

STRENGTHENING BRAND IMAGE OF PESANTREN BASED ON TWO-WAY SYMEIRICAL MODEL THROUGH GENERATION Z

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Abstract :

This research explores how to strengthen a brand image based on the two-way symbolic model through Generation Z. This research uses a qualitative case study approach. The research subjects included caregivers, Pesantren heads, administrators, guardians, alums, the community, and students. Data collection techniques include observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis techniques include data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. The research results show that applying a two-way symmetrical communication model can strengthen the brand image of Pesantren through interaction with Generation Z, which can be proven by several indicators, namely dialogism, involvement of Generation Z, messaging adaptation, and relationships. A two-way symmetrical communication model can increase involvement and interaction between administrators, students, and the community. Generation Z has a crucial role in strengthening the image of Pesantren through social media campaigns. Open communication and responsive adaptation of messages to feedback help build a positive image of Pesantren. The active involvement of students in social and religious activities strengthens relationships with the community, making Pesantren an inclusive and responsive institution that contributes significantly to the welfare of the local community.

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini membahas tentang cara memperkuat citra merek berbasis model simbolik dua arah melalui Generasi Z. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif. Subjek penelitian meliputi pengasuh, kepala pesantren, pengurus, wali, alumni, masyarakat, dan santri. Teknik pengumpulan data meliputi observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Teknik analisis data meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penerapan model komunikasi simetris dua arah dapat memperkuat citra merek pesantren melalui interaksi dengan Generasi Z, yang dapat dibuktikan dengan beberapa indikator, yaitu dialogisme, keterlibatan Generasi Z, adaptasi pesan, dan hubungan. Model komunikasi simetris dua arah dapat meningkatkan keterlibatan dan interaksi antara pengurus, santri, dan masyarakat. Generasi

Z memiliki peran penting dalam memperkuat citra pesantren melalui kampanye media sosial. Komunikasi yang terbuka dan adaptasi pesan yang responsif terhadap umpan balik membantu membangun citra pesantren yang positif. Keterlibatan aktif santri dalam kegiatan sosial dan keagamaan memperkuat hubungan dengan masyarakat, menjadikan pesantren sebagai lembaga yang inklusif dan responsif yang berkontribusi signifikan terhadap kesejahteraan masyarakat setempat.

INTRODUCTION

Strengthening the brand image of Pesantren is independent of one-sided promotional efforts. Still, it requires implementing a two-way symmetrical communication model with Generation Z to build relationships with mutual understanding and a positive impact (Dobija et al., 2023; Gaol & Hutasoit, 2021; Maulidia, 2023). This is because Generation Z, who grew up in the digital era is used to fast and interactive information (Prasetyo et al., 2024; Sanjani et al., 2023). They value transparency and authenticity in communication, so promotion models with multiple directions are often ineffective (Bravo et al., 2021; Steils et al., 2022; Syarifah & Hidayat, 2024). In a two-way symmetrical communication model, Pesantren can listen and respond to the needs and views of Generation Z in real-time. (Islam et al., 2023; Wahyudi, 2023). This allows the creation of constructive dialogue, where both parties can learn and understand each other (Faiz et al., 2023; Iqbal et al., 2023). Thus, implementing this communication model strengthens the image of Pesantren through active and responsive involvement and builds stronger and positive relationships with Generation Z (Arifin & Zaini, 2024; Khotimah et al., 2024; Shi et al., 2024). This approach will ultimately increase trust and loyalty towards Pesantren and have a long-term, beneficial impact on the institution's image.

