

Public Relations Services of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of South Sumatra Province in Providing Public Information Based on WhatsApp Artificial Intelligence Chatbot

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ABSTRACT

Public Relations of the Ministry of Religion of South Sumatra Province faces challenges in providing public information services due to the high volume of public inquiries through digital channels, while human resource capacity is limited, so the previous response time reaches 5-8 hours. As an innovation, AIOHumas, which is an Artificial Intelligence (AI) chatbot based on WhatsApp, was developed. This study aims to analyze public information services through AIOHumas and its improvement strategies. The research uses a descriptive qualitative approach based on the New Public Service Theory (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2003). Data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and documentation studies of three key informants, namely the Head of the Public Relations Working Team, the Website Manager and AIOHumas, and the AIOHumas PIC. Data analysis used the Miles and Huberman interactive model. The results of the study show that AIOHumas meets five indicators of modern public services, namely responsiveness (response in seconds and operating 24 hours), transparency (official data is validated), accountability (periodic data updates every three months by a dedicated data team), accessibility (reaching around 6,000 users through familiar platforms), and participation (unanswered questions are used as database development materials). Service improvement is realized through strengthening the 24-hour automated system, expanding service coverage, continuous data updates, and humanizing digital services in AIOHumas version 3 which sets standards for polite, friendly, and empathetic communication. This innovation won the 1st place award for "Work Unit with Innovative Communication" at the Regional Office level in 2025, although it still faces the constraint of dependence on internet infrastructure and management that is centralized to one to two people.

INTRODUCTION

Public Relations of the Ministry of Religion of South Sumatra Province has an important role in providing public information services to the public, especially related to religious services such as marriage registration, hajj information, and other religious document management. Based on the results of initial observations and preliminary studies, it is known that the Public Relations of the Ministry of Religion of South Sumatra Province receives hundreds of public messages every month through social media and official WhatsApp. The message was dominated by recurring questions such as marriage registration procedures, hajj service schedules, and the mechanism for managing religious documents. A similar phenomenon is also found in the public information services of the Ministry of Religion nationally, where digital channels are the main media for the public to access religious information (Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, 2023; Central Information Commission, 2023).

Recent research shows that the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based chatbots in the context of public services can significantly improve service effectiveness by improving response speed, operational

efficiency, and user satisfaction. A meta-analysis of various AI chatbot studies in public services found that the use of chatbots is able to improve service efficiency, reduce response times, and significantly increase user satisfaction compared to conventional manual services, especially in answering routine questions and requests for basic public information. This shows the potential of AI chatbots as an innovative tool that can reduce the workload of apparatus while accelerating the delivery of information to the public in an increasingly dynamic and complex digital government environment (Ma'rup et al., 2024).

Based on the internal report of the public satisfaction survey of the Ministry of Religion of South Sumatra Province in 2024, the average response time to public questions reaches 5-8 hours (internal data from the Ministry of Religion of South Sumatra, 2024). This condition has the potential to have an impact on reducing the quality of public services and reducing the satisfaction of service users. On the other hand, government agencies also face challenges in the form of spreading hoaxes and misinformation on digital platforms. South Sumatra Province has developed a hoax clarification portal through the "South Sumatra Kominfo Fact Check" service, which shows that digital information management is a crucial part in mitigating the negative impact of infodemics on public trust in digital government services (Kominfo Sumsel, 2024).

In a broader context, the choice of platform is an important factor in the development of digital-based public information services. In Indonesia, WhatsApp is the most widely used instant messaging application by people from various walks of life. By utilizing WhatsApp as a service platform, government agencies can reach a wider community without requiring users to learn new applications, so that public information services become more accessible and inclusive.

