PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF UINSU ON THE INSTAGRAM PLATFORM TO ENHANCE A POSITIVE IMAGE AMONG NEW STUDENTS

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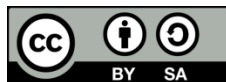*Corresponding Author: putri0603213028@uinsu.ac.id

Article Info	ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the communication strategy implemented by the Public Relations of the State Islamic University of North Sumatra (UINSU) through the Instagram platform in order to form a positive image among new students. The data was analyzed using the Theory Image in the corporate image category. The problems studied in this study are how the strategy is built by UINSU Public Relations and what are the inhibiting and supporting factors for the implementation of UINSU's Public Relations strategy. The research method used is a qualitative-descriptive approach with data collection techniques in the form of observation, interviews, and documentation of the Instagram account @uinsu_official and new students in the 2024/2025 academic year. The results of the study are expected to be able to reveal the strategy and effectiveness of the content published by the official account @uinsu_official as well as the supporting and inhibiting factors for the implementation of public relations communication strategies. This study also provides theoretical contributions to the development of communication science as well as practical recommendations for institutions in improving the reputation and involvement of new students through social media.

Keywords: Communication Strategy, Public Relations, Instagram, Positive Image, New Students, UINSU

1. INTRODUCTION

In the current digital era, effective communication has become one of the key success factors for higher education institutions, including the State Islamic University of North Sumatra (UINSU). According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media enables users to interact and share information in a more dynamic manner (Dalimunthe, 2018; Ritonga et al., 2024). Instagram, as one of the most

popular social media platforms among the younger generation, provides an opportunity for UINSU to build and enhance a positive image among new students.

The Instagram account managed by the Public Relations Division of UINSU is @uinsu_official, which has 61.1 thousand followers. Through this account, UINSU's public relations team carries out various activities, such as disseminating information regarding student achievements, scholarships, graduation ceremonies, and other relevant updates. The presence of the @uinsu_official Instagram account facilitates new students in accessing information related to UINSU. Amid the increasing competition in the education sector, it is essential for UINSU to build and maintain a positive image in the eyes of the public, particularly among new students.

An efficient approach to achieving this objective is through a public relations communication strategy that integrates the use of social media, especially Instagram (Harianto et al., 2023; Ohorella et al., 2024). As one of the most popular social media platforms, Instagram offers strong visual characteristics and the capability to reach a broad audience, particularly the younger generation or prospective students. According to Qualman (2018), the rapid shifts in trends and user preferences on social media can influence the effectiveness of communication strategies. Therefore, UINSU must conduct regular evaluations and adjust the published content to ensure its relevance and appeal.

Sari and Asep Soegiarto (2013) stated that public relations is a communication process aimed at building, maintaining, and developing mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its publics. They emphasized the importance of effective communication strategies in creating a positive organizational image and highlighted the role of public relations in addressing emerging societal issues.

A positive image of a public university refers to the favorable perception held by the public, prospective students, and stakeholders toward the institution. This image encompasses a strong reputation related to academic quality, research, and community service. According to Fombrun (1996), a strong and positive image is built through consistency between what is communicated and the experiences perceived by the audience. By maintaining alignment in the published content, UINSU can foster trust and loyalty among new students. A university with a positive image is considered capable of delivering high-quality education, producing competent graduates, and contributing significantly to the advancement of science and technology.

A favorable image also reflects a safe and supportive campus environment, as well as strong relationships with alumni and industry partners. With a positive image, higher education institutions can attract more prospective students, enhance public support, and strengthen collaborations with various stakeholders, ultimately contributing to the success and sustainability of the institution. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), a positive image is a favorable perception

formed in the public's mind about an organization or brand, influenced by experience, communication, and interaction with the organization.

Literature Review

The theory employed in this study is the Image Theory. According to Frank Jefkins, as cited in a book by Soemirat and Elvinaro Ardianto (2007:114), image refers to the perception or impression held by an individual toward something, which is shaped by personal experience and knowledge. Image can be categorized into several types, including mirror image, current image, wish image, multiple image, and corporate image. A positive image is essential for an institution, as it serves as a benchmark for building public trust and loyalty.

In the context of corporate image, based on Frank Jefkins' theory, this term refers to the overall portrayal of an organization formed through various elements such as its history, reputation, core values, and the way it communicates and interacts with its publics. The communication strategies implemented by UINSU's Public Relations team on Instagram play a direct role in shaping UINSU's corporate image. With a positive and professional image, UINSU is expected to attract the interest of prospective students and strengthen its position as a modern and reputable Islamic higher education institution.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive approach, involving observation, interviews, and documentation. This approach was chosen as the researcher aims to generate descriptive data related to the communication strategies implemented by the Public Relations Division of the State Islamic University of North Sumatra (UINSU) through the Instagram social media platform in an effort to enhance the university's image. According to Sugiyono (2016:9), descriptive qualitative research is grounded in post-positivist philosophy and is used to study natural objects (unlike experimental research), wherein the researcher serves as the primary instrument.

