

THE ROLE OF THE VICE PRINCIPAL FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS IN IMPROVING THE SCHOOL'S REPUTATION

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the strategic role of the Deputy Principal for Public Relations in enhancing the reputation of SMA Negeri 3 Rejang Lebong. The study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design through interviews, observations, and document analysis. The focus of the study is how public relations functions are carried out strategically in building public image and trust. The findings show that public relations plays a role not only as a conveyor of information, but also as a managerial actor involved in communication planning, strengthening the school's positioning, and proactive issue management. The strategies applied integrate two-way communication with the principles of educational marketing management through digital and conventional promotion, publication of achievements, and external collaboration. The contribution of this research lies in the identification of a strategic-integrative public relations model that places reputation management as a key managerial function in enhancing public trust and school competitiveness.

Keywords: Deputy Principal, Public Relations, School Reputation.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis peran strategis Wakil Kepala Sekolah Bidang Hubungan Masyarakat dalam meningkatkan reputasi SMA Negeri 3 Rejang Lebong. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan desain studi kasus melalui wawancara, observasi, dan analisis dokumen. Fokus kajian adalah bagaimana fungsi humas dijalankan secara strategis dalam membangun citra dan kepercayaan publik. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa humas berperan tidak hanya sebagai penyampai informasi, tetapi sebagai aktor manajerial yang terlibat dalam perencanaan komunikasi, penguatan positioning sekolah, serta pengelolaan isu secara proaktif. Strategi yang diterapkan mengintegrasikan komunikasi dua arah dengan prinsip manajemen pemasaran pendidikan melalui promosi digital dan konvensional, publikasi prestasi, serta kolaborasi eksternal. Kontribusi penelitian ini terletak pada identifikasi model humas strategis-integratif yang menempatkan pengelolaan reputasi

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sebagai fungsi manajerial utama dalam meningkatkan kepercayaan masyarakat dan daya saing sekolah.

Kata Kunci: Wakil Kepala Sekolah, Public Relation, Reputasi Sekolah

A. Introduction

In the contemporary era, characterized by information openness and a wide variety of educational institutions, competition between schools has become increasingly fierce and dynamic. Schools no longer serve merely as providers of educational services, but also as institutions that must demonstrate their excellence and competitiveness (Abunaser et al., 2024; Abunaser & Rubkhi, 2025). The presence of elite schools, international-based programs, and easy access to information through digital media enable the public to compare the quality of schools more objectively and quickly (Natavia et al., 2025). This situation requires every school to have a clear strategy for building trust and attracting prospective students (Al Rosid & Munir, 2020).

In this context, the reputation and image of an institution are strategic factors that determine a school's position in the competition. Reputation is formed from the accumulation of performance, service quality, achievements, and consistency in communication and behavior of the institution towards stakeholders (Rachman et al., 2025). A positive image reflects the public's perception of the school's credibility and quality, thereby directly influencing the decisions of parents and students in choosing an educational institution. (Amado Mateus et al., 2024). Therefore, reputation management is not merely a supplement, but a fundamental requirement for maintaining sustainability and strengthening the school's competitiveness amid increasingly complex competition.

One important factor that determines public trust in educational institutions is reputation, also known as school image. Public trust in educational institutions is the reputation also known as the school's image. Image is the impression, feeling, and self-perception of the public towards an institution, and the impression deliberately created from an object, person, or organization (Moh. Rois Abin, Rahadian Fatawi, 2019). Associations, assessments, responses, opinions, public trust, or certain symbols in the form of services, company names, and specific product or service brands that are accepted by the public as their target audience are all forms closely related to reputation (At et al., 2024). Image or reputation is the impression, feeling, or conception that exists in the public regarding a company, an object, a person, or an institution (Beno et al., 2022). The image of a school is the main vision of an educational institution, shaping its reputation and positive perception presented to the public, which is the main task of the school's public relations management team (Rusyanti et al., 2021). In an era of increasingly fierce competition between schools, a good reputation is not only an indicator of educational quality, but also plays a strategic role in attracting prospective students and support from various parties. Therefore, school reputation management must be carried out systematically and planned through effective management, one of which is through the active role of the Deputy Principal for Public Relations (Humas).

