


Research Article

Public Relations Strategy in Increasing Brand Awareness of Boarding-Based School

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ABSTRACT

In the increasingly competitive era of education globalization, brand awareness is one of the most important aspects to strengthen the prestige and positive image of an educational institution. This study aims to analyze public relations strategies for increasing brand awareness as well as the supporting and inhibiting factors at Insan Terpadu Junior High School, a dormitory-based school known for its slogan Qur'anic Character, Future Insight. The research approach used qualitative case studies. Data were obtained by participant observation and in-depth interviews with the principal, head of public relations, head of student affairs, teachers, and students. The results showed that the public relations strategies used include active communication with student guardians through social media, innovative programs such as English Peer Tutoring (EPT), and religious-based activities such as Rihlatut Tasmi's Wa Khotmil Qur'an. The main supporting factors are the involvement of student guardians and the utilization of social media, while constraints include limited human resources and budget. The importance of a comprehensive public relations strategy to build positive relationships with the public and increase the competitiveness of the institution so that it will have an impact on increasing the reputation and public trust in Insan Terpadu Junior High School, which in turn strengthens the school's brand awareness and attracts more potential students.

Keywords: Boarding School; Brand Awareness; Public Relations; School Competitiveness

1. INTRODUCTION

In the midst of globalization and increasingly fierce competition, educational institutions are required to not only provide quality education, but also build a strong reputation in the eyes of the community. Brand awareness is an important element in increasing the competitiveness of educational institutions, establishing cooperation with various parties, and strengthening the image of the institution (Halim & Rofiki, 2022). To increase brand awareness, a special role is needed so that this institution has a positive image. An effective public relations strategy is essential in increasing and strengthening the school's brand awareness among the community (Wafa et al., 2017). The ability of public relations to build positive relationships between the institution and the public, both internal and external, is known as a constructive relationship (Anam & Kusuma, 2024). Brand awareness plays an important role in making educational institutions more attractive to the public. The brand is not just an identity, but a distinctive feature that distinguishes the educational institution from others. With strong brand awareness, an educational institution can be more easily remembered and recognized in various situations. When parents and prospective guardians can immediately recognize and remember the brand of an institution, this shows a deep understanding of the quality and value offered (Diana et al., 2023; Yaqin, 2024).

Based on the results of interviews with the Principal, Insan Terpadu Junior High School is known by the slogan Qur'anic character, future insight. The institution also a dormitory-based school that is believed to be able to form superior individuals. In addition, the institution's brand awareness is actually quite good and has been recognized by the community. This can be seen from the enthusiasm of the community who enroll their children and can also be seen from the increase in the graph of the number of registrants from year to year (Nasution, 2024). The leadership of the institution realizes that every student who enrolls needs to be nurtured both academically and non-academically. The school assumes that this institution is like a workshop, a place where vehicles (in this case students) are repaired and developed. Before a student is accepted, prospective parents are invited to discuss their readiness to support their child's education. The school also ensures that parents are willing to commit to the learning process that will be implemented. Each student will be directed according to their interests and talents, and the school will focus on supporting the development of these talents.

The quota restriction in the admission of new learners is a form of school concern to ensure that every student gets the same priority and attention (Anam, 2024).

Table 1. New Student Enrollment at Insan Terpadu Junior High School

Year	Registrant	Received
2022	80	40
2023	97	45
2024	143	55

Previous research results show that brand image and school reputation play a key role in influencing guardians' decision to choose a school for their children. (Sya'idah & Jauhari, 2024).. Schools that have a positive image and superior achievements tend to be more trusted by parents. This is in line with the approach of Insan Terpadu Junior High School which focuses on academic, non-academic achievements and foreign language teaching to enhance its positive image in the community. In addition, research on public relations strategies in building the image of Islamic boarding schools has also been conducted (Syakir & Mahmudah, 2023). Shows that strategies such as public relations open to prospective parents and scholarship programs are effective in building public trust and strengthening the image of the institution. Further findings highlight the importance of building brand awareness especially in higher education institutions, where appropriate public relations strategies can help strengthen the institution's image and attract the public (Putri et al., 2021). As such, the current study features a different approach from previous research, by exploring new dimensions and using more sophisticated research methods. The difference in the timing of the research and the focus on boarding schools are key differentiators, reflecting a more updated research approach.

