

Strengthening Institutional Image Through Public Communication Strategies in the Rebranding Process of the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The image of government institutions is a critical asset in building public trust, and rebranding is one of the strategies used to strengthen it, as undertaken by the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Indonesia (Kemhan RI) through the launch of a new logo in January 2022 to replace its identity used since 2005. This study aims to examine how public communication strategies contributed to strengthening institutional image during Kemhan RI's rebranding process, using Harold Lasswell's communication model (Who Says What In Which Channel To Whom With What Effect) as the analytical framework. A qualitative case study approach was employed, with data collected through semi-structured interviews with five purposively selected key informants, comprising senior public relations officials, military and civilian staff, an external branding expert, and an institutional intern, conducted between January and April 2024. Source and methodological triangulation were applied to ensure data trustworthiness, and data were analysed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model. The findings show that rebranding communication was carried out through a two-tier communicator structure led by the Minister of Defense and operationalised by the Public Relations Bureau, with messages grounded in seven institutional values aligned with the bureaucratic reform agenda. A multiplatform communication strategy spanning mass media, social media, and official digital channels produced measurable public engagement, including 9,610 Instagram likes and 517 Twitter engagements on the rebranding announcement. Preliminary survey data further indicate that 93% of respondents assessed Kemhan RI's image as having improved following the rebranding. The study concludes that successful government rebranding depends not on visual change alone but on the strategic coherence of its accompanying communication process, contributing theoretically by advancing a more dynamic application of Lasswell's model as a framework for evaluating strategic communication coherence in institutional contexts.

Keywords: public communication strategy; rebranding; Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Indonesia; Lasswell's communication model; institutional image

ABSTRAK

Citra institusi pemerintah merupakan aset penting dalam membangun kepercayaan publik, dan salah satu strategi yang ditempuh untuk memperkuatnya adalah rebranding, sebagaimana dilakukan Kementerian Pertahanan Republik Indonesia (Kemhan RI) melalui peluncuran logo baru pada Januari 2022 untuk menggantikan identitas yang telah digunakan sejak 2005. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji bagaimana strategi komunikasi publik berkontribusi terhadap penguatan citra institusi selama proses rebranding tersebut, dengan menggunakan model komunikasi Harold Lasswell (Who Says What In Which Channel To Whom With What Effect) sebagai kerangka analisis. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, dengan data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi terstruktur kepada lima informan kunci yang dipilih

secara purposif, meliputi pejabat humas senior, staf militer dan sipil, pakar branding eksternal, serta seorang peserta magang di lingkungan Kemhan RI, yang dilaksanakan pada Januari hingga April 2024. Triangulasi sumber dan teknik digunakan untuk menjaga keabsahan data, dan analisis data dilakukan menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa komunikasi rebranding dijalankan melalui struktur komunikator dua lapis yang dipimpin oleh Menteri Pertahanan dan dioperasikan oleh Biro Humas, dengan pesan yang berlandaskan tujuh nilai institusi yang selaras dengan agenda reformasi birokrasi. Strategi komunikasi multiplatform yang mencakup media massa, media sosial, dan kanal digital resmi menghasilkan keterlibatan publik yang terukur, termasuk 9.610 likes di Instagram dan 517 engagement di Twitter pada unggahan pengumuman rebranding. Data survei awal juga menunjukkan bahwa 93% responden menilai citra Kemhan RI meningkat setelah rebranding. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa keberhasilan rebranding pemerintah tidak ditentukan oleh perubahan visual semata, melainkan oleh koherensi strategis dari proses komunikasi yang menyertainya, serta memberikan kontribusi teoretis berupa penerapan model Lasswell yang lebih dinamis sebagai kerangka evaluasi koherensi komunikasi strategis dalam konteks institusional.

Kata kunci: *strategi komunikasi publik; rebranding; Kementerian Pertahanan Republik Indonesia; model komunikasi Lasswell; citra institusi*

INTRODUCTION

In an era of increasing public scrutiny and digital transparency, the image of government institutions has become a critical asset in sustaining public trust and policy legitimacy. The Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Indonesia (Kemhan RI), as a strategic institution responsible for national security and sovereignty, faces a particularly complex image management challenge: it must project strength, modernity, and accountability simultaneously, to audiences ranging from the general public to international defense partners. One of the most visible strategies through which institutions pursue image renewal is rebranding, and in January 2022, Kemhan RI undertook precisely this, when Minister of Defense Prabowo Subianto officially introduced a new institutional logo to replace the one that had been in use since 2005. The change was framed not merely as an aesthetic update, but as a symbol of a stronger, more modern defense spirit aligned with Indonesia's ongoing bureaucratic reform agenda.

