



The Influence of Social Media on Public Relations as a Reinforcement of Higher Education Reputation

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Abstract :

This study aims to analyze the role of social media in public relations management in Islamic higher education institutions with a focus on ethical governance and use, strategic platform utilization, and its impact on institutional reputation. As digital communication becomes increasingly important in higher education, universities must adapt to this trend by implementing strategies that align with institutional values and effectively meet the needs of their stakeholders. This study explores social media management practices using a qualitative approach and a case study method. Data was collected through interviews with students, lecturers, and staff, as well as analysis of documentation of social media platforms used by the university. The results show that ethical governance and the use of social media have strengthened institutional communication by aligning published content with Islamic values and ethics. Strategically, the institution has utilized various platforms, including Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, to target specific audiences and increase engagement. The impact on reputation is evident in the increase in public interaction and positive perceptions despite the potential risks arising from irrelevant or untimely content. This study is expected to contribute to understanding effective social media governance in higher education institutions, emphasizing the importance of ethical practices, strategic content delivery, and reputation management.

INTRODUCTION

Advances in information technology have changed many aspects of life, including how communication and information are delivered (Ding et al., 2021; Setyowati et al., 2021; Szymkowiak et al., 2021). One of the most significant developments in the last decade has been the emergence of social media (Barrot, 2022; Szymkowiak et al., 2021). Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn have become dominant communication tools, providing new opportunities for various institutions, including universities (Capriotti & Zeler, 2023; Mishnick & Wise, 2024; Samala et al., 2024). Social media is now an alternative solution to improve reputation, build relationships with the community, and expand communication reach (Ataman et al., 2024; Maulidia, 2023; Ridlo & Yanti, 2023). Universities that act as educational and research institutions have begun to adopt social media as part of their public relations strategy to strengthen their image, attract prospective students, and strengthen relationships with alums.

This phenomenon shows that social media is a communication tool and a strategic element in building an institution's reputation in the digital era. Research on the role of social media in higher education public relations has been widely conducted. Social media is a marketing communication tool for any institution (Fraccastoro et al., 2021; Poluan et al., 2022; Savitri et al., 2021). Infante & Mardikaningsih (2022) explain how social media is an effective communication channel for building audience relationships. Malesev & Cherry (2021), in research, found that social media positively impacts a university's reputation through more personal engagement. A study by Doyle et al. (2022) explores social media strategies in building the image of educational institutions. Social media can be used for fundraising and increasing alum engagement (Briner & Reed, 2024; Chaudhari & Awesh Bhornya, 2022; Drezner & Pizmony-Levy, 2021). Research by Obermayer et al. (2022) discusses the framework of effective social media strategies in organizations. This reflects that social media has a significant role in supporting PR activities in universities.

There is a research gap in understanding how governance and ethics of social media use are applied in higher education, especially in the Indonesian context. Previous studies often do not specifically highlight social media platform strategies and their impact on institutional reputation. This study offers novelty by integrating the perspectives of governance, strategy, and the impact of social media on higher education reputation. This approach not only fills the gap in the literature but also provides new insights into more targeted and data-driven PR practices. This paper aims to explore social media as a role for PR in higher education in improving institutional reputation at the Islamic University of Malang. Specifically, this study seeks to explore the governance and ethics of social media use in higher education, identify the most effective strategies for using social media platforms, and evaluate the impact of social media on institutional reputation. Thus, this paper is expected to provide practical guidance for higher education managers in utilizing social media strategically and responsibly.

Three main aspects are the focus of this study in the context of using social media as a role for PR in higher education, how governance and ethics of social media use are crucial to ensure that activities on digital platforms are by institutional values and applicable regulations. Second, how should social media usage strategies be designed to maximize the platform's potential? Such as selecting relevant content, determining optimal publication times, and interactively engaging audiences. Third, the impact of social media on the reputation of higher education institutions is very significant because it can increase the visibility of institutions, strengthen positive images, and build closer relationships with various stakeholders. This research is expected to provide significant academic and practical torment of Public Republic relations education institutions.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study type (Williams, 2021). This approach was chosen to analyze and deeply understand the public relations communication strategy implemented by the Islamic University of Malang. The location selection at the State Islamic University of Malang, Dinoyo, Lowokwaru, Malang City, East Java, is based on its position as one of the leading Islamic universities in Indonesia. As an Islamic-based educational institution, this university has unique challenges and opportunities in building public trust in its institution, making it a relevant material object to study.

