

## Information Transparency for Image and Credibility of Government Institutions in Indonesia

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**Abstract:** Freedom in communication is enjoyed by society in the post-political reforms in Indonesia, resulting in a need for information transparency in government institutions. This study discusses the role of transparency of information in building image and credibility in accordance with the regulation of the Republic of Indonesia No. 14 of 2008, on public information. The purpose of this research is to describe and analyses the openness of government institutions to establish image and credibility in society. The method used in this study is qualitative with the support of online data searches to produce a description of the implementation of transparency in Indonesia. The findings of the study are threefold: government institutions lack understanding of information transparency there are some ongoing efforts to establish information management units and openness is needed to build the image and credibility of institutions.

**Key words:** Transparency of information, information management, image and credibility of the institution, political communications, credibility, Indonesia,

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### INTRODUCTION

The passage of Law No. 14 of 2008, on Public Information Transparency (Law-KIP), post-political reform in Indonesia became one of the foundations of society in the seeking, selecting the sources of and distributing credible information. Through this regulation, information management in public entities must allow the public to know the tasks and activities performed.

Under Article 1, Paragraph 3, of Law-KIP, public entities are executive, legislative, judicial and other entities that function with main tasks associated with the administration of the state and with some or all of their funds sourced from the State Budget (APBN) and/or Local Budget (APBD). Likewise, entities are non-governmental organizations if some or all of their funds come from the APBN, APBD, community contributions and abroad. In the context of this research, public entities focused on government institutions.

Although, the Law-KIP has been in effect, since, 2008, it was not easily implemented. Due to the environment of government entities, information management in government institutions tends to remain secretive as a result of the bureaucratic trap that much of their information arises from disputes between the government institutions and the public as users of information.

In connection with the description, the formulation of the problem in this study is as follows: how can government institutions understand the Public

Information Law that must be implemented; how can government institutions establish an information management Unit? and can implementing public transparency build the image and credibility of government institutions.

The purpose of this research is to increase the understanding of the transparency of government institutions and analyse public information unit management in government institutions. An additional purpose is to gain a sense of the relevance of information transparency to the image and credibility of government institutions from the perspective of the public. The expected benefit of this research is to provide input to government institutions in Indonesia on how the Law on Public Information 14 should be a reference in the life of the state.

A previous study, "The Public Information Transparency in East Java" was performed by Herda (2013) from the Faculty of Administrative Sciences, Brawijaya University, Malang. In essence, the study found that Law 14/2008 does not guarantee the public easy access to government information. The state still does not give the public access to the amount of information that should be accessible (Anonymous, 2013a-h).

There were similar findings in the study, "Assessing Implementation of Law Public Information Transparency for The Implementation of Good Governance Principle: study in West Lombok District and the City of Surakarta". The study was conducted by Sakapurnama from the

University of Indonesia. In essence, the study found that the transparency of information has not been able to realize good governance because the region is hesitant to allow information transparency.

Concepts and theories used in this study relate to the transparency of information as power in organizations, organizational communication and imaging theory. The third approach is the concept and theory to support the analysis of the information transparency for imaging and credibility of government institutions in Indonesia.

In the era of communication technology, information moves freely and it is difficult to control its flow. Information is becoming more flexible in its spread to people. Because, it is in line with political reforms in Indonesia that seek independence in communication, the public's right to know about government performance becomes very important.

The definition of transparency of public information in the Law-KIP is used as a reference in the management of information in Indonesian public entities. In the dynamics of freedom of communication, information is a reliable source of power within an organization to support its smooth functioning (O'Brian, 2003). In contextual information are data that have been processed in a way that is meaningful and beneficial to the institution. Information has been characterized as follows "information is a lot of power in the global paradigm is owned by developed countries" (Naisbitt, 1994). Another view maintains that "useful information reduces uncertainty. In other words, the information provides guidance so that organizational goals can be achieved according to its intended purpose" (Charles, 1996).

