

Journalists' Perceptions of Press Release Quality at the Institut Teknologi Sumatera

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Abstract

This study aims to explore how journalists interpret the quality of press releases produced by the Public Relations Office of the Sumatera Institute of Technology (Itera), particularly in relation to news values and the practical needs of journalistic work. The research employs a descriptive qualitative method by collecting data through in-depth interviews with six journalists from local and national media who routinely receive and process Itera's press releases into news articles. The findings indicate that journalists view Itera's press releases as having met basic technical standards, including the completeness of the 5W+1H elements, the use of the inverted pyramid structure, and adherence to standard Indonesian language conventions. However, journalists also identified several areas needing improvement, particularly the simplification of scientific terminology, deeper elaboration of research and technological innovations, and broader angles so that releases are not solely focused on ceremonial events. Additionally, journalists emphasized the need for an increased number of releases, better access to expert sources, and a more narrative and publicly relevant writing style. This study highlights that the effectiveness of a press release is not solely determined by the completeness of its data but also by the ability of public relations practitioners to produce messages that carry strong news value, making them more engaging and beneficial for both journalists and the public. Therefore, the study recommends strengthening science communication skills, increasing the volume of press releases, and adjusting writing styles to better meet media needs.

Keywords: Public Relations, Journalists' Perceptions, Press Releases, Media Relations



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INTRODUCTION

In the current era of information openness, the relationship between public relations units of public universities and mass media journalists has become a crucial element in shaping institutional image in the public sphere. Public relations plays a strategic role in building and maintaining organizational reputation through the management of two-way communication with various stakeholders. Rakhmat, emphasizes that an organization's public relations function serves as the frontline in constructing a positive image within society, encompassing the dissemination of information, the identification of solutions to emerging issues, and the formulation of strategies to sustain public trust (Handin et al., 2020).

In the current era of information openness, the relationship between public relations departments of public universities and mass media journalists has become an important element in shaping an institution's image before the public. Public relations holds a strategic role in building and maintaining the reputation of an organization by managing two-way communication with various stakeholders. Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig (1995) explain that the ideal form of relationship between public relations and media is a two-way symmetrical relationship, which allows a mutually beneficial exchange of information. In the context of higher education, this pattern of relationship becomes increasingly significant, considering the role of media as a bridge between the institution and the public in conveying academic achievements, research outcomes, and the institution's social contributions (Dozier, D. M., Grunig, L. A., & Grunig, 1995).

One of the primary instruments used by public relations practitioners to distribute official information is the press release. Wilcox and Cameron, define it as a written communication medium strategically designed to attract media attention and shape public perceptions of an organization. In the view of Newsom, Turk, and Kruckeberg, press releases not only function as an informational tool but also serve as a means to build organizational image and public trust. The success of a press release, in turn, depends on the extent to which the information aligns with the needs and editorial standards of journalists. Additionally, contemporary research emphasizes that the characteristics of press releases—such as newsworthiness, clarity, and relevance affect how journalists process and use the information in their reporting (Vonk et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of press releases is not solely assessed by the frequency of their publication, but rather by how journalists evaluate the quality of the information presented. Cutlip, argue that effective press releases must be able to meet media needs while simultaneously reflecting the credibility of the institution (Cutlip, S. M., Center, A. H., & Broom, 2016). In journalistic practice, information quality is assessed through news values such as timeliness, proximity, conflict, impact, and human interest (Kovach, 2014). Shoemaker, further emphasize that journalists' decisions to publish information are influenced by media organizational factors, news values, and professional considerations regarding information sources (Shoemaker, 2016).

The Public Relations Office of the Institut Teknologi Sumatera (ITERA) routinely distributes press releases to various local and national media outlets as part of the institution's external communication strategy. This practice aligns with Theaker's, view that public relations functions to maintain the consistency of an organization's image in the public sphere through the dissemination of planned and ethical information (Theaker, 2017). However, not all press releases issued by ITERA's public relations office are published by journalists. This situation indicates the presence of an information filtering process, commonly referred to as gatekeeping, as introduced by Kurt Lewin in his work *Human Relations* in 1947 (Kurt Lewin, 1947) as cited in (Nurudin, 2017), in which journalists act as gatekeepers who determine whether information is newsworthy and suitable for publication. Consequently, journalists'

decisions become a determining factor in whether public relations messages can be effectively conveyed to the public.

