



The Role of Public Relations in Encouraging Religious Tolerance and Moderation in the Pluralistic Society of Pudukpayung Village Semarang

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Abstract. *Religious tolerance and moderation are becoming increasingly important in Indonesia's diverse society. This study aims to explore the role of public relations in promoting religious tolerance and moderation through community activities in Pudukpayung Village, Banyumanik District, Semarang City. Using a qualitative approach with a case study design, this study combines participant observation, in-depth interviews, document analysis, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The results show that PR plays an important role through symmetrical two-way communication strategies, active involvement in community activities such as tirakatan and social service, and mediation of conflicts between religious groups. Key findings reveal the effectiveness of the PR approach in building dialogue, increasing mutual understanding and strengthening social cohesion. Despite the challenges in reaching exclusive groups, PR shows good adaptability. This study provides valuable insights into practical strategies for promoting religious tolerance and moderation at the community level, with important implications for the development of PR policies and practices in the context of diverse societies.*

Keywords: *Public relations, religious tolerance, religious moderation, two-way communication, social cohesion*

Abstrak. Toleransi dan moderasi beragama menjadi semakin penting dalam masyarakat Indonesia yang beragam. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi peran humas dalam mempromosikan toleransi dan moderasi beragama melalui kegiatan masyarakat di Kelurahan Pudukpayung, Kecamatan Banyumanik, Kota Semarang. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus, penelitian ini menggabungkan observasi partisipan, wawancara mendalam, analisis dokumen, dan Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa PR memainkan peran penting melalui strategi komunikasi dua arah yang simetris, keterlibatan aktif dalam kegiatan masyarakat seperti tirakatan dan bakti sosial, dan mediasi konflik antar kelompok agama. Temuan-temuan utama mengungkapkan efektivitas pendekatan PR dalam membangun dialog, meningkatkan saling pengertian, dan memperkuat kohesi sosial. Terlepas dari tantangan dalam menjangkau kelompok-kelompok eksklusif, PR menunjukkan kemampuan beradaptasi yang baik. Studi ini memberikan wawasan yang berharga tentang strategi praktis untuk mempromosikan toleransi dan moderasi beragama di tingkat masyarakat, dengan implikasi penting bagi pengembangan kebijakan dan praktik PR dalam konteks masyarakat yang beragam.

Kata kunci: Hubungan masyarakat, toleransi beragama, moderasi beragama, komunikasi dua arah, kohesi sosial

1. BACKGROUND

In an increasingly complex era of globalization, religious tolerance and moderation are two very important values to be improved in community life, especially in the context of Indonesia which is rich in diversity. Tolerance is not only about respecting differences, but also about understanding and respecting diversity. Meanwhile, religious moderation emphasizes the importance of maintaining balance in religion and not being extreme. Religious moderation can be interpreted as an approach that prioritizes tolerance and mutual respect between adherents of different religions. This attitude is important to

prevent extremism and radicalization that can damage social harmony. (Fahri, mohammad, 2022).

In Indonesia's multicultural society, various cultures, family backgrounds, religions, ethnicities, and other aspects interact with each other. Religious harmony and moderation depend on the principles of each religion that is adhered to, which allows and facilitates good relations with adherents of other religions. In this context, the role of public relations becomes very strategic in promoting religious tolerance and moderation in society. Public relations functions as a communication bridge between the government, society, and various religious organizations, so that it can facilitate better dialogue and understanding between various groups. (Munir, 2023).

Although there has been extensive research on religious tolerance and moderation, there is still a gap in the literature regarding the specific role of PR in promoting these values at the community level. This study aims to explore and analyze the role of PR in promoting religious tolerance and moderation through various community activities. One example of an activity that will be studied is participation in the tirakatan event, a Javanese tradition that is carried out before the commemoration of Indonesia's Independence Day. This event involves all local residents without discrimination of ethnicity and religion, making it an ideal platform for promoting tolerance. (Putri & Aman, 2022).

In addition, this study will also examine the role of PR in other activities such as urban agricultural extension and community service, which bring together various racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural groups. These activities not only have specific goals, but also serve as a means to promote religious moderation and build interfaith dialogue. By analyzing the role of PR in these activities, this study is expected to provide new insights into effective strategies for promoting religious tolerance and moderation at the grassroots level.

2. THEORETICAL STUDY

This research is based on several key theories and concepts in the fields of communication, public relations, and religious studies. These theories provide a framework for understanding the role of PR in promoting religious tolerance and moderation.

Symmetrical Two-Way Communication Theory

The symmetrical two-way communication theory developed by (Grunig, 2009) is the main foundation in understanding the modern PR approach. This theory emphasizes the importance of dialogue and mutual understanding between organizations and their publics. In the context of religious tolerance and moderation, this approach allows PR not only to convey messages, but also to listen and respond to the needs and perspectives of various religious groups. (Grunig, 2009).

