



## **THE ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS MANAGEMENT IN BUILDING THE REPUTATION OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN THE DIGITAL ERA (CASE STUDY AT ULUL ALBAB ISLAMIC EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION)**

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### **Abstract :**

In the rapidly developing digital era, the role of public relations in educational institutions has become very strategic, especially in building and maintaining a positive reputation on an ongoing basis. This research focuses on the role of public relations management at the Ulul Albab Islamic Education Foundation in building a positive image in the digital era. As an educational institution based on Islamic values, this foundation is responsible for producing a generation with knowledge and morals, while maintaining good relations with stakeholders such as students, parents, alumni and the community. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to analyze the strategies, challenges and effectiveness of public relations programs in conveying positive messages and strengthening public trust. The research results show that effective public relations management can introduce the foundation's superior programs and values through appropriate communication, while managing the challenges of the digital era such as the flow of information on social media which quickly influences public opinion. By utilizing technology and digital communication strategies, public relations is expected to be able to expand the reach of communication, improve the positive image of the foundation, and create better relationships with various parties. This research provides an overview of the strategic steps that have been taken by the Ulul Albab Islamic Education Foundation to maintain its reputation amidst the changing dynamics of digital communication.

**Keyword :** *Role, Public Relations Management, Reputation, Institutions, Digital Era*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the digital era which continues to develop rapidly, the role of public relations in educational institutions is increasingly important, especially in building a positive and sustainable reputation. The Ulul Albab Islamic Education Foundation, as an educational institution based on Islamic values, has a responsibility not only to produce a knowledgeable and moral generation, but also to maintain a positive image in the eyes of society. Along with the increasing use of technology and social media, the role of public relations in educational foundations has become more strategic in expanding the reach of communication and strengthening

relationships with various stakeholders, including students, parents, alumni and the general public.

Effective public relations management in educational institutions such as the Ulul Albab Islamic Education Foundation can be the key to introducing superior programs and the values espoused by the foundation. Through appropriate communication strategies, public relations can convey positive messages and widely relevant information, thereby building the foundation's image as an institution that not only focuses on academic aspects, but also on fostering Islamic character. On the other hand, the digital era also brings its own challenges for public relations in maintaining reputation, especially because information disseminated on social media can quickly influence public opinion, both positively and negatively.

This research aims to analyze the role of public relations management at the Ulul Albab Islamic Education Foundation in building and maintaining the reputation of this educational institution in the digital era. By utilizing the right technology and digital strategies, public relations is expected to be able to improve the positive image of the foundation, strengthen public trust, and create better relationships with all parties involved. This analysis is also expected to provide a clear picture of the steps taken by foundations in managing their reputation amidst changing communication dynamics in the digital era.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to analyze in depth the role of public relations management at the Ulul Albab Islamic Education Foundation in building the reputation of educational institutions in the digital era. Qualitative methods were chosen to gain a comprehensive understanding of the strategies, challenges and effectiveness of the foundation's public relations program in forming a positive image in the eyes of the public.

Research subjects include the Ulul Albab Islamic Education Foundation's public relations team, foundation leaders, teachers, students, and parents or guardians of students who are deemed to have views and experiences relevant to the research topic. The selection of informants was carried out purposively, taking into account the parties who played a role and were directly involved in the foundation's public relations activities.

Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies. In-depth interviews were conducted to obtain information about the role, strategies and obstacles faced by the public relations team in building the foundation's reputation in the digital era. Participatory observation was carried out to see directly the public relations activities at the foundation, especially in the use of digital and social media. Documentation studies are used to analyze communication materials published by foundations, such as posts on social media, digital publications and public relations reports.

The data obtained was analyzed descriptively, using thematic analysis techniques. Each data collected is identified, classified and categorized based on main themes relevant to the role of public relations management in building a foundation's reputation. It is hoped that the

results of this analysis will provide in-depth insight into the strategic role of public relations at the Ulul Albab Islamic Education Foundation in managing the image of educational institutions in the digital era.

