



A CULTURAL APPROACH TO DEVELOPING PUBLIC RELATIONS IN SCHOOLS TO ALIGN LOCAL VALUES

Ummi Hani¹, Ummul Khoiroh², Juwita³, Qomariah⁴, Dian Zulfatul Iman⁵, Moh Rifai⁶

^{1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6} Universitas Nurul Jadid, East Java, Indonesia

Email: Haniummi17@gmail.com¹, Ummulkhoiroh14@gmail.com², Juwita200222@gmail.com³, Riyaalmurtadlo@gmail.com⁴, Nanaydian3@gmail.com⁵, Mohrifaiahmad@unuja.ac.id⁶

Abstract:

Public relations (PR) in schools is increasingly essential in facing the challenges of globalization, especially in aligning local values with modern communication practices. This research explores applying a cultural approach in PR strategies at MA Sunan Muria Pategalan, Jatibanteng District, Situbondo Regency, which has a rich local culture. Using qualitative methods with case studies, data was collected through observation, in-depth interviews with key informants (school principal, head of public relations, student parents), and documentation related to school homework activities. Data were analyzed using an analysis model that included condensation, presentation, and conclusion. The research results show that integrating local culture in PR can strengthen relations between schools and communities, create more relevant and meaningful communication, and increase community acceptance of schools. This research emphasizes the importance of understanding and respecting local cultural values in building harmonious relationships.

Keywords: *public relations, cultural approach, local values*

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly complex educational landscape, the role of public relations has increasingly important significance (Maula, 2023; Habib et al., 2023). The cultural approach in developing public relations in schools is a very relevant topic today. In an era of globalization, where local values are often threatened by foreign cultures, it is important to understand how public relations can function as a bridge to align local values with broader communication practices (Morris, 2022; Senja, 2022). This is in line with the finding that culture has a significant influence on public relations practices, where effective communication must consider the specific cultural context (Koswara et al., 2023; Martinez et al., 2023). Effective public relations does not only focus on conveying information, but also on establishing strong relationships between schools and their communities (Yanti, 2021; Aririguzoh, 2022). However, in practice, a gap is often found between the concept and application of public relations in educational institutions. That, one of the main problems in managing public relations in schools is the lack of integration of local values in communication strategies. Theoretically, the goal of public relations is to create a harmonious relationship between institutions and their communities with an approach that is appropriate to the local cultural context (Pajarianto et al., 2022; Labarca et al., 2021). That, in reality, many schools use generic public relations strategies that follow global trends without considering the local cultural context. As a result, these strategies are often not relevant to the needs of local communities, so that the relationship between schools and communities becomes less harmonious.

Public relations in schools should not only function as a promotional or

publication tool, but also as a liaison that is able to align local values with modern communication demands. The integration of local culture in public relations strategies is very important because it can strengthen the emotional relationship between the school and its community (Pavlidou et al., 2021; Hurst., 2021). An approach based on local values also helps schools create communication that is more relevant and meaningful for the community (Solissa et al., 2024; Mus et al., 2024). Local traditions adopted in public communication activities will increase community acceptance of the school. This approach creates a sense of connectedness and strengthens social ties between the institution and its community. Strategies that ignore local cultural aspects risk creating distance between the school and the community, so that the messages conveyed do not receive optimal attention (Mundiri, 2023). Without adequate understanding of local culture, public relations in educational institutions risks failing to convey messages effectively (Maulana, 2019). Forming a positive image of an institution in society requires careful planning and appropriate implementation, which must be adapted to local cultural characteristics and context. (Parra-Cardona et al., 2021; Aripin et al., 2023). Local cultural aspects have a significant influence on public relations strategies and practices, especially in determining appropriate communication approaches (Sipuan et al., 2022; Ramandha et al., 2022). Therefore, understanding and respecting local traditions and cultural values is an important element in building harmonious relationships. This is in line with the opinion of Sumendap (2022), which states that school and society are two elements that are interrelated and cannot be separated. The relationship between the two can only be established optimally through effective internal and external communication. Apart from that, Edy Susanto (2019) emphasized that public trust in educational institutions is one of the key factors that determines the progress of these institutions. (Use APA Style)

