

The Strategy of the Madrasah Principal in Shaping Image through Public Relations Management

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Abstract

In an increasingly competitive educational landscape, institutions are leveraging technology and social media to enhance their public image, build trust, and establish strong branding. This qualitative study explores the strategic role of the principal in managing public relations (PR) to shape a positive institutional image at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Al-Yasini. Through observations and interviews with the principal and PR team, the research underscores the centrality of the principal's leadership in directing and evaluating PR performance. The study adopts the Four-Step PR Model—Problem Defining, Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation—as an analytical framework. Findings reveal that the principal's strategy is effectively realized through flagship programs such as the Genius Class and scholarship initiatives, as well as the formation of a specialized PR IT Team. These efforts led to a notable increase in student enrollment, reflecting improved institutional visibility and reputation. However, challenges persist in the form of inconsistent content posting, subpar visual presentation, and limited creativity in digital communication. The study concludes that while strategic leadership is a critical enabler of successful PR, there is a pressing need to enhance the technical and creative capacities of the PR team to fully leverage digital platforms and sustain institutional growth.

Keywords: School Principal Strategy; Public Relations Management; Madrasah Image; Four-Step PR Model; Educational Leadership

INTRODUCTION

In this era of disruption, educational institutions are expected to provide quality services that meet the community's needs, especially as new and equivalent institutions continue to emerge. It is not uncommon for these new institutions to operate under a single educational foundation, yet they compete within the same local ecosystem. Therefore, educational institutions must position themselves as providers of excellent and community-responsive education, ensuring that their programs, facilities, and management systems align with the public's growing demand for high-quality learning (Eka Diana et al., 2023); (Izza Nila Syarifah & Azzah Nor Laila, 2025). The community's awareness of the importance of education will not develop if institutions fail to present a clear, transparent, and appealing picture of their current state and achievements. According to (Nuzula et al., 2024), institutional image (*citra lembaga*) must be strategically managed through consistent communication that reflects both the strengths and the social relevance of the institution. In other words, communities need to "see" the value of education through how the institution portrays its identity, achievements, and responsiveness to societal needs.

For this reason, educational institutions need to conduct continuous socialization efforts, both directly through community engagement and indirectly via digital platforms such as social media, websites, and online publications. As emphasized by (Fathan Zaini, 2024), combining traditional communication (face-to-face) with digital-based interaction is an effective strategy to increase public participation and trust in educational institutions. Digital media not only broadens reach but also strengthens the institution's visibility and credibility in real time.

This activity represents the core function of Public Relations (PR) in education management — to build, maintain, and enhance the relationship between the institution and its community. As Hartati (2023) notes, PR serves as a communication bridge that connects institutional goals with community expectations, ensuring transparency and trust. (Maziyatus Sholihah et al., 2023) found that a well-implemented PR strategy significantly influences a school's public image and competitiveness, especially in the face of growing educational competition.

In Islamic educational contexts, PR management also becomes a tool for dakwah and educational empowerment. As argued by (Setiawan, 2025), effective PR strategies in

madrasahs can enhance institutional reputation, encourage community participation, and ensure that the institution remains relevant to societal transformation in the digital era.

Therefore, managing PR is not merely about promotion but about strategic relationship management-ensuring that every communication and service reflects institutional excellence, educational quality, and community-centered values. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct socialization to the public, either directly or through electronic information such as social media, to shape the madrasah's image in the community's eyes. This serves as a manifestation of the public relations (PR) function to build relationships with the community so that they understand the importance of education (Eka Diana et al., 2023).

As observers and simultaneously as consumers of education, the community is certainly knowledgeable and more prudent in judging quality educational institutions as the harbor for their children to seek knowledge. They will assess directly, and many of them will even seek information through the internet, neighbors, relatives, and even alumni of the institution. The principal's strategy in shaping the institutional image through public relations management is highly appropriate for building a public narrative through direct and indirect communication with the community.

The school's image will not be formed if the perception and communication with the community are merely assumptions and not based on the actual conditions. A positive image can be formed by several factors, such as the quality of education, learning, facilities, and the behavior of the students. Building a positive image for an educational institution can be carried out through various activities. The forms of these activities include achieving academic and non-academic performance, extracurricular activities, positive behavior habitualization activities, workshops, and others. This aims to prove that the educational institution can demonstrate to the public that it is a quality educational institution (Hruska & Maresova, 2020).

When discussing image formation, it is inseparable from public relations activities. When associated with public relations activities, it is inevitably linked to the processes of shaping public opinion, publication, and marketing (Indriani & Syamsudin, 2023). With the aim of introducing the educational institution to the wider community so that it can attract the interest of consumers or clients to use the services offered (Indrioko, 2015). In building a positive image perception for the educational institution, public relations plays a crucial

role. Public relations has the role of maintaining the institution's image through communication between the institution and the community by conveying school programs and important school agendas.

