# UNLOCKING THE PARADOX
# (EFFECTIVENESS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THE E-GOVERNMENT SERVICES OF THE NORTH SUMATRA MINISTRY OF REGION)

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**Abstract.** This research aims to investigate the implementation of e-Government in the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Province, with a focus on the challenges faced and strategies to increase its effectiveness. This research method uses a qualitative approach by conducting in-depth interviews with 20 respondents consisting of employees of the Ministry of Religion and people who use e-Government services. Data were analyzed using content analysis techniques to identify main patterns and themes from the interviews. The research results show that limited technological infrastructure, low public digital literacy, and concerns about data security are the main challenges in implementing e-Government. Recommended strategies include increased investment in technology infrastructure, digital literacy training, and improved data security policies to increase the acceptance and effectiveness of e-Government services in the future.

**Keywords:** e-Government, implementation, challenges, North Sumatra

## I.   INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has made it easier for people to access and obtain information[1]. Therefore, Public Relations (PR) must be ready to face various changes by adapting to the development of new digital media. Internet-based technology, as one of the media that is developing rapidly at present, has a significant influence in supporting the delivery of information to the public and is a fast, effective and efficient communication tool[2]. In accordance with contemporary conditions, the government places great emphasis on the use of information technology to support government activities. Advances in information and communication technology have brought significant changes to the public service paradigm, including the management of government information through e-Government[3]. E-Government promises better efficiency and accessibility for the public in obtaining services and information from government agencies. In this context, the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Province, as a government institution responsible for managing religious affairs and community life, cannot ignore the importance of implementing e-Government to improve the quality of information services to the community[4]. E-Government refers to the use of information and communications technology (ICT) by governments to provide public services, interact with citizens, and manage internal government processes more efficiently. According to Undesa, e-Government involves the use of ICT to increase accessibility, efficiency and transparency in government administration[5]. The aim is to improve public services, citizen participation and government administrative efficiency[6].

Ideally, e-Government is a government work system designed to reduce bureaucracy in providing services. Unfortunately, the reality on the ground shows that this system is not working perfectly and often receives criticism from the public. Ideally, e-Government at the Ministry of Religion aims to create efficient, transparent and inclusive services in religious administration[7]. However, the reality often does not match expectations. Some of the challenges faced include limited access and infrastructure, lack of technological skills, data security, lack of system integration, and lack of innovation. To overcome the gap between the ideal and reality of e-Government in the Ministry of Religion, a commitment is needed to increase accessibility, improve technological infrastructure, increase public digital literacy, strengthen data security, improve system integration, and continue to encourage innovation in technology-based public services[4]. E-Government covers various aspects, including electronic services (e-services), electronic communication between government and citizens (e-communication), and the use of ICT in the government decision-making process (e-governance)[8]. By implementing the e-Government concept, the government can increase efficiency, reduce bureaucracy, increase transparency, and provide better public services to citizens. Implementing e-Government can also increase citizen involvement in the decision-making process and accelerate economic growth through technological innovation[9] .

The application of e-Government is not only limited to technological aspects, but must also pay attention to the impact and needs of society as end users[10]. Citizens play an important role in the context of e-Government, including

citizen participation, accessibility and inclusivity, awareness and education, privacy protection, feedback and engagement, and ease of use[11]. By involving the community in every stage of e-Government development, the government can ensure its implementation is more successful and in line with the daily needs and aspirations of the community. The public demands better service quality from time to time, so it is important for the government to continue to evaluate and identify the problems faced as an effort to improve service quality to meet community needs[12]. One of the problems related to this is that many people do not yet feel the full benefits of e-Government services even though the facilities are available. This could be caused by poor service quality or public distrust of government services. To provide efficient, effective services and maintain public trust, the government must understand and consider input from the public as an evaluation of the quality of e-Government services themselves[13]. Evaluation of e-Government services is very important because it will provide an overview of the current conditions regarding the service. The evaluation process allows the government to determine whether the services they provide are in line with community expectations or not[14]. Evaluation must be carried out regularly and involve various parties, including the government, technology developers and the community. The evaluation results can be used as a basis for improving and enhancing e-Government services.

