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Public Relations Management in Increasing the Number of Students in Islamic Boarding Schools

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Abstract:
Public relations management serves as a strategic tool for managing communication between Islamic boarding schools and their stakeholders, so that the educational institution's objectives can be achieved effectively and efficiently and increase the number and competitiveness of students in terms of both quality and quantity. This study aims to analyze the concept of PR planning in increasing the number of students, PR implementation patterns, and PR evaluation models at the Darul Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School. This study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach to examine community relations and public relations management in increasing student enrollment at the Darul Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School umbulsari Jember. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation. Credibility was ensured through source and method triangulation, while data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns and meanings related to public relations practices. The results indicate that the Islamic boarding school increased student enrollment through systematic public relations management. This involved conducting comprehensive needs analyses, establishing clear enrollment targets, and implementing both routine and incidental programs. Key strategies included regular information dissemination, social media outreach, parent engagement via WhatsApp groups, cultural performances, and student achievement exhibitions. External networking, including collaboration with international partners, enhanced institutional visibility. Program effectiveness was reinforced through continuous monitoring, stakeholder feedback, managerial supervision, and sustained human resource development.

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INTRODUCTION

Public relations management plays a strategic role in responding to the challenges of competition among educational institutions in the modern era, where the public is increasingly critical and selective in choosing educational institutions that are of high quality and relevant to future needs (Thahir, 2019) . Public relations in the context of education functions not only as a communication link between institutions and the public, but also as a key tool in building a positive image and reputation for institutions (Fakhrurizae, 2019; Ali, 2023) thereby attracting prospective students and parents to choose a particular Islamic boarding school or school (The Role of Public Relations in Enhancing the Image of Educational Institutions, Ruslan, 2010). Various studies have found that good public relations strategies can increase public trust and expand the institution's communication network with internal and external audiences (The Importance of Public Relations Role in Educational Institutions, Hartati, 2024). In addition, effective public relations management is seen as an integral part of school marketing that contributes to attracting new prospective students (Al-Muqsith & El Adawiyah, 2024; Madrasah Public Relations Management in Attracting Public Interest, Ja'far, 2025). Public relations has also been proven to be effective in establishing partnerships and strengthening relationships with the wider community, including local and international stakeholders (The Role of School Public Relations in Establishing Partnerships (Fitri & Masyithoh, 2025; Hepni, 2022). Thus, this research is important to understand how systematic public relations management can increase the number of students and the competitiveness of the Darul Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School amid increasingly fierce competition in education.

Previous studies consistently demonstrate that public relations management plays a strategic role in strengthening the image of educational institutions and attracting public interest, which is directly related to efforts to increase student enrollment in Islamic boarding schools (Adawiyah, 2024) found that effective public relations activities, particularly promotional strategies and image-building programs, significantly attracted new students to Madrasah Aliyah Al Manaar Muhammadiyah. Similarly, (Ja'far, 2024) emphasized that transparent communication and active parental involvement are essential components of madrasah public relations management in gaining public trust. (Sasriani et al., 2024) reported that well-planned public relations strategies in public junior high schools contributed to a noticeable increase in student numbers. (Anggraeni and Pramusinto, 2024) further highlighted that strong public relations strategies enhance institutional image, which positively influences prospective students' enrollment decisions. (Mayasari et al., 2024; Reza 2024) showed that effective public relations management fosters public trust and strengthens institutional credibility. (Ramadhan et al., 2025) demonstrated that comprehensive public relations activities significantly improve school image. (Suyitno, 2025; Srimulyani, 2007) emphasized the importance of public relations in educational marketing to attract new students. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, (Zunaida and Aulia, 2023) confirmed that effective public relations management increases community interest, while (Muharramah et al., 2023; Maesaroh, 2024). underlined the importance of school community relations in sustaining educational institutions (Afiati and Mulyono., 2023). Collectively, these studies underline the relevance of examining public relations management in pesantren as a strategic effort to increase student enrollment through effective communication, positive institutional image, and active public engagement.

