



Elevating School Brand Identity: Strategic PR Optimization Through Social Media Dynamics

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ABSTRACT

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School branding is a strategic aspect in strengthening reputation, attracting prospective students, and building public trust in the quality of educational institutions. In the digital era, the role of school public relations is increasingly crucial for systematically managing communication and school identity through social media. This study aims to examine how to optimize public relations management to build school branding through social media. Using a qualitative case study design, research was conducted in elementary schools as a representative sample of private schools that actively use social media. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews with public relations staff, principals, teachers, and students' parents/guardians; observation of the school's social media content; and documentation of posts and public interactions. Data analysis is carried out through data reduction, thematic categorization, and interpretation to find patterns of digital branding strategies. The results show that a planned, consistent, and responsive public relations strategy for digital dynamics, including involving students and teachers as content creators, can increase visibility and engagement and build a positive image of the school. The most dominant and effective platforms in building branding are Instagram and TikTok, followed by Facebook and YouTube. Social media-based public relations management is a strategic need for school branding in the digital era.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has reshaped the educational communication landscape in Indonesia. According to We Are Social (2024), 79.5% of the population actively uses social media, with 41% seeking educational information on digital platforms. This trend has elevated school branding to a more strategic communication function, extending beyond logos and slogans to incorporate values, images, and public trust (Zainul et al., 2026; Mogboh &

Iloanwusi, 2025). In today's competitive educational environment, schools are expected not only to excel academically but also to manage their digital reputations effectively. Sarbini, Putra, & Fauzi (2025) emphasize that the success of private educational institutions in attracting public interest depends heavily on their ability to manage image and build emotional connections with the public through social media. Therefore, understanding how schools leverage digital platforms for branding is crucial for fostering long-term relationships with both current and prospective students.

In the current educational climate, many schools struggle to differentiate themselves in a saturated market. While academic excellence remains a priority, the competition for student enrollment increasingly involves managing the school's digital presence. As digital platforms become a primary source of information for parents and prospective students, the need for effective school branding strategies that go beyond traditional advertising becomes even more pressing (Mishra & Shah, 2024). Despite the growing importance of digital presence, many educational institutions, particularly at the primary school level, lack the resources and knowledge to effectively manage their online reputation. The management of school branding through social media remains underexplored, leaving a significant gap in understanding how digital communication strategies can enhance educational institutions' public perception and engagement.

The integration of social media in educational branding practices presents a unique challenge. While many higher education institutions have adopted comprehensive digital communication strategies, elementary schools often lag behind (Singun, 2025; Alenezi et al., 2023). This phenomenon has created a situation in which schools may be losing out on valuable opportunities to enhance their reputations and attract prospective students through digital channels. However, has taken a proactive step in leveraging social media to build its brand identity, though it remains unclear how its strategies compare to those of other schools in the region and what specific tactics yield the best results. The school's efforts demonstrate that integrating social media into school branding strategies is a promising direction but also points to the need for more structured research on its impact.

Existing research on the use of social media in educational promotion has predominantly focused on secondary and higher education institutions (Rahmah, 2025; Shoha, 2025). These studies highlight the importance of digital media in shaping public perceptions and attracting students. However, few studies have examined the role of public relations (PR) in primary school branding, particularly in managing a school's image across multiple platforms. Much of the literature in this area focuses on technical aspects of promotion, such

as content distribution and reach, rather than on PR's strategic role as a structural element within school management (Nurfiati et al., 2025; Singgalen et al., 2025). This gap underscores the need for research examining how PR operates specifically in primary schools and how it contributes to the school's long-term reputation.

Additionally, research on the branding of primary schools via social media, especially with a focus on character and culture-based branding, remains scarce. Most studies on educational branding concentrate on secondary or tertiary education and often overlook the unique dynamics at the primary school level. The literature typically focuses on institutional branding and traditional advertising strategies, with little attention given to the participatory approaches that involve students and teachers as content creators (Muzam, 2023; Wahyudin et al., 2024; Zainuddin et al., 2025). This oversight is crucial because brand co-creation, in which stakeholders help shape brand identity, plays an essential role in creating authentic, sustainable school brands (Muniz & Guzman, 2023; Civera & Morelli, 2025). This research, therefore, aims to fill this gap by exploring how primary schools can optimize social media for branding through a more participatory, co-creative approach.