The data in this study consists of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained from informants, including leaders, lecturers, and university employees. At the same time, secondary data comes from official documents, institutional reports, and other relevant sources. Data collection techniques are carried out through three main methods: interviews, observations, and documentation. Interviews are conducted in depth to gather information directly from informants about public relations communication strategies. Observation was conducted by observing public relations activities in the field, while documentation was conducted to obtain written evidence that supports the research results as in Table 1.

Table 1. Data and Data Collection Techniques

Data Collection Techniques	Code	Data Source
Interview	I	Leaders (Ld), lecturers (Lt), Univ Employees (Ue), Student (S)
Observation	O	Public relations activities in the field
Documentation	D	Official documents, institutional reports

Data analysis in this study uses the Miles and Huberman approach, which includes three main stages: data display, data reduction, and conclusion (Köhler, 2024). Data display is done by compiling data in an easy-to-understand format for further analysis. Data reduction is done by filtering relevant information and eliminating data unrelated to the study's focus. Concluding is done by concluding the data processed to answer the research questions. The validity of the data is checked through four main criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, thus ensuring that the data obtained is genuinely valid and reliable.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Governance and Ethical Use of Social Media

Governance and ethical use of social media are key elements in universities' public relations communication strategy. Islamic University of Malang has implemented a policy that regulates the use of social media by all academics to ensure that published content is in line with institutional values and Islamic ethics. Social media is a strategic tool for building a reputation and increasing public trust through information transparency and positive interactions. However, in its implementation, there are still challenges to ensuring that all parties comply with the established guidelines.

The findings of interviews with students stated, " I think campus social media is very helpful for getting information quickly, especially about campus events or administrative information. However, I feel that there is still some content that is not relevant to students' needs, for example there are too many promotions of activities that are not directly related to academics." (I-S-AR) Another student added, " I like that the campus is transparent through social media, but sometimes I feel that our academic needs are not given enough attention. Many posts focus on promotion or the image of the institution rather than important information such as exam schedules or scholarship applications." (I-S-MM)

On the other hand, a lecturer expressed his views by saying, " I strongly support the existence of ethical guidelines in the use of campus social media. However, I think staff need to be further trained to understand how to use this platform optimally. There is a lot of potential that can be explored if we really understand how to communicate on social media." (I-Lt-DM) This is also reflected in the results of interviews with employees: " I think campus social media can be a very effective tool for building an institution's reputation. However, stricter supervision is needed so that the content does not cause misunderstandings, especially when it comes to sensitive or technical information" (I-Ue-LH). The explanation of the interview results shows that although the use of social media has had a positive impact, there is still room for improvement in balancing the needs of promotion and academic information.

Based on the interview data, the researcher at Islamic University of Malang argues that good governance and consistent application of ethics are essential to maintaining a balance between institutional promotion and student information needs. Universitas Islam Negeri Malang has successfully used social media for transparency and reputation, but training and supervision development are still needed. A more collaborative approach between students and lecturers in managing social media can increase content's relevance and ensure that all stakeholders' needs are met.

Table 2. Ethical Aspects of Social Media Management

Aspects	Indicator	Description
Relevance of Information	Content according to stakeholder needs and institutional needs	Social media provides relevant and useful information, both for students, lecturers, and the community
Ethics and Security	Compliance with ethical norms and information security	All uploads comply with communication ethics, do not spread hoaxes, and maintain the confidentiality of institutional data
Monitoring and Evaluation	Monitoring of social media activities and Periodic evaluation of strategy effectiveness	The university has a monitoring and evaluation mechanism to ensure the effectiveness of social media use according to objectives
Adapting to Change	Responsive to new trends and Innovation in communication strategies	Universities adapt to changing social media trends to maintain relevance and increase engagement with audiences

Table 2 describes the Ethical Aspects in Social Media Management in higher education, covering four main aspects that serve as guidelines to ensure that social media is used effectively and in accordance with applicable norms. These findings emphasize the importance of governance and ethical use of social media in the context of public relations in higher education. By adhering to ethical guidelines, institutions can improve their reputation and build trust and loyalty from academics and the community. However, further interpretation suggests that flexible policy adaptation and ongoing dialogue between all parties will be key to the success of this strategy. Therefore, social media management must be continuously evaluated and adjusted to the needs of the times.

