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## Barriers and Strategies of School Public Relations Management in Building Institutional Image and Public Trust: A Systematic Literature Review

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### ABSTRACT

#### Background

Background: In an increasingly competitive educational environment, schools are required to build a strong institutional image and maintain public trust. School public relations (PR) management plays a strategic role in shaping positive perceptions; however, many institutions still encounter structural and operational barriers that hinder effective implementation.

#### Purpose

This study aims to examine the strategies employed in school public relations management to strengthen institutional image and public trust, as well as to identify the key challenges that influence their effectiveness

#### Method

a qualitative approach was adopted using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). The literature search was conducted systematically through Publish or Perish, focusing on articles published between 2021 and 2025. The selection process followed the PRISMA framework, encompassing identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages. Fifteen relevant articles were selected and analyzed in depth

#### Results

The findings reveal that effective PR strategies include optimizing social and mass media, strengthening stakeholder relationships, communicating flagship programs, and developing brand image and awareness. Nevertheless, implementation is constrained by limited human resources, low digital competencies, budget restrictions, negative public perceptions, and weak internal coordination and organizational support

#### Contribution/value

This study highlights that successful school public relations management relies not only on communication strategies but also on adequate resources, strong organizational support, and proactive leadership to ensure professional and sustainable PR practices

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## **INTRODUCTION**

School public relations (PR) management is an essential component of educational management that functions to build effective communication between schools and the public. The role of PR extends beyond merely disseminating information; it also contributes strategically to shaping the school's image and enhancing public trust in educational institutions. Effective PR management enables schools to communicate their programs, achievements, and institutional values transparently and sustainably, thereby strengthening public support for the delivery of education (Fitri et al., 2023).

However, numerous studies indicate that the implementation of PR management in schools has not yet been fully optimized. Research conducted in elementary schools shows that school–community relationships are still dominated by one-way communication and are not supported by structured evaluation systems, limiting the effectiveness of PR programs (Aminda et al., 2021). This condition suggests that school PR continues to face challenges in carrying out its strategic functions professionally.

Along with the rapid development of information technology, school PR is also required to adapt to digital-based communication. Nevertheless, recent studies reveal that limited competencies in managing digital and social media represent a significant barrier to building school reputation in the digital era. Unsystematic content management and a lack of understanding of digital communication strategies have prevented online media from being utilized to its full potential.

In addition to internal challenges, school PR also faces external pressures in the form of competition among educational institutions. This competition requires schools to develop more creative and well-planned communication strategies to build brand awareness and public trust. Based on this background, the study proposes two research questions: (1) What are the barriers to school public relations management? and (2) What strategies are employed in school public relations management?

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative approach using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to identify the barriers and strategies of school public relations (PR) management in building institutional image and public trust. The researcher conducted a systematic search for articles published between 2021 and 2025 using the Publish or Perish software. The search and selection process followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) model, which includes several stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. The identification stage began with an article search through Publish or Perish using the Google Scholar database. The search was conducted using Boolean operators with the keywords (“public relations” AND “school” AND “strategy”), yielding 982 documents, and (“public relations” AND “school” AND “challenges”), yielding 964 documents. Subsequently, the screening process was carried out to eliminate documents that did not meet the predetermined criteria, as outlined in the following table.

No	Category	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
1	Type of publication	Articles published in academic journals	Articles in "CITATION" and "HTML" formats
2	Article accessibility	Open-access and full-text articles	Articles that cannot be accessed
3	Year of publication	2021–2025	Before 2021
4	Number of citations	More than 0	0 citations
5	Language	Articles written in Indonesian and English	Articles written in languages other than Indonesian and English

Articles that passed the screening based on the inclusion criteria were then assessed for eligibility by examining the journal indexing rank, relevance to the expected topic, and permitted research approaches, namely qualitative (non-SLR) and quantitative studies. After the eligibility assessment, the articles entered the inclusion stage, where the findings were organized into a data presentation table. A total of fifteen selected articles met the requirements and were relevant to the research topic.

Accordingly, the data selection process involved choosing articles that aligned with the inclusion criteria and analyzing them through a thematic approach based on the research questions. The thematic analysis was conducted to identify and formulate the main themes relevant to school public relations management.