Data collection in this study was carried out through three techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to directly monitor the activities of the official Instagram account of UINSU's Public Relations Division (@uinsu_official), including the types of content uploaded, the frequency of posts, and forms of interaction with followers. This observation aimed to obtain empirical insights into how communication strategies are practically executed on social media.

Respondents for the interviews were selected based on specific criteria: they must be students from the 2024 intake, active Instagram users, and class representatives from various study programs at the Tuntungan IV campus. Interviews were conducted with three respondents, each representing a different

study program. In addition, interviews were also conducted with several members of the UINSU Public Relations team. Documentation included analysis of data obtained from UINSU's Instagram account and photographic records taken during the interview process.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on in-depth observation and analysis of the research sources, the researcher conducted an examination of the communication strategy of UINSU's Public Relations Division on the Instagram platform to enhance a positive image among new students. The focus of the study includes:

1. The communication strategy developed by UINSU's Public Relations Division through the Instagram platform
2. Supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of UINSU's public relations strategy

Communication Strategy Developed by UINSU's Public Relations Division via Instagram

The public relations communication strategy for enhancing the university's positive image comprises a series of efforts designed to create a favorable impression of the institution, thereby fostering a sense of pride, comfort, and motivation among new students to become part of the academic community. This strategy aims to cultivate a positive experience from the outset of a new student's engagement with the university, both through media and direct activities.

Such a communication strategy may include producing engaging visual content, such as photos and videos of campus activities, academic achievements, student organization events, and faculty collaborations. It also involves utilizing Instagram's interactive features to increase engagement with prospective students. Moreover, maintaining message consistency is crucial for effectively building UINSU's positive image. Through regular analysis of content effectiveness, communication strategies can be continuously refined to successfully construct a strong image and increase the interest of prospective students in UINSU.

Figure 1. Official Instagram Account of UIN Sumatera Utara

< uinsu_official   ⌄   …

UIN Sumatera Utara Medan

931   **61,1rb**   **132**
postingan   pengikut   mengikuti

Perguruan Tinggi & Universitas
Akun Resmi Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara Medan
dikelola oleh Tim Kerjasama Kelembagaan dan Humas UIN SU
Medan
linktr.ee/UINSumateraUtara

Ilham Luthfi, a member of UINSU's Public Relations team, stated that the Public Relations Division actively collaborates with faculties and student organizations. During various campus activities such as seminars, competitions, or other events, the PR team typically requests documentation from the organizing committee or directly participates in coverage efforts. Additionally, students are often involved as content creators or volunteers, particularly those with an interest in media, design, or journalism. This collaboration not only enriches the variety of published content but also fosters broader engagement across all campus elements, thus cultivating a shared sense of ownership over UINSU's positive image.

According to Indah Novita Jambak, a respondent from the Nutrition study program, the content provided by UINSU's Public Relations Division aligns well with the informational needs of new students. She noted that the content has been quite helpful, particularly in terms of academic information and campus orientation. However, she also suggested that it would be more effective if the information were presented in a more structured format—such as through dedicated highlights—so it could be accessed and understood more easily.

Public relations can serve to facilitate decision-making processes at various organizational levels, as noted by Keller (2008). Grunig, Wilcox, and Agee (2006) explain that public relations is a management function responsible for evaluating public attitudes, identifying policies and procedures of an individual or organization toward the public, developing plans, and executing communication programs to achieve mutual understanding and public acceptance. Furthermore, Wilcox and Agee (2006) describe public relations as the art of cultivating appreciation and creating a positive image of an organization in the eyes of employees, consumers, and distribution partners. Indirectly, image—or public perception—is both the end result and primary objective of all activities within a public relations work program (Ruslan, 2007).

The Qur'anic verse Al-Hujurat:11 contains a moral message highly relevant to the principles of public relations. The verse forbids mocking, insulting, or calling

others by degrading nicknames. In the context of public relations, this verse teaches the importance of ethical communication, respect for differences, and the maintenance of harmony in social relations. A public relations practitioner holds a significant responsibility in maintaining a positive image of an institution or organization in the public eye. By adhering to the values contained in this verse, a PR professional can foster healthy and harmonious relationships with the public and create communication that is courteous, wise, and respectful. This aligns with the fundamental goal of public relations: to build a positive image and public trust through ethical communication.

According to Mr. Firmansyah, a member of UINSU's Public Relations team, the greatest challenge in building a positive image through Instagram lies in maintaining the consistency and quality of content. As Instagram is a visually driven platform, an appealing visual presentation combined with clear information is essential to capture audience attention. However, a significant limitation is the scarcity of human resources capable of producing high-quality content on a regular basis.

In addition, the Public Relations team must continuously adapt content to align with the ever-evolving trends of social media, while simultaneously upholding the Islamic and academic values that are integral to UINSU's identity. Therefore, a carefully crafted strategy is required to ensure that the content remains relevant, engaging, and aligned with the distinctive character of the university.

