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Public Relations Management in Improving the Image and Performance of Educational Institutions: Strategies, Challenges, and Implications

Lilah Karmilah
Magister Pendidikan Guru Sekolah Dasar, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

Eni Kartini
Magister Pendidikan Guru Sekolah Dasar, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

Zakia Nur Aras Wiguna Kusuma
Magister Pendidikan Guru Sekolah Dasar, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

Neneng Rostika
Magister Pendidikan Guru Sekolah Dasar, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

Sofyan Iskandar
Magister Pendidikan Guru Sekolah Dasar, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

***Corresponding Author:** lilahkarmilah10@upi.edu

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Abstract
Public relations management plays a strategic role in building and maintaining a positive image and improving the performance of educational institutions in the midst of evolving social dynamics. This article aims to analyze the public relations strategies that can be effectively implemented, the challenges faced in their implementation, and the long-term implications for the reputation and sustainability of educational institutions. Through a qualitative-descriptive approach and literature study, it is found that well-managed public relations can strengthen internal and external communication, build public trust, and support the achievement of the institution's vision and mission. However, challenges such as limited resources, internal resistance, and changes in communication technology demand continuous adaptation and innovation. The implications of effective public relations management not only impact on public perception, but also on increasing participation, the quality of education services and the competitiveness of the institution. Therefore, strengthening the capacity of public relations is one of the strategic keys in the management of modern educational institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Today, educational institutions are not only required to provide quality learning services, but must also be able to create a positive image before the public (Mubarok, 2022). In this context, public relations management becomes an important instrument to build harmonious relationships between the institution and the community, parents, students and other related parties. Increased public trust can directly affect the reputation and operational effectiveness of educational institutions (Halim, 2022).

In the midst of globalization and the rapid advancement of information technology, educational institutions face the challenge to not only provide quality learning services, but also to build a positive and trusted image before the public. The image of educational institutions is now an important factor in determining the competitiveness and sustainability of these institutions (Sutisna, 2003). Therefore, the role of public relations has become increasingly vital in delivering accurate information, building

effective communication, and building good and harmonious relationships with all stakeholders, such as students, parents, communities, and governments (Firdaus, 2023).

Public relations management in educational institutions is not only limited to disseminating information, but rather a strategic effort to create positive public perceptions and support the achievement of the institution's vision and mission (Effendy, 2017). The role of professional public relations can increase community engagement, strengthen public trust, and handle communication crises in an effective way (Husaini, 2024). Unfortunately, the important role of public relations often does not receive proportional attention in many educational institutions. There are still many schools and institutions that do not have a structured public relations system based on appropriate communication strategies. The lack of understanding of institutional management of the strategic value of public relations and limited resources are the main obstacles in optimizing this function (Supriani, 2022).

This study presents a new integrative framework that positions public relations management not merely as a communication tool, but as a strategic managerial function in educational institutions. Through this article, we will comprehensively discuss the strategies that can be applied in public relations management in educational institutions, the main challenges that often arise in practice, and the implications of public relations management for the image and performance of educational institutions. Hopefully, this research can be a reference source for policy makers and educational practitioners in improving the efficiency of public relations management (Patimah & Fauzi, 2023).

In simple terms, management can be interpreted as a management process. Jannah et al. (2018) argue that management includes activities in organizing and managing an organization in order to achieve predetermined goals. According to the definition of the Institute of Public Relations (IPR), a leading public relations organization in the UK and Europe, as cited by Sholihah (2018) public relations management is a series of efforts carried out in a planned and sustainable manner to build and maintain harmonious relationships and mutual understanding between an organization and all parties that are its goals. In line with what was stated by Frank Jeffkins (Muspawi & Gustriana, 2019) that public relations are all communication activities carried out in a planned manner, both from within and outside an institution, with the main objective of building mutual understanding.

Thus public relations, or public relations, is a crucial element that plays a role in supporting the achievement of an organization's goals (Danisah & Evita, 2024). Public relations management in education has a crucial role in strengthening the relationship between educational institutions and the wider community, strengthening the positive image of the institution, and encouraging the improvement of the quality of education. The success of a public relations strategy depends on a well-planned process, including the stages of planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating activities that are able to build harmonious relationships and good public perceptions (Novitasari et al., 2021). This approach is key in developing educational facilities, strengthening public trust, and socializing the values and success of educational institutions. The following description will discuss in detail the main elements of public relations management in the educational environment.

