

Integrated Media Relations Strategies of the Directorate General of Taxes to Enhance Brand Image

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Abstract: This study examines the media relations strategies employed by the Directorate General of Taxes (DGT) to improve its institutional image. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation of media activities, and analysis of official documents to understand communication practices comprehensively. The findings reveal a structured and sequential media relations process comprising: (1) provision of clear and accurate information materials, (2) facilitation of verification mechanisms, (3) relational engagement with journalists, and (4) integration of the PESO media strategy (paid, earned, shared, and owned media). While empirical evidence on public compliance or brand perception is limited, informants perceive that these strategies enhance transparency, credibility, and accessibility of information, thereby supporting the improvement of DGT's institutional image. The study proposes a conceptual model illustrating how information supply, verification, relational trust, and multi-channel communication interact to strengthen perceived institutional legitimacy and media relationships. These findings highlight the potential of strategic media relations in public institutions to address negative perceptions and reinforce organizational credibility.

Keywords: Brand Image, Directorate General of Taxes, Government PR Strategy, Media Relations, PESO Media.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini menganalisis strategi hubungan media yang diterapkan oleh Direktorat Jenderal Pajak (DJP) untuk meningkatkan citra institusi. Dengan menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi kegiatan media, dan analisis dokumen resmi untuk memahami praktik komunikasi secara komprehensif. Temuan menunjukkan proses hubungan media yang terstruktur dan berurutan, meliputi: (1) penyediaan materi informasi yang jelas dan akurat, (2) fasilitasi mekanisme verifikasi, (3) keterlibatan relasional dengan jurnalis, dan (4) integrasi strategi media PESO (paid, earned, shared, dan owned media). Meskipun bukti empiris mengenai kepatuhan publik atau persepsi merek terbatas, informan menilai bahwa strategi ini meningkatkan transparansi, kredibilitas, dan aksesibilitas informasi, sehingga mendukung perbaikan citra institusi DJP. Penelitian ini juga mengusulkan model konseptual yang menunjukkan bagaimana penyediaan informasi, verifikasi, kepercayaan relasional, dan komunikasi multi-kanal saling berinteraksi untuk memperkuat legitimasi institusi dan hubungan dengan media. Temuan ini menekankan potensi hubungan media strategis pada institusi publik dalam menangani persepsi negatif dan memperkuat kredibilitas organisasi.

Kata kunci: Citra Merek, Direktorat Jenderal Pajak, Hubungan Media, Strategi PR Pemerintah, PESO Media.



Introduction

Since the beginning of the reformation era, government public relations (PR) in Indonesia has undergone significant transformation. The professionalization of government PR, particularly since 2003, marked a turning point with the formalization of its functions and the establishment of forums across government institutions and ministries (Kementerian Pendayagunaan Aparatur Negara, 2003). Historically, government PR primarily focused on building a positive image and managing institutional reputation (Lani & Handayani, 2021; Sugiyanto et al., 2020). Over time, its scope has expanded to encompass broader dimensions, including managing public and stakeholder interests strategically and systematically (Eller, 2016). This evolution aligns with contemporary PR models emphasizing dialogue, feedback, and relationship building, rather than solely reputation management, positioning government PR as a critical component of governance capable of navigating complex societal dynamics and responding to public expectations. The need for such strategic engagement becomes particularly evident in situations where public controversies threaten institutional credibility.

Government PR is formally defined in regulations such as *Peraturan Menteri Pendayagunaan Aparatur Negara dan Reformasi Birokrasi Nomor 31 Tahun 2011*, which outlines guidelines for public relations infrastructure within government institutions (Kementerian Pendayagunaan Aparatur Negara dan Reformasi Birokrasi Republik Indonesia, 2011). Within this framework, government PR functions not merely as a communication channel but as a management tool to facilitate effective, persuasive, and efficient interactions with the public. Its primary objective is to build harmonious relationships while maintaining a positive institutional image and reputation (Kriyantono, 2019). PR officers act as representatives of governmental bodies, reflecting both personal and institutional values, and serve as foundational pillars in establishing trust, shaping institutional image, and managing crises (Lani & Handayani, 2021).

