



Digital Communication Approaches to Strengthen Public Trust and Engagement

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ABSTRACT

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Advances in information technology have brought significant changes in the way educational institutions interact with the community. Madrasahs utilize digital communication strategies to build public trust and improve the image of the institution. This study aims to analyze the digital communication strategies implemented by Islamic high schools in strengthening public trust through transparency and honesty in conveying information. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection methods through observation, interviews, and documentation. The subjects of the study included the principal, deputy head of public relations, students, and parents of students. The focus of this study is how digital communication is used as a strategy to build closer relationships with the community and increase the level of public participation and involvement in the madrasah. The results of the study show that madrasahs implement various digital communication strategies, such as the use of social media, official websites, and audiovisual-based information publications to increase transparency and public trust.

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INTRODUCTION

In this modern era, rapid technological developments have brought about changes in society in the way they communicate and interact. Communication is a process of interaction between God's creatures that can be done through symbols, signals, and behavior or actions (Zamzami & Sahana, 2021). Communication is the process of exchanging messages between two parties, namely the sender and the recipient, which takes place intentionally with clear intentions and goals (Hasanah & Munif, 2023). Communication provides equal opportunities for every individual to express opinions, share creative ideas, and exchange thoughts to support the development of educational institutions towards a better direction (Saudah, 2020). The rapid development of information supported by technological advances makes it easier to meet information needs. One form of communication that has emerged from this development is digital communication, which provides faster, wider, and more flexible access in conveying messages and interacting (Puspitosari & Lokananta, 2021). Digital

communication, often referred to as online communication, refers to personal computer-based interactions that allow the sending, receiving, and exchange of information through various platforms. This communication makes it easier for educational institutions to reach audiences more widely and efficiently. The delivery of information to students, parents, educators and administrative staff can be done without any barriers of region or geographical location (Maisyaroh, 2024). The selection of the right media can help convince the public about the content of the message to be conveyed (Hafsah, 2023).

In the world of education, the implementation of effective communication strategies plays an important role in strengthening understanding and increasing student participation. This strategy includes the active involvement of all parties, both educational institutions and the community, through two-way communication that creates dynamic and constructive interactions (Ndruru et al., 2024). Most countries prioritize the use of information and communication technology as a core component in their education systems to support the learning process (Yaqin, 2021). To achieve widespread recognition and acceptance by various levels of society, the promotion of educational institutions must be carried out optimally.

This effort can be realized either through direct interaction with the community or by using an indirect approach (Yaqin & Fadilah, 2024; Zain & Mustofa, 2024). Educational institutions need to continuously improve the satisfaction of students and their parents as the parties receiving services. This can be achieved through the implementation of the right strategy in forming a positive image between the school and the community, so that a positive opinion is formed in the community. As a result, schools have the potential to attract more new students (Rita Fitria, 2024).

Many experts believe that the preparation of systematic, planned and good quality communication plays an important role in building public trust in an institution (Amalia, 2020; Zaini & Fahmi, 2023; Faiz et al., 2023). The community has an important role in maintaining the positive reputation of an educational institution. The process of building and strengthening this trust is an important basis for educational institutions, as reflected in the beliefs that grow in the community (Amar, 2024a; Zuhdi et al., 2024; Hidayat et al., 2024). Building public trust, especially in educational institutions, is not a simple matter. Therefore, the principal, as a leader in an educational institution, holds a great responsibility in accordance with his role and function (Amar, 2024b).

Public trust is formed through positive experiences experienced by parents and students regarding the quality of education provided, transparency in management, and student success in achieving achievements. This trust is further strengthened by the increasing academic and non-academic

achievements of students, the existence of excellent programs that are in line with the development needs of students, and responsive and professional services. In addition, competitive education costs also provide added value in the eyes of the community (M. et al., 2024; Ridlo & Yanti, 2023).

With the rapid development of technology, educational institutions need to utilize digital communication as an important strategy to reach and interact with the community. Digital communication, which allows for fast and wide dissemination of information, plays an important role in increasing trust and strengthening the relationship between schools and the community, including students and parents. To build this trust, educational institutions must implement a structured, consistent, and transparent communication strategy. Thus, educational institutions can improve their image, increase satisfaction, and create positive opinions among the community, which in turn helps attract more students and increase public trust.

