

Strategic Public Relations Planning for Quality Enhancement in Islamic Educational Institutions

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines the strategic planning patterns of public relations (PR) in Islamic educational institutions, focusing on Madrasah Tsanawiyah. The research is grounded in the premise that PR plays a crucial role in building institutional reputation, stakeholder trust, and educational quality. This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation involving 12 respondents, including principals, vice principals, teachers, administrative staff, and school committee members. Data analysis was conducted using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, while validity was ensured through triangulation of sources and techniques. The findings reveal that PR planning is conducted routinely but remains general, flexible, and not based on systematic analysis such as stakeholder mapping or environmental scanning. Leadership dominance is evident, with principals acting as central decision-makers, while stakeholder involvement is limited and largely symbolic. The discussion highlights that PR practices have not yet aligned with grand theories such as Strategic Management Theory, Excellence Theory, and Stakeholder Theory. Consequently, PR functions remain fragmented and less measurable. In conclusion, this study emphasizes the need for a strategic transformation toward structured, participatory, value-based, and data-driven PR planning to enhance institutional quality, sustainability, and public trust in Islamic educational institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

The increasing complexity of contemporary educational ecosystems has positioned public relations (PR) as a strategic function within Islamic educational institutions. In the current era of digital transformation, institutions are not only expected to deliver high-quality academic outcomes but also to maintain strong

public trust, stakeholder engagement, and institutional reputation (Otiso, 2025). The phenomenon of declining public confidence in some educational institutions, coupled with the rapid spread of information through digital media, has intensified the urgency for strategic public relations planning. Islamic educational institutions, in particular, face unique challenges as they must integrate professional management practices with religious values (Doorley & Garcia, 2015). This dual responsibility often leads to inconsistencies in communication strategies, resulting in suboptimal institutional positioning. Moreover, the shift from traditional administrative approaches to strategic management frameworks demands a more structured and proactive PR planning model. Without a clear strategic orientation, PR activities tend to be reactive, fragmented, and ceremonial rather than impactful. Therefore, strategic public relations planning is no longer optional but becomes a necessity to enhance institutional quality and sustainability in Islamic education (Abiin & Baharun, 2026).

In practice, many Islamic educational institutions still perceive public relations as a technical or supportive function rather than a strategic managerial role. This phenomenon is evident in the limited integration of PR planning within institutional strategic plans, where PR activities are often reduced to event documentation, publication, and protocol management (Soim et al., 2026). Such practices indicate a gap between theoretical advancements in strategic PR and their application in Islamic educational contexts. Additionally, the lack of data-driven decision-making in PR planning further weakens its contribution to institutional quality enhancement. Institutions rarely utilize stakeholder analysis, environmental scanning, or performance evaluation metrics as part of their PR strategies. Consequently, PR initiatives fail to align with broader institutional goals, including quality assurance and academic excellence. This issue becomes more critical when considering the increasing competition among educational institutions, both nationally and globally. Islamic educational institutions must therefore reposition PR as a strategic instrument that contributes directly to quality improvement, rather than merely serving as a communication tool.

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of public relations in educational settings. For instance, research by Hidayat (2020) emphasizes the role of PR in building institutional image through effective communication strategies. Similarly, Suryadi (2021) demonstrates that stakeholder engagement significantly influences educational quality outcomes. Another study by Rahman and Aziz (2022) explores the integration of digital media in PR practices, showing its potential to enhance institutional visibility and credibility. Meanwhile, Fitriani (2023) examines PR management in Islamic schools and finds that value-based communication can strengthen trust among stakeholders. Although these studies

provide valuable insights, they predominantly focus on implementation aspects rather than strategic planning. Most of them also treat PR as an operational function without deeply analyzing its role in long-term institutional quality enhancement. As a result, the conceptualization of strategic PR planning within Islamic educational institutions remains underexplored.

A critical analysis of existing literature reveals several limitations that justify the need for further research. First, there is a lack of comprehensive frameworks that integrate PR planning with quality management systems in Islamic education. Second, previous studies tend to adopt a partial approach, focusing on either communication strategies or stakeholder relations without linking them to institutional quality indicators. Third, the contextual specificity of Islamic educational institutions—such as their reliance on religious values, community-based governance, and moral objectives—is often overlooked. This creates a theoretical gap in understanding how strategic PR planning can be adapted to align with Islamic educational principles. Furthermore, empirical evidence on the effectiveness of PR planning in improving educational quality remains limited. Most studies rely on descriptive methodologies without providing robust analytical insights. These limitations highlight the need for a more integrative and context-sensitive approach to studying PR planning in Islamic education.

