

## Analyzing the Implementation of Public Relations Ethics at PT KAI and Its Implications on Competitive Advantage

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Informasi Artikel	Abstract
E-ISSN : 3026-6874 Vol: 3 No: 1 Januari 2025 Page : 82-96	<i>This study examines the role of public relations (PR) ethics in enhancing PT Kereta Api Indonesia's (PT KAI) competitive advantage in the railway industry. Ethical practices in PR are vital for fostering stakeholder trust, improving customer satisfaction, and enhancing employee engagement, all of which contribute to sustainable growth and market leadership. Adopting a qualitative research design and a case study approach, the research investigates how ethical principles such as transparency, integrity, equity, respect, and responsiveness are applied within PT KAI's operational and strategic frameworks. Data collection involved document and thematic analyses, emphasizing ethical practices' impact on stakeholder relationships and competitive outcomes. The findings highlight that PT KAI's ethical initiatives strengthen its reputation, promote customer loyalty, and support a positive workplace environment. Despite these successes, challenges remain, including the absence of formalized ethical guidelines and the need for ethical leadership. The study concludes that integrating PR ethics into organizational culture enhances competitive advantage and ensures long-term sustainability in a dynamic market.</i>
<b>Keywords:</b> Competitive Advantage Ethics Organizational Sustainability PT KAI Public Relations	

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji peran etika hubungan masyarakat (humas) dalam meningkatkan keunggulan kompetitif PT Kereta Api Indonesia (PT KAI) di industri perkeretaapian. Praktik-praktik etis dalam PR sangat penting untuk menumbuhkan kepercayaan pemangku kepentingan, meningkatkan kepuasan pelanggan, dan meningkatkan keterlibatan karyawan, yang semuanya berkontribusi pada pertumbuhan berkelanjutan dan kepemimpinan pasar. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus, penelitian ini menyelidiki bagaimana prinsip-prinsip etika seperti transparansi, integritas, kesetaraan, rasa hormat, dan daya tanggap diterapkan dalam kerangka kerja operasional dan strategis PT KAI. Pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan menggunakan analisis dokumen dan analisis tematik, yang menekankan pada dampak praktik-praktik etika terhadap hubungan dengan para pemangku kepentingan dan hasil-hasil kompetitif. Temuan-temuan tersebut menyoroti bahwa inisiatif-inisiatif etika PT KAI memperkuat reputasinya, meningkatkan loyalitas pelanggan, dan mendukung lingkungan kerja yang positif. Terlepas dari keberhasilan tersebut, masih ada tantangan yang dihadapi, termasuk tidak adanya pedoman etika yang diformalkan dan perlunya kepemimpinan yang beretika. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa mengintegrasikan etika PR ke dalam budaya organisasi dapat meningkatkan keunggulan kompetitif dan memastikan keberlanjutan jangka panjang di pasar yang dinamis.

**Kata Kunci :** Keunggulan Kompetitif, Etika, Keberlanjutan Organisasi, PT KAI, Hubungan Masyarakat

### INTRODUCTION

Public Relations (PR) ethics are crucial in establishing trust and credibility within highly competitive industries. For PT Kereta Api Indonesia (PT KAI), a State-Owned Enterprise (SOE) in Indonesia's transport sector, ethical PR practices play a pivotal role in maintaining public confidence, enhancing customer satisfaction, and securing a competitive edge. The evolving complexities and intensifying competition in Indonesia's transport industry emphasize the necessity for operational sustainability and differentiation, which can be achieved through the adoption of ethical practices. This study investigates how PT KAI incorporates PR ethics to

cultivate positive stakeholder relationships and strategically leverages these ethical practices to gain a competitive advantage.

Ethics in public relations encompass the moral principles guiding the profession, the ethical dilemmas practitioners encounter, and the frameworks designed to foster ethical behavior. Ethical standards in PR significantly influence public trust and the overall effectiveness of communication strategies. Research by Natawilaga (2018) underscores the critical importance of ethics in ensuring the effective execution of PR tasks while safeguarding the company's image, particularly during crises. Practices such as transparent and honest information sharing not only uphold reputation but also facilitate the development of trust-based relationships with stakeholders, thereby generating positive public opinion even under challenging circumstances.

