

Integrating Technology-Based Public Relations to Improve Brand Identity in Islamic Boarding Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze how the optimization of publication media and public relations (PR) strategies contributes to enhancing perceived quality and brand association at Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School. Information was obtained through document analysis, in-depth interviews with public relations managers, and direct observation of institutional communication activities using a qualitative case study methodology. The findings reveal that the strategic use of electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM), targeted sales promotions, and symbolic interaction through social media platforms significantly improve stakeholders' perceived quality of the institution. Furthermore, the brand link is successfully reinforced by PR techniques aimed at building a favourable corporate image and enhancing brand loyalty among students and the local community. The study concludes that integrated, media-based public relations strategies are instrumental in building institutional credibility and public trust. These findings highlight the importance of adopting ethically grounded, technology-integrated PR approaches and recommend the development of a symmetrical two-way communication model to sustain the positive image and long-term relevance of Islamic boarding schools in the digital era.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of rapid globalization and digital transformation, public relations (PR) strategies play an increasingly important role in shaping the reputation and competitiveness of educational institutions (Juhji et al., 2020; Soimet et al., 2022; Marpaung & Sazali, 2022; Maula et al., 2023), including Islamic boarding schools (Citraningsih et al., 2021; Maulana et al., 2022; Jufaini, 2023; Baharun & Hasanah, 2023; Nuzula et al., 2024). Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School, as a traditional Islamic institution, faces increasing challenges in maintaining a positive image amid increasing competition from modern educational institutions and increasingly high societal expectations. Effectively managing public communications through digital media is no longer an option but rather an urgent need (White, 2011; Biernacka-Ligieza, 2021), especially for institutions that want to improve quality perceptions and build strong brand associations.

The Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), as cited by Subarjo and Setianingsih (2020), reported a steady increase in national internet penetration, indicating a major shift in the way the public interacts with institutions. This digital shift presents both opportunities and challenges for Islamic boarding schools (Lundeto et al., 2021; Kardi et al., 2023; Halimah et al., 2024). Although many educational institutions have adopted cyber public relations and digital engagement strategies, Islamic boarding schools—due to cultural, structural, or resource constraints—often lag in implementing these strategies. As a

result, Islamic boarding schools are at risk of being perceived as institutions that are less progressive or less responsive to the demands of the times.

Several previous studies have confirmed the relevance of PR in enhancing institutional reputation. Chen (2017) emphasized the importance of brand association in the branding strategy of educational institutions, while Nuseir et al. (2023) demonstrated the effectiveness of e-WoM and cyber PR in shaping public perception. However, there is still very little research that systematically explores how digital publication media can be optimized to enhance perceived quality and brand association, especially in traditional Islamic institutions such as Islamic boarding schools. In addition, the integration of modern PR strategies with Islamic boarding school values has not been widely studied, leaving a significant research gap in the literature. Based on this, this study aims to examine how Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School utilizes digital public relations strategies—including advertising, cyber PR, and electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM)—to enhance perceived quality and strengthen the brand association. This study also seeks to identify internal and external factors that influence the effectiveness of these strategies and assess their implications for the credibility and sustainability of the institution.

Theoretically, this article contributes through the application of symbolic interactionism theory and symmetrical two-way communication model in the context of Islamic boarding schools. Practically, this article offers a roadmap for Islamic boarding schools in modernizing public engagement patterns without sacrificing their religious identity. Ultimately, this article aims to enrich the discourse on technology-based public relations in Islamic education and provide strategic recommendations for managing digital communication in Islamic boarding schools.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study type to explore in depth the public relations strategy implemented by Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School. Case studies are chosen because they allow researchers to understand complex phenomena holistically in a real context, especially in terms of managing public communication through digital media in the Islamic boarding school environment.

The unit of analysis in this study is Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School, which covers various aspects of its organization and communication. The focus of the study includes public relations practices, the use of digital publication media, and efforts to build perceptions of quality and brand associations. The selection of Nurul Jadid as the subject of the study is based on its position as one of the largest Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, which has begun to adopt digital technology in managing its public relations. Through this study, it is hoped that a contextual picture will be obtained that is relevant and applicable to Islamic education in general and that unique factors that influence the effectiveness of PR strategies in the Islamic boarding school environment will be revealed.

The sources of information in this study were obtained from various informants who have significant roles in the management and implementation of public relations at Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School. Informants include Islamic boarding school administrators, students, guardians of students, students, and representatives of educational institutions under the auspices of the Islamic boarding school. Informants were selected purposively based on their involvement in PR activities and their ability to provide relevant information. This approach provides a diversity of perspectives that allow researchers to develop a comprehensive understanding of public relations practices and their impact on public perception.

