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Public Relations Management in an Effort to Improve School Branding Through the “Program Gerbang”

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Abstract

Public relations management in schools must work actively in efforts to improve school branding. Moreover, the current conditions of the development of the era of globalization and increasingly tight school competition. Schools must also innovate in creating their school's characteristics. Madrasas has a unique school program, namely the Gerbang program (enthusiasm for foreign languages). This program not only improves foreign language skills but also contributes to forming the school's identity or brand. Therefore, it is necessary to improve public relations through this Gerbang program to improve school branding. The purpose of the study was to determine, the public relations management process in an effort to improve school branding through the Gerbang program. Public relations model of madrasas in efforts to improve school branding in the implementation of the Gerbang program. Implications of the Gerbang program in efforts to improve school branding. The type of research in this study is a case study with a qualitative approach. The impact is increasing the attractiveness of prospective students, increasing achievement, increasing the reputation of the sekolah, increasing student confidence, increasing social media followers.

INTRODUCTION

In managing education, there are several important aspects in it, such as curriculum management, finance, human resources, and no less important is public relations management. Public relations management has a very important position in running education in madrasahs (Purwanto & Wafa, 2023; Rahmawaty & Narsa, 2022). The wider community can know and trust madrasahs, which is the task of the public relations department. Public relations management can help madrasahs create a positive brand and increase student appeal (Anani-Bossman, 2021; Hefniy & Arifin, 2023; Maulidia, 2023). This means that good public relations management in madrasahs can improve school branding. This can be proven by previous research showing that public relations management can help madrasahs create strong and attractive branding (Gangal Yilmaz, 2023; Untung et al., 2023). To create a good madrasah climate, public relations has the responsibility to build mutual understanding and good cooperation between madrasahs and the public. Ultimately, public relations can build branding by communicating well with the public. This proves that no matter how good a madrasah is, it will not be known by the wider community if the madrasah has a passive public relations management.

Madrasahs must pay attention to various aspects including the importance of public relations management, in creating superior madrasahs in accordance with the development of the times (Buyamin, 2022; Oparaugo, 2021; Untung et al., 2023). Therefore, education managers must also always be updated in knowing the opportunities they have. Exploring these opportunities

shows that foreign language skills are an important part of improving the quality of Indonesian education (Maulana et al., 2022). Learning various foreign languages is a way to live a successful life. Mastery of foreign languages is a provision in readiness to face the challenges of rapid changes in the times.

In facing this problem, it is not enough to improve the quality of Indonesian education by relying only on the learning process in the classroom. Therefore, an innovative program is needed to overcome this problem. Gerbang (Gemar Berbahasa Asing) is one of the programs initiated by the madrasah education section of Banyuwangi Regency which aims to improve students' foreign language skills, especially at the junior high school level throughout Banyuwangi Regency. MTsN 1 Banyuwangi is a madrasah that actively implements and reports Gerbang program activities every day on the madrasah's social media. This has increased the public's attraction to madrasahs.

With the existence of this Gerbang program, it makes it easier for madrasahs to produce quality generations and prepare them to compete and survive in the era of globalization with the abilities they have. The first goal of this program is not to produce foreign language skills but rather students' interest in learning. This program has proven to have a very positive influence on the development of students' foreign language skills and of course it is easier to implement the current curriculum. And it also has a very positive influence on the image of madrasahs. With this program, madrasahs are better known by the community.

This study offers novelty by examining the role of public relations management specifically in utilizing the "Enjoy Foreign Languages" program as a strategy to improve school branding in the madrasah environment, especially at MTsN 1 Banyuwangi. In the midst of increasingly tight competition in educational institutions, school branding no longer only relies on image building through academic achievement or physical infrastructure alone, but also through a cultural approach and internal programs that have selling value. In this context, language activities are not only a means of improving student competence, but also an effective medium for forming a positive image of the school in the eyes of the community. This also marks a paradigm shift that public relations do not only play a role as a conveyor of information, but as a strategic actor in building the identity and reputation of the institution.