Social Capital Theory

The concept of social capital proposed by (D. Putman, 2000) is relevant in understanding how community activities can strengthen social bonds. Putnam argues that participation in shared activities can increase trust and cooperation between different groups. This theory helps explain how PR involvement in community activities can build social cohesion amidst religious diversity. (Portes, 2017).

Conflict Management Theory

Conflict management theory, particularly the conflict resolution model developed by (Fisher R et al., 1991), provides a framework for understanding the role of PR in managing potential conflicts between religious groups. This theory emphasizes the importance of communication, negotiation, and mediation in resolving disputes, which is in line with the role of PR in facilitating dialogue between religious groups. (Rahim, 2005).

The Concept of Religious Moderation

The concept of religious moderation, as outlined by (Hilmy, 2013), is important in the context of a pluralistic society. Religious moderation emphasizes balance, justice, and rejection of extremism in religious practice. This concept provides a theoretical basis for understanding the goals and approaches of PR in promoting interfaith harmony. (Hilmy, 2013).

Previous Research

Several previous studies have examined the role of communication in building religious tolerance. (Ridwan & Khotimah, 2024) examined the role of media in promoting interfaith dialogue in Indonesia, and found that balanced and positive reporting can increase understanding between religious groups. Meanwhile, (Alam, 2016) examines the

effectiveness of government programs in building social harmony in multi-religious societies, demonstrating the importance of bottom-up approaches and the involvement of community leaders..

In the context of the role of PR, (Fathan & Saifuddin, 2019) on the communication strategy of religious institutions in building a positive image provides insight into the importance of transparency and openness in religious communication. (Fatimah et al., 2024) A study on the role of local government public relations in managing SARA issues shows that a proactive and collaborative approach with various stakeholders can be effective in preventing conflict.t.

Although this study has made valuable contributions, there is still a gap in understanding the specific role of PR in promoting religious tolerance and moderation through community activities at the local level. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the strategies and impacts of PR roles in the context of a diverse community in Pudukpayung Village, Semarang City.

3. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore in depth the role of public relations in promoting religious tolerance and moderation through community activities. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena. (Pratchett, 1999).

The research location is in Pudukpayung Village, Banyumanik District, Semarang City, with the main focus on activities carried out in RW 5. The selection of this location is based on the diversity of religions and cultures in the area, as well as the existence of community activities that are relevant to the research objectives. This research was conducted for 3 months, namely from June to August 2024..

The data collection techniques used in this study include:

1. Participant observation: Researchers are directly involved in community activities such as tirakatan, urban agricultural extension, and community service. This observation allows researchers to directly observe interactions between residents and the role of public relations in these activities. (Spradley, 2017).
2. In-depth interviews: Conducted with public relations, community leaders, and citizens from various religious backgrounds. Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain in-depth information about participants' perceptions and experiences regarding the

role of public relations in promoting religious tolerance and moderation.(Qu & Dumay, 2011).

3. Document analysis: Researchers analyze related documents such as public relations work programs, activity reports, and media publications about activities carried out.
4. Focus Group Discussion (FGD): Involving representatives from various religious groups to discuss the effectiveness of the role of PR in promoting religious tolerance and moderation. (Krueger RA, 2014).

Data analysis was conducted using the thematic analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis process included:

1. Data recognition through transcription and repeated reading.
2. Data coding to identify emerging patterns.
3. Search for potential themes from identified codes.
5. Review and refinement of themes.
6. Establishment and naming of themes.
7. Writing the analysis report.

To increase the credibility of the research, data triangulation was conducted by comparing data from various sources and collection methods (K. Denzin, 2009). In addition, member checking was also done by asking participants to check the accuracy of the researcher's findings and interpretations.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of data obtained through participant observation, in-depth interviews, document analysis, and Focus Group Discussions (FGD), several main themes emerged related to the role of Public Relations in encouraging religious tolerance and moderation through community activities in Pudukpayung Village, Banyumanik District, Semarang City.

The following are the results and discussion of the research findings:

PR Communication Strategy in Promoting Religious Tolerance and Moderation

The results of the study indicate that PR uses a symmetrical two-way communication approach in promoting religious tolerance and moderation. This strategy involves active dialogue with various religious groups and facilitating intergroup communication. One participant, a community leader, stated:

"PR not only conveys information, but also actively listens to the aspirations and problems of various religious groups. This makes us feel appreciated and facilitates mutual understanding."

This finding is in line with the symmetrical two-way communication model proposed by (Beresford & Schwarz, 2014), which emphasizes the importance of dialogue and mutual understanding in building effective relationships between organizations and their publics.