Another significant gap lies in the absence of explicit models that connect strategic public relations planning with measurable quality enhancement outcomes. While quality in education is often associated with academic achievement, curriculum development, and institutional accreditation, the contribution of PR planning to these dimensions is rarely examined. This lack of explicit linkage results in an underestimation of PR's strategic value. Additionally, existing research does not sufficiently address how PR planning can influence internal stakeholders, such as teachers and administrators, in fostering a culture of quality. The focus is predominantly external, emphasizing public image rather than internal transformation (Nurhaida & Asdiqoh, 2026). This imbalance limits the effectiveness of PR strategies in achieving sustainable quality improvement. Therefore, there is a pressing need to develop a conceptual and empirical model that explicitly demonstrates the relationship between strategic PR planning and quality enhancement in Islamic educational institutions.

In response to these gaps, this study proposes a strategic public relations planning framework that is specifically tailored to Islamic educational institutions. The novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach, combining principles of strategic management, public relations theory, and Islamic educational values. Unlike previous studies, this research explicitly positions PR planning as a core component of quality management, rather than

a peripheral function. It introduces a systematic model that includes environmental analysis, stakeholder mapping, strategic formulation, implementation, and evaluation, all aligned with institutional quality indicators. Furthermore, this study incorporates Islamic values such as transparency (*amanah*), accountability (*mas'uliyah*), and community engagement (*ukhuwah*) into the PR planning process. This value-based approach distinguishes the proposed model from conventional PR frameworks, making it more relevant to Islamic educational contexts.

The contribution of this research is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it enriches the discourse on public relations by extending its application to the domain of Islamic education, which has received limited attention in mainstream PR literature. It also bridges the gap between PR planning and quality management, offering a more holistic understanding of institutional development. Practically, the findings of this study provide actionable insights for educational leaders and policymakers in designing effective PR strategies that support quality enhancement (Astuti et al., 2024). By adopting a strategic approach, institutions can improve stakeholder trust, strengthen institutional reputation, and ultimately achieve better educational outcomes. This research also serves as a reference for future studies that aim to explore the intersection of communication, management, and Islamic education.

In conclusion, the dynamic challenges faced by Islamic educational institutions require innovative and strategic approaches to management, including public relations planning. The limitations of existing practices and the gaps in previous research underscore the importance of developing a more comprehensive and context-sensitive framework. By addressing these issues, this study aims to contribute to the advancement of knowledge and practice in the field of Islamic education. The proposed strategic PR planning model not only responds to current challenges but also anticipates future developments in the educational landscape. As such, it holds significant potential for enhancing the quality and sustainability of Islamic educational institutions in an increasingly competitive and interconnected world (Muzaat & Abdullah, 2026).

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design to explore strategic public relations planning for quality enhancement in Islamic educational institutions. The qualitative approach is selected to gain an in-depth understanding of social phenomena, meanings, and processes that cannot be captured through quantitative measurement. The case study design allows the researcher to investigate the dynamics of public relations planning within real-life institutional contexts, particularly focusing on how strategies are formulated, implemented, and evaluated (Abdussamad, 2021). This approach is

relevant as it enables a holistic exploration of institutional practices, considering cultural, organizational, and value-based dimensions inherent in Islamic education. Through this design, the study does not aim to generalize findings statistically but to provide rich, contextualized insights that contribute to theoretical development and practical understanding of strategic public relations in Islamic educational settings (Subhaktiyasa et al., 2025).

The research was conducted at two Islamic educational institutions, namely MTs Misbahul Hidayah Suboh and MTs Sunan Ampel Ketah, both located in Situbondo Regency. These institutions were selected purposively based on their active engagement in institutional development and their efforts to improve educational quality through stakeholder involvement. The respondents in this study consist of key informants who are directly involved in planning and implementing public relations activities. They include school principals, vice principals, public relations coordinators, teachers, administrative staff, and representatives of school committees or guardians. The selection of respondents uses purposive sampling techniques, ensuring that participants have relevant knowledge, experience, and authority related to the research focus. This diversity of respondents allows for a comprehensive understanding of how public relations planning is conceptualized and practiced within the institutional context.

Data collection techniques in this study include in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation analysis. In-depth interviews are conducted to capture the perspectives, experiences, and strategic considerations of respondents regarding public relations planning and its role in enhancing institutional quality. Observations are carried out to examine actual practices, interactions, and communication patterns within the institutions, providing contextual validation of interview data. Documentation analysis involves reviewing institutional documents such as strategic plans, public relations programs, reports, and communication materials to understand formal planning processes (Dewi & SH, 2025). To ensure data credibility, this study applies triangulation techniques, including source triangulation, method triangulation, and time triangulation. These strategies are essential to enhance the validity and reliability of findings, ensuring that the interpretations accurately reflect the reality of the studied institutions.

