

The Role of Public Relations in Promoting the Image of SD Negeri 158 Palembang

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Abstract

Article entitled "The Role of Public Relations in Promoting the Image of SDN 158 Palembang". This study aims to determine and describe the role of Public Relations in building the image of the school in elementary schools. The method used in this study is a qualitative descriptive method to determine the role of Public Relations in building the image of the school. Data collection techniques using observation, interviews, and documentation techniques are used to collect data on the state of the role of public relations and other supporting factors. The results of the study indicate that the role of Public Relations in building the image of the school at SDN 158 Palembang has carried out its roles and functions in a fairly good category. This is illustrated by the contribution of public relations staff in the formulation of plans and implementation of the Public Relations program. This success is supported by harmonious communication between the school and parents of students and full support from the Principal. The inhibiting factors found are the less than optimal socialization of the program to the wider community and the limited time of Public Relations personnel due to their dual role as educators (teachers). Conclusion Overall, efforts to build the image of the school at SDN 158 Palembang have been carried out systematically through strong internal collaboration. However, better time management and optimization of digital media utilization as a means of socialization are needed so that the school's positive image can reach stakeholders more widely and effectively.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental pillar of a nation's progress and competitiveness. Through education, individuals acquire new knowledge, develop essential skills, and enhance their capacity to address increasingly complex challenges and intense competition in the era of globalization. The rapid advancement of science and technology requires society to continuously adapt and improve its competencies. One of the most effective ways to enhance the quality of human resources is through the education sector. Educational institutions serve as agents of change and centers for developing future generations. As communities become more selective in choosing educational institutions that meet their expectations, schools are required to establish and maintain a positive public image.

Public Relations (PR) plays a strategic role in the implementation and development of educational institutions. PR functions as a communication bridge between schools and the community, fostering harmonious relationships that encourage public trust, participation, and support. Effective public relations activities enable educational institutions to communicate their vision, mission, achievements, and educational programs while responding to the expectations and aspirations of stakeholders. Consequently, PR contributes significantly to strengthening institutional credibility and ensuring sustainable community engagement.

According to Harsono, as cited in Rachmadi's *Public Relation*, public relations encompasses all activities carried out by an institution or organization through PR practitioners to establish effective communication and organizational structures that promote mutual understanding between the institution and its stakeholders. The primary objective of public relations is to ensure that the organization's goodwill, activities, and achievements are clearly understood by its various publics. In the context of educational institutions, PR seeks to improve public understanding of the school's vision, mission, and educational objectives while simultaneously enabling schools to better understand the needs and expectations of the community they serve.

Furthermore, public relations encourages collaboration among school administrators, teachers, parents, and the wider community in supporting students' educational development. It enhances parental participation in school activities, increases community awareness of the importance of contributing to educational improvement, and strengthens cooperation in achieving institutional goals. Through effective communication and community engagement, PR helps maintain public confidence in the school and its educational programs. Such trust is essential for securing community support, financial assistance, and other resources necessary for sustaining and improving educational quality.

The importance of public relations should not only be recognized by school leaders but also by every unit within the educational institution. Effective PR requires the active participation of all stakeholders in creating positive interactions with the public. A school's image represents the collection of beliefs, perceptions, and impressions held by the community regarding the institution. These perceptions significantly influence public attitudes and decisions, including parents' choices when selecting schools for their children.

A positive institutional image is therefore a valuable asset that reflects the school's reputation, credibility, and achievements. Educational institutions with a strong public image are more likely to gain public appreciation, attract prospective students, and receive broader community support. Consequently, maintaining and enhancing a positive school image has become a crucial responsibility of public relations. As emphasized by Harsono et al. (2020), a favorable institutional image should be continuously nurtured to ensure sustained public trust and long-term organizational success.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive research design to examine the role of public relations in promoting the image of SD Negeri 158 Palembang. A qualitative approach was selected because it aims to explore meanings, processes, and actual practices in depth rather than producing quantitative data. The study focused on how public relations plans, implements, and disseminates school image promotion activities, as well as how these activities influence stakeholders' perceptions of the school.

The research was conducted at SD Negeri 158 Palembang, located in Palembang City, South Sumatra Province, Indonesia. The key informants included the principal, the vice principal responsible for student affairs or public relations, teachers involved in promotional activities, public relations officers, representatives of the school committee, and parents of students. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, whereby participants were chosen based on the relevance of their roles and their direct involvement in public relations and school image promotion activities.