The role of Public Relations (PR) is crucial in facing social dynamics, developments in information technology, and increasing demands for transparency[15]. Public relations is not only a disseminator of information, but also a liaison between agencies and the community. Understanding the importance of the role of Public Relations is increasingly urgent, especially in the context of sustainability of technology-based services. In the context of e-Government implementation in the Ministry of Religion, there is a striking paradox between the idealism of the concept and the reality faced. Ideally, e-Government is expected to provide efficient, transparent and inclusive services to the community. This concept promises the use of information technology to reduce bureaucracy, increase information accessibility, and speed up government administration[16]. However, the reality on the ground often does not match these expectations. Paradoxes arise when limited technological infrastructure, lack of digital literacy in society, and data security problems become the main obstacles in implementing e-Government[17]. Even though the government has provided e-Government facilities, many people have not been able to experience its maximum benefits. For example, although the aim of e-Government is to increase citizen participation in the decision-making process, in reality there are still gaps in public access and awareness of these services [18]. This paradox illustrates that despite rapid technological progress and the government's determination to improve public services, e-Government implementation is still faced with complex challenges. The ideality of the e-Government concept is in conflict with the reality on the ground which shows that there is a gap between expectations of convenience and efficiency and the reality of the difficulty of system integration, lack of innovation, and challenges in building public trust in

government digital services[19]. In this context, the e-Government paradox in the Ministry of Religion illustrates that although there is a determination to improve services through technology, practical and social challenges still hinder the achievement of ideal goals. This requires a greater commitment to overcome this paradox through improving infrastructure, digital literacy, data security, and effective communication strategies from Public Relations (PR) in bridging the ideal expectations and the reality of e-Government implementation.

## II. RESEARCH METHOD

This research method includes a qualitative approach using a field research approach based on field observations[20]. This research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of interactional public relations communication in managing e-government information services at the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion, North Sumatra Province. The research paradigm used is constructivism, which emphasizes that knowledge is an active construction that is influenced by an individual's experience, values and social context.

The research was conducted at the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Province, with a period from the first week of November to the fourth week of January. The research informants consisted of the Head of Public Relations, Public Relations Officers, and the community of prospective Hajj pilgrims in Medan City, North Sumatra Province. Primary data sources were obtained from direct sources and secondary data sources were obtained from literature studies and documentation at the research location[21].

Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation studies. The research instruments used included a structured list of questions for interviews and social media content analysis. The data analysis technique follows the Miles and Huberman model of data analysis method, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data validity was checked by continuous data collection and source triangulation as well as theory triangulation. This method aims to provide a comprehensive picture of public relations communication practices in managing e-government information services, taking into account the local context and existing field realities.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
*Interactional Public Relations (PR) communication in managing E-Government information services.*

This research identifies the interactional communication model carried out by the Public Relations of the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Province in managing E-Government information services. As emphasized in chapter II, the role of Public Relations is vital as an intermediary between public bodies and the community in providing and disseminating information through e-government platforms. In this context, Public Relations must have adequate capabilities to function as an information service

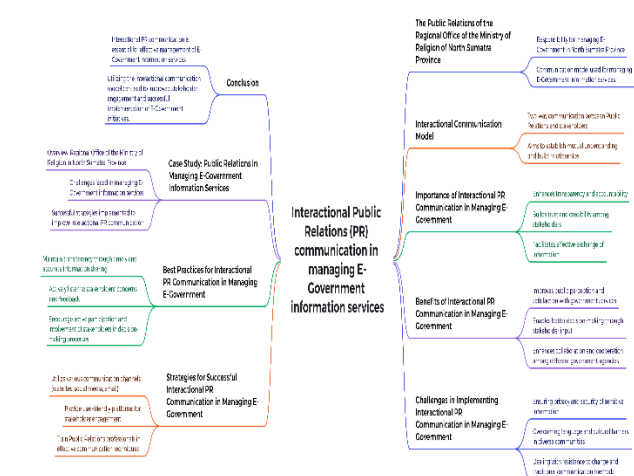center that manages data from government and public institutions.



Figure 1. Interactional Public Relations (PR) communication in managing E-Government information services.

Apart from carrying out an interactional role with the community, Public Relations is also responsible for producing publication materials required by government agencies and other agencies. With its strategic position, Public Relations must maximize its performance both internally and externally. Rapid technological developments require Public Relations to develop creative and innovative approaches in managing E-Government information services. The results of interviews with the Public Relations Office of the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Province showed that their interactional communication, especially involving direct meetings with the community, was limited. This is due to the main focus of Regional Office Public Relations which is more on internal coordination. In general, Public Relations tends to provide general information to the public, while more detailed information can be accessed through information services provided by E-Government. E-Government itself is an effort to increase the efficiency of public services by utilizing information and communication technology. However, several tasks such as confirming and clarifying information are still often carried out directly by Regional Office Public Relations, especially through the Information and Documentation Management Officer (PPID).