Previous studies have discussed this topic extensively, such as that conducted by Abdul et al. (2023) in their study on website-based public relations digitalization in schools, which showed that websites are not only a means of conveying information, but also an effective tool for building public trust and promoting schools. Likewise, The importance of implementing a structured public communication strategy in forming a positive image of educational institutions through digital media, such as websites and social media (Rosi et al., 2022; Purwanto & Wafa, 2023). The novelty of this research lies in its deeper focus on the application of digital communication in madrasas, by examining how transparency and honesty in conveying information can strengthen the relationship between madrasas and the community and increase public trust, especially in the context of Islamic education.

This study aims to determine the digital communication strategy carried out by MA Nurul Jadid in increasing public trust. This study focuses on the use of digital technology to improve communication between educational institutions and the community, which can ultimately strengthen public trust and create stronger and more harmonious relationships.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study type to understand the phenomenon of digital communication applied in educational institutions. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to dig up in-depth information about the experiences, understandings, and views of subjects on the phenomenon being studied. This research was conducted at MA Nurul Jadid Paiton Probolinggo, which is part of the Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid Paiton Probolinggo, an Islamic educational institution that is active

in using digital communication strategies. This location was chosen because it has digital communication policies and programs that are relevant to the research objectives, namely to increase public trust through the use of digital technology.

Data collection techniques used in this study include observation, interviews, and documentation (Kurniawati & Fauzi, 2023). Observations were carried out to observe the digital communication process implemented at MA Nurul Jadid Paiton, both through social media, websites, and audiovisual publications. In-depth interviews were conducted with research subjects consisting of the Principal, Deputy Public Relations, students, and parents of students, to explore their views on the digital communication strategies implemented. Documentation is used to collect written evidence in the form of activity reports, published materials, and related data that support the research findings.

Data analysis in this study follows the analysis model developed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. In the first stage, data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation will be reduced to filter relevant information and reduce data that is not in accordance with the focus of the study. In the second stage, the reduced data will be presented in narrative or tabular form to facilitate understanding and further analysis. Finally, at the conclusion stage, researchers will analyze the data comprehensively to answer research questions and draw conclusions about the digital communication strategies implemented to increase public trust in MA Nurul Jadid.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Public Trust Implementation Strategies

Madrasah Aliyah Nurul Jadid is an educational institution that has characteristics, which is a private school under the auspices of the Nurul Jadid Paiton Probolinggo Islamic Boarding School. In an effort to improve the quality and development of the institution, this school continues to adapt to the dynamics of the times. One form of adaptation can be seen in the provision of electronic-based communication services, which function to expand the delivery of information and interaction between the school and the outside community. The public's trust in MA Nurul Jadid is also inseparable from the influence of the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School as the parent institution, which has been known and has a strong reputation in the community. In terms of interest and trust in MA Nurul Jadid, all forms of activities both in the field of education and outside the academic field are informed in detail with the aim that the public can understand and follow the various activities that are being carried out by the institution.

Menurut penjelasan Bapak Misbahul Munir, as the Head of Madrasah Aliyah Nurul Jadid, the rapid development of digitalization that has been increasingly felt since the COVID-19 pandemic has encouraged madrasahs to continue to innovate. These innovations aim to make information about madrasahs accessible to the public more widely. One example is the success of attracting the attention of a student from Sumenep, Madura, who decided to join the madrasah not because of family influence, but through information he got from the madrasah's official social media account.

The process of planning and implementing digital communication strategies in schools based on the vision of "The Realization of Superior Madrasah in forming religious, civilized, independent, and outstanding students, based on the Trilogy and Five Consciousness of Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School Students" is carried out systematically by integrating religious and cultural values of the pesantren into each stage. In the planning stage, the school formulates digital communication goals that are in line with the vision of the madrasah, such as strengthening religious and civilized image, promoting student achievement, and building independence through digital media. This strategy is realized through the development of digital content that reflects the Santri Trilogy and the Five Santri Awareness

Furthermore, at the implementation stage, educational institutions utilize various digital means, including social media accounts, official websites, and communication applications, to convey information effectively to the public. The content uploaded is designed creatively and educationally, including Islamic values, learning activities, student achievements, and madrasah programs that support the formation of religious and independent character. In addition, the involvement of all stakeholders, including teachers, students, and parents, is an important part in ensuring that digital communication strategies run optimally. With this approach, madrasahs are not only able to increase public trust, but also build a superior image in accordance with the vision and mission of the institution.