This research includes an in-depth analysis of how the application of a two-way symmetrical communication model can strengthen the brand image of Pesantren through interaction with Generation Z. Research (Baharun et al., 2023; Prihananto et al., 2024) shows that the use of social media by educational institutions, especially Pesantren, can improve their brand image. Case studies of several Pesantren in Indonesia show that a social media strategy involving Santri as brand ambassadors can strengthen the positive image of Pesantren in the wider community (Putra, 2023; Steils et al., 2022; Yaqin, 2024). Furthermore, (Eriksson et al., 2022) said that exploring differences in social media use between different generations and their impact on brand loyalty, focusing on Generation Z in Pesantren, shows that their active involvement in social media can increase brand loyalty and image. Meanwhile, (Gazi et al., 2024) explained the application of a symmetrical two-way communication model in educational institutions, including Pesantren. The research results show that a communication approach that involves active dialogue between Pesantren administrators and students can strengthen the brand image and increase student participation in promotional activities.

This research seeks to explore how applying a two-way symmetrical communication model in interactions with Generation Z can optimize the image

and reputation of Pesantren, focusing on aspects such as engagement, transparency, and authenticity. This research will identify how integrating various communication dimensions can form stronger relationships and mutual understanding between Pesantren and Generation Z (Maliki et al., 2024). By understanding how this innovative approach functions in the context of brand communication, this research can provide valuable insights into designing communication strategies that are more effective and relevant to the needs and characteristics of Generation Z.

This research aims to analyze how the application of a two-way symmetrical communication model can strengthen the brand image of Pesantren through interaction with Generation Z by identifying key factors that influence the effectiveness of two-way communication, understanding the preferences and expectations of Generation Z in the context of Pesantren, and evaluating the impact of strategies. Interactive and responsive communication to the image and reputation of the Pesantren. This research argues that strengthening the brand image of Pesantren requires a more dynamic and interactive approach, especially in dealing with Generation Z, which is critical and connected to digital technology. Traditional approaches that rely on one-way promotions often cannot reach and build strong relationships with this generation.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative case study type approach (Steils et al., 2022). This approach was chosen because this research aimed to deeply understand the application of the two-way symmetrical communication model in Pesantren. This approach allows researchers to explore the perspectives and subjective experiences of the parties involved. This research site is the Bahrul Ulum Besuk Pesantren, Probolinggo district, East Java, Indonesia, based on several strong reasons. First, the Bahrul Ulum Pesantren has a good reputation and is widely known among the public, making it possible for this research to obtain relevant and comprehensive data. Second, this Pesantren has demonstrated efforts in adopting modern technology and approaches in its educational and da'wah activities, making it an ideal place to test the proposed two-way communication model. Third, with a student population mainly from Generation Z, Bahrul Ulum provides an opportunity to directly understand this generation group's preferences and communication behavior. Finally, the openness and support of Pesantren management for academic research offers more accessible access to data collection and interaction with students and staff, which is very important for the success of this research.

Participants were selected using a purposive technique; they were chosen with specific considerations and objectives. The reason for using this technique is that researchers need data in the form of information that can only be obtained from informants who certainly have more knowledge about the data that researchers want to get to produce data that meets expectations and is relevant to the title that has been determined. This research involved 8 participants by Tabel 1: caregivers, Pesantren heads, administrators, the community, and students. The informants have different occupational, educational, and gender

backgrounds, so they must provide accurate information about the research theme.

Table 1. Research Informants

Participants	Gender		Educational background				Informant code
	Male	Female	high school	Bachelor	Magister	Doctor	
Pesantren's nurse	1	-	-	-	-	1	MB
Pesantren's Head master	1	-	-	1	-	-	MAY
Pesantren's Manager	1	1	2	-	-	-	NH, SN,
Society	1	1	1	1	-	-	MR, SA,
Santri	1	1	2	-	-	-	ADF, SR,
Jumlah	5	3	5	10	1	1	-
Total	31 Participant						

The interview technique used in this research is a semi-structured interview technique, which means it has an interview guide, although there are interviews outside the guide. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher introduced himself and provided an overview of the interview topic. Agreements were made with participants to record interviews to improve accuracy and thorough documentation. These recorded sessions and the accompanying transcripts served as a valuable resource for careful analysis and interpretation in this study. By Tabel 2, the researcher prepared several questions relevant to the research theme as a semi-structured interview. These questions were designed to explore the extent of strengthening the brand image of Pesantren based on the Two-Way Simeiris model through Generation Z at the Bahrul Ulum's Pesantren.