This can be utilized to support high-quality education with the need for cooperation from all parties involved, one of which is the general public. In accordance with Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 20 of 2003, it is stated as follows: 1) The role of the community in education includes the efforts of individuals, groups, families, professional organizations, business actors, and groups in the community in organizing educational activities; 2) The community can participate in the implementation and utilization of educational outcomes; and 3) Government regulations regarding the role of the community as mentioned in paragraphs 1 and 2 are governed by government regulations (Maulana, 2019).

Public relations is what makes society better so that public trust in individuals or groups can be strengthened (Fadillah et al., 2022). Public relations is the manager of organizational functions, namely developing the identity and image of the organization, creating a positive identity and reputation, and fostering reciprocal two-way traffic communication with various parties (Tendean, 2013). The main role of people in an organization is to create, develop, and strengthen the positive impact of the organization on the community or the public. This is to maintain two-way communication between the public and the organization in order to foster trust and a positive environment so that the organization's reputation can be enhanced (A. Munir, 2023). Public relations is very important for any organization or agency, regardless of its size, or the role of public relations, which is very important for organizations. Public relations covers all activities carried out by a group or organization through public relations officers to improve structure and communication in order to create better relationships between the group and its constituents (Akmal et al., 2023).

Public relations serves to disseminate information about school activities and developments to the local community, including education and school programs. Educational institutions are expected to be able to contribute to society in the current global context by providing high-quality educational services. Increasing public demand for quality educational services is a major factor influencing this issue (Nadia Anggraeni & Pramusinto, 2024). The competitiveness of schools must be handled properly because schools are educational institutions that are a shared responsibility and affect the lives of the community (Mukmin, 2020). The presence of public relations in schools is very important in achieving school goals, because the tasks of school leaders will be lighter and help schools achieve their goals. Schools are educational institutions that provide services to the general public (Bilqis & Rivo, 2016).

Previous literature reviews show that the effectiveness of public relations functions in educational institutions contributes significantly to improving the image and reputation of schools. Several studies reveal that transparency of information, openness of communication, and effective management of relationships with the community can strengthen public trust in schools. However, there are limitations in studies that specifically discuss the role of the Vice Principal in the context of high schools in certain regions, such as SMAN 3 Rejang Lebong. Based on these observations, this article offers a new scientific contribution by focusing on the role of the Vice Principal for Public

Relations in improving the reputation of SMAN 3 Rejang Lebong, which has not been widely explored in previous literature.

Based on conceptual descriptions and various previous research results, it can be understood that school reputation and image are strategic assets that are built through institutional performance and effective communication management with stakeholders. Various studies have emphasized the importance of public relations in strengthening public trust, increasing information transparency, and building constructive two-way communication between schools and the community. However, most studies still discuss the role of public relations at a general and normative level, without examining in depth how specific structural roles in school management concretely contribute to reputation building.

In addition, studies that specifically highlight the role of the Deputy Principal for Public Relations at the senior high school level, particularly in the context of specific regions such as SMAN 3 Rejang Lebong, are still relatively limited. In fact, within the school organizational structure, this position has strategic responsibilities in designing and implementing institutional communication. Therefore, more focused research is needed to explain the role, strategies, and actual practices of the Vice Principal for Public Relations in improving the school's reputation. With this in mind, this article offers a scientific contribution by focusing on the role of the Vice Principal for Public Relations in improving the reputation of SMAN 3 Rejang Lebong, in an effort to fill the gap in studies that have not been widely explored in previous literature.

