

# A Qualitative Research on the Improvement of Government Public Relations in the Low Fertility Society

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## 저출산 정부홍보 개선방안을 위한 질적 연구

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**Abstract** The purpose of this study is to propose an effective PR plan for government policies in order to make the people aware of the importance of the fertility rate by seeking strategies to counter the low fertility rate. Focus group interviews were conducted with 6 experts with high expertise in government policy advertising and public relations among advertising and public relations academics and practitioners. It was found that low fertility PR strategy raised the problems of integrated public relations and budgeting. PR message strategy was lacked a creative approach suitable for the target, and the media strategy did not reflect the characteristics of the younger generation. Based on these research results, an improvement plan for government PR to counter the low fertility was proposed, and it is expected that it will be used for policy making in the future.

**Key Words** : Low fertility, Government PR, Public relations effect, Government policy, PR message

**요약** 본 연구의 목적은 국가의 주요 정책인 저출산 대응전략 모색을 통해 국민들이 출산율의 중요성을 인지하기 위한 정부정책의 효과적인 홍보방안 제안이다. 본 연구는 광고홍보 학계와 실무자들 중에서 정부의 정책광고와 홍보에 전문성이 높은 6명의 전문가를 대상으로 초점집단면접을 실시하였다. 연구결과, 정부의 저출산 홍보전략은 통합홍보와 예산 편성의 문제점이 제기되었고, 홍보메시지 전략은 일관성 높고 타겟에 적합한 창의적인 접근이 부족하였으며, 매체전략은 젊은 세대의 특성을 반영하지 못한 것으로 나타났다. 이러한 연구결과를 바탕으로 저출산 대책 정부홍보의 개선방안을 제안하였고, 향후 정책입안에 활용될 것이 기대된다.

**주제어** : 저출산, 정부홍보, 홍보효과, 정부정책, 홍보메시지

## 1. Introduction

Korea's population growth rate was at a low level of 0.2% until 2020, but turned to a decreasing trend to -0.18% in 2021. The main causes of the low birth rate, from more than 1 million newborns born every year in the 1970s

to about 200,000 newborns in recent years, are changes in values such as avoidance of marriage and late marriage, and the economic burden of childcare caused by a surge in real estate prices [1]. In order to recognize the seriousness of the world's lowest fertility rate and respond to it, the government is pursuing it

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as a key national task.

However, there is a limitation to settling the problem of low fertility, and the public's consensus on government policies is also lacking. Korean government's low fertility policy publicity has not received good marks in budget allocation, public relations goals, target selection, publicity messages and media selection.

The low fertility rate causes a decrease in the population of youth and young adults and a decrease in the working-age population, which causes difficulties in the national economy due to an increase in the cost of supporting the elderly that our society has to support due to the rapid aging of the aging population. The population decline is not only facing an economic disaster, but also the risk of national annihilation.

In Korea, government policies related to childbirth have been implemented for various purposes in accordance with social changes since the 1960s. Due to the population increase in the 1970s, people said, 'Let's have only two children without distinguishing between sons and daughters' or 'There are many two. Promoting childbirth suppression slogans such as 'Let's have only one child and raise them well' have contributed greatly to achieving successful policy goals that the entire nation agrees with.

This study was conducted for the purpose of suggesting effective public relations improvement measures for the low birth rate government policy. This study suggests a direction to establish effective public relations plans, and only by strategically approaching and publicizing the public can overcome the crisis of low fertility and achieve demographic reform without a population cliff.

## 2. Literature Review

Government policy publicity is a planned communication activity that sets clear goals and implements them in order to form, maintain, and develop friendly relations with the public [2-4]. The purpose of public relations is to inform the public about the government's work and to increase the efficiency of the institution's operation through appropriate communication technology [5,6].

Although Korea's low fertility policy publicity has excellent quantitative results, it has several problems in terms of effectiveness. The problem with the low fertility policy publicity in Korea is that it mainly consists of public information that relies on press releases rather than publicity, fragmentary publicity by individual ministries rather than integrated publicity at the government-wide level [7].

The fundamental problem of information public relations in Korea is that it stems from the pre-modern perception of high-ranking government officials who view public relations as a social science management strategy that uses public communication rather than as a social science management strategy [8,9].

The result of studying the public relations strategy of the government's low fertility policy by analyzing the semantic network structure of messages related to the low fertility recorded on Twitter shows that the low fertility situation is the result of individual voluntary choices. Messages related to the government's fertility promotion policies were found to be relatively low [10].