Table 2. Interview Material

Participants	Material
Pesantren's nurse	Policy in strengthening brand image
Pesantren's Head master	Communication strategy for Pesantren's brand image
Pesantren's Manager	Communication with Santri and Community
Society	Community Interaction and Involvement with Pesantren
Santri	Two-Way Communication on Learning and Life Experiences in Pesantren

Each interview lasted 30 minutes. The researcher used a recording device to capture the interview process and make written field notes. Interview results, including participant information, interviewer details, and interview transcripts, were transcribed. Respondents' names were replaced with codes such as MB-MAY (abbreviation of the informant's full name) to protect confidentiality and uphold research ethics.

Based on the interview transcripts, the researcher identified themes based on the research objectives. This process involved identifying themes in the interview data by reviewing the interview transcripts thoroughly several times until the researcher obtained a clear picture of strengthening the Pesantren's

brand image based on the Two-Way symmetrical model through Generation Z at the Bahrul Ulum's Pesantren (Rudding et al., 2023). Furthermore, after the interview, the researcher assured participants that the interview recording would be kept confidential. This research interview protocol was essential in helping to guide in-depth, semi-structured interviews with participants. Semi-structured designs balance flexibility and an established framework, allowing researchers to delve deeper into a particular subject while remaining open-minded to unexpected results.

Data analysis in this research uses the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (1994) in (Köhler, 2024), which consists of 4 steps: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions/verification. The initial data analysis stage includes collecting research data obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation as research notes. The second step in data reduction is summarizing, selecting key elements, and focusing on essential data that aligns with the research theme. This careful data reduction process aims to present a clear and concise picture of strengthening brand image based on the two-way symmetrical model (Untung et al., 2023). Next, the third step involves presenting the data through narrative text. The final step in the data analysis process includes drawing research conclusions based on data reduction. These conclusions were carefully crafted to synthesize the data collected. Data validity was ensured through data triangulation and review, which ensured consistency with research findings. To ensure the accuracy of the data collected, source triangulation was carried out by cross-referencing information from previous theories and studies related to various fields of education and learning systems in Pesantren.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Two-way public relations, or two-way public relations (PR), is a communication approach that focuses on the reciprocal interaction between an organization and its publics (Hankore et al., 2023; Solimin, 2023). Unlike the one-way communication model that only emphasizes the delivery of messages from the organization to the audience, two-way public relations emphasizes the importance of dialogue and feedback. In this model, the organization not only conveys information, but also listens and responds to the needs, concerns, and input of the public. This allows for a more transparent, trusting, and mutually beneficial relationship between the organization and its audiences (Faiz et al., 2023; Solimin, 2023). Two-way public relations as an approach serves not only as a tool for building an image, but also as a mechanism for managing public perception effectively, which ultimately helps the organization adapt to changes and societal needs.

Dialogism as an Application of a Two-Way Symbolic Model

Dialogism is the application of the symmetrical model in strengthening the brand image of the Bahrul Ulum's Pesantren. Pesantren caregivers stated that "implementing a two-way symmetrical communication model with Generation Z can be done by using various digital platforms, such as social media and instant messaging applications, to interact directly with them. We also often hold

discussion forums and feedback sessions where students can express their opinions and suggestions. Our goal is to ensure that students feel heard and involved in decisions that affect them"(MAY). Another perspective from students is that "the application of this two-way symmetrical communication model means we have more opportunities to talk and provide input. For example, in the discussion forums held, we can convey ideas and criticism regarding various aspects of life in Pesantren"(SR). Social media is also beneficial because we can easily communicate with the management and get a fast response.