From the aspect of regulation, freedom of communication and information contained in Law of KIP is already in line with the 1945 Constitution, Article 28F. The Law of KIP states: "Everyone has the right to communicate and obtain information to develop personal and social environment as well as the right to seek, gain, possess, store, process and convey information by using all available channels". The Freedom of Information Law provides the foundation for government institutions in managing information, providing that such management should not be limited to the interests of the institution but also meet the public demand for information. In creating a public information access mechanism that is efficient, fast and affordable to the public and the media, a government institution must prioritize transparency of information to build its image and credibility in the community.

However, there are factors that hinder the implementation of transparency, i.e., the lack of anticipation among information and documentation

management officers, enduring confusion among government organizations regarding the management of information and a lack of transparency in government work ethic (Irawan, 2011). Information management personnel in government institutions are likely to advocate a bureaucratic trap characterized by secrecy, giving rise to disputes between government institutions and the society or with fellow government institutions. For example, conflicting information exists in various provinces across Indonesia. The Provincial Information Commission (KIP), East Java, received 500 Disputes of Information for the year 2012 (KIP East Java, 2013). The Information Commission of West Java also noted as many as 113 disputes relating to information (Anonymous, 2013a-h).

The Information Commission of Banten Province Experienced the same phenomenon, handling 36 reports of information disputes. The Central Information Commission also noted that a dispute that cannot be resolved in the province continues to the centre. From 2010 until 2012, there were 817 public information request disputes submitted to the Central Information Commission (Anonymous, 2013a-h).

Observing these conditions, government institutions should maintain open communication that explores performance, productivity and financing to build their image and public trust. In the view of Sopory and Dillard to achieve credibility in the source of a message it is important to create effective communication. However, it is not easy to achieve transparency of information, given the bureaucratic culture of Indonesia which is accustomed to opacity and institutional secrecy (Susanto, 2013).

The records of the Central Information Commission on the amount of conflicting information indicates that there is a government institution and that the public understands the transparency. In this regard, the problems of this study were formulated as follows: how can we understand the regulatory government institutions for the benefit of the public transparency of information users; how can information management units be established to manage public information and can public transparency improve the image and credibility of government agencies.

The right to information is fundamental and is inherent in humanity. An open government has value the value of accountability and democratic participation (Smola, 2001). Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenthal define transparency as the instinct of human consciousness to acquire knowledge outside itself. This right is recognized in Article 19 of the Declaration of Human Rights commonly adopted in 1948. Therefore, the right to information must be maintained and championed,

including when faced with manipulation by entities in government institutions (Haryanto, 2010). Meanwhile, freedom of communication is described as “openness as a political principle of democracy, the right to information and the right to freedom of dissent is the control and participation in running the government” (Bagir, 2013). From a communication perspective, the performance of the organization associated with the communication flow is structured and complex. Organizational communication is the “performance and interpretation of messages between communication units that are part of a particular organization”. Meanwhile, “organizational communication is the pattern and form of communication that occurs in the context of network and organizational structure” (Susanto, 2009). The four functions of communication within the organization are control, motivation, emotional expression and information (Robbins, 1996).

In an organization there are units that perform the function of public relations communication, namely, that function as information centres. This function is in line with Bernay’s assertion that the primary functions of public relations are providing information to the public, lobbying to change the public’s attitudes and actions directly and seeking to integrate the attitudes and actions of the entity with those of the public or otherwise. Thus, if the appropriate government agencies can establish openness and transparency which democratization demands it is expected to improve the image and credibility in the community (Rosady, 1998).

According to Jefkins, “the image of a person or an individual impression of something that emerged as a result of knowledge and experience” (Soemirat and Elvinaro, 2007). Credibility in relation to information, according to Rogers and Svenning (1969) is “One person’s or group’s trust in the quality and amount of information that is provided and useful life”.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This research on public information uses qualitative methods to describe the implementation of information transparency in government institutions. According to Bogdan and Taylor, qualitative research is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of words written or spoken of people and behaviours that can be observed (Lexi, 2009).