Strategic of The Use Social Media Platforms



Using social media platforms at Universitas Negeri Malang has been designed to maximize the institution's visibility and reputation. Various social media platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, are utilized for various communication purposes, including academic information, campus activities, and promotions. Social media is used in an integrated manner to create a positive image of the university in the eyes of the public. However, its effectiveness depends on how each platform is used strategically to target different audiences.

Universitas Islam Malang uses several social media platforms for external and internal communication. Instagram is the primary medium for sharing photos and visual stories about campus activities. Facebook and Twitter are used to share official announcements and short news, while YouTube is used to publish promotional videos and academic content. One of the leading examples is the campaign with the tagline "From NU for Indonesia and World Civilization," which received much attention on Instagram and YouTube, showcasing the achievements of students and lecturers in various fields. This shows how the university utilizes different platforms to meet specific communication goals.

Using various social media platforms provides a competitive advantage for Universitas Islam Malang in reaching a broad audience. By using a strategy that focuses on the strengths of each platform, the university can deliver more relevant and engaging messages. However, the researcher also noted that the integration between platforms is not yet fully optimized, so there is still an opportunity to improve synergy in delivering messages. Training for social media managers and regular evaluation of the performance of each platform are important recommendations in this finding.

Table 3. University Social Media

Figure	Explanation
	<p>The main page of the website of the Islamic University of Malang (UNISMA) with the link https://unisma.ac.id/ . This page displays the slogan "From NU for Indonesia and World Civilization" which reflects the identity of the institution as part of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)</p>
	<p>The official YouTube page view of the Islamic University of Malang (UNISMA) Public Relations with the link https://www.youtube.com/@HumasUnismaOfficial/ . This account functions as a public communication media to share information, activities, and campus achievements</p>
	<p>The official Twitter account of Universitas Islam Malang (UNISMA) with the link https://x.com/unisma193?t=Hvscie8yVJaY4wR50iz6yQ&s=09 . This account is used as a platform to disseminate information, activity updates, and campus achievements to a wider audience.</p>
	<p>The official Instagram account of the Islamic University of Malang (UNISMA) with the link https://www.instagram.com/unisma_malang . This account is used as a platform to disseminate information, promotions, academic activities, and campus achievement info.</p>

Figure	Explanation
	<p>View of the TikTok account of the Islamic University of Malang (UNISMA) with the link https://www.tiktok.com/@unisma_malang . This account is used as a platform to disseminate information on academic activities and the lecture process as well as an introduction to the campus environment.</p>
	<p>Facebook account of Universitas Islam Malang (UNISMA) with link https://www.facebook.com/share/18EPoyXR3N/ . This account is used as a platform to disseminate information about activities outside the campus.</p>

A good strategy for using social media platforms, as in Table 3, can help universities build closer relationships with their audiences. With a planned and data-driven approach, institutions can ensure that the messages delivered reach the target audience and create the desired impact. In the context of the State Islamic University of Malang, this success shows the importance of social media as a strategic tool in public relations management. However, the sustainability of this strategy requires continuous evaluation and innovation.

Impact of Social Media on Reputation

The use of social media significantly affects the reputation of the Islamic University of Malang. Social media platforms have become the main channel for promoting academic activities, student achievements, and the university's flagship programs. With active interaction and engaging content, the university has succeeded in creating a positive image in the eyes of the public. However, this impact is not only positive because potential risks to reputation also arise due to misuse or errors in managing social media. University social media conveys important information, such as registration announcements, academic schedules, and student achievements. Instagram is the most popular platform among students because of its attractive appearance and interactive content. However, there are several cases where posts do not match audience expectations, such as lack of clarity of information or delays in delivering announcements. However, social media generally helps increase public engagement and build a positive reputation for the university.

