



The Effect of Professionalism and Interpersonal Communication on The Image of an Agency Through Public Trust as A Mediation Variable in The Tanjung Jabung Barat Resort Police

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the influence of professionalism and interpersonal communication on agency image through public trust as a mediating variable at the Tanjung Jabung Barat Police Resort. Police agency image reflects public perceptions of the performance, integrity, and quality of public services provided. This study employed a quantitative approach with a survey method. The study population was 11,200 individuals, including those who had received services from the Tanjung Jabung Barat Police Resort. The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula with a 10% margin of error, resulting in a sample size of 100 respondents. Data were collected through a Likert-type questionnaire. Path analysis was used to examine the direct and indirect effects between variables. The results showed that professionalism and interpersonal communication had a positive and significant effect on public trust. Public trust also had a positive and significant effect on agency image. Furthermore, public trust was shown to mediate the influence of professionalism and interpersonal communication on agency image. These findings confirm that improving the professionalism and quality of interpersonal communication among police officers plays a crucial role in building public trust and strengthening the image of the police institution.

Keyword: Professionalism, Interpersonal Communication, Public Trust, Institutional Image, Police.

INTRODUCTION

Public service is one of the primary functions of government in fulfilling the basic needs and rights of the public. The quality of public services provided by government agencies is a benchmark for the success of good governance. In this context, government agencies are required to provide services that are effective, efficient, transparent, and oriented towards public satisfaction. Furthermore, according to Zahari et al. (2025), public service management plays a strategic role in building public trust in the government. When service management is implemented well, the public will experience tangible benefits in the form of

convenience, speed, and certainty of service. Conversely, if service management is poor, it is often complicated and non-transparent, ultimately eroding the government's legitimacy in the eyes of the public. Quality public service not only impacts the achievement of organizational goals but also directly influences the level of public trust as service users.

The image of the police agency is a strategic factor in supporting the effectiveness of the implementation of the police's duties and functions as protectors, guardians, and servants of the public. According to Ardianto (2014), an agency's image is the sum of public perceptions, beliefs, and impressions of an organization, formed through direct experience and information received. In the context of public services, agency image is an important indicator of the success of professional, transparent, and accountable service delivery.

One of the main factors influencing agency image is the professionalism of its officers. Professionalism reflects the level of expertise, competence, responsibility, and adherence to the code of ethics in carrying out their duties. According to Siagian (2016), the professionalism of public officials is reflected in their technical abilities, work attitudes, and moral commitment in providing services to the public. Professional police officers will be able to provide fair and quality services, thereby fostering a positive public perception of the police institution.

In addition to professionalism, interpersonal communication between police officers and the public also plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and assessments. Liliwari (2015) states that effective interpersonal communication is characterized by openness, empathy, supportiveness, and mutual respect. In police services, good interpersonal communication can reduce misunderstandings, increase public satisfaction, and strengthen the relationship between officers and citizens.

Professionalism and good interpersonal communication will lead to the formation of public trust. According to Mayer et al. (2015), trust is an individual's willingness to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations regarding the intentions and behavior of another party. In the context of policing, public trust arises when the public believes that police officers possess integrity, competence, and good faith in carrying out their duties. Public trust is a crucial social capital for police institutions in maintaining legitimacy and public support.

Several previous studies have shown a significant relationship between professionalism, interpersonal communication, public trust, and agency image. Research by Putra & Sartika (2020) found that officer professionalism positively influences public trust in public institutions. Furthermore, research by Rohman (2019) demonstrated that interpersonal communication among public service officials significantly influences levels of public trust. Another study by Rahman (2023) showed that public trust has a positive influence on the image of government agencies.

The results of these previous studies indicate that public trust acts as a mediating variable, strengthening the influence of professionalism and interpersonal communication on agency image. Therefore, the author is interested in conducting research using public trust as an intervening variable to empirically test the influence of professionalism and interpersonal communication on agency image at the Tanjung Jabung Barat Police Resort.

METHOD

This research was conducted at the Tanjung Jabung Barat Police Resort, Jambi Province. The data used in this study consisted of secondary and primary data. According to Sugiyono in Sudirman et al. (2020), primary data is data collected directly by the researcher from primary sources, while secondary data is documentation, published data, or data used by the organization. The variables used in this study were discipline (X1) and work environment (X2) as independent (exogenous) variables, public service quality (Y) as a mediating variable, and public satisfaction (Z) as a dependent (endogenous) variable.

