structures, though with varying nomenclature and degrees of autonomy. Some ministries placed PR within broader bureaus handling finance, law,

or foreign cooperation. Yet, in all institutions, PR divisions were explicitly mandated to manage public information and external relations, as stated by informant from BNPP,

> *"Even though our bureau combines finance and PR, we have our own mandatory tasks. We handle media, publications, and respond to public inquiries independently from financial operations.* (RJN, 40)."

All informants stated that PR position has been accommodated into the organizational structure and acted as the spearhead in delivering government programs and performance, as well as a source of reliable information for the public. As seen in Table 2, PR are classified as a special unit (Ani et al., 2017), indicating the specific tasks to carry out, not just supporting other departments.

**Table 2**

*PR in Government Organizational Structure*

|  | Structural Position | Classification |
|---|---|---|
| *KESDM* | PR and Information Subdivision | Special unit |
| *KKP* | PR Bureau and Foreign Cooperation | Special unit |
| *Kemenkumham* | PR, Law and Cooperation Bureau | Special unit |
| *Kementan* | Organization, Personnel, Legal and PR Coordinator | Special unit |
| *BNPP* | Bureau of General Finance and PR | Special unit |
| *PTRI ASEAN* | Communication Officer | Special unit |

*Note.* The PR units in all six government institutions have been positioned as special units within the organizational structure, albeit often merged with other functions such as law and finance.

**Figure 2**

*Organizational Positioning of PR Units in Government Institutions*



Organizational Positioning of PR Units in Government Institutions
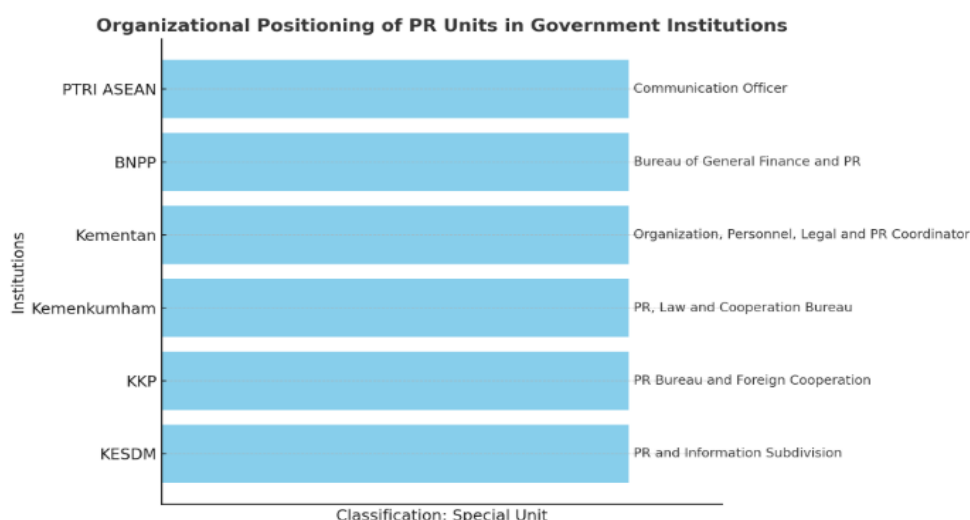
*Note.* All six institutions formally classify PR as a *special unit*, though often merged with other functions such as finance or law.

While this structural inclusion signals institutional acknowledgment of PR's importance, the lack of direct reporting lines to top decision-makers limits PR's capacity to influence policy agendas. Such positioning reinforces its operational rather than strategic role within government communication ecosystems.

**Media utilization in government communication**

Finding of this study shows a strong shift toward digital communication platforms across all institutions. While traditional channels such as printed bulletins, magazines, posters, and press conferences remain in use, social media has become the primary tool for outreach and engagement. Instagram and X (formerly Twitter) dominated institutional communication strategies due to their wide reach, low cost, and interactive features, confirmed by informant of the six institutions. One of them mentioned,

> *"Instagram is the fastest way to deliver information and engage with the public. People can comment or message us directly, allowing us to manage a more interactive communication. (IN, 35)."*

Both Instagram and X are used to disseminate information, broadcast specific content like video of Indonesian borderline condition, increasing public awareness, build engagement, participation, and managing two-way communication flow. Other platforms like YouTube and Facebook, were selectively used especially for audiovisual campaign. Institutional websites primarily served as repositories for news, announcements, and activities rather than interactive communications spaces. Although no longer a priority, mass media optimization are still needed as in press conference, press release, and coverage of institutions' programs and activities in newspaper or TV. The selection of media is adjusted according to the intended audience, so the message can be conveyed effectively.

**Discussion**

This study provides empirical evidence that PR practices within Indonesian government institutions remain predominantly operational, focusing on communication facilitation and technical execution rather than strategic advisory roles. These findings resonate with earlier research emphasizing the limited autonomy of PR divisions in public-sector contexts, where hierarchical governance structures often constrain communicative innovation (Broom & Sha, 2021; Mukhlis et al., 2024; Lopes & Farias, 2022). Similar patterns were observed by (Fatimah et al. 2024), who documented that both local and central government PR units frequently serve as information intermediaries rather than decision-making partners (O. Andersson & O. Renz, 2021; Tam et al., 2022). At the same time, the increasing adoption of digital platforms reported here aligns with global trends emphasizing transparency and digital transformation in public communication (Fadillah & Huiquan, 2024), suggesting a partial yet incomplete shift toward modern communication paradigms (García de Soto et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2022; Li et al., 2021).

