



## The Effect of Persuasive Communication of Public Relations of Class I Railway Engineering Center in Medan on Public Safety Awareness and Compliance at Level Crossings in Medan City

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the influence of persuasive communication conducted by Public Relations of Medan Class I Railway Engineering Center (BTP) on increasing public awareness and compliance with safety at level crossings in Medan City. This study uses a quantitative explanatory approach with a sample size of 385 people selected by purposive sampling. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test the direct and indirect effects between variables. The results of data analysis show that persuasive communication has an effect on safety awareness with a p-value of  $0.000 < 0.05$  and a t-statistic value of 9.144. Persuasive communication has an effect on compliance with a p-value of  $0.000 < 0.05$  and a t-statistic value of 14.329. Awareness has an effect on compliance with a p-value of  $0.000 < 0.05$  and a t-statistic value of 6.12. The indirect effect test shows that Safety Awareness significantly mediates the effect of Persuasive Communication on Compliance, with a mediation coefficient value of 0.332 and a t-statistic of  $4.801 > 1.96$  and a p-value of  $0.000 < 0.05$ . These findings indicate that persuasive communication by BTP Medan Public Relations plays an important role in increasing safety awareness and public compliance in Medan City. This study is expected to contribute to the development of policies related to safety at level crossings.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Communication from the government is very necessary so that public policies can be conveyed and obeyed by the public. This public policy communication involves the audience or public and aims to change their attitudes and behavior, so it can be classified as public communication. According to Dennis Dijkzeul and Markus Moke (Kurniawati, 2023). Mulyana in (Hendri 2019) stated that the use of persuasive communication is expected to be able to inform, teach, encourage, change attitudes or beliefs, change behavior or actions, and also entertain.

North Sumatra Province is one of the areas that has an active railway line on the island of Sumatra with a total of 433 level crossings consisting of guarded and unguarded level crossings spread across several regions. North Sumatra Province is also recorded as an area with a fairly high number of accidents each year. The large volume of vehicles and the high level of community mobilization are triggers for the high number of accidents at level crossings in North Sumatra Province.

Based on data from the BTP Medan Annual Report for 2024, the number of accidents at level crossings in North Sumatra in 2020-2024 can be seen in table 1.1 as many as 191 incidents with the number of accidents tending to increase in the last three years. Accidents at railroad level crossings in 2020-2024 caused 84 minor injuries, 51 serious injuries and 48 deaths. The most accidents occurred at unguarded level crossings as many as 182 incidents with cars/buses/trucks being the types of vehicles that experienced the most accidents. Accidents often occur at unguarded level crossings because there are no crossing guards so that motorists who cross are less careful and ignore warnings from trains that are about to pass.

BTP Medan Public Relations has the responsibility to socialize level crossing safety to the public. BTP Medan Public Relations is considered a source that has credibility and the ability to convey messages related to the socialization of safety at level crossings to the public so that the information and messages conveyed are certainly valid information and accompanied by actual data. The public will be more receptive to messages from sources that are considered competent in their fields such as BTP Medan Public Relations. The public also tends to trust sources of information that are honest and unbiased and have an attractive message delivery. Another important indicator in carrying out persuasive communication aimed at changing behavior is the quality of the message content. The quality of the message content refers to the extent to which the message conveyed can influence the audience, both in terms of clarity, strength of argument, and logic used. The socialization message conveyed by BTP Medan Public Relations uses words that are easy for the public to remember. An example of the content of a communication message using the tagline "BERTEMAN" which is an abbreviation of "Berhenti, Tengok Kanan Kiri, Aman, Jalan". This tagline was chosen so that it is easy for the public to remember and understand. Other socialization messages such as an invitation to always pay attention to safety at level crossings, educational messages about traffic signs at level crossings, and revealing data and facts related to accidents at level crossings

and the risks for those who violate them. In addition to positive messages, messages that are frightening (appeal messages) are also used such as "Breaking Through Level Crossings, Game Over" and several other messages that try to increase public awareness.