The Public Relations Deputy explained, Improving the quality of human resources, especially in the field of Public Relations and optimizing the official website of madrasahs in <https://www.manuruljadid.sch.id/> is a very important strategic step. This step aims to ensure a more effective, professional, and in accordance with public expectations of information, as well as strengthen the positive image of madrasahs in the digital era.

According to one of the students' parents, the decision to send their child to MA Nurul Jadid was based on information obtained through the madrasah's official Instagram account. He explained that the use of social media by madrasahs really helps them get a complete picture of learning activities and atmosphere

without the need to come directly to the location. "I decided to send my child to MA Nurul Jadid because I saw the official Instagram account of the madrasah which is very active in sharing various activities, both academic and non-academic. From there, I can see firsthand how the learning process, the atmosphere of the madrasah environment, and the achievements of the students are. I feel that there is no longer a need to conduct a direct survey in the field because the information provided through social media is quite convincing," he said. He also added that the transparency of information through social media gives a sense of trust in the quality of education at MA Nurul Jadid, such as documentation of religious activities, competitions, and daily learning, parents feel confident that this madrasah is able to provide quality education and in accordance with Islamic values.

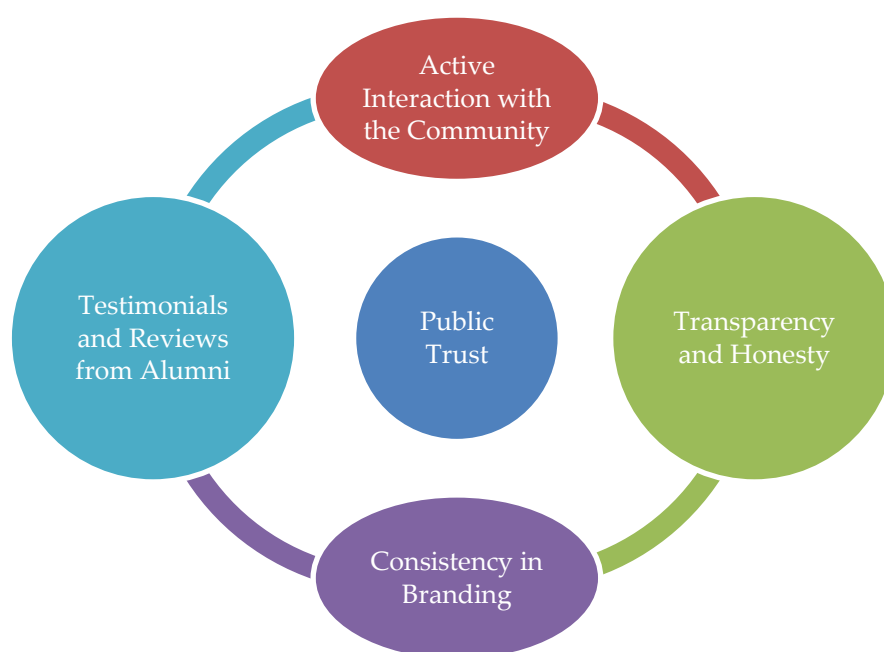


Figure 1. Public Trust Strategy Cycle

Along with the rapid development of the digital era, communication patterns have undergone very fundamental changes. Advances in information and communication technology have drastically changed the way humans interact, disseminate information, and establish relationships (Andzani & Irwansyah, 2023). Trust from the community is an important element for educational institutions, because it has a direct impact on their sustainability and existence in the future (Febrianti & Syukri, 2023). Public trust is an important element in educational institutions because with the trust of the community they will entrust the future of their children to attend school in the institution (Bakar et al., 2021). In order to maintain sustainability and increase public trust in the

world of education, every educational institution always innovates and designs effective strategies to achieve the expected goals (Fadilah & Ali, 2024).

Active interaction with the community

Active interaction between educational institutions cannot be separated from the important role of parents in building a comfortable learning atmosphere and supporting learning effectiveness. The head of the madrasah emphasized how important it is to establish effective communication with students' parents in order to build public trust in the madrasah. The strategies implemented include the delivery of information related to school activities, achievements, and student moral development through various communication channels such as telephone, official websites, and WhatsApp groups.