The institutional positioning of PR within multi-functional bureaus helps explain this operational confinement. Consistent with Grunig's Excellence Theory, strategic communication effectiveness depends on whether PR has access to dominant coalitions and policymaking arenas (Grunig, 2020). Yet, as our findings reveal, PR units often remain embedded within administrative divisions such as finance or legal affairs, diluting their strategic influence. This organizational marginalization echoes Ani et al. (2017) and Soegiarto et al. (2024), who noted that bureaucratic cultures emphasizing message control, risk avoidance, and top-down hierarchies restrict PR innovation in government settings. Recent scholarship on digitalization in public relations further confirms that technological adoption alone cannot overcome legacy communication norms without parallel institutional reforms (Kretschmer & Winkler,

2024; Criado et al., 2021).

The integration of social media has undeniably opened spaces for two-way interactions. Citizens can comment on posts, send direct messages, and even lodge complaints online, creating opportunities for dialogic engagement absent in pre-digital communication environments. However, these interactions often remain transactional rather than transformational. Feedback may be acknowledged but seldom informs institutional decision-making or policy narratives. As Grunig's notes, strategic communication requires not only information exchange but also mutual understanding between institutions and their publics (Grunig, 2020). The limited autonomy of PR units, which often positioned within multi-functional bureaucratic divisions, constrains their capacity to translate digital interactions into policy-relevant insights, reflecting structural issues noted in previous studies on public-sector PR (Ani et al., 2017; Soegiarto et al., 2024).

Comparative research shows how other governments have moved toward interactive and participatory models of digital PR. For instance, studies on public-sector influencer strategies (Ju et al., 2025) and digital storytelling in governance (Oke & Awoyemi, 2024) document how online platforms have been used to humanize government communication, mobilize communities, and foster two-way trust-building dialogues. In contrast, Indonesian practices appear stuck between traditional publicity paradigms and emerging participatory potentials. While social media adoption here matches global trends (Quesenberry, 2020), the lack of institutionalized mechanisms for analyzing, responding to, and integrating citizen feedback reflects how technological adoption implemented without proper cultural adaptation" (Kretschmer & Winkler, 2024).

To align with global best practices and theoretical expectations, several reforms are necessary. First, institutional restructuring should grant PR divisions direct access to policymaking forums, ensuring their involvement in strategic agenda-setting rather than post-decision publicity. Second, capacity-building initiatives must equip practitioners with skills in strategic framing, data analytics, and participatory media management, enabling them to transition from technicians to strategic communication professionals (Ju et al., 2025; Quesenberry, 2020). Third, governments should pilot interactive digital platforms, such as influencer-driven campaigns (Ju et al., 2025) that embody the dialogic principles of public sphere theorists and modern PR scholarship (Cohen et al., 2021; De Angelis, 2021; Fadillah & Huiquan, 2024). Finally, future research should examine citizen perceptions of government PR to evaluate whether digitalization efforts meaningfully enhance trust, transparency, and democratic legitimacy or merely modernize bureaucratic publicity without transforming its communicative ethos.

## Conclusion

This study examined the roles, organizational positioning, and media utilization of public relations (PR) divisions across six Indonesian government institutions to answer questions concerning the extent of PR's strategic involvement in governance and its adaptation to digital communication environments. The findings reveal that PR practitioners predominantly perform communication facilitator and communication technician roles, ensuring information dissemination, media relations, and operational communication tasks are effectively managed. While the integration of social media platforms such as Instagram, X, and YouTube demonstrates progress

toward two-way communication, the study also found that this interaction remains largely transactional rather than deliberative. Citizen feedback collected through digital channels seldom translates into strategic agenda-setting or participatory policymaking processes. Furthermore, the organizational positioning of PR within broader bureaucratic structures limits its autonomy and access to decision-making forums, keeping PR practices primarily operational and reactive despite the opportunities provided by digitalization and public demand for transparency.

Conceptually, this study contributes to public relations and communication scholarship by offering empirical evidence on the evolving role of government PR in the digital era, particularly within emerging democratic contexts. Methodologically, the study integrates thematic qualitative analysis with institutional mapping to illustrate both the breadth of PR functions and the depth of its organizational constraints, thereby extending prior research on government communication paradigms. Theoretically, the findings enrich discussions on PR roles and functions in relation with contemporary digital public sphere debates by highlighting how technological adoption alone does not guarantee participatory communication unless supported by structural reforms and professional capacity-building. This study also bridges literature on public sector transparency, digital engagement, and strategic communication, providing a comparative lens between Indonesian practices and international innovations in digital governance. By doing so, it positions government PR as a critical yet underexplored actor in shaping public trust, institutional legitimacy, and democratic accountability in the information age.

Despite these contributions, this study acknowledges several limitations that require attention in future research. First, the focus on six government institutions offers context-specific insights but limits generalizability across all levels of Indonesian governance, including local administrations with diverse resources and communication capacities. Second, while this study examined PR practitioners' perspectives, it did not capture citizens' evaluations of digital engagement efforts, leaving unexplored whether current communication practices effectively enhance public trust or democratic participation. Third, the study did not analyze the content quality and engagement metrics of digital platforms in detail, which could reveal whether two-way interactions foster meaningful dialogue or remain symbolic. Future research should therefore employ mixed methods approaches combining citizen surveys, digital analytics, and comparative case studies across regions and administrative levels to generate a more comprehensive understanding of government PR's evolving role in participatory governance and digital communication ecosystems.

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