Effendi (2024) further emphasizes that ethics serve as essential guidelines for public relations practitioners, enabling them to make decisions that are both appropriate and responsible. Ethics integrate moral considerations with professional conduct, ensuring that information is conveyed wisely to uphold the company's reputation. The application of ethics in public relations also empowers organizations to establish strong, trust-based relationships with stakeholders. Ethical actions reinforce the company's positive image and foster customer loyalty by creating a reliable and credible organizational identity.

The implementation of ethical guidelines within PR organizations forms the foundation of effective practice. Ki et al. (2011) demonstrate a positive correlation between the presence of formal ethics statements and the ethical behavior of practitioners, noting a reduction in malpractice and an increase in professionalism in organizations adhering to these guidelines. Similarly, Ki and Kim (2009) identify a progressive shift toward higher ethical standards in PR firms established during the 1980s and 1990s. Leadership support also plays a critical role; top management's endorsement of ethical practices significantly encourages ethical decision-making among PR practitioners (E. Ki et al., 2011).

PT Kereta Api Indonesia (PT KAI) serves as a relevant case study in examining the role of ethics in public relations (PR), which constitutes a fundamental pillar in corporate communication. In the management of mass transportation, where interactions with the public directly influence customer experience, ethical considerations play a crucial role (Adelia et al., 2023). Transparency in service-related aspects, including schedules, fares, and operational procedures, is significantly shaped by ethical PR practices. PT KAI encounters several challenges, including crisis management, service enhancements, and intense industry competition. Ethical PR functions as a strategic tool that enables the company to address these challenges with integrity and accountability. In the context of large-scale projects or service disruptions, maintaining transparent and open communication serves as a critical mechanism for mitigating negative reputational impacts. By upholding ethical standards in PR, PT KAI can foster public trust and enhance its long-term credibility in the transportation sector.

At PT KAI, ethical PR transcends routine practice and integrates into the company's strategic initiatives to address the unique challenges associated with being a state-owned enterprise. Operating under public accountability and government oversight, PT KAI navigates ethical complexities such as ensuring transparency while adhering to regulatory requirements. The importance of embedding moral considerations and professional behavior into the company's strategies to build trust and enhance customer loyalty through ethical stakeholder engagement.

Ethical dilemmas are an inherent aspect of PR practice, often testing practitioners' moral judgment. Celofiga (2023) identifies these dilemmas as significant challenges in the field, necessitating robust training and well-structured ethical frameworks. Similarly, Makamani and Zimanyi (2020) point to the critical role of binding codes of conduct and leadership influence in fostering ethical behavior. These factors are particularly pertinent in the transport sector, where public accountability, operational risks, and stakeholder expectations intersect.

This research explores how PT KAI integrates ethical PR practices into its daily operations and strategic decision-making processes. It examines the frameworks, policies, and ethical principles underpinning PR activities, evaluating their measurable impacts on customer loyalty, brand reputation, and market position. By doing so, the study aims to elucidate the role of PR ethics as a driver of operational sustainability and long-term competitive advantage in Indonesia's transport industry. The integration of PR ethics into competitive strategies, as outlined by Porter's framework of cost leadership, differentiation, and focus, offers valuable insights into how ethical practices can deliver sustainable marketplace advantages.

In summary, while ethics is widely acknowledged as a fundamental element of PR, its integration into strategic frameworks remains underexplored, particularly in the context of state-owned enterprises like PT KAI. This study bridges this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of how ethical PR practices not only reinforce trust and credibility but also function as strategic tools to achieve competitive advantage in the face of challenges within the transport sector.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a literature-based research methodology to analyze the significance of ethics in Public Relations (PR) practices at PT Kereta Api Indonesia (PT KAI). The methodology is detailed as follows:

The research centers on examining literature and information pertaining to PR practices within the transportation sector, with a particular emphasis on Indonesia. The scope includes scholarly articles, industry reports, and other written works focusing on PR ethics, with PT KAI serving as the primary case study. A descriptive literature study was adopted as the research design, enabling an in-depth exploration and analysis of existing works that address the role and importance of ethics in PR, particularly within the context of PT KAI.

Bridging the gap between traditional PR ethics and the evolving demands of the digital era, this research not only explores the ethical dimensions of PR practices in Indonesia's transportation sector but also extends its relevance to contemporary public service responsibilities. By analyzing PT KAI as a case study, the study highlights the ethical imperatives in corporate communication, which serve as a foundation for broader digital literacy initiatives. These insights contribute to shaping evidence-based strategies that policymakers can leverage to enhance community empowerment and economic development, ensuring that ethical communication remains integral to digital public service frameworks.