This phenomenon becomes relevant to be examined more deeply through the perspective of journalists as actors who select and evaluate information prior to publication. An understanding of how journalists assess the quality of press releases can assist public relations practitioners in improving the effectiveness of their communication strategies. Drawing on the view of Lattimore (Lattimore, D., Baskin, O., Heiman, S. T., & Toth, 2016), that successful media relations are supported by trust, open communication, and mutual understanding between public relations practitioners and journalists, this study focuses on journalists' perceptions of the quality of press releases issued by the Public Relations Office of the Institut Teknologi Sumatera (ITERA).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the meanings and perceptions held by journalists regarding the quality of press releases distributed by the Public Relations Office of the Institut Teknologi Sumatera (ITERA). Denzin and Lincoln, state that qualitative research focuses on understanding social phenomena from the participants' perspectives by emphasizing context, meaning, and interpretation (Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, 2011). This approach is chosen because the study does not aim to measure relationships numerically, but rather to interpret journalists' subjective experiences in interacting with public relations communication products.

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative methodology to deeply explore how journalists perceive and interpret the quality of press releases distributed by the Public Relations Office of the Institut Teknologi Sumatera (ITERA). Qualitative research is exploratory and interpretative, emphasizing the researcher's role as the primary instrument in data collection and interpretation (Creswell, J. W., & Poth, 2023). This approach enables a comprehensive depiction of the natural communication dynamics between public relations practitioners and journalists. It also provides an opportunity to analyze journalists' perceptions, perspectives, and evaluations of press release quality.

For this research, six journalists were purposively selected based on the intensity of their professional interactions with ITERA's public relations office over the six-month period from January to June 2025. Three journalists represent regional media (Lampung Post, Radar Lampung, Kupas Tuntas) and three represent national media (LKBN Antara, Harian Kompas, IDN Times).

Data were collected using a combination of direct observation, in-depth interviews, and document review. Observation allows researchers to record real-world behaviors, interactions, and contexts that contribute to a richer understanding of how journalists engage with press releases (Chand, 2025). In-depth interviews involve guided conversations between the researcher and participants, facilitating detailed insights into personal experiences and meanings (Chand, 2025). Document review supplements the data by providing contextual and historical information about press release practices. This combination of methods enhances the depth and credibility of qualitative findings

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study explores the perceptions of six journalists from both local and national media regarding the quality of press releases produced by the Public Relations Office of the Institut Teknologi Sumatera (ITERA). The findings reveal three principal aspects: (1) the quality of writing and the completeness of the information presented, (2) the extent to which the language used conforms to journalistic standards, and (3) journalists' needs along with their feedback for improving ITERA's press release practices.

Writing Quality: Completeness of 5W+1H and Compliance with Journalistic Standards

All journalists stated that the press releases produced by the Public Relations Office of the Institut Teknologi Sumatera (ITERA) are generally comprehensive, fulfill the 5W+1H elements, and follow the inverted pyramid structure, which is a standard format in journalistic writing.

Several key findings emerged from the interview results:

1. Journalists from Lampung Post, Radar Lampung, and LKBN Antara considered ITERA's press releases to be "*very comprehensive and highly consistent with journalistic standards.*"
2. Journalists from Kupas Tuntas and Kompas stated that the press releases are "*complete and appropriate,*" although in some issues there is still room for deeper contextual elaboration.
3. A journalist from IDN Times noted that the information structure in ITERA's press releases is well organized and easy to transform into news articles.

These findings indicate that the writing structure of ITERA's press releases generally meets the fundamental standards for news writing, as explained by Newsom, Turk, and Kruckeberg (2013), namely the presentation of complete information, a coherent structure, and the inclusion of essential facts required by editorial teams.

Compliance with Journalistic Language and Standard Indonesian (KBBI)

All journalists involved in the study agreed that the language used in ITERA's press releases is generally appropriate, formal, and consistent with the standards of Standard Indonesian as regulated in the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (KBBI).