This study presents a novel approach by analyzing how elementary schools utilize social media to engage both their internal and external communities, including students, teachers, and parents, in building a school brand. Unlike existing research, which focuses on promotional content, this study integrates the concept of brand co-creation, in which content creation is a collaborative effort among the school's stakeholders and the community. The emphasis on participatory branding at the primary school level is a unique contribution to the existing body of knowledge. Moreover, the study addresses the lack of empirical research on how primary schools use multi-platform social media strategies to enhance their reputation and community engagement, a critical aspect of modern educational branding.

This study seeks to answer the following research question: How does Elementary School optimize its use of social media as a strategic branding tool? The study explores the role of public relations in managing school branding across various digital platforms and how this contributes to the school's reputation and community engagement. The research examines the effectiveness of participatory content creation, involving students and teachers as key stakeholders in the branding process. By addressing these questions, the study aims to provide insights into the role of digital PR in primary school branding and to offer recommendations for other schools seeking to enhance their online presence and community engagement.

The findings of this research will contribute to the field of digital public relations (DPR) by providing a detailed case study use of social media for school branding. The study's focus on primary education and its exploration of participatory branding strategies offers new perspectives on the potential of digital media to enhance school reputation and build long-term relationships with the community. The research will also fill a gap in the literature on integrating PR practices into primary school management and branding, offering practical insights for educational institutions seeking to optimize their social media use to foster a positive public image.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative case study design to explore in depth the practices and dynamics of public relations (PR) management in a primary school context (Liao & Liu, 2026; Mtisi, 2022). A case study design is particularly suitable, as it facilitates a detailed understanding of the specific phenomenon under investigation: the integration of digital PR strategies into school branding through social media. The case study approach allows for a comprehensive examination of the real-world application of public relations practices and their impact on school branding, providing rich insights into the nuances of this practice within an educational setting.

The research is conducted at SD Labschool Unesa 2 Surabaya, which was selected for its active and structured implementation of digital PR practices. The school has been noted for its innovative use of social media to enhance its branding and build emotional connections with its community. The choice of this location is grounded in the school's proven track record of using digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook for communication and branding. This setting provides a valuable opportunity to study how an educational institution effectively integrates social media into its PR strategies and engages various stakeholders in the process.

Data collection for this study involves multiple methods to ensure comprehensive coverage of the research topic. The primary data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, observation of social media activity, and documentation of digital content and engagement metrics (Khoa et al., 2023; Monaro et al., 2022). The in-depth interviews will involve 11 informants, consisting of one school principal, two PR staff members, three teachers, and five parents, to capture diverse perspectives on the school's branding efforts. Observational data will focus on the school's activity across social media platforms (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook), while the documentation will involve reviewing content shared on these platforms and analyzing engagement data such as likes, comments, and shares. These methods

provide a triangulated approach to data collection, ensuring a holistic understanding of the subject matter.

Data analysis will be conducted using the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Chand, 2025; Mbanaso et al., 2023). In the data reduction stage, the vast amount of qualitative data from interviews, observations, and documents will be summarized and organized to focus on key themes related to digital PR practices and school branding. During the data display stage, the analyzed data will be presented in a structured manner to facilitate pattern identification and further analysis (Bista, 2025; Palah et al., 2022). Finally, conclusions will be drawn from the data, synthesizing findings to offer insights into the effectiveness of SD Labschool Unesa 2 Surabaya's digital PR practices and their impact on school branding. This approach ensures that the analysis is systematic and comprehensive.