Data collection techniques were carried out through three main methods: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. Observations were conducted to directly observe the PR practices being carried out, including the use of digital media. In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants to gain an understanding of the strategies, challenges, and results of public relations activities. Documentation includes analysis of official documents, Islamic boarding school publications, and digital media content published by the institution. This combination of methods allows data triangulation to increase the validity and reliability of research results.

Data analysis was carried out in stages through the process of data reduction, data presentation, and verification. Data reduction aims to filter relevant information from raw data. Furthermore, the filtered data is presented in the form of narratives, tables, or thematic matrices to identify main patterns and themes. Verification was carried out iteratively to ensure the consistency and validity of the data analyzed. Qualitative analysis techniques such as coding were used to group key themes that emerged from the data, referring to the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism and the symmetrical two-way communication model that became the conceptual basis of this study. Triangulation of sources and methodologies was used in this study to improve the findings' accuracy and reliability. Comparisons between the results of observations, interviews, and documentation were carried out to gain a comprehensive

understanding. The results of the data analysis were then interpreted in the context of Islamic public relations and education theories, resulting in relevant and applicable academic contributions.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of interviews with five key informants at Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School are presented in Table 1. The data include their responses to questions about the effectiveness of the Islamic boarding school's public relations strategy. The table summarizes key themes such as public relations objectives, media used, challenges faced, and perceptions of the impact of public relations activities. Most informants highlighted the importance of digital media as the main medium despite constraints related to human resources and infrastructure. In addition, all informants agreed that public relations had improved the image of the Islamic boarding school in the eyes of the public.

Table 1: Summary of Interview Results

Theme	Informant 1	Informant 2	Informant 3	Informant 4	Informant 5
Public Relations Goals	Branding	Branding	Branding	Education	Branding
Main Media	Digital	Digital	Digital	Digital	Digital
Challenges	HR	Infrastructure	HR	HR	Infrastructure
Public Relations Impact	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive

Table 1 shows consistent thematic patterns across the informants' responses. All informants emphasized the important role of digital media in public relations strategy, reflecting the trend of modernization of communication. The main challenges identified were the lack of skilled human resources and limited infrastructure. However, perceptions of the impact of public relations activities were consistently positive, indicating that despite the challenges, the strategies implemented were effective. The main objective of public relations is to focus on branding, with some informants also linking it to educational aspects. These data reflect a collective awareness of the importance of image management in enhancing institutional competitiveness.

Thematic patterns in the interviews reflect the adaptation of Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School to modern communication needs. The focus on digital media as the main platform indicates an awareness of the increasingly digital changes in audience behaviour. Challenges such as human resources and infrastructure indicate that technology adoption is still in a transitional stage, requiring further investment in training and development. Positive perceptions of the impact of public relations activities show that the pesantren's branding efforts have succeeded in building a strong image while educating the public about the institution's vision and mission. This underscores the importance of a strategic approach to public relations management in Islamic education environments.

Table 2 summarises the results of observations on public relations activities at Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School. This data includes the types of public relations activities, the media used, and public involvement in these activities. Observations were conducted for one month, recording activities such as managing social media accounts, publishing news on the website, and organizing virtual events. All activities use digital media as the main channel, with varying levels of public involvement between platforms.

Table 2: Summary of Observation Results

Type of activity	Main Media	Public Engagement
Social Media Management	Instagram, YouTube	Tall
News Publishing	Website	Currently
Virtual Events	Live Stream YouTube	Tall

Table 2 shows that social media such as Instagram and YouTube are the most widely used platforms for public relations activities. The highest level of public engagement was recorded in social media activities, indicating the effectiveness of this medium in reaching a wider audience. In contrast, virtual events showed relatively low levels of engagement, possibly due to technical limitations or lack of audience interest. News publications on websites had moderate levels of engagement, reflecting a more specific and selective audience. These data indicate a diversification of communication channels that are in line with audience needs and preferences.

The pattern in the observation results reflects a public relations strategy based on the optimal use of digital media. High public engagement on social media platforms indicates that audiences are more interested in visual and interactive content. Conversely, low participation in virtual events indicates the need to evaluate

the promotion strategy and design of the event. Moderate engagement on website news reflects that this medium is more suitable for audiences seeking in-depth information. All of these patterns emphasize the need for a tailored approach to each communication channel to maximize public relations impact.

