

## INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN BUILDING AN IMAGE OF CONTINGENCY PERSPECTIVE OF ACCOMMODATION

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### Abstract :

*This research explores public relations strategies in educational institutions, focusing on the descriptive qualitative research method. Specifically, the study examines the public relations (PR) approach of Al-Manar Semboro Jember Islamic boarding school, which emphasizes interpersonal communication to cultivate a positive institutional image and foster trust within the community. Utilizing a humanistic approach, the school addresses community perceptions, assumptions, and needs promptly and effectively, prioritizing truth, speed, accuracy, friendliness, and comfort in its communication efforts. Key steps taken by the Islamic boarding school include home visits to engage with guardians, holding evaluation meetings, organizing religious activities and open days, and involving the community in school events, alongside providing a suggestion box for public feedback. These efforts underscore the school's commitment to enhancing staff communication skills, empathy, honesty, ethics, and emotional intelligence while prioritizing community needs and feedback. Through these initiatives, Al-Manar Semboro Jember Islamic Boarding School strives to maintain satisfactory relationships with stakeholders and deliver quality educational services.*

### Abstrak:

*Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi strategi kehumasan pada lembaga pendidikan dengan fokus metode penelitian deskriptif kualitatif. Secara khusus penelitian ini mengkaji pendekatan humas (PR) Pondok Pesantren Al-Manar Semboro Jember yang menekankan pada komunikasi interpersonal untuk menumbuhkan citra institusi yang positif dan menumbuhkan kepercayaan di masyarakat. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan humanistik, sekolah menangani persepsi, asumsi, dan kebutuhan masyarakat dengan cepat dan efektif, dengan mengutamakan kebenaran, kecepatan, ketepatan, keramahan, dan kenyamanan dalam upaya komunikasinya. Langkah-langkah penting yang dilakukan pesantren antara lain kunjungan rumah untuk berinteraksi dengan wali, mengadakan rapat evaluasi, menyelenggarakan kegiatan keagamaan dan hari terbuka, dan melibatkan masyarakat*

*dalam acara-acara sekolah, serta menyediakan kotak saran untuk masukan masyarakat. Upaya-upaya ini menggarisbawahi komitmen sekolah untuk meningkatkan keterampilan komunikasi staf, empati, kejujuran, etika, dan kecerdasan emosional sambil memprioritaskan kebutuhan dan umpan balik masyarakat. Melalui inisiatif-inisiatif tersebut, Pondok Pesantren Al-Manar Semboro Jember berupaya menjaga hubungan yang memuaskan dengan pemangku kepentingan dan memberikan layanan pendidikan yang berkualitas.*

## INTRODUCTION

The role of communication in marketing products is to introduce the company and create positive communication at the consumer level to improve the company's image. Interpersonal communication also functions as a tool to boost the company's image (Ulyah & Susilawati, 2017). The use of communication as a marketing tool is an essential issue in supporting business activities in order to improve the image of the institution in the eyes of the public and the guardians of students as consumers so that it can maintain public trust to continue to believe in the vision and mission of the institution.

In life, a person needs to socialize and create and maintain close relationships with other people. Therefore, we spend much time communicating interpersonally to maintain social relationships. Likewise, to be able to change the attitudes and behavior of other people with persuasive efforts. In the educational process, we often encounter failures, usually due to a weak communication system (Ropiani, 2018). Interpersonal communication also requires mutual give and take between the actors involved. In other words, communicators exchange information, thoughts, ideas, and so on.

Amid increasingly fierce competition in the era of educational autonomy, the public relations department in educational institutions must be able to build better and more reliable communication networks amidst competition between educational institutions (Syam & Hidayat, 2019). Customer satisfaction is crucial in forming a good image and attitude towards educational institutions. Forming a good attitude is necessary to satisfy customers (students/students). This can last a long time because education competition is increasingly competitive, so a multi-faceted approach needs to be taken to attract public interest. Service is defined as the actions or actions of a person or organization to provide satisfaction to customers or fellow employees. With good service (Heriyanto et al., 2021).

In communication between administrators of educational institutions and the community, an empathetic attitude needs to be fostered. Empathy can be realized if leaders are willing to pay attention to the community and find out what the community as customers and service users need about the community's needs for the institution. The social interaction process is done by building good community communication. Effective interpersonal relationships are relationships where there is a supportive attitude.

In organizations, an open communication system must continue to be developed because, despite many communication systems and several communication barriers, open communication is better than a closed one. In this

communication system, the signs that can be generated are understanding, pleasure, influence on attitudes, improved relationships, and action.