The population of this study was all 11,200 people who had used population administration services at the Population and Civil Registration Office of Tanjung Jabung Barat Regency. Because the population is relatively large and it is impossible to reach all of them, the researcher used a purposive sampling method, where respondents were intentionally selected because they met the criteria for using public services. The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula (Sugiyono, 2019) with a 10% margin of error, resulting in a sample of 100 respondents.

Primary data collection was conducted using a questionnaire structured based on the indicators of each research variable. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The data analysis method used was structural path analysis using the Structural Equation Modeling-Based Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) approach. SEM-PLS was chosen because it is capable of testing complex models, explaining relationships between latent variables, and remains effective for relatively small samples (Hair et al., 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Research Variables

Descriptive data analysis of the research results was used to analyze respondents' responses to each indicator of the variables studied. The results of the questionnaire distributed to 100 respondents regarding the research variables are shown in the following table:

Table 1. Descriptive Analysis Results per Variable

No	Variables	Item	Total Score	Scale Range	Category
1.	X1_Professionalism	9	3.324	3.060 – 3.779	High
2.	X2_Interpersonal Communication	10	3.709	3.400 – 4.199	Good
3.	Y_Public Trust	8	2.942	2.720 – 3.359	High
4.	Z_Agency Image	8	2.970	2.720 – 3.359	Good

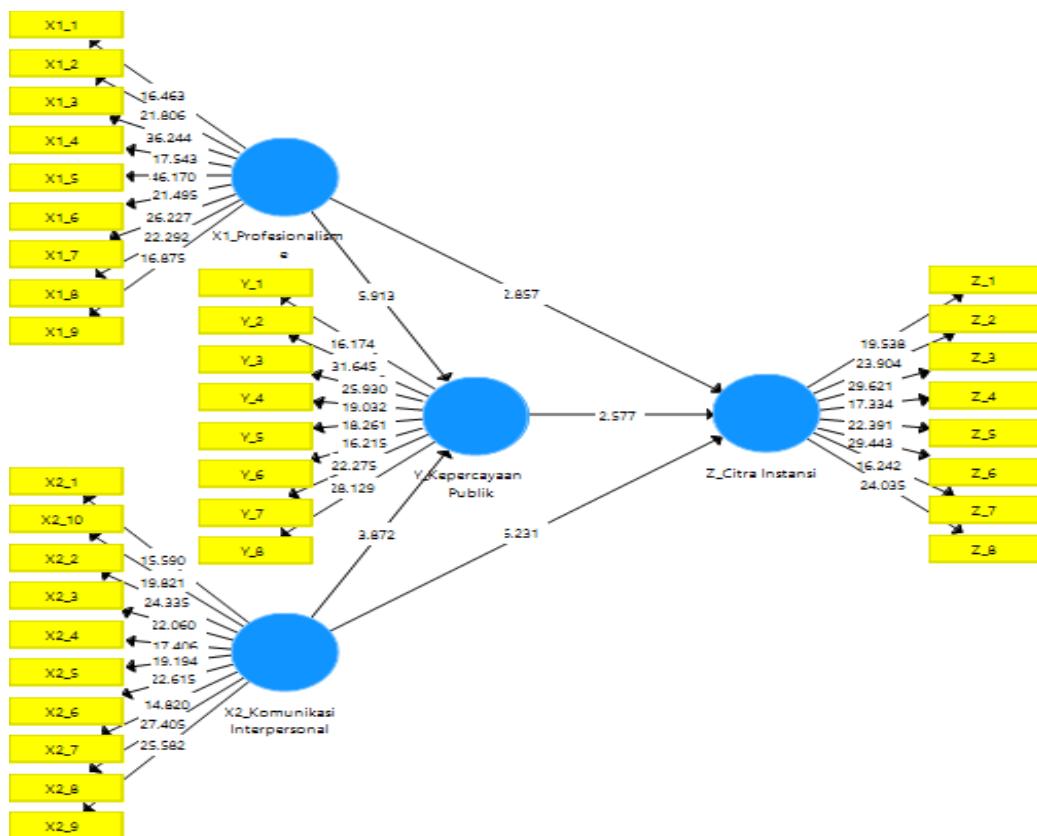
Source: Primary data, processed, 2025

The results of this study indicate that each member of the public has a positive perception of the variables of discipline, work environment, quality of public services, and public satisfaction. The total score for each variable is 3,324, categorized as high; for Interpersonal Communication, 3,709, categorized as good; and for Public Trust, 2,942, categorized as good. The variable Institutional Image scored 2,970, categorized as good.