**RESULTS**

This section presents the results of a systematic review of fifteen articles discussing school public relations (PR) management in efforts to build institutional image and public trust. These articles were analyzed to identify the focus of the studies, the issues raised, and the main findings related to PR strategies and practices in educational institutions.

In general, the review reveals a consistent pattern of findings across studies, particularly regarding the strategic role of public relations in public communication, educational service marketing, and strengthening school image. A summary of the research characteristics and the main findings of each article is presented in Table 1 as the basis for analysis in the subsequent subsection.

Table 1. Identity and Findings of Selected Articles

No	Article Identity	Review Results
1	Title: Public Relations Strategy at SMK IPIEMS Surabaya in Enhancing Institutional Image and Public Trust During the Covid-19 Pandemic Authors: Puji Rahayu & Novi Trisnawati	Approach: Qualitative Problem: Public doubts regarding the quality of vocational schools during the pandemic Findings: Intensive promotion, social media utilization, and alumni loyalty

	Journal: JPAP Unesa (2022)	improved image and public trust
2	Title: Strategies to Increase Public Interest in Schools through the Optimization of School Public Relations Services Authors: Bagus Rachmad Saputra et al. Journal: JDMP Unesa (2021)	Approach: Qualitative Problem: Low public interest in the school Findings: Optimizing PR services increased community attraction
3	Title: School Marketing Strategies in Attracting Public Interest Authors: Muhamad Basorah et al. Journal: Kelola UKSW (2020)	Approach: Qualitative Problem: Competition among schools Findings: Promotional strategies and flagship programs increased applicant interest
4	Title: Collaboration Between School Public Relations and Business and Industry (DUDI) in Improving Graduate Competence Author: Ryan Rahmawati Journal: Al-Rosikhun UIN Malang (2021)	Approach: Qualitative Problem: Alignment of graduate competencies with industry needs Findings: PR collaboration with industry improved competence and employment opportunities for graduates
5	Title: Educational Service Marketing Strategies in Increasing Public Interest Authors: Evi Zulfiah et al. Journal: Ideguru Dikpora DIY (2022)	Approach: Qualitative Problem: Low number of applicants Findings: Effective segmentation and promotion increased public interest
6	Title: Strategies for Building School Brand Awareness Authors: Mughni Zaenal Mukhtar et al. Journal: Tadbir IAIN Gorontalo (2021)	Approach: Qualitative Problem: Lack of public trust Findings: Brand awareness increased trust and applicant numbers
7	Title: Management in Building School Brand Image Author: Rio Septian Journal: Media Manajemen Pendidikan (2020)	Approach: Qualitative Problem: Weak school image Findings: Effective management functions helped build brand image
8	Title: Principal Strategies in Building School Image Authors: Faizal Amir et al. Journal: Islamic Management (2021)	Approach: Qualitative Problem: Low madrasa image Findings: Internal and external strategies improved image and student enrollment
9	Title: School Strategies for Successful Student Admissions (PPDB) Authors: Andriawan Fajar Ramadhan & Ika Maryani Journal: Kelola UKSW (2021)	Approach: Qualitative Problem: Competition in student admissions Findings: Planning and promotional activities increased applicant numbers
10	Title: School Collaboration Strategies	Approach: Qualitative

	with International Institutions in Foreign Language Learning Authors: Nur Anisatussholihah et al. Journal: JAMP UM (2024)	Problem: Quality of foreign language learning Findings: International partnerships enhanced student competence
11	Title: Marketing Strategies in New Student Admissions Authors: Pangestika et al. Journal: Munaddhomah (2022)	Approach: Qualitative Problem: Low applicant interest Findings: Social media and word-of-mouth were effective in attracting prospective students
12	Title: The Role of Public Relations in Socializing SLB E Negeri Pembina Medan School Authors: Risa Fadila & M. Yoserizal Saragih Journal: JIGE (2023)	Approach: Qualitative Problem: Limited public understanding Findings: Journalistic media helped build parents' trust
13	Title: Building School Image Based on the Marketing Mix Authors: Budiatyomo & Iriani Journal: Kelola UKSW (2022)	Approach: Qualitative Problem: Declining student enrollment Findings: The marketing mix strengthened school image
14	Title: Press Contributions in Publicizing Flagship Programs of Reference Schools Authors: Ade Rosad et al. Journal: Islamic Management (2022)	Approach: Qualitative Problem: Limited publication of school programs Findings: The role of the press improved school reputation
15	Title: Superior Marketing Management Strategies for Educational Services Authors: Beny Sintasari & Nailatul Afifah Journal: Munaddhomah (2023)	Approach: Qualitative Problem: Competition among educational institutions Findings: Superior marketing enhanced institutional image and student interest