One aspect that needs to be discussed in relation to the cultural approach in public relations is the theory of cultural dimensions, as one way for educational institutions to deepen their understanding of the urgency of the cultural approach in developing public relations. Geert Hofstede describes the cultural dimension as a tool for understanding how cultural differences influence the way people think, behave, and interact in a society, especially in cross-cultural relationships. Hofstede introduced six cultural dimensions which include aspects such as power hierarchies, individual or group orientation, gender roles and life values, level of comfort with uncertainty, views on time and traditions, (Žemojtel et al., 2023). Each dimension provides insight into differences in values between cultures, for example, collectivist cultures tend to emphasize group cooperation, while individualist cultures emphasize individual freedom (Monrouxe et al., 2022). By understanding these dimensions, individuals or organizations can be more effective in establishing cross-cultural communications, managing global teams, or adapting to different cultures, whether in education, business, or social interactions.

In the existing literature, there have been many studies that have explored the relationship between culture and public relations, but there are still gaps that need to be filled, few of which emphasize a cultural approach based on local values. Several studies, such as those conducted by Huda (2022), introduced the concept of Dialogic Communication Theory which emphasizes the importance of participatory two-way communication between organizations and the public. However, this approach is still often universal without considering the specific cultural context. Other research shows the effectiveness of social media in strengthening school relationships with communities (Agustini, 2022), but does not explicitly discuss integrating local values in the strategy. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by exploring how local values can be integrated into public relations strategies in schools, as well as their impact on the relationship between schools and local communities.

Previous studies generally only discuss in general terms the importance of aspects of public relations strategy in educational institutions. This research focuses on an area that is known to have rich local cultural traditions that are still well preserved, specifically at MA Sunan Muria, Pategalan Village in Jatibanteng District, Situbondo Regency. This location is very relevant to the research conducted by the researcher entitled Cultural

Approach in Developing Public Relations in Schools to Harmonize Local Culture, because this institution is located in the midst of a community with strong traditional values.

This research is motivated by the phenomenon in Jatibanteng District, where many schools have not been able to optimize the use of cultural approaches as part of their communication strategy. As a result, the relationship between the school and the surrounding community is not always harmonious, resulting in a less than optimal image of the school. This condition is further complicated by the potential for friction between global culture which has entered through technological developments and local culture which is highly respected by the people of Jatibanteng District. If not managed well, this situation risks reducing the level of public trust and support for educational institutions in the region.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research was conducted at MA Sunan Muria Pategalan, Jatibanteng District, Situbondo Regency, with special consideration due to the rich culture and uniqueness of the surrounding community which differentiates it from other areas. The choice of this location was motivated by the researcher's desire to dig deeper and understand the unique and diverse cultural dynamics in the school environment and surrounding community. This is important because MA Sunan Muria Pategalan has a strategic role in maintaining and aligning local cultural values with educational developments in the era of globalization. This research uses a qualitative research method with a case study approach. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to analyze cases comprehensively, thereby gaining a deep understanding of the context and complexity of the phenomenon under study. In order to collect the necessary data, this research applies several data collection techniques, namely observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with key informants, such as the principal of MA Sunan Muria, the head of community relations, and the students' parents. Structured interview techniques were used to obtain credible information regarding how local culture is applied in school community relations strategies. In addition, documentation related to school activities was also analyzed to provide a more complete picture of the implementation of the cultural approach. The collected data was then analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) analytical model, which consists of three main stages: data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. This analysis process was carried out systematically and in depth, allowing researchers to gain a thorough understanding of the role of cultural approaches in shaping community relations practices in schools and their suitability with local cultural values.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on research conducted, it was found that the local culture around MA Sunan Muria Pategalan, which is located in Jatibanteng District, Situbondo, has a significant role in developing community relations strategies in schools. Research data shows that culture contributes to the development of public relations in schools as follows;