Measurement Model Test (Outer Model)

a. Convergent Validity

Convergent validity indicates the extent to which indicators within a construct truly measure the same concept. This means that all indicators "converge" on the latent variable they represent. Convergent validity can be identified from the outer loadings in Figure 1 below:

**Figure 1. Outer Loading**

Based on the outer loading results displayed in Figure 1, it can be seen that all indicators for each research variable have loading values above 0.7, indicating a strong ability to measure their respective constructs. Outer loading is an indicator of convergent validity, and the ideal value is above 0.70. Therefore, all indicators in this study are declared valid and statistically significant in representing the latent variables studied.

Another measure for establishing convergent validity at the construct level is the average variance extracted (AVE). The stipulation in the measurement model (outer model) states that the AVE is considered to have met convergent validity if the AVE value is greater than 0.50. The AVE values are as follows:

Table 2. Average Variance Extracted Values

Variables	AVE	\sqrt{AVE}	Description
X1_Professionalism	0,672	0,820	Valid
X2_Interpersonal Communication	0,581	0,762	Valid
Y_Public Trust	0,634	0,796	Valid
Z_Agency Image	0,636	0,797	Valid

Source: SmartPLS 3.0 output (2025).

Table 2 shows that all variables—digitalization, professionalism, public service quality, and public satisfaction—have AVE values above the recommended minimum threshold of 0.50. An AVE value above 0.5 indicates that the variance of the indicators of each construct is successfully explained by that construct. Therefore, it can be concluded that the four variables in this study have met the validity test at the convergent stage.

b. Discriminant Validity Test

The discriminant validity test uses cross-loading values and is conducted to ensure that each concept of each latent variable is distinct from the other variables. An indicator is considered to meet discriminant validity if the indicator's cross-loading value for its variable is the largest compared to the other variables, or if its cross-loading value is greater than 0.7. The results of the discriminant validity test are as follows:

Table 3. Cross-Loading

Item	X1_Professionalism	X2_Interpersonal Communication	Y_Public Trust	Z_Agency Image
X1_1	0.741	0.708	0.715	0.733
X1_2	0.810	0.751	0.792	0.809
X1_3	0.891	0.768	0.742	0.765
X1_4	0.778	0.728	0.742	0.715
X1_5	0.904	0.765	0.792	0.822
X1_6	0.809	0.728	0.780	0.788
X1_7	0.854	0.780	0.651	0.737
X1_8	0.829	0.753	0.711	0.771
X1_9	0.745	0.734	0.723	0.701
X2_1	0.732	0.704	0.790	0.705
X2_10	0.689	0.767	0.612	0.704
X2_2	0.744	0.769	0.677	0.739
X2_3	0.782	0.759	0.761	0.796
X2_4	0.614	0.759	0.603	0.684
X2_5	0.601	0.770	0.690	0.720
X2_6	0.626	0.797	0.619	0.712
X2_7	0.618	0.722	0.610	0.624
X2_8	0.730	0.782	0.652	0.705
X2_9	0.770	0.789	0.706	0.721
Y_1	0.649	0.658	0.762	0.648
Y_2	0.797	0.793	0.851	0.813
Y_3	0.743	0.716	0.813	0.769
Y_4	0.670	0.652	0.791	0.653
Y_5	0.780	0.751	0.759	0.773
Y_6	0.611	0.631	0.768	0.679
Y_7	0.756	0.720	0.790	0.761
Y_8	0.720	0.704	0.831	0.685
Z_1	0.678	0.761	0.632	0.777
Z_2	0.684	0.747	0.715	0.816
Z_3	0.769	0.749	0.813	0.839
Z_4	0.733	0.738	0.689	0.756
Z_5	0.762	0.741	0.763	0.791
Z_6	0.717	0.750	0.748	0.842
Z_7	0.778	0.714	0.744	0.750
Z_8	0.802	0.774	0.706	0.804

Source: SmartPLS 3.0 output (2025).