In line with this, government public relations has also undergone a transformation of roles. Gone defines public relations as "managing relationships between organizations, stakeholders, and the public through strategic and goal-oriented communication". "It provides organizations with insights into stakeholder interests, expectations, social issues, and public concerns." This definition emphasizes the role of PR as a strategic tool to listen to and respond to public needs in a systematic manner, similar to Organizational Listening (Kurniawan et al., 2025). This view is reinforced by Irawanto et al. (2022) who state that government public relations plays a role as a "digital narrator" and a "conversation facilitator" in building relationships with the public through digital media (Irawanto et al., 2022). The digital era also encourages the realization of the concept of e-government, where public services are required to be accessible online, efficiently, and transparently.

In the midst of these demands, Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 14 of 2008 concerning Public Information Disclosure affirms the obligation of public bodies to provide information that is fast, accurate, and easily accessible to the public. Therefore, the use of digital technology such as the WhatsApp AI chatbot in public information services is part of the efforts to adapt government agencies to the demands of information disclosure and improve the quality of public services in the digital era.

Based on the overall description, it can be understood that the main problem that needs to be studied lies not only in the existence of the WhatsApp AI chatbot as a technological innovation, but also in how the public relations services of the Ministry of Religion of South Sumatra Province provide public information through the media. Thus, it is important to examine more deeply how the public relations communication service of the Ministry of Religion of South Sumatra Province provides public information based on the Artificial Intelligence (AI) WhatsApp chatbot. In addition, considering that public services in the digital era demand continuous quality improvement, it is also necessary to study how improving public services at the Ministry of Religion of South Sumatra Province can be done through the use of WhatsApp's Artificial Intelligence (AI) chatbot to the public.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research approach used in this study is qualitative with a descriptive type. This approach was chosen because this research focuses on understanding in depth the social and communication phenomena that occur in the work environment of the Public Relations of the Ministry of Religion of South Sumatra Province, especially in the context of the application of WhatsApp-based Artificial Intelligence (AI) Chatbot technology as a medium for public information services.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Public Information Services of the Ministry of Religion of South Sumatra Province Based on WhatsApp Artificial Intelligence Chatbot

Responsiveness: Speed and Availability of Public Information Services

From the comparison of the three informants, all three have a consistent understanding that changes in responsiveness are the most felt impact of the presence of AIOHumas. However, there are different points of view: Akhpasi and Eka Widianingsih highlight the technical aspects of speed and ease of operation, while Abdul Qudus Fitriansyah emphasizes the impact on the community who previously had to sacrifice time to come in person.

The author considers that this difference in viewpoint actually strengthens the same conclusion from two directions: from the manager's side, responsiveness increases because the system works automatically, from the community's side, responsiveness is perceived as a real time saver. In the perspective of Chapter II, this condition

shows that the responsiveness indicators have been significantly met through AIOHumas, although manual service is maintained as a complementary pathway for more complex needs.

Transparency: Open Access and Public Information Delivery Process

From the comparison of the three informants, there was a significant difference in the ability to describe transparency. Akhpasi has the most in-depth understanding of process transparency because he is the one who designs and manages the system's workflow. Eka Widianingsih has a more operational understanding of transparency in daily monitoring. Meanwhile, Mr. Abdul Qudus Fitriansyah sees transparency from the perspective of institutional policies that ensure that various access routes remain open.

The author is of the view that these three perspectives actually reflect three mutually supportive layers of transparency: technical transparency at the system level, operational transparency at the monitoring level, and policy transparency at the institutional level. In the perspective of Chapter II, the fulfillment of these three layers of transparency shows that AIOHumas not only provides information openly, but also manages the disclosure responsibly at every level of the organization, which is a concrete implementation of the principle of transparency in government public relations services.

Accountability: Validation, Consistency, and Information Accountability

From the comparison of the three informants, all three have a consistent understanding that information accountability is a priority that cannot be compromised. However, there is an interesting difference in emphasis: Akhpasi emphasizes accountability through the prohibition of manual answers to prevent inconsistencies, Eka Widianingsih emphasizes accountability through verification mechanisms and periodic updates, while Abdul Qudus Fitriansyah emphasizes accountability through the formation of a special data team as an organizational structure that ensures updates take place systematically.