From the informant's statement above, it can be seen that implementing the two-way symmetrical communication model at the Bahrul Ulum's Pesantren has positively impacted increasing involvement and interaction between administrators, students, and the community. Pesantren have successfully built an open and responsive dialogue with students through digital platforms such as social media and instant messaging applications. Regular discussion forums and feedback sessions strengthen students' involvement with Pesantren, allowing them to express opinions and suggestions directly (Sanjani, 2024; Sutrisno et al., 2023). Thanks to this communication model, Santri feels more involved and valued, which allows them to provide constructive input and criticism (Yang et al., 2024). As a primary means of communication, social media facilitates fast and efficient interaction between students and Pesantren's administrators.

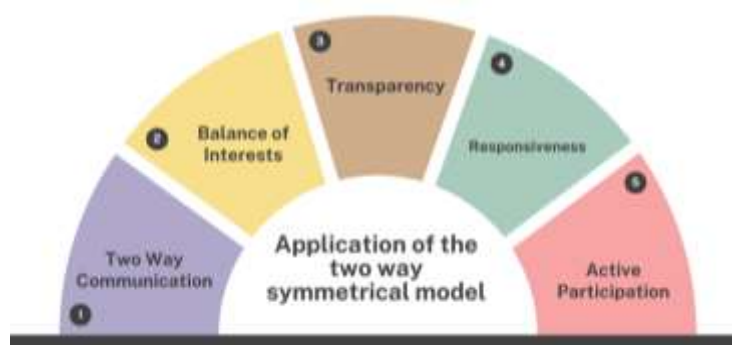


Figure 1. Application of the Two-Way Communication Model

The Figure 1, explains that the application of the two-way symmetrical model in dialogism can be analyzed through several leading indicators: Two-way communication is at the heart of this model, which emphasizes the active involvement of the audience and the mutual listening quality of the dialogue. Balance of interests, namely the extent to which the organization's and the audience's interests are accommodated in the communication process. Transparency, namely that the organization is open in conveying information and is responsible for feedback and criticism from the audience. Responsiveness measures the speed and relevance of the organization's response to feedback or questions from the audience. Apart from that, active participation from the audience also needs to be considered. The extent to which the audience is involved in initiating communication and dialogue initiatives, as well as the opportunities given to them to initiate discussions or ask questions.

Generation Z Engagement

The involvement of Generation Z in strengthening the brand image of Islamic boarding schools based on a two-way symmetrical model shows that an inclusive and balanced communication approach can increase the effectiveness of branding strategies. As stated by the head of the Pesantren, "The role of Generation Z in strengthening the brand image of Pesantren is vital because they are very technology and social media literate, so they can become effective ambassadors for spreading the positive image of Islamic boarding schools to the wider community. Generation Z, known for its ability to utilize technology and social media, requires communication channels that enable active interaction and constructive feedback." Meanwhile, the Pesantren's administrator said that "one concrete example is the social media campaign carried out by Bahrul Ulum's students, namely that they designed interesting and relevant content for their audience on platforms such as Instagram @pp.bahrululumprobolinggo and TikTok @pp_bu. "With this content, which includes daily activities at the Islamic boarding school, the achievements of the students, and the special programs that we hold, it not only increases the positive image of the Pesantren but also attracts the interest of prospective new students and the general public."

Based on this, it can be concluded that Generation Z's active involvement can be seen from their participation in digital platforms such as social media and online forums, which enable them to voice their opinions and shape the image of Pesantren (Syakir & Mahmudah, 2023; Ubaedullah, 2024). Their feedback helps Islamic boarding schools adjust their branding strategies to better suit this generation's expectations (Ariyani et al., 2024). The two-way symmetrical model emphasizes transparency and accountability (Havifi et al., 2023). Islamic boarding schools must provide transparent and open information and be responsive to questions and criticism, building trust and strengthening relationships with young audiences.