Furthermore, this study strengthens the literature on the transformation of the role of madrasahs in the era of globalization, which requires them to be adaptive to the demands of the times without losing their Islamic identity. By making MTsN 1 Banyuwangi the subject of study, this study provides an original contribution in the form of documentation and practical analysis of how a state madrasah integrates religious values with the demands of 21st century skills, one of which is through strengthening foreign languages. The combination of language programs, creative public relations management, and institutional branding becomes a new narrative that is important in framing the existence of madrasahs not only as religious-based educational institutions, but also as modern entities that are ready to compete openly in the public sphere.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research was conducted with the aim of knowing the public relations management in the Gerbang program which is one of the leading programs of MTsN 1 Banyuwangi. The focus of the research is the process of events, so a qualitative approach is used. According to Moleong, qualitative research is a type of research that aims to understand phenomena related to the actions of research subjects in a special context that is purely by using a natural approach (Moleong, 2020). The researcher chose a case study as a research method because it aims to present a valid and in-depth report on public relations management at MTsN 1 Banyuwangi in an effort to improve branding through the Gerbang program.

This study was conducted at MTsN 1 Banyuwangi, located at Jl. Mawar No. 35, Lingkungan Mojoroto R, Mojopanggung, Kec. Giri, Banyuwangi Regency, East Java 68422. With the research subjects of the Principal, the Head of the Gerbang program coordinator, the Deputy for Quality Assurance, the Deputy for Public Relations, teachers, Gerbang ambassadors. The collection technique was carried out by observation, in-depth and unstructured interviews, documentation.

According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, the qualitative data analysis process consists of four main stages: data collection, data condensation, data presentation, drawing conclusions (Williams, 2021). Researchers will conduct validity tests using several techniques. In addition, data validity will be tested by evaluating its credibility through various methods of collecting data sources and information (Citriadin, 2020): Source triangulation, technique triangulation, theory triangulation, and added with member check technique.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Public Relations Management Process

MTsN 1 Banyuwangi initiated a flagship program called Gerbang (Foreign Language Movement) in an effort to improve the image and competitiveness of madrasahs in an increasingly competitive era. This program is not only a strategy to strengthen school branding, but also a solution to various challenges faced by madrasahs, such as low student interest in foreign languages and lack of parental involvement. Through a systematic approach, the Gerbang program is designed and implemented in four main stages, namely formulation of problems and opportunities, planning, implementation, and evaluation. Each stage has an important role in ensuring that this program runs effectively, sustainably, and provides real impacts for all madrasah residents.

In the first stage, namely the Defining Problems and Opportunities stage, the results of the research conducted aim to define problems and opportunities strategically and systematically. This is proven by the ability of the madrasah's public relations to identify existing problems and at the same time see the opportunities owned by the madrasah. One of the main focuses is efforts to improve school branding through the Gerbang program. In this process, several problems were found such as low student interest in foreign languages, lack of parental awareness, and competition with other madrasahs. To answer these challenges, a special program was created with the name Gerbang which carries the symbol of "the door to a new world" and carries the motto "Foreign Languages: From Interest to Achievement". This program emphasizes the value of courage in speaking foreign languages with the main targets of students and parents. The persona of the Gerbang program is interesting and collaborative, with an educational but not patronizing language style, friendly, and uplifting. On the other hand, opportunities that can be utilized include strong support from the Ministry of Religion of Banyuwangi Regency and the existence of professional human resources with high qualifications at MTsN 1 Banyuwangi.

The second stage is planning or planning that is carried out in a structured and transparent manner. This process begins with a planning meeting that discusses various things such as compiling a work program, establishing cooperation with the English Language Center (ELC), establishing partnerships with the community, compiling procedures for implementing the updated Gerbang program, and compiling a publication strategy to increase visibility and branding through content management and publication. Large meetings with parents, the community, and the committee are held twice a year, while internal meetings between teachers are held more intensively even though they do not have a fixed schedule for smooth coordination.

In the third stage, namely Implementation, the implementation of the Gerbang program is carried out routinely every Monday to Friday. The schedule is English on Monday and Wednesday, Arabic on Tuesday and Thursday, and Friday is used for English in the first to third weeks and Arabic in the fourth week. The activity takes place from 05.50 to 06.50 with the presence of teachers, Gerbang coordinators, and Gerbang ambassadors who are on guard in the madrasah yard. Students who show achievements will be given awards. Innovations in activities carried out include the arrival of tourists and UIN Malang students, language camps, and ceremonies in foreign languages. For publication, the implementation is carried out consistently in accordance with the activities taking place at the madrasah; every time there is an activity, the editing and publication process is carried out directly on the same day through official media such as websites, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube.