This study contributes to the body of knowledge surrounding public service obligations in the digital age by providing data-driven recommendations for digital literacy programs. The findings are intended to assist policymakers in formulating effective strategies to empower communities and drive economic growth (Riduan et al., 2024). Additionally, the study presents a scalable framework applicable to similar initiatives worldwide.

The primary research method applied is literature analysis. By systematically searching for and critically reviewing relevant sources, the study aims to identify essential themes, trends, and findings concerning ethical considerations in PR, focusing on PT KAI.

Operational definitions for the study include the development of a conceptual framework for understanding ethics in PR. This framework clarifies key concepts such as ethical principles, ethical PR practices, and their influence on corporate reputation.

The principal research instrument comprises a curated collection of literature, including journal articles, books, industry reports, and other pertinent resources that provide comprehensive insights into PR ethics, particularly within PT KAI.

The data collection process involved a systematic literature search, designed to ensure the inclusivity and relevance of the selected materials to the research objectives.

Data analysis was conducted through a descriptive approach, organizing and interpreting information from the literature to uncover patterns, key insights, and implications regarding ethical PR practices, specifically at PT KAI.

Through this methodological framework, the study seeks to enhance understanding of the critical role of ethics in PR practices at PT KAI and its broader impact on the company's reputation within Indonesia's transportation industry.



**Figure 1. Research flowchart**

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

PT Kereta Api Indonesia (PT KAI), as the foremost state-owned enterprise in Indonesia, is entrusted with providing and managing railway transportation services nationwide. Established to enhance the efficiency and safety of railway operations, PT KAI serves as a cornerstone of Indonesia's transport infrastructure, catering to both passenger and freight needs. The organization adheres to a comprehensive framework of ethical principles that regulate its communication and public engagement.

PT KAI's restructuring extends beyond changes in ownership and encompasses comprehensive modernization initiatives to remain competitive in a rapidly evolving industry. The company actively invests in technology and infrastructure to enhance operational efficiency and elevate service quality. These modernization efforts include the development of stations, upgrades to railway tracks, and the acquisition of an advanced train fleet.

Nevertheless, throughout its extensive journey, PT KAI has encountered not only structural and technological transformations but also various operational and managerial challenges. These include bolstering security measures, enhancing service quality, and addressing critical issues such as delays and accidents.

As a provider of mass transportation services, PT KAI significantly influences social and environmental spheres. Ethical public relations practices emphasize communication strategies that align with the company's commitment to generating positive societal impacts. Ensuring environmental sustainability and contributing to the welfare of communities situated along railway lines are central elements of PT KAI's ethical responsibilities.

Ethical principles serve as a foundation for decision-making processes, guiding employees in their conduct and interactions within the organization and with external parties. These principles are essential for fostering trust and ensuring transparency, particularly within

the public transportation sector, where safety, reliability, and customer satisfaction remain top priorities.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Principle of Transparency**

PT Kereta Api Indonesia (PT KAI) places significant emphasis on transparency as a fundamental ethical principle in its operations. This principle is essential for fostering trust between the organization and its stakeholders. Transparency entails providing clear, accurate, and timely information regarding services, safety protocols, and operational changes. This aligns with Ogugua's assertion that transparency in communication strategies is critical for building trust and enabling informed decision-making among the public (Ogugua, 2024).

The ethical principle of transparency at PT KAI serves multiple purposes, including building trust, enhancing accountability, and fostering positive stakeholder relationships. Transparency is not merely a regulatory obligation but a moral imperative underpinning effective communication strategies and public engagement. It acts as the foundation for ethical public relations practices, reinforcing the organization's commitment to integrity and accountability.

Building public trust is a key objective of transparency. Trust is indispensable in public relations, especially for a state-owned enterprise like PT KAI, which relies heavily on public confidence in its services. Necić highlights that transparency reduces skepticism and strengthens stakeholder trust (Necić, 2021). By openly communicating about its services, safety measures, and operational changes, PT KAI reassures the public of its dedication to ethical standards and accountability. This perspective aligns with the findings of Stanić and Barišić, who emphasize the role of ethical communication practices in maintaining trust and loyalty among stakeholders (Stanić & Barišić, 2019).