Government PR also serves as a mediator between the government, citizens, and other stakeholders, enhancing governance and development outcomes (Maulidia, 2020). PR officers contribute to institutional performance by promoting achievements, monitoring public opinion, and providing feedback to leadership (Ayudia & Wulandari, 2021). Unlike PR in the private sector, government PR lacks commercial motives, focusing instead on public service and citizen's rights to information and communication (Suprawoto, 2018). Its responsibilities include communication management, internal and external stakeholder engagement, and strategic image-building, as outlined in *Peraturan Menteri Pendayagunaan Aparatur Negara Nomor PER/12/M.PAN/08/2007* (Kementerian Pendayagunaan Aparatur Negara, 2007). Despite formalization, challenges remain in ensuring that strategies effectively address crises and controversies that can erode public trust.

PR as a discipline is defined in multiple ways. Marston (1979) defines public relations as intentional and persuasive communication efforts designed to influence key segments of the public, emphasizing its strategic purpose. Jefkins (2021) frames PR as a system of communication fostering goodwill, while the Institute of Public Relations defines it as a planned, continuous effort to maintain mutual understanding between an organization and its publics. Theaker (2020) emphasizes PR as ensuring accurate public perceptions, even in the



presence of criticism, and Samson (2018) positions PR as a management function systematically seeking understanding, sympathy, and support from stakeholders. These conceptualizations provide a theoretical foundation for understanding how PR, including government PR, shapes public perception and institutional image.

Historically, PR has been closely associated with media relations. Early practices focused on attracting media attention and shaping public opinion (Priandono, 2023). Press agency, as characterized by Grunig and Hunt (1984), laid the foundation for contemporary media relations practices. Media relations involves managing communication with journalists and media organizations to ensure accurate and favorable reporting (Putri & Lestari, 2023). Its role becomes especially critical in crisis contexts where institutional reputation is at stake (Gifari & Purnama, 2017). PR and media relations thus work in tandem to manage public perception strategically.

Previous studies show that media relations positively influence institutional image and synergy with marketing functions (Gifari & Purnama, 2017). Active media engagement ensures accurate dissemination of information and strengthens credibility (Sambo, 2019). However, most research has focused on corporate contexts, leaving gaps regarding media relations in government institutions facing reputation crises. Few studies analyze the effectiveness of media strategies in restoring public trust following controversial events involving public officials. This gap is evident in the Directorate General of Taxes (DGT), which has faced intense public scrutiny following high-profile cases involving personnel connected to the institution. One example is the widely reported assault case involving Mario Dandy and David Ozora, in which the son of a tax official was accused of violent misconduct, generating extensive media coverage and public debate about accountability and integrity within the civil service (ABC News, 2023; Channel News Asia, 2023). The case demonstrates how controversies linked to government officials can quickly escalate in public perception, emphasizing the importance of strategic media relations to manage reputation risk, restore public trust, and maintain institutional credibility.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating media relations strategies at the DGT to enhance institutional brand image. It is guided by Jefkin's (2021) media relations framework, which emphasizes proactive and strategic management of media communication to shape public perception, maintain organizational credibility, and build trust. The framework outlines four key components: planning media engagement, targeting relevant audiences, maintaining consistent and persuasive messaging, and monitoring media impact to evaluate effectiveness. Applying this framework, the study examines how strategic media engagement at the DGT can manage controversies, restore public trust, and foster compliance, particularly in the aftermath of cases like the Mario Dandy–David Ozora incident (ABC News, 2023; Channel News Asia, 2023). Guided by this framework, the study addresses two main research questions concerning the implementation and impact of media relations strategies within the Directorate General of Taxes (DGT). First, it examines how media relations strategies are implemented by the DGT's public relations unit to manage public perception following institutional controversies. Second, it explores the extent to which these media relations strategies influence the DGT's brand image and public compliance.



Media relations strategies are multifaceted, encompassing internal communication to ensure organizational members understand policies and anticipate potential issues, and external communication to foster positive perception among stakeholders. PR roles, as categorized by Dozier and Broom (1995), include expert prescriber, communications facilitator, problem-solving facilitator, and communications technician, reflecting the diverse responsibilities of PR practitioners as strategic advisors, mediators, crisis managers, and technical coordinators.