Social media is a very effective tool for building an institution's reputation, but its success depends on proper management. Using relevant, interactive, and audience-oriented content is key to creating a positive image. Researchers also emphasize the importance of a consistent monitoring and evaluation system to minimize potential risks to the university's reputation. Effective social media management directly shapes the positive image of Universitas Islam Malang as a professional and high-achieving educational institution. The high level of interaction on social media reflects the success of public relations in understanding the needs and preferences of the audience. The researcher also emphasized the importance of a structured communication strategy, including selecting relevant content and persuasive language to build emotional connections with the audience. With society's increasing dependence on social media, universities that are not adaptive to this development are at risk of losing their competitiveness.

Universitas Islam Malang continues to strive to innovate in the use of social media, such as utilizing analytical technology to understand audience interaction patterns or collaborating with influencers to reach a wider audience. Social media should be viewed as a strategic investment in building a long-term reputation, not just a one-way communication tool. Social media has developed into an integral element in the communication strategy of universities, including Universitas Islam Malang.

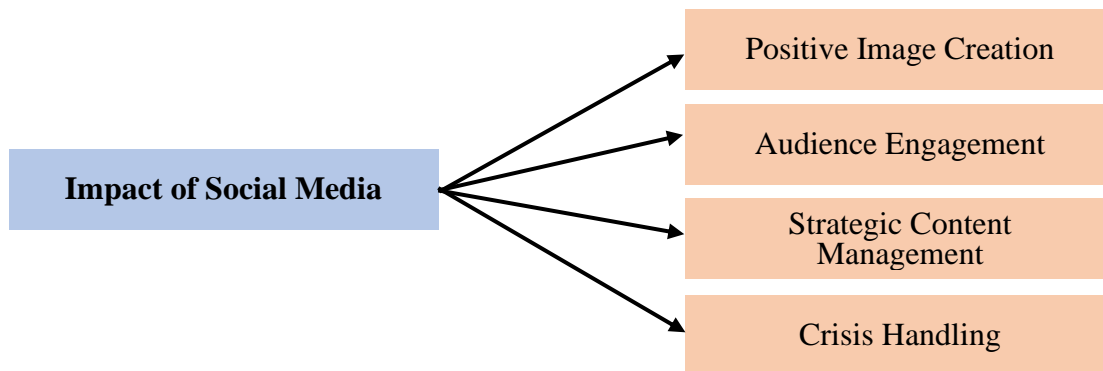


Figure 1. Impact of Social Media on University Reputation

Figure 1. social media can accelerate the spread of positive information while effectively dealing with crises. An active presence on social media platforms creates a space for dialogue between institutions and the public, ultimately strengthening public trust. However, this study also shows that reputation on social media is dynamic and can change quickly, depending on how institutions handle issues or criticisms that arise. Thus, the role of public relations becomes crucial to ensure that the narrative formed on social media always supports the vision and mission of the institution. The success of the Islamic University of Malang in using social media can be a model for other universities, especially in integrating digital technology as part of a modern public relations strategy. This finding also strengthens the understanding that an institution's reputation is built through academic achievement and effective and responsive communication in cyberspace.

Discussion

The findings of this study at the Islamic University of Malang emphasize the significant role of governance and ethical use of social media in enhancing institutional reputation and public trust. Several studies support this conclusion, highlighting the importance of clear ethical guidelines in social media management within educational contexts (Adams et al., 2023; Reisach, 2021; Rukavina et al., 2021; Vivar & Peñalvo, 2023). Transparent communication strategies on social media positively impact institutional trust among stakeholders. Studies by Lee (2021) demonstrated how ethical social media practices contribute to a more substantial institutional reputation, particularly in universities aiming to bridge academic and public interests. However, challenges persist, as outlined in research by Reisach (2021), highlighting gaps in stakeholder engagement due to content misalignment. As detailed in this study, the ethical framework at the Islamic University of Malang echoes these findings. It reinforces the need for institutions to balance promotional efforts with addressing the practical informational needs of their academic community.