Based on interviews with the Deputy Principal for Public Relations at SMAN 3 Rejang Lebong, the latest data for the 2025/2026 academic year shows that there are 211 male students and 298 female students. The main issue raised in this study is how the Deputy Principal for Public Relations contributes to improving the performance of SMAN 3 Rejang Lebong, as well as the factors that support and hinder this role. The hypothesis states that the active and strategic role of the Deputy Principal in the field of Public Relations has a positive influence on improving the school's reputation.

The purpose of this study is to analyze and describe the contribution of the Deputy Principal for Public Relations to improving the reputation of SMAN 3 Rejang Lebong, as well as to compile recommendations that can serve as a reference for the development of the role of Public Relations in other schools.

B. Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design (Sugiyono, 2019). The research was conducted in May 2025 at SMAN 3 Rejang Lebong, Bengkulu Province. The research subject was the Deputy Principal for Public Relations as the main informant who has a strategic role in managing school communication and reputation. The subject was selected purposively, considering that the informant directly understood the planning and implementation of public relations functions at the school.

Data collection techniques include structured interviews, observation, and document analysis (Siti Romdona et al., 2025). Interviews were conducted in person and recorded to

ensure data accuracy. Observations were made of public relations activities and practices in the school environment. In addition, supporting documents such as activity reports, school publications, and public relations program archives were analyzed to reinforce and verify the interview data.

The data obtained was analyzed qualitatively through three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and verification or conclusion drawing (Al Rosid et al., 2024; Miles et al., 2014). Data reduction was carried out by selecting and focusing on information relevant to the research objectives. Data presentation was carried out in the form of descriptive narratives based on emerging themes. The verification stage was carried out by reviewing the consistency of data from interviews, observations, and documents to ensure the validity of the findings (Firmansyah et al., 2021). The limitation of this study lies in the number of subjects, which was only one person, so the results of the study are contextual and not intended for broad generalization.

C. Results and Discussion

Findings regarding functional roles, programs, communication patterns, obstacles, and the impact of public relations on school reputation show that the Deputy Principal for Public Relations at SMA Negeri 3 Rejang Lebong performs strategic and managerial functions. The role as a liaison between the school and the community, policy consultant, two-way communication facilitator, and institutional promotion manager is in line with Grunig's (1992) theory of Excellence in public relations, which emphasizes that effective public relations must be involved in strategic decision-making and build symmetrical two-way communication (Abdullah et al., 2024; Chan et al., 2025; Lopez & Combs, n.d.). Practices such as school committee meetings, publication of achievements, collaboration with external agencies, and active parental involvement reflect the implementation of communication that is not only informative but also participatory. (Yang et al., 2023).

Promotional programs through social media, websites, visits to junior high schools, publications in print media, and the strengthening of extracurricular activities also show that the public relations function in this school is integrated with the principles of marketing management. This is in line with the marketing management concept proposed by Kotler and Keller (2016), which states that planning, implementing, and controlling communication activities are part of the strategy to build an organization's image and competitiveness (Norman et al., n.d.). However, unlike previous studies that viewed school public relations as merely a means of conveying information, in the context of SMA Negeri 3 Rejang Lebong, the public relations unit also plays a role in positioning the school amid competition between educational institutions and responding proactively to issues in order to maintain the stability of its reputation.

Findings related to obstacles, such as limited resources, lack of public understanding, and potential negative issues, further emphasize that reputation management is an ongoing process that requires communication innovation and strong internal synergy. The visible impact in the form of increased public trust, parental participation, and student enrollment interest shows that public relations functions contribute significantly to strengthening the

school's reputation. Thus, these overall results show that the success of school reputation management is greatly influenced by the strategic capacity of the public relations unit in managing communication, promotion, and collaboration in an integrated and sustainable manner.

The Functional Role of Public Relations

The Deputy Principal for Public Relations plays a strategic role as a liaison between the school and the community, parents, government agencies, and the media. He or she also acts as a consultant, communication facilitator, and problem solver, ensuring that all school policies are understood by all stakeholders. With planned management, measurable program implementation, and regular evaluation, Public Relations becomes the main promoter in increasing community trust and the interest of prospective students. One concrete way of establishing relationships with parents and the community is through school committee meetings, where effective two-way communication can be established to convey aspirations and input, as well as discuss various school programs.

