



Communication Strategy in Attracting Public Interest Based on Pesantren

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Abstract : *The purpose of this research is to identify communication strategies that are more effective in attracting people's interest in joining the madrasa and their obstacles. This research uses a qualitative approach and case studies to understand the communication strategy at madrasa based on pesantren and its impact on public interest. Data was collected through interviews with various related parties, participatory observation, and document analysis. The results of the research will provide insight into effective communication strategies in Islamic boarding schools and the level of community involvement in the institution's activities. The results of this work are a). Through an effective communication strategy, the madrasa has succeeded in increasing public interest in their education program, by identifying audiences, crafting convincing messages, and utilizing various media to reach a wider audience. The madrasa based on pesantren is an effective agent of change in awakening and fostering rural communities. b). The madrasa based on pesantren faces constraints of limited resources and a lack of communication skills in implementing communication strategies, but by utilizing local resources, skills training, and curriculum innovation, they have the potential to become more effective agents of change in attracting the interest of rural communities.*

Keywords : *Communication Strategy; Public Interest; Pesantren.*

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INTRODUCTION

Effective communication has become an essential component of educational management, particularly in building sustainable relationships between educational institutions and their stakeholders. Beyond disseminating information, communication enables schools to establish mutual understanding, enhance institutional credibility, strengthen community participation, and develop a positive public image. In an increasingly competitive educational environment, communication strategies have become a strategic instrument for attracting prospective students, maintaining parents' trust, and fostering long-term partnerships with the wider community (Alfiyani, 2018; Flor, 2018; Marfu'ah, 2018; Mukhirto & Fathoni, 2022).

Communication scholars emphasize that effective organizational communication should not merely deliver information but also facilitate reciprocal interaction between institutions and their stakeholders. The two-way communication perspective highlights dialogue, participation, and mutual understanding as the foundation of sustainable organizational relationships. In educational institutions, this approach enables schools to identify community expectations, accommodate public aspirations, and formulate communication strategies that respond to stakeholders' needs rather than relying solely on one-way information dissemination.

Previous studies have demonstrated that communication strategies contribute significantly to institutional development. Sitepu and Sabrin (2020) reported that persuasive communication and promotional strategies enhance public interest and organizational competitiveness. Fathoni (2022) found that communication plays an important role in supporting educational development through instructional interaction. Similarly, Arifin (2018) emphasized that persuasive communication effectively strengthens community participation through empowerment programs. Although these studies provide valuable insights into communication practices, they primarily focus on promotional activities, instructional communication, and community empowerment. Limited attention has been given to how Islamic educational institutions strategically integrate communication principles to establish sustainable and mutually beneficial relationships with surrounding communities. This limitation indicates an important research gap. Existing studies have not sufficiently explained how communication strategies are systematically implemented in Islamic boarding school-based educational institutions to foster public trust, strengthen institutional reputation, and increase community participation in educational development. Furthermore, previous research has paid limited attention to the communication processes that create reciprocal relationships between schools and stakeholders as an integral part of institutional management.

MTs Bustanul Faizin, located in Blimbing Village, Besuki District, Situbondo Regency, represents an Islamic educational institution that continuously seeks to strengthen its relationship with the surrounding community. Despite its educational potential, the institution

faces several communication challenges, including limited dissemination of institutional information, increasing competition among educational institutions, and persistent public perceptions that Islamic boarding schools primarily emphasize religious instruction while paying insufficient attention to academic excellence. These challenges highlight the importance of developing communication strategies that effectively accommodate community expectations while promoting the institution's educational values.

Unlike previous studies that primarily examine communication from promotional or instructional perspectives, this study investigates communication strategies from the perspective of reciprocal institutional relationships between schools and communities. The novelty of this research lies in explaining how communication practices are systematically implemented to build mutual trust, encourage community participation, and strengthen the institutional image of an Islamic educational institution through sustainable engagement with stakeholders.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the communication strategies implemented by MTs Bustanul Faizin in attracting public interest and strengthening community engagement, as well as to identify the challenges encountered in implementing these strategies. The findings are expected to contribute to the literature on educational communication by providing a contextual understanding of community-based communication strategies within Islamic educational institutions and offering practical implications for school leaders seeking to enhance institutional reputation and stakeholder relationships.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the communication strategies implemented by MTs Bustanul Faizin in attracting public interest and strengthening community engagement. A case study was considered appropriate because it enables researchers to explore complex social phenomena within their real-life context and to obtain a comprehensive understanding of institutional communication practices (Kusumastuti & Khoiron, 2019; Salam, 2023). The research was conducted at MTs Bustanul Faizin, located in Blimbing Village, Besuki District, Situbondo Regency, East Java, Indonesia. The research site was purposively selected because the institution has consistently implemented community-based communication strategies as part of its efforts to enhance institutional reputation and increase public participation.

Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The participants were selected using purposive sampling and consisted of Islamic boarding school administrators, teachers, administrative staff, students, parents, and community representatives who were directly involved in the institution's communication activities. Participant observation enabled the researchers to examine communication practices during daily interactions between the pesantren, students, parents, and the surrounding community. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain participants'

perspectives regarding communication strategies, institutional relationships, and factors influencing public interest. Documentary evidence, including promotional materials, institutional reports, school archives, and media publications, was analyzed to complement the primary data. The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, credibility was established through source triangulation and methodological triangulation by comparing information obtained from observations, interviews, and documentary evidence.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. The Communication Strategy That Has Been Carried Out in Attracting Public Interest

Strategy is basically planning and management to achieve certain goals. However, strategy doesn't just serve as a roadmap that shows direction; he must also be able to present specific operational tactics (Fuad, 2021). The same applies to the communications strategy, which is a combination of communication planning and communication management to achieve stated goals. This communication strategy must have the ability to practically demonstrate how these tactics will be implemented, with the flexibility to adapt according to changing circumstances.

The success of communication activities is very dependent on determining the right communication strategy (Littlejohn & Stephen, 2009). Conversely, if there is no good communication strategy, the communication process, especially through the mass media, has the potential to have a negative impact (Sholehah, 2020). To evaluate the communication process, communication models are used as analytical tools. In observing and assessing the success of an ongoing or completed communication process, especially in terms of its impact, analysis is used using various communication models.

The formulation of a communication strategy, as proposed by Anwar Arifin, is divided into several stages, namely (Meilisa & Firdaus, 2018):

- a. The audience is known. Knowing the audience is needed to maximize the strategy so that it is in accordance with expectations and becomes a reference for determining the right strategy. The audience is the communicant who will receive the message and become the focus of the communication program, so understanding the audience is very important.
- b. The message is composed. After identifying the audience, the message to be conveyed to the communicant needs to be prepared and adapted to the background of the audience, such as economic, educational, socio-cultural and religious aspects.
- c. Method set. After the message is prepared according to the audience, the method of disseminating the message to the audience needs to be considered. This method relates to the type of communication to be used.

- d. Media is selected and used. Selection and use of media is a determining factor in the delivery of messages to target communicants. The use of media is adjusted to the characteristics of the audience, the type of message, and the communication method used, such as print media, newspapers, radio, television and online media.

MTs Bustanul Faizin has the goal of attracting the public's interest to become more familiar with and interested in the educational programs offered. To achieve this goal, the Islamic boarding school has carried out various effective communication strategies. Analysis of the communication strategy that has been carried out can provide insight into the success of Islamic boarding schools' efforts in achieving their goals.

First of all, MTs Bustanul Faizin knows the audience well as the first step in formulating a communication strategy. They understand the profile and needs of the target community, including socio-cultural, religious and economic aspects. With a deep understanding of the audience, Islamic boarding schools can develop messages that are right on target and relevant to their interests and needs.

Furthermore, pesantren have developed strong and convincing messages to convey the educational values they offer. These messages are directed at motivating the public to be interested and encouraged to choose the educational programs provided by the MTs Bustanul Faizin. These messages are also adapted to the audience's background so that they are easier to understand and accept.

In determining the method of communication, pesantren have carried out a careful analysis of the most effective types of communication. They use various communication media, including print media, newspapers, radio, and online media. The selection of the media is based on the characteristics of the audience, the type of message to be conveyed, and the desired method of communication. Thus, the message can be conveyed more precisely and successfully reach the target community.

Furthermore, MTs Bustanul Faizin has also chosen and used media wisely. They adapt media use to the characteristics of the target community. For example, if the target audience uses social media more, pesantren will optimize the use of online media in spreading their messages. With the right media selection, messages can reach the target audience more effectively and efficiently.

Through the communication strategy that has been implemented, MTs Bustanul Faizin has succeeded in attracting public interest. They succeeded in creating high awareness of their educational program and succeeded in inspiring the community to make positive decisions in choosing educational programs at the pesantren.