The urgency of this research, then, is to help boarding schools improve competitiveness in a competitive educational environment by implementing effective public relations strategies. The effectiveness of public relations strategies can also shape public trust, which is a crucial factor in guardians' decision to choose a school for their children. With an in-depth understanding of the role of public relations strategies in increasing school brand awareness, this research provides benefits for educational institutions to strengthen their reputation. This study aims to analyze the public relations strategy in increasing brand awareness in dormitory-based schools as well as the inhibiting and supporting factors of the public relations strategy in increasing brand awareness.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The research method adopts a qualitative paradigm with a case study type. The research location was carried out at Insan Terpadu Junior High School due to the ease of accessing information. Data sources in this research are divided into primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained directly from the research location or object of research through several informants such as the principal, head of community relations and student affairs, teachers and students. Meanwhile, secondary data comes from literature that supports the focus of the research (Mubarok & Angga, 2023). This method focuses more on understanding the social context, individual experiences, and the meaning contained in the phenomenon under study (Rifa'i, 2023). Data collection techniques used for research include observation, interviews, and documentation studies. Furthermore, interviews were conducted to obtain data directly from research informants including the principal, head of school, head of community relations, head of student affairs, teachers and students. Documentation is needed to collect data related to the research focus (Sholeh & Akbar, 2021). Researchers analyzed the data by interpreting the words contained in the data to get meaning. Research data analysis is carried out through three stages at once, namely data reduction, presenting data, and drawing conclusions (Diana et al., 2023).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Public Relations Strategy in Increasing Brand Awareness of Boarding School

Public relations is a well-planned two-way communication process, both from internal and external parties of educational institutions, forming a balanced relationship for the purpose of getting responses, public opinions and a positive image of the community (Muammarulloh & Halwati, 2024), thus the public relations strategy uses effective communication that is established between the institution and the public with it called two-way communication, by emphasizing good communication between schools and the community can help schools in implementing effective public relations strategies. Public relations strategy is a very important component for the development of educational institutions or organizations. public relations in the work environment, a public relations are required not only to focus on the internal environment of the organization but also to build and maintain good relations with external (stakeholder) organizations public relations must

function as a communication link in an educational institution, both through direct interaction and through the media, then by developing and facilitating efforts aimed at promoting educational institutions, maintaining positive relationships with the community or internal stakeholders, and forming a brand image for the educational institution. (Qonita et al., 2024). Where Brand awareness as the capacity of potential consumers to identify or recall a brand with a certain product category.

The level of Brand Awareness or consumer perception of the products offered plays a role in the ability of consumers to recognize the brand. There are four levels of brand awareness, starting from top of mind (the highest level of awareness) where the brand is first thought of by consumers in a particular product category, such as an educational institution with a reputation and superior quality that is widely recognized by consumers. Then, brand recall (brand identity) where consumers can remember the brand without additional encouragement, for example an educational institution that attracts interest but has not yet reached the top of mind level. Brand recognition (intermediate awareness) indicates a lack of awareness, for example, educational institutions that are starting to be recognized but require further explanation to be recognized. Finally, Unaware of Brand (lowest level of awareness), where consumers are hesitant or unsure in identifying the brand, often occurs in educational institutions that do not yet have a strong reputation so that they do not gain the trust of potential consumers or parents in registering their children. (Santoso et al., 2024).

Based on the results of observations and interviews with teachers and the head of public relations, there are public relations strategies in increasing brand awareness found, namely Communication with student guardians, The school routinely provides information on learning progress to student guardians through social media. Monthly meetings with student guardians are also held to discuss student progress, so that parents feel involved and get accurate information. Cooperation with other institutions, Insan Terpadu Junior High School actively cooperates with various educational institutions, which expands the network and enhances the school's reputation. Innovation in Education The school continues to innovate and listen to input from various parties to remain competitive in the modern era. This includes the application of technology in learning and extracurricular activities that support all-round student development. (Yaqin, 2024). Public relations strategies in increasing brand awareness, namely:



Figure 1. Public relations strategy of in Raising Brand Awareness

3.1.1 Building Relationships

Insan Terpadu Junior High School seeks to enhance its positive image in the community, including among local communities, other educational institutions and the media, through a variety of effective public relations strategies. One such strategy involves collaborating with nearby primary schools through educational seminars, competitions and educational visits, which aim to increase the exposure. This statement is supported by observations with the principal who emphasized the importance of the school's reputation in supporting the success of the school's brand awareness, so that the implementation of appropriate public relations strategies can form positive relationships with school partners (Nasution, 2024). Organizations that do not have an effective strategy will face challenges such as, lack of coordination, the emergence of problems, as well as the emergence of conflicts that are difficult to solve and various other challenges (Ainul et al., 2024). In addition, Insan Terpadu Junior High School also actively engages in supportive interactions with the surrounding community, as evidenced by active involvement in social activities involving their students, as well as visits to various

schools to introduce the institution as part of efforts to build strong relationships with other educational institutions.

3.1.2 Alumni Ambassador

Insan Terpadu Junior High School aims to have alumni who have positive experiences at the school become ambassadors to attract potential new students. In support of this mission, the head of public relations said that the school initiated the Alumni Ambassador program, where successful alumni are invited as representatives at open house events or education fairs to introduce the school from an alumni perspective. In addition, mentoring activities conducted by alumni to current students aim to share experiences and provide inspiration, while strengthening the school's image. The school also provides specialized platforms for alumni, such as groups or newsletters, as a means of sharing information including the promotion of new admissions. (Yaqin, 2024). Insan Terpadu Junior High School also actively maintains communication with alumni who continue their education to higher levels, which was confirmed by the principal, with the aim of maintaining sustainable relationships and supporting the future growth alumni. The Alumni Ambassador program continues to be developed by holding regular meetings twice a year according to the schedule set by the school. Involving alumni in school promotion and recognition efforts is an effective public relations strategy to increase brand awareness and a positive image in the eyes of the community (Nasution, 2024).

3.1.3 Rihlatut Tasmi' wa Khotmil Qur'an (RTQ) and Bil Qur'an

The Rihlatut Tasmi' wa Khotmil Qur'an program is an initiative derived from the school's internal program, Intensive Qur'an, which has a positive impact in the community. The program involves the student guardian committee and receives full support in its implementation. RTQ is structured as a khataman visit at the home of the student's guardian that has been scheduled by the school, where each grade IX student makes a visit according to mutual agreement. Ustadzah Uun, as a teacher and the facilitator of this program, stated that this step was effective in strengthening the positive image of the school by introducing superior programs and increasing brand awareness exposure. The Bil Qur'an program is interesting because students are sent out by the school with a teacher escort for learning at a predetermined location. Bil Qur'an is a continuation of Intensive al-Qur'an, where ninth grade students are taken to the Paiton Regional TPQ for al-Qur'an learning with the Tartila method. The head of student affairs stated that to carry out a public relations strategy well, educational institutions need to have programs that support competitiveness, and this program is considered capable of increasing brand awareness of Integrated Insan Junior High School by introducing its superior program and utilizing the benefits of this program to attract prospective guardians (Anam, 2024).

3.1.4 English Peer Tutoring (EPT)

English Peer Tutoring is a new program. This program is interesting because it involves 9th grade students in English Peer Tutoring (EPT) in schools such as Insan Terpadu Elementary School and Kotaanyar Public Elementary School. In this program, students teach their intensively learned English, give tutorials to elementary school students, and document the activities through the school's multimedia. Mentor teachers participate in the program, while students undergo training before starting EPT. This English Peer Tutoring program is a new initiative, starting in October 2024 and better organized in the upcoming 2025 school year. The Head of Student Affairs said that the renewal of the program at Insan Terpadu Junior High School has improved the positive image of the school, as evidenced by the interest of prospective guardians who want to enroll their children after our students are involved in this program. The success of the EPT program development is evident from the community interest triggered by the applied learning method. The school hopes that this program can be a foundation for institution in improving the competitiveness of the institution in the future. The EPT program can help Insan Terpadu Junior High School have a stronger brand identity because the program also helps schools in increasing brand awareness because a school that succeeds in building brand awareness that can be proven through how many people recognize and remember a brand is specifically a pesantren-based school educational institution with more advanced program development (Anam, 2024).