METHODS

This research uses the library research method. Library research aims to collect data or information contained in various literature sources (Raihan, 2017). The literature used in this study are books, journal articles, and research reports as listed in the bibliography. The steps of this method, namely determining the topic to be studied, searching for comprehensive and in depth information, collecting data from various sources, presenting data and compiling reports.

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach that aims to describe Public Relations Management in Improving the Image and Performance of Educational Institutions: Strategies, Challenges and Implications. This approach was chosen because it is relevant to explore complex and in-depth phenomena, especially related to Public Relations Management in a dynamic educational context. This approach is expected to provide a comprehensive and in-depth picture of Strategies,

Challenges and Implications Public Relations Management in Improving the Image and Performance of Educational Institutions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Education is the main foundation that is crucial in determining the excellence of a nation (Ainun et al., 2024). With education, individuals are able to explore and develop new knowledge needed to face various challenges and increasingly complex competition along with the times. Educational institutions are agents of change and a place to channel knowledge for the next generation (Sandyakala, 2020). Educational institutions today are not only required to provide quality learning services, but must also be able to build a positive image in the eyes of the public (Kurniawati & Fathul, 2023). Image is a perception or picture that the community has of an institution.

Image is a perception, view, or picture that the public has of an institution, which is the result of a deliberately formed impression of an object, individual, or organization (Iswahyuni & Ainur, 2022). Image is formed from the public's objective assessment of the actions, behavior, and ethics shown by an institution in its social environment (Ningsih et al., 2022). A positive and strong image can increase public trust and interest in educational institutions, which in turn contributes to an increase in the number of applicants, alumni success, and support from various related parties. (Annisafitri & Ahmad, 2022). The image of an educational institution stems from the identity of the institution, which is reflected through the figure of the leader, the name of the institution, and various displays such as the use of public media in visual, audio, and audio-visual forms. In addition, the identity and image of the institution are also reflected in non-physical aspects, such as the values and philosophy held, the quality of service, as well as the style of work and communication both internally and externally (Sukinem & Tutut, 2022).

Image is an impression, feeling, or picture that the public has of a company, object, individual, or institution (Alma, 2008). Image cannot be produced directly like a product produced in a factory, but is an impression that is formed based on individual knowledge and understanding of something. Image is formed through the institution's systematic efforts in implementing operational activities that are oriented towards service quality. The level of service quality organized is directly proportional to the positive perception of the institution's image. In addition, image construction is also influenced by individual experiences that significantly shape mental dispositions towards certain objects. Image is the main goal, as well as a reputation and achievement to be achieved for the world of public relations (public relations). This requires management responsibility to achieve goals strategically by implementing a clear and comprehensive work program (Erlin et al., 2024).

Management is a process or discipline that involves planning, organizing, directing, and controlling various activities in the organization and all its aspects, in order to achieve organizational goals effectively and efficiently. According to Luther Gullick, management is a discipline that is studied systematically, which emphasizes understanding the scientific elements in management, so that management can be considered as a field of science. (Meliana et al., 2022). Meanwhile, Koontz and O'Donnell revealed that management is an effort made to achieve certain goals by involving the participation of others (Ratnasih, 2012). With management, the relationship between education (schools) and the community can be carried out systematically (Listina, 2016). The role of public relations in educational institutions is one of the main and crucial elements in education management. The public relations management process in the field of education includes planning, implementing, controlling, and evaluating programs that focus on the social interaction of institutions, by optimally utilizing potential resources (Annisafitri & Ahmad, 2022).

Public relations management is an effort made by an organization in building effective communication with the community, so that an intensive communication relationship is needed to achieve the goals set by the organization (Ningsih et al., 2022). Public relations management has become an integral part of the management strategy of an institution. Especially in the field of education, in a context where educational institutions play a crucial role in shaping the character and

future of the younger generation, public relations management is very important to strengthen the image of the institution in the eyes of the public (Fauzan et al., 2024).