Table 3 summarises documentary evidence of public relations activities at Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School. This data includes the type of document, its content, and its frequency of publication. The documents analyzed include social media posts, website articles, and public relations activity reports. In the past month, there have been 20 social media posts, eight website articles, and three activity reports. These documents reflect routine activities carried out to maintain communication with the public.

Table 3: Summary of Documentary Evidence

Document Type	Document Contents	Publication Frequency
Social Media Posts	Event information, motivation, Dawuh Masyayikh.	Tall
Website Articles	Islamic boarding school news	Currently
Activity Report	Program achievements	Currently

Table 3 shows the different publication frequency patterns for each document type. Social media posts have the highest frequency, reflecting their important role in everyday communication. Articles on websites have a lower frequency, but their content is more in-depth and informative. Activity reports have the lowest frequency because they are evaluative and are usually published after major activities have concluded. These data show a consistent effort in maintaining relationships with the public through various channels and document formats.

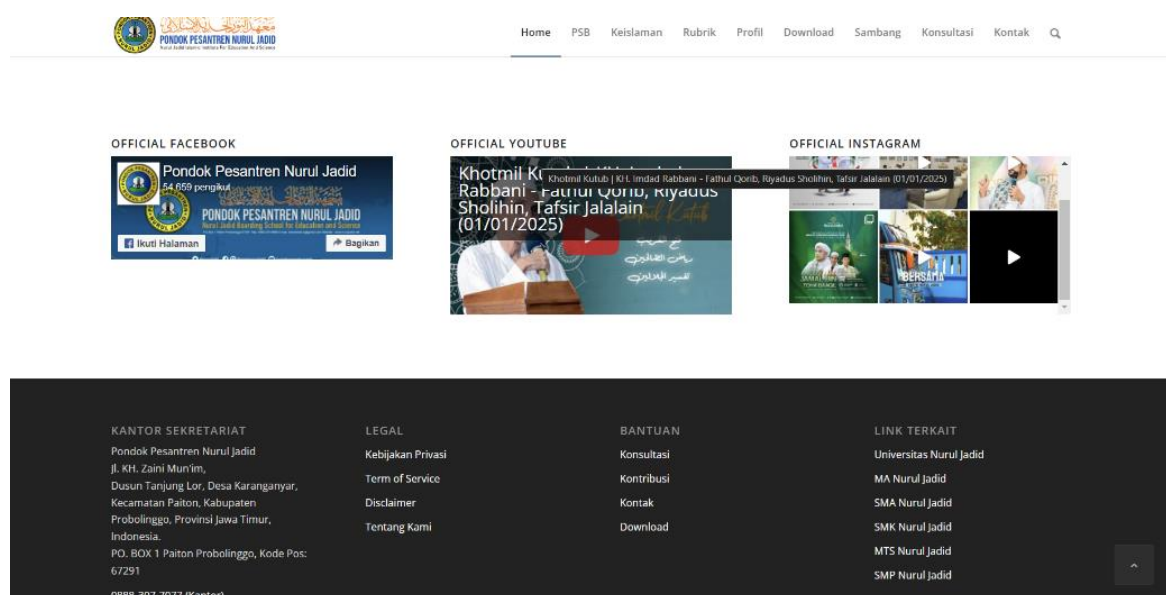
The documentation pattern shows a planned and segmented communication strategy. The high frequency of social media posts reflects the need to maintain real-time engagement with the audience. Less frequent but in-depth website articles indicate a focus on providing quality information. Infrequent activity reports indicate that these documents are more internal and strategic. Overall, this pattern shows a balanced effort between public communication needs and internal management, reflecting a professional approach to managing the pesantren's public relations.

The importance of publication media and the role of public relations in improving perceived quality and brand association at the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School was revealed through interviews with managers and stakeholders. Interviews revealed that good media management can improve the image of the pesantren and strengthen the community's positive association with this institution. However, there are also challenges related to resource management and the integration of communication strategies that are not optimal. This has implications for the limited reach of publications and the inaccessibility of various groups in society. In addition, more structured media management can function to improve external relations, but if not managed properly, this can actually disrupt the desired goal, namely creating a positive image in the eyes of the community. Therefore, optimizing publication media and the role of public relations are the main keys to improving the quality of perception and brand association of Islamic boarding schools.