Rebranding as a phenomenon has been studied extensively in corporate and commercial contexts. Kotler and Keller define it as an effort to reshape an organization's identity to better align with its market relevance, while Tjiptono and Fandy emphasize that rebranding fundamentally concerns the transformation of organizational image, not merely its visual representation (as cited in Pratama et al., 2022). Studies in the Indonesian business sector have confirmed that logo changes can produce measurable image effects: Nabila (2018) found that PT Bank BRI's rebranding accounted for a 34.2% shift in corporate image perception, while Febriansyah (2013) demonstrated that logo changes at PT Telkom produced significant brand image effects only when accompanied by consistent messaging and organizational commitment.

In the government context, however, the dynamics of rebranding differ substantially. Public sector institutions are not market-driven; their legitimacy rests on accountability, public trust, and political authority rather than consumer preference.

Studies on government public relations in Indonesia have shown that two-way communication, transparency, and public participation are key determinants of institutional image (Mardiana et al., 2017; Hariani, 2017). Yet these studies address image management in general operational contexts; they do not examine rebranding as a deliberate, bounded communication strategy. Meanwhile, studies that do focus on government rebranding, such as Abadi and Maharani (2021) on the rebranding of a health institution and Purnomo et al. (2022) on the Ministry of Cooperatives' rebranding via Instagram, treat communication strategy and rebranding as largely separate concerns, or focus on a single platform rather than a holistic communication strategy.

This gap is significant. When a government institution undergoes rebranding, the communication strategy that surrounds the identity change is not incidental; it is constitutive of whether the rebranding succeeds in reshaping public perception. Without a structured communication strategy, even a well-designed logo change risks being dismissed as politically motivated or cosmetically superficial, as early public commentary on Kemhan RI's new logo on social media platforms demonstrated. The question of how government institutions strategically communicate identity change to diverse stakeholders, and with what effect on institutional image, remains undertheorized in Indonesian communication scholarship, particularly in the defense sector where political sensitivity and institutional authority add further complexity.

This study addresses that gap by examining the public communication strategies employed by Kemhan RI during its 2022 rebranding process, analyzed through Harold Lasswell's communication model (Who Says What In Which Channel To Whom With What Effect). Lasswell's framework was selected not merely because of its descriptive utility, but because its five elements map directly onto the strategic decisions that any institutional communicator must make: who speaks, what is said, through which media, to which audiences, and to what effect. Applied to a government rebranding context, the model enables a structured evaluation of whether each communication element was intentionally designed and mutually coherent, a dimension that prior studies using this framework have not fully explored. The novelty of this study lies in three areas: it integrates rebranding and public communication strategy within a single analytical framework applied to a government institution; it situates this analysis within the defense sector, a context characterized by unique constraints of political authority and institutional accountability; and it advances a more dynamic application of Lasswell's model as a framework for evaluating strategic communication coherence in institutional contexts.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design with a descriptive case study approach. As Strauss and Corbin (2013) explain, qualitative research is particularly suited for examining social phenomena in their natural, complex, and holistic contexts, building understanding through inductive reasoning rather than statistical measurement. This approach was selected because the focus of this study, the public communication strategies of a government institution during its rebranding process,

demands in-depth, interpretive analysis that cannot be captured through quantification alone. The unit of analysis is Kemhan RI, specifically its rebranding process initiated in January 2022, with the study focusing on how the Public Relations Bureau of the Secretariat General designed and executed its public communication strategies, analyzed through the five elements of Lasswell's communication model.