The strategic functions of PR include maintaining harmonious communication, serving public interests, and upholding organizational ethics (Harlow, 1976). Practitioners design programs to promote transparency, prevent misconduct, and ensure accountability. Effective strategies incorporate publications, events, community engagement, lobbying, negotiation, and corporate social responsibility (Ruslan, 2012; Vusparatih, 2013). Media relations now include structured practices such as press conferences, visits, gatherings, and press upgrades, fostering mutual understanding between organizations and media outlets (Mauludi et al., 2022; Sambo, 2019).

Brand image, closely linked with PR, represents public perceptions of an organization (Daud, 2021; Kotler & Keller, 2012). PR strategies can shape these perceptions by emphasizing organizational strengths and favorable attributes (Rangkuti, 2002). Ayudia and Wulandari (2021) underscore the critical role of PR practitioners in forming and maintaining institutional image. Despite this, empirical evidence on how media relations enhance brand image in government institutions remains limited, particularly when public trust is compromised. By integrating insights from government PR literature, media relations theory, and brand image research, this study contributes to understanding the strategic role of media relations in crisis management and image restoration in the public sector. It offers empirical evidence of the practical outcomes of PR interventions in a government institution, bridging theory and practice in media relations and public sector communication.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative case study design to explore how media relations function as a strategic public communication tool in enhancing the brand image of the DGT. A qualitative approach is appropriate for research that seeks to understand meaning, context, and depth of human experience and organizational practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study method enables an in-depth examination of media relations as they naturally occur within an institutional context affected by reputational challenges (Yin, 2018).

Data were collected through three complementary methods; in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis, to achieve triangulation, which enhances the credibility and trustworthiness of findings (Patton, 2015; Bowen, 2009). Triangulation allows the researcher to cross-validate information derived from multiple sources, making interpretations more robust and contextually grounded.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, which seeks individuals with direct experience and expertise relevant to the phenomenon under study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To maintain confidentiality and ethical standards, all informants are referred to by codes:



KI1: External journalist with one year of experience covering DGT-related economic news. Participated in press conferences and media gatherings.

I1: Internal practitioner responsible for news management and media monitoring at DGT. Over nine years of experience in public relations.

I2: Internal practitioner responsible for external relations and communication strategy planning. Directly involved in implementing media relations activities.

The key informant was an economic journalist from a national news agency who routinely covered DGT activities, including press conferences and media gatherings. Two internal informants were senior practitioners within the DGT's public relations division responsible for designing and implementing media relations activities. Selecting participants with diverse but directly relevant perspectives ensured that both institutional strategy and external media interpretation were represented, providing a holistic understanding of media relations outcomes.

In-depth interviews constituted the primary data source. Semi-structured interview protocols were developed to allow flexibility in probing participant's views while maintaining consistency across key topics. Internal informants were interviewed face-to-face at the DGT headquarters, while the external journalist participated via an online video platform. Interviews lasted between 60 and 75 minutes and were audio-recorded with informed consent to ensure accurate transcription. Questions explored participant's experiences with media relations, perceptions of strategy effectiveness, challenges encountered in communication execution, and insights on how media coverage influenced public perception of the DGT.

During observation, the researchers attended DGT-organized media events such as press conferences and media gatherings. Observation notes focused on interactions between public relations practitioners and journalists, message framing, responsiveness to media inquiries, and the dynamics of institutional communication in practice. These contextual observations enriched interview data by documenting real-time communicative behavior and institutional engagement.

Document analysis supplemented interviews and observations. Official internal documents, press releases, policy statements, and media coverage reports were examined to contextualize participant's accounts and verify communication strategies discussed in interviews. Document analysis also helped capture the intended messaging of DGT communications and any alignment or discrepancy with media reporting (Bowen, 2009).

Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were integral to study design and execution. All procedures followed established norms for research involving human subjects. Before data collection, participants received written and verbal explanations of the study's purpose, methods, potential benefits, and risks, and all provided written informed consent (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001). Participants were assured that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any stage without negative consequences. To protect privacy, all informant identities were replaced with pseudonyms or codes, and no personally identifiable information appears in the findings. Audio recordings, interview transcripts, and field notes



were stored securely on password-protected devices accessible only to the researcher. This approach ensured both confidentiality and data integrity throughout the research.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2019), which consists of three primary components: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the data condensation phase, raw textual data were systematically coded and categorized to identify recurring themes and patterns related to media relations strategies and brand image outcomes. Data display involved organizing codes into matrices and thematic groupings to facilitate comparison across informants and data sources. Finally, verification entailed iterative reflection and cross-validation against observational and documentary evidence to ensure analytical accuracy and consistency.