The data analysis in this study follows the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data condensation involves selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming raw data obtained from the field into meaningful units. Data display is conducted by organizing information into matrices, charts, or narrative descriptions to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions are

drawn through an iterative process of verification, ensuring that findings are grounded in empirical evidence. Throughout the analysis process, the researcher continuously reflects on emerging patterns, relationships, and themes related to strategic public relations planning and quality enhancement. This analytical framework allows the study to produce systematic and credible findings, contributing to the development of a contextualized model of public relations planning in Islamic educational institutions.

Table 1. Research informant data

No	Initial	Position/Role	Institution
1	R1	Principal	MTs Misbahul Hidayah Suboh
2	R2	Vice Principal for Curriculum	MTs Misbahul Hidayah Suboh
3	R3	Public Relations Coordinator	MTs Misbahul Hidayah Suboh
4	R4	Teacher	MTs Misbahul Hidayah Suboh
5	R5	Administrative Staff	MTs Misbahul Hidayah Suboh
6	R6	Committee/Parent Representative	MTs Misbahul Hidayah Suboh
7	R7	Principal	MTs Sunan Ampel Ketah
8	R8	Vice Principal for Student Affairs	MTs Sunan Ampel Ketah
9	R9	Public Relations Coordinator	MTs Sunan Ampel Ketah
10	R10	Teacher	MTs Sunan Ampel Ketah
11	R11	Administrative Staff	MTs Sunan Ampel Ketah

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Strategic Planning Patterns of Public Relations in Islamic Educational Institutions

The findings reveal that public relations (PR) planning in Islamic educational institutions is carried out through structured yet adaptive patterns, although not fully formalized into a comprehensive strategic document. Both MTs Misbahul Hidayah Suboh and MTs Sunan Ampel Ketah initiate PR planning at the beginning of the academic year through coordination meetings involving school leaders and key personnel. However, the planning process tends to be general, flexible, and highly dependent on situational needs rather than based on systematic analysis such as stakeholder mapping or environmental scanning. This condition indicates that PR planning is still positioned at a practical-operational level rather than a strategic-managerial level.

As expressed by R1, "We usually plan public relations programs at the beginning of the academic year, but the planning is still general and can change depending on the situation in the field." Similarly, R3 stated, "There is no written strategic plan specifically for public relations; we usually adjust based on ongoing activities and needs." These findings explicitly show that although planning activities exist, they have not yet been supported by structured

frameworks such as long-term planning documents, measurable indicators, or systematic evaluation tools. As a result, PR planning has not been optimally aligned with institutional quality enhancement goals, making its contribution less measurable and less sustainable.

Stakeholder Engagement and Leadership Dominance in PR Planning

Another important finding indicates that PR planning is strongly influenced by leadership dominance while stakeholder involvement remains limited and largely symbolic. The principals act as central decision-makers who control communication flows and determine PR strategies, ensuring consistency in institutional messaging. However, this centralized model reduces participatory planning and limits the involvement of teachers, committees, and parents in decision-making processes. R7 emphasized, “All communication related to external parties must be coordinated with the principal to maintain the institution’s image.” This highlights the strong authority of leadership in shaping PR direction.

On the other hand, stakeholder engagement is mostly implemented in the form of participation in school activities rather than involvement in planning (Sydorchuk et al., 2024). R6 stated, “We are usually invited to attend meetings or events, but we are rarely involved in determining the program plans.” This finding demonstrates a clear gap between the recognition of stakeholders as important partners and their actual involvement in strategic planning. Consequently, PR planning tends to reflect top-down perspectives, which may not fully accommodate stakeholder expectations and needs. This condition limits the effectiveness of PR strategies in building collaborative relationships that contribute to sustainable quality improvement.

Digital Utilization, Value Integration, and Weak Evaluation Mechanisms

The study also finds that the use of digital media, integration of Islamic values, and evaluation mechanisms in PR planning are present but not yet optimally managed in a strategic manner. Both institutions utilize digital platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook to disseminate information and promote school activities. However, the absence of structured digital communication planning, including content strategies and audience targeting, makes these efforts less effective. R3 explained, “We use WhatsApp groups and Facebook to share school activities, but we do not yet have a structured digital communication strategy.”