Table 3 shows that all indicators in the research variables have cross-loading values greater than 0.7. This result indicates that the indicators used in this study have good discriminant validity in constructing their variables. All indicators have cross-loading values greater than the cross-loading values of other variables. Therefore, the discriminant validity requirement is met, and the model can proceed to the next stage of analysis.

3) Composite Reliability

The composite reliability test aims to determine the reliability of the items developed in this study. According to Hair et al. (2019), a construct is considered reliable if its composite reliability value is greater than 0.70. If the composite reliability is <0.70 , the items are deemed unreliable in measuring or reflecting the latent variable. The results of the composite reliability test are shown in Table 4 below:

Table 4. Composite Reliability Values

Variables	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha	Description
X1_Professionalism	0,948	0,938	Reliabel
X2_Interpersonal Communication	0,933	0,920	Reliabel
Y_Public Trust	0,933	0,917	Reliabel
Z_Agency Image	0,933	0,918	Reliabel

Source: SmartPLS 3.0 output (2025).

The Composite Reliability values for all four constructs are above the threshold of 0.70, indicating that the indicators comprising each construct have a high level of reliability in measuring the latent variables studied. The high Composite Reliability values compared to Cronbach's Alpha indicate that the measurement model has good stability and accuracy in the Partial Least Squares approach. Thus, it can be concluded that all constructs in this study have met the reliability criteria and are suitable for use in structural analysis in the next hypothesis testing stage.

Structural Model Testing (Inner Model)

The process for evaluating a structural model includes two main aspects: (1) testing the coefficient of determination (R-Square) to measure the model's predictive power, and (2) analyzing the effect size (F-Square) to assess the contribution of each predictor variable to the dependent variable.

1) R-Square Value

The coefficient of determination (R^2) serves as an indicator that measures the proportion of the endogenous construct's variance that can be explained by the exogenous construct in the model. The coefficient of determination values for this research model are presented in the following table:

Table 5. R-Square Value

Variables	R Square	Adjusted R Square
Y_Public Trust	0,841	0,838
Z_Agency Image	0,921	0,919

Source: SmartPLS 3 output (2025).

The R-squared value for the public trust variable is 0.841, with an adjusted R-squared value of 0.838. These results indicate that variations in public trust can be strongly explained by the independent variables in the research model, with the remainder being explained by factors outside the model. Meanwhile, the R-squared value for the institutional image variable is 0.921, with an adjusted R-squared value of 0.919, indicating that most of the variation in institutional image can be explained by the constructs influencing it in the structural model.

The high R-squared and adjusted R-squared values for these two endogenous variables reflect the model's excellent predictive ability and demonstrate that the relationships between the variables in this study have strong explanatory power and are relevant in explaining the phenomenon under study.

2) F-Square Value (f2 Effect Size)

The F-square test is conducted to assess the significance of an exogenous construct's contribution to the change in the R-square value if that construct is removed from the model. According to Hair et al. (2019), the criteria for interpreting effect size are based on: 1) A value of 0.02 indicates a small effect; 2) A value of 0.15 indicates a moderate effect; 3) A value of 0.35 represents a large effect; and 4) A value below 0.02 indicates that the variable does not have a significant effect. The F-square values for this research model are presented in the following table:

Table 6. F-Square Values

Variables	Y_Public Trust	Z_Agency Image
X1_Professionalism	0,341	0,163
X2_Interpersonal Communication	0,150	0,356
Y_Public Trust		0,116

Source: SmartPLS 3.0 output (2025).

Table 6 shows that the effect size (F-Square) of each exogenous variable contributes differently to explaining the endogenous variables in the structural model, as explained below:

1. The professionalism variable contributes 0.341 to public trust (categorized as moderate) and 0.163 to institutional image (categorized as moderate). These results indicate that the professionalism of personnel in building public trust and building the image of the police institution is still moderate.
2. The interpersonal communication variable contributes 0.150 to public trust (categorized as moderate) and 0.356 to institutional image (categorized as high). These results indicate that the interpersonal communication conducted by personnel in building public trust is still moderate, but in building the image of the police institution, it has been implemented well, increasing positive public perception of the image of the West Tanjung Jabung Police.
3. The public trust variable has an F-Square value of 0.116 to institutional image (categorized as relatively small). These results indicate that public trust in police personnel in building the image of the police agency remains relatively low.