The fourth stage is Evaluation or evaluation which is carried out periodically through direct monitoring and feedback from madrasah residents and the Ministry of Religion. This evaluation also includes improving strategies by meeting the needs of facilities and infrastructure, adding innovations to activities in the Gerbang program, and improving the quality of teachers and Gerbang ambassadors so that the program can continue to develop sustainably.

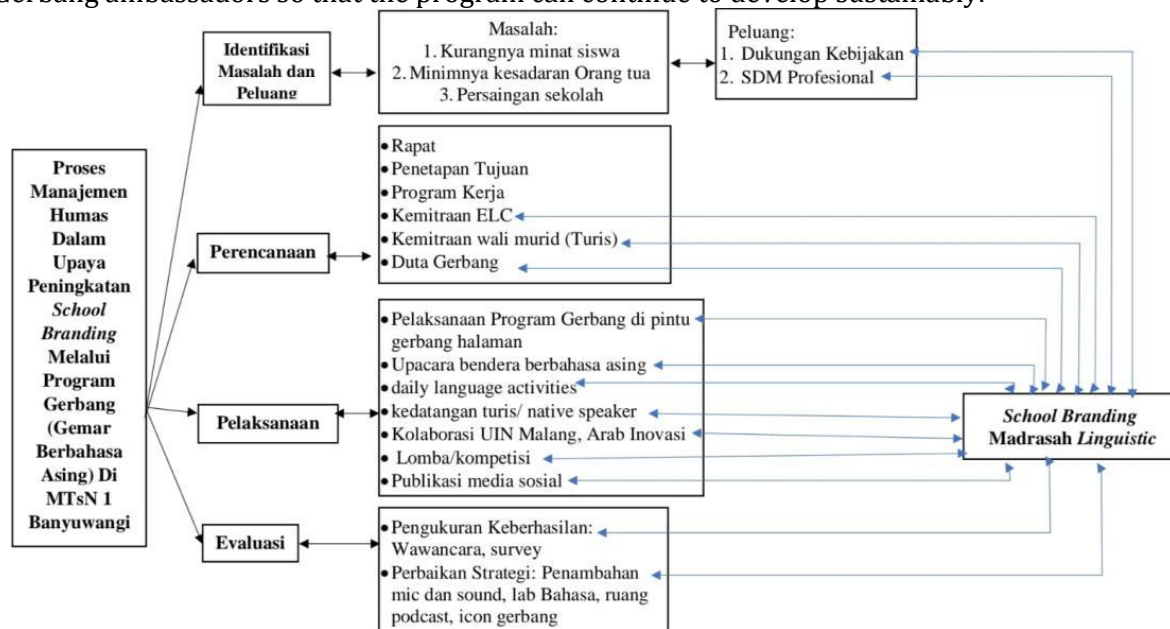


Figure 1. Concept of the Program

There are two appropriate public relations models to be applied in efforts to improve school branding in the Gerbang program, namely the public information model and two-way symmetric. The public information model ensures transparency in delivering information to the public, especially related to the Gerbang program. By utilizing various media such as websites, magazines, and social media accompanied by captions or information. Commitment to the principle of openness increases public trust and of course prevents misunderstandings. The two-way symmetric model in school branding emphasizes two-way communication between the madrasah and the community. Through mass meetings, open discussions, and active interactions on social media, the madrasah receives input and adjusts policies according to the needs of students, parents, and the educational environment. This approach strengthens transparency, increases public trust, and ensures that the Gerbang program continues to develop responsively.