To support the implementation of the research, a descriptive approach can also describe the systemic findings related to the focus set. Descriptive research aims to collect information that describes in detail the actual symptoms, identify problems or assess practical conditions and practices that apply, make comparisons or

evaluations and determine whether other people have the same response to a given problem and learn from them to make future plans and decisions (Jalaluddin, 2009).

Data collection techniques focused on online searches are supported by a variety of related documents. It is expected that the focus of the research problem can be described as an overall picture of the implementation of information transparency in government institutions. This study was conducted from August, 2013 to November, 2013. The study sites were all events in Indonesia based on online data searches relating to the transparency of information.

These observations include all news of information disputes between government institutions and society as well as amongst government agencies. The data were set purposively by selecting nine stories, comprising 4 news stories related to government agencies’ understanding of the rules of transparency of information, 2 news stories related to the formation of public information management units and 3 news stories on the transparency of information that supports the image and credibility of government agencies. The search for online news located 178,800 news stories related to public information disputes. These nine online news stories made up the sample for this qualitative analysis which is related to the substance of the study.

According to Rahmah Ida, in determining the categorization of content analysis among other news concerning the accuracy, fairness or impartiality of the news in the balance of news writing, news sources are obvious (Burhan, 2011). Holsti, meanwhile, asserts that content analysis is a technique used to draw conclusions through an objective and systematic effort to identify the characteristics of the message (Lexi, 2009).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Indonesian government agencies experience difficulties in implementing public information disclosure. This is because before the reformation era, they could freely limit access to any type of information with the excuse that, it was a state secret or for other reasons related to national security. Information moved in one direction from the centres of power to society as passive information-receiver. Although, information spread among people through mass media, traditional media as well as communication in public places were also strictly supervised and controlled by the organs of state power. Therefore, government agencies felt free to close access to any type of information related to their main tasks and functions as public servants. In fact, however, societies must have access to all relevant information to observe

how well government agencies are performing their jobs. Nevertheless, the habit of concealing information with the excuse that it is a secret is not solely due to the government agencies' behaviour in perceiving themselves as information authorities. Rather, it is because, the culture of closure in a paternalistic society also gives a large role to establishing the culture of closure. Even closure related to negative things is institutionalized for the purpose of maintaining harmony which is unilaterally interpreted.

The various factors discussed in this research relate to government agencies' weak understanding of information transparency, forming ideal information management units and the complexity of information disclosure in establishing government agencies' image and credibility.

**The weak understanding of information transparency:**

The efforts of government institutions as public entities to understand the Law of the Freedom of Information Act are intended to achieve a prosperous information society because people's right to know is one of the principles in implementing a democratic state. Demands for political reform in Indonesia also require transparency in governance by civilized officials.

Nevertheless, it is not easy for government agencies to understand and execute information transparency. There are many government institutions that are reluctant to share information with the public. There are still a few institutions that do not share information. There are only a few that do want to provide information. Even in those entities, not all of their staff wish to provide information rather, only those who are working at the central level support transparency whereas local governments do not seem to do so maximally, although local Information Commissions already exist. Many government institutions do not want to share information with people because they are anxious that people will know whether they break the rules in their work (Anonymous, 2013a-h).

In East Java, the majority of local government entities established a policy to close off all public access to information. Of 38 district and city government agencies, only eight districts/cities provided public access to information. Kompas news reported a similar occurrence where the Headquarters of the Indonesian National Police definitively refused to share the suspicious data accounts of seventeen Indonesian police officers as requested by Indonesian Corruption Watch (ICW) (Anonymous, 2013a-h). According to the news, it can be concluded that government agencies tend not to give any public access to or even acknowledge any public right to have

information. The basic principles of a democratic state include: government by constitution, democratic elections, law making by agreement, an independent judicial system, limited executive power, a free media, a role for interest groups or non-governmental organizations, the public's right to information, protection of minority rights and civilian control of the military (Urofsky, 2001).