3.1.5 School Competitiveness Reputation

The reputation of each school is an important component that must be built and strengthened for each school. The achievements made by students in various competitions each year strengthen the reputation of Insan Terpadu Junior High School as a quality educational institution by emphasizing educational learning activities. A good reputation is very important in attracting the attention of prospective students and parents, as well as providing confidence that despite the limitations of each school, the quality of education can still be maintained. Schools with a good reputation are easily

recognized by parents. Another advantage of a school's good reputation is good coverage from the media (Wahidah et al., 2024). The principal explained that the school always tries to involve students in every competition by producing their learning level at school and the school assumes that actively involving students in academic and non-academic achievements can be one of the school's strategies in increasing Brand Awareness, so from this the school hopes that the objectives of the public relations strategy carried out can attract a supportive response from the community (Nasution, 2024). So, it is important for public relations to carefully maintain the reputation of educational institutions in order to create a positive view of the public towards the sustainability of educational institutions (Hidayati & El Adawiyah, 2024).

Table 2. Achievements of Insan Terpadu Junior High School

Year	Achievements	Level
2022	Regent Cup 2022, 2nd Place	District
2023	Huandong-Hongkong Macao Greater Bay Area Mathematical Olympiad, 2nd Prize Award	International
2023	Thailand International Mathematical Olympiad, Silver Award	International
2023	National Championship VI Self Shield in Batu Malang, 2nd and 3rd Place	National
2024	Madakaripura Cup Probolinggo, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Place	District
2024	Olympic Pascal, 1st and 3rd Place	District
2024	Mathematical Olympiad UM Malang, Finalist	District
2024	Indonesia Mathematical & Science Competition, Finalist	National
2024	Musabaqah Hifdzil Qur'an Haico 2024, 3rd Place	National

3.2 Factors Public Relations Strategies in Increasing Brand Awareness

3.2.1 Supporting Factors

The main supporting factors in this educational institution include appropriate media selection, and student guardian involvement through digital platforms. **First**, social media is used by Insan Terpadu Junior High School as a means to introduce the school to the community by documenting student activities on a regular basis. This platform makes it easier for educational institutions to showcase their strengths to the public. The deputy head of student affairs stated that digital media is a key element in the success of the school's public relations strategy, and helps prospective guardians and students to get information about school activities. Insan Terpadu Junior High School regularly documents student progress which is uploaded through Instagram and other social media platforms. In addition, social media is used in the New Student Admission process, facilitating prospective students in accessing information related to registration requirements and procedures. The admission of new student process is socialized through social media to make it easier for prospective students to find the information needed. With the relevance of social media in the current era, Insan Terpadu Junior High School utilizes it as a tool in the public relations strategy to document student activities, the admission of new student process, and school achievements, which are also distributed through mass media. The role of social media is very important in the public relations strategy to introduce and increase brand awareness to the community. building a positive image for the institution is when the community has a positive view.

Secondly, the support of the student guardian committee is one of the advantages. The full support and positive testimonials from the guardians play a role in improving the school's reputation and strengthening brand awareness in the community. The active involvement of the guardians also provides moral and psychological support, encouraging students' motivation and enthusiasm in the learning process. Parents' involvement in the supervision of learning makes students more likely to participate. In addition, the school benefits from the trustees' extensive network of connections, which can contribute to the sustainability of the school. Insan Terpadu Junior High School believes that the support from the student guardian committee helps the school to be more active and effective in increasing the school's brand awareness, as stated by the deputy head of student affairs. Public relations in the context of education includes a series of activities carried out by the organization to build a positive image with the community or parties not directly related to the organization. The purpose of public relations in education is to foster and encourage teamwork (psychomotor aspects), develop and train students to think critically (cognition aspects), and develop and train students to think critically (Sinaga et al., 2024). Formal education cannot run optimally, a sign of the involvement of non-formal education from the family and the environment in shaping the educational process (Elvriany & Irawan, 2023).