Figure 2. Instagram Feed Display of UIN Sumatera Utara

The use of social media in public relations offers a range of significant benefits. First, it enables direct interaction with the public—answering questions and responding to comments—which can strengthen public trust and loyalty toward an institution or organization. Second, social media facilitates the rapid dissemination of information and provides access to the latest relevant news, reaching a broader audience. Third, it allows for the collection of direct feedback

from the public regarding institutional performance, which can be used to improve the quality of services and operations (Anshar, 2019).

Mr. Farhan Nasution, a member of the UINSU Public Relations team responsible for managing the university's official Instagram account, explained that the effectiveness of communication via Instagram is measured using several indicators:

"First, the PR team monitors the engagement level of each post, such as the number of likes, comments, and shares. This reflects the extent to which the audience is interacting with the uploaded content. Second, they observe the growth in follower count. An increase in followers indicates the account's appeal, while a decline may signal the need to evaluate the content strategy. Third, the team utilizes Instagram's Insight feature to obtain data such as post reach, audience demographics, and geographic origins of Instagram users. This data helps identify the types of content most favored by the audience. Finally, direct feedback from followers is also taken into account—whether through comments, direct messages (DMs), or responses from students and members of the academic community. Thus, evaluation is not only based on numerical metrics but also on audience responses and perceptions of the shared content."

Surah Ali Imran, verse 159 emphasizes the importance of gentleness, forgiveness, and openness in communication and leadership. These values are highly relevant in the context of building a positive university image, as a university is not only assessed based on its academic quality, but also on the attitude, culture, and governance of the institution in fostering relationships with its students, lecturers, staff, and the broader community. When a university prioritizes a humanistic, friendly approach and values the aspirations of its academic community through dialogue and deliberation, its image in the public eye will grow as an inclusive, compassionate, and trustworthy institution. Conversely, a rigid, uncommunicative, and authoritarian university tends to be avoided by prospective students, potential partners, and the general public. Therefore, the values embedded in QS. Ali Imran: 159 provide a spiritual and ethical foundation for universities to build a positive image grounded in noble character and empathetic leadership.

Inhibiting and Supporting Factors in the Implementation of UINSU Public Relations Strategy

Based on research findings obtained by Annisa Julianti Kudadiri (2023) in her scientific work entitled "Public Relations Communication Strategy in the Management and Delivery of Information at the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Dairi Regency," it can be understood that, in the specific context of the strategy carried out by the Public Relations division of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Dairi Regency, the supporting factor in the successful implementation of the strategy is the cooperation among members in the publication of news. This collaboration

ensures the active existence of the public relations division in managing and providing information services within the Ministry. There are no significant obstacles in implementing the public relations strategy for information services, as access is available through various channels including online platforms, written correspondence, and direct dialogue. Although there are limitations in technological skills among some staff members, these are not considered major obstacles due to strong interdepartmental collaboration in various aspects, which prioritizes teamwork to overcome such issues. Activities conducted in collaboration with institutions under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Dairi Regency, also contribute to the Ministry's continued active role in religious activities, effectively mitigating these challenges.

Supporting Factors in the Implementation of UINSU Public Relations Strategy

1. The support of university leadership serves as a major strength. The rectorate generally provides support for Public Relations programs, both in terms of policy and moral encouragement.
2. The ease of access to technology and social media facilitates the work of the Public Relations team. With increasingly advanced digital infrastructure, the process of creating and disseminating information becomes more efficient.

Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of UINSU Public Relations Strategy

1. The limited number of team members and technical expertise often poses a challenge. Not all team members possess the skills in graphic design, creative writing, or video editing necessary to produce engaging content.
2. A limited budget is also an obstacle in producing high-quality content, such as professional videos or visual campaigns that require higher production costs.
3. Maintaining content neutrality amid sensitive issues presents its own challenge. The Public Relations team must carefully choose wording and perspectives to ensure that the information remains objective and does not incite controversy.
4. Delays in receiving information from campus work units hinder the timely updating of content. This limits the Public Relations team's ability to present current and relevant information to the public.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the communication strategy implemented by the Public Relations (PR) team of Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara (UINSU) through the Instagram platform is quite effective in building a positive image

among new students. This strategy is realized through the use of engaging visual content such as photos and videos of campus activities, academic achievements, and the utilization of Instagram's interactive features to increase audience engagement. The effectiveness of communication is evaluated by considering indicators such as the level of engagement, follower growth, use of the Insight feature, and direct responses from account followers. The PR team at UINSU also adapts content to social media trends while maintaining Islamic and academic values that represent the campus identity. Supporting factors for the success of this strategy include support from campus leadership and ease of access to technology and social media. Meanwhile, the challenges faced include limited human resources and technical expertise, budget constraints, difficulty in maintaining neutrality amidst sensitive issues, and delays in information delivery from campus units. With strategies that are continuously evaluated and adjusted, UINSU's PR team can maximize the role of social media, especially Instagram, as a means to build a positive institutional reputation in the eyes of new students.

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