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VIRTUAL SCHOOL TOURS AS VISUAL TRANSPARENCY: A FRAMEWORK FOR ACCOUNTABILITY AND STAKEHOLDER TRUST

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Abstract : *The increasing demand for transparency and accountability in educational institutions has encouraged schools to adopt digital innovations to communicate information more openly to stakeholders. This study aims to analyse the meaning of virtual tours as a form of transparency and their role in strengthening institutional accountability and stakeholder trust. Employing a qualitative approach with a case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. Data were analysed through processes of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that virtual tours are perceived as a form of visual transparency that authentically represents school facilities and is easily accessible to the public. This transparency helps reduce information asymmetry, enhances perceptions of institutional honesty, and fosters trust among parents from the initial stage of engagement. Moreover, virtual tours help strengthen relationships between schools and stakeholders while encouraging improvements in internal facility governance. Thus, this study highlights that the strategic utilisation of digital technology serves as an effective instrument for promoting transparency, reinforcing accountability, and building sustainable stakeholder trust in educational management.*

Keywords : *Virtual Tour; School Transparency; Institutional Accountability; Community Trust.*

Abstrak : *Meningkatnya tuntutan akan transparansi dan akuntabilitas di lembaga pendidikan telah mendorong sekolah untuk mengadopsi inovasi digital guna menyampaikan informasi secara lebih terbuka kepada para pemangku kepentingan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis makna tur virtual sebagai bentuk transparansi serta perannya dalam memperkuat akuntabilitas institusi dan kepercayaan pemangku kepentingan. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Data dianalisis proses reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tur virtual dipersepsikan sebagai bentuk transparansi visual yang secara autentik merepresentasikan fasilitas sekolah dan mudah diakses oleh masyarakat. Transparansi ini membantu mengurangi asimetri informasi, meningkatkan persepsi kejujuran institusi, serta membangun kepercayaan orang tua sejak tahap awal keterlibatan. Di samping itu, tur virtual juga membantu memperkuat hubungan antara sekolah dan pemangku kepentingan serta mendorong perbaikan dalam pengelolaan fasilitas internal. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa pemanfaatan strategis teknologi digital merupakan instrumen yang efektif untuk mendorong transparansi, memperkuat akuntabilitas, dan membangun kepercayaan pemangku kepentingan yang berkelanjutan dalam pengelolaan pendidikan.*

Kata Kunci : *Tur Virtual; Transparansi Sekolah; Akuntabilitas Institusi; Kepercayaan Masyarakat.*

INTRODUCTION

The increasing demand for transparency and accountability in the management of educational institutions has become a critical issue in today's digitally connected society (Li & Zhang, 2025; Omar et al., 2024; Ramírez & Montero, 2024). Stakeholders including parents, prospective students, and the broader community no longer evaluate schools solely based on academic performance, but also on the openness of information, clarity of facilities, and professionalism of institutional governance. This shift is reinforced by rapid developments in digital technology, which enable information to be accessed quickly, visually, and interactively (Gordillo-Tenorio et al., 2023; Onyejelem & Aondover, 2024; Tan et al., 2025). Consequently, schools are increasingly required to adopt more transparent and communicative approaches to maintain public trust and institutional relevance.

Despite this growing demand, a specific problem persists in how schools communicate the actual condition of their facilities and learning environments. Information provided through brochures and official websites tends to be predominantly textual and often fails to represent real conditions comprehensively (Allbright et al., 2023; Hilton et al., 2024). This limitation creates a discrepancy between stakeholder expectations and perceived reality, which may lead to skepticism and declining trust. In competitive educational environments, particularly among private institutions, the inability to demonstrate credible transparency can directly affect stakeholders' decision-making processes and institutional reputation (Al-Thani, 2025; Karusala et al., 2024; Nadira et al, 2025).

In response to these challenges, schools have begun to utilize digital media as a communication tool. However, current practices largely reflect one-way communication models that emphasize information dissemination rather than interactive and experiential transparency (Hamzah et al, 2024). While digital platforms have improved accessibility, they do not necessarily guarantee the authenticity or completeness of information presented. As a result, stakeholders may still experience uncertainty regarding the actual conditions of school facilities, indicating that existing approaches have not fully addressed the need for meaningful transparency in educational contexts.

