



Business Communication Strategy In Improving Customer Confidence Regarding The Quality of Drinking Water Companies For Regional Drinking Water

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze and design a business communication strategy to increase customer trust in the drinking water quality provided by PDAM Kota Bandar Lampung, particularly in the Teluk Betung Barat area. Despite having access to piped water, many customers still prefer bottled water (AMDK), indicating a lack of confidence in PDAM's water for direct consumption. Using a qualitative descriptive method with a post-positivist approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. Informants included PDAM officials and customers. The results show that communication factors—such as limited public education, lack of transparency, and inconsistent messaging—contribute to customer distrust. SWOT analysis was used to identify internal and external factors that affect communication performance. The study recommends strategic improvements through transparent, community-based communication, increased use of social media, and proactive crisis communication. An integrated communication strategy is essential to rebuild trust and reduce public dependence on bottled drinking water.

Keywords: Business Communication, Customer Trust, PDAM, Bottled Water (AMDK), Communication Strategy.

Introduction

Teluk Betung Barat, a district in the city of Bandar Lampung, is one of the areas served by the Regional Drinking Water Company (PDAM) for clean water needs. Despite the availability of piped water, a significant number of residents prefer to purchase Bottled Drinking Water (AMDK) for daily consumption, suggesting a persistent distrust in the quality of PDAM-supplied water. Data shows that while there are 549 registered PDAM customers in the area, around 75% still depend on AMDK for drinking needs. This reflects a broader issue of consumer perception where taste, clarity, and hygiene of piped water are questioned, especially due to aging infrastructure such as old pipes, which can compromise water quality by the time it reaches consumers (Ratminto & Atik, 2019).

PDAM's revenue structure, according to internal financial data, indicates a reliance on two sources: regular services (33.89%) and Public-Private Partnerships (66.11%). However, these income streams do not necessarily correlate with increased consumer trust. Many customers believe that AMDK offers better safety and freshness, even though it is more expensive than PDAM water (Pratama, Ratminto & Atik, 2019). Monthly sales

data from AMDK retailers in the region further confirm consistent demand, indicating that practicality and perception of quality play key roles in consumer choice.

This condition poses a challenge to PDAM's public image and communication strategy. Negative perceptions, despite periodic water quality testing, show that technical improvements alone are insufficient without effective communication to the public. A proposed solution is the implementation of an integrated business communication strategy, which includes public education, transparency in water treatment processes, improved customer service, social media engagement, and customer testimonials. These efforts aim to rebuild customer confidence and shift consumption behavior towards PDAM water.

Theoretically, business communication is defined as a process of exchanging ideas, information, and instructions to support organizational goals. Rouly (2016) emphasizes that business communication involves verbal and non-verbal interactions intended to achieve business objectives. This includes critical elements such as purpose, message content, communication channels, clarity, and audience consideration. According to Murphy & Herbert (1991), effective communication must adhere to principles like completeness, conciseness, clarity, and correctness, which are essential in building trust and organizational credibility.

Strategically, the application of the pull, push, and pass marketing public relations approach can be leveraged by PDAM. As Widuhung (2021) notes, pull strategies create customer demand by enhancing product appeal; push strategies improve accessibility through distribution channels; and pass strategies adapt communication to environmental and social dynamics. These strategies are aligned with the social responsibility programs (CSR), where companies engage with the community not only for economic gain but also to strengthen public trust (Krisnayana, 2016).

To guide communication planning, a SWOT analysis framework is essential in evaluating internal and external factors affecting the company. Strengths may include infrastructure or brand reputation; weaknesses could involve service inconsistency or outdated systems; opportunities might arise from public policy support or rising awareness about water safety; and threats may come from competitors in the AMDK industry. Rangkuti (2004) and Suarto (2017) affirm that SWOT is a strategic tool to optimize strengths and opportunities while minimizing weaknesses and threats.

Communication strategies must also be audience-centric. Hamad (2024) outlines a five-stage communication impact model—knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation—illustrating the dynamic and nonlinear process of influencing public behavior. A successful strategy requires identifying the target audience, crafting messages that resonate, and selecting the right media for dissemination.

In sum, this research seeks to identify the communication factors that lead PDAM customers to prefer AMDK and to formulate strategic communication efforts that could enhance trust in PDAM water. By combining SWOT analysis and consumer interviews, this study aims to provide practical and theoretically grounded recommendations for PDAM Kota Bandar Lampung in rebuilding customer confidence and ensuring sustainable water consumption behavior in the region.