Public relations management in the context of educational institutions is not just disseminating information, but rather a strategic effort to create positive public perceptions and support the achievement of the institution's vision and mission (Effendy, 2017). Public relations management has a crucial role in shaping and strengthening the image of an educational institution (Winarto et al., 2023). PR management includes various activities aimed at strengthening the relationship between educational institutions and the community and various other related parties, including the mass media, government, and the industrial sector (Ningsih et al., 2022). In this context, PR management is an important instrument to build harmonious relationships between institutions and the community, parents, students and other related parties. Increased public trust can directly affect the reputation and operational effectiveness of educational institutions.

Public Relations Management Strategies in Improving the Image and Performance of Educational Institutions

Public relations management (PR) in educational institutions has a crucial role in building and maintaining a positive image of the institution, while encouraging overall performance improvement. Strategies that can be applied in effective educational institutions by building two-way communication, both internally (among staff, teachers, and management) and externally (parents, community, media). As in (Hakim & Fahrur, 2024) the importance of strengthening cohesiveness among all internal parties. This step is considered vital to ensure a coherent and positive message about the madrasah is conveyed to the community.

In addition, there is a continuous commitment to development and improvement, both from the internal side of the organization and in building and improving the image of madrasah in the eyes of the community (Lubis et al., 2023). One of the strategies in public relations management to improve the institution's image is to implement active two-way communication between the institution and its stakeholders, such as students, parents, teachers, and the surrounding community. External communication can be done by creating communication programs such as social activities, educational seminars, and exhibitions of student work as an effective means of strengthening relationships with the community (Fauzan et al., 2024). Consistent and open communication serves as a bridge of information and prevents misunderstandings between the school and the public.

The next strategy that can be applied is to utilize social media and technology (Hasanah et al., 2024). In the digital era, social media is the main tool in building the institution's brand image. Another strategy that can be done is to promote the advantages of educational institutions through various communication channels and effective marketing platforms. This includes utilizing social media, websites, school activities, and collaboration with local media and educational communities. (Fauzan et al., 2024). In line with (Hakim & Fahrur, 2024), information dissemination through various media channels, both electronic such as television, radio, social media and school websites, as well as print media including publications in local newspapers, distribution of brochures, and installation of billboards and banners. This multi-channel approach allows the school to reach a wider and more diverse audience. This strategy is also used to disseminate student achievements, learning innovations and social activities. This has proven to be effective in attracting the interest of the community and prospective learners.

The next strategy is to build relationships with stakeholders through social activities, educational CSR, or collaboration with other institutions (such as universities or the industrial world). Cooperation is carried out by trying to create a harmonious relationship between the organization and various parties, both internally and externally, in order to increase the effectiveness of cooperation (Putri et al., 2023). Public relations are obliged to disseminate the mission of the agency they represent in order to be accepted and gain support from the community. This is done to establish good relations with the public, as well as to obtain public opinion and positive attitude changes for

both parties (Ningsih et al., 2022). This creates added value and a positive perception of the institution.

Strategies in designing school programs are also an important aspect in improving the quality of education, which involves continuous efforts to improve teachers' competencies, various professional development programs such as training, workshops, and mentoring can be implemented (Yasin et al., 2024). In addition, schools also actively evaluate and update the curriculum to keep it in line with current educational developments and student needs. The preparation of school programs is carried out by introducing the potential and advantages possessed to students who have the ability or opportunity to continue their education to a higher level (Masrufa, 2024).

Challenges in Implementing Public Relations Management Strategies

Although these strategies have a positive impact, their implementation is faced with various challenges (Meliana et al., 2022). The process of implementing public relations in educational institutions does not always run smoothly, as there are often challenges or obstacles. Public relations is expected to create a public space that provides a medium for balanced communication and interaction between the government, schools and communities, and vice versa. However, in reality, public relations has not been able to carry out its duties and functions optimally. The lack of effectiveness of public relations work is caused by various obstacles, such as problems in coordination patterns, institutional structures, human resource competencies, supporting facilities, and lack of commitment from the leadership (Hapsah, 2022).