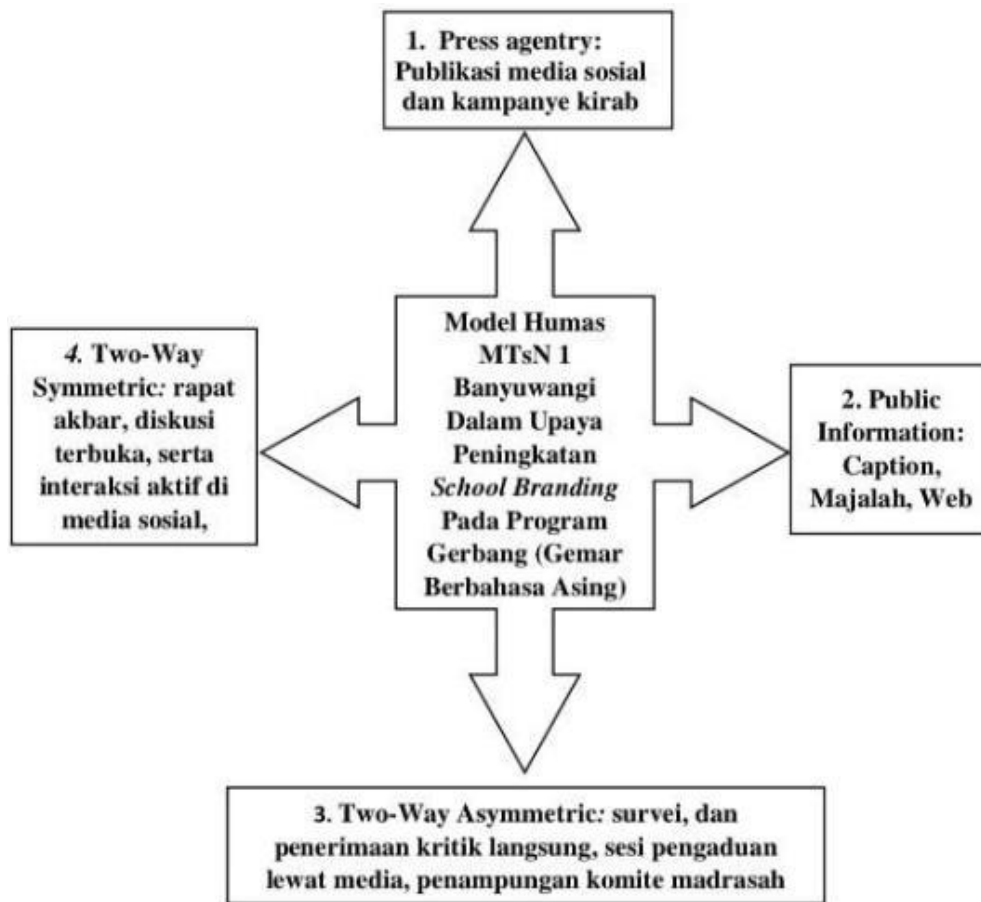


Figure 2. Public Relation Model

Implications of the Gerbang (Foreign Language Enthusiasm) Program

The implication of this strategy is increasing public trust, as evidenced by the increase in the attractiveness of prospective students. An increase in the number of PPDB registrants from 399 students in 2023/2024, 427 students in 2024/2025, to 454 students in 2025/2026. Applicants are not only from the local area, but also from outside the city. Increased student achievement, student achievement in foreign language competitions, higher foreign language exam scores compared to the previous year, successfully winning championships in various foreign language olympiads, speeches, debates, and storytelling competitions.

Increasing the reputation of the madrasah to become a superior madrasah as recognized in the Decree of the Head of the Banyuwangi Ministry of Religion No. 107 of 2024 on March 5, 2024. Active publication by public relations on various social media platforms further strengthens school branding. With regular assistance and evaluation from the Banyuwangi Ministry of Religion, MTsN 1 Banyuwangi is committed to continuing to maintain its reputation as a superior madrasah that is highly competitive and becomes a role model for other madrasahs. Increasing student confidence, English presentations, communicating and interacting with various groups, applying foreign languages every day, to the courage to interact with tourists. Continuous expansion of promotional reach can increase madrasah social media followers.

DISCUSSION

The public relations management process in the Gerbang program includes defining problems and opportunities strategically and systematically. The problems include students' lack of interest in foreign languages, lack of parental awareness, and competition with other schools.

According to Krashen's theory, motivation and a supportive environment play an important role in the success of foreign language learning (Pauzan, 2024). Parental involvement in children's education, including providing motivation and additional facilities, has a significant influence on learning outcomes (Utama & Akbar, 2023). And for the existence of competition with other schools, in accordance with the concept of educational branding in the brand identity theory, it emphasizes the importance of building a strong and consistent image so that madrasas have higher competitiveness (Hasanah et al., 2023). And the opportunity is that there is support from the Ministry of Religion of Banyuwangi Regency and professional human resources.