To strengthen the trustworthiness of the study, criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were applied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with data and methodological triangulation. Dependability was supported by maintaining an audit trail of decisions, coded transcripts, and analytical memos. Confirmability was ensured through reflexive journaling and cross-checking interpretations with peer feedback. Transferability was addressed through rich, contextual descriptions allowing readers to assess applicability to similar institutional settings.

The study was conducted primarily at the DGT headquarters in Jakarta, with interviews and observations taking place in organizational and virtual settings throughout 2024. The combination of rigorous qualitative design, ethical safeguards, and systematic analysis procedures ensures that the findings are both contextually meaningful and academically credible.

Results and Discussion

The following section presents the findings from the study, highlighting how the Directorate General of Taxes (DGT) implements media relations strategies, manages information dissemination, and engages with journalists and the public through various communication channels.

Providing Information Materials

Another media relations strategy implemented by the Public Relations Division of the Directorate General of Taxes (DGT) is the systematic provision of information materials. At this stage, the public relations unit proactively collaborates with mass media organizations by supplying information through press releases, media gatherings, press conferences, and interviews. This cooperation ensures that journalists receive accurate, complete, and timely materials to support news production and enhance the institution's public image.

Providing accurate information without concealing facts is viewed as part of the DGT's commitment to transparency and institutional credibility. Information disclosure is carried out broadly, quickly, and in a timely manner, using accessible methods and minimal cost. This approach aligns with the statement provided by I1:

“When journalists need information from our institution, we will provide it as openly and transparently as possible. For us, the role of journalists in producing accountable news



for their readers is very important, because the information written by journalists can influence public opinion and perception.”

This statement indicates that the DGT recognizes the strategic role of journalists in shaping public understanding. By providing journalists with open access to accurate and complete information, the institution supports responsible journalism and works toward improving its institutional image. Cooperation with journalists is therefore not merely routine communication but a strategic effort to enhance credibility and promote fact-based public discourse. KI1 highlighted the clarity and structure of information materials presented during media briefings:

“During media briefings, they present clear PowerPoint materials and data that are easier to understand compared to highly complex technical information. The speakers are also appropriate and competent to explain the topics. There is consistency between the presentation materials and how they are delivered.”

This structured and journalist-friendly approach facilitates effective information transfer and supports the DGT’s efforts to project an open, transparent, and reliable institutional image, although the study does not empirically measure changes in public perception or compliance.

Providing Verification Facilities

Verification facilitation mechanisms are another media relations strategy that contributes to improving the DGT’s image. By offering access and support to media workers, such as recorded press conferences on YouTube, journalists can confirm information and revisit statements as needed. KI1 explained:

“When they provide online coverage, including doorstep interviews and live broadcasts on YouTube, it really helps journalists. The recordings are clearer and make it easier to review the information.”

These verification opportunities enhance transparency, reduce misinterpretation, and strengthen the perception of credibility and accountability. Informants perceived that these facilities support reliable reporting and institutional trust, though this study does not provide empirical evidence on public compliance or measurable brand outcomes.

Building Personal Relationships with the Media

Relational engagement with journalists involves developing interpersonal connections and attentive communication beyond formal news needs. KI1 shared: “Once, during a media gathering outside the city, I got sick. The public relations team and even some officials took care of me. It made the relationship feel mutual, not hierarchical.” This approach reflects media relations practices grounded in respect and empathy. Informants described these relational strategies as contributing to cooperation and credibility, enhancing the DGT’s image as responsive and trustworthy, while acknowledging that the findings are based on perceptions rather than measured outcomes.



PESO Media Strategy

The DGT applies the Paid, Earned, Shared, and Owned (PESO) media strategy to enhance institutional communication and **support image improvement**. Paid media includes television, radio, print, online platforms, outdoor media, and advertisements in public transportation. I2 explained:

“We use electronic media such as television including RCTI, ANTV, TVONE, Kompas TV, Metro TV, and Transmedia. We also use radio, print and online media, outdoor banners, billboards, and advertisements on trains and busways.”

