

The Role of Public Relations Strategies in Strengthening Islamic Primary School Reputation

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine in depth how public relations strategies at SD Muhammadiyah Blunyah are implemented in building image, fostering trust, and strengthening the school's reputation as an Islamic educational institution. This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the public relations strategies of SD Muhammadiyah Blunyah in building the school's image, trust, and reputation. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, documentation, and literature studies, then analyzed thematically with source triangulation to ensure validity. The results of the study indicate that the school's public relations strategies include improving the quality of educational services, such as Tahfidz classes and bilingual programs, as well as being active in social media publications with an agenda-setting approach and dialogic communication. Involvement in community-based public relations-based social activities also strengthens the image and trust of the community. The positive image that is formed has an impact on increasing parental trust, which is influenced by direct experience, interpersonal communication, and institutional content. The school's reputation has also increased, as seen from the growth in the number of registrations and the involvement of alumni and the community. However, challenges such as limited human resources and less structured public evaluation still need to be overcome. Research confirms that human strategies that integrate Islamic values and digital engagement are the key to successfully building a school's reputation and competitiveness in the modern era.

Keywords: parental trust, public relations strategy, reputation of Islamic education, school image,



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INTRODUCTION

The current developments in globalization and digitalization present increasingly diverse and dynamic challenges for educational institutions, particularly Islamic-based schools. The rapid flow of information, evolving societal expectations, and intensified competition among educational institutions demand that schools not only excel academically but also

effectively build a positive public image [1]. Society today is more critical in selecting educational institutions, considering various aspects ranging from the quality of learning, graduate character, to the institution's public image [2]. Therefore, the role of public relations becomes highly strategic and vital in bridging communication between the school and the community, whether in conveying achievements, vision and mission, or the values upheld by the school.

Public relations strategies are no longer viewed as mere complements to school management but have become integral in shaping public perception of the identity and credibility of educational institutions [3]. In the context of Islamic schools, a positive image is not only measured by academic achievements but also by how Islamic values, character building, and social concerns are displayed and implemented within the school environment [4]. Effective public relations must be able to represent the institution's entire identity, consistently deliver messages through various communication channels, and adapt to changing digital communication trends and the evolving needs of society [5], [6].

SD Muhammadiyah Blunyah, as one of the Islamic schools in its region, demonstrates an interesting dynamic in building its image and public trust. Amid intense competition among Islamic and general educational institutions, the school strives to maintain its identity as an institution that integrates Islamic values into the educational process. With flagship programs such as the Tahfidz Al-Qur'an class, character-based learning, and other supporting activities, SD Muhammadiyah Blunyah offers strong differentiation in the eyes of parents and the community. The role of public relations is crucial in packaging, promoting, and sustaining this positive image, especially in the digital communication era that demands speed and accuracy of information.

The utilization of social media by SD Muhammadiyah Blunyah forms an essential part of its public relations strategy. Social media serves as a medium for disseminating information about activities, documenting student achievements, and building open, two-way communication with parents and the wider community [7]. Moreover, the school actively organizes social-religious activities such as "Jumat Berkah," support for orphans, and Islamic holiday commemorations, which directly involve community participation. This strategy aligns with a community-based public relations approach that emphasizes emotional closeness between the institution and its community. Through active involvement, the school successfully builds the perception that it not only educates formally but also participates socially and spiritually within the community.

The consistently built image through various activities and public communications positively impacts the level of community trust [8]. Parents tend to feel more reassured and confident entrusting their children to schools that show concern for moral development, safety, and student comfort [9]. This trust then becomes a critical foundation in building the school's long-term reputation. A strong reputation increases parental loyalty, enhances the school's appeal amid competition, and provides stability in enrollment numbers and community support [10], [11]. In this regard, public relations not only disseminate information but also act as guardians of the institution's identity and managers of public perception towards the school.

However, in its implementation, public relations strategies at schools such as SD Muhammadiyah Blunyah face several challenges. Common issues include limited human resources with expertise in public communication and digital media, lack of structured content planning, and suboptimal evaluation of the effectiveness of public relations messages [12]. When communication is inconsistent or unresponsive to emerging issues, it can result in a decline in public trust. Therefore, the success of public relations strategies heavily depends on the school's ability to conduct strategic planning, provide training for the public relations team, and use technology wisely and purposefully [13].