Educational institutions are required to be able to synergize and involve the community in managing and developing managerial processes in their institutions. This statement refers to education with the community, namely that institutions try to include the community in every government program. This is because the real needs faced by society are the primary purpose of the educational institution's existence. An educational institution should create a positive image in the community's hearts so that the community can make decisions to register their children and participate actively in the development of the educational institution.

The progress of educational institutions can be seen in how far the public can trust them to carry out their duties. Thus, educational institutions or leaders, in particular, must create strategies that can create an institutional climate that is dynamic and responsive to the surrounding community's needs (Azhar et al., 2022). Institutions progress because of support from society, and society can progress because of adequate education (Annisya, 2017). Education as a service product is intangible but can meet consumer needs (Fradito et al., 2020).

Suppose the school, parents, and community relationship is well established. In that case, it will undoubtedly make a better and more significant contribution to developing education and learning to jointly realize quality education in schools. With community participation, educational institutions will run unilaterally and find it easier to develop (Indrioko, 2021).

It cannot be denied that society and schools are related and play a mutual role in each other. Educational institutions and society have a mutually beneficial relationship; this relationship must be maintained to support society's future and the educational institution's sustainability. Educational institutions can be viewed and give a good impression if their existence is recognized and have support from the wider community (Mahfuzhah & Ansari, 2018). Good relations between institutions and society must always be maintained. Harmony between the two will be mutually beneficial, so there is a need for a harmonious relationship (Afkarina, 2018).

Parties should establish excellent and harmonious communication and cooperation with the community to create a positive view of the community towards the institution's condition and education. Creating a harmonious relationship, such as criticism, suggestions, and good responses from the community, can even contribute to creating a quality educational institution. Achieving quality education must be balanced with the readiness of each school to provide the best services and facilities (Saepudin & Irawaty, 2020).

Based on the theory of contingency of accommodation in public relations, public relations practice moves based on a continuum of total (pure) advocacy, which means when a public relations practitioner tries to meet an organization's or public's needs by reducing or eliminating the public's needs. Total (pure) accommodation is when public relations practitioners try to meet the organization's and its public's needs through dialogue, negotiation, and compromise.

Based on several related studies conducted (Muslimin & Umam, 2019) which only focus on the internal public between kiai and santri in instilling moral values, face-to-face interpersonal communication (direct communication) with two forms of process, namely the interpersonal communication process carried out during recitation sessions and the Non-Recitation Interpersonal Communication Process. The second research was conducted (Sikumbang & Wijaya, 2019) which only focuses on improving the quality of graduates, namely communication patterns to motivate teachers and education staff to pay more attention to performance to be able to work well so that this is expected to improve the quality of madrasah graduates.

Based on previous research, this research is different from several previous studies because this research focuses on the public as a whole (society). This research is based on the concepts of Contingency and Accommodation Theory. This theory explains that when carrying out a program, an organization must adapt to the needs of its environment (society) (Rahmi, 2020). This theory can be used as a basis for discussing communication implementation in educational institutions to meet the needs of each social element so that organizational goals can be achieved. Therefore, it is interesting to know how the Islamic educational institution Al-Manar Islamic Boarding School applies interpersonal communication to meet the demands and needs of society based on the principle of contingency of accommodations, as discussed above.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The method used in this research is qualitative. This research seeks to find and describe facts and analyze situations by understanding the community's opinions, attitudes, behavior, and desires. This research was conducted at the AL-MANAR Jember Islamic boarding school educational institution Foundation regarding communication strategy. The research informants were Islamic boarding school teachers, principals, parents, or guardians of Islamic boarding schools and the surrounding community. Informants were chosen purposively.

Data collection is done through in-depth interviews, namely conducting direct and answering questions using an interview guide. Questions and answers were conducted in depth to support quantitative data in a targeted manner and obtain information obtained through the questionnaire. In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants of Islamic boarding school administrators, teachers, and guardians.

This research uses a qualitative approach to provide information, understanding, and description of the content and quality of the target or object of research. The term description is research that is intended to create a description of the events that took place. Data is collected, analyzed, and abstracted, and theories emerge that will show the results of the qualitative research findings (Mohammad & Ika Nurul, 2018). Therefore, this research seeks to examine the application of interpersonal communication in building an image from a contingency perspective of accommodation (needs-based).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Al-Manar madrasa and Islamic boarding school are located in the Bangkalan hamlet, Semboro sub-district, Jember regency, where the background to its establishment was based on the community's need for the importance of education. As time passes, Islamic boarding schools have opened formal education programs from kindergarten to senior level (MA). As a religious education institution, Islamic boarding schools carry out various strategies and approaches to building community relationships, including communication. As Islamic educational institutions, Madrasahs carry a task that takes work; an excellent managerial system is needed in all aspects (Wahid B, 2017). Education is a service that, in this case, is provided by the management of educational services to parties who receive it directly per specific quality standards. In a relative sense, the quality of service meets the expectations of the parties who need and are interested in the service.