The authors assess that these three approaches form a multi-layered accountability system: inconsistency prevention at the technical level, quality monitoring at the operational level, and structural assurance at the managerial level. The multiple layers of this accountability mechanism show that AIOHumas does not rely on just one control point, but builds an integrated accountability system. This is in line with the principle of accountability in Chapter II which emphasizes that every information provided must be accountable to the community as a party served.

Accessibility: Unhindered Fulfillment of Public Information Rights

From the comparison of the three informants, Akhpasi provided a technical perspective on accessibility in terms of platform selection, Eka Widianingsih provided accessibility confirmation from the user experience he monitored, and Abdul Qudus Fitriansyah added the accessibility dimension through ensuring that conventional service lines remain open.

The author considers that the combination of digital accessibility and conventional accessibility maintained at the same time is an inclusive and appropriate approach. Not all people have seamless digital access, and not all questions can be solved through chatbots. By maintaining both paths, the fulfillment of the right to public information as emphasized in Chapter II can reach the public more evenly. The figure of 6,000 users conveyed by Akhpasi is a quantitative indicator that shows that the accessibility provided is really widely used by the community.

Participation: Community Engagement in Service Communication

From the comparison of the three informants, there is a clear division of roles in managing community participation. Eka Widianingsih is at the forefront of receiving and responding to community interactions, Akhpasi translates these interactions into system development, and Abdul Qudus Fitriansyah ensures institutional commitment that the space for participation is always open.

The author considers that this layered mechanism is an implementation of participation indicators that go beyond just formal fulfillment. Every unanswered question of the community is not only addressed, but actively used to expand the capacity of the system. This means that community participation serves as a feedback mechanism that encourages the improvement of services organically and sustainably, which is the highest form of participatory principles in government public relations services as described in Chapter II. Improving Public Services at the Ministry of Religion of South Sumatra Province through WhatsApp Artificial Intelligence Chatbot

Strengthening Responsiveness through a 24-Hour Automated System

The author considers that Abdul Qudus Fitriansyah's perspective is important to understand in the context of improving services: the ideal responsiveness is not only a matter of speed, but also of reach. A system that is fast but only accessible to digital users does not meet inclusive standards of responsiveness. By maintaining the conventional path, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of South Sumatra Province ensures that strengthening

responsiveness through technology does not create new gaps for people who are not familiar with digital services, in line with the principle of equitable responsiveness in Chapter II.

Increased Accessibility through Platform Innovation and Service Coverage

From the comparison of the three informants, Akhpasi described the increase in accessibility from a technical and strategic perspective, Eka Widianingsih confirmed it in terms of user response, while Abdul Qudus Fitriansyah complemented it with a guarantee of accessibility for all segments of society. The author considers that the increase in accessibility of AIOHumas is multidimensional: accessible in time because it operates 24 hours, accessible in terms of platform because it uses WhatsApp that the community already has, accessible in terms of content because it continues to expand the scope of service information, and accessibility in terms of channels because it maintains direct communication. These four dimensions of accessibility together ensure that the fulfillment of the right to public information as affirmed in Chapter II and Law No. 14 of 2008 can be felt by the widest possible community.

Strengthening Accountability through Data Updates and System Consistency

From the comparison of the three informants, there is a strong alignment on the importance of accountability as the foundation of public trust. What is interesting is that the three informants not only understand accountability as an obligation, but also as a strategic need for the sustainability of service use. The statements of Abdul Qudus Fitriansyah and Akhpasi, who both mentioned the risk of losing public trust if the data is not updated, show that there is a mature awareness that accountability is a prerequisite for service sustainability, not just a formality.

The authors consider that the expansion of the accountability mechanism from two-person management to the formation of a dedicated data team is a significant and timely step in the right direction. This is in line with the principle of accountability in Chapter II which emphasizes that public accountability must be inherent in the system, not dependent on individuals alone (Pandiangan & Ratnasari, 2023).