Transparency also plays a crucial role in enhancing accountability. By sharing information about its operations and decision-making processes, PT KAI demonstrates responsibility to the public. This is especially critical during crisis situations, where timely and transparent communication can shape public perceptions and responses. Cintia underscores that prompt and transparent communication is vital for effective crisis management, as it mitigates reputational risks and underscores an organization's commitment to ethical practices (Cintia, 2024). This proactive stance not only resolves immediate challenges but also strengthens long-term trust in the organization.

Additionally, transparency fosters positive relationships with a diverse range of stakeholders, including customers, employees, and the broader community. As Putra observes, an effective public relations strategy involves tailoring messages to audience needs while promoting a favorable organizational image (Putra, 2024). Through transparent practices, PT KAI engages in meaningful dialogue with its stakeholders, addresses their concerns, and incorporates feedback into its operations. This participatory approach cultivates a sense of shared responsibility and community, which is essential for maintaining public trust and support.

Furthermore, transparency is integral to ethical decision-making within the organization. PR professionals at PT KAI are responsible for upholding ethical standards and ensuring that communications align with the company's values and code of conduct. Jiang asserts that PR professionals play a pivotal role in establishing ethical guidelines that govern organizational communication (Jiang, 2024). By prioritizing transparency, PT KAI not only adheres to ethical norms but also sets a benchmark for ethical conduct within the industry.

### **Community and Stakeholder Engagement**

The ethical framework proposed by Blackford et al. emphasizes the significance of prioritizing equality and active participation in communication, a principle that PT Kereta Api



Indonesia (PT KAI) demonstrates through its engagement with communities and stakeholders to ensure their voices are represented (Blackford et al., 2021). PT KAI positions community and stakeholder engagement as a cornerstone of its communication strategy, underscoring equality and active participation. This approach is founded on the premise that effective public relations must incorporate the perspectives and concerns of all stakeholders, fostering a more inclusive and responsive organizational culture.

A central objective of PT KAI's community engagement is to promote equitable access to information and services. By actively involving diverse community groups in its communication processes, the organization ensures that all societal segments, irrespective of socioeconomic status, have equal opportunities to participate in discussions related to transport services and policies. This aligns with Parikesit's findings, which highlight the importance of public trust in transport services, particularly concerning health protocols during the pandemic (Parikesit, 2023). By championing equality, PT KAI effectively addresses the diverse needs of its customers, enhancing overall satisfaction and fostering loyalty.

PT KAI's commitment to active participation is evident in its efforts to establish platforms for dialogue between the organization and its stakeholders. This participatory approach is essential for comprehending community needs and expectations, which in turn inform service improvements and policy modifications.

Moreover, PT KAI recognizes stakeholder engagement as vital to building trust and credibility. Transparent communication serves as the foundation for cultivating authentic relationships with stakeholders, enabling the organization to strengthen its reputation and reinforce public confidence.

Additionally, PT KAI integrates community engagement into its corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. By involving community members in CSR activities, the organization ensures that its efforts align with the priorities and needs of the communities it serves. This alignment not only enhances the impact of CSR programs but also solidifies PT KAI's role as a socially responsible entity within Indonesia's transport sector. Through these strategies, PT KAI exemplifies the practical application of ethical principles in fostering equality, active participation, and trust, thereby reinforcing its position as a leader in ethical public relations practices.

### **Respect diverse customer needs and perspectives**

Respect represents a cornerstone of PT Kereta Api Indonesia's (PT KAI) communication strategy, emphasizing the importance of addressing the diverse needs and perspectives of its stakeholders. This aligns with Musoke et al., who identify respect as a fundamental ethical virtue in public health, underscoring its critical role in public interactions (Musoke et al., 2020). By treating customers with dignity and valuing their feedback, PT KAI seeks to foster strong relationships with the community, thereby enhancing customer loyalty and satisfaction.

The principle of mutual respect serves as a foundational element in PT KAI's public relations ethics, guiding interactions with stakeholders, including customers, employees, and the broader community. This principle is pivotal in nurturing positive relationships, improving communication, and ensuring that diverse voices are considered in decision-making processes.