School Public Relations Activities

Public Relations programs and activities that have been implemented include socialization and promotion of the school through social media, websites, and visits to junior high schools. In addition, Public Relations actively organizes school events that involve the community, collaborates with various agencies, publishes student and teacher achievements, and provides information and complaint services for the community. The strategies implemented include disseminating information through various media channels, both electronic, such as social media and the school website, and print media, including publications in the local newspaper "Curup Ekspres," distribution of brochures, and installation of billboards and banners. In addition, SMAN 3 Rejang Lebong actively develops and presents various extracurricular programs, such as activities, scouting, pencak silat, taekwondo, and various academic and non-academic achievements of its students. These activities require program actions that integrate all individuals or related activities, as well as a formal organizational structure that plays a significant role in the implementation of marketing strategies (Munib et al., 2023).

School Communication Patterns

The communication strategy implemented includes open and transparent two-way communication through bold and appealing media channels, parental involvement in all educational activities, regular dissemination of information, networking with relevant institutions, and a personal and coordinated approach to external parties. Marketing ethics in the context of education involves offering intellectual quality services and holistic character building (Suyitno, 2021). William J. Shultz states that marketing management can be defined as a systematic process that includes planning, directing, and controlling all marketing activities carried out by a company or division within that company. Basically, marketing management is a mechanism for planning, directing, and supervising all marketing activities in an organization or business entity (Ma'sum, 2020).

Barriers to Public Relations Management

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The challenges faced include a lack of public understanding of school education programs, competition between educational institutions, limited human resources and budget allocation, the impact of negative issues or news that could potentially damage the institution's image, and the need to maintain consistency in internal communication. Research conducted by A. Efferi in 2014 revealed that the emergence of new educational institutions has encouraged increased competition between schools (Dwiayama, 2021). Effective education management is imperative to deal with existing competition (Shobri et al., 2022). The development of society is determined by education, while high-quality education can only flourish in the context of a society that has achieved progress (Noviantiani & Harmonika, 2021).

The Impact of Public Relations on School Reputation

The role of public relations has proven to be highly significant in improving the image and reputation of educational institutions, as reflected in increased public trust, student enrollment, and parent and community involvement in school activities. Harmonious relations between schools and their external environment also have a positive impact on the quality of education and the profile of graduates. This approach is in line with the latest research by Hakim (2019), which highlights the significance of collaboration between schools and external entities in order to expand learning opportunities and develop student potential (Hakim & Rozi, 2024). Thus, improving the school's reputation will proportionally increase the number of students enrolling at SMAN 3 Rejang Lebong, and vice versa (Rahman, 2016).

Table 1. Summary of Public Relations Strategies

Strategic Aspect	Type of Activity	Objective	Impact on Reputation
Functional Role	School community liaison, communication facilitator, policy consultant, problem solver	To build two-way communication and ensure policies are understood by the public	Enhances institutional trust and transparency
Digital Promotion Strategy	Publications through social media and the school website	To expand information reach and strengthen school branding	Increases visibility and promotes a modern school image
Direct Promotion (Offline)	Visits to junior high schools, publications in "Curup Ekspres," brochures, banners, billboards	To attract prospective students and introduce flagship programs	Increases student enrollment interest
Achievement	Dissemination of	To build an image	Strengthens

Publication	academic and non-academic achievements	of a high-achieving school	the school's positioning amid competition
Collaborative Activities	School committee meetings, partnerships with institutions, community engagement activities	To build relationships and stakeholder participation	Increases public support and engagement
Issue Management	Responding to negative issues, clarifying information	To maintain image and stability reputation	Reduces the risk of declining public trust
Extracurricular Strengthening	Development of scouting, pencak silat, taekwondo, and other activities	To showcase non-academic excellence	Builds a holistic and competitive school image