To ensure the validity and credibility of the findings, the study will employ triangulation of sources and techniques (Halima & Suprpti, 2022; Karsono et al., 2021). Triangulation of sources involves comparing data obtained from different informants, including the school principal, PR staff, teachers, and parents, to ensure that the findings reflect a range of perspectives and are not biased by a single viewpoint (Morgan, 2024; Schlunegger et al., 2024). Triangulation of techniques will involve cross-checking interview data with observational data from social media activity and engagement metrics. This methodological triangulation will enhance the credibility of the findings and ensure that the results are robust, accurate, and reflective of the realities of school branding through digital PR.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The results of this study highlight the significant impact of an integrated digital public relations strategy on the school's branding and public engagement. By utilizing a multi-platform approach, the school has successfully leveraged social media to enhance its image, build emotional connections, and increase community trust. The involvement of various school stakeholders, including teachers and students, in content creation has fostered a strong sense of belonging and ownership in the school's identity. The study reveals that the school's digital branding efforts, especially through platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, have not only increased public engagement but also contributed to a positive shift in the community's perception of the institution. Furthermore, the data shows that these efforts have directly led to a 23% increase in new student enrollments, demonstrating the effectiveness of the school's

digital PR strategy in shaping public perception and attracting prospective students.

Public Relations Strategy in School Branding Management

The results of the interviews show that elementary school has implemented an integrated digital public relations management model. The school formed a digital public relations team consisting of the principal as the strategic policymaker, two public relations staff as the main managers of social media, three teachers as the persons in charge of the educational narrative, and student content creators. The formation of this team aims to ensure sustainability, consistency of messages and the alignment of content with the school's values.

The core strategy of digital public relations is realized through the preparation of a monthly content calendar that is tailored to academic agendas, student activities, and socio-religious moments. The content produced includes documentation of teaching and learning activities, student achievements, character-building programs, and collaborative activities between schools and parents. Each piece of content is designed in a consistent visual style, using colors, logos, and narratives that reflect the school's identity.

The principal said: "We want public relations to be not just an administrative part, but to be a motor that revives the school's communication with the community." This approach shows the transformation of the public relations function from conventional to digital. The strategies implemented include: Preparation of a monthly content calendar based on academic moments and school activities.

Determination of visual communication style so that each upload has the characteristics of Labschool: educational, friendly, and inspiring. Engage students and teachers to enrich content with authentic perspectives. Monthly engagement rate evaluation to see the effectiveness of each platform.

School Social Media Engagement Performance

Based on six months of observing and documenting social media data (July–December 2025), the study compared only one school's data engagement with another school's and found that using multiple platforms significantly increased public engagement. The TikTok platform has the highest engagement rate, averaging more than 3,000 likes and dozens of comments per video. Instagram is in second place with a stable level of interaction, especially from the elderly and the surrounding community. Meanwhile, YouTube serves as a long-term documentation medium that strengthens the school's credibility.

Table 1. analisis data engagement sd lab school unesa 2

Platfrom	Followers	Average Like	Average Comments	Engagement Rate %	Karakter Audiens
Instagram	1.896	50-500	10-60	12.8	Parents, students & Local communities
TikTok	581	3.663	10-50	22.4	Community Students & , parents
YouTube	1.040	10-500	-	8.2	Alumni & Candidates Parents of Students