In addition to governance, the adaptability of social media strategies to align with current trends is a critical factor in enhancing audience engagement. Institutions like the Islamic University of Malang benefit from continuous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to optimize social media strategies. Responsive adaptation to audience behaviour and trends enables institutions to remain relevant while maintaining ethical standards (Hidayat et al., 2024; Musenze & Mayende, 2023). The ethical aspects table presented in this study aligns with these studies by stressing the necessity of monitoring and innovation in social media management. Therefore, the findings reaffirm the argument by Vivar & Peñalvo (2023) that a collaborative and dynamic approach involving all stakeholders ensures that social media functions effectively as both a promotional and informational tool, meeting institutional and community needs comprehensively.

The strategic use of social media platforms at Universitas Islam Malang illustrates the institution's efforts to maximize visibility and reputation while catering to diverse audience needs. This finding aligns with research by Lee et al. (2022), which emphasizes the importance of platform-specific strategies to enhance communication effectiveness in higher education. The targeted use of social media platforms, such as Instagram for visuals and YouTube for video storytelling, strengthens engagement and institutional branding. The campaign "From NU for Indonesia and World Civilization" showcases how tailored strategies on Instagram and YouTube can amplify the institution's values and achievements. However, consistent with Malesev & Cherry (2021) study, integration across platforms remains a challenge, reflecting the need for greater synergy in content delivery to ensure consistent messaging and audience retention.

Regular evaluation and training for social media managers are essential for optimizing performance. These studies underscore the significance of data-driven strategies and capacity-building to sustain social media's strategic impact (Infante & Mardikaningsih, 2022; Poluan et al., 2022; Samala et al., 2024). At Universitas Islam Malang, using analytics and periodic evaluations, as suggested by these findings, could improve the effectiveness of social media campaigns and audience targeting. The institution's approach supports Mishnick & Wise (2024) argument that dynamic social media management, informed by audience behaviour and emerging trends, ensures relevancy and engagement. By addressing the gaps in integration and fostering innovation, Universitas Islam Malang can strengthen its position as a leader in strategic public relations through social media. The findings from Universitas Islam Malang illustrate the significant role of social media in shaping institutional reputation. Social media has the power to build public trust and enhance brand visibility (Doyle et al., 2022; Malesev & Cherry, 2021; Obermayer et al., 2022).

The university demonstrates how effective engagement can positively impact reputation by leveraging platforms like Instagram to showcase achievements and interactive content. Inconsistent or irrelevant messaging could undermine audience trust. Moreover, consistent with the dynamic nature of social media, it underscores the need for active monitoring and a responsive strategy to address risks and criticisms swiftly, ensuring that the institution's online presence aligns with its mission and values.

Universitas Islam Malang's strategic innovations include using analytics and collaborating with influencers to enhance audience reach. Adopting data-driven approaches and modern public relations practices in higher education. Additionally, the emphasis on a structured communication strategy and persuasive content aligns with Drezner & Pizmony-Levy (2021), who highlight the importance of emotional connection in fostering loyalty and engagement. The study's findings reinforce the work of Obermayer et al. (2022), suggesting that universities that fail to adapt to digital advancements risk losing competitiveness in a rapidly evolving educational landscape. Universitas Islam Malang's achievements serve as a valuable model, showcasing how a balanced approach combining academic excellence and innovative social media strategies can build and sustain a strong institutional reputation. The results of this study are expected to contribute to understanding the strategic role of social media in higher education, especially in shaping institutional reputation and public trust. Focusing on the Islamic University of Malang as a case study highlights how a tailored social media strategy, supported by ethical governance and audience-oriented content, can increase engagement and build a positive image for educational institutions.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that the use of social media at the Islamic University of Malang has a significant role in managing public relations and building the institution's reputation. Regarding governance and ethical use, implementing policies that regulate content according to institutional values has provided a strong foundation for transparent and responsible communication. However, there are still challenges in monitoring and training users. The strategy of utilizing social media platforms also shows success in conveying messages tailored to each platform's audience's characteristics, such as Instagram for visualizing activities and YouTube for academic content. In addition, the impact of social media on the university's reputation is reflected in the increase in public interaction and positive perceptions of academic achievement. However, there is still a potential risk of irrelevant content or miscommunication. Social media has become a strategic tool in strengthening the institution's image as an innovative and competitive university. However, the findings of this study have several limitations, namely in one research location, so generalization to other institutions needs to be done with caution. Future studies are also recommended to compare social media strategies across institutions to enrich perspectives on public relations management in the higher education sector.

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