3.2.2 Inhibiting Factors

Inhibiting factors in the success of public relations strategies in increasing brand awareness. **First**, currently, Insan Terpadu Junior High School faces the challenge of low human resources as several key personnel decided to join the P3K program, causing a significant shortage of personnel. This vacancy forces the remaining human resources to take on dual roles, dividing attention between primary teaching duties and additional duties previously handled by those who left. This

condition has the potential to reduce the quality of education that has been built by Insan Terpadu Junior High School. If left unchecked, it could affect the school's image in the eyes of the community. The low number of human resources is a big challenge for public relations strategies in an effort to increase brand awareness. The involvement of human resources in public relations activities that support brand awareness is limited due to double workloads. Active participation from all elements of the school, including optimal human resources, is needed in effective public relations efforts because they directly reflect the quality of the school. The principal stated that this is a personal challenge in managing various learning programs at school, especially in terms of public relations strategies, due to the position of the newly appointed principal and according to the journal, communication strategy of public relations in building brand awareness of international programs, one of the functions of public relations is to plan strategies to achieve institutional goals with management control that reflects maintained quality (Yanti & Wijaya, 2022).

Secondly, the limited budget at Insan Terpadu Junior High School affects various school activities, including the public relations strategy, despite the school's reputation for excellence. As a boarding-based institution that prioritizes the quality of education and students' welfare, most of the budget is allocated for the maintenance of learning and dormitory facilities, such as adequate learning spaces, laboratories, as well as comfortable and complete dormitory facilities. Scholarships for outstanding students are also a priority, so a large portion of the funds are provided to support students from diverse backgrounds. The main source of school income from student tuition is also a budget restriction, especially if there is a fee assistance program for underprivileged students. Human resource development and curriculum excellence also receive important budget allocations to maintain education standards. The remaining budget available for public relations activities in increasing brand awareness is very limited. This budget constraint can hinder the success of school programs, including the efforts of public relations strategies to increase brand awareness, which require significant costs. If funding for these public relations strategies is limited, their implementation may be disrupted, potentially reducing the school's competitiveness and reducing the effectiveness of future programs (Nasution, 2024).

In previous research that has been carried out, that public relations strategy in increasing brand awareness of boarding-based schools is considered crucial by getting support and a positive image from the community. Strategic two-way communication between school institutions and the public, especially in the field of social media and direct meetings with student guardians, is an important factor. Cooperation with other institutions and innovation in education, as well as the alumni ambassador program and religious activities that include the Rihlatut Tasmi' Wa Khotmil Qur'an program also support efforts to strengthen the school's image. In this case, it is in line with the public relations strategy in increasing brand awareness by involving various parties ranging from alumni, parents of students and the community. The main strategy also used is English Peer Tutoring (EPT) and focusing on student achievement with various competitions, one of the main strategies of EPT helps build school reputation. However, there are also inhibiting factors in public relations strategies, namely limited human resources and limited budgets that affect the effectiveness of public relations strategies. Low human resources and limited budget are challenges in carrying out various school programs in supporting the strategy to increase brand awareness. Therefore, increasing human resources, optimizing the budget, and the active role of all school community members are crucial in ensuring the success of public relations strategies.

Recognizing the level of brand awareness which includes top of mind, brand recall, brand recognition, and unawareness of brand is the first step to evaluate the extent to which schools can be recognized and remembered in the minds of consumers in this context, namely the community (Anwar et al., 2024). From the level of brand awareness, schools can create the right public relations strategy to strengthen their brand in the minds of consumers and get a positive image. In public relations, the importance of two-way communication between the school and the community becomes a point in ensuring that the messages conveyed are in accordance with the values and identity of the school (Vanel et al., 2024). In the context of education, a harmonious relationship between the school and the community and the development of a positive image is essential. Public relations play a vital role in building and maintaining harmonious relationships between educational institutions and their publics (Sopia & Dermawan, 2024). With effective strategies, such as the use of social media, and a focus on student achievement as well as various programs that are optimized and practiced directly to the community through collaborative activities with other schools, Insan Terpadu Junior High School can increase their brand awareness and reputation in the eyes of the community (Hermawan & Carnawi, 2024). In addition, strategies to overcome obstacles such as low human resources and limited budgets need to be a priority in designing effective public relations strategy solutions for dormitory-based schools.