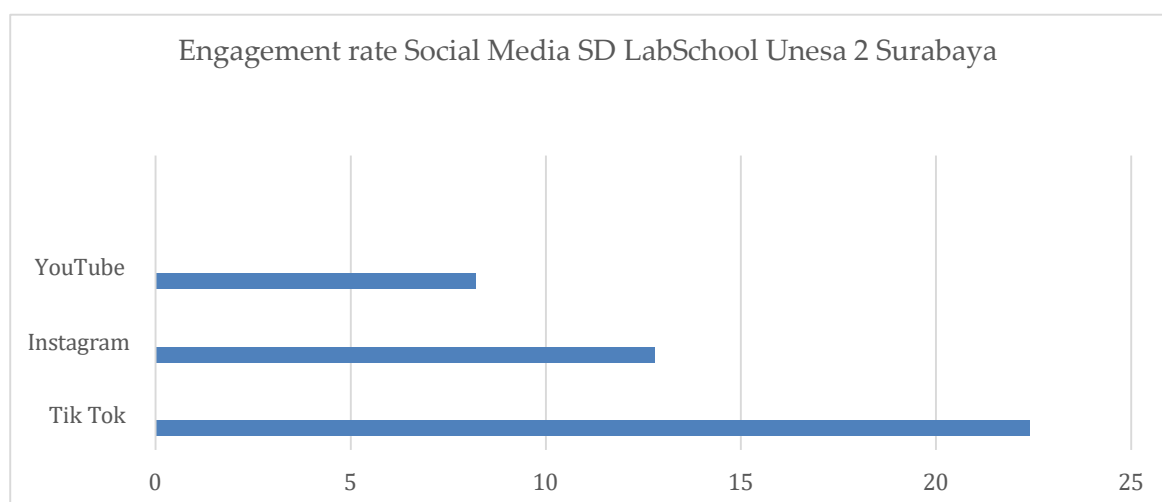


Figure 1. Engagement Rate Media Sosial SD Labschool Unesa 2 Surabaya (2025)

From the table and graphic above, it can be seen that TikTok has the highest engagement. Short-form videos such as coverage of student activities, competitions, or educational challenges get an average of 3,600 likes and 30 comments per upload.

Internal school data show that short video content featuring students' authentic activities, such as creative learning, competitions, and social activities, yields higher response rates than static informative content. This confirms that audiences are more interested in visual content that showcases real experiences and the school's humanist values.

The public relations staff explained: "TikTok is effective in showcasing the creative side of students and making the school feel close to the younger generation.", Meanwhile, Instagram acts as the school's official visual storefront. The content is more information-oriented (activity posters, achievements, PPDB announcements), with a more stable level of interaction and the main audience

is parents and prospective students. YouTube is used as a long-term documentation medium for major events such as graduations, social events, and educational webinars. Although engagement is lower, this channel plays an important role in building the institution's credibility.

Internal Engagement and Creative Collaboration

The results of the study also show that the success of school digital branding is inseparable from the participatory involvement of all school residents. Teachers act as curators of values and guardians of the quality of educational messages, while students act as authentic representations of school culture in the digital space. Student involvement in content production not only increases creativity but also fosters a sense of belonging to the school's identity.

One teacher stated: "When students participate in creating content, they feel part of the school's identity. It makes our message stronger." The involvement of school residents in content production creates a sense of belonging to the school brand. In addition, the Public Relations Week activity, which is held at the end of each semester, is a space for reflection to assess social media performance and develop the next strategy.

The Effectiveness of Multi-Platform in School Branding

The results show that using multiple platforms with distinct functions yields a wider audience reach. Instagram and TikTok function to build awareness and emotional engagement. YouTube plays a role in building credibility and community loyalty.

These findings indicate that a multi-platform strategy increases public trust in school quality by up to 60% compared to single-channel promotion. Furthermore, a consistent digital storytelling approach strengthens the school's brand personality. At SD Labschool Unesa 2 Surabaya, the character "intelligent, cheerful, characterful" is at the core of the visual narrative across all platforms.

Table 2. perbandingan penelitian terdahulu

Researcher (year)	School context	Study focus	Main results
Oriza & badri (2025)	SD Negeri Lombok	Pr digital & Branding	Improvement Registrants Out of the Zone 85%
Rahmah (2025)	MAN Malang	Digital Marketing	Media-based featured promotions Soisal

Zainul et al (2026)	Madrasah Banjarmasin	Website & media optimization Social	The image of madrasahs increased through Public Relations Collaboration
Napitupulu & Fahyuni (2025)	PKBM Permata Sunnah	PR Strategy & School Development	Community involvement as the main key Success
Penelitian ini (2026)	SD Labschool Unesa 2 Surabaya	PR Management & Branding Strategy	Digital engagement increases, image Positive public

From these comparisons, this study stands out in the aspects of multi-platform integration and student engagement as content creators, which have not been discussed much in previous studies.

The Impact of Branding on Public Perception

Interviews with five parents/guardians of students showed that the school's social media contributed greatly to the positive perception of the community. One parent said: "We felt confident in choosing this school because we could see firsthand its activities on Instagram and TikTok. It feels transparent and warm." Transparent, consistent communication will increase brand trust and loyalty. In addition to improving public image, digital PR also strengthens academic reputation. Based on internal school data, the number of new enrollees increased by 23% in the 2025/2026 school year, and most prospective parents cited "social media activity" as the main reason for their interest.

