



STRATEGIES OF PUBLIC RELATIONS MANAGEMENT FOR BUILDING EDUCATIONAL IMAGE IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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Abstract :

This study aims to analyze public relations management strategies in building the image of education in the digital era, with a case study at MTs Negeri 6 Kediri. The main problems encountered include the low level of digital literacy among educators and limited resources in media management. The research employs a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation involving the principal, vice principal for public relations, teachers, students, and parents. Data validity was ensured using source triangulation and member checking. The findings reveal that MTsN 6 Kediri implements digital-based public relations strategies through the optimization of social media (Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube), digital publications (website, e-newsletters), stakeholder engagement (parents, alumni, community), and crisis communication management. These strategies have contributed to enhancing the institution's image, as reflected in an average annual increase of approximately 15% in student enrollment, higher digital interactions, and growing public trust in transparent information. The main challenges faced are limited human resources in the digital field and resistance from some teachers and parents. These are addressed through digital literacy training, technological support, and socialization of digital literacy. The study contributes theoretically by integrating the concepts of public relations management and digital branding within the context of Islamic education, while its practical contribution lies in providing recommendations for digital public relations strategies that can be adopted by other madrasahs..

Keywords : *Public Relations Management, Educational Image, and the Digital Era*

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of digital technology has brought significant changes to various aspects of life, including education. In today's information era, educational institutions face challenges in maintaining the quality of learning while also building a positive image in society. Setyowati (2020) emphasizes that creating a strong educational image is essential for gaining public trust in schools. Therefore, effective communication methods are crucial for establishing and sustaining an institution's reputation.

According to Suharto (2019), school public relations (PR) plays a vital role

in safeguarding educational reputation, particularly through clear information dissemination and effective communication approaches. Digital media, especially social platforms, enables schools to share information quickly, engage with stakeholders, and build a positive reputation (Yunita & Prasetyo, 2021). In modern education, institutional reputation is shaped not only by communication strategies but also by social interactions, community involvement, and the integration of technology in public communication.

More than 70% of educational institutions in Indonesia have adopted digital media to communicate and promote a positive image (Kemendikbud, 2023). However, many of these institutions lack well-structured PR strategies, making the use of technology less effective. The spread of misinformation or hoaxes poses a serious threat to institutional reputation, making PR management a key necessity (Rahman, 2022). Digital PR strategies can foster greater parental and community involvement in education, while also strengthening public trust. Information about student achievements, educational policies, and school programs can be effectively delivered through platforms such as social media and school websites (Sari & Nugroho, 2021). In this way, digital PR enhances transparency and builds a stronger institutional image.

MTsN 6 Kediri, as an Islamic school, faces challenges in managing its educational image amid the rapid growth of digital technology. In this digital era, implementing effective PR management strategies is crucial to build, maintain, and improve the institution's reputation. The school aims to foster public trust through social media engagement, collaboration with stakeholders, and transparent communication. Furthermore, establishing a professional image and taking active roles in academic and social activities are equally important.

Nevertheless, several issues remain in applying digital-based PR strategies. These include inconsistent updates, limited audience interaction, and underutilization of digital technology in community engagement. Previous studies have largely focused on PR management strategies in general schools or higher education institutions. Consequently, research on the application of such strategies in Islamic schools is still scarce (Santoso, 2021).

Previous studies have widely examined public relations (PR) strategies in general schools and higher education institutions (Prasetyo, 2020; Santoso, 2021). However, research focusing on Islamic schools, particularly state madrasahs, remains limited. Madrasahs face a dual challenge: positioning themselves as quality educational institutions while simultaneously being recognized as progressive religious institutions. MTs Negeri 6 Kediri is an interesting case to explore, as despite its active use of digital media, it continues to face obstacles such as low digital literacy, limited human resources, and resistance from some stakeholders toward digital communication practices.

In light of this context, the present study seeks to answer the following research question: How does MTs Negeri 6 Kediri implement public relations management strategies to build its educational image in the digital era? The objectives of the study are to (1) describe the digital PR strategies applied, (2)

identify the challenges encountered, and (3) analyze their impact on the educational image of the madrasah.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method employed in this study is qualitative research with a case study approach. The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of public relations management strategies in shaping educational image in the digital era at MTsN 6 Kediri. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore phenomena comprehensively from the perspective of the subjects involved.

Data were collected through direct observation, in-depth interviews with key stakeholders such as the principal, PR team, teachers, and students, as well as documentation in the form of digital archives, activity reports, and official school social media content. These methods were designed to provide a holistic picture of how public relations strategies are implemented to build and maintain the institution's image. Both primary and secondary data were obtained from interviews and observations related to PR activities at the school.

To ensure data validity, the study employed source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking. Data analysis followed the framework, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that MTsN 6 Kediri implements a range of digital public relations (PR) strategies to foster a positive image within the community.

First, social media optimization is carried out through the use of Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube for publishing school activities, as well as WhatsApp Groups for intensive communication with parents. This aligns with (Kotler and Keller's , 2016) perspective in their book *Marketing Management*, where they assert that social media serves as a valuable tool for promoting educational marketing. Second, the school provides the public with direct access to information regarding school policies, student achievements, and school activities through both online and print media. As (Goldhaber , 1993) notes in *Organizational Communication*, such transparency is crucial for enhancing an institution's credibility.