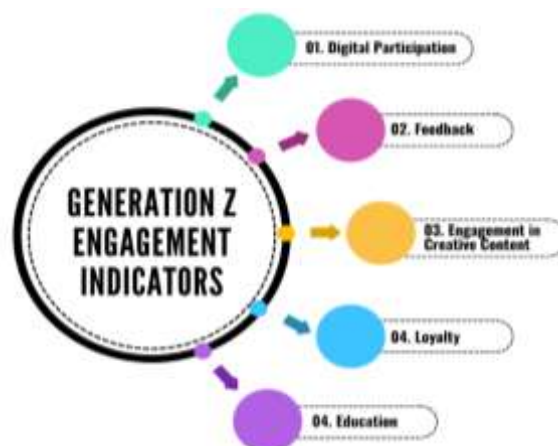


Figure 2. Generation Z Engagement

The explains the involvement of Generation Z by Figure 2, which is an essential indicator in strengthening brand image. First, the digital platforms used, such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, are very important because they attract their attention differently. The effectiveness of the platform is measured

through engagement and participation metrics. Quality of interaction includes the type (informative, dialogic, collaborative) and depth of engagement, such as lengthy comments and active participation in the campaign. User experience assesses ease of access and quality of interaction with an organization's content. The impact of engagement can be seen from the number of likes, shares, comments, and frequency of re-engagement. Creative involvement includes creating videos, memes, or blogs and content innovation. Feedback is measured through the frequency and quality of feedback for organizational improvement. Relationships to organizational goals are evaluated based on the alignment of engagement with the mission and their contribution to strategic objectives. Acceptance and loyalty levels are measured through support and signs of long-term loyalty. Education and information assesses knowledge about brands and services and the impact of educational efforts on engagement. These indicators provide an overview of Generation Z's engagement with organizations and their influence on brand development and communications strategies.

Attract Generation Z with Symmetrical Communication

Message adaptation is an essential indicator for building a brand image based on a two-way symmetrical model through Generation Z. The explanation from Islamic boarding school caregivers is that "the way Pesantren respond to feedback from Generation Z regarding the content they consume is with every comment, criticism or suggestion that We accept that it is analyzed carefully and also holds regular online discussion sessions where students can directly express their opinions." We then use this feedback to improve and develop our communications strategy. For example, when there was criticism regarding the lack of educational video content, we immediately increased the production of that content. Moreover, the way Pesantren adapt messages to attract the attention of Generation Z, as explained by the boarding school administrators, is by realizing that Generation Z has different communication preferences from previous generations. Therefore, we focused on using popular digital platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. We also try to convey messages relevant to their daily lives, using language that is easy to understand and attractive visuals.

From the informant's statement above, it can be concluded that message adaptation in strengthening brand image has a vital role in building a relevant and attractive image for young audiences and Pesantren using popular digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube to convey their messages, ensuring the content created relevant to the daily life of Generation Z and presented in an attractive visual form (Nuha et al., 2024; Rahmawati et al., 2024). Bahrul Ulum's Pesantren also conducted in-depth research to understand issues important to Generation Z, such as sustainability, social justice, and technology. It involved them in the content creation process. Pesantren can measure the messages' effectiveness through digital metrics such as the number of likes, shares, comments, and views (Faishol & Zuhro, 2024). Pesantren also takes feedback from Generation Z seriously, making continuous improvements based on criticism and suggestions received.

MESSAGING ADAPTION



Figure 3. Messaging adaption

The figure 3, shows that message adaptation in building a brand image based on a two-way symmetrical model through Generation Z requires several key indicators to ensure effectiveness. First, interactivity becomes vital by looking at how actively Generation Z engages in conversations with brands and how brands respond to feedback and questions from this audience. Second, the message's relevance must be considered, where the message conveyed must be by the interests, values, and needs of Generation Z, using the language, communication style, and platform they use. Additionally, Collaboration and participation measure the extent to which brands involve Generation Z in product development or marketing campaigns (Sukandar et al., 2024). Finally, the consistency of the message conveyed through various communication channels must be considered to ensure conformity between the message and the actions or images projected by the brand (Kasir & Awali, 2024). By paying attention to these indicators, companies can build a solid and relevant brand image in the eyes of Generation Z through a two-way symmetrical communication approach.