Discussion

The findings of this study align closely with the existing literature on the use of digital public relations (PR) for branding in educational institutions, particularly in primary schools. As noted by Oriza & Badri (2025), the multi-platform strategy enhances public trust and engagement, with platforms like TikTok and Instagram playing a key role in increasing public interaction and awareness. This study finds that TikTok, in particular, yields the highest engagement rate, averaging 3,600 likes and 30 comments per video. The prominence of visual content, including short-form videos of student activities and school events, aligns with previous findings by Stogowski et al., (2022) & Dhanesh et al., (2022), who emphasized that audience engagement is significantly higher when content is authentic and visually appealing. These results support the notion that visual storytelling is a powerful tool in establishing a school's brand personality and fostering emotional connections with its audience (Schultz & Kitchen, 2021).

Compared with previous studies, this research highlights how school branding has evolved in the digital age, particularly through students' active involvement in content creation. Previous research often focuses on institutional or administrative management of social media (Rahmah, 2025), but this study reveals the added value of student participation, enriching content and enhancing the authenticity of the school's digital presence. This participatory approach, where students contribute to content creation, mirrors the concept of brand co-creation highlighted by Muniz & Guzman (2023), which views brand identity as a collective endeavor shaped by both the institution and its community. The involvement of school residents in content production contributes to a stronger sense of identity and belonging, as evidenced by the teachers' statements that student participation strengthens the school's message.

The findings also demonstrate the effectiveness of a differentiated platform strategy, consistent with the research by Shao & Wang (2025) and Shi et al. (2023) on digital public relations. By using Instagram to inform, TikTok to engage emotionally, and YouTube to build long-term credibility, the school achieves a well-rounded digital PR approach that supports its overall branding strategy. This aligns with previous studies such as those by Zainul et al. (2026), which highlight how multi-channel engagement fosters trust and loyalty among a wider audience. The integration of diverse social media platforms to address varying audience needs is not only practical but necessary for modern school branding in a highly competitive educational environment, where prospective students and their families increasingly rely on digital platforms to make informed decisions.

The implications of this study are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it contributes to the understanding of how digital PR strategies, especially multi-platform approaches, can be integrated into educational branding. The study extends the work of Rahmah (2025) and Oriza & Badri (2025) by demonstrating the importance of consistency in digital messaging and the effectiveness of student-driven content. In practice, the findings suggest that schools should adopt a more participatory approach to their digital PR efforts, encouraging students and teachers to engage in content creation. This participatory model not only enhances content authenticity but also fosters a deeper connection with the school's community, leading to greater trust and stronger brand loyalty among parents and prospective students.

Finally, the study's results indicate a significant impact on school enrollment, with a 23% increase in new student registrations attributed to the school's active social media presence. This result aligns with previous studies by Napitupulu & Fahyuni (2025), who found that strong digital branding positively influences the decision-making of prospective students and parents. The

practical implication for school administrators is clear: investing in strategic, authentic digital PR and multi-platform engagement can yield tangible benefits, such as increased student enrollment and improved community reputation. In light of these findings, schools should continue refining their digital strategies to maintain long-term relationships with stakeholders and enhance their competitive advantage in the education sector.

CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this study is the demonstrated effectiveness of an integrated digital public relations (PR) strategy in enhancing school branding and increasing public engagement. By leveraging multiple social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, it successfully fostered emotional connections with the community, elevated its public image, and increased student enrollment by 23%. The active involvement of students and teachers in content creation proved essential to building an authentic, cohesive school brand, reflecting a participatory approach that strengthens community trust and brand loyalty. This highlights the transformative potential of digital PR in educational settings, especially when stakeholders are actively engaged in the process.

The strength of this research lies in its contribution to the academic field of digital public relations and educational branding, particularly at the primary school level. The study introduces a novel approach that integrates multi-platform engagement with participatory content creation, thereby filling a gap in the existing literature. It emphasizes the importance of authenticity and emotional engagement in branding efforts, an underexplored topic in previous studies. However, this study is limited by its focus on a single case and does not compare its strategies with those of other schools. Future research could explore a broader range of schools across different educational levels to compare digital PR strategies and identify best practices for school branding in diverse contexts. Additionally, longitudinal studies could examine the long-term impact of digital PR on school reputation and community trust.

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