Konsultasi

Konsultasi

- Halaman konsultasi ini dapat anda manfaatkan untuk bertanya seputar sosial keagamaan, kepribadian, informasi seputar Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid.
- Sebelum mengirimkan pertanyaan, pastikan anda telah mencari terlebih dahulu jawaban permasalahan di fitur "Pencarian" yang terletak di pojok kanan atas. Jika tidak ditemukan, silahkan kirimkan pertanyaan anda melalui form dibawah.
- Setiap pertanyaan yang masuk akan kami sortir berdasarkan prioritas dan urutan yang masuk.
- Untuk mendapatkan jawaban dari pertanyaan yang masuk, kami akan meneruskan pertanyaan tersebut pada pihak-pihak yang betul-betul ahli & berkompeten, atau Masyayikh Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid jika diperlukan.
- Kami akan mempublikasikan setiap pertanyaan dan jawaban yang kami nilai layak untuk dipublikasikan di website nuruljadid.net, tentu setelah mencentang form persetujuan dari anda.
- Jawaban konsultasi akan segera kami respon sesuai data yang anda berikan. Bisa jadi kami membalas melalui nomor telpon, email atau bahkan surat ke alamat anda.



The interview results show that the relationship between the quality of publications and the role of public relations at Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School is greatly influenced by communication management that has not been structured as a whole. Unprofessional management causes information to be delivered to the public unevenly, which ultimately affects their perception of the Islamic boarding school. In many cases, fragmented and poorly directed publications can create a less solid impression of the Islamic boarding school brand. Theoretically, according to research by Alexandris et al. (2008), consistent service quality and communication have a direct correlation to perceived quality and brand association. In addition, according to Chen and Myagmarsuren (2011), brand and company image significantly affect relationship quality, and relationship quality has a significant influence on relationship value. This shows that the implementation of a more planned and coordinated communication strategy can produce more positive results in building a stronger image of the Islamic boarding school. Over time, consistency in delivering messages will strengthen the Islamic boarding school's brand association in the community.

The results of observations of media publication activities at Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School show a mismatch between communication objectives and implementation in the field. Although Islamic boarding schools have various communication channels, not all of them are utilized optimally. For example, although Islamic boarding schools have social media accounts, the lack of maintenance and content updates means that the audience rarely engages with the messages conveyed. This observation implies that the mismatch between expectations and reality can reduce the positive impact of the publications made. If the publication is not optimized properly, it can affect public perception, which can ultimately harm the Islamic boarding school. Therefore, Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School needs to understand that success in publication depends not only on the channels used but also on the quality of the content and its regular and consistent maintenance.

The results of the observation show that although Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School has many communication channels, the consistency and quality of the content conveyed are often lacking. This causes a lack of audience engagement with the messages conveyed. According to research by Baetzgen and Tropp (2015), well-managed social media can increase engagement and create strong brand associations. In the context of Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School, the lack of management of social media accounts and the inconsistency of the messages conveyed can reduce audience engagement. Another study by Sumardi et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of audience engagement in building a strong organizational image, which should be the focus of the communication strategy of Islamic boarding schools. Therefore, to increase the effectiveness of media publication, Islamic boarding schools need to improve the quality and consistency of content and involve the audience in more active conversations.

Functional evidence of well-managed publication media at Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School is seen in the increase in community involvement and wider recognition of the Islamic boarding school brand. Well-organized publications using various platforms can create a positive image and improve public perception of the quality of education provided. However, dysfunctional evidence shows that without proper management, existing communication channels can be counterproductive. In this case, although Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School has great potential in publication media, if not optimized, this can hinder the

achievement of the goal of increasing brand association. For example, a lack of response to questions or comments on social media can reduce desired interactions and make the audience feel ignored. Therefore, in order to give functional benefits and prevent ineffectiveness, media releases must be used as efficiently as possible.

Evidence C shows a gap between public expectations and reality in the publication of Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid, especially regarding the speed and responsiveness to public feedback. According to Bryce's research (2007), organizations that are responsive to feedback can strengthen relationships with audiences and increase public trust in their brands. Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid, who is not fully responsive to comments and criticisms, may have difficulty in building better relationships with the public. Keller (2013) shows that open and responsive communication is the key to building a good image and strengthening brand associations in the minds of the public. Therefore, Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid needs to develop a more responsive system of communicating with the public in order to improve the quality of communication and more positive brand associations.

4. CONCLUSION

This study found that Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School successfully implemented a digital media-based public relations strategy, positively influencing its public image through effective use of social media and a comprehensive website. Despite facing challenges such as limited human resources and infrastructure, the study highlights the importance of strategic planning and adequate resource support in digital transformation. Using a multi-method approach—interviews, observations, and documentation—the research provides a comprehensive understanding of PR practices and contributes academically by updating perspectives on digital media use in Islamic educational institutions. However, its focus on a single case limits generalizability, and the brief observation period may reduce analytical depth. Future studies should involve more institutions, extended research durations, and complementary quantitative methods to yield broader, more applicable insights.

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