This study aims to analyze in depth the management of public relations in efforts to increase the number of students at Darul Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School. Specifically, the research seeks to examine the concept of public relations planning implemented by the pesantren in building a positive institutional image and attracting public interest, to identify the patterns of public relations program implementation involving both internal and external

stakeholders, and to evaluate the public relations evaluation models used to measure the effectiveness of these programs in increasing student enrollment. In addition, this study aims to understand the role of public relations in strengthening public trust, enhancing the involvement of parents and the surrounding community, and expanding the pesantren's cooperation networks with various institutions. Through this research, a comprehensive understanding of effective and sustainable public relations strategies within the pesantren context is expected to be obtained. The findings of this study are expected to serve as a practical reference for pesantren administrators in designing and implementing more strategic, adaptive, and responsive public relations management, thereby supporting sustainable growth in student enrollment and strengthening the overall competitiveness of the institution.

This study shows that public relations management is believed to play a strategic role in increasing the number of students at Darul Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School. Targeted public relations planning, implementation of programs involving internal and external parties, and continuous evaluation are believed to be able to build a positive image of the boarding school in the eyes of the community. Through open communication, the use of information media, and the active involvement of students' guardians and the surrounding community, the boarding school has the potential to increase public trust and expand the reach of the institution's promotion. In addition, good relationships with various partners and stakeholders are expected to strengthen the boarding school's existence as a superior and trusted educational institution. Therefore, this study argues that effective, systematic, and sustainable public relations management will have a direct impact on increasing public interest in enrolling their children at the Darul Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School, which will ultimately contribute to a significant increase in the number of students.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach to explore in depth the meaning of individuals' life experiences related to the social phenomena they face. (Dodgson, 2023; Lim, 2024) argue that this approach allows researchers to capture individuals' perceptions, awareness, and experiences in depth, making it relevant for understanding leadership practices in the context of education. The phenomenon studied is community relations management in increasing the number of students at the Darul Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School. (Englander, 2016; Frechette et al., 2020) emphasize that phenomenology can reveal the essence of life experiences in a particular social context, thereby capturing the dynamics between leaders and followers. This study focuses on how public relations management increases the number of students at the Darul Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School.

In the data collection process, researchers used several techniques, including in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation. (Rutledge and Hogg, 2020) emphasize that combining these techniques is essential for obtaining a rich and deep understanding in qualitative research. Interviews were conducted with Islamic boarding school administrators. (McGrath et al., 2018; Guo et al., 2024) argue that interviews allow researchers to understand subjective perspectives and individual interpretations of the phenomena experienced. Observations were conducted to review routine activities and interactions between Islamic boarding school administrators and the community, including the parents of students. (Zamiri and Esmaeili, 2024) highlight that the researcher's direct involvement in the environment allows for a more holistic understanding of social dynamics. Documentation, such as archives of activities, policies, and internal records, according to (Palinkas et al., 2015), complements the data to provide a more comprehensive research perspective. Direct visits to the boarding

school, as noted help build a strong contextual understanding and provide a complete picture of community relations management practices in increasing the number of students at the Darul Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School.

To ensure the validity and credibility of the data, the researchers applied triangulation techniques by comparing and confirming findings from various sources and data collection methods, as emphasized by (Valencia, 2022), who highlighted the role of triangulation in strengthening research results. This triangulation includes source triangulation (Islamic boarding school administrators and documents) and method triangulation (interviews, observation, documentation).