Data were collected through documentation, interviews, and observations. Documentation was used to gather written and visual materials related to public relations and school image promotion, including public relations work plans, activity calendars, partnership agreements, promotional materials such as brochures, pamphlets, posters, banners, social media content, the school's website, public relations activity reports, and photographs of school events that reflected the school's public image. These documents were analyzed to identify patterns, strategies, and the consistency of promotional activities carried out by the public relations unit.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide while allowing participants the flexibility to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives. Interviews involved the principal, vice principal, public relations officers, school committee representatives, and parents to obtain information regarding public relations planning, communication media, target audiences, public perceptions of the school, challenges encountered, and strategies employed to promote the school's image. The interview transcripts were subsequently analyzed to identify emerging themes and patterns.

Observations were conducted using both participant and non-participant approaches. The researcher directly observed public relations activities and school image promotion programs implemented at SD Negeri 158 Palembang. Observation focused on promotional events within the school, meetings with parents, school committee activities, and other events that had the potential to influence the school's public image. During the observation process, the researcher recorded behaviors, interactions, and the overall atmosphere in detailed field notes, supported by photographs or audio recordings where permission had been granted.

Data were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis procedures proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction involved selecting, organizing, and focusing relevant information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. The reduced data were then presented in the form of descriptive narratives, direct quotations from participants, and contextual explanations to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn by interpreting the findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of public relations, the strategies employed, supporting and inhibiting factors, and their contribution to strengthening the institutional image of SD Negeri 158 Palembang.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from various participants, including the principal, public relations officers, teachers, school committee representatives, and parents, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Technique triangulation involved comparing findings derived from interviews, observations, and documentation to enhance data credibility. Furthermore, member checking was carried out by returning interview transcripts and preliminary interpretations to participants for confirmation, ensuring that the findings accurately reflected their intended meanings and perspectives.

DISCUSIOM

The present study was conducted at SD Negeri 158 Palembang to examine the role of public relations (PR) in promoting the institutional image of the school. The findings were obtained through a qualitative research approach using observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. These three data collection techniques enabled the researcher to explore the implementation of public relations activities comprehensively while ensuring the credibility of the findings through data triangulation. The analysis demonstrates that the public relations function at SD Negeri 158 Palembang extends beyond administrative communication. Instead, it has become an integral component of school management that contributes significantly to strengthening institutional reputation, enhancing public trust, and fostering positive relationships with stakeholders.

The findings reveal that the Public Relations unit performs a strategic role as the school's communication center and as the primary liaison between the institution and its stakeholders. This role is reflected in the systematic management of information dissemination, stakeholder engagement, and institutional promotion. Rather than functioning solely as a promotional office, the PR unit coordinates communication among school leaders, teachers, students, parents, the school committee, government agencies, and the wider community. Such coordination ensures that information delivered to the public remains accurate, transparent, and consistent with the school's vision and mission.

Based on the observational data, the implementation of public relations activities at SD Negeri 158 Palembang is characterized by openness, responsiveness, and consistency. School administrators recognize that public trust cannot be established solely through academic achievements but must also be supported by transparent communication and accountability. Consequently, the PR unit has adopted communication strategies that emphasize openness in conveying information regarding school programs, student development, extracurricular activities, and institutional achievements. This transparency has contributed to strengthening parents' confidence in the school while simultaneously enhancing its reputation within the local community.

Interview findings further indicate that the school's communication strategy is implemented through intensive interaction with various stakeholders. Parents are regularly informed about school activities, policy changes, academic programs, and student achievements through both face-to-face meetings and digital communication platforms. This continuous interaction enables parents to remain actively involved in their children's educational development while fostering mutual trust between

families and the school. Such findings support the argument that educational public relations is fundamentally concerned with developing reciprocal communication rather than merely disseminating institutional information.

Public relations has long been recognized as both the art and science of building mutual understanding between organizations and their publics. Within educational institutions, PR serves as an essential management function that facilitates communication between schools and internal as well as external stakeholders. According to Erlin et al. (2024), educational public relations is responsible for managing communication processes that support teaching and learning while enhancing institutional quality. The findings of the present study reinforce this perspective by demonstrating that effective communication significantly contributes to strengthening stakeholder confidence and institutional credibility.

The strategic role of school public relations is also consistent with the objectives of Indonesia's National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003, which emphasizes equitable access to education, quality improvement, accountability, and effective educational management. These principles require educational institutions not only to provide quality learning but also to maintain transparent governance and constructive relationships with the community. Consequently, public relations becomes a strategic instrument through which schools communicate their educational values, achievements, and commitments to the public while simultaneously responding to community expectations.