Based on the above description, this study aims to thoroughly examine how public relations strategies are implemented at SD Muhammadiyah Blunyah to build image, foster trust, and strengthen the reputation of the school as an Islamic educational institution. This research holds high relevance in the context of modern Islamic education management development that focuses not only on curriculum and teaching methods but also on strategic communication skills that shape public perception. It is expected that the findings will provide both theoretical and practical contributions for other Islamic schools in designing effective, adaptive public relations strategies grounded in Islamic values.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the public relations strategies implemented by SD Muhammadiyah Blunyah in building the school's image, trust, and reputation, focusing on communication processes, social interactions, and stakeholder experiences. This case study involves the public relations team, teachers, the principal, parents, as well as alumni and community members, with purposive sampling used to ensure the data obtained is relevant and comprehensive. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation of school activities and social media interactions, documentation of promotional materials and internal reports, as well as literature review and secondary data to enrich the analysis [14]. Data analysis was conducted thematically using an inductive approach, including data organization, reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing, supplemented by source triangulation to enhance the validity of findings. Ethical considerations were observed by obtaining necessary permissions, maintaining informant confidentiality, and applying privacy principles and parental consent in managing digital data, consistent with ethical digital public relations practices in schools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Public Relations Strategy in Building School Image

The findings show that SD Muhammadiyah Blunyah implements several public relations strategies to establish and maintain a positive school image. Interview data with school management indicated that the school prioritizes the improvement of educational services through flagship programs, including Tahfidz, bilingual learning, and academic and non-academic competitions. School administrators explained that these programs are communicated to parents and the wider community as part of the school's educational identity. Interviews with parents also indicated that educational experiences influence their perceptions of the school. One parent reported that after attending the school, their child had become more confident and had memorized a considerable number of Qur'anic verses. This testimony indicates that parents recognize both academic and religious outcomes as important aspects of the school's educational service.

Observation data further showed that the school actively communicates its programs and achievements through digital platforms. School social media accounts, particularly Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, are used to publish information about student achievements, school activities, religious programs, competitions, and other institutional activities. The observed content demonstrates that the school does not limit its communication to academic achievements but also presents religious, character-building, and community-oriented activities. Documentation in the form of social media publications, photographs, and activity records confirms the consistency of these communication activities. The school also conducts community-oriented programs, including *Jumat Berkah*, *Jumat Berbagi*, and *Berbagi Takjil*. Observations and activity documentation indicate that these programs involve students, teachers, parents, and members of the surrounding community.

The findings also indicate that the school pays attention to ethical aspects of digital communication. Interviews with school personnel indicated that publication of students' activities is conducted with consideration of privacy and parental consent. Student identities are managed carefully when photographs or other materials are published through digital platforms. In addition, school personnel reported that criticism or negative responses on social media are addressed through communication rather than confrontation. These findings demonstrate that the school's public relations activities consist of educational service delivery, digital communication, community engagement, and ethical management of institutional information.

The Influence of School Image on Parental Trust

The findings indicate that parents' trust in SD Muhammadiyah Blunyah is developed through both direct and indirect experiences. Interview data from parents show that direct experience with their children's learning and behavior constitutes an important basis for trust. Parents referred to their children's academic development, religious practices, discipline, confidence, and experiences within the school environment when explaining their reasons for trusting the institution. Other sources of information include testimonials from other parents, social media content, community networks, and information about student achievements.

Interview findings further indicate that academic and non-academic achievements contribute to parents' perceptions of school quality. Parents mentioned achievements in areas such as olympiads, Tahfidz competitions, and sports as visible indicators of student development. At the same time, parents emphasized the importance of a religious, disciplined, and safe learning environment. Some parents expressed a sense of reassurance when their children were supervised in an environment that emphasized religious and moral values. These findings suggest that parental trust is not formed solely from promotional communication but from the interaction between information received from the school and parents' direct experiences.

Observation and documentation findings support the interview data. School activities documented through social media and institutional records demonstrate that the school consistently communicates academic achievements, religious activities, student development, and community programs. These forms of communication provide parents and prospective parents with information about the school's activities beyond routine classroom instruction. Thus, the evidence indicates that school image is constructed through a combination of educational experience, institutional communication, student achievements, and community interaction.

Impact of Image on School Reputation

The findings indicate that the positive school image is associated with several indicators of institutional reputation. According to school administrative records, the number of prospective students applying to the school has shown an increasing trend during the three-year period covered by the school's internal records. The specific annual figures should be presented in a table based on the school's official admission records, for example, the number of applicants, accepted students, and students who finally enrolled. This institutional evidence is important because it provides a more direct basis for assessing changes in public interest than relying solely on perceptions expressed by participants.

Interview data also indicate that alumni, parents, and community members participate in school activities as donors, volunteers, or activity partners. School personnel described this involvement as evidence of continued community support, while documentation of school activities confirms the participation of external stakeholders in selected programs. Parents and

alumni also contribute to the dissemination of information about the school through personal networks. These findings indicate that the school's reputation is reflected not only in prospective student interest but also in stakeholder participation and continued institutional relationships.

Nevertheless, the qualitative data do not establish a direct causal relationship between the school's public relations activities and the increase in student applications. Rather, the findings indicate an association between the school's image-building activities, positive parental perceptions, stakeholder involvement, and increased public interest. A stronger claim regarding the influence of image on enrollment would require systematic comparison of admission statistics across several years together with evidence identifying the reasons parents selected the school.

Challenges in Public Relations Strategy

The findings reveal several challenges in implementing the school's public relations strategy. Interviews with school personnel identified limited human resources with specialized competencies in public relations, digital communication, and digital marketing. School personnel explained that social media management is often conducted alongside other educational and administrative responsibilities. This condition affects the frequency and consistency of content production, particularly during periods when school activities are relatively limited. Interview participants also indicated that the school does not yet have a fully structured mechanism for periodically measuring public perceptions of its communication and institutional image.

Observation of the school's digital communication further indicates variation in the frequency and intensity of social media content. Although the school actively publishes important programs and achievements, content production is not always consistent across periods. The available documentation also shows that communication activities are largely focused on informing the public about ongoing activities rather than systematically collecting and analysing audience responses. These findings indicate that the school's public relations practice remains strongly activity-oriented and has not yet been fully supported by systematic evaluation of communication outcomes.

The challenges identified in the interviews and observations suggest that strengthening the capacity of personnel is necessary. Training in digital content management, public relations planning, audience analysis, and communication evaluation could support a more systematic approach. In addition, the school could establish indicators for evaluating social media engagement, parental perceptions, community responses, and the effectiveness of promotional communication. Such measures would allow the school to move from predominantly reactive communication toward a more planned and evidence-based public relations strategy.

Discussion

The public relations strategy implemented by SD Muhammadiyah Blunyah reflects a comprehensive understanding of the importance of institutional image in building public trust. By prioritizing flagship programs such as the Tahfidz class, bilingual program, and academic and non-academic competitions, the school not only demonstrates the quality of its educational services but also practices the principle of customer satisfaction as described by Kotler and Fox [15]. This approach is further supported by active and structured use of social media, enabling the school to manage the public narrative through the application of agenda-setting theory [16]. This illustrates how a systematic public relations strategy can strengthen the school's position as a responsive and trustworthy institution.

The engagement strategy in social activities, such as “Jumat Berkah” and “Berbagi Takjil”, reinforces the implementation of community-based public relations [17], [18]. The school’s image is built not only on academic achievements but also on tangible contributions to the community. This aligns with findings by Firdaus et al. [19] and Adiyono et al. [20], who emphasizes the importance of digital citizenship and ethical practices in managing digital media within Islamic educational institutions. By applying principles of ethical publication and open communication, SD Muhammadiyah Blunyah has created meaningful two-way communication with the public, as described by Grunig and Hunt [21] in the concept of dialogic communication.

Parental trust in the school is not formed instantaneously but through the accumulation of information from various channels, both direct and indirect. The two-step flow of communication model by Al-Olaqi [22] and Musullulu [23] is highly relevant in this context, as the influence of fellow parents or community leaders significantly impacts educational decisions. The school’s reputation for academic excellence and a religious environment serves as a primary attraction [24], [25]. This strengthens the argument that positive perceptions of the school can drive strategic family decisions when choosing educational institutions for their children.

A strong image has also been shown to directly impact the school’s long-term reputation. The increase in new student enrollment over the past three years indicates that the image has become an effective marketing tool [26], [27]. This is supported by the involvement of alumni and the community, who serve not only as passive supporters but also as active participants in various school activities as donors and partners. In line with Rahmawati [28] and Hasanudin et al. [29] findings, reputation is a critical strategic asset in maintaining the competitiveness of educational institutions, especially amid rising inter-school competition.

Nevertheless, challenges remain. Some of the obstacles faced by SD Muhammadiyah Blunyah include limited human resources trained in public relations, inconsistency in social media content during low-activity periods, and insufficient evaluation of public perception. These findings are consistent with Saharani et al. [30] and Johar et al. [31], who indicate that many Islamic schools have yet to optimize social media use effectively. Therefore, strengthening the capacity of the public relations team, providing digital training, and implementing monitoring and evaluation systems for public perception are urgent priorities to ensure the communication strategy remains relevant and impactful.

CONCLUSION

The public relations strategy of SD Muhammadiyah Blunyah has successfully built a positive image that significantly impacts parental trust and the school’s long-term reputation. This approach, which combines high-quality educational services, strategic utilization of social media, active involvement in social activities, and the implementation of ethical communication based on Islamic values, enables the school to excel and adapt in the dynamics of the digital era. Consequently, public relations can no longer be regarded as a supplementary function but as a key element in the governance of educational institutions. Therefore, other schools, especially those based on Islamic principles, need to replicate a similar approach by strengthening human resource capacity, managing digital media professionally, and developing two-way communication that fosters trust and active public participation.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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