2. Constraints and Obstacles Faced In Implementing Communication Strategies to Attract Public Interest

Pesantren Bustanul Faizin is a secondary Islamic education institution located in a rural village. As an educational institution, MTs aims to provide quality religious and

academic education for its students. One of the challenges faced by MTs Bustanul Faizin is to attract the interest of the local community to choose their institution as a place of education for their children. This article will discuss some of the obstacles and obstacles faced by MTs in implementing effective communication strategies to increase public interest.

a. Limited Resources

One of the main obstacles faced by MTs Bustanul Faizin Islamic Boarding School is limited resources. As educational institutions located in rural areas, limited budgets make it difficult for them to develop adequate communication strategies. Effective promotional media such as billboards, television advertisements, or advertising in mass media require high costs, which are difficult for institutions with a minimal budget to reach.

b. Lack of Communication Skills

Although Pondok Pesantren Bustanul Faizin has competent staff in the fields of religion and education, the lack of skills in communication and marketing is another obstacle. They may not have a workforce specifically trained in promotion and marketing, making it difficult for them to develop an effective and engaging communication strategy.

c. Competition with other schools

The area where MTs Bustanul Faizin is located may also have several other schools and educational institutions offering a similar education. This competition makes MTs have to be more active in facing challenges to attract public interest. Competition also encourages educational institutions to build a strong image and identity to stand out among other schools.

d. Community Perceptions of Pesantren

Some people in rural areas may still have an old-fashioned perception of pesantren, considering them places that are less relevant to the times and science. MTs Bustanul Faizin needs to make more efforts to make people aware of the importance of education at Islamic boarding schools and its benefits for the future of the younger generation.

e. Trends in the Search for Formal Education

The trend of people in seeking formal education, especially in urban areas, tends to change with the times. Many parents prefer to send their children to formal schools that offer a general and technology-based curriculum. MTs needs to face this challenge by developing the right strategy so that it remains relevant and attractive to the community.

Even though MTs Pondok Pesantren Bustanul Faizin faces several obstacles in implementing the communication strategy, there are several steps that can be taken to overcome this problem, namely:

a. Utilization of Local Resources

MTs can find creative ways to leverage local resources in their promotions. For example, they can work with local business owners to promote MTs through banners or flyers. They can also use social media actively and create engaging content to reach a wider audience without huge expenses.

b. Communication Skills Training

These institutions may consider providing specific training to their staff in communication and marketing skills. That way, they will be more skilled in composing effective messages and communicating them to the public.

c. Image and Identity Strengthening

MTs need to build a strong image and identity as a superior and quality educational institution. They can highlight their strengths and provide examples of brilliant student achievements to build public trust.

d. Community Education

Through outreach and education activities, MTs can convey information about the importance of education at Islamic boarding schools and its benefits for children's academic and spiritual development.

e. Curriculum Innovation

MTs can update and develop their curricula to stay relevant with the times and offer a comprehensive, high-quality education. MTs Bustanul Faizin faces a number of obstacles and challenges in implementing a communication strategy to attract public interest. However, with the right efforts and initiatives, they can overcome these problems and strengthen their position as an educational institution that is of interest to the public. Utilization of local resources, communication skills training, strengthening image and identity, community education, and curriculum innovation are important steps that can be taken to achieve this goal. Hopefully these steps will help MTS Bustanul Faizin Islamic Boarding School in increasing public interest and contributing to improving the quality of education for the younger generation in the area.

CONCLUSION

MTs Bustanul Faizin has implemented an effective communication strategy. By knowing the audience and compiling messages that are right on target, they are able to convey educational values convincingly. Using the right communication methods, such as various media and social media, provides an opportunity to reach a wider audience. With a wise selection of media, messages can be conveyed more effectively and efficiently. Through this strategy, MTs Bustanul Faizin succeeded in achieving their goal of increasing public interest in the educational programs they offer and becoming an effective agent of change in awakening

and fostering rural communities. MTS Bustanul Faizin faces a number of obstacles and obstacles in implementing a communication strategy to attract public interest. Limited resources, lack of communication skills, competition with other schools, public perceptions of Islamic boarding schools, and the trend towards seeking formal education are challenges that need to be overcome. However, by utilizing local resources, training in communication skills, strengthening image and identity, public education, and curriculum innovation, MTs can overcome these obstacles and increase public interest in choosing them as an educational institution. With the right efforts, MTs Bustanul Faizin can become a more effective agent of change in awakening and fostering rural communities.

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