The lack of professional human resources in the field of public relations is another challenge in public relations management. Organizing public relations management, it is important to form a competent public relations team to assist with public relations work (Marpaung et al., 2023). Many educational institutions, especially in the regions, do not have specialized or professional staff in public relations. This leads to unsystematic information management and tends to be reactive rather than proactive. The challenges of government public relations management include lack of coordination between agencies, resistance to change, limited human resource capacity, and the lack of budget allocated for public communication activities (Azhar et al., 2022). The absence of good coordination often causes information delivered to the public to be inconsistent and inaccurate. Implementing a digital strategy and branding is costly, from professional content creation to digital platform maintenance. Small private schools or public schools in disadvantaged areas often experience difficulties in this regard (Patimah & Fauzi, 2023).

Not all parties within the institution are ready to accept the changes brought about by the public relations management strategy. Some teachers or staff consider public relations activities as not part of their main duties and are therefore reluctant to get involved. In some cases, public relations is expected to build a public space that provides a medium to ensure a balance of communication and interaction between the government, schools and communities, and vice versa (Novitasari et al., 2021). However, in reality, public relations have not been able to carry out their duties and responsibilities optimally. This is due to various obstacles, such as problems in coordination models, institutions, human resource skills, infrastructure, and lack of commitment from the leadership. Bureaucratic procedures and regulations from the education office inhibit public relations innovation (Putri et al., 2023). This inhibits the institution's flexibility in networking or collaborating with external parties. These challenges indicate the need for human resource training, strengthening institutional policies, and raising awareness of the important role of public relations in creating a competitive and sustainable institutional image.

Implications of Public Relations Management in Improving the Image and Performance of Educational Institutions

Public Relations Management has a very crucial role in improving the image and performance of educational institutions (Hasanah et al., 2024). In the context of educational institutions, public relations are not only concerned with efforts to build a positive image in the eyes of the public, but

also with strengthening effective communication between institutions and various stakeholders, such as students, parents, teaching staff, government, and the general public.

Here are some important implications of public relations management in improving the image and performance of educational institutions:

1. Improving the Image of Educational Institutions (Masrufa, 2024)
   a. Building a positive reputation assists educational institutions in building and maintaining a good reputation. By managing external and internal communications, educational institutions can showcase their achievements, innovations and the values underpinning their vision. Through effective communication strategies, information about positive academic achievements, facilities or extracurricular activities can be disseminated.
   b. Managing crises When events occur that can damage the image of an educational institution, public relations management plays a role in responding quickly and effectively, and keeping the information circulating under control. A good crisis communication strategy can help minimize the negative impact on an educational institution's reputation.
   c. By establishing good relationships with the media, educational institutions can obtain favorable news coverage. Good news about events, teaching or research can strengthen the institution's image in the eyes of the public.
2. Improving the Performance of Educational Institutions (Sirait et al., 2023)
   a. Good public relations management helps to establish effective communication between educational institutions and stakeholders, such as the government, alumni, parents and the community. This enables the institution to understand the needs and expectations of the various parties involved.
   b. Reducing the Information Gap, public relations management can minimize the occurrence of miscommunication which is often an obstacle in achieving the goals of educational institutions. By providing clear and transparent information about policies, achievements, and recent developments, educational institutions can increase public trust.
   c. By utilizing public relations activities, educational institutions can expand their network of cooperation with various parties, such as other universities, the industrial sector, and government agencies. This cooperation can lead to improved facilities, access to resources, and improved quality of teaching and research.

CONCLUSION

Public relations management plays a vital role in improving the image and performance of educational institutions. In this connected and competitive era, educational institutions are required to be more proactive in building and maintaining reputation in the eyes of the public. An effective public relations strategy includes structured communication planning, transparent information dissemination, and quick and precise crisis management. In addition, the use of information technology and social media is a very powerful tool to introduce superior programs, academic achievements, and social activities held by educational institutions, which can directly increase the public's positive perception of the institution.

However, although public relations strategies have a lot of potential to improve the image and performance of educational institutions, there are various challenges that must be faced. One of them is the difference between public expectations and the reality on the ground, as well as the difficulty in managing the diverse perceptions of various stakeholders. In addition, the challenge of consistently managing internal and external communication is also a significant obstacle. The implication of these challenges is that it is important for educational institutions to develop more targeted communication policies, involve all elements of the organization, and adapt a flexible public relations approach to maintain quality relationships with the public.

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