Islamic boarding school public relations officers take various approaches and strategies to get the public's attention. Communication strategies in planning theory are needed to know and understand the situation to obtain the right way to achieve communication goals. Communication strategies require very complex planning so that the messages prepared are conveyed well to the audience (Melania & Wulandari, 2022). Therefore, it is not surprising that Islamic boarding schools and institutions, especially the public relations department, carry out various strategies and approaches through communication to provide an overview and understanding of the community's needs. Arthur W. Page, as quoted, states several principles that can be applied in public relations practice in maintaining an institution's relationship with its public:

### **Tell the Truth (Preaching the Truth)**

Building the image of a madrasah is done by convincing other people with various rational things and inviting other people together to take part in realizing the goals of the madrasah, namely, by understanding and uniting oneself with the situation of the communicant, which means depicting that he is in the "same boat" as the communicant, that he also feels what the communicant feels after that trying to interact with him while realizing the ideas and vision and mission of the madrasah to the community (Nuril Qodri, 2019).

A school is an institutional organization operating in the field of education that provides services to the public in terms of education, and it is no different if the school's target is students and the community in its environment. So that schools cannot be separated from society's role and the society's position for schools (Ma'sum, 2020). Public relations in an educational institution plays a role in marketing and building a good image so that people trust the educational institution (Cendekia Sandyakala, 2020). Good cooperation and professional promotion provide suggestive value to the institution's image in society (Aguustina, 2021).

Based on research conducted (by Fredy et al., 2019), it is stated that teachers and education personnel have a professional attitude in their field. Hence, they can provide quality services for students. Customer satisfaction is closely related to the correspondence between expectations and the reality of the

quality of educational services obtained. There have been several efforts to improve the image of the institution. The first is external, namely carried out in two ways (coercive and persuasive) (Pramungkas, 2020).

The pick-up-the-ball method, involving visits to the guardian's house at the Al-Manar Islamic boarding school foundation, is utilized as a communication approach. These visits are conducted by all management elements, including teaching staff from both formal and non-formal institutions, foundation and boarding school administrators, and caregivers. Additionally, competent members of the public or Islamic boarding school guardians who contribute positively are invited to accompany them on these visits to other students' homes. Santri, or students, are also involved in these home visits. The visits are carried out gradually and flexibly, meaning they do not occur on a fixed schedule but are conducted whenever feasible and time allows. Notably, prior notice about the visits needs to be given, as the intention is to avoid inconveniencing the Islamic boarding school guardians regarding reception for the visit.

Based on this interview and the researcher's observations, the efforts made by the Islamic boarding school and the AL-Manar Institute to establish communication and community relations are by visiting the homes of the parents of the students and parents to provide truthful information related to the Islamic boarding school and developing public issues. The Islamic boarding school immediately came down, one of which was by visiting the community's homes or the Islamic boarding school so that the institution and the Islamic boarding school directly knew the situation of the community and the Islamic boarding school both economically and in other conditions. This step is very effective in building friendships so that guardians and guardians of students do not hesitate to communicate with administrators and provide ideas, concepts, and input. Moreover, that way, the administrators directly understand what the student and student guardians want and expect so that a sense of sympathy and empathy is fostered by mutual understanding.

### **Listen to The Customer (Listen to the Voice of Consumers/Community)**

One of the ways a company's progress is influenced by the company's ability to serve its consumers (Rohaeni & Marwa, 2018). As customers and users of educational institutions, society now tends to be more critical and realistic in choosing educational institutions. Competition for educational institutions in the 4.0 era has experienced a significant shift. Educational institutions have been classified as a service industry that demands professional management (Setiawan, 2018). Therefore, educational institutions must do maximum work, such as collaborating with all elements of education, paying attention to desires, and optimizing efforts so that at least more than half of customers are satisfied with the services provided. Efforts to achieve customer/student satisfaction can be seen from the relevance of hopes and desires and harmonious communication between the school and stakeholders, which is an effective way to determine the factors in achieving customer needs (Arafah & Chrysoekamto, 2020).