One of the most significant findings of this research concerns the role of communication transparency in shaping institutional image. Transparency emerged as the primary communication principle guiding public relations practices at SD Negeri 158 Palembang. Rather than limiting communication to formal announcements, the school continuously shares information regarding educational programs, extracurricular activities, student competitions, and school development initiatives. Such openness enables parents and community members to understand the school's priorities and achievements while minimizing misinformation that could negatively affect institutional reputation.

The effectiveness of transparency is strengthened by the school's responsiveness to stakeholder concerns. During observations, the researcher found that school administrators and PR personnel actively responded to questions, suggestions, and complaints submitted by parents. Instead of perceiving criticism as a threat, the school regarded community feedback as an important resource for institutional improvement. This approach reflects contemporary public relations theory, which emphasizes two-way symmetrical communication as the most effective model for establishing long-term organizational relationships.

The findings also indicate that effective public relations depends heavily on strong internal coordination. Although PR personnel are primarily responsible for communication activities, the school's positive image is ultimately constructed through the collective efforts of all members of the institution. The principal provides strategic leadership, teachers contribute by demonstrating professional educational practices, administrative staff ensure effective public services, and students represent the institution through their academic and non-academic achievements. This integrated organizational culture enables the school to communicate a consistent institutional identity to the public.

Internal communication was observed to function effectively through regular meetings, collaborative planning sessions, and continuous coordination among school personnel. Such internal collaboration minimizes communication gaps while ensuring that every member of the institution conveys similar messages regarding the school's vision, mission, and educational objectives. This finding supports previous research suggesting that organizational reputation is significantly influenced by internal communication quality before external promotional activities can achieve meaningful outcomes.

Another important finding concerns the increasingly significant role of digital communication in educational public relations. The rapid development of information technology has transformed the ways educational institutions communicate with their stakeholders. At SD Negeri 158 Palembang, digital media has become an indispensable communication channel for disseminating institutional information quickly and efficiently. Social media platforms, online messaging applications, and digital

communication groups are utilized extensively to share announcements, celebrate student achievements, promote educational programs, and strengthen community engagement.

The use of digital communication offers several advantages. First, it enables information to reach parents almost immediately, reducing delays associated with conventional communication methods. Second, digital platforms facilitate interactive communication, allowing parents to ask questions, provide suggestions, and receive responses in real time. Third, digital media allows the school to showcase its achievements to broader audiences beyond the immediate school community, thereby increasing institutional visibility within Palembang.

Observation results indicate that digital communication is not limited to promotional purposes but also supports educational management. Information regarding school schedules, extracurricular activities, academic competitions, and administrative procedures is regularly distributed through official communication channels. Parents therefore receive timely information that enables them to participate more actively in school programs. This continuous communication contributes to stronger parent-school relationships while enhancing institutional transparency.

The findings demonstrate that digital media has become an effective instrument for institutional branding. Rather than relying exclusively on printed promotional materials, SD Negeri 158 Palembang has gradually integrated digital platforms into its communication strategy. Student achievements, school celebrations, community service activities, religious events, and extracurricular programs are documented and shared through digital media, enabling the school to present itself as an active, innovative, and achievement-oriented educational institution.

These findings are consistent with Ningsih et al. (2022), who argue that public relations contributes significantly to institutional reputation through systematic publication, achievement promotion, transparent communication, and community engagement. The present study further extends this understanding by demonstrating that digital communication has strengthened these traditional PR functions through wider audience reach, greater communication efficiency, and increased opportunities for stakeholder interaction.

Overall, the findings from this first stage of analysis indicate that the success of public relations at SD Negeri 158 Palembang is closely associated with four interrelated factors: transparent communication, effective stakeholder engagement, strong internal coordination, and the strategic utilization of digital communication technologies. Together, these factors have enabled the school to strengthen public confidence, enhance institutional credibility, and establish a positive educational image within the community. These findings provide a strong foundation for the subsequent discussion concerning the implementation of internal and external public relations functions, communication strategies, and the challenges encountered in promoting the school's institutional image.

One of the principal findings of this study is that the effectiveness of public relations at SD Negeri 158 Palembang is closely associated with the successful integration of internal and external communication functions. The findings demonstrate that these two dimensions are complementary rather than independent. Internal communication strengthens organizational commitment and ensures consistency in institutional messaging, while external communication enables the school to establish constructive relationships with parents, community members, government agencies, and other stakeholders. The interaction between these two functions has become a critical factor in developing and maintaining the school's positive institutional image.