Since the implementation of E-Government in 2009, the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Province has actively used this platform in managing information services. However, there are several aspects that still require direct communication, such as interaction with PPID to retrieve specific information, which shows that the use of E-Government does not cover all aspects of communicating with the public digitally.

*Management of e-government information services at the regional office of the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Province.*

Management of E-Government information services at the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Province continues to experience significant development and improvement. Public Relations (Public Relations) of the North Sumatra Regional Office plays a crucial role in ensuring the effectiveness and accessibility of information provided by the government to the public via the E-Government platform. One approach taken is through optimizing information management through the official website, with a focus on improving content quality, more intuitive navigation and a more attractive appearance. This information management process involves various stages starting from content writing by the source, approval by the editor, to final publication on the website, which aims to ensure that the information conveyed to the public is accurate and useful.

Tabel 1. Strategis and Expected Outcomes

| Aspect | Strategies Implemented | Expected Outcomes |
|---|---|---|
| Information Dissemination | Optimization of information through the official website and use of social media platforms | Accurate, useful, and easily accessible information for the public |
| "Pusaka" Application | Providing integrated services via mobile application | Easy and efficient public access to various government services |
| Data Security And Public Awareness | Education on safe and responsible use of digital technology and cybersecurity measures | Enhanced data security and increased public awareness on privacy and safe digital practices |

Apart from using the official website, Public Relations of the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Province also uses social media and print media as tools to optimize the dissemination of information. Various content and information relevant to public and religious services are uploaded regularly on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Twitter and YouTube. This approach not only increases the reach of information but also expands interaction between government and society, by ensuring that the messages conveyed can be easily digested and understood by various groups. Another innovation implemented is through the use of the "Pusaka" application, a super application that provides various integrated and public services. Launched in 2022, this application has succeeded in attracting around 500 thousand users with various comprehensive features. It includes services such as Indonesia Bangkit Scholarship information, Public Complaints Service, Digital Library, Islamic Higher Education Services, and many more. Application users can easily access these various services via their mobile devices, increasing efficiency and ease of access for the public to government services.

The use of information and communication technology (ICT) in E-Government management not only has an impact on increasing the efficiency of public administration but also increases transparency and accountability. The instructions of the President of the Republic of Indonesia regarding E-

Government policy have become the basis for the development of these various platforms, with the aim of providing services that are faster, more accurate and easily accessible to the public. This is in line with the government's vision of providing public services that are more modern and responsive to the needs of today's digital society.

Nevertheless, challenges remain in implementing E-Government, especially related to data security and public awareness of the importance of privacy in using digital platforms. The Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Province continues to be committed to ensuring that any information provided is not only useful but also safe from cyber security risks. Education and outreach regarding the safe and responsible use of digital technology is also an integral part of the E-Government development strategy in this area. With ongoing efforts to improve the management of E-Government information services, it is hoped that the people of North Sumatra will be increasingly helped in accessing public information and government services more effectively and efficiently. Public Relations of the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Province continues to strive to expand the scope of services and improve the quality of interaction with the community through these various initiatives, so that the government's vision of realizing transparent and responsive government can be achieved even better in the future.

*Factors Inhibiting Public Relations (PR) of the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Province in managing E-Government information services.*

In managing E-Government information services at the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Province, there are several challenges that need to be overcome, especially those related to Human Resources (HR). These obstacles can come from internal or external institutions, which can affect the effectiveness and efficiency of program implementation. For example, limited facilities and technological equipment are internal factors that need to be considered to ensure that all human resources can work optimally. In addition, semantic barriers are also an important consideration in the context of digital communication. Misinterpretation of information can occur if there is not enough clarification, which has the potential to affect the accuracy and clarity of information conveyed to the public via the E-Government platform. Therefore, it is important to ensure that HR is equipped with good communication skills and a deep understanding of the content being disseminated. Human obstacles, such as differences in perception and expertise among human resources, are also factors that influence the management of information services. In a regional office, expertise in using technology may be good enough, but at a more local level such as a district or city, variations in HR capabilities can be a challenge. Increasing human resource capacity through adequate training and support is the key to overcoming this obstacle.