The Role of Relationships in Two-Way Communication

Relationships are the most critical part of two-way communication in building strong and mutually beneficial relationships with Generation Z. The head of the Pesantren said that "building relationships, namely Pesantren build and maintain relationships between students, administrators, and others, prioritizing open communication and mutual respect. Every student is given the opportunity to speak and convey their opinions through various forums and regular meetings. Teachers and staff are also trained to always listen and provide constructive responses." forms of interaction that occur between Pesantren and the community, as stated by MR, "the forms of interaction are very diverse, for example Islamic boarding schools often hold recitations and lectures that are open to the public. Apart from that, when there are big events such as the Prophet's birthday or Eid al-Adha, Pesantren always invite the public to take part. Bahrul Ulum's Pesantren has a MASHBARU assembly which can be attended by the local community so that every Friday night we regularly participate in the recitation activity." This activity can build a form of interaction and contribution between the two parties.

The interview above shows that Islamic boarding schools play an essential role in the lives of the surrounding community, not only as religious educational institutions but also as centers of social and religious activities (Mita Silfiyasari & Ashif Az Zhafi, 2020)(Azhar & Haryanto, 2024). This harmonious and mutually supportive relationship is driven by the Islamic boarding school's active involvement in the community, open communication, and programs that directly benefit the community (Achmad, 2023). The community appreciates Islamic boarding schools' contribution and hopes that this relationship will continue to develop in the future.



Figure 4. MASHBARU Assembly Recitation

From the Figure 4, it can be understood that building relationships shows a harmonious and mutually supportive relationship between the Pesantren and the surrounding community. The community shows high involvement in activities held by Pesantren, such as attending recitations, religious events, and social activities and providing input in planning Pesantren activities. The assembly activities attended by the community and students from the Bahrul Ulum's Pesantren itself created a form of relationship that could be well established. Moreover, Islamic boarding schools also maintain regular and open communication with the community through various media, including announcements in mosques, leaflets, and social media (Aini et al., 2024). The community appreciates Islamic boarding schools' contribution and hopes that this relationship will continue to develop in the future.

The relationship between Pesantren and society shows dynamic and mutually beneficial interactions (Rahmatillah, 2024; Zulham et al., 2023). Islamic boarding schools play an essential role in the social and religious life of the surrounding community, not only as educational institutions but also as centers of inclusive social activities (Dwi & Maskuri, 2023). This harmonious relationship is reflected in the active participation of Islamic boarding schools in various social activities, such as recitations, lectures, and celebrations of religious holidays,

which are open to the entire community (Sanjani et al., 2024; Siregar & Desky, 2024). Thus, the relationship between Islamic boarding schools and society is characterized by mutual respect and working together to achieve common goals (Istianah et al., 2023). The community appreciates the contribution of Pesantren in improving their welfare and quality of life and hopes that this relationship will continue to develop and become stronger in the future (Salman & Nuha, 2024; Shodiq, 2023). Pesantren are considered successful in building a positive image as institutions that care and are responsive to community needs while at the same time strengthening their role as centers of education and significant social activities.

CONCLUSION

Implementing a two-way symmetrical communication model at Bahrul Ulum's Pesantren through digital platforms and discussion forums has significantly enhanced involvement and interaction among administrators, students, and the community. The key players in strengthening the image of the Islamic Boarding School are Generation Z through effective social media campaigns. Adapting messages based on Generation Z input fosters a positive and attractive image, while students' active involvement in social and religious activities further strengthens community ties. This demonstrates that Pesantren can function as inclusive, transparent, and responsive institutions, contributing positively to local welfare and quality of life. The study's limitations include its focus on a single Pesantren, reliance on potentially biased interview and observation data, limited exploration of other generational impacts, and the partial coverage of offline interactions. Future research should address these limitations to better understand the effectiveness of the two-way symmetrical communication model across various Pesantren and contexts.

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