Structural Model

In the SEM-PLS analysis, the structural model value in this study can be seen from the direct effects value, also known as the path coefficient. Next, path coefficients between

constructs were measured to determine the significance and strength of the relationship and to test the hypothesis.

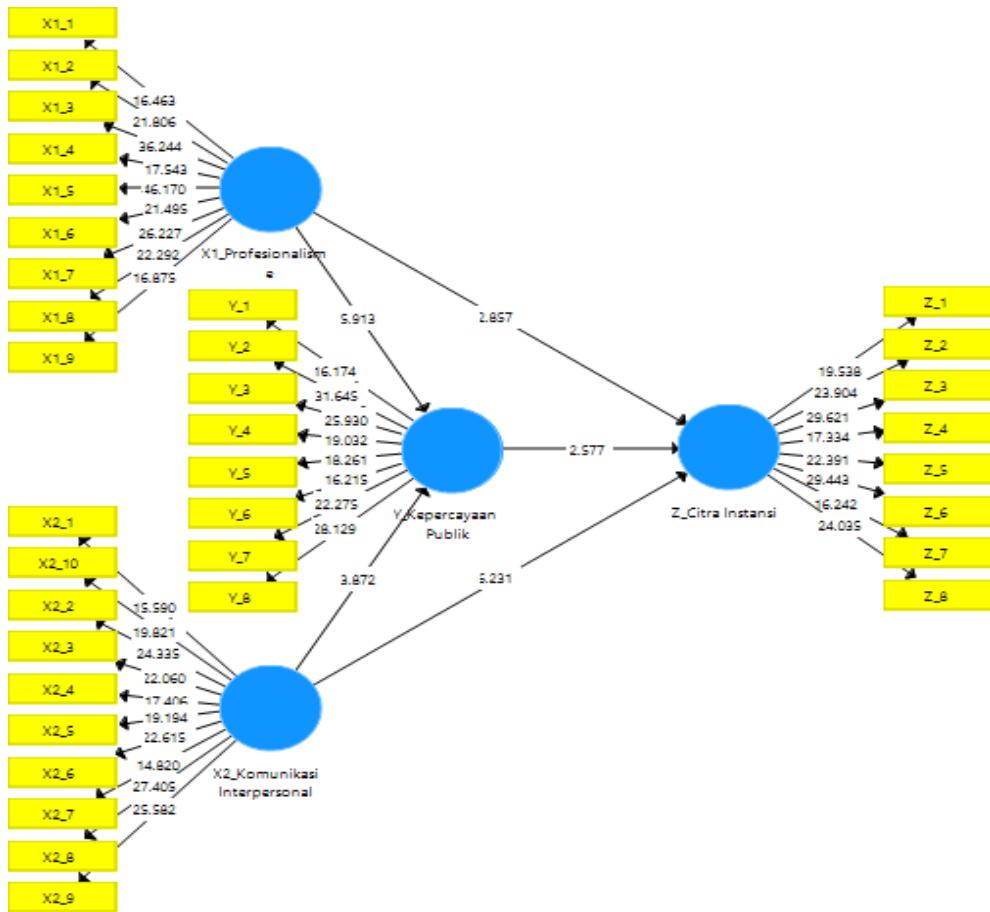


Figure 2. Bootstrapping Method

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing of the effect of exogenous variables on endogenous variables is conducted by comparing the p-values of the path coefficients with a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. The test is considered highly significant if the p-value is less than or equal to 0.05 (p-value ≤ 0.05) or using the t-table value of 1.96. The criteria for rejecting and accepting the hypothesis are: if the t-statistic $>$ the calculated t-statistic, the hypothesis is rejected, and if the t-statistic $<$ the calculated t-statistic, the hypothesis is accepted.

To answer the hypothesis proposed in this study, the Bootstrapping results can be seen as follows:

Table 7. Results for Inner Weights (Path Coefficients)

Item	Causal Relationships Between Constructs	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Decision
1	X1_Professionalism -> Y_Public Trust	0.563	5.913	0.000	Diterima
2	X2_Interpersonal Communication -> Y_Public	0.374	3.872	0.000	Diterima

Item	Causal Relationships Between Constructs	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Decision
	Trust				
3	X1_Professionalism -> Z_Agency Image	0.318	2.857	0.005	Diterima
4	X2_Interpersonal Communication -> Z_Agency Image	0.435	6.231	0.000	Diterima
5	Y_Public Trust -> Z_Agency Image	0.240	2.577	0.010	Diterima
6	X1_Professionalism -> Y_Public Trust -> Z_Agency Image	0.135	2.129	0.034	Diterima
7	X2_Interpersonal Communication -> Y_Public Trust -> Z_Agency Image	0.090	2.403	0.017	Diterima

Source: SmartPLS 3.0 output (2025).