Participants were selected using a purposive sampling strategy to obtain information from individuals with direct knowledge of and involvement in Kemhan RI's rebranding communication. A total of five key informants were selected: Brigadier General TNI Edwin Adrian Sumantha, Head of the Public Relations Bureau, selected as the primary decision-maker in public communication; Colonel Inf Susilo Wardoyo, Head of the Partnership Relations Section, with approximately eight years at Kemhan RI; Citra Wulan Suci, Head of the Non-Government Relations Sub-section, with approximately fourteen years in the public relations division; Erwin Parengkuan, Founder and CEO of TALKINC, selected as an external branding expert with over 30 years of professional experience; and Ranita Sumintapura, an intern at Kemhan RI's Public Relations Bureau, representing a non-institutional observer perspective.

Primary data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted between January and April 2024 at Kemhan RI's main office in Jakarta. All interviews were recorded with consent and subsequently transcribed. Secondary data were obtained from the official Kemhan RI website, official social media accounts, and media coverage, which served to corroborate and contextualize interview findings. Source triangulation was applied by comparing data from multiple informants across different positions, while methodological triangulation was employed by comparing interview results with documentary and social media evidence (Alfansyur & Mariyani, 2020; Moleong, 2016). Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (as cited in Sugiyono, 2019), consisting of three stages: data reduction, in which raw transcripts were condensed by identifying key themes aligned with Lasswell's five elements; data display, in which findings were organized into narrative thematic categories; and conclusion drawing and verification, in which interpretive conclusions were cross-checked against secondary data and prior literature.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study examines the public communication strategy employed by Kemhan RI during its 2022 logo rebranding, analysed through the five elements of Lasswell's communication model. While previous studies on government rebranding have tended to focus either on visual identity change or public relations strategy in isolation (Mardiana et al., 2017; Nabila, 2018), this study integrates both dimensions within a single analytical framework applied to the defense sector, a context that has received limited scholarly attention.

The primary communicators in Kemhan RI's rebranding process were the Minister of Defense, the Vice Minister, the Secretary General, and operationally, the Head of the Public Relations Bureau of the Secretariat General, a hierarchy reflecting the formal authority structure established under Ministerial Regulation No. 02 of 2015, which

designates the Head of Public Relations as the authorised information officer (PPID). As one internal informant described, the initial rebranding announcement was made directly by the Minister at the leadership meeting, after which communication responsibilities were delegated downward through the institutional chain. This finding aligns with Grunig and Hunt's concept of asymmetrical public communication commonly practiced in government institutions, where messages originate from top leadership and are cascaded through designated spokespersons (as cited in Mardiana et al., 2017). However, what distinguishes Kemhan RI's approach is the deliberate involvement of an internal communications team responsible for translating the Minister's vision into operational communication materials across multiple platforms, a two-tier communicator structure that suggests a more coordinated approach than typically observed in studies of Indonesian government communication, where messaging is often ad hoc and personality-driven.

The core messages conveyed during the rebranding process centered on seven institutional values: national safety and sovereignty, professionalism and integrity, service quality improvement, innovation and technology adoption, inter-institutional partnership, transparency and accountability, and equality and diversity. These values represented a deliberate repositioning of Kemhan RI's identity in response to external pressures including geopolitical shifts, demands for bureaucratic reform, and changing public expectations of government transparency. This multi-value messaging strategy is consistent with what Kotler and Keller describe as the core function of rebranding: constructing a new identity that is simultaneously distinct and relevant to its stakeholders (as cited in Pratama et al., 2022). Importantly, the bureaucratic reform narrative highlighted by the military informant connects the visual change to a broader governance reform agenda, lending institutional legitimacy beyond mere aesthetic renewal, directly confirming Febriansyah's (2013) earlier finding that logo changes alone have minimal impact unless accompanied by consistent and meaningful messaging.

In terms of channel selection, Kemhan RI employed a multiplatform communication approach, utilising mass media, digital and social media platforms, the official institutional website, and direct public engagement through press conferences and seminars, with channel selection preceded by systematic audience analysis to identify which platforms best matched the communication preferences of each target segment. The effectiveness of this strategy is evidenced by measurable digital engagement: the rebranding announcement on Instagram received 9,610 likes and 151 comments, while the Twitter post generated 463 likes, 54 retweets, and 517 total engagements. These data points provide concrete indicators of audience reach and message penetration, supporting Cahyani's (2020) argument that government public relations increasingly relies on social media not merely as a broadcasting tool, but as a platform for gauging and shaping public perception, consistent with Ayudia and Wulandari's (2021) recommendation to match message format to channel characteristics.

