

# Strategic Public Relations Communication in Higher Education: The Case of Raden Fatah State Islamic University Palembang



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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Article history</b>  <i>Received: January 7, 2024</i>  <i>Revised: February 16, 2024</i>  <i>Accepted: April 5, 2024</i></p> <p><b>Keywords</b>  <i>public relations</i>  <i>communication strategy</i>  <i>higher education</i>  <i>media relations</i>  <i>crisis management</i></p> <p> DOI: <a href="https://doi.org/10.12928/channel.v12i1.648">10.12928/channel.v12i1.648</a></p>	<p>This study examines Raden Fatah State Islamic University Palembang's public relations (PR) communication strategies in establishing relationships with press agencies. The research highlights the challenges and opportunities faced by the university's PR department in navigating the rapidly evolving digital landscape. Utilizing a qualitative approach and case study methodology, the study explores the university's cooperative efforts with mass media outlets, focusing on internal and external stakeholders. Key findings indicate that effective PR strategies involve strategic communication, media engagement, and proactive crisis management. The study also identifies inhibiting factors, such as interest conflicts and coordination issues, alongside supportive factors like robust Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure and collaborative media partnerships. These insights provide a comprehensive understanding of the PR practices at Raden Fatah State Islamic University and offer actionable recommendations for enhancing institutional communication strategies.</p> <p>This is an open-access article under the <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/">CC-BY-SA</a> license</p> 

## INTRODUCTION

Individuals encounter evolving social conditions significantly influenced by technological advancements as society progresses. The term “disruptive” has gained prominence, underscoring pervasive changes and disruptions across all aspects of life. The rapid pace of change is evident, prompting many to exert significant effort to adapt (Kartikasari, 2017). The unique characteristics of this disruptive era are widely discussed across various groups. For instance, the ease of accessing data freely is a hallmark of this period, enabling unrestricted dissemination of information and eliminating any notion of secrecy (Asri, 2018). Life is increasingly integrated into the digital realm, allowing activities, work, and even living arrangements to be conducted online. This swift transformation is facilitated by technology, highlighting the profound impact of the digital age on daily life (Laksamana, 2018).

The influence of digital technology necessitates significant adaptations in everyday life, particularly within educational institutions that continuously scrutinize social media. These institutions must innovate and evolve to ensure efficient and impactful information delivery to the public (Mayangsari & Salim, 2021). Public relations departments within universities play a crucial role in this process. Public relations, a key area within Communication Science, has become increasingly vital and expansive (Dayanti et al., 2013). Effective communication is essential in public relations because the conveyance of ideas and meanings holds substantial importance (Heath, 2010). Public relations efforts aim to foster mutual understanding, acceptance, and positive collaboration between an agency and the public. This is achieved through strategic guidance and communication. Effective communication management in public relations is crucial for supporting and enhancing institutional activities, ensuring that goals are met, and strengthening relationships with the public (Mahfuzhah & Anshari, 2018).

Several online media outlets and the press constantly seek out errors and mistakes made by various parties to generate sensational news. For instance, [beritapagi.co.id](http://beritapagi.co.id) reported that the Chancellor of Raden Fatah State Islamic University was brought to the Ombudsman regarding issues related to single tuition fees (uang kuliah tunggal) (Oskandar, 2022). Additionally, [rmosulsel.id](http://rmosulsel.id) covered concerns about single tuition and the issue of cuts in single aid, drawing attention

from the South Sumatra Regional Legislative Council. In this report, politicians urged that these problems should not lead to Raden Fatah State Islamic University Palembang students dropping out due to unpaid tuition fees (Rosnita, 2022). Persistent negative news about the Chancellor and the University will inevitably tarnish the institution's reputation in the eyes of the public. Consequently, it is crucial to acknowledge the role of the University's public relations team in mitigating these adverse effects and actively working to restore and improve the University's image.

A well-crafted communication strategy is essential for achieving maximum impact in any communication effort. Public relations (PR) professionals can effectively analyze and implement responses by integrating all strategic components into a cohesive plan, including communicators, information, media channels, and audiences. This approach allows PR professionals to assess where information is delivered, anticipate potential impacts, and ensure that messages are appropriately targeted. Reviewing and refining communication strategies is crucial for PR professionals to execute their activities successfully and achieve desired outcomes (Cangara, 2014).

The literature review reveals significant insights into public relations communication strategies for establishing relationships with press agencies. Notably, the research by Permadi and Habibullah (2022), titled "BNN Public Relations Communication Strategy in Providing Information to the Public," highlights a critical gap in the current approach. Their findings demonstrate that BNN public relations must employ specific communication strategies when addressing public concerns about resolving cases involving state officials. This oversight underscores the need for a more structured and strategic communication framework to enhance the effectiveness of public relations efforts in engaging with the media and the public.

Research by Darmawaty and Winduwati (2022) demonstrates the effectiveness of strategic information dissemination in targeting the correct recipients. Furthermore, Winata and Loisa (2021) highlight the success of media relations activities in enhancing the university's image. The study reveals that positive media coverage, facilitated by proactive engagement and relationship-building with the press, has significantly contributed to the favorable perception of Tarumanegara University. This evidence underscores the pivotal role of strategic communication and media relations in shaping and maintaining a positive institutional image, particularly during challenging times like the COVID-19 pandemic (Salim et al., 2023).

Based on the literature review, there are differences between the research carried out by the author, particularly regarding the communication role of state Islamic higher education in conveying information. The similarity in writing this article lies in its focus on public relations communication strategies. By examining the problems outlined in the literature, this study will delve deeper into three specific problem formulations: (1) What is the form of cooperation in the public relations section of Raden Fatah State Islamic University Palembang? (2) What is the Raden Fatah State Islamic University Public Relations communication strategy in establishing relationships with press agencies? (3) What factors influence communication strategies in Public Relations?

This study investigates these questions to analyze the collaboration between the Raden Fatah State Islamic University Public Relations Section and press agencies and examine the influence of their communication strategies.

## METHOD

In this research, the author employs a qualitative approach to describe and uncover factual data concerning Raden Fatah State Islamic University's public relations communication strategy in establishing relationships with press agencies. Using a case study method, the qualitative approach is chosen because it allows for collecting in-depth, intensive, and detailed data that cannot be quantified (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The data collection procedure began with interviews with key informants, including the Head of Raden Fatah State Islamic University's Public Relations and their Sub-Coordinator on Press Agencies Relations. A document study was also conducted to gather data from internal company documents and external sources such as newspapers, magazines, and other media. The data analysis involves a comprehensive review of all available data from various sources, including observations, interviews, and documentation (Purnomo & Saidah, 2023).

The data analysis employs an interactive model analysis technique consisting of three stages: data condensation, data presentation, and drawing conclusions and verification (Sumardi & Wahyudiati, 2021). This comprehensive approach ensures a nuanced understanding of Raden Fatah State Islamic University's public relations strategies. It provides a detailed examination of the mechanisms and effectiveness of their communication efforts with press agencies.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Form of Collaboration in the Public Relations Section of Raden Fatah State Islamic University Palembang

Public relations activities must be distinct from the communication patterns used in work programs. In higher education institutions, the duties and functions of public relations are crucial for maintaining a positive image. Effective public relations management involves strategic communication to shape perceptions and foster relationships between the organization and its internal and external stakeholders (Heath, 2010).

Based on the results of an interview with the head of Public Relations at Raden Fatah State Islamic University Palembang, it was found that the university leverages its public relations team to represent and promote the university's image through its official website and social media platforms. The PR department ensures that accurate information about the university is accessible online, reflecting the institution's identity and reputation.

*As explained by the leaders and top officials of Raden Fatah State Islamic University Palembang, this PR includes the face of the campus, the face of the public body, the front guard, good public relations are the image of Raden Fatah State Islamic University, the good one. If people want to know what Raden Fatah State Islamic University is like, they can come to UIN without going far. It can be seen from the website and social media that Raden Fatah State Islamic University Public Relations was officially formed. For the official website <https://radenfatah.ac.id/> and social media Instagram @uinrafahpalembang (Maulani, head of Public Relations University Palembang, personal interview, December 22, 2024)*

Public relations in educational institutions are a crucial aspect of their managerial activities, facilitating proportional cooperation between the institutions and the public, who are key stakeholders as consumers of their graduates. Effective public relations build confidence in the institution, positively influencing public perception and increasing awareness and attention toward the quality of education. Additionally, public relations serve as a vital conduit between agency leaders and the public, guiding internal and external communications to foster a supportive and informed community (Hakim, 2019).

According to Sripoku.com, during a guest lecture, Endang, the Dean of the Faculty of Adab and Humanities at Raden Fatah State Islamic University Palembang, addressed the rumors about a Korean dance performance on campus. She urged the public to respond thoughtfully to the news, emphasizing that the presence of Korean dance should not be seen as cultural appropriation. Engaging with other cultures, she argued, is part of broadening our understanding, and the event was themed around cultural exchange. Another speaker, a historian from Sriwijaya University, discussed the relevance of Malay culture for the younger generation. Unfortunately, the viral response only highlighted the negative aspects. Endang noted that the performers' attire, which did not include hijabs, should be viewed within their own cultural norms, as their clothing was still respectful. She acknowledged the mixed reactions but saw the situation as a learning opportunity (Pairatkhadafi, 2023).

Based on the results of the documentation, the form of cooperation carried out by the Public Relations of Raden Fatah State Islamic University Palembang regarding online media in conveying information includes the following in the Figure 1.



**Fig 1.** Documentation of Forms of Online Media Collaboration in Conveying Information  
Source: SRIPOKU.com & Antaranews.com

The Chancellor of Raden Fatah State Islamic University, Palembang, Mrs. Nyayu Khodijah, confirmed the institution's dedication to fostering international collaboration, as reported by Antara Online media. She highlighted that on August 23, 2023, a significant cooperation agreement was signed by the Head of the General Administration, Planning Bureau, and Finance of UIN Palembang, Mr. Dur Brutu, and the Director of Y-EPIC Republic of Korea, Woo Chul Lee, in the Hall of the Faculty of Adab and Humanities. This signing of an international Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) underscores Raden Fatah State Islamic University's commitment to enhancing its international accreditation and its impactful role in global higher education, particularly through the Tri Dharma Tinggi collaboration on an international scale (Abdullah, 2023).

In response, the Public Relations and Public Information Department of Raden Fatah State Islamic University Palembang is actively engaging in international cooperation. This includes collaborations with universities in the United States and South Korea to facilitate student and lecturer exchanges and provide other practical experiences.

*These are several activities or work programs at Raden Fatah State Islamic University Palembang as a form of international-scale cooperation. Previously, he collaborated with various international universities such as Washington DC and New York, United States. Collaboration with Y-EPIC South Korea is a step toward opening up opportunities between the two universities to carry out student exchanges on an international scale. One form of implementing cooperation includes student exchanges, both practical field experience (PPL) and global real work lectures (KKN) for students and lecturers at Raden Fatah State Islamic University Palembang. (Maulani, head of Public Relations University Palembang, personal interview, December 22, 2024)*

Based on comprehensive interviews, observations, and documentation, it is evident that the Public Relations Department of Raden Fatah State Islamic University in Palembang effectively disseminates information through several official websites. These platforms introduce the university's work structures and highlight its advantages. The Public Relations department also collaborates with press agencies to convey information about various positive activity programs and address negative issues. This multifaceted approach, characterized by its transparency, ensures thorough and credible communication with the public.

Raden Fatah State Islamic University has collaborated extensively with the mass media to promote and publish activities within the academic community and external activities associated with the university. Table 1 below shows a list of media outlets collaborating with Raden Fatah State Islamic University.

Table 1. Report on Collaboration with Online Media

Institutions	Year	Form of Implementation
PT. Media Sriwijaya Anugerah	2020	This collaboration aims to promote Raden Fatah State Islamic University Palembang through subscriptions to general daily newspapers and digital newspapers.
PT. Citra Media Palembang Express	2020	This collaboration aims to promote Raden Fatah State Islamic University Palembang through subscriptions to general daily newspapers and digital newspapers.
Sumatera Express	2020	This collaboration aims to promote Raden Fatah State Islamic University Palembang through subscriptions to general daily newspapers and digital newspapers.
Lembaga Penyiaran Publik Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI)	2022	Collaboration in the field of Tridharma development (Apprenticeship, community service)
Stasiun Televisi Republik Indonesia (TVRI) Palembang	2022	Collaboration in education, research, and community service continued through MoA by the faculty of social and political sciences at Raden Fatah State Islamic University Palembang through the student internship program.

The collaboration with the Public Relations Press Institute of Raden Fatah State Islamic University is essential for effectively responding to negative news circulating in the public. This partnership not only aids public relations professionals in gathering information but also enhances their capacity to manage public perception. The structure of this collaboration includes signing Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with various international universities and related agencies, ultimately improving the quality of Raden Fatah State Islamic University.

Public relations play a crucial role in shaping public opinion. If an agency faces negative public perception, it is the responsibility of public relations to manage and transform this perception into a positive one, which can yield significant benefits. Public opinion is dynamic and can shift rapidly, impacting the primary goal of public relations: securing goodwill from the community. Therefore, it is imperative to influence public opinion through strategic public

relations communication (Herlina, 2015).

### **B. Raden Fatah State Islamic University Public Relations Communication Strategy in Establishing Relations with Press Agencies**

Establishing a positive relationship with the mass media is crucial for public relations in developing the image of an institution or organization. High media publicity significantly influences public opinion formation, making it essential to maintain relationships with the press and media. The function of public relations, which involves linking positive relations to internal or external factors, requires a strategic approach to achieve the goals that public relations aspire to as representatives of their institutions. The relationship between the public and press agencies is more than just one-sided. It is a mutually beneficial partnership where public relations need press agencies for publicity, and press agencies need public relations for accurate information (Salsabila, 2020).

Public relations work is essential for refining employee engagement and is vital for practitioners developing strategies for internal audiences. It advances the conceptual foundation of zones of meaning in public relations scholarship (Lemon, 2018). Based on these facts, a communication strategy for public relations is necessary to liaise with mass media or press agencies. High publicity in mass media greatly influences public opinion formation (Deslia & Amali, 2023), which is why maintaining relationships with mass media or press agencies is vital.

The role of a public relations professional is significant in communication strategies as a liaison with journalists and press agencies. Public relations targets both internal and external publics, builds good relationships between the institution and its stakeholders, and avoids psychological barriers that could arise between the two parties (Sauki, 2022).

Societal paradigms or distorted thinking can perpetuate toxic conditions and environments. Therefore, improving societal attitudes is of paramount importance. In contemporary digital times, individuals with limited perspectives often exhibit greater deference towards those in higher social strata than those with broader perspectives (Afiana et al., 2023). In practical terms, Raden Fatah State Islamic University's public relations frequently face challenges where isolated incidents reported in the media can tarnish the university's image. Given the media's inherent interest in reporting such incidents, these situations necessitate effective communication strategies to mitigate negative public perception. Thus, the critical need for robust communication practices in addressing these conflicts of interest cannot be overstated.

The communication strategy provides instructions for disseminating information regarding the socialization of work programs. It offers guidance on the content and approach for socialization or communication that can instruct and motivate all participants in conveying messages as part of the further development of the communication program. The communication strategy in its planning has two central points: imaging and forming cooperation (Ropik, 2017). Strategic enhancements in communication strategies, responsiveness to issues, and marketing initiatives can significantly reinforce a positive public image. Additionally, it is imperative to recognize the potential of social media as a powerful tool for shaping the perception of Islamic colleges. Proactive efforts in disseminating positive content can augment the institution's visibility, fostering a more favorable public sentiment (Nikmah & Rasyid, 2023).

Raden Fatah State Islamic University's public relations employ a cooperative approach in its interactions with press agencies, focusing on internal and external stakeholders. Internally, this involves fostering relationships with employees, while externally, it extends to engaging with press agencies, mass media, and the broader public. This strategic approach underscores the university's commitment to a collaborative PR system, aligning with legal definitions of the press as articulated in Law No. 40 of 1999, which defines the press as a societal institution and a vehicle for mass communication encompassing various media forms (Pemerintah Republik Indonesia, 1999).

The public relations function at Raden Fatah State Islamic University involves several fundamental work guidelines. One of these guidelines emphasizes the importance of collaborating with external parties to support university activities. For instance, the university signed a cooperation contract with the South Sumatra Bank of Babel to handle payment activities at the university. This example highlights that the PR administration must ensure completeness in managing these activities, document them for evidence, and publicize them to enhance the university's reputation and build a positive image. Mr. Maulani, a respected figure in the field and a key contributor to the public relations work guidelines at Raden Fatah State Islamic University Palembang, explained that:

*The public relations function in higher education, especially at Raden Fatah State Islamic University, has several sections of work guidelines, the first of which is carrying out collaborative activities with external parties that support activities at the university. "For example, signing a cooperation contract with the South Sumatra Bank of Babel for all payment activities at Raden Fatah State Islamic University, public relations administration must be complete, documentation activities are essential as evidence, and finally, publication of every cooperation activity so that our university will be known and build a good image. (Maulani, head of Public Relations University Palembang, personal interview, December 22, 2024)*

A positive image of public bodies hinges on the trust and hope invested in them by society. Thus, cultivating a favorable public perception necessitates meeting public expectations. Enhancing this positive perception relies on internal and external service capabilities, as highlighted by Aziiz and Anom (2023). The symbiotic relationship between Public Relations (PR) and press agencies is crucial in achieving organizational goals and executing various initiatives. PR serves as an information source for press agencies and acts as a conduit for disseminating news about institutional activities, thereby enhancing societal awareness and benefits (Mahfuzhah & Anshari, 2018). Among its roles, PR facilitates positive institutional-community relations, fostering cohesion within and outside organizational boundaries.

Press agencies play a crucial role as conduits of public information, shaping the narrative that reaches society (Aziiz & Anom, 2023). Establishing a good relationship with press agencies is beneficial and strategically essential for fostering favorable public opinion and swiftly cultivating a positive institutional image. At Raden Fatah State Islamic University Palembang, enhancing cooperation with press agencies involves several key stages: (1) Managing Press and Mass Media Affairs: This includes documenting university activities and ensuring that significant events and achievements are communicated effectively to the press; (2) Organizing Media Gatherings and Press Conferences: These events provide opportunities for direct interaction between the university and the media, allowing for the dissemination of important information and fostering mutual understanding. (3) Monitoring Media Coverage: Keeping track of how the university is portrayed in the media helps PR to respond promptly to any negative coverage and leverage positive stories to enhance the university's image. (4) Collaborating on Public Relations Initiatives: This includes news dissemination, magazine publications, promotional materials, and managing official social media channels. These efforts aim to increase visibility and effectively communicate the university's achievements and initiatives to the broader public.

The author found continuity in the results based on interviews and documentation with various informants. Using several social media or online platforms and collaborating with entities such as PT. Media Sriwijaya Anugerah, PT Citra Media Palembang Express, Sumatra Express, RRI (Radio Republik Indonesia), and Republik Indonesia Television Station (TVRI), the university's PR department ensures a robust and effective communication strategy. This collaboration aims to provide good service and maintain a positive public image.

### **C. Factors that Influence Public Relations Communication Strategies in Establishing Relations with Press Agencies**

Community relations aim to foster a harmonious relationship between organizations (including politicians) and the community to increase social awareness and mutual understanding (Nastain & Nurdiarti, 2022). Public relations play a crucial role in serving four main functions: as a communicator, building positive relationships, providing management support, and creating a favorable corporate image (Teguh et al., 2023). Public relations are critical in an institution or agency, particularly if the agency frequently interacts with the broader community. This interaction helps develop, create, and maintain a mutual care attitude between the agency and the community. Public relations act as a liaison between the agency and the public, transmitting information and maintaining good relationships to foster a positive image for the institution or agency (Kholisoh & Yenita, 2015).

PR studies indicate that dialogic public relations have emerged as a new theory and practice approach over the last two decades. The continuous and dynamic nature of connections enabled by information and communication technology has revolutionized the field, allowing for uninterrupted interactions between entities (individuals or organizations) (Ayu et al., 2023). In its implementation, community relations at Raden Fatah State Islamic University Palembang are influenced by several factors: (1) Inhibiting Factors: (a) Interest Factors: Conflicting interests within or between the institution and external entities can hinder effective public relations. (b) Lack of Coordination: Insufficient coordination between public relations and press agencies can lead to miscommunication and ineffective information dissemination. (c) Political Policy Factors: Political decisions and policies can impact public relations activities, sometimes limiting their ability to build a positive image. (2) Supporting Factors: (a) Internal Factors: Technological resources, such as computers and internet networks, support public relations performance. These tools facilitate effective communication and information management. (b) External Factors: Collaboration with press agencies enhances community relations.

### **CONCLUSION**

From the results of the research on "Raden Fatah State Islamic University Public Relations Communication Strategy in Establishing Relations with Press Agencies," it can be concluded that the Public Relations Section of Raden Fatah State Islamic University Palembang engages in cooperative efforts primarily through communication and collaboration with mass media outlets. These initiatives encompass promotional activities to enhance public relations awareness and effectiveness within the university. Additionally, the university partners with various media platforms to advance the professional development of its public relations personnel. This collaboration extends to educational endeavors, including training programs and radio and television broadcasting internships.

The Public Relations Communication Strategy at Raden Fatah State Islamic University is not just about establishing robust relationships with press agencies. It's about a comprehensive PR collaboration framework that focuses on collaborative efforts with internal and external stakeholders. Internally, the strategy emphasizes engaging employees and fostering strong relations with stakeholders. Externally, it prioritizes building connections with press agencies, mass media, and the broader public. This approach is pivotal to the university's comprehensive PR collaboration framework.

Various factors are crucial in how Raden Fatah State Islamic University Palembang establishes relationships with press agencies. Inhibiting factors include issues such as differing levels of interest among stakeholders, inadequate coordination between public relations and press agencies, and policy constraints. Conversely, supportive factors include internal elements like a robust Information and Communication Technology infrastructure, such as computer systems and internet networks, facilitating efficient communication. Additionally, external factors, such as collaborative efforts with press agencies, enhance the efficacy of communication strategies.

The findings of this study significantly enhance our understanding of strategic social media communication and public relations at Raden Fatah State Islamic University. The university's focus on cultivating a positive campus image is a promising sign for its future. Moreover, they offer actionable insights that can empower the university's Public Relations department to disseminate precise and comprehensive information. These insights also serve as valuable evaluation criteria for similar institutions, enabling them to enhance their communication strategies effectively.

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