Based on Table 6 above, the following interpretations can be made:

1. The results of the hypothesis test indicate that the influence of professionalism on public trust has a t-statistic of $5.913 > 1.96$, and a p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$, thus accepting hypothesis H1. These results indicate that professionalism has a positive and statistically significant effect on public trust. This means there is empirical evidence supporting the positive influence of professionalism in increasing public trust.
2. The results of the hypothesis test indicate that the influence of interpersonal communication on public trust has a t-statistic of $3.872 > 1.96$, and a p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$, thus accepting hypothesis H1. These results indicate that interpersonal communication has a positive and statistically significant effect on public trust, thus confirming Hypothesis 3 (H3). This means there is empirical evidence supporting the positive influence of interpersonal communication in increasing public trust.
3. The results of the hypothesis test indicate that the influence of professionalism on the agency's image has a t-statistic value of $2.857 > 1.96$, and a p-value of $0.005 < 0.05$, so that hypothesis H1 is accepted. These results can be stated that professionalism has a positive and statistically significant effect on the agency's image. This means there is empirical evidence supporting the positive influence of professionalism in improving the agency's image.
4. The results of the hypothesis test indicate that the influence of interpersonal communication on the agency's image has a t-statistic value of $6.231 > 1.96$, and a p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$, so that hypothesis H1 is accepted. These results can be stated that interpersonal communication has a positive and statistically significant effect on the agency's image. This means there is empirical evidence supporting the positive influence of interpersonal communication in improving the agency's image.
5. The results of the hypothesis test indicate that the influence of public trust on the agency's image has a t-statistic value of $2.577 > 1.96$ and a p-value less than the 5% significance level ($0.010 < 0.05$), thus accepting hypothesis H1. These results indicate that public trust has a positive and statistically significant effect on agency image. This means there is empirical evidence supporting the positive influence of public trust in improving agency image.

6. The results of the hypothesis test indicate that the influence of professionalism through trust on agency image has a t-statistic of $2.129 > 1.96$, and a p-value of $0.034 < 0.05$, thus accepting hypothesis H1. These results indicate that professionalism through trust has a positive and statistically significant effect on agency image. This means there is empirical evidence supporting the positive influence of professionalism through trust in improving agency image.
7. The results of the hypothesis test indicate that the influence of interpersonal communication through trust on agency image has a t-statistic of $2.403 > 1.96$, and a p-value of $0.017 < 0.05$, thus accepting hypothesis H1. These results indicate that interpersonal communication through trust has a positive and statistically significant effect on agency image. This means there is empirical evidence supporting the positive influence of interpersonal communication through trust in improving agency image.

DISCUSSION

The Influence of Professionalism on Public Trust

The results of this study indicate that police professionalism has a positive and significant impact on public trust in the West Tanjung Jabung Police. This finding indicates that the higher the level of professionalism displayed by officers, the stronger the public's trust in the police institution.

This study's findings also align with trust theory, which states that public trust is built through perceptions of the ability, integrity, and benevolence of the trusted party (Mayer et al., 2015). Police professionalism reflects these three dimensions, particularly in terms of ability and integrity in carrying out law enforcement duties and serving the public. Therefore, increased professionalism directly strengthens public confidence that the police institution is capable of carrying out its role effectively and reliably.

Empirically, the results of this study are consistent with previous findings showing that the professionalism of public officials significantly influences public trust. Research by Putra & Wulandari (2022) confirmed that the professionalism of public sector employees significantly influences public trust, as the public feels safer and more confident in institutions run by individuals with expertise and high moral responsibility.

The Influence of Interpersonal Communication on Public Trust

The results of this study indicate that interpersonal communication among police officers has a positive and significant impact on public trust in the West Tanjung Jabung Police Resort. This finding indicates that the quality of direct interactions between officers and the public is a crucial factor in shaping public trust in the police institution. Clear, open, and responsive communication enables the public to understand service procedures and feel valued, thus strengthening trust in officers as representatives of the institution.