Previous studies have extensively examined school image, service quality, and parental trust as determinants of school choice (Debs et al., 2023; Evans, 2024; Nicholson, 2023), as well as the role of trust in sustaining institutional relationships (Budiarti et al., 2023; Carnawi et al., 2024). Other research highlights transparency as a foundational element of accountability and emphasizes the role of digital media in enhancing communication effectiveness. Nevertheless, these studies predominantly conceptualize transparency as administrative disclosure or rely on quantitative approaches that limit in-depth understanding of stakeholder perceptions (Guesmi et al., 2023; ŞAHiN et al., 2025). More importantly, existing literature has not adequately theorized visual and interactive transparency as a distinct mechanism of accountability, nor has it systematically examined

how such transparency shapes trust through experiential engagement. This indicates a clear academic gap that remains insufficiently explored.

Addressing this gap, the present study proposes a conceptual repositioning of virtual school tours as a form of visual transparency-based governance. Unlike prior studies that treat virtual tours primarily as promotional tools (Maluk Urigüen et al., 2025; Mousa & Arslan, 2023), this research conceptualizes them as an accountability mechanism that integrates three key constructs: visual transparency, institutional accountability, and stakeholder trust. This integrative perspective represents the novelty of the study, offering a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of how digital visualization practices can function as a governance instrument. By employing a qualitative case study approach, this research captures the lived experiences and interpretations of stakeholders, thereby providing deeper insights into the social processes underlying trust formation.

Based on the above arguments, this study aims to analyze how virtual school tours function as a strategy for enhancing institutional accountability and strengthening stakeholder trust. Specifically, it seeks to examine how visual representations of school facilities influence stakeholder perceptions of transparency, honesty, and professionalism. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically by advancing the discourse on transparency in educational management and practically by providing guidance for schools in designing more effective, trust-oriented communication strategies in the digital era.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design (Fahmi, 2024; Niam et al., 2024) . This design was chosen based on the research objective, which seeks to deeply understand the role of virtual school tours in building institutional transparency, accountability, and stakeholder trust. Case studies allow researchers to explore phenomena contextually and comprehensively in a real-world setting, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the interactions between school management practices, digital communication strategies, and perceptions of trust. This approach is relevant for exploring the meanings, processes, and subjective experiences of educational actors that cannot be adequately explained through quantitative approaches.

This research was conducted at Tunas Luhur High School. The location was chosen based on the consideration that the school has implemented virtual school tours as part of its transparency and communication strategy for the community and prospective students. This practice makes Tunas Luhur High School an appropriate empirical context to examine the relationship between facility visualization, institutional accountability, and the formation of stakeholder trust. Furthermore, the school demonstrates a commitment to digital-based innovation in educational management, thus providing rich and relevant data for the research focus.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation studies. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, with criteria including; 1) direct involvement in school management or communication processes, 2) experience interacting with or utilizing virtual school tours, and 3) relevance to the study's focus on transparency and accountability. This approach ensured that participants possessed sufficient knowledge and experience to provide meaningful insights. The informants consisted of school principals, vice principals, teachers, parents, and community representatives, each contributing different perspectives related to institutional transparency practices.

In-depth interviews were conducted to explore participants' perceptions, experiences, and evaluations regarding the use of virtual school tours as a transparency mechanism. Observations focused on the structure, content, and presentation of the virtual tours, particularly how schools visually represented their facilities, educational programs, and institutional identity. Documentation studies were carried out by examining official school documents, digital promotional materials, institutional reports, and communication archives related to transparency and accountability practices (Okoko et al., 2023; Salmona & Kaczynski, 2024). The combination of these techniques enabled data triangulation to enhance the credibility and validity of the findings.

Table 1: Characteristics of Research Informants

No	Informant Category	Code	Number	Role/Position	Relevance to Study
1	Principal	AA	1	School leader	Policy maker and decision-maker in transparency and institutional accountability
2	Vice Principal	MH	1	Facilities and infrastructure coordinator	Responsible for managing and presenting school facilities, including virtual tour content
3	Teachers	NF, AN, NN	3	Educators	Directly involved in school activities and institutional representation
4	Parents	MH, AS, etc.	4	Stakeholders/users	Evaluate transparency and form trust perceptions toward the school
5	Community Member	HN	1	External stakeholder	Provides broader public perspective on school transparency
Total			10		

Data analysis was conducted using an interactive and iterative model. The first stage involved data condensation, where raw data were reduced, selected, and focused based on relevance to the research objectives. The second stage involved data display, presenting data in the form of thematic narratives and categorical classifications to identify patterns and relationships between themes. The final stage involved conclusion drawing and verification, in which interpretations were continuously compared with the data and research context to ensure consistency, validity, and analytical rigor. This analytical process was conducted cyclically to strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings.