**DISCUSSION**

This discussion is directed toward a deeper examination of research findings related to the strategies and barriers of school public relations (PR) management in building institutional image and public trust. The literature review indicates that PR strategies implemented by schools have contributed positively to improving public perceptions. However, the effectiveness of these strategies cannot be separated from the structural and cultural barriers that accompany them.

Therefore, the following discussion integrates findings on PR management strategies with the barriers encountered in their implementation. This approach aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of school public relations management

while highlighting the factors that influence both the success and the limitations of PR strategy implementation within the educational context.

### **Barriers to School Public Relations Management**

Based on the synthesis of the fifteen analyzed articles, several major barriers were identified in the implementation of school PR management, both internal and external.

#### **a. Limited Human Resources**

According to Rahayu and Trisnawati (2022), school PR functions are often carried out concurrently by teachers or school leaders, resulting in PR management that has not yet operated professionally. This condition leads to suboptimal planning and implementation of PR programs. Similarly, Saputra et al. (2021) state that the lack of dedicated PR personnel affects the quality of school communication services with the community. Furthermore, Amir et al. (2024) note that the role of the madrasa principal remains central to PR activities due to the absence of staff with specialized competencies in public communication.

#### **b. Digital Competence and Media Management**

Basorah et al. (2024) argue that the limited ability of school administrators to utilize digital media constitutes a major barrier to school marketing and public relations. Social media usage has not been conducted strategically or sustainably. This finding is reinforced by Pangestika et al. (2024), who report that school social media management remains sporadic and lacks a clear communication plan. Meanwhile, Fadila and Saragih (2023) emphasize that limited journalistic skills and media management capabilities pose challenges for school PR, particularly in disseminating programs and building public understanding.

#### **c. Budget Constraints**

Zulfiah et al. (2023) identify budget limitations as a significant inhibiting factor in implementing school promotion and publication activities. PR programs are often not prioritized in school financial planning. This aligns with the findings of Budiattyomo and Iriani (2022), who state that the implementation of the marketing mix in schools is frequently hindered by insufficient funding, preventing promotional strategies from being executed optimally.

#### **d. Public Perception and Trust**

Low public trust in schools represents an initial barrier to building brand awareness. Negative perceptions or limited information received by the community require school PR to work harder to establish a positive image. Additionally, Rosad et al. (2021) note that insufficient publication of flagship school programs prevents the public from fully recognizing the school's potential. Similarly, Sintasari and Afifah (2022) argue that competition among educational institutions intensifies the challenges faced by school PR in building public trust.

#### e. Internal Coordination and Support

Rahmawati (2022) explains that implementing PR collaboration with external stakeholders, such as the business and industrial sectors (DUDI), requires strong internal coordination. However, in practice, not all school members share the same understanding of the PR role. Moreover, Ramadhan and Maryani (2024) assert that the success of new student admission strategies (PPDB) largely depends on the synergy of the entire school community. Limited involvement of teachers and educational staff in promotional activities becomes a barrier to effective PR management.

### **School Public Relations Management Strategies**

Based on a systematic review of the fifteen articles summarized in Table X, the findings indicate that school PR management strategies for building institutional image and public trust are implemented through several interconnected approaches. These strategies emerged as responses to challenges such as low public interest, weak school image, and public doubts regarding the quality of educational services.