On that basis, the Law of the Republic of Indonesia on Public Information is one of the new laws in line with the principle of the public's right to know. In practice, this law does not mean that all messages, news and information can flow freely to the public; rather, the flow of information remains within the limits of openness that builds public confidence in the honesty of government agencies. The rule does not require all information to be open to the public, however, government agencies cannot decide what information remains confidential unilaterally. In essence, government institutions must follow the rules of transparency of information to create a climate of open communication. "A climate of free-flowing open communication can be achieved if there is institutional support, the participation of members of the organization and trust in all organizational entities" (Moersal, 2011).

In this context, government agencies should be open and if they classify information with the excuse that it requires secrecy then, those decisions should be made through deliberation in accordance with the public transparency regulations. There are four classifications of information in Law No. 14/2008 which is the base of the processing of public information.

The first type is information that must be provided periodically. Government agencies must provide information under their authority that is truthful and easily accessible to the public. Public information that must be announced periodically includes information related to public bodies' performance and finances and other information required by legislation. Agencies must provide this information to the public at least once every six months. Furthermore, the information should be delivered in a comprehensive way, so that, the public or the information requester can easily understand it.

The second category is information that must be delivered immediately it includes all information that may endanger people's lives and public order. This basis can be used by government agencies to justify concealing particular information subjectively. Immediate information is spontaneous information received at that very time. Such information may not be withheld and manipulated for the benefit of government agencies' image because it is urgent and important to be immediately shared with the

public or the information requester. The third type is information that must be available at any time. That is to say, government agencies must provide eight types of public information including:

- The list of public information under its authority
- The results of decisions and considerations by government agencies
- Policy including supporting documents
- Project work plans
- Agreements between government agencies and third parties
- Government agencies' policies
- Employee procedures
- Information access service reports

Whilst this information is stated as being open to the public if it is in dispute it should be easily accessed by the information requester under the technical conditions of the information committee.

The fourth type of information is the exceptions. Government agencies must provide information for all public requesters, except for information that if shared, will:

- Obstruct law enforcement
- Interfere with the protection of intellectual property rights and protection against unfair competition
- Endanger the defence and security of a country
- Reveal Indonesia's natural wealth
- Be detrimental to national economic resilience
- Be detrimental to international relations
- Reveal the content of a personal authentic deed
- Reveal a personal secret

The public information exceptions that are noted in Law No. 14/2008 are not to be used by government agencies to evade their responsibility to provide information to the public. However, they are used as a reference to filter the information that can and cannot be accessed by people. From the organizational communications perspective these exceptions are not used to buy time to manipulate information before delivering it to the public. However, it is not problematic if government agencies take time to clarify information for the user as in the principle stated by Pearce and Cronen that "communication should be reorganized and adjusted with the context for the sake of helping human behaviour" (West and Turner, 2010).

With regard to the legal aspect, government agencies must indeed be concerned about public demand for information transparency. Before the Indonesian

reformation period in 1998, it was difficult for people to seek, acquire and use information, however, the Public Information Act now gives people rights to assess government agencies' performance according to established procedures.

According to Article 4 Law No. 14/2008 which specifies the rights of information requesters, each person has the right to acquire and examine public information and attend public meetings which are open to people to acquire public information. Each person has the right to obtain copies of public information through a petition and share that information with other members of the public according to legislation. As public information requesters, people have the right to file petitions for public information, including the reasons for the request. Each requester also has the right to file a lawsuit in court if they encounter any obstacles to acquiring information.

The problem is that there are many disputes regarding information as a result of government agencies' reluctance to make information transparent in the first place. One example is a case cited by hukumonline.com, "The absence of defendant. Adjudication problem KIP". Implementation at the non-litigation adjudication stage in the resolution of public information disputes is frequently stymied by the absence of the defendant and as a result the commissioner's panel cannot hear arguments regarding the government agencies' policy rejecting the information petition. Dispute petition resolution sessions tend to run the same course. The Central Information Commission has no authority to force the parties, witnesses or experts to attend. For example, the defendant was absent from the session regarding a petition from Herunarsono towards State Primary School 12 Rawamangun and East Jakarta Education Department. The defendant was also absent from the adjudication session regarding a dispute petition by a number of candidates for civil service represented by Medan Legal Aid against Medan government and University of North Sumatera (USU). USU did not attend the adjudication session for the entire final month of the proceedings.