A primary objective of the respect principle is to acknowledge and uphold the dignity and rights of individuals. PT KAI demonstrates its commitment to ethical conduct and social responsibility by treating all stakeholders with respect. This approach reflects Coetzee et al.'s findings, which emphasize the importance of respect in organizational contexts, particularly when decisions affect employees and stakeholders (Coetzee et al., 2019). In public relations, this commitment translates into actively listening to stakeholder concerns and incorporating their input, leading to more informed and effective decision-making.

Respect also fosters inclusive communication within PT KAI's strategies. The organization strives to ensure that its communication efforts are accessible and consider the diverse cultural and social backgrounds of its stakeholders. In a multicultural society like

Indonesia, such inclusivity is crucial to addressing varied expectations and communication styles. Humsona highlights the importance of valuing stakeholders' unique perspectives, particularly in corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Humsona, 2023). Through inclusive dialogue, PT KAI enhances its reputation and strengthens its relationships with the community.

Additionally, respect plays a crucial role in building trust, an essential component of effective public relations. Transparent and respectful communication fosters trust among stakeholders, reinforcing long-term relationships. This aligns with Stanić's research, which underscores the significance of respect and other ethical behaviors in public relations for cultivating durable stakeholder connections (Stanić, 2020). Trust, in turn, bolsters customer loyalty and contributes to a positive public image.

Furthermore, the principle of respect is integral to ethical decision-making at PT KAI. Prioritizing respect ensures that the organization's policies and practices align with ethical standards and societal expectations. This is particularly critical in crisis management, where respectful communication can mitigate negative impacts and affirm the organization's commitment to its stakeholders. Cintia emphasizes the value of respectful engagement during crises, noting its significant influence on public perception and response (Cintia, 2024). Through its steadfast commitment to the principle of respect, PT KAI not only strengthens stakeholder relationships but also upholds its reputation as an ethically responsible organization.

### **Responsiveness**

Responsiveness is a fundamental ethical principle guiding PT Kereta Api Indonesia's (PT KAI) communication practices. The organization has established a crisis communication framework that prioritizes swift and effective responses to incidents, as evidenced by Cintia's study, which highlights PT KAI's proactive measures during railway accidents (Cintia, 2024). This responsiveness not only addresses immediate issues but also reflects the company's commitment to accountability and continuous improvement, which are critical for maintaining public trust.

The principle of responsiveness in PT KAI's public relations ethics underscores the organization's dedication to addressing stakeholder needs and concerns promptly and effectively. This principle is vital for fostering trust, enhancing communication, and ensuring alignment with evolving public sentiments and expectations.

A key objective of the responsiveness principle is to enhance stakeholder engagement. By actively listening to and addressing stakeholder concerns, PT KAI creates a more inclusive environment where community members feel valued and heard. This approach aligns with the broader understanding that timely responses in crisis situations are essential for maintaining trust and credibility, even though specific research directly linking this to PT KAI remains unavailable.

Responsiveness also plays a crucial role in building trust and credibility. When PT KAI demonstrates its commitment to promptly addressing stakeholder inquiries and concerns, it fosters a sense of reliability among the public. This is particularly important in the transportation sector, where public trust is paramount. Although ethical decision-making during crises requires organizations to be responsive to societal needs, O'Sullivan et al.'s reference focuses on ethical values in pandemic resource allocation and does not specifically address public relations in the transportation sector.

Furthermore, responsiveness is integral to effective crisis management. During crises such as accidents or service disruptions, PT KAI's ability to respond quickly and transparently significantly influences public perception and mitigates potential backlash. While Chang et al. discuss the importance of adapting communication strategies during health crises, their findings do not explicitly address PT KAI's crisis management within the transportation sector.

Responsiveness also contributes to continuous organizational improvement. By actively seeking feedback from stakeholders and addressing their concerns, PT KAI can identify areas for improvement and implement necessary changes. Although Ndebele et al. emphasize the importance of ethical frameworks in public health, their findings do not specifically relate to the role of responsiveness in organizational performance within PT KAI's context.

Overall, while the principle of responsiveness in PT KAI's public relations ethics serves multiple purposes including enhancing stakeholder engagement, building trust and credibility, facilitating effective crisis management, and driving continuous improvement the cited references do not fully support all claims made. It is essential for PT KAI to embed responsiveness into its organizational culture to strengthen its public relations efforts and contribute to the satisfaction and well-being of the communities it serves.