This approach ensures that parents are always up-to-date on their children's educational developments, resulting in transparent relationships and active parental involvement in supporting students' school and family programs. In addition, the head of the madrasah also received constructive input to improve the quality of education. These measures not only increase parental participation in the educational process, but also strengthen the positive image of the madrasah in the eyes of the wider community.

One of the flagship programs held is the Science and Social Competition for students at the First Level Advanced School (SLTP) level throughout East Java. This competition is designed as a means to hone and develop the potential and interest of participants in the field of science while strengthening the relationship between madrasahs and the surrounding community.

In addition, this educational institution has a Language Specialization Program that is focused on improving Arabic, English, and Indonesian literature skills for students. The program aims to equip students with adequate language competencies to support their participation in the global environment, while meeting society's needs for individuals with good linguistic skills.

In order to increase the effectiveness of communication with the public, MA Nurul Jadid also utilizes various digital platforms as a means of delivering information. Through the official website and other digital media, the madrasah provides up-to-date information about academic activities, learning programs, and various important announcements. The use of digital technology plays a role in increasing information transparency and forming positive public opinion, so as to strengthen the image of madrasahs in the educational community and the wider community.

The madrasah encourages its students to be involved in various student organizations to hone their leadership skills and strengthen their personality character. Participation in student organizations aims to develop emotional

intelligence, form an attitude of discipline and responsibility, and instill a spirit of service, so that students can make a real contribution to community life. Thus, MA Nurul Jadid not only plays a role as an educational institution, but also as an institution that is active in building social and cultural capacity in the community.

Active interaction with the community is a key element in a digital communication strategy that can strengthen public trust in the Supreme Court Nurul Jadid Institution. These interactions include quick responses to questions, comments, and complaints submitted by the community, as well as participation in relevant discussions. Social media has great potential to encourage interaction, collaboration, and information exchange that can increase the level of public trust (Maisaroh & Wibioso, 2022).

Positive and responsive interactions on social media can help build a better image and strengthen relationships with students' parents, alumni, and the community in general. Furthermore, effective interactions on social media can have a positive impact on an institution's reputation, which in turn has the potential to attract more prospective students and increase public trust. This approach is able to build harmonious relationships with the community and strengthen trust in Islamic educational institutions (Carnawi et al., 2024).

Transparency and Honesty in Communication

Transparency is related to the delivery of information in a clear, open, and without any attempt to hide the facts, while honesty focuses more on delivering accurate information in presenting information that is not misleading. In addition, transparency is also an important element in an effective communication strategy in the management of educational institutions (HS et al., 2024). The implementation of a transparent and honest communication strategy can strengthen the relationship between the institution and the community, including students' parents, alumni, and the surrounding community. When institutions convey information related to educational policies, academic activities, or programs that are held openly and clearly, this will increase the level of trust between the institution and the community.

Honesty in communication also ensures that no information is hidden or misinterpreted that has the potential to damage public trust. Honesty is a very important basic value in the midst of various challenges in this modern era. Transparency and honesty in communication are key elements in building a productive work environment and strengthening the image of an institution. The implementation of effective communication management in the Intra-Madrasah Student Organization (OSIM) has succeeded in building effective coordination between members. This not only facilitates the resolution of differences of

opinion through deliberation and mutual agreement, but also ensures the smooth implementation of each work program in accordance with the plan that has been prepared. (Rahmatillah & Abdurrahman, 2023).

Implementing a digital public relations strategy in an effort to improve the image of the institution by utilizing various digital platforms to convey public information transparently and accurately. In line with technological developments, madrasah public relations proactively presents valid and trustworthy information to the public through visual and audiovisual media, thereby strengthening public trust in these educational institutions.

Furthermore, the implementation of digital communication strategies contributes to building positive public opinion and strengthening the image of the institution. With technology-based communication management, madrasahs can establish more effective relationships with the community, both internally and externally. In addition, this approach ensures that every information submitted prioritizes the principles of transparency and honesty and meets the public's needs for access to relevant and actual information.

Consistency in Branding

Consistency in branding, which includes consistency in message communication, visual display as well as media channels used such as Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, TikTok and Website, is an important aspect of a digital communication strategy that can increase public trust. As an educational institution, presence on various platforms requires consistency in conveying messages and maintaining a communication style (Gemilang & Yuliana, 2023). Brand consistency is an important factor that helps educational institutions appear more professional and trustworthy (Khotimah et al., 2024; , Maulidia, 2023), while differentiating them from other institutions (Anwar et al., 2023). The sustainable application of brand consistency will build a solid perception in the public mind, so that it can increase public trust in the educational institution.