Local Culture-Based Activities

Local culture-based activities are various activities that reflect local culture, traditions and wisdom passed down from generation to generation (Agus et al., 2021; Arafah et al., 2023). These activities are often rooted in social norms, customs and beliefs of local communities which aim to maintain the identity and noble values of a community. Examples of this kind of activity include traditional ceremonies, traditional arts, regional culinary specialties, to locally based environmentally friendly practices such as the subak system in Bali (Ammar, 2023; Nur et al., 2023). Apart from being a means of preserving culture, this activity is also an educational medium to introduce the younger generation to their ancestral heritage. In the era of modernization, this activity is increasingly relevant as an effort to maintain the uniqueness of local culture in the midst of globalization, which often erodes traditional values. By actively involving the

community, this activity also plays a role in strengthening social ties and pride in local identity. The results of the researcher's interview with the principal of the Ma Sunan Muria school also stated that activities that represent local values at MA Sunan Muria are activities that reflect the traditions and culture of the Situbondo community, especially those that are in line with Islamic values. For example, we have an Islamic Holiday celebration program that is packed with local wisdom, such as the reading of barzanji, hadrah, and the "Kadisah" tradition before Ramadan (MH, 2024).

Based on the results of the interview above, it shows that MA Sunan Muria Pategalan Situbondo is committed to preserving local values through various activities based on Islamic traditions and culture. Activities such as the reading of barzanji, hadrah, and the "Kadisah" tradition which are carried out before the month of Ramadan are clear examples of the implementation of local values which are strengthened by religious teachings. The aim of this activity is to preserve cultural heritage while instilling Islamic values in the younger generation, so that they can recognize and feel proud of their traditional roots. The positive response shown by students is proof of the success of this program, although there are still challenges, especially in dealing with the influence of modern culture. To overcome this, creativity is a key factor, such as the use of social media for promotion and documentation of activities. In this way, these activities not only strengthen local values in the school environment, but also have a broad impact on the surrounding community, so that local traditions remain alive and relevant amidst current developments.

Activities oriented to local culture have a strategic role in strengthening positive relationships between schools and communities. However, its success really depends on the extent to which the school understands and respects local cultural values, as reflected in the interview results mentioned above. Research conducted by Abidin (2021) shows that culture-based activities can strengthen emotional relationships between educational institutions and the community. Similar findings were also confirmed by Mukhtar (2021), who emphasized the importance of collaboration in implementing these cultural activities. Therefore, schools need to design cultural activities that encourage active participation, to ensure that the main function of these activities in building social relationships remains relevant and has a significant impact. A deep understanding of local cultural structures is a key factor in developing effective public relations, as it ensures the relevance and acceptance of school programs within the community. Local culture plays a significant role in shaping the way schools interact with society, especially through the values and norms that underlie them. Schools that have a good understanding of the local cultural context tend to more easily gain support from the community. On the other hand, an inability to understand the context can trigger resistance, as reflected in a number of cases where school policies are deemed not to be in line with local cultural values.

Social Concern-Based Communication

Social Concern-Based Communication is a form of communication that aims to raise awareness and encourage action on relevant social issues, such as poverty, education, and the environment (Febriyanti et al., 2022). This communication focuses on achieving the common good by emphasizing the values of empathy, solidarity, and social responsibility. The messages delivered are designed to touch the emotional aspects of the audience, using inclusive and inspiring language to encourage active participation (Arif et al., 2021). Furthermore, this communication often involves collaboration between communities to create real and sustainable impacts. Based on the results of the researcher's interview with the public relations officer of MA Sunan Muria, who said that social concern-based communication has a real impact. One of the traditions that we prioritize is the implementation of rebbè activities, namely joint prayer and dhikr events that are routinely held by the madrasah. This activity not only functions as a spiritual medium, but also as a forum for building communication with the community. In every rebbè activity, we often convey social messages, such as an invitation to increase awareness of education and maintain environmental cleanliness. This tradition has an important role in strengthening the relationship between madrasahs and society (MU,

2024).

Based on the interview above, it can be interpreted that MA Sunan Muria has succeeded in integrating social concern-based communication with a cultural approach through local traditions such as *rebbè*. This tradition is not only a spiritual vessel, but is also used as a means of communication to convey relevant social messages, such as concern for education and the environment. By involving students, teachers, and the community, the madrasah creates harmonious relationships while building a positive image as an institution that not only focuses on formal education, but also cares about local values and global social challenges. The social concern shown by the school has a close relationship with the formation of a positive image in the eyes of the community (Wahid, 2023; Suherni et al., 2023). Based on the results of observations, schools that actively support social issues, such as local economic empowerment or environmental preservation, tend to have a better reputation (Efendi & Sholeh, 2023). Conversely, a passive attitude towards local social issues can lead to a decrease in the level of public trust in the institution. Communication that reflects social concern plays a key role in building emotional relationships between schools and the community (Iksal et al., 2024)(Safuan et al., 2024). Schools that engage in activities such as community service, health programs, or environmental campaigns usually receive more respect from the community. However, dysfunction can occur if such communication is not followed by real action, which can give the impression that the activities are merely formalities. Overall, social awareness is a crucial element in building a school's reputation. Through this approach, schools can not only improve their positive image but also provide significant social impact to the community.