Support from the Ministry of Religion can be linked to the institutional theory put forward by Meyer and Rowan. This theory explains that organizations that gain legitimacy from external institutions will have higher stability and access to wider resources. Institutional branding includes strategies to strengthen the identity, values, and uniqueness of the institution through superior programs that are consistent and relevant to the needs of the community (Berdiieva & Goroshko, 2022). And teachers must have several abilities such as the theory of professional competence put forward by Law Number 14 of 2005 concerning Teachers and Lecturers, a teacher must have pedagogical, personality, social, and professional competence. Improving teacher professionalism must be done continuously through relevant education and training. (Gani & Adam, 2023). Teacher professionalism contributes directly to improving the quality of national education.

Structured program planning also includes organizing the roles of teachers and students as language ambassadors. Planning is done by holding meetings. Effective discussions in education can build a collaborative culture and improve the quality of decision making (Kartika et al., 2020). In the meeting, they discussed establishing cooperation with several parties. Cooperation is a form of social process that involves various parties to achieve common goals (Agus et al., 2021). This is in line with the concept of educational networks explained which emphasizes that building collaborative networks can improve the quality of education and strengthen educational institutions. And also cooperation between madrasah, guardians, and the community. Community involvement in education can improve the quality of learning and strengthen the relationship between educational institutions and their environment.

Community support in bringing tourists to the madrasah. Direct interaction between students and native speakers or tourists is an important element in experiential branding in the madrasah environment (Ghufron et al., 2023). And also formed gate ambassadors which are done through strict selection. The presence of ambassadors is a form of strong character branding, because it reflects students who excel, are confident, and communicative. And also the planning of major changes in content management and publication has encouraged madrasahs to be more active in increasing visibility and school branding.

Implementation of routine gate activities every day (Arabic and English) alternately and consistent publication. The Gate program can be associated with the theory of multiple intelligences developed by Howard Gardner. This theory emphasizes that each individual has different intelligences, including linguistic intelligence that can be developed through direct interaction and practice. And publication is carried out consistently in accordance with the correct strategy theory, considering that social media has a big role in shaping public perception of an educational institution (Ghufron et al., 2023). The support from teachers in publications on their personal accounts also strengthens the word-of-mouth marketing strategy, which is known as one of the most effective marketing methods in building a reputation (Berdiieva & Goroshko, 2022), and periodic evaluation through direct monitoring and feedback from madrasa residents and the Ministry of Religion. Interviews and questionnaires play a role in educational evaluation, as well as how the data obtained can be used to improve the effectiveness of learning.

The public relations management model used leads to two approaches, namely the public information model to ensure transparency in delivering information to the public. The theory of transparency in education, which emphasizes that open access to information, can increase accountability and public trust in madrasahs (Baines et al., 2022). In addition, research on the influence of transparency and accountability in education management shows that openness of information plays an important role in increasing community participation in education. And the two-way symmetrical communication model, there is active reciprocal communication between the madrasah and the public through social media, digital publications, and external partnerships.

The implication of this strategy is increasing public trust, increasing the attractiveness of prospective students. The use of social media in school branding plays a big role in attracting the attention of prospective students and increasing the number of applicants (Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2021). The improvement of the reputation of the madrasah to become a superior madrasah is proven by the statement letter of the Ministry of Religion of Banyuwangi No. 107 of 2024, which was issued on March 5, 2024. This decree confirms the status of MTsN 1 Banyuwangi as a superior madrasah based on academic achievement, learning innovation, and strategic programs implemented in its education system.

Increasing student confidence, Interactive learning methods, as explained in research by Bahrani et al., show that an interaction-based and participation-based approach can increase student confidence in speaking English. Continuous expansion of promotional reach can increase the number of followers of the madrasah's social media. Public relations have an important role in managing communication and building a positive image of the madrasah on social media. The use of social media by madrasah public relations can increase public trust in the educational institution with the right communication strategy; public relations can disseminate information about superior programs, student achievements, and various academic and non-academic activities that attract public attention.

CONCLUSION

The Gerbang Program at MTsN 1 Banyuwangi has proven effective in enhancing school branding through a systematic public relations strategy involving four key stages: problem identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation. The program successfully addressed challenges such as low student interest in foreign languages and limited parental awareness, leveraging institutional support and qualified human resources. Its implementation improved student confidence, academic and non-academic achievements, and digital visibility. However, limitations remain in the consistency of parental involvement and the scalability of the program to broader contexts. Future research is recommended to explore long-term impacts of language-based branding initiatives and to assess their adaptability in different educational settings.

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