### **Service equity for all communities**

PT Kereta Api Indonesia (PT KAI) upholds the principle of equity, ensuring that its services remain accessible to all societal segments. This commitment is evident in its ethical guidelines for public communication, which emphasize equitable access to both information and services (Lategan et al., 2022). By adopting inclusive policies, PT KAI seeks to eliminate barriers that may hinder certain groups from utilizing its services effectively.

The principle of fairness serves as a foundational framework within PT KAI's public relations ethics, promoting equality, inclusiveness, and equitable treatment in all stakeholder interactions. This principle plays a crucial role in fostering trust, strengthening community relationships, and advancing the organization's commitment to social responsibility.

A primary objective of the fairness principle is to ensure equality in access to services and information. PT KAI acknowledges the diverse backgrounds and needs of its stakeholders, including customers, employees, and the broader community. By prioritizing equity, the organization strives to provide equal opportunities for all individuals to access services and participate in decision-making processes. This aligns with Munala et al.'s findings, which emphasize the dual importance of social justice and equity in public health, noting that equity is both a moral imperative and a practical necessity for effective service delivery (Munala et al., 2022).

Equity also serves as a cornerstone for building public trust. Demonstrating a commitment to fairness enhances PT KAI's reliability and credibility among stakeholders, an essential factor in the transport sector where public confidence is critical. Marcellus et al. argue that public health practitioners who prioritize equity effectively advocate for the needs of marginalized communities, underscoring the role of equitable communication in fostering trust and collaboration (Marcellus et al., 2022).

Moreover, the fairness principle encourages active stakeholder participation in decision-making processes. PT KAI aims to establish platforms for dialogue, enabling community members to voice concerns and contribute to discussions about transport services. This participatory approach facilitates a deeper understanding of community needs and expectations, which can guide service enhancements and policy adjustments. Chang et al. highlight the importance of equity in public infrastructure, suggesting that inclusive practices yield better outcomes for all stakeholders (Chang et al., 2023).

Equity further underpins PT KAI's commitment to corporate social responsibility (CSR). By ensuring its CSR initiatives are fair and inclusive, PT KAI addresses the needs of underserved communities and supports their development. This aligns with Necić's insights, which emphasize the challenges of implementing ethical frameworks in public relations while stressing the need to prioritize fairness within such frameworks (Necić, 2021).

In conclusion, PT KAI's adherence to the principle of fairness within its public relations ethics encompasses promoting equality, fostering trust, encouraging stakeholder participation, and guiding CSR initiatives. By embedding equity into its organizational culture, PT KAI not



only enhances its public relations efforts but also contributes to the welfare of the communities it serves, ensuring equitable treatment for all stakeholders.

### **Integrity to maintain honesty and ethical service standards**

The principle of integrity forms the cornerstone of PT Kereta Api Indonesia's (PT KAI) ethical communication practices. The organization strives to uphold honesty and ethical standards in all interactions, which are critical for cultivating a reputable brand. Chong and Patwa (2023) emphasize the positive correlation between ethical communication and value creation, highlighting that integrity in communication enhances stakeholder relationships and societal well-being.

Integrity is a fundamental aspect of PT KAI's public relations ethics, reflecting its commitment to ethical behavior, transparency, and accountability in stakeholder interactions. This principle plays a pivotal role in fostering trust, enhancing the organization's reputation, and aligning all communications and actions with its core values.

A primary objective of the integrity principle is to establish and sustain trust through transparent communication. Integrity involves maintaining honesty and openness in all dealings, which is essential for building trust among stakeholders, including customers, employees, and the broader community. Dewi and Syakir (2022) assert that integrity is a critical attribute for both leaders and organizations to effectively fulfill their responsibilities. By prioritizing integrity, PT KAI assures stakeholders that its operations and communications are guided by ethical principles, thereby reinforcing public trust in the organization.

Integrity also serves as a foundation for accountability within PT KAI. An organization committed to acting with integrity takes responsibility for its actions and decisions, which is particularly crucial in the public transport sector, where passenger safety and satisfaction are paramount. Joković (2021) underscores the role of public service ethics, including integrity, in cultivating a culture of accountability within organizations. By adhering to this principle, PT KAI ensures it addresses stakeholder concerns responsibly and remains accountable for its societal impact.