The results of a focus group interview with married women showed several important implications in deriving a communication strategy to effectively raise the awareness of married women about the low fertility phenomenon. First, the government's low

fertility promotion requires an organized and multi-layered approach rather than a short-term campaign. Second, an integrated public relations approach through collaboration among government departments is more effective than public relations by individual government departments. Third, the use of media such as SNS and online communities and the discovery of reliable message sources for women should be explored to develop publicity messages that the public can sympathize with [11,12].

These existing literature are summarized as the need to develop a publicity message that raises the sense of community about childbirth and child rearing through the enhancement of trust in the government, rather than just the publicity of the government's low fertility publicity campaign.

### 3. Research Method

In this study, a qualitative research method was used to explore the awareness of the low fertility government public relations in Korea and effective communication strategies. Qualitative research method is an inductive research method that analyzes the discourse that respondents answered about the research content and analyzes the meaning and meaning of the answers they posed [13]. It is a useful research method that can derive in-depth research results compared to quantitative research methods as a research method that deeply analyzes the actual contents and experiences experienced by the survey participants [14].

The number of respondents is relatively limited, but experts with deep awareness and knowledge about the research contents are relatively limited than the questionnaire survey method that targets a large number of randomly

selected subjects because it is judged that the recognition and knowledge of the academic and industry on the subject of this study is insufficient. It is expected to contribute to increasing the reliability and validity of the research results in that it targets.

#### 3.1 Selection of Survey Participants

In qualitative research, the reliability and validity of research results can be increased only when experts with high understanding of the research purpose and research problem are selected as respondents. For the selection of survey participants, the academic survey participants selected three people with high interest in government advertising and public relations from the list of members of the Korean Advertising Association and the Korean Public Relations Association. Three people with experience in public relations were selected. In selecting a sample, considering both the homogeneity and heterogeneity of respondents belonging to academia and practitioner groups is an important factor in selecting subjects for qualitative research, gender and age were reflected.

**Table 1. Focus Group Interview Participants**

	Participant	Age	Gender	classification	Position
Academia	G1-1	58	M	Metropolitan university	Professor
	G1-2	46	F	Provincial university	Associate professor
	G1-3	38	M	Metropolitan university	Assistant professor
Industry	G2-1	56	M	Advertising agency	Director
	G2-2	44	F	PR agency	Team leader
	G2-3	32	M	Advertising agency	Manager

### 3.2 Data Collection and Research Questions

In order to collect in-depth data from the survey participants on the research question, a focus group interview was conducted twice with a team of three of the six people presented above. In order to create a natural atmosphere for the interview process and to listen to the in-depth opinions of the survey participants, the survey contents were delivered two weeks before the interview. The in-depth survey was conducted at an advertising company familiar with the participants.

The questions prepared to collect data in the in-depth focus interview included the following related to major research questions. In the public relations policy, the following four research themes were established because the purpose of PR, message, media and future improvement plan are major issues.

First, what is the overall evaluation of the Korean government's low fertility PR goals and strategies?

Second, what is your evaluation of the low fertility PR strategy?

Third, what is your evaluation of the use of media to promote low fertility policies?

Fourth, in order to overcome the world's lowest fertility rate, what should be emphasized in promoting low fertility in the future?

## 4. Results

The topics of appearances answered by academia and advertising and public relations experts were analyzed. These six experts presented a total of 97 appearance themes. Similar opinions were presented by academia, advertising and public relations experts, and by

age group, but there were also a number of different opinions.

The fact that similar opinions and different opinions were presented according to the academic circles, the working circles, and age groups means that there are various opinions about the Korean government's low fertility policy promotion. In this study, only the most meaningful content of similar or overlapping responses among the survey subjects was presented in the research results section. Opinions of specific survey subjects for each research question are summarized as follows.

### 4.1 Research Question 1

For the past 20 years, the government has invested a lot of PR expenses to inform low fertility. However, the theme and concept change every year and the inconsistent public relations did not contribute to raising the public's will to give birth. It is evaluated that it has not been a public relations strategy that the public can empathize with (G1-2, G2-3)

Policy publicity should set clear goals and be operated continuously for a long time. It is disappointing that the public relations goals have changed with each change of government. Rather than unilateral publicity, we should naturally induce empathy through an emotional approach (G1-1, G2-2).

When you set your PR goals, you need to check your short-term and long-term goals (G1-3, G2-1).