The results of interviews with informants from the Public Relations Institution of the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Province show that

Human Resources (HR) play a crucial role in the successful implementation of the E-Government program. A decline in human resource levels can hamper the availability and accessibility of information needed by the community. Therefore, investment in human resource development through education and training must be a priority to improve the efficiency and quality of public services.
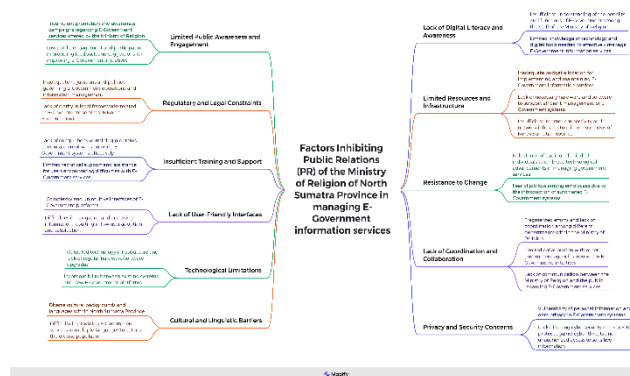


Figure 2. Factors Inhibiting Public Relations (PR) of the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Province in managing E-Government information services.

On the other hand, minimum standards in mastering technology are also a challenge for human resources within the Ministry of Religion. Mastering new and complex technology requires a fair amount of time and dedication, especially when the technology continues to develop rapidly. Local governments must ensure that their human resources not only understand technology, but are also able to integrate this technology into daily operations effectively. In conclusion, to be successful in implementing E-Government, the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Province must overcome challenges related to Human Resources with a holistic approach. This includes developing technical skills, improving internal communications, and investing in human resources to ensure that all potential obstacles can be successfully overcome and public services can be significantly improved.

*Unlocking the Paradox: Public Relations Effectiveness in North Sumatra Ministry of Religion's E-Government Services*

Analysis of transactional communication in the context of Unraveling Paradoxes: The Effectiveness of Public Relations in the North Sumatra Ministry of Religion's E-Government Services reveals the crucial role of Public Relations in facilitating the flow of information between the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion and the community. Public Relations is responsible for providing clear, accurate and easily accessible information via websites, social media and mobile applications. Transactional communication ensures that the information the public needs is delivered in a timely and effective manner. In addition, transactional communication plays an important role in maintaining transparency and accountability in E-Government services. By opening access to information such as public policies and programs, Public Relations helps build public trust. It also ensures more active

participation of the public in government processes, increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of public services. On the other hand, HR-related challenges require constant communication to address deficiencies in technological capabilities and HR skills. Public Relations plays a role in conveying training and development needs to ensure that HR can make maximum use of E-Government technology. This open and structured communication is important to minimize information gaps between the parties involved.

Apart from that, in the context of E-Government services, transactional communication helps build a strong collaborative network between the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion and other institutions and the community. Public relations facilitates the mutually beneficial exchange of information, promoting effective collaboration to improve the quality of public services. Structured and coordinated communication helps create a work environment that is conducive to the implementation of innovation and continuous improvement. Lastly, transactional communication plays a key role in overcoming internal and external obstacles that may arise in the E-Government implementation process. Public relations is not only a connector of information but also a mediator who is able to handle problems and facilitate sustainable solutions. This reflects the importance of effective communication in building a public service system that is responsive and adaptive to community needs.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS

The paper will not be reformatted, so please strictly keep the instructions given above, otherwise it will be returned for improvement. Please upload your paper in DOC file through the Conference website under Paper Submission menu. Implementation of e-Government in the Ministry of Religion of North Sumatra Province faces complex challenges that affect effectiveness and public acceptance. Although the concept promises efficiency and transparency in public services, the reality on the ground shows a number of problems that need to be addressed. One of the main obstacles is limited technological infrastructure which causes unequal public access to e-Government services. Lack of digital literacy is also a serious obstacle, with most people not being skilled in using digital platforms provided by the government. Apart from that, data security is an important issue that affects public trust in e-Government. Lack of data protection and confidentiality of personal information is a major concern for users of these services. Other challenges include inadequate system integration between various units in the Ministry of Religion, which often hinders smooth operations and effective services to the community. In overcoming these challenges, serious efforts are needed to improve technological infrastructure, increase people's digital literacy, strengthen data security, and improve coordination and integration between units within the organization. The government needs to be committed to continuing to develop and improve the e-Government system so that it can provide maximum benefits for society and fulfill expectations for better and more transparent public services.

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