In analyzing the data, the researchers used the thematic analysis technique developed which emphasizes the identification of patterns, themes, and meanings in qualitative data. (Naeem et al., 2023) note that thematic analysis helps reveal key patterns and relationships in interview, observation, and documentation data. This process involves coding data, grouping themes, and interpreting how these themes relate to the policies, roles, and impacts of public relations management in increasing the number of students, as described by (Bingham, 2023). Through this approach, the researcher describes how public relations management increases the number of students. This analysis also allows researchers to link findings to theoretical frameworks, providing meaningful interpretations of public relations management in building a sustainable literacy culture in the modern era, as argued who emphasize the importance of public relations management in order to adapt to contemporary challenges while maintaining traditional Islamic boarding school values.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The Concept of Public Relations Planning in Enhancing the Competitiveness of Darul Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School in Umbulsari, Jember

Based on observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation conducted by researchers at the Darul Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School in Ponorogo, it was found that public relations planning is an initial and fundamental stage in public relations management to improve the competitiveness of Islamic boarding schools. Public relations planning is carried out systematically through several main stages, namely needs analysis and goal setting.

First, Needs Analysis, The initial stage in public relations planning at Darul Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School is a systematic and continuous needs analysis. Based on interviews with the Deputy Head of Public Relations, the teachers' council, the boarding school committee, and the foundation's management, it is clear that this needs analysis is the main foundation for designing effective and relevant public relations programs. The needs analysis process is carried out through regular meetings, which are usually held before the start of the new academic year. The purpose of these meetings is to identify the various internal and external needs of the boarding school, including information needs, institutional image, and relationships with the community and students' guardians. In this forum, each party is given the opportunity to provide input, evaluate previous public relations programs, and propose strategies deemed necessary to improve the quality of the boarding school's communication. The results of the deliberations are then summarized and used as a reference in the preparation of the public relations work plan so that it is in line with the vision, mission, and objectives of the Darul Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School.Analisis kebutuhan tersebut difokuskan pada kebutuhan Pondok Pesantren Darul Muttaqin in the next year. The main focus is on planning a strategy for accepting new students so that the recruitment process can run effectively and attract prospective students and gain the trust of parents. In addition, the needs analysis also emphasizes the socialization of the

pesantren program to parents and the wider community as an effort to strengthen communication, transparency, and the positive image of the institution. Another aspect of concern is the publication of flagship programs and student achievements, both in academic and non-academic fields, so that the success of the pesantren can be more widely known. In addition, the implementation of momentum-driven public relations activities, such as the commemoration of Islamic holidays and social activities, is also an important part of the needs analysis. These activities are considered strategic in strengthening the relationship between the pesantren and the community while emphasizing the role of the pesantren as an active educational and social institution that makes a real contribution.

The results of the study show that social and religious public relations activities are seen as a strategic medium for attracting public attention. Through these activities, Islamic boarding schools strive to build a positive image and public trust, thereby encouraging parents to send their children to Darul Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School.

Table 1

Focus on Public Relations Planning Needs Analysis

No	Focus Area	Type of Activity
1	New Student Admission	Community outreach/socialization
2	Islamic Boarding School Publication Public Relations	Social media and activity documentation
3	Hubungan masyarakat	Religious and social activities
4	Boarding School Image	Publication of students' achievements

Second, Setting Objectives, After conducting a needs analysis, the next stage in public relations planning at Darul Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School is setting public relations objectives. Based on findings in the field, these objectives are formulated through deliberation with relevant parties to ensure they are in line with the boarding school's vision and mission. The Deputy Head of Public Relations explained that the main objective of public relations is to disseminate information about the pesantren's programs to the wider community. He stated, "We want the community to have a complete understanding of the pesantren's programs, so that Darul Muttaqin becomes better known and trusted as an Islamic educational institution." The dissemination of this information is considered important for building a positive image of the pesantren in the community. In addition, public relations also aims to increase the number of new students each year. An increase in the number of students is understood as an indicator of the boarding school's existence and quality. In an interview, the public relations department revealed, "The increase in students is not merely a matter of numbers, but shows that the boarding school is accepted and needed by the community." Therefore, various communication and promotion strategies have been designed to attract prospective students and parents. Thus, public relations is not only oriented towards promotion, but also serves as a means of spreading the teachings of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah an-Nahdliyah Islam in accordance with the vision of the Darul Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School.