The Role of Public Relations in Community Activities

The results of participant observations on the tirakatan activities, urban agricultural extension, and community service showed that Public Relations played an active role in designing and implementing these activities as a means to increase religious tolerance and moderation. In the tirakatan activities, for example, Public Relations involved various religious groups and used the moment to emphasize the values of togetherness and mutual respect.

A FGD participant commented:

"The community service activities initiated by Public Relations succeeded in uniting residents from various religious backgrounds. When we work together to clean the environment, religious differences become irrelevant."

This finding reinforces Putnam's (D. Putman, 2000) argument about the importance of social capital in building social cohesion, where joint activities can strengthen ties between different groups.

The Role of PR in Conflict Management and Resolution

Document analysis and interviews revealed that PR also plays a significant role in conflict management and resolution when tensions arise between religious groups. PR uses a mediation and dialogue facilitation approach to resolve disputes. One prominent example is the resolution of a conflict related to permits to build a house of worship. A PR representative explained: "We facilitate dialogue between the disputing groups, make sure all parties feel heard, and help find a solution that is acceptable to all parties." This approach is in line with the conflict resolution theory put forward by (Fisher R et al., 1991), which emphasizes the importance of communication and mutual understanding in resolving conflicts.

PR Adaptation Challenges and Strategies

Although the role of public relations in promoting religious tolerance and moderation is generally positive, the study also identified several challenges. One of these is the difficulty in reaching groups that tend to be exclusive. To overcome this, public relations adopted a strategy of personal approach and involving key figures from the group. One interviewee stated:

"Initially our group was reluctant to participate in joint activities. However, the personal approach of public relations and the involvement of figures we respect made us more open."

This finding underscores the importance of a locally tailored approach in promoting religious tolerance and moderation, as stated (Doyle, 2019) in his theory of an inclusive public sphere.

Impact of Public Relations Role on Public Perception

The results of the FGD and interviews showed that the active role of public relations in promoting religious tolerance and moderation has had a positive impact on public perception. The majority of participants reported increased mutual understanding and cooperation between religious groups.

One FGD participant concluded:

"Now we can interact more easily with neighbors of different religions. There is a stronger sense of mutual trust."

This finding supports Allport's opinion (Decarvalho, 1993) argument in the contact hypothesis, which states that positive interactions between groups can reduce prejudice and increase tolerance. The conclusion from the results and discussion is that the role of public relations in promoting religious tolerance and moderation through community activities has a significant positive impact. Two-way communication strategies, active involvement in community activities, roles in conflict management, and adaptation to local challenges are key factors in the success of these efforts. However, this study also identified areas that still need improvement, such as outreach to groups that tend to be exclusive.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study reveals that Public Relations plays an important role in efforts to increase religious tolerance and moderation in Pudukpayung Village, Banyumanik District, Semarang City through a symmetrical two-way communication approach and active involvement in community activities. This strategy has proven effective in building dialogue, mutual understanding, and positive interaction between religious communities. The role of Public Relations in managing and resolving conflicts through mediation and facilitation of dialogue also makes a significant contribution to resolving disputes and preventing escalation of inter-religious conflicts. Despite facing challenges in reaching exclusive groups, Public Relations has demonstrated good adaptability. The positive impact of Public Relations efforts can be seen from the increasing mutual understanding and cooperation between religious communities in society.

However, this study has several limitations. First, the study only focused on one specific geographic region, so generalization of the findings should be done with caution. Second, the relatively short duration of the study may not fully describe the long-term impact of PR efforts. To address these limitations, it is recommended that future studies conduct cross-regional comparison studies and conduct longitudinal studies to measure the long-term impact of PR programs.

Based on the research results, several recommendations can be put forward. Public Relations needs to develop a more structured and sustainable program to promote religious tolerance and moderation, by involving representatives of various religious groups in its design. Increasing the capacity of Public Relations staff in conflict management and facilitating interfaith dialogue is also needed. In addition, Public Relations can strengthen collaboration with educational institutions, civil society organizations, and local media to expand the reach and impact of its programs. The implementation of a periodic evaluation system and optimization of the use of digital media are also recommended to increase the effectiveness of the role of Public Relations in promoting religious tolerance and moderation.

For further research, it is recommended to examine more deeply the role of social media and digital technology in PR efforts to promote religious tolerance and moderation. It is also important to explore the perspectives of minority and marginalized groups, as well as examine contextual factors that influence the effectiveness of PR's role. Thus, it is hoped that a more comprehensive understanding of the role of PR in promoting religious tolerance and moderation can be obtained, which in turn can contribute to the creation of

a more harmonious and inclusive society.

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