Methodology

Type of Research

This research adopts a qualitative descriptive approach using the post-positivist paradigm. It is designed to provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of communication phenomena, particularly the business communication strategies used by PDAM Kota Bandar Lampung to build customer trust in the quality of their drinking water. According to Sugiyono (2020), qualitative research emphasizes meaning and interpretation over generalization, with the researcher acting as the key instrument in data collection and interpretation. This study aims to explore perceptions, behaviors, and communication processes related to customer trust.

Research Location and Time

The research was conducted in Teluk Betung Barat, Bandar Lampung, specifically around Jl. P. Emir Moh. Noer, Sumur Putri, which is approximately 8 to 9.5 kilometers from the University of Bandar Lampung. The research activities took place over a period of five months, from November 2024 to March 2025.

Research Informants

Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, where participants were chosen based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. Three categories of informants were used:

- Key Informants: Senior PDAM staff members with over ten years of experience and comprehensive understanding of company operations and water management.
- Main Informants: Technical staff in charge of service and distribution within PDAM who provided insights into operational challenges and customer interaction.
- Supporting Informants: PDAM customers in Teluk Betung Barat who still rely on bottled water (AMDK), offering consumer perspectives regarding water trust and usage behavior.

Data Collection Methods

Three methods were used for data collection to ensure depth and triangulation:

- Observation: Conducted on-site to observe the behavior and routines of residents related to PDAM water usage. Observations included physical reactions to water quality and daily practices in handling water.
- Unstructured Interviews: Held with informants to explore their experiences, opinions, and assessments of PDAM services and water quality. This flexible format allowed respondents to express views beyond the scope of prepared questions.
- Documentation: Involved collecting and reviewing relevant materials such as internal reports, customer complaints, water quality test records, and supporting literature to validate other data sources.

Data Validity

To ensure data credibility, this research applied data triangulation, both in terms of sources and techniques:

- Source Triangulation: Data were gathered from PDAM management, technical personnel, and customers, allowing the researcher to compare different viewpoints and identify consistencies or discrepancies.
- Technique Triangulation: The combination of observation, interviews, and documentation enabled validation of findings through different methods. This ensured that interpretations reflected reality as closely as possible.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats). This framework enabled the researcher to evaluate internal and external factors influencing PDAM's communication performance and customer trust. The SWOT approach helped formulate strategic communication solutions by identifying areas where PDAM can improve, adapt, and better position its message to regain and strengthen public confidence in the quality of its drinking water.

Result and Discussion

This study revealed a number of internal and external communication factors that influence customer trust in the drinkability of water provided by PDAM Kota Bandar Lampung, particularly in the Teluk Betung Barat area. Based on in-depth interviews, direct observations, and supporting documentation, the findings highlight several key themes: internal management, environmental challenges, corporate reputation, customer perceptions, and the application of business communication strategies.

1. Internal Factors

Internally, PDAM has implemented water treatment procedures in accordance with the Ministry of Health regulations and conducts routine laboratory tests. The utility also operates a 24-hour complaint handling system and utilizes a digital complaint management platform called the PAS System. However, customer trust remains low, as many residents still choose to boil water or purchase bottled water (AMDK). This suggests that the existence of systems and procedures alone is insufficient without clear, consistent, and educational communication that reassures customers about water safety. As noted by Murphy and Herbert (1991), the effectiveness of business communication lies in completeness, clarity, and concreteness—elements that are still lacking in PDAM's public communication.

2. External Factors

Externally, PDAM faces challenges such as unpredictable weather, aging infrastructure, and negative past customer experiences. For instance, heavy rain upstream often leads to turbidity, forcing the utility to temporarily halt water processing. These interruptions, if not communicated transparently, reinforce public skepticism. According to Hamad (2024), the communication impact process—from knowledge to confirmation—requires consistency and engagement. PDAM must move beyond information delivery to community education and persuasive strategies that help shift consumer perceptions and behaviors.

3. Customer Perception and Public Image

The study found that customer perception is significantly shaped by personal experiences and peer feedback rather than official information. Some customers noted improvements in water clarity but still expressed hesitation in drinking it directly. This perception gap underscores the need for PDAM to be more transparent, especially about its quality control processes. The company's public image is still in recovery, as confirmed by PDAM's public relations officers, and is heavily influenced by social media discourse and response speed.

