



## **OPTIMIZING SOCIAL MEDIA AS A PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOL IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS**

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### **Abstract:**

This research analyzes the role of social media as a public relations tool in educational institutions in the context of the digital era. The background to this research is the rapid development of technology which is changing society's communication patterns and the need for educational institutions to build closer relationships with their communities. The aim of the research is to identify social media optimization strategies, opportunities and challenges faced by educational institutions in utilizing this platform. The method used is a literature study with a descriptive-analytical approach, examining various theories and previous research results. The research results show that social media has great potential in supporting public relations functions, such as conveying information quickly and efficiently, building a positive image, and strengthening two-way communication with various stakeholders. However, optimizing social media faces challenges such as limited competent human resources, difficulty maintaining content consistency, and online reputation risks due to the spread of negative information. In conclusion, social media is a strategic tool to increase the visibility, reputation and relationship of educational institutions with the community. Effective implementation requires a strategic approach, professional management, and the use of the latest technology to overcome existing challenges.

**Keywords:** *Social Media, Educational PR, Digital Optimization, Strategic Communication*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The development of digital technology has changed the way people communicate and obtain information. Social media, as one of the most important innovations in the digital era, not only facilitates communication but also provides space to build closer relationships between institutions and their communities. In the context of the world of education, social media is becoming an increasingly important platform for institutions to convey information, build a positive image, promote programs, and increase interaction with various stakeholders, such as students, parents, teachers, alumni and the wider community.

Public relations (public relations) in educational institutions has a strategic role in building public trust and maintaining the institution's reputation. With the increasing use of social media, the function of public relations is no longer limited to conventional approaches, such as press conferences, publishing brochures, or conducting face-to-face activities. Now, social media offers various advantages, such as wide reach, real-time interaction, and ease of conveying messages visually and creatively. For example, through platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter, educational institutions can share achievements, promote activities, or answer questions from the public more quickly and transparently.

However, despite its enormous potential, many educational institutions face

challenges in utilizing social media optimally. Some institutions tend to use social media only as a one-way channel to convey information without taking advantage of interactive features that can increase user engagement. Additionally, a lack of understanding of the characteristics and specific audiences of each platform often becomes an obstacle in designing effective content. Other challenges include managing online reputation, responding to criticism on social media, and the need for human resources skilled in digital media management.

On the other hand, educational institutions also need to be aware of the risks that arise from the use of social media, such as the spread of inaccurate information, the potential for unmanaged negative criticism, and threats to data security. Therefore, the use of social media as a public relations tool requires a strategic approach that not only pays attention to technical aspects, but also considers ethics, risk management and the continuity of effective communication.

The concept of Public Relations in the Digital Era involves a significant transformation in communication practices and public relations management. The following is an explanation of the basic theories of PR, its role in educational institutions, and how digitalization is changing PR practice. Public relations (public relations) is a discipline that focuses on communication between organizations and their publics. In the digital era, several basic theories of public relations that are relevant include the Two-Way Communication Theory, which emphasizes the importance of reciprocal interactions between organizations and the public. In a digital context, this means utilizing online platforms to listen and respond to feedback from audiences in real-time (Sari & Soegiarto, 2019). Apart from that, Reputation Management Theory also plays an important role, because public relations is responsible for building and maintaining a positive image of the organization. In the digital era, an organization's reputation is greatly influenced by information spread on social media and other online platforms (Kharisma & Agustina, 2019). Lastly, Theory Agenda Setting emphasizes that the media has the power to determine issues that are considered important by the public. In a digital context, public relations must be active in creating content that can influence public opinion and direct discussions to issues that are relevant to the organization.

Public relations has a crucial role in educational institutions, covering various important aspects. One of them is information management, where public relations is tasked with disseminating information about the activities, policies and achievements of the institution to the public. This includes managing social media and official websites to ensure information can be accessed easily (Habib et al., 2021). Apart from that, public relations also plays a role in building a positive image, by helping create a positive image of educational institutions in the eyes of the public through effective communication. This is very important to attract prospective students and get support from stakeholders (Sari & Soegiarto, 2019). Mediating communication It is also an important function of public relations, which acts as a liaison between school management and students, parents and the community, ensuring that messages from leaders can be conveyed well (Anggraini & Maulida, 2023). Finally, in managing a crisis, public relations must respond quickly to manage information and maintain the reputation of educational institutions so that they remain positive in the eyes of the public (Kharisma & Agustina, 2019).