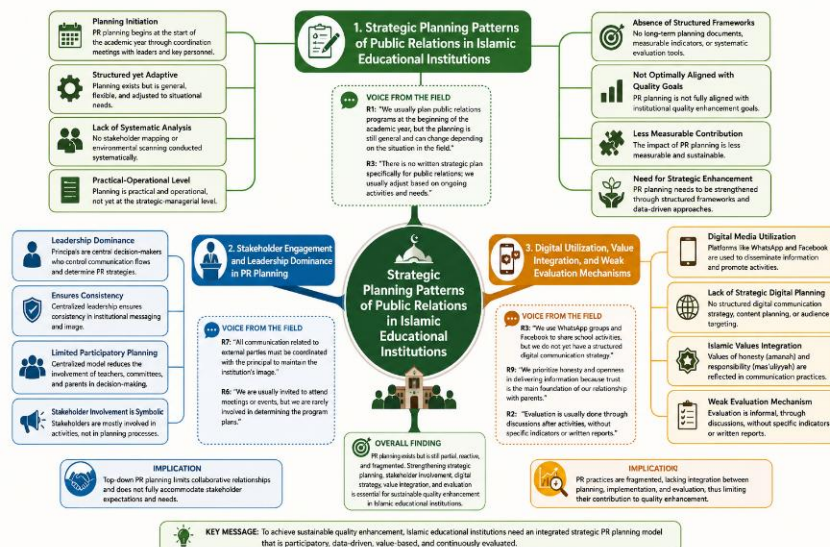


Figure 1. A mind map featuring appealing visuals and key ideas

In addition, Islamic values such as honesty (*amanah*) and responsibility (*mas'uliyah*) are strongly reflected in communication practices, particularly in building trust with parents. R9 stated, "We prioritize honesty and openness in delivering information because trust is the main foundation of our relationship with parents (Faidah et al., 2023)." Despite this, these values have not been systematically integrated into formal PR planning frameworks. Furthermore, evaluation of PR activities is still weak and largely informal. R2 mentioned, "Evaluation is usually done through discussions after activities, without specific indicators or written reports." These findings explicitly indicate that PR practices are still fragmented, lacking integration between planning, implementation, and evaluation, which ultimately limits their contribution to institutional quality enhancement.

DISCUSSION

Strategic Planning Patterns of Public Relations in Islamic Educational Institutions

The findings indicate that public relations (PR) planning patterns in Islamic educational institutions remain predominantly at a practical-operational level rather than evolving into a strategic-managerial framework. (Lauren, 2023) Although both madrasahs conduct initial planning at the beginning of the academic year through internal coordination meetings, the process lacks comprehensive situational analysis such as stakeholder mapping, environmental scanning, and measurable performance indicators. From the perspective of Strategic Management Theory, effective planning should involve systematic stages including environmental analysis, strategy formulation, implementation, and evaluation. However, the observed practices reflect a reactive approach,

where flexibility replaces structure, resulting in short-term adjustments rather than long-term strategic direction (Suhermanto, 2024), (Suhermanto, 2022). This gap suggests that PR has not yet been positioned as a core strategic function that contributes directly to institutional quality enhancement. Consequently, the absence of structured planning limits the ability of PR activities to create sustainable institutional value and measurable outcomes.

From the lens of Excellence Theory in Public Relations (Grunig & Hunt), effective PR should function as a strategic management role that aligns organizational goals with stakeholder expectations through symmetrical communication. However, the findings reveal that PR activities are still treated as administrative support rather than strategic drivers. The absence of formal planning documents, such as PR strategic plans or communication roadmaps, indicates weak institutionalization of PR within organizational structures. This condition reinforces the notion that PR practices are heavily dependent on individual experience rather than standardized systems. As a result, PR initiatives become fragmented and inconsistent, reducing their effectiveness in building institutional reputation. In competitive educational environments, such limitations hinder the ability of institutions to differentiate themselves and maintain public trust.

Therefore, a paradigm shift is required to transform PR planning into a data-driven and strategy-oriented process. Integrating Strategic Planning Theory with Islamic educational values can provide a more holistic framework, where planning includes SWOT analysis, stakeholder identification, goal setting, and systematic evaluation. This transformation would enable PR to function not only as a communication tool but also as a strategic instrument for institutional development. By aligning PR strategies with quality enhancement goals, Islamic educational institutions can strengthen their adaptability, competitiveness, and sustainability in responding to societal demands (Mundiri & Sanafiri, 2022).