Orientation to the Public Interest through the Humanization of Digital Services

From the comparison of the three informants, Akhpasi and Eka Widianingsih have a harmonious understanding of humanization standards, although from different sides: Akhpasi designs the standards, Eka Widianingsih monitors their implementation. Abdul Qudus Fitriansyah provides an institutional background that explains why a more focused orientation to the public interest is necessary. The author is of the view that the establishment of humanist standards as technical rules that are trained into the system is a step that goes beyond just communication aesthetics. This is an institutional commitment that the community's interest in getting dignified services is recognized as a need that is equal to the importance of accurate information. In the perspective of Chapter II, the orientation to the public interest realized through the humanization of services reflects the values of the New Public Service that places the community not as an object of service, but as citizens who are entitled to a service experience that respects their dignity.

Participation and Sustainability: Challenges and Strategies for the Future

The distribution of management competencies to the entire public relations team is the most urgent step, because without it, even a reliable infrastructure will lose capable managers when there is a change of personnel. The 1st place award for the innovative communication work unit mentioned by Abdul Qudus Fitriansyah shows that the sustainability of innovation has been recognized externally, which at the same time is a responsibility to continue to be maintained and improved. In the perspective of Chapter II, the equitable readiness of human resources is one of the main determining factors for the success of digitizing public services that cannot be ignored for long-term sustainability (Sangaji, 2025).

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research and discussion on the public relations services of the Ministry of Religion of South Sumatra Province in providing public information based on the WhatsApp Artificial Intelligence Chatbot, several conclusions can be drawn as follows:

Public information services of the Ministry of Religion of South Sumatra Province take place through the use of WhatsApp-based Artificial Intelligence Chatbots known as AIOHumas. These services are analyzed based on five main indicators, namely responsiveness, transparency, accountability, accessibility, and participation. In terms of responsiveness, the system is able to respond to public inquiries in seconds and operates for a full twenty-four hours. In terms of transparency, the information submitted is sourced from official data that has gone through a validation process before being published. In terms of accountability, information management is carried out through periodic data updates every three months by a dedicated data team. In terms of accessibility, the choice of WhatsApp as the main platform ensures that the service can be reached by various levels of society without the need for additional applications. In terms of participation, every community question that has not been answered by the system is not only handled manually, but also used as material for database development. Overall, this

service shows the application of modern public service principles as affirmed in the New Public Service Theory. The improvement of public services through AIOHumas is realized through strengthening responsiveness based on automated systems, expanding service accessibility, strengthening information accountability, and humanizing digital services in AIOHumas version 3 which sets standards for polite, friendly, and empathetic communication. However, the implementation of this service still faces obstacles such as dependence on internet infrastructure and dependence on management on only one or two people. The success of this innovation is evidenced by the achievement of the 1st place award for the work unit with innovative communication at the Regional Office level in 2025 as external recognition of the services that have been carried out.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on the results of the research and the conclusions above, the researcher gave several suggestions as follows:

For the Public Relations of the Ministry of Religion of South Sumatra Province, it is recommended to continue to develop and update the AIOHumas system periodically so that the information provided remains accurate and relevant. It is also necessary to increase the capacity of all human resources of the public relations team in the management of digital services so that they do not depend on just one or two people, as well as increase socialization to the community so that the range of participation is wider and more even.

For future researchers, this research is expected to be a reference for developing studies on public services based on digital technology. Researchers can further expand the focus of research by quantitatively assessing the level of public satisfaction, comparing the implementation of Artificial Intelligence chatbots in other government agencies, or examining the ethical aspects of the use of Artificial Intelligence in public services.

For the development of communication science, this research is expected to contribute to the study of public communication, digital communication, and government public relations. This research can be an academic reference on how the five indicators of government public relations services are applied concretely in the context of digital technology-based public services, so that the study of public service communication transformation in the digital era can continue to develop.

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