Digitalization has changed public relations practices significantly with various innovations affecting the way communication is carried out. One of them is the use of digital media, where public relations now utilizes various media platform digital such as social media, websites and mobile applications to reach a wider audience quickly (Anggraini & Maulida, 2023). This allows the delivery of information efficiently and interactively, expanding the reach of the message conveyed (Ayu, 2024). In addition, data analysis is an important part of public relations strategy, where with digital analytical tools, public relations can measure the effectiveness of communication campaigns and understand public sentiment towards certain issues. This data helps in adjusting communication strategies that are more targeted (Public Relations of the Ministry of State Secretariat, 2021). However, the digital era also brings new challenges, such as the spread of fake news (hoax), which can damage the institution's reputation.

Therefore, public relations needs to be proactive in providing accurate information to fight disinformation and maintain public trust (Kharisma & Agustina, 2019).

This literature study-based research aims to analyze how social media can be optimized as a public relations tool in educational institutions. This research will identify opportunities and challenges in the use of social media and provide strategic recommendations based on the best practices that have been studied. By understanding the role of social media in more depth, it is hoped that educational institutions can utilize this technology to strengthen relationships with stakeholders, improve the institution's reputation, and adapt to communication needs in the digital era.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This research uses qualitative methods with a literature study approach (literature review) to analyze concepts, theories and previous research results related to optimizing social media as a public relations tool in educational institutions. This approach is descriptive-analytical in nature and aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the strategies, challenges and opportunities in using social media for public relations needs in the world of education. Literature study is an effective method for identifying trends and gaps in existing research, as well as building a theoretical basis for further research (Xiao & Watson, 2019).

Data sources in this research include scientific journal articles, academic books, research reports, and relevant official publications. This data was taken from various trusted academic databases such as Google Scholar, ProQuest, And ResearchGate (Tranfield et al., 2003). Criteria for selecting literature include relevance to the topic, up-to-dateness (especially in the last five years), source credibility, and suitability of themes covering social media strategies, implementation challenges, and the effectiveness of social media in educational public relations (Jimin, 2023).

The data collection process began with identifying keywords such as "social media in education," "digital public relations," and "social media management in schools." Relevant literature is then selected based on abstract, content, and suitability to the research topic. The data obtained was analyzed using a thematic approach, including data reduction steps, data presentation based on themes and categories, and critical interpretation of findings to answer research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

It is hoped that the results of this research will be able to identify strategies for optimizing social media as a public relations tool in educational institutions, understand the challenges and opportunities for its implementation, and provide practical recommendations for increasing the effectiveness of social media in managing public relations. With this methodology, research is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to the management of public relations of educational institutions in the digital era.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Public relations in Islamic educational institutions can be defined as a systematic effort to build and maintain good relations between educational institutions and the community (Holifah & Mundiri, 2024). This includes conveying information, promoting activities, as well as managing the image of the institution so that it can be well received by the public. Public relations in Islamic educational institutions aims to create good relationships between educational institutions and various parties, including students, parents, the community and other stakeholders. (Zamroni et al., 2020).

Public relations acts as a communication bridge that enables two-way dialogue between educational institutions and the community. Effective communication is the key to creating understanding and trust between both parties. In the context of Islamic educational institutions, PR strategies include academic and non-academic promotional activities, managing information about student achievements, as well as community involvement in activities organized by the institution (Zamroni et al., 2020).

Public relations is tasked with building effective communication between the internal public (teachers, staff, students) and the external public (parents, community,

government), ensuring that information and institutional policies are conveyed well. The Public Relations management process includes planning, implementing, controlling and evaluating programs that focus on social interaction and maximizing the potential of institutional resources. Public relations plays a role in forming positive public opinion through precise, accurate and responsive communication to people's aspirations (Pramungkas, 2020).

The strategy for using social media in public relations management in educational institutions has developed along with the rapid development of technology. An effective strategy involves in-depth analysis of audience behavior, especially parents and prospective students, to understand the right social media platforms to reach the target audience (Nurcahya et al., 2024). Educational institutions can take advantage of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, And Twitter to disseminate information that builds a positive image, as well as promoting academic and non-academic activities. Promotion via social media helps educational institutions to convey information about their activities, achievements and programs effectively. This shows that optimal use of social media can increase the public's positive perception of educational institutions, which in turn can increase the credibility and reputation of these institutions (Falah & Setiawan, 2022).

The use of social media such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube to increase the visibility of Islamic educational institutions is a strategic step to strengthen the image of the institution in the eyes of the public. Facebook, for example, allows institutions to build two-way communication through posts featuring school activities, student achievements, superior programs, or testimonials from alumni and parents. This not only creates a positive image but also builds public trust. Meanwhile, Instagram, with its focus on visual content, can be used to show interesting learning activities, school facilities or extra-curricular programs. Consistent and aesthetic content will help strengthen the institution's branding. On the other hand, YouTube allows institutions to create profile videos, documentation of major events, or even interactive learning materials that are able to convey deeper messages while demonstrating the Islamic values being taught (Kurnia & Nasution, 2024).