Earned media is implemented through talk shows, press coverage, and media gatherings, enabling journalists to clarify tax issues. KI1 noted: *“Through media gatherings, the information becomes clearer because we can ask questions directly.”*

Shared media involves active use of social media platforms such as Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn, enabling both information dissemination and interactive engagement. KI1 observed: *“Social media allows us to get updates quickly. We can see official information directly.”* Owned media includes the official website (www.pajak.go.id) and *Kring Pajak* services, along with WhatsApp groups used to distribute verified information to journalists.

The integrated PESO strategy ensures coordinated messaging across channels, supporting the DGT’s efforts to enhance visibility, credibility, and public perception. Informants perceived that this approach contributes to institutional image improvement, although this study does not empirically measure its effects on public compliance or brand perception.

The Directorate General of Taxes (DGT) demonstrates strategic media relations practices consistent with Jefkin’s framework, particularly in the deliberate provision of accurate information to journalists. The findings show that DGT disseminates press releases via its official website and communicates with media contacts through dedicated WhatsApp groups, enabling journalists to request clarifications directly. These practices are intentionally designed to improve the institution’s public image by shaping media narratives and enhancing transparency. Previous research indicates that timely and accurate information strengthens institutional credibility (Kurniawan & Wijoyo, 2025), yet providing information alone does not guarantee sustained public trust without interactive engagement and feedback (Kriyantono & Safitri, 2024). DGT’s structured media relations are therefore necessary but not sufficient; long-term improvement in brand image depends on continuous and inclusive engagement with media stakeholders.

Collaboration with media through structured briefings, clear presentations, and qualified spokespersons further supports institutional image improvement. Journalists reported that the clarity and consistency of materials facilitated accurate reporting of complex tax policies, reflecting Jefkin’s emphasis on understandable and verifiable content (Mauludi et al., 2022). Organized briefings promote responsible reporting and strengthen public discourse (Apriliani, 2022). However, the extensive use of government-paid media raises critical questions: to what extent can such visibility be considered neutral communication rather than a form of subtle



state influence or propaganda? Similarly, while earned media activities such as talk shows and media gatherings provide engagement opportunities, the independence of coverage remains contingent on the framing imposed by the institution. These reflections suggest that media strategies, while improving institutional visibility, also involve negotiation of power and influence over public perception.

Verification practices, including live-streamed press conferences and archived recordings, allow journalists to cross-check information and enhance understanding of tax policies, embodying Jefkin's principles of transparency and credibility (Putri & Lestari, 2023; Apriliani, 2022). Yet, access alone does not automatically translate into trust, compliance, or measurable improvements in brand image unless systematically evaluated (Jakus, 2018). The use of WhatsApp groups for distributing verified information further alters traditional journalist–state interactions, improving speed and coordination but potentially creating expectations of constant responsiveness and influencing journalistic autonomy.

Personal relationships with media representatives are another key strategy. Staff and officials demonstrate respect and attentiveness during events, fostering trust and long-term collaboration beyond transactional interactions. This relational approach aligns with Jefkin's framework, emphasizing engagement as a cornerstone of effective media relations (Putri & Lestari, 2023). Research suggests that personal rapport supports cooperative reporting and credibility (Haryanti & Rusfian, 2025). However, relational strategies are resource-intensive and may be challenging to scale, highlighting the importance of embedding interpersonal engagement within broader, systematic plans to maximize impact on public perception (Kriyantono & Safitri, 2024). The findings suggest that relational trust mediates institutional transparency, demonstrating how social capital functions as a mechanism to improve government image.

DGT's adoption of the PESO media strategy illustrates a comprehensive, integrated approach to public communication, coordinating paid, earned, shared, and owned media to enhance visibility, interaction, and authoritative messaging. This multi-channel strategy reflects Jefkin's emphasis on leveraging diverse tools to influence media narratives (Putri & Lestari, 2023). At the same time, theoretical considerations emerge: paid media initiatives may be perceived as propaganda, earned media may be subtly guided by state priorities, and digital platforms such as WhatsApp and social media reshape traditional journalist–state relationships. These dynamics reveal potential tensions between strategic communication and journalistic independence while highlighting new avenues for understanding mediated transparency and networked accountability.