Internal Public Relations as the Foundation of Institutional Image

The study found that effective institutional branding begins with strong internal communication. Public relations activities at SD Negeri 158 Palembang are not carried out solely by designated PR personnel; instead, they involve collaboration among the principal, vice principals, teachers, administrative staff, and students. Every member of the school community contributes to shaping public perceptions through daily interactions, professional conduct, and participation in school activities.

Observational data indicate that the principal plays a central leadership role in coordinating communication among all school personnel. Regular coordination meetings are conducted to discuss school programs, evaluate ongoing activities, and ensure that information delivered to stakeholders remains accurate and consistent. Such meetings also provide opportunities for teachers and staff

members to express opinions, identify challenges, and propose improvements. This collaborative decision-making process promotes organizational transparency and strengthens institutional cohesion.

Teachers, in particular, play a significant role in reinforcing the school's reputation. Beyond their instructional responsibilities, teachers act as representatives of the institution during interactions with parents and the community. Their professionalism, communication skills, and commitment to student development directly influence stakeholders' perceptions of the school. Throughout the observation period, teachers demonstrated positive attitudes toward parents by responding courteously to inquiries, providing regular updates on students' progress, and participating actively in school events. These interactions contribute substantially to establishing trust between families and the school.

Administrative staff also contribute to institutional image through the quality of public services they provide. The researcher observed that visitors and parents were welcomed professionally, administrative procedures were handled efficiently, and information was delivered clearly and respectfully. Such seemingly routine interactions significantly influence first impressions of the institution. Previous studies on educational service quality have consistently shown that stakeholder satisfaction is shaped not only by academic performance but also by the professionalism of administrative services.

Students likewise serve as important ambassadors of the school's image. Their achievements in academic competitions, sports tournaments, cultural performances, and extracurricular activities represent tangible evidence of the school's educational quality. The study found that student accomplishments are consistently documented and publicized by the Public Relations unit, transforming individual achievements into institutional assets that strengthen the school's reputation.

The harmonious relationships among school personnel also contribute to a positive organizational climate. Interview participants explained that mutual respect, teamwork, and shared responsibility have become part of the school's organizational culture. Such a culture enables school members to work collaboratively toward achieving institutional goals while presenting a unified image to external audiences. This finding supports the view that a positive organizational culture serves as the foundation for effective external communication.

External Public Relations and Stakeholder Engagement

While internal communication establishes organizational consistency, external public relations focuses on building sustainable partnerships with stakeholders outside the school. The findings indicate that SD Negeri 158 Palembang actively maintains relationships with parents, the school committee, local government agencies, educational authorities, community organizations, and local media. These relationships are developed through continuous communication, collaborative activities, and transparent information sharing.

Parents represent the school's most important external stakeholders. Interview data reveal that parents are regularly involved in educational activities through meetings, consultations, parenting programs, and school events. Rather than functioning merely as recipients of information, parents are encouraged to participate actively in discussions regarding school development and student welfare. This participatory approach enhances parents' sense of ownership and responsibility toward the institution.

The researcher observed several parent meetings during the study period, where school leaders openly discussed educational programs, student achievements, administrative policies, and future development plans. Parents were given opportunities to express suggestions, concerns, and expectations. Such two-way communication strengthens mutual understanding while minimizing potential conflicts arising from misinformation or inadequate communication.

Collaboration with the School Committee also emerged as an important component of external public relations. The committee functions as a bridge between the school and the community by representing parents' aspirations while supporting institutional development. According to interview participants, committee members are actively involved in planning major school programs, evaluating educational initiatives, and assisting in the organization of community-based activities. Their participation enhances transparency and strengthens public confidence in school governance.

The study further indicates that partnerships with government institutions contribute positively to the school's reputation. Participation in educational programs organized by local authorities enables SD Negeri 158 Palembang to demonstrate compliance with national educational standards while expanding opportunities for professional development and institutional collaboration. Such

partnerships reinforce public perceptions of the school as a credible and accountable educational institution.

Digital Communication as a Strategic Public Relations Instrument

One of the most prominent themes emerging from this research concerns the strategic utilization of digital communication technologies. The rapid advancement of information technology has transformed public expectations regarding organizational communication. Educational institutions are increasingly expected to provide timely, accurate, and accessible information through digital platforms. The findings demonstrate that SD Negeri 158 Palembang has responded positively to these expectations by integrating digital communication into its public relations strategy.

The school's official social media accounts function as primary communication channels through which achievements, educational activities, announcements, and community engagement programs are shared. Unlike traditional promotional methods that rely on printed brochures or banners, digital communication allows information to reach stakeholders almost instantly. This immediacy has improved communication efficiency while expanding the school's visibility within the broader community.