The results of this study confirm that the Deputy Principal for Public Relations at SMA Negeri 3 Rejang Lebong plays a crucial role in building and maintaining the school's reputation. These findings are in line with the literature that emphasizes that public relations functions as a manager of two-way communication between schools and the public, and is responsible for creating a positive image through transparent information. The placement of the public relations unit in a specific position within the management structure has implications for the implementation process of these public relations functions (Tanjung, 2020). Through various initiatives, educational institutions have built a positive image, increased public trust, and ultimately contributed to improving the quality of education (Robi'atul Adawiyah, 2025). The principal and vice principal in charge of public relations are required to evaluate various programs and activities related to school community relations management (government, private sector, stakeholders, and the community as a whole), with the aim of showcasing the performance achieved by the educational institution they lead in building relationships with the community in order to obtain support, ideas, learning resources, and school funding (Novi Ariyanti & Muhammad Anggun Manumanoso Prasetyo, 2021).

The programs implemented, including promotion through digital media, community activities, and publication of achievements, have proven effective in strengthening public trust in educational institutions. The concept of education marketing is characterized by the launch of various publications, such as guidelines for promoting educational institutions based on marketing models (Andri Cahyo Purnomo, 2022). The management of school public relations units emphasizes activities that support institutions in identifying and resolving public relations issues, such as strategies for promoting schools to the community so that the community has confidence and belief that their children will

receive an education at these schools (Muslihatul Nur Azizah, 2024). Similarly, the communication approach that has been implemented has succeeded in building harmonious relationships between schools and external entities, thereby supporting the achievement of educational institution objectives. Education plays a crucial role in determining the existence and progress of society, because education is an effort to transfer and transform knowledge, religious values, culture, and other elements in various aspects and types to future generations (M. Munir, 2018).

The public relations unit in educational institutions plays a role in developing and maintaining collaboration between internal school components (principals, educators, staff, and students) and external entities (parents, communities, and other institutions outside the school). This unit is also tasked with conveying information to both parties so that collaboration can take place harmoniously and efficiently (Muhibah & Jannah, 2018). The measures described above can be a solution for every parent who intends to send their child to school, given that parents are intrinsically responsible for finding the best or highest quality educational institution for their child (Zakaria et al., 2023).

However, this study also identified significant challenges, including a lack of public understanding, limited resources, and negative issues that require a quick response. These challenges require public relations units to continue to innovate in their communication approaches and build solid internal synergy in order to optimally achieve the vision of educational institutions. Based on these conditions, communication must be implemented effectively between the deputy head of public relations and the community so that the communication objectives within educational institutions can be achieved, in line with the statement by Lupiyoadi and Hamdani (2009:159) because one of the objectives of communication in educational institutions is to maintain and improve the image of the institution and attract prospective students (Widhiyarti & Artikel, 2017).

D. Conclusion

Based on the results of research conducted on the role of the Deputy Principal for Public Relations in improving the reputation of SMAN 3 Rejang Lebong, it can be concluded that optimizing the function of public relations significantly affects the image and trust of the community towards educational institutions. The Deputy Principal for Public Relations plays an active role as a mediator between the school and the community, parents, government agencies, and the media, as well as acting as an effective communication facilitator and problem solver in the delivery of school policies. Various communication initiatives and approaches that have been implemented, including promotion through social media platforms, organizing school events, publishing achievements, and opening information services, have proven effective in increasing community participation and strengthening the reputation of educational institutions. However, obstacles such as limited resources, a lack of public understanding, and competition between schools remain major issues that require ongoing attention.

Overall, this study confirms that the active and strategic role of the Vice Principal for Public Relations is a key element in building and maintaining the positive reputation of educational institutions. The implication of this study is the need to increase capacity, innovate programs, and strengthen internal and external synergies so that public relations functions can be optimized in dealing with the dynamics and challenges of education in the future.

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The Role of the Vice Principal for Public Relations in Improving the School's Reputation

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