1. Four journalists—from Lampung Post, Radar Lampung, Kupas Tuntas, and Kompas—assessed that the language used in ITERA's press releases is "*very good.*"
2. A journalist from IDN Times considered the language to be "*good and largely consistent with KBBI standards,*" but suggested that certain scientific and technical terms should be simplified to make them more accessible to general readers.

These findings indicate that the Public Relations Office of ITERA has generally implemented linguistic standards that align with the needs of journalistic practice. However, the nature of science and technology topics often requires linguistic adaptation so that the information can be communicated more clearly and effectively to media audiences.

Journalists' Feedback on the Development of ITERA's Press Releases

Although the overall quality of the press releases was considered satisfactory, the journalists provided several relatively consistent suggestions for improving the content, depth of information, and public relevance of ITERA's press releases. These suggestions can be grouped into four main themes:

1. **Enriching Topics on Research, Technology, and Innovation**
Most journalists observed that ITERA's press releases are still largely dominated by ceremonial or institutional agenda coverage. Journalists from Antara and Kompas emphasized the importance of including more information related to research activities and technological development so that the content becomes more meaningful and provides stronger informational value for the public.
2. **Increasing the Quantity and Diversity of Press Releases**
Journalists from Radar Lampung and Kupas Tuntas highlighted the need to increase both the volume and variety of press releases, particularly those that offer multiple possible news angles. This would allow editorial teams to have more options when developing news stories.
3. **Simplifying Scientific Terminology and Strengthening Narrative Style**

Journalists from IDN Times and Kompas noted that some press releases still appear rather rigid and overly institutional in tone. They suggested presenting the information in a lighter and more accessible language style so that it can be more easily understood by the general public.

4. Providing Expert Sources

A journalist from IDN Times specifically suggested that the public relations office should be more proactive in presenting expert sources who can provide analysis on public policy issues. This would enable ITERA to strengthen its position as a credible source of academic expertise.

Information Needs Based on Priority Levels

Journalists from the six media organizations expressed relatively consistent information needs. All journalists identified faculty research as the most important type of information, followed by faculty expertise, which was mentioned by five journalists. Three journalists also expected press releases related to community service activities, while two others highlighted the importance of reporting student achievements. In addition, three journalists considered information regarding university policies and leadership agendas to remain necessary.

These findings indicate that content related to science, technology, research, and innovation represents the most prominent information need. At the same time, this presents a strategic opportunity for ITERA's public relations office to design external communication strategies that are more relevant to media interests.

Alignment of ITERA's Press Releases with News Values

The findings indicate that ITERA's press releases generally comply with fundamental journalistic writing standards, including the completeness of the 5W+1H elements, the use of the inverted pyramid structure, and the application of formal language. However, when examined through the lens of news values, as outlined by Kovach and Rosenstiel (Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, 2019), there remains room for improvement, particularly in the following aspects:

1. Human interest

Many journalists noted that while the press releases are informative, they lack elements that evoke emotional engagement or a sense of connection with the public.

2. Public relevance

Some press releases tend to emphasize institutional promotion, with limited focus on the societal impact of programs or research activities.

3. Novelty and depth

Journalists expect a greater emphasis on recent research, faculty innovations, and science-related issues presented with deeper analysis.

These gaps suggest that while ITERA's public relations office has successfully met the technical requirements of journalistic writing, further enhancement is needed in content development to better align with the newsworthiness criteria prioritized by journalists.

Challenges for ITERA's Public Relations in Simplifying Science and Technology Information

One of the key issues identified is the use of relatively complex scientific terminology in several press releases. This finding aligns with broader communication research, which emphasizes that readability, clarity, and news value significantly influence journalists' gatekeeping decisions, particularly in determining whether information is suitable for publication (Harcup & O'Neill, 2020).

In the context of ITERA, two main challenges can be identified. First, content related to research and technological innovation needs to be presented through simpler and more accessible narratives. Second, journalists require practical and applicable explanations, enabling them to translate research findings into language that can be easily understood by the general public. These findings highlight the importance of science communication competencies within university public relations, as complex scientific knowledge must be communicated accurately while remaining accessible to broader audiences (Bucchi, M., & Trench, 2021).