Conceptually, interpersonal communication is understood as the process of direct message exchange characterized by clarity, empathy, openness, and active listening (DeVito, 2016). In the context of public service, effective interpersonal communication serves as a means of building psychological bonds between officers and the public. When officers are able to convey information firmly but politely, and demonstrate a willingness to listen to the public's aspirations, positive perceptions are formed, contributing to increased public trust (Gibson et al., 2011).

Empirically, the results of this study align with previous research findings, which found that interpersonal communication among officers significantly influences public trust. Research by Dirks & Ferrin (2001) emphasized that trust develops through repeated and open

interactions between individuals, where perceptions of honesty and goodwill are formed through the communication process. Another study by Rahmayanty (2019) showed that effective interpersonal communication increases public perceptions of transparency and fairness in public services, thereby strengthening trust in service providers. Furthermore, Wulandari & Putra (2022) found that in the context of government services, empathetic and responsive communication significantly influences levels of public trust, especially when the public feels heard and involved in the problem-solving process.

The Influence of Professionalism on Institutional Image

The results of this study indicate that police professionalism has a positive and significant influence on the image of the West Tanjung Jabung Police. These findings indicate that the quality of attitudes, behavior, and competence of officers in carrying out public service duties are crucial factors in shaping public perception of the police institution. Professionalism demonstrated through mastery of duties, adherence to procedures, and integrity in service directly contribute to the formation of a credible and trustworthy image of the institution in the eyes of the public.

Conceptually, according to Zahari et al. (2025), the professionalism of officers significantly determines the public's image of the bureaucracy. Professional officers will provide responsive, transparent services, and be free from discriminatory practices. Professionalism encompasses not only technical skills but also integrity, honesty, and commitment to public service. When police officers demonstrate professionalism in their actions, the public will perceive the institution as credible, trustworthy, and reputable. Thus, professionalism serves as a key foundation in shaping a positive image of the institution in the public eye.

Furthermore, reputation management theory explains that an organization's image is the result of public perception of its behavior and performance (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2014). In the context of the police, the institution's image is formed through direct and indirect interactions between officers and the public. If the service provided is fair, transparent, and consistent, the public will associate the police with values of integrity and reliability. Conversely, unprofessional actions such as abuse of authority, discrimination, or ethical violations can damage the institution's image and erode public trust (Rahmayanty, 2019).

The Influence of Interpersonal Communication on Institutional Image

The results of this study indicate that interpersonal communication among police officers has a positive and significant impact on the image of the West Tanjung Jabung Police Department. This finding indicates that the quality of direct interactions between officers and the public is a strategic factor in shaping public perception of the police institution. Clear, open, and understanding-oriented communication not only increases service effectiveness but also strengthens the institution's image as a responsive and humane organization.

Conceptually, interpersonal communication is a process of exchanging messages that involves openness, empathy, clarity, and active listening skills (DeVito, 2016). In the context of public organizations, interpersonal communication serves as the primary means of forming public impressions and assessments of the institution. When officers are able to convey service information transparently, act firmly but politely, and demonstrate attention to public needs, a positive service experience is created, which in turn improves the institution's image (Gibson et al., 2011).

Empirical findings support this view, including research conducted by Rachman & Lestari (2021), which showed that effective interpersonal communication significantly influences the image of public institutions, as the public judges organizations based on direct communication experiences with their officers. In the context of the police, this confirms that

the success of building a positive image depends not only on technical performance but also on the ability of officers to interact communicatively and ethically.

The Influence of Public Trust on Institutional Image

The results of this study indicate that public trust has a positive and significant impact on the image of the West Tanjung Jabung Police. This finding indicates that the level of public confidence in the integrity, competence, and consistency of police performance is a crucial determinant in shaping positive perceptions of the institution. High public trust creates a better assessment of the police's reputation, credibility, and legitimacy as a service and law enforcement agency.

Conceptually, public trust is understood as the public's belief that an institution has the capability, good intentions, and integrity to exercise its authority and protect the public interest (Mayer et al., 2015). In the context of public organizations, trust functions as social capital that strengthens the relationship between the institution and the community. When the public trusts the police institution, every action and policy taken tends to be perceived positively, thus contributing directly to the formation of a positive institutional image (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003).