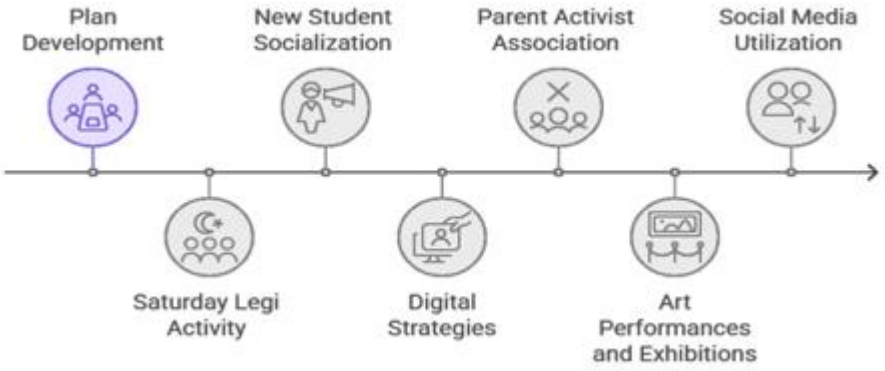
Implementation of Public Relations in Improving the Competitiveness of Darul Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School in Umbulsari, Jember

The implementation of public relations at Darul Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School is a stage of implementation of a systematically prepared plan. Based on the results of observations, interviews, and documentation, public relations are carried out through various strategies aimed at increasing the competitiveness of the boarding school while attracting the interest of the community to send their children to school. The implementation of public relations is directed at efforts to provide the community with an understanding of the importance of pesantren education, guarantee the quality of education, and build a positive image of the institution. The strategies applied emphasize program continuity, emotional closeness to the community, and the use of various relevant communication media.

One form of public relations implementation is the routine Saturday Legi activity, which involves community leaders and student guardians through written invitations as a form of formal and personal communication. In addition, public relations is also active in socializing the acceptance of new students by utilizing print media in the form of banners and social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp. Digital strategies are carried out through the distribution of flyers, documentation of activities, and twibbons uploaded to the official pesantren account and teachers' personal accounts. The pesantren also formed a Parent Activist Association, facilitated through a WhatsApp Group as a means of communication, coordination, and participation for parents in supporting and promoting the pesantren. Other public relations activities are carried out through art performances and student achievement exhibitions at haflatul imtihan events and parent meetings, which foster a sense of pride and trust among the community. The pesantren also utilizes official social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and its website as a means of continuous publication.

Figure 1

Public Relations *Strategies at Darul Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School*



Evaluation of Public Relations in Improving the Competitiveness of Darul Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School in Umbulsari, Jember

The evaluation of public relations management at Darul Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School in Umbulsari, Jember, is an important step in determining the extent to which the public relations program has been successful in increasing the number of students and the competitiveness of the boarding school. This evaluation is conducted on an ongoing basis, involving both internal and external parties. Based on the results of observations, interviews, and documentation, the evaluation stage serves as a means of assessing the effectiveness of the public relations program's implementation, while also providing feedback for improving the boarding school's communication and promotion strategies.

One of the evaluation methods applied is periodic observation of the implementation of public relations work programs. The head of the boarding school, as the supervisor, is directly responsible for supervision, conducting informal observations and recording the results of observations and reports from the Deputy Head of Public Relations. Follow-up evaluations are tailored to the type of program; short-term programs are evaluated monthly or semiannually, while medium-term programs are evaluated at the end of the academic year. In addition, evaluations are also conducted by gathering input from various parties, including foundation administrators, parents, religious leaders, and the surrounding community. This approach strengthens the pesantren's accountability and increases public trust in the institution.