The application of digital media elements can be a driving factor in strengthening public trust in institutions (Hafid & Purnomo, 2024). Maintaining consistency in messages and visual identities on social media will not only increase its positive image in the eyes of the public, but also strengthen relationships with students' parents, alumni, and the wider community. This in turn can increase the level of public trust in the institution and attract more prospective students who want to join.

Branding consistency is reflected in various extracurricular activities designed to build character as well as develop students' skills. Every Tuesday, students actively participate in various activities, such as hadrah, futsal, banking accounting, graphic design, journalism, democracy classes and literacy classes. Participation in this activity also provides added value in the learning process,

but also strengthens the identity of the madrasah as a holistic educational institution and is committed to the development of students' potential as a whole.

Consistency in branding is the main factor in building the identity and reputation of an educational institution in a sustainable manner displaying the image as an institution that excels in the academic and non-academic fields. This is evidenced by the achievements of students in various competitions that are regularly published. For example, in December 2024, MA Nurul Jadid students won 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place in the Taqdimul Qishah Competition and 3rd place in the Khitobah Competition at the National Arabic Language Festival organized by Al-Amien Prenduen University in Sumenep, Madura.

Testimonials and Reviews from Alumni

The opinions and experiences shared by alumni play an important role in building credibility and increasing trust in an institution. Reviews from alumni and statements of experience from students' guardians contribute greatly to attracting prospective students. These various experiences not only strengthen the positive image of madrasahs in the community, but also foster parents' confidence in the quality of education provided (Masrufa, 2024).

The students also managed to achieve proud individual achievements. One example is Afi Ahmad Ridlo who won first place in the "Santri A Day to Become a Minister" competition organized by the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia. In the event, Afi managed to outperform 140 other participants and had the opportunity to experience firsthand as a minister for one day in Jakarta. This success reflects the quality of education and coaching in producing outstanding students at the national level.

The alumni of this institution also gave positive testimonials about the educational benefits they have obtained. Many of them are now contributing in various fields, both as academics, entrepreneurs, and leaders in educational institutions. Some alumni even managed to continue their education at leading universities and participate in educational development. One example is Muhammad Ficky Haris Ardiansyah has carved more than 30 achievements in various essay and academic competitions, both on a national and global scale.

Previous alumni gave positive testimonials about Ficky's achievements, stating that his success was not only a source of inspiration, but also strengthened the school's image and reputation. They assessed that Ficky's achievements reflected the quality of education and coaching at MA Nurul Jadid, encouraging the next generation to continue to innovate and achieve. The positive impact of these achievements can be seen in increasing students' enthusiasm for learning and active participation in various academic activities, which ultimately contributes to the development of the quality of education and strengthens the

identity of school excellence in the national and international arena.

Overall, various student achievements and testimonials from alumni show that MA Nurul Jadid is always committed to improving the quality of education, economic empowerment, and health. This commitment not only contributes to the success of students during their education at the Islamic boarding school, but also equips them with skills and insights that allow them to compete at the national and international levels.

Positive reviews from alumni through social media can strengthen the image of the institution and increase the level of public trust. By sharing positive experiences gained by alumni regarding the quality of education, learning activities, and the madrasah environment, it can expand the dissemination of information that contributes to increasing the trust of prospective students and the community (Arifin, 2024; Faiz et al., 2023). It also helps create a more trustworthy image and attracts more parents who want to ensure the quality of education offered based on the real experience of alumni.

CONCLUSION

The digital communication strategy implemented by MA Nurul Jadid has succeeded in increasing public trust in educational institutions. By utilizing digital platforms such as official websites, social media, and communication applications, this madrasah conveys information openly, consistently, and professionally. The communication process starts from planning that is in line with the institution's vision, to the implementation of content that reflects Islamic values. The involvement of educators, students, guardians, and the optimal role of Public Relations are the keys to the success of this strategy. Its effectiveness is reflected in the increasing participation of the community, especially in choosing education for their children, which is based on information accessed through digital media. Active interaction between the madrasah and the public builds positive relationships, strengthens the image of the institution, and increases public trust in the quality of education offered. With a structured and consistent strategy, MA Nurul Jadid has succeeded in strengthening its image and building public trust.

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