#### a. Utilization of Social Media and Mass Media as Tools for Public Communication

The review shows that optimizing social media and mass media is the most dominant PR strategy in building institutional image and public trust. Puji Rahayu and Novi Trisnawati (2022) emphasize that intensive promotion through social media during the pandemic reduced public skepticism toward vocational schools and increased trust. Similar findings are presented by Pangestika et al. (2022), who state that social media and word-of-mouth communication effectively attract prospective students during the admission process (PPDB). Beyond social media, journalistic media also serve as an important reinforcement. Risa Fadila and M. Yoserizal Saragih (2023) demonstrate that school publications through journalistic channels enhance parents' understanding and trust, particularly in the context of special education schools. Furthermore, Ade Rosad et al. (2022) affirm that press contributions in publicizing flagship school programs directly improve the school's reputation in the public eye.

#### b. Strengthening Relationships with the Community and External Stakeholders

PR management strategies are also characterized by strengthening relationships between schools, communities, and external stakeholders. Bagus Rachmad Saputra et al. (2021) show that optimizing PR services oriented toward public service increases community interest in schools. PR not only disseminates information but also builds sustainable trust-based relationships. Moreover, Ryan Rahmawati (2021) finds that collaboration between school PR and the business and industrial sectors (DUDI) contributes to improving graduate competence, indirectly reinforcing the school's image as an institution aligned with labor market needs. These findings indicate that external partnerships are a crucial component of PR strategies for building public trust.

### c. Highlighting Flagship Programs and School Achievements

The review reveals that communicating flagship programs and school achievements is a consistently applied PR strategy for building a positive image. Muhamad Basorah et al. (2020) report that promoting flagship programs is a key factor in increasing public interest amid competition among schools. This is supported by Evi Zulfiah et al. (2022), who state that appropriate market segmentation and targeted promotion significantly enhance applicant interest. Additionally, Budiatyomo and Iriani (2022) demonstrate that implementing the marketing mix in building school image enables institutions to present the advantages of their educational services comprehensively, thereby strengthening positive public perceptions.

### d. Strengthening School Brand Image and Brand Awareness

Several articles specifically highlight brand image and brand awareness as strategic outcomes of school PR management. Mughni Zaenal Mukhtar et al. (2021) find that efforts to build school brand awareness contribute to increased public trust and higher enrollment numbers. This aligns with the study by Rio Septian (2020), which shows that effectively executed management practices can establish a strong and sustainable school brand image. These findings indicate that school PR focuses not only on short-term promotional activities but also on forming a consistent institutional identity and image in the public sphere.

### e. Managerial and Leadership Approaches in PR Strategy

The review also demonstrates that the success of PR strategies is closely linked to managerial approaches and school leadership. Faizal Amir et al. (2021) emphasize that madrasa principals who integrate internal and external strategies can enhance school image and increase student enrollment. Additionally, Andriawan Fajar Ramadhan and Ika Maryani (2021) show that systematic planning and management of student admission promotions are critical factors in strengthening public trust in schools.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the results of a systematic review of the fifteen analyzed articles, it can be concluded that school public relations (PR) management plays a strategic role in building institutional image and public trust. Effective PR strategies are implemented through the optimization of communication media, strengthening relationships with stakeholders, highlighting flagship programs, and continuously developing school brand image and brand awareness. A managerial approach that is well planned and aligned with the school's vision serves as a primary supporting factor in the success of these strategies. The findings also indicate that the utilization of social media, mass media, and external collaborations represents dominant strategies for enhancing school visibility and shaping positive public perceptions. Furthermore, the involvement of alumni, the business and industrial sectors, and other external institutions reinforces public trust in the quality and relevance of the educational services provided by schools.

However, the implementation of school PR management continues to face various barriers, both internal and external. Internal barriers include the limited availability of dedicated PR human resources, low digital competence in media management, budget constraints, and weak internal coordination and institutional support. Meanwhile, external barriers are primarily associated with negative perceptions and low public trust in schools, influenced by insufficient publication and intense competition among educational institutions. Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate that the success of school PR management is determined not only by the communication strategies employed but also by resource readiness, organizational support, and school leadership. Therefore, strengthening professional PR capacity, improving digital literacy, allocating adequate budgets, and fostering synergy among all school members are essential prerequisites for sustainably building institutional image and public trust.

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