One of the public relations strategies includes involving alumni in increasing brand awareness as brand ambassadors of the school. Successful alumni have a great influence in attracting new students and strengthening the school's image (Mundiri & Sri Agustina, 2024; Ibrashev et al., 2024; Hidayati & Adawiyah, 2024). The alumni ambassador program is believed by the school that this strategy can utilize experience and loyalty to expand the reach of brand awareness. Support from various parties, one of the main supports is the student guardian committee, which also has an important influence in

building and improving the school's reputation where the alumni program is a public relations strategy employed by the school to attract prospective students. The active involvement of parents not only provides moral support, but also helps strengthen the relationship between the school and the community. Inhibiting factors such as the school's low human resources and limited budget can affect the implementation of public relations strategies must be handled carefully. Improving human resources through training and development, as well as optimizing their use to support school promotion and communication activities should be a priority in the public relations strategy to increase brand awareness. Human resources who contribute to the public relations strategy need to be empowered and given optimal support to carry out their duties effectively.

In addition, the use of social media as a school strategy to promote every school activity and become an effective and efficient communication place needs to be considered. Social media can be a powerful tool in documenting school activities, introducing excellent programs, and interacting digitally with the community. With the right public relations strategy, schools can utilize social media to significantly increase brand awareness exposure. So, over all the public relations strategy in increasing brand awareness of boarding-based schools requires a holistic and integrated approach. By paying attention to the inhibiting and supporting factors in the public relations strategy. Insan Terpadu Junior High School can improve a strong image and positive reputation among the community through the cooperation created with various parties, one of which is other schools and effective communication, significantly increasing the brand awareness, and creating a sustainable positive impact as a quality educational institution.

4. CONCLUSION

The conclusion that can be drawn from the description above, public relations strategies in increasing brand awareness of boarding-based schools, this research discusses the importance of effective public relations strategies, the involvement of various stakeholders, such as alumni ambassadors, parents and the community, as well as a focus on educational innovation and various excellent programs are key in strengthening the school's image. The inhibiting factors, namely budget limitations and low human resources (HR) can affect the implementation of public relations strategies, but can be prevented through improving the quality of HR, optimizing the budget, and utilizing social media as an effective communication tool. Proper implementation of public relations strategies can have a positive and significant impact in increasing school brand awareness. By strengthening the school's reputation and brand image, it can attract new prospective students, strengthen community benefits and build a strong identity for Insan Terpadu Junior High School. So, it is important to continue to improve and perfect the public relations strategy so that it can be achieved properly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For future research, it is recommended to conduct an in-depth study of the direct influence of the implementation of public relations strategies on the improvement of a more detailed analysis of the effectiveness of the Alumni Ambassador program in expanding the reach of brand awareness and increasing alumni loyalty can also provide valuable insights. In addition, further research on the impact of social media as a communication tool in strengthening the school's brand awareness exposure to build more effective interactions with the community also needs to be done.

Recommendations for strategies to increase brand awareness of boarding-based schools include various things including; the development of excellent programs, which can encourage schools to continue to develop innovative excellent programs in education as an effort to strengthen the school's image and reputation. Interesting and quality programs will be an attraction for prospective students and support the increase in brand awareness. Furthermore, optimizing human resources (HR), optimizing sufficient human resources to support the implementation of public relations strategies, including in improving the quality of human resources and optimizing the budget. Investment in competent and adequate human resources is one of the steps in achieving the success of public relations strategies. Finally, strategic integration, integrating public relations strategies with various programs in public relations strategies such as meetings with, routine activities with the community and effective use of social media. Effectiveness in communication will strengthen the message and identity of the school in the eyes of the community.

Thus, this study provides valuable insights into the importance of public relations strategies in increasing brand awareness of dormitory-based schools. The recommendations and themes from this research can serve as a foundation for further research and practice in strengthening the relationship between the school and the community, as well as building a positive and strong image of the school in the eyes of the community.

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