In efforts to heed community voices, Islamic boarding schools, such as the AL-Manar Islamic Boarding School Foundation, have implemented suggestion boxes to absorb aspirations and suggestions from the community. Despite direct

communication of ideas, suggestions, and assumptions by the lower middle-class village residents, suggestion boxes serve as a medium for the community and Islamic boarding school guardians to convey any concerns related to the institution. Through these channels, Islamic boarding schools prioritize the needs and desires of the guardians of the santri and the community. Moreover, upon picking up or opening suggestions, public relations management typically conveys messages from the community or Islamic boarding school trustees for consideration and evaluation. Consequently, the AL-Manar Islamic boarding school seeks to foster relationships with the community and walisantri by actively listening to criticism and community wishes, aiming to provide maximum services tailored to educational needs. Furthermore, to mitigate negative perceptions and opinions, Islamic boarding school public relations initiatives include regular checks and comprehensive information dissemination regarding the activities and developments of the institution. These efforts contribute to maintaining positive relations with the community and guardians while striving to control any unfavorable perceptions of the institution.

### **Prove it with Action (Prove it with Action)**

Sometimes, community members have various images of companies or educational institutions; for example, some feel satisfied and good, and others still have many shortcomings that need improvement (Indriani et al., 2021). Research (Nirmala Sari & Prasetya, 2020) shows that improving the quality of services is also in line with increasing student-parent satisfaction. Educational services are activities to fulfill customers' desires (Ningsih et al., 2018).

Following evaluation meetings conducted by the Islamic boarding school and the institution, overseeing the programs and agenda agreed upon by the community and Islamic boarding school guardians falls upon administrators like Amiruddin Lutfi at the AL-Manar Islamic Boarding School Foundation. The aim is to ensure that the decisions made during these meetings are effectively implemented within the Islamic boarding school. This endeavor reflects the institution's commitment to enhancing its image and maintaining positive relations with the community and walisantri. However, this responsibility presents a challenge for Islamic boarding schools in meeting the demands and needs of the community, which serve as benchmarks for both teacher and community satisfaction.

### **Manage for Tomorrow (Prepare Yourself for Tomorrow)**

Centered on quality, based on the participation of all its members, and aims for long-term success through customer satisfaction and providing benefits for all members in the organization and society. Someone with a strong impression of an Islamic educational institution, especially a school/madrasah, will not hesitate to register and entrust his children (Indriani et al., 2021).

Anticipate public reaction and eliminate practices that create difficulties. Create good intentions; every activity carried out now will impact the future, likewise within institutions. An institution needs to plan every activity, program, and daily activity to be carried out well. Planning for future activities helps avoid difficulties and chaos that may occur in the future.

Established in response to the community's demand for religious knowledge and education, the AL-Manar Islamic boarding school has endeavored to enhance its image and maintain trust with the community and Islamic boarding school stakeholders. Recognizing the need to attract students, the management and existing human resources have committed to improving the quality of education offered. One such initiative involves implementing a tahfidzul Qur'an program, which has garnered significant interest from the public within the few months since its inception. Additionally, in preparation for the future, the Islamic boarding school aims to optimize the human resources within the existing management structure, aligning individuals' majors and abilities with their respective fields. This strategic approach aims to cultivate graduates capable of competently practicing Islamic teachings in society in alignment with the institution's vision and mission.

### **Conduct Public Relations as If the Whole Company Depends on it (Perform PR Actions as if the Entire Institution Depends on It)**

Running a business that seeks to maximize competitiveness through continuous improvement of products, services, people, processes, and organizational environment. Educational institutions cannot be separated from society. However, this does not mean that schools must be integrated into society; instead, they must still show their identity as educational institutions that can influence education and community development (Siswanto, 2022).

The importance of community relations by the fundamental values in Islam is the establishment of good relations between community members (teachers, students, boarding school/institution administrators, parents, committees), the general public, foundations, the environment, and community figures, so that creating good, harmonious and well-knit relationships and mutual understanding to achieve a goal (Rizal, 2019). Good relationships between schools, parents, and the community benefit educational institutions, the community, parents, and students. The implementation of education strives for society, especially students, to become more advanced. (Rohani, 2021) . Community development, one of the objects of da'wah, must be connected to a communication strategy (Arifin, 2019).