Data validity was maintained through triangulation of sources and techniques by comparing interview results, observations, and documentation. Member checking was conducted by confirming findings with key informants to ensure the researcher's interpretations align with the reality on the ground. Diligent observation and continuous researcher involvement in the research process were also implemented to increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the research results.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the thematic analysis of the data obtained, the findings reveal that virtual tours not only function as a medium for information delivery but also serve as a strategic instrument that shapes perceptions of openness, credibility, and institutional integrity in educational settings. These findings are organized into several main themes that reflect the dimensions of visual transparency, the reduction of information asymmetry, and the contribution of virtual tours in fostering stronger relationships between institutions and stakeholders. Thus, this section provides a comprehensive overview of the role of virtual tours within the context of accountable educational governance and public trust orientation.

1. Transparency of School Facilities through Virtual Tours

The research findings indicate that transparency of school facilities through virtual tours is interpreted as an institutional effort to present the physical condition of the school openly, visually, and easily accessible to stakeholders. At Tunas Luhur High School, virtual tours allow parents and the community to directly view classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and the school environment without having to be physically present. Based on initial observations, the researchers found that the facility visualizations were presented comprehensively and sequentially, thus providing a complete picture of the school's condition. This practice is not understood as a mere promotional strategy, but rather as a form of information transparency aimed at reducing the information gap between the school and the public.

Interviews with the principal reinforced these findings. The informant emphasized that visual presentations reflect real-world conditions so prospective parents

can obtain an objective picture from the outset. He stated that "*we want parents to see the school as it is,*" to avoid overly high expectations once students are accepted. The researcher's observations during the documentation process revealed that the school did not close off or avoid specific areas, but rather presented the facilities as they were. This demonstrates institutional awareness of the importance of visual honesty in building relationships with the public.

These findings were further supported by interviews with parents, who stated that the virtual tour helped them gain a concrete understanding of the school's conditions. One informant stated that the visualization of the facilities "*matched what we later saw in person*." Researchers interpreted this experience as evidence that visual transparency plays a role in reducing information uncertainty and building perceptions of the school's honesty from the initial stages of interaction.

2. Virtual Tours as a Practice of Institutional Accountability

In an operational context, virtual tours are positioned as a practice of institutional accountability in conveying information about educational facilities openly and verifiably by the public. At Tunas Luhur High School, facilities such as classrooms, laboratories, and the library are displayed as they are without excessive visual manipulation. During observations, researchers noted that the camera angles and visual quality were not directed at masking specific limitations, but rather at showcasing the school's actual condition.

Interviews with school principals indicate that honesty in presenting facilities is seen as part of the educational institution's moral responsibility. The informant emphasized that "*what is presented must reflect the actual conditions*" so that the public can assess the school objectively. This statement demonstrates an awareness that school facilities are not only internal assets but also objects of public scrutiny.

This finding is reinforced by an interview with the Vice Principal for Facilities and Infrastructure, who explained that visual documentation is regularly updated. According to him, "*visual updates are important to remain relevant to conditions on the ground*." Researchers interpret this practice as a paradigm shift in accountability, from a previously administrative and closed approach to more direct digital transparency. Observations of the school's official website indicate that virtual tour content is accessible without restrictions, reinforcing the virtual tour's function as an instrument of institutional accountability.

3. Building Stakeholder Trust through Visual Transparency

Visual transparency through virtual tours significantly contributes to building stakeholder trust. Researchers observed that facility visualizations provide an indirect

experience that allows parents and prospective guardians to form their own initial assessments. Learning spaces and supporting facilities are displayed in detail, allowing the public to visualize the learning environment more concretely.

Interviews with parents revealed that the virtual tours provided a sense of security and confidence in the quality of the learning environment. One informant stated that "*seeing the facilities made us more confident*," especially since the visualizations mirrored the actual school conditions. Researchers interpreted this finding as indicating that trust is not built solely through written claims, but rather grows from the congruence between visual representations and reality.

Prospective parents expressed similar sentiments, stating that virtual tours helped alleviate doubts during the school selection process. Visual access was considered very helpful, especially for those with limited time and distance. Researchers' observations showed that consistency between visual appearance and actual conditions on the ground strengthened a school's credibility. Thus, visual transparency plays a crucial role in building both rational and emotional trust.