The researcher observed that photographs and videos documenting school activities were consistently uploaded following major events. These publications highlighted students' participation in competitions, classroom learning, extracurricular activities, religious celebrations, environmental campaigns, and cultural events. Such visual documentation serves not only as evidence of institutional activity but also as an effective branding strategy that communicates the school's educational values.

The findings further suggest that digital communication strengthens transparency. Parents can monitor school activities, observe students' participation in various programs, and obtain updated information without visiting the school physically. This accessibility contributes to greater parental engagement while reinforcing trust in the institution.

Interview participants emphasized that digital media has become particularly valuable in responding quickly to emerging issues. Information can be clarified immediately whenever misunderstandings arise, reducing the likelihood of misinformation spreading within the community. This responsiveness represents one of the key strengths of modern public relations management.

Challenges in Implementing Public Relations Activities

Despite these positive findings, the study also identified several challenges affecting the implementation of public relations at SD Negeri 158 Palembang. One significant challenge concerns the limited availability of personnel possessing specialized competencies in digital communication, graphic design, photography, and multimedia content production. Although teachers and administrative staff demonstrate strong commitment to institutional promotion, not all possess professional expertise in communication technologies.

Rapid changes in public expectations also present ongoing challenges. Parents increasingly expect institutions to provide high-quality digital content, immediate responses to inquiries, and transparent communication regarding educational policies. Meeting these expectations requires continuous adaptation, technological investment, and professional development.

Another challenge relates to the dynamic nature of public opinion. Institutional reputation can be influenced rapidly by information circulating through digital media, including inaccurate or incomplete information. Consequently, the Public Relations unit must continuously monitor public perceptions while responding promptly to emerging concerns. This finding highlights the growing importance of crisis communication and reputation management within educational institutions.

Limited financial and technological resources also influence the implementation of communication strategies. While digital platforms generally reduce promotional costs compared with conventional advertising, effective digital communication still requires investment in equipment, software, internet infrastructure, and staff training. Interview participants acknowledged that resource limitations occasionally affect the quality and frequency of promotional activities.

To address these challenges, SD Negeri 158 Palembang has implemented several strategic initiatives. Teachers and staff members are encouraged to participate in professional development programs related to information technology, digital literacy, and communication skills. The school also seeks to strengthen collaboration with local media organizations and community partners to expand institutional visibility while maximizing available resources.

Overall, the findings presented in this section demonstrate that the effectiveness of public relations at SD Negeri 158 Palembang is influenced by the successful integration of internal communication, stakeholder engagement, digital communication strategies, and continuous organizational adaptation. These interconnected factors collectively strengthen the school's institutional image while establishing a solid foundation for long-term public trust and organizational sustainability. The following section discusses the interview findings, observational evidence, and documentary analysis in greater depth, providing a comprehensive interpretation of how these strategies contribute to building a positive institutional reputation.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion regarding the role of public relations in promoting the institutional image of SD Negeri 158 Palembang, several key conclusions can be drawn. Overall, the findings indicate that the public relations function has been implemented systematically through effective communication, coordination, and publication activities. As explained by Mrs. Novi, the school's strategy emphasizes information transparency and the utilization of digital media as a means of strengthening relationships between the school and the community. The success of public relations in building a positive institutional image is reflected in the increasing trust of parents and the positive public appreciation of students' academic and non-academic achievements, which have been consistently documented and publicized.

In addition to these general findings, the study provides several recommendations for enhancing the role of public relations in the future. SD Negeri 158 Palembang is encouraged to develop a more integrated digital documentation system to ensure that records of the school's achievements and activities are more easily accessible to prospective parents and other stakeholders. Furthermore, the school should strengthen the technical competencies of personnel supporting public relations, particularly in creative content development and digital communication, so that social media promotion becomes more engaging and aligned with contemporary communication trends. These initiatives are expected to reinforce the school's position as one of the leading elementary schools in Palembang.

Overall, it can be concluded that public relations management at SD Negeri 158 Palembang extends beyond a merely administrative function and serves as a strategic management instrument capable of transforming internal achievements into a favorable public perception. Strong collaboration among school leaders, teachers, the school committee, parents, and the wider community forms the foundation for sustaining the school's positive institutional image. By continuously innovating its promotional strategies and maintaining responsiveness to community feedback, SD Negeri 158 Palembang is expected to further strengthen its institutional image, credibility, and public trust in the future.

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