## **RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **a) The Strategic Role of Public Relations Management**

Public relations management (public relations) in educational institutions has a very strategic role in supporting the achievement of the institution's vision, mission and goals. In the modern era, public relations not only functions as a conveyor of information, but also as a reputation manager, conflict mediator, and driver of community participation (Pratiwi 2015). Public relations management acts as a strategic information manager who ensures that the foundation is able to:

Communicate the vision, mission and values of the institution. Public Relations (Public Relations) in educational institutions has a strategic role in ensuring that the vision, mission and core values of the institution are clearly conveyed and accepted by all stakeholders, both internal and external (Mujib and Saptiningsih 2021). In the context of the Ulul Albab Islamic Education Institution, the Public Relations that has been formed in an effort to embody the vision and mission of the Institution has been conveyed systematically through several steps that have been taken by the Institution. Through a short interview with the chairman of the Foundation, he conveyed concrete steps to convey the vision and mission externally to the guardians of the students, and the community in general through the role of public relations to the maximum. Among the things carried out by public relations at the Ulul Albab Islamic Education Foundation is making banners and brochures. which are made every year, installing billboards that include the Foundation's vision and mission, making news or videos about student activities that reflect the Foundation's vision and mission and every time there are activities carried out by the Ulul Albab Islamic Education Institute, they always provide information to the guardians. students about their vision and mission. Apart from that, as comparative data, we also conducted interviews with several santri guardians regarding the Foundation's vision and mission and how it is implemented. In general, they understand it, by giving positive responses, this is proven by the output of their children as memorizers of the Koran, understanding several salaf books. and, this is in accordance with the vision and mission of the Institute.

Manage crisis communications. A communication crisis is a situation where a problem or issue occurs that can threaten the reputation, trust or image of an educational institution in the eyes of the public. In this context, public relations (Public Relations) plays a strategic role in managing crisis situations, mitigating their impact, and restoring public trust (Yulista 2019). In his book *Crisis Communications: A Casebook Approach*, Fearn-Banks states that crisis communication is one of the vital functions of public relations. Some of the key roles of public relations according to Fearn-Banks are: Building trust: Public relations must provide correct and relevant information to maintain public trust in educational institutions,

Reduce escalation of issues: With fast and effective communication, public relations can prevent issues from developing into larger crises ,  
Creating contingency plans: Educational institutions must have crisis management plans designed by public relations to deal with various scenarios(Fearn-Banks 2016).

Based on our interview with the public relations coordinator of the Ulul Albab Islamic Education Institute, regarding the management of public relations in the context of communication crisis management, Ahmad Khoirul as the coordinator said that the complexity of the problems he faced, which put the good name of the Islamic boarding school or institution at stake, for example, there were problems involving the students in forms of disputes or other violations, and public relations efforts at the institution in order to manage these problems are in a consistent manner, conducting outreach to the guardians of students at each new student admission, providing facilities and infrastructure for complaints for santri guardians and creating a WhatsApp group for santri guardians.

#### **b) Challenges in the Digital Era**

The digital era has brought significant changes in the way information is delivered and received. With the rapid development of information technology, public relations faces various challenges in managing communications, building a positive image, and establishing relationships with the public. The main challenges include increasing expectations of transparency and responsiveness, changes in people's information consumption patterns which are more inclined towards digital media, as well as the risk of spreading misinformation or hoaxes (Septiyani et al. 2024). According to James E. Grunig, one of the pioneers of modern public relations theory, the main challenge in the digital era is managing communication with increasingly diverse audiences. Public relations must understand the needs and preferences of each audience segment, and create relevant and consistent messages across various platforms (Kriyantono 2017).

From the results of observations and interviews we conducted with the public relations coordinator (Ahmad Khorul) and several of his members, we found several challenges faced by public relations management at the Ulul Albab Islamic Education Foundation, including:

Rapid dissemination of information. With the existence of social media, online news platforms, and instant communication applications, information can be spread widely in just seconds. This has a major impact on how public relations manages communications and an organization's reputation. Relevant or controversial information often goes viral in a short time, requiring public relations to react quickly. A slow response can make the situation worse, especially in a crisis context. For example, failure to provide clarification on circulating issues can result in widespread speculation and misunderstanding, as in several cases faced by the public relations officer of the Ulul Albab Islamic Education Foundation, several services at the institution which in quotation marks were unsatisfactory, were made status by several trustees. students. So the steps taken by public relations as a preventive effort are monitoring

social media, forming a crisis team that is ready to respond with a mature strategy, providing accurate and clear information to prevent the spread of wrong information, and providing education to the public, especially parents of students/students. about the importance of verifying information before sharing it.

Public expectations for transparency and rapid response in educational institutions are both challenges and opportunities. Institutions that are able to meet these expectations will build strong trust with the public and strengthen their positive image. However, to achieve this, collaborative efforts are needed between technology, management and policies oriented towards openness and accountability. James E. Grunig, a pioneer of public relations theory, emphasized that transparency is a key element in organizational communication. According to him, the public who feel they receive honest and open information from educational institutions tend to have a higher level of trust. Grunig also notes that transparency does not only mean providing information, but also ensuring that the information is relevant, accurate, and accessible (Mallappiang and Muharram 2023). David Meerman Scott, digital strategy expert, explains that fast response is an inevitable demand in the digital era. In the context of educational institutions, Scott highlighted that audiences, such as parents and students, want direct communication via social media or digital platforms. Slow responses can create the impression of a lack of competence or caring (Erwin et al. 2023). In this context, concrete steps taken by the Ulul Albab Islamic Education Institute's public relations team include: Creating and maintaining an official institutional portal that provides the latest information, such as updated policies, programs, schedules and financial reports on the website, Managing official accounts on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter to deliver announcements quickly and interact with audiences directly, Using applications such as WhatsApp or educational management platforms (e.g., Google Classroom or Edmodo) to provide real-time information to students and parents., Form special team who are ready to respond to public questions or issues, especially in emergency or crisis situations, Anticipate issues that may arise by conveying facts or clarifications early before rumors spread, and Holding open meetings or webinars involving parents, students and other stakeholders to discuss important issue.

### **c) Public Relations Management Strategy in Building Reputation**

Edelman, CEO of the Edelman Trust Barometer, highlights that building trust is at the core of reputation strategy. For educational institutions, this means providing transparent information, upholding integrity in financial and academic management, and maintaining openness in the face of criticism or controversial issues. According to him, public trust is the most valuable reputation capital (Sarinastiti 2015). Solis believes that in the digital era, the reputation of educational institutions is greatly influenced by their digital footprint. Public relations must ensure that the institution has a positive image on social media, online reviews, and other platforms. This strategy involves consistent content management, engaging storytelling, and

professional management of public response. In their book *Effective Public Relations*, they emphasize that public relations functions as a gatekeeper of information. A successful public relations strategy must ensure that the agency's message is delivered clearly, consistently, and in line with the organization's core values. This is important to build a positive public perception of educational institutions (Reddi 2019).

Untuk menghadapi tantangan tersebut, berikut adalah strategi yang dapat diterapkan oleh Lembaga Pendidikan Islam Ulul Albab : Optimalisasi Media Sosial: Menggunakan platform seperti Instagram, Facebook, dan YouTube untuk menyebarkan informasi tentang program, kegiatan, dan prestasi yayasan. Konten yang menarik, seperti video pendek, testimoni siswa, dan ulasan kegiatan, dapat meningkatkan keterlibatan masyarakat, Peningkatan Branding Digital artinya Membuat website resmi yayasan yang informatif dan user-friendly sebagai pusat informasi utama. Dan Meningkatkan kemampuan tim humas Lembaga Pendidikan Islam Ulul Albab dalam memanfaatkan teknologi digital dan platform komunikasi modern.

#### **d) Positive Impact of Effective Public Relations Management**

Effective public relations management in Islamic educational institutions such as Ulul Albab contributes greatly to increasing public trust. With a communication strategy that is transparent, consistent, and based on Islamic values, institutions not only build a good reputation but also create strong relationships with the community. The impact is widespread, from increasing participation to strengthening missionary da'wah and religion-based education. With an effective public relations strategy, institutions can convey information related to policies, programs and operational activities in a transparent manner. This helps the public understand how the institution works, including use of funds, sustainability of educational programs, and performance evaluation. When the public feels they are given access to sufficient information, they tend to have more confidence in the credibility of the Institution. From the results of interviews we conducted with Foundation administrators, teachers, the community and student parents, the steps taken by the public relations team have had a positive impact on the Institution, including: Public trust in the Ulul Albab Islamic Education Foundation continues to increase from year to year, this is proven. with the community's contribution to this institution being very significant, both materially and immaterially, especially the local community, even from the results of interviews conducted with the head of the Foundation, it was said that 50% of the development included self-help of the surrounding community, increasing new student enrollment, even from data obtained by students or Students at the Ulul Albab Islamic Education Institute come from all districts in the province of North Kalimantan. There are representatives, considering that geographically this institution is far from urban areas, this proves that the role of public relations in maximizing digital media is quite successful.

## **CONCLUSION**

Public relations management plays a strategic role in building and strengthening the reputation of the Ulul Albab Islamic Education

Foundation in the digital era. Through effective communication management, public relations can bridge the needs between institutions and the community, utilize digital technology to convey information transparently, and respond to issues quickly and accurately.

Planned and professional public relations helps institutions create a positive image, increase public trust, expand audience reach, and strengthen the mission of preaching Islamic-based education. With an adaptive approach to digital developments, the Ulul Albab Islamic Education Foundation can build strong relationships with students, parents and the wider community, so that it is able to maintain its relevance and excellence amidst global competition.

Ultimately, effective public relations not only supports the sustainability of educational institutions but also strengthens their role as institutions that uphold Islamic values and provide a positive impact on society.

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