Systematic evaluation of media relations outcomes remains essential. Jefkin's framework emphasizes assessing not only implementation but also effectiveness in achieving communication goals (Putri & Lestari, 2023). International guidelines, including the Barcelona Principles and OECD recommendations, stress evaluating outcomes such as public understanding, trust, and behavioral change (Jakus, 2019; OECD, 2021). Incorporating structured assessment would allow DGT to determine whether its strategies successfully



improve institutional image, strengthen credibility, and encourage compliance, while also addressing concerns about media influence.

Overall, DGT's media relations strategies—including structured information supply, verification, relational engagement, and integrated PESO use—form a strategic process aimed at improving institutional image. While the study does not empirically measure effects on compliance or brand perception, it highlights how media relations can reinforce visibility, credibility, and perceived reliability.

Theoretical Contribution

This study extends Jefkin's framework by demonstrating how government media relations integrate relational, verification, and multi-channel strategies to institutionalize transparency and manage public perception. It emphasizes the interplay between relational trust, digital communication channels, and perceived legitimacy in public sector institutions. Furthermore, it raises critical considerations regarding the boundaries of state influence, the independence of journalistic coverage, and the potential tension between strategic communication and propaganda, providing a foundation for future research on government-media interactions and institutional image improvement.

Conceptual Model: DGT Media Relations Strategies

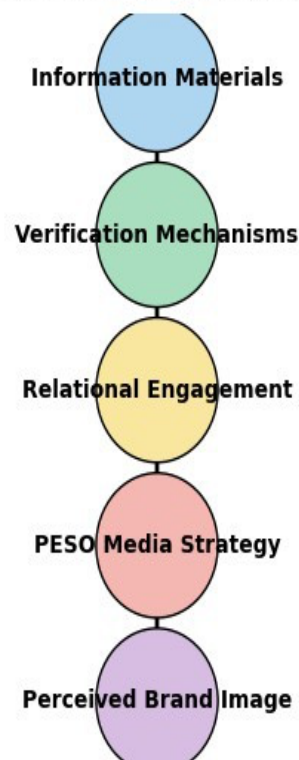


Figure 1.
Conceptual Model: DGT Media Relations Strategies
Source: Researchers

Conclusion

This study examined how the Directorate General of Taxes (DGT) implements media relations strategies to manage public perception, particularly in the context of its challenging institutional image. The findings show that DGT applies a structured and integrated approach to media relations, including the provision of clear and accurate information materials, facilitation of verification through press conferences and recorded content, relational engagement with journalists, and the use of multi-channel communication via paid, earned, shared, and owned media. Social media and coordinated channels such as WhatsApp groups further support timely information dissemination and interaction with the public and media.

Although this study does not empirically measure effects on compliance or brand perception, informants consistently perceive that these strategies contribute to enhancing transparency, credibility, and accessibility of information. Overall, the evidence suggests that

DGT's media relations practices are designed to improve its institutional image, strengthen trust with journalists, and promote a perception of the organization as responsive and reliable.

These findings indicate that government media relations can be strategically used to address negative perceptions and enhance institutional legitimacy. Future research could investigate the measurable impact of these strategies on public trust, compliance, and brand image, and explore how multi-channel and relational approaches function across other public institutions.

Implications of the study highlight that government media relations involve multiple dimensions, including informational, relational, and strategic communication activities. Analyzing these strategies provides insight into how public institutions structure media engagement, manage institutional visibility, and maintain professional relationships with journalists. The study also demonstrates the applicability of the PESO media model in public-sector communication, offering a structured approach for organizing multi-platform media relations. Limitations include the focus on a single institution and a small number of informants, which may not capture all possible media relations practices within other government agencies. The study is also limited to descriptive and analytical insights, without assessing the effectiveness or outcomes of these strategies. Suggestions for future research include analyzing media relations strategies across multiple government institutions to identify common practices and variations, and exploring additional methods such as content analysis to examine the alignment between organizational messaging and media coverage. Comparative studies could further illuminate how different institutional contexts shape media relations strategies.

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