It is clear that government agencies tend not to fully understand the information transparency requirement which is in the spirit of establishing a democratic and prosperous information society. Alternatively, perhaps the agencies understand the regulations in the Law of KIP but assume that they are the authorities with the right to manage and control what information becomes public. It cannot be forgotten that the bureaucracies within government agencies have long enjoyed the freedom to conceal information from the public with the excuse that it must remain secret.

**Public information management unit:** The information transparency regulation requires government agencies to create a unit to manage public information, so that, government agencies fulfil their responsibility to provide, deliver or publish public information under their authority to requesters unless the information falls under one of the exceptions. Government agencies must anticipate information requests and be prepared to process the information quickly and smoothly to improve the image and credibility of state officials.

In the news story entitled “Officers should not be Afraid of Reporters”, Chief of Police, Rembang District, AKBP M. Kumiawan asked the officers in his ranks not to be afraid to provide information to reporters. The main point of the story is that reporters provide current information that is needed by the public through media. People want accurate and thorough information and it is provided through both printed and electronic media. Therefore, government agencies should recognize the importance of a good information process. Nevertheless, for reasons of efficiency, Indonesian government agencies are not necessarily creating a new unit for information management. Rather, some agencies are achieving equivalent results by for example, designating a work unit of the agency’s public relations unit as the public information manager.

As the result of the existence of public relations units that hold public information, the responsibility to provide information to the public is on the right track with regard to the regulation of transparency. Moreover, the scope of public relation’s responsibility is indeed related to information processing for the internal benefit of an organization as well as various parties outside the organization. Without any public relations it is difficult for an organization to identify and address the external and internal public in executing management functions so as to maintain a positive and mutually beneficial relationship between the organization and society (Calvin and Sudarso, 2013). Public relations itself is a management function that establishes and maintains a good and mutually beneficial relationship between the organization and society and that influences the success or failure of the organization (Broom and Cutlip, 2009).

An article published in Detik demonstrated that public relations functions walk the same path as public information processing. Entitled “the Head of Public Relations in Tabanan District: Public Information = Double-edged Sword” it stated that society has the right to as much information as possible. If the information is classified, then information disputes might occur. Thus, the common perception among all information management officials in understanding the

public information transparency law is that transparency is truly necessary. Essentially, public bodies should form an information management work unit that is positioned within public relations or if they can fund it, make it a separate unit. The most important component of the unit is qualified human resources who are supported by advanced information-communication technology. This information management unit is responsible for processing public information for the agency’s internal benefit as well as society. The duties that should be fulfilled, according to the regulation, include: providing accurate information, establishing an information system and documenting public information management, making decisions about delivering information to the public and using communication technology for efficiency and speed.

**Information transparency to establish image and credibility:** In the current climate of communication freedom in Indonesia, efforts to improve government agencies’ images and credibility should be based on the law of information transparency. The positive image of a government agency is related to its personnel’s credibility as open state officials. With the 1998 reformation, the credibility of government agencies became the measurement of a fair and prosperous information society. Credibility can rise and fall swiftly (Rogers and Kincaid, 1981). Meanwhile, the factors that substantially determine public trust are: the characteristics of competence, the existence of an authority relationship, the characteristics and quality of open communication. Trust itself is classified into the following three types: acceptance, non-commitment and rejection (Ray, 1973).

The information manager within a government agency has the task and responsibility for improving the public image and credibility of the agency for both internal and external benefit. Some state that the improvement of Indonesian government agencies’ images is related to the assessment of organization’s performance. Yeremias Keban noted, “the assessment of performance can be used as the measurement of the success of an organization which can be used as input for improvement and development of organization performance” (Ria and Putera, 2013).