4. Communication Strategies

PDAM employs both internal and external communication strategies. Internally, the company conducts regular briefings and coordinates through WhatsApp and the PAS System for complaint resolution. Externally, PDAM uses Instagram and WhatsApp for updates and campaigns, a call center for direct customer support, and offline outreach in neighborhoods. Despite these efforts, PDAM must strengthen two-way communication and public education to build more inclusive and transparent relationships with customers.

5. Crisis Communication

In times of water service disruptions, PDAM deploys rapid-response laboratory teams to visit affected homes and explain the issues directly to customers. This hands-on approach demonstrates responsibility and empathy, two important principles in maintaining public trust during service crises.

6. SWOT Analysis and Strategic Planning

The SWOT analysis revealed that PDAM's strengths include standard-compliant treatment processes, responsive service, and active communication channels. Weaknesses include the perception that PDAM water is not ready-to-drink in all areas and a public image still in recovery. Opportunities arise from increased public awareness of water quality, technological advances, and government infrastructure support. However, threats

such as extreme weather, negative public opinion, and competition from AMDK remain significant.

SWOT analysis is a strategic tool used to identify the internal and external factors that can influence the effectiveness of an organization—in this case, PDAM Kota Bandar Lampung—in building customer trust toward the quality of its drinking water. The analysis consists of four components:

- Strengths (S): Internal advantages and resources that support the achievement of goals.
- Weaknesses (W): Internal limitations or deficiencies that hinder performance.
- Opportunities (O): External factors that the organization can exploit to its advantage.
- Threats (T): External challenges that may pose risks or obstacles.

Table 1. SWOT of PDAM Kota Bandar Lampung

Strengths	Weakness
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Water treatment follows Ministry of Health standards (Permenkes). 2. Routine laboratory testing of water quality. 3. Fast response to customer complaints. 4. Availability of official communication channels (social media, PAS System, call center). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. PDAM water is not ready-to-drink in all areas. 2. Public image is still in recovery. 3. Limited reach of public education initiatives. 4. Inconsistent water quality in different service areas.
Opportunity	Threats
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Growing public awareness of clean water and health. 2. Advances in information and communication technology. Government support for water infrastructure improvements. 3. Potential market for PDAM-branded bottled drinking water (AMDK). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Extreme weather events (e.g., floods affecting raw water quality). Spread of negative public opinion through social media. 2. Competition from bottled water brands perceived as safer and more convenient.

The table above summarizes the SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) of PDAM Kota Bandar Lampung's communication strategy to build customer trust in drinking water quality. The analysis divides strategic factors into internal and external categories.

Strengths include adherence to health standards in water treatment, routine lab testing, responsive customer service, and active communication channels such as social media and the PAS System. These support PDAM's credibility and service reliability.

However, Weaknesses remain, such as limited availability of ready-to-drink water in all areas, an image still under recovery, inconsistent service quality, and low public awareness regarding water safety.

On the external side, PDAM has several Opportunities, including rising public concern for health, advancements in digital technology, and government support for clean

water infrastructure. These can be leveraged to improve public engagement and education.

At the same time, Threats like extreme weather, negative public perception, and competition from bottled water (AMDK) challenge PDAM's reputation and customer retention.

In summary, this SWOT analysis highlights the importance of a strategic and transparent communication approach that reinforces PDAM's strengths, addresses weaknesses, utilizes emerging opportunities, and anticipates potential threats.

Table 2. SWOT Matrix of PDAM Kota Bandar Lampung

Internal Eksternal	Strengths : 1. Water treatment follows Ministry of Health standards (Permenkes). 2. Routine laboratory testing of water quality. 3. Fast response to customer complaints. 4. Availability of official communication channels (social media, PAS System, call center).	Weaknesses : 1. PDAM water is not ready-to drink in all areas. 2. Public image is still in recovery. 3. Limited reach of public education initiatives. 4. Limited reach of public education initiatives.
	Opportunities : 1. Growing public awareness of clean water and health. 2. Advances in information and communication technology. Government support for water infrastructure improvements. 3. Potential market for PDAM-branded bottled drinking water (AMDK).	S-O Strategies (Strength-Opportunity): 1. Educate the public via social media about PDAM water treatment and safety standards. 2. Publish lab results regularly to enhance transparency. 3. Collaborate with media to promote innovations and success stories.
	Threats : 1. Extreme weather events (e.g., floods affecting raw water quality). Spread of negative public opinion through social media. 2. Competition from bottled water brands perceived as safer and more convenient.	W-O Strategies (Weakness-Opportunity): 1. Use IT tools to enhance quality control and data sharing. 2. Launch campaigns explaining clean vs. drinkable water. 3. Expand digital and in-person educational outreach.member engagement and reduce fluctuation
	S-T Strategies (Strength-Threat): 1. Deploy rapid-response lab teams to counter water quality issues quickly. 2. Use official communication channels to prevent the spread of misinformation. 3. Conduct routine pipe flushing to avoid contamination.	W-T Strategies (Weakness-Threat): 1. Increase face-to-face outreach (e.g., town hall meetings). 2. Improve water distribution systems to reduce AMDK dependence. 3. Extend call center hours and emergency services.