Dynamics of Public Relations–Journalist Relations in the Context of Media Relations

The relationship between the Public Relations Office of the Institut Teknologi Sumatera (ITERA) and journalists, based on the interview findings, demonstrates a generally positive trend. This is reflected in the ease of access to information, the completeness of press releases in accordance with journalistic formats, and the responsiveness of public relations practitioners to media needs, which are key indicators of effective media relations practices (Macnamara, 2021).

However, journalists' requests for greater topic diversity and more in-depth research coverage indicate increasing expectations toward the role of public relations as a provider of academic and knowledge-based information. This condition aligns with the principle of two-way symmetrical communication, which emphasizes that public relations should not only disseminate information but also understand and respond to journalists' needs as strategic partners.

Furthermore, the expectation that ITERA's expert sources should be more actively involved in public issues as expressed by journalists from IDN Times and Lampung Post highlights an opportunity for the institution to strengthen its positioning as a knowledge-based and credible institution. The involvement of expert voices in media discourse plays an important role in enhancing institutional credibility and public trust (Fahy & Nisbet, 2021).

Implications for ITERA's Public Relations Communication Strategy

The findings of this study generate several strategic implications for improving the performance of ITERA's public relations. *First*, there is a need to shift the focus from ceremonial content toward research and innovation-based press releases, as such information carries higher news value and is more relevant to public interests.

Second, it is important to strengthen the capacity of public relations practitioners in science communication writing, so that research outputs can be conveyed in a more accessible manner without compromising scientific accuracy.

Third, the role of faculty members as expert sources should be optimized to enable ITERA to respond more quickly and credibly to public issues. The presence of expert voices is essential in enhancing institutional credibility and authority in media discourse (Azzahra et al., 2025). *Fourth*, press release texts need to be expanded and enriched, allowing media organizations to develop multiple news angles and produce more diverse coverage (Verčič & Špoljarić, 2021).

Finally, maintaining consistency in the frequency of press releases, as expected by journalists from Radar Lampung and Kupas Tuntas, is crucial, as sustained media output contributes to strengthening institutional visibility and media presence.

Synthesis of Findings

Overall, journalists tend to view ITERA's public relations press releases positively, particularly in terms of their writing structure and completeness of information. However,

they still expect improvements in several areas, including narrative quality, depth of research coverage, the use of more accessible language, and the availability of expert sources.

The gap between technical writing standards and news value emerges as a key factor influencing media decisions on whether to publish a press release. Therefore, the effectiveness of a press release depends not only on the completeness of information but also on the ability of public relations practitioners to produce content that goes beyond being merely informative; by ensuring it carries strong news value and relevance for the public.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that journalists generally perceive the quality of press releases produced by ITERA's Public Relations Office as technically sound. The releases are considered comprehensive, fulfilling the 5W+1H elements, adhering to the inverted pyramid structure, and employing formal language in line with journalistic standards. These fundamental competencies serve as a strong foundation for ITERA's public relations in establishing effective media relations.

However, journalists also identify considerable room for improvement, particularly in terms of content depth and substance. ITERA's press releases are still largely dominated by ceremonial coverage and have yet to fully capitalize on the potential of research outputs, technological innovations, and faculty expertise as high-value news sources. Journalists expect press releases that not only convey information but also provide clearer context, societal impact, and public relevance. In addition, the use of language in scientific topics needs to be simplified to ensure accessibility for broader audiences.

Furthermore, journalists emphasize the importance of the public relations office in facilitating access to expert sources who can respond to current issues in a timely and credible manner. The availability of academic experts from ITERA is seen as essential for enhancing the quality of media coverage while simultaneously strengthening the institution's image as a science- and technology-based university.

Based on these findings, this study recommends several strategic improvements, including strengthening public relations capacity in science communication, increasing both the quantity and diversity of press release topics, expanding research-based content, and adapting writing styles to better align with news values. Enhancing these aspects is expected not only to improve relationships between public relations and journalists but also to reinforce ITERA's position as a credible and relevant source of academic information in the public sphere.

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