Stakeholder Engagement and Leadership Dominance in PR Planning

The study reveals that leadership dominance is a defining characteristic in PR planning within the observed institutions. Principals act as central decision-makers who control communication flows and determine strategic directions. From the perspective of Leadership Theory, particularly transformational and participative leadership models, effective organizational planning should encourage shared decision-making and collective engagement (Abdullah & Sukriyah, 2026). While centralized leadership ensures consistency and message control, it simultaneously limits the inclusiveness of the planning process. This imbalance creates a structural gap where stakeholder contributions are minimized, reducing the diversity of perspectives needed for effective PR strategies. As a result, planning becomes less responsive to external needs and expectations.

Analyzed through Stakeholder Theory (Freeman), organizations are expected to actively involve stakeholders as strategic partners in decision-making processes. However, the findings indicate that stakeholder engagement remains largely symbolic, confined to participation in activities rather than involvement in planning. This limited engagement reflects a transactional rather than relational approach to stakeholder management. Consequently, PR strategies fail to fully capture the needs, perceptions, and expectations of the community (Musyarofah et al., 2025). The dominance of top-down communication further reinforces institutional boundaries, preventing the development of collaborative relationships. Such conditions reduce the effectiveness of PR in fostering mutual understanding and long-term trust between institutions and their stakeholders.

To address this issue, a shift toward participatory and collaborative leadership is **ضروری**. Incorporating Collaborative Governance Theory into PR planning can enhance stakeholder involvement through structured dialogue mechanisms such as focus group discussions and joint planning forums. By creating inclusive decision-making spaces, institutions can ensure that PR strategies are more representative, adaptive, and responsive. Strengthening transparency and shared ownership will not only improve stakeholder trust but also enhance the overall effectiveness of PR in supporting sustainable quality improvement (Huang, 2022), (McLeod, 2024).

Digital Utilization, Value Integration, and Weak Evaluation Mechanisms

The utilization of digital media in PR practices reflects an initial adaptation to technological advancements, yet it lacks strategic depth. Platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook are used primarily for information dissemination without structured planning, audience segmentation, or performance evaluation. From the perspective of Digital Communication Theory, effective digital PR requires integration between content strategy, audience analysis, and data-driven evaluation. The absence of these elements indicates that digital communication remains tactical rather than strategic. Consequently, the potential of digital platforms to enhance institutional visibility and engagement is not fully optimized.

On the other hand, the integration of Islamic values such as *amanah* (trustworthiness) and *mas'uliyah* (responsibility) represents a significant strength in PR practices. This aligns with Value-Based Management Theory, which emphasizes the role of ethical principles in shaping organizational behavior and stakeholder trust (Lund, S., Riiser, K., & Løndal, 2023), (Kim et al., 2024). However, these values are not yet institutionalized within formal PR frameworks, making their implementation inconsistent and dependent on individual awareness. Additionally, the lack of systematic evaluation

mechanisms reflects a critical weakness when viewed through Performance Management Theory, which stresses the importance of measurable indicators and continuous assessment. Without clear evaluation tools, institutions cannot accurately measure the effectiveness or impact of their PR activities.

To enhance effectiveness, an integrated approach combining digital strategy, value formalization, and systematic evaluation is ضروری. Institutions should develop structured digital communication plans that include clear objectives, target audiences, content strategies, and measurable indicators. Simultaneously, Islamic values should be embedded into formal PR guidelines to ensure consistency and sustainability (Aimah et al., 2026). The adoption of Integrated Communication Theory can bridge the gap between planning, implementation, and evaluation, ensuring coherence across all PR activities. By strengthening these three aspects, PR can evolve into a strategic function that significantly contributes to institutional quality enhancement and long-term reputation building.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that strategic public relations (PR) planning in Islamic educational institutions remains transitional from operational practices toward a systematic and integrated framework. PR activities are routinely conducted through internal coordination, but the absence of environmental analysis, stakeholder mapping, measurable indicators, and structured evaluation makes implementation largely reactive and situational. Principal-centered decision-making supports communication consistency but limits stakeholder participation and alignment with community expectations. Similarly, digital platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook are utilized adaptively but lack structured content planning, audience segmentation, and data-driven evaluation. Islamic values, particularly *amanah* (trustworthiness) and *mas'uliyah* (responsibility), strengthen public trust but have not been systematically incorporated into PR planning. These findings highlight the need to integrate Strategic Management Theory, Excellence Theory, Stakeholder Theory, Leadership Theory, Digital Communication Theory, and Value-Based Management. Therefore, strategic, participatory, value-driven, and systematically evaluated PR planning is essential to strengthen institutional reputation, public trust, stakeholder relationships, and sustainable educational quality in Islamic educational institutions.

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