Moreover, integrity underpins ethical decision-making. PT KAI's public relations practices are designed to uphold ethical standards, ensuring honesty and respect in all communications. Stanić (2020) highlights that codes of conduct in public relations provide normative frameworks that guide organizations in their communication practices. By embedding integrity into its decision-making processes, PT KAI can navigate complex situations ethically and achieve better outcomes for stakeholders.

Additionally, the principle of integrity supports the cultivation of long-term relationships with stakeholders. Consistently demonstrating integrity in its communications and actions enables PT KAI to build loyalty and foster positive relationships with customers and communities. This commitment is particularly significant in the transport sector, where customer loyalty directly influences organizational success. By prioritizing integrity, PT KAI nurtures a loyal customer base that relies on the organization for safe and reliable services.

In conclusion, the principle of integrity in PT KAI's public relations ethics fulfills several critical functions, including building trust, fostering accountability, guiding ethical decision-making, and strengthening long-term stakeholder relationships. By embedding integrity into its organizational culture, PT KAI not only enhances its public relations effectiveness but also contributes to the well-being of the communities it serves, ensuring all communications and actions align with its core ethical values.

### **Challenges in the implementation of public relations ethics at PT KAI**

The implementation of public relations ethics at PT Kereta Api Indonesia (PT KAI), a state-owned railway company in Indonesia, encounters several significant challenges that mirror broader issues within the field of public relations. These challenges encompass the absence of formalized ethical guidelines, the complexities involved in identifying ethical

breaches, and the necessity for robust ethical leadership. Addressing these obstacles requires a comprehensive approach that integrates ethics training, the development of a clear and enforceable code of conduct, and the cultivation of an organizational culture rooted in ethical principles.

One of the primary challenges in implementing public relations ethics at PT Kereta Api Indonesia (PT KAI) is the absence of formalized ethical guidelines. Many organizations, including public relations firms, often lack structured ethics statements or codes of conduct, resulting in inconsistent practices and ethical dilemmas (E.-J. Ki et al., 2011). The lack of such frameworks complicates the ability of practitioners to navigate ethical challenges, as they lack clear standards to inform their decisions (Necić, 2021). This issue is further exacerbated by the nature of ethical violations in public relations, which are often less apparent compared to fields like journalism, where breaches are more conspicuous (Necić, 2021). To address this, the establishment of a comprehensive ethics statement is crucial to providing a robust framework that guides ethical behavior and decision-making at PT KAI.

Additionally, the organization faces the challenge of fostering ethical leadership. Research indicates that strong support for ethical practices from top management significantly increases the likelihood of ethical behavior among public relations professionals (E.-J. Ki et al., 2011). This underscores the importance of cultivating an ethical culture that is reinforced by leadership commitment. Ethical leadership not only provides strategic direction for the organization but also motivates employees to prioritize ethical considerations in their professional conduct (Lee & Cheng, 2012). Consequently, PT KAI should prioritize the development of leadership that exemplifies ethical principles and actively promotes an environment where ethical behavior is both valued and expected.

### **Steps to deal with ethical challenges in public relations**

To address these challenges, PT Kereta Api Indonesia (PT KAI) can implement a series of strategic measures. First, the organization should develop and adopt a formalized code of ethics tailored to its specific context and challenges. This code should be comprehensive, encompassing a wide range of ethical dilemmas that employees may encounter in their roles (Kim & Ki, 2014). Furthermore, PT KAI should establish regular ethics training programs to ensure that all employees fully understand the ethical standards expected of them and are well-prepared to navigate ethical dilemmas effectively (Meng et al., 2022). Such training initiatives would not only reinforce the significance of ethical behavior but also contribute to fostering a culture of integrity across the organization.

Additionally, PT KAI should facilitate open discussions on ethics by creating platforms where employees can express concerns about ethical issues. Encouraging transparency and providing opportunities for dialogue can aid in the early detection of potential ethical violations and promote a heightened sense of accountability among employees (Jiang, 2024). By integrating transparency and ethical considerations into everyday decision-making processes, PT KAI can create an environment that prioritizes ethical behavior.

In conclusion, the challenges PT KAI faces in implementing public relations ethics stem from the absence of formal ethical guidelines, the difficulty of detecting violations, and the need for robust ethical leadership. Through the establishment of a comprehensive code of ethics, the provision of regular ethics training, and the encouragement of open dialogue on ethical issues, PT KAI can effectively address these challenges and cultivate a culture of ethical conduct within the organization.