The Use Of Local Languages And Symbols

The use of local languages and symbols plays an important role in strengthening cultural identity and creating emotional connections with certain communities (Mandasari & Winduwati, 2022). Local languages, as a means of communication, not only make it easier to convey messages to local people but also show appreciation for their culture (Ayudia & Wulandari, 2021). This makes the audience feel more appreciated and emotionally connected. Meanwhile, local symbols such as traditional motifs, traditional clothing, or cultural icons typical of a region can be strong visual elements to attract attention and convey meaningful messages. In the context of marketing, education, or social campaigns, the use of local languages and symbols can increase the effectiveness of message delivery because they are more relevant to the audience. In addition, it also contributes to the preservation of local traditions and culture, introducing the uniqueness of an area to a wider audience, and building collective pride in the community. According to the statement given by the informant in an interview with the researcher, namely the principal, who stated that the use of local languages and symbols has a very positive impact. The use of Madurese and local symbols at MA Sunan Muria is indeed one of the important aspects in our efforts to build strong relationships with the community. Madurese, as the everyday language of the Situbondo community, makes it easier for us to communicate with parents and the surrounding community. It also shows that our school values local culture, which is important for creating mutual trust.

As the interview results above, the Principal of MA Sunan Muria Pategalan, Situbondo, emphasized the importance of using local languages and symbols in strengthening the relationship between the school and the surrounding community. Madurese, which is the everyday language of the Situbondo community, is considered the main means of facilitating effective communication and building strong emotional bonds. The principal explained that the use of local languages not only facilitates interaction, but also emphasizes that the school is an inseparable part of the community, not an isolated entity. In addition, local cultural symbols, such as Madurese batik motifs, serve to strengthen the school's visual identity, while also showing that this institution plays a role as a preserver of local culture.

Effective use of local languages can enhance the emotional connection between schools and communities. Local languages are not only a means of communication, but

also a symbol of respect for community values and traditions. Conversely, insensitivity to local languages can create social distance that hinders collaboration. Meliani (2023)(Rodliyah et al., 2024) found that the use of local languages in school programs enhances a sense of community inclusion. Local languages are an important element in building harmonious relationships between schools and communities, as they reflect respect for local cultural values.

Involvement Of Community Leaders

The involvement of community leaders is the process of involving individuals who have influence or authority in a community to participate in an activity or initiative (Rahman & Hamdi, 2021; Habibah & Mahmudah, 2022). These community leaders can be religious leaders, traditional leaders, intellectuals, or public figures who are respected by many people. In the context of utilizing social media to improve the image of Islamic boarding schools, the involvement of community leaders aims to increase the credibility and public trust in Islamic boarding schools, reduce negative stigma, and spread positive information through their influence. The participation of community leaders can help expand the reach of messages and strengthen the image of Islamic boarding schools in the community (Fauzia & Hamdani, 2021). Based on information obtained from interviews with school public relations officers, it was conveyed that community leaders are very helpful in increasing the credibility of Islamic boarding schools. When respected community leaders support and speak positively about Islamic boarding schools, the community will more easily accept the information we convey. Support from religious leaders or intellectuals can also help reduce the negative stigma that is sometimes attached to Islamic boarding schools. So, their presence in our various activities is very influential.

From the interview above, it can be concluded that community leaders play a very important role in supporting the Public Relations tasks of Islamic boarding schools. Community leaders such as ulama and intellectuals can help increase public trust in Islamic boarding schools. Their support for various Islamic boarding school activities, both through social media and directly, contributes to strengthening the positive image of Islamic boarding schools and ensuring that the information conveyed to the public remains accurate. The presence of community leaders also plays a role in reducing negative stigma that may exist, as well as facilitating the dissemination of information about the achievements and programs of Islamic boarding schools, thereby strengthening the relationship between Islamic boarding schools and the community.