In addition to observation and aspirations, public relations management evaluation is also carried out through managerial supervision and human resource development. Public relations staff and educators participate in Focus Group Discussions (FGD) to discuss and share solutions to public relations program issues, with supervision and input from pesantren supervisors. This ongoing coaching improves the managerial competence of staff, improves public relations program management, and has a positive impact on the competitiveness of the pesantren and the number of students accepted. The findings show that a combination of observation, aspirations, and human resource coaching is an effective strategy to ensure that public relations programs run optimally.

Discussion

Based on theory and research findings at the Darul Muttaqin Umbulsari Islamic Boarding School, there is a strong correlation between the concept of public relations management in education and actual practice in the field. The theory proposed by (Thahir, 2019) states that public relations has a strategic role in facing competition between educational institutions, especially in attracting the interest of an increasingly critical and selective public. This is in line with the research findings, where PR planning at Darul Muttaqin is carried out systematically through needs analysis and goal setting that focuses on accepting new students, publishing flagship programs, and strengthening relationships with parents and the community. This planning process also demonstrates the application of modern PR strategy principles, namely building a positive image of the institution through transparent and sustainable communication.

Figure 2

Enhacing Institutional Image Through Public Relations



The implementation of public relations at Darul Muttaqin emphasizes the role of public relations as a liaison between the Islamic boarding school and the public, as explained by (Fakhrurizae, 2019; Ruslan, 2010; Riggio, 2005). Activities such as Saturday Legi, socialization of new student admissions, the formation of the Parent-Teacher Association, art performances, and the use of social media show that the pesantren implements comprehensive internal and external communication strategies (Romdhoni, 2015. These findings are in line with previous studies showing that good public relations strategies can improve the image of an institution, expand communication networks, and attract prospective students and parents (Hartati, 2024; Al-Muqsith & El Adawiyah, 2024; Ja'far, 2025). In other words, public relations at Darul Muttaqin not only focuses on promotion but also strengthens emotional bonds and public trust in the pesantren.

The evaluation of public relations in Islamic boarding schools also reinforces the theory that evaluation is an important component in building the effectiveness of public relations strategies (Sasriani et al., 2024; Anggraeni & Pramusinto, 2024). Regular observations, gathering input from internal and external parties, and human resource development through focus group discussions (FGDs) demonstrate systematic and sustainable evaluation practices. These findings support the theory that proper evaluation not only improves the managerial competence of staff but also improves public relations program management, strengthens public trust, and directly impacts an increase in the number of students. Thus, the findings of this study confirm the relevance of educational public relations theory in the context of Islamic boarding schools as a strategic effort to improve institutional competitiveness and sustainability.

CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that public relations management at the Darul Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School in Umbulsari, Jember, plays a strategic role in increasing the competitiveness of the institution and the number of students. The findings show that systematic public relations planning through needs analysis and goal setting is the main foundation for building a positive image of the boarding school, expanding communication with parents and the community, and attracting prospective students. The implementation of public relations involving routine activities, the use of social media, the formation of the Paguyuban Wali Murid Penggerak (Parent Association), as well as art performances and student achievement exhibitions proves that integrated internal and external communication strategies can strengthen emotional ties and public trust in the boarding school.

Public relations evaluation in Islamic boarding schools has also proven effective in improving program management quality and human resource competencies. Periodic observations, gathering input from internal and external parties, and human resource development through focus group discussions help ensure that public relations programs run optimally, strengthen institutional accountability, and have a direct impact on increasing the number of students. These findings support previous theories that emphasize the importance of continuous evaluation as a tool to improve the effectiveness of public relations strategies and build a positive reputation for educational institutions.

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that Islamic boarding schools continue to develop adaptive public relations strategies, including maximizing the use of digital communication technology, expanding cooperation networks with various parties, and actively involving students' guardians and the community in the planning and evaluation of public relations programs. For further research, it is recommended to conduct comparative studies between Islamic boarding schools to identify best practices in Islamic education public relations

management, as well as to examine the long-term impact of public relations programs on the reputation of institutions and the academic achievements of students.

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