4. Virtual Tour and Strengthening School Relations with Stakeholders

Strengthening school-stakeholder relations is defined as improving the quality of interaction and engagement between the school and the community. At Tunas Luhur High School, virtual tours serve as a communication tool that expands the school's reach. Based on observations of the school's digital media, researchers found that virtual tours were among the most accessed and engaged content by the public.

Interviews with senior teachers revealed that virtual tours helped reach parents who previously had limited access to in-person attendance. Informants stated that since the virtual tours were introduced, "*parents have found it easier to understand the school's conditions*," even though they cannot attend the school. Researchers interpret this finding as a form of expanding school relations mediated by digital technology.

These findings were reinforced by the school's public relations staff, who reported that publishing the virtual tour increased interaction through digital media. They stated that "*after the virtual tour was posted, public response increased*." Researchers' observations of the comments section and direct messages indicated more active two-way communication. This interaction reflects a more participatory, relational closeness between the school and stakeholders.

5. Managerial Implications of Virtual Tours on School Governance

Virtual tours have managerial implications for school governance, particularly in the management of educational facilities. During observations, researchers found that

some facilities were repaired and reorganized before the visual documentation process was undertaken. This indicates that virtual tours significantly impact school management practices.

Interviews with school principals indicate that publicly accessible facility visualization encourages management to improve standards of cleanliness, tidiness, and suitability for learning spaces. The informant stated that "*every displayed space reflects the school's image*," making facility management a strategic concern. This statement demonstrates that visual transparency creates an indirect mechanism of public control.

Interviews with the school management team also revealed that virtual tours are used as internal evaluation materials. Facility visualization helps management identify areas for improvement more objectively. Researchers interpret this practice as a form of managerial reflection based on visual evidence. Thus, virtual tours serve not only external purposes but also encourage the strengthening of more accountable school governance and a focus on quality educational services.

To provide a comprehensive overview of the overall research results, a summary of the sub-findings is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Phenomenological Analysis of the Use of Virtual Tours in Strengthening School Accountability

Sub-Findings	Key Data	Meaning
Transparency of School Facilities through Virtual Tours	Principal and Parent Interviews; Visual Observation of School Facilities	Virtual tours are defined as a practice of open information that presents the condition of school facilities in a realistic and easily accessible manner, thereby reducing the information gap between schools and the public.
Virtual Tours as a Practice of Institutional Accountability	Interview with the Principal and Deputy Principal for Facilities and Infrastructure; Observation of visual content updates	Virtual tours serve as a means of institutional accountability by allowing the public to directly assess and verify the condition of school facilities.
Building Stakeholder Trust through Visual Transparency	Interviews with Parents and Prospective Guardians; Observation of visual conformity and actual conditions	Visual transparency through virtual tours reduces information uncertainty and builds stakeholder trust in the school's honesty and credibility.
Virtual Tour and Strengthening School Relations	Interviews with Teachers and Public Relations Staff; Observations of Digital Interactions	Virtual tours expand the reach of communication and encourage more active two-way interactions, thereby strengthening participatory relationships between schools and stakeholders.

with Stakeholders		
Managerial Implications of Virtual Tours on School Governance	Interview with the Principal and Management Team; Observation of facility improvements	Virtual tours encourage managerial reflection and improved facility management standards, as well as strengthening more accountable and quality-oriented school governance.

Based on the table 1, it can be concluded that virtual tours not only function as an information medium, but also become a strategic instrument in building transparency, accountability, and stakeholder trust as well as strengthening school governance.

Overall, the research results show a consistent pattern across sub-findings, namely that virtual tours are utilized as an instrument of planned and ongoing transparency. The transparency of visually displayed facilities does not stand alone, but is connected to institutional accountability practices in the presentation of school information. This pattern is reinforced by the alignment between the virtual tour visualization and the factual conditions observed in the field, thus forming a perception of honesty and credibility in the eyes of parents. The trust built through visual transparency subsequently impacts the strengthening of school relations with stakeholders, as indicated by increased public understanding, interaction, and engagement. All of these findings are also interconnected with managerial implications, where visual transparency encourages schools to maintain facility quality more consistently as part of their institutional responsibility.

The findings of this study demonstrate that virtual school tours function as a strategic instrument of transparency, accountability, trust-building, stakeholder engagement, and internal governance improvement. Rather than merely serving as digital promotional media, virtual tours are interpreted by stakeholders as authentic representations of school conditions that enable independent evaluation. This indicates that visual transparency operates not only at the level of information access but also as a meaningful social practice that shapes perceptions and interactions between schools and stakeholders.