### **Implications of Public Relations Ethics on Competitive Advantage**

The implementation of ethical practices at PT Kereta Api Indonesia (PT KAI) plays a pivotal role in securing a competitive advantage within the railway industry. By embedding ethical principles into its operations, PT KAI enhances its corporate reputation, fosters

customer loyalty, and promotes employee satisfaction key elements for achieving sustainable business performance.

A primary avenue through which PT KAI leverages ethics is its commitment to customer satisfaction. Research indicates that integrating business ethics into marketing strategies positively influences customer satisfaction, which subsequently drives improved business performance (Nadham & Nahid, 2015). PT KAI adopts a customer-centric approach by prioritizing transparency and accountability in its services. This approach is particularly evident in its crisis communication strategy, where the company actively engages stakeholders and provides timely, accurate information during incidents to maintain trust and credibility (Cintia, 2024). Such practices not only mitigate reputational risks but also enhance customer loyalty, a critical factor in a competitive market.

These creative solutions need to make use of advanced technology (Judijanto et al., 2023). PT KAI employs technological innovations that align with ethical standards to improve its service offerings. The introduction of the KAI Access application exemplifies this strategy, enhancing user experiences with features such as online ticketing and efficient customer service (Christanto, 2024). By prioritizing user satisfaction and accessibility, PT KAI underscores its commitment to ethical service delivery, a distinguishing factor in the digital era. Studies demonstrate that the quality of e-services significantly impacts customer satisfaction and competitive advantage in e-commerce, emphasizing the importance of ethical considerations in technology adoption (A. S. Dewi et al., 2023).

In addition to customer-focused strategies, PT KAI places considerable emphasis on employee well-being and workplace ethics, which further strengthens its competitive position. Ethical business practices cultivate a positive work environment, enhancing employee performance and productivity. Through investments in employee training and development, PT KAI not only adheres to ethical standards but also nurtures a motivated workforce essential for delivering high-quality services. The alignment between employee satisfaction and ethical practices is critical for maintaining operational efficiency and achieving long-term organizational objectives.

PT KAI's ethical practices constitute a strategic asset that enhances its competitive advantage in the railway industry. By prioritizing customer satisfaction, ethically integrating technology, and fostering a supportive workplace culture, PT KAI positions itself as a leader in the sector. These practices not only improve business performance but also ensure the company's sustainability in an increasingly dynamic and competitive market.

## **CONCLUSION**

The findings of the research highlight that ethical practices in public relations (PR) serve as vital strategic assets for PT Kereta Api Indonesia (PT KAI). By emphasizing principles such as transparency, integrity, equity, respect, and responsiveness, the organization effectively strengthens stakeholder relationships, enhances public trust, and builds a sustainable competitive advantage in the railway sector. PT KAI demonstrates the successful integration of ethical PR principles into its operational and strategic frameworks, guiding its decision-making processes to ensure accountability, transparency, and alignment with stakeholder expectations. This approach is particularly evident in its crisis communication strategies, where the company emphasizes timely and accurate dissemination of information to mitigate reputational risks and foster trust.

The implementation of PR ethics at PT KAI, however, is not without challenges. The absence of formalized ethical guidelines, difficulties in identifying ethical violations, and the need for robust ethical leadership present significant obstacles. Addressing these challenges necessitates the establishment of comprehensive codes of conduct, regular ethics training programs, and the cultivation of an ethical organizational culture reinforced by committed leadership. PT KAI's focus on customer satisfaction and the ethical application of technological innovations, such as the KAI Access application, reflects its dedication to enhancing service

delivery. These initiatives improve user experience and accessibility, underscoring the organization's commitment to ethical service provision in an increasingly digital environment.

Furthermore, PT KAI prioritizes employee well-being and workplace ethics, fostering a positive work environment that enhances productivity and service quality. By investing in employee training and development, the organization ensures that its workforce is well-equipped to uphold ethical standards, thereby supporting operational efficiency and achieving long-term organizational objectives. The research emphasizes that ethical PR practices significantly contribute to PT KAI's competitive advantage by enhancing customer loyalty, strengthening brand reputation, and positioning the organization as a leader in the transport sector. In conclusion, the study underscores the critical role of ethical public relations practices in driving organizational success. PT KAI's commitment to embedding these principles into its culture and operations ensures sustainable growth while solidifying its position within a highly competitive industry.

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