If you feed the low fertility promotions that have been conducted so far as a score, you can give them about 70 points. All the people have heard of the massive budget execution at least once, but the practical effect was insignificant.

In the future, it seems that the promotion of low fertility should be carried out at the national level by the Prime Minister's Office as a control tower (G1-2, G1-3).

#### 4.2 Research Question 2

The low fertility promotional message should accurately analyze the cause of the low fertility and target the fertility age group by reflecting this. In the meantime, publicity messages were written from a national perspective and had low impact. The development of promotional messages based on storytelling that can affect individual citizens should be developed (G2-1, G2-2).

Those in their 20s and 30s, who are the age group for childbirth, are the MZ generation and have different values from the age group that establishes national policies. Various investigations will need to be done for a promotional message strategy that can appeal to the MZ generation (G1-3, G2-1)

The causes of the low fertility are diverse, including changes in the younger generation's values, avoidance of marriage and late marriage, and the excessive financial burden required to raise children. It is meaningless to unilaterally enforce policy publicity without healing these fundamental causes. I think that a promotional message should be delivered along with efforts for fundamental healing (G1-3).

#### 4.3 Research Question 3

The media strategy should be set so that the low fertility policy publicity converges online and offline and delivers it to the target accurately, but unfortunately that is not the case (G1-2, G2-1).

The characteristics of social media and online media are sharing and participation. The low fertility policy publicity should reflect these characteristics of the media, but it is evaluated that so far, the focus has been on one-sided delivery. In order to activate communication with the MZ generation, it is necessary to promote policies that reflect the media characteristics of sharing and participation (G1-3, G2-2).

The media budget is insufficient for most policy publicity. It is a disadvantage that occurs because publicity is carried out in a short period of one year. Rather than setting the media budget separately for each government department, it is necessary to organize the budget by integrating it (G1-1, G2-1).

#### 4.4 Research Question 4

The world's lowest fertility rate is a disaster for our country. Policy publicity should be carried out so that all people can recognize that the low birth rate is my problem (G1-2).

The low fertility promotion budget is distributed among various government ministries, so there is a limit to increasing the integration effect. In the future, the Prime Minister's Office should be integrated with the control tower to manage publicity and execute the budget (G2-1, G2-2).

The emergence of new media such as SNS and online requires major revisions to the PR strategy. It is necessary to establish a PR strategy that utilizes the interactive and ripple power of the new type of media (G1-3, G2-3).

## 5. Conclusion

The government is implementing policies to create a social environment that creates a favorable environment for childbirth and nurturing. Each government department, centered on the Ministry of Health and Welfare, is carrying out public relations activities to respond to the ripple effect of the low birth rate. In order to successfully realize government policies, effective and appropriate public relations policies must be accompanied.

This study was conducted to explore the current status, problems, and improvement plans of public relations programs for low fertility programs. For this purpose, in-depth interviews were conducted with experts from academia and practical fields. As a result of the study, it was found that publicity programs for countermeasures against low fertility are carried out in various ways through TV, newspaper, radio, online, mobile, and SNS, and the public's awareness and trust are at a high level. However, it was found that there is room for improvement in message delivery methods, integrated public relations, diversification of publicity targets, use of new types of media, and budget for various public relations projects currently in progress.

Experts who participated in depth interviews as to why Korea's low fertility policy promotion is unsuccessful pointed to the absence of a control tower and lack of leadership as the main reasons. More than half of those in their twenties do not plan to have children after getting married, and the percentage of couples agreeing not to have children increased from 29.1% in 2015 to 52.4% in 2020, which clearly shows the failure of policy promotion. Due to the global economic downturn, soaring real estate prices, and changes in young people's values, the number of couples who do not have children

after marriage is increasing, and there is a risk that the low fertility trend will intensify [15].

While the MZ generation has active contact with new types of media such as mobile, online, and SNS, the older generation still prefers existing media such as TV and newspapers and promotional materials such as leaflets. If we objectively identify the needs and desires of target audiences of various classes, subdivide them, and implement appropriate message and media strategies for each target, it is expected to execute low fertility publicity more effectively than now. It would be desirable to analyze the background through situational analysis and basic research before establishing the government public relations goals and plans to overcome the low fertility and aging society, and then establish a differentiated public relations plan for each target based on this.

In future research, if policy experts from government agencies related to low fertility participate, it is expected that the limitations of this study's research targeting academia and practitioners will be overcome.

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