Religious activities, including congregations and Islamic boarding school recitations, are open to the general public at the AL-Manar Islamic boarding school foundation without any restrictions. This inclusive approach is perceived as beneficial and serves as a means of fostering relationships with the community and walisanytri. The Islamic boarding school also collaborates with other religious figures to organize public recitations, such as the Muslimatan attended by mothers and Thursday gatherings attended by fathers, which have been ongoing for an extended period. These activities serve as platforms for disseminating religious teachings to the community and facilitate communication between the Islamic boarding school, the wider community, and other religious figures. The community's enthusiastic participation in these events underscores their welcoming attitude towards religious activities. Furthermore, the Islamic boarding school actively promotes the importance of education and other social aspects during these gatherings, fostering reciprocal

relationships with the community. Through these efforts, the Islamic boarding school aims to establish strong communication channels with the community, aiming to foster adherence to Islamic teachings and promote mutual dependency and reciprocity between the community and the institution.

### **Remain Calm, Patient and Good Humored (Remain Calm, Patient and Humorous)**

Be consistent, calm, and considerate when conveying information or contacting the public. When a crisis occurs, stay calm and remember that communicating the problem with a cool head is the best way. Delivery of messages done gently, politely, and impartially will add credibility to communication, especially when delivery is done in gentle ways (Muttaqin, 2018).

Program evaluation is an activity intended to determine how high the success level of planned activities is. (Hidayati, 2021) With evaluation, educational organizations are expected to be able to evaluate themselves to improve the quality of education in the future. (Tardian, 2019).

As institutions providing educational services, schools must prioritize satisfactory service to customers (stakeholders) and educational services to create customer (stakeholder) loyalty. This will provide benefits for the school (Elytasari, 2017). Community involvement is needed to control the implementation of education so that the community can provide feedback and assessment of the performance of educational institutions.

To address issues and challenges encountered by Islamic boarding schools, a strategy employed by the AL-Manar Islamic Boarding School Foundation involves conducting evaluation meetings with the community and guardians. Typically scheduled towards the end of the school year or preceding student competitions, these meetings cover infrastructure, teaching and learning activities, education financing, and future program planning. Attendees comprise Islamic boarding school trustees, alumni, and administrators at all levels. By actively involving Walisanytri and alumni, the institution aims to garner ideas, thoughts, and suggestions directly related to Islamic boarding school programs and other relevant matters. Through these evaluation meetings, the Islamic boarding school endeavors to rectify and monitor the adequacy of school activities, identify obstacles and shortcomings, and gauge the effectiveness of public relations initiatives. Feedback obtained during these sessions serves as valuable input for refining and improving future activities, ultimately contributing to the institution's ongoing efforts to strengthen relationships with the community and stakeholders.

Positive communication plays a crucial role in resolving issues, as highlighted by Mufid (2020). Putra and Sukaesih (2019) emphasize the importance of public relations in crisis management and improving service excellence. To address this, Islamic boarding schools focus on enhancing service quality, utilizing speed, accuracy, friendliness, and comfort strategies. For instance, the Al-Manar Islamic Boarding School promptly responds to complaints through various channels, including Facebook and suggestion boxes,

to maintain a positive image. Friendliness is upheld through polite and impartial communication, fostering mutual understanding and trust.

Additionally, the institution prioritizes comfort by addressing concerns raised via suggestion boxes to enhance satisfaction among students and guardians. Furthermore, communication with student parents and collaboration with external Islamic boarding school organizations facilitate the quick resolution of obstacles and contribute to building a positive image of the institution. Through these efforts, Islamic boarding schools aim to establish harmonious relationships and enhance communication with all stakeholders.

## CONCLUSION

The PR of the Al-Manar Semboro Jember Islamic boarding school's public relations strategy is interpersonal communication; this is done in an effort to build an image. Moreover, fosters a sense of trust in the community in the existence of Islamic boarding schools, mutual respect, and understanding. Interpersonal communication is quite effective in problem-solving. Al-Manar Islamic Boarding School responds to the perceptions, assumptions, and needs of the community using a humanistic approach, providing truth, speed, accuracy, friendliness, and comfort so that the community and Islamic boarding school guardians feel satisfied with the performance and educational services offered by the Islamic boarding school.

The steps taken by Islamic boarding schools to filter information, assumptions, perceptions, and community needs include visiting the homes of Islamic boarding school guardians, holding evaluation meetings, holding religious activities and open days, and involving the community when there are Islamic boarding school activities, and providing a suggestion box for the general public. The efforts made by the AL-MANAR Semboro Jember Islamic boarding school for communication are carried out by improving skills, experience, ability to empathize, honesty, ethics, politeness, emotional intelligence, individual skills, and the credibility of the information to be conveyed, listening to input and prioritizing community needs.

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