The involvement of local cultural figures in the cultural approach to Public Relations (PR) development in schools has a significant impact on aligning local values with the school's image. The main function of the involvement of local cultural figures is to strengthen the emotional connection between the school and the surrounding community, while introducing cultural values that are relevant to everyday life (Karmila, 2022; Hatta, 2022). Local cultural figures are generally respected for their contributions to preserving traditions and culture, so their participation in school activities can help educate the community about the importance of local values (Sunandar, 2021; Aquan et al., 2023). This can accelerate the process of accepting the school as an integral part of the community and strengthen its positive image. However, there is a potential for dysfunction, where dependence on one cultural figure can limit the space for variation and diversity of values in society. If school Public Relations relies too much on one cultural figure, it risks alienating other community groups who do not feel connected to the figure. Therefore, it is important for schools to involve various cultural figures to create a more inclusive and comprehensive narrative. The involvement of local cultural figures in the development of school Public Relations has a strong correlation with the acceptance of local values by students and the community. Local cultural figures often have high credibility in the eyes of the community due to their reputation in maintaining and developing local culture. When they are involved in school programs, they bring cultural values that are respected and recognized, so that the messages conveyed become more easily accepted. As a result, the community and students tend to see the school as an institution that strives to maintain and appreciate local identity. If the school's Public

Relations succeeds in integrating local cultural values through the involvement of these figures, acceptance of the school will increase. Conversely, if schools do not involve local cultural figures, they may have difficulty reaching a wider audience and feel disconnected from their cultural roots, which can reduce the effectiveness of the Public Relations being carried out.



Based on the research results above, several aspects of the culturally based approach implemented in schools are revealed to strengthen relations between educational institutions and the surrounding community. One approach found is local culture-based activities that reflect traditional values and local wisdom. This activity not only serves to preserve culture, but also introduces students and the community to their ancestral heritage. For example, activities such as reading barzanji and the "Kadisah" tradition which are carried out before the month of Ramadan at MA Sunan Muria, are clear examples of efforts to maintain local cultural identity combined with religious values. This activity has an important role in fostering a sense of pride in local culture while strengthening the identity of students and the local community. Even though there are challenges from the influence of modern culture, this activity remains relevant by utilizing technology, such as social media, to document and disseminate information, so that it remains maintained and accepted by the younger generation.

In addition, this cultural-based approach also includes communication based on social concern, which is an important strategy in building emotional relationships between schools and communities. In this case, schools do not only focus on academic achievement, but also care about social issues such as education, the environment, and community welfare. The rebbè tradition at MA Sunan Muria, which combines prayer and dhikr together with social messages, is an example of how social communication is used to strengthen ties with the surrounding community. Through this activity, messages of concern for the environment and the importance of education can be conveyed in a more effective and touching way. This approach shows that communication based on social concern and local cultural values can strengthen the positive image of schools and increase community participation in supporting social activities held. This also proves that by actively involving the community in cultural-based activities, schools can strengthen their role as an integral part of the local community.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above research, it can be concluded that, This research shows that a local culture-based approach in education and social communication has a very important role in strengthening the relationship between schools and the community. Activities that combine traditional values with religious and social teachings not only help maintain cultural identity, but also strengthen social ties within the community. Through culture-based activities such as traditional ceremonies, traditional arts, and invitations to care about social issues, schools can create a more harmonious and profound environment in building a sense of pride and concern for the surrounding environment.

The approach that integrates local cultural values with social awareness-based

communication also provides significant contributions to enriching the understanding of educational communication. By utilizing local values that are respected in the community, schools can build stronger relationships with the community. The use of local traditions as a means to convey social messages increases the effectiveness of communication, so that the community becomes more involved in social and educational issues. This study provides a new perspective on the importance of maintaining and utilizing local culture in developing positive social relationships in the context of education.

However, this study is limited to one school with very specific local traditions and culture, so the results may not be fully applicable to other schools with different cultural backgrounds. The method used, namely interviews, also has limitations in exploring all dimensions of the influence of local culture on education. Therefore, further research is needed with a more diverse approach and wider scope to explore more deeply how local culture can be integrated into education in various larger social contexts.

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