The existence of our institution today can be said to be an institution that is always actively providing information about institutional activities, championships, branding, and the facilities it possesses. This dissemination of information is inseparable from the role of public relations (PR) in communicating institutional matters. The role of PR in establishing communication space with numerous stakeholders is very vital. This is because PR, as the institution's information conveyor, has the responsibility to continuously maintain its existence in building the institutional image sustainably.

Therefore, the PR Manager performs three roles: first, as a problem definer (or expert prescriber), who works as a consultant to define problems, suggest options, and monitor policy implementation. Second, as a communication facilitator, who acts as a boundary person between the organization and its environment, ensuring that two-way communication continues. Third, as a problem-solving facilitator, who partners with senior managers to identify and solve problems (Syahputra et al., 2018). Therefore, in this article, the author will discuss the strategy of the madrasah principal in shaping a positive image for the educational institution through public relations management.

METHODS

This study aims to determine the madrasah principal's strategy in building a positive image through public relations management. The Principal was asked to provide a detailed explanation of the strategy used to manage or regulate and direct public relations as the spearhead in forming a positive image in our institution. For this reason, the writing method uses a descriptive qualitative approach that is normative, which is adapted from the sources who planned and carried out this strategy through interviews with the madrasah principal based on programs designed together with the Deputy Head of Public Relations as the executor of public relations in the educational institution. Meanwhile, the object of the research is more focused on the ways and steps to form a madrasah's image through public relations management in our institution.

Data collection was carried out using interview, observation, and documentation study techniques. There were three key informants: the madrasah principal, the

administrative staff, and the madrasah committee. The analysis technique used consists of data collection, data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. To ensure its truthfulness, a credibility test was conducted through source triangulation and data collection.

RESULTS

Strategy

The madrasah principal's strategy in shaping the image of Madrasah Tsanawiyah Al-Yasini through Public Relations Management is executed using a four-step model: Defining the Problem, Planning and Programming, Implementation and Control, and Program Evaluation.

Findings on Madrasah Image and Public Relations

The functions and tasks of the Public Relations (PR) division within the madrasah include:

1. Providing information and aligning ideas (concepts) to the community or parties that require it.
2. Assisting the leadership who, due to their duties, cannot directly provide information to the community or the parties that need it.
3. Assisting the leadership in preparing materials regarding issues and information that will be conveyed or that attract the public's attention at a certain time.
4. Assisting the leadership in developing plans and follow-up activities related to services provided, as a result of reciprocal communication with external parties.

Results of the Principal's Strategy in Shaping Madrasah Image Through Public Relations Management at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Al-Yasini

Public Relations Management (PR Management) is a sub-field that supports the performance of the Madrasah Principal in carrying out institutional duties. The central role of PR makes it a division capable of making the institution's image a consideration for clients when making decisions. This PR function is utilized by MTs. Al-Yasini as a strategy to build the madrasah's image among the general public. Good communication between PR and stakeholders (the community, parents/guardians, students, and alumni) shapes a

positive image for the institution. The researcher used the following steps to explore the strategy:

1. Defining the Problem (Problem Identification)

The initial stage focused on problem discovery. The purpose of this was to analyze the needs and gain an understanding of what needs to be done to gather information about issues within the institution. The general tendency of the community is often reluctant to send their children to school within an Islamic boarding school (*pondok pesantren*). Therefore, communication was needed with *pesantren* policymakers to provide flexibility for community members to attend MTs. Al-Yasini without having to reside at the *pesantren*.

The formulation and socialization of madrasah's flagship programs became a key method to rebuild the madrasah's image. The primary problem found was the lack of information received by the community concerning the various policies and programs available at MTs. Al-Yasini. Hence, the role of public relations in conveying information both online and offline was deemed crucial.

2. Planning and Programming

Following problem identification, the madrasah's PR focused on planning and programming. The plan formulated by the principal involves creating flagship programs and supporting programs (scholarships). Other planning elements include providing adequate school facilities and infrastructure. The two special classes (Genius Class and Star Class) also form part of the image formation. The formation of an IT Team by PR was deemed highly needed to support information dissemination.

3. Implementation and Control

Implementation involves empowering the institution's media in line with the planned goals. The primary strategy is the use of social media (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok) for dissemination. Publication is executed by the PR Team by sharing activities (flagship programs, scholarships, achievements, etc.) through socialization, parent-teacher meetings, and digital platforms. This aims to ensure all information is viewed and absorbed by the wider audience, allowing the community to assess the institution and foster interest.