Social media is also an effective tool for attracting the attention of prospective students and parents. Through paid advertising (paid ads) or organic marketing, agencies can target audiences based on location, interests, or specific criteria. Social media allows wide dissemination of information, such as enrollment programs, scholarships or open days (open house). Interactive features like "story" And "live" on Instagram and Facebook can also be used to provide direct experience to prospective students and parents about the school atmosphere and activities (Respati et al., 2023). Apart from attracting attention, social media also supports direct interaction with the community. By answering questions in the comments column or via direct messages, institutions can strengthen relationships with the community. Live question and answer sessions are an effective means of explaining the institution's vision and mission, while community groups on platforms such as Facebook provide a space for discussion between parents and teachers. This creates closer communication and encourages active community involvement in supporting institutional activities (Falah & Setiawan, 2022). The existence of Islamic educational institutions on social media also helps expand the reach of da'wah and provide a positive influence. The content shared is not only in the form of promotions, but also spreads Islamic values through educational and inspirational posts. In this way, institutions can demonstrate commitment to education based on Islamic values and build an image as an institution that contributes to improving the morals of society (Wiranti et al., 2023).

On the other hand, social media offers a cost-effective promotional solution compared to traditional methods such as print or television advertising. This platform allows institutions to reach a wider audience without spending a large budget. In addition, the impact of promotions can be measured in real-time through analytical tools such as Facebook Insights or Instagram Insights, so that strategies can be optimized based on existing data (Nugraha & Irwansyah, 2022).

Transparency and credibility of institutions can also be increased through the use of social media. By consistently publishing activities, the public can see how the institution carries out its daily operations. Real examples such as uploading videos of classroom teaching or annual activity reports provide a clear picture of the quality and dedication of the institution, thereby increasing the trust of prospective students and parents in the Islamic educational institution. Through an integrated and professional strategy, social media is not only a promotional tool but also a forum for education and da'wah that is in line with Islamic values. With the right approach, Islamic educational institutions can utilize the potential of social media to increase visibility, attract public attention, and expand positive influence in this digital era (Saputra, 2024).

Optimizing social media as a public relations tool in educational institutions faces various challenges that need to be overcome for maximum results. One of the main challenges is the lack of competent human resources. Not all institutions have staff who understand professional social media management strategies, so social media is often only managed by teachers or staff without special training, which hinders optimal results. Apart from that, budget limitations are a significant obstacle, especially for Islamic educational institutions with limited funds. Effective social media management requires investment, both in quality content, analytical software, and paid advertising, so many institutions have to rely on organic strategies whose results are slower (Ayu, 2024).

Another challenge is maintaining consistency in content production. Institutions often have difficulty presenting content that is relevant, interesting and in line with their vision, especially when they lack creative ideas. Additionally, algorithm changes on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube often decrease the organic reach of content, so institutions must continually adapt to new strategies to stay relevant. Building interaction with the audience is also a challenge, because social media is not only about posting content, but also maintaining active communication. Lack of response to comments or messages from users can reduce audience engagement and trust (Sumarlan, 2022).

Educational institutions also need to face challenges in maintaining a positive image on social media. The risk of criticism or negative comments is always present, and online reputation management is important, especially when dealing with viral issues or public misunderstandings. In addition, the diverse audience segmentation, from students, parents, to the general public, means that institutions must develop a content strategy that can meet the needs of all segments without losing focus. As an Islamic educational institution, another challenge is ensuring that the content published is in line with Islamic values. Mistakes in conveying messages can cause controversy and damage the institution's reputation (Zen & Sitanggang, 2023).

To overcome these challenges, educational institutions need to allocate adequate resources for social media management, train staff professionally, and utilize the latest technology. A well-designed and consistent strategy, as well as attention to digital trends and ethics, will help Islamic educational institutions optimize social media as an effective public relations tool.

## **CONCLUSION**

Social media is a very important platform in supporting the role of public relations in educational institutions. Its use allows the delivery of information more widely, quickly and efficiently, while strengthening the institution's positive image in the eyes of the public. Through social media, institutions can build two-way communication with students, parents and the community, as well as promote educational activities in a more interactive and transparent manner. However, to optimize this potential, educational institutions must be able to overcome various challenges, such as limited competent human resources, consistent content production, and online reputation management. The right strategy, including staff training, audience understanding, and leveraging analytical technology, is the key to success. With a strategic and professional approach, optimizing social media can improve reputation, attract the interest of

prospective students, and strengthen relationships between educational institutions and stakeholders, thereby helping institutions adapt to communication needs in the digital era.

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