Empirically, various studies have shown that public trust has a direct and significant influence on institutional image. Research conducted by Alwi & Sari (2021) revealed that the level of public trust in public institutions contributes significantly to the formation of a positive image of the organization. Meanwhile, a study by Nugroho & Setiawan (2020) showed that high public trust in the transparency and accountability of government officials is directly proportional to positive perceptions of the institution's image. In the context of the police, research by Rinaldi (2022) found that high public trust in the integrity and fairness of officers strongly influences the positive image of the police institution in the eyes of the public.

The Influence of Professionalism Through Trust on Institutional Image

The results of this study indicate that police professionalism has a positive and significant influence on the image of the West Tanjung Jabung Police Department, through public trust as a mediating variable. These findings indicate that apparatus professionalism not only directly impacts the formation of an institution's image but also indirectly strengthens that image by increasing public trust. Thus, public trust serves as a crucial mechanism bridging the relationship between apparatus professionalism and the image of the police institution.

Conceptually, civil servant professionalism reflects the level of competence, integrity, responsibility, and adherence to ethical standards in carrying out public service duties (Dwiyanto, 2018). Consistent professional behavior will shape positive public perceptions of the civil servant's capabilities and commitment, which subsequently develops into public trust. This trust serves as social capital that strengthens institutional legitimacy and creates a positive public image (Mayer et al., 2015; Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003).

Empirical findings also support this mediating relationship. Research by Nugroho & Setiawan (2020) shows that public trust acts as a significant mediating variable between civil servant professionalism and the image of government institutions. Similar results were demonstrated by Rinaldi (2022), who found that public trust in the integrity and competence of police officers contributes to shaping positive perceptions of the police's image in Indonesia. Furthermore, a study by Alwi & Sari (2021) confirmed that increasing the professionalism of police officers without a corresponding increase in public trust will not directly improve the institution's image, as the public assesses credibility primarily based on consistent behavior and transparency of service.

The Influence of Interpersonal Communication Through Trust on Institutional Image

The results of this study indicate that interpersonal communication among police officers has a positive and significant effect on the image of the West Tanjung Jabung Police Resort, through public trust as a mediating variable. This finding indicates that the quality of interpersonal communication not only directly impacts the formation of the institution's image but also indirectly strengthens that image by increasing public trust. Thus, public trust serves as a key mechanism bridging the relationship between interpersonal communication among officers and the image of the police institution.

Conceptually, interpersonal communication is understood as a direct interaction process characterized by openness, empathy, clarity of message, assertiveness, and active listening skills (DeVito, 2016). In the context of public service, effective interpersonal communication enables more personal and meaningful relationships between officers and the public. Communicative and empathetic interactions will foster positive perceptions of the officer's good intentions and concern for the public interest, which then develops into public trust in the institution (Gibson et al., 2011).

Empirical findings support this mechanism. Research conducted by Nugraha & Pramudito (2021) found that effective interpersonal communication significantly increases public trust in government institutions, and this trust positively influences the institution's image. Similar results were presented by Sari & Rachmawati (2022), who showed that interpersonal communication based on empathy and clarity of messages improves public perceptions of the integrity of public institutions. In the police force, research by Saputra (2023) also confirmed that good officer communication skills, such as active listening and clear explanations of procedures, increase public trust in police performance and strengthen the institution's image.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the descriptive analysis, it can be concluded that the overall condition of professionalism, interpersonal communication, public trust, and institutional image at the Tanjung Jabung Barat Police Resort are in the good category. The public views the Tanjung Jabung Barat Police Resort as an institution that plays a vital role in maintaining security and order and providing public services.

The results of the research hypothesis testing indicate that professionalism and interpersonal communication have a positive and significant influence on the institutional image of the Tanjung Jabung Barat Police Resort. This indicates that improving officer professionalism and the quality of interpersonal communication directly increase the public's positive perception of the police institution. Furthermore, professionalism and interpersonal communication also have a positive and significant influence on public trust. These findings confirm that public trust in the police institution is formed through evaluations of officer professional behavior and the quality of communication interactions.

Furthermore, the results of the study indicate that public trust acts as a mediating variable in the relationship between professionalism and interpersonal communication and institutional image. This means that the influence of professionalism and interpersonal communication on institutional image will be stronger if public trust is increased. Thus, public trust is a key factor in building a sustainable police institutional image.

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