The target audiences were segmented into five groups: the general public, military personnel and their families, defense industry stakeholders, local governments, and the

international community, with each segment receiving messaging tailored to its specific information needs and relationship with the institution. Messages directed at the general public emphasised institutional legitimacy and national security commitment, while communications aimed at defense industry actors foregrounded partnership and innovation. This deliberate audience segmentation reflects a strategic shift from the traditional one-size-fits-all government communication model toward a more targeted, stakeholder-specific approach. Preliminary survey data revealed that 71% of respondents were unaware of Kemhan RI's rebranding before the study, underscoring both the scale of the communication challenge and the importance of multi-segment targeting, while the finding that 93% of respondents subsequently assessed Kemhan RI's image as having improved suggests that when communication reaches its intended audiences, it is effective, consistent with Mardiana et al.'s (2017) finding that two-way communication and public participation are key determinants of successful government image-building.

The effects of Kemhan RI's rebranding communication were observed across four dimensions: public response, brand recognition, institutional influence, and digital engagement. Positive public reception was reflected in social media metrics and the preliminary survey, where 97% of respondents agreed that the rebranding decision was appropriate and 76% believed that rebranding directly shapes institutional image. Beyond public perception, the rebranding was also noted to have influenced other government institutions to undertake similar identity renewal processes, an institutional ripple effect suggesting the communication strategy successfully framed rebranding as a marker of progressive governance. Taken together, these effects demonstrate that Kemhan RI's rebranding succeeded not only as a visual identity exercise but as a strategic communication intervention, consistent with Indika and Dewi's (2018) argument that successful rebranding requires simultaneous cultivation of a favorable brand image through sustained, coherent communication. The long-term challenge lies in maintaining image continuity beyond the initial launch: communication strategies must evolve into dialogic and participatory forms to sustain public trust over time, moving beyond one-directional message delivery toward genuine two-way engagement with the public (Canel & Luoma-aho, 2019).

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how public communication strategies contribute to the strengthening of institutional image during a government rebranding process, using Kemhan RI's 2022 logo change as its empirical case. Through the analytical lens of Lasswell's communication model, the findings reveal that the success of Kemhan RI's rebranding was not determined by visual change alone, but by the coherence, consistency, and strategic intentionality of the communication process that surrounded it. Three key factors emerged as central to this success: the structured communicator hierarchy anchored by the Minister and operationalized through the Public Relations Bureau, which ensured that messaging was both authoritative and operationally coordinated; the deliberate alignment of rebranding messages with the broader

bureaucratic reform agenda, which gave the logo change institutional and political legitimacy; and the multiplatform communication strategy guided by audience segmentation, which enabled Kemhan RI to reach diverse stakeholder groups with tailored messaging, as evidenced by measurable digital engagement and overwhelmingly positive public assessment in post-rebranding survey data.

This study makes two contributions to communication scholarship. First, it extends the application of Lasswell's communication model beyond its conventional descriptive use, demonstrating that the model can serve as an analytical framework for evaluating strategic communication coherence in institutional contexts, specifically, whether each element of a communication process is intentionally designed and mutually reinforcing. Second, this study contributes to the emerging literature on public sector rebranding by demonstrating that rebranding in a bureaucratic and defense context operates differently from corporate rebranding, shaped by accountability norms, political legitimacy, and public trust rather than market forces, factors that amplify the role of strategic communication far beyond visual identity management (Canel & Luoma-aho, 2019; Leijerholt et al., 2019).

For government institutions considering rebranding, this study suggests that communication strategy must be planned in parallel with identity design, not as an afterthought. The involvement of senior leadership as primary communicators, combined with a trained public relations team and a multi-channel distribution strategy, proved critical in Kemhan RI's case, and rebranding communication should not conclude at the launch event; sustaining institutional image requires ongoing dialogic engagement with the public. Future studies are encouraged to apply a comparative design, examining rebranding communication strategies across multiple government institutions or between public and private sector organizations, while longitudinal research tracking public perception of Kemhan RI's image over time would also provide valuable insight into whether the effects observed in this study are sustained beyond the initial rebranding momentum.

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