Based on the 2024 BTP Medan annual report, from 2020 - 2024 there have been 72 accidents at level crossings in Medan City. However, the number of accidents has tended to decrease in the last three years. Accidents at level crossings in 2024 were 12 incidents, down 2 accidents from the previous year, the number of accidents decreased not too significantly because the target for accidents desired by all transportation is zero accidents.

Petty and Cacioppo (2014) explain that after the message is delivered to the recipient, the recipient goes through the cognitive stage, namely studying the message received by elaborating it on the knowledge and understanding he has which then results in behavioral changes commonly known as the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). This is in line with the concept of awareness put forward by B. Kutchinsky in (Fadila, 2017) that the level of awareness is influenced by various factors including knowledge, understanding, and attitude. Adequate knowledge of the risks and consequences of violations can encourage people to comply with the rules more. Understanding the importance of maintaining safety at level crossings can change behavior patterns and increase awareness and compliance with safety rules. In addition, a positive attitude towards safety, which can be influenced by education and awareness campaigns, also plays an important role.

Research on the influence of persuasive communication in improving public safety in traffic has been widely conducted, such as the research by Nelansari & Tjahjawati (2022) entitled "Analysis of the Effectiveness of Campaign Messages to Improve Safety at Level Crossings of PT KAI Daop 2 Bandung". This study shows that increasing traffic compliance is often influenced by the extent to which the public feels emotionally involved in the socialization delivered. Based on the above and the gaps that exist with previous studies, the researcher is interested in conducting research related to "The Influence of Persuasive Communication of Public Relations of the Medan Class I Railway Engineering Center on Public Safety Awareness and Compliance at Level Crossings in Medan City". This study aims to explore the relationship between persuasive communication on awareness and compliance of driver safety at level crossings carried out by the Medan BTP Public Relations based on the perspective of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) theory by Petty and Cacioppo which is associated with the concept of awareness put forward by B. Kutchinsky and Obedience Theory by Blass. By exploring this relationship, it is hoped that more effective strategies can be found to improve safety at level crossings.

This research is interesting to conduct because of its relevance to the increasingly pressing issue of public safety. With the increasing number of vehicles and trains in Medan City, the challenges in maintaining safety at level crossings are becoming increasingly complex and a comprehensive approach is needed in handling them. In the future, this research is expected to be able to contribute to the development of transportation safety policies in Indonesia,

especially in the context of level crossings in Medan City. In addition, this research also has the potential to provide recommendations for policy developers to design more effective programs in improving safety at level crossings. Thus, this research will not only provide academic contributions, but also significant practical impacts on public safety.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Mulyana in (Hendri, 2019) persuasive communication is also a form of instrumental communication function, namely a function that aims to inform, teach, encourage, change attitudes or beliefs, change behavior or actions, and also entertain. Public relations is one of the techniques and concentrations of the field of communication science that analyzes the responses and impacts that will affect the position of the company concerned because what is disseminated by Public Relations through communication will affect public perception and have an impact on the company (Severin & James, 2014). However, obtaining a positive response and reputation must be fought for and is not an easy job (Griffin, 2012).

Socialization from a Public Relations perspective is defined by Rahutomo (2013) as an effort to increase the sensitivity and understanding of the target public to attract concern and realize positive perceptions or opinions towards an activity formed by the company so that good beliefs and images are formed through organizing messages intensively with communication methods with a certain time period. In one situation we evaluate a message deeply, carefully and with critical thinking, but in another situation we evaluate the message in passing without considering the arguments underlying the content of the message (Griffin, 2012).

Awareness is a person's alertness to events in their environment (such as sights and sounds from the surrounding environment) and cognitive events including memory, thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations (Suparwi, 2020). According to Matlin (2018) awareness is the ability to be aware of various things in our environment, both abstract and concrete, which are done automatically or through preattentive processing. Widjaja in (Fadila, 2017) states that awareness is defined as feelings, knowledge, and memories of the state of oneself and the environment. Awareness includes an understanding of self-esteem, legal will, and other things. According to Maharani (2016) self-awareness is insight into or insight into the reasons for one's own behavior or self-understanding. Self-awareness is an important raw material for demonstrating clarity and understanding of one's behavior.