The table above illustrates the results of a strategy formulation based on the SWOT matrix, which integrates internal (Strengths and Weaknesses) and external (Opportunities and Threats) factors to develop a comprehensive business communication strategy for PDAM Kota Bandar Lampung. This strategic formulation is divided into four main categories: S-O, W-O, S-T, and W-T strategies, each tailored to address the organization's internal capabilities and external challenges.

The S-O (Strength–Opportunity) strategy focuses on leveraging PDAM's internal strengths to seize existing opportunities. This includes maximizing the use of social media and official digital platforms to educate the public about water treatment processes, regularly publishing laboratory test results to promote transparency, and collaborating with media outlets to disseminate positive narratives and innovations. These initiatives aim to build public confidence and reinforce PDAM's commitment to safe and reliable water services.

The W-O (Weakness–Opportunity) strategy aims to overcome internal limitations by taking advantage of favorable external conditions. This involves utilizing technological advancements to improve monitoring and communication, enhancing public education about the difference between clean water and drinkable water, and expanding educational outreach to increase public understanding and trust.

The S-T (Strength–Threat) strategy is designed to use PDAM's strengths to counteract external threats. For instance, deploying rapid-response laboratory teams to address quality concerns directly at customer locations, strengthening official communication channels to prevent the spread of misinformation, and conducting regular maintenance such as pipeline flushing to mitigate contamination risks from aging infrastructure.

Lastly, the W-T (Weakness–Threat) strategy seeks to minimize internal weaknesses while reducing the impact of external threats. This includes expanding offline outreach programs for customers who lack access to digital platforms, accelerating infrastructure improvements to enhance water quality consistency, and extending call center service hours or emergency response teams to ensure prompt resolution of customer complaints.

Through these integrated strategies, PDAM Kota Bandar Lampung is expected to improve its communication effectiveness, enhance customer satisfaction, and gradually rebuild public trust in the quality and safety of its piped drinking water.

Discussion

This study found that customer trust in PDAM Kota Bandar Lampung's drinking water is influenced by both internal and external communication factors. Internally, although PDAM complies with health standards and provides responsive services, many customers still lack confidence due to limited public education and unclear messaging about water safety.

Externally, factors such as weather disruptions, aging infrastructure, and negative perceptions—often spread via social media—further undermine public trust. Many residents continue to boil water or buy bottled water (AMDK), even after noticing improvements in clarity, indicating a gap between technical progress and consumer perception.

SWOT analysis shows that PDAM can leverage its strengths (e.g., digital platforms and lab testing) and opportunities (e.g., rising health awareness) to rebuild trust. At the same time, it must address weaknesses like inconsistent service and mitigate threats such as AMDK competition through transparent, consistent communication.

To strengthen trust, PDAM should enhance both digital and face-to-face educational campaigns, publish water test results, and engage directly with communities. Strategic communication that is clear, inclusive, and responsive is essential for shifting public perception and reducing dependence on bottled water.

Conclusion

This study concludes that customer trust in the drinking quality of PDAM Kota Bandar Lampung's water remains low due to both internal and external communication challenges. Although PDAM has implemented technical improvements and complies with health standards, public skepticism persists, driven by unclear messaging, lack of public education, and past negative experiences.

Through SWOT analysis, the research identifies strategic directions that can strengthen PDAM's communication efforts—by leveraging its strengths and opportunities, addressing weaknesses, and minimizing threats. A more transparent, educational, and community-centered communication strategy is essential to rebuild trust, encourage behavioral change, and reduce reliance on bottled water (AMDK). Effective communication is not only a support system but a key driver of public confidence in public services.

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