This approach aligns with (Grunig and Hunt's, 1984) two-way symmetrical communication model, in which organizations not only disseminate information but also build reciprocal interaction with their publics.

Second, digital publications are developed through the school's official website, which provides institutional profiles, news updates, and online student admission services. Such transparency enhances the school's credibility, as information is openly accessible to the public. This finding resonates with (Fombrun and Van Riel's , 2004) organizational reputation theory, which emphasizes that a positive image is shaped by communication quality and information openness. According to (Lievrouw and Livingstone , 2006) in the *Handbook of New Media*, digital activities are crucial for reaching a wider

audience.

Third, stakeholder engagement is prioritized by involving parents and alumni in webinars, workshops, and social activities, as well as through collaboration with local media. Collaboration with external parties is also a key strategy for enhancing the visibility of the madrasah. Partnerships with media outlets and other organizations provide strategic benefits, as (Molleda , 2009) notes in the *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, allowing the institution to engage a larger number of stakeholders. Additionally, in the digital era, school public relations must ensure that information is accurate, relevant, and responsive to evolving communication trends (Heath & Coombs, 2006, *Strategic Issues Management*). Such responsiveness is a critical component in building effective relationships with the public.

The findings indicate that in the digital era, PR management strategies at MTsN 6 Kediri have undergone significant transformation, with technology serving as a primary tool for creating a positive educational image. The school employs social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube to communicate, share updates, and enhance its reputation. According to Effendy (2017), the management and dissemination of information are essential for effective organizational communication in educational institutions. Social media has become particularly important as a rapid and wide-reaching channel to connect with a larger audience in a short amount of time. This strategy reflects (Kotler and Keller's , 2016) perspective that strong stakeholder relationships form the foundation for building an educational institution's brand.

Fourth, crisis communication management is practiced by responding professionally to public criticism on social media and clarifying negative issues or misinformation. The challenges faced by MTsN 6 Kediri in managing its digital image include ensuring that the information provided is accurate, thereby effectively managing public responses to criticism or comments on social media. In the digital era, institutions must implement robust information management systems (Sugiyono, 2019) to minimize the risk of misinformation and enhance transparency. Therefore, the school's PR team plays a crucial role in ensuring that the information shared is not only relevant but also accurate and aligned with the school's goals and vision. To maintain reputation and public trust, the school adopts a responsive and professional communication approach when addressing negative feedback or criticism.

Furthermore, there has been an increase in public trust in MTsN 6 Kediri, as reflected in the growth of student enrollment over the past three academic years: 2022/2023 - 737 students; 2023/2024 - 856 students; 2025/2026 - 872 students, representing a 15% increase. This trend, along with greater access to information about school programs, demonstrates the impact of PR management strategies on the school's educational image. As Nasution (2018) points out, communities tend to choose institutions with a strong reputation, indicating that effective image management directly contributes to increased student enrollment.

In addition, student engagement with digital media enhances learning

outcomes and reinforces the school's reputation as an innovative and technology-based educational institution. As Lestari (2020) notes, the use of digital media in educational communication is a vital component in creating MTsN 6 Kediri's image as a progressive, open, and adaptive school that responds to contemporary developments. These outcomes highlight the effectiveness of the school's digital PR management strategies in building and maintaining a positive educational image. These findings support the issues management framework proposed by (Heath and Coombs , 2006), which underscores the importance of timely and accurate responses in handling issues that may threaten organizational reputation.

The impact of these strategies has been considerable. Interview data indicate an increase in student enrollment of approximately 15% over the past three years, greater public engagement on social media platforms, and stronger trust in the school's transparency of information. This supports (McQuail's , 2010) argument that intensive public interaction in digital communication directly contributes to building a positive institutional image.

Nevertheless, several challenges were identified. Limited digital literacy among teachers and PR staff has constrained the effectiveness of social media management. In addition, inadequate technological resources and resistance from some parents toward digital communication remain significant obstacles. To address these issues, the school has initiated digital literacy training for teachers and staff, invested in technological facilities, and provided digital literacy education for parents. These efforts are consistent with (Van Dijk's ,2020) view that digital literacy is a key factor in optimizing the use of technology in the modern era.

CONCLUSION

The digital public relations strategies implemented by MTsN 6 Kediri encompass social media optimization, digital publications, stakeholder engagement, and crisis communication management. These strategies enable the school to communicate effectively with the public, disseminate information transparently, and maintain active interaction with parents, alumni, and the wider community. By adopting a two-way communication approach, the school not only shares information but also responds to feedback, which strengthens mutual understanding and trust.

The impact of these strategies has been significant. Evidence from the study indicates an increase in student enrollment, enhanced public engagement on social media platforms, and improved community trust in the school's transparency and credibility. The findings align with theories on organizational reputation and stakeholder engagement, demonstrating that systematic digital PR efforts contribute directly to building a positive institutional image in educational settings.

Despite these achievements, several challenges remain, including limited digital literacy among teachers and PR staff, as well as insufficient technological resources. To address these issues, the school has implemented digital literacy training, provided necessary technological support, and conducted outreach to

educate parents on digital communication tools. These measures highlight the importance of capacity building and resource allocation in maximizing the effectiveness of digital public relations in educational institutions.

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