Compliance is a phenomenon similar to self-adjustment. The difference lies in the aspect of the influence of legitimacy (as opposed to coercion or social pressure), and there is always an individual, namely the authority holder (Boeree, 2017). Meanwhile, according to Rahmawati (2015) Obedience is defined as a disciplined attitude or obedient behavior towards an order or rule that has been set, with full awareness. In order for concepts to be studied empirically, they must be operationalized by changing them into variables. The conceptual framework is the result of the researcher's logical reasoning which includes

important descriptions to help achieve research objectives and formulate hypotheses. The conceptual framework is the theoretical relationship between research variables, such as independent and dependent variables (Sugiyono & Lestari, 2024).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The type of research used in this study is quantitative research. Quantitative research is a method for testing a particular theory by examining the relationship between variables. In this study, the data collected were in the form of numbers or scores from questionnaires which were then analyzed statistically using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). SEM is a statistical technique used to test and estimate the relationship between variables in a model. SEM is used to test theoretical models that involve direct and indirect relationships between variables. This study uses a measurement scale with a Likert scale. The population in this study were people in Medan City who knew or had participated in the safety socialization at level crossings carried out by the BTP Medan Public Relations. Based on the sample calculation according to the Cochran formula, 385 people were obtained. The sampling technique used in this study used the purposive sampling technique. The data collection technique used in this study was by using a questionnaire. A questionnaire is a series of question instruments arranged based on the research variable measuring instrument (Sahir, 2021). The research questionnaire is divided into 4 parts, namely respondent data consisting of 7 questions, related to persuasive communication of BTP Medan Public Relations as many as 16 statements, related to community compliance as many as 12 statements and related to safety awareness as many as 12 statements, all of which must be answered by respondents honestly and correctly. This study uses a data analysis method with SEM PLS (Structural Equation Modeling Partial Least Squares), which is a statistical analysis method used to test and model the relationship between variables. Data processing for this study uses SmartPLS software version 4.1.1.2. The reason for using SEM PLS in the analysis of this research data is because SEM PLS can be used to test complex theoretical models with many variables that influence each other, both latent variables (unmeasured) and measured variables

## **RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### ***The Influence of Persuasive Communication of BTP Medan Public Relations on Public Safety Awareness at Level Crossings in Medan City***

The results of the analysis show that persuasive communication has a significant influence on public safety awareness at level crossings. The significance value obtained ( $p < 0.05$ ) indicates that communication carried out by BTP Medan Public Relations is able to form understanding and increase public attention to the importance of safety at railroad crossings.

This finding is in line with the ELM theory put forward by Petty and Cacioppo on persuasive communication which emphasizes the importance of four main components, namely the credibility of the source (communicator), message content, media selection, and recipient characteristics. In this context, BTP Medan Public Relations acts as a communicator who conveys safety

messages through various media such as brochures, banners, stickers, and social media, which effectively influence public awareness as the target audience.

One of the factors that influences the effectiveness of persuasive communication is the credibility of the message source. In this study, BTP Medan Public Relations acts as a message source that is trusted by the public. Messages conveyed by parties with high credibility, such as authorities related to safety and traffic, have been proven to be more acceptable and influence increasing public awareness. This is in line with the findings of Ginting's (2024) research which states that the persuasive communication competence of the source influences behavioral change.

Based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) theory outlined by Petty and Cacioppo, audience involvement in persuasive messages greatly influences how they process the message. More engaged audiences tend to use the central path to process information, which means they will analyze the message more deeply and, in turn, increase their awareness of safety issues. In this context, the message conveyed by BTP Medan Public Relations uses a data-based and fact-based approach, which is very effective in attracting the attention of audiences involved in the topic.

Based on B. Kutchinsky's perspective, safety awareness can be increased by presenting relevant and actual information about the risks faced in the field. In this study, the persuasive communication approach used accommodates informative and emotional messages, for example the slogan "Breaking Through Level Crossings, Game Over" which has been proven to raise emotional awareness in the community.

The results of this study strengthen the findings of Nelansari & Tjahjawati (2022) which show that safety campaigns that utilize visualization of the impact of accidents are able to raise public awareness. The use of visual and emotional messages by BTP Medan Public Relations also provided significant results in increasing awareness. One of the strengths of BTP Medan Public Relations communication lies in the strategy of delivering consistent and contextual messages, including targeting high-risk groups such as motorcyclists and students. Field activities such as direct socialization provide a more touching and effective interpersonal approach in building public awareness. Awareness formed through persuasive communication is also closely related to increasing audience knowledge about safety at level crossings. Audiences who receive informative and evidence-based messages will have more knowledge about potential hazards and how to prevent them, which in turn increases their awareness of safety.

Social media as part of the communication strategy also contributed greatly to this result. The active presence of BTP Medan Public Relations on digital platforms allows for the wide and rapid dissemination of messages, especially to the younger generation. In addition, the persuasive communication approach used also prioritizes the credibility of the message source. Public Relations as an official government institution is considered to have authority and public trust, so that the messages conveyed are more easily accepted by the

public, in accordance with the credibility of the source in the Elaboration Likelihood Model theory.

However, the awareness formed does not only depend on the frequency of messages, but also the quality of the interaction. Therefore, these results imply the importance of improving the interpersonal communication capacity of field officers, so that the messages delivered can be more effective and adapted to the local characteristics of the multicultural and dynamic Medan community. Overall, the first hypothesis that was proven significant indicates that persuasive communication strategies are indeed effective in shaping public awareness. These findings not only strengthen communication theory and previous research, but also provide direction for improving safety socialization through improving message design, selecting communication channels, and periodically evaluating public perception.

### *The Influence of Persuasive Communication of BTP Medan Public Relations on Public Compliance at Level Crossings in Medan City*

The results of the second hypothesis analysis show that persuasive communication significantly influences public compliance at level crossings. This is evidenced by the statistical test significance value which is below 0.05 so that the second hypothesis is accepted. This finding is consistent with the Elaboration Likelihood Model theory which states that messages that are credible, relevant, and delivered in an interesting way can influence changes in attitudes and behavior. In this context, public compliance increases when they receive safety messages that are inspiring and easy to understand.

The communication used by BTP Medan Public Relations includes cognitive and affective elements in their messages, including the use of slogans, threats of sanctions, and strong accident visualizations. This approach affects the psychological aspects of the message recipient, so that they are motivated to comply with the rules in order to avoid risk. A study by Blass (2009) in Obedience Theory states that a person's compliance with the rules is influenced by the extent to which they see the source as a legitimate and credible party authority. BTP Medan Public Relations as an extension of the government has strong authoritative legitimacy to convey safety messages.

Public compliance is also formed through repetition and consistency of the messages conveyed. The more often people are exposed to safety campaigns, the more likely they are to adjust their behavior according to the safety norms being promoted. Effective persuasive communication not only influences cognition but also drives the audience's affection and conation. This means that people not only understand but also feel it is important to comply with the rules and ultimately actually implement the expected behavior. This is in line with the results of Panjaitan's (2021) study which states that persuasive communication has an influence on compliance.

Audience involvement in persuasive communication also plays a major role in influencing compliance. Audiences who are more engaged with the message given tend to process the message deeply and then change their attitudes towards safety. This leads to more lasting behavioral changes, which are reflected in higher levels of compliance with safety rules.

These results strengthen the research of Nelansari & Tjahjawati (2022) which states that campaigns that touch the emotional side, such as through real stories of accidents or visualizations of losses, are better able to encourage behavioral changes, including compliance in traffic. Social media support and face-to-face activities by BTP Medan Public Relations are reinforcing factors in influencing the community. Socialization at vulnerable points such as unguarded crossings has a direct effect on the community passing through the location. In addition to messages and media, the interpersonal approach taken by socialization officers also determines the level of compliance. Friendly, informative, and communicative officers will create positive relationships with the community and encourage active participation.

This finding is also in line with the objectives of several laws and regulations governing safety at level crossings. One of them is Law Number 23 of 2007 concerning Railways Article 124, which states that road users are required to give priority to trains when crossing level crossings. This provision is a form of regulation that emphasizes absolute priority for trains for the safety of all. In addition, Article 114 of Law Number 22 of 2009 concerning Traffic and Road Transportation also states that vehicle drivers are required to stop when the signal sounds, the barrier closes, or there is another signal, and are required to give priority to trains. Thus, persuasive communication conducted by BTP Medan Public Relations, such as the use of the tagline "BERTEMAN (Stop, Look Right-Left, Safe, Walk)" and other educational and emotional messages, have proven effective in encouraging the public to be more obedient to these regulations. Furthermore, the form of public compliance is not only measured from their behavior in obeying signs and signals, but also from compliance with legal provisions that contain sanctions. In this case, Article 296 of Law Number 22 of 2009 stipulates those violations at level crossings, such as breaking through when the signal has sounded or the barrier is starting to close, can be subject to criminal sanctions in the form of a maximum of 3 months imprisonment or a maximum fine of Rp750,000.

By knowing the potential sanctions through persuasive socialization, the community becomes more alert and obedient to the applicable rules. Persuasive communication of BTP Medan Public Relations functions not only as a medium of information, but also as a tool for legal education and behavior change. With this approach, the implementation of laws and regulations becomes more effective because it is accompanied by increased public awareness and compliance. This shows that persuasive communication is a very effective tool in increasing public compliance with safety rules, as long as it is carried out systematically, consistently, and pays attention to the local characteristics of the message target. This study confirms that changes in attitude through persuasive communication can affect public compliance. Communities that have a more positive attitude towards safety are more likely to act in accordance with existing rules. These results support the ELM theory which states that persuasive communication will affect real behavior, namely compliance.

### ***The Influence of Awareness on Public Compliance at Level Crossings in Medan City***

The third hypothesis in this study shows that safety awareness has a significant effect on safety compliance at level crossings. The test results show a significance value below the threshold of 0.05, so this hypothesis is accepted. This finding explains that an individual's awareness or understanding of a risk will greatly affect their intention and behavior to comply with the rules. Individuals who are aware of the danger tend to act carefully and obediently.

Awareness of risk, such as the possibility of being hit by a train at an unguarded crossing, encourages people to be more alert and stop before crossing. This reflects that knowledge and understanding contribute greatly to behavioral change. These results are also consistent with research by Kutchinsky, which states that increasing awareness can significantly suppress deviant behavior and increase compliance with applicable rules, especially in the context of public safety.

People who are aware of the importance of complying with traffic rules at level crossings will more easily accept and implement these social norms. Awareness formed through education and campaigns will be the foundation for a positive attitude towards compliance. Increasing awareness can be achieved through communication strategies that emphasize educational, informative, and emotional aspects. When people understand the real consequences of non-compliance, such as loss of life, the urge to comply increases.

The role of families, educational institutions, and the media in creating awareness is also very large. Campaigns that are not only carried out by government agencies but also supported by community elements will strengthen the effect of this awareness. The results of this study strengthen the recommendation that awareness is not only a psychological indicator, but also a predictor of real behavior. The higher the awareness, the higher the level of compliance with safety rules.

The existence of this strong correlation explains that an awareness-based approach should be the main strategy in transportation safety programs, including socialization at level crossings. This third hypothesis emphasizes that safety awareness is an important factor in determining the level of community compliance with safety regulations, and should be the focus of every public safety campaign.

### ***The Influence of Persuasive Communication of Public Relations of Class I Medan Railway Engineering Center on Public Compliance at Level Crossings in Medan City Through Safety Awareness Mediation***

The fourth hypothesis tests the indirect effect of persuasive communication on public compliance through a mediating variable, namely safety awareness. The results showed that the mediation effect was significant, with a mediation coefficient value of 0.332 and a t-statistic of  $4.801 > 1.96$  and a p-value of  $0.000 < 0.05$ , which means that safety awareness is an important mediator in the relationship between persuasive communication and compliance. This finding supports the partial mediation model, where persuasive communication influences compliance both directly and through increased awareness. In other

words, effective communication not only influences behavior directly but also forms an understanding that forms the basis for compliance.

This model is in accordance with the integrative approach of the Elaboration Likelihood Model theory which emphasizes that effective behavioral change occurs if individuals experience changes in attitudes and awareness first. This shows that awareness acts as a bridge to change. The presence of a mediation effect in this study shows that persuasive communication carried out by BTP Medan Public Relations is able to shape public perception of the importance of safety, which then encourages them to be more obedient to the rules. This indirect effect also shows that communication does not always have an instant effect on compliance, but needs to go through a process of internalization and reflection by the individual. This process occurs when individuals understand and acknowledge the importance of the safety message. These results are in line with the research findings of Dyatmika (2021) which states that communication accompanied by increased awareness will result in more lasting behavioral changes than one-way communication that only conveys information.

The practical implication of this finding is the importance of strengthening the educational component in persuasive communication, not just the informative aspect or threat of sanctions. Education forms deep awareness and creates voluntary compliance behavior. Safety campaigns should be designed in two stages: first, building awareness with in-depth information, and second, encouraging compliant behavior through strengthening norms and positive examples.

The mediation effect of awareness, which is new in this study, also emphasizes that social change is complex and requires a gradual process. Awareness is a fundamental initial stage in creating a society that complies with traffic rules at level crossings. Overall, the fourth hypothesis that proved significant provides important insight that communication strategies that touch individual awareness will be much more effective in building a long-term culture of safety and compliance in society. However, the researcher is aware that there are still limitations in this study, especially in terms of regional coverage, namely that it was only conducted in Medan City, so the results cannot necessarily be generalized to other cities with different social conditions.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Persuasive communication has a positive and significant influence on public safety awareness at level crossings with a significance value obtained ( $p < 0.05$ ) indicating that communication carried out by BTP Medan Public Relations is able to form an understanding and increase public attention to the importance of safety at railroad crossings. Persuasive communication also has a positive and significant influence on public compliance with a t-statistic of  $14.329 > 1.96$  and a p-value of  $0.000 < 0.05$ . This finding is consistent with the persuasive communication theory of Petty and Cacioppo which states that messages that are credible, relevant, and delivered in an interesting way can influence changes in attitudes and behavior. In this context, public compliance increases when they receive safety messages that are inspiring and easy to understand. Public awareness has been shown to have a positive and significant influence on safety

compliance. The test results show a significance value that is below the threshold of 0.05, so this hypothesis is accepted. This finding explains that individual awareness or understanding of a risk will greatly influence their intention and behavior to comply with the rules. Persuasive communication also has an indirect effect on compliance through the mediation of safety awareness variables. The results of the study showed that the mediation effect was significant, namely with a mediation coefficient value of 0.332 and a t-statistic of  $4.801 > 1.96$  and a p-value of  $0.000 < 0.05$ , which means that safety awareness is an important mediator in the relationship between persuasive communication and compliance. This model is in accordance with the integrative approach of the Elaboration Likelihood Model theory which emphasizes that effective behavioral change occurs if individuals experience changes in attitudes and awareness first.

### ADVANCED RESEARCH

Future advanced research should explore the longitudinal effects of persuasive communication strategies by public institutions like BTP Medan on sustained behavioral compliance in traffic safety, particularly at level crossings. While this study confirmed the immediate impacts of persuasive messaging on awareness and compliance, there is a research gap regarding how long these behavioral changes persist over time without reinforcement. Moreover, comparative studies between urban and rural populations could reveal how contextual factors such as infrastructure, education levels, and media access influence the effectiveness of persuasive communication. Future studies should also incorporate experimental or mixed-method designs to evaluate the interplay between emotional appeal, message framing, and digital communication tools in altering public attitudes. Investigating the role of social influencers and peer-led interventions in reinforcing public safety behavior could further deepen understanding and enhance public relations strategies for transportation safety.

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