Therefore, information managers within government agencies should be able to build good relationships with other institutions, the public and mass media. These positive relationships can be achieved by providing information relating to the organization’s tasks and responsibilities openly, so that, it can be easily accessed by public as the information user. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that information transparency within

government agencies is not easily executed. This difficulty is caused by government taking too long to acquire protection from the authority and the characteristics of tiered bureaucracy. These conditions have obstructed the delivery of information to the public. In information transparency which is generally in line with the regulations, government agencies are still apparently anxious that transparency will reveal their weaknesses, failures and the other negative aspects to the public. Instead, transparency will actually improve agencies' image and credibility in executing their main tasks and functions.

The public's right to know specifics about the performance of government agencies is an attempt to optimize societal supervision of government performance. It is indeed difficult to achieve information transparency because many problems have the potential to give government agencies a negative image. However, information transparency effects a positive image which can improve institution's credibility. According to Frank (1992), image is generally a person's impression about something that results from his knowledge or experiences in interacting and communicating with his environment.

Meanwhile, Jalaluddin (2008) emphasizes that image is a picture of reality and it should not be based on reality but rather is the world based on perception. In this context, image can be subjective depending on the person who perceives it. However, image is in fact more dependent on the judgement of the public outside the organization. As government agencies attempt to improve their images and credibility it is interesting to analyse the news at *Tribun-Timur.com* which covers the topic "Implementing the Principle of Transparency of Public Information". Essentially, a number of political elites have stated that information transparency will encourage public officers to be more careful in executing their policies because the public also supervises the government's performance. Essentially, transparency is a positive act that can impact public trust towards government agencies.

Otherwise, if government agencies do not allow public access to information, they will garner a negative image. Consequently, the public will not trust them. Organization image cannot be separated from efficient information processing of organization resources and it also contains positive values (Raymond, 1995). In the individual context, the following two factors influence image: personal factors of individuals, including biological factors, membership in a group, his/her role in the group and situations that influence the individual and environmental/social factors such as experiences, family, culture, religion, race and social status (Rhenald, 2003).

Government agencies that seek to acquire a positive image should execute the mandate of information transparency regulation consistently. To be consistent, an organization should improve the quality of its understanding of information transparency which is supported by advanced facilities. In "Local Regulation of Information Transparency is Prepared", Padang Express Daily, reported that regional Representative Council Agam District, West Sumatra, had prepared a draft of a local public information transparency regulation that can fulfil information transparency for the public. The draft aims at increasing society's trust towards government (Ekspres, 2013).

Another news item, "KIP Regulation Increases Public Trust towards State Officials", emphasized that the Implementation of Law No. 14/2008 on Public Information Transparency can improve the image and the public trust of state officials or government agencies. There is a sense that the term image is negative. However, if the image is about performance then Law of KIP is the most appropriate for the performance image of state officials towards people," said the Chief of Central Information Commission, Abdul Rahman Ma'mun (Anonymous, 2013).

In light of the relationship between information transparency and image and credibility, government agencies need not be concerned about allowing public access to information. The readiness to execute their tasks and responsibilities transparently creates positive judgements and gives hope for the formation of a prosperous Indonesian information society. Thus, transparency will positively impact not only government agencies' images but also their institutional credibility. A good relationship between government agencies and members of society as information users will give nuance to the expected improvement of the organization's images and credibility.

## **CONCLUSION**

The implementation of public information transparency in Indonesian government agencies is still hindered by several problems. To achieve a prosperous information society, the government should create public information transparency. The principle of information transparency among government agencies is that people should be given the right to acquire true information because it is beneficial to know about government agencies' performance. However, there is a tendency among government agencies to still support keeping information confidential. According to claims about public information transparency, government agencies are

apparently still lagging in creating information management units. This tardiness is triggered by hesitation to execute transparency and there are many bureaucratic problems with establishing new units in government agencies.

To improve both the internal and external images of government agencies, attempts to execute information transparency should be enthusiastically supported by public bodies because government agencies will improve their public images and credibility if they comply with Law No. 14/2008.

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