From an interpretative perspective, this study positions virtual tours as a form of visual transparency that transforms how information is communicated and validated. Unlike conventional transparency, which relies on textual or administrative disclosure, visual transparency allows stakeholders to directly "experience" institutional conditions through mediated visual representation. In this regard, the author departs from dominant perspectives that reduce transparency to information availability, and instead argues that transparency must be understood as an experiential and interpretive process. This

interpretation emphasizes that meaning is constructed through the interaction between visual representation and stakeholder perception, thereby redefining transparency as an active rather than passive process.

This position both aligns with and extends previous studies that highlight the importance of openness in reducing information asymmetry and strengthening trust (Greene et al., 2023; Huang & Chueh, 2023; Xu, 2025). While prior research acknowledges the role of digital media in facilitating transparency, it largely conceptualizes transparency as one-way communication or administrative disclosure (Abdullah, 2025). This study critically argues that such perspectives are insufficient to explain how trust is formed in contemporary digital contexts. By demonstrating that stakeholders interpret visual representations as indicators of honesty and professionalism, this research advances the theoretical linkage between transparency and trust formation, particularly by emphasizing the role of visual congruence between representation and reality.

The novelty of this study lies in proposing an integrative framework that connects visual transparency, institutional accountability, and stakeholder trust within educational management. In contrast to earlier studies that treat virtual tours primarily as marketing tools (Maluk Urigüen et al., 2025; Mousa & Arslan, 2023), this research explicitly positions them as a governance mechanism that reflects institutional responsibility. Furthermore, the study introduces the concept of visual accountability, where institutions are not only accountable through written reports but also through publicly accessible visual evidence. This conceptual contribution offers an alternative perspective within the theoretical landscape of educational governance by shifting the focus from procedural accountability to experiential accountability.

The implications of these findings are both theoretical and practical, with broader relevance in the global context of digitalized education systems. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of transparency and accountability discourse by incorporating visual and experiential dimensions into educational management theory. Practically, it suggests that schools should strategically design virtual tours as part of their communication and governance systems, ensuring alignment between visual representation and actual conditions. At a global level, these findings are particularly relevant as educational institutions worldwide face increasing demands for openness, credibility, and digital engagement (Baruah, 2025; Romeo, 2024; Wang et al., 2024; Zhang & Wu, 2024). Thus, virtual tours can be understood as a scalable and adaptive tool for strengthening institutional legitimacy in diverse educational contexts.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged as part of its academic contribution. First, the research is limited to a single case study, which may affect the generalizability of the findings across different institutional and cultural contexts. Second, the focus on qualitative data emphasizes depth of understanding but does not

measure the extent of influence quantitatively. Third, the study primarily captures stakeholder perceptions at a specific point in time, without examining long-term impacts of virtual transparency practices. These limitations open opportunities for future research to test the proposed conceptual framework in broader settings, employ mixed-method approaches, and explore longitudinal effects. By situating these limitations as directions for further inquiry, this study reinforces its position as an evolving contribution to the discourse on transparency, accountability, and trust in educational management.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study confirm that virtual school tours function not merely as technological or promotional tools, but as a strategic mechanism of visual transparency that directly contributes to strengthening institutional accountability and stakeholder trust. By enabling stakeholders to access realistic and verifiable representations of school facilities, virtual tours reduce information asymmetry and foster perceptions of honesty and professionalism. This study thus achieves its objective by demonstrating that transparency, when delivered through visual and interactive media, becomes more meaningful, experiential, and influential in shaping stakeholder trust. The key contribution of this research lies in advancing the concept of visual transparency as a form of accountability practice, which integrates openness, verification, and stakeholder engagement into a single governance framework within educational management.

The novelty of this study is reflected in its conceptual positioning of virtual tours as part of visual-based accountability, extending beyond conventional administrative transparency toward an experiential and trust-oriented approach. Theoretically, this research enriches the discourse on educational management by linking visual transparency, accountability, and trust into an integrated perspective. Practically, it provides guidance for educational institutions to strategically design digital communication that is authentic, consistent, and sustainable in order to strengthen public trust. However, this study is limited to a single case context and focuses on stakeholder perceptions, which may restrict broader generalization and long-term impact analysis. Therefore, future research is recommended to expand the scope across multiple institutions, apply mixed-method approaches, and examine the longitudinal effects of visual transparency on institutional performance and stakeholder trust, thereby reinforcing and extending the academic contribution of this study.

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