4. Program Evaluation

Evaluation is carried out through the analysis of data received via social media, including the number of followers, messages and impressions, visitor satisfaction, and audience engagement rate. A comprehensive evaluation is conducted routinely by monitoring external developments and analyzing community responses to anticipate challenges and shortcomings. Errors are responded to responsively by the PR IT Team.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical Foundation of Strategy, Image, and Public Relations

The findings show that the madrasah's approach is rooted in established communication principles.

1. Strategy is defined as the art of planning, initially stemming from the military world as planning warfare with the aim of achieving victory, which is then elaborated into concrete actions (Fadriati, 2014). This highlights the deliberate and planned nature of the principal's actions.
2. The overall goal is Image Formation. Image is described as the feeling or impression held by the public towards an institution, a deliberately created impression (Irfan, 2018). According to Sandra Oliver (Irfan, 2018), this "imaging" is a perception that emerges in the consumer's mind when recalling a particular product.
3. The vehicle for this strategy is Public Relations (PR), which is fundamentally a series of activities to establish harmonious relationships and gain conscious and voluntary support (Indriani & Syamsudin, 2023). Frank Jefkins (quoted by (Roberts-Bowman, 2016) views PR as encompassing all forms of planned, mutual communication (internal and external) to achieve specific goals based on mutual understanding. This underscores that PR is essential for all organizations, especially educational ones that exist amid diverse societal groups, acting as an effort to convey news and create a positive impression (Asrul Anan, 2016). The three functions of PR suggested by Bertrand R. Canfield (2018)—serving the public interest, maintaining good communication, and emphasizing good morals and behavior—directly correlate with the madrasah's ethical and community-focused approach.

Analysis of the Principal's Strategy using the Four-Step Model

The madrasah principal's strategy closely follows the Four-Step PR theory by Cutlip, Center, and Broom.

1. Defining the Problem

The madrasah's initial decline in student numbers (2020-2022) was the central problem. This step required the PR team to monitor public attitudes and behavior (Sitorus et al., 2023). The identification of two key issues—the community's reluctance regarding the *pesantren* residency requirement and the sheer lack of information—validated the need for a targeted PR campaign. This finding moved the strategy from a general task to a specific, problem-focused communication challenge.

2. Planning and Programming

Planning serves as the necessary initial step for all activities, whether short-term or long-term (Eka Diana et al., 2023); (Supriani, 2022). The madrasah's planning—establishing flagship programs, scholarships, and special classes—demonstrates a strategic effort to adapt the institutional product to meet public needs. The role of the PR team here is strategic and urgent in bridging the madrasah and its public (Rahayu & Trisnawati, 2022). This proactive approach, as noted by the principal, is crucial for maintaining a positive reputation, attracting interest, and gaining community support (Khorotunniswah, 2020). Furthermore, the necessity of the IT Team aligns with the literature emphasizing that the success of digital PR is dependent on the quality of the IT team managing social media (Imaniyah et al., 2016).

3. Implementation and Control

The implementation phase involves translating plans into tangible action, primarily through offline and online media. The strategic reliance on social media is the most realistic way to convey messages and ensure institutional information reaches a wide audience (Supriani, 2022). This communication process (internal and external) is vital because it forms the perception related to the public's level of respect and trust in the institution.

4. Program Evaluation and Obstacles

The evaluation step provides essential feedback, mirroring E. Boulding's model where image building is connected to the feedback and reinforcement process. The positive result—the increase in student enrollment—validates the strategic implementation.

However, the evaluation also revealed critical operational obstacles: inconsistency, mediocre content quality, and delayed counter-information. These constraints emphasize that while the strategic planning is sound, tactical execution requires refinement, particularly through better team communication and the recruitment of professional editors.

CONCLUSION

The strategy implemented by the Principal of *Madrasah Tsanawiyah Al-Yasini* to shape the institution's image through Public Relations (PR) management is systematic and aligned with the Four-Step PR Model: Defining the Problem, Planning and Programming, Implementation and Control, and Program Evaluation. The application of this strategy, through flagship programs such as *Spectacular Language* and *Smart MIPAS*, as well as scholarship schemes and specialized classes (*Genius Class* and *Star Class*), has effectively addressed the issue of declining student enrollment. Evaluation results indicate a steady growth in public trust, reflected in the increased number of student admissions.

Moreover, the establishment of the Deputy Head of PR (*Waka Humas*) as the coordinator for community relations has optimized communication management and reduced the principal's administrative burden, ensuring more structured and consistent dissemination of institutional information. However, challenges remain in maintaining operational consistency and improving the quality of digital content. Inconsistencies in posting schedules, limited presentation quality, reliance on low-grade editing tools, and delays